THE DIFFICULTIES
VIETNAMESE SECONDARY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE
IN PRODUCING ENGLISH FINAL CONSONANTS

BY
NGO TRUNG HIEU
BACHELOR OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES
HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LINGUISTICS (TESOL)

DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
BENEDICTINE UNIVERSITY
LISLE, ILLINOIS, USA

JUNE, 2019
Abstract

Clear pronunciation is supposed to be one of the main elements contributing to learners’ success in not only mastering languages but also concrete communication, especially to Vietnamese secondary students who are on the way to pave the basic path of learning English. Certainly, they have to face a vastness of difficulties in pronunciation, or final consonants in particular, on account of the difference and contrast between English and Vietnamese sounds systems. Nevertheless, most studies conducted up to now have focused much on adult learners, or their difficulties in improving four main skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing.

When pronouncing English, Vietnamese learners tend to remove final consonants since Vietnamese final consonants are always omitted due to the language characteristics. Therefore, this research was intended to provide more thorough insights into the most difficult final consonants to most of the Vietnamese secondary learners as well as the reasons that lead to their difficulties or mistakes in producing such final consonants correctly. The investigation was carried out with the participation of 100 students aged 11 to 15 who were learning English at Ky Nguyen International Language School with the purpose of getting the results for two primary research questions:

1. What are the most difficult final consonants for learners in Ky Nguyen International Language School to pronounce?

2. What are the primary reasons that lead to such pronunciation problems?

In order to get the data for the study, an investigation was conducted in Ky Nguyen International Language School. The reason for which this school was chosen to conduct the research was that
a majority of students in this school learned English for many years but they still encountered some pronunciation problems with the final consonants. 100 students were engaged in two parts of the data collection process. For a start, they were asked to record sets of tables consisting of final consonants. Subsequently, they were told to provide their opinion for four more questions. Finally, the collected data was analyzed into tables so that further discussion could be made.

The data analysis revealed that most students in Ky Nguyen International Language School found difficulties in producing final consonants, especially /l/, /v/, /ʃ/ and /dʒ/. Furthermore, learning new words without checking any dictionary for pronunciation together with the shortage of being instructed how to produce the sounds precisely culminated to students’ mispronunciation.

The thesis also made some necessary contribution to raising learners’ awareness of precise pronunciation. To commence with, they were provided with instruction to produce each sound along with what created the difference between sounds pairs or why they made mistakes with such sounds. Therefore, they would have some concept of how to correct their pronunciation.

In addition, not solely teachers but also students are supposed to share the responsibility for students’ success since the overall achievements should be the combination between teachers’ explanation and students’ own attempt.
DECLARATION

I, NGO TRUNG HIEU hereby declare that this thesis entitled “THE DIFFICULTIES VIETNAMESE SECONDARY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE IN PRODUCING ENGLISH SOUNDS” submitted to Benedictine University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics (TESOL Concentration) is entirely my own work. It has not been previously published, as a whole or in part, or submitted to any other institution for any other degree, diploma, or professional qualification.

Research for this work was approved by the Benedictine University Institutional Review Board.

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Candidate signature: [Signature]
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Student number: B2404639
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would first like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Olga Lambert, whose expertise was invaluable in the formulating of my thesis topic and methodology in particular.

I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Sandra Kies and Dr. Le Hoang Dung for wholeheartedly providing me with valuable feedback and enthusiastic assistance, which made a remarkable contribution to my thesis.

I would like to say thanks to The Board of Directors in Ky Nguyen International Language School for lightening my workload as well as allowing me to carry out collecting the data for this research.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Statement of problem

In the age of information, it cannot be denied that English makes a huge contribution to the success in any types of communication all over the world. However, in their research, Isaac (2009), Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011), Hismanoglu (2013) and Ketabi & Saeb (2015) pointed out that English pronunciation teaching and learning was wildly ignored in many countries whose English was considered to be the foreign language. From the results of other research by Brown (1992), Fraser (1993), Yates (2001), Gilakjani (2012) English pronunciation was disregarded by not only teachers but also learners who maintained the view that English pronunciation was difficult to master on account of some subjective and objective reasons.

Similarly, there is an increasing concern related to the condition of teaching and learning pronunciation in Vietnam. Traditionally, Vietnam has applied the “teacher-centered, book-centred and grammar-translation methods to teach English as Foreign Language (Liu & Little Wood, 1997) (cited by Son, 2011), which led to the absolute dependence of learners on their teachers or in other words, they were passively positioned in the process of receiving knowledge (Tomlinson & Dat, 2004). In order for students to achieve the best scores in their exams, language teaching and learning in Vietnam put grammar, reading and writing on the top of priority over speaking (Hoang, 2003). The fact that little time was spent on practicing pronunciation and speaking also devoted to turning it into an unessential part of language learning (Huy, 2006).

Fortunately, thanks to the globalization, the ability of speaking English fluently with correct pronunciation has been increasingly prioritized these days. A majority of Vietnamese now
has raised their awareness of the importance of English pronunciation which allows them to be successful in communication. Nevertheless, Huy (2006), Nguyen (2007), Tweedy (2012), Lin (2014) found that Vietnamese learners still found it challenging to comprehend and to be comprehended by foreigners in conversations no matter how much time they consumed on learning languages.

In an effort to modify what made English pronunciation an obstacle for learners on the route of mastering language, a vast array of studies were conducted. Nguyen (2007) pursued an investigation into learners’ difficulties in pronouncing English final consonants; Ha (2007) found out three most popular mistakes made by learners including sounds omissions (especially final sounds), sound confusion (e.g. /t/ = /θ/, /z/ = /dz/ or /z/ = /ð/) and sound redundancy (/s/, /z/). Findings from such studies managed to equip learners with knowledge related to phonological aspects of English with a hope to better their pronunciation. Nonetheless, little advancement was witnessed after such research, which means that there are still other reasons beside the phonological one. Once again, the question of the exact factors causing mispronunciation was raised.

The aim of this study is to investigate the hindrance faced by Vietnamese learners in terms of other factors beyond the phonological ones. The researcher hopes that it will provide a well-rounded view for those whose intention is to get their pronunciation improved.

II. Personal motivation

This research was conducted thanks to my motivation that has been founded since I learned English in high school and became a student majored in English Linguistics and Literature in University of Social Science and Humanities. During that time, I was provided with chances
to learn a variety of subjects completely taught by Vietnamese teachers who achieved their master or doctor degree in universities overseas. I soon realized that I had problems with my pronunciation as well as my speaking skill although I had formerly been confident in myself while my classmates considered pronunciation as their biggest obstacle. However, after four years, the chances of being exposed to an English speaking environment and working part-time as an interpreter made a contribution to improving my pronunciation. That was when I realized that such noticeable changes were rooted from many other factors like self-study and self-confidence, which went beyond academic knowledge.

After graduation, I started working as a teacher in some language centers. I found that most of my students got trouble pronouncing English sounds, especially the final consonants even though they learned English at their very young age. What they could master after such a long time was some knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Many of them even found it impossible to get the correct pronunciation no matter how much they were aware of the International Phonetic Symbols (IPS).

From my own experience in both learning and teaching, I wanted to do something with the purpose of providing not only my students but also other Vietnamese learners with more knowledge so that they can be better at pronunciation, which should, in turn, strengthen their confidence in communication.

III. **Goals and significance of the thesis**

1. **The goals**

   The first goal of this thesis is to deepen the findings of former research related to learners and teachers perspective about learning and teaching speaking in general and pronunciation in
particular by figuring out which English final consonants are the most difficult to Vietnamese learners.

The second goal is to fill the gap that was not studied in previous research. As what has just been mentioned in part 1 of this chapter, previous researchers paid most attention to the phonetic aspect of this topic while hardly anyone showed their interest in other aspects coming from teachers and learners. In order for the second goal to be accomplished, the researcher was supposed to find the answer for two research questions (1) the most difficult final consonants faced by Vietnamese learners and (2) the reasons that lead to such difficulties excluding the phonetic aspect.

In order to meet the demand of learning spoken English, there has been an enormous increase in the number of English language centers in Vietnam. But, hardly any of them have yet been chosen for any study to be conducted. Therefore, my third goal was to conduct this research in a language center in Vung Tau, Vietnam to provide a more well-rounded view of the teaching and learning English in Vietnam besides the official schools in the national education network.

2. The significance & the gap identification

Up to now, a lot of research has been conducted to provide a thorough insight into the difference between English and Vietnamese sound systems, from which learners are equipped with a well-rounded comprehension of the pronunciation definition with the aim of getting them to improve their communication. However, it was pointed out that such knowledge related to sounds, words, phrases or sentences was insufficient due to the existence of many other subjective and objective factors which remarkably affect the process of teaching and learning language like the methods and current context of teaching and
learning English in Vietnam, the instruction of teachers or the ability to self-study of students. Therefore, it is a must to conduct this study whose results will be announced to both teachers and learners in order to establish a more suitable teaching and learning strategies. After all, learners’ better performance in learning and using language in their daily life should always be prioritized.

IV. Outline of the thesis

There are six chapters comprised in the thesis.

In the first chapter—Introduction, the current situation that Vietnamese learners have to face is introduced, and the personal inspiration of the researcher is also stated. In addition, the goal as well as the importance of this thesis is exhibited. In chapter 2—Literature review, readers are provided with a thorough review of related background study. A criticism on theory of pronunciation along with results from former studies which was considered the base of this thesis is attached in this chapter. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology with description and explanation in details about how research methods, participants and instruments were chosen. The collected date is subsequently analyzed in chapter 4 in order to gain the final results, which is followed by Chapter 5 where discussion of the results and implications is described. Chapter 6 recapitulates and makes a summary of the whole study, point out the limitations and recommend some ideas for further research in the future.
CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the background theory on pronunciation in general and teaching pronunciation in Vietnam in detail. For a start, the definition of pronunciation will be presented, which is followed by the comparison between English & Vietnamese final consonants. Ultimately, reasons that lead to learners’ mispronunciation will be focused on before the two research questions are raised.

I. The definition of pronunciation

The definition of pronunciation is suggested in many ways. However, in general, pronunciation means the sounds that learners produce in order for meaning to be conveyed. According to Fraser (2001), it consists of the segments (particular sounds of a language), suprasegmental aspects (intonation, stress, timing, rhythm), voice quality (how the voice is projected) and other factors like gestures or expression that are closely related to how people speak. They all combine when people talk, so it is suggested that they should be studied as integral parts of spoken language.

Traditionally, segmental aspects are mostly focused on the approach to pronunciation, which makes it easier for learners to work on. However, in the modern time, recent researchers pay more attention to suprasegmental aspects for the fact that it may bring the most efficiency to speakers’ intelligibility.

1.1 Suprasegmental aspects

a. Stress
According to many teachers, stress which refers to the prominence provided to certain syllables in the words or words in the utterances holds the basic factor of pronunciation teaching. One of the most notable features in English is that not all syllables are stressed. Or in other words, it is the reduction of unstressed syllables. Therefore, stressed syllables are longer, louder, more forceful and at different pitch.

Clennell (1997) suggested that there are three different levels of stress

- **Word level**: multisyllabic words have one or more syllables that are stressed
  
  Ex: STUdent, aBlility, refuGEE…

  Each word with at least two syllables has one stressed syllable, which is fixed for every word despite any variation.

- **Sentence level**: the most important words tend to be stressed
  
  Ex: I GO to SCHOOL

  Words that are more important (or are considered the content words) will certainly carry the stress. On the opposite, words with less necessary (usually the ones are grammatical) tend not to be stressed.

- **Contrastive stress**: the most important words carry the greater stress
  
  Ex: CHRIStina TAKES the STUdent to the PARty

  Among the stressed syllables, there exists the most important stress called “tonic” depending on the meaning conveyed by the speaker. If the speaker wants to emphasize the individual responsible for the action, CHRIS in Christina will be stressed. However, if the speaker wants to concentrate on the party (not the beach or the zoo), PAR in PARty will be stressed. Undoubtedly, the tonic is important because it not only holds the main stress but also changes the major pitch or varies according to the speaker’s meaning.
b. **Intonation**

It is vital to identify the speaker’s attitude thanks to his/her intonation. As presented in 1.1, intonation is closely related with stress, therefore, learners have to master this when learning English in order to avoid any unsuitable transfer from their mother tongue.

Clennell (1997) mentions three primary approaches to intonation theory.

- The grammatical approach
- An approach that focuses on the connection between intonation and attitude
- The discourse approach.

However, due to the limited time that students have in the English class, these approaches should be identified in a much simpler way as followed.

- A falling pattern: is used to show a signal that the speaker has (temporarily) finished
- A rising intonation: is used to show a question or continuation. The difference meaning can be conveyed in even a short sentence. Normally, Yes-No questions end in rising intonation while WH Questions end in falling tone. Nevertheless, the way people make such questions are subjected to their intention and their real context of the conversation.
- A fall-rise tone: is used to indicate that the speakers get stuck in the mixed feeling like uncertainty or suspicion.
- A rise-fall tone: is used to refer the strong feelings of surprise, agreement or disagreement.

c. **Features of connected speech**

In English, sounds are not produced separately but they are linked or blended in a different way from that of other languages. This can explain why learners, especially in Asia, find it
deterrence in pronouncing the final sounds and link these sounds to the starting sounds of the following words.

For example: It’s\_impossible\_to\_let\_you\_eat\_it

```
1     2  3  4
```

It can be seen that there is a consonant-vowel link at (1) and (6). The connection at (6) even changes the sound from /t/ to /d/. Similarly, the connection at 2 changes the sound from /t/ to /tʃ/. Additionally, the link at (3) changes the sound by adding a light /w/ between “you” and “eat”.

d. Voice quality

Pennington (1996) states that voice quality is “the aspect of prosody that spans the longest stretches of speech and underlies all other aspects”. He also argues that “all other aspects of pronunciation including suprasemential and segmental are produced within the limits of the voice quality set by articulators and the breath stream coming up from the lungs”.

Fundamentally, how mouth is held is supposed to affect the quality’s accent in long-term setting. Due to the fact that each language has different long-term settings, it is advisable for learners to concentrate on the settings related to English. For example, Vietnamese sounds are produced in the back of the mouth, while English sounds are the production made from the front of the mouth. Therefore, instructing learners to raise awareness of bringing sounds forward may allow them to gain benefit in some extent. (Kerr, 2000).

1.2 Segmental aspects

As learning English, all learners have the desire to produce the correct sounds. However, most of them may face difficulty with particular sounds, sounds combination or putting
particular sounds in particular positions (Fraser, 2001). In a similar way, the quality of vowels can change remarkably owing to how much stress they receive.

Phonemes, the factors supposed to convey meaning, are the foundation of English sounds system. They may be vowels, diphthongs (the combination of two vowel sounds), triphthongs (the combination of three vowel sounds) or consonants. These sounds are generated thanks to the use of tongue in different position of mouth (Underhill, 1994).

Consonants are identified in terms of these factors:

- Place of articulation: where the sound is made in the mouth
- Manner of articulation: how the sound is made
- Vibrate (or voicing): whether or not the vocal cords vibrate

Vowels are depicted in terms of these factors:

- The length (depending on stress)
- The position of mouth in which they are produced
- The degree to which the lips are rounded, spread or neutral.

II. Comparison of consonants in English and Vietnamese sounds systems

In her study, Duong (2008) compared the two sounds systems in terms of the final consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner of Articulation</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Place of Articulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Labial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop</td>
<td>voiceless</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative</td>
<td>voiceless</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affricate</td>
<td>voiceless</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximant</td>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td>voiced</td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Vietnamese consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of articulation/Manner of articulation</th>
<th>Labial</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Alveo-palatal</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stop</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ñ</td>
<td>č</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un-aspirated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiceless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fricative</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>h</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>v</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As what can be seen from the tables, there are 24 consonants in English in comparison with 22 consonants in Vietnamese. However, while most consonants in English can be placed at the final position, only six of which can be situated as the same place in Vietnamese. Therefore, Vietnamese people find it difficult to produce final consonants.

Table 3. Vietnamese final consonants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of articulation/Manner of articulation</th>
<th>Labial</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Velar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stop</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>ѡ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sounds comparison (consult Appendix 2)

III. The reasons why Vietnamese learners face difficulty in producing English final consonants precisely

1. Tendency to omit the final sounds due to the influence of mother tongue

Final sounds are known as the factor to create the difference in a variety of English words, so it cannot be denied that final consonants play an integral part in English. For example, lie-like-light-line will be the same if their final consonants are not pronounced, or bye-bike-bite
will have nothing different if the final sounds are removed. However, final consonants are never pronounced in Vietnamese due to its language characteristics.

Vietnamese can fully understand the word “thích (like)” without the pronouncing of the final sounds /tʃ/. In addition, consonants at the end of the words are often more troublesome than the same consonants at the beginning of words, especially for learners whose native language does not allow producing any consonants as the final position. It is easily seen that Vietnamese pronounce the final sounds of the word “mount” into “mouse”. They can pronounce the individual sounds correctly, but cannot do it in the full sentence or real context (Nguyen, 2007)

2. **Rules for combining sounds**

It is said that “difficulties may arise because the rules for combining sounds into words are different in the learners’ language”. This type of difficulty can occur even when a particular sound is a part of the inventory of both English and the native language”. As a monosyllabic language, the combination for Vietnamese words can be a vowel + a vowel as in “ao” (pond), consonant + vowel as in “ba” (father), consonant + vowel as in “chi” (limbs), etc. By contrast, the combination rules of English words are much more complex because English is a polysyllabic language. For instance, the formation of the words “international” can be structured like this: vowel-consonant clusters- vowel-consonant- vowel-consonant cluster-vowel- consonant.

In addition, the fact that there are no consonant clusters in modern Vietnamese also creates obstacles for learners. In Vietnamese, it is easily seen that there is combination between consonants like tr, ch, th, ngh, etc. However, they are pronounced as one sound only, not
separate sounds. While in English, learners have to pronounce each consonant in the clusters like spr, skr, str...Rules for combination really affect the way of producing sounds for Vietnamese learners. (Le, 2011)

3. **Stress and intonation**

It is suggested that “the pattern of stress and intonation, which determine the overall rhythm and melody of a language, can be transferred from the native language to the second language”.

However, it seems that there’s only one tone when making both questions and statements in Vietnamese while there are three kinds of tone in making English questions. For example, Vietnamese people use falling tone for this question “Cô ấy là Hoa đúng không? (Is she Hoa?)” but English people use three following types of tone: raising voice to find out if she is Hoa, falling voice to make sure that she is Hoa, both falling and rising to express they are not sure if she is Hoa.

Moreover, whenever speakers speak any Vietnamese sentence, they have to produce all the words in that sentence. For example, in this sentence “Bạn đi đâu thế?”, all the words must be said without stress on any individual one. Nevertheless, when they speak the same sentence in English “Where are you going?”, they just need to put the stress on “where” and “go”. Due to this fact, Vietnamese learners often put the stress on all the words in an English sentence, as well as feel difficult when hearing any sentences from foreigners since such sentences are spoken with the reduced sounds. (Nguyen, 2007)

4. **Tendency to transfer English sounds to so-called similar sounds in Vietnamese**
As explained in a variety of studies before, it is a big challenge for Vietnamese learners to produce English sounds exactly, especially when they appear as the final position. It leads them to the solution of transferring English sounds to the nearly-similar sounds in their native language. It seems to be good; however, it will be a big problem to their pronunciation in the long run since it not only makes their English so “Vietnamese” but also make them incomprehensive to native speakers. We can take the word “face” for example. Vietnamese learners often pronounce /fei/ instead of /feis/. In addition, they transfer the sound into /phay/ in Vietnamese, which is a completely difference from the original sound.

In her studies, Nguyen (2007) draw three steps of reducing sounds, which are often used by the learners. Firstly, the strange English sounds are replaced by the sounds that exist in their first language. However, it should be noticed that not every single sound in English have a similar counterpart in Vietnamese, so the sound they find may almost be false. Secondly, learners remove the difficult sounds for them. As mentioned above, there are some English sounds that do not exist in Vietnamese. Learners tend to ignore these sounds when they appear in the words. In the next step, learners reduce the final cluster now that final sounds always challenge them. When learners are at this stage, their pronunciation becomes extremely terrible.

5. Lack of instruction

In general, the instruction for foreign language often focuses on four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The target language’s alphabet and sound system are clearly introduced during the first stage of learning; however, teachers tend to fail in duplicating it in the next stages (Elliot, 1995). As a result, learners suppose that pronunciation is not really
important, or it is not as important as other factors in English. Gradually, pronunciation is considered to be a linguistics component rather than conversational fluency, which means that it plays a less important part in communication. Therefore, teachers view pronunciation as the least useful in a language class, and spend most of their time in class for other aspects that they consider more important (Pennington, 1994)

6. **The context of teaching and learning pronunciation in Vietnam**

6.1 **Background**

Ketabi & Saeb (2015) stated that pronunciation received insufficient appreciation in spite of being considered as a significant element in learning to speak a second language. Its role differs enormously and the time allocated for it is determined by teachers. Consequently, teaching and practicing pronunciation is not considered as a frequent activity in EFL/ ESL class (Hismanoglu, 2010). Moreover, by describing pronunciation as “Cinderella of language teaching” or “an orphan in English program around the world”, some language experts like Gilbert (1994), Brinton and Goodwin (1996), Canagarajah (2005) maintained the view that pronunciation was not as highly appreciated as it should have been.

6.2 **The context of teaching English pronunciation in Vietnam**

Suggested by Ross (1992) and Canagarajah (2005), teaching English pronunciation has always been a difficult task in which well-trained non-native English speaking teachers may not have the feeling of confidence when taking themselves as a model for students to follow. Consequently, Brown (1992), Fraser (2000), Yates (2001) pointed out that many English language teachers tended to avoid teaching pronunciation on account of their shortage of skills, knowledge and confidence. Therefore, instead of focusing on phonology which
comprises both theory and knowledge of the target language’s sounds system, teachers and learners had better pay more attention to the practice and usefulness of sounds in speaking and listening. (Burgess and Spencer, 2000).

Since Vietnam established the international economic relations with other countries worldwide, English has considered the first choice of foreign language to master. However, as showed in studies conducted by Pham (2005), Ha (2007), Kieu (2010), the traditional teacher-centered method together with the program emphasizing the acquisition of grammar made a contribution to the inability to produce correct pronunciation as well as competence in English communication. Sharing the same idea, Wright (2002) stated that the syllabus in Vietnam requires students to be accurate in grammar and writing rather than to be fluent in speaking. Moreover, it was noted by Tweedy (2012) that despite the support to teach pronunciation in ESL classrooms, only 30% of ESL teachers are equipped with formal training in pronunciation teaching. This culminated in the fact that students received insufficient instruction of how to pronounce the words correctly.

7. **The lack of autonomous learning**

Autonomous learning can be defined as self-directed learning, self-access learning, self-instruction, individual learning, and independent learning (Little (1991), Nunan (1996)). Jones (1998) there existed two primary concept embraced in the definition of autonomous learning. The first one was “autonomy” referring to the awareness and competency to take charge of one’s learning while the second one - learning – implies a set of procedures and strategies that learners adopt to achieve the level of “autonomy” (Jones, 1998).
As a tool to provide learners with “sufficient information on word derivation, meaning, spelling and pronunciation”, the fact that dictionary holds a significant role in learning any foreign language is irrefutable. Moreover, a good dictionary also carries related information like grammar, usage, synonyms, antonyms and even the dissimilarities between written and spoken language (Schofield, 1997). Thanks to the analysis of the data collected in a survey conducted in China, Schofield (1997) emphasized that autonomous learning was extremely important in mastering language since the scores of those who frequently consulted dictionary was always 20% higher than those who did not.

However, in a survey conducted among 2307 secondary students by Littlewood (2000), it was revealed that learners in Vietnam as well as some Asian countries like Brunei, China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam were passive or even considered “obedient listeners”, who did not have any thought that teachers should be the ones to be asked. Due to the network of teacher-centered, they preferred to acquire knowledge through teachers’ transmission, not through their own way of discovering.

8. The lack of consulting dictionary in learning languages

A dictionary is supposed to be a must-have material for every language learner since it provides information relating to words like derivation, meaning, spelling and pronunciation (Schofield, 1997). Sharing the same idea, other studies conducted by Gu & Johnson (1996), Kojic-Sabo & Lightbrown (1999), Schmitt (1997) pointed out the contribution of dictionary in learners’ language proficiency, which strengthened the significance of dictionary use in language learning.
However, Fan (2003), Harley & Hart (2000), Hayati & Fattahzadh (2006) and Loucky (2002) drew a conclusion that learners tended to guess a word’s meaning or international phonetic symbols (IPS) rather than check it up in a dictionary, which partially culminated in their mispronunciation.

IV. Previous studies on mispronunciation in Vietnam

A wide range of studies on Vietnamese learners’ mispronunciation have been conducted. Le (2008) conducted a study in Phuc Trach Secondary School with the participation of 59 female and 41 male students. The result of this study suggested that most students found the final consonant /p/ the most difficult to pronounce with 81%.

Another study conducted by Luu (2011) with 85 students in Hung Vuong University revealed that a majority of students could not pronounce the final sound /dʒ/ (94%) and /tʃ/ (78%). At the same time, fewest students found /m/ the hardest final sound to pronounce (3.2%).

V. Research gap & Research question

As can be seen from the review of literature, former researchers like Luu (2011), Nguyen (2007) focused on some consonants mispronunciation while Hoa (1965) concentrated on phonological aspects. Therefore, the researcher aims to investigate learners’ difficulties in learning pronunciation not only from phonological aspects but also from social and individual context in order to fulfill the gap left in previous studies. This study will concentrate on a case study of a typical language center in Vung Tau, Vietnam under the form of recording students’ pronunciation and their responses to provided questions related
to their habit of learning pronunciation. The result from the analyzed data hopefully enables both teachers and learners to better their method of teaching and learning.

In order to get the goals accomplished, the researcher targets to find the answers for these two questions:

1. What are the most difficult final consonants for learners in Ky Nguyen International Language School to pronounce?

2. What are the primary reasons that lead to such pronunciation problems?
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In chapter 2, it is revealed that Vietnamese learners’ mispronunciation is originally caused from the differences between English and Vietnamese sounds system together with the influence of other objective and subjective factors. This chapter identifies how the research took place under the chosen appropriate method.

I. Research context

According to what has been mentioned in the previous chapter, Vietnamese learners are facing difficulties in learning English pronunciation, which originates from both subjective and objective rationale. This project is conducted with the purpose of investigating the real hindrance that Vietnamese learners have to overcome in case they want to better their pronunciation. The project will focus on research taking place in Ky Nguyen International Language School in Vung Tau, Vietnam, where thousands of secondary students are pursuing their English courses. The data collected from students here will provide some deeply revealing insights into their pronunciation via the recordings recorded by them before being collected by researchers. The data will make it possible for better solutions to be suggested with the aim of facilitating learners to improve their pronunciation in learning English communication.

In order for the task to get done, the researcher must find out the answers for these two research questions

1. What are the most difficult final consonants for learners in Ky Nguyen International Language School to pronounce?

2. What are the primary reasons that lead to such pronunciation problems?
II. **Methodology & Research Design**

1. **Methodology**

To gain responses to the research questions raised at the end of chapter 1, a case study research was employed as the only method that met the study’s requirements although it brought both advantages and disadvantages depending on (1) the research question type, (2) the overall control of researcher and (3) the focus on current context in comparison with the historical phenomena (Yin, 2003). As taking these three elements into consideration, the research would significantly benefit from using case study thanks to the advantages it offered, such as allowing the researcher to get deeper understanding of what was going to be studied, access what they had never expected before the research as well as pay more attention to the necessities of individual characteristics (Hodkinson, 2001).

This case study employed a mixed-method research from which the results were collected from students’ recordings and their responses to given questions in the questionnaire. As defined by Tashakkori & Creswell (2007), a mixed-method is a process of collecting and analyzing data in order to integrate the findings and draw conferences in a single study. Obviously, a mixed method consists of both qualitative and quantitative dimension. However, some difficulties may be rooted from the researcher’s effort during the process of expressing the relation between those two methods.

Despite the contrasting views that it gained, a mixed-method research was supposed to take the best result from each separate one. Inherited from the perspective of Bryman (2006), there were some reasons why this method was taken into consideration. The first one is **triangulation** which aimed to seek corroboration between quantitative and qualitative. The second one is completeness which applied the combination of research approach to gain a
well-rounded context of the study phenomenon. This method also neutralized the limitations as well as strengthened more inferences, which was considered the third reason. Moreover, Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) stated that a mixed-method may provide some questions that could not be fully answered by either qualitative or quantitative. This meant that a mixed-method study could use one research approach to give some explanation to the data collected from other(s), especially in a context from which unexpected findings appear. Therefore, it was supported by numerous scholars like Bernard (1994), who proposed that a mixed method would provide a well-rounded understanding of the research issues no matter what orientation of the researcher. It was also noted by Brewer and Hunter (1989) that no study could be conducted within one method because of the tremendous growth of social sciences.

2. **Research design**

Data collection was carried out as exhibited in the following diagram.
As shown in the process, the researcher had to meet Ky Nguyen’s director first to get her signature as approval of conducting the research at Ky Nguyen International Language School right after receiving permission from Benedictine University. At the subsequent step, the research instrument was adjusted to print before being handed out to students. The research instrument and letters of parents’ approval were also subsequently sent to students. Ultimately, students were given a sheet of paper comprising (1) sets of words and (2) four multiple choice questions. After learning time, they were asked to stay in the class for 10 minutes in order to record the sets of words, which was followed by providing answers for questions in their sheet of paper. Each recording was named “PR + number” from 1 to 100 to match their anonymous paper. In order to get more recordings, researcher also set up an email account in which the sets of words and questions were uploaded. Participants who could get access to the email recorded the words and responded to the question, then sent them back to the researcher subsequently. All recordings recorded directly in the classroom as well as in the mailbox were stored in researcher’s smart phone while their papers were kept at researcher’s home, all of which will be sent to Benedictine University for safer storage in its campus. In the final stage, the collected data was analyzed to gain the final results for the research questions.

3. Research participants

Learner participants were selected randomly from different types of classes (IELTS Introduction, Grammar, Communication class) with different levels of proficiency from pre-intermediate to advance. Among 100 students at the age of 13-16 taking part in the research, there were 73 females in comparison with 27 males. Conducted with such participants in this situation, the research was expected to gain a vast range of responses from them on this research topic. The
researcher received 100 recordings together with 100 sheets of paper reflecting their answer. Therefore, 100 recordings and sheets of paper were sufficiently valid to be analyzed.

4. **Research instrument**

4.1 **Rationale for using recordings**

As mentioned above, the study targets to find out the English sounds that challenge Vietnamese learners the most as well as the reasons for their pronunciation difficulties. Nothing can be as appropriate as recording learners’ pronunciation since such recordings facilitate the researcher to listen to the produced sounds adequately carefully to get the final result. In addition, the questions given to participants will contribute to identifying whether their mistake in producing sounds was caused from the sound’s difficulties or there were any more reasons.

4.2 **Rationale for using questionnaire**

In order to gain more exact reasons that drove learners to mispronunciation, four questions were distributed to learners after they finished their recordings. Those questions focused on how learners dealt with new words’ pronunciation that they had during their learning English, what they did to remember and memorize words’ pronunciation and how much time they were instructed by their teachers in the class. These questions are raised due to the current fact in Vietnam where teachers normally cut the amount of time that should have been for practicing pronunciation to get more time for doing grammar exercises.

4.3 **Questions transcription**

There are two primary tasks that students are asked to fulfill, comprising the recording of words and response to four questions.
4.2.1 Tables of words

Tables marked 1 & 2 aimed to check students’ pronunciation of /m/ and /n/ as the ending position, which was considered creating no hindrance thanks to the similarity between the two sounds systems.

Tables marked 3 & 4 aimed to check if students could distinguish the difference between /b/ and /p/ as the ending position.

Tables marked 5 & 6 aimed to check if students could distinguish the difference between /f/ and /v/ as the ending position.

Tables marked 7 aimed to check if students could pronounce /l/ as the ending position.

Tables marked 8 & 9 aimed to check if students could distinguish the difference between /t/ and /d/ as the ending position.

Tables marked 10, 11 & 12 aimed to check if students could distinguish the difference between /tʃ/ , /dʒ/ and /z/ as the ending position.

Tables 13 & 14 aimed to check if students could distinguish the difference between /ʃ/ and /s/ as the ending position.

4.2.2 Survey questions

Question marked 1 indicated the learners’ habit of checking pronunciation as encountering new words.

Question marked 2 indicated how learners memorized new words’ pronunciation.

Question marked 3 indicated how they dealt with difficult words.

Question marked 4 indicated how frequently pronunciation was taught in their English class.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

I. Summary of the study and research methodology

As what has been mentioned in the previous chapter, English plays a more and more increasingly important role in Vietnam, which leads to the fact that everyone including parents, teachers and learners pay much of their attention to mastering English. However, it was admitted that learning English in Vietnam means being excellent in grammar and reading while pronunciation was taken for granted thanks to the national syllabus. Together with witnessing how students struggled with pronunciation during the process of learning English, the researcher would like to find out the most difficult final sounds faced by Vietnamese learners as well as other social reasons leading to such difficulties besides phonological aspects.

Ky Nguyen International Language School, where the researcher has been working since 2016, was chosen to conduct a two-part survey consisting of recording sets of sounds and providing answers to given questions with the purpose of collecting data for this research. The reason for this choice was that while most of the previous studies took place at mainstream schools or universities while Ky Nguyen is a kind of a language center, which was hardly chosen by former researchers. The data collected was then analyzed in comparisons with the research questions.

II. Description of analysis tool and analysis process

The researcher collected the data from both recordings and responses to four questions, which was then separated into two main data collections.
In terms of the recordings, the researcher was supposed to listen to the numbered recordings together with marking the sounds on the correlative paper (for example, the recording numbered “01” was listened while reading the paper numbered “01”). The correct sounds received a tick (✓) while the incorrect sounds received a cross (✗). After that, the data from both recordings and survey questions was entered manually and analyzed by using Excel in Microsoft Office 2007 to calculate the percentage of students producing the correct sounds along with their responses.

III. Results

After being analyzed, the result of the collected data is separated into two primary categories. The first one is the comparisons between pairs or groups of sounds that are supposed to be similar to each other in some extent. All these sounds were recorded as the final position in the given words. The second one comprises the responses from attendants to four questions related to their way of learning English pronunciation.

1. The most difficult final sounds for Vietnamese learners

The results of research question 1 is shown in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 The percentage of students pronouncing final consonants correctly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Number of participants with wrong pronunciation</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/m/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/n/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/b/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>/p/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/l/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/r/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/d/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/tʃ/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/dʒ/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/s/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/ʃ/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/z/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/f/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/v/</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The given table demonstrates the rate of learners who could produce English final sounds correctly.

Overall, it is obviously witnessed that in terms of nasal sounds, no students surveyed found it a hindrance to pronounce /m/, /n/ correctly in comparison with 100% of those who could not produce the final sound /l/. Regarding to labio, while no one pronounced /b/ imprecisely, only 37% of students managed to pronounce /p/.

In terms of alveolar, only 19% of participants could not pronounce /t/ in comparison with 40% of those who were unable to pronounce /d/. The number of students who could pronounce /tʃ/ nearly doubled the figure for /dʒ/. 


Among the three sounds /s/, /ʃ/ and /z/, it is clearly witnessed that /s/ was the easiest sound to pronounce with 25% learners producing it wrongly while the figure for /z/ and /ʃ/ was 43% and 55% respectively.

Despite being counterparts, the sound /ʃ/ was produced incorrectly by 42% of students, which doubled the number of those who could produce the sound /v/. 

2. **Surveyed questions**

With the purpose of finding out more objective and subjective reasons that lead to learners’ mispronunciation, the researcher also asked them to answer four questions after they had finished their recordings.

2.1 **What Vietnamese learners often did when they encountered new words in their class**

The result of question 2.1 is exhibited in Table 4.2

Table 4.2 What learners often did when they encountered new words in their class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of respondent</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look up the dictionary</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guess</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask teachers/ classmates/ foreigners</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 presents learners’ habit when facing new words in their class.

Obviously, 73% of students surveyed preferred guessing the pronunciation based on the so-called similar spelling between words to applying other ways of learning new vocabulary. This
reason certainly dominated the chart. One fifth of those responded to the questionnaire tended to get the words’ pronunciation from their teachers or classmates. The chart also revealed that only 7 out of 100 students shaped the habit of checking IPS in the dictionary to ensure their correct pronunciation.

2.2 **What Vietnamese learners did to memorize words’ pronunciation**

The result of question 2.2 is exhibited in Table 4.3

Table 4.3 What learners did to memorize words’ pronunciation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of respondent</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeat many times based on the IPS in dictionary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a similar sound in Vietnamese</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 provides information about how learners memorized new words encountered in their class.

As can be seen from Table 4.3, 88% of students admitted that they tended to find a similar sound in Vietnamese to substitute the original sound in English. Only 12% of students formed their habit of checking the word’s IPS in dictionary and repeated the word until they remembered. In addition, students found no more ways to memorize new words.
2.3  How learners dealt with the word with difficult pronunciation

The result for Question 2.3 is exhibited in Table 4.4

Table 4.4 How Vietnamese learners dealt with the words which were difficult to pronounce precisely

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of respondent</th>
<th>Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repeat many times based on the IPS in dictionary</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a similar sound in Vietnamese</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask teachers/ classmates/ foreigners</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ways</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 reveals how Vietnamese learners coped with difficult English sounds

In general, the number of students who preferred to find an equivalent sound in Vietnamese contributed to 78% of those asked, which was the highest number in the table. 12% of learners checked dictionary for correct IPS before repeating the words while the other 10% of learners stated that they would ask their teacher or people around them like classmates, foreigners to get the pronunciation.

2.4  How frequently Vietnamese learners were instructed to produce the correct pronunciation in their class.

The result of Question 2.4 is exhibited in Table 4.5
Table 4.5 demonstrates how regularly students were instructed to precisely pronounce English sounds in their class.

Having a closer look at the table, 62% of learners reported that they were barely instructed how to read the IPS of the word in English classes while 24% of students revealed that they were mostly shown how to pronounce words in their class. At the same time, 7% of students stated that they were fully guided how to produce correct sounds. In contrast, 7% of students received almost no instruction of pronunciation.

This chapter has provided the analysis of data collected from the two research questions. The result will be discussed in Chapter 5- Discussion in light of relevant background theory.
DISCUSSION

I. Summary of the study

The aim of the study is to investigate the difficulties of Vietnamese learners in learning English pronunciation. The research was supposed to conduct a survey with two primary research questions with the purpose of finding the most difficult final sounds faced by Vietnamese learners as well as the objective and subjective reasons that led to this issue.

The study was conducted with 100 learners in Ky Nguyen International Language School in Vung Tau, Vietnam. At first, all participants were required to record sets of individual words with the final sounds supposed to be mispronounced. After that, they provide responses to four other questions related to their pronunciation learning. The research then listened to their recordings and put a mark or a cross to indicate the right or wrong pronunciation, and counted the answers for four questions. All collected data were entered manually and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel 2017 to get the percentage of students for each question.

II. Research question 1 (Part 1)

“What are the most difficult final consonants for learners in Ky Nguyen International Language School to pronounce?”

The purpose of this question was to find out the most difficult final sounds for Vietnamese learners to pronounce when learning English. According to the result, /l/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/ and /v/ are generally the most difficult final sounds since less than half of the students failed to pronounce them. This finding is similarly to the conclusion made by Nguyen (2007), Luu (2011), Ha (2005). Although Nguyen (2007) found that /z/ was the most difficult sound in her study since
85% of students showed their inability to pronounce this sound, it just accounted for 57% in this study.

III. **Research question 2 (Part 2)**

1. **Question 1: As seeing a new word, what do you do to pronounce it correctly?**

   The aim of question 1 is to figure out the habit of students as encountering new words. The data revealed that most students had a tendency to guess the word’s pronunciation or ask people around them like teachers, classmates or foreigners rather than check its IPS in the dictionary, which means that they were passive in learning or were even lack of self-learning. As a result, the fact that they did not master the precise phonetic symbols of the word together with the influence of Vietnamese pronouncing words without final sounds partly culminated in the omission of English final sounds, one of the difficulties faced by Vietnamese learners. This result is supported by the conclusion made by Littlewood (2000), Tran (2013)

2. **Question 2: What do you do to memorize the word’s pronunciation?)**

   The aim of question 2 is to figure out how Vietnamese learners memorize the word’s pronunciation. From the result analysis, 88% students admitted that they just transferred the English sound into an equivalent sound in Vietnamese in order to make it easier for them to memorize the word in comparison with only 12% shaping their habit of checking and repeating the word’s IPS. Once again, it proves that a majority of students showed no interest in learning and practicing pronunciation suggested in dictionary. This result is strengthened by Nguyen (2007) who drew three stages of transferring sounds from English to Vietnamese, in which learners became terrible at pronunciation when they approached the last stage.
3. **Question 3: What do you do when facing a word that you find hard to pronounce correctly?**

From the result of two previous questions, it came as no surprise that most students showed their tendency to transfer the sound to Vietnamese or asked other people (78% and 10% respectively) instead of consulting a dictionary (12%) or found other ways (0%). This result is not solely backed up by the theory of Fan (2003), Harley & Hurt (2000) and Hayatti & Fattazadh (2006) but also by conclusions drawn from Nguyen (2007) and Tran (2013).

4. **Question 4: Are you instructed how to read the IPS of each word in your English class?**

The aim of this question is to find out the amount of time spent on instructing students to correct their pronunciation in the English class. 62% of students stated that they received instructions for 40-60% of the words taught in the class while only 31% of students were instructed to pronounce at least 70% of the words during class time. This result is in line with what Pham (2005), Ha (2007), Kieu (2010) concluded in their studies. Although Tweedy (2012) suggested that 30% of ESL teachers were not well-trained, the study did not aim to clarify this information in the context of Vietnam.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I. **Summary of the study**

Teaching and learning English has become increasingly important in Vietnam due to the need of the social development. However, for many reasons, most students could not pronounce English sounds, especially final consonants, correctly no matter how long they have been learning English. Observing how students struggle to produce the correct pronunciation after years of learning, the researcher, by using the mixed method between recording students’ pronunciation and getting their responses to four questions, would like to find out what final sounds causes the most difficulties for Vietnamese learners as well as the primary reasons that led them to mispronunciation.

The research was conducted with the participation of 100 learners who were attending English courses in Ky Nguyen International Language School in Vung Tau, Vietnam. The collected data was analyzed by using Microsoft Excel 2007 to get the correct result, which was then compared in light of the previous theory background.

After making comparisons between the result of this study and others, it is obviously seen that there are some final consonants that most students find a hindrance to pronounce like /l/, /dz′/, /ʃ/ and /v/. This result was similar to the conclusion in former studies carried out by Nguyen (2007), Luu (2011), Ha (2005).

In terms of learners’ solution to new words, it is exhibited that they tended to guess the pronunciation or ask people around them rather than checking the IPS in the dictionary. In addition, what most of them did to memorize the pronunciation was to transfer the sounds into a similar sound in Vietnamese without being aware that it contributed to worsening their
pronunciation. This finding was supported by Pham (2005), Ha (2007), Kieu (2010), Nguyen (2007) and Tran (2013).

Findings from the study are expected to provide a thorough insight into the final sounds that created hindrance for most Vietnamese students represented by those learning in Ky Nguyen International Language School. At the same time, it presents the differences between two sounds system together with how to pronounce individual sound (Appendix 2) so that learners can apply into their pronunciation practice.

Moreover, more than phonological aspect, this study already shows the reasons for such difficulties rooted from both objective and subjective sides. The most concerning thing is that students lacked of being instructed how to pronounce the words correctly during their class time. They even showed no tendency to learn by themselves in order to get the correct pronunciation since they would rather transfer the sounds or guess the words’ pronunciation than checking the IPS in dictionary. As a result, they worsened their own pronunciation even though they have learned English for a long time.

II. Limitations in the study

It has to be admitted that there are some limitations in the study.

First of all, the number of participants is 100 while there are more than 2000 students learning in KY Nguyen International Language School, so the result could not completely reflect the general situation.

Another point to be mentioned is the lack of some sounds like /θ/, /ð/, /r/, /h/ in the sets of words for recording. This is because the researcher wanted to find out the mistakes created by the
sounds that students easily found so-called equivalent sounds in Vietnamese. They should be mentioned in another study.

From the limitations mentioned above, further research could be conducted in the future with a wider range of participants and more instruments in order to gain more useful results.
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*Prospect, 15*, 2


APPENDIX 1

Dear Students in Ky Nguyen International Language School,

This survey is aim to find out the consonants as final sounds that are often produced improperly by Vietnamese students, on which we base to find the reasons leading to such mispronunciation.

Thank you for spending your time on this survey.

PART 1: RECORD THESE WORDS

1. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Come</th>
<th>Lime</th>
<th>Cream</th>
<th>Steam</th>
<th>Stream</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scream</td>
<td>Him</td>
<td>Organism</td>
<td>Storm</td>
<td>Arm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bane</th>
<th>Cane</th>
<th>Corn</th>
<th>Keen</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vegetarian</td>
<td>Between</td>
<td>Contain</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Concern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bomb</th>
<th>Comb</th>
<th>Stab</th>
<th>Lab</th>
<th>Herb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shrub</td>
<td>Club</td>
<td>Pub</td>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Tube</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Deep</th>
<th>Sleep</th>
<th>Hope</th>
<th>Slope</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep</td>
<td>Kidnap</td>
<td>Slap</td>
<td>Stop</td>
<td>Pop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cough</th>
<th>Laugh</th>
<th>Off</th>
<th>Beef</th>
<th>Leaf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>Cliff</td>
<td>Himself</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Proof</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cave</th>
<th>Leave</th>
<th>Improve</th>
<th>Of</th>
<th>Pave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Curve</td>
<td>Live</td>
<td>Dive</td>
<td>Thrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Hell</th>
<th>Tell</th>
<th>Industrial</th>
<th>Memorial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Imperial</td>
<td>Spell</td>
<td>Parallel</td>
<td>Scale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hat</th>
<th>Bat</th>
<th>Cat</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Create</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passionate</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>Heat</td>
<td>Shot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bed</th>
<th>Embed</th>
<th>Kid</th>
<th>Slid</th>
<th>Hid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mad</td>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>Decide</td>
<td>Divide</td>
<td>Indeed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Teach</th>
<th>Match</th>
<th>Watch</th>
<th>Hatch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>Leach</td>
<td>Wretch</td>
<td>Scratch</td>
<td>Speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Judge</th>
<th>Manage</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Carriage</th>
<th>Teenage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Savage</td>
<td>Voyage</td>
<td>Beverage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freeze</th>
<th>Sneeze</th>
<th>Close</th>
<th>Choose</th>
<th>Lose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
<td>Tease</td>
<td>Release</td>
<td>Showbiz</td>
<td>Buzz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wash</th>
<th>Cash</th>
<th>Flash</th>
<th>Smash</th>
<th>Fish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stylish</td>
<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Distinguish</td>
<td>Rubbish</td>
<td>Impoverish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Please pronounce these words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miss</th>
<th>Kiss</th>
<th>Fix</th>
<th>Mass</th>
<th>Bass</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
PART 2: Please answer these questions

Câu hỏi 1: Khi gặp từ mới, bạn làm thế nào để phát âm từ đó?

(Question 1: As seeing a new word, what do you do to pronounce it correctly?)

a. Tra từ điển (look up the dictionary)

b. Đoán (guess)

c. Hỏi giáo viên/ bạn cùng lớp/ người nước ngoài (ask teachers/ classmates/ foreigners)

d. Cách khác (other ways)…………………………………………

Câu hỏi 2: Bạn làm gì để nhớ cách phát âm của từ vựng?

(Question 2: What do you do to memorize the word’s pronunciation?)

a. Lặp lại nhiều lần theo phiên âm trong từ điển (repeat many times based on the IPS in dictionary)

b. Tìm một âm tương tự trong tiếng Việt (find a similar sound in Vietnamese)

c. Cách khác (other ways)…………………………………………

Câu hỏi 3: Bạn làm gì khi gặp từ mới khó phát âm?(có thể chọn nhiều đáp án)

(Question 3: What do you do when facing a word that you find hard to pronounce correctly?)

(attendants can choose more than one)

a. Lặp lại nhiều lần theo phiên âm trong từ điển (repeat many times based on the IPS in dictionary)

b. Tìm âm tương tự trong tiếng Việt (find a similar sound in Vietnamese)

c. Hỏi giáo viên/ bạn cùng lớp/ người nước ngoài (ask teachers/ classmates/ foreigners)

d. Cách khác (other ways)

Câu hỏi 4: Bạn có được hướng dẫn cách đọc phiên âm trong lớp học không?
Question 4: Are you instructed how to read the IPS of each word in your English class?

a. 100% số lượng từ (100 % of words)

b. 70%-90% số lượng từ (70%-90% of words)

c. 40%-60% số lượng từ (40%-60% of words)

d. < 30% of words (dưới 30% số lượng từ)

CÂM ON BẠN ĐÃ THAM GIA

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION
APPENDIX 2

FINAL CONSONANTS COMPARISONS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE SYSTEMS

1. **English consonants system**

There are 24 consonants in the English consonants system classified according to their respective point of articulation, manner of articulation, and the presence or absence of phonation. They are patterned in pairs of voiced-voiceless.

They are defined as 5 groups: stops, affricatives, fricatives, nasals and liquids.

- In the first group of stops, the voiceless including /p, t, k/ is modified like this
  - /p/ is bilabial, /t/ is alveolar /k/ is velar

They can appear in 3 positions of an English word: initial, middle, final.

However, /t/ can be transferred to the sounds /d/ if it accompanies a strong voice like in “kitty” or “letter”

The other group of stops consists of /b, d, g/ which are defined as voiced. Like the stops voiceless, they can also come as initial, middle and final position of a word

- The second group named affricates includes /tʃ/ and /ʤ/ which are made up of a voiceless blade stop and a voiced one respectively. Both of them can also stand at the 3 positions of a word

- The third group named fricatives has 9 consonants which go in following pairs
  - /f/ - /v/: voiceless and voiced labiodentals
  - /θ/ - /ð/: voiceless and voiced interdentals
  - /s/ - /z/: voiceless and voiced alveolar sibilants
  - /ʃ/ - /ʒ/: voiceless and voiced alveopalatal sibilants
/h/: voiceless glottal oral fricative

Except for /h/ which never comes as the final, the 8 others can be initial, middle and final in a word

- The fourth groups is nasals including /m, n, /

/m/: voiced nasals, articulated bilabial

/n/: voiced nasals, alveolar

/ŋ/: voiced nasals, velar

/m, n/ occur in all positions

/ŋ/: never occur in the initial

- The last group is liquids including /l, r/. They are both voiced alveopalatal and can come as 3 positions

English consonants cluster: 2 elements (sp, fl...), 3 elements (spr, scr...) 

2. **Vietnamese consonants system**

There are 20 consonants in Vietnamese consonants system which are described according to articulation and manner of articulation.

There are also 5 groups: stops, fricatives, nasals, lateral, semivowels

- The first group named stops including 9 consonants

/b/: voiced unaspirated bilabial stop

/t/: voiceless unaspirated dental stop

/d/: voiced unaspirated dental stop

/th/: voiceless aspirated alveolar

/t/: retroflex alveolar stop
/c/: voiceless unaspirated palatal stop
/k/: voiceless unaspirated velar
/g/: voiced equivalent of /k/

- The second group named fricatives including 7 consonants

/f/: voiceless labiodental
/v/: voiced counterpart
/s/: voiceless postdental sibilant
/ʃ/: the same like /ʃ/ in English
/z/: voiced retropflex alveopalatal fricative
/kh/: voiceless palatovelar aspirant
/h/: voiceless aspirated glottal fricative

- The third group named nasal including 4 consonants

/m/: voiced bilabial nasal
/n/: voiced apico-alveolar
/p/: voiced hard palatal nasal
/ɲ/: voiced velar nasal

- The fourth group is lateral including /l/- voiced frictionless lateral

- The last group is glides including 2 consonants

/w/: voiced bilabial continuant
/y/: voiced palatal continuant

Vietnamese consonants can occur initially and finally but never middly

Vietnamese consonants combination: ng, ngh, nh, tr, th, ch, ph
3. Final consonant comparisons

3.1 /ʃ/, /s/ and /z/

It is apparent that Most Vietnamese tend to pronounce /ʃ/ into /s/, which can be explained by these reasons. The first one is they do not manage in distinguishing the difference between these two sounds due to a slight difference between them: /ʃ/ is voiceless fricative alveo-platal while /s/ is voiceless fricative alveolar. In order to pronounce /ʃ/, the speakers’ lips should be rounded while /s/ requires them to let the air escape through a narrow passage along the center of their tongue (Dao, 2007). Another reason is that in Vietnam, despite the existence of both these sounds, few people can pronounce /ʃ/ in a precise way in any conversation. Eventually, they have no idea of correct production of this sound (Duong, 2008).

As explained by Duong (2008), /z/ is voiced fricative alveo-platal. In order to pronounce /z/, learners should let the tongue touch inside of the lower-front teeth and the blade is supposed to touch the inside of the upper teeth and the air escapes through a narrow passage along the center of the tongue.

3.2 /tʃ/ - /dʒ/

Based on the categorized sounds system, /tʃ/ is considered as a voiceless affricate alveo-platal whereas /dʒ/ is a voiced fricative alveo-platal. In case of /tʃ/, in order to pronounce /tʃ/, speakers should allow their tongue to touch the ridge of the upper front teeth for /t/, and move to the place for fricative /ʃ/ afterwards. Similarly to the pronunciation of /dʒ/, the tongue should first touch the ridge of the upper front teeth for /d/, then the tip of the tongue.
moves to the place for the fricative /ʒ/ (Duong, 2008). Additionally, Vietnamese learners tend to pronounce /tʃ/ to /č/ in Vietnamese, which reduces the air out from the lung.

**a. /m/, /b/ and /p/**

To create the 'm sound' /m/, the lips are pressed together, causing the air to be blocked from leaving the mouth. The soft palate drops, allowing air to pass out through the nose. The sound is voiced, so the vocal cords vibrate while producing it. The 'b sound' /b/ is voiced (the vocal cords vibrate while producing it), and is the counterpart to the unvoiced 'p sound' /p/.

To create the /b/, air is briefly prevented from leaving the vocal tract by closing the lips. The sound is aspirated when the air is released. The aspiration for a /b/ is less than the aspiration for a /p/.

The 'p sound' /p/ is unvoiced (the vocal cords do not vibrate while producing it), and is the counterpart to the voiced 'b sound' /b/.

To create the /p/, air is briefly prevented from leaving the vocal tract by closing the lips. The sound is aspirated when the air is released. The aspiration for a /p/ is greater than the aspiration for a /b/.

**b. /f/ and /v/**

The 'f sound' /f/ is unvoiced (the vocal cords do not vibrate during its production), and is the counterpart to the voiced 'v sound' /v/.

To create the /f/, the jaw is held nearly closed. The upper backside of the bottom lip is pressed very lightly into the bottom of the top teeth. Air is pushed out the mouth between the
top teeth and the upper backside of the bottom lip. This sound is to be a continuous consonant, meaning that it should be capable of being produced for a few seconds with even and smooth pronunciation for the entire duration.

The lips are kept mostly relaxed during the production of the /f/. A common error English language learners make is overproducing this sound by curling the bottom lip under the top teeth. This creates problems when linking other sounds to and from the /f/.

The 'v sound' /v/ is voiced (the vocal cords vibrate during its production), and is the counterpart to the unvoiced 'f sound' /f/.

To create the /v/, the jaw is held nearly closed. The upper backside of the bottom lip is pressed very lightly into the bottom of the top teeth. Air is pushed out the mouth between the top teeth and the upper backside of the bottom lip. This sound is a continuous consonant, meaning that it should be capable of being produced for a few seconds with even and smooth pronunciation for the entire duration.

The lips are kept mostly relaxed during the /v/. A common error ESL/ELL students make is overproducing this sound by curling the bottom lip under the top teeth. This creates problems when linking to and from the /v/.

c. /n/ and /l/

To create the 'n sound' /n/, the air is blocked from leaving the mouth by pressing the tip against the tooth ridge and the sides of the front of the tongue against the side teeth. The soft palate drops, allowing air to pass out through the nose. The sound is voiced, so the vocal cords vibrate while producing it.
There are two 'l sound' formations--also known as allophones of the 'l sound': a 'light l' and a 'velar' (or dark) 'l'. The 'velar l' is represented by the International Phonetic Alphabet symbol /ɫ/.

The following is a description for the light l; hereafter simply referred to as the 'l sound' /l/.

To create the /l/, the tip of the tongue is placed against the middle of the tooth ridge. The sound is created when air travels alongside the tip of the tongue, between the front of the tongue and the side teeth.

d. /t/ and /d/

The 't sound' /t/ is unvoiced (the vocal cords do not vibrate while producing it), and is the counterpart to the voiced 'd sound' /d/.

To create the /t/, air is briefly prevented from leaving the vocal tract when the tip of the tongue presses against the tooth ridge while the sides of the tongue press against the upper side teeth. The sound is aspirated when the air is released. The aspiration for a /t/ is greater than the aspiration for a /d/, especially when it is the first sound of a word or the first sound of a stressed syllable.

Advanced ESL/ELL pronunciation students should be aware of /t/ allophones, of which there are many. The /t/ is usually only pronounced as described above in the following circumstances:

The 'd sound' /d/ is voiced (the vocal cords vibrate while producing it), and is the counterpart to the unvoiced 't sound' /t/.
To create the /d/, air is briefly prevented from leaving the vocal tract when the tip of the tongue presses against the tooth ridge while the sides of the tongue press against the upper side teeth. The sound is aspirated when the air is released. The aspiration for a /d/ is less than the aspiration for a /t/.

Advanced ESL/ELL pronunciation students should be aware that when the /d/ is followed by an 'l sound' /l/ or an ‘n sound’ /n/, the aspiration of the /d/ is not released in the same manner as before other sounds. Instead, a lateral aspiration is used in the /d+l/ combination, and a nasal aspiration is used in the /d+n/ combination.
APPENDIX 3

Consent Form for Recording & Survey Research

Difficulties of Vietnamese students when pronouncing English sounds

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to define difficulties of Vietnamese students when pronouncing English sounds as well as to suggest some solutions to tackle their pronunciation issues.

Procedures: Upon your agreement to participate in this study, you will complete a recording with tables of sounds together with a survey of four (4) questions, which will take less than 10 minutes.

Risks and Benefits Associated with the Study: This study does not have any known risks. The benefits in this study include pointing out pronunciation problems that students may face.

Confidentiality: These surveys are anonymous. The records of this study will be kept in a locked office at the university, preventing any breach of confidentiality. Should the study ever become published material, your name will in no way be linked to the study, nor will it mention your personal involvement.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with this BU student researcher or with Benedictine University faculty. You are free to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers or Benedictine University.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher(s) conducting this study is Ngo Trung Hieu with Dr. Olga Lambert. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, please ask the student researcher at this time. If questions or concerns arise at a later time, you may direct them to 084983929711 or to 630-829 6291. Questions and concerns may also be addressed to Alandra Devall, Ph.D., Chair, Institutional Review Board, Benedictine University, 5700 College Road, Lisle, IL 60532, 630-829-6295 or adevall@ben.edu.

Statement of Consent:

By signing below, you have agreed to the above information in its entirety. Signing also indicates that you are 18 years of age or more and that you have agreed to participate.

Signature _______________________________________ Date_____________
APPENDIX 4

Consent Form for Survey Research

The difficulties faced by Vietnamese secondary students in English pronunciation

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to define difficulties of Vietnamese students when pronouncing English sounds as well as to suggest some solutions to tackle their pronunciation issues

**Procedures:** Upon your agreement to participate in this study, you will complete a brief survey that will take less than 20 minutes

**Risks and Benefits Associated with the Study:** This study does not have any known risks. The benefits in this study include pointing out pronunciation problems that students may face

**Confidentiality:** These surveys are anonymous. The records of this study will be kept in a locked office at the university, preventing any breach of confidentiality. Should the study ever become published material, your name will in no way be linked to the study, nor will it mention your personal involvement.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with this BU student researcher or with Benedictine University faculty. You are free to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the researchers or Benedictine University.

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**Statement of Consent:**

By signing below, you have agreed to the above information in its entirety. Signing also indicates that you are 18 years of age or more and that you have agreed to participate.

Signature _________________________________________ Date____________
THESIS APPROVAL

Student: Ngô Trung Hiếu

Department: Languages and Literature, College of Liberal Arts

Thesis Title: THE DIFFICULTIES VIETNAMESE SECONDARY STUDENTS EXPERIENCE IN PRODUCING ENGLISH FINAL CONSONANTS

Sandra Kies
Thesis advisor August 21, 2019

Olga D. Lambert
Thesis advisor August 21, 2019

Approval for Binding

Olga D. Lambert
Chair, Dept. of Languages and Literature August 21, 2019

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