

ATTITUDES TOWARD NATIVE-LIKE PRONUNCIATION AND PRONUNCIATION ACHIEVEMENT AMONG VIETNAMESE EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation remains an essential component of communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), yet many learners experience psychological barriers that hinder effective spoken communication. This study investigates the relationships among pronunciation anxiety, attitudes toward native-like pronunciation, and pronunciation achievement among Vietnamese university students. Using a quantitative correlational design, survey data and pronunciation test scores were collected from 272 non-English major students at four universities. Descriptive analyses revealed that participants reported relatively high levels of pronunciation anxiety and strong preferences for native-like pronunciation. Students who had been exposed to English before adolescence demonstrated significantly higher levels of pronunciation anxiety and stronger adherence to native-like pronunciation norms than those who began learning English later. Multiple regression analysis further showed that both pronunciation anxiety and attitudes toward native-like pronunciation were significant negative predictors of pronunciation achievement. The findings suggest that excessive orientation toward native-like pronunciation may increase learners' psychological burden and adversely affect pronunciation performance. The study therefore supports a pedagogical shift from native-speaker norms toward the intelligibility principle, emphasizing effective communication over accent imitation. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the psychological factors influencing pronunciation learning and provide practical implications for English language teaching in Vietnamese EFL contexts.

Keywords: *pronunciation anxiety; native-like pronunciation; pronunciation achievement; intelligibility principle; Vietnamese EFL learners.*

Introduction

In English communication, pronunciation directly affects listener understanding, fluency, and speech intelligibility. The Intelligibility Principle (Levis, 2020) and a pedagogical emphasis on sustained comprehensibility (Saito, 2021) are two examples of how applied linguistics has fueled a macro-level change over the past ten years away from strict correctness toward communicative effectiveness. There is still a significant systemic gap, though, since bottom-up educational realities continue to show opposition to this shift while top-down theories oppose the predominance of native-like norms. This conflict implies that theoretical advancement at the macro level breaks down when it is mediated via the subjective, anxiety-ridden psychological environments of individual language learners.

This theoretical-practical difference shows

up as an educational stalemate in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings like Vietnam. Grammar-translation assessment criteria often downplay pronunciation acquisition, a systemic issue that is significantly exacerbated among non-English majors. This group navigates a restricted language ecosystem since they are not required to communicate outside of official testing and have minimal exposure to spoken English. When learning pronunciation, students who are majoring in English frequently struggle to control fundamental aspects like word stress and the rise and fall of their voice (Luu & Nguyen, 2026). This is significant since communication confidence is influenced by proficiency in these areas (Nguyen & Newton, 2019; Luu et al., 2025). Ongoing problems cast doubt on the fundamental belief that sound faults are solely caused by poor skill or insufficient practice. These issues indicate that learners should

pay close attention to the ideological and emotional elements influencing how successfully sounds are remembered.

Pronunciation anxiety is the most common of these disruptive processes; it is not a passive result of subpar performance but an active, crippling psychological obstacle. It causes avoidant behaviors, classroom mutism, and the long-term repression of latent competence as a situation-specific emotional restriction (Baran-Lucarz & Lee, 2021; Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). Importantly, this anxiety is closely linked to the acute social risk associated with real-time voice output, identity fragility, and public self-concept instability (Kimura, 2021). Pronunciation challenges become high-stakes psychological risks that directly stop the cognitive capacity needed for correct articulation for non-English majors who lack institutional peer validation or extensive phonetic instruction.

However, diagnosing anxiety in isolation obscures the deeper ideological structures that generate it. A strong countercurrent that passionately idealizes native-like perfection also governs learner psychology, revealing a serious conflict between native-oriented aspirations and intelligibility-oriented realities (Levis, 2024; Saito, 2021). A psychological paradox is revealed by critical analysis: the blind idealization of an unachievable native standard acts as the major driver for cognitive dissonance. While a high conformity with national norms is sometimes regarded as a source of motivation, it really acts as the major engine for cognitive dissonance. The strain that results from learners continuously comparing their interlanguage performance to an unachievable level directly contributes to the pronunciation anxiety that paralyzes vocal production (Park, 2022). Because learner attitudes are an ideological double-edged sword that often undermines educational objectives, they cannot be viewed as a linear motivating advantage.

This critical intersection marks the exact point of fragmentation in contemporary EFL literature. Current research is still quite compartmentalized, addressing accent attitudes (Almusharraf, 2022) and pronunciation anxiety (Baran-Lucarz & Lee, 2021) as distinct factors with a strong empirical bias in

favor of English majors. While surface-level teaching strategies have received descriptive attention in the Vietnamese context (Nguyen & Newton, 2019; Nhat & Hien, 2025), there is a dearth of scientific information about how these psychological elements interact and how their effect changes depending on a learner's developmental exposure to the language. University students who do not major in English are the crucial focal point of this dilemma; caught between strict graduation requirements and little language assistance, they experience particular psychological conflicts that probably change how these affective factors function.

The current study addresses these gaps by conducting a simultaneous predictive analysis of pronunciation anxiety, native-like attitudes, and objective phonological achievement among Vietnamese non-English majors. By evaluating these elements in conjunction with the impact of early vs late language exposure, the study explains the hierarchy of these psychological barriers. This gives EFL teaching data-driven insight into whether institutional interventions should emphasize therapeutic anxiety reduction, the destruction of false conceptions, or a strategically coordinated dual strategy. This inquiry is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the levels of pronunciation anxiety and attitudes toward native-like pronunciation among the participants?

RQ2: Do pronunciation anxiety and attitudes toward native-like pronunciation differ based on the age of initial exposure?

RQ3: To what extent do pronunciation anxiety and attitudes toward native-like pronunciation predict pronunciation test scores?

1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Levis's (2020) Intelligibility Principle. Rather than treating these frameworks separately, this study integrates them to explain how emotional factors and pronunciation beliefs jointly influence pronunciation achievement among EFL learners.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) explains the emotional dimension of language learning. It proposes that affective factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation can either

facilitate or block language input processing. In pronunciation learning, high anxiety raises the affective filter, reducing learners' ability to produce and practice spoken language effectively. This is especially important in EFL classes because students are required to perform orally while being evaluated. Previous studies have demonstrated that pronunciation anxiety is linked to worse oral performance, avoidance of related activities, and decreased confidence (Baran-Lucarz & Lee, 2021; Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). Kimura (2021) goes on to highlight that this anxiety is connected to identity and fear of unfavorable social evaluation in addition to being performance-based.

However, pronunciation results cannot be entirely explained by anxiety alone. Learners' emotional experiences and learning behaviors may be influenced by their perceptions of what constitutes proper pronunciation. Levis's Intelligibility Principle (2020) is pertinent in this situation. According to the idea, intelligibility should take precedence over native-like precision when it comes to successful pronunciation. In global English contexts, mutual comprehension is more crucial for effective communication than accent copying. However, many students still argue that the ideal technique is to pronounce things like native speakers. Such ideas may bolster drive and effort, but they can also lead to irrational expectations and psychological strain, especially in cases students feel they fall short of measuring up to native norms.

Importantly, the connection between these two frames is mediated by the learner's background. The manifestation of these emotive and attitudinal elements is influenced by an individual's developmental history, notably the age of initial language exposure. Learners who started learning English at different phases of development may experience variable levels of anxiety or attachment to native-like standards. As a result, these psychological components work together to impact speech development in ways that differ among learners.

Based on this integrated perspective, this study proposes that foreign language pronunciation anxiety and native-like pronunciation attitudes function as two interrelated psychological

predictors of empirical pronunciation achievement. To systematically examine these relationships, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Foreign language pronunciation anxiety exerts a significant negative influence on EFL learners' pronunciation achievement.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Native-like pronunciation attitudes exert a significant negative influence on EFL learners' pronunciation achievement due to the psychological strain and unrealistic standards they impose.

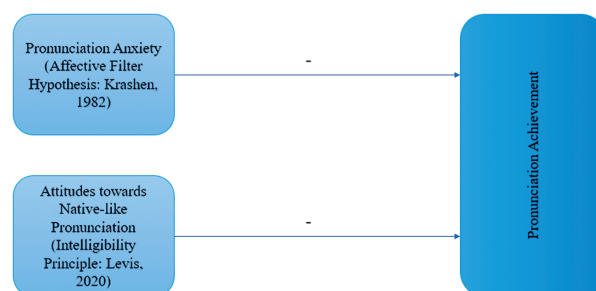


Figure 1. The proposed conceptual framework

(Note. (-) indicates a hypothesized negative relationship)

2. Method

Research Design

The research design adopted in this study was quantitative. It focuses on using numerical data to measure connections between variables. The study is to investigate the relationship between pronunciation achievement and views of native-like pronunciation and pronunciation anxiety, which makes this design appropriate. Clear comparison and statistical testing of these correlations are made possible by a quantitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, it enhances objectivity in data processing and lessens subjective interpretation.

The study follows a correlational design. This means it does not manipulate variables. It only examines natural relationships among them. Correlational design is widely used in language learning research when the goal is to predict or explain learner outcomes based on psychological factors (Dörnyei, 2007). In this study, pronunciation anxiety and attitudes are treated as independent variables. Pronunciation achievement is treated as the dependent variable.

Research Context and Participants

This study was conducted at four private universities in Vietnam. These universities are in urban areas. English is a compulsory subject for all majors. However, students mainly use English inside the classroom. Real communication practice is still limited. Pronunciation is usually taught in speaking courses, not as a separate subject. This creates a gap between learning and real use.

A total of 272 non-English major students participated. They came from Information Technology, Business Administration, Engineering, and Law. These majors often require English for study and future work. Most students had 7-10 years of English learning experience. Their level was mainly A2 to B1 (CEFR). The group showed a notable difference in language history: 151 participants (55.5%) started formal exposure to English during post-childhood, whereas 121 participants (44.5%) reported first exposure

during pre-adolescence. The majority of students reported having no formal phonetic instruction, and their main practice was restricted to speaking assignments in the classroom, despite their diverse linguistic backgrounds.

The sample included 52% first-year and 48% second-year students, aged 18-21. Both male and female students participated. Their exposure to English outside class was limited. This makes them suitable for studying pronunciation anxiety and attitudes in a real EFL learning context.

A convenience sampling method was applied. This method is often used in education when access to participants is limited (Etikan et al., 2016). Although it is not fully random, it is suitable for quantitative studies in university settings. All participants joined voluntarily and were informed before data collection.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants (N = 272)

	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year of Study	First-year	141	51.8
	Second-year	131	48.2
Gender	Male	128	47.1
	Female	144	52.9
Major	Information Technology	78	28.7
	Business Administration	69	25.4
	Engineering	63	23.2
	Law	62	22.7
CEFR Level	A2	121	44.5
	B1	151	55.5
Age of exposure	Pre-adolescent exposure	121	44.5
	Post-childhood exposure	151	55.5

Instrument

Attitudes towards native-like pronunciation

This study used a subscale adapted from Uchida and Sugimoto (2019) to measure learners’ attitudes toward native-like pronunciation in a Vietnamese EFL context. The scale focused on pronunciation goals, including preference for native-like speech and acceptance of native-like accents. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used.

The six-item measure demonstrated great intraclass reliability (ICC =.953) and excellent reliability (α =.953), with item-total correlations ranging from .729 to .921. 77.10% of the variance might be explained by a single component, according to exploratory factor analysis. Strong construct validity was established by factor loadings ranging from.744 to.937 and all communalities above .554. Overall, the scale was accurate and suitable for evaluating the students’ views toward pronunciation..

Table 2. Factor Loadings and Communalities

Items	Factor Loading	Extraction
Factor: Native-like Pronunciation Attitudes (NLP)		
NLP2: It is important that I possess a native-like pronunciation.	.937	.878
NLP3: It is acceptable to me if Vietnamese teachers use a Vietnamese accent.	.934	.872
NLP5: I do not care about teachers' pronunciation if I understand the communication.	.905	.818
NLP6: I do not care about my pronunciation if people understand my communication.	.888	.789
NLP4: It is acceptable to me if I use a Vietnamese accent.	.846	.715
NLP1: I believe it is important that teachers possess a native-like pronunciation.	.744	.554
Eigenvalues	4.626	
% of Variance Explained	77.102%	
Cumulative Variance Explained (%)	77.102%	

(Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Only one component was extracted, so the solution cannot be rotated)

Foreign Language Pronunciation Anxiety Scale (FLPAS) Learners' pronunciation anxiety was measured using and modifying the Foreign Language Pronunciation Anxiety Scale (FLPAS), which was created by Kralova et al. (2018). With 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree), higher scores correspond to higher levels of anxiety. The construct validity of the scale was high. A

two-factor structure that explained 86.75% of the variation was validated by EFA: learning difficulty and required persistence (31.47%) and pronunciation performance and social anxiety (55.28%). With reliability of .975 and .962 for the two factors, reliability was extremely high ($\alpha = .968$). Strong loadings were displayed by every item, demonstrating FLPAS's dependability.

Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix and Communalities

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Extraction
Factor 1: Pronunciation performance and social anxiety			
PA12: Other students do not have better English pronunciation than I do. (R)	.916	.259	.906
PA11: I am afraid my future colleagues will have better English pronunciation than I do.	.908	.278	.902
PA8: I feel embarrassed when I realize that I pronounce some words incorrectly.	.901	.302	.902
PA14: I do not feel ashamed when people correct my pronunciation mistakes. (R)	.900	.364	.943
PA6: I am bothered about making pronunciation mistakes.	.887	.208	.831

PA15: It seems to me that I cannot get rid of my Vietnamese accent in English.	.885	.371	.922
PA13: I am worried about not being understood because of my improper pronunciation.	.879	.250	.836
PA5: I am satisfied with my English pronunciation. (R)	.871	.251	.822
PA2: I do not like talking to more advanced English speakers.	.864	.285	.828
PA9: I am afraid people will think I am silly because of my poor pronunciation.	.863	.389	.896
PA10: I consider imitating native-like English pronunciation ridiculous.	.853	.364	.860
PA4: I get nervous when I have to speak English in front of other people.	.815	.276	.741
PA3: I feel embarrassed talking to people with good English pronunciation.	.789	.493	.865
PA1: I do not feel nervous when speaking English. (R)	.778	.195	.643
Factor 2: Learning difficulty and required persistence			
PA7: I realize how many pronunciation mistakes I make.	.184	.920	.881
PA16: I can never master good English pronunciation.	.330	.914	.944
PA19: It is very difficult to pronounce like a native speaker.	.315	.913	.933
PA20: Good English pronunciation is very important for professional communication.	.298	.906	.910
PA17: I do not think English pronunciation is difficult. (R)	.355	.883	.906
PA18: I consider the rules of English pronunciation incomprehensible.	.318	.883	.881
Eigenvalues	14.505	2.845	
% of Variance Explained	55.28%	31.47%	
Cumulative Variance Explained (%)			86.75%

(Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. (R) denotes reverse-scored items)

Pronunciation achievement test

To measure objective pronunciation achievement, a structured 10-point pronunciation test was developed for non-English majors, conceptually guided by the intelligibility principles of Levis (2020) and Saito (2021). Part 1 consists of isolated word reading (4.0 points), evaluating word stress and segmental accuracy across 20 items to address typical phonological challenges for Vietnamese non-majors, with each item worth 0.2 points. Part 2 involves sentence reading (6.0 points) using 6 complex sentences to assess connected speech mechanics, including rhythm, linking, and intonation (Nguyen & Newton, 2019), with each sentence worth a maximum of 1.0 point. Aligned

with the evaluation framework of Saito (2021), a specific rubric scores each sentence based on three core dimensions such as segmental accuracy, suprasegmental accuracy, and fluency, with the criteria ratings mathematically scaled to fit the 1.0-point maximum per sentence.

Two independent applied linguistics experts confirmed the content validity of the test for non-English majors at A2 to B1 CEFR levels. For scoring reliability, two experienced EFL lecturers independently evaluated the recorded audio of all 272 participants. Score discrepancies of 0.5 points or less were averaged, while gaps exceeding 0.5 points were resolved through collaborative re-examination and consensus. The statistical

reliability of this scoring process was verified by a two-way mixed effects Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC). The analysis yielded an excellent ICC of .912 (95% Confidence Interval [.885, .934]), demonstrating outstanding scoring consistency and confirming the stability of the final test scores.

Data collection and analysis

The period of data collection was January through March of 2026. Prior to the main study, a pilot research was conducted with non-participants to verify item consistency, and the instruments underwent minor adjustments after examination by four specialists in applied linguistics. For the pronunciation test, participants completed the reading tasks individually in a quiet classroom setting to minimize background noise. Each participant was given two minutes to review the test items before recording began. Their oral responses were recorded using high-quality digital voice recorders to ensure acoustic clarity, and the resulting audio files were converted into a standardized format and safely stored using anonymous identification codes. Strict adherence to ethical standards was maintained; participation was completely optional, anonymous, and subject to withdrawal at any moment.

The analysis was done using SPSS 27. Descriptive statistics summarized the data.

Cronbach’s alpha tested reliability. EFA confirmed construct validity. Independent samples t-tests examined group differences. These procedures ensured valid and reliable results for interpreting relationships among variables.

3. Findings

The Levels of Pronunciation Anxiety and Attitudes Towards Native-like Pronunciation Among The Participants

Descriptive findings indicate fairly elevated levels of both pronunciation anxiety and perceptions regarding native-like pronunciation. Attitudes regarding native-like pronunciation showed the highest mean ($M = 3.82, SD = 0.87$), suggesting that numerous learners still link good pronunciation to sounding like native speakers, even though responses differed among participants.

Pronunciation anxiety was likewise moderate ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.58$). Learning difficulty and necessary persistence were the most essential facets ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.73$) pointing out that learners remain troubled with pronunciation but feel bound to put up much work to overcome these obstacles. Pronunciation performance and social anxiety were somewhat less pronounced ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.60$), but there was still considerable level of strain when speaking.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Foreign language pronunciation anxiety	272	2.00	5.00	3.54	0.58
Learning difficulty and required persistence	272	2.00	5.00	3.69	0.73
Pronunciation performance and social anxiety	272	2.00	5.00	3.47	0.60
Attitudes towards native-like pronunciation	272	1.00	5.00	3.82	0.87

The Differences Between Attitudes Towards Native-like Pronunciation and Levels of Pronunciation Anxiety With The Age of Exposure

An independent samples t-test was performed to evaluate differences in pronunciation-related constructs according to the age of English exposure. The sample was split into two groups: pre-adolescent and post-childhood exposure. Statistical analysis indicates that these groups have unique socio-psychological characteristics.

Because the variances weren’t equal for overall

anxiety (Levene’s test, $F = 5.08, p = .025$), the degrees of freedom got tweaked with the Welch-Satterthwaite correction. Learners who had pre-adolescent exposure, kind of reported a notably higher overall pronunciation anxiety ($M = 3.79, SD = 0.59$) than learners with post-childhood exposure ($M = 3.33, SD = 0.49$), $t(232.05) = 6.86, p < .001, d = 0.85$. It seems this split was mostly powered by pronunciation ability factors and social anxiety, where the early-exposure group landed higher scores ($M = 3.72, SD = 0.63$) than

the later-exposed group ($M = 3.27, SD = 0.48$), $t(218.35) = 6.45, p < .001, d = 0.81$.

This structural variation illustrates the intricate interactions involved in learning a second language. Although early exposure is frequently linked to linguistic benefits, emotional anxiety is rarely lessened by it. Rather, learners who started learning English at a young age seem to establish an idealized internal standard and increased phonological awareness. They feel more pressure to maintain an impeccable performance since they have dedicated more time and identity to the language. On the other hand, late-primed learners expressed less anxiety, perhaps as a result of lower levels of phonological self-monitoring and more practical communicative objectives.

Attitudes about a native-like pronunciation

also changed quite a bit; learners who were exposed early seemed to want a native-like accent more strongly ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.88$) compared with those who were exposed later ($M = 3.62, SD = 0.82$), $t(270) = 4.38, p < .001, d = 0.53$. So it looks like starting earlier, maybe encourages a sturdier promise to standard acoustic patterns. Also, the early-exposure group had higher ratings for learning difficulty and more need for persistence ($M = 3.95, SD = 0.68$ versus $M = 3.47, SD = 0.70$), $t(259.49) = 5.72, p < .001, d = 0.70$. Even if the early-exposure group reports both more anxiety and stronger ambitions, it still seems these findings point to the idea that chasing native-like standards can accidentally raise the psychological load on learners, and not just as a helpful aim.

Table 5. Differences in pronunciation attitudes and anxiety

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Foreign language pronunciation anxiety	Pre-adolescent exposure	121	3.79	0.59	6.86	232.05	< .001	0.85
	Post-childhood exposure	151	3.33	0.49				
Learning difficulty and required persistence	Pre-adolescent exposure	121	3.95	0.68	5.72	259.49	< .001	0.70
	Post-childhood exposure	151	3.47	0.70				
Pronunciation performance and social anxiety	Pre-adolescent exposure	121	3.72	0.63	6.45	218.35	< .001	0.81
	Post-childhood exposure	151	3.27	0.48				
Attitudes towards native-like pronunciation	Pre-adolescent exposure	121	4.07	0.88	4.38	270.00	< .001	0.53
	Post-childhood exposure	151	3.62	0.82				

The Prediction of Pronunciation Anxiety and Attitudes Towards Native-like Pronunciation on The Pronunciation Test Scores

Pronunciation anxiety ($r = -.331, p < .001$) and native-like attitudes ($r = -.234, p < .001$) are both substantially and adversely connected with objective pronunciation test results at the macro

level, according to Pearson correlation analysis. Anxiety and native-like attitudes have a negative correlation ($r = -.175, p = .002$), indicating that although both constructs impair performance on their own, they represent partially independent psychological dimensions that together lead to worse phonological outcomes. One of these

dimensions is based on social-evaluative anxiety, while the other is rooted in the cognitive burden of rigid idealization.

Both characteristics are independent negative predictors of pronunciation performance, according to multiple regression analysis (Table 6). Pronunciation anxiety ($\beta = -.383, p < .001$) and native-like attitudes ($\beta = -.301, p < .001$) significantly reduce test performance, according to the regression model ($R^2 = .197, Adjusted R^2 = .191, F(2, 269) = 33.063, p < .001$). No issues were found using multicollinearity diagnostics ($VIF = 1.032$).

These results give a clear assessment of the study’s hypothesis. Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were completely supported. The study found that both foreign language pronunciation anxiety ($\beta = -.383, p < .001$) and native-like pronunciation attitudes ($\beta = -.301, p < .001$) are significant

predictors of pronunciation accomplishment. These empirical findings show that placing a high priority on a native-like accent, rather than improving proficiency, predicts worse outcomes in phonological tasks, most likely due to the psychological strain and unreasonable expectations it imposes.

The convergence of negative correlations and beta weights reveals the true psychological cost of perfectionism. When students seek for an absolute native acoustic norm, they set an unreasonable standard that serves as a barrier to phonological success. Although some learners have the regulatory urge to persevere, this driven effort, combined with an idealized norm, causes cognitive overload. As a result, cognitive resources are diverted away from the automaticity necessary for fluent articulatory output, resulting in decreased articulatory fluency and lower test scores.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics, correlations, and multiple regression results

Variable	M	SD	Foreign language pronunciation anxiety	Attitudes towards native-like pronunciation	B	SE	β	t	VIF
Foreign language pronunciation anxiety	3.54	0.58	—		-0.694	0.100	-.383	-6.910*	1.032
Attitudes towards native-like pronunciation	3.82	0.87	-.175*	—	-0.364	0.067	-.301	-5.433*	1.032
Pronunciation test score	8.03	1.06	-.331*	-.234*	—	—	—	—	—
[Constant/ Intercept]	—	—	—	—	11.877	0.476	—	24.942*	—

(Note. $N = 272$. Values under columns 1 and 2 represent Pearson correlation coefficients (r). $R = .444, R^2 = .197, Adjusted R^2 = .191, F(2, 269) = 33.063, p < .001$)

4. Discussions and Implications

The results show that among non-English majors, pronunciation anxiety and the idealization of native-like norms are both important, independent negative predictors of pronunciation performance. The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) is directly supported by this data, which shows that emotional obstacles actively obstruct the cognitive processes necessary for articulation rather than

just coexisting with learning challenges. This study shows that pronunciation anxiety functions as a persistent, high-stakes psychological risk that impairs performance even when students put forth considerable effort, in contrast to earlier research that frequently portrayed it as a passive response to poor skill (Baran-Lucarz & Lee, 2021; Coppinger & Sheridan, 2022). The social-evaluative worries outlined by Kimura (2021)

exacerbate the detrimental effects of this anxiety when students experience the burden of being judged by others in real time.

The findings also casts doubt on the conventional wisdom that a high inclination for native-like standards is just a motivational advantage. This work offers empirical evidence that such inflexible views function as an ideological double-edged sword, which is consistent with the concerns expressed by Levis (2024) and Saito (2021). Learners set an unachievable norm that causes cognitive dissonance and paralysis when they use native-like accuracy as their only benchmark (Park, 2022). These findings demonstrate that this cognitive overload is especially harmful for non-major students, who function within a limited language environment, in contrast to earlier research that has mostly concentrated on English majors. Lower test results result from the desire of perfection, which takes mental energy away from the automaticity required for fluid output rather than improving clarity or intelligibility.

This study sets itself apart by proving that early English exposure does not always result in a psychological buffer. Compared to those exposed later in childhood, these individuals reported higher levels of anxiety and more strict adherence to national standards, despite the fact that early exposure is frequently praised for language benefits. This implies that these crushing perfectionism standards become more ingrained the longer a student engages with an idealized, native-oriented educational style. This study clarifies the precise hierarchy of these barriers by concurrently modeling these affective and ideological factors, demonstrating that institutional focus must change from solely skill-based practice to addressing the emotional and cognitive barriers that determine the practice's actual success.

The results have important implications for EFL instruction in Vietnam and other comparable settings where standardized correctness often comes at the expense of communicative effectiveness. The native-speaker prejudice that underlies present evaluation standards must be abandoned by educators since it actively hinders non-major students' growth. Pronunciation-related psychological stress may be reduced by making

the Intelligibility Principle (Levis, 2020) the main educational objective. Institutions can give students a more manageable, less stressful goal by redefining effective communication as the capacity to be understood rather than the ability to imitate a native-like accent. This change successfully reduces the emotional filter, freeing students from the crippling anxiety of falling short of unattainable standards and enabling them to concentrate on functional speaking (Krashen, 1982).

Therefore, in addition to phonetic teaching, institutional treatments should focus on therapeutic anxiety alleviation. According to the findings, social anxiety is made worse by the present assessment environments, which are frequently motivated by grammar-translation techniques (Nguyen & Newton, 2019). The classroom mutism that is frequently observed in kids with high performance anxiety may be lessened by switching to low-stakes, task-based activities (Baran-Lucarz & Lee, 2021). To assist students in dismantling the unreasonable standards that now anticipate their subpar performance, teachers should openly discuss with them the limitations of native-like norms.

Finally, a one-size-fits-all approach to pronunciation seems to be ineffective since early-exposed and late-exposed learners have different traits. Early-exposed learners, who have deeper roots in idealized language norms, may require more intensive psychological support to distinguish their identity from their pronunciation correctness. In the meantime, as encouraged by current developments in international communication, curriculum for all students should highlight the diversity and adaptability of spoken English (Saito, 2021). Universities may help non-English majors break free from the crippling cycle of anxiety and perfectionism by synchronizing these pedagogical shifts, de-centering the native-speaker ideal and legitimizing varied, understandable phonological output.

Conclusion

This study shows that among Vietnamese non-English majors, pronunciation anxiety and a strict adherence to native-like standards serve as important psychological obstacles that hinder objective pronunciation accomplishment. Due to the unsustainable cognitive burden imposed by the pursuit of perfectionism, which takes mental

resources away from the automaticity necessary for fluent speech, empirical results show that these dimensions function as independent negative predictors of phonological performance. Long-term exposure to idealized instructional models may unintentionally reinforce the very perfectionist standards that undermine communicative efficacy. Additionally, early exposure to English offers no inherent psychological buffer; in fact, early-exposed learners report increased anxiety and a more dogmatic adherence to native-like standards.

The use of self-report surveys, which may lead individuals to provide biased responses based on what they believe is socially acceptable rather than their actual sentiments, limits these results. Furthermore, the results cannot be applied to non-English majors in different Vietnamese geographical or institutional contexts due to the convenience sample strategy used at four private metropolitan institutions. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional methodology, which records pronunciation scores and psychological states at a single moment in time, limits its ability to draw clear conclusions regarding long-term causative changes.

Future research should use longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to monitor how these emotional and ideological factors change over time in order to get around these restrictions. To obtain a more comprehensive, human knowledge of the psychological challenges behind foreign language speech production, researchers should also incorporate qualitative data, such as in-depth interviews with learners, and give a thorough explanation of the pronouncing exam itself.

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All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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