

University of Szeged  
Doctoral School in Linguistics  
English Applied Linguistics PhD Program

**Karina Baranyi-Dupák**

**Pronunciation- and accent-related beliefs, attitudes, and  
pronunciation learning strategies of English language teacher  
trainees in Hungary**

Doktori (Ph.D.) értekezés tézisei - Summary of Doctoral Dissertation

Supervisor:  
Katalin Doró, PhD, dr. habil

Szeged, 2024

# 1. Rationale for the study

It is recognized that teachers' thought processes, prior experiences, and the context in which they teach affect their teaching. Teaching is a profession in which students begin learning with pre-established beliefs and notions about what teaching entails. As Levin (2014) notes, it is crucial to identify teacher trainees' (mis)conceptions, theories, and beliefs to address them in teacher education. Johnson (1994) points out that teacher trainees must be given opportunities to understand themselves and their beliefs about learning and teaching. This can be achieved by providing opportunities for self-reflection and by explicitly discussing potential misbeliefs and biases. If we are to improve teacher education, it is also essential to understand "how preservice teachers conceptualize their initial teaching experiences, interpret new information about second language learning and teaching, and translate this information into classroom practices" (Johnson, 1994, pp. 440-441).

This dissertation aims to address two gaps in applied linguistics research: the lack of research on teacher cognition in second language (L2) pronunciation instruction, more specifically, teachers' attitudes and beliefs regarding pronunciation, and pronunciation instruction and learning, which, after decades of neglect, is gaining increasing attention in international research (Derwing & Munro, 2022) but is still an under-researched topic (Tsang, 2021). Research has explored teacher cognition across various skills, particularly grammar. Although pronunciation cognition research has lagged behind that on other skills (Baker & Murphy, 2011), a wealth of information is available regarding aspects that most affect intelligibility and comprehensibility (e.g., Munro & Derwing, 2001, 2006; Hahn, 2004). However, research suggests that pronunciation is often neglected in classrooms due to time constraints and teacher insecurity (Burgess & Spencer, 2000; Breikreutz et al., 2001; Macdonald, 2002). This is problematic, because accurate and intelligible pronunciation is crucial for effective communication. In addition, failing to address pronunciation problems in the classroom can lead to students not prioritizing their pronunciation improvement, which perpetuates the problem. To give pronunciation the same priority as other language skills and fully incorporate it into the language-learning process, it is crucial to (re)evaluate its current standing. This can be achieved by identifying the problematic aspects of pronunciation learning and teaching in Hungarian schools and teacher education to emphasize and raise awareness of the significance of pronunciation learning and teaching. Teacher trainees are ideal candidates for this purpose, as they can provide a threefold perspective: experiences from their recent high

school years, their current university studies, and their future role as teachers with emergent teacher cognition.

## 2.Theoretical background

The dissertation draws on established and novel frameworks to explore teacher trainees' emergent cognitions of pronunciation teaching and learning in a Hungarian context. The first is Borg's (2003) teacher cognition framework. Teacher cognition is "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think" (Borg, 2003, p. 81). Borg's framework builds on mainstream educational research and aims to capture "the complexity of teachers' mental lives" (p. 86). In this framework, teacher cognition is understood as "what second and foreign language teachers, at any stage of their careers, think, know, or believe in relation to various aspects of their work" (p. 86). Teacher cognition is influenced by several factors, including schooling, professional coursework, classroom practice, and contextual elements. Borg's (2003) framework highlights the importance of early experience, the potential effect of professional coursework, and the relationship between cognition and classroom practice. This study also utilized Macalister's (2014) emergent teacher cognition framework, which includes beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, prior knowledge and experience, and contextual factors that impact teacher trainees' cognition. Additionally, given that the primary focus of this dissertation is pronunciation teaching and learning, Burri, Baker and Chen's (2018) framework for preparing pronunciation instructors is also drawn upon. This framework includes *personal-professional*, *teacher preparation*, and *language factors*, along with the contextual factors added by Burri and Baker (2021). As described in the framework, these factors have a reciprocal relationship with the other three factors and impact teacher trainees' cognition, practices, and identity. This framework integrates pedagogical and linguistic perspectives, with a specific focus on pronunciation. Relying on these frameworks, this dissertation aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of teacher trainees' emergent cognitions (more specifically, beliefs and attitudes), as well as past experiences regarding pronunciation teaching and learning, thereby contributing to the development of teacher education programs in Hungary.

When conducting research on the cognition of L2 English pronunciation, it is essential to consider some key aspects of English pronunciation teaching and learning, both globally and in the research context. As Derwing and Munro (2022) highlighted, pronunciation teaching has undergone significant changes over the years. While earlier emphasis was placed on achieving

native-like pronunciation, focus shifted to natural input and exposure. However, due to the perceived challenges in achieving native-like pronunciation, there was a decline in both pronunciation instruction and research. Nonetheless, as Derwing and Munro (2022) noted, it is now recognized that intelligibility and comprehensibility are more important than sounding native-like. The global use of English has resulted in the emergence of various fields to document how English is used, grouped under the broad term Global Englishes (Rose et al., 2020), drawing on the work of scholars of World Englishes (WE) (Kachru et al., 2006), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2006a; Seidlhofer, 2011), and English as an International Language (EIL) (Matsuda, 2012). According to Rose et al. (2020), ELF research has changed how English language use is perceived in many areas of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language education. ELF advocates for the importance of intelligibility over native-like pronunciation (Jenkins, 2006b; Saito, 2021), challenging “the way we view the English language as ‘owned and ruled’ by native speakers” (Rose et al., 2020, p. 1). However, as Tsang (2021) points out, “despite these discussions, it is ultimately the frontline teachers who act as gatekeepers, making the all-important decisions about how pronunciation and listening are to be taught in the EFL classroom. Hence, it is of great significance to understand teachers’ cognition” (p. 2).

The Hungarian educational system, the National Core Curriculum and the university entrance and graduation requirements regarding language proficiency, utilize the term “foreign language” and refer to English language teachers in Hungary as EFL instructors. The primary languages of instruction for English teacher education programs at the University of Szeged, where the present study was conducted, are English and Hungarian (with Hungarian being a prerequisite for pedagogy and psychology courses), resulting in a less intercultural context for teacher trainees in comparison to other higher education programs (such as the BA or MA programs in English studies or doctoral studies). In the Hungarian National Core Curriculum there are only subtle and indirect references to “the acceptance and dissemination of the plurality of standard norms in foreign language education,” although there is a “general openness to linguistic varieties and dialects” (Huber, 2023, pp. 58-59). Globally used textbooks, many of which are used in Hungary, tend to represent Inner Circle varieties (Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020), particularly Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) (Tsang, 2019), underrepresenting non-standard (Hilliard, 2014) and non-native accents (Kopperoinen, 2011). These factors are relevant to the analysis and discussion of the present research, which was conducted in a foreign language context rather than an ELF context. Although in some school settings, students may come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and

use English as a lingua franca, the majority of these students typically grow up in a predominantly monolingual society and learn English through formal instruction. This does not mean that they do not use English outside the classroom or operate in various language-use contexts, which may have an effect on their perceptions of their identity due to different expectations associated with EFL use at university as opposed to the use of ELF in their free time (Fekete, 2018). Extramural learning, in which a sense of enjoyment is an important aspect, may positively affect students' motivation, reduce their anxiety, and increase their willingness to communicate (Fajt, 2022), making this aspect of their learning crucial, especially given that pronunciation learning may often occur individually.

In the literature on pronunciation, "success in the phonological realm refers to the ability to identify and/or produce L2 sounds on level with a native speaker verified through perceptual or production tasks incorporating contextualized and/or decontextualized formats" (Moyer, 2018, p. 50). As a result, terms such as native, native-like, and non-native cannot be avoided when reviewing and discussing the pronunciation learning and teaching literature. While this dissertation acknowledges the importance of ELF perspectives in the broader context of English language education, presenting them both in its literature review and discussion, it is situated within a foreign language teacher education context. However, it considers the interplay of the EFL and ELF perspectives in shaping learners' beliefs and experiences.

### 3. Research questions and methodology

#### 3.1 Research questions

Building on the theoretical frameworks and background previously outlined, I conducted a study to explore the beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of teacher trainees situated at the intersection of teacher cognition and second language acquisition (SLA) research on pronunciation learning and teaching (Burri et al., 2018; Burri & Baker, 2021). To gain further insights, the study also incorporated perspectives on language learning strategies (LLS) (Oxford, 2017) and individual differences. A parallel mixed-methods design was employed to address the research questions, with qualitative data providing a more comprehensive understanding of numeric data (Dörnyei, 2007). The data collection process involved action research (Mills, 2014) conducted in the classroom, with the researcher and the teacher being the same person. The study seeks to answer the following five research questions:

Study 1:

- RQ1 What are Hungarian English language teacher trainees' attitudes towards various English accents?
- RQ2 What are Hungarian English language teacher trainees' beliefs about accents?

Study 2:

- RQ3 What are Hungarian English language teacher trainees' beliefs about pronunciation learning and teaching?

Study 3:

- RQ4: What is Hungarian English language teacher trainees' experience with formal and informal pronunciation learning?

Study 4:

- RQ5: What strategies and methods have Hungarian English language teacher trainees used to improve their English pronunciation?

Each research question is further divided into sub-questions. These are listed and summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of research questions, sources of data, and method of analysis

		<b>RQ Nr</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Method of analysis</b>
<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Study 1</b>	RQ1	What are Hungarian English language teacher trainees' attitudes towards various English accents?	Questionnaires	Descriptive statistics Qualitative data analysis
		RQ1.1	Which English accents do they prefer and why?		
		RQ1.2	Do they engage in conscious accent imitation?		
		RQ2	What are Hungarian English language teacher trainees' beliefs about accents?		
		RQ2.1	What are their beliefs about the necessity of accents?		
		RQ2.2	What are their beliefs about the necessity of accents?		
		RQ2.3	What are their beliefs about the controllability of accents?		
	<b>Study 2</b>	RQ3	What are Hungarian English language teacher trainees' beliefs about pronunciation learning and teaching?	Questionnaires	Descriptive statistics Qualitative data analysis
		RQ3.1	What are their beliefs about their own pronunciation?		
		RQ3.2	What are their beliefs about the challenges of pronunciation learning		
		RQ3.3	What are their beliefs about the factors that influence pronunciation?		
		RQ3.4	What are their beliefs about the importance and frequency of pronunciation learning in the classroom?		
	<b>Study 3</b>	RQ4	What is Hungarian English language teacher trainees' experience with formal and informal pronunciation learning and with accent change?	Questionnaires	Descriptive statistics Qualitative data analysis
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>Study 4</b>	RQ5	What strategies and methods do Hungarian English language teacher trainees use to improve their English pronunciation?	Questionnaires	Descriptive statistics Qualitative data analysis
		RQ5.1	What strategies and methods do Hungarian English language teacher trainees use to improve their English pronunciation in general?		
		RQ5.2	What strategies and methods did Hungarian English language teacher trainees use to improve their English pronunciation regarding a specific task, shadowing?	Shadowing Diaries	

## 3.2 Participants

The study involved 128 second-year English teacher trainees studying at the University of Szeged, Hungary, with a proficiency of B2-C1 level, as they all passed an internally administered, university-regulated, complex language and study skills exam at the end of the semester preceding data collection. The selection of teacher trainees as study participants was based on their unique ability to provide multiple perspectives, given their status as English language learners with recent high school experiences, English majors, and future teachers. In the fourth semester of their studies, when the data collection took place, they were required to attend four compulsory courses in the English teacher education program (90 minutes each). Of the participants, 73% were female (n=93) and 27% were male (n=35), aged between 20 and 25 years old. The participants spoke several additional languages, including German (42%), Spanish (21%), French (12%), Italian (9%), Japanese (5%), Russian (5%), Romanian (2%), Serbian (2%), and Chinese (2%). Regarding the onset of language learning, the majority (75%) of the participants started learning English in their fourth year of elementary school, whereas 16% of the participants started learning English in elementary school but earlier than their classmates, and 9% started learning English in kindergarten. Of the participants, 35% reported having stayed in an English-speaking country, of which 30% had visited the United Kingdom and 5% had visited the United States. The majority (14%) spent a week there, followed by those who spent two weeks (12%), three weeks (5%) and 3-4 months (5%) at their chosen destination. Approximately a quarter (24%) of the participants reported having been taught by a native English speaker in school, half of whom had a native English speaker teacher in elementary school and the other half in high school (a few students had more than one such teacher). Of the native speaker teachers, 54% were American, 23% British, 15% Australian, and 8 Scottish.

All participants were enrolled in a course called Integrated English Language Skills, one of the four compulsory courses in the semester. The course was designed to improve the students' speaking, listening, reading, writing skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation through various written and oral tasks. Participants had already completed grammar courses, introductory courses in linguistics and applied linguistics, and preparatory courses for their Academic English Exam (a university-regulated, complex language and study skills exam at the end of the third semester of the teacher education program). However, they had not yet taken any courses on phonetics and phonology.



### 3.3 Research instruments and procedure

Data on participants' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding pronunciation were collected through questionnaires, whereas their pronunciation learning strategy use was tracked through diaries.

#### 3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to gather insights into teacher trainees' beliefs, attitudes, and experiences regarding accents, pronunciation learning, and teaching. The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, nine of which were closed-ended and multiple-choice, while the remaining nine were open-ended. Both the questionnaire and responses were in English. Whenever possible, the study relied on open-ended questions to allow respondents to “express their thoughts and ideas in their own manner and thus potentially resulting in less predictable and more insightful data” (Gass & Mackey, 2007, p. 151). Quantification and classification were applied only to make the tendencies more transparent and comparable. Scales were used to gauge students' views on the perceived difficulty or importance of pronunciation phenomena. Ready-made lists of choices were provided for questions that were expected to yield otherwise vague or varied answers that would have been difficult to categorize. An “other” option was included whenever possible so that participants could add any unlisted answers.

The questionnaire in the present study was developed based on student feedback and insights, as well as considering the gaps in Hungarian research. Some questions were adapted from the questionnaires used in studies by Cenoz and Garcia Lecumberri (1999) and Derwing and Rossiter (2002), as well as the researcher's personal experiences with problematic areas of L2 speech and pronunciation learning among university students in Hungary.

The questionnaire was distributed over three consecutive years, twice during distance teaching due to COVID-19 (2020 and 2021) and once in a face-to-face teaching setting (2022), towards the middle of the semester. The students were free to decide whether they wanted to complete the questionnaire. Consent was obtained from the participants for anonymous use of their answers in research. A total of 128 participants completed the questionnaire: 46 in 2020, 38 in 2021, and 44 in 2022.

Closed-ended questions were analyzed using SPSS, whereas the data from open-ended questions were first coded using inductive coding (more specifically, *in vivo* and descriptive

coding), and then organized into major categories using pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). MaxQDA software was used to facilitate the management of codes and calculate frequencies, but no predefined codes were imposed on the data. Some insightful and detailed comments provided by participants were used as examples in the qualitative analysis.

### 3.3.2 Diaries

Diaries served as the primary data collection tool for the strategy data in this dissertation. The diaries were a mandatory component of an individual task assigned to students enrolled in Integrated English Language Skills Classes, in which they were asked to provide regular feedback on their shadowing progress (described below). Completed diaries were submitted as Excel tables via the study platform of the university called Coospace. It is important to note that they constituted only one aspect of a more extensive project that was not entirely encompassed in the present study. Within it, the students were tasked with shadowing a one-minute-long recording of a native speaker's speech. This required them to read the transcript aloud while listening to the recording and trying to closely match the speaker's speech, intonation, and rhythm. Participants were allowed to choose from two samples which were chosen based on speech rate, accent, genre, and topic. The speech rate of the samples was chosen such that it was fast enough for the participants to be able to shadow it, but it would still remain challenging. One of the speakers spoke with an SA accent, and the other spoke with an RP. In the British sample, the speaker described childhood experiences, whereas the American speaker discussed their approach to dealing with difficult situations. In both cases, the interview questions were transcribed to provide additional context for the participants. The audio samples were approximately one- minute long and were cut from the interviews to form a coherent unit with clear beginnings and endings. No adjustments were made to the speed of the original recording; the participants were asked to listen and shadow the speakers at the original speed.

Participants were asked to choose whether they wanted to work with a sample of a British or an American speaker. They were given transcripts based on their preference, which they were asked to read carefully. 75% of the participants (n=80) chose the American speaker, whereas 25% (n=27) chose the British speaker. The transcript contained only periods at the end of the sentences, and no other punctuation. The practice period was scheduled to include the university spring break, when students had more time to organize their practice sessions at their convenience. The practice period occurred after the students were given the questionnaires. Participants were allowed to practice shadowing as often as necessary. They were expected to

record a “Final Shadowing Sample” when they were satisfied with their progress. Both files were uploaded to the online platform mentioned above.

The diaries were submitted by the participants (n=107) on three occasions from 2020 to 2022. To ensure maximum effectiveness, the participants were provided with a diary template containing a series of specific guiding questions to assist in organizing their entries. In 2022, the collection of diaries had one notable difference: the task was optional, and students could choose it as one of four assignments. Informal feedback suggested that some students might find the task laborious and time-consuming once in-person classes resumed, despite being easy during lockdown. Only nine out of 48 students across the three groups in 2022 chose to complete the shadowing task.

Data from the diaries were first coded using inductive coding. Experienced difficulties and strategies used for overcoming problems were organized into categories using pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). MaxQDA software was used to facilitate the management of codes and calculate the frequencies. Furthermore, the strategies and tactics were categorized based on Szyszka’s (2017) PLS taxonomy.

## 4. Structure of the dissertation

This thesis is divided into five chapters that aim to shed light on the emergent language teacher cognition of pronunciation learning and teaching among English-language teacher trainees in Hungary. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study, outlining its rationale, theoretical background, research questions, and methodology.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing research, with a particular emphasis on three main areas: teacher cognition, language teacher cognition, and the literature on pronunciation teaching and learning. After introducing the emergence and concept of teacher cognition, key questions and concepts related to this area are reviewed. Next, this chapter focuses on the concept of language teacher cognition and its research across various skills. It also addresses methodological issues associated with this field of study and focuses on emergent language teacher cognition. Furthermore, this chapter explores some of the major themes in the literature on pronunciation instruction from the perspective of teachers’ beliefs, practices, and challenges. It also includes an overview of the objectives of pronunciation learning and the factors affecting it, as well as pedagogical perspectives and studies of learners’ attitudes. Furthermore, it focuses on a general overview of learning strategies, followed by

pronunciation learning strategies in particular and a brief overview of the shadowing literature. Finally, the context in which the study was conducted is described.

Chapter 3 presents the research questions addressed in the study, provides the background of the participants, and offers a detailed account of the data collection process, data analysis, and presentation. The methods employed in this study are also described, including an outline of their respective strengths and limitations.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings in four subsections. Each subchapter is dedicated to the results and discussion of a specific study. In Study 1, Part A presents the results regarding teacher trainees' attitudes towards English accents, whereas Part B focuses on teacher trainees' beliefs about accents. Study 2 focuses on teacher trainees' beliefs about pronunciation, and Study 3 examines their past experiences with formal and informal pronunciation learning. Finally, Study 4 discusses the pronunciation learning strategies employed by students, including both reported strategies and strategies used in connection with the specific task of shadowing.

The final chapter provides a summary of the main findings of this dissertation. It also highlights the potential limitations of the study and discusses its implications for both teacher education and pronunciation research. In addition, possible areas of focus for future research are suggested.

## 5. Results

The first research question aimed to explore Hungarian English language teacher trainees' attitudes towards various English accents. The findings revealed that Hungarian teacher trainees share a common inclination with learners across several other European countries: a strong preference for native-like accents, particularly British accents, in this dataset. The data revealed that these trainees associate perceived positive attributes with British accents, which reflect qualities such as pleasantness, elegance, softness, and formality. However, the results also reflect the standard ideology associated with British accents and the view that they are challenging to imitate. In contrast, American accents were often associated with intelligibility, "calmness," and "naturalness" and were also viewed as easier to replicate. It is worth noting that the descriptors used to describe accents in this study reflect not only the perceived quality of accents, but also human characteristics, indicating the presence of stereotypes.

The motivations for imitation included familiarity, personal preference, and perceived benefits, such as sounding more refined or sophisticated. Imitation was also viewed as an

enjoyable activity. However, the challenges of imitation, such as insecurity, fear of criticism, and inability to reach certain goals, were also evident, which were frequently mentioned reasons for choosing not to imitate accents. Moreover, the belief that an L1 Hungarian accent is something to be eliminated appeared, although only sporadically.

The second research question focused on Hungarian English language teacher trainees' beliefs about accents. The results indicate that participants prioritized adopting a native-like accent for themselves due to their emerging teacher identity, the perceived superiority of a native-like accent, and the increased comprehensibility it provides. However, they did not consider sounding native-like important for learners of English, placing a greater emphasis on aspects such as comprehensibility, grammar or vocabulary. Interestingly, participants were more divided on the second question than the first, often supporting opposing views with the same reasons. While still in a minority, some participants considered an L1 accent as acceptable. Participants not only aspired to have a native-like accent but also believed in its attainability and controllability. They acknowledged that exposure to the language and native speakers played an important role in the attainability of an accent, while concentration and invested time and practice were believed to be key to controlling it.

The third research question focused on Hungarian English language teacher trainees' beliefs about pronunciation learning and teaching. The results indicated that more participants were satisfied with their pronunciation than not, while less than half of the participants expressed clear satisfaction. Many students felt that they should improve in certain areas, leading to indecision or dissatisfaction with their pronunciation of individual words, intonation, and stress. For many, having a Hungarian accent presented a problem, and they used its presence or absence as a reference point to assess the quality of their pronunciation. Stressful situations and anxiety were also believed to negatively affect their pronunciation. According to their evaluations, stress and intonation were the most challenging aspects of pronunciation learning. However, many students seemed to underestimate the difficulty of vowels, which could pose challenges for Hungarian learners of English, based on the existing literature. Students attributed great importance to study-abroad opportunities, conversing with native speakers, and listening to English-language media. While individual motivation was highly valued, targeted pronunciation improvement ranked low, possibly indicating the belief that pronunciation cannot be improved as effectively in a classroom setting. However, the students expressed the belief that focusing on pronunciation in the classroom is important, with divided opinions on the time of onset of instruction. Most students favored regular pronunciation instruction, with shorter class sections dedicated to it.

The fourth research question aimed to explore Hungarian English language teacher trainees' experience with formal and informal pronunciation learning. The results indicated that participants did not receive adequate feedback on their pronunciation in educational settings. Although teachers provided feedback (participants recalled positive feedback slightly more often than negative feedback), the total number of participants who received feedback from them was relatively low, with feedback being somewhat vague and nonspecific in nature. Negative feedback was often centered on issues of accent rather than pronunciation, often in the form of criticism. Regarding the factors that influenced participants' pronunciation in the past, English-language films and music emerged as the most popular options, as well as university courses. For many, the university was the only stage of their academic career where their pronunciation was addressed. Approximately one-third of the participants in this study did not feel that their teachers had contributed to improving their pronunciation skills at any stage of their primary and secondary school English studies. Most participants reported learning pronunciation in the classroom during their studies, however, its most typical form was repetition.

The fifth and final research question focused on the strategies and methods Hungarian English language teacher trainees used to improve their English pronunciation. Regarding the reported ways of improving pronunciation in the questionnaire, the results indicated that most participants made a conscious effort to improve their pronunciation. They mostly relied on cognitive and memory strategies to achieve this goal. More than one-third of the reported tactics involved watching and listening to English-language media. While some participants used a wider range of tactics, many relied solely on listening. Repetition was also a common tactic applied by the participants.

The shadowing diaries provided insight into participants' pronunciation learning strategy use while engaged in the task of shadowing. The diaries made it possible to gain insights into various aspects of the shadowing process that might not have been revealed in an in-class pronunciation training session. Although in several cases it was clear that students' phonetics- and phonology-related concepts were not yet crystallized, some diaries presented clear signs of students becoming more aware of certain pronunciation-related phenomena and their meaning, such as stress patterns, intonation, and pronunciation issues connected to certain vowels and consonants. Students also seemed to have become more aware of the difficulties and possibilities for improving these aspects of language. In some students, shadowing also initiated reflections on what it means to imitate someone's speech and whether imitating a chosen accent is an achievable goal.

With regard to strategies, students seemed to rely most on cognitive strategies and, to a lesser extent, metacognitive strategies during shadowing (with some examples of memory and compensation strategies). The preference for these strategies could be attributed to the nature of the task, as it requires plenty of repetition; reading aloud; the isolated practice of words, phrases, or sentences; focus on pronunciation and intonation rules, and planning. More important were, however, the variety of tactics (some very specific to the present task) participants were required to employ, some of which certainly equipped them with the experience necessary for further autonomous practice. Their hands-on experience with relying on various strategies could enable the re-application or transfer of these strategies to other areas of pronunciation learning and could help them better understand the related theoretical issues.

## 6. Main conclusions

The results underscore the need for teacher educators to familiarize learners with questions and issues of accent imitation, rejection, and stereotypes. This can help them understand why they wish to sound in a certain way and to what extent that is even a realistic goal. After all, as Lindemann et al. (2014) note, “Working with both L1 and L2 speakers’ beliefs about pronunciation to the same degree as pronunciation itself is not merely idealistic; it is a practical way to deal with negative attitudes” (p. 189)

Most participants expressed a strong desire to achieve a native-like accent, which can be explained by their future teacher identity, the perceived superiority of native-like accents, viewing them as a valuable asset, and personal preferences. Those who did not prioritize this goal still recognized the importance of comprehensibility and demonstrated an awareness of obstacles like age and the EFL environment. Some also embraced their L1 accent and did not wish to change it. Overall, the reasons for their beliefs showed great variation, but as the quotes demonstrate, many of them had very clear ideas and reasons for their views, and many students seemed to purposefully project a specific identity with the choice of their accent goals. Moyer (2018) highlights that understanding and acknowledging these beliefs is important: “we should ask how they want to use the target language now and in the future and help them set benchmarks for their progress, while offering an array of practice activities that support their individual needs” (p. 107).

Most participants believed that comprehensibility takes precedence over a native-like accent for language learners according to the quantitative results. However, the qualitative analysis of the responses reveals a more nuanced perspective. The number of those in support

of and against the question was close, and participants often cited the same reason for different opinions. This could be due to the differences in their language learning experience, language proficiency, and the goals of their former teachers. While some students still viewed pronunciation as an aspect of language learning that is less important than others, they were not the majority. The reasons some participants provided regarding the importance of comprehensibility showed a thorough understanding of crucial issues in pronunciation learning and teaching research. Further exploration of views on all sides of the debate could provide more clarity on the matter for both researchers and students.

The data revealed general satisfaction among the participants regarding their pronunciation skills, albeit with some areas identified for improvement. The main reason for dissatisfaction was the presence of a Hungarian accent. Although suprasegmentals were considered challenging, it is possible that the difficulty of vowels was slightly underestimated. The impact of spending time in the country where the L2 is spoken, interaction with native speakers and English language media, and individual motivation were highly regarded in enhancing pronunciation. In contrast, instructed pronunciation was valued less despite participants acknowledging its significance. While individual work in pronunciation improvement is crucial, this belief could prevent participants from feeling responsible for aiding future students in attaining their pronunciation goals. Research highlighted experienced teachers' important role in achieving positive pronunciation changes (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Therefore, in addition to being aware of the importance of spending time in a context where the L2 is spoken, and communicating with native speakers in social situations as often as possible, prospective teachers of English must also explore additional techniques that can be employed when the above opportunities are not readily available for a student.

Regarding the reported factors influencing participants' pronunciation, the strong influence of English language media on their pronunciation is not surprising. However, it is concerning that many students felt that their pronunciation was affected only by their high school and/or university studies. Elementary school teachers play an important role in pronunciation teaching, especially because of the age factor. Obtaining Hungarian teachers' perspectives on this issue and why they neglect pronunciation teaching could provide valuable insights for teacher education and could be used to help teachers overcome these issues. Given the importance of English language media in students' lives, it is necessary to establish a closer link between students' individual learning activities and classroom learning to enhance their motivation and engagement, and improve the quality of their individual learning. The findings regarding pronunciation learning in the classroom were based on data from a small set of



participants. Although the data suggests that pronunciation is an area of focus in most cases, the teaching methods used tend to rely on repetition. A larger sample size and direct classroom observations may contribute to the generalizability of the results. However, there is a pressing need to educate future teachers on a greater range of techniques to teach pronunciation effectively.

The participants' diaries provided insights into their challenges during practice and the solutions they employed. The data indicated an increased awareness of pronunciation phenomena and the challenges in their improvement. It also helped participants realize the complexities of accent imitation, raising doubts about its necessity in some while motivating others to continue imitating. While cognitive strategies were the most commonly used, participants employed diverse techniques to overcome their difficulties. Finally, conscious reflection on the success rate of pronunciation learning strategies and tactics could aid students in their future teaching practice and hopefully provide an incentive to make pronunciation improvement a regular goal in their future classrooms.

## 7. Implications for teacher education

The findings have important implications for teacher education. Although achieving a native-like accent is generally neither necessary nor feasible, participants expressed a strong preference for it. Although university courses can change this viewpoint, the literature suggests that this potential is uncertain (Weinstein, 1990; McDiarmid, 1990). More importantly, the data show that most teacher trainees have clear preferences and specific beliefs regarding accents and pronunciation at this stage of their studies, with reasons for their choice. The fact that some students do not have views on these issues is also noteworthy, indicating a potential lack of awareness of questions on accent and pronunciation, a lack of willingness to reflect on these issues, or a lack of motivation or interest in pronunciation improvement. It is crucial to consider these beliefs when developing curricula, uncover their underlying reasons, and discuss the potential impact of these preferences on their future teaching, the consequences of teachers imposing their preferences on their students, or the reasons for a lack of interest and views on these matters. Only after students fully comprehend the complex factors that influence accent, accent choices, and pronunciation (linguistically, psychologically, and sociologically) can they be expected to make informed decisions about the chosen language input and pronunciation teaching techniques implemented in the classroom, while also considering their students' preferences regarding accents. Furthermore, teachers must understand the impact of their

pronunciation-related feedback on students, as pronunciation is a sensitive issue (Guiora et al., 1972). Teacher education should provide students with information that helps them deliver nuanced, accurate, and personalized feedback that considers individual students' abilities and goals.

The remaining findings are particularly valuable to teacher trainers. Although participants demonstrated awareness of the areas in which their pronunciation could be improved, they still relied mainly on passive strategies (e.g., listening) to do so. Therefore, it is essential for teacher education programs to prioritize pronunciation teaching, similar to other skills such as grammar, reading, listening, and speaking. Although pronunciation improvement requires active involvement, it is often treated as an individual responsibility. This is reflected in participants' firm belief that studying abroad, exposure to native speakers, personal motivation, and English language media would impact their pronunciation the most. In contrast, targeted interventions, for example, in the classroom, were less emphasized, despite evidence that pronunciation can be improved by instruction (Saito & Plonsky, 2019), by non-native speaker teachers as well (Levis et al., 2016). Teachers must understand their role in pronunciation improvement if they are to be effective in helping students. Although the participants demonstrated an awareness of the difficulty of teaching intonation and stress before formally learning about them, they may have underestimated the difficulty of vowels. Teacher education can provide valuable support by helping teachers identify and address these challenges. When teachers thoroughly understand the nuances and acquire the skills to tackle such issues, the perceived difficulty can be transformed into areas of improvement rather than be neglected due to a lack of knowledge and confidence regarding the solutions. Participants' recognition of the importance of pronunciation teaching in the classroom and their desire to improve their own pronunciation indicated their willingness to learn. They need guidance to effectively incorporate pronunciation teaching into classroom activities.

The primary focus of shadowing research has been to determine whether and how shadowing can enhance listening, fluency, and pronunciation. To this effect, quantitative methods that measure progress and skill development among students are prevalent. Fewer studies have investigated the subjective experiences of students who engage in shadowing, even though it requires resourcefulness as an individual task, offering insights into pronunciation learning strategies. Pawlak and Szyszka (2018) suggested that researchers explore PLS use in specific tasks to add variety to the existing findings. With the use of diaries written by students, the present dissertation focused on the strategies and tactics applied during completing a specific task, shadowing. However, the shadowing task has been found to have numerous

further advantages for both teachers and students. It could provide valuable information to teachers about the areas of difficulty and challenges faced by students as well as their preferences regarding accents and preferred study methods. For students, shadowing was a novel and engaging exercise that elicited more complex information about their learning than simply asking students about it. This can help them become aware of the pronunciation phenomena they may struggle with, especially if they have to record themselves. It could also allow them to reassess their desire to imitate a specific accent. Additionally, it can activate a range of strategies, encourage self-reflection, raise awareness of pronunciation phenomena, and encourage the reconsideration of one's language learning goals, especially if there is time to discuss shadowing experiences with students.

## 8. Limitations of the study

Exploring beliefs and attitudes is inherently challenging. No single data-collection tool can precisely capture what teachers believe or think. In addition, each tool has limitations, and questionnaires, especially open-ended questions, can be discouraging for some individuals. Despite this, questionnaires were essential to gain a detailed elaboration of participants' thoughts, which provided more insight into the nuances of their beliefs and attitudes. Although not everyone provided detailed answers to the open-ended questions, most participants did. However, follow-up interviews with participants could have offered even more profound insights into ambiguous answers and more information in cases where the answers were brief.

One of the main limitations of using diaries is the commitment they require. Students must dedicate a significant amount of time and effort to keeping their diaries up-to-date, which can burden those with busy schedules or competing priorities. However, the deadline set for the shadowing task, and the COVID-19 lockdown situation, when most students were at home, may have facilitated regular entries. Another limitation of using diaries is that they focus on events and experiences that have already taken place. If students did not take the time to reflect on their daily practice and record it in their diary immediately, important information may have been lost or forgotten over time. Furthermore, when used as an in-class assignment, there is a risk that students will be tempted to include information intended to impress their instructor. It can be difficult to verify whether the shadowing activity was completed as required and with what regularity, which can undermine the effectiveness of this data-collection tool. However, in the case of learning strategies, and more specifically, in connection with the shadowing task, in-class solutions were not feasible. Only by providing participants with the opportunity to work

alone on shadowing was it possible to gather data on their individual solutions to the challenges posed by shadowing (unaffected by the teachers' input).

The final limitation is generalizability. The participants were only second-year teacher trainees at the University of Szeged; thus, the findings may not be generalizable to other EFL contexts or other Hungarian universities. Furthermore, the study reflects teacher trainees' beliefs and attitudes at this stage of their studies before they have had the opportunity to gain teaching experience and specialized knowledge of matters of accent and pronunciation. As such, the findings are of primary relevance for pronunciation teaching and teacher education, and these limitations should be considered when comparing the results of this study to other contexts.

## 9. Suggestions for future research

The study revealed that most students did not remember receiving meaningful pronunciation training during their early years of education. To better understand this observation, further studies should investigate whether it is specific to this population or reflects a more general trend. Additionally, research could focus on exploring the pronunciation teaching habits of Hungarian teachers in elementary schools and their beliefs and experiences regarding pronunciation training. It could also be beneficial to further investigate aspects of participants' pronunciation learning experiences, the feedback they received, and their beliefs about pronunciation feedback. Pronunciation feedback is often overlooked but is a crucial aspect of learning.

To assess the effectiveness of specialized courses or teacher education on students' beliefs and attitudes toward pronunciation, these participants could be surveyed later to monitor any changes in their beliefs as a result of attending Phonetics and Phonology or Sociolinguistics classes. A further point of assessment could be the year they start their teaching practice and gain experience with learners. In contrast, conducting research with first-year university students could yield interesting data on early teacher beliefs about entering university, as their high school experiences are more recent at this stage.

Regarding the shadowing task, follow-up interviews could shed more light on whether students found shadowing helpful in improving their pronunciation and explore how it may have shaped their beliefs or provided them with strategies that they later relied on. Moreover, the study or its parts could be replicated in other EFL teacher education contexts, or in Hungary.

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