Perception towards formative assessment in selected English pronunciation classes among English majors

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This research aimed at discovering the students' perception towards formative assessment conducted in the pronunciation classes at Mien Dong University of Technology (MUT). A total of one hundred and eighteen university freshmen participated in answering the questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions. The quantitative data gained from the questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS in terms of descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data were analyzed using the content analysis approach. The results showed the students' proper awareness of formative assessment in general and their positive perception towards the application of formative assessment tasks. However, despite the advantages, this application was still admitted containing some disadvantages.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation has long been receiving little attention since linguists made their first efforts at studying the subject of language teaching. Pronunciation is always considered merely as a supplementary component of speaking. Even as one of the components of speaking skills, it is not as popular and well understood by language teachers as grammar and vocabulary. That is why a course for pronunciation does not earn a certain place in a lot of language curriculums. A lot of curriculum developers choose either to incorporate pronunciation into speaking courses or to entirely allow their teachers to make the decision (McGregor & Reed, 2018). In this case, it is the teachers who will decide whether they want pronunciation in their syllabus or not. As teachers do not have much time for their speaking courses and some of them, especially non-native teachers, find it hard to teach pronunciation, they tend to neglect this part of the language or just give it little attention. In their study, Purcell and Suter (1980) also depreciated teachers' instructions in pronunciation by stating that, "teachers and classrooms seem to have had remarkably little to do with how well our students pronounce English" (p. 285). Since not much attention is paid to pronunciation itself, not much effort is put into finding how to assess it. However, as Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996) asserted in their book that if nonnative speakers cannot catch up with the "threshold level" of pronunciation, they will encounter many "oral communication problems" although they are good at English grammar and vocabulary. Pronunciation should be reserved a secured place in language curriculums and be looked at carefully by language teachers. Moreover, when it is taught, it has to be assessed. Assessment for pronunciation should also be of great interest to researchers in the field of language teaching and learning.

Many researchers consider formative assessment as one of the most effective ways to raise students' achievement in classrooms (Black & William, 1998). Also, in tertiary education in Vietnam, formative assessment is generally acknowledged and applied in classrooms. However, its importance and value in students' learning are not well understood. This is also true in the field of English teaching and learning where only a few hours of instructions are allowed per week for the coverage of many required contents and units in the course. As a result, teachers will find formative assessment time-consuming and distracting to their normal practices in the classrooms. In the case of students, many of them tend to focus on marks and results rather than the quality of their learning. Therefore, they aim at achieving good marks rather than seriously look at their learning process. These factors lead to the lack of attention given to the appropriate application of formative assessment in the field of English teaching and learning.

In addition to the factors that form the research gap, it is worth noting that most studies on formative assessment have their focus on writing skills, leaving little space for the other skills and areas, including pronunciation. With the nature of a productive skill that has the final product as a tangible piece of writing, writing seems to be one of the easiest skills to apply any kind of formative assessment and adjustment. To seek for the originality and not to get involved in topics that are widely and well-studied before, the researcher chooses pronunciation and how it is assessed. Besides, to draw teachers and students' attention to formative assessment in pronunciation classrooms, a more specific study on different types of formative assessment and students' reactions to them is also worth conducting. Based on the significance and necessity of formative assessment in English pronunciation classes, the objectives of this study were (1) to find out students' perception towards formative assessment in a pronunciation course at MUT, (2) to find out the students' opinions about the application of two types of FA (teacher's feedback and self-assessment) in the selected pronunciation classes at MUT.

Research questions

To investigate the students' perception towards formative assessment in pronunciation class at MUT, the following research questions were formulated:

(1) What is the students' perception of formative assessment in a pronunciation course at MUT?

(2) What is the students' perception towards the application of the two types of formative assessment (teacher's feedback, and self-assessment) in the selected pronunciation classes at MUT?

Conceptual framework

The researcher finally came to the conceptual framework of the study which was described in the following diagram.
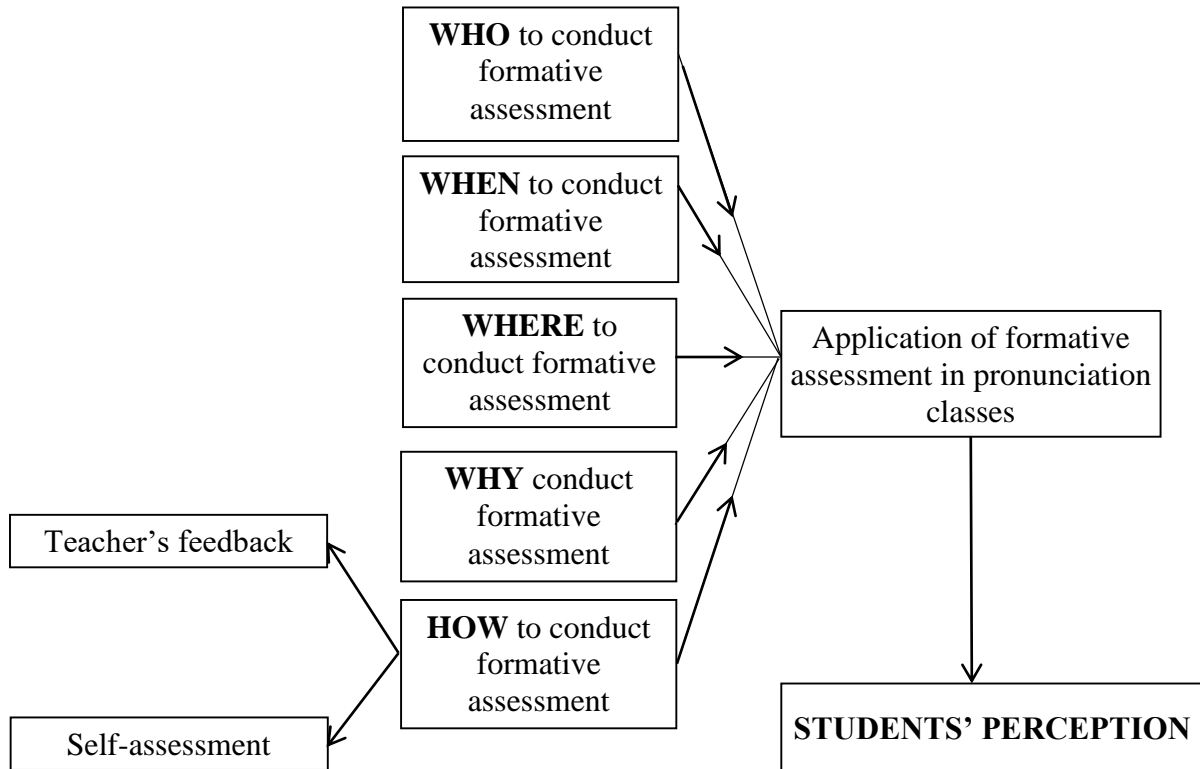
Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

A teacher must consider the five key aspects of formative assessment to ensure the successful application of this assessment in a classroom. These key aspects, as stated in the previous sections, are listed in the form of the following questions:

(1) Who should conduct a formative assessment?

(2) When should a formative assessment be conducted?

(3) Where should a formative assessment be conducted?

(4) Why should a formative assessment be conducted?

(5) How should a formative assessment be conducted?

Taking account of the key aspects mentioned above, this study employs the formative assessment tasks proposed by Black and William (2009). The formative assessment tasks proposed by Black and William (2009) are widely accepted by many other researchers in the same field and applied in many teaching and learning contexts since they are well defined and built from a strong theoretical basis. However, due to the characteristics of pronunciation as well as the purpose and limitation of this study, only the two formative assessment tasks, namely teacher's feedback and self-assessment were applied and examined.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 118 students who were from two pronunciation classes in a university in Dong Nai province, Vietnam. The participants were at pre-intermediate levels, as determined by the university entrance examination.

2.2. Instruments

The researcher applied a lot of research instruments to collect the data. First, to make sure the students had the experience of participating in the formative assessment in a pronunciation course before collecting their opinions on it, the researcher conducted an experimental course as the treatment for this study. This treatment focused on the application of teacher's feedback and self-assessment. Next, questionnaires and interviews were employed to collect the students' perceptions and opinions about the application of formative assessment in their classes.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

Concerning the data collection procedure, the researcher started to apply all of the two formative assessment tasks. This application, which was the treatment of the study, took 8 weeks with 3.75 hours of instruction each week. The application consisted of two stages in which all of the two types of formative assessment were used. Before the first stage began, the teacher asked the students to record their pronunciation of all the words for both English vowels and consonants. This was their first recording. In the first stage, two formative assessment tasks which were the teacher's oral feedback, and self-assessment were carried out for the students' pronunciation of vowels in their first recording. After experiencing the two types of assessments on vowels, the students were required to record their pronunciation of vowels for the second time. At this time, the teacher listened to the students' second recording and gave written feedback on their pronunciation. This process was repeated for the second stage in which the focus was put on the students' pronunciation of English consonants. Next, the researcher had the students answer the questionnaire which focuses on their perception towards formative assessment and its two different types during the final week of the experimental course. Finally, the researcher conducted interviews to gain deeper insights from the students about the issue. The interviews were recorded for later analysis and interpretation.

For the quantitative section, 118 students from two pronunciation classes participated in the survey. These participants were chosen for the convenience of the researcher. Among 118 participants, 24 of them joined the qualitative interview for their in-depth opinions. These 24 students, accounting for about 20 percent of the total number of the participants, were chosen for the interview based on their scores and performances in class.

Table 1

A summary of the instruments employed in the study

Research questions	Investigative questions		Number of items/ questions	
			Student questionnaire	Student interview
Research question 1	Students' perception towards formative assessment in a pronunciation course at MUT	Who to conduct formative assessment	3 (Section 1A - Items 1.1→1.3)	
		When to conduct formative assessment	3 (Section 1A - Items 2.1→2.3)	
		Where to conduct formative assessment	2 (Section 1A - Items 3.1→3.2)	

Research questions	Investigative questions		Number of items/ questions	
			Student questionnaire	**Student interview**
		Why conduct formative assessment	2 (Section 1A - Items 4.1→4.2)	
Research question 2	Students' opinions about the application of teacher's feedback and self-assessment in the selected pronunciation classes at MUT	Teacher's feedback	7 (Section 1A - Items 5.1→5.7)	2 (Question 1,2)
		Self-assessment	5 (Section 1A - Items 6.1→6.5)	2 (Question 3,4)
		Ranking of the two formative assessment tasks	1 (Section 1B)	
		Suggestions for the application of the two formative assessment tasks		1 (Question 5)
		General opinions about the pronunciation course		1 (Question 6)
Demographic information			6 (Section 2 - Items 1→6)	
Total			**29**	**6**

Source: The researcher's data analysis

Regarding data analysis, the data were classified and analyzed according to the main themes of the research such as the student's perception towards who, when, where, and why conduct the formative assessment, and the students' opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of teachers' feedback, and self-assessment in their pronunciation classes. The quantitative data reported were analyzed by using descriptive statistical techniques by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software including mean scores and standard deviation. The qualitative data collected through interviews were synthesized. Audio data were transcribed into texts for analysis. Later, the data were interpreted according to themes to serve the purpose of the study.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Students' perception of the application of formative assessment in their classes

Students' perception of who to conduct formative assessment

The table showed positive results when the mean values of the three items ranged from 2.95 to 3.92. Among the three agents that should assess a student's pronunciation, the first item which was the teacher received the strongest agreement from the students. The mean scores and

standard deviation of the other two items (items 1.2 and 1.3) were not much different from each other and both items received agreement from the students. However, statistically, the students still showed less confidence to have their pronunciation assessed by themselves (M = 2.95) than by their friends (M = 3.00). Additionally, the standard deviation of items 1.2 and 1.3 was high (S.D = .587 and S.D = .600 respectively) and ranged from the lowest score (Min = 1) to the highest score (Max = 4), indicating that the responses varied considerably among students. In comparison with the first item which referred to the teacher as the assessor, the other two items referred to the students' classmates and themselves received much lower mean scores and much higher standard deviation. This comparison suggested that the students had the highest expectation and strongest faith in their teacher to assess their performance.

Table 2

Students' questionnaire responses on who to conduct formative assessment

	N	Mean	S.D	Min	Max
1.1. His/her teacher	118	3.92	.281	3	4
1.2. His/her classmates	118	3.00	.587	1	4
1.3. The student himself/ herself	118	2.95	.600	1	4

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Students' perception of when to conduct formative assessment

These three items were included in the questionnaire to find out whether the students thought it was necessary to apply formative assessment regularly during the course. Firstly, this description showed the students' preference for the high frequency of formative assessment in the pronunciation course. Specifically, of all the three items, item 2.1 with the idea that formative assessment should be conducted at the end of every session or specific content had the highest mean value (M = 3.66) and lowest standard deviation (S.D = .477) ranging from 3 to 4. This statistic proved that all of the students in this class preferred to have their pronunciation assessed regularly during the course. Secondly, the figures also disclosed the students' disagreement on applying formative assessments rarely in a course. Both items 2.2 and 2.3 received low mean scores and both mean scores were negative ones (M < 2.5). Item 2.2 which followed the idea that formative assessment should occur at the end of a course did not receive positive perception from the students when its mean value was below average (M = 2.41). This figure revealed that the students already knew formative assessment should occur several times during the course. The students might also know that formative assessment was different from a major test that they usually had to take at the end of a course or semester. Finally, the least accepted idea which was item 2.3 only had a mean value of 2.36. This mean score was lower than item 2.2 (M = 2.41) and much lower than item 2.1 (M = 3.66). The students, according to this description, might not consider conducting formative assessment only when the teachers recognize some problems in students' learning as effective as doing this assessment periodically. They might know that in a large-sized class with about 60 students, it was difficult for a teacher to recognize the problems in the students' learning if he or she did not carry out some assessment methods.

Table 3

Students' questionnaire responses on when to conduct formative assessment

	N	Mean	S.D	Min	Max
2.1. At the end of each session or the specific content	118	3.66	.477	3	4
2.2. At the end of the course	118	2.41	.746	1	4
2.3. When students encounter learning problems	118	2.36	.886	1	4

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Students' perception of where to conduct formative assessment

The collected data for the question '*Where should the formative assessment be conducted?*' was described in the following table. In general, both items of this section had the above-average mean values (M > 2.51), indicating that the students agreed to carry out the formative assessment tasks both in class and out of class. However, there was a major difference in the level of students' agreement between the two places of conducting the formative assessment. Item 3.1 which referred to the classroom as the appropriate setting of formative assessment received a much higher mean value (M = 3.83) than that of item 3.2 which pointed out the out of class setting (M = 2.63). This description revealed that the students preferred to carry out the formative assessment in class rather than out of class. Besides, the standard deviation of item 3.1 was low (S.D = .422) and the responses ranged from 2 to 4, revealing that the students' perceptions were not much different from each other and that they found it more effective to assess in class. The students might find it easier to for the assessment to occur in class since they could receive the useful support and instructions from their classmates and teacher. On the contrary, in the case of the out-of-class setting, the figures showed a major gap among the students' perceptions (Min = 1 and Max = 4). This point disclosed that besides some students who were extremely confident and willing to assess by themselves at home, there were still some students finding it difficult or ineffective to do that outside of class.

Table 4

Students' questionnaire responses on where to conduct formative assessment

	N	Mean	S.D	Min	Max
3.1. In class.	118	3.83	.422	2	4
3.2. Out of class.	118	2.63	.763	1	4

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Students' perception of why to conduct formative assessment

As to *why the formative assessment should be conducted*, the data collected from the students' responses generated these results which were described in the following table. Of all the four items, item 4.1 and 4.4 had the lowest standard deviations with the narrow range from 3 (Min = 3) to 4 (Max = 4), which revealed that all students, without any exception, agreed with what the

item 4.1 and 4.3 stated and more than that, most of them expressed strong agreement (M > 3.25). With the highest mean value (M = 3.90) and lowest standard deviation (S.D = .304), item 4.4 stating that formative assessment could enhance students' pronunciation confirmed the students' strongest confidence in the effectiveness of formative assessment on their pronunciation. The students started to recognize that besides the common-known function of assessing their ability of pronunciation, the formative assessment also worked very well, and even better, in improving that ability. Back to the basic function of an assessment which is to assess, the figures also showed a highly positive signal from the students towards the accuracy of formative assessment. Although the mean value of item 4.1 (M = 3.75) was not as high as that of item 4.4 (M = 3.90), there were still enough grounds to conclude that most students found their pronunciation to be accurately assessed through the formative assessment tasks when the standard deviation was low (S.D = .437) and the students only chose between 3 points or 4 points to rate this item. From what has been discussed about items 4.1 and 4.4, it was obvious to conclude that the students strongly believed in the accurate evaluation and positive changes that formative assessment could bring to their pronunciation.

In terms of students' attention to their learning, the result of item 4.2 revealed a shift from the students' indifference to a more responsible and focused attitude towards the learning process of their pronunciation. With the high mean score of 3.56 for item 4.2, it seemed that the students started to be aware of their pronunciation and then pay more attention to it thanks to the various use of teacher's feedback and students' self-assessment. The item that came last in the ranking list of the four items was item 4.3. Although its mean value was not as high as that of the other three items, it was still much higher than the average score of the scale (3.05 > 2.51). This result expressed the students' agreement on the increasing motivation that formative assessment could bring to them during their learning process. However, the standard deviation of this item was high (S.D = .772) and the range of the students' responses was from 1 to 4, indicating that not all students could increase their motivation thanks to formative assessment and that their opinions immensely differed from each other.

Table 5

Students' questionnaire responses on why to conduct formative assessment

	N	Mean	S.D	Min	Max
4.1. Because it accurately assesses my pronunciation.	118	3.75	.437	3	4
4.2. Because it helps me focus on and be aware of my pronunciation.	118	3.56	.593	2	4
4.3. Because it motivates me to learn pronunciation when I know I will be assessed.	118	3.05	.772	1	4
4.4. Because it enhances my pronunciation.	118	3.90	.304	3	4

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Students' perception of teacher's feedback

From this section forward, the data collected for the two formative assessment tasks will be described in detail. The responses for the first formative assessment task which is the teacher's feedback were presented in the following table. The first four items in this section (item 5.1 to 5.4)

focused on discovering the level of the student's agreement on the different benefits that teacher's feedback could bring to their learning. In general, all of the four statements received strong agreements from the students, which could be seen from the table that the mean values of the four items were within the highest range of the scale ($3.25 < M < 4.00$). Of all the four items, item 5.1 had the highest mean score ($M = 3.80$) and the lowest standard deviation (S.D = .404) with the results ranging from 3 to 4. This description revealed that all the students believed in the accuracy of the teacher's feedback on their pronunciation. The students also showed their confidence in the teacher's knowledge and assessing ability by giving this item such a high score. The confidence in the accuracy of the teacher's feedback played an important role in the students' positive attitude towards the other benefits that this type of formative assessment could bring to their learning. It was because only accurate assessment could lead to improvements, proper awareness, and motivation.

With the strong confidence that the teacher had accurately assessed their pronunciation and given them correct feedback, the students then believed that this feedback could make their learning process more visible and helped them improve their pronunciation. The results of items 5.2 and 5.3 were not much different from each other since they both had high mean values of 3.63 and 3.66 respectively. One of the major difficulties that students usually encounter when they want to improve their learning is that they do not know where they are in their learning process and thus do not know how far they still must go to reach their goals. The application of the teacher's feedback in this pronunciation course was expected to let the students know how good or bad their current pronunciation was and then how much they still had to try to have better pronunciation. The students admitted that they had a better understanding of their learning process of pronunciation by showing their agreement on item 5.2 ($M = 3.63$ and S.D = .486).

Moreover, with the use of both oral feedback and written feedback, the application of teacher's feedback was also believed to provide the students with effective guidelines on how to make their pronunciation better as the mean value of item 5.3 was the second-highest one in this section ($M = 3.66$). Also, the low standard deviation (S.D = .475) and the range of the students' responses which was from 3 to 4 showed the similarity between the students' perception towards the effectiveness of the teacher's feedback.

When the students expressed that they found the teacher's feedback accurate, informative, and effective, they were also expected to show their increasing motivation towards learning pronunciation. From the data shown in table 5, it was obvious that item 5.4 which stated that the students had more motivation to learn pronunciation after receiving their teacher's feedback received positive attitudes from the students. Although its mean value ($M = 3.32$) was not as high as those of the three above-mentioned items, it was still within the highest range of the scale ($3.25 < 3.32 < 4$). With the confidence that they had already received clear information about their current pronunciation and useful guidelines on how to make it better, the students seemed to realize that it was not as difficult to improve their pronunciation as they had thought before. From that realization, the students might start to focus on their learning and try to have better pronunciation.

The last three items in this section revealed the students' further opinions about the practice of teacher's feedback in the two pronunciation classes. Item 5.5 receives a high mean score ($M = 3.56$) which disclosed that the students preferred to receive specific feedback with advice on how to improve rather than non-specific feedback such as "you did great" from the teacher. With this result, the students expressed that the mere descriptions of their current pronunciation, regardless of how positive they were, were not enough to satisfy them if these descriptions were not accompanied by the guidelines on how to make improvements. This result also revealed a positive

signal that the students started to have serious attitudes towards their learning.

In terms of which type of teacher's feedback was preferred by the students between oral feedback and written feedback, the data for item 5.6 disclosed the dominance of oral feedback over written feedback (M = 3.17). Unlike any other language areas in which the students can clearly understand the teacher's guidelines in written form, comments and instructions on pronunciation are extremely difficult to understand if they were not expressed verbally. That was why the students might think that they needed to receive the correct form of pronunciation in oral feedback so that they could be easier to visualize the correct production and then do the same.

Finally, the students admitted that they still had difficulties when receiving the teacher's feedback. With the mean value of 3.07 and a low standard deviation of .484, item 5.7 received the students' agreement on the fact that they did not completely understand all the feedback the teacher gave them and that they still did not have enough chances to express those difficulties to the teacher. This result indicated that the teacher's feedback, from the students' perception, still contained a disadvantage besides several major advantages that were mentioned above.

Table 6

Students' questionnaire responses on teacher's feedback

	N	**Mean**	**S.D**	**Min**	**Max**
5.1. I think my pronunciation is accurately assessed by my teacher.	118	3.80	.404	3	4
5.2. I am more aware of my pronunciation learning process after receiving my teacher's feedback.	118	3.63	.486	3	4
5.3. The teacher's feedback helps me improve my pronunciation.	118	3.66	.475	3	4
5.4. I have more motivation to learn pronunciation after receiving my teacher's feedback.	118	3.32	.597	2	4
5.5. I prefer my teacher's feedback with advice on what I can do to improve my pronunciation rather than non-specific feedback such as "you did great", "you need to work on this", etc.	118	3.56	.674	2	4
5.6. I prefer receiving oral feedback from my teacher to the written one.	118	3.17	.671	2	4
5.7. I need more opportunities to respond to my teacher's feedback on what I don't understand.	118	3.07	.484	2	4

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Students' perception of self-assessment

The last formative assessment task applied in this pronunciation course was self-assessment. The table below showed the results of the data collected for this type of formative assessment.

Table 7

Students' questionnaire responses on self-assessment

	N	Mean	S.D	Min	Max
6.1. I think I can accurately assess my pronunciation.	118	2.15	.712	1	4
6.2. I am more aware of and responsible for my pronunciation learning process after assessing myself.	118	3.10	.632	1	4
6.3. I can improve my pronunciation by assessing myself.	118	2.85	.735	1	4
6.4. I have more motivation to learn pronunciation after assessing myself.	118	3.08	.615	2	4
6.5. I need more instruction from my teacher on how to assess my pronunciation.	118	3.56	.593	2	4

Source: Data analysis result of the research

It could be seen from the table that not all the items in the self-assessment section received a positive perception from the students. The only item that received negative results was item 6.1 with a mean value of 2.15. The result indicated that the students did not believe they could accurately assess their pronunciation. However, the high standard deviation (S.D = .712) and the responses ranging from 1 to 4 revealed a major gap among the opinions and that there were still some students who felt strongly confident when assessing themselves. Those students might belong to the group of good students in the classes. On the contrary, the other group of students which included the weak students seemed not to be confident in their knowledge of pronunciation and their ability to assess their work.

Although the students found themselves unable to accurately assess their pronunciation, they still showed their positive perception towards the other three benefits of self-assessment. First, when asked about the effect of self-assessment on increasing their awareness and responsibility for their learning process of pronunciation, the students agreed. Among all of the items in this section, item 6.2 received the most positive responses from the students when its mean value was 3.10. This result was not too difficult to understand since self-assessment did provide the students with the opportunities to listen to their pronunciation and have some serious reflection on it. The students, then, might realize that improving their pronunciation was neither their teacher nor their friends' job but their responsibility. Second, the students admitted that self-assessment could help in improving their pronunciation. Despite a not very high result, the mean value of 2.85 for item 6.3 still showed a positive signal from the students towards this aspect. By listening to their pronunciation, applying the new knowledge, and even doing some research to be able to assess themselves, the students were believed to make some improvements to their learning process. Third, self-assessment was believed to help in increasing the students' motivation to learn pronunciation. With the mean value of 3.08 and the responses ranging from 2 to 4, it was clear that item 6.4 received positive attitudes from the students. Having more chances to seriously reflect on their learning, the students might want to learn more about the subject to find some ways to

enhance their skills. As a result, the students might pay more attention to the teacher's instructions in class and even do some research on the subject at home.

Although the students agreed on the benefits brought to their learning by self-assessment, they still revealed that this type of assessment was somehow confusing to them. The table showed a considerably high mean value for item 6.5 (M = 3.56), indicating that the students were truly in need of their teacher's further instructions on how to do the assessment. This result could be anticipated because self-assessment had to be conducted entirely out of class since the only way the students could hear themselves was to listen to their recordings. Moreover, when they did it out of class, the teacher could not be available to support them.

3.1.2. Analysis of student's responses to the interview

The 24 participants of the interviews were divided into three groups according to their pronunciation ability measured through their scores and performances in class. These groups included a good group with 8 students, an average group with 7 students, and a weak group with 9 students. Each student was asked 8 structured questions. The analysis of the students' responses to the interview questions was presented in the sections below.

Students' opinions about teacher's feedback

The first two questions of the interview focused on exploring the students' opinions about the application of the teacher's feedback which was one of the two formative assessment tasks. The following table shows the students' opinions for question 3 dealing with *what the students liked about the teacher's feedback.*

Table 8

Students' interview responses on what they liked about teacher's feedback

Students' responses	Total count (N=24)
The teacher's feedback was specific, clear, and easy to understand.	19
The teacher's feedback contained instructions on how to improve.	18
The teacher's feedback was given to every student in the class.	10
The teacher's feedback was accurate and fair.	6
The teacher's feedback helped increase students' motivation.	3

Source: Data analysis result of the research

The results showed the unity of students' opinions on what they liked about, or in other words, the advantages of the teacher's feedback. Two advantages stood out from the others on the list since they were suggested by most students. These two advantages of the teacher's feedback included the characteristics of being specific, clear, and easy to understand and the provision of instructions on how to improve. What the students liked showed what they wanted the feedback to be. Therefore, through these results, it was obvious that 19 out of 24 students wanted the teacher to point out every error that they had and describe it in a way that they could understand. Moreover, 18 students also valued the teacher's guidance on how to correct the errors since it might be difficult for them to find the answers themselves. In addition to these two advantages, 10 out of 24

students revealed that they appreciated it when the teacher gave feedback to every student in the class. As the class size was too large with about 60 students in each class, it was indeed a great opportunity for the students to be aware of their pronunciation through the teacher's feedback and also for the teacher to have a more thorough understanding of the students' ability.

Besides acknowledging the advantages of the teacher's feedback, the students also pointed out some *aspects that they did not like about this type of assessment*. These opinions were shown in the following table.

Table 9

Students' interview responses on what they disliked about teacher's feedback

Students' responses	Total count (N=24)
The students had nothing to dislike about the teacher's feedback.	12
The teacher's feedback was quite short.	10
Sometimes the students could not remember the teacher's feedback when they were out of class.	2

Source: Data analysis result of the research

It could be seen from the results that the students did not have much to tell about the disadvantages of the teacher's feedback. Half of the students expressed that they did not find anything to dislike about the teacher's feedback. Most of the other students revealed the thing they disliked about this task was that it was quite short. One of them said, "What I dislike was that the time for the teacher's feedback was limited so that the teacher could not give long feedback and only focused on the main points. As a result, even though I wanted to hear more, I could only send emails to the teacher or talk to her after the lessons." The teacher's oral feedback in this course was carried out in class, in one session which lasted 135 minutes, and for 60 students each class. This lack of time eventually resulted in brief feedback which only focused on the students' main problems. That was why the teacher decided to give the students written feedback with more specific guidelines after their second and third recordings.

In short, the students showed their positive opinions about teacher's feedback when they revealed various advantages of this task and most of them shared the same opinions. In terms of disadvantages, some students pointed out that short feedback was the only drawback of this type of assessment. There was no significant difference found between the opinions of the good, average, and weak groups for this issue.

Students' opinions about self-assessment

The interview looked at the students' opinions about self-assessment. The following table showed *what the students liked about self-assessment*.

Table 10

Students' interview responses on what they liked about self-assessment

Students' responses	Total count (N=24)
Self-assessment enabled students to recognize their errors.	13
Self-assessment motivated students to learn pronunciation.	13
Students became more responsible for their learning after assessing themselves.	10
Students were more aware of their abilities after assessing themselves.	8
Self-assessment encouraged students to find out about pronunciation from different sources.	2

Source: Data analysis result of the research

According to the results, the two most common advantages of self-assessment were pointed out by more than half of the students (13 out of 24 students). First, the students revealed that self-assessment allowed them to recognize their errors. Usually, it is easy for students to have a look back at their work if it is in the form of written work. It is because the products of their written work, such as sentences or essays, are available right after they finish the work. However, in the case of speaking and pronunciation, the only way for students to revise their work is to record themselves. This course, by requiring the students to make recordings, enabled them to listen to their pronunciation. In fact, the pronunciation that the students heard in the recordings might be different from the one in their imagination. When listening to themselves, the students might recognize that their pronunciation was not as clear as they thought. Then, they might start to look for solutions and improve their pronunciation. This process resulted in the students' motivation to learn pronunciation and their responsibilities for their pronunciation. More than half of the students agreed that this type of assessment increased their motivation for learning pronunciation and 10 of them expressed their responsibilities for their learning after assessing themselves.

On the contrary, the students also pointed out some drawbacks of self-assessment. Their opinions were described in the following table:

Table 11

Students' interview responses on what they disliked about self-assessment

Students' responses	Total count (N=24)
Students were unable to accurately assess themselves.	16
Students did not know how to describe their errors and correction properly in words.	11
Students were sometimes dishonest when assessing themselves.	5

Source: Data analysis result of the research

Most of the students (16 students) revealed that they did not know whether their pronunciation was correct or not. One of them said, "Sometimes it was very difficult to recognize my errors, especially with the words that I had never known before." Another student revealed that "The only thing I did not like about this activity was that I could lead myself in the wrong direction. This was resulted by the fact that I always thought what I pronounced was correct when in fact it might be not." In this case, the students thought that their assessment of their pronunciation was quite subjective and not thorough.

Besides, nearly half of the students (11 out of 24 students), mostly the weak students, admitted their problems in describing their errors in words. In the course, the teacher required the students to fill in a self-assessment form to guide them on how to assess themselves and make sure that they did the assessment. However, due to the lack of pronunciation knowledge and the limited ability in writing, some students might still find it difficult to express what they thought in words. The last disadvantage of self-assessment disclosed by some students was also worth noticing. According to 5 students, the students might be sometimes dishonest about their problems. On one hand, some students still believed that the teacher would evaluate their work by giving marks on every task that they did.

3.2. Discussion

In this section, the results generated from the questionnaire and interview will be discussed and summarized more systematically.

First of all, the application of formative assessment in this pronunciation course enabled the students to hold a better understanding of formative assessment. The idea that formative assessment was mostly the tests that teachers give students for the mere purpose of assessing their abilities and ranking them was no longer held by the students. In terms of the *agents* taking part in this assessment, the students believed that this process should include all of the parties in the class, i.e., the teacher, the students, and their classmates. Although the result showed the teacher as the most expected agent in the assessment, it still indicated a positive signal in the students' perception since they already recognized their role in the learning process. They now realized that not only the teacher could assess their performances but they, the students, could also do that job. About the *time*, the students showed their preference for the high frequency of conducting formative assessments in the course. Formative assessment was expected to occur as soon as the students finished learning a lesson or a specific content of the course.

In respect of the *place*, it was believed that formative assessment should be conducted both in class and out of class. It could be seen from this result that the students considered formative assessment as something they could do by themselves at home and that this task was not as complicated as what they had thought before. However, the students still preferred to assess the class where they could receive support from their classmates and timely guidance from their teacher. In connection with the *benefits* of formative assessment, the students recognized that this type of assessment could bring them much more than just a mere announcement of their ability. According to the students, the provision of accurate assessment and useful feedback gave them a clearer awareness of their learning and more motivation to learn pronunciation.

Secondly, the application of teacher's feedback was believed to have a positive effect on the students' learning of pronunciation. In the students' opinions, the teacher's feedback in this course had some positive characteristics. One of them was that this feedback was specific and clear enough for the students to understand. The use of both oral and written feedback enabled the teacher to express and deliver her feedback more clearly and effectively. By that, the students were

more likely to recognize exactly which part of their pronunciation contained errors. Besides describing the students' errors in pronunciation, the teacher's feedback also provided them with instructions on how to correct the errors. Importantly, the students could receive the teacher's guidelines on what they could do next instead of the mere description of their errors. Thanks to this, the students could not only recognize their errors but also know how to improve their pronunciation. Another positive characteristic of this feedback was that it was given to every student in the class.

Although most of the students' opinions towards the teacher's feedback were positive ones, some drawbacks of this task still existed. First, the teacher's oral feedback to the students was reported to be shorter than what the students had expected. This resulted in the fact that there were too many students allocated to a pronunciation class in this school while the time given to the pronunciation course was limited. Only the including of two sessions for the student-teacher conferences in the course required a lot of the teacher's effort. Consequently, the time allowed for each teacher-student conversation was not enough to meet the expectation of both parties. In this case, the teachers should carefully plan the conference and seek the most effective ways to carry out the conference to ensure both the quality of the oral feedback and the sufficient time for the activity.

Regarding the second disadvantage of the teacher's feedback, some students found it difficult to remember the teacher's oral feedback when they were out of class. Although the teacher already provided each student with a brief note on their errors and how to correct them after each conference, it was still difficult for them to recall exactly how the sounds were produced. In this situation, the teachers should provide the students with some kind of report on the conversation between them and the students. Due to the distinctive characteristics of pronunciation, these reports should be in oral form to make it possible for the students to relisten at home and practice their pronunciation based on that report. Also, the students should be encouraged and given more time and chances to respond to the teacher on what they did not understand the feedback. This opportunity would make each of the students a more active participant in the conferences and thus make them have a better understanding and memory of the teacher's oral feedback.

The next drawback of the teacher's feedback lay on the fact that it was seriously an exhausting task for the teacher to conduct when applied to several large-sized classes at the same time. The task of listening to each of the students' recordings and giving comments on it required a great deal of the teacher's time, effort, and patience. This is a worth-considering problem since it would directly affect the teachers' motivation and the decision of applying this type of feedback in pronunciation classes. In this case, to successfully carry out this task, the teacher should pay serious attention to the time management and the planning stage before doing the task.

Next, self-assessment was believed not to be as effective. The major reason for this result was from the fact that this task could not be conducted in class but only out of class since the students could only listen to their pronunciation at home, through their recordings. Without any support from the teacher and their friends at home, the students had to struggle a lot to find out the way to assess themselves and some admitted that they could not correctly assess their pronunciation. Besides facing some difficulties in assessing themselves, the students also found no motivation in doing this task at home when they did not receive any encouragement and support from their teacher and friends. In this case, some students were not serious in doing the task, but they only completed it as a fulfillment to the teacher's requirement.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Formative assessment has constantly been praised by a lot of researchers for its effectiveness in improving students' academic abilities. However, this kind of assessment has not always been understood and used properly by both teachers and students. Especially in pronunciation courses that receive little attention from the participants, this assessment is even more neglected. For those reasons, the researcher tried to conduct a study aiming at finding out the students' perception towards formative assessment in selected pronunciation classes at Mien Dong University of Technology. Additionally, the students' opinions about the application of formative assessment including its advantages and disadvantages were also investigated. The students' perception plays a major role in deciding the students' learning attitudes and motivation which can lead to their improvements. Therefore, this study, with its findings and suggestions, may hopefully help teachers in choosing effective ways to enhance their students' learning.

After carrying out the experimental course with the application of the two formative assessment tasks including teacher's feedback and self-assessment, the researcher used two research tools which were questionnaires, and interviews to collect the data for this study. There were two major findings following the two research questions. Concerning the first finding, the students referred to formative assessment as an assessment conducted by the teacher and students at the end of each session or a specific unit both in class and out of class to improve their pronunciation, accurately assess their pronunciation, increase their awareness, responsibility, and motivation for their learning of pronunciation. In respect of the second finding, through the students' opinions, the application of the two formative assessment tasks had both advantages and disadvantages. However, in general, the students showed their positive perception of this application.

This application of formative assessment in a pronunciation course was believed to have a positive impact on the students. First, it enabled the students to have a better and proper understanding of what was so-called "formative assessment", which might be different from what they previously thought of this term. Secondly, by receiving various assessment and feedback from all the agents participating in the classrooms such as the teacher, classmates, and themselves, the students had a clearer and more accurate awareness of their pronunciation. Finally, by actively participating in the process of formative assessment, the students tended to pay more attention and be more responsible for their learning of pronunciation.

In short, formative assessment was recognized as an effective tool to improve the students' pronunciation and increase their involvement and motivation in their learning. The application of formative assessment in this study has achieved a lot of positive results yet left some drawbacks. Based on these advantages and disadvantages, in the next section, the researcher will propose some suggestions for a better application of formative assessment in a pronunciation course.

In addition, there are some suggestions for teachers in charge of pronunciation classes as follows:

First, the teachers should try to involve all of the agents in a classroom including the teacher, the students, and their classmates in the application of formative assessment. To do that, the teachers should promote interaction among these agents in the classrooms by creating a more supportive classroom environment. More conversations and discussions between the teachers and students, and students and their classmates should be conducted in the classroom to narrow the distance among the agents and make each individual more willing to express their opinions.

Next, the teachers should make more attempts to conduct formative assessments regularly. To do that, the teachers should incorporate more formative assessment tasks in the course. The teachers, then, should manage their time more effectively in class to leave space for formative assessment at the end of each session. Besides, the teachers should also seek for many other forms of formative assessment, especially those that are effective and less time-consuming at the same time.

Moreover, the teachers should design both in-class and out-of-class tasks with more activities for the students in the class. On one hand, since the students showed their preference for in-class assessment, the teachers should try to manage more activities in class so that they can keep an eye on the student's performances and provide timing solutions.

Finally, the teachers should try to apply formative assessment in more and more pronunciation classes as the students were highly confident of the benefits that this assessment could bring to their learning. To do this, the teachers should introduce this application to those who are not aware of it by conducting demonstration classes and inviting other teachers to attend.

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