PRE- AND IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' COGNITIONS ABOUT PRONUNCIATION TEACHING: AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHILEAN CONTEXT

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An increasing number of studies have enquired into what teachers think, know and believe in order to understand how these cognitions shape teachers' practices (Borg, 2015). Despite this growing interest, there is need for investigating teachers' developmental processes throughout their training and careers more comprehensively (Burri & Baker, 2021). The following doctoral thesis project explores how teachers' knowledge, beliefs and practices about pronunciation teaching compare during and after their training, examining the factors contributing to this development.

Four cohorts of pre-service and in-service teachers from three Chilean universities were studied, with their cognitions compared at different stages of their training and career. This includes student teachers from first, third and fifth years of ELT training programmes and novice teachers. Participants' knowledge and beliefs about pronunciation teaching were obtained through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Initial findings suggest there are noticeable changes in perceptions regarding the importance of pronunciation teaching, learning models, judgements on their own pronunciation and knowledge to teach the content. These preliminary findings can greatly help understand teachers' training needs to improve their professional preparation and teaching practices.

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of English has increased the demand for teachers who can prepare learners for effective communication. Nowadays, interactions frequently occur between speakers from various linguistic backgrounds, where English acts as a *Lingua Franca* (Jenkins et al., 2017). This has also improved the importance of teaching speaking and listening skills, where pronunciation should be treated as central due to its impact on mutual intelligibility (Levis, 2018). Unfortunately, English teachers are not usually trained in pronunciation pedagogy. This results in teachers relying on their intuitions for selecting contents, materials and methodologies (Derwing & Munro, 2005), all of which can be influenced by their own experiences as language learners (Lortie, 1975). This is especially relevant for non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) who may be learning the language as part of their training.

This report focuses on some of the more salient preliminary results of a PhD thesis which examines the development of Chilean pre- and in-service teachers' cognitions about pronunciation teaching. Specifically, this report summarises preliminary results on four themes related to participants' cognitions: a) the importance of pronunciation/teaching, b) learning goals, c) models, and d) confidence and self-efficacy for teaching pronunciation.

L2 Teacher Cognition and Pronunciation Instruction

Teacher cognition research has focused on understanding what teachers think, know and believe and how these mental constructs influence classroom practices (Borg, 2015). As the field expands, research interest has also targeted teacher cognitions regarding specific language domains, such as pronunciation instruction.

Previous research has demonstrated teachers often do not receive training in pronunciation pedagogy, but just instruction on phonetics and phonology (Murphy, 2014). This lack of training has been reported as affecting teaching confidence (Foote et al., 2011), which may result in evading pronunciation instruction in the classroom. Sociocultural factors, such as teachers' own English pronunciation concerns, have also been described as making them avoid pronunciation teaching, especially in the case of NNESTs (Couper, 2016). Recent investigations, however, have shown the positive impact of pronunciation pedagogy training in teachers' cognitions and practices (Burri, 2016). Changes in teachers' views regarding intelligibility as a learning goal and the inclusion of different varieties of English as models of pronunciation, for example, are part of this cognition development.

Nevertheless, most past research has focused on experienced teachers or on teachers taking short courses about pronunciation pedagogy (e.g. Baker, 2011; Buss, 2017). Fewer studies have investigated pronunciation-related cognitions from a longitudinal perspective (Burri & Baker, 2021). Therefore, there is a need for exploring teachers' cognition processes throughout their training and careers more comprehensively. This cross-sectional study aims to address these research gaps by analysing how different groups of pre-service and in-service teachers' knowledge and beliefs about pronunciation teaching compare at different stages of their training and career. The next sections describe the context of study, research questions and the methods and materials employed.

Context of study

This study involves ELT Teacher Education programmes in Chile. There are currently 34 ELT training programmes throughout the country. These programmes do not require a minimum English proficiency level to enrol, however, all graduates should reach a C1 level (see CEFR) before graduation. Their training agenda is organised over 9-10 terms and focuses on three areas: a) language courses; b) the study of linguistic disciplines such as grammar and phonetics; and c) courses on ELT methodology and education principles. School-based teaching experiences are included progressively throughout these programmes, and the last semester usually corresponds to the professional practicum. Pre-service teachers can also apply for a grant which allows them to spend one term abroad to enrich their training.

Most programmes, nevertheless, present disciplinary subjects separately from pedagogical ones. Concerning pronunciation teaching, for instance, teachers are only trained in phonetics and phonology, and these modules are mainly seen as addressing student teachers' English competence rather than future practices within the classroom.

Research Questions

Based on the preceding discussion and context, the research questions from my doctoral study addressed in this article are the following:

1. How do Chilean teachers' cognitions about pronunciation teaching and practice compare at different stages of their ELT training and post-graduation?
2. What factors influence the development of their cognitions about English pronunciation instruction?

METHODS

Procedure

This PhD project has adopted a mixed methods design involving two phases. The first quantitative phase consisted of an online survey to provide evidence of teachers' cognitions within the domain of ELT and pronunciation instruction. This helped illustrate any opinion changes among the participating cohorts. These surveys were delivered to all participants during the first weeks of the academic year, with the aim of obtaining first-year student teachers' perceptions before any training. Due to the Covid pandemic, the second phase took place two months after survey completion. This involved retrospective semi-structured interviews, designed to expand upon the data obtained in the surveys. Because of its qualitative nature, this phase obtained richer interpretations of the elements that contribute to shaping participants' cognitions.

Participants

A total of 293 pre-service and in-service teachers from three ELT Teacher Education programmes in Chile were surveyed. They represent between 30% and 60% of total enrolment. The participating institutions share similar curricular designs, including courses on Phonology and Phonetics, sequential teaching experiences and a professional practicum, which is a requirement for graduating with the teaching degree. It was assumed that these circumstances situate these pre-service and in-service teachers on a common ground for study.

Participants are at different training and career stages (Table 1), so they can be compared to each other and changes in cognitions can be identified. These groups consist of 1) students entering these teaching degrees, 2) third-year student teachers, 3) final-year teacher candidates, and 4) graduates from these programmes, with less than 5 years teaching experience.

Table 1
Cohorts of participants

	Cohort	No. of participants			
		University 1	University 2	University 3	Total
1.	First year	34	29	35	98
2.	Third year	21	25	20	66
3.	Fifth year	15	24	19	58
4.	Novice teachers	25	24	22	71

In response to the large number of participants willing to be interviewed, approximately 10% of each surveyed cohort was selected. Participants were randomly chosen to avoid any

sampling bias. This resulted in 33 interviews of between 45-60 minutes, with at least two members of each cohort.

Materials

Three bilingual surveys were developed to address each cohort accordingly. Their organisation and topics are presented in Table 2. Some items were added/worded differently depending on participants' progression of studies, but the sections about ELT and pronunciation teaching were identical. Section V was specially designed for cohorts 3 and 4 as it enquires about participants' classroom practices.

Questionnaire items were mostly worded as statements in which participants could express their opinions on 7-point scales (from 1 = Strongly Disagree/Not at all important to 7 = Strongly Agree/Extremely important). Closed/Open-ended questions were mainly used to understand their own learning experiences and teaching practices.

Table 2
Surveys organisation

Section	Topics covered
I. English learning experiences	-At school -University training
II. Beliefs about ELT	-Pronunciation teaching importance -Language ideologies
III. Beliefs about English Pronunciation Teaching	-Pronunciation importance for communication -Pronunciation instruction goals -Pronunciation contents -Pronunciation models
IV. Confidence and self-efficacy for teaching pronunciation	-Self-evaluation of English proficiency and pronunciation -Knowledge about pronunciation teaching -Pronunciation teaching difficulty
V. Pronunciation teaching practices	-Teaching methodologies -Pronunciation models -Contents covered

Respondents were also invited to a follow-up semi-structured interview (SSI). To explore participants' responses to the survey, interview guides followed the surveys' organisation and covered the same topics. These instruments also included items from previous research about pronunciation-related cognitions (e.g. Buss, 2017).

Data Analysis

Survey data was examined with descriptive statistics to gain an overview of each cohort's cognitions and emerging trends in relation to variation. This information has been organised in tables of frequencies to make comparisons between cohorts. To complement this quantitative phase, interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). They were video recorded and transcribed in their original language, and their data were thematically coded. The numerical data obtained through survey questionnaires helped guide this exploration; however, the analysis of qualitative data was not limited to preconceived categories.

RESULTS

As this report focuses on preliminary findings of a larger PhD thesis, this section presents data that are still under analysis. I will concentrate on four areas that address research questions 1 and 2 and which have appeared as the ones thus far showing the most changes across all cohorts.
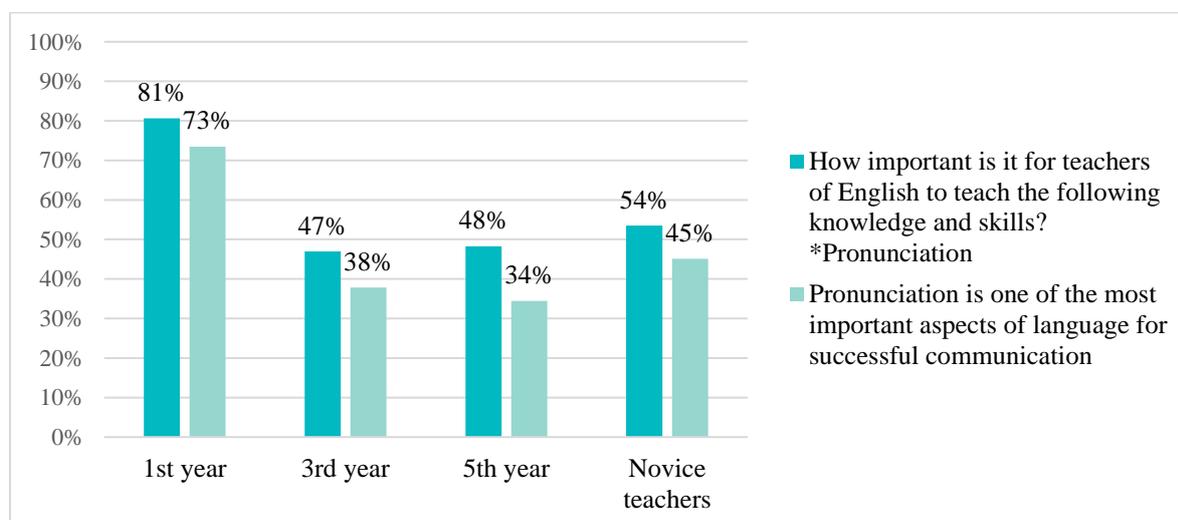
Pronunciation importance

Pronunciation importance was measured by two survey items (Figure 1). As shown, a vast majority of first-year teacher candidates assigned pronunciation a special position within English lessons and the success of oral communication. When asked to define good pronunciation, they referred to an accurate articulation of sounds and, consequently, being 'easy to understand'. This is illustrated by Emilia, one of the first-year interviewees:

> […] I think that taking into account um consonant sounds and vowels, right, and regardless of the accent you choose to pronounce them, um the idea is that it can be understood well um what word is being articulated […] (SSI #1)

Figure 1

Cohorts' cognitions on pronunciation importance. Extremely/Very important and Strongly Agree/Agree survey responses. Items adapted from Nagle et al. (2018) and Buss (2017).

Favourable views on pronunciation importance, by contrast, decreased among the other cohorts. Third-year interviewees referred to discussions of ELF and EIL in Linguistics lectures to justify their answers. They claimed that a 'perfect' pronunciation is unnecessary for speakers to communicate successfully. Fifth-year teacher candidates argued that communication is the goal of learning any language. Therefore, communication takes priority over correct pronunciation, and other content should be prioritised, such as listening and conversational skills. This idea is supported with their study-abroad experiences, where they interacted with other international speakers, but realised they lacked those competences.

Novice teachers agree with this notion of giving precedence to other content over pronunciation. They proposed that pronunciation could be integrated implicitly when teaching vocabulary, practicing speaking or in response to learners' errors, which may reduce learners' anxiety when facing this content, and enhance their motivation.

Both cohorts used their training experiences in the Phonetics and Phonology modules to support their arguments. Some describe these courses as extremely demanding due to the specific contents and requirements to adhere to the RP or GA accents when being assessed, as Claudia, one of the novice teachers explained:

> […] with Mr. XXXX you had to say, okay, are you adopting the British or American accent […] and let's be consistent with the accent, […] actually, our own accents were punished a lot […] (SSI #1)

Pronunciation instruction, consequently, was constantly equated with the learning of Phonetics and Phonology, which might be non-essential for regular classrooms. Should pronunciation be taught, they advocate facilitating pronunciation instruction through less explicit explanations or correction techniques.
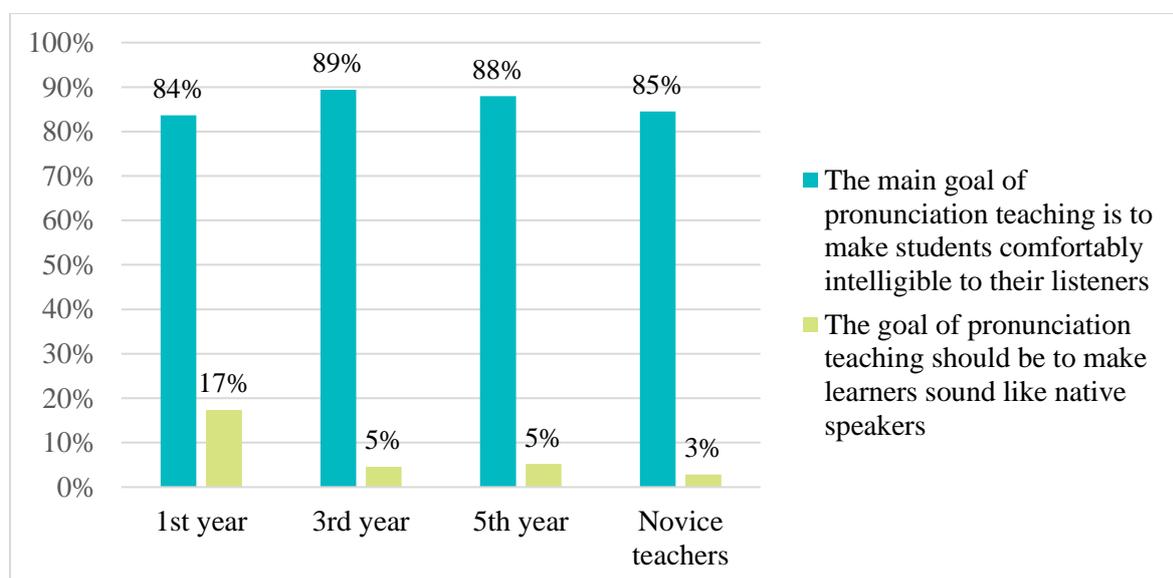
Although participants at later stages were the most likely to downgrade the importance of pronunciation teaching and to argue this content may be exclusive to those who require a professional knowledge of the language, all cohorts concur with this complex and specialised view of pronunciation instruction. They usually use the term 'Phonetics' interchangeably to refer to pronunciation. Their notion of correct/perfect pronunciation, additionally, entails a native-like production of sounds.

Goal of pronunciation teaching

The cohorts' cognitions about the goal of pronunciation learning/teaching were explored by two survey items. Figure 2 shows that participants widely affirmed that intelligibility should be the main goal of pronunciation instruction. However, 17% of first-year student teachers also agree with idea of acquiring a native-like pronunciation as a learning goal. Interview data suggests this cohort considers both dimensions inter-dependent; they believe nativelike pronunciation is naturally intelligible, and consequently, they partially agreed with both statements.

Figure 2

Cohorts' views on pronunciation learning goals. 'Strongly Agree/Agree' survey responses. Items adapted from Foote et al. (2011).

Furthermore, a common interview theme across all cohorts was the idea that there should be differentiated goals depending on the type of English learners. In the case of school learners, participants largely considered native-like pronunciation to be unnecessary as communication can be successful regardless of speakers' accented speech. For teachers of English, however, some interviewees believed that intelligible pronunciation might not be enough. While all cohorts in the surveys widely supported teachers' ability to teach English irrespective of their accented speech, some participants from cohorts 1, 2 and 4 mentioned that they might be the only accessible language model for some learners. This was precisely expressed by Pablo, a third-year participant, who thinks teachers approximating native-like pronunciation "[…] gives students a role model, a goal, the aim that they should reach [...] and if the teacher mispronounces how are the students going to pronounce well?" (SSI #1)
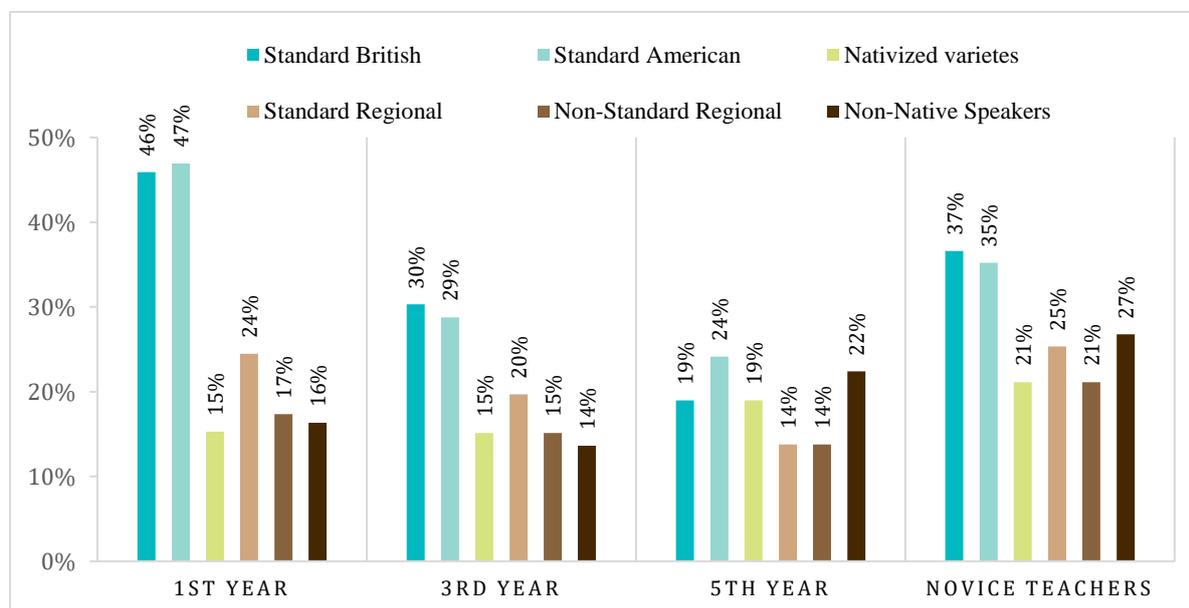
Fifth-year student teachers were the only cohort who expressed consistent views regarding teachers *only* having an intelligible accent, both in the survey and the interviews. This belief was explained as a protest reaction to the high standards of achievement imposed in Phonetics and Phonology modules, as previously reported. This benchmark performance was also discussed with novice teachers; however, these graduates see this requirement as something helpful rather than detrimental.

Pronunciation teaching models

One survey item enquired about English accents and their importance for pronunciation teaching (Figure 3). The extent to which these models could be used for either receptive or productive skills was explored in the interviews.

Figure 3

Cohorts' cognitions on pronunciation teaching models. Extremely/Very important survey responses to: How important do you think it is to use each of the following accents when teaching pronunciation? Adapted from Kanellou (2011)

First-year candidates describe American and British accents as *the most widely used*, hence they represent what learners would be most exposed to. These two varieties are also defined as *more neutral*, and thus, more intelligible to learners. They consequently believed they should form the basis of pronunciation teaching to equip learners for future interactions. They acknowledged the importance of other Englishes, but mainly for receptive skills.

Similarly, third-year teacher candidates gave preference to BrE and AmE. They show, however, more awareness of language variation because of their Linguistics courses. This supports their views of exposing learners to different accents to develop receptive skills and to demonstrate patterns of language change. This cohort also highlights British and American accents' presence in the media and in ELT materials validates their use in the classroom.

Fifth-year participants, in contrast, exhibited the most resistance towards using BrE and AmE for pronunciation teaching. This is due to their training experiences, which have led them to face international interactions with little knowledge of other Englishes, and an idealised concept of 'correct' English. They advocate, consequently, a balanced inclusion of different accents, especially those not usually available in ELT materials. They also propose including non-native speech samples to illustrate successful language learners, in the hopes that they may help learners improve their confidence. These ideas are well illustrated in Jacqueline's words, a fifth-year interviewee:

> […] it could serve as a point of reference for the […] students […] to increase their confidence [...] I want them to understand that English is not just owned by some people, […] that they understand all these variations, […] and that perhaps they do not feel that they are less or that they are being left behind if they do not have these standards or these models (SSI #1)
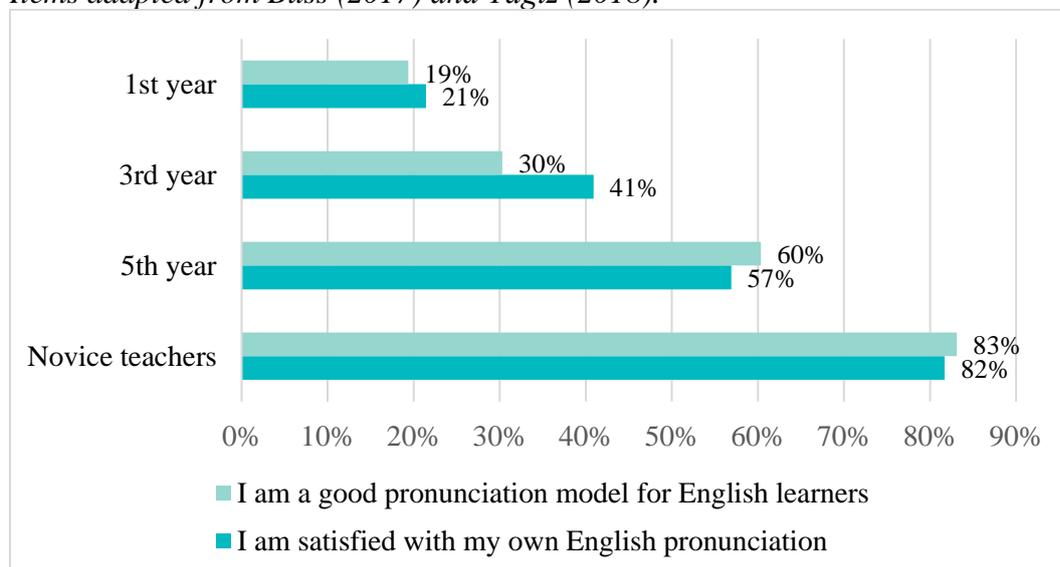
Finally, novice teachers show similar ideas to first-year participants. They also considered BrE and AmE the basis of pronunciation teaching, as they are *more neutral*, especially AmE. The feasibility of including other Englishes was also questioned, as they could be difficult to understand, which would complicate students' learning experience more than necessary. As long as these *other models* were similar to BrE and AmE, these graduates would use of them.

Confidence and self-efficacy

The final survey section enquired about participants' own judgements of their English pronunciation and knowledge about pronunciation instruction, and how they relate to their readiness to teach it effectively. Figure 4 illustrates some items about the cohorts' satisfaction with their own pronunciation and whether they can serve as models to learners.

Figure 4

Cohorts' perceptions on their own English pronunciation. 'Strongly Agree/Agree' responses. Items adapted from Buss (2017) and Yağiz (2018).

There is a clear progression of participants' own evaluation throughout the years. Interview data shows the first cohort acknowledges they need to polish their production of segments, especially vowels. They mention the Phonetics module they had just started has made them realise their pronunciation is still not satisfactory. Third-year candidates also saw themselves as requiring pronunciation improvement. They agree with first-year participants about Phonetics and Phonology modules evidencing they lack knowledge, particularly regarding prosody.
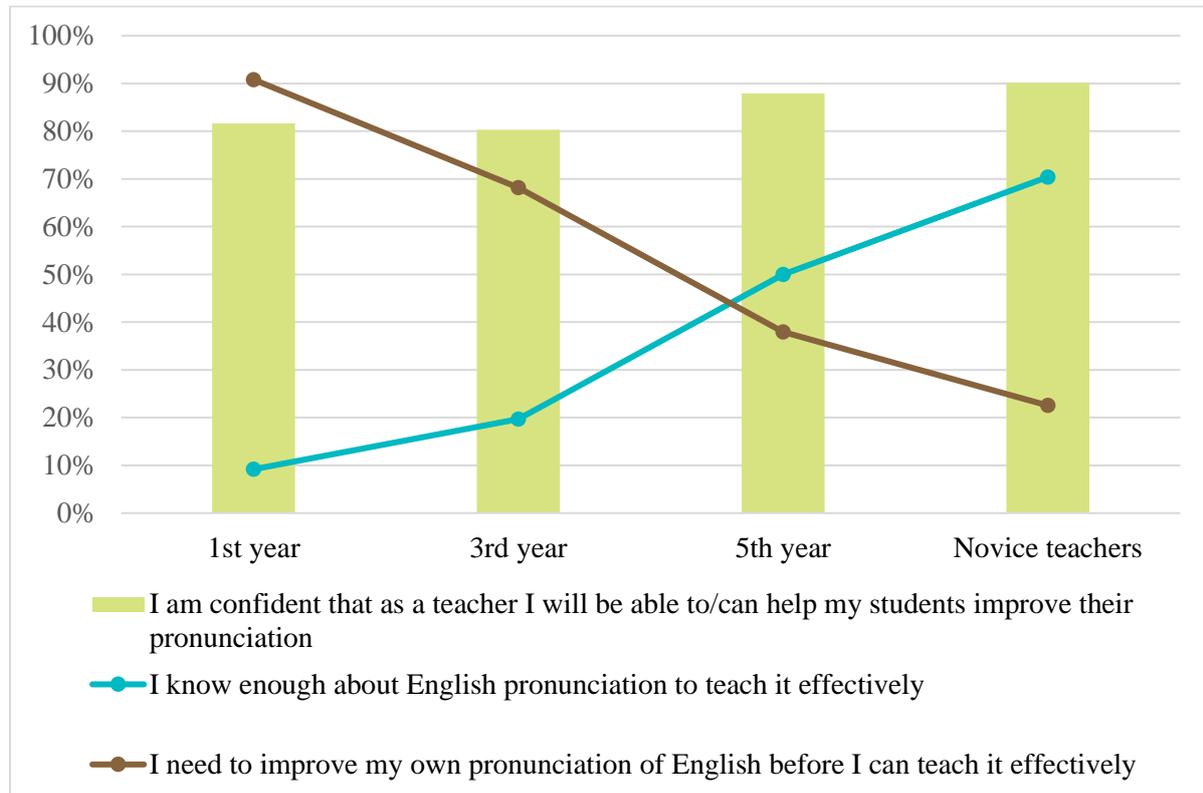
The last two cohorts, conversely, show a great improvement in their self-evaluation. Both groups associated this development with their training and practicum/working experiences. Participants also saw their study-abroad experiences as an influencing factor, especially in terms of fluency and self-confidence to speak in front of others. Suprasegmentals, nevertheless, are still seen as the most challenging aspect of English pronunciation, but they did not see it as affecting their speech or teaching.

These views are strongly connected with cohorts' perceptions on how much knowledge they possess to teach pronunciation, and whether they need to improve their own speech before

teaching it effectively (Figure 5). Cohorts at earlier training stages, for example, acknowledge their need for knowledge and pronunciation improvement.

Figure 5

Cohorts' cognitions on confidence-related questions. 'Strongly agree/Agree' responses. Survey items adapted from Buss (2017).

Interestingly, all cohorts show high levels of confidence in their ability to help learners improve their English pronunciation. Despite their training stage and the concerns reported before, cohorts at earlier training stages trust the quality of the education they will receive. Agata, a first-year student teacher explains this:

> I also have confidence […] in the academic staff. This first semester I have realised that there are very committed teachers [...] and well, there are other goals that one also pursues, so all of this gives you this conviction and this confidence [...]. (SSI #1

Fifth-year student and novice teachers see their own learning experiences through the Phonetics and Phonology modules as constituting their knowledge base for pronunciation instruction. They state that their teaching experiences have confirmed this knowledge base to be very effective. Additionally, some of these participants consider themselves as having innate abilities to learn languages, a belief which has been reassured in the training programme. They see this as validating their capabilities to eventually teach the language in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore Chilean pre- and in-service teachers' cognitions about pronunciation teaching and their contributing factors. Regarding the first research question, it was found that these participants experience a progressive change in cognitions throughout their training and early career. These variations are mainly about participants' views on the importance of pronunciation teaching, which learning models are most appropriate and their judgements on their own pronunciation and knowledge to teach pronunciation.

Concerning the factors influencing these changes in cognitions, as enquired by research question 2, teacher training is mentioned as having a great impact on these student and novice teachers' beliefs, confirming previous research in the field (Burri, 2016; Buss, 2017). Participants support their answers with their own learning experiences inside these programmes, especially in Phonetics and Phonology modules, which are seen as their knowledge base for pronunciation instruction. This apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), makes them feel progressively assertive about their knowledge despite not being specifically trained in pronunciation instruction. Their trust in the institutions also appears as a contributing factor for these participants' high levels of confidence over the years. This result challenges previous findings which report NNESTs generally lack confidence for pronunciation teaching (Couper, 2016). Participants' study-abroad experiences also emerges as an influencing factor in their confidence, especially with regards to the importance of including different English varieties for pronunciation teaching. This and other additional activities should be further explored.

However, the character and demanding standards of the Phonetics and Phonology courses might be affecting how teachers perceive pronunciation teaching, which they usually associate with specialised content. The lack of immediate connection between pronunciation instruction and intelligibility development suggests these courses have not focused on future learners' needs but on pre-service teachers' pronunciation improvement. A detailed exploration of the quality of these programmes, therefore, should be addressed in future research. Additionally, a longitudinal investigation with these participants could help explain more precisely their changes in cognitions. Some current participants have agreed to take part in further studies, and therefore I plan to continue this exploration.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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