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SEGMENTAL AND SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES IN INDONESIAN EFL SETTING

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ABSTRACT
Pronunciation instruction has often been rarely practiced in EFL classrooms. The debate on the importance of segmental and suprasegmental in the pronunciation instruction is the result of a switch in the targeted learning goals from nativelike to intelligibility in the English as a Lingua Franca era. This descriptive article analyzes the ongoing pedagogical debate and explores the implication for Indonesian EFL teachers and students. The literature reveals the segmental and suprasegmental differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia, followed by how L1 interferences affect the learning. This paper recommends a holistic and integrated approach for teachers to involve pronunciation in the overall instruction. Through game-based interactive activities, speech recognition application, authentic material and shadowing, EFL teachers vary the pronunciation enhancement. Reflective method on students' common errors and needs is essential in improving students' intelligibility.
Keywords: Pronunciation, segmental, suprasegmental, intelligibility, English as a Foreign Language

ABSTRAK
Pengajaran pelafalan jarang dilaksanakan di kelas Bahasa Inggris. Perdebatan mengenai pentingnya unsur segmental dan suprasegmental muncul seiring bergesernya target pembelajaran. Target pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris awalnya merujuk pada aksen penutur asli lalu menjadi berfokus pada keterpamahan di era Bahasa Inggris sebagai Lingua Franca. Artikel deskriptif ini menganalisis perdebatan pedagogis yang sedang berlangsung dan mengulas implikasinya bagi pengajar serta pembelajar EFL di Indonesia. Tinjauan pustaka dalam tulisan ini memaparkan perbedaan segmental dan suprasegmental antara bahasa Inggris dan bahasa Indonesia, serta bagaimana pengaruh Bahasa asli memengaruhi proses belajar. Artikel ini merekomendasikan pendekatan holistik dan terpadu agar guru dapat melakukan pengajaran pronunciation saat jam kelas secara menyeluruh. Melalui aktivitas interaktif berbasis permainan, aplikasi pengenal suara, materi otentik, dan teknik shadowing, guru dapat mengvariasikan metode peningkatan pelafalan. Selain itu, metode reflektif yang berfokus pada kebutuhan serta kesalahan umum siswa menjadi kunci penting dalam meningkatkan kejelasan pelafalan mereka.
Kata Kunci: Pelafalan, segmental, suprasegmental, keterpamahan

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation instruction has been underemphasized in EFL classroom, most likely overshadowed by other speech features. Pronunciation plays a crucial role in speech as it affects the meaning of the output (Prashant, 2018). One of the studies on effective pronunciation instruction focuses on suprasegmental or segmental features. This stemmed from the notion of intelligibility and near-native principles (Wang & Wen, 2023). Intelligibility promotes the training of L2 speech production that is comprehensible for speakers and listeners to encode and decode, while the nativelike principle is aiming the class to sound like natives of the targeted language (Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2022). As English has been renowned as the global lingua franca (Wang & Jenkins, 2016; Yao et al., 2019), researchers pointed out intelligibility as the goal of teaching pronunciation (Wang & Wen, 2023).

This implies that students receive pronunciation instruction that most likely does not require them to achieve near-native accents if they can hear sounds and produce comprehensible output in speaking. Both segmental and suprasegmental dimensions influence intelligibility, but there remains a gap in exploring these elements in the Indonesian EFL setting (Irawan & Ahmad, 2025). Existing studies in Indonesia have described learners' pronunciation errors in segmental and suprasegmental features (Laila & Leliana, 2022; Suciati & Diyanti, 2021), the influence of regional languages on English pronunciation (Abdul et al., 2025), and the effects of integrated instruction in a junior high school classroom (Mawardi et al., 2023). However, empirical evidence on the relative contribution of segmental and suprasegmental features to intelligibility in the Indonesian EFL setting is still limited (Irawan & Ahmad, 2025).

Much of the remaining literature focuses on recommending that teachers balance and integrate both dimensions in instruction (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Suciati & Diyanti, 2021). This paper addresses this gap by synthesizing the theoretical and empirical literature on the two dimensions for the Indonesian EFL setting. This paper explores the debate on suprasegmental and segmental, then discusses integrated teaching strategies for Indonesian EFL teachers.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive literature review method. Relevant theoretical literature and empirical studies were synthesized to analyze the characteristics and pedagogical implications of suprasegmental and segmental features in the Indonesian EFL setting. The sources reviewed are the books, journal articles, and conference papers listed in the References, which include theoretical works on pronunciation instruction and empirical studies conducted in Indonesian EFL settings. The literature was organized thematically into four areas that structure the discussion: (1) the definitions and characteristics of segmental and suprasegmental features, (2) the differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia and the influence of L1 interference, (3) the debate on the relative importance of segmental and suprasegmental features for intelligibility, and (4) teaching practices for Indonesian EFL teachers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Two aspects of language contributing as building blocks of pronunciation are called segmental and suprasegmental. Segmental is a sound system, while suprasegmental is a dimension that affects the meaning of the sentence. The former can be separated into segments while the latter cannot.

Segmental

Segmental is defined as the sound system of consonants and vowels of a language (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Consonant is a phonetic property that requires an obstruction of airflow in the vocal tract to produce speech sounds. It is associated with the articulatory organs like lips, tongue, and teeth involved in producing the sounds. Vowel, on the other hand, is the production of sounds with free airflow from the vocal tract passing to the mouth while the tongue is either in a high, low, back, or front position (Kirkhorn Rødvik, 2018). Each sound is characterized by the place and manner of articulation. Vowels and consonants may function differently in language attributes as consonant is more crucial in lexicon features and vowel in prosodic levels (Nespor et al., 2003 as cited in Nazzi, 2005).

Both vowels and consonants are associated in terms of the conceptualization of syllables. A syllable is a phoneme made up of a single vowel or vowel being a nucleus that is surrounded by consonants (Kirkhorn Rødvik, 2018; O'Connor & Trim, 2015). For instance, English syllables are divided into three structures. These are the minimum syllable (V) that comprises one vowel, a syllable with one consonant and one vowel (CV), and a syllable (CVC) having a vowel in the center with consonants on the sides (Islam, 2020).

Suprasegmental

The suprasegmental aspect of language is beyond single speech sounds. This term is coined as discourse features that consist of more than one inherent feature or segment (Ladefoged, 2006 as cited in Tolibovna, 2023). However, the definition in the literature of suprasegmental is not adequate as it does not apply to certain conditions such as the pitch, stress, and quantity over a single segment, and also the domains that are larger than one segment but do not behave the same way as the other suprasegmentals, like palatalization of consonant cluster (Lehiste, 1976). Some suprasegmental features are length, intonation, stress, and rhythm (Tolibovna, 2023).

Stress

Variations of stressed and unstressed syllables are used while speaking. Stress refers to highlighting a specific syllable in a word by emphasizing it (Ahmad, 2018). Stressing the syllables usually produces sounds that are "longer, louder, and higher in pitch" (Celce-Murcia, 2010, p. 184). EFL students need to articulate and comprehend sounds voiced with stress since the meaning of words a speaker intends to say depends on the use of stress. For example, if a person says the word "record" as "reCORD", it means the act of recording and not the noun form of a collection of evidence as in "REcord".

Length

The suprasegmental feature of length in a sound is referred to as the amount of time a word or phrase is articulated (Tolibovna, 2023). Examples of length are the vowels of short O, short U, long O, long U, etc. The word "not" is produced with a short O, making it unique from other words like "note" as it needs to be uttered with a long O.

Rhythm

Rhythm is composed of the stressed and unstressed elements in the syllables. It distinguishes and compares two languages that are syllable-timed and stressed-timed (Fuchs, 2014). English is a stressed-timed language, so it has regular rhythmic beats (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). However, there is still a controversy among researchers as some argued about the accuracy of stress and syllable timing terms as they could not find the exact isochrony and concluded that the rhythmic differences in L1 and L2 were due to the "phonologic rule idiosyncratic to different languages" (He, 2014).

Intonation

The coalescence of the length, intensity, and pitch used in a discourse is referred to as intonation (Levis, 2012). As intonation helps speakers to not sound like mechanical robots, it plays important roles as intonation may have its attitudinal function, accentual function, and grammatical function; it can also transmit signals to help the listener distinguish between old and new information (Roach, n.d.). He explained that the attitudinal function helps speakers to emphasize emotions and behaviors, the accentual function facilitates prominence, the grammatical function helps listeners grasp the intention like getting to differentiate a statement from a question, and speakers and listeners can know which information is already given and the ones that are recently spoken about. Likewise, intonation helps in giving agreement or disagreement, question delivery, and confirmation on a topic (Ching, 2006 as cited in Suciati & Diyanti, 2021).

Suprasegmentals and Segmental Difficulties in Indonesian EFL Setting

English is used as a foreign language in Indonesia. In Kachru's three circles of English, Indonesia is in the expanding circle where English is not spoken in public places (Yusny, 2013). English and Bahasa Indonesia are different in terms of different aspects of language such as phonology, orthography, punctuation, grammar, vocabulary, and style.

The segmental difference between these two languages is evident in the number of consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. While English has 22 vowels and diphthongs, the Indonesian language is composed of six vowels and three diphthongs. For consonants, there are 24 consonants in English and 19 in Bahasa Indonesia (Swan & Smith, 2001). This diversity has confused M/I speakers to properly pronounce words that need to be in comparable lengths (bit/beat, pill/peal, cot/caught, etc.), conflations, and diphthongs that can be long and short. More pronunciation problems are found in the consonants. The most common error is the pronunciation of /θ/which is absent in M/I and is only uttered as /t/ ('tin' for thin, 'tousan' for thousand). The confusion of post-vocalic /r/ for Indonesian learners has influenced their pronunciation of /r/ in English to be a rolled alveolar sound (Swan & Smith, 2001). Likewise, a study on EFL college students in a private Indonesian university shows that students mostly made errors in the consonants /θ/, /v/, /ʒ/, /ʃ/, /ð/, /k/, /j/ and vowels /a/, /ʌ/, /ɔ/, /ə/, /u/, /æ/, /ɪ/ (Laila & Leliana, 2022).

English suprasegmental features are distinctive from that of Indonesians. Connected speech links vowels or reduce vowels. It involves "alveolar flapping, overall linking, and consonant cluster simplification" (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Indonesians may find this difficult as they do not practice this when they speak their official language. They also tend to produce flat tones on English words or phrases that supposedly are pronounced with stress (Swan & Smith, 2001) since Indonesians mostly use word stress to emphasize a word and not to change the meaning (Laila & Leliana, 2022).

Language interference becomes a hurdle for Indonesian EFL students in producing segmental and suprasegmental sound. One evident was investigated qualitatively in a rural area in Indonesia where the Buginese students mispronounced words and placed a wrong stress on the word because of L1 interference (Abdul et al., 2025). Spoken words can be translated totally different by the listeners because of mispronunciation.

Segmental vs. Suprasegmental Components in Indonesian EFL Setting: Which Is More Important?

Both the importance of segmental and suprasegmental features has been long debated, especially in a view of intelligibility. Studies on determining either suprasegmental or segmental as the most effective pronunciation features have emerged to analyze the effects each of the features has on the intelligibility of the students (Wang, 2020). Suprasegmentals are argued to be of paramount importance in pronunciation teaching, but classroom practices that have been done throughout the years revealed segmental as the most highlighted dimension. The assumption of suprasegmentals as the underlying factor of intelligibility and that it must be a prioritized topic of instruction is affected by the reality of natives who tend to depend on suprasegmental aspects like stressed syllables rather than segmental features (Wang, 2020). Contrastingly, phonological and phonetic features are claimed to be safeguards for EFL students in improving intelligibility as miscommunication in an international setting happens due to phonological issues (Jenkins, 2002). For instance, a study on students' intelligibility in an Indonesian institute suggested that segmental features surpassed suprasegmental performance in influencing intelligibility, while suprasegmental dimension plays a role in overall comprehensibility (Irawan & Ahmad, 2025).

Considering the practical implementation of these pronunciation features, teachers need to be aware that suprasegmentals and segmental are two crucial elements in pronunciation instruction. Therefore, focusing on one aspect does not contribute to the improvement of the intelligibility and comprehensibility of students (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). They suggested a diagnostical analysis of the student's needs in both dimensions of pronunciation, then teachers can facilitate the students based on the aspects that hurdle their pronunciation. Similarly, a holistic approach to teaching suprasegmentals and segmental should be the goal in pronunciation instruction as these two are inseparable in creating effective communication (Zielinski, 2015 as cited in Wang, 2020) and this is proven to better enhance pronunciation instruction when both are being taught (Lee et al., 2015). Action research done in Indonesia on incorporating segmental and suprasegmental components, backed with data from students' pronunciation assessment, showed that the integration and variation of these two dimensions boost improvement in the teaching of pronunciation (Mawardi et al., 2023). Although many studies distinctively highlight the role of

each dimension, the integration of both segmental and suprasegmental components would most likely lead to pronunciation improvement.

Teaching Practices for Indonesian EFL Teachers

In enhancing students' suprasegmentals and segmental features of pronunciation, EFL teachers ought to view these not as dichotomy of dimensions, but as a holistic approach. When students are taught about phonology and phonetic sounds, it would be a great opportunity to introduce suprasegmental features as well so that these two aspects would be combined, thus, boosting students' pronunciation (Suciati & Diyanti, 2021).

Pronunciation instruction should be varied. EFL teachers ought to explore interactive learning tools and application that can engage students (Abdul et al., 2025). As an example, a teacher gave pronunciation games integrated in the segmental and suprasegmental components, part of action research in an Indonesian Junior High School (Mawardi et al., 2023). The study revealed an increase in student pronunciation. Further, the utilization of digital tool like ELSA Speak, a speech recognition application. In an Indonesian secondary school, ELSA speak is proven to foster fluency and accuracy in speaking (Elsani et al, 2023). Authentic materials and exposure to English speech sounds can be arranged in a meaningful way to facilitate student learning. Students can do shadowing based on the authentic material, an audio of a spoken language in this case. Shadowing is an effective technique that helps students in speaking skill enhancement (Sindi et al., 2025). Balancing out the language learning targets, pronunciation lessons need to be embedded especially in a speaking class as it can improve the intelligibility and comprehensibility of the students even in a short period (Gordon & Darcy, 2019) or it can be the core component in the teaching of speaking skill (Reskiawan et al., 2026).

Beyond the instruction, teachers need to possess a reflective ability to prepare for the class. The common errors Indonesian students usually make in terms of segmental and suprasegmental features may help teachers to better understand the needs of the students. Reflective method can be incorporated as teachers' way to evaluate students' needs and errors, and it also can be used as a learning tool for students. For instance, a group of Indonesian college students who are facilitated with reflective learning method were self-aware of their capability in pronunciation. Thus, they actively planned to increase their performance (Surwatono, 2014). Further, it is indeed a pivotal preparation for teachers to do diagnostic testing on students' ability in speaking, listening, and pronunciation so that the lessons can be designed for students' learning needs (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). EFL teachers' creativity and adaptability (Suwartono, 2014) to different learning conditions are highly encouraged in providing explicit and implicit pronunciation drills, pronunciation awareness in students, and giving feedback in classes (Reskiawan et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

The two dimensions of pronunciation, segmental and suprasegmental, are often compared in terms of their importance. However, these two components need to be

integrated in the instruction. Indonesian EFL teachers should vary the pronunciation instruction and develop engaging activities using reflective method and creativity. Future research needs to seek out a productive model consisting of the suprasegmentals and segmental features for various learning conditions.

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