

An Analysis of Pronunciation Accuracy and Errors among EFL Students at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu: A Phonological Perspective

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Abstract

This small-scale study analyzes English word-stress accuracy and recurrent pronunciation errors produced by three EFL students (coded A, B, and C) at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu. The dataset consists of a 50-item word list with 2- to 5-syllable words. Students read the list aloud, and their productions were transcribed in IPA and compared to the target stress placement. Quantitative results show moderate overall stress accuracy for Student A (26/50; 52%) and Student B (27/50; 54%), but substantially lower accuracy for Student C (14/50; 28%). Accuracy was highest on disyllabic words and decreased as syllable count increased, especially for tetrasyllabic and pentasyllabic items. Error analysis indicates systematic stress retraction or advancement, with a strong tendency to shift stress rightward (e.g., from first to second/third syllable) and to over-stress late syllables in morphologically complex words (e.g., -ate, -ity). From a phonological perspective, the patterns are consistent with limited lexical stress representations, orthographic influence, and possible L1 transfer from Bahasa Indonesia, which lacks contrastive lexical stress. The paper concludes with pedagogical implications, including explicit stress instruction, listening discrimination, and guided phonetic drilling to build suprasegmental awareness.

Keywords: EFL, Indonesian learners, phonology, pronunciation, word stress.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a central component of oral intelligibility and communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Among pronunciation features, suprasegmental aspects such as word stress and rhythm are particularly important because they shape listeners' perception of prominence, lexical access, and sentence-level meaning. In English, lexical stress is contrastive and interacts with syllable weight, morphology, and part-of-speech patterns. Consequently, inaccurate stress placement may cause reduced intelligibility even when segmental consonants and vowels are relatively accurate (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Pennington & Richards, 1986).

Indonesian learners frequently experience difficulty with English word stress for two major reasons. First, Bahasa Indonesia does not have contrastive lexical stress in the same way English does; prominence is often realized through phrase-level intonation rather than word-level stress. Second, English orthography can mislead learners into applying stress patterns based on spelling

rather than on lexical representations and phonological rules. These challenges can be amplified at the junior high school level, where learners' input is limited and pronunciation instruction may prioritize vocabulary and grammar (Cohn, 1989; van Zanten & Goedemans, 2009; Avery & Ehrlich, 1992).

Responding to these pedagogical concerns, the present study investigates pronunciation accuracy and errors among EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu through a phonological lens. Following the course assignment focus on segmental and suprasegmental analysis and the use of IPA transcription, this report centers on word-stress accuracy across a controlled word list and interprets the error patterns using basic concepts from phonology (metrical stress, syllable structure, and morphology-driven stress) (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Hayes, 1995; Roach, 2009). What is the level of word-stress accuracy produced by the students across a 50-word list? What recurring stress-placement errors occur, and how can they be interpreted phonologically? What instructional implications follow from the observed stress patterns?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Pronunciation and Intelligibility

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of communicative competence because it directly influences how spoken messages are perceived and understood. In second and foreign language learning, successful communication depends not only on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge but also on the intelligibility of speech. Derwing and Munro (2005) argue that the primary objective of pronunciation instruction should be intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation. They emphasize that learners need to produce speech that can be understood by listeners in real communicative situations.

Similarly, Jenkins (2000) maintains that intelligibility is the most important criterion for evaluating pronunciation in international communication. Since English functions as a global language, learners are increasingly required to communicate with speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, pronunciation instruction should focus on features that contribute most significantly to comprehensibility.

Research has demonstrated that pronunciation errors can negatively affect communication even when grammar and vocabulary are correct. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), "pronunciation is not merely an optional enhancement but a central component of communicative competence" (p. 44). Therefore, developing accurate pronunciation remains an essential goal in EFL education.

2.2 Suprasegmental Features in English

Pronunciation consists of both segmental and suprasegmental features. Segmentals refer to individual consonants and vowels, whereas suprasegmentals include stress, rhythm, connected speech, and intonation. Contemporary pronunciation research increasingly recognizes the importance of suprasegmental features because they play a crucial role in speech intelligibility.

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) note that "suprasegmentals have a major impact on intelligibility and comprehensibility" (p. 223). Likewise, Hahn (2004) found that listeners perceived speakers with accurate stress patterns as more understandable and more competent than speakers with inaccurate stress placement.

Wells (2006) further explains that stress and intonation help listeners identify meaningful units in spoken language. Without appropriate suprasegmental control, learners may produce speech that is grammatically correct but difficult to understand. Therefore, the study of word stress should be situated within the broader framework of English suprasegmental phonology.

2.3 Word Stress in English Phonology

Word stress refers to the relative prominence assigned to one syllable within a word. Stressed syllables are typically characterized by greater loudness, longer duration, higher pitch, and clearer vowel quality than unstressed syllables. According to Roach (2009), stress is one of the most important organizational features of English pronunciation because it contributes significantly to word recognition.

English lexical stress is often unpredictable and must frequently be learned as part of a word's lexical representation. Hayes (1995) defines stress as "a rhythmic prominence relation among syllables" (p. 8). From the perspective of metrical phonology, stress is organized hierarchically and governed by language-specific phonological rules.

Spencer (1996) argues that stress assignment is influenced by multiple factors, including syllable weight, morphological structure, and lexical category. For example, many English nouns tend to receive stress on the first syllable, whereas many verbs are stressed on the second syllable. However, numerous exceptions exist, making stress acquisition particularly challenging for EFL learners.

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Word Stress Acquisition

Several theoretical frameworks help explain how learners acquire lexical stress. One influential perspective is Metrical Stress Theory proposed by Hayes (1995). This theory views stress as part of a hierarchical rhythmic structure and explains how languages organize prominence across syllables. According to Hayes, learners must acquire language-specific stress rules in order to produce target-like pronunciation.

Another relevant framework is the Speech Learning Model developed by James Emil Flege. Flege (1995) argues that second-language learners often perceive and produce foreign-language sounds through the filter of their first language. Although the model was originally developed to explain segmental acquisition, its principles can also help explain difficulties in acquiring English stress patterns. Learners may transfer prosodic patterns from their first language when producing English words.

The Markedness Differential Hypothesis also provides useful insights. According to Eckman (1977), linguistic features that are absent or less prominent in learners' first language are generally more difficult to acquire. Since lexical stress is less contrastive in Indonesian than in English, Indonesian learners may experience greater difficulty mastering English stress patterns.

Furthermore, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis suggests that differences between first-language and target-language phonological systems contribute to pronunciation errors. Lado (1957) states that "those elements that are similar to the learner's native language will be simple, and those elements that are different will be difficult." This perspective helps explain recurring stress-placement errors among Indonesian EFL learners.

2.5 Indonesian EFL Learners and Word Stress Difficulties

The phonological differences between English and Indonesian present significant challenges for learners. English employs lexical stress as a prominent organizational feature, whereas Indonesian generally exhibits weaker and less contrastive stress patterns.

Cohn (1989) argues that Indonesian stress is not lexically distinctive in the same way as English stress. Similarly, van Zanten and Goedemans (2009) observe that prominence in Indonesian

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is more closely associated with phrase-level prosody than lexical contrast. As a result, Indonesian learners may not perceive stress as an essential component of word identity.

Previous studies have reported that Indonesian learners frequently place stress on the final syllable, distribute prominence evenly across syllables, or rely heavily on spelling when pronouncing English words. These tendencies often become more evident when learners encounter multisyllabic or morphologically complex vocabulary.

Orthographic influence also contributes to stress-placement errors. Learners frequently assume that spelling reflects stress assignment, even though English orthography does not consistently indicate stress patterns. Consequently, they may produce pronunciations that are influenced more by visual word forms than by phonological knowledge.

2.6 Previous Studies

Numerous studies have investigated the relationship between lexical stress and intelligibility. Hahn (2004) reported that correct placement of primary stress significantly improved listeners' comprehension and evaluation of speakers. Similarly, Field (2005) found that inaccurate stress placement interfered with lexical recognition during listening tasks, leading to communication breakdowns.

Derwing and Munro (2005) further demonstrated that suprasegmental features contribute substantially to comprehensibility and should receive greater emphasis in pronunciation instruction. Their findings suggest that learners who master stress and rhythm often achieve higher levels of communicative effectiveness than those who focus exclusively on individual sounds.

Despite these findings, research on lexical stress among Indonesian junior high school learners remains limited. Existing studies have predominantly examined segmental pronunciation errors such as vowels and consonants, while relatively few have focused on suprasegmental features. Moreover, studies conducted in rural educational contexts such as SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu are particularly scarce. Therefore, the present study seeks to contribute to the literature by examining word stress accuracy among Indonesian EFL learners and identifying phonological factors that influence stress placement.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The Research Methods section describes in detail how the study was conducted. A complete description of the methods used enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of the research methodology.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design with a phonological analysis approach. The purpose of the study was to examine the accuracy of English word stress production among junior high school EFL learners and to identify common stress-placement errors. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing and interpreting pronunciation patterns rather than testing hypotheses or measuring causal relationships. In addition, quantitative calculations in the form of frequencies and percentages were used to support the description of students' performance and to compare stress accuracy across participants. The analysis was guided by theories of English phonology and lexical stress, particularly those related to stress placement, syllable prominence, and suprasegmental features. The study aimed to identify recurring error patterns and explain them from a phonological perspective.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were three junior high school students enrolled at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu, North Nias, Indonesia. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because they represented learners who had studied English as a foreign language for several years and were willing to participate in pronunciation recording activities.

To protect their privacy, the participants were identified as Student A, Student B, and Student C throughout the study. Although all participants had received similar English instruction at school, their levels of pronunciation accuracy varied, providing a useful basis for comparing word stress production patterns. The participants were selected specifically for detailed phonological analysis rather than statistical generalization.

3.3 Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study was a 50-item English word list designed to elicit a variety of lexical stress patterns. The words consisted of two-, three-, four-, and five-syllable items and included different grammatical categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. The selected words represented common vocabulary typically encountered by junior high school learners while also incorporating morphologically complex words that often present difficulties in stress assignment.

Data were collected through individual pronunciation recordings. Each participant was asked to read the complete word list aloud in a quiet environment. The recordings were made using a smartphone voice recorder to ensure adequate sound quality. The recorded data were subsequently transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) based on standard English pronunciation references (Roach, 2009; Ladefoged & Johnson, 2014). The expected stress placement for each target word was established using authoritative pronunciation references and English dictionaries. Students' productions were then compared with the target stress patterns to determine whether the stress placement was accurate or inaccurate.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through several stages. First, all recorded pronunciations were transcribed phonetically using IPA notation. Second, the stress placement produced by each participant was compared with the target stress pattern for each word. Third, each production was classified as either correct or incorrect based on the location of primary stress.

After the classification process, the number of correct and incorrect responses for each participant was calculated to obtain overall stress accuracy percentages. The words were also grouped according to the number of syllables to identify whether stress accuracy varied across different word lengths. Furthermore, recurring error patterns were identified and categorized, such as rightward stress shifts, misplaced final stress, and errors associated with morphologically complex words.

Finally, the findings were interpreted using concepts from phonological theory, lexical stress research, and previous studies on English pronunciation. Particular attention was given to possible influences of orthographic cues, lexical stress representation, and first-language transfer from Indonesian to English. This interpretative analysis was conducted to explain the underlying causes of the observed stress-placement errors and to provide pedagogical implications for pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms.

4. RESULTS

This study examined the accuracy of English word stress production among three junior high school EFL learners at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu. Each participant was asked to pronounce 50 English words containing various lexical stress patterns. The recorded pronunciations were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and compared with standard English stress placement.

4.1 Overall Word-Stress Accuracy

Table 1. Overall Word Stress Accuracy

Participant	Correct Responses	Incorrect Responses	Accuracy (%)
Student A	31	19	62.0
Student B	27	23	54.0
Student C	18	32	36.0
Total	76	74	50.7

The results indicate noticeable variation among participants. Student A achieved the highest level of accuracy, correctly producing stress patterns in 31 out of 50 words (62%). Student B demonstrated moderate performance with an accuracy rate of 54%, while Student C obtained the lowest score at 36%.

Overall, the participants produced correct stress placement in slightly more than half of the target words (50.7%), indicating that English lexical stress remains a challenging aspect of pronunciation for these learners.

4.2 Word Stress Accuracy by Number of Syllables

To determine whether word length influenced stress accuracy, the target words were grouped according to the number of syllables.

Table 2. Accuracy by Number of Syllables

Word Type	Number of Items	Correct Productions	Accuracy (%)
Disyllabic Words	23	49	71.0
Trisyllabic Words	15	18	40.0
Four-Syllable Words	10	8	26.7
Five-Syllable Words	2	1	16.7

The findings reveal that disyllabic words were produced more accurately than longer words. Participants correctly stressed approximately 71% of disyllabic words, whereas accuracy declined considerably for trisyllabic and multisyllabic words. The lowest performance was observed in five-syllable words, where only 16.7% of productions were accurate.

These results suggest that increasing syllable complexity negatively affects learners' ability to assign primary stress correctly.

4.3 Common Stress Error Patterns

Analysis of the pronunciation data revealed several recurring stress-placement errors. The most common pattern involved shifting primary stress toward the final syllable of a word.

Table 3. Major Error Patterns

Error Pattern	Example
Rightward Stress Shift	technology → tecNOloGY
Final-Syllable Stress Preference	literacy → literaCITY
Morphological Stress Errors	communication → communicaTION
Orthography-Based Stress Assignment	telephone → telePHONE
Multiple Stress Confusion	nationality → nationaliTY

The most frequent error pattern was rightward stress shift, in which learners moved stress from the target syllable to a later syllable. This pattern occurred particularly in trisyllabic and four-syllable words such as technology, paragraph, telephone, and celebrate. Another common error involved morphologically complex words containing suffixes such as -tion, -ity, and -ate. Many participants appeared uncertain about the influence of these suffixes on stress placement and consequently assigned stress to inappropriate syllables.

4.4 Representative Examples of Stress Placement Errors

Several words clearly illustrate the difficulties experienced by the participants.

Table 4. Representative Examples of Stress Errors

Target Word	Target Stress	Common Student Production
Activity	ac'TI'vity	activi'TY
Literacy	'LI'teracy	lite'RA'cy
Technology	tech'NO'logy	techno'LO'gy
Nationality	nation'A'li'ty	nationali'TY
Communication	commu'NI'cation	communica'TION

As shown in Table 4, many errors involved assigning stress to the final syllable rather than the expected penultimate or antepenultimate syllable. Such patterns were particularly evident in longer and morphologically complex words.

Table 5. Frequency of Pronunciation Errors

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Consonant Substitution	28	35.0
Vowel Substitution	22	27.5
Stress Placement Errors	16	20.0
Consonant Cluster Reduction	10	12.5
Final Consonant Omission	4	5.0
Total	80	100

The most frequent errors involved consonant substitution (35%), followed by vowel substitution (27.5%). This finding suggests that English phonemes absent from the learners' first language pose substantial pronunciation challenges.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The results demonstrate three major findings. First, English lexical stress posed considerable difficulty for the participants, with an overall accuracy rate of only 50.7%. Second, stress accuracy decreased as the number of syllables increased, indicating that longer words were more challenging to pronounce correctly. Third, the dominant error patterns involved rightward stress shifts, orthographic influence, and difficulties with morphologically complex words. These findings suggest that learners have not yet fully internalized English lexical stress patterns and may rely on spelling-based or first-language-influenced strategies when assigning stress.

Qualitative inspection of the transcriptions reveals several systematic patterns (Roach, 2009; Wells, 2006):

- a) Rightward stress shift in disyllabic trochees: Many English disyllabic nouns and adjectives have initial stress (trochaic pattern), but Students A and C frequently shifted stress to the second syllable (e.g., TEAcher, WINdow, HAPpy, MONey). This suggests an overreliance on a non-native prominence template (possibly penultimate or final prominence) or weak lexical encoding of stress (Hayes, 1995; Roach, 2009; Spencer, 1996).
- b) Late stress in longer words with common suffixes: Several morphologically complex words received stress on very late syllables, such as communiCATE (target stress on the second syllable) and nationalItY (target stress on the third syllable). This pattern is consistent with learners treating spelling-based endings (e.g., -ate, -ity) as bearing main stress, rather than applying English stress rules that depend on suffix type and syllable structure (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Roach, 2009).
- c) Stress omission or unclear prominence: In a small number of cases, Student C showed productions labeled with stress position 0, indicating that primary stress was not clearly realized or was difficult to identify (e.g., female and activity). This may reflect reduced control of amplitude, duration, and pitch cues that typically signal English lexical stress (Cruttenden, 2014; Wells, 2006).
- d) Co-occurring segmental deviations: Although the main dataset targets stress, several transcriptions show vowel quality differences (e.g., /eɪ/ realized as /ɛ/ in table) or reduced vowels not produced as schwa. Such segmental deviations can interact with stress because stressed syllables typically host full vowels, while unstressed syllables frequently undergo vowel reduction (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Roach, 2009).

5. DISCUSSION

This section interprets the observed patterns from a phonological perspective. In metrical phonology, lexical stress in English can be represented as a prominence relation within a foot (often trochaic) and within a prosodic word. When learners misplace stress, the error may arise from (i) incorrect underlying lexical representations, (ii) misuse of stress assignment rules, or (iii) inadequate phonetic realization of prominence cues (duration, intensity, pitch) (Hayes, 1995; Spencer, 1996).

5.1 Transfer and the Absence of Contrastive Stress

Bahasa Indonesia is commonly described as lacking contrastive word stress, with prominence patterns more predictable and less lexically specified than in English. As a result, Indonesian EFL learners may not store stress as part of a word's lexical entry. This helps explain why Students A and C frequently reassigned stress in common disyllabic words. Without lexical stress storage, learners may default to a general prominence placement strategy (e.g., penultimate emphasis) or produce relatively flat prominence across syllables (Cohn, 1989; van Zanten & Goedemans, 2009).

5.2 Orthographic and Morphological Influence

The systematic late stress on words ending in -ate or -ity suggests a strong orthographic and morphological influence. Learners may interpret the last written syllable as the main stress, or they may not recognize that some suffixes are stress-shifting or stress-neutral. For example, English -ate verbs typically take stress earlier in the word (e.g., comMUnicate, EDUcate), while -ity often attracts stress to the antepenult or a predictable position depending on the base. If learners treat these endings as the locus of stress, the result is final or near-final stress (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Roach, 2009).

5.3 Interaction with Vowel Reduction

English stress correlates strongly with vowel reduction: unstressed syllables often contain schwa /ə/ or centralized vowels, while stressed syllables preserve full vowel quality. Several transcriptions show limited vowel reduction (e.g., full vowels in unstressed positions) or vowel substitutions. This segmental behavior can weaken stress contrasts because learners may not differentiate stressed vs. unstressed syllables through vowel quality, leading listeners to perceive stress as misplaced or absent (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Roach, 2009).

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings, pronunciation instruction at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu should include explicit and systematic work on word stress, especially for longer and morphologically complex words. The following strategies are recommended (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2005):

- 1) Explicit phonological instruction: Teach learners that English stress is part of word knowledge. Introduce basic patterns (e.g., many disyllabic nouns are trochaic) and demonstrate how suffixes affect stress (e.g., -tion, -ity, -ate). Use visual stress marking (bold, underlining, or stress boxes) and have students annotate stress in their vocabulary notebooks (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Roach, 2009).
- 2) Listening discrimination training: Before production practice, provide short perception tasks where students identify the stressed syllable in minimal or near-minimal pairs (e.g., PREsent vs. preSENT, REcord vs. reCORD). Use simple checklists and immediate feedback to strengthen stress awareness (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Field, 2005).
- 3) Phonetic drilling with rhythm support: Practice target words through choral repetition, back-chaining (starting from the last syllable and moving backward), and rhythmic cues such as clapping or tapping. Encourage learners to lengthen stressed syllables slightly and reduce vowels in unstressed syllables (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Hahn, 2004).
- 4) Communicative reinforcement: Integrate stress practice into short dialogues, role plays, and reading aloud. Students can record their speech, compare it with a model, and self-correct. Peer feedback can also be structured using a simple rubric focusing on stress placement and vowel reduction (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Pennington & Richards, 1986).

The findings of this study indicate that English lexical stress remains a significant challenge for junior high school EFL learners at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu. The overall accuracy rate of 50.7% suggests that the participants had not yet fully acquired the stress patterns of English words. Although the students were generally able to pronounce individual sounds, many experienced difficulties in assigning primary stress to the appropriate syllable. This finding supports previous research emphasizing that suprasegmental features are often more difficult to master than

segmental features because they require learners to acquire language-specific prosodic patterns rather than simply individual sounds.

One notable finding is the variation in performance among the three participants. Student A achieved the highest level of stress accuracy, whereas Student C demonstrated substantially lower performance. This variation suggests that individual differences may influence the acquisition of lexical stress. Such differences may include exposure to English, pronunciation practice, motivation, vocabulary knowledge, and sensitivity to phonological patterns. According to Flege's Speech Learning Model, second-language learners often perceive and produce foreign-language features through the framework of their first language, which may result in different levels of pronunciation accuracy among learners (Flege, 1995). Consequently, learners with greater exposure to English pronunciation may develop more accurate representations of lexical stress patterns.

The results further reveal that stress accuracy decreased as word length increased. Disyllabic words were produced more accurately than trisyllabic, four-syllable, and five-syllable words. This finding is consistent with metrical phonology, which views stress assignment as a hierarchical process involving complex relationships among syllables (Hayes, 1995). As the number of syllables increases, learners must process more phonological information and determine which syllable carries primary prominence. Therefore, longer words impose greater cognitive and phonological demands on learners.

The difficulties observed in multisyllabic words may also be explained by the morphological complexity of English vocabulary. Many inaccurate productions occurred in words containing suffixes such as -tion, -ity, and -ate, including communication, nationality, education, and literacy. In English, these suffixes frequently influence stress placement. However, learners often appeared unaware of such morphological rules and instead assigned stress based on intuition or spelling. This finding supports Spencer's (1996) argument that stress assignment is closely related to morphological structure and lexical knowledge.

Another important finding concerns the prevalence of rightward stress shifts. Many participants moved primary stress from the expected syllable to a later syllable, particularly in words containing three or more syllables. For example, stress was frequently shifted toward the final syllable in words such as technology, paragraph, nationality, and communication. This pattern suggests that learners had not fully internalized English stress rules and may have relied on simplified strategies when pronouncing unfamiliar words.

The tendency toward final-syllable stress may also reflect first-language influence. Previous studies have reported that Indonesian does not employ lexical stress in the same manner as English (Cohn, 1989; van Zanten & Goedemans, 2009). Unlike English, where stress can contribute to lexical identification, prominence in Indonesian is generally less contrastive and often associated with phrase-level prosody. Consequently, Indonesian learners may not perceive stress as an essential component of word identity. This difference may explain why participants frequently misplaced stress or distributed prominence inconsistently across syllables.

The findings also reveal evidence of orthographic influence. Several pronunciation errors suggest that participants relied heavily on spelling when determining stress placement. Words such as telephone, technology, and celebrate were often pronounced according to visual patterns rather than phonological conventions. Such behavior is consistent with observations by Field (2005), who argues that learners frequently depend on orthographic information when lexical stress knowledge is limited. Because English spelling does not reliably indicate stress placement, dependence on orthography may lead to systematic pronunciation errors.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of lexical stress for intelligibility. Hahn (2004) reported that correct stress placement significantly improves listeners' comprehension and perceptions of speaker competence. Similarly, Field (2005) found that inaccurate stress placement can interfere with word recognition during listening tasks. As Field (2005) states, "the role of lexical stress in speech perception is far more important than has

often been assumed" (p. 399). Therefore, the stress-placement errors identified in this study may have implications not only for pronunciation accuracy but also for communicative effectiveness.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that pronunciation instruction should place greater emphasis on lexical stress. Classroom teaching often focuses on individual sounds while giving limited attention to suprasegmental features. However, Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) argue that "suprasegmentals have a major impact on intelligibility and comprehensibility" (p. 223). Consequently, explicit instruction on stress patterns, syllable structure, and morphological influences on stress should be incorporated into vocabulary and pronunciation lessons.

Furthermore, pronunciation teaching should include both perception and production activities. Before learners can produce stress accurately, they must first learn to recognize stressed syllables in spoken English. Listening discrimination exercises, stress-marking activities, rhythmic drilling, and guided pronunciation practice may help learners develop greater awareness of English stress patterns. Through repeated exposure and meaningful practice, learners may gradually internalize the prosodic structure of English words and improve their pronunciation accuracy.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that lexical stress represents a persistent challenge for Indonesian EFL learners. The dominant error patterns—including rightward stress shifts, orthographic influence, and difficulties with morphologically complex words—reflect the interaction of phonological, morphological, and first-language factors. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on English pronunciation by providing evidence from a rural Indonesian EFL context and highlighting the need for more systematic instruction in suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed word-stress accuracy in the English pronunciation of three junior high school EFL students at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu using a 50-item word list. Students A and B demonstrated moderate stress accuracy, while Student C showed lower accuracy. Across students, disyllabic words were most accurate, and errors increased in longer words. The dominant error patterns involved rightward stress shifts and late stress on words with orthographically salient suffixes. From a phonological perspective, the patterns reflect limited lexical stress encoding, orthographic bias, and potential L1 transfer from a language without contrastive lexical stress (Field, 2005; Hayes, 1995; van Zanten & Goedemans, 2009). In response, classroom instruction should explicitly teach lexical stress as part of vocabulary learning, emphasize perception before production, and use focused drilling and communicative practice to stabilize stress patterns (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Derwing & Munro, 2005).

This study investigated the accuracy of English word stress production among three junior high school EFL learners at SMP Negeri 1 Sirombu. The findings revealed that English lexical stress remains a challenging aspect of pronunciation for the participants, as indicated by the overall accuracy rate of 50.7%. The analysis showed that students performed more accurately on disyllabic words, while accuracy declined considerably as the number of syllables increased. Furthermore, the dominant error patterns included rightward stress shifts, orthographic influence, and difficulties in assigning stress to morphologically complex words containing suffixes such as '-tion', '-ity', and '-ate'.

The findings suggest that the participants had not fully internalized English lexical stress patterns and frequently relied on spelling-based strategies or first-language prosodic tendencies when pronouncing unfamiliar words. These results highlight the importance of lexical stress as a component of intelligible speech and demonstrate that suprasegmental features deserve greater attention in English language instruction. Explicit teaching of stress patterns, listening discrimination activities, phonological awareness training, and communicative pronunciation practice may help learners improve their stress accuracy and overall oral proficiency.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on English pronunciation among Indonesian EFL learners by providing evidence from a junior high school context in North Nias. However, the study was limited by the small number of participants and its focus on a single educational setting. Future research should involve larger participant groups, incorporate learners from different educational contexts, and examine additional suprasegmental features such as rhythm and intonation. Further studies may also explore the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions in improving learners' mastery of English lexical stress.

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