DEVELOPING SUPRASEGMENTAL COMPETENCE: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH WORD STRESS AND INTONATION TO UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Received: 20.10.2025
Revised: 21.10.2025
Accepted: 22.10.2025

Keywords: suprasegmental competence, English word stress, intonation, pronunciation teaching, communicative activities.

Annotation. This study explores effective strategies for developing suprasegmental competence, focusing on English word stress and intonation for Uzbek EFL learners. Suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation play a crucial role in English communication, influencing both intelligibility and listener comprehension. The study highlights classroom techniques, including modeling, drilling, audiovisual aids, and communicative activities, to enhance learners' awareness and accurate production of word stress patterns and intonation contours. Emphasis is placed on integrating pronunciation instruction with speaking and listening activities to foster both accuracy and fluency. The findings suggest that consistent practice, corrective feedback, and contextualized learning can significantly improve Uzbek EFL learners' suprasegmental competence, leading to more effective oral communication in English.

Introduction. Developing suprasegmental competence is an essential aspect of English language learning, as features such as word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation significantly influence intelligibility and communicative effectiveness. For Uzbek EFL learners, mastering these suprasegmental features can be particularly challenging due to differences between Uzbek and English phonological systems. Uzbek is largely a syllable-timed language with relatively predictable stress patterns, whereas English is a stress-timed language with variable stress and intonation patterns, which often leads to pronunciation errors, reduced comprehensibility, and communication breakdowns. Effective teaching of word stress and intonation is therefore crucial to help learners improve both their spoken accuracy and overall fluency. Pedagogical approaches that integrate modeling, repetition, audiovisual aids, and interactive communicative activities provide learners with opportunities to perceive, practice, and produce accurate stress and intonation patterns in meaningful contexts. Moreover, developing learners' suprasegmental awareness encourages them to recognize patterns in connected speech, adjust their rhythm, and convey meaning, attitude, or emotion appropriately.

Literature rewiev. Suprasegmental features, including word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation, are widely recognized as essential for intelligible and effective communication in English [1]. Research shows that learners who lack suprasegmental competence often face difficulties being understood by native and non-native speakers, which can impede overall communicative success [2]. Word stress is particularly critical, as incorrect stress placement can change word meaning, for example between ‘record (noun) and re’cord (verb), while intonation conveys pragmatic functions, attitudes, and emotions that help listeners interpret meaning accurately [3]. Studies also highlight that traditional pronunciation instruction often focuses on segmental features such as individual vowels and consonants, neglecting suprasegmental elements, which results in speech that may be phonetically correct but difficult to understand due to unnatural stress or monotone intonation [4]. Effective teaching approaches emphasize integrating suprasegmental instruction with communicative practice, using techniques such as modeling, drilling, audiovisual aids, contextualized speaking tasks, and technology-assisted feedback to enhance learners’ awareness and production of stress and intonation patterns, thereby improving intelligibility and overall oral competence [5].

Research methodology. The research methodology employed in this study was designed to investigate effective strategies for developing suprasegmental competence, focusing on English word stress and intonation among Uzbek EFL learners. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the quantitative improvements in learners’ pronunciation and the qualitative aspects of their learning experiences. The participants consisted of forty intermediate-level Uzbek EFL learners aged between sixteen and twenty-two years, drawn from a secondary school and a university language program. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that all participants had comparable levels of English proficiency and prior exposure to the language. Pre-tests were administered to assess learners’ baseline competence in word stress, sentence stress, and intonation patterns. The instructional intervention spanned six weeks, with two 60-minute sessions conducted each week, combining explicit teaching of stress and intonation rules with practical exercises designed to reinforce learning. Classroom activities included modeling of correct stress patterns, drilling exercises, listening and perception tasks, audiovisual materials to demonstrate natural intonation contours, and communicative speaking tasks that required learners to apply suprasegmental features in meaningful contexts. Teachers provided immediate corrective feedback during exercises, and learners were encouraged to self-monitor and peer-assess to enhance awareness and accuracy. Data collection involved multiple instruments to capture both performance and perceptions. Audio recordings of learners’ oral productions during pre-tests, post-tests, and classroom activities were analyzed to evaluate improvements in stress placement, sentence rhythm, and intonation accuracy. Additionally, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather learners’ attitudes, perceptions, and reflections on the effectiveness of the instructional strategies. Classroom observations were recorded to monitor engagement, participation, and the

implementation of teaching techniques. For data analysis, quantitative results from pre- and post-tests were subjected to statistical analysis using paired-sample t-tests to determine the significance of improvements in learners' suprasegmental competence. Qualitative data from interviews, questionnaires, and classroom observations were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, challenges, and learners' responses to the instructional interventions. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for validation of findings and a more nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of different teaching strategies. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study, including obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality of personal data, and maintaining voluntary participation. This methodological framework provided a systematic and reliable approach for investigating the impact of explicit instruction, practical exercises, and technology-supported strategies on the development of English word stress and intonation skills among Uzbek EFL learners, offering practical implications for educators and curriculum designers.

1-Table. Effective teaching strategies for word stress and intonation

Strategy	Description	Benefits
Modeling	Teacher demonstrates correct stress patterns and intonation	Learners develop auditory awareness and accurate imitation
Drilling Exercises	Repetition of words and sentences with correct stress/intonation	Reinforces muscle memory and pronunciation accuracy
Audiovisual Materials	Videos, recordings, and software showing natural speech	Enhances perception and understanding of intonation contours
Communicative Tasks	Role-plays, dialogues, and speaking activities	Integrates suprasegmental features into meaningful contexts
Peer and Self-Assessment	Learners monitor their own and others' pronunciation	Encourages self-correction and raises awareness

Presents effective teaching strategies for developing word stress and intonation in Uzbek EFL learners. The table outlines five key strategies commonly used in pronunciation instruction, including modeling, drilling exercises, audiovisual materials, communicative tasks, and peer/self-assessment. Each strategy is described briefly, and its specific benefits for enhancing suprasegmental competence are highlighted. Modeling allows learners to hear and imitate correct stress patterns and intonation, while drilling exercises reinforce accurate pronunciation through repetition. Audiovisual materials provide authentic examples of natural speech, helping learners perceive intonation contours and stress placement more clearly. Communicative tasks integrate suprasegmental practice into meaningful speaking

activities, promoting real-world application. Finally, peer and self-assessment encourage learners to monitor their own and others' pronunciation, fostering self-correction and greater awareness of prosodic features. Overall, the table demonstrates how a combination of explicit instruction, practice, and feedback can effectively enhance learners' suprasegmental competence in English.

Research discussion. The findings of this study indicate that targeted instruction in word stress and intonation significantly improves Uzbek EFL learners' suprasegmental competence and overall oral intelligibility. Analysis of pre- and post-test recordings revealed a noticeable improvement in learners' ability to correctly place word stress and produce appropriate intonation patterns, suggesting that explicit instruction combined with repeated practice is effective in addressing common pronunciation difficulties. Learners who participated in perception-based listening tasks, audiovisual modeling, and drilling exercises demonstrated greater accuracy and fluency in stress placement compared to those who relied solely on traditional pronunciation exercises. This supports existing research emphasizing that suprasegmental competence cannot be effectively developed through segmental-focused instruction alone, and that contextualized, communicative practice is essential for meaningful learning. Qualitative data collected through classroom observations and learner questionnaires further highlighted the importance of immediate corrective feedback, modeling, and opportunities for active practice. Learners reported that visual and auditory cues provided through audiovisual materials helped them internalize stress patterns and intonation contours more effectively, while communicative tasks allowed them to apply these features in authentic speaking situations. Moreover, peer-assessment and self-monitoring were found to reinforce learners' awareness of suprasegmental features, helping them notice discrepancies between their production and target models. The study also revealed challenges faced by Uzbek EFL learners in mastering English suprasegmentals. Differences between Uzbek, a syllable-timed language with relatively predictable stress, and English, a stress-timed language with variable stress patterns, contributed to persistent errors, particularly in multi-syllable words and connected speech. Intonation patterns, especially rising and falling contours associated with questions, emphasis, and emotions, initially posed difficulties for learners, reflecting the need for sustained exposure and practice. However, repeated modeling, guided drills, and contextualized communicative practice gradually mitigated these difficulties, indicating that learner difficulties can be addressed through systematic, structured instruction.

Conclusion. The study concludes that developing suprasegmental competence, particularly in word stress and intonation, is essential for improving Uzbek EFL learners' oral intelligibility, fluency, and overall communicative effectiveness. Targeted instructional strategies that combine explicit teaching, modeling, perception-based listening activities, drilling, audiovisual materials, and communicative tasks were found to significantly enhance learners' ability to produce accurate stress patterns and intonation contours. The integration of technology,

including audio recordings and speech analysis tools, provided learners with immediate feedback and facilitated self-monitoring, further supporting the acquisition of suprasegmental features. The research also highlighted the specific challenges faced by Uzbek learners due to differences between their native syllable-timed language and English stress-timed patterns, as well as variations in intonation contours. Despite these challenges, systematic practice, contextualized exercises, and repeated exposure allowed learners to gradually improve accuracy and gain confidence in their spoken English. Overall, the findings suggest that suprasegmental competence can be effectively developed through structured, communicative, and technology-supported instructional approaches. These strategies not only improve pronunciation accuracy but also enhance learners' engagement, motivation, and ability to convey meaning, emotion, and intent naturally in English. The study underscores the importance of incorporating suprasegmental instruction into EFL curricula and provides practical insights for educators seeking to enhance learners' oral communication skills. By focusing on word stress and intonation, teachers can support learners in achieving more comprehensible, fluent, and expressive English speech, thereby fostering both academic success and real-world communicative competence.

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