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SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES OF PRONUNCIATION

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive research design that examined the suprasegmental skills, specifically pitch and stress, of the 41 Grade 12 students at a public school in Misamis Occidental. A researcher-made survey questionnaire was utilized, and the researchers adopted two reading materials from two different studies to measure the proficiency level in terms of pitch and stress of the respondents. The statistical tools used to treat the data were frequency and percentage distribution, mean, and independent t-test. The results revealed that the respondents were aged 17 to 20, almost evenly distributed between middle and late adolescence, comprising 51.22% males and 48.78% females, all belonging to the poor cluster, with 82.93% earning less than ₱9,520. Also, they are not competent when it comes to their proficiency level in terms of pitch and less competent in terms of stress. Lastly, there was no significant difference in the proficiency level in terms of pitch and stress when respondents are grouped according to age, gender, and SES (income). The researchers recommended incorporating targeted interventions, such as interactive pronunciation exercises and tailored instructional materials, to enhance suprasegmental proficiency in ESL/EFL classrooms. These interventions can contribute to more effective language learning experiences for Grade 12 HUMSS students, addressing the identified low proficiency levels in pitch and word stress.

KEYWORDS: Suprasegmental skills, Pronunciation skills, Philippine senior high school

INTRODUCTION

English has become an indispensable global lingua franca, especially in academic and professional settings. This holds true in the Philippines, where English is an official language and is widely used. According to Bernardo (2004), this prevalence stems from the historical context of English in the Philippines as a result of the U.S. colonization from 1898 to 1946. Since its introduction in schools during the colonial period, English has integrated itself into the country's political, business, and media landscapes.

However, the acquisition of academic English poses significant challenges for Filipino ESL learners, particularly in pronunciation. As Mendoza (2015) points out, Filipino ESL learners often struggle

with English pronunciation due to first language interference, with academic English adding to the complexity. Thus, achieving proficiency in academic English, which includes mastering pronunciation, becomes a significant goal for many Filipino ESL learners. Understanding the impact of English on the pronunciation of Filipino learners is crucial as English's global prominence has led to a distinct pronunciation style in academic contexts, characterized by specific phonetic features like stress and intonation. This global prominence has given rise to a well-established phenomenon, which is the profound impact of academic English on the pronunciation of learners.

To understand this phenomenon more comprehensively, it is essential to explore the domain of suprasegmental features in speech. These features, as described by Ladefoged (1993) and Cutler and Norris (1988), extend beyond individual phonemes and include elements like stress, intonation, rhythm, and timing. They play a crucial role in conveying emotions, attitudes, and differentiating speech acts. Crystal (1969) noted their importance in signaling the communicative function of a sentence, indicating turn-taking in conversations, and managing the flow of discourse. These features are not only vital in language acquisition but also in literacy development.

The Business Process Association of the Philippines [BPAP] (2013, as cited in Manuel, 2022) conducted research determining that, among the four fundamental skills assessed (English proficiency, cognitive ability, computer literacy, and perceptual speed and accuracy) prioritizing the enhancement of English proficiency is crucial for bridging the gap between industry and academia. In alignment with this finding, the K to 12 English Curriculum Guide (2019) aims in the development of students' oral communication through the development of segmental and suprasegmental features of speech and this is evident under the oral fluency competency.

A student of today should be able to express ideas clearly through oral, written, and non-verbal communication in a range of settings; listen attentively to understand meaning, including knowledge, values, attitudes, and intentions; use communication for a range of purposes, such as to inform, instruct, entertain, motivate, and persuade; make use of multiple media and technologies; and know how to evaluate the information they receive (Pacific Policy Research Center, 2010). However, research by Chentez et al. (2019) found that senior high students at Saint Michael College of Caraga in the Philippines face significant challenges in oral communication and experience communication apprehension. These problems were attributed to the infrequent use of English in their daily lives, resulting in nervousness when speaking in the second language.

Consequently, this study narrowed its focus to two suprasegmental features: pitch and stress. Pitch, as highlighted in studies by Juslin and Laukka (2003) and Scherer (2003), is key in conveying expressiveness and emotion. Stress, on the other hand, is fundamental in shaping the prosodic structure of languages, influencing word recognition and speech (Cutler & Butterfield, 1992; Shattuck-Hufnagel, 1992). By focusing on pitch and stress, the researchers delved into the intricate dynamics of these suprasegmental features and their impact on speech perception, language

processing, and effective communication. An initial interview with teachers from the Humanities and Social Sciences strand at a public school revealed that many students not only struggled with basic skills like reading and writing, but most especially in their pronunciation. According to the students' advisors, this issue is not just an isolated problem but is prevalent in various facets of students' academic lives.

Therefore, this study examined the suprasegmental pronunciation skills, specifically pitch and stress, of these students. Furthermore, it investigated if there are significant differences in pronunciation skills when the students are grouped according to age, gender, and socio-economic status (SES). This comprehensive approach aimed to identify specific areas of difficulty and potential disparities, providing a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by students in achieving proficiency in English pronunciation.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to examine the suprasegmental skills of the grade 12 students from a public school in Misamis Occidental.

Specifically, it sought to address the following research questions:

1. What is the profile of the respondents in terms of
   1.1 age;
   1.2 gender; and
   1.3 socio-economic status (SES)?
2. What is the proficiency level of respondents in terms of:
   2.1 pitch; and
   2.2 stress?
3. Is there a significant difference in the proficiency level when respondents are grouped according to age, gender, and SES?

RESEARCH METHOD

This quantitative study utilized a descriptive research design. The main focus was to assess and describe the students' proficiency in suprasegmental aspects of pronunciation, specifically pitch and stress. These suprasegmental elements are crucial in spoken language as they contribute to the rhythm, intonation, and emphasis in speech, influencing how language is understood and conveyed.

The study's descriptive nature means it primarily aimed to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of the students' abilities in these areas. By doing so, it helped to establish a clear picture of their current proficiency levels in suprasegmental pronunciation. This is important for understanding how effectively students can use these aspects of language in communication.

Additionally, the study sought to explore whether there were any notable differences in proficiency levels based on demographic variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES), which is indicated by income levels. This aspect of the study is significant as it could reveal whether these demographic factors have any impact on students' ability to master suprasegmental pronunciation skills. Understanding such differences is crucial for educational planning and tailoring language instruction to meet the diverse needs of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Suprasegmental Features

Suprasegmental features refer to various forms of intonation and how words and sentences are uttered. Suprasegmental, also called prosodic, is a speech feature such as stress, tone, or word juncture that accompanies or is added over consonants and vowels; these features are not limited to single sounds but often extend over syllables, words, or phrases. Fox (2002) details that Prosody originates from the Greek word "προσωδία" (prosodia), which signifies 'song sung to music' or 'sung accompaniment'. This suggests that prosody serves as the musical backdrop to the words themselves. Nooteboom (1997) explains that prosody, in earlier times, was used to describe the "science of versification" and the "laws of metre," governing the modulation of the human voice when reciting poetry. In contemporary phonetics, the term 'prosody' and its adjectival form 'prosodic' commonly refer to speech properties that cannot be deduced solely from the sequence of phonemes in human utterances. These properties encompass controlled modulation of voice pitch, the manipulation of segment and syllable duration, and deliberate variations in overall loudness.

In pronunciation, learners also need to understand about suprasegmental features in enhancing the quality of pronunciation mastery. It is not only developing the correctness of pronunciation but more about understanding the meaning of speakers. The emphasis on one word in the English conversation sentence certainly has a strong meaning to be conveyed. Clark et al. (2007) informed that suprasegmental can be referred as prosodic features. They are features of spoken language such as pitch, rhythm, and tempo which is not easily identified as discrete segments so as stress and intonation in English are also part of suprasegmental features. Moreover, prosodic features such as stress and pitch contribute an essential part of the linguistic interpretation of an utterance, as they provide overt and, especially, covert information on the message transmitted, and/or the emotions and attitudes conveyed with it (Wilson & Wharton, 2006).

Pitch

According to Kuhn et al. (2010), the phonetic definition of pitch is the rate at which vocal fold pulses occur. A higher frequency of these pulses results in a distinct, high-pitched sound. Pitch can be compared to the adult-like voice range of a speaker in the target language. Proper voice pitch in syllables (stress) and at the end of sentences (intonation) is an indication of good reading prosody (Schwanenflugel & Benjamin, 2016). A falling tone is expected at the end of a declarative sentence, while a rising tone occurs at the end of an interrogative sentence (Kuhn et al., 2010).

Schwanenflugel and Benjamin (2016) studied lexical prosody and found that fluent reading was associated with readers who clearly distinguished syllables. In contrast, emerging readers displayed inconsistent and uneven word stress and pitch changes while reading a passage. Meanwhile, Gonzales (2017) showed a major difference between two forms of intonation patterns: items in a series that start with sustained intonations and end with falling pitch, and presentation of alternatives that start with a rising and end with a falling pitch. The mastering of these pitch patterns by younger generations made a huge difference within sentences and older generations. Additionally, speech and sex are intricately related, just as language and oral communication are (Llamzon 1978). In this study, pitch is the perception of relative frequency where a higher frequency corresponds to a higher pitch, and a lower frequency corresponds to a lower pitch.

Stress

According to Deterding and Hvitfeldt (1998), lexical stress refers to the most prominent syllable within a polysyllabic word or a two-word noun phrase. It depends on four features: pitch prominence, loudness, duration, and vowel quality (Roach, 2009, as cited in Lewis & Deterding, 2018). Stressed syllables are slightly longer, slightly louder, and/or slightly higher pitched than unstressed syllables. Unstressed syllables are less prominent and characterized by a softer, quicker, centralized vowel with minimal pitch movement. Lewis and Deterding (2018) explain that unstressed syllables often reduce to the schwa /ə/, /ɪ/, and /ʊ/. The alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in English creates a rhythm that differs from some other languages.

According to a study obtained by Gilakjani (2011), the main problems that were faced by ESL and EFL students are lack of exposure to target language, lack of motivation, less pronunciation skill, and lack of attention, rhythm, intonation and word stress in English. In addition, the study stretches the emphasis on stress and pitches intonation as it is the most frequent element being related to pronunciation and has a vital role in correct utterance (Ahmad, 2018). Previous studies have employed various methods to measure or identify learners' proficiency in terms of stress. Sa'di et al. (2022) carefully selected a list of English stimulus words to illustrate different stress assignments within longer utterances (full sentences). This approach aimed to capture participants' natural and typical pronunciation. The researchers used the Waveform, Spectrogram and Pitch Display (WASP) application version 1.80 to accurately determine stress placement in participants' pronunciation. The software provided visual representations of the elicited pronunciations, ensuring objectivity and reliability.

Karjo (2016) utilized the immediate repetition task to assess whether Indonesian learners of English could correctly place lexical stress in two-syllable and three-syllable English words. In this task, participants listened to 80 words presented auditorily through a loudspeaker and repeated each word as accurately as possible, paying attention to stress location. The participants' responses were recorded and later analyzed using speech analysis software to determine the accuracy of stress placement.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th edition (2010) and Coxhead (2000) as cited in Karjo (2016) The English words used were purposefully chosen from the Academic Word List developed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent's Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender, and SES, were gathered and analyzed to obtain an accurate description of the respondents. In terms of the respondents' age, it ranges from 17-20 years old. The researchers then categorized the age range into two categories: middle adolescence and late adolescence (Cunha, 2021).

Hence, the demographic profile findings provide a foundational understanding of the respondents. Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic profile in terms of age, gender, and socio-economic status.

Table 1: ***Distribution of Respondents According to Age, Gender, and Socio-economic Status.***

Respondents' Profile	**Frequency** *(n=41)*	**Percent**
Age		
14-17 (middle adolescence)	21	51.22%
18-21 (late adolescence)	20	48.78%
Gender		
Male	21	51.22%
Female	20	48.78%
Socio-economic Status (SES)		
less than ₱9,520 (poor cluster)	34	82.93%
₱9,521-₱19,040 (low income)	7	17.07%

Table 1 shows that the age distribution indicates a nearly even split between middle adolescents aged 14-17, accounting for 51.22% of the participants, and late adolescents aged 18-21, making up 48.78%. Similarly, the gender distribution is balanced, with males representing 51.22% and females 48.78%. The majority of respondents fall within the poor cluster, with 82.93% earning less than ₱9,520. Only a small fraction of respondents, specifically 17.07%, are in the low-income bracket, earning between ₱9,521 and ₱19,040. In a related study on the academic performance of senior high school students in San Pablo City, Esguerra (2019) reported a similar age distribution, with many students in the middle to late adolescence range.

The gender distribution in the San Pablo study showed a higher percentage of female students (68.6%) compared to males (31.4%), reflecting a gender imbalance often observed in other regional studies. Regarding socio-economic status (SES), the same study indicated that a large number of students came

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from lower-income families. Specifically, 45% of the parents earned between ₱10,000 and ₱20,000 monthly, while 32% earned more than ₱20,000 but less than ₱30,000. This SES data is comparable to the findings in this study, where 82.93% of students are in the poor cluster (earning less than ₱9,520) and 17.07% are in the low-income category (earning between ₱9,521 and ₱19,040). Hence, the results suggest that the survey predominant ly captured the perspectives of young individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, providing insight into the economic diversity of the participants which led to significant implications for the survey's findings and their applications.

Proficiency Level in Terms of Pitch and Stress

Tables 2 and 3 present the proficiency level of respondents in terms of pitch and stress respectively based on their demographic profile.

Table 2: ***Proficiency Level of the Respondents in Terms of Pitch***

Respondents	**Number of Students Frequency** (n=41)	**Percent**	**Standard Deviation**	**Pitch Mean Score**	**Verbal Interpretation**
Age					
14-17 (middle adolescence)	21	51.22%	6.32681	19.14	Not competent
18-21 (late adolescence)	20	48.78%	6.29453	15.6	Not competent
Gender					
Male	21	51.22%	6.14507	16.52	Not competent
Female	20	48.78%	6.85393	18.35	Not competent
Socio-economic Status (SES)					
less than ₱9,520 (poor cluste	34	82.93%	6.36928	18.02	Not competent
₱9,521-₱19,040 (low income	7	17.07%	6.49175	14.14	Not competent
Overall	**41**	**100%**	**6.4845**	**17.41**	**Not Competent**

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that the overall proficiency level of Grade 12 students in terms of pitch is primarily low, with a mean score of 17.41 and a standard deviation of 6.4845. This score falls under the verbal interpretation of **not competent** suggesting that the majority of students struggle with pitch as a suprasegmental feature of pronunciation. When examining the proficiency levels based on age, middle adolescents (14-17 years) exhibit a higher mean score (19.14) compared to late

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adolescents (18-21 years) who have a mean score of 15.6. Both age groups are classified as **not competent**. The slightly better performance of the younger group may suggest that younger students are more adaptable or perhaps more recently engaged in foundational language learning activities that emphasize pitch. This could imply that interventions aimed at improving pitch proficiency might be more effective if implemented earlier in adolescence.

The results from Table 2 indicate an average proficiency level in pitch as **not competent**, highlighting a significant issue in suprasegmental pronunciation skills among the respondents. This aligns with broader observations in language acquisition, where learners often struggle with the nuances of pitch and intonation in a new language. For example, a study by Kennedy and Trofimovich (2010) found that younger learners often have better pronunciation skills due to greater neural plasticity and more recent engagement with language-learning environments. Similarly, Granena and Long (2013) supported the Critical Period Hypothesis, suggesting that language acquisition, including pronunciation skills, is more effective during early adolescence. Additionally, adolescence is a critical period for language development, and variations in pitch proficiency could be influenced by factors such as cognitive development and exposure to the target language (Gauthier & Shi, 2014). Thus, the inconsistency in pitch proficiency between middle and late adolescents might reflect these developmental and experiential differences.

In terms of gender, female students (48.78% of the respondents) have a higher mean score ($\bar{x}$=18.35) compared to their male counterparts who have a mean score of 16.52. The average score for males at 16.52, marked as **not competent** in pitch modulation, reveals a widespread challenge. Similarly, females, with an average score of 18.35, also categorized as **not competent**, face a similar situation. In alignment with this result recent studies such as those by Park (2013) have indicated that females often exhibit superior language skills in various areas, including pronunciation. Correspondingly, research by O'Brien (2018) found that female students tend to have better pitch discrimination abilities than males, which could explain their higher mean scores in this study. Furthermore, gender differences in pitch perception and production are well-documented, with research indicating that females generally exhibit more sensitivity to pitch variations than males (Sachs et al., 2019). These findings explain that while the average competence in pitch modulation is low for both genders, females display a wider range of abilities. Despite both groups falling under the **not competent** category, the higher mean score for females suggests a marginally better proficiency in pitch.

In terms of SES, students from the poor cluster which constitute 82.93% of the respondents have a mean score of 18.02, with a standard deviation of 6.36928, which falls under the category of **not competent**. Students from the low-income group who make up 17.07% of the respondents have a lower mean score of 14.14, with a standard deviation of 6.49175, also categorized as **not competent**. These findings suggest that respondents from families with a monthly income below ₱9,520 (poor cluster) display a higher average proficiency, although not competent, challenging the assumed correlation between economic challenges and lower pitch proficiency. On the other hand, respondents

from families with a monthly income ranging from ₱9,521 to ₱19,040 (low income) exhibit a lower average score, indicating a potential decrease in pitch proficiency compared to the poor cluster. The higher standard deviation within the low-income group suggests greater variability in pitch scores, reflecting diversity in proficiency levels.

The findings of this research contradict Lim's (2019) investigation into how socioeconomic status influences the suprasegmental features, such as pitch and stress, of Philippine English. Lim observed that individuals from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited suprasegmental features more closely resembling those of native speakers compared to their counterparts from lower SES backgrounds. Similarly, Fernald et al. (2013) found that children from higher socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds experienced more linguistically stimulating environments characterized by greater vocabulary diversity and more intricate sentence constructions, which contributed to their language growth. Additionally, Crosnoe and Cooper's (2010) research found that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often have less exposure to enriched language environments, impacting their language development. Researchers observed that students from lower SES backgrounds often demonstrate a monotonous voice, possibly due to limited exposure to diverse linguistic models, restricted access to language-focused educational resources, or societal contexts that undervalue expressive language use. This counterintuitive result could be influenced by various factors, such as differing levels of exposure to environments that foster language skills or varying quality of education between different socio-economic groups. It may also reflect the complex relationship between socio-economic factors and educational outcomes, which necessitates further investigation.

The study by Suciati and Diyanti (2021) corroborate these findings, further emphasizing the difficulties learners face in producing appropriate intonation patterns. Expanding on these results, several other studies have delved into the implications of pitch proficiency. Similarly, studies in the field of language teaching have advocated for integrating pitch training into curriculum to enhance overall communication skills (Gilbert, 2012). These studies collectively underline the importance of pitch in creating effective and engaging speech and the need for targeted strategies to overcome monotony and enhance proficiency.

These observations suggest a need for more focused pedagogical approaches in teaching pitch and intonation. Traditional language teaching methodologies often prioritize grammar and vocabulary, potentially underestimating the importance of suprasegmental features. Incorporating activities that specifically target intonation patterns, such as shadowing exercises, intonation contour analysis, and expressive reading tasks, could be beneficial. Additionally, leveraging technology, like speech analysis software, could provide learners with immediate feedback on their pitch modulation, aiding in more effective learning. Furthermore, these findings can inform curriculum development in language teaching, highlighting the importance of integrating suprasegmental training into language learning programs from early stages. This integration could significantly improve learners' overall communicative competence and comfort in the target language. The result emphasizes the need for

enhanced focus on suprasegmental pronunciation, particularly pitch modulation, in language learning and teaching.

Table 3: ***Proficiency Level of the Respondents in Terms of Stress***

Respondents	Number of Students	Percent	Standard Deviation	Stress Mean Score	Verbal Interpretation
Age					
14-17 (middle adolescence)	21	51.22%	3.46616	8.29	Not Competent
18-21 (late adolescence)	20	48.78%	2.41487	8.6	Not Competent
Gender					
Male	21	51.22%	3.27836	8.38	Not Competent
Female	20	48.78%	2.68524	8.5	Not Competent
Socio-economic Status (SES)					
less than ₱9,520 (poor cluster)	34	82.93%	3.06612	8.41	Not Competent
₱9,521-₱19,040 (low income)	7	17.07%	2.63674	8.57	Not Competent
Overall	**41**	**100%**	**2.96689**	**8.43**	**Not Competent**

The data presented in Table 3 provides an analysis of the proficiency level of Grade 12 students in terms of stress as a suprasegmental feature of pronunciation, categorized by age, gender, and socio-economic status (SES). The overall assessment indicates that the students are **not competent** in applying correct word stress, a critical element for effective communication and intelligibility in English pronunciation.

For the age groups, students aged 14-17 (middle adolescence) and 18-21 (late adolescence) both show similar proficiency levels with mean stress scores of 8.29 and 8.6, respectively. The middle adolescence group, which constitutes 51.22% of the respondents, exhibits a slightly higher mean score, suggesting marginally better proficiency, yet both groups fall under the **not competent** category. The higher variability in stress scores for the middle adolescence group (standard deviation of 3.46616)

compared to the late adolescence group (2.41487), which makes up 48.78% of the respondents, indicates more inconsistency in applying correct word stress among younger students. This is supported by research showing that late adolescents typically possess more advanced cognitive skills and have had greater exposure to language practice, which enhances their ability to manage linguistic features like stress more consistently (Pellegrino et al., 2001; Snow, 2010).

Gender analysis reveals that both male and female students have similar proficiency levels, with mean scores of 8.38 for males and 8.5 for females. Males and females constitute 51.22% and 48.78% of the respondents, respectively. Females show slightly better consistency (lower standard deviation of 2.68524) compared to males (3.27836), yet both groups are still classified as **not competent**. According to the study by Al-Thalab and Abdalla (2021), English females outperform males in the stress placement of three-syllable words. Additionally, women usually use emphatic stress patterns in their speech to express uncertainty and use tones to emphasize certain words such as great, so, or really (Jinyu, 2014). Similarly, the study of Hariri (2012) revealed that females demonstrate greater accuracy and clarity in consonant pronunciation compared to males. Furthermore, Arangilan et al. (2022) assert a similar pattern, highlighting that females generate clearer and more precise speech sounds than males. This could be attributed to women's efforts to maintain a shared pronunciation standard within their female peer group. This suggests that gender does not significantly impact proficiency in stress pronunciation, aligning with findings by Derwing et al. (2014), who noted that suprasegmental features such as stress are equally challenging across genders.

Regarding socio-economic status, students from the poor cluster (less than ₱9,520) and the low-income group (₱9,521-₱19,040) also display **not competent** proficiency levels, with mean scores of 8.41 and 8.57, respectively. The poor cluster constitutes 82.93% of the respondents, while the low-income group makes up 17.07%. The low-income group shows slightly better proficiency and less variability in their scores (standard deviation of 2.63674) compared to the poor cluster (3.06612). This difference may be attributed to varying access to educational resources and exposure to quality language instruction, as suggested by recent research on the impact of socio-economic factors on language acquisition (Graham, 2021).

Overall, the mean stress score of 8.43 for all respondents indicates a significant challenge in mastering the correct application of word stress. The consistent **not competent** rating across all demographic categories underscores a need for improved instructional strategies and resources focused on suprasegmental features of pronunciation. The study by Thomson and Derwing (2014) suggests that effective stress placement is crucial for intelligibility and effective communication in English.

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Table 4: ***Significant Differences When Grouped According to Age***

	t-value	p-value	Verbal interpretation
C	-0.335	0.739	No Significant Difference
D	1.797	0.08	No Significant Difference

The results of stress (C) and pitch (D) variables in Table 4, categorized by age, revealed interesting findings. The analysis indicated that stress levels (C) provide ***No Significant Difference*** between groups (t = -.335, p = .739). This implies that respondents from both age groups experienced similar levels of stress in the context being studied. The lack of statistical significance suggests that age does not play a significant role in influencing stress levels in pronunciation skills, according to the collected data.

Similarly, the results for pitch (D) also indicated ***No Significant Difference***, albeit with a slightly lower p-value (t = 1.797, p = .080). This suggests that pitch perception does not vary significantly between middle and late adolescence groups in the study. The absence of statistical significance reinforces the idea that age may not be a determining factor in pitch perception in the context of pronunciation skills. Since the respondents are in their adolescence phase, Gawi (2012) postulates that they have a greater aptitude for language acquisition compared to adults. This acquisition entails skills including pronunciation as manifested in their speaking capabilities. Correspondingly, Cunha (2021) asserts that these age ranges indicate the developmental phase during which adolescents undergo a transition, indicating higher levels of proficiency.

These findings align with previous research conducted by Gawi (2012) that the age at which students begin learning a foreign language might not be a decisive factor in their performance. The current study's agreement with Gawi's (2012) findings further supports the notion that age may not be a critical factor in determining pronunciation skills, specifically regarding stress and pitch. The lack of significant differences in stress and pitch across age groups challenges the common belief that younger learners inherently have an advantage in acquiring pronunciation skills. This is particularly relevant given the widely accepted idea that early exposure to a language contributes to better language acquisition.

Hence, the statistical analysis, conducted at the 0.05 significance level, revealed no significant differences among respondents when grouped by age. The findings indicate that there were no notable variations in stress and pitch among different age groups. These results coincide with existing literature, which challenges the belief that age plays a decisive role in shaping pronunciation skills.

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The absence of statistical significance in stress and pitch suggests that, within the parameters of this study, age does not exert a significant influence on suprasegmental features in pronunciation.

Table 5 presents the statistical test result on the significant difference in the pitch and stress proficiency levels between male and female.

Table 5: ***Significant Differences When Grouped According to Gender***

	t-value	p-value	Verbal interpretation
C	-.127	.900	No Significant Difference
D	-.899	.374	No Significant Difference

The analysis conducted on stress (C) and pitch (D) variables categorized by gender unveiled intriguing insights as shown in Table 5. For stress (C), the result showed a ***No Significant Difference*** ($t = -0.127$, $p = 0.900$), indicating that stress levels did not significantly vary based on gender. Similarly, the results for pitch (D) indicated a ***No Significant Difference*** ($t = -0.899$, $p = 0.374$), suggesting no substantial distinction in pitch perception between gender groups. At the 0.05 significance level, both variables, C (stress) and D (pitch), failed to demonstrate statistical significance, implying a lack of gender-related differences in stress and pitch perception among the respondents.

These findings are consistent with a study conducted by Hariri (2012), which also found no significant differences in stress and pitch based on gender. Additionally, the present study aligns with research on pronunciation differences between genders, where non-considerable variations were reported. These collective findings reinforce the notion that gender-related distinctions may not be prominent factors influencing stress and pitch perception across different linguistic aspects.

The absence of statistically significant differences challenges preconceived notions regarding gender-based variations in pronunciation skills. This suggests that, at least within the scope of this study, gender is not a determining factor in the observed suprasegmental features. It is worth exploring further through additional research to understand more deeply how gender might or might not impact other linguistic aspects or factors related to language acquisition. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence suggesting that gender might not be a defining factor in the development of stress and pitch perception in language learning.

Table 6 discloses the t-test result on the significant differences in pitch and stress proficiency level of respondents when grouped according to SES (income).

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Table 6: ***Significant Differences When Grouped According to SES (income)***

	t-value	p-value	Verbal interpretation
C	.415	.680	No significant difference
D	1.183	.245	No significant difference

The analysis conducted on stress (C) and pitch (D) variables, categorized by respondents' socioeconomic status (SES), did not demonstrate significant differences. The t-values of .415 for stress (C) and 1.183 for pitch (D), coupled with corresponding p-values of .680 and .245, respectively, indicate a lack of significant variation between the SES groups. At the 0.05 significance level, the results suggest no notable differences in stress and pitch perception among respondents grouped by SES. These findings align with the broader body of research, which indicates that while socioeconomic status (SES) can influence language learning, it is not the sole determinant of pronunciation skills. For instance, a study on Bangladeshi university students found significant links between SES and language proficiency but also highlighted the roles of parental influence, educational settings, and individual motivation. These factors collectively impact pronunciation abilities, suggesting that SES alone does not dictate pronunciation outcomes (Hannan et al., 2024).

Supporting this perspective, Smith et al. (2021) found that socioeconomic status did not significantly impact the acquisition of suprasegmental features such as pitch and stress among language learners. Their research highlighted that factors such as educational context and exposure to language use were more critical in determining proficiency levels. Similarly, Johnson and Reynolds (2022) concluded that while SES might influence access to resources, it does not directly translate to differences in pronunciation proficiency, emphasizing the importance of teaching methods and individual learner characteristics.

CONCLUSION

The research identifies significant shortcomings in speaking skills, particularly in pitch and stress, which are crucial for clear and effective communication. These deficiencies pose a concern as clear pronunciation is essential in academics, social interactions, and career development. Therefore, there is really a problem in the suprasegmental features of the student regardless of their age, gender, and socioeconomic status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should consider creating and planning remedial classes or adopting new educational approaches for students who demonstrate lower or inadequate levels of competency. Additionally, the school head must address the evident pronunciation issues within the school and proactively develop solutions to resolve the anticipated challenges. Students are encouraged to take part in these remedial

sessions, focusing especially on oral pronunciation, with particular attention to suprasegmental features. The Department of Education (DepEd) could enhance the K-12 curriculum guide by placing more emphasis on oral competency, particularly in the prosodic elements of speech, not just in oral communication. Moreover, future researchers could build on this study to explore the reasons why senior high school students struggle with pronunciation, investigate the impact of poor pronunciation on students' overall performance, and identify effective tools and strategies to improve their pronunciation skills.

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