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An Extracurricular Training Program to Develop Suprasegmental Features and Prosodic Competence in B1 EFL Learners

*Programa extracurricular para desarrollar rasgos suprasegmentales y competencia
prosódica en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel B1*

Flor María Tipán Tituaña

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8025-619X>

Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador
Ecuador – Durán

Mayra Soraya Alomoto Cevallos

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6684-9677>

Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador
Ecuador – Durán

Johnny Segundo Campoverde López

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0108-4755>

jscampoverdel@ube.edu.ec

Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador
Ecuador – Durán

Josué Bonilla Tenesaca

jrbonillat@ube.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6748-2345>

Universidad Bolivariana del Ecuador
Ecuador - Durán

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ABSTRACT

The development of oral intelligibility is a fundamental aspect of English as a Foreign Language learning, especially for B1-level students who need to communicate clearly in academic and everyday situations. However, in many school contexts, pronunciation instruction tends to focus on individual sounds, grammar, and vocabulary, while suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation receive limited attention. This situation reduces students' opportunities to develop clearer, more fluent, and more comprehensible oral production. The objective of this article is to propose a structured extracurricular training program to strengthen the prosodic competence of B1 EFL learners. The study follows an applied and proposal-based approach aimed at designing a pedagogical intervention that complements regular English classes. The proposal is organized into progressive phases, including awareness and diagnosis, development of word and sentence stress, rhythm and connected speech practice, use of intonation in communication, integration of suprasegmental features in communicative tasks, and formative assessment. It is

concluded that an extracurricular program focused on prosody can provide systematic opportunities for oral practice and contribute to improving students' intelligibility, confidence, and communicative competence.

Keywords: prosodic competence, suprasegmental features, oral intelligibility, English as a foreign language, extracurricular program

RESUMEN

El desarrollo de la inteligibilidad oral constituye un aspecto fundamental en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera, especialmente en estudiantes de nivel B1, quienes necesitan comunicarse de manera clara en situaciones académicas y cotidianas. Sin embargo, en muchos contextos escolares, la enseñanza de la pronunciación suele centrarse en sonidos individuales, gramática y vocabulario, dejando en segundo plano los rasgos suprasegmentales como el acento, el ritmo y la entonación. Esta situación limita las oportunidades de los estudiantes para desarrollar una producción oral más clara, fluida y comprensible. El objetivo de este artículo es proponer un programa extracurricular estructurado para fortalecer la competencia prosódica de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel B1. La investigación se desarrolla desde un enfoque aplicado y propositivo, orientado al diseño de una intervención pedagógica complementaria a las clases regulares. La propuesta se organiza en fases progresivas que incluyen sensibilización y diagnóstico, desarrollo del acento léxico y oracional, práctica del ritmo y habla conectada, uso de la entonación en la comunicación, integración de rasgos suprasegmentales en tareas comunicativas y evaluación formativa. Se concluye que un programa extracurricular centrado en la prosodia puede ofrecer oportunidades sistemáticas de práctica oral y contribuir al mejoramiento de la inteligibilidad, la confianza y la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: competencia prosódica, rasgos suprasegmentales, inteligibilidad oral, inglés como lengua extranjera, programa extracurricular

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INTRODUCTION

The development of oral communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is an essential goal in contemporary language education, particularly for intermediate learners who are expected to communicate clearly in academic and everyday situations. At the B1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, learners should be able to participate in communicative exchanges on familiar topics, express opinions, and produce simple connected speech with a reasonable degree of intelligibility (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo et al., 2019). However, effective oral communication does not depend only on grammar and vocabulary knowledge, but also on how speech is organized through prosodic features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation (Levis, 2018; Saito, 2021).

In many EFL teaching contexts, pronunciation does not always receive systematic attention within regular classroom instruction. Lessons often prioritize vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and written production, while suprasegmental features are addressed only occasionally or implicitly. As a result, learners may produce grammatically acceptable utterances that are still difficult for listeners to understand. This situation affects oral intelligibility and may also reduce learners' confidence and willingness to participate in communicative activities (Derwing & Munro, 2015; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Suprasegmental features play a central role in spoken communication because they contribute to meaning construction, discourse organization, and the interpretation of communicative intentions. Stress helps speakers highlight relevant information within words and utterances; rhythm supports more natural and fluent speech; and intonation allows speakers to express emotions, attitudes, questions, statements, and emphasis. For this reason, the development of prosodic competence is essential for helping learners produce clearer, more comprehensible, and more effective oral communication (Kang et al., 2021; Roach, 2019).

The professional problem addressed in this article arises from a need identified among B1 EFL learners: the limited availability of extracurricular spaces to practice suprasegmental features beyond regular class hours. The source document states that students experience difficulties in oral production due to limited control of stress, rhythm, and intonation, as well as the lack of structured opportunities to practice these features outside the classroom. This situation reveals a gap between the communicative expectations of the B1 level and the actual opportunities learners have for sustained oral practice (Lee, 2020; Evers & Chen, 2022).

From a pedagogical perspective, extracurricular activities can serve as a relevant alternative for strengthening learners' oral competence. These spaces can extend language exposure and practice time, promote meaningful interaction, and provide a less restrictive environment than regular classroom instruction. Moreover, when extracurricular activities are organized with clear learning objectives, they can complement formal instruction and support the

development of specific skills such as pronunciation, fluency, and intelligibility (Benson, 2013; Richards, 2015).

In this regard, an extracurricular program focused on suprasegmental features can provide learners with systematic opportunities to listen, imitate, produce, record, and evaluate their oral performance. Activities such as shadowing, guided repetition, expressive reading, dialogues, role-plays, short presentations, and peer feedback may support the progressive development of prosodic competence. These strategies allow learners to move from an initial stage of awareness and recognition of prosodic patterns toward more spontaneous use of suprasegmental features in communicative tasks (Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2020).

Research on pronunciation instruction has emphasized that intelligibility should be prioritized over native-like pronunciation. From this perspective, the goal is not for learners to eliminate their accent completely, but to communicate in a way that can be understood by listeners in real communicative contexts (Derwing & Munro, 2020; Levis, 2018). In this sense, suprasegmental features are especially relevant because they influence how listeners process and interpret spoken messages (Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2020; Kang et al., 2021).

The objective of this article is to propose a structured extracurricular training program to develop suprasegmental features and prosodic competence in B1 EFL learners in order to improve their oral intelligibility. The proposal is grounded in principles of Communicative Language Teaching, Skill Acquisition Theory, pronunciation for intelligibility, CEFR communicative competence, and autonomous learning beyond the classroom (DeKeyser, 2017; Littlewood, 2021; Council of Europe, 2020).

The relevance of this study lies in its practical response to a frequent issue in EFL instruction: the lack of systematic practice of suprasegmental pronunciation. It also contributes to the field of English language teaching by presenting a pedagogical proposal organized into progressive phases, including activities, resources, and assessment criteria that can be adapted to different educational contexts. In this way, the article aims to support not only learners' pronunciation development, but also their confidence, fluency, and overall communicative competence (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Nagle et al., 2022).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study followed an applied and proposal-based methodological approach, since its main purpose was to respond to a specific educational problem identified in a secondary EFL context. The problem addressed was the limited availability of extracurricular opportunities for B1-level learners to practice suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation after regular class hours. Therefore, rather than conducting an experimental intervention, the study focused on the design of a pedagogical proposal aimed at strengthening learners' prosodic competence and improving oral intelligibility.

The research was framed as a pedagogical design proposal. Its purpose was to construct an extracurricular training program that could complement regular English classes and provide students with systematic speaking practice. The proposal was grounded in Communicative Language Teaching, Skill Acquisition Theory, pronunciation for intelligibility, CEFR communicative competence, and a suprasegmental approach to pronunciation instruction. These theoretical foundations supported the selection of activities, the organization of the program, and the assessment criteria included in the proposal (Council of Europe, 2020; DeKeyser, 2017; Levis, 2018; Littlewood, 2021).

The context of application corresponds to Unidad Educativa Particular Andrew, located in Quito, Ecuador. The target population consists of second-year high school students enrolled in English as a Foreign Language courses whose proficiency level corresponds to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The program was designed for learners who need to improve the clarity of their spoken production through guided practice of stress, rhythm, and intonation (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo et al., 2019).

The methodological procedure was organized into three main stages. The first stage consisted of the identification and analysis of the professional problem. In this stage, the lack of extracurricular activities for practicing suprasegmental features was established as the central difficulty affecting learners' oral intelligibility. The second stage involved the review and organization of theoretical foundations related to prosody, suprasegmental features, intelligibility, communicative competence, and out-of-class language learning. The third stage focused on the design of the extracurricular training program, including its phases, activities, resources, evaluation strategies, and expected results (Benson, 2013; Richards, 2015).

The proposed program was structured into progressive phases that move from awareness and diagnosis to controlled practice and communicative production. The first phase focuses on raising learners' awareness of suprasegmental features and diagnosing their initial pronunciation performance through listening tasks, reading aloud, and short recordings. The second phase addresses word and sentence stress through repetition, stress-marking exercises, guided reading, and short dialogues. The third phase centers on rhythm and connected speech through shadowing, phrase grouping, linking practice, and recorded dialogues. The fourth phase develops intonation through expressive reading, listening activities, and role-plays. The fifth phase integrates stress, rhythm, and intonation into communicative tasks such as presentations, storytelling, and group discussions. Finally, the evaluation and feedback stage assesses learners' progress through oral performances, recordings, self-assessment, peer feedback, and teacher assessment (Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2020).

The implementation plan was designed to last six months. The first five months correspond to the development of the five instructional phases, with one phase carried out each month through weekly extracurricular sessions. The sixth month is dedicated to evaluation and

feedback. The sessions combine guided instruction, practice, and communicative activities in an interactive and student-centered environment. This gradual progression from awareness to controlled practice and, finally, to more spontaneous oral production is consistent with current approaches to pronunciation development and skill acquisition (Saito, 2021; Suzuki, 2021).

The materials and resources proposed for the program include authentic audio recordings, short videos, worksheets, flashcards, scripts, role-play cards, presentation topics, rubrics, reflection sheets, and mobile recording tools. These resources were selected to increase learners' exposure to English prosodic patterns and to support repeated oral practice. Recording tools are especially relevant because they allow students to compare their initial and later performances, reflect on their progress, and identify specific areas for improvement (Lee, 2020; Evers & Chen, 2022).

Assessment was conceived as both formative and summative. Formative assessment takes place throughout the program through teacher observation, checklists, peer feedback, self-assessment, and recorded speaking tasks. Summative assessment is included in the final stage through oral presentations, recorded dialogues, and individual performances. The main evaluation criteria are word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, intonation, fluency, and overall intelligibility. This assessment structure is consistent with the proposal's emphasis on continuous feedback, learner reflection, and progressive improvement of prosodic competence (Lee, 2020; Saito, 2021).

Overall, the methodological design of the study responds directly to the identified professional problem and provides a feasible pedagogical route for developing suprasegmental features in B1 EFL learners. By combining explicit pronunciation instruction, guided practice, communicative tasks, and continuous feedback, the proposal offers a structured alternative for improving learners' oral intelligibility beyond regular classroom instruction (Kang et al., 2021; Nagle et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main result of this study is the design of a structured extracurricular training program aimed at developing suprasegmental features and prosodic competence in B1 EFL learners. Since the study follows an applied and proposal-based design, the quantitative results presented in this section are organized as projected outcomes based on the expected implementation of the program. These projected results are useful for showing how students' progress could be measured through diagnostic, formative, and final assessment procedures.

The program responds to the limited opportunities students have to practice stress, rhythm, and intonation outside regular English classes. This problem affects oral intelligibility because suprasegmental features play an important role in how listeners understand spoken messages (Levis, 2018; Kang et al., 2021). Therefore, the proposal was structured around six

stages: awareness and diagnosis, word and sentence stress, rhythm and connected speech, intonation in communication, integration in communicative tasks, and final evaluation.

Quantitative projection of students' progress

The first quantitative result refers to the expected improvement in students' prosodic competence after participating in the extracurricular program. To measure this progress, a rubric with five criteria is proposed: word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, intonation, and overall intelligibility. Each criterion may be evaluated on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents very limited performance and 5 represents strong performance.

Table 1

Projected Pre-Test and Post-Test Results in Prosodic Competence

Assessment criterion	Pre-test mean score	Post-test mean score	Difference	Percentage of improvement
Word stress	2.3	3.8	+1.5	65.2%
Sentence stress	2.1	3.7	+1.6	76.1%
Rhythm	2.0	3.5	+1.5	75.0%
Intonation	2.2	3.9	+1.7	77.2%
Overall intelligibility	2.4	4.0	+1.6	66.6%
General mean	2.2	3.8	+1.6	72.7%

The projected results in Table 1 suggest that students could show noticeable improvement in all assessed dimensions after completing the extracurricular program. The general mean increases from 2.2 in the pre-test to 3.8 in the post-test, representing a projected improvement of 72.7%. The highest expected improvement appears in intonation, with an increase from 2.2 to 3.9, followed by sentence stress and rhythm. This indicates that systematic practice through listening, repetition, shadowing, role-plays, and communicative tasks may help learners gain better control of suprasegmental features.

These results are consistent with research emphasizing that pronunciation development requires repeated exposure, guided practice, and opportunities for communicative use (Saito & Plonsky, 2019; Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2020). In this sense, the program does not focus on isolated pronunciation drills only but combines controlled practice with meaningful oral interaction. This progression may support the development of automaticity and more intelligible speech.

Quantitative organization of the program phases

A second quantitative result is related to the distribution of time, activities, and assessment moments throughout the program. The proposal is designed to last six months, with weekly extracurricular sessions. Each month focuses on a specific phase of prosodic development.

Table 2
Quantitative Distribution of the Extracurricular Program

Month	Phase	Number of sessions	Main focus	Estimated number of activities	Type of assessment
Month 1	Awareness and diagnosis	4	Recognition of stress, rhythm, and intonation	8	Diagnostic assessment
Month 2	Word and sentence stress	4	Word stress and sentence stress	10	Formative assessment
Month 3	Rhythm and connected speech	4	Rhythm, linking, and phrase grouping	10	Formative assessment
Month 4	Intonation in communication	4	Rising and falling intonation	9	Performance-based assessment
Month 5	Integration and production	4	Communicative use of prosody	8	Self and peer assessment
Month 6	Evaluation and feedback	4	Final oral performance	6	Summative assessment
Total		24		51	

Table 2 shows that the program includes 24 extracurricular sessions and approximately 51 learning activities. This distribution allows students to move gradually from recognition and controlled practice to communicative production. The largest number of activities is concentrated in Months 2 and 3, which focus on stress, rhythm, and connected speech. This is pedagogically relevant because these areas require repeated and guided practice before students can apply them naturally in spontaneous communication.

The inclusion of diagnostic, formative, performance-based, self, peer, and summative assessment also supports continuous monitoring of students' progress. This assessment structure is important because feedback helps learners notice their pronunciation difficulties and make adjustments over time (Lee, 2020; Evers & Chen, 2022).

Projected improvement by performance levels

A third quantitative result refers to the expected change in students' performance levels. For this purpose, students may be classified into four levels according to their rubric scores: low, basic, satisfactory, and high. This classification can help teachers identify whether the program

contributes to moving students from lower levels of oral intelligibility toward more effective communicative performance.

Table 3

Projected Distribution of Students by Performance Level

Performance level	Score range	Pre-test students	Pre-test percentage	Post-test students	Post-test percentage
Low	1.0–1.9	8	32%	1	4%
Basic	2.0–2.9	12	48%	4	16%
Satisfactory	3.0–3.9	5	20%	13	52%
High	4.0–5.0	0	0%	7	28%
Total		25	100%	25	100%

Table 3 presents a projected group of 25 students. Before the intervention, most students are expected to be located in the low and basic levels, with 80% of learners scoring below the satisfactory level. After the program, the projection shows that 80% of students could reach satisfactory or high performance. This suggests that a structured extracurricular program may contribute to improving learners' ability to use suprasegmental features more effectively.

The expected reduction in the low-performance group, from 32% to 4%, is especially relevant because it indicates that students with greater initial difficulties may benefit from additional guided practice. Similarly, the increase in the high-performance group, from 0% to 28%, suggests that some students may develop stronger control of stress, rhythm, and intonation after sustained practice.

These projected results support the idea that oral intelligibility can improve when learners receive systematic instruction focused on suprasegmental features. Previous studies have highlighted that intelligibility is strongly influenced by prosody and that learners do not need native-like pronunciation to communicate effectively (Derwing & Munro, 2020; Levis, 2018). Therefore, the goal of the program is not to eliminate students' accents, but to help them communicate more clearly and confidently.

Discussion of the pedagogical contribution

The quantitative projections indicate that the proposed program may have a positive impact on students' prosodic competence and oral intelligibility. The expected improvement in word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, intonation, and overall intelligibility suggests that extracurricular practice can complement regular English instruction and address areas that are often neglected in the classroom.

One important contribution of the program is its focus on suprasegmental features rather than only individual sounds. This is relevant because stress, rhythm, and intonation help organize speech and support listener comprehension (Roach, 2019; Kang et al., 2021). In B1 learners, these

features are especially important because students are expected to participate in familiar communicative situations with reasonable clarity (Council of Europe, 2020; Piccardo et al., 2019).

Another important contribution is the gradual structure of the program. Students first become aware of prosodic features, then practice them in guided activities, and finally apply them in communicative tasks. This sequence is consistent with Skill Acquisition Theory, which explains that language skills develop through repeated practice and gradual automatization (DeKeyser, 2017; Suzuki, 2021). Therefore, the design of the program allows learners to build their oral performance progressively.

The use of recordings, self-assessment, and peer feedback also strengthens the pedagogical value of the proposal. These strategies encourage learners to reflect on their own pronunciation and become more autonomous in their learning process. In extracurricular contexts, this is particularly valuable because students have more opportunities to practice beyond the limits of regular class time (Benson, 2013; Lee, 2020).

However, it is important to recognize that the quantitative data presented in this section are projected results and not empirical findings from an implemented intervention. For this reason, future studies should apply the program in a real educational setting and collect actual pre-test and post-test data. To strengthen the validity of the findings, future research should include control groups, delayed post-tests, independent teachers, and multiple institutions, as recommended for second language acquisition intervention studies (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

Overall, the projected quantitative results suggest that the extracurricular training program may be a feasible and pedagogically useful alternative for improving B1 EFL learners' prosodic competence. By providing systematic practice in stress, rhythm, and intonation, the program can contribute to clearer, more fluent, and more intelligible oral communication.

CONCLUSIONS

This article proposed a structured extracurricular training program aimed at developing suprasegmental features and prosodic competence in B1 EFL learners. The proposal responded to the limited opportunities students have to practice stress, rhythm, and intonation beyond regular classroom instruction, a situation that may affect their oral intelligibility and communicative confidence. The theoretical foundations showed that prosodic features play an important role in spoken communication because they support meaning, fluency, and listener comprehension (Levis, 2018; Kang et al., 2021; Saito, 2021).

The program was organized into six progressive stages: awareness and diagnosis, word and sentence stress, rhythm and connected speech, intonation in communication, integration of suprasegmental features in communicative tasks, and final evaluation and feedback. This sequence allows learners to move from recognition and controlled practice to more spontaneous oral production. In this sense, the proposal is consistent with communicative language teaching

and skill acquisition principles, which emphasize meaningful interaction, repeated practice, and gradual development of automaticity (DeKeyser, 2017; Littlewood, 2021; Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2020).

The projected quantitative results suggest that the program could contribute to improving learners' prosodic competence and oral intelligibility; however, these results should be understood as projected outcomes because the study focuses on the design of the proposal rather than its empirical implementation. Future research should apply the program in real educational contexts and include pre-tests, post-tests, control groups, delayed post-tests, independent evaluators, and multiple institutions to strengthen the validity and generalizability of the findings (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

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