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The Relationship Between Syllable Awareness And Pronunciation Tendencies Among Indonesian Students

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the connection between syllable awareness and pronunciation preferences among Indonesian EFL students. Using a structured online survey, data were gathered from 25 Indonesian EFL students using a quantitative descriptive approach. The instrument comprised syllable-counting tasks, stress awareness questions, and reflective prompts for pronunciation difficulties. The findings show that, although the majority of students have valid syllable recognition in familiar English words, a significant number still miscount syllable counts in more sophisticated structures owing to spelling interference and first language (L1) transfer. Notably, errors frequently occur in words with consonant clusters, which learners typically follow Indonesian phonological rules by adding vowel sounds (epenthesis). The results indicate a significant association between syllable awareness and pronunciation accuracy. Students with higher awareness are more likely to have nativelike pronunciation, but those without this awareness are more likely to make phonological mistakes. This study highlights the teaching value of including explicit syllable instruction and auditory training in EFL classrooms to improve learners' phonological skills and spoken English proficiency.

Keywords: *Syllable Awareness, Pronunciation, EFL Students, Consonant Clusters, And Phonological Interference.*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of learning the English language that significantly impacts communication effectiveness. Indonesian students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) frequently encounter challenges with pronunciation due to the notable differences in syllable structures between English and Bahasa Indonesia. English permits intricate syllable patterns, including consonant clusters, which are seldom present in the phonological framework of the Indonesian language. These structural differences between languages can lead to difficulties in second language acquisition, especially when the first language influences the learning process of the second language (Brown, 2007). This structural contrast causes many Indonesian students to mispronounce English words, particularly when they encounter unfamiliar syllable arrangements.

One critical factor that influences pronunciation is syllable awareness. Syllable awareness refers to a learner's ability to recognize syllable boundaries and patterns within words (Yule, 2020). Learners who possess strong syllable awareness are more likely to pronounce words accurately because they can effectively segment and process word structures. A previous study conducted by Wardana et al. (2022), focused on improving English pronunciation through phonological awareness instruction, including its effects on speech sound articulation, word stress, intonation, and speaking motivation. However, this study did not specifically explore the relationship between syllable awareness and pronunciation tendencies based on students' self-reported responses. This study offers a different perspective by focusing on students' syllable awareness and self-perceived pronunciation patterns without direct pronunciation intervention.

Most existing studies focus on students' mispronunciations but seldom explore the relationship between their syllable awareness and pronunciation patterns. Understanding this relationship is vital because enhancing syllable awareness could serve as a key strategy for improving pronunciation skills. Furthermore, previous studies often depended on direct pronunciation recordings, while this research highlights students' self-reported tendencies and their conscious awareness of syllable structures, presenting a novel viewpoint on how students perceive and approach English pronunciation.

Given the scarcity of studies that directly examine the relationship between syllable awareness and pronunciation tendencies among Indonesian EFL students, this research aims to address the existing gap. The objective of this study is to determine whether students with higher syllable awareness also demonstrate more accurate pronunciation tendencies based on their self-reported responses. The anticipated findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of phonology-based learning strategies that can assist Indonesian EFL students in enhancing their English pronunciation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a quantitative descriptive method to assess students' knowledge of English syllable structures. This approach was selected to acquire quantifiable and objective information on students' capacity to count syllables, identify syllable boundaries, and observe variances between English and Indonesian syllable patterns (Sugiyono, 2013). Since this study was noninterventional, it concentrated only on describing learners' current state of syllable awareness without administering any treatments.

Data was collected using an online form created with Google Form. The questionnaire had three sections: (1) syllable-counting tasks, in which students were asked to determine the number of syllables in selected English and Indonesian words; (2) stress awareness tasks, in which students identified the position of stress or complexity in syllables; and (3) reflection-based questions, which required students to articulate their perceptions and challenges in pronouncing English syllables. The items were modified from prior studies on phonological awareness and syllabification (Yule, 2020).

An online questionnaire that was given to people who knew the basics of English phonology was used to gather data for this study. Participants were chosen on the basis of their knowledge of Indonesian and English syllable structures. To learn more about how syllables are pronounced and understood in both languages, a total of 10 to 25 replies were collected and examined. The respondents range in age from 16 to 20 and 21 to 25 years old.

This investigation used Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which comprises three major steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). First, during the data reduction phase, irrelevant or inconsistent responses were eliminated in order to concentrate on robust indicators of syllable awareness. Second, the remaining data was presented as percentage tables and visual charts (data display), enabling the researchers to identify which aspects of syllable awareness were well understood or frequently misunderstood. Third, conclusions were reached by identifying patterns, such as frequent mistakes in consonant cluster identification or a tendency to use native language phonotactics.

The quantitative data were analyzed using straightforward descriptive statistics (percentage analysis) to determine the distribution of valid and erroneous responses. Meanwhile, the qualitative reflections were categorized theme-wise to identify learners' perceptions and common challenges, particularly concerning complex English syllables. These findings are addressed in the following section to provide pedagogical implications.

This approach is in line with small-scale linguistic research methods, which combine structured tasks and learner perception to provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the results obtained from 25 student respondents who completed the questionnaire. The primary emphasis is on how syllable awareness affects students' English pronunciation preferences. The findings are divided into three categories: accurate syllable counting, awareness of syllable stress and complex syllable structures, and learners' perceptions of syllable complexity in English versus Indonesian.

The data were gathered using a structured online survey with multiple-choice and open-ended questions. These tools were created to evaluate participants' capacity to count syllables, recognize complex syllable patterns, and reflect on their own pronunciation issues. Respondents were purposively chosen from English education students who had fundamental phonological understanding, and data were analyzed descriptively using percentage calculations and thematic categorization.

Overall, the majority of participants were able to accurately count the number of syllables in English phrases, especially those that are frequently used in daily situations. For example, 84% of students accurately recognized that the word "independence" has four syllables. This suggests that older terms with fairly clear phonetic structures allow students to correctly identify syllable divisions.

Despite the fact that the majority gave right responses, a handful of kids picked incorrect alternatives: 12% said that "independence" had 3 syllables, and 4% thought the word had 5 syllables. This implies that, while there is a general awareness of syllables, not all students are consistent in applying this knowledge—possibly because they rely more on spelling than on actual pronunciation. This tendency represents a larger problem seen in the study: students frequently perceive syllabus orthographically rather than phonetically, resulting in erroneous syllabus counts. Recent studies indicate that numerous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners often articulate English words according to the phonological rules of their native languages. Additionally, they frequently rely on visual cues or spelling to guide their pronunciation, which leads to consistent mispronunciations (Idrus et al., 2025).

A comparable pattern was seen in reactions to the term "education," with 80% accurately recognizing it as a four-syllable word, but 20% answering with 2, 3, or even 5 syllables. This suggests that lexical complexity, such as word length, vowel location, and consonant placement, can be confusing. Even when students have previously heard the word, they may still have difficulty breaking it down into correct syllabic components.

Students' accuracy considerably increased for simpler terms like "health" and "together": 88% correctly recognized "health" as having one syllable, and 96% accurately answered that "together" has three syllables. These results imply that familiarity and syllabic simplicity are important factors in learners' ability to recognize syllables, particularly in words lacking complex clusters or ambiguous stress.

Beyond syllable counting, the study evaluated students' ability to say particular English words, notably those with consonant clusters or requiring stress placement. In the case of the word "apple," 84% of students understood that it comprised two syllables, while 16% thought it had only one. This reflects a tendency among certain students to simplify pronunciation based on spelling or L1 experience, where syllable structure is more consistent and predictable.

A comparable problem was encountered with the word "school. " Although it phonetically comprises one syllable in English, 20% of participants reported hearing or pronouncing it as having two syllables. This may be due to epenthesis, in which Indonesian learners add a vowel sound between consonants to facilitate articulation, as when pronouncing "school" as "sekul". The phenomenon of inserting vowel sounds between consonants, is frequently observed in the English pronunciation of Indonesian learners. According to Septa Aryanika (2024), the transfer of phonetic features from the first language (L1) plays a crucial role in shaping second language (L2) pronunciation, often resulting in consistent pronunciation errors, particularly in phonemes or clusters that do not exist in the learners' native language.

This pattern persists with words such as "strong" and "strengths": 16% of students thought "strong" had two syllables. Similarly, 16% of respondents reported adding additional vowel sounds when pronouncing words like "street" or "strengths". These pronunciation errors align with the research conducted by Wardana et al. (2022), which found that Indonesian EFL students frequently mispronounce consonant-heavy English words by adding additional vowel sounds or reducing consonant clusters. Such errors generally arise from the phonological influence of their first language on their English pronunciation.

In response to the question of which language has more complicated syllable structures, 52% of students believed English was more complex than Indonesian. This is a positive sign of increased metalinguistic awareness among learners. The development of metalinguistic awareness is essential in the context of foreign language acquisition. According to Ansar (2019), implementing phonological awareness training in the classroom can greatly enhance students' speaking abilities, boost their motivation, and foster their confidence in achieving accurate pronunciation.

However, 28% of respondents thought both languages were equally complex, with 20% believing Indonesian syllables to be more complex. These findings indicate that, while there is some awareness of phonotactic differences, a substantial number of students still do not have a thorough understanding of how syllable structure influences pronunciation. Some may continue to base syllable complexity largely on spelling rather than true sound patterns.

This misunderstanding might impede pronunciation improvement. If learners feel that a word like "street" has more than one syllable, they may continue to insert vowels unconsciously until provided with targeted instruction and auditory training. In this

study, students' reflections on open-ended responses also revealed a lack of confidence when faced with unfamiliar syllable clusters, reinforcing the need for specific syllable instruction.

Overall, the study's results indicate that syllable awareness is positively connected with correct pronunciation. Students who have a good knowledge of syllable boundaries and syllable counts are less likely to make mistakes such as vowel insertion or bad stress placement. Conversely, learners with a poor grasp of syllable structures tend to follow the patterns of their first language, leading to mistakes in English pronunciation.

As a result, students who gain greater syllable awareness will also strengthen their phonological skills, resulting in clearer pronunciation. This enhancement is critical not just for speaking ability, but also for listening comprehension and general spoken language understanding. The research highlights the necessity of specifically teaching syllable patterns in English classrooms, particularly for students whose first language differs greatly in phonotactic structure. The importance of explicitly teaching syllable patterns is further corroborated by Mutia (2025), who created pronunciation assessment tools that significantly enhanced students' phoneme accuracy. That emphasized the necessity of delivering structured and targeted pronunciation training in the classroom. These assessment tools enabled students to identify their pronunciation deficiencies and demonstrated quantifiable improvements in accuracy through consistent practice.

Educators can help reduce L1 interference and encourage more accurate English speech production by including syllable-based activities into pronunciation teaching and encouraging learners to listen critically to nativelike patterns.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of data collected from 25 respondents, this study finds that syllable awareness has a considerable impact on pronunciation preferences among Indonesian EFL learners. Most students were able to correctly identify syllable boundaries in regular English words, particularly those with basic phonological structures. However, difficulties arose when students were presented with complex syllable patterns containing consonant clusters, as a significant proportion showed tendencies to insert extra vowel sounds, influenced by Indonesian phonotactic regulations. These findings suggest that, despite having overall phonological awareness, the absence of specialized training on English syllable structure—particularly distinctions from L1—results in persistent pronunciation mistakes.

The results also show difference perceptions of syllable complexity, with more than half of the students accurately identifying English as more complex than Indonesian. This indicates developing metalinguistic awareness, but also emphasizes the necessity for ongoing development through structured exposure and reflective practice. Ultimately, the research concludes that increasing syllable awareness is important not

just for improving pronunciation, but also for helping learners' overall listening and speaking abilities. It is thus suggested that English instructors explicitly include syllable-focused teaching into pronunciation training, particularly for students whose first language differs greatly in syllable structure and stress patterns. By doing so, instructors may successfully decrease L1 interference and encourage more accurate English speech production in EFL students.

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