

## **STUDENTS' PHONEMIC AWARENESS IN MASTERY ENGLISH VOWEL AND CONSONANT SOUNDS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research dealt with the students' phonemic awareness in mastery English vowels and consonants sounds. The aim was to show activities carried out by the students to pronounce the English vowels and consonants sounds and to read as well as to write the sounds symbol in phonemic transcription. The subject in this research was the second semester students of English Education Study Program of a private university in Medan with total number of 15 students. Descriptive qualitative with observation was designed to implement this research. The subject of this research was observed thoroughly during the learning process. The result showed that the students were aware of phonemic in English sounds. They were able to understand the phonemic concept of English vowels and consonants sounds. They were able to pronounce and differentiate the phonemic transcription of English vowel and consonant sounds.*

**Keywords:** *vowels, consonants, sounds, phonemic awareness*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Phonics and phonemic awareness are closely related. Learning about one aspect reinforces the other. Both are concerned with sounds, with phonemic awareness involving spoken language and phonics involving written language. Without phonemic awareness, learners may be confused by the print system and how it represents the spoken word (Anthony & Mohd Said, 2019). Students need to understand that a word is made up of a series of discrete sounds in order for them to make sense of phonics teaching. Thus, phonemic awareness and phonics teaching need to be integrated.

It is then realized that the teaching of phonics is needed in order that the students are able to identify and pronounce English words correctly. They also need to be able to recognize the sounds and able to write the symbol of the sounds. This idea is supported by the statement from Anthony & Mohd Said (2019) that the knowledge of phonemes and graphemes should be taught because it will enable pupils to identify words in linear and non-linear texts.

Phonics has been stated as helpful for young learners as it develops learners'

reading skills. Specifically, phonics in teaching is a systematic strategy that combines sounds with letters or with groups of letters. Further, phonics helps learners to read and write quickly and fluently as they get to read and write easier. As a result, learners can memorize words and retrieve them quicker (Ehri, 2005); (Loyd, 2000); (Vadasy et al., 2005) in Nasrawi & Al-Jamal (2017). In order to make sure that all children become good readers, it is essential that they learn the main letter sounds and know how to blend words using those letters sounds fluently (Anthony & Mohd Said, 2019). With phonics, the aim is to use aspects of phonetics to help make it easier for children who are learning to read and write.

Yellin (2017) in Nasrawi & Al-Jamal (2017) defined phonics as a structured relationship between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters). If the students are shown some letters and they are asked to point to a certain letter, they can show the letter and make the sound of the letter. This indicates that the students have the knowledge of phonics. Simply say, phonics is the knowledge of knowing the relation between printed letters and the

sounds uttered. Without knowing letter-sound correspondences, learners are deprived of a fundamental means of recognizing and producing known words and of figuring out new ones when reading and writing (NSW, 2009). The knowledge of phonemes and graphemes should be taught because it will enable pupils to identify words in linear and non-linear texts (Anthony & Mohd Said, 2019).

Phonics instruction involves teaching students to know the relationships between letters and sounds and how to use this knowledge to recognize words when reading, and to spell words when writing (NSW, 2009). The teaching of phonics provides students with the opportunity to learn within a context (Moodie-Reid, 2016).

NSW (2009) suggested some principles of effective phonics teaching.

1. Phonics knowledge and skills are critical to becoming literate.

An essential part of learning to read and write is the understanding that letters and combinations of letters make up particular sounds and words. Without knowing letter-sound correspondences, learners are deprived of a fundamental means of recognising and producing known words and of figuring out new ones when reading and writing.

2. Phonics needs to be explicitly taught.

Letter-sound correspondences are arbitrary and therefore difficult to discover without explicit teaching. Explicit phonics teaching requires teachers to clearly and consistently enunciate the sounds they are teaching. Yellin (2017) in Nasrawi & Al-Jamal (2017) also suggested using an explicit phonics instruction that entails blending sounds together. During the teaching of phonics to the students, the teachers require to give examples by demonstrating or showing the correct pronunciation of the sounds for each letter and how to blend the letters to produce correct sound of a word.

3. Phonics also needs to be taught systematically.

Teaching phonics in an effective sequence will significantly influence

the rate at which students successfully acquire phonics knowledge and skills.

Abdullah et al. (2014) in Anthony & Mohd Said (2019) wrote that the explicit and systematic teaching of phonics will allow pupils to become independent reader through fun-filled activities. Ding (2015) in Anthony & Mohd Said (2019) also indicated that implicit phonics instructions has a major effect mainly on low proficient ESL learners who lacks exposure to English. This is due to the implicit phonics instruction is helpful in providing phonics teaching in real reading experience.

4. Phonics needs to be taught in an integrated literacy program.

Students need to understand that a word is made up of a series of discrete sounds in order for them to make sense of phonics teaching. Thus, phonemic awareness and phonics teaching need to be integrated. As well, phonics needs to be integrated into other parts of a literacy session and into learning in other learning areas. The more students are provided with scaffolded opportunities to practise their phonics learning in authentic reading and writing contexts, the more successful they will be in applying and transferring this knowledge.

5. Phonics needs to be taught in a balanced literacy program.

Over time, an effective literacy program needs to be balanced in relation to the four literacy resources and include teaching of all critical aspects of literacy. While the purpose, task or context of a particular literacy session may require a stronger focus on one aspect over others, an effective early literacy program will incorporate a balance of aspects including phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, writing, speaking, concepts about print and reading texts.

6. Phonics needs to be taught to a level of automaticity.

Phonics should be taught and practiced to a level where decoding becomes

habitual and automatic. In this way, students will readily recognize and produce familiar words accurately and effortlessly and be more likely to effectively identify and produce words that are new to them. Developing automatic word recognition will support and enhance comprehension.

7. Phonics teaching is enhanced by an emphasis on multi-sensory activities. High quality phonics teaching involves the use of auditory, visual and kinesthetic activities that acknowledge students' different learning styles and encourages them to activate as many of their senses as possible. Activities could involve students moving their bodies to make letter shapes, manipulating magnetic letters to make words, tracing letters and words with fingers in the air or with sticks in sand, tapping out phonemes, writing letters with crayons, pencils, chalk, whiteboard markers or using a computer or Interactive Whiteboard to create and manipulate words and texts.
8. Phonics teaching needs to be supported and reinforced using quality texts. Students need frequent opportunities to practice and apply their developing knowledge. The use of decodable texts is sometimes advocated to reinforce phonics learning.
9. Phonics teaching is enhanced by the use of technology. ICT in general and Interactive Whiteboards in particular, have the potential to impact on and provide benefits for phonics teaching and learning. Interactive Whiteboards extend a teacher's repertoire of skills by enabling them to:
  - link to prior phonics learning by revisiting saved work and building on it in subsequent lessons,
  - manipulate letter combinations during phonics teaching sessions,
  - make modelled and guided phonics teaching more interactive, interesting and engaging.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research was conducted by applying descriptive qualitative method

with observation as the instrument to collect the data. The subject involved was the students of the second semester of English Education Study Program in a private university in Medan with total number of 15 students. This second semester students was chosen because the subject of Phonetics and Phonology was given in this semester. The observation was conducted thoroughly for four months.

Observation sheets were prepared by the observer to record every single activity occurred in the classroom. The sheets were prepared for both the students and the lecturer. Other than observation sheets, recording and documentation were also used as additional instruments in this research in order to obtain more accurate data during observation in the classroom.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The observation results are elaborated on below paragraphs.

During the learning process, the lecturer gave pre-test to the students to obtain the preliminary data of the students' knowledge of phonics and phonemes. Then, the lecturer taught the students using certain variety of method, technique, or strategy completed with the procedures to seek the performance of the students when they were taught. At the end of the learning process, the lecturer gave post-test to find out the students' knowledge.

The lecturer adopted synthetic phonics approach (Anthony & Mohd Said, 2019). There were five skills to be taught: learning the letter sounds, learning letter formation, blending, identifying sounds in words, and spelling the tricky words. The lecturer used phonics worksheet consisted with variety of activities such as the phonics awareness by identifying letters and initial letter sounds, listening comprehension, following directions or steps, and oral communication. The administration and scoring of the test used Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) which were adopted from Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy (DIBELS) 8th Edition.

The test given by the lecturer showed significant difference. The test given was consisted of 50 words showing the letters for the sound of vowels and consonants sound. The total score obtained by the 15 students during pre-test was 309 with average score was 20.6 point. In post-test, the total score was 585 and the average score reached 39 point. The difference of pre-test and post-test was 276 in total and 18.4 for the average as the result. This average score showed increasing. Here is the table showing the difference score.

**Table 1. Score of Pre-test and Post-test**

No.	Initial	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
1	S	15	42	27
2	VL	15	43	28
3	AL	31	43	12
4	LN	18	36	18
5	RG	26	46	20
6	AA	33	45	12
7	DA	14	33	19
8	WA	22	42	20
9	A	16	26	10
10	PR	17	41	24
11	HY	18	40	22
12	SN	21	45	24
13	DY	13	33	20
14	RFZ	35	41	6
15	DR	15	29	14
<b>Total</b>		<b>309</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>276</b>
<b>Average</b>		<b>20.6</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>18.4</b>

The Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) and Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) assessment form from Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy (DIBELS) 8th Edition was applied by the lecturer to assist the scoring for the test given to the students. This form was applicable for this kind of test measurement. Here is the sample of scoring the students' phonemic fluency using the PSF test.

ASSESSMENT: LETTER NAMING FLUENCY (LNF)

Administration:

- Put the copy of the words in front of the students.
- Instruct the students a specific direction.  
Here are some letters. Say the names of the letters. When you heard the word "Begin" then start from the letter pointed. When you heard "Stop" then you need to stop.
- Scoring rules.  
Correct response : no slash (/) mark on the scoring form.  
Incorrect response : slash (/) on the letter named incorrectly.  
Self-correction : write "SC" and score as correct response if students say letter name incorrectly but correct it within 3 seconds.

Letters	Student Says	Scoring Procedure	Correct Letters
bTnE	"/b/...T...n...E"	✗ T n E	3/4
pSnL	"p.../s/...n...L"	p ✗ n L	3/4
MiKl	"M...L.../k/...L"	M I ✗ L	3/4

Letters	Student Says	Scoring Procedure	Correct Letters
bTnE	"d...T...n...E"	✗ T n E	3/4
pSnL	"q...S...m...L"	✗ S ✗ L	2/4
MiKl	"M...L...k...L"	M ✗ k L	3/4

**Figure 1. The Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) assessment form**

ASSESSMENT: PHONEMIC SEGMENTATION FLUENCY (PSF)

Administration:

- Instruct the students a specific direction.  
I will say a word. When I finish saying it, you tell me all the sounds of the word you heard. For example, when I say "come" then you need to say /k/ /a/ /m/
- Begin the test by hearing the first word to the student.
- Mark the assessment form by underlining each different, correct, sound segment produced. Give slash (/) for incorrectly sound produced.
- Directly and clearly say the next word when the student finished saying the sounds of the previous words.
- Students are given 3 seconds for each sound produced.
- Scoring rules.  
Correct response : underline the sound segment correctly pronounced.  
Incorrect response : slash (/) on the sound segment correctly pronounced and circle the sound if pronounced correctly without segmentation.  
Self-correction : write "SC" and score as correct response if students pronounced the sound incorrectly but correct it within 3 seconds.

Word	Student Says	Scoring Procedure	Correct Segments
track	"tu...tu...a...tu"	/t/ /t/ /a/ /t/	3/4
bet	"bi...e...tu"	/b/ /e/ /t/	3/3

Word	Student Says	Scoring Procedure	Correct Segments
track	"t...t...a...tu"	/t/ /t/ /a/ /t/	3/4
bet	"p...t...t"	/b/ /e/ /t/	3/3
bet	"d...e...t"	/b/ /e/ /t/	2/3

**Figure 2. The Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF) assessment form**

The 15 students as the subject in this research had different level background knowledge of phonics and phonemics awareness. Only few of them were fluent in pronouncing the sounds and the rest were average. The activities done by the

students during the learning process were following several steps prepared by the lecturer. First, the students learning the letters for the 42 sounds by hearing the sounds of vowels and consonants as in the following list (Llyod, 2007).

- Group 1 : s, a, t, i, p, n
- Group 2 : c k, e, h, r, m, d
- Group 3 : g, o, u, l, f, b
- Group 4 : ai, j, oa, ie, ee, or
- Group 5 : z, w, ng, v, little oo, long oo
- Group 6 : y, x, ch, sh, voiced th, unvoiced th
- Group 7 : qu, ou, oi, ue, er, ar

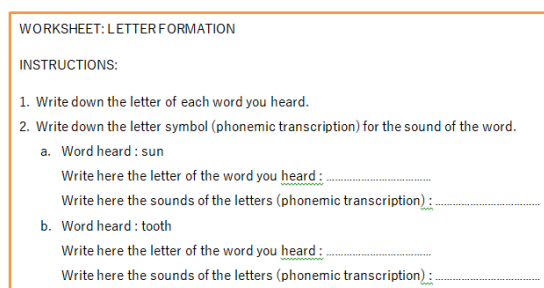
The students were showed a video recording of pronouncing each sound by providing some examples of the sounds and the name of the letter presented by the sounds. After viewing it, they were given some explanation how to differentiate the vowels and consonants sounds through the distinctive features of each sound. Vowels are described by the tongue height, tongue advancement (front, central, back), lip rounding (round, unrounded), tongue length (tense, lax), and voicing. Consonants are described by voicing (voiced, voiceless), manner of articulation, and place of articulation.

Each words showed and heard to the students was accompanied by the gesture of the sound of the words produced. For example, when they saw in the video recording the word “snake”, they also saw a gesture showing a movement like a snake and heard the sound “ssss” to indicate the phoneme /s/. This activity was done to each of the sound introduced to the students. Here are some examples of the words introduced to the students following the letters group for the sounds of English vowels and consonants.

- s ..... snake, sun, sit
- a (short a) ..... ants, angry, hat
- t ..... tennis, teddy, cat
- i (short i) ..... indian, in, sit
- p ..... puff, pig, spot
- n ..... noise, nosedive, man
- c ..... cat, clog, tractor
- k ..... kitten, kite, skip
- e (short e) ..... egg, shed, tent

- h ..... hop, hot, hill
- r ..... rag, run, carrot
- m ..... meal, man, summer
- d ..... drum, band, sad
- g ..... glug, goose, leg
- o (short o) ..... octopus, ostrich, shop
- u (short u) ..... up, umbrella, jump
- l ..... lolly, lick, slug
- f ..... fish, fun, sniff
- b ..... bat, ball, crab
- ai (long a) ..... snail, rain, pain
- j ..... jelly, jump, jam
- oa (long o) ..... goat, coat, soak
- ie (long i) ..... tie, die, lie
- ee (long e) ..... see, sheep, feet
- or ..... short, torch, corn
- z ..... zebra, buzz, zip
- w ..... wind, wet, west
- ng ..... strong, song, string
- v ..... van, vest, drive
- oo (long o) ..... cook, book, tooth
- y ..... yogurt, yo-yo, yard
- x ..... fox, six, box
- ch ..... chick, church, chips
- sh ..... ship, dish, crash
- th (voiced) ..... that, this, feather
- th (unvoiced) ..... thin, thick, thunder
- qu ..... quack, quick, squirrel
- ou ..... ouch!, cloud, sound
- oi ..... coin, point, join
- ue (long u) ..... rescue, barbecue
- er ..... term, her, sister
- ar ..... car, park, star

Next activity, the students learned letter formation. During this activity, they were given worksheet to write the sounds symbol of each word heard. Here is the example of the worksheet.



**Figure 3.** Worksheet Letter Formation

The activity was continued by giving the students another worksheet

which contained jumbled words. They were requested to arrange the word correctly and blend the sound while pronouncing the words. Here is the example of the worksheet.

WORKSHEET: BLEND JUMBLED LETTERS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Blend the following jumbled letter into correct words.
  - a. t - a - f - e - h - r - e  
Write here the correct letter of the word : .....  
Write here the sounds of the letters (phonemic transcription) : .....
  - b. a - r - l - m - u - b - l - e  
Write here the correct of the word you heard : .....  
Write here the sounds of the letters (phonemic transcription) : .....

Figure 4. Worksheet Blend Jumbled Letter

Next activity, the students were requested to identify the sounds. They were again need to complete the worksheet given. In this activity, the students were asked to identify the initial and final sounds of vowels and consonants of the words pronounced. This activity was aimed to develop more the phonological awareness of initial and final vowels and consonants blend. The example of the worksheet is given below.

WORKSHEET: IDENTIFY INITIAL AND FINAL SOUND

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Write down the letter of each word heard.
2. Write down the letter symbol (phonemic transcription) for the sound of the word.
  - a. Word heard : thump  
Write here the letter of the word you heard : .....  
Write here the sounds of the letters (phonemic transcription) : .....
  - b. Word spelled : mice  
Write here the letter of the word you heard : .....  
Write here the sounds of the letters (phonemic transcription) : .....

Figure 5. Worksheet Identify Sound

The last activity conducted was spelling the tricky words. Here, the students were heard some regular and irregular sound of words and asked to write down the words spelled. The example of the worksheet is shown herein below.

WORKSHEET: SPELLING TRICKY WORDS

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Select the correct words heard.
2. Spelled the words.
3. Write down the letter symbol (phonemic transcription) for the sound of the word.
  - a. Word heard and spelled : running, blending, blonder, thinner  
Write here the word you heard : .....  
Write here the sounds of the letters (phonemic transcription) : .....
  - b. Word heard and spelled : tick, tock, duck, dark  
Write here the word you heard : .....  
Write here the sounds of the letters (phonemic transcription) : .....

Figure 6. Worksheet Spelling Tricky Word

Overall, those activities administered during the teaching learning process prepared by the lecturer in order the students to master the English vowels and consonants sounds.

Based on the observation result and the test score, it was considered that the students could manage their awareness of phonic and phoneme. They could recognize the sounds, write the symbol of the sounds, and write the letter represent the sounds. Though some of the students had difficulty at the beginning, in the end, all of them enjoyed the learning process of knowing the sounds. They also had better ability to decode the relationship of the letter and the sound and how to read/pronounce and to write them. Furthermore, the students were easier to understand the distinctive features of vowels and consonants respectively.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To conclude, this research showed a significant result of students' phonemic awareness. The lecturer and students were able to work together in building the phonic awareness which resulted in the development of understanding the phonetic in order to distinguish letter and sound. Even though all the activities given by the lecturer are a student-centered approach, but they allow the students to involve more in the activities in a multi-sensory way.

In addition, it is suggested for those who are interested in developing the students' phonemic awareness of English vowel and consosnant sounds could arrange different phonics instruction activities (worksheet) to meet the needs of

students' learning. Also, it is suggested to create a connection between prior knowledge and new experience of students while learning the phonics. It is to ensure that the students are encouraged and engaged during the learning process.

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