

**The Effect of Phonological Awareness on Preparatory stage EFL Teachers'  
Pronunciation competence**

**A Research in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the PhD Degree in Education (TEFL)  
(EFL Curriculum and Instruction)**

**By**

**Ayat Mohie Eldein Hassan Awad**

**Senior specialist English Language at Ministry of Education**

**Supervised by**

**Prof. Dr. Awatef Ali sheir**

**Professor of Curriculum and EFL Instruction**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies for Education**

**Cairo University**

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**Abstract.**

The purpose of this research was to determine the effect of phonological awareness theory on the preparatory stage EFL teachers' pronunciation competence. The EFL teachers were 20 teachers in Al Sayda Zienab directorate-South Cairo District. Three instruments were used: needs analysis questionnaire to collect the required information from EFL teachers in order to elicit their responses about EFL teacher's pronunciation skills and phonological awareness, a pre-post test in to investigate the effects of the suggested program based on phonological awareness on developing the required EFL teachers' pronunciation competence before and after the program and scoring rubric in order to be able to measure some features of pronunciation. Results of the study indicated that phonological awareness theory contributed more to EFL preparatory stage teachers' pronunciation. The study recommended the need for improving preparatory stage EFL teachers' performance through training courses, workshops and ongoing improvement to increase their efficiency within the field of their work.

**Keywords:** phonological awareness, pronunciation.

## Introduction

English language is one of the most significant means of communication around the world. Despite the importance of teaching the four main skills as a whole, it is urgent to pay more attention to the speaking skill generally and pronunciation competence particularly as one of speaking skills components. Much of the communication is conveyed through speaking. Good pronunciation are a key element to every EFL learner's ability to communicate in English (Kelton, 2014). In addition to (Dash, 2015) stated that the process of learning English is interconnected process, that is each area of the language that is being taught helps to improve other aspects of the language. Thus, pronunciation competence is related to other language skills.

Pronunciation means the way sounds are produced to make meaning, including consonants and vowels (segments) aspects of speech beyond the level of individual segments such as stress, intonation, and linking (suprasegments) aspects and how the voice is produced (Yates & Zielinski, 2009; Glekg 2012). That is why pronunciation is "one of components that is crucial to acceptable communication in English" (Agusalim et al, 2014, p.135).

Language proficiency requires acceptable pronunciation, thus good pronunciation is the base of effective communication and it is considered an essential skill that learners should acquire because it affects both accuracy and comprehension (Han, 2008; Warisara, 2013). Pronunciation gets its highly important position among other English skills components because learners with good pronunciation are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas of language aspects, unlike others who face difficulties in pronunciation and cannot be understood even if they have perfect grammar and massive vocabulary to express themselves (Piotr & Lynda, 2009). In the same context, learners with good pronunciation are commonly regarded more professional and respected as they are given higher social status. However, mispronunciation causes embarrassment, misunderstanding, and communication breakdown (Mustafa, 2012). Furthermore, poor communication skills can decrease learners self-confidence, hinder interaction, and negatively affect the speaker's credibility (Nihal, 2013). Moreover mispronunciation leads to learners' lack of self-confidence and avoidance speaking when communicating with native

English speakers (Thanyalak, 2012).

To this end, pronunciation competence is important as other phases of language such as grammar, vocabulary or any other aspect of language. If a learner's general aim is to talk intelligibly to others in another language, a reasonable pronunciation competence is important. Because the learner while learning the pronunciation competence of a foreign language, often confronts different phonetic and phonological problems that obviously hinder his/her learning and ultimately prevent him/her from acquiring expected general proficiency in the oral and auditory skills of the target language. Phonological and phonetic differences between foreign languages include differences in intonation, articulation, stress, rhythm, rhyme, pause and juncture (Zamira, 2014). One of the greatest teaching strategies is phonological and phonetic awareness, which may help teachers to accomplish their class objectives and it might also help learners get rid of boredom as well as they feel the language itself.

Tang (2009) states that there are several factors influencing the pronunciation of the L2 learners. That is, the first language interference. By interference of mother language, learner's age, learner's attitude and psychological environment, prior pronunciation instruction, and the insufficient language knowledge of English phonology and phonetics. Phonetic awareness indicates an EFL learner's ability to identify English consonants in terms of points and manner of articulation, English vowels in terms of tongue height, tongue position, and lips shape, and the quantity of the vowel diphthongs and triphthongs in English words, specific cases of English consonants and vowels (Venkatagiri and Levis, 2009). Considering such consequences, this study aims to visualize and clear the fundamental impacts of phonological and phonetic awareness on the development of EFL students' pronunciation competence performance. Moreover, both students and EFL teachers will be informed that these two factors are supposed to facilitate the teaching and learning of EFL pronunciation Competence due to their significant role in this matter.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of the study can be stated as a great number of EFL teachers at preparatory stage have lack of performance of pronunciation competence, problems and difficulties concerning the production and discrimination of English pronunciation skills. Accordingly, the researcher tried to examine the effect of phonological awareness on the EFL teachers' pronunciation competence.

## **Purpose of the study**

This study aimed to:

- 1- Identify the adequate advantages of using phonological awareness.
- 2- Indicate the features of the proposed program based phonological awareness for developing EFL teachers' pronunciation at preparatory stage.
- 3- Explore the effect of the proposed program based on phonological awareness for developing the pronunciation competence for EFL teachers at preparatory stage.

## **Hypotheses of the Study**

- 1- There is a statistically significant difference between the overall mean scores of the study group on the pre-posttest in favor of the post one administration of phonological awareness rules.
- 2- There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the study group in the post-application of the pronunciation skills checklist in favor of the study group.

## **Definition of the Terms:**

### **Phonological awareness**

1. Yopp and Yopp (2009, p. 2) defined phonological awareness as "the ability to attend to and manipulate units of sound in speech (syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes) independent of meaning which includes matching synthesis and analysis"
2. Alshammari (2015, p.2) defined phonological awareness as "a term that is used to refer to one's sensitivity to the phonological structure of words in one's language. phonological awareness includes awareness of individual words in sentences, syllables, and onset-rime segments, as well as awareness of individual phonemes".

For the researcher, phonological awareness is defined as using as integrated system of speaking rules that includes identifying and manipulating units of oral language such consonant and vowel sounds, stress,intonation, diphthongs, segment sentences, segment and blend syllable, segment and blend phonemes

## **Pronunciation**

- 1.(Yates&Zielinski, 2009;Glekg 2012) define pronunciation as the way sounds are produced to make meaning, including consonants and vowels (segments); aspects of speech beyond the level of individual segments such as stress, intonation, and link(suprasegmentals); aspects and how the voice is produced.
2. James (2014, p.250) defines the Pronunciation as "the way a certain sound or sounds are produced. Unlike articulation, which refers to the actual production of speech sounds in the mouth, pronunciation stress more the way sounds are perceived by the hearer.

For the researcher, pronunciation is defined as explaining how sounds are produced through training learners to develop conscious knowledge ofsegmental andsuprasegmental aspects.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Theoretical Background of the study**

#### **Phonological Awareness and Pronunciation Skills:**

Pronunciation hasgreat importance for successful oral communication. Good pronunciation is the foundation of effective spoken communication. Language proficiency requires acceptable pronunciation, thus pronunciationis considered an essential skill that learners should acquire because it affects both accuracy and comprehension (Han, 2008; Warisara,2013). Pronunciation gets its highly important position among other English skills components because learners with good pronunciation are more likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas of language aspects, unlike others who face difficulties in pronunciation and cannot be understood even if they have perfect grammar and massive vocabulary to express themselves (Piotr&Lynda, 2009).

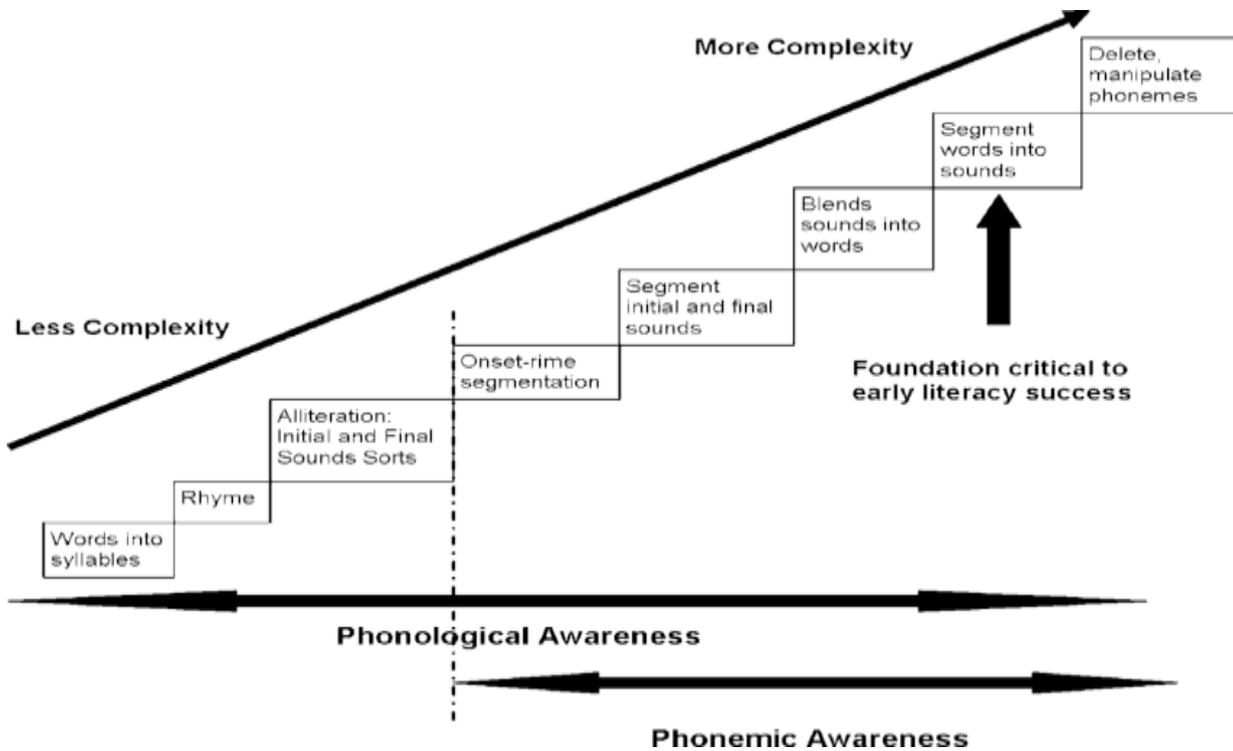
In the same context, learners with good pronunciation are commonly regarded more professional and respected as they are given higher social status. However, mispronunciation causes embarrassment, misunderstanding, and communication breakdown (Mustafa, 2012). Furthermore, poor communication skills can decrease learners self-confidence, hinder interaction, and negatively affect the speaker's credibility (Nihal,2013). Moreover mispronunciation leads to learners' lack of self-confidence and avoidance speaking when communicating with native English speakers (Thanyalak, 2012). English pronunciation has various competences such as sounds, stress and variation of pitch. Working in sound systems emphasizes the critical importance of the suprasegmental features( i.e. stress, rhythm and intonation), and their use is not just to complete meaning, but to create meaning(Morley,, 1999).

Phonological awareness is the key to success in practicing oral performance skills. A deficit in phonological is a major factor in teachers' oral performance difficulties. It is important to clarify the core of PA. Siegel & Chan (2013, p. 2) point out PA is "the ability to reflect on and manipulate the phonemic segments of speech and it is the ability to perform mental operations on the output of the speech-perception mechanism". Pilat & Kilanowski-Press (2011) confirmed that PA is the understanding and recognizing the sound structure of the spoken language. Thus, PA not includes written letters but it deals with learner's awareness of sound structure of oral language. PA is a term that indicates to an individual awareness of the sound structure or phonological instruction of talked words. The obvious awareness of phonological structure helps the learners to draw a connection between spoken language and written symbols (Goldsworthy & Pieretti, 2012 & Gillon, 2017).

Mayer (2008) added that phonological awareness involves knowing that words are composed of sound units and that sound units can be combined to form words. For example, the spoken word "pan" consists of three phonemes: /p/, /a/, and /n/. Phonological awareness refers to (1) the process of breaking a spoken word into its sound units such as being able to discriminate the sounds /p/, /a/, and /n/ when the word "pan" is spoken-and (2) the process of producing and blending sound units to form spoken words-such as being able to produce and blend these three sounds when one wants to say the word "pan". However, tasks of the phonological awareness may vary in type and difficulty and goes through a sequence of processes and activities as clarified by Schuele & Boudreau (2008) in the following figure:

**Figure (2)**

**. Sequence of phonological awareness instruction and intervention.**



Adopted from (Schuele& Boudreau2008, p. 9)

Accordingly, the phonological awareness skills are distinguished by the task performed and the size of the unit of sound that it is the focus of the task. Blending sounds together, segmenting words into constituent sounds, recombining sounds of words and judging whether two words have some sounds in common (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

Reviewing the literature, it was evident that there is a strong relationship between pronunciation skills and phonological awareness as clarified by Gillon (2004) who referred to phonological awareness as the learners' awareness of the sound structure, or phonological structure of spoken word which would enable them to sound out a word. Thus, Because of the gap in the literature, there was an urgent need for conducting the current study aiming to investigate the effectiveness of phonological awareness in developing pronunciation skills.

## **Method**

The present study adopted the quasi-experimental design using (one group for EFL teachers' pre-post treatment). The group was taught through a suggested program based on phonological

awareness for developing pronunciation competence skills. The pre-post pronunciation test was administered to the same group before and after the treatment.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study consisted of A group of twenty EFL teachers for preparatory stage (males and females) who were randomly selected from Al SaydaZainab directorate – South Cairo district in the academic year 2021-2022 (during COVID-19) their ages were ranging from thirty four to fifty two years old. The EFL teacher's group presented the experimental group which was taught by using phonological awareness program.

## **Instruments of the Study**

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the researcher designed the following instruments:

1. Needs analysis questionnaire.
2. Pre-posttest.
3. Scoring rubric.

### **Description of the different Instruments:**

#### **1- Needs analysis questionnaire.**

The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher to collect the required information from EFL teachers and the university specialists in order to elicit their responses about EFL teacher's oral performance skills that can fulfill their needs which in turn will help in designing the suggested program. The questionnaire **in its final form** was divided into two main parts. The first part attempted to elicit information about EFL teachers learning needs by posing the question. How important are the following English oral performance skills to EFL teachers? The oral performance components were required for EFL preparatory stage teachers were divided into three macro skills and twelve micro skills. The second part of the questionnaire is attempted to elicit information about EFL teachers PA as a learning needs by posing the question "How important are the following PA skills to the

EFL teachers in order to be included in the English language program to develop oral performance skills?" The PA skills were required for EFL preparatory stage teachers were divided into two sections, which included syllablesin (3 statements), phoneme identification in (9 statements). Respondents had to tick one choice for each skill from the three point's likert scale survey questionnaire (very important–somewhat important – unimportant) to determine the opinions of the EFL teachers towards using phonological awareness in development of oral performance skills.

### **Validity of the questionnaire**

To validate the questionnaire in its preliminary form, it was submitted to a panel of jurors . They were asked to judge the questionnaire validity in terms of clarity and appropriateness of its items and instructions. All jurors wrote their relevant notes, comments and recommendations about the questionnaire. Their comments and recommendations were taken into consideration. Finally, they indicated that the questionnaire was valid.

The researcher constructed and administered a pre-post oral performance test. It was used as a pre-test prior to the program implementation to identify the level of participants (EFL teacher's one group) in oral performance skills before commencing the experiment. In addition, it was used as a post-test in order to investigate the effects of the suggested program based on phonological awareness on developing the required EFL oral performance skills.

## **2- the test**

### **Description of the test**

The test consists of two sections; reception section and production section. The reception section consisted of four questions. The second section is productionsection.It tests of oral performance skills this section is given to the learners to be answered, that should be answered individually and orally through reading aloud while the instructor records the answers of each participant to be corrected later.

### **Validity of the test**

The test was submitted to a number of specialized jury members in the domain of EFL curriculum and instruction of teaching to declare their opinions regarding the clarity of test instructions, the suitability of the test to the level of EFL teacher's preparatory stage, and the clarity of the questions. The jury members suggested some changes and recommendations

such as in reception section; the main suggestion was to focus on phonological features in specific words implicitly in sentences, not in separate words. In the light of the comments the researcher developed the test.

### **3. The Rubric for scoring oral performance test**

The researcher adapted Cambridge PET Speaking analytical Rubric in order to be able to measure some features of pronunciation rather than measuring oral performance as a whole skill. The scoring rubric was selected meticulously to assess the participants' scores in the pre – post oral performance test. The rubrics contained the target features and four scoring items to identify the EFL learners' level in each question in the test. The total test score was determined by summing the total score of the test items. The rubric ranged from (4) Excellent to (3) Very good, to (2) Good, to (1) Poor. Specialized in the field of EFL curriculum and instruction to determine its content validity.

#### **Validity of the Rubric**

The rubric was submitted to a panel of jury specialized in the field of EFL curriculum and instruction so as to determine the degree of significance and appropriateness for EFL preparatory stage teachers. The jury members asserted that the oral performance rubric proved to be valid.

#### **Results and Discussions**

The present study tried to explore how effective teaching pronunciation through phonological awareness was on the experimental group. The “t-test” was utilized for the analysis of data obtained from the oral performance test. Scores of the participants on the pre-post tests were analyzed and compared.

Hypothesis (1) predicted that there would be significant difference (in favor of the post-performance) between mean scores on the pre and post-performance on the total pronunciation test.

Results indicated that the experimental group's mean scores on the post administration of the whole sheet of the Pronunciation test was higher and statistically significant compared to the

pre- administration as t-value (0.98) is ( 16.04), and Eta- squared was 0.98 as presented in table (1). Consequently, the first hypothesis is confirmed and accepted.

**Table (1)**

**t-value&  $\eta^2$  between mean scores of the Experimental group in the Pre-Post Pronunciation Test**

No	Group	Mean	SD	DF	t-value	$\eta^2$
20	Pre	20.50	4.27	38	15.18*	0.94*
20	Post	41.05	4.07			

**\*Significant at 0.05**

**Hypothesis (2)**

Results revealed that the study group achieved a significant improvement on each domain of the post pronunciation test as the difference in the mean scores between the pre and post administrations was statistically significant. Results also showed that learners got high marks on particular pronunciation skills (Discriminate between words ending with S/d sound; Reception and production correct patterns of word and sentence stress; Differentiate between different patterns of intonation) as t-values were high as shown in table (2). This result illustrates that the enhancement of the study group performance was due to the exposure to the TBI program which was found to be effective in promoting pronunciation skills of the participants. Consequently, the second hypothesis is confirmed and accepted.

**Table (2)**

**t-value&  $\eta^2$  between mean scores of the Experimental group in relation to the Pre-Post Pronunciationtest Domains**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Mean Pre</b>	<b>Mean Post</b>	<b>SD Pre</b>	<b>SD Post</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b><math>\eta^2</math></b>
1-Discriminate between words ending with <b>S</b> sound	2.50	3.70	1.53	0.72	3.13*	0.98*
2-Discriminate between words ending with <b>Ed</b> sound	2.10	4.10	1.64	0.62	4.97*	0.98*
3-Reception correct patterns of word stress	2.00	4.10	1.38	0.44	6.33*	0.99*
4-Reception correct patterns of sentence stress	2.10	4.25	1.64	0.62	5.34*	0.98*
5-Production correct patterns of word stress	1.90	4.05	1.41	0.59	6.13*	0.99*
6-Production correct patterns of sentence stress	1.85	4.00	1.62	0.77	5.22*	0.98*
7-Differentiate between different patterns of intonation	1.90	4.30	1.37	0.56	7.05*	0.98*

**\*Significant at 0.05**

## **Discussions**

Based on the results mentioned above, there is evidence that the suggested PA program had a large effect on promoting pronunciation competence of EFL preparatory stageteachers. This is indicated by the previously presented statistical analysis where scores of the study group on the pre-postadministrations of pronunciation test was compared using t-test. The researcher attributed these results to the implementation of PA

program in teaching the study group. Using the PA program was found to be effective and useful for the participants. This is consistent with the results provided by varied studies that proved the effective role of PA program on promoting EFL teachers' different language (e.g. (Serrano, 2016; Jaskolski, 2013; Cunningham et al., 2009; Carroll, 2016 etc.)

There is a great consensus among researchers, as mentioned in literature review, that PA processes and procedures increased teachers' phonological knowledge; and the teachers' increased knowledge resulted in gains in both the frequency and complexity of phonological instructional implementation and improving pronunciation competence and acquire oral language actively. After analyzing and interpreting teachers' attitudes towards using PA as teaching strategies and its effect on their pronunciation competence, the researcher found out that most teachers' responses were strongly. This indicated that using PA strategies had positive effect on teachers' performance.. Therefore, using PA can be regarded better than using regular instruction method in developing EFL teachers' pronunciation competence.

## **. Conclusion:**

It might be concluded that PA is very important in teaching pronunciation competence. The study findings, from theoretical and imperial points of view suggested that PA had apposite effect enhancing and developing the EFL teachers' pronunciation competence. In addition, this study showed that teachers would like to use PA in the classroom. Moreover, this study indicated that teachers were more interested in using PA strategies in their school environment for developing students' pronunciation competence and oral communication.

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