

## **The Proficiency of Oral Language and Phonological Awareness in Adult EFL Students**

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### **Abstract**

*The ability to recognize phonological patterns is essential for comprehending language and word formation. The issues are brought on by the absence of an English sound in other languages, particularly in Indonesia. This study looked into the connection between oral language competency and phonological awareness in adult English language learners. Although additional in-depth studies on the relationship between phonological awareness and oral language ability in adult EFL learners have not been widely conducted, this is based on a curiosity about whether phonological awareness still has a relationship with it. Researchers employed a correlation design and quantitative approaches. Sixty-two respondents from the third-year STKIP PGRI Jombang students in the English Education department program participated in this study. Purposive approach was employed to choose the responders. The information is derived from the midterm exam assignments. The phonology and speaking lecturer created the tool for a semester four course on academic settings. With the use of SPSS version 25, non-parametric Spearman's rho was used to examine the data. According to the outcomes of the data analysis, the value of the 2-tailed sig. is 0.463, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, the researchers draw the conclusion that there is no meaningful relationship between spoken language ability and phonological awareness. They assumed that the outcome was due to the disparity in emphasis between the speaking test scoring criteria and the course materials for Speaking for Academic Setting.*

**Keyword:** *correlation; adult EFL students; phonological awareness; oral language proficiency*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Phonological awareness (P.A) is the ability to identify and manipulate parts of oral languages, such as words, onsets, and rimes. Fakhir (2014) states that Phonological Awareness refers to an understanding of the language's sound structure, which is made up of words, syllables, rhymes, and sounds (phonemes). Phonological awareness has a crucial role in understanding language and how words come together. In use, phonological awareness becomes a tool for EFL students to absorb the words they hear and at the same time rephrase them with proper pronunciation. According to Hentasmaka (2020), phonological awareness affected significantly both receptive and productive skills. Thus, phonological awareness (PA) is essential to learning to decode and spell written words, it encompasses a range of abilities that grow throughout time and are critical for success in reading and spelling. For typical readers, phonological awareness is particularly crucial in the early stages of reading development, which include preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. Many pupils' future reading difficulties can be avoided by explicitly teaching phonological awareness during these formative years. Nonetheless, decoders who struggle at any age might focus on improving their phonological awareness, particularly if they exhibit issues with blending or

segmenting phonemes

Research of phonological awareness in EFL Classroom in Indonesia has shown a majority of poor readers and spellers display a weakness in phonological awareness. The factors that cause difficulties are the lack of a sound of English in Indonesian, some sounds are allophonic in the Indonesian language but English are different sounds, some words are not familiar pronunciation in Indonesian or Local language and inconsistent spelling-sound correspondence in English which also causes problems in mastering phonological awareness for Indonesian EFL learners (Yulia, 2017). Discussing more detail about phonological awareness, According to Yeung, Chan (2013), oral language proficiency and phonological awareness significantly predicted word reading in kindergarten children. Oral language proficiency refers to the point of skill, which students can use the language. In educational environments, a teacher's spoken language performance serves as an example for pupils, and they should copy and absorb it in their own performances. This could be due to their genuine inability to speak English well enough to explain subject-specific material in the language, or it could be the result of their conviction that speaking English for the duration of a session would take more effort and stamina than explaining lessons in their mother tongue.

Yeung (2013) stated oral language proficiency and phonological awareness significantly predicted word reading in kindergarten children. Oral language proficiency refers to the point of skill, which students can use the language. Competence can be regarded as a static concept, having to do with structure, state, or form, whereas proficiency is essentially a dynamic concept, having to do with process and function.” (Taylor, 1983). Several studies also found similar results. Skubic, et al (2021) stated phonological awareness has a special place in the development of children's early literacy and school literacy. It can be predicted performance in the preschool period at the next stage of reading acquisition. They also stated that both phonological awareness and musical activities are based on orientation in the sound environment, and this requires good listening skills. Besides listening and reading, according to Hu (2019), phonological awareness has correlated significantly with speaking skills, and that its prediction of spelling was the strongest. Phonological awareness also relates to writing skills. (Goswami (2014) argues that it is through the motivation of young literacy learners to write down their thoughts that the development of phonological awareness truly occurs. There are several previous studies on the correlation between phonological awareness and oral language proficiency. Hulsey, Sevcik, Ronski (2018) found that children with limited speech ability have receptive language and letter-sound knowledge that supported the development of phonological awareness skills. Then Hu (2019) found the correlation between all three levels of phonological awareness, with the three English skills. Overall phonological awareness had significant correlations with all skills, closest with spelling, followed by listening, and weakest with reading. Other studies by Permatasari (2019) examines that phonological awareness interventions have a significant effect on the emergency skills of children. She uses the pre-test post-test method on 2 class kindergarten age consists of 8 subtests.

Elhassan, Crewther, Bavin (2017) examined the contribution of phonological awareness to phonological decoding, visual word recognition, reading rate, and reading comprehension in 124, fourth to sixth-grade children (aged 9–12 years). Phonological awareness contributed significantly to all reading measures

except rate, but in the moderate group only to phonological decoding. phonological awareness did not influence performances on any of the reading measures examined for the fluent reader group. Furthermore, Ansar (2019) found that the students improve their speaking skills through reading, repeating, responding, and managing word sound with phonological awareness. Besides that, the ability to use the phonological awareness method builds students' efforts for improving their skills.

Most studies examining the relationship between phonological awareness and oral language proficiency are used in early childhood or young children as a subject. Therefore, Research that discusses the relationship between phonological awareness and oral language proficiency of adult EFL in Indonesia does not yet exist. The researcher investigates the phonological awareness abilities of English department students at STKIP PGRI Jombang and the relationship with their oral language proficiency. The discussion of the research focuses on correlation studies of student scores in phonological awareness and their mid-test scores at oral language proficiency in speaking.

However, based on some previous studies above. Most studies examining the relationship between phonological awareness and oral language proficiency are used in early childhood or young children as a subject. Thus, they investigated the phonological awareness abilities of English department students at STKIP PGRI Jombang and the relationship with their oral language proficiency. The discussion of the research focused on correlation studies of student scores in phonological awareness and their mid-test scores at oral language proficiency in speaking.

## **METHOD**

In this study, the researchers used a quantitative approach with a correlational design. There were 2 variables in this study, there were independent variable and dependent variable. The independent variable here was x and the dependent variable was y. The x variable of this research was the phonological awareness test and the y variable was the oral language proficiency test result. The population of this research was the students of the English department on STKIP PGRI Jombang. They focused on 3rd years students of English Department. The data in this study were collected through the phonological awareness test. The test was held in the middle of the semester at the mid-term test. Phonological awareness tests here are made by the lecturer. This test consists of 40 pieces consisting of 8 parts; Ryme, Rhyme and Onset, Isolation phonemes, Identifying common phonemes, categorizing phonemes, blending, segmenting, and deleting. Examiners on this test consist of 1 expert, 1 lecturer, and 2 students. To equalize the research process, examiners received training from experts. Oral language proficiency test refers to speaking skill test. This test refers to the mid-semester exam in the speaking for the academic setting course.

The researchers used correlational analysis. It was used to find out the correlation between two variables or more. before the correlation analysis, the researcher did assumption tests to test the normality and linearity of the data. If the assumptions were fulfilled then the correlational analysis was conducted by using Pearson correlation. On the other handed, if the assumptions were not fulfilled so the analysis was done by implementing spearman correlation.

The data analysis was conducted to answer the research questions. The research question that needed have been answered in this study was whether there

was there any significant correlation between phonological awareness skill and Oral Language Proficiency of adult EFL learners. To answer the research question, the researchers used statistical analysis by using SPSS 25. The data was in the form of scores from the phonology awareness and oral language proficiency test. They used correlational analysis to find out the correlation between two variables or more. Then, before the correlation analysis, the researcher did assumption tests to test the normality and linearity of the data. If the assumptions were fulfilled then the correlational analysis was conducted by using Pearson correlation. On the other handed, if the assumptions were not fulfilled so the analysis was done by implementing spearman correlation. The correlation was considered significant if the significant value was less than 0. 05. Further, the correlation was considered positive if the coefficient value was positive.

## RESULT

The researchers found the Sig value on Phonological Awareness and Oral Language Proficiency is .000 where this value is lower than .005. Overall it can be concluded that the assumption of normality is not fulfilled

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Phonological Awareness	,159	62	,000	,913	62	,000
Speaking Skills	,314	62	,000	,772	62	,000

Meanwhile the sig deviation value of linearity was 0. 899. on linearity test. this shows that the distribution of phonological awareness and oral language proficiency data was linear because the value was greater than 0. 05. so it could be concluded that the linearity assumption was fulfilled.

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Speaking Skills *	Between Groups	(Combined)	390,804	24	16,283	,650	,866
		Linearity	43,429	1	43,429	1,732	,196
		Deviation from Linearity	347,375	23	15,103	,602	,899
Within Groups			927,583	37	25,070		
Total			1318,387	61			

Since the normality assumption test is not fulfilled, the researcher conducted the hypotheses test by using the non-parametric Spearman's Correlation test.

### Correlations

			Phonological Awareness	Speaking Skills
Spearman's rho	Phonological Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,095
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,463
		N	62	62
	Speaking Skills	Correlation Coefficient	,095	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,463	.
		N	62	62

Based on the table above, the result of the value of Sig. (2-tailed) is .463 which is higher than .05. It means the Null hypotheses (Ho) is accepted and the alternative hypotheses (Ha) is rejected. It means that there is No correlation between Phonological Awareness and Oral language proficiency.

### DISCUSSION

This research focused on investigating the correlation between phonological awareness and oral language proficiency in adult EFL. In this study, the researcher only focused on onset rhyme and phonemic awareness. Onsets are any consonants before a vowel in a spoken syllable, rimes are the vowel, and any consonants after it. Meanwhile, Phonemic awareness refers to the specific ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Oral language proficiency is another variable investigated in this study. “The latter term [proficiency] designating something like the ability to make use of competence. Competence can be regarded as a static concept, having to do with structure, state, or form, whereas proficiency is essentially a dynamic concept, having to do with process and function.” (Taylor, 1983). The oral language here refers to speaking skills in adult EFL. Speaking skill is a productive skill in the oral mode. According to Nunan (2003), Speaking is a productive oral skill and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning.

The results of the analysis in findings showed that the value of sig. (2-tailed) is 0.463 which is higher than 0.05. These results show that there is no significant correlation between Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency. This finding contradicts the previous research findings which is show a significant correlation between Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency. The researcher assumes the insignificant correlation is caused by some factors. First, the focus of the speaking material. The speaking for academic setting course focuses more on broadcasting and debates. Where this has a slightly different focus from speaking for everyday communication. Second, the aspect of being scored in the speaking test. Aspects assessed from the midterm test is slightly different from the aspects of speaking that are usually assessed such as fluency, pronunciation, etc.

Speaking skill is a productive skill in the oral mode. According to Nunan

(2003), Speaking is a productive oral skill and it consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. Speaking is important because speech production becomes a part of daily activities which involve interaction Thornburry (2005). Speaking separates into micro and macro skills (Brown, 2007). Micro skills refer to producing smaller chunks of language including phonemes, morphemes, words, collocations, and phrasal units. While macro skills focus on the larger elements such as fluency, discourse, function, style, cohesion, nonverbal communication, and strategic option. Speaking also has some aspects. According to Harris (1974), there are five components of speaking skill concerned with comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency. The researcher chose speaking skills that take in the speaking for the academic setting course in 3rd-year students.

The data analysis on the correlation between adult EFL students' Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency was conducted by using non-parametric Spearman's Correlation, it's because the normality assumption was not fulfilled. Based on the results of the data analysis obtained, the value of sig. (2-tailed) is 0.463 which is higher than 0.05. These results show that there is no significant correlation between Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency. This finding contradicts the previous research findings of Hulsey et al (2018), Hu (2019), Permatasari, et al (2019), Elhassan, et al (2017), Ansar (2019) which is show a significant correlation between Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency.

However, the focuses of previous research and this research are quite different. Hulsey et al (2018) focus on investigating the relationship between speech, language, and phonological awareness in preschool-age children. Then, Hu (2019) investigated phonological awareness and English skills divided into 3 parts: spelling, listening, and reading on the college students. While, Permatasari, et al (2019) focused on investigating phonological awareness intervention in improving emergent literacy skills in early childhood that use pretest and posttest methods. And, Elhassan, et al (2017), that focused on investigating the contribution of phonological awareness to reading fluency in children's age. Then, Ansar (2019) investigated the effectiveness of phonological awareness as the action research in speaking which uses class action research on the college student and lecturer. Meanwhile, this research has more specific focus of Phonological awareness and oral language proficiency which refers to adult EFL students.

The researcher assumes the insignificant correlation is caused by some factors. First, the focus of the speaking material. The speaking for academic setting course focuses more on broadcasting and debates. Where this has a slightly different focus from speaking for everyday communication. Second, the aspect of being scored in the speaking test. Aspects assessed from the midterm test are intro, clarity, content, style and delivery, visual aids, summary, and addressing questions. This is slightly different from the aspects of speaking that are usually assessed such as fluency, pronunciation, etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research was conducted to investigate the correlation between adult EFL students' Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency. The data analysis on the correlation between adult EFL students' Phonological awareness and

Oral language proficiency was conducted by using non-parametric Spearman's Correlation, it's because the normality assumption was not fulfilled. Based on the results of the data analysis obtained, the value of sig. (2-tailed) is 0.463 which is higher than 0.05. So, the researcher conclude that there is no significant correlation between Phonological awareness and Oral language proficiency. The Researcher assumed that the result was caused by the focus difference in Speaking for academic setting course materials and the aspects being scored in the speaking test such as fluency, pronunciation, etc.

Regarding the limitations of the findings during the study, the researcher draws some suggestions for better future research. First, it is recommended that the future researcher ensure the focus of the material and aspect being scored for the two skills. Second, it is suggested for the researcher to ensure that the research instrument is in accordance with the research objectives, it is better if the researcher develop their own instrument to collect the data.

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