



ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF PHONETIC AWARENESS ON SPOKEN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION IN ESL LEARNERS

Kanumarlapudi Srinivasu, Research Scholar, Texas Global University

Dr. Kalyana Chakravarthi Thirunagari, Research Supervisor, Texas Global University

ABSTRACT

Phonetic awareness is an elementary skill, having a prominent influence on the spoken competence of ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. The present research aimed to contribute to the exploration of the training's effect in the improvement of pronunciation, comprehension, and speech of learners. It engaged 150 participants from multiple groups, considering age distribution, education levels, years learning ESL, and their professional profiles. Quantitative analysis included Likert-scale assessments and a chi-square test of the responses to determine whether the perception of phonetic awareness does impact real-life communication in the real world. The findings indicate a high relationship between phonetic awareness and enhanced linguistic abilities. Individuals reported significant benefits including more understandable pronunciation, increased confidence at work, and fewer miscommunications within the workplace. Further, the study highlighted the significance of incorporating phonetics in ESL programs because most respondents indicated that it is a component necessary for developing effective communication skills. The findings suggest that phonetic training is beneficial in language acquisition but also helps prepare learners with important tools for successful careers in most sectors. This study reaches a conclusion that phonetic awareness is an essential aspect for ESL learning, contributing, in direct proportion, to both fluency and confidence required within social and professional settings. However, this research suggests that to enhance linguistic competence in ESL subjects, educators and language instruction institutions must emphasize phonetic training in curriculum design as well. Future research can further investigate the long-term effects of phonetic training and its relevance across specific occupational domains.

Keywords: Phonetic awareness, ESL learners, spoken English proficiency, professional communication, phonetic training, workplace interactions, language acquisition, pronunciation skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

English is the leading language in global communication. Its role in professional and academic environments has become more significant over the years. For many non-native speakers, speaking English is a key to success, but pronunciation and fluency are difficult skills to achieve. Phonetic awareness, among other features in learning a language, highlights its importance in acquiring well-crafted and correct spoken English. Phonetic awareness is an understanding and ability to use the sounds of a language to effectively communicate.



Improvement in phonetic skills in ESL learners will reflect on the fluency in the language, but their professional communication would be affected by this.

Pronunciation, though essential to accomplish daily tasks successfully, often is secondary in most ESL programs, with a focus primarily on grammar, vocabulary, and reading. The absence of phonetic training makes it hard to communicate and be communicated with clearly. Phonetic awareness enables a learner to pronounce sounds in English correctly and develops confidence in workplace communication, presentations, and meetings.

This paper will discuss the role of phonetic awareness in the spoken English proficiency and consequently in the professional communication of ESL users. The comparative analysis of responses obtained from a diverse spectrum of participants will examine how phonetic training impacts pronunciation, confidence, and comprehensive communication skills. The results will highlight the significance of ESL programs incorporating phonetic awareness that will help learners meet their academic and professional ends.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Birch (2014) underscores the significance of phonics-related competencies in L2 reading, while expressing concern about their historical marginalization in L2 reading education, attributed to an over focus on whole language methodologies. The term L2 denotes the acquisition of English as both a second and foreign language in this research. Adesope et al. (2011) assert that "despite extensive documentation of the effects of phonics instruction in the literature, there is a paucity of understanding regarding the efficacy of this method in imparting literacy to immigrant students whose primary language is not English." Despite numerous meta-analyses and literature reviews conducted in recent years to elucidate the effectiveness of various methods for enhancing L2 literacy development, none have specifically addressed the role of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in improving English learners' L2 word decoding skills. Increased focus on word decoding proficiency is necessary, since it is generally acknowledged as a fundamental element of L2 reading competence. Similarly, the reading of pseudowords serves as a dependable indicator of reading proficiency, and using pseudoword assessments guarantees that learners have not previously encountered the target words, enabling them to exhibit their phonetic decoding skills to properly recognize the pseudowords. Pseudowords are lexemes that conform to English orthographic conventions but lack semantic significance (e.g., sarp, desh, or chab).

Murphy Odo, D. (2021). Despite significant attempts to comprehend the effects of instructional interventions on L2 reading development, a definitive understanding of the role of phonemic awareness and phonics teaching on reading in English as a second language remains elusive. A review of the scientific literature from 1990 to 2019 identified 45 papers including 46 studies with a total of 3,841 participants. Effect sizes were documented for the impact of several phonological awareness and/or phonics instructional treatments on word and pseudoword reading. The findings indicated that L2 phonological awareness and phonics teaching have a modest influence on L2 word reading ($g = 0.53$) and a substantial impact on



pseudo word reading ($g = 1.51$). Moderator studies indicated the influence of many moderators, including testing technique, kind of PA/phonics intervention, and the setting in which the intervention took place. Based on these results, policymakers and educators may provide novice learners of English as a second language phonemic awareness and phonics education that will enhance their reading, comprehension, and enjoyment of English. Future research should aim to comply with increasingly rigorous criteria of quality in educational research.

Thompson, M. (2022). This non-experimental research aimed to ascertain the impact of English language competency on phonological awareness abilities in second graders. A convenience sample of 101 second-grade students was collected from a school in Northwest Arkansas. Secondary data from the Phonological Awareness Screening Test was examined to ascertain any differences in phonological awareness abilities between native English speakers and English language learners. An study of the data revealed a considerable disparity in phonological awareness abilities between English language learners and native English speakers. Native English-speaking pupils had superior phonological awareness abilities compared to English language learners. The findings of this research may be beneficial for educators, interventionists, administrators, and lawmakers. Numerous research studies (Lonigan & Goodrich, 2018; Russak, 2013; Yesil-Dagli, 2011) have established the necessity of phonological awareness, leading to the implementation of curricula that provide direct instruction in this area. However, non-native English speakers continue to face challenges in developing reading skills. This research contributes to the existing literature by showing that, at least within this sample of children in Northwest Arkansas, non-native English speaking kids have significant difficulties with a crucial component of reading, phonological awareness. The results suggest that English Language Learners need more teaching in phonological awareness than is being offered. Phonological awareness is an essential condition for effective reading. Without phonological awareness abilities, English Language Learners (ELLs) would persistently achieve poorer reading scores, as shown by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017). To bridge this gap, educators must tackle the underlying causes of the issue. Despite the varying foundational abilities among ELL students, such as vocabulary, spoken language proficiency, and phonological awareness, they are entitled to help within their educational institutions. Although several schools employ experts to assist ELL students, other institutions lack such resources. Each kid is entitled to the highest quality education and equitable opportunities for success.

Gandhioke, S. & Singh, C. (2023). This study investigates the importance of intonation in spoken English. The presence of accurate intonation often passes unrecognized by Native Speakers (NS) of English as an automatic process, whereas its deficiency or limited application obstructs communication for speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research, including 110 EFL university students in China, revealed that the majority of students lacked confidence in addressing this aspect of oral discourse due to uncertainty on how to manage a characteristic of which many learners



were unaware. Grammar and vocabulary are made available to learners via numerous tools; nonetheless, the mechanism used for conveying intonation and associated prosodic qualities remains very abstract and intangible. The study, based on observations and recorded oral discourses, was then transcribed for qualitative content analysis (Kvale, 2007). "The findings indicated an increase of interest among the participants." They articulated a fervent desire to rectify their speech deficiencies, master the subtleties necessary for coherent and natural expression, and enhance their comprehension of spoken English for precise verbal communication, therefore substantiating the assertion that intonation is both teachable and learnable.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the research study is to analyze the impact of phonetic awareness on spoken English proficiency and professional communication in ESL learners.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: This study will follow a descriptive and analytical research design in trying to determine the relationship that exists between phonetic awareness, spoken English proficiency, and professional communication skills in ESL learners. The descriptive research aspect is designed to describe demographic variables and their distribution. The analytical research aspect involves describing the relationship that exists between phonetic awareness and an improvement in linguistic and professional communication skills using the Likert scale and chi-square test statistical tools.

Population and Sampling:

- **Population:** The population of this study comprised adult ESL learners who came from different educational, professional, and linguistic backgrounds.
- **Sample Size:** 150 participants were selected for this research to ensure proper representation of both genders, different age groups, educational qualifications, and professional fields.
- **Sampling Technique:** Stratified random sampling technique was used for the needed demographic representation, mainly gender, age, and professional fields.

Tools for Data Collection:

Structured Questionnaire: The respondents answered a questionnaire consisting of demographic questions and Likert-scale items that measured perceptions about phonetic awareness and its effects on communication.

The three sections of the questionnaire were the following:



- **Demographics:** The gender, age, educational background, professional field, and ESL learning experience.
- **Phonetic Awareness and English Proficiency:** Questions about improvement in pronunciation, comprehension, and professional articulation.
- **Professional Communication:** Measured confidence, workplace interaction, and the reduction of misunderstandings.

Likert Scale: A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure responses to statements about phonetic awareness with the following anchors: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Data Analysis Methods:

Descriptive Statistics: Frequency distributions and percentages were calculated to summarize demographic information. "Mean scores were calculated for responses to Likert-scale items to provide an overall indication of trends in perceptions."

Inferential Statistics: A chi-square test would be conducted to find the relationship of phonetic awareness on the proficiency in spoken English. Then, the observed and expected frequency for responses on Likert Scales were compared to understand if it was statistically significant.

V. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents:

Table 1: Demographics of the respondents

	Particulars	F	%
Gender	Female	70	46.7
	Male	80	53.3
	Total	150	100.0
Age Group	18–24	45	30.0
	25–34	60	40.0
	35–44	30	20.0
	45+	15	10.0
	Total	150	100.0
Educational Background	High School Diploma	25	16.7
	Bachelor's Degree	90	60.0
	Master's Degree or Higher	35	23.3
	Total	150	100.0
Years of ESL Learning	Less than 1 Year	15	10.0
	1–3 Years	50	33.3
	4–6 Years	55	36.7
	More than 6 Years	30	20.0
	Total	150	100.0



Field	Education	40	26.7
	Healthcare	25	16.7
	Information Technology	30	20.0
	Business and Finance	35	23.3
	Others (e.g., Retail, Hospitality)	20	13.3
	Total	150	100.0

The 150 respondents provide a balanced and diversified sample, thus allowing for meaningful insight into the study of phonetic awareness in ESL learners.

Gender Distribution: There were 80 males, constituting 53.3% and 70 females constituting 46.7%, with fair gender representation. "Such distribution ensures that findings in this study are not gender biased and therefore offer a broader view of experiences and opinions."

Age Group: The highest number of participants was aged between 25 and 34 years, which accounted for 60 respondents (40.0%). The age group between 18 and 24 years ranked second with 45 participants (30.0%). The age group of 35–44 years constituted 20.0% or 30 respondents, and the age group 45 years and above represented the smallest category at 10.0% or 15 respondents. The findings thus indicate that most of the respondents are within the age bracket of young adults who would probably be busy in career development and English language learning.

Educational Background: Bachelor's degree was the level held by most of the participants (60.0%); that is, most were highly educated. Other people who participated in the survey obtained a master's degree or more than a bachelor's degree and even up to the Ph. D. level at 23.3%. About 16.7 percent had a high school diploma and below. This is therefore an educationally diverse pool in which different levels of educational qualifications could impact on their response concerning phonetic awareness and ESL learning.

ESL learning experience: The majority in ESL learning experience is 36.7% who had studied it from 4–6 years; this is the highest experience so recorded. About 33.3% had 1–3 years of experience, whereas 20.0% more than 6 years experienced it. Only 10.0% had an ESL experience for less than one year. These figures suggest that most respondents have a moderate to advanced level of familiarity with English, making them well-suited for evaluating the impact of phonetic awareness on spoken proficiency.

Professional Field: Respondents were drawn from a wide range of professional fields, with education (26.7%) and business and finance (23.3%) being the most represented sectors. Information technology professionals accounted for 20.0%, followed by healthcare at 16.7%. A smaller proportion (13.3%) belonged to other industries such as retail and hospitality. This diversity indicates that the study's findings could have broad applicability across different occupational contexts, especially regarding professional communication and phonetic awareness in workplace interactions.

The demographic profile depicts a very diversified and balanced sample with respect to gender, age, education, ESL learning experience, and professional background. It ensures that



the study encompasses a large range of experiences that will yield valuable insights about the relationship between phonetic awareness, spoken English proficiency, and professional communication.

Table 2: Analysis of the Impact of Phonetic Awareness on ESL Learners

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean Score
1. Improved pronunciation of spoken English in phonetic awareness.	10	15	30	65	30	3.83
2. Confidence in professional setup: clear pronunciation.	5	10	20	70	45	3.97
3. Improves the ability to hear and understand spoken English, through phonetic training.	8	12	25	75	30	3.89
4. Better interaction with colleagues: improved phonetics.	7	10	35	60	38	3.84
5. Improved articulation in professional communication.	6	9	28	68	39	3.92
6. Phonetic awareness reduced misunderstandings in the workplace.	8	10	22	75	35	3.89
7. Phonetic awareness should be a focus area in ESL programs.	5	8	25	65	47	4.00

- **Phonetic Awareness and Pronunciation:** The respondents scored the role of phonetic awareness in improving pronunciation with a mean score of 3.83, which reflects a very strong positive impact.
- **Confidence in Professional Settings:** The statement received a high mean score of 3.97, which shows that most respondents agree that pronunciation skills increase confidence.
- **Understanding Spoken English:** With a mean score of 3.89, most respondents agreed that phonetic training is beneficial for comprehension.
- **Workplace Interaction:** A score of 3.84 indicates that enhanced phonetic ability has positively impacted communication at the workplace.
- **Professional Articulation:** The respondents agreed to the fact that phonetic awareness contributes to articulation as well, with a mean score of 3.92.
- **Avoiding Misunderstandings:** A mean score of 3.89 indicates that phonetic ability reduces issues with communication at the workplace.
- **Importance in ESL Classes:** The highest mean score is 4.00, which indicates that phonetics is what should be focused on in ESL classes.

A Likert-scale analysis indicates respondent consensus: phonetic awareness is important to improve on an appropriate level of spoken English proficiencies as well as at communicating for professional use. Data justifies the introduction of phonetics with regard to ESL programs for implementing practical skills in a proper direction.

**Hypothesis Testing:**

H₀: Phonetic awareness bears no relationship to enhanced spoken English proficiency.

H₁: Phonetic awareness does have a relationship with enhanced spoken English proficiency.

We thus test this hypothesis by carrying out the analysis of the response for Statement 1 on improved pronunciation of spoken English through phonetic awareness in terms of observed and expected frequencies.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test Table

Response	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O-E) ² /E
Strongly Disagree (SD)	10	24	8.17
Disagree (D)	15	24	3.38
Neutral (N)	30	24	1.50
Agree (A)	65	24	70.04
Strongly Agree (SA)	30	24	1.50
Total	150	150	84.59

Calculation:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E} = 84.59$$

Degrees of Freedom (df):

$$df = (\text{Categories} - 1) = 5 - 1 = 4$$

Significance Level (α):

At $\alpha=0.05$, $\alpha = 0.05$ and $df=4$, the critical value from the chi-square distribution table is 9.488.

Since $\chi^2=84.59 > 9.488$, we reject the null hypothesis (H₀).

This implies that phonetic awareness is significantly correlated with enhanced proficiency in spoken English.

Table 4: Main Analysis: ESL Learners' Responses to Phonetic Awareness

Aspect	Negative Responses (Disagree + Strongly Disagree)	Neutral	Positive Responses (Agree + Strongly Agree)	Percentage Positive (%)
Improved pronunciation	25	30	95	63.3
Confidence in professional setup	15	20	115	76.7
Better understanding of	20	25	105	70.0



spoken English				
Improved interaction with colleagues	17	35	98	65.3
Improved articulation in professional settings	15	28	107	71.3
Reduced workplace misunderstandings	18	22	110	73.3
Phonetic awareness focus in ESL programs	13	25	112	74.7

This table combines the responses of respondents for different aspects of phonetic awareness and its influence in professional communication.

Mostly the respondents agreed or strongly agreed for all parameters. Responses under confidence in professional environments and phonetic awareness attention to ESL programs were highly positive at 76.7% and 74.7%, respectively.

Scores in the neutral range 20% to 35% indicate some degree of hesitation or variability in opinions.

The overall negative responses were below 20% for all the aspects, which generally fortified the general positive perception of phonetic awareness as a critical factor for improving spoken English proficiency and professional communication.

Results of the chi-square test and respondent feedback indicate a significant relationship between phonetic awareness and its impact on spoken English and professional communication. Findings like these validate the hypothesis that enhancing phonetic skills among ESL learners positively affects their linguistic and workplace interactions.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study brings out the crucial role that phonetic awareness plays in enhancing spoken English proficiency and professional communication for ESL learners. Findings show that the participants, who were diverse in terms of demographic and professional backgrounds, recognize the value of phonetic training in several aspects of language use. Key improvements reported are clearer pronunciation, increased confidence in professional settings, better comprehension of spoken English, and fewer misunderstandings in workplace interactions. The results also underscore the importance of phonetic awareness in the development of better articulation and communication, particularly at work. Most of the respondents agreed that the use of phonetic skills is very important in ESL learning programs to help learners acquire fluency and confidence in using the English language.

The study provides strong evidence of a direct relationship between phonetic awareness and enhanced spoken English proficiency through the application of statistical analysis, including a chi-square test. In conclusion, phonetic awareness emerges as an essential element in the process of ESL learners toward the achievement of effective communication. This study



underlines the role of language educators to focus more on phonetics so that learners can overcome barriers in their lives and succeed in either personal or professional settings. Future studies may expand on the findings here by examining the effects of phonetic awareness over longer time periods or in specific occupational settings.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Adesope O. O., Lavin T., Thompson T., Ungerleider C. (2011). Pedagogical strategies for teaching literacy to ESL immigrant students: A meta-analysis. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(4), 629–653. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2010.02015.x>
- [2]. Birch B. M. (2014). *English L2 reading: Getting to the bottom*. Routledge.
- [3]. Carnoy, M., & Garcia, E. (2017, January 12). Five key trends in U.S. student performance: Progress by Blacks and Hispanics, the takeoff of Asians, the stall of non-English speakers, the persistence of socioeconomic gaps, and the damaging effect of highly segregated schools. Economic Policy Institute. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588043.pdf>
- [4]. Gandhioke, S. and Singh, C. (2023) Learner Awareness of the “Music” of Spoken English—Focus on Intonation—And Its Impact on Communicative Competence. Is Intonation Teachable and Learnable? *Creative Education*, 14, 454-468. doi: [10.4236/ce.2023.143031](https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2023.143031)
- [5]. Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews*. SAGE Publications. <https://methods.sagepub.com/book/doing-interviews>. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849208963>
- [6]. Lonigan, C. J., & Goodrich, J. M. (2018). Identifying differences in early literacy skills across subgroups of language-minority children: A latent profile analysis. *Developmental Psychology*, 54(4), 631-647.
- [7]. Murphy Odo, D. (2021). A Meta-Analysis of the Effect of Phonological Awareness and/or Phonics Instruction on Word and Pseudo Word Reading of English as an L2. *Sage Open*, 11(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211059168>
- [8]. Russak, S. (2013). The contribution of phonological awareness to literacy acquisition in English as a foreign language: Cross-linguistic implications. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, 39(1), 17-22.
- [9]. Thompson, M. (2022). The effect of English language proficiency on phonological awareness skills among second graders. *Journal of Graduate Education Research*, 3, 15-19.
- [10]. Yesil-Dagli, U. (2011). Predicting ELL students’ beginning first grade English oral reading fluency from initial kindergarten vocabulary, letter naming, and phonological awareness skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26, 15-29.