

Phonological Awareness in Typical Children Speaking English

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Abstract

Phonological awareness is an individual awareness to the sound structure or phonological structure of a spoken word in contrast to written word. Phonological awareness to be examined in the broader scope of phonology because we find that long before a child become aware of the phonological structure of words, he or she has specialised phonological knowledge. The purpose of the study is to describe the phonological awareness in 3-7 years old typical children speaking English. Twenty typical children speaking English were randomly picked up from various schools in Kerala in the range of 3-7 years. Three subtests syllable blending, phoneme blending, rhyme from the Phonological Awareness Test was adapted with modification to suit Indian population was used as stimuli. Statistical analysis revealed high significant difference across age groups for all the subtests.

Introduction

Phonology is the ability to hear the differences between sounds in spoken words. Children that lack phonological awareness are unable to comprehend alliteration, the meaning of rhyme, or the fact that some words are longer than others.

Phonological awareness describes awareness of how spoken language consists of smaller components and ability to identify and manipulate these. Torgerson, Brooks, Gascoine and Higgins (2019), Ehri & Flugman (2018).

The International Literacy Association (2020) confirms that phonological awareness particularly at the phoneme level has a direct role in many components of literacy development including decoding and spelling. (The International Literacy Association 2020)

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken parts of sentence and word. Examples include being able to identify words that rhyme, recognize alliteration, segmenting a sentence into words, identifying the syllables in a word and blending and segmenting onset-rhymes.

Phonological awareness is concerned with the sounds of spoken language and has nothing to do with the letters of our alphabet. Phonological awareness relates to the child's understanding of whether spoken words are made up of sounds, other words may exist within a word, or that word may be made up of syllables made up of phonemes.

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that includes four developmental levels:

- Word awareness
- Syllable awareness
- Onset-Rhyme awareness
- Phonemic awareness

Moats (2010) reported that Phonological awareness is essential for reading because written words correspond to spoken words. Readers must have awareness of the speech sounds that letters and letter combinations represent in order to move from a printed word to a spoken word (reading) or a spoken word to a written word (spelling).

Varghese and Kumaraswamy (2012) investigated the phonological awareness skills (isolation and deletion tasks) in 5-8 years old typically developing English speaking children and she concluded that at the age of 8 years the isolation and deletion tasks were easier than at the age of 5 years.

Moyle, Heilmann and Berman (2013) evaluated the assessment of early developing phonological awareness Skills: A Comparison of the Preschool Individual Growth and Development Indicators and the Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening, the results suggested that the PALS-PreK (Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening–Pre kindergarten) was more advantageous than the IGDIs (Individual Growth and Development Indicators) in terms of providing meaningful data for this group of children. The IGDIs appeared to be more appropriate for developmentally advanced pre-schoolers in this population.

Chacko and Kumaraswamy (2015) investigated a few phonological awareness skills in 6–8-Year-old typically developing English speaking children and found that within and across the age groups, younger children (6 years) were sensitive to larger linguistic units but

less so to smaller linguistic units and older children (8 years) were sensitive to both larger and smaller linguistic units.

Need for the Study

English is considered to be the main mode of education and used from age of 3 years when children enter play school. In spite of being a successively learnt second language, English is the primary language of official teaching and medium of education. Considering this point, it can be anticipated that comprehending phonological awareness skills in Indian English using children will assess in dealing with later literacy and language issues. Hence, the current study highlights the importance of phonological awareness in Indian English Context with the objective of describing of phonological awareness skills in typical children speaking English in the age range of 3-7 years.

Methodology

Aim: The aim of the study was to describe the phonological awareness in 3-7 years old typical children speaking English.

Participants: Twenty typical children in the age range of 3 to 7 years was randomly picked up from various schools of Kerala.

Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- All the children were attending English medium school.
- Parents were also using English at home.
- No history of speech language and hearing impairment
- No neurological impairment
- Subject did not have otological, psychological or ophthalmic problems.
- Language profiling of the subjects were evaluated using LEAP-Q

(*LEAP-Q: Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire, Marian. V, Blumenfeld, K.H and Koushanskaya, 2007).

Exclusion Criteria:

- Children with history of speech, language and hearing impairment and other neurological problems are excluded.
- Children who does not have any exposure to English Language.

Test Materials

Three subtests syllable blending, phoneme blending and rhyme from the Phonological Awareness Test 2 (Linguist, 2010) was adapted with modification to suit Indian population was used as a stimulus.

- 1) Syllable Blending: For syllable blending the child had to blend the syllables pronounced by the experimenter to form a word.
(For example: biscuit=bis-cuit)
- 2) Phoneme Blending: When pronouncing phonemes, the child has to leave a 1 second gap between each phoneme. After that the child has to blend each phoneme. (For example: m-u-m=mum, d-o-g=dog)
- 3) Rhyme: The child has to pronounce the words with equal emphasis at 1 second interval. (For example: PEN-HEN-BUG=BUG)

Test Procedure

Every child was tested independently. The test was conducted in a silent room along with proper lightings. Each child was positioned at length of 1 foot distance in front of the laptop microphone. Before recording of the sample, the clinician had an informal interaction with every child in order to build rapport. The study consists of three subtests that derived from phonological awareness test with adequate alteration. All children were instructed to blend the syllables, phonemes and to pronounce the words with equal emphasis on the stimuli presented. Parent's consent was taken before the test procedure.

Recording

The PRAAT version 6.3.03, (Paul Boersma, 2022), software was used for recording responses. Sampling rate of 44100Hz and quantisation level set at 16 bits. For every correct response a score of 1 was given and for incorrect response a score of 0 was given. The results obtained are discussed below.

Results and Discussion

The study aimed at describing the phonological awareness skill in typical children speaking English. The obtained data were statistically analysed and discussed.

FIGURE 1: COMPARISON ACROSS 3 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

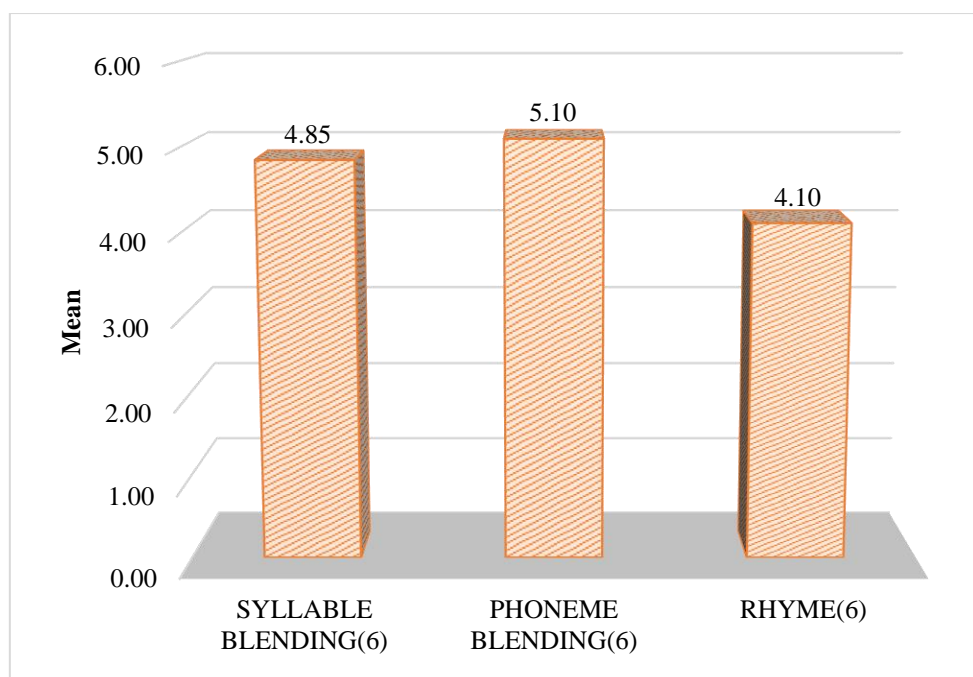


Table 1: Comparison across 3 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	IQR		Wilcoxon signed rank test p value (adjusted)		
					Lower	Upper	SYLLABLE Vs PHONEME	SYLLABLE Vs RHYME	PHONEME Vs RHYME
SYLLABLE BLENDING (6)	20	4.85	1.954	6.00	4.00	6.00	0.261, NS	0.030, Sig	0.005, HS
PHONEME BLENDING (6)	20	5.10	1.683	6.00	4.25	6.00			
RHYME (6)	20	4.10	2.174	5.00	2.25	6.00			

It can be seen from the above table and figure (FIGURE 1 & TABLE 1) children in the age range of 3-7 years had developed phonological awareness skills. Syllable blending showed a mean value of 4.85, Phoneme Blending mean value of 5.10, Rhyme mean value of 4.10. High significant difference was seen for Phoneme Blending and Rhyme. Significant difference was seen for Syllable Blending and Rhyme. No significant difference was seen when the data was cross compared across the age. Statistical analysis revealed high significant difference across age groups for all three subtests.

Phonological awareness is a strong predictor for a child's reading success. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term which covers basic awareness of speech sounds (knowledge that sounds make up onset-rimes, onset-rimes make up syllables, syllables make

up words) and the advanced skills such as manipulation (substituting, deleting, reversing) of words.

High significant difference across age groups for all the 3 subtests were noted and it is accordance with the study done by Chacko and Kumaraswamy (2015) few phonological awareness skills in 6–8-Year-Old Typically Developing English Speaking Children it is concluded that children at the age of 8 years are easier to segment the syllables than the age of 7 years. From the present study it is also evident that as age increases, children were able to improve phonological awareness skills.

Summary and Conclusion

Phonological awareness is a key early indicator of emergent and proficient reading, including an explicit awareness of the structure of words, syllables, onset-rime, and individual phonemes. Together with phonics, phonological awareness (in particular phonemic awareness) is an integral component of reading instruction (Torgerson et al., 2019)

The present study attempt to describe the phonological awareness skills in English speaking Indian children. 20 typically developing English speaking Indian children who are in the age range of 3-7 years were taken as subjects.

Three subtests (syllable blending, phoneme blending and rhyme) from phonological awareness test 2 (Linguist, 2010) was taken for the present study.

The obtained data was subjected to statistical analysis. The results showed that high significant difference was seen in phoneme blending and rhyme whereas significant difference was seen in syllable blending and rhyme. The statistical data showed high significant difference across age group. Within the age group 3-7 years, elder children performed better in all 3 subtests than younger children. These skills are prerequisites for learning to read and spell. So, it is significant to know the development of these skills in the age range of 3-7 years.

Limitations

- Sample size was less hence validity of the result was less reliable.
- Only 3 subtests have been adapted.
- The study does not categories the age group from 3-7 years.

Future Directions

- Test can be administered on other languages too.
- Sample size can be increased.
- The study could be done with more subtests.

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