

## DEVELOPING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND PRONUNCIATION OF THE FIFTH GRADERS BY USING RHYMING POEMS

**Mita Elliyuspita**

*ellicute1985@gmail.com*

SMAN 1 Banyuasin 1

**Abstract:** The objectives of this study were to find out whether or not there was a significant difference in phonological awareness and pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not and to analyze the difficulties encountered by the students in developing their phonological awareness and pronunciation. This was nonequivalent-groups pretest-posttest design. Forty out of 262 fifth graders of SDN 117 Palembang were purposively taken as the samples. The data were analyzed using t-test and questionnaire. The findings showed that there was a significant difference in phonological awareness and pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not. Furthermore, the result of the questionnaire revealed that the students had difficulties in developing their phonological awareness and pronunciation by using rhyming poems. Quick explanation by the writer, too much information and the difficulty of the concepts of phonological awareness were the sources of students' difficulty. The findings of this study also found that the students were not accustomed to pronouncing words in English. The pronunciation of English sounds was confusing for them which might be caused by the fact that there are English sounds that do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *phonological awareness, pronunciation, rhyming poems, fifth graders*

In the process of teaching and learning English for the fifth graders at elementary schools, the exposure to the English pronunciation occurs when the fifth graders are asked to read aloud and practice their pronunciation by repeating the words

they mispronounce. Therefore, phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation are good to be developed to young learners.

Since English in Indonesia is learned as a foreign language, before young learners learn to read English,

they have few or limited spoken words in mind, and young learners have rarely or never been trained in phonological awareness (PA). Therefore, they may find learning English very difficult and dull, especially if the learning is concerned with sounds or pronunciation.

Phonological awareness (PA) is needed to be exposed to the English young learners as many young learners are not aware of the English sounds. In addition, many researchers have asserted that phonological awareness (PA) capacity is essential for the development of early reading (Huang, Lin, & Su, 2004, p.61). Young learners begin to develop the skills they need to recognize words, such as orthography (letters), phonology (sound) and the links between orthography and phonology. Therefore, English young learners (EYL) need to be exposed with such materials as evidence shows that phonological awareness (PA) training can equip children with the ability to decode the words correctly and improve reading (Huang, Lin, & Su, 2004, pp.61-62). Therefore, if the young learners are not able to hear the separate sounds in words, they cannot relate these sounds to letters of the alphabets and so cannot use

decoding to understand the unknown words.

Phonological awareness (PA) seems to be especially linked to the ability to pronounce new words. According to Treiman (1991) cited in Huang, Lin, & Su (2004, p.63), when children read new words, they use two routes or methods, to pronounce them. The first route involves using memorized associations between familiar printed words (sight words) and their pronunciation. The second route involves “sounding out” the word by constructing a pronunciation from the word’s printed form.

In this case, the development of phonological awareness (PA) can turn into the development of the students’ pronunciation. A consideration of learners’ pronunciation errors and how these can inhibit successful communication is a useful basis on which to assess why it is important to deal with pronunciation in the classroom.

Pronunciation is an integrated and integral part of second/foreign language learning since it directly affects learners' communicative competence as well as performance to a substantial extent. Notwithstanding, the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL), pronunciation has received varied

treatment from having no room in the synthetic syllabus and the grammar-translation method to being the cardinal focus in the situational syllabus and the audio-lingual method in which emphasis is put on the traditional notions of pronunciation, minimal pairs, drills and mini-conversations.

Maniruzzaman (2009) states that a lack of knowledge of pronunciation could affect learners' reading and spelling. Furthermore, a learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for a speaker from another community to understand. Eskenazi (1999, p.448) says that proficient pronunciation is essential to language learning because below a certain level of pronunciation, even if grammar and vocabulary have been mastered, communication obviously cannot take place. Pronunciation is very important and learners should pay close attention to pronunciation as early as possible. Otherwise, the result will be that advanced learners find that they can improve all aspects of their proficiency in English except their pronunciation, and mistakes which have been repeated for years are impossible to eradicate.

Many learners tend to focus on learning English on more meaning-based than the English sounds. In

line with this, the previous study that was conducted by Chen, Yau (1989) and Hsieh's (1999) cited in Huang, Lin, & Su, 2004, p.62) that when Chinese students learn a new English word, they often emphasize the spelling and meaning of the word but ignore its sound and, consequently, are not familiar with how to detect and guess the sounds and syllables of the new words. Since their reading is frequently interrupted to look up words in a dictionary for meanings and pronunciations, they either find reading a tough task or just give up reading altogether. Furthermore, Troia (2004, p.1) finds that numerous intervention studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of explicit phonological awareness (PA) training for children with and without disabilities. In those studies, the majority children who receive such instruction make substantial progress in both decoding and spelling proficiency.

Based on the informal observation done by the writer at SDN 117 Palembang, most of the fifth graders of SDN 117 Palembang could not pronounce certain sounds well that did not exist in Bahasa Indonesia such as /θ/ and /ð/. They tended to pronounce /θ/ as /t/ and /ð/ as /d/. In other words, they tended to transfer their knowledge of their first

language (L1) Bahasa Indonesia to English such as the sound /ʃ/ is pronounced /s/ like in the words “she” and “show” and they also tended to pronounce the sound /p/ in the word “phone” instead of /f/. Another problem the fifth graders had was the overgeneralization of the words in English. The fifth graders tended to pronounce “put” as /pʌt/ instead of /put/ as the way to pronounce the words “but”, “cut”, and “hut”. In other words, they tend to overgeneralize the pronunciation.

Chard and Dickson (1999, p.261) state that phonological awareness (PA) can be developed through carefully planned instruction, and this development has significant influence on young learners’ reading and spelling achievement.

Phonological awareness (PA) seems to be especially linked to the ability to pronounce new words. A fun way of practicing the production of difficult sounds is through the use of tongue-twister and rhymes (Kelly, 2007: 16). Rhymes can be found in poems. Rhyming poem is one of the ways to develop the fifth graders’ phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation. In the rhyming poems, there are some words that have the same initial sounds, middle sounds or the ending sounds so that

the students can be exposed to the similar sounds. This way can be used in developing the students’ phonological awareness (PA) when the students recognize the similar sounds or different sounds in the beginning and ending words in rhyming poems. Sadlier-Oxford (2000, p.2) says that rhymes have long been accepted as having a place in the preschool classroom and the range of rhymes that can be used is extensive. Furthermore, Holdaway’s observations (1979) cited in Sadlier-Oxford (2002, p.2) supports the finding of the rhymes use in preschool. The teacher in preschool use rhymes and songs with groups of children or the whole class, which has a real social benefit as children chant and sing in unison.

To develop the fifth graders’ phonological awareness and pronunciation, rhymes are one of the fun ways that can be applied in the process of teaching and learning. Many examples of rhymes can be found in poems. Rhyming poem is one of the ways to develop the pupils’ phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation because rhyming poems focus on the sounds and rhymes that can help young learners figure out how language works and help them to read.

Burrows (2005) says that rhymes offer such a teaching resource. They are the traditional verses that have been handed down orally over the generations and young children. Rhyming poems develop the young learners' language skills that seem a logical step to give the young learners who are starting to learn English as a foreign language (EFL). Gumiel (2005) also states that rhymes help children's language, rhymes are short enough for the age-group to remember, rhymes require active participation of the students, rhymes are quite repetitive, rhymes are an authentic material, rhymes provide examples of 'real' language and help to bring the 'real' world into the classroom. Moreover, rhymes contribute to encourage learners' interest to study the language, rhymes are useful to establish a warm and relaxing atmosphere in the classroom. The language in rhymes is rich and colorful and extends the children's vocabulary beyond the limited range of their own day-to-day experiences.

Young learners can learn new words, learn the rhythmic patterns of language, learn to hear the individual sounds with words, practice the production of difficult sounds, and develop their communication skills by having such fun activities using

rhyming poems. Dombey (1999, as cited in Konza (2006, p.37) says that rhyming also helps children relate sounds patterns to the letter cluster that represent them in words like "pale", "male", and "tale", which assists both reading and spelling. Thus an awareness of rhyme that can be found out in rhyming poems has a significant role to play in literacy development. Therefore, this study is important to conduct as it might provide opportunity for the young learners in developing their phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation.

The problems of this study were formulated in the following research questions:

- 1) Was there any significant difference in phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not?
- 2) What were the difficulties encountered by the fifth graders in developing their phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study applied a quasi experimental research design, that is

called *nonequivalent-groups pretest-posttest design*.

The participants of this study were the fifth graders of SDN 117 Palembang. In determining the total number of the subjects of this study, purposive sampling method was used. 40 fifth graders were selected as samples based on the following criteria: (1) the classes were taught by the same teacher, (2) the fifth graders were in the same age, (3) lack of pronunciation ability in learning English and (4) did not take English course. 20 fifth graders were chosen as the experimental group and 20 fifth graders were chosen as the control group.

To avoid misunderstanding, some important terms in this study need to be defined operationally. Terms such as phonological awareness, pronunciation, and rhyming poems were defined specifically in context of this study. In this study, phonological awareness is the state of having knowledge or consciousness of and the ability that should be developed and taught to English young learners at elementary school in order to be able to detect and manipulate the different sounds used in words. Furthermore, pronunciation In this study refers to how the fifth graders of SDN 117

Palembang produce sounds, stress intonation of the words correctly.

In this study, rhyming poems mean the poems which have many words that are ended with the same sound that was used to develop the fifth graders of SDN 117 Palembang in phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation. This study applied (1) content validity, (2) construct validity, (3) tryout, (4) experienced lecturers' judgment, and (4) interrater reliability.

KR21 was used to find out the reliability for phonological awareness and Pearson Product Moment was used to find out the reliability for pronunciation. The reliability coefficient for phonological awareness test was 1.00 and the reliability coefficient for pronunciation test was 0.846. Phonological awareness test, pronunciation test, and questionnaire were tried out at SD Methodist 2. The test was reliable if the reliable coefficient was higher than 0.7. Phonological awareness test and pronunciation test were reliable because the reliability coefficients were more than 0.7.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In this research the data were obtained through the tests (pretest and posttest) and questionnaire. The

tests were used to determine the significant difference resulting from teaching of phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation by using rhyming poems between the experimental group and the control group. The questionnaire was given to the experimental group. The questionnaire was used to find out the fifth graders' difficulties in developing phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation during the treatment.

In scoring the significant difference in phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not, the formula proposed by Direktorat Pendidikan Umum, Ditjen, Dikdasmen, Depdiknas (2004) were used.

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\mathbf{B}}{\mathbf{N}} \times 100$$

Where:

B: right answer

N: total of the test item

To score the phonological awareness test and the analytic rubric for assessment of Scoring Rubric for Pronunciation proposed by Baker (2009).

Furthermore, paired samples t-test statistical procedure was used through the statistical package for social science (SPSS/P) 16 program for windows to find out whether or not there was a significant difference in phonological awareness (PA) of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not and there was a significant difference in pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not.

In answering the third problem of this study, the responses of the fifth graders toward questionnaire were analyzed to find out their difficulties in encountering the development of phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation during the treatment.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Phonological Awareness**

The highest phonological awareness score in the pretest of the experimental group was 70.00; the lowest score was 56.00; and the mean was 63.10 The highest score in posttest of the experimental group was 84.00; the lowest score was 58.00; and the 74.00 (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Pretest Scores of Phonological Awareness (Experimental Group)**

| Experimental | N  | Min   | Max   | Mean    | Std. Dev |
|--------------|----|-------|-------|---------|----------|
| Pretest      | 20 | 56.00 | 70.00 | 63.1000 | 5.08765  |
| Posttest     | 20 | 58.00 | 84.00 | 74.0000 | 6.55342  |

Meanwhile the highest phonological awareness score in the pretest of the control group was 76.00; the lowest score was 50.00; and the mean was 61.10 (Table 2).

**Table 2. Pretest Scores of Phonological Awareness (Control Group)**

| Experimental | N  | Min   | Max   | Mean    | Std. Dev |
|--------------|----|-------|-------|---------|----------|
| Pretest      | 20 | 50.00 | 76.00 | 61.1000 | 6.66412  |
| Posttest     | 20 | 54.00 | 78.00 | 63.8000 | 7.72964  |

The result of the paired samples t-test; paired samples difference in mean between pretest and posttest of phonological awareness achievement in experimental group was 1.09, with standard deviation of 7.00 and t-obtained was 6.96 at the significant

level 0.05 and the degree of freedom 19, and the critical value of t-table for two tailed test was 1.729. It can be shown in the table below.

The result showed that the research hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) was accepted and the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) was rejected.

**Table 3. Paired Sample Test of Phonological Awareness Achievement in the Experimental Group (N-20)**

|                         | Paired Differences |                |   |        | T      | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------|---|--------|--------|----|-----------------|
|                         | Mean               | Std. Deviation | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |        |        |    |                 |
|                         |                    |                | Lower                                     | Upper  |        |    |                 |
| Pair Pretest - Posttest | -1.09000E1         | 7.00301        | -14.177                                   | -7.622 | -6.961 | 19 | .000            |

It means that there was a significant difference in phonological awareness (PA) of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not.

**Pronunciation**

The highest pronunciation score in the pretest of the experimental group was 69.00; the lowest score was 40.00; and the mean was 53.35. The highest score in posttest of the



experimental group was 82.50; the lowest score was 62.50; and the 71.95. The Table is shown below.

**Table 4. Pretest Scores of Pronunciation (Experimental Group)**

| Experimental | N  | Min   | Max   | Mean    | Std. Dev |
|--------------|----|-------|-------|---------|----------|
| Pretest      | 20 | 40.00 | 69.00 | 53.3500 | 7.65042  |
| Posttest     | 20 | 62.5  | 82.5  | 71.950  | 5.7854   |

Meanwhile the highest pronunciation score in the pretest of the control group was 62.50; the lowest score was 39.50; and the mean was 51.525. The highest score in posttest of the control group was 65.00; the lowest score was 40.00; and the 54.275. The Table is shown below.

**Table 5. Pretest Scores of Pronunciation (Control Group)**

| Control  | N  | Min  | Max  | Mean   | Std. Dev |
|----------|----|------|------|--------|----------|
| Pretest  | 20 | 39.5 | 62.5 | 51.525 | 6.9594   |
| Posttest | 20 | 40.0 | 65.0 | 54.275 | 7.0215   |

The result of the paired samples t-test; paired samples difference in mean between pretest and posttest of pronunciation achievement in experimental group was 1.86, with standard deviation 8.87 and t-obtained was 9.37 at the significant level of 0.05 and the degree of freedom 19, and the critical value of t-table for two tailed test was 1.729.

**Table 6. Paired Samples Test of Pronunciation Achievement in the Experimental Group (N-20)**

|                           | Paired Differences |          |                 |   |         | T     | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|---------------------------|--------------------|----------|-----------------|---|---------|-------|----|-----------------|
|                           | Mean               | Std. Dev | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference |         |       |    |                 |
|                           |                    |          |                 | Lower                                     | Upper   |       |    |                 |
| Pair 1 Pretest - Posttest | -1.860             | 8.877    | 1.98501         | -22.754                                   | -14.445 | -9.30 | 19 | .000            |

It can be stated that the research hypothesis (H<sub>2</sub>) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H<sub>02</sub>) was rejected. It means that there was a significant difference in pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by

using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not.

### **The Result of Questionnaire**

Based on the fifth graders' responses toward questionnaire, 95% fifth graders learnt English since they were in the first grade of elementary school and another fifth grader (5%) learnt English since they were in the kindergarten. Furthermore, all the fifth graders in the experimental group only learnt English once a week at school and they also did not take an English course. In addition, 50% fifth graders liked learning English and another 50% did not like learning English. The reason for those who liked learning English were (1) English was easy to understand, (2) their English teacher was good, (3) English could help them to study overseas, (4) they could be able to speak English with the foreigners, and (5) learning English was challenging. Other reasons for those who did not like learning English were (1) English was difficult to understand, (2) it was very hard to pronounce some words in English, and (3) there were so many vocabularies in English that were difficult to memorize.

The fifth graders in the experimental group still had some difficulties related to phonological

awareness concepts even though those concepts had already been taught during the treatment. Some concepts made them confused and difficult to understand because phonological awareness was not taught at school. Besides that, based on the responses toward the questionnaire, there were 3 fifth graders or 23% of fifth graders responded to some phonological awareness concepts which were difficult to understand. Some concepts that made them confused were rhyme recognition, rhyme production, syllable blending, phoneme blending, phoneme deletion of initial sound, and phoneme deletion of final sound.

There were some reasons why the fifth graders encountered difficulties in developing phonological awareness: They got confused with those concepts (53.84%), those concepts were difficult to understand, they did not know the meanings of words given as examples (38.46%), and phonological awareness was not learned at school (7.69%).

In addition, 45% or 8 fifth graders also had problems with the pronunciation of some words especially with the sounds that do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia such as /θ/ in "three" and /ð/ in "there". On the

other hand, based on the fifth graders' responses to the question no. 17, 35% or 7 fifth graders thought that homophones and homographs were difficult and complicated to understand because they needed to know the differences among some words that needed to be practically and frequently pronounced. Furthermore, based on the fifth graders' responses to the question no. 18, 20% or 4 fifth graders responded that they were not accustomed to pronouncing the words in English and 20% or 4 fifth graders also responded that some English sounds did not exist in *Bahasa Indonesia*. They got confused because some words are difficult to pronounce even though those words were pronounced repeatedly to the fifth graders.

### **Interpretation of Developing Phonological Awareness by Using Rhyming Poems**

There are some reasons why rhyming poems can develop the fifth graders' phonological awareness. First, rhyming poems is a good teaching resource or material for the English teacher that both capture the fifth graders' enthusiasm for learning and develop their language skills (Burrows, 2005, p.1).

Second, the fifth graders had high motivation and enthusiasm in

learning and developing phonological awareness. Most of them could catch the phonological awareness concepts that were taught every meeting. They could also easily adapt the rhyming poems that were given every meeting. They had already known what they should do with the poems. The fifth graders were exposed to phonological awareness by using rhyming poems so the fifth graders' phonological awareness developed significantly. Third, the treatment of phonological awareness by using rhyming poems was held three times a week for sixteen meetings (2 x 45 minutes). They could remember easily materials that they learnt in the previous meeting. So, the time frequency in learning the phonological awareness by using rhyming poems helped the fifth graders develop their phonological awareness so that their scores results in posttest were higher compared to their scores in pretest.

### **Interpretation of Developing Pronunciation by Using Rhyming Poems**

There are some reasons why rhyming poems can develop the fifth graders' pronunciation. First, rhyming poems helped the fifth graders to improve their

pronunciation because poems should be read aloud by them. The fifth graders could express their emotion and imagination by reading aloud the poems. Bromley cited in Vianty, 2002: 168) says that poems often contain rhyme, rhythm, and repetition that enhance their message and impact, they should be read aloud to be best enjoyed. Secondly, rhyming poems focus on the sounds and rhymes that can help the fifth graders figure out how language works and help them to read. The rhyming words in the poems helped them to decode the words. Furthermore, the fifth graders learned to hear the individual sounds with words, learned new words, learned rhythmic patterns of language, learned the individual sounds with words, and practiced the production of difficult sounds. From rhyming poems, some ways or techniques were applied in developing their pronunciation. The fifth graders were asked to drill or practice to read the poems by emphasizing the rhyming words, identify the minimal pairs, homophones and homographs, and also read the poems aloud. Third, the treatment of pronunciation by using rhyming poems was held three times a week for sixteen meetings (2 x 45) minutes. They could easily

remember the words that were learnt and pronounced in the previous frequency in exposing the pronunciation by using rhyming poems helped the fifth graders develop their pronunciation so that their scores results in posttest were higher compared to their scores results in pretest.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on findings and interpretations, some conclusions can be drawn. First, there was a significant difference in phonological awareness (PA) of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not. Second, there was a significant difference in pronunciation of the fifth graders who were taught by using rhyming poems compared to that of those who were not. Third, from the analyses of the data gathered during the experiment and after the experiment, it could be concluded that the fifth graders could develop their phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation. Fourth, based on the analysis of the fifth graders' responses toward questionnaire that was given after the treatments, the fifth graders in the experimental group got some difficulties in

developing their phonological awareness and pronunciation. The fifth graders still had some difficulties related to phonological awareness concepts even though those concepts had already been taught during the treatment. Some concepts made them confused and difficult to understand because phonological awareness was not taught at school. Besides that, there were 3 fifth graders or 23% of fifth graders responded to the difficult concepts of phonological awareness they learnt. Some concepts that made them confused were rhyme recognition, rhyme production, syllable blending, phoneme blending, phoneme deletion of initial sound, and phoneme deletion of final sound. There were some reasons why the fifth graders encountered some difficulties in developing phonological awareness: They got confused with those concepts (53.84%), those concepts were difficult to understand, they did not know the meanings of words given as examples (38.46%), and phonological awareness was not learned at school (7.69%).

In addition, 45% or 8 fifth graders also had problems in pronouncing some words especially with the sounds that did not exist in Bahasa Indonesia such as /θ/ in

“three” and /ð/ in “there”. On the other hand, based on the fifth graders’ responses to the question no. 17.35% or 7 fifth graders thought that homophones and homographs were difficult and complicated to understand because they needed to know the differences among some words that needed to be practically and frequently pronounced. Furthermore, based on the fifth graders’ responses to the question no. 18.20% or 4 fifth graders responded that they were not accustomed to pronouncing the words in English and 20% or 4 fifth graders responded that some English sounds did not exist in *Bahasa Indonesia*. They got confused because some words were difficult to pronounce even though those words were pronounced repeatedly to the fifth graders.

Due to some limitation of this study, some suggestions are given. First, the fifth graders at SDN 117 Palembang are suggested to develop their phonological awareness (PA) so that they can detect the sounds and manipulate the sounds and they know how to pronounce the words correctly. Besides that, they need to learn and practice to pronounce the English words by reading. Second, the teachers of English at SDN 117 Palembang especially who teach the fifth graders are suggested to

introduce phonological awareness and develop phonological awareness and pronunciation by using rhyming poems so that the fifth graders can learn and improve their English pronunciation. Furthermore, the teachers of English at SDN 117 Palembang should not neglect the phonological awareness and pronunciation aspects in learning English. The teachers of English at SDN 117 Palembang should also expose the fifth graders to practice pronunciation every meeting and correct them if they make mistakes because pronunciation should be exposed frequently in order the fifth graders remember and get used to pronounce the words correctly. Finally, other researchers are suggested to do further research in longer time about developing phonological awareness (PA) and pronunciation by using rhyming poems because this study was conducted in a very limited time.

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#### **About the author**

Mita Elliyuspita, S.Pd.,M.Pd is an English teacher at SMAN Banyuasin 1, South Sumatera.