

Investigating Adult EFL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 21
1. **Students' perspective on the implementation of ICT to learn English in the post-pandemic era**
Silvia N.P. Erito1-7
2. **Fostering religious moderation through English debating**
Atin Kurniawati9-16
- 13
3. **Obstacles of implementing study from home program in one junior high school: Teachers' and parents' experiences**
Nur Padhilah, Sri Setyarini, and Gin Gin Gustine 17-24
4. **Flouting communication principles of cross cultural understanding course interaction**
Russilawati, Nurlaila Kadariyah, and Fajrianor 25-29
5. **The effect of achievement motivation on competency elementary school teacher in Ambon city**
La Ode Safihu 31-35
6. **EFL learners' willingness to communicate, communication strategy, and teacher communication behavior of State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Kediri**
Saidah and Yogi Rohana37-47
7. **Pre-service teachers' utterances based on gender language features**
Karimah, Nurlaila Kadariyah, and Afifah Linda Sari 49-57
- 20
8. **An analysis of translation errors on travel brochure "Pesona Wisata Pacitan"**
Uly Karta Diayu Shinta, Chusna Apriyanti, and Samsul Hadi59-68
9. **Human resources upgrading as school accreditation preparation**
Nila Lukmatus Syahidah69-72
10. **Teaching English literary works: investigating the challenges and possible strategies in EFL classroom**
Agwin Darwiyanti and Fazri Nur Yusuf73-78
- 9
11. **Cultivating critical thinking skills in EFL student teachers through online learning**
Arik Susanti, Respati Retno Utami, and Ika Anggun Camelia..... 79-85

12. **Performing authentic assessment toward students' reading skill in EFL classroom: challenges in Indonesian context**
Anggi Yusuf Mustofa87-95
13. **An item analysis of multiple-choice test for the fourth grade students of Ar-Rahman elementary school Kediri**
Khurniatu Sholikhah Qurrotu Aini Lubna..... 97-105
14. **Applying online flipped learning in teaching speaking for undergraduate EFL students**
Muhammad Firnas Hibatulloh and Muhammad Alfin Hisbulloh 107-112
15. **A critical review: How does problem-based learning lead Indonesian EFL students' critical thinking in reading skill?**
Salma 'Aqilatul Muwaffaqoh, Edwin Nuvianto Al-Aziz 113-119
16. **The use of peer corrective feedback in improving argumentative writing skill of university students**
Sri Wahyuni..... 135-145
17. **Blended learning method for EFL argumentative writing environment: Theories and practice**
Elfi, M. Zaim, Hermawati Syarif, and Yetti Zainil..... 147-154
18. **Transitivity in Fable Stories in BIPA textbook "Sahabatku Indonesia"**
Afina Naufalia..... 155-163
- 10
19. **Students' perception and needs analysis on the use of online English learning during COVID-19 pandemic**
Nur Hidayati, Ary Setya Budhi Ningrum, and Nurul Aini..... 165-169
20. **Paraphrasing method as plagiarism avoidance in academic writing**
Ria Fakhurriana and Wety Asri Ningsih..... 171-175
- 17
21. **Analysis of the students' needs in general English course at the civil engineering study program of Yapis university Papua, Indonesia**
Tenri Ugi Irianto..... 177-184
22. **Teacher professional development in English instructional assessments through TPACK**
Fauris Zuhri..... 185-195
23. **Investigating adult EFL learners' phonological awareness deficits**
Fajar El Fikri and Daning Hentasmaka..... 197-206

24. **Hots-based instructional strategies that work to enhance critical thinking among university students**
Fathor Rasyid 207-216
25. **Media-assisted vocabulary learning: Phonic cards**
Hesty Puspita Sari and Azza Jauhar Ahmad Tajuddin 217-227
26. **Short vowels and long vowels pronunciation difficulties among students of vocational high school of Ngadirojo 2021/2022 academic year**
Fitriana, Agustina Sri Hafidah, Chusna Apriyanti..... 229-237
27. **Inclusive-based education in creating a great dignified *madrasah ibtidaiyah***
Lilis Samrotul Ilmi, Prim Masrokan Mutohar, and Kojin 239-248
28. **An analysis of adjacency pairs on the conversation between Rachel and Ben in the short comedy movie entitled translator**
Ade Dwi Cahyanti 249-254
29. **Language style used in advertisements of Indonesian beauty products**
Nur Mutmainna Halim and Abd Halim 255-265
30. **Language and identity: Code switching and code mixing in Indonesian web-series layangan putus**
Mufti Rasyid and Fitriatul Masitoh 267-275
31. **Students' learning strategies levels in learning EFL at state Islamic institute of Kediri, Indonesia**
Agus Edi Winarto 277-284
32. **An analysis of English Youtube content as a media to improve pronunciation skills**
Anwarul Mustofa, Aprilia Angraini Ali, and Renita Donasari 285-292
33. **An analysis of YouTube content as an alternative to learn speaking**
Renita Donasari; Ghovind Yusuf Prasetyo and Muhammad Hilmi Sholahudin.... 293-303
34. **The technique of teaching "name of the days" for young learners**
Aprilia Indah Ariyati, Nada Sabila Luthfiah, and Raden Roro Ajeng Herdani Kusumanigrum 305-308
35. **The implementation of students' task in creating digital storybook for children**
Indah Puspitasari and Syafi'atul Lailiyah 309-313

36. **"I have no time": The experience of 2 in-service EFL teachers on self-initiated professional development in digital era**
Sekar Ayu Wardhani, Endang Fauziati, and Dewi Rochsantiningsih 315-320
37. **Informal digital learning of English (IDLE) practices and their influence on students' creative writing**
Joan Nofila Nurlinita, Nur Arifah Drajadi, and Suparno 321-324
38. **English assessment during COVID 19 pandemic**
Eldiana Ardi Wijayanti 325-333
39. **Peer assessment on speaking performance among senior high school student of Mamba'us Sholihin Gresik**
Ahmad Yusuf Mustofa 335-345
40. **Designing receptive skill assessment test: Student's reading and listening comprehension of report text**
Dhimas Dwyki Atmadja 347-357
41. **Students' interest on learning English using youtube towards speaking ability**
Maidatul Khasanah, Griseldis Faden Herdina, Griselda Gian Heris Herdina 359-365
42. **Finding the washback effect of IELTS test on second language learners**
Raulina Suci Maharani 367-373
43. **Forming the assessment of speaking skill**
A Fawazien Ready 375-383
44. **An Analysis of Grammar Assessment in Tenses Structure for Senior High School**
Muhammad Azizin 385-392
- 19
45. **Code mixing bahasa Indonesia with English utterances on Maudy Ayunda video YouTube channel**
Moh. Rif'attullah, Bambang Eko S. and Fitri Palupi K. 393-399
46. **Diagnostic assessment: One step closer to understand stundents**
Nufal Aini 401-408
47. **The implementation of formative assessments in EFL students' writing through written corrective feedback**
Pooja Anggunsari 409-415

48. **A narrative analysis of someone's experience in using TikTok to improve English public speaking**
Sylvia Putri Ainurrifah and Renita Donasari..... 417-423
- 12
49. **Developing interactive multimedia for teaching personal pronouns for English learners of Egypt Islamic boarding and course Pare**
Fatqu Rofiqoh Dewi and Kurnia Maulidya 425-435
50. **Online-mediated direct feedback on sentence combining practice to develop complex sentence construction skills**
Qanitah Masykuroh..... 437-444
51. **Developing scoring rubric in writing test**
Tsania Fitra Maulidia..... 445-451
52. **Tutor's emotions in English private tutoring (EPT) environment**
Aliatun Ni'am Qomarurrijal, Ngadiso, and Nur Arifah Drajadi 453-458
- 15
53. **Muhadhoroh and English public speaking skills: Benefits, challenges, and strategies**
Lestari Budianto..... 459-467
54. **The emotional landscape of postgraduate TESOL students in thesis supervision: a narrative inquiry**
Shofiatu Fikri, Sumardi, and Nur Arifah Drajadi..... 469-475
55. **Laskar Pengajar Indonesia education system of ex-localization's children in Gedangsewu**
Azmi Puspa Dewanti and Nurul Aini..... 477-481
- 10
56. **Evaluation of the implementation of leading programs at SMA Negeri 1 Kertosono and MA Negeri Nganjuk (CIPP model evaluative study)**
Agustina Kurniasari, Mukhammad Abdullah, Iskandar Tsani..... 483-491
57. **The implementation of blended learning for Economic faculties in Kota Kediri: EFL learners' perception, problems and suggestions**
Ulfi Dina Hamida, Ninik Farikha, Kristanti Yuntoro Putri 493-498
58. **Students perception of using Google Meet for online storytelling**
Arum Satria Pertiwi and Dewi Nur Suci..... 499-502

INVESTIGATING ADULT EFL LEARNERS' PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS DEFICITS

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Abstract

29

The study aimed to find out the tendency of Phonological Awareness (PA) deficits in adult EFL learners based on their levels of PA test achievement. The PA deficits being investigated in this study focused on the two levels of PA, onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness. This study implemented quantitative design, especially observational study. The data were collected from sixty-three English Department participants taking the Phonology course. The results of descriptive analysis showed that the adult EFL learners tend to have 29.44% PA deficits. Adult EFL learners with high PA level have a lower tendency of deficit than those with low PA level. Further, the results of the data analysis also showed that the high PA level learners have 37.34% lower deficits than the low PA level learners. Those tendencies indicate that the low-level learners tend to have a higher risk in language learning. Additionally, they also have a higher risk in their future English teaching practice.

Keywords: adult EFL learners, phonological awareness, phonological awareness deficits.

25

1 INTRODUCTION

Phonological awareness (PA) is the ability to recognize and manipulate units of oral language. It refers to the ability to hear and work with the sounds in words (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008) or the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes, syllables, onset and rhymes into words (Konza 2011). PA can be demonstrated by tasks such as tapping out the number of syllables in a word, rhyming words, judging the number of phonemes in a word, differentiating separate words in a spoken sentence, and deleting initial or final phonemes of a word. Tasks such as blending, deleting, substituting or moving phonemes within or between words require phonological awareness or the ability to detect and manipulate sound units (Anthony & Francis, 2005). In learning English, this ability is needed to be able to absorb and process words better.

Even though PA relates closely to listening and speaking skills (Hentasmaka, 2020), it is also proven crucial for reading and spelling success especially at the earliest stages of reading development in children. Some studies have examined PA as one of reliable predictors and associates of early reading ability in children (Yeung & Chan, 2013; Carson, 2012). Additionally, PA is the efficient and effective integration of a key predictor of literacy success into children's beginning classroom reading programs (Carson, 2012). The study by Yeung and Chan (2013) shows that PA, at varying linguistic units, is closely related to the English reading of English as a second language (ESL) children with a non-alphabetic first language (L1) and limited exposure to oral English in everyday life. It is also confirmed that oral language skills and PA are significant predictors of English word reading. Other study by Carson (2012) results a significant reduction in the number of children presenting with reading problems was identified between those who received classroom PA instruction and those who followed the 'usual' reading program. These studies prove that PA has a big role in language learning, especially in reading.

The role of PA is also proven to be important in foreign language learning context. Former research shows that PA has significant positive impact to decode the language for the EFL learners (Yoshikawa & Yamashita, 2014). According to Yoshikawa and Yamashita (2014), as learners using English as a foreign language in order to their mother tongue, they face different way to read the words, different sounds or even they do not have some sounds in their first language. In the study, the link from PA to reading comprehension suggests that PA serves as a basis for second language (L2) English reading among an L1-Japanese population. Finding on an indirect effect of PA on reading comprehension indicates that phonological processing skills help the readers process and comprehend written text information in their L2.

Additionally, the result of some studies proved that PA is not only important in foreign language learning, but also in foreign language teaching (Carrol et al., 2012; Hismanoglu, 2012; Washburn et al., 2011). Carrol et al. (2012) underlines the importance of PA knowledge for teachers to provide appropriate learning experiences and quality feedback to their students. The result of their study proves that PA instruction is a critical component of classroom literacy instruction, both prior to and during the formal teaching of literacy. In line with Carrol et al. (2012), Hismanoglu (2012) reveals the contribution of teachers' PA knowledge to their teaching practice. The result of the study shows that prospective EFL teachers' PA deficits with respect to segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the English language has negative correlation to their teaching with assumption that a good language teacher should be a good model for the students by pronouncing English words correctly and accurately. Earlier study by Washburn et al. (2011) shows that teachers' PA has positive contribution in teaching reading for children with dyslexia supporting the variable of teachers' teaching ability, knowledge of basic language concepts, alphabetic principle, morphology and dyslexia itself. In conclusion, the teacher's PA affects their teaching practice which then affect their students' language learning.

Regarding the contribution of PA in language learning (Milankov et al., 2021; Carrol & Breadmore, 2017; Yoshikawa & Yamashita, 2014; Yeung & Chan, 2013) and teaching (Carrol et al., 2012; Hismanoglu, 2012; Washburn, 2011), the deficits of PA is believed to bring negative impact in the quality in learning and teaching. The study by Yeung and Chan (2013) shows that PA has correlation with students reading comprehension. The study proves that when the student has deficits in PA, he or she has difficulty in learning reading too. In line with that, this situation is also happened to adult EFL learners. Finding by Yoshikawa and Yamashita (2014) indicates that deficits in phonological processing skill, which refers to PA, will cause the readers to experience difficulties in processing and comprehending written text information. Then, Carrol and Breadmore (2017) found that the specific weaknesses of PA that have the biggest responsibility of children reading skill lack is segmenting and blending phonemes. Milankov et al. (2021) shows that students who have difficulty reading have poorer PA compared to students who have no reading difficulty.

In the context of adult language learners, especially the in-service and preservice teachers, the PA deficits is proven to affect the teaching practice. Furthermore, the study by Carrol et al. (2012) shows that PA knowledge of teachers' deficits correlates with inappropriate learning experiences and low-quality feedback to their students. Hismanoglu (2012) found that prospective EFL teachers' PA deficits with respect to segmental and suprasegmental aspects of the English language has negative correlation to their teaching. Then, Washburn et al. (2011) study proves that teachers' PA deficits has negative contribution in teaching reading for children with dyslexia.

Underlining PA deficits effect on language learning and teaching presented by the studies above, PA training focusing on the deficits is believed to be a solution. Thus, the identification of learners' PA deficits is needed to achieve effective PA training. Facilitating the need, the researcher conducted this study to find out the tendency of PA deficits in adult EFL learners. The PA deficits being investigated in this study focus on the two levels of PA, they are onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness.

Another point that needs to be considered is learners' various levels of understanding. The study by Qunayeer (2020) shows that there is significant difference between the level of students' proficiency and their comprehension level. In other words, the high-level learners might understand the material easier than the low-level learners. Considering this situation, the study also focuses on the adult EFL learners' PA levels as different levels may have different needs in training in order to raise their best performances. Knowing learners' PA levels can be a consideration for teachers and lecturers in choosing effective strategy in PA training.

Considering the background and the discrepancies describe above, the problems of the research that need to be answered in this study are formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the tendencies of PA deficits of adult EFL learners?
- 2) What are the tendencies of PA deficits of adult EFL learners with high PA level?
- 3) What are the tendencies of PA deficits of adult EFL learners with low PA level?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1. Design

This study was a descriptive quantitative study. Descriptive quantitative is a study with purpose of describing and interpreting, the current status of individuals, settings, conditions, or events (Mertler, 2016). In descriptive research, the researchers are studying the phenomenon of interest as it exists naturally without manipulation of the individuals, conditions, or events. To be more specific this study was included in quantitative observational study. Based on Leedy and Ormrod, (2013, cited in Mertler, 2016) quantitative observational studies typically focus on a particular aspect of behavior that can be quantified through some measure. The particular aspect behavior in this study was the tendency of PA deficit in adult EFL learners, thus included into observational research.

2.2. Participants

Sixty-three English department students at STKIP PGRI Jombang were chosen as the sample on this study by using a purposive sampling technique. It was form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their surveys (Ary et al., 2010). The sampling technique was used to avoid the errors of judgment in the selection. The sixty-three students as the sample of the research since they are taking the Phonology course. This situation was assumed to support the data collection process in this study since they have basic knowledge in phonology (i.e. the difference between letter and sound).

2.3. Data Collection

The data from sixty-three participants in this study were collected through PA Test. The test of PA used in this study was constructed for adult learners whose first language is not English. The purpose of the test was to measure learners' PA skills at two general levels: the awareness skills at phoneme and onset-rime levels. The test consisted of forty oral response items which are divided into eight parts. The items were adapted from *Starting Points: Supporting the Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008).

2.4. Data Analysis

The data analyses were conducted to answer the three research questions: 1) What are the tendency of PA deficits of adult EFL learners?; 2) What are the tendency of PA deficits of adult EFL learners with high PA level?; 3) What are the tendency of PA deficits of adult EFL learners with low PA level?.

To answer the first research question, the researcher used descriptive analysis to investigate the tendency of PA deficits of adult EFL learners. As stated in Mertler (2016), a simple tally sheet might be developed as an instrument to record the number of times the behavior occurs. The occurrence is then counted to determine its overall frequency (Mertler, 2016). Referring to the data analysis suggested by Mertler (2016), the analysis in this study was done by calculating the frequency and percentage of the PA deficits in each aspect: identifying unrhymed words, changing the onset of words, isolating phonemes, identifying phonemes, categorizing phonemes, blending phonemes, segmenting phonemes and deleting phonemes respectively. The percentage of the frequency of occurrence was calculated dividing the number of the deficit occur with the total responses in each aspect and multiplied it by 100%. Descriptive analyses on the range, maximum and minimum deficits occur, and standard deviation of the PA deficits were then conducted with the help of SPSS program.

Prior to the data analysis to answer the second and third research questions, the researcher classified the adult EFL learners into high and low levels based on the PA score. The classification was done by quartiling the learners' scores to have a clear distinction between the high and low-levels. In this process, the learners' scores were divided into four. The first group contained the lowest score up to the lower quartile (10-33), the second group included the lower quartile to the median (33-41), the third group was the median to the upper quartile (41-45), and the fourth group comprised upper quartile to the highest score of the entire set (45-51). The first group of quartiles in this study represented the low PA level and fourth group of quartiles represented the high PA level.

Following the classification process, descriptive analyses on high- and low-level learners were conducted. The descriptive analyses included calculating the range, maximum and minimum deficits

occur, and standard deviation, the frequency and percentage of PA deficits. The analyses were done with the help of SPSS program.

3 RESULTS

3.1. The Tendency of PA Deficits of Adult EFL Learners

Based on the data analysis process which include the frequency, the range, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation of PA deficits, it is found 1020 mistakes made by the adult EFL learners which indicates the learners' PA deficits. The mistakes found by researcher were from both onset-rime and phonemic awareness levels from a total of 3465 responses. It means that 29.44% mistakes were made by the learners in responding the questions. The detail of descriptive analysis result of the data obtained can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of PA Deficits

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	63	41	4	45	16,19	8,95
Valid N (listwise)	63					

With the Range of 41 as presented in Table 1, the Minimum mistakes made by the learners are 4 and the Maximum mistakes are 45. From sixty-three learners (N=63), the Mean of PA deficits is 16.19 which means that most of the learners made 16 mistakes with Standard Deviation of 8.95.

The specific data analysis on each of the awareness levels shows that 170 mistakes were made in onset-rime awareness level and 850 were made in phonemic awareness level out of 1020 deficits. To get a balance comparison between the contribution of each levels on PA deficits, a seperated descriptive statistics analysis on onset-rime awareness level was conducted covered the range minimum and maximum deficits made, the mean of deficits made, and the standard deviation. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics on Onset-Rime Awareness Deficits

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	63	9	0	9	2,7	2,28
Valid N (listwise)	63					

The result of descriptive statistics analysis on onset-rime awareness deficits presented in Table 2 shows that from sixty-three students (N=63) the maximum mistakes made are 9 from a the Range of nine. The Mean of the deficit is 2.7. It means that the average students made two to three mistakes in onset-rime awareness level. The Standard Deviation shows 2.28, which means that the data has a low variation.

There are ten items in the test of onset-rime awareness which include the ability to identify unrhymed words (five items) and the ability to change the onset of words (five items). The test was given to sixty-three learners. Overall, 630 responses were collected and analyzed for the frequency and percentage.

Table 3 The Frequency of Onset-Rime Awareness Deficits

Variable of deficits	Frequency	Percentage
The ability to identify unrhymed words	92	14,38%
The ability to change the onset of words	78	12,19%
Total	170	26,57%

The result of the data analysis presented on Table 3 shows that the ability to identify unrhymed words contribute more on onset-rime awareness deficits. Out of 170 mistakes made by the learners, 92 mistakes (14.38%) were made in this aspect while 78 mistakes (12.19%) were in changing the onset of words. The mistakes in identifying the unrhymed word are 14 points higher than the mistakes in changing the onset of words. Overall, the contribution of onset-rime awareness deficit on PA deficits is 26.57%.

Following the descriptive analysis in onset-rime awareness level, further descriptive analysis was also conducted in phonemic awareness level. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Phonemic Awareness Deficits

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	63	33	3	36	13,49	7,28
Valid N (listwise)	63					

Table 4 above informs that from the Range of 33 mistakes, the minimum mistakes and maximum mistakes made by the learners are 3 and 36 (N=63). These data have a mean of 13.49 and standard deviation of 7.28, which means that the variation variation of the deficit in phonemic awareness level is higher than the variation of the deficit in onset-rime awareness level. The average students made 13 to 14 mistakes (Mean= 13.49, SD= 7.28).

There are forty-five items in the test of phonemic awareness which includes the ability of isolating phonemes (five items), identifying phonemes (five items), categorizing phonemes (five items), blending phonemes (five items), segmenting phonemes (five items which consist of twenty phonemes) and deleting phonemes (five items). Overall, 2835 responses were collected and analyzed for the frequency and percentage.

Table 5 The Frequency of Phonemic Awareness Deficits

Variable of deficits	Deficits	Percentage
Isolating phonemes	93	3,23%
Identifying common phonemes	93	3,23%
Categorizing phonemes	94	3,26%
Blending phonemes	107	3,72%
Segmenting phonemes	424	14,72%
Deleting phonemes	39	1,35%
Total	850	29,51%

From the result of the data analysis presented in Table 5, it can be clearly seen that the deficits in segmenting phonemes contribute the most in phonemic awareness deficit (424 mistakes) followed by blending phonemes (107 mistakes), categorizing phonemes (94 mistakes), isolating phonemes and identifying common phonemes (93 mistakes), and deleting phonemes (39 mistakes). Overall, 850 mistakes were made in phonemic awareness level, which means the deficits in this level contributes as much as 29.51% to the PA deficits.

Concluding the finding above, the majority of adult EFL learners tend to have 29.44% of PA deficits (1020 mistakes from 3465 responses, N=62). To be more specific, 26.57% deficits happened in the onset-rime awareness level while 29.52% deficits happened in the phonemic awareness level. Further, it is also found that the higher tendency of deficits in the phonemic awareness level happened in the skill of segmenting phonemes (424 mistakes from 850 responses).

Considering the results of the study, it is worried that those deficits will affect learners' language learning process especially in reading skill in which the learners need to comprehend written text information (Milankov et al., 2021; Carol & Breadmore, 2017; Yoshikawa & Yamashita, 2014; Yeung & Chan, 2013). Further finding from the data analysis shows that the deficits tendency in phonemic awareness level is higher than the deficits in onset-rime awareness level (29.52% compares to 26.57%). This finding is in line with Washburn (2011) who found that on average of the research participants failed to demonstrate phonics principles. To be more specific, the skills covered in the phonemic awareness level in this study are isolating phonemes, identifying common phonemes, categorizing phonemes, blending phonemes, segmenting phonemes, and deleting phonemes. Based on the findings, segmenting phonemes contribute the most in phonemic awareness deficit (424 out of 850 mistakes) followed by blending phonemes (107 mistakes) which increase language learning difficulties especially in reading as mentioned Carol and Breadmore (2017) that segmenting and blending have biggest responsibility of learners' reading skill difficulties.

3.2. The Tendency of PA Deficits of adult EFL learners with high PA level

From the quartering process, it is found nineteen learners included in high PA level. The PA deficits of these nineteen learners are then analyzed descriptively for the Range, Minimum, Maximum, and Standard Deviation. The result of the general analysis on PA deficits in this high PA level learners is presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics of PA Deficits in High PA Level Learners

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	19	6	4	10	7,53	2,06
Valid N (listwise)	19					

Table 6 informs us that the Mean of PA deficits is 7.53. It means that most of the high PA learners tend to make 7 to 8 mistakes with minimum mistakes made is 4 and maximum is 10 (SD=2.06).

There are 143 mistakes from 1045 responses (13.68%) found in high PA learners for both onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness levels. The results of the descriptive analysis in onset-rime awareness level are presented in Table 7, 8, 9 and Table 10.

Table 7 Descriptive Statistics of Onset-Rime Awareness Deficits in High PA Level Learners

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	19	3	0	3	,95	,85
Valid N (listwise)	19					

Based on the result of descriptive statistics analysis of onset-rime awareness deficits presented in Table 7, it can be seen that from students who took the onset-rime awareness test made maximum mistake of 3 from a range of mistakes of 3. The Mean the deficit is .95 and Standard Deviation is .85, which shows a low data variation. The average students made one to two mistakes (Mean= .95, SD= .85).

From 190 responses collected from high PA level learners in onset-rime awareness level, it is found 9.47% deficits (18 mistakes). The deficits found are then analyzed for the frequency and percentage. The result of the data analysis is presented in Table 8.

Table 8 The Frequency Statistics of Onset-Rime Awareness Deficits in High PA Level Learners

Variable of deficits	Frequency	Percentage
The ability to identify unrhymed words	13	6,84%
The ability to change the onset of words	5	2,63%
Total	18	9,47%

Table 8 shows that the ability to identify unrhymed words contribute more on onset-rime awareness deficits. Out of 18 mistakes made by the learners, 13 mistakes (6.84%) were happened in this aspect while 5 mistakes (2.63%) were made in changing the onset of words.

Further descriptive analysis was also conducted in phonemic awareness level. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 9.

Table 9 Descriptive Statistics of Phonemic Awareness Deficits in High PA Level Learners

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	19	7	3	10	6,58	2,29
Valid N (listwise)	19					

Based on the result of descriptive statistics analysis of phonemic awareness deficits presented in Table 4.9, from the high-level learners tend to make 6 to 7 mistakes (Mean= 6.45, SD= 2.29) in which the minimum mistakes made is 3 and maximum is 10 from a range of 7.

The phonemic awareness level consists of thirty items which are divided into six aspects. Overall, 855 responses were collected from nineteen high PA level learners in phonemic awareness level and 125 (15.62%) mistakes were found.

Table 10 The Frequency of Phonemic Awareness Deficits in High PA Level Learners

Variable of deficits	Deficits	Percentage
Isolating phoneme	8	0,94%
Identifying common phonemes	6	0,70%
Categorizing phonemes	8	0,94%
Blending phonemes	17	1,99%
Segmenting phonemes	84	9,82%
Deleting phonemes	2	0,23%
Total	125	14,62%

The result of the data analysis presented on Table 10 shows that out of 125 mistakes made by the learners with the ability of segmenting phonemes contribute more on phonemic awareness deficits by 84 mistakes (9.82%), followed by blending phonemes with 17 mistakes (1.99%), isolating and categorizing phonemes with 8 mistakes (0.94%), identifying common phonemes with 6 mistakes (0.70%), and deleting phonemes with 2 mistakes (0.23%).

From the finding above, it can be concluded that the adult EFL learners with high PA level tend to have 13.68% deficits in PA (143 mistakes from 1045 responses, N=19). The highest contributor of deficits is the deficits in phonemic awareness level with 14.62% (125 mistakes from 855 responses) in which the skill of segmenting phonemes contributes the most in this level (9.82% deficits=84 out of 125 mistakes). The deficits in onset-rime awareness is 9.47% (18 mistakes from 190 responses) in which the ability to identify unrhymed words contributes the most (6.84%=13 out of 18 mistakes). Those tendencies are considered low which indicates that the adult EFL learners with high PA level have a low risk in experiencing difficulties in language learning especially in reading skill (Milankov et al., 2021; Yoshikawa & Yamashita, 2014).

3.3. The Tendency of PA Deficits of adult EFL learners with low PA level

Seventeen learners with the score of ten to thirty-three were grouped into low PA level as the result of the quartering process. A similar data analysis to the previous one is also conducted in this stage with the following results.

Table 11 Descriptive Statistics of PA Deficits in Low PA Level Learners

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	17	23	22	45	28.06	6.67
Valid N (listwise)	17					

With the Range of 23 as presented in Table 11 the minimum mistakes made by the learners is 22 and the maximum is 45. Based on the deficit Mean score it is known that the low PA level learners tend to make 28 mistakes (Mean=28.06, SD=6.67).

In total of 935 responses collected from seventeen learners in low PA level, 51.02% deficits (477 mistakes) were found in both onset-rime awareness and phonemic awareness levels. The descriptive analyses results of the deficit in each level are presented in Table 12, 13, 14, and 15.

Table 12 Descriptive Statistics of Onset-Rime Awareness Deficits in Low PA Level Learners

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	17	8	1	9	5,12	2,39
Valid N (listwise)	17					

Based on the result of descriptive statistics analysis of onset-rime awareness deficits presented in Table 12, from seventeen students (N=17) who took the onset-rime awareness test made minimum mistakes of 1 and maximum mistakes of 9 from a range of 8. These data have a Mean of 5.12, which means that the average students made 5 mistakes. The Standard Deviation is 2.39 that shows a low variation in deficits.

A similar data analysis for each of PA levels is also conducted in answering research question three. Overall, 170 responses were collected in onset-rime awareness level and found 87 mistakes (51.18% deficits) as shown in Table 13.

Table 13 The Frequency of Onset-Rime Awareness Deficits in Low PA Level Learners

Variable of deficits	Frequency	Percentage
The ability to identify unrhymed words	42	24,71%
The ability to change the onset of words	45	26,47%
Total	87	51,18%

Out of 87 mistakes made by the low PA level learners in onset-rime awareness level, 45 mistakes (25%) were happened in changing the onset of words while 42 mistakes (23.33%) were made in identifying unrhymed words. The numbers show a quite similar tendency of deficits in both variable of deficits in onset-rime awareness level.

Further analysis in phonemic awareness level found that the average students in low PA level made around twenty-two to twenty-three mistakes in phonemic awareness level, the detail findings are presented in Table 14.

Table 14 Descriptive Statistics of Phonemic Awareness Deficits in Low PA Level Learners

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Deficits	17	19	17	36	22,94	5,62
Valid N (listwise)	17					

As mentioned before, the seventeen students in low PA level tend to make around twenty-two to twenty-three mistakes (Mean=22.94, SD=5.62) with maximum mistakes is 36 and minimum mistakes is 17 (Range=90). The Standard Deviation is quite high which shows that the deficits variation in phonemic awareness level higher than those in onset-rime awareness level.

Following the descriptive analysis on the above aspects, an analysis for the frequency and percentage of phonemic awareness deficits was done. The tendency of 50.98% deficits (390 mistakes) were found iout of 765 responses.

Table 15 The Frequency of Phonemic Awareness Deficits in Low PA Level Learners

Variable of deficits	Deficits	Percentage
Isolating phoneme	51	6,67%
Identifying common phonemes	55	7,19%
Catergorizing phonemes	45	5,88%
Blending phonemes	47	6,14%
Segmenting phonemes	169	22,09%
Deleting phonemes	23	3,01%
Total	390	50,98%

The result of the data analysis presented in Table 15 shows that the ability of segmenting phonemes contributes more to phonemic awareness deficits by 169 mistakes (22.09%), followed by identifying common phonemes with 55 mistakes (7.19%), isolating phonemes with 51 mistakes (6.67%), blending phonemes with 47 mistakes (6.14%), categorizing phonemes with 45 mistakes (5.88%), and then deleting phonemes with 23 mistakes (3.01%).

The tendency of PA deficits of adult EFL learners with low PA level shows 477 mistakes from 935 responses (51.02% deficits, N=17). Unlike the high PA level group in which the phonemic awareness level contributes more to the deficits, the low PA level group has a balance contributions from the onset-rime and phonemic awareness levels deficits. The deficit in onset-rime awareness is 51.18% (87 mistakes from 170 responses) while the deficit in phonemic awareness is 50.98% (390 mistakes from 765 responses). Similar to the finding in high PA level group, the deficit in the skill of segmenting phonemes is the highest contributor of deficits in phonemic awareness level (22.09%).

The findings indicates that the adult EFL learners with low PA level have a higher risk in experiencing difficulties in learning reading (Milankov et al., 2021; Yoshikawa & Yamashita, 2014). Further, similar to the general finding of PA deficits, deficit in the skill of segmenting phonemes is the highest contributor of phonemic awareness deficits (22.09%). This situation increases the risk of low PA level learners in learning English as a foreign language since it is considered as one of the main factors of learners' reading difficulties (Carol & Breadmore, 2017).

Additionally, the learners in this study are pre-service teachers whose deficits of PA will contribute to their teaching success. In line with the studies by Carrol et al. (2012), Hismanoglu (2012), and Washburn (2011), the findings of this study show that the learners might have difficulties in their future teaching practice, especially the adult EFL learners with low PA level. The difficulties they might face are inappropriate learning experiences and low-quality feedback to their students (Carrol et al., 2012), low quality of teaching English (Hismanoglu, 2012), and difficulties in teaching reading (Washburn et al., 2011).

4 CONCLUSIONS

This present study aims to investigate the tendency of adult EFL learners PA deficits. Additionally, it also aims to investigate the tendency of deficits across PA levels. The results of descriptive analysis with the help of SPSS program show that overall, the adult EFL learners tend to have 29.44% PA deficits in which the deficits tendency in phonemic awareness level is higher than the deficits in onset-rime awareness level. Further, the results also show that segmenting phonemes and blending phonemes contribute more to the PA deficits.

Adult EFL learners with high PA level have a lower tendency of deficit than those with low PA level. The results of the data analysis show that the high PA level learners tend to have 13.68% deficits in PA while the low PA level learners tend to have 51.02% deficits. Those tendencies indicate that the low-level learners tend to have a higher risk in language learning especially in reading skill. Further, they also have a higher risk in their future English teaching practice.

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