

# Teachers' Knowledge of Phonological Awareness Levels: A Case of Jordanian EFL Teachers' Perception

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Phonological awareness is perceived as one of the key building blocks of the development of emerging reading skill. To date, little is known about how phonological awareness instructions can be implemented effectively in EFL classrooms. In Jordan, studies revealed that young readers struggle with English reading development, which represents a challenge to EFL teachers. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the perception of Jordanian EFL teachers of the knowledge of phonological awareness levels at emerging readers' stage and identifying the factors that affect teachers' perception. A cross-sectional questionnaire was used and distributed to a sample of 73 participants at primary private schools in Jordan. Descriptive statistics, independent sample paired t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed a misinterpretation regarding the concepts of phonological awareness and phonics among EFL teachers. The results further revealed that EFL teachers' perception of phonological awareness was not mediated by their academic qualifications, teaching experience, gender, or age. The findings will be interpreted and discussed, and their pedagogical implications will be finally highlighted.

**Key words:** *Phonological Awareness, Emerging Readers, Knowledge Perception, Jordanian EFL Teacher.*

## Introduction

Studies exploring teachers and learners' perceptions regarding how teachers teach and how learners learn language skills remain a rich source of data for all EFL stakeholders (Awwad, 2019). An appropriate level of phonological awareness knowledge forms the cornerstone of young learners' successful learning at early stages. Robust phonological awareness can be

further seen as one of the crucial components of novice learners' early reading and spelling ability development (Alhumsi & Shabdin, 2016). The term '*phonological awareness*' can be defined as an explicit ability to manipulate and segment speech into smaller discrete sound units (Kibby, 2009). This indicates that young learners can conceptualise sound units and identify them in words, and hence derive or generate new linguistic units.

The importance of the phonological stems from the need to use it as a vehicle for both teachers and learners to facilitate the teaching and learning of fundamental reading and spelling skills. Schuele and Boudreau (2008) pointed out that the aim of phonological awareness instruction is assisting young learners to gain a foundation of phonological awareness by which they can benefit from decoding instruction. Such a process entails the understanding that language consists of syllables and sounds. Therefore, the enhancement of young learners' ability to read and write can be sufficiently attained by detecting the sounds of words which can help them capture phoneme-grapheme associations. A growing body of literature further showed that young learners who are unable to manipulate sounds in words will have more difficulty in learning to read effectively (Anthony & Farnis, 2005).

Furthermore, previous research indicated that phonological awareness has been characterised as one of the indispensable sub-skills in learning to read and write (Cárnio, Vosgrau & Soares, 2017). However, a gap is assumed to exist between research knowledge concerning learning to read and the public understanding condition (Castles, Rastle & Nation, 2018). Besides, it has been observed that Jordanian pre-service EFL teachers are not fully aware of how to teach and assess phonological awareness skills (Alshaboul, 2018). This implies that novice readers will find more difficulty in acquiring reading skills and the other English language skills more effectively due to the lack of their ability to decode English sounds. Hence, the current study was designed to investigate the perception of Jordanian EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness levels at the emerging readers' stage.

The importance of this study further stems from the growing interest of different stakeholders regarding the understanding how young EFL learners learn to read more effectively and what teaching strategies and techniques can help accomplish this objective more adequately (Castles et al., 2018). Recently, the rates of reading skill achievement have given an impression that many students are still experiencing difficulty at elementary schools concerning their ability to read to a satisfactory level (Akyol, Çakıroğlu, & Kuruyer, 2017). Thus, more attention should be given to literacy acquisition strategies, i.e. developing new and effective techniques for teaching reading skills to advance young learners to become better readers.

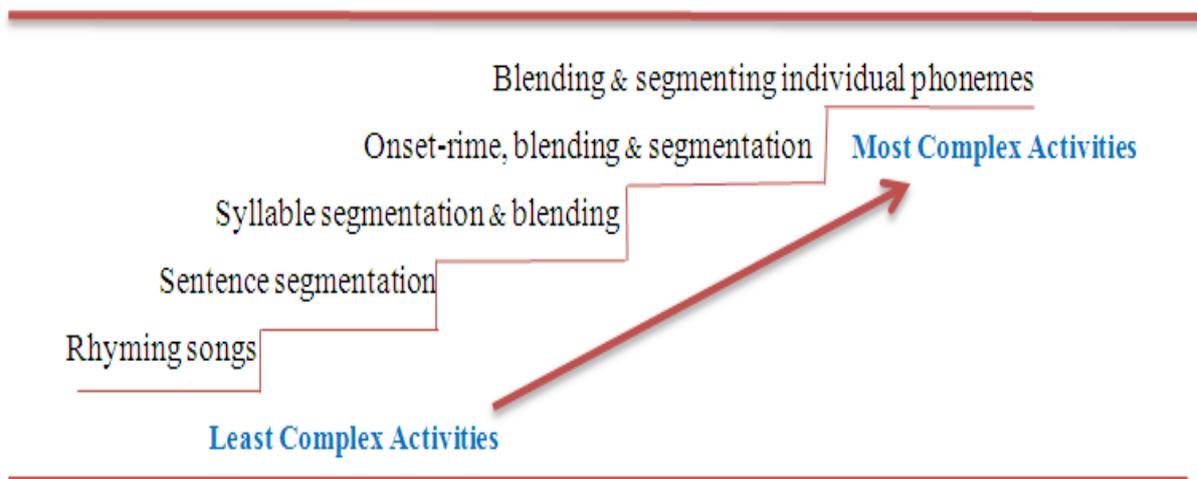
## Literature Review

### *Phonological Awareness Levels*

Mastering certain sub-skills is argued to be a prerequisite that can help young EFL learners become better readers. Therefore, the phonological awareness skill is assumed to be at the top of this list and a priority for both EFL learners and teachers. Reviewing the literature, researchers use an umbrella term to express the concept of phonological awareness which is used to demonstrate different levels of metalinguistic skills. Thus, phonological awareness is one component of metalinguistic awareness, which refers to the process of thinking about one's own language (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Others inaccurately use phonological awareness concept interchangeably with phonemic awareness, which is obviously related to the most complicated level of phonological awareness (Lane, Pullen, Eisele & Jordan, 2002). For example, Walsh (2009) pointed out that phonemic awareness refers to the smaller units of speech, and hence is considered one area of literacy that falls under the phonological category.

Furthermore, Chard and Dickson (1999) provided a clear categorisation of phonological awareness levels. As shown in Figure 1 below, phonological awareness activities can be classified in terms of complexity into three distinct levels. The first level tackles activities like initial rhymes, rhyming songs and sentence segmentation. This level which is considered the least complex shows awareness concerning what individual words can be separated. The second level includes activities that involve dividing words into syllables and words that can be combined into syllables. The final level which is deemed the most complicated one tackles activities such as blending and segmenting individual phonemes. This level, i.e. phonemic awareness is regarded the highest level of phonological awareness which is also attached to children's skill of early word decoding (Ball & Blachman, 1991).

Figure1. Continuum of Phonological Awareness Complexity (Adopted from Chard and Dickson 1999)



### ***Teachers' Knowledge of Phonological Awareness***

Reading attainment requires a number of fundamental sub-skills in order to maintain the development of reading skills. In early years of formal education, it is evident that reading skill development is vital for future reading achievement. A number of studies confirmed that teachers of novice students who provide them with phonological awareness instructions should have sufficient awareness and understanding of the process of language acquisition regarding the association between the phonemes and graphemes (Fielding-Barnsley & Purdie 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that primary school teachers should show greater understanding of how to implement an effective reading program that includes explicit phonological awareness instructions. As it will be expected that young learners find it difficult to segment phonemes by themselves relying on everyday experience, it is necessary for teachers involved in teaching emerging readers to have sufficient knowledge and ability regarding phonological awareness instructions (Shankweiler & Fowler 2004). In other words, teachers of emergent students will be able to have a positive influence on learners' reading acquisition if they show excellent awareness of the importance of phonological awareness skills.

Ample evidence obtained from previous research supported the need for phonological awareness instruction. For instance, Ouellette and Senechal (2008) concluded that teachers of young learners who took part in training workshops regarding the use of explicit phonological awareness in their primary classrooms revealed increased knowledge. Thus, teachers who appropriately acknowledge and understand the importance of phonological awareness can more easily and effectively apply their understanding through practical techniques within their classrooms. Consequently, their students will be able to cultivate the reading program more effectively which involves the constant provision of phonological skill instructions.

### ***Teachers' Perception of Phonological Awareness as a Fundamental Emerging Reading Skill***

Given that providing authentic and explicit instruction of phonological awareness skill can enhance young learners' reading skill, it is therefore advantageous for educators and teachers to perceive phonological awareness as a fundamental aspect of primary school reading programs. It is expected that such a perception will have a reflection on teachers' classroom practices. However, previous research revealed a paucity of studies that tackle the perception of phonological awareness in relation to kindergarten teachers (Dahmer 2010). Consequently, Savage and Carless (2005) concluded that students who have been exposed to reading programs which provided explicit phonological awareness instruction were more successful in their reading achievement compared to those who have not had similar instruction or have been exposed to it implicitly. It is hence recommended to incorporate the instruction of phonological awareness into any emerging reading program since it can identify those young students who

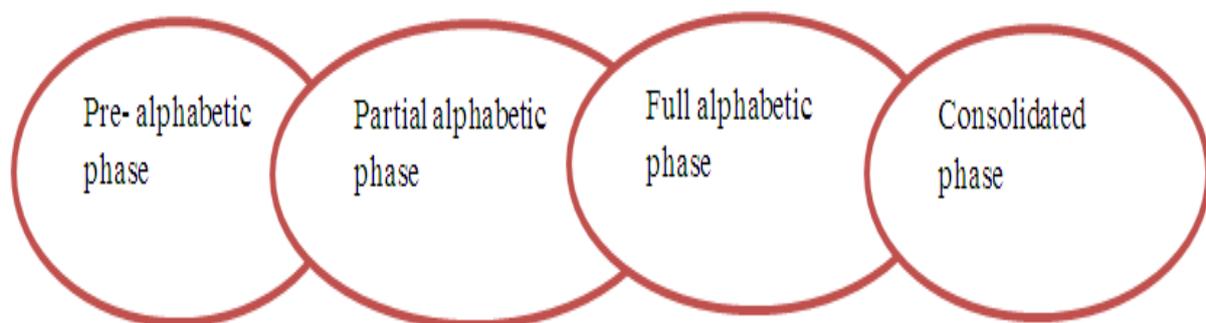
potentially have difficulties or problems with reading at an earlier stage. In a recent study, McNeill (2018) investigated the effectiveness of the methods used to develop pre-service teachers' phonemic, morphological and orthographic awareness of spelling instruction. The study recruited 86 pre-service teachers who participated in 10 hours of metalinguistic coursework. The implemented coursework focused on phonological awareness, orthographic awareness and morphological awareness. The findings disclosed that the coursework was helpful and effective in constructing teachers' phonemic, morphological and orthographic awareness.

In summary, despite the existence of rich groundwork regarding phonological awareness and learning to read, scarceness of studies that focus on early childhood education and EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness in the Arab World is evident through reviewing the related literature. Thus, the current study is an attempt to respond to this research gap with a particular focus on the conceptual basis of EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The area of language development, mainly in the case of children and novice learners, is governed with a large number of theoretical views (Ehri et al. 2001). Given that phonological awareness represents one of the significant pillars promote reading proficiency, this study is thus centred on EFL teachers' perception concerning the knowledge of phonological awareness levels. Figure 2 below illustrates the Phase Theory, which represents the theoretical framework of this study.

**Figure 2.** The Phase Theory of automatic word reading (Ehri, 2005).



Ehri (2005) suggested four phases for the development of fully automatic sight word reading. These phases include pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and consolidated alphabetic. It is suggested that Phase Theory can help teachers understand their students' reading expectations once they have progressed during the prior phases of learning (Gaskins, Ehri, Cress, O'Hara and Donnelly 1997). The *pre-alphabetic phase* takes place before any

alphabetic knowledge and does not involve any letter-sound relations. Such relation is maintained by using visual features known as cues (Ehri 2005). In the second phase, i.e. *partial alphabetic phase*, young learners use some letters in words and try to pronounce them. The first and last letters in a word are the most sophisticated in this phase (Ehri 2005). In the third phase, i.e. *full alphabetic phase*, emergent learners in reading can form alphabetic associations and use letter-sound relationship in sight words. During this phase, letter-sound associations start to solidify in memory (Ehri 2005). The last phase is identified as the *consolidated alphabetic phase* which is important to indicate that the repeated letter patterns formulated by emergent readers become consolidated in memory (ibid).

To conclude, the poor reading achievement of most learners may be attributed to the teachers' lack of knowledge concerning language structure in addition to their perceptions of teaching approaches (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski, and Chard 2001). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the perceptions of Jordanian EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage.

### ***Research Questions***

1. What is the perception of Jordanian EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage?
2. Is there a significant difference between perceptions of Jordanian EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness and their academic qualification, teaching experience, age, and gender?

### **Methods**

#### ***Research Design***

This study employed a quantitative method for the purpose of data collection and analysis since one of the features of this particular method is to collect numeric data and analyse them statistically (Creswell 2012). This study administered a cross-sectional questionnaire to EFL teachers teaching at Jordanian private primary schools in Amman. The questionnaire was designed to explore the perceptions of EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage. Data was collected during the second semester of the academic year 2018/2019. The data was gathered by completing the questionnaire and then was analysed using SPSS software. A set of statistical tests were used to analyse the entered data to answer the aforementioned research questions.

### *Participants*

The participants of this study were 73 Jordanian EFL teachers (48 females and 25 males), teaching at different private primary schools in Amman, Jordan. The teachers deliver five hours of teaching for each class per week with a total of 20 teaching hours per week. Their teaching experiences are in the range of 5-25 years with different levels of teaching qualifications. Table 1 below summarises the demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1:** Demographic Characteristics of EFL Teachers of Emerging Readers

<b>Demographic Factors</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Degree</b>	Diploma	05	06.8%
	Bachelor	57	78.1%
	Master	11	15.1%
<b>Experience</b>	Less than 5	16	21.9%
	5-10	29	39.7%
	11-15	15	20.5%
	16-20	08	11.0 %
	More than 20	05	06.8%
<b>Age</b>	22-34	30	41.1%
	35-44	21	28.8%
	45-55	17	23.3%
	Over 55	05	06.8%
	<b>Gender</b>	Male	25
Female		48	65.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>73</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Instrumentation and Study Procedure*

The study employed a cross-sectional questionnaire, which included 20 Likert-scale items (Dahmer 2010) to gather data from the respondents, i.e. the EFL Jordanian teachers. The survey collected demographic information involving age, academic degree, teaching experience and gender. It took the participants around twenty-five minutes to complete the survey. For reliability purposes, the alpha coefficient for the entire questionnaire was calculated and was found to be 0.798, which is considered good in terms of reliability. Additionally, the validity of the questionnaire was checked by a panel of experts in the field. Finally, the gathered data was entered for the analysis by using SPSS software version 22.

## Findings

### *Findings of the First Research Question*

The First Research Question asked about the perception of Jordanian EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage. A cross-sectional questionnaire was used to gather data to enable answering of the first research question. Descriptive statistics were used to run for frequencies, mean, standard deviation, and percentages. Table 6 below summarised the mean of the perception of EFL teachers' knowledge of the phonological awareness level.

**Table 6:** Perceptions of EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness level

Item		Mean	SD
1-	Phonological awareness skill is fundamental in the first grade.	4.23	.99
2-	Daily phonological awareness instruction is useful for predicting future reading difficulties.	4.04	.99
3-	Phonological awareness instruction can be used to prevent future reading difficulties.	4.14	1.01
4-	Phonological awareness and phonics instructions teach the same reading strategies.	3.52	1.04
5-	EFL emergent readers need to know how sounds connect to letters to be able to read.	4.05	1.02
6-	Phonological awareness and phonics are the same.	3.30	1.15
7-	Teaching phonemic segmentation skill should come first before phonemic blending or manipulation skills.	3.63	.89
8-	Difficulties in reading skills cannot be prevented in the first grade or later grades.	2.78	1.30
9-	Explicit phonological awareness instructions can decrease or eliminate early reading difficulties.	3.85	1.02
10-	Phonological awareness instructions do not help learners recognise the printed words.	2.58	1.30
11-	Difficulties in reading skill cannot be identified until the first grade or later grades.	2.88	1.37
12-	Daily phonological awareness instructions help young learners recognise words in print.	3.85	.99
13-	Phonological awareness instructions focus only on the sounds in words.	3.15	1.33
14-	Phonological awareness instructions should be explicitly taught with formal lessons to improve students' reading skill.	3.97	1.13

15-	Phoneme segmentation involves segmenting sounds to pronounce words.	3.92	.84
16-	Phonemic segmentation skill is easier than phoneme blending skill.	3.82	.91
17-	Syllable segmentation and blending activities are considered to be one of the most sophisticated levels of phonological awareness.	3.77	1.02
18-	Emergent readers should be able to isolate sounds in words.	3.34	1.20
19-	Phonics should be taught before phonological awareness.	3.73	1.03
20-	Learning to read includes blending sounds to form words.	4.00	.78

It is important to note that the focus of items 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18 and 20 was to unveil EFL teachers' perceptions of the knowledge of phonological awareness levels. The results as obtained from these items showed that the mean of participants' responses ranged between 3.15 and 4.23 (out of 5), indicating that most of the respondents agreed that phonological awareness skill is essential in developing EFL emergent readers' reading skill in the first grade. Some items focused on the significant level of phonemic awareness. For example, item 13 (M=3.15; SD= 1.33) indicated that most of the respondents believed that phonological awareness instruction focuses only on the sounds in words. Item 15 (M= 3.92; SD=.84) indicated that most of respondents agreed that phoneme segmentation involves segmenting sounds to pronounce words. The responses on item 20 (M= 4.00; SD=.78) indicated that the majority of respondents agreed that learning to read includes blending sounds to form words. Item 18 (M=3.34; SD= 1.20) showed that EFL teachers had a moderate level of awareness with respect to emergent readers' ability to isolate sounds in words.

Regarding the other items which were dedicated to explore the function of phonological awareness, the respondents agreed that the use of phonological awareness skill is useful for predicting and preventing future reading difficulties as in item 2 (M=4.04; SD=.99) and item 3 (M=4.14; SD=1.01). Furthermore, item 9 (M=3.85; SD=1.023) indicated that majority of the respondents agreed that explicit phonological awareness instructions can decrease or eliminate early reading difficulties. Similarly, item 14 (M=3.97; SD=1.13) designated that most respondents agreed that phonological awareness instruction should be explicitly given through formal lessons to improve students' reading skill. Responses to item 12 (M=3.85; SD=.99) indicated that most of EFL teachers agreed that daily phonological awareness instructions help young learners recognise words in print. However, there were items that contradicted the above responses. For example, items 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 16, 17, and 19 did not support the significant use of phonological awareness skill. The purpose of these items was to ensure the respondents do not choose responses randomly, which can lead to instrument redundancy.

As for items 4 (M=3.52; SD=1.04), 5 (M=4.05; SD=1.02), 6 (M=3.30; SD=1.15), and 19 (M=3.73; SD=1.03), the responses indicated that the teachers agreed that phonological

awareness instruction and phonics are similar. However, item 8 ( $M=2.78$ ;  $SD=1.30$ ) showed a low level of knowledge regarding reading skill difficulties in the first grade or later. In contrast, items 2 ( $M=4.04$ ;  $SD=.99$ ) and 3 ( $M=4.14$ ;  $SD=1.01$ ) showed a high level in the respondents' awareness concerning preventing future reading difficulties. Item 10 ( $M=2.58$ ;  $SD=1.30$ ) indicated a low level of awareness regarding the inability of learners to recognise the printed words, whereas it has been reported in item 12 ( $M=3.85$ ;  $SD=.99$ ) that most of the respondents agreed that daily phonological awareness instructions help young learners recognise words in print.

Furthermore, it has been found in item 11 ( $M=2.88$ ;  $SD=1.37$ ) that EFL teachers possess limited knowledge with respect to reading difficulties that cannot be identified or predicted until first grade or later grades. In contrast, item 2 ( $M=4.04$ ;  $SD=.99$ ) reported high level of awareness regarding the usefulness of phonological awareness instruction in predicting future reading difficulties. Item 16 ( $M=3.82$ ;  $SD=.91$ ) showed a moderate level of awareness concerning the easy task of phonemic segmentation skill compared to phoneme blending skill. Similarly, item 17 ( $M=3.77$ ;  $SD=1.02$ ) reported a moderate level of awareness with respect to the most complex levels of phonological awareness as a number of participants did not agree that syllable segmentation and blending activities are considered one of the most sophisticated levels of phonological awareness.

### ***Findings of the Second Research Question***

The second research question asked whether there is a significant difference between the perception of Jordanian EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness and their academic qualifications, teaching experiences, age and gender. To answer this question, One-way ANOVA analyses for academic qualification, teaching experience and age, and t-test analyses for gender were used to determine whether there are significant differences between the aforementioned variables.

Table 2 below demonstrates the effect of gender on the EFL teachers' perception of knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage by running an independent sample t-test. The output of the t-test did not reveal any significant differences between male and female EFL teachers' perception. Thus, gender has no noticeable impact on teachers' perception with the insignificant p-value = .24.

**Table 2:** T-test for the effect of gender on EFL teachers' perception of phonological awareness

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
(Items 1-20) EFL teachers' perception of knowledge of phonological awareness	Male	25	73.68	8.64	.70	.24
	Female	48	71.96	10.41		

\*p < 0.05

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to show whether there are significant differences among EFL teachers' perception based on their academic qualification, teaching experience and age. Table 3 below summarises the output of the ANOVA regarding teachers' perception of the knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage in relation to academic qualification. As seen in Table 3, there is no significant difference between EFL teachers' perception and their academic degree since the p-value is .85.

**Table 3:** ANOVA for EFL teachers' perception and their academic degrees

	Degree	N	Mean	SD	F	P
(Items 1-20) EFL teachers' perceptions of knowledge of phonological awareness	Diploma	5	74.40	5.77	.154	.85
	Bachelor	57	72.60	10/05		
	Master	11	71.45	10.59		
	Total	73	72.55	9.81		

\*p < 0.05

Regarding the relationship between EFL teachers' perception and their teaching experience, Table 4 below depicts the ANOVA results. The insignificant p-value indicates that there is no relationship between EFL teachers' perception of their knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage and their teaching experience.

**Table 4:** ANOVA for EFL teachers' perception and their teaching experience

	Experience	N	Mean	SD	F	P
(Items 1-20) EFL teachers' perceptions of the knowledge of phonological awareness	Less than 5	16	70.13	14.10	.43	.78
	5-10	29	72.90	10.19		
	11-15	15	74.67	5.24		
	16-20	8	71.75	7.64		
	More than 20	5	73.20	4.43		
	Total	73	72.55	9.81		

Finally, Table 5 below illustrates the relationship between EFL teachers' perception of phonological awareness levels and their age group. The results of the ANOVA showed that there is a potential relationship between EFL teachers' perceptions and their age group with the p-value approaching a significant level ( $p = .09$ ).

**Table 5:** ANOVA for EFL teachers' perception and their age

	Age	N	Mean	SD	F	p
(Items 1-20) EFL teachers' perceptions of the knowledge of phonological awareness	22-34	30	69.70	11.90	2.18	.09
	35-44	21	76.19	9.26		
	45-55	17	71.94	4.75		
	Over 55	5	76.40	6.10		
	Total	73	72.55	9.81		

To conclude, the One-Way ANOVAs and the Independent Sample t-test demonstrate non-significant differences between EFL teachers' perception of the knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage and their academic qualification, teaching experience, age and gender. These results indicate that EFL teachers' perception is not affected by any of the aforementioned variables. However, by approaching a statistically significant level, the age variable seems to have a potential influence on EFL teachers' perception of phonological awareness.

## Discussion

This study was designed to investigate the perception of Jordanian EFL teachers of the knowledge of phonological awareness levels at emerging readers' stage and whether their perception is affected by a number of independent variables, i.e. academic qualification, teaching experience, age and gender.

### *Discussion of the Results of the First Research Question*

The high level of awareness obtained in items 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, and 20 proposed that Jordanian EFL teachers of emerging readers recognise the significance of phonological awareness in improving EFL emerging readers' reading skill. For example, items 1, 2, 3, 9, and 20 represented the belief that phonological awareness skill is essential for learning to read and useful for predicting and preventing any future reading deficiency. This result goes in line with studies conducted by Al-Otaiba et al. (2008) and Burke, Hagan-Burke, Kwok, and Parker (2009). Burke et al. (2009) claimed that "phonological awareness is the first essential element of a prevention-based approach to reading failure and disability" (p. 209). Hence, when EFL teachers of emerging readers perceive such significant uses, young learners will be able to decrease or eliminate any reading deficiency in their future learning.

As for item 7 and 15, a noticeable level of awareness was reported regarding the role and function of phonemic segmentation, i.e. segmenting speech into discrete sounds in order to pronounce words. It should be noted that this result was in harmony with the findings of Ball and Blachman (1991), who concluded that most of kindergarteners are able to learn how to segment spoken words into phonemes. This also implies that the majority of respondents are aware of the phonemic awareness levels. Another example showing teachers' moderate awareness of phonological awareness levels was represented by item 16 as the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that phonemic segmentation skill is easier than phoneme blending skill. Moreover, most of the participants reported a significant level of awareness concerning the main function of phonological awareness as indicated by the responses on items 12 and 13. The descriptive data also indicated a high level of awareness represented by item 14 on the use of explicit and formal phonological awareness instructions to improve learners' reading skill. However, item 10 revealed a disagreement with the statement that phonological awareness instructions do not help young learners identify the printed words.

Consequently, due to this notable level of knowledge supporting explicit and formal instruction of phonological awareness, it seems that a large number of EFL teachers at private schools in Jordan do perceive explicit instruction as essential in the programs of early years. This relevant finding is supported by the responses attained from item 18 which reported that a moderate number of participants mentioned that emerging readers should be able to isolate sounds in words. In addition, item 20 reported that significant number of respondents indicated that learning to read includes blending sounds to form words. This result is consistent with that of Abshire (2006), who contended that explicit phonological awareness instruction appears to provide significant academic achievement. In contrast, a low level of awareness represented by item 17 revealed that syllable segmentation and blending activities are considered to be one of the most sophisticated levels of phonological awareness.

An interesting finding in this study was that the majority of the respondents seemed to lack the basic knowledge of phonics. This is probably due to the idea that EFL teachers use phonics and phonological awareness interchangeably as indicated by items 4, 5, 6, and 19. This result is consistent with what Bos et al. (2001) found. It should be noted that this survey involved concepts of phonological awareness and phonics which means that incorrect responses give a noticeable indication of the lack of knowledge or the misinterpretation of both terms. For example, item 4 reported that a moderate number of respondents agree that phonological awareness and phonics instructions teach the same reading strategies. In addition, item 6 reported that most of the participants agree that phonological awareness and phonics are the same, whereas a low level of awareness was represented by item 19 regarding the statement that phonics should be taught before phonological awareness. As for item 5, it reported a high

level of knowledge concerning the belief that EFL emerging readers need to know how sounds connect to letters to be able to read. It is crucial to indicate that teachers who do not acquire adequate knowledge of both terms are not effectively able to teach both concepts to their young learners (Kozminsky and Kozminsky 1995).

### ***Discussion of the Results of the Second Research Question***

It is important to note that the results of the independent variables in this study (gender, academic qualification, teaching experience, and age) did not show any statistically significant differences regarding their influence on the perception of EFL teachers. However, the focus of this section will be dedicated to discussing the obtained results of two variables, namely gender and teaching experience. As for gender, the findings indicated that there was no significant difference in the perception of teachers of emerging readers in relation to their phonological awareness levels knowledge based on gender. This means that gender had no influence on the perception of EFL teachers. This can be attributed to the fact that most EFL teachers agreed with the overall perception related to the levels of phonological awareness. This also implies that teachers are generally aware of the significant levels of phonological awareness. It is important to note that gender alone is not likely to determine the quality of a teacher (Francis et al. 2008). Relatively, having competent male and female teachers can only improve the quality of teaching profession. Thus, this result was supported by Kassaian (2011) and Wolter, Braun, and Hannover (2015), who revealed that gender was not found to be an influential factor regarding perceptions of English literacy skills.

Regarding teaching experience, the demographic data showed that 39.7% of the participating EFL teachers had 5-10 years of teaching experience. Therefore, the findings of this study are probably influenced by a higher percentage of EFL teachers with this category of teaching experience. The results showed that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of EFL teachers of emergent readers based on teaching experience variable. This can be attributed to the fact that most of EFL teachers agreed with the overall perceptions in relation to phonological awareness levels. This result is supported by a number of studies (e.g., Bos et al. 2001; Dahmer 2010). These studies found no significant differences in the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding literacy skills based on teaching experience.

The results of the current study showed a positive impact of EFL teachers' knowledge of basic language literacy skill represented by phonological awareness levels. In this study, the specialised content knowledge of EFL teachers indicated general awareness of the teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness skills. This is in line with the theory of content knowledge of teaching which proposed that specialised content knowledge is an essential subdivision of complete content knowledge specialised in the work of teaching in a way that varies from common content knowledge required by teachers (Ball, Thames, and Phelps 2008).

## Conclusion

To conclude, the findings of the current study supported the significance of phonological awareness levels pertaining to the perceptions of EFL teachers of emerging readers at primary stage. However, there was no interaction between perceptions of EFL teachers' knowledge of phonological awareness levels in the emerging readers' stage and the variation in their gender, academic qualification, teaching experience, or age. Even though EFL teachers showed knowledge of phonological awareness, a misunderstanding of the concepts of phonological awareness and phonics was evident. Due to the misinterpretation of both concepts, it should be noted that EFL teachers who do not gain sufficient knowledge of both terms cannot teach both concepts effectively to their students. As a result, this could negatively affect the development of their reading skill in future. Thus, decision makers at Ministries of Education are recommended to work on remedial intervention programs regarding reading skill development.

The findings of this study suggest a number of practical and pedagogical implications. First, there is a need to increase specialised content knowledge of EFL teachers on reading and literacy skills, particularly, the knowledge of phonological awareness and phonics. The results further showed that EFL teachers do possess noticeable knowledge of all of phonological awareness levels, but their knowledge might not be sufficient enough to help them distinguish between phonological awareness and phonics. Such skills are urgently required for effective teaching of emerging readers. This means that EFL teachers are required to enhance their specialised content knowledge for the purpose of improving emerging readers' levels to create learnable and understandable communication among this group of learners in their classrooms. Another implication is that Ministries of Education or teacher training bodies are encouraged to offer in-service training courses which are needed for EFL teachers concerning general literacy skills and particularly phonology.

It is crucial to indicate that this study is limited to the population from which the sample was drawn. Therefore, the findings should be generalised with caution as they were obtained based on a Likert-survey tool. Future studies are recommended to include interviews for a more in-depth exploration of EFL teachers' perception of their phonological awareness. Furthermore, it is worth suggesting that future research should compare native and non-native EFL teachers' perception as well as teachers from different first languages. Additionally, in order for EFL teachers to broaden their knowledge of phonological awareness usage, they are advised to follow up related and up-to-date research, attend courses on teaching reading skill, or take part in continuous professional development opportunities that constitute a platform related to reading skill foundations. Technology integration (e.g., blackboard collaborate system) may provide assistance in enhancing the quality of phonology instructions, specifically in phonological awareness and phonics.

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