

An Investigation into Phonological Awareness and ESL Instructional Practices Provided to Grade 4 ESL Students: A Study Based on a Selected ESL Tuition Class in Galle District

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Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structures of language, including identifying and working with sounds at different levels such as words, syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes. Phonological awareness skills are crucial for ESL bilinguals as they form the foundation for reading and writing proficiency. These skills enable students to recognize and manipulate sounds in a new language, aiding in the accurate pronunciation, decoding, and spelling of words. This study investigated phonological awareness and ESL instructional practices among Grade 4 ESL students in a tuition class in Galle District. The research aims to assess the performance of these bilingual Sinhala-English students on various phonological tasks and evaluate the effectiveness of current ESL teaching strategies. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative analysis of students' performance in tasks such as word awareness, rhyme recognition, rhyme production, syllable counting, syllable segmentation, phoneme detection, and phoneme blending, with qualitative insights from an open-ended questionnaire completed by their teacher. The findings revealed strengths in rhyme recognition and phoneme blending while highlighting weaknesses in rhyme production and syllable segmentation. The study indicates the necessity for a balanced instructional approach that addresses all aspects of phonological awareness. The thematic analysis of the teacher's responses identified effective strategies and highlighted the need for additional resources and support to enhance phonological skills. Despite limitations such as a small sample size and the lack of longitudinal data, the study provides valuable insights into the phonological awareness of ESL students in this context. Recommendations for future instructional practices include integrating a variety of phonological activities, utilizing advanced technological tools, and fostering collaboration among ESL specialists. This comprehensive approach aims to improve students' reading, writing, and overall language proficiency, preparing them for success in an English-speaking world.

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