CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the study's foundational elements, including the background, research question formulation, research objectives, research hypothesis, significance, scope, limitations, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Research

Reading is a process of decoding written symbols into meaningful ideas, making it a crucial skill for communication and understanding the world. As Somadayo (2011) highlights, reading is an interactive activity that involves interpreting the meaning of written materials. Developed societies often regard reading as a fundamental necessity, emphasizing the importance of nurturing reading habits from a young age. Suganda (2015) adds that reading and writing skills enhance students' ability to communicate effectively, which is the ultimate goal of language learning. Parents and teachers play pivotal roles in fostering children's reading interest and habits.

In the context of English language learning for young learners (EYL), teaching reading requires approaches tailored to their developmental needs. The English alphabetic writing system, which represents phonemes and morphemes, presents unique challenges (Robertson & Deacon, 2019). One critical skill in this process is phonemic awareness, defined as the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds within words (Scott, 2009). According to Bray

(2007), Phonemic awareness plays a crucial role in developing reading proficiency and serves as a reliable predictor of future reading success. It enables children to recognize the relationship between sounds and letters, which is essential for decoding words effectively. Early literacy instruction in EYL typically emphasizes phonemic awareness, as it can be developed within a relatively short time (Reading & Deuren, 2007)

The connection between phonemic awareness and reading comprehension has been extensively researched over the years. Monesa (2022) discovered a strong correlation between phonemic awareness and reading comprehension among fifth-semester university students. Similarly, Zahira and Andreani (2023) also found a significant positive relationship between phonemic awareness and reading comprehension skills in second-grade students at Indonesian elementary schools. Children who demonstrate a strong ability to isolate, blend, segment, and manipulate phonemes in their early years are much more likely to become proficient readers later on. Conversely, children who struggle with phonemic awareness often face challenges in reading comprehension and fluency. Thus, phonemic awareness becomes the foundation for literacy acquisition, which determines a child's overall reading, spelling, and language comprehension skills.

Much has been written about children's ability in phonemic awareness during the early years and their impact to later reading ability, but in the case of EFL learning more specifically countries such as Indonesia, the development of these skills can be a particularly difficult endeavor given the difference in

language and general lack of experience in the English language. As stated by Yurianto et al., (2021), Indonesian EFL learners have difficulty identifying English phonemes. According to Firman et al., (2021) The low achievement in comprehending English reading texts is affected by some reading difficulties, one of which is low phonemic awareness, thus for further studies, phonemic awareness in reading activities should be a concern.

However, the researcher argue for this problem that it may not be fully recognized or overcome with traditional teaching methods. Pindiprolu and Forbush (2009) highlighted that difficulties in developing early reading skills can be most effectively addressed using computer-based reading programs. These programs should provide students with structured and clear instruction in the five essential areas of early reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. (National Reading Panel, 2000). Karemaker, Pitchford, and O'Malley (as cited in Radell, 2012) argue that incorporating software as a supplement to traditional teaching methods is more effective for developing phonemic awareness skills than relying solely on traditional teaching. Various technologies can help improve phonemic awareness, such as computer-based programs with audio features, adaptive software tailored to student performance, audio-visual multimedia, and interactive computer games (Blake, Winsor, & Allen, 2014).

For this study, the researcher utilize interactive digital media for teaching phonemic awareness, considering it provides immediate audio-visual feedback and making learning fun and interactive. According to Castro (2019), the

multimedia elements, like animations and sounds, make phonemic concepts more concrete and accessible. These technologies cater to different learning styles, keeping students motivated and attentive, which is crucial for developing foundational reading skills. From these reasons the researcher use an application, namely Starfall.

Starfall is a application that provides a learning framework for basic reading instruction with specific games and lessons (Van Wormer, 2010). It provides some practice which include identification of sound, phonemic sound-ability and phoneme blending which are essential skills in early reading. The specific feature of this application is friendly interface and appealing design, so students of early ages would be interested in its use.

Some previous study are related to this research about the phonemic awareness and the use of technologies such as Starfall application. Firstly, study was done by Albreiki (2020) with the title "Exploring the Role of Interactive Technology in Promoting Kindergarteners' Phonemic Awareness Skills." The results of this research demonstrated that the use of interactive technology significantly promoted kindergarteners' phonemic awareness, specifically in developing letter-sound relationships and sight word recognition. The Starfall website was utilized as one of the interactive technological tools in this study, it facilitated the development of phonemic awareness through engaging, multimodal learning activities. This study was conducted at the kindergarten level in the United Arab Emirates. The other study was done by (Zamora &

Pittman, 2018; Pomar, 2018; Raffas, 2022; Alhumsi, 2021) that also confirm the influence of technology on phonemic awareness.

Some of the previous research have concluded that technology facilitated learning resources can be very useful in class. The literature review also shows that digital applications like Starfall can create an engaging environment. Nevertheless, the effect of the Starfall application on phonemic awareness in an EFL setting, focusing on Indonesian elementary learners, has not been sufficiently elucidated as yet. Based on these statements, the researcher helps to answer this particular concern by conducting the research entitled "The Effectiveness of Using Starfall Application on the Fourth Grade Students' Phonemic Awareness at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir"

B. Statement of Research Problem

Based on the background of the study, the research problems are defined as follows:

Is the use of the "Starfall" Application effective on the student's phonemic awareness of the Fourth Grades at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir?

C. Objectives of The Research

Based on the research question, the purpose of this study is to determine whether the Starfall Application is effective towards the fourth grade students' phonemic awareness at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir.

D. Research Hypothesis

Based on the research problem "Is the use of the "Starfall" Application effective on the student's phonemic awareness of the Fourth Grade at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir?"

The researcher formulates a hypothesis as follows:

1. **Null Hypothesis**

   (Ho): There is no significant difference on students' phonemic awareness before and after taught by using Starfall Application of the fourth grades students at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir.

2. **Alternative Hypothesis**

   (Ha): There is a significant difference on students' phonemic awareness before and after taught by using Starfall Application of the fourth grade students at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir.

E. Signifcance of The Research

In this study, the researcher anticipates that the findings of this study are expected to be valuable for:

   a. Teachers

   The result of this research can be used to help teachers in teaching students' phonemic awareness by implementing Starfall application.

   b. Students

   The result of this research can be used to develop their abilities in phonemic awareness. Because by implementing this application, it

will give them a lot of new experiences in order that they will be more interested and enjoy in their learning.

c. The future researchers

Future researchers can use the findings of this study as an additional reference for conducting similar research, obtaining relevant information, and supporting their studies.

F. Scope and Limitation of The Research

Based on the research background above, the researcher of this research focused on the use of the Starfall Application on the students' phonemic awareness. This study is only conducted on students of fourth-grade at SDI Al-Hidayah Samir. The limitation of this research is the focus on using the Learn to Read level of the Starfall application as the teaching medium for phonemic awareness.

The material of phonemic awareness taught by the researcher includes the recognition and pronunciation of short vowels (such as -an, -at, -en, -et, -ig, -ip, -ot, -og, -ug, -ink), long vowels with silent e patterns (such as -a-e, -i-e, -o-e, -u-e), r-controlled vowels (ar, or, er, ir, ur), diphthongs (such as ai, ea, ee, oa), as well as consonant blends and digraphs (such as sh, wh, th, ch). These materials were selected based on the features available in the application and were presented through interactive activities, word-building exercises, and pronunciation practice supported by audio-visual feedback.

G. Definition of Key Terms

1. Effectiveness

   Effectiveness refers to how well a task is completed and how much the results match what was expected. In simple terms, if a task is finished according to the plan, it can be considered effective.

2. Starfall Application Software

   Starfall is an educational application designed to support reading and phonemic awareness through interactive games, activities, songs, and stories. It aims to make learning to read engaging and enjoyable for young learners.

3. Phonemic Awareness

   Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to recognize that spoken words are composed of individual sounds, known as phonemes, and the capability to rearrange and substitute these phonemes to form new words (Paganelli, 2007).