

EQUIPPING PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH PHONETICS

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Abstract

Phonics is one of the subjects that pre-schools teachers need to teach. It is not easy to teach this subject since the text books do not provide how to pronounce the sounds. Phonetics facilitates the pre-school teachers who teach Phonics. Phonetics equips teachers with diagrams that presents what organs of speech are activated during the production of sounds. The community service program is to equip pre-school teachers with the sounds of bilabials, labiodentals, dentals, alveolars, and velars. The community service programs is conducted online using zoom platform and WAG. It comprises 14 sessions attended by 10 pre-school teachers. The training has three stages: teaching the class, demonstrating the sounds and assessment. The teachers are able to finish all the task given and are able to do the work individually and in group. In addition, they are given the opportunities to demonstrate how to pronounce the sounds learned in zoom room. They are drilled. They are assessed by pronouncing the words list and record all the production. After being equipped with Phonetics, they are expected to bring this knowledge when they teach their students. Therefore, the students can follow the lesson easily.

Keywords: *Phonics, Phonetics. Pre-School Teachers, Sounds, Diagram*

Abstrak

Fonik adalah salah satu mata Pelajaran yang diajarkan oleh guru-guru preschool. Pengajaran fonik ke siswa preschool ini bukanlah hal yang mudah Siswa preschool berlatih mengucapkan bunyi-bunyi dalam Bahasa Inggris dan guru akan menjadi model dalam pengajarannya. Fonetik memfasilitasi guru- guru yang mengajar fonik untuk memberikan cara yang mudah ke siswa preschool. Fonetik juga memberikan pengetahuan ke guru-guru preschool agar siswa dapat mengaktifkan alat bicara mereka sehingga siswa mudah membunyikan bunyi tersebut. Dalam pelatihan ini guru-guru yang mengajar fonik akan dibekali tentang bagaimana memproduksi bunyi tentang bagaimana memproduksi bunyi-bunyi yang diajarkan dalam buku teks siswa. Dalam buku siswa tidak terdapat penjelasan bagaimana cara membunyikan bunyi tersebut berdasarkan diagram fonetik. Guru-guru tersebut dilatih dengan menggunakan drilling dan mendemonstrasikan bunyi-bunyi tersebut. Evaluasi diberikan secara lisan dan tulisan untuk mengetahui pemahamannya. Diharapkan guru-guru tersebut dapat mendemonstrasikan dan dapat menjadi model untuk siswa sehingga siswa dapat melihat dan berlatih bagaimana membunyikan bunyi-bunyi tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Fonik, Fonetik, Guru Presechool, Bunyi, Diagram

INTRODUCTION

Phonics instruction has become one of the most essential components in early childhood education, particularly in preschool settings where children begin developing foundational literacy skills. The ability to recognize sounds, connect letters with their corresponding pronunciations, and produce accurate speech forms the basis for future language acquisition and reading competence. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), phonics learning is not only related to reading development but also to listening comprehension, pronunciation accuracy, and communicative confidence. Preschool children are at a critical stage of language development in which exposure to correct pronunciation significantly influences their long-term linguistic habits. Consequently, teachers play a central role as language models whose pronunciation and articulation directly affect children's language learning outcomes (Cameron, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, many preschool teachers encounter difficulties in producing accurate English sounds. The sounds that are particularly those that do not exist in their first language. These pronunciation challenges often result in inconsistent phonics instruction, inaccurate modeling of sounds, and limited effectiveness in early English learning activities. Therefore, strengthening teachers' phonics competence has become an urgent issue in preschool education.

Among preschool teachers, several practical and pedagogical problems contribute to the weakness of phonics instruction. One of the major issues is the limited knowledge of phonetics and phonology among teachers who are responsible for introducing English sounds to young learners. Kelly (2000) explains that many English teachers experience pronunciation difficulties because they lack formal training in phonetics and articulatory awareness. Many teachers therefore rely heavily on imitation or textbook pronunciation guides without understanding the underlying phonetic principles. Pre-school teachers have difficulties to understand the teachers' manual textbook which is not practical. Additionally, they have no background knowledge about it.

Regarding commercially available preschool textbooks often provide only simplified pronunciation examples without sufficient explanation of how sounds are formed. Such materials rarely include detailed guidance regarding articulation, stress patterns, or sound differentiation, making it difficult for teachers to teach pronunciation accurately and systematically. Furthermore, teachers frequently lack access to practical pronunciation training that is specifically designed for early childhood contexts.

Phonics is one of the subjects that preschool teachers have to teach. The pre-school students learn how to pronounce the words appropriately. The teachers should be good models for the learners for good pronunciation. To be models, they should possess competence in how pronouncing sounds appropriately (Bai & Yuan, 2019). Therefore, the teachers are trained to get the knowledge how the sounds are produced based on place and manner of articulation. The material trained is consonants. Besides, they learn the type of articulators that are involved in producing the sounds. Teachers should be equipped with Phonetics to pronounce the sounds well. Phonetics which is defined as the study of speech sounds facilitate the teachers with the detailed elaboration about how to say the sounds accurately. Moreover, they learn about how sounds are produced by the articulators.

Phonetics is the field that examines speech sounds, encompassing three key aspects: (1) the production of sounds, (2) their transmission, and (3) their perception. Human language consists of various sounds, which involve different speech organs. Phonetics



explains how these sounds are produced based on two primary factors: the place of articulation and the manner of articulation. The former refers to the interaction of articulators to generate sounds, while the latter concerns the way airflow is modified at specific points to create different sounds (Todd, 1997; Roach, 2009; Ladefoged, 2011).

The study of phonetics encompasses the production, transmission, and perception of speech sounds. Speech organs play a crucial role in this process, influencing how sounds are articulated. As explored by Todd (1997), Roach (2009, 2022), and Ladefoged (2011), phonetics is categorized based on place and manner of articulation. Additionally, Roach (2009, 2022) provides details the mechanism by which speech organs contribute to sound production. These organs, including the lips, tongue, teeth, alveolar ridge, hard and soft palate, and vocal cords, all participate in articulation. Their roles in speech formation are defined by their ability to modify airflow and contact other articulators, thereby generating various speech sounds.

Roach (2009, 2022) provides a detailed account of this mechanism, explaining how different speech organs contribute to sound production. These organs include the lips, tongue, teeth, alveolar ridge, hard palate, soft palate, oral and mouth cavities, pharynx, larynx, vocal cords, and glottis. Their roles are described as follows: (1) The pharynx is a tube situated above the larynx, measuring approximately 7 cm in women and 8 cm in men. At its upper end, it branches into two parts: one leading to the back of the mouth and the other extending toward the nasal cavity. (2) The velum, or soft palate, is positioned in a way that allows airflow through both the nose and mouth. It serves as an articulator that the tongue can touch. When pronouncing [k] and [g], the tongue contacts the underside of the velum, generating velar sounds. (3) The hard palate, commonly referred to as the "roof of the mouth," is easily accessible by the tongue. (4) The alveolar ridge, located behind the front teeth, is positioned between the top front teeth and the hard palate. Though it feels smooth, it has a rough surface covered in ridges. Sounds produced by the tongue touching this area, such as [t] and [d], are called alveolar sounds. (5) The tongue functions as an articulator capable of assuming different shapes and positions. Though it has distinguishable parts, there are no clear boundaries within the tongue.

Place of Articulation

Phonetics categorizes sound production based on the place and manner of articulation (Todd, 1997; Roach, 2009; Ladefoged, 2011). Speech sounds result from the activation of specific speech organs, including:

1. Bilabial sounds: Produced when the upper and lower lips meet, as in words like *pie, buy, be, pray, cab, ship*.
2. Labiodental sounds: Created by raising the lower lip until it nearly touches the upper front teeth, as in *fine, vine, fan, van, tough, caravan*.
3. Dental sounds: Formed when the tongue tip or blade touches the upper front teeth, as in *thigh, thy*.
4. Alveolar sounds: Occur when the tongue tip or blade contacts the alveolar ridge, as in *die, nie, let*.
5. Palatal sounds: Generated when the front of the tongue comes into contact with the hard palate, as in *you, she, ship*.
6. Velar sounds: Produced when the back of the tongue touches the soft palate, as in *hack, hug*.



Manner of Articulation

Sounds are also categorized based on how they are articulated. In English, consonants are classified into stops, fricatives, affricates, nasals, liquids, and glides:

1. Stops: These are produced by completely blocking the airstream. For example, [p] and [b] are bilabial stops formed by momentarily closing the lips to obstruct airflow. Other stop consonants include [t], [d], [k], and [g].
2. Fricatives: These sounds involve a nearly complete closure of the airstream, creating friction similar to air escaping from a punctured tire. Examples include [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [s], [z], [ʃ], and [ʒ].
3. Affricates: These are a blend of stops and fricatives. In English, the affricates include [tʃ] as in *chain* and *rich*, and [dʒ] as in *Jane* and *ridge*.
4. Nasals: Air flows through the nasal passage when producing nasal sounds, which include [m], [n], and [ŋ]. The position of these sounds aligns with those of [p, t, k], but airflow is directed through the nose.
5. Liquids: These include [l] and [r], as heard in *lilt* and *roar*. The [l] sound occurs when the tongue tip touches the alveolar ridge while allowing air to escape from the sides. The [r] sound is produced by curling the tongue tip behind the alveolar ridge and flipping it forward.
6. Glides: These sounds involve minimal constriction of articulators and resemble vowels. The [w] sound is produced by raising the back of the tongue toward the velum while rounding the lips, while [j] is articulated in a manner similar to the "ee" sound in *bee*. Both [w] and [j] are classified as semi-vowels due to their vowel-like properties.

In summary, consonants are classified based on three criteria: the level of airflow obstruction (e.g., stops, fricatives, nasals), the place of articulation (e.g., dental, alveolar, palatal), and voicing (whether the sound is voiced or voiceless). This study aims to train preschool teachers in phonetics, equipping them with the skills needed to teach phonics effectively. By understanding proper pronunciation, teachers can confidently instruct young learners using phonetic charts that categorize sounds based on place and manner of articulation. The phonetic training primarily focuses on bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, and velar sounds, as these are fundamental in the phonics materials used by preschool children.

METHODS

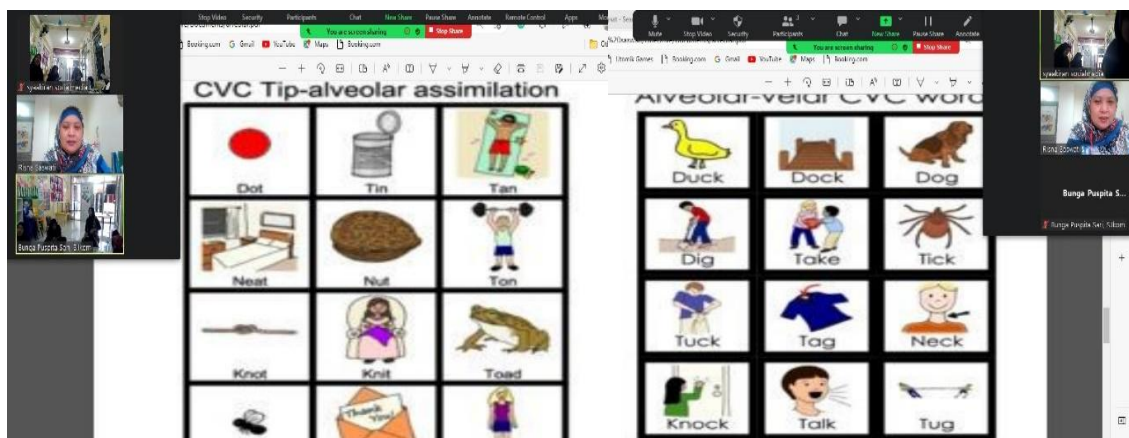
Understanding phonetics is essential for effective pronunciation instruction, particularly for preschool teachers. Training sessions focus on helping teachers develop the ability to produce and teach fundamental sounds through structured phonetic exercises. The target sounds include bilabial, labiodental, dental, alveolar, and velar consonants, which are commonly introduced to young learners in phonics textbooks. By gaining expertise in phonetics, teachers can ensure accurate pronunciation and facilitate effective language learning in preschool students. The lesson is conveyed using online modes. The synchronous uses Zoom as the platform and WA group is used for asynchronous. The sessions consist of 14 sessions without giving an achievement test. They just practice a lot. The participants are six kindergarten teachers who teach *RA Syaakiran Islamic* Preschool in **Matraman** Jakarta. The sounds they are supposed to produce are recorded and sent using whatsapp platform. The material for the training is presented in the following table:



Tabel 1. Material

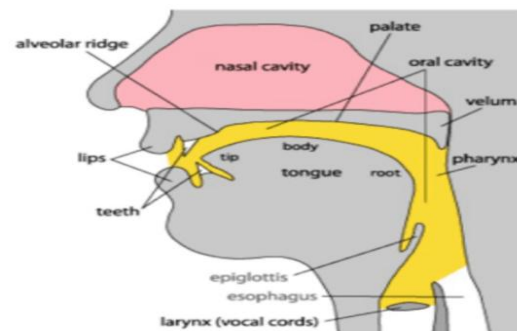
Session	Material	Platform
1 and 2	Introduction to Phonetics	Zoom and WAG
3 and 4	Bilabials	Zoom and WAG
5 and 6	Labiodentals	Zoom and WAG
7 and 8	Dentals	Zoom and WAG
9 and 10	Alveolars	Zoom and WAG
11 and 12	Velars	Zoom and WAG
13 and 14	Assessment	Zoom and WAG

The zoom shots for the process of teaching and learning using the zoom platform:



The material for teaching phonics:

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palato-velar	Velar	Glottal
Unvoiced (-V)	-V	-V	-V	-V	-V	-V	-V	-V
Voiced (+V)	+V	+V	+V	+V	+V	+V	+V	+V
Stops (Plosives)	p b			t d			k g	ʔ
Fricatives		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricates				tʃ dʒ				
Nasals	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral (approximant)				l				
Approximant	w			r		j		ʍ



What is velar?

➤ When you make sounds like *k* and *g*, you can feel the back of your tongue touching the velum.

Velars

- ▶ Sounds produced with the back of the tongue against the velum (soft palate) are called velars.
- ▶ They are represented by the symbol [k], [g] and [ŋ] as in **kid, kill, go, gun, give, sing and ringing.**
- ▶ Despite the variety in spelling, the [k] sound is both then initial and final sound in the words **cook, kick and coke.**

Labiodental consonants

f fine v vine

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This segment is to elaborate the teaching sessions, the task given and the result of the pre-school teachers' work.

Stage 1: Knowledge Building

The first stage of the program focuses on building participants' foundational understanding of English phonetics and pronunciation. This stage is designed to introduce preschool teachers to concepts related to speech sounds and phonics instruction before engaging them in practical pronunciation activities. At the beginning of the training, participants are introduced to the concept of phonetics as the scientific study of speech sounds and their production. Therefore, this introductory session aimed to strengthen participants' conceptual awareness regarding the relationship between phonetics, pronunciation, and phonics instruction in preschool education. The training then continues with explanations regarding the organs of speech, including the tongue, lips, teeth, alveolar ridge, palate, vocal cords, and nasal cavity. They are introduced with the organ of speech. Participants are introduced to how these speech organs function together to produce English sounds. During this session, visual diagrams and video demonstrations are used to assist participants recognize the physical movement of articulators during pronunciation. It is conducted in session 1 and session 2. Additionally, they are supposed to be aware of the organ of speech used during sounds production.

Particular attention is given to English consonants and vowels that are commonly problematic for Indonesian speakers, such as /θ/, /ð/, /v/, and /æ/. Odden (2005) explains that understanding articulatory mechanisms is important because speech sounds are produced through coordinated movement of speech organs.

During the initial sessions, several participants experience difficulties distinguishing similar English sounds and identifying differences between Indonesian and

English pronunciation patterns. Some participants also show hesitation and lack of confidence when asked to pronounce unfamiliar sounds individually. According to Kelly (2000), learners and teachers commonly experience pronunciation difficulties when they lack phonetic awareness and articulatory knowledge. These challenges indicate that participants require not only theoretical explanations but also intensive guided practice to improve their pronunciation competence.

The first and second session, the teachers are equipped by the material of introduction of phonetics which covers the definition of phonetics, diagram of sounds, the organ of speech and examples of sounds. The elaboration using phonetics is confusing for them since it is new. The second session, they learn the organ of speech involved in producing the sounds. They are assessed by given the questions about the organ of speech and the work is sent to this media and given feedback through WAG. The questions are the definition of phonetics, names of organs of speech, and names of sounds. Based on the results, they are able to finish the work and able to answer those questions correctly. The third and fourth sessions, the training provides the elaboration of bilabial sounds. The material is about what bilabial sounds are, the way how to produce the sounds using a diagram including the what organs of speech activated, the minimal pairs, and the examples of the words containing bilabial sounds. The teachers are given the opportunities to practice how to demonstrate the bilabials. They practice how to pronounce the list of words provided individually and in group. The home assignment is given to practice how to say bilabials. The fourth and fifth session, the pre-school teachers are equipped by labiodental sounds. The definition of the sounds, the diagram showing the sounds produced, the minimal pairs, and the list of words containing the sounds are elaborated. The next session is the teachers are supposed to do the exercise. They are to answer the questions related to the material given, find the words containing labiodentals and practice how to say the words. The fifth and sixth session, the elaboration about dental sounds are given. The material is about the definition, the list of words containing the sounds and the dental sounds diagram to assist them to pronounce the sounds. They do the exercises about the lesson. The next sessions are to elaborate the alveolar and velar sounds. The steps are the same as the previous sessions which are the elaboration of the sounds and the practices.

The second Stage: Practical Skills Development

In this stage, the pre-school teachers are given the opportunities to practice how to say all the sounds they learn. They are given the diagram and learn it. The diagrams present which organs of speech are activated when producing the sounds. They practice by demonstrating how the sounds are produced using the diagram. The teachers are drilled individually, pairs and group. Additionally, they practice using minimal pairs list to make a difference between voiced and voiceless sounds. They can do self-study by reading the diagram of sounds. They can see when producing alveolar sound, the tip of the tongue comes in contact with the alveolar ridges. The teachers can follow the instruction given by the diagram.

The practices are they are drilled based on the sounds they learn in every session. Then, they demonstrate the sounds by pairs, group and class. They also are given the opportunities to demonstrate the sounds individually. One of the most effective activities implemented during this stage is drilling practice. Participants engage in repetitive pronunciation exercises focusing on problematic English sounds frequently encountered in preschool learning materials. Through continuous repetition, participants gradually



improve their pronunciation accuracy, fluency, and confidence. Drilling activities also allowed participants to become more familiar with English sound patterns and helped reduce first-language interference in pronunciation. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010) argue that controlled pronunciation practice can enhance learners' articulatory precision and phonological awareness.

The program further equips the teachers with minimal pair exercises to strengthen participants' ability to differentiate similar sounds. Participants practice contrasting word pairs such as *tin-ten*, *take-make*, and *dog-dock* in order to improve their phonemic discrimination skills. This activity is particularly beneficial for pre-school teachers because the participants previously struggle to identify subtle sound distinctions in English. By practicing minimal pairs, participants became more aware of pronunciation differences that may influence meaning and comprehension in communication. According to Morley (1991), minimal pair activities are effective for developing phonemic sensitivity and improving intelligibility in spoken English.

To encourage active participation and collaborative learning, the class is organized to pronounce selected words, sentences, and short classroom expressions while receiving direct corrective feedback from the facilitators. Meanwhile, group activities allow participants to practice collaboratively, discuss pronunciation difficulties, and support each other's learning process. The collaborative atmosphere reduced participants' anxiety and increased their willingness to practice English pronunciation openly. As the training progressed, participants demonstrate greater confidence and show noticeable improvement in articulatory accuracy and phonetic awareness.

The last stage: Assessment Outcomes

The sounds they learn are bilabials, dentals, labiodentals, alveolars, and velars. The assessment is given to measure whether there is improvement after they learn. The assessment is they need to list down the words containing the sounds learned. The feedback is provided for the exercises. The work is submitted using WAG as well the feedback. The next assessment is the teachers need to pronounce the words list they make and record the pronunciation. It is done individually. The recordings are sent through WAG. The list of words are the words containing bilabials, dentals, labiodentals, alveolar and velars.

The final stage of the program focuses on assessing participants' pronunciation performance and evaluating the effectiveness of the training activities. One of the primary assessment methods involves recorded pronunciation tasks in which participants are asked to pronounce specific English words. These recordings are to compare participants' pronunciation performance before and after the training program. The assessment results indicate substantial improvement in participants' articulation clarity, pronunciation consistency, and confidence in producing English sounds. In addition to pronunciation recordings, participants are required to complete several practical assignments related to phonics instruction and articulatory practice. These assignments include identifying sound categories, practicing minimal pairs, and preparing simple phonics teaching activities for preschool learners. Most participants successfully complete the assignments and demonstrated improved understanding of phonetic concepts and pronunciation techniques. The completion of these tasks reflected participants' growing ability to apply theoretical knowledge into practical classroom contexts.

The results show that the pre-school teachers are able to finish the work and able to do it well based on the feedback given. They learn how to demonstrate the sounds by



learning the diagrams of sounds. The diagrams assist them to pronounce the words since it presents clearly what speech organs need to be activated during the production. The words list containing the sounds help them to distinguish the sounds as voiced and voiceless. They are supposed to comprehend how to say the sounds since they need to teach the pre-school students. To know the diagrams, the teachers feel at ease how to demonstrate to say the words. It is easier for the pre-school students to follow how to say the sounds. Furthermore, the assessment results reveal increased teaching readiness among participants. Prior to the training, many teachers expressed uncertainty regarding their ability to teach English pronunciation effectively in preschool classrooms. It is because they do not have previous knowledge about phonetics. Therefore, they have problems in understanding teachers' manual.

However, after participating in the program, teachers report feeling confident in demonstrating English sounds, correcting children's pronunciation, and conducting phonics-based learning activities. Participants also indicate that the training help them recognize the importance of accurate pronunciation in early childhood education. Overall, the assessment outcomes demonstrate that the online phonetics training program contribute positively to the enhancement of preschool teachers' pronunciation competence and instructional preparedness. One of the most essential point is they know how to teach phonics to children easily. They are guided by the teachers' manual just in case they forget how to demonstrate the sounds. They know how to read the manuals.

Discussion

The findings of this community service program indicate that online phonetics training can contribute to improving preschool teachers' professional phonetic competence, particularly in pronunciation and phonics instruction. One of the most notable outcomes is the improvement of teacher competency in understanding and producing English sounds accurately. Prior to the program, many participants lack sufficient knowledge regarding articulation and phonological distinctions. However, after participating in the training activities, participants demonstrate stronger phonetic understanding and greater confidence in classroom pronunciation practices. This improvement confirms that practical pronunciation training can strengthen teachers' instructional competence and enhance their effectiveness as language models for young learners (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Moats, 2020).

Another important finding concerns the development of phonetic awareness among teachers. The training enables teachers to become more conscious of how speech sounds are physically produced and how articulatory processes influence pronunciation accuracy. This phonetic awareness is important in preschool education because young children tend to imitate sounds directly from their teachers. According to Patsy

The program also provides instructional benefits for preschool teaching practices. By integrating theoretical explanation with practical exercises, the training created meaningful learning experiences that were directly applicable to classroom instruction. Activities such as drilling, minimal pair exercises, and pronunciation demonstrations can be adapted into engaging phonics activities for preschool learners.

From the perspective of preschool classroom implications, improved teacher pronunciation competence may contribute positively to children's language development and literacy readiness. Accurate phonics instruction helps children recognize sound-letter relationships more effectively and supports the development of listening and speaking



skills. When teachers are able to model pronunciation accurately and confidently, preschool learners are more likely to acquire clearer pronunciation habits and stronger phonological awareness. Linnea C. Ehri et al. (2001) emphasizes that phonics instruction significantly contributes to children's reading readiness and literacy development. Consequently, improving teacher competence in phonetics may indirectly enhance the quality of early childhood English instruction and support children's future literacy development.

Finally, this community service program highlights the importance of sustainable professional development for preschool teachers. Pronunciation competence cannot be developed through one-time training alone; instead, it requires continuous practice, reflection, and instructional support. Therefore, follow-up activities such as advanced pronunciation workshops, peer mentoring, online learning communities, and continuous phonics practice are necessary to maintain and further improve teachers' competence. Sustainable professional development community service programs can help teachers continuously update their knowledge and adapt their teaching practices to the evolving needs of early childhood language education. Through ongoing support and training opportunities, preschool teachers can continue strengthening their phonetic competence and providing higher-quality English learning experiences for young children.

CONCLUSION

Phonics is one of the subjects at pre-school teachers need to teach. It is not easy to teach the pre-school students to pronounce the sounds. The text books do not provide how to pronounce the sounds. The teachers are confused to understand manuals since they lack of the background knowledge of Phonetics. Phonetics can assist the pre-school teachers to demonstrate how pronounce the sounds easily. The teachers can demonstrate by using the organ of speech and show the students who imitate what teachers do. After getting the lesson, the teachers know how to do it. Diagrams can help the teachers to make them demonstrate how to pronounce the words. The teachers who are well-equipped with phonetics feel more confident to teach since they know how to say the sounds. In addition, the implementation of the online phonetics community service program reveals a positive contribution to the professional development of preschool teachers, particularly in improving their pronunciation competence, phonetic awareness, and confidence in teaching English phonics. Using a combination of theoretical understanding and practical pronunciation activities, teachers obtain not only knowledge about phonetics that can support effective language instruction in pre-school classrooms but also, they know how to teach the preschool children phonics easily. Teachers can demonstrate how to pronounce the sounds. It is expected the children are to imitate it. The community service program also promotes educational empowerment by providing accessible learning opportunities that enable teachers to strengthen their instructional capacity and become better language models for young learners. Furthermore, the findings shed some lights on the importance of sustainable teacher training as a continuous process rather than a one-time activity. Ongoing professional development community service programs, collaborative learning communities, and regular pronunciation practice are essential to maintaining and further enhancing teachers' phonetic competence. Therefore, sustainable phonics and pronunciation training initiatives for pre-school teachers should continue to



be developed in order to support the long-term improvement of pre-school teachers in specific objectives.

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