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The Effect of Using the Functional Approach on Developing Phonological Awareness in Arabic among Elementary School Girls

Dr. Abeer bint Saleh AlSalem

*Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction,
 Faculty of Education, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University,*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

abeer-ucsd@hotmail.com

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Abstract

The current research aimed to identify the effect of using the functional approach for the Arabic language on developing phonological awareness in fifth-grade elementary school girls. To achieve this, the researcher prepared a list of phonological awareness skills that need to be developed in fifth-grade students, including skills such as (rhythm, manipulation, discrimination, processing meaning, and context). Additionally, a phonological awareness scale was prepared to measure these students' skills. The research used an experimental/control group design with pretest-posttest, where the control group was taught using the conventional method, while the experimental group was taught using the functional approach. The research found a statistically significant difference at the significance level of (0.001) between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the posttest of the phonological awareness scale, favoring the scores of the experimental group. The research recommended the use of the functional approach in teaching the Arabic language, based on its role in developing learners' phonological awareness. It also emphasized the need to develop educational content that meets students' needs and interests, and to provide an educational environment that functionally simulates their daily lives.

Introduction

Language is considered one of the essential means of contact that facilitate communication and understanding, carrying thoughts, values, and attitudes, in addition to its sounds and symbols. It is the primary means for humans to express their ideas, feelings, and emotions. Furthermore, language is a system and a repository of the heritage of nations. Therefore, it should be taught in a way that serves the needs and interests of students, considering life situations related to the students and their goals. This ensures they use the language correctly and appreciate its value in expressing their needs and ideas, which contribute to building society and shaping its image before other communities.

Just as language contributes to shaping society, society in turn contributes to shaping and developing language. The speaking community gives words their meanings and derives from vocabulary what expresses its innovations and goals. The culture of every society is embedded in its language, encompassing its lexicon, grammar, morphology, phonetics, art, and literature. There can be no human civilization without a linguistic renaissance (Madkour, 2005).

Several linguistic theories and approaches have emerged that have contributed to the study of the social aspects of language and its role in the cohesion of society, as well as the structure of language. Among the most prominent is the structural theory, which posits that each language has its unique structure and interconnected elements. This theory is based on the analysis of these elements that comprise the structure of the language, whether they are sounds produced by the human vocal organs, perceived by the ear, and translated into the social function of language through speaking, or sounds that are conventionally combined into meaningful units through words and sentences that manifest in the processes of reading and writing (Al-Abdullah, 2015; Nail, 2011).

Each approach to language teaching relies on a linguistic theory, a psychological theory, or a combination of both, which in turn affects the choice of appropriate teaching methods. The functional approach is considered one of the most important modern approaches in teaching national languages, as it views language as having a social function. This perspective has led to an awareness of the importance of effective linguistic communication (Al-Sayed, 2009).

Educational applications of the functional approach include focusing on topics related to functional writing, such as letters and telegrams, and introducing vocabulary and structures that are important in the learner's life and most common in daily life. It emphasizes only the sufficient and necessary amount of grammar to enable students to write and read correctly and to achieve linguistic and written functionality. In this sense, the functional approach creates motivation for learning in students and makes them more enthusiastic about it (Al-Mutairi, 2012).

Background and Objective

The functional approach is one of the methods where both the teacher and the learner engage positively. It involves presenting a problem, issue, or topic, followed by exchanging opinions to achieve active learning within a suitable environment that fosters motivation for learning and knowledge acquisition. This approach encourages active participation without waiting for the teacher to present the material. Therefore, the functional approach in language education requires identifying common everyday speaking situations, transforming linguistic learning in the classroom into a real-life scenario where students practice speaking on the phone, engaging in dialogues in role-playing situations, introducing themselves to peers, or speaking in meetings (Fadallah, 2003).

True, realistic learning begins when teachers challenge the capabilities and potentials of learners. This is achieved through the functional approach, which relies on problem-solving methods and posing realistic questions that require solutions. It places the learner in a position where they must utilize all their abilities and potentials to reach a solution. However, these questions require the teacher to have the ability to develop skills related to critical reading.

The functional approach is defined as a series of interconnected linguistic skills that students learn in order to use and apply them inside and outside the school. The functional approach is also defined as a series of interconnected linguistic skills that students learn in order to use and apply them inside and outside the school. This means providing opportunities for students to apply those rules in various life situations through therapeutic methods used by the functional approach in terms of solving problems and using rhymes, linguistic games, and other approaches (Al-Sayed, 2009).

According to the functional approach, the philosophy of language education centers on a clear understanding and strong awareness of the functions that language serves in the learner's life. It emphasizes effective planning to construct meanings, perceptions, and necessary linguistic concepts. During the learning process, students must grasp the nature of what they are doing, its role, and its functions in their lives to meet their requirements. This necessitates good content planning, organization, and mastery of language skills to construct meanings and understand the relationships between them to achieve functional use (Al-Sulaiti, 2002).

Functional theories form the theoretical foundation of the functional approach, where functional linguistics is the approach through which language is studied. It views the function of language and its elements as key to understanding processes and constructing linguistic texts. Functional language theories suggest that since language is fundamentally a tool, it

logically follows that text construction is better analyzed and understood by knowing the functions it performs. These theories belong to structural and humanistic linguistics, considering the broader context in which linguistic elements are used and studying how they can be effectively functional in specific environments. This means that functional theories of language rules tend to focus on how language is actually used in communicative contexts. It assumes that the fundamental relationships between linguistic elements have functional motivations (Salem et al., 2022).

Dik (1962) classified the functional approach as follows:

In the functional model, language is primarily conceived as a tool for social interaction among humans, used for the purpose of social communication. Within this model, individuals attempt to uncover the role of language in what people do and achieve in social interaction. In other words, natural language is viewed as an integral part of communicative competence for its users.

Functionalism in education forms the basis for curriculum development because "the school's connection to life and the alignment between curriculum and the environment are essential conditions for achieving the function of education." This means that education primarily aims to prepare learners for productive lives rather than mere acquisition of disconnected facts and knowledge. Knowledge gains importance only through its ability to be used and applied in life. Fundamentals of the functional approach include the following elements (Shehata and Al-Najjar, 2003, p. 261).

- Language as habitual: It is not merely a set of facts that can be taught; hence teaching methods based on rote learning and lecturing are no longer effective.
- Skill as a prerequisite for habit formation: Using language is considered a skill that requires practice.

- Language as an integrated unit: Modern educational philosophy views language as an integrated unit and separating its branches does not serve its practice in daily life situations.
- Necessity of starting from students' language and their prior experiences: The learner's language serves as the starting point in language education because it is linked to their reality and reflects their personal experiences.
- Language learning is acquired through activity: Language learning should be practiced through rich linguistic activities both in and out of the classroom, built upon students' interests and preferences rather than solely on curriculum-based approaches.
- Language is a social function established to perform specific functions among humans; therefore, it should be taught through its functions.
- The learner is the central focus of language learning, not the teacher, where learning is the focus of attention rather than teaching.
- Teaching strategies should develop the functional use of language, hence modern strategies should be chosen based on learner effectiveness.
- Using modern techniques and focusing on them in language learning.
- Not separating language from its social context, providing learners with opportunities to use it in all its forms, and creating suitable conditions similar to linguistic situations outside the school

There are criteria to be considered in developing a functional curriculum:

- Adopting a modern view of the curriculum as a system, interacting with society with its culture, philosophy, and issues, and the learner in terms of understanding their nature, growth characteristics, learning methods, and the era they live in with its orientations, activities, and challenges.

- Focusing on acquiring language skills in sending messages in conversation and writing and receiving in listening and reading until the language becomes habitual for the learner in its use, requiring practice and practice in life situations naturally (Al-Sayed, 2009).
- Concentrating on the basics of the language learned by the young on the basis of its material and concepts, helping the young to possess these basics leading to positive interaction with life situations, and in light of this direction, the functional curriculum emerged focusing on the core topics widely used, and nothing leads to the interest in education like the functionality of the material learned by the learner to meet their needs and satisfy their interests (Al-Sayed, 2004).
- Carefully developing learners' language skills and enhancing their abilities in performance and creativity and encouraging them to study the mother tongue based on understanding.
- Striving to achieve the social function of language: the ability to communicate with others, understand them, and make them understand in light of their cultural backgrounds through the development of speech and writing in social situations that require language use (Zahed, 2004).
- Assisting learners in developing their linguistic competence, with attention to linguistic accuracy in the texts placed in books, to guide correct pronunciation and facilitate understanding while focusing attention on adjusting the structure not less than adjusting the last word (Hamed, 2004).

Abu-Amsha (2011, p. 3) identified the elements of the functional approach as follows:

1. The linguistic activities in which the learner must engage.
2. The linguistic functions that the learner will perform.

3. Detailed linguistic activities for the learner in each topic, and the overarching general concepts that the learner deals with.
4. The linguistic forms (structures) spoken and written that the learner must use to express functions, ideas, and topics.
5. The skills that the learner should acquire, and their performance based on these skills.

As for the characteristics of the functional approach, Ibrahim (2009) mentioned the following:

- It is an approach to curriculum design that derives educational content from analyzing students' needs, enabling them to meet these needs and master language skills. This approach focuses more on using language and applying it in various contexts rather than solely on linguistic structures.
- It utilizes simulations of real-life situations that require communication, recognizing that these situations are constantly changing. This stimulates learners' motivation by their desire to achieve meaningful communication through realistic topics.
- It represents a more effective and prevalent alternative to traditional approaches that emphasize rules and structures.
- It emphasizes the learner's need to learn a language for specific purposes such as speaking, public speaking, reading, and writing, as well as common linguistic functions that benefit students in practical life and enable social interaction.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of using the functional approach:

- Al-Rababah (2019) emphasized the significance of employing the functional approach in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers. Understanding and effectively implementing this approach in organized steps was found crucial.

- Swierzbin and Reimer (2019) aimed to explore teachers' perceptions regarding the use of the functional approach in teaching grammar. Results indicated positive attitudes among teachers towards using the functional approach in grammar instruction.
- Al-Harithi (2019) demonstrated the effectiveness of a proposed program based on both the technological and functional approaches in developing speaking and oral reading skills among middle school female students.
- Al-Tamim (2020) affirmed the effectiveness of a program based on the functional approach in enhancing linguistic reasoning skills among elementary school students.
- Al-Fallaj, and Saleh (2022) revealed the effectiveness of a program based on the functional approach in addressing common grammatical errors among seventh and eighth-grade female students studying Arabic language.
- Salem et al. (2022) demonstrated the impact of using the functional approach in addressing reading difficulties among preparatory school first-grade students.
- Al-Muzein et al. (2023) clarified the effectiveness of a program based on the functional approach in developing remote verbal communication skills among seventh-grade students.

These studies collectively underscore the practical benefits and positive outcomes associated with implementing the functional approach in various educational contexts.

Education scholars in the field of language teaching emphasize the importance of learners utilizing their knowledge of the characteristics and structural levels of texts (phonemes "sounds" and morphemes "word formations") to predict successive developments in texts and achieve effective linguistic communication. This is achieved through awareness of sound, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels of language (Ahmed, 2016).

Phonological awareness impacts reading acquisition on one hand, while reading and writing activities contribute to its development on the other. There exists an interactive, reciprocal relationship in both directions: phonological proficiency both shapes and is shaped by learning to write. A learner who lacks phonological awareness and works to develop it may struggle with reading and writing. The greater the learner's phonological awareness, the better their reading comprehension and ability to overcome literacy challenges (Abu Al-Diyar et al., 2012; Ecalle et al, 2003).

Phonological awareness refers to the mechanism through which sounds operate to form the phonological system of a language. Understanding the phonological system of their native language enables speakers to produce meaningful words, distinguish sounds absent in the language, and recognize sound patterns that deviate from the language's phonological system (Al-Anani et al, 2006).

Phonological awareness is a necessary skill that helps students perceive the sounds that make up speech, sequence them, process them, and interact with them. It is crucial for their linguistic, reading, and writing development across different stages of life. Indicators include students' recognition of letters, syllables, words, and understanding of writing formats (Al-Ghazo et al., 2005).

Phonological awareness refers to a set of skills such as the ability to identify spoken word sounds, distinguish between sounds, segment spoken words into individual sounds, blend individual sounds to form words, analyze words into syllables, and segment words into phonemes (Anthony, & Francis, 2005).

Therefore, phonological awareness skills are considered the core nucleus for the development of reading and writing skills. The phonological component is one of the most important components of language, encompassing everything related to an individual's

processing and perception of sounds and distinguishing between phonetic phonemes. We notice efficiency and deficiency in this component when learners attempt to establish a correlation between letters, sounds, written letters, and pronunciation (Al-Farmawi, 2006).

Phonological awareness serves as a general ability with multiple dimensions that vary in difficulty. In light of this, phonological awareness is classified into three different levels: onset rhyme awareness, syllable awareness, and phonological unit awareness (phoneme) (Smith, 2010). These levels are as follows:

1. Awareness of onset rhyme.
2. Syllable awareness.
3. Awareness of the smallest phonological unit (phoneme).

Onset-Rime Awareness: Rhyme is defined as the obligatory part of a segment consisting of its vowel and the consonant that follows it. Onset consists of the consonants preceding the vowels. Learners are considered to have onset-rime awareness if they can analyze syllables into rhyme units and onsets in oddity tasks.

Syllable Awareness: Gillon (2004) defines syllable awareness as the ability to delete the smallest unit of language that can be independently produced. Some linguists argue that learners develop syllable awareness before developing phonological skills such as onset-rime awareness and phoneme awareness.

Phoneme Awareness: Phoneme refers to the smallest phonological unit that affects word meaning. Phoneme awareness includes abilities related to segmenting, rearranging, and substituting phonological units (Gillon, 2004).

Among the studies that focused on phonological awareness development: Abdel-Bary (2017) revealed a positive correlation between phonological awareness development and alphabetic writing skills. Khaled (2017) demonstrated the effectiveness of a proposed strategy based on the comprehensive listening model in improving phonological awareness and imaginative thinking among ninth-grade female students. Refai (2017) proved the effectiveness of a program in developing phonological awareness and self-concept among elementary school students with reading difficulties. Khawalda (2018) showed a positive impact of the auditory perception skills training program on improving phonological awareness among learning-disabled students in the Asir region, Saudi Arabia. Abu Aker and Suleiman (2022) found negative relationships between phonological awareness and stuttering frequency, and phonological awareness and the number of incorrect words, while a positive relationship was found between phonological awareness and verbal fluency and a positive correlation between phonological awareness and correct words per minute. Dardeer et al. (2022) confirmed the effectiveness of a program based on storytelling activities in developing phonological awareness skills among a sample of hearing-impaired children. Siam (2023) concluded that chunk reading has a positive and effective impact on developing phonological awareness among first-grade elementary school students in enhancing their reading ability. It also found differences in reading activity assessment scores among students related to their acquisition of phonological awareness and chunk reading training.

Thus, numerous studies conducted in the field of phonological awareness, both locally and globally, have emphasized the importance of phonological awareness training for students to improve their language skills, especially reading and writing. Based on a review of previous studies and the literature, the researcher concludes the role played by the functional approach in developing phonological awareness, through:

- The functional approach emphasizes activities that contribute to social interaction among students. Specific phonological awareness activities will be implemented in regular sessions for various reading and writing exercises to train phonological skills.
- Collaborative work and self-esteem for students enable opportunities to expose them to questions, similarities, and differences in words, enhancing their understanding of spoken words. Consequently, students can produce linguistic output through expressive speaking or writing.
- Individualized attention and training for these students can enable them to produce clear and useful sentences, and attempt to incorporate new vocabulary into their linguistic repertoire.

In addition to phonological awareness being an internal factor influencing reading skills mastery, recent studies have found that phonological awareness correlates with vocabulary usage and understanding the necessary meanings of words, which are fundamental variables influencing reading proficiency.

Current research highlights the critical role of phonological development in language acquisition among elementary school students in Saudi Arabia. While grammar instruction typically begins in fourth grade with a focus on structural aspects, semantic levels are typically addressed in secondary education, leaving phonological awareness and skills underemphasized during the elementary years (Salem et al., 2022). Teachers often restrict instruction to basic letter recognition, overlooking deeper phonological understanding. This oversight presents significant challenges for young learners' reading proficiency, essential for academic success. Studies like Alharbi (2016) advocate targeted interventions to enhance reading achievement, especially for students with learning disabilities. Additionally, Alshumaimery et al., (2014) urge further investigation into Saudi children's specific phonological challenges, revealing gaps in

current knowledge. Exploratory research could provide insights into the prevalence and nature of these weaknesses among Saudi elementary students, informing culturally appropriate and evidence-based interventions to strengthen phonological awareness and improve reading outcomes across the board.

Recent studies underscore deficiencies in phonological awareness among Saudi elementary students. Alshumaimery, et al., (2014) advocate for expanded research in this area due to existing gaps in understanding. Similarly, Khasawneh (2020) identified phonological awareness deficits among Saudi students with learning disabilities, potentially impacting their reading skills. These findings align with broader research by Scarborough (2005), illustrating a correlation between weak phonological awareness and later reading challenges. Conducting exploratory research could delve into the specific phonological awareness hurdles faced by Saudi students, building upon existing findings. Such investigations could pave the way for targeted interventions addressing these weaknesses, empowering Saudi students towards enhanced reading proficiency.

This study intends to examine how the functional approach influences phonological awareness in Saudi elementary schools. By integrating findings from both local and global studies, and based on research conducted in this field both locally and globally, the research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What phonological awareness skills should be developed for elementary school students?
2. How effective is the functional approach in developing phonological awareness among elementary school students?

Method

The research followed the quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control/experimental group design approach to determine the effectiveness of the functional approach in developing phonological awareness among elementary school students.

Research Hypothesis

There is a statistically significant difference at the level of (0.001) between the mean scores of the experimental and control groups in the post-application phase of the phonological awareness scale (skills and total score), favoring the experimental group.

Participants

The research population consisted of fifth-grade female students attending government schools in Riyadh City during the academic year 2023/2024, totaling (48978) students. The sample included from Primary School 175 Education Office in Al-Naseem Al-Rawaby neighborhood in Riyadh City divided into thirty (30) female students representing the control group where the traditional teaching method was implemented, and thirty (30) students representing the experimental group where the functional approach was implemented in teaching.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

First: in preparation of the phonological awareness skills list and the scale used to measure them, the researcher followed the following steps in preparing the phonological awareness scale for fifth-grade students:

- Reviewed previous research studies and Arabic language teaching methods that addressed phonological awareness and its skills.
- Conducted interviews with Arabic language teachers and supervisors at the elementary level to gather their opinions on suitable phonological awareness skills for fifth-grade students.
- Developed an initial list of phonological awareness skills and presented it to a group of curriculum specialists and Arabic language teaching methods experts to assess their alignment with the specified dimension, suitability for students, clarity of formulation, and allowed freedom for addition, deletion, or modification.
- Revised the list based on the experts' feedback, retaining skills that received a high level of agreement among them. Some skills were removed from the scale, such as distinguishing between sounds of silent and voiced consonants, distinguishing between nominal and verbal sentence types, and classifying words based on their syllables and sounds, as they were deemed unsuitable for elementary students. The agreement rate ranged between 85% and 100%.
- Emphasized linguistic accuracy and replaced words with more appropriate alternatives based on reviewers' comments. The following table illustrates phonological awareness skills and their sub-skills included:

Table 1

List of Phonological Awareness Skills for Fifth-Grade Students

Phonological Awareness Dimensions	Phonological Awareness Skills	Sub skills
Phonological Processing of Words and Sentences	Rhythm	Determines words that share the same sound Differentiates between declarative and interrogative sentences.
	Manipulation	Deletes a phonetic unit.
		Adds a phonetic unit.
		Substitutes a phonetic unit.
	Discrimination	Analyzes words into phonetic segments.

		Distinguish between the hamzat al-wasl and the hamzat al-qat`.
Semantic and Contextual Processing	Semantic and Contextual Processing	Discriminates between different types of Arabic stress
		Determines the different meanings of a single word.
		Identifies the general context of a written text.

Building the Scale of Phonological Awareness Skills for Fifth-Grade Students

Building the scale in its preliminary form, the researcher was able to define the initial concept of the scale and its dimensions by referring to the theoretical framework and a collection of previous studies that addressed auditory awareness skills. Based on the skills agreed upon by the reviewers, the researcher identified the dimensions of the auditory awareness scale for fifth-grade students. These dimensions consist of two main components, incorporating (10) sub-skills. The following factors were taken into consideration: suitability for the age group, and a progressive level of difficulty, which is evident in the final version of the scale. Below is the table of dimensions for the auditory awareness scale:

Table 2

Dimensions of Auditory Awareness Scale for Fifth Grade Students

Auditory Awareness Dimensions	Auditory Awareness Skills	The vocabulary used to assess these skills	Total
Phonetic Processing of Words and Sentences	Rhythm: Identifies common words in terms of their rhythmic patterns	20,2,1	3
	Distinguishes between declarative and interrogative sentences.	23,21,3	3
	Manipulation: Deletes a phonetic unit.	24,7,6	3
	Adds a phonetic unit.	25,9,8	3
	Substitutes a phonetic unit.	26,11,10	3
	Analyzes words into phonetic segments.	22,15,14	3
	Discrimination: Distinguish between the hamzat al-wasl and the hamzat al-qat`.	30,17,16	3
	Differentiates between different types of stress.	29,5,4	3
	Determines the various meanings of a single word.	28,13,12	3

Semantic and Contextual Processing	- Identifies the general context of a written text.	27,19,18	3
Total			30

Validity of the Auditory Awareness Scale for Fifth Grade Students

The researcher verified the validity of the Auditory Awareness Scale for fifth-grade students through expert judgment. The researcher presented the scale to a group of expert judges, and as a result of their evaluation, no items were deleted from the scale. Attention was given to the judges' feedback concerning linguistic accuracy and appropriate word substitutions.

Reliability Calculation Using Cronbach's Alpha

The reliability of the dimensions and the scale as a whole was computed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient with a survey sample of 38 students. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the entire scale was 0.88, indicating high reliability.

Scale Administration Time Determination

The administration time of the scale was determined by calculating the time taken by the first and last students in the survey sample to complete the scale. The average time taken was 30 minutes, establishing the required administration time for the scale as 30 minutes.

Scoring and Scale Correction

After constructing the scale, a rubric for scoring was developed. The test consists of 30 diverse items including multiple-choice and short essay questions. Each correct answer gets one point, while incorrect answers receive zero points. Students scoring less than 40% (less

than approximately 12 out of 30 total points) are considered to have deficiencies in auditory awareness.

Secondly: Implementation of Functional Approach Teaching

The researcher attempted to assess the impact of using the functional approach by selecting two units from the second semester of the fifth-grade Arabic language textbook. Exercises and activities were developed using worksheets and strategies that aimed at activating classroom situations designed to enhance auditory awareness through the functional approach. These included teaching strategies such as brainstorming, cooperative learning, role-playing, problem-solving, experimental inquiry, discussion and dialogue, reinforcement, modeling, and repetition. Educational activities were designed to connect the learner's environment to learning, thereby increasing motivation, and directly using Arabic language skills through real-life situations experienced by the students.

The approach was implemented over a period of two months, comprising three lessons per week over eight weeks, with each lesson lasting 45 minutes. The implementation took place during the second semester of the academic year 2023/2024. The effectiveness of the functional approach was evaluated by measuring the impact of teaching on the experimental group immediately after the conclusion of the teaching period. The effectiveness of the functional approach was determined by calculating the differences between the experimental and control groups on the auditory awareness scale before and after the experiment.

Results

Validity Testing and Presentation of Results: The hypothesis states that "there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and control

groups in the post-application of the Auditory Awareness Scale (skills and total score) in favor of the experimental group."

To verify this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was conducted between the experimental and control groups to compare the mean scores in the post-application of the Auditory Awareness Scale. The results are summarized in the following table:

Table 3

Difference between the mean scores of post-application of the Auditory Awareness Scale for the control and experimental group

Main Skill	Group	The number	The mean	Standard deviation	t -Value	Level of significance
Auditory Processing	Experimental Group	30	21.8	1.82	20.82	0.001
	Control Group	30	13.3	2.52		
Meaning and Context	Experimental Group	30	21.83	1.577	10.19	0.001
	Control Group	30	12.5	1.13		
Total Score	Experimental Group	30	14.4	1.76	16.9	0.001
	Control Group	30	7.8	2.39		

It is evident from the previous table that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group in the total score of the auditory awareness scale. Thus, the hypothesis is accepted as follows: There is a statistically significant difference at a significance level of (0.001) between the means of the experimental and control groups in the auditory awareness scale for skills (rhythm, manipulation, discrimination, semantics, and overall scale) after implementing the functional approach in favor of the experimental group.

It is clear from the above that there are differences in the means of scores between the experimental and control group members in the post-application on the auditory awareness scale with its various dimensions. The average scores for the experimental group were: auditory processing (21.8), meaning and context (21.83), and total score for auditory awareness scale (14.4). Whereas for the control group, the average scores were: auditory processing (13.3), meaning and context (12.50), and total score for auditory awareness scale (7.8). This difference is attributed to the application of the functional approach to the experimental group, indicating the effectiveness of the functional approach in developing auditory awareness.

To verify the impact of using the functional approach on developing auditory awareness, the effect size was calculated using eta squared (η^2), and the results were as follows:

Table 4

Assessing Effect Sizes to Explore Significant Differences in the Results of the t-Test Post-Application of the Auditory Awareness Scale:

Skill	Value of t	η^2	Type of Effect Size
Auditory Processing Skill	20.82	0.86	Very big
Meaning and Context	18.19	0.64	big
Overall Skills	19.982	0.83	Very big

It is evident from the previous table that all (μ^2) values are of a very large and large type, ranging between (0.86) and (0.64). This indicates the impact of the functional approach in developing phonological awareness: auditory processing (rhythm – manipulation – discrimination), meaning and context, and overall skills.

Discussion:

The current study found a statistically significant difference at the (0.001) significance level between the mean scores of the experimental group and the control group in the post-application of the phonological awareness scale, favoring the scores of the experimental group. These results can be attributed to the following reasons:

1. ***Lesson Preparation and Targeted Skills Development:*** Linking lessons to community relevance, and the inclinations and preferences of the students.
2. ***Diverse Exercises and Activities:*** During the teaching of reading, writing skills, and phonological awareness.
3. ***Providing Appropriate Reinforcement:*** Whether material or moral, and feedback to the students.
4. ***Diverse Teaching Methods:*** To accommodate individual differences among students, increasing interaction and engagement.

The results of the current research are consistent with findings from some studies reviewed by the researcher, including studies by Abdel-Bary (2017), Refai (2017), and Khawalda (2017), which focused on phonological awareness development. They affirmed the effectiveness of some teaching strategies used in developing phonological awareness. This improvement for students in the experimental group can be attributed to the diversity of activities, exercises, games, and tasks included in the functional approach aimed at developing phonological awareness. The techniques used by the researcher had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the functional approach. The researcher encountered challenges such as attention deficits, organizational issues among some students, and lack of focus from others. These were overcome by the diversity of techniques serving the functional approach, including

variation within each activity, which greatly attracted students' attention to the activities and fostered their desire to participate in training sessions, thus aiding in achieving the goals of the approach.

The researcher trained students using diverse tools and methods, acting as motivators and helping them to maintain focus and attention on the functional approach activities. The researcher progressively structured activities from easy to difficult, dividing students into groups in some exercises, a step that was well received by the students, enhancing their engagement in the training sessions and helping to achieve the goal of developing phonological awareness among the experimental group students.

Assessment also played a crucial role in the success of the functional approach, both during and after teaching. It contributed to identifying strengths and weaknesses in each session, attempting to overcome weaknesses and develop strengths among the experimental group students.

Conclusion:

The current study discussed the impact of employing the functional approach in developing phonological awareness among elementary school students. The varied activities, exercises, and games included in the functional approach helped attract students' attention and fostered their engagement and interaction in learning. The diverse techniques used in the study demonstrated a positive effect on enhancing the effectiveness of the functional approach, contributing to strengthening focus and attention on educational activities and increasing students' willingness to participate and interact. These results underscore the importance of adopting innovative teaching strategies and employing diverse educational resources to achieve the goals of developing phonological awareness among elementary school students.

The study recommends the adoption of the functional approach in teaching the Arabic language, highlighting its significant role in fostering phonological awareness among students. It underscores the importance of developing educational content that is tailored to students' needs and preferences, and creating an educational environment that mirrors their daily experiences. Moreover, the study emphasizes the critical need to train teachers and equip them with the requisite resources to achieve these objectives. This includes leveraging technology and electronic platforms to enhance learning both inside and outside the classroom, thereby enriching the overall learning environment in schools.

Suggestions for further research could include:

1. Investigating the long-term effects of the functional approach on students' phonological awareness and reading proficiency.
2. Exploring variations in the implementation of the functional approach across different educational settings or student demographics.
3. Assessing the efficacy of specific technological tools and electronic platforms in supporting the functional approach to Arabic language instruction.
4. Examining the perceptions and experiences of students, teachers, and parents regarding the integration of the functional approach in Arabic language education.
5. Conducting comparative studies between traditional and functional approaches to determine their relative impacts on student learning outcomes.

These research avenues can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness and applicability of the functional approach in enhancing Arabic language education. They can also guide future educational policies and practices aimed at optimizing learning experiences for students.

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