ENGLISH MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS OF EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS DURING BLENDED LEARNING IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract: This study is aimed to investigate the English morphological awareness of EFL university students during blended learning due to the covid-19 pandemic. A mixed-method was employed and 17 students were willing to be participants. This study applied an online test to obtain quantitative data and an online open-ended questionnaire to gain qualitative data. The results demonstrated that (1) 10 students (58.8%) were categorized as moderate in English morphological awareness skills, 5 students (29.4%) were perceived high criteria and only 2 students (11.8%) were ranked low category. (2) 17 students expressed their opinion on the English learning experience during blended learning implementation due to the covid-19 pandemic which has a connection to morphological awareness. Their views are generally summarized as follows; they admitted that they actively self-studied at home, preferred offline learning to online learning, frequently practiced English at home, seldom read English books and most of them made extensive use of social media and the internet to access English learning content. The results of this study can be concluded that the English learning environment and recent technologies such as social media and the internet, could have a significant impact on building and improving students' English morphological awareness.

Keywords: *blended learning, english morphological awareness*

INTRODUCTION

English morphological awareness has a huge impact on non-native English users' language skills, notably among English foreign language students (Jeon, 2011). The problem arises when the students use words inappropriately and incorrectly. The problem emerges when students use language erroneously and incorrectly. To counteract this, students must practice English morphological awareness, which entails being able to add and remove affixes (prefix and suffix) from a word, as well as form and alter it based on its meaning and structure (Giyatmi Giyatmi, 2017). In an essence,

English morphological awareness is a strategy for ensuring that learners use language accurately and correctly in terms of English word structure and grammatical adjustment. This is because they are aware of using appropriate and correct words based on base words, adding affixes, modifying base words into inflection aspects due to time, number, and aspect for example *run* into *runs* or modifying meaning and word category or word class e.g *teach* into *teacher* (Westby, 2013).

During the covid-19 pandemic, the English Morphological awareness skill of EFL university students appears as a big concern. Because the teaching-learning system radically transforms from traditional or face-to-face class setting into online learning class or a mix of them both which is called blended learning. This issues a question of whether the covid-19 pandemic contributes to degrading students' morphological awareness or not.

In this research, the writer investigated the level of English Morphological awareness of 17 EFL university students particularly at State College of Islamic Studies Mandailing Natal (STAIN Mandailing Natal), North Sumatera province, Indonesia. It was carried out based on two research problems: (1) into what category is the level of morphological awareness of EFL university students during blended learning. To gain this, a quantitative method was administered via an online test containing questions that measure students' English Morphological awareness (2) what are the pictures of students' daily English learning during blended learning implementation that takes part to affect students' morphological awareness. For this, the qualitative method was organized via giving an open-ended questionnaire containing several questions inquiring about their daily English learning to confirm and clarify the previous statistical result on their level of English Morphological awareness.

Some previous studies on English Morphological awareness have demonstrated a significant connection between English morphological awareness and English skills. Previous studies discovered that English morphological awareness has a strong connection with English skills, namely listening (Gottardo et al., 2018; Karimi, 2013) reading comprehension (Jeon, 2011; Kieffer & Lesaux, 2012; Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008), and writing (Allen & Lembke, 2020). Thus, English morphological awareness plays an important role to enable EFL students to build their English skills. The research gap between predecessor studies with this recent study is the focus of research. The

previous ones had explored the connection between English Morphological awareness and students' English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), meanwhile, this current one investigated the students' level of English Morphology awareness after they had carried out blended learning during a covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, this latest study tried to discover the reasons for students' level of English Morphological awareness based on their English daily learning.

Nevertheless, despite the majority of previous studies on English Morphological awareness with a strong connection to English skills, this little work had been conducted to fill the research gap. Consequently, this recent study tries to contribute to a research novelty on a comprehensive understanding of the level of English Morphological awareness of EFL university students, mainly for people who conceive English as their foreign language. This present study is worth it accomplish with regard it offers a picture of how good the level of EFL university students in English Morphological awareness during blended learning implementation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

English Morphology

Morphology is defined as part of linguistics that concerns the relation between meaning and how the words are formed (Fasold & Linton, 2006). Besides, Morphology is also defined as the study of word structure, consisting of word changes based on grammar (inflection), meaning and word category (derivation), etc (Handoko, 2019). Another premise stated that Morphology is interpreted as the study that focuses on word structure and their connection between words for instance morphemes (the smallest part of a word) as the source to create a single word (McCarthy, 2002). It implies that a single word is formed from many tiny parts or we call them morphemes. Moreover, morphology discussed the interior parts of words (Haspelmath, 2002) word formation, and their structure (Katamba, 2005). To sum up, English Morphology means the study of a word and how it is formed referring to its internal parts or specific internal structure in the context of the English language. The internal structures of a word encompass the affixation (adding prefix, infix, and suffix on a certain morpheme), converting the meaning and word class category (derivation), or modifying the word based on grammatical needs (inflection).

English Morphological Awareness

Morphological awareness is defined as a conscious awareness of identifying and detecting the structure of morphemes in a certain word and having the ability to modify, reflect and manipulate the word structures (Kirby et al., 2012). It is also defined as individual awareness of the smallest units of meaning comprising affixes added on base and root words (Apel, 2014). Morphological awareness has a significant role to develop students' literacy skills. It can affect and improve the students' literacy by enhancing their awareness skill on affixation of a word (adding prefix, infix or suffix) and word relation between a base word with their change meaning, word category altering and modifying forms namely inflection and derivation. Therewith, morphological awareness skill has the potential to help students, principally in literacy measures, and also to succeed in academic achievement testing (Apel et al., 2013).

Below are various tasks that a teacher or a lecturer can apply to assess students' English morphological awareness level cited from (Apel, 2014) page 206.

Segmenting task

This task is addressed for spoken mode. It is aimed to assess the morpheme in a certain word and to test what the morpheme sounds like. For example: How many parts do you hear in a word: *Recyclable*. It has three parts namely (1) re-, (2) cycle, -(3) able (Casalis et al., 2004).

Definition task

This task is for spoken mode and it is directed to test students' awareness of the meaning of affixes and their effects on the meaning change of base words. Example: *a person who plays football is …..* (the answer is *footballer*) (Casalis et al., 2004).

Spoken relatives task

This is also a spoken mode task and it is organized to assess awareness of base word and its relation to inflection and derivation form. Example: Garden. *My father is a …..(gardener)* (Apel et al., 2013).

Affix identification task

This is a written mode test and it is directed to assess the morphemes which are existing in a certain word. Example: Determine the 'add-ons' in this list of words: *rain, rains, raining, run, runner*. The add-ons are *rains, raining, runner*. Rain and run are base words without any affixation added-on (Apel et al., 2013).

Written relatives task

This kind of task is a written mode task and it is used to assess the morphological awareness of the relation of the original word (base words) to their formation of inflection and derivation. Example: Beauty. ***The girl's rose is very___*** the answer is ***beautiful*** (Apel et al., 2013)**.**

Spelling multi-morphemic word task

This task is administered via written mode and it is addressed to test morphological awareness on how to spell written affixes. Example: spell *dresses.* Spell *plainest* (Apel et al., 2013).

Suffix choice task

This is a written mode test and it aims to assess awareness of grammatical class change and meaning change of a certain base word. Example: *Andrew is popular for being ____ among society* (friend, friendly, friendship, friendliness) the answer is *friendly* (Nagy et al., 2003).

Derivational spelling task

This task is in written mode and it aims at assessing morphological awareness of how the affix on a morpheme can influence its spelling. Example: What affix at the end of morpheme: *lucky____ -y, -ie, -ey* (the answer is –*y*) (Sangster & Hélène Deacon, 2011).

Blended Learning

Blended learning is a teaching method in which a teacher instructs students in an online class in which all students are involved virtually (via zoom, teleconferences, Google Meet, etc.) and, on the other hand, a teacher instructs students in an offline class whereby all students physically attend the class. Assignments and exercises are then handled asynchronously (for example via WhatsApp, email, google from, etc). (Boyarsky, 2020). Another premise emphasized that blended learning is integrating digital learning mode (online) and face-to-face class mode (Tomlinson, 2019). Blended learning has been implemented on campus where the writer is working. It starts in late 2019, the moment when the covid-19 outbreak rapidly and shockingly appears, until the middle of 2022 when covid-19 outbreak successfully has been mitigated and prevented by a mandatory vaccine program from the national government.

Blended learning successfully changes the learning setting. Students now are familiar with online learning, offline learning, or a combination of both. Students and also lecturers are also getting accustomed to joining online class settings since they have adapted and adopted recent technologies such as zoom, google meet, Whatsapp, email, etc. This is the new face of the learning system. Even so, there are some obstacles for instance internet connection, compatible recent technology gadget ownership, and boredom. Nevertheless, blended learning has brought students on a new journey in a learning system. This is interesting to investigate whether that new atmosphere affects students' morphological awareness or not, as they never could face it when they are joining in an offline class setting. Moreover, this blended learning for some individuals still lasts due to emergency affairs, for example when a lecturer is outside the city regarding sudden and important duty from campus, then he/she organizes class remotely online. When the duty is completely done, he/she comes back with an offline class setting.

METHOD

This research employed a mix-method approach. Mix method approach is a combination of a qualitative and quantitative method to reveal an understanding of a certain study completely. The qualitative method tends to utilize words (for example: using some open-ended questions) and the quantitative method intends to employ numbers (Creswell, 2014). A quantitative method was used to measure statistically the level of EFL university students in English morphological awareness during online and offline learning or blended learning. Furthermore, a qualitative method was used to uncover students' everyday English learning, which helped to support the statistical finding of the level of English morphological awareness among EFL University students.

The data sources were obtained via online under the consideration of low cost, time efficiency, and efficacy due to obeying covid-19 protocols. The participants in this study were 17 English Foreign Language (EFL) university students in the fourth semester at STAIN Mandailing Natal, North Sumatera, Indonesia. They were selected because they had completed the course of English Morphology. Moreover, they also had experienced a blended learning atmosphere during English Morphology class. The

17 students who met the two criteria above are considered eligible participants who have reliable and rich information on English Morphological awareness skills.

In quantitative data collection, the participants were given an online test containing 10 questions to measure English Morphological awareness in form of multiple choices via google forms. Each question has four choices determining whether the choice is correct or incorrect in terms of English Morphology. The 10 questions were designed based on four kinds of morphological awareness tasks. They are (1) affix identification task model for awareness of the morphemes and (2) written relatives task for awareness of base words into inflection and derivation (Apel et al., 2013), (3) suffix choice task model for awareness of the meaning of affixes and grammatical class (Nagy et al., 2003), (4) Derivational spelling task model for awareness on how the addition of morphemes can influence base words (Sangster & Hélène Deacon, 2011). One of the real questions given in the online test was as follows:

A snake moves …

    a. slow
    b. slowly
    c. slowest
    d. slower

The online test of English Morphological awareness was executed at the end of the semester. The data obtained subsequently were computed by using SPSS 22 and afterward analyzed statistically into frequency distribution in terms of the English Morphological awareness level and interpreted into three criteria of English Morphological awareness level; (1) 80-100 is considered high, (2) 50-70 is perceived moderate, (3) 00-40 is rated low.

On the other hand, the qualitative data collection was done by giving an open-ended questionnaire. There were five questions on the open-ended questionnaire concerning students' daily learning that has a connection with English Morphological awareness. The open-ended question used Bahasa Indonesia due to gain in-depth students' opinions. This way allowed the researcher to find out the background of students in daily English learning during online and offline learning class settings (blended learning). This leads the researcher to confirm and clarify the quantitative result previously by analyzing the result of the open-ended questionnaire to acquire a

depth picture of understanding of students' English Morphological awareness, notably during blended learning implementation.

The questions yielded in the open-ended questionnaire were as follows:

1. Do you always self-study at home? Give your reason and explain.

2. Which one is more effective to help English mastery, online learning or offline learning? Give reason and explain.

3. Do you practice English both spoken and written at home? Explain.

4. How frequently do you read English books during online and offline learning? Explain.

5. During the covid-19 pandemic, the teaching-learning process is conducted mixed online and offline, how frequently do you access English content (music, videos, articles) via social media and the internet? Explain.

In quantitative data analysis, each student's score on the English morphological awareness test was collected in an excel sheet. After that, the total collected students' scores were computed by using SPSS 22 frequency distribution which distributed the students' scores in the Morphological awareness test into three categories with intervals: (1) 80-100 is considered high, (2) 50-70 is perceived moderate, (3) 00-40 is rated low. The number of students who were falling into certain criteria was calculated into a percentage. The results were yielded showing how many students were dominant in a certain criterion of level skill of EFL university students on English morphological awareness.

In qualitative data analysis, the results of open-ended questionnaires were translated and transcribed into English. After that, the writer identified, analyzed, and interpreted into specific separated themes based on five given questions in open-ended questionnaires. Moreover, the writer also classified and quantified the students' opinion tendency on each question into a percentage to ease mapping students into what opinion they were dominant. The translated and transcribed data were interpreted separately based on themes based on the aforementioned questions to get in-depth students' opinions regarding the learning experience during blended learning implementation. The interpretations are afterward used properly to confirm and clarify the results of previous quantitative analysis on English Morphological awareness skill level.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study's findings are two-fold: (1) the results of an English morphological awareness test administered to EFL university students, and (2) students' opinions based on their experiences with English learning in a blended learning class setting (a combination of online and offline learning), which were obtained through an open-ended questionnaire.

Table 1. Results of Test of Students' English Morphological Awareness

No.	Interval of score	Criteria	Frequency	Percent
1.	80-100	High	5	29.4%
2.	50-70	Moderate	10	58.8%
3.	00-40	low	2	11.8%
	Total		**17**	**100%**

Following the administration of an English morphological awareness test to 17 EFL university students, the findings revealed that five students (29.4%) scored in the 80-100 range. Their English morphological awareness skill is graded as high. Nevertheless, it is ranked second in terms of total frequency. Meanwhile, the remaining ten students (58.8%) received a score of 50-70, indicating that their English morphological awareness skill is moderate. On the level of English morphological awareness, this achievement is dominant. Finally, only two (11.8 percent) students achieved a score between 00 and 40, implying that they have a low level of English morphological awareness.

Due to the covid-19 outbreak, the open-ended questionnaire highlighted the reality of students learning English during blended learning deployment. The following is a simplified quantification of the findings, coupled with a selected excerpt based on the results of an open-ended questionnaire;

Students Always Self Study at Home

There were 11 participants who claimed that they always self-study at home (64.70 percent). As well as the convenient access to mobile learning applications, a student (students with number identity 16= S.16) confirmed that he used to self-study at home during blended learning:

> *Yes, because today learning English is easy due to we can **access** it wherever, for instance, **Facebook, online learning applications**, and so on.*

*I love English because I used to play the application **Hello English** on my sister's smartphone. (S.16)*

Conversely, another student (S.15) argues that self-study can be accomplished via the use of social media platforms (such as Facebook and YouTube) as well as books. Likewise, (S.16) remarked that self-study is a realistic alternative to conventional English courses. The following are highlights from their statements:

*Yes, I self-study at home by watching **video vlogs**, and conversations on some **social media platforms** and (reading) **some books** I borrow from Madina (STAIN Mandailing Natal) that location is quite near my house. I also emphasize that studying together and discussing together about English is also important to share knowledge. (S.15)*
*Yes, I self study English at home independently because I do not take any **English courses**, then I always study English via the internet (S.16)*

In opposite to 11 students who reported always self-study at home during blended learning due to the covid-19 pandemic, there were 6 students-participants (35.29 percent) who stated that they did not always self-study at home during blended learning due to the pandemic. Students (S.3) and (S.1) identified themselves and freely stated why they do not always self-study, stating:

*Sometimes, (I learn English at home) when having a good mood in my **spare time**, and (I) don't know what to do (S.3)*
*Somewhile, I want my **vocabulary, speaking or English being improved** (S.1)*

Determining More Effective Way to Help English Mastery: Online Learning or Offline Learning

All student-participants claimed that offline learning is more effective than online learning. The reasons offline learning is more effective are expressed by (S.2), (S.15), (S.16), and (S.17). Those who agreed that offline learning is more effective cited a number of factors. Offline learning is more appealing and participatory than a face-to-face lecturer, and it also permits gathering and discussing with classmates in a real-world context, reducing misinterpretation of material delivery and effectively omitting constraints such as a poor internet connection. They reacted:

*Honestly, I prefer offline because we can **directly ask the lecturer** and the lecturer explains (the material) face to face mode and gives the detailed part of the explanation by writing the breakdown formulas. Moreover, offline learning is **monitored by the lecturer** (S2)*

> *I think offline (is more effective) because via offline, we can **discuss directly with friends** and we can get much more references. And via offline we can effectively express questions to the lecturer about the course material we still don't understand (S.15)*

> *Offline. Because we can ask directly as detail as possible **without misunderstanding** chances just like occurs in an online class setting (S16) Offline, because the learning process is more maximum, meanwhile online tends to be lazy due to bad internet connection. (S17)*

Do You Practice English Both Spoken and Written at Home?

A higher percentage of students-participants (9) acknowledged that they speak and write English at home. Identified Participants (S.8), (S.10), and (S.12) evaluated the high frequency of practicing English at home as a good way to improve speaking and pronunciation. They noted:

> *Yes. (Practicing) speaking in front of the mirror (S8)*
> *Yes. Because practicing English will make (us) fluent in pronunciation and each word in English (S.10)*
> *Yes. Sometimes I use English little (with high frequency) because I always hear it (English) on campus (S.12)*

Remarkably, the other 8 students (47.05 %) thought they practice English at home on occasion. The following are two of their excerpts, asserting:

> *Sometimes, I practice English at home with my sister, for instance, sometimes I use words from kinds of stuff in the kitchen and mirror as the object to train my English (S15)*
> *Not frequent in practicing English (and) practice English via Whatsapp with friends who are interested in using English (S16).*

Students' Frequency in Reading English Books during Blended Learning

Only 3 (17.64 %) students mentioned they read English books frequently, while 14 (82.35 %) admitted they read English books only infrequently. The students who described read English books a frequently, stating:

> *Every day I read about English even in online or offline learning (S.7)*
> *Almost every day (read English books) due to the covid-19 pandemic each day there is an assignment/task from the lecturer. Therefore I always focus on my smartphone/laptop to study English (S.13)*

Concurrently, some respondents admitted that they occasionally read English books. They expressed:

> *Not often, but I also read and borrow dictionaries and English theory books at the library near my home. At another time, I read a conversation book belonged to my father when he studied at university a long time ago (S.2)*
> *Not too often (reading English books at home), because I also have other activities must do. Besides, reading book for me is self-healing and gives nutrition to the brain (S.10)*

During the covid-19 pandemic, the teaching-learning process is conducted mixed online and offline, how frequently did the students access English content (music, videos, articles) via social media and internet?

The majority of respondents said they were content with their ability to obtain English information via social media and the internet. Their total number of participants exceeds 15 (88.23%). According to a participant (S.1) speaking and listening development is enhanced by watching YouTube videos. Furthermore, the respondent (S.2) made a similar allegation. The following statements elaborate on this.

> *Almost every day I watch videos on youtube and listen to music. That activity can help me to understand English either by speaking or listening (S.1)*
> *Almost every day (to access English content on social media) minimum of 2-3 hours and more are allocated for it. I watch English videos on Facebook, and Instagram and saved them. If I found a new word, I automatically write it in my little notebook, and I practice it (S.2)*

A little number namely 2 students (11.76%) stated a low frequency of accessing English content on social media and the internet. They only use it in their spare time, as a student, as identified (S.11) acknowledged:

> *Just in spare time and never miss an English article to read. (S.11)*

Discussion

The results of English morphological awareness satisfactorily have met the expectation, even if some little aspects need to be improved. The point is that the students' learning experience during blended learning due to the covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the students' morphological awareness skills and vice versa. The higher the English morphological awareness skill, the better English skills the students will have. When the students engage with morphological awareness, such as being aware of specific morphemes and their structure, automatically their English skills also gradually escalate regarding the use of morphemes/words correctly, proportionally, and

appropriately based on words formation, modification, and meaning change (Giyatmi Giyatmi, 2017; Westby, 2013).

Even so, some results pointed out that the students' accomplishment on English morphological awareness presides tendency into low criterion. Since they rated seldom and the like on a particular English learning experience during blended learning due to covid-19 pandemic. In an open-ended questionnaire, a little number of student-participants rated seldom to self-study, just once in a while practicing English spoken and written at home, low frequency of reading English books at home, and allocating less time to access English content on social media and internet. Their English learning experiences, unfortunately, denoted a negative image. The consequence is their English morphological awareness skill slowly degrading. As admitted that English morphological awareness has a high tense of connection to students' English skills, one of which is English literacy (Wilson-Fowler & Apel, 2015).

The moderate criterion of English morphological awareness embraced more than half of the total student participants. Furthermore, the high criterion of English morphological awareness also covered the second biggest number of total students. It infers an understanding that their English learning experience during blended learning due to the covid-19 pandemic strongly created a great impact on their morphological awareness skill improvement. Some excerpts of their perceptions via an open-ended questionnaire confirmed that phenomenon.

In accordance with students' opinion regarding self-study at home mainly learning English by utilizing social media platforms and books, daily habit of practicing English spoken and written at home, and their hype and interest to access English content on internet and social media. It is in line with what (Umam & Zabidi, 2021) found in their study namely in recent times, digital technology based-learning due to the covid-19 outbreak has rapidly and inevitably become an option in the education sector, especially in higher education.

The aforementioned findings clear our insight that English morphology is not only linguistic competence and it does not only have a scrubby role in English skills, yet it plays a prominent part to equip English skills. Our perception might be turned away from the paradigm that English morphology covers the meaning, morphemes, word formation, word modification, and word class change into a new fresh paradigm namely

the awareness of using English Morphology in the English context as asserted that morphological awareness can be applied by building the ability to be aware of using morpheme/word and its change due to grammatical adjustment, word modification, word formation and word meaning change.

During blended learning due to the covid-19 pandemic, the way EFL learners learn promptly changes. They adapt the integrated learning both online via digital technology and offline in an as conventional way. This is suitable to a previous study by (Komalasari, 2021) which emphasizes that digital technology or online affects many things such as education, industry, science, and human skills. English materials are also available vastly on the internet. In learning English, digital technology penetrated as one of the keys to achieving the goal of learning. Therefore, it is important to know how far the students have utilized digital technology to improve their English skills and morphological awareness skills during blended learning.

Here the old paradigm will be complemented; from English skills as English proficiency and English morphology as part of linguistic competence; now they both deservedly be integrated into the language curriculum to support each other so English language learner, notably English foreign language (EFL) learner where English is not their first language, nor their mother tongue and nor their second language, acquire the English language easier by developing English morphological awareness since early time in the context of English language teaching-learning. Moreover, it significantly helps students who are engaged in both online learning and offline learning to solve their problems in detecting English word changes which have a connection to language mastery.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS
Conclusions

This study demonstrated the level of English morphological awareness of EFL university students. This study frames various pictures of student skills in English morphological awareness, foremost during blended learning implementation due to the covid-19 pandemic. Thus, three criteria of students' English morphological awareness skills were discovered. There is a high criterion of English morphological skill which

involved 10 students (58.8%), a moderate criterion which settled 5 students (29.4%), and a low criterion which detected only 2 students (11.8%).

Moreover, the results of the open-ended questionnaire confirmed and clarified the previous statistical results on students' English morphological awareness. Their opinions are generally summarized as follows; they admitted that they actively self-studied at home, preferred offline learning to online learning, frequently practiced English at home, seldom read English books, and most of them maximally utilized social media and the internet to access English learning content. The results of this study navigate us to take into serious account that the English learning environment and recent technologies such as social media and the internet, could give a significant impact on building and improving students' English morphological awareness.

Suggestions

This study talks about the English morphological awareness skill of EFL university students. Accordingly, it is necessary to integrate the knowledge of the morphemic and smallest structure of words with four English skills since early education, at least from the junior high school level. It will crucially be helping students to be more aware of each word structure, word-class change, and word meaning change.

Nevertheless, this study only applied four kinds out of eight tasks available to assess English morphological awareness skills. Meanwhile, there are eight kinds of tasks that possibly could be done, at least, the small sample size, and only four kinds of tasks applied in this study, sufficiently can fill the research gap of previous studies and also can answer the English morphological awareness skill of EFL University students in a certain small place as acknowledged in the introduction. The upcoming study is expected to be done with larger coverage of sampling from different schools or universities and apply complete kinds of tasks to assess morphological awareness skills.

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