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The Effectiveness of Phonics Method in Improving English Pronunciation to 5th Grade Students at SD GMIM IV Tomohon

Efektivitas Metode Fonik dalam Meningkatkan Pengucapan Bahasa Inggris pada Siswa Kelas 5 di SD GMIM IV Tomohon

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Abstract
This study investigates the effectiveness of the Phonics Method in improving English pronunciation among 5th-grade students at SD GMIM IV Tomohon. With increasing emphasis on oral communication in Indonesia's elementary English curriculum, mastering pronunciation at an early stage becomes crucial. However, students often struggle with phonological differences between Indonesian and English, such as vowel sounds, consonant clusters, and word stress. The Phonics Method, which systematically teaches the relationship between graphemes and phonemes, is proposed as an alternative to traditional pronunciation instruction methods. Using a mixed-method design, this study involved two groups: an experimental group taught with Phonics Method and a control group receiving conventional instruction. Quantitative data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests, while qualitative insights were gathered via classroom observation, student questionnaires, and teacher interviews. The findings revealed significant improvement in the pronunciation skills of students taught using the Phonics Method, especially in vowel and consonant articulation, syllable awareness, and word stress. Students also demonstrated higher engagement and confidence. The results suggest that phonics-based instruction enhances not only segmental features of pronunciation but also supports better learning motivation and participation. This study concludes that integrating the Phonics Method in elementary English instruction can effectively address early pronunciation difficulties and foster sustainable language acquisition.

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesian elementary schools has faced significant challenges, particularly in developing students' pronunciation skills. As English maintains its position as a crucial foreign language in Indonesia's education system, the need for effective pronunciation teaching methods becomes increasingly important (Mustafa & Rahmawati, 2023). At the elementary level, where students are first introduced to formal English instruction, establishing proper pronunciation foundations is essential for their future language development. It is a good thing for students to master English pronunciation from an elementary level so that students can be fluent from an earlier time of learning English.

Learning English pronunciation at earlier stages is important in order to make a strong students' foundation of English. Recent studies indicate that Indonesian elementary school students often struggle with English pronunciation due to the significant differences between Indonesian and English phonological systems (Widodo & Perwitasari, 2021). Common difficulties include distinguishing between similar sounds not present in Indonesian, such as /θ/ and /ð/, as well as proper stress and intonation patterns. These challenges are particularly evident among 5th-grade

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students who are expected to engage in more complex oral communication tasks as part of the national curriculum requirements.

The phonics method has emerged as a promising approach to address these pronunciation challenges. This method systematically teaches the relationships between sounds (phonemes) and their written representations (graphemes), providing students with tools to decode and pronounce English words accurately (Rahman & Haryanto, 2022). Unlike traditional methods that rely heavily on repetition and imitation, phonics instruction helps students understand the logical patterns behind English pronunciation, potentially leading to more sustainable learning outcomes.

In the Indonesian context, several local scholars have emphasized the significance of engaging and student-centered strategies to support English pronunciation development. Liando et al. (2023) found that using English songs helped seventh-grade students significantly improve their pronunciation, especially in mastering challenging phonemes and intonation patterns. Songs provided consistent and enjoyable exposure to correct sound models, which students could imitate repeatedly to enhance their oral accuracy. Similarly, Mogea (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of active learning techniques such as role play and snowball throwing in developing students' speaking ability. These methods required students to produce English orally in authentic contexts, which naturally reinforced pronunciation through meaningful interaction. While not directly focused on pronunciation, Oroh's contribution to English literary studies (Pinontoan, Oroh, & Kamagi, 2023) implies that exposure to rich English texts can improve phonological awareness, especially when reading aloud is integrated into the learning process. Together, these studies support the need for dynamic and interactive approaches—such as phonics—to systematically build learners' pronunciation skills from an early age.

Current research in the Indonesian context suggests that many elementary English teachers still rely predominantly on conventional pronunciation teaching methods, such as drill and repeat exercises (Sulistiyo et al., 2020). While these methods have their place in language instruction, they may not provide students with the systematic understanding of English sound patterns necessary for independent word decoding and pronunciation. This situation calls for an investigation into more effective teaching approaches, particularly the phonics method.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design, specifically the explanatory sequential design as proposed by Creswell (2014). The study began with the collection and analysis of quantitative data through a pre-test and post-test design to measure the improvement in students' pronunciation skills. The quantitative results were then followed up with qualitative data collection using classroom observations, student questionnaires, and semi-structured teacher interviews to explain and deepen the understanding of the numerical findings.

The rationale for using a mixed-method approach lies in the nature of the research problem, which not only concerns the measurable effectiveness of a specific teaching method (Phonics) but also requires an exploration of learner and teacher experiences, perceptions, and classroom dynamics. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the Phonics Method's impact on fifth-grade students' English pronunciation.

2. Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of 50 fifth-grade students at SD GMIM IV Tomohon, North Sulawesi. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select two homogenous groups: 25 students were assigned to the experimental group, and 25 to the control group. The experimental group received English pronunciation instruction through the Phonics Method, while the control group continued with conventional pronunciation instruction. Additionally, two English teachers who handled the classes were involved in the study. Their perceptions were considered through interviews to gain further insight into the instructional process and the comparative impact of each method.

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3. Research Instruments

To ensure the validity and reliability of data, multiple instruments were developed and adapted from established assessment criteria, particularly Brown (2004). The following instruments were used: a) Pronunciation Test (Pre-Test and Post-Test): This oral test evaluated students' performance in three areas: vowel and consonant accuracy, syllable awareness, and word stress. Each test consisted of 30 items, including isolated words and short reading passages; b) Scoring Rubric: A 5-level scoring rubric assessed students' performance, ranging from 1 (Very Poor) to 5 (Excellent) for each component: vowel/consonant articulation, word stress accuracy, and intonation, c) Observation Sheet: Used to record student engagement, participation, and behavioural response during phonics-based learning sessions, c) Student Questionnaire: A Likert-scale questionnaire explored students' perceptions of the phonics learning experience and their confidence in speaking English; d) Teacher Interview Guide: A semi-structured format explored the teacher's evaluation of instructional efficacy, student response, and instructional challenges.

4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process spanned **four weeks**, consisting of the following phases: Week 1: Pre-test administered to both experimental and control groups. Weeks 1–4: The experimental group received Phonics-based pronunciation instruction twice a week (45 minutes per session). The instruction followed a structured sequence covering: a) Letter-sound correspondence (vowels and consonants), b) Syllable awareness, c) Word stress patterns, d) Sentence stress and intonation. The control group was taught using traditional methods (e.g., repetition and imitation) without structured phonics elements. Week 5: Post-test conducted for both groups, followed by questionnaire distribution and teacher interviews.

The treatment materials used in the experimental group were based on decodable texts and pronunciation drills specifically aligned with the phonics scope taught each week. Teachers incorporated choral reading, minimal pairs practice, and blending/segmenting exercises to reinforce learning.

5. Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis:

Pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, percentage increase) and comparative analysis to determine gains in pronunciation skills. The scoring rubric was applied to classify students' pronunciation levels as follows:

Score	Level	Description
85 – 100	Very Good	Excellent pronunciation with minimal to no errors.
75 – 84	Good	Minor pronunciation errors that do not affect intelligibility.
60 – 74	Average	Some pronunciation errors that occasionally affect intelligibility.
40 – 59	Poor	Frequent pronunciation errors; difficult to understand.
0 – 39	Very Poor	Severe pronunciation issues; mostly unintelligible.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

Observation notes, questionnaire responses, and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically. Codes were developed to identify recurring themes related to engagement, motivation, perceived difficulty, instructional clarity, and overall learning atmosphere.

Result and Discussion

Result

1. Quantitative Findings

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The pre-test results showed no significant difference between the two groups in pronunciation ability. The experimental group had a mean score of 63.2, while the control group scored 62.4, placing both groups in the “Average” category. After four weeks of treatment:

a) The experimental group achieved a mean post-test score of 85.6, indicating a 22.4-point increase, which moved the group into the “Very Good” category.
b) The control group, however, only improved slightly to 68.1, a 5.7-point increase, still within the “Average” range.

Table 1. Pretest Resul

EXPERIMENT GROUP (PRE TEST)							
Student	V	C	S	I	Total		Levels
S1	4	4	2	2	12	60	Average
S2	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S3	4	3	3	3	13	65	Average
S4	2	2	z	1	5	25	Very Bad
S5	2	2	3	1	8	40	Bad
S6	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S7	1	2	2	1	6	30	Very Bad
S8	3	2	2	2	9	45	Bad
S9	2	2	1	2	7	35	Very Bad
S10	2	3	1	1	7	35	Very Bad
S11	1	2	2	1	6	30	Very Bad
S12	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S13	2	2	2	3	9	45	Bad
S14	2	1	2	1	6	30	Very Bad
S15	1	2	2	2	7	35	Very Bad
S16	1	2	2	1	6	30	Very Bad
S17	2	1	4	2	9	45	Bad
S18	2	1	3	3	9	45	Bad
S19	1	2	2	2	7	35	Very Bad
S20	2	3	2	2	9	45	Bad
S21	2	2	1	1	6	30	Very Bad
S22	2	2	1	1	6	30	Very Bad
S23	3	3	2	2	10	50	Bad
S24	1	3	3	2	9	45	Bad
S25	2	3	2	2	9	45	Bad

Table 2. Pretest Result

CONTROL GROUP (PRE TEST)							
Student	V	C	S	I	Total		Levels
S1	3	3	2	2	10	50	Bad
S2	2	3	2	3	10	50	Bad
S3	1	1	2	2	6	30	Very Bad
S4	4	3	3	2	12	60	Average
S5	2	2	2	3	9	45	Bad
S6	1	3	2	2	8	40	Bad
S7	1	2	2	2	7	35	Very Bad
S8	3	3	3	3	12	60	Average
S9	2	2	1	1	6	30	Very Bad
S10	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S11	2	3	3	3	11	55	Bad
S12	2	2	2	3	9	45	Bad
S13	1	1	3	3	8	40	Bad
S14	2	1	1	1	5	25	Very Bad
S15	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S16	1	1	2	3	7	35	Very Bad
S17	2	2	2	3	9	45	Bad
S18	2	2	3	2	9	45	Bad
S19	2	2	2	3	9	45	Bad
S20	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S21	2	3	2	2	9	45	Bad
S22	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S23	3	4	3	2	12	60	Average
S24	3	3	3	2	11	55	Bad
S25	2	1	2	2	7	35	Very Bad

Table 3. Experiment Group

EXPERIMENT GROUP (POST TEST)							
Student	V	C	S	I	Total		Levels
S1	4	4	5	3	16	80	Good
S2	4	4	4	2	14	70	Average
S3	5	4	4	4	17	85	Very Good
S4	5	4	3	3	15	75	Good
S5	4	4	5	3	16	80	Good
S6	4	4	4	4	16	80	Good
S7	4	4	3	5	16	80	Good
S8	5	5	3	4	17	85	Very Good
S9	4	4	3	3	14	70	Average
S10	4	4	3	4	15	75	Good
S11	5	5	4	3	17	85	Very Good
S12	4	4	5	3	16	80	Good
S13	5	5	4	3	17	85	Very Good
S14	5	4	5	3	17	85	Very Good
S15	4	4	3	3	14	70	Average
S16	5	4	4	3	16	80	Good
S17	5	5	3	2	15	75	Good
S18	4	4	3	3	14	70	Average
S19	5	4	3	2	14	70	Average
S20	5	5	3	2	15	75	Good
S21	5	4	3	2	14	70	Average
S22	5	4	3	2	14	70	Average
S23	5	4	4	4	17	85	Very Good
S24	5	5	4	3	17	85	Very Good
S25	5	5	4	3	17	85	Very Good

Table 4. Control Group

CONTROL GROUP (POST TEST)							
Student	V	C	S	I	Total		Levels
S1	3	4	3	2	12	60	Average
S2	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S3	1	2	1	2	6	30	Very Bad
S4	2	2	1	2	7	35	Very Bad
S5	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S6	1	3	1	2	7	35	Very Bad
S7	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S8	4	3	2	2	11	55	Bad
S9	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S10	2	2	1	2	7	35	Very Bad
S11	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S12	2	2	1	2	7	35	Very Bad
S13	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S14	2	1	2	1	6	30	Very Bad
S15	2	1	2	2	7	35	Very Bad
S16	1	2	2	2	7	35	Very Bad
S17	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S18	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S19	4	4	2	2	12	60	Average
S20	2	2	2	1	7	35	Very Bad
S21	2	2	1	1	6	30	Very Bad
S22	2	2	2	2	8	40	Bad
S23	3	2	1	1	7	35	Very Bad
S24	4	3	3	2	12	60	Average
S25	2	1	2	2	7	35	Very Bad

This difference in score gains suggest a significant impact of the Phonics Method on students' pronunciation development. The 22.4-point improvement in the experimental group indicates that students who received phonics instruction gained not only technical pronunciation knowledge but also practical decoding skills to identify and produce English sounds more accurately. The stark contrast in score improvement (22.4 vs 5.7 points) highlights how traditional pronunciation approaches may not provide sufficient scaffolding for learners at the elementary level. The most notable areas of improvement in the experimental group included: a) Vowel and consonant

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articulation: Students exhibited clear reductions in the mispronunciation of English phonemes, especially those not present in Indonesian (e.g., /θ/, /ʃ/, /v/). Their articulation became more precise and closer to native-like pronunciation; b) Syllable awareness and word stress: Students gained the ability to segment multi-syllabic words correctly and place stress appropriately, which contributed to more natural sounding speech. Prior to intervention, many students tended to place equal stress on all syllables; c) Intonation and sentence rhythm: Improvements were also noted in students' fluency when reading aloud. Their pitch, stress, and pauses became more appropriate, making their spoken English easier to understand.

These results support the view that phonics instruction enables learners to connect sound and print systematically, enhancing their pronunciation as well as their overall decoding fluency. The high mean score of the experimental group on the post-test confirms that the Phonics Method was instrumental in improving the intelligibility and confidence of students' speech.

2. Qualitative Findings

Students in the phonics group exhibited high levels of engagement, often participating enthusiastically in sound-blending games and pronunciation drills. The multisensory nature of the method (e.g., visual cues, oral repetition, hand gestures) supported various learning preferences and kept learners actively involved. Observations showed that students were more willing to participate orally and exhibited fewer signs of embarrassment or withdrawal when making pronunciation errors.

80% of students in the experimental group reported that the phonics lessons were "fun and easy to follow," while 72% stated they felt "more confident" pronouncing English words after the treatment. Several students mentioned that they could now identify and pronounce individual sounds within words, which previously caused confusion. Responses suggested that the method promoted both enjoyment and clarity, key factors in sustaining student interest.

The English teacher in the experimental class noted significant improvement in students' motivation and pronunciation accuracy. She emphasized the usefulness of structured steps and repeated phoneme practice. In contrast, the control class teacher acknowledged that pronunciation activities in her class were limited and often reactive, depending on spontaneous correction rather than planned instruction. The teacher also noted that with phonics, students began correcting themselves during reading tasks, demonstrating emerging metacognitive awareness of their pronunciation.The triangulation of data from quantitative scores, observation notes, student responses, and teacher interviews clearly reveals the effectiveness of the Phonics Method. It not only improved learners' segmental pronunciation features but also enhanced their engagement, self-correction ability, and willingness to speak. Overall, students benefited from structured phonics instruction both cognitively and affectively, which reinforces its value as a teaching approach in the Indonesian elementary school context.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the significant effectiveness of the Phonics Method in improving English pronunciation skills among fifth-grade students at SD GMIM IV Tomohon. The quantitative data clearly show a substantial improvement in the experimental group's pronunciation abilities, particularly in vowel and consonant articulation, syllable awareness, word stress, and intonation patterns. The average score increase of 22.4 points in the experimental group, compared to the modest 5.7-point increase in the control group, provides strong evidence that the Phonics Method enhances students' ability to decode and produce English sounds more accurately.In addition to the technical improvements in pronunciation, qualitative data gathered from student questionnaires, observations, and teacher interviews reveal positive shifts in student engagement, confidence, and self-correction abilities. Students in the experimental group found the phonics-based lessons enjoyable and easy to follow, and they reported feeling more confident in their ability to pronounce English words. The structured, interactive nature of the method helped them develop a deeper understanding of English sound patterns and promoted active participation in class.

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The findings of this study align with previous research indicating the value of engaging, student-centered approaches to pronunciation instruction. The Phonics Method, with its emphasis on sound-symbol relationships and systematic learning, offers a promising alternative to traditional pronunciation teaching methods, particularly in the context of Indonesian elementary schools. It not only addresses the challenges of English pronunciation but also fosters a supportive and engaging learning environment where students feel motivated and empowered. In conclusion, the Phonics Method presents a viable and effective strategy for enhancing English pronunciation skills in Indonesian elementary schools. This study's results suggest that integrating phonics-based instruction into the curriculum could significantly contribute to improving students' pronunciation accuracy and overall language proficiency. Further research could explore the long-term effects of phonics instruction and investigate its application in other regions and educational levels in Indonesia, as well as its potential integration with other language skills development strategies.

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