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## The Phonics Method to Increase English Pronunciation for Young Learners

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**Abstract :** The purpose of this study was to solve the problem of fifth-grade students at SDN Ciwiden Kota that still low in pronunciation skills. Their English pronunciations are still considered inadequate, as seen by an average score of 52.85. This study design is Classroom Action Research (CAR). The data gathering approaches employed included an oral test, which is read aloud simple descriptive text, interviews with students and teachers, and field notes. In this study, the phonics method was employed to improve students' pronunciation skills through classroom activities. This study was carried out in two phases. The first cycle showed no significant improvements, however there was some improvement with an average score of 62.92. Cycle two was consequently required, and it showed remarkable improvement with an average score of 80.17. In short, the findings of this study suggest that the phonics method can improve students' English pronunciation skills and boost students' confidence in pronouncing a word in English. Then, during the learning process, a more effective strategy for students' pronunciation was discovered by applying the phonics method

**Keywords :** Phonics method, English pronunciation, Young learners.

### INTRODUCTION

The important element of learning English is Pronunciation. Paying attention to pronunciation while communication plays an important role in learning a language. According to Harmer (2001) cited by Tiyas & Aniuranti (2023), states that the first thing native speakers are concerned with is pronunciation. Thus pronunciation is an important feature in language learning. In addition, Hişmanoğlu (2006) explains that pronunciation is not only important for successful oral communication, but also an important part of oral competence. Furthermore, Yates & Zielinski (2009) cited by Asrul & Husda (2022) explains that language components such as sounds, words, phrases, and new sentences are the primary skills of pronunciation in English language learning. Tiyas & Aniuranti (2023) also argue that Grammar and vocabulary are important language components, yet they may be turned meaningless if speakers cannot pronounce specific components or words correctly. If people use proper pronunciation, native speakers may understand even mistakes in grammar.

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Therefore, pronunciation is an essential element of language learning for students since it allows for successful communication.

Despite the crucial role of English pronunciation is apparent, it is generally regarded as a difficult component. As mentioned by Martínez-Flor (2006) cited by Gilakjani (2016) that English pronunciation is the most difficult skill to learn and requires a lot of time to learn. Also, English pronunciation is frequently neglected as a learning priority. According to Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2011), many teachers try to teach grammar, vocabulary, and the four necessary language skills without considering integrating pronunciation instruction. Gilakjani (2016) also explained that the teaching of English pronunciation sometimes receives less attention or is rarely involved intensely. Considering the importance of learning English pronunciation, which, while regarded difficult to acquire, can be accelerated by systematic practices. As stated by Tiyas & Aniuranti (2023), systematic activities accelerate improve pronunciation learning. Teachers and students both play essential roles in this process and are actively involved.

English pronunciation is different from Indonesian pronunciation due to differences in word placement between written and spoken form. As described by Karlina et al. (2020) that Bahasa Indonesia is a phonetic language, which means a language that has a direct link between spelling and pronunciation. In other words, there is an association between the written words and how they are spoken. For example, the word “Rumah” is pronounced /ru·mah/. Compared to that, Karlina et al. (2020) state that English is a non-phonetic language, which implies that there is no direct link between letters and their associated sounds, and the association between written and spoken is frequently inconsistent. For example, the word “See” is pronounced /si:/. Because of this, the difference makes most students unable to pronounce English correctly. This is also faced by the fifth grade students in SDN Ciwidey Kota, where the students' ability in pronunciation is still very low. The average of English pronunciation test was only 52,85. most students still pronounce English words with Indonesian pronunciation, such as the word "Like" (Suka) pronounced /laik/, but pronounced as /lik/ "Lick" (Menjilat). thus, shows that most students are still do not understand the relationship between letters and sounds in context of English. Besides that most students still lack confidence when pointed by the teacher to pronounce or read words in English.

Aside from the students' low pronunciation skills, teaching English pronunciation to young students is suggested. According to Nixon and Tomlinson (2005) cited by Sariçoban

and Kuç (2010) explain that pronunciation learning should be learned as early as possible, this is because in their formative years, young learners are much more receptive to learning sounds and pronunciation patterns. Furthermore, Zhang and Yin (2009) also argue that teaching pronunciation needs to start in elementary school since children can acquire sound systems more rapidly and effectively than adults because advanced age complicates the process of learning pronunciation. Sarıçoban and Kuç (2010) stated that students in the range of 7-12 years old are significantly less self-conscious than those of 13 years old and above, it is because in the age range of 13 years old and above they are less able to imitate well. Thus this study tries to overcome students' problems in pronunciation and focus on improving students' ability in English pronunciation.

One of the effective methods in teaching English pronunciation is the phonics method. Sahara (2019) states that the basic principles of phonics were first developed by John Hart in 1570. Scott and Ytreberg (1994) mentioned that phonics is a methodology based on the combination of sounds and letters learned phonically. In addition, According to Bald (2007) cited by Paris (2019) that phonics is a systematic method of teaching about the sounds conveyed by letters and letter groups, it also includes teaching children to combine and blend letter sounds to read or write words. This approach encourages students to decode written letters with sounds based on graphemes. Furthermore, Paris (2019) defines the phonics method as an approach to teaching reading that emphasizes the relationship between letters and sounds. It involves teaching students to decode words by sounding out individual phonemes and blending them together to form words. This systematic approach aims to develop students' phonemic awareness and decoding skills, enabling them to read with fluency and accuracy.

Furthermore, teaching phonics involves evaluating students ability to pronounce. Pronunciation is significantly more than just individual sounds. Pronunciation is a way of saying a word, particularly one that is accepted or widely understood. It additionally serves as a graphical representation of how a word is pronounced, employing phonetic symbols. In this instance, the writer considers multiple aspects while grading students' pronunciation, including voicing, vowel length, and specific sound. Teaching phonics to young learners is quite beneficial and impactful. As mentioned by Kurniati (2015), the use of phonics allows students to read and pronounce words and sentences faster. In line with Kurniati (2015) who argues that using phonics can help students pronounce and read words or sentences easily, such as the word "c-a-t", phonics helps students recognize "c /khe/ - a /ae/ - t /the/" so they

can combine them to become "cat". Furthermore, Pancare (2018) cited by Tiyas & Aniuranti (2023) explains that learning phonics encourages young readers to integrate sound-spelling patterns to decode newly written words by instructing them to pronounce them. Also, the phonics method can help students build confidence in pronouncing words. Thus it can be concluded that phonics is beneficial in reading, spelling, and can help students who are at risk of developing reading disabilities.

Also, there are several studies that have been conducted to analyze how the use of phonics can help learn English pronunciation. The first study is by Kurniati et al. (2015), This study focuses on the use of phonics method to improve English pronunciation skills of kindergarten students in reading simple sentences. The results of this study found significant progress in improving students' pronunciation skills. The second study was conducted by Tiyas & Aniuranti (2023), the purpose of this study is to improve classroom learning which improves the quality of education especially in English pronunciation of sixth grade elementary school students. Classroom Action Research is used in this study. in the learning process, phonics method is used to improve students' pronunciation skills, the results show that students get better grades after getting English learning using phonics method. In their findings, they concluded that the application of phonics method can improve students' pronunciation skills. Based on previous research, this study is also expected to explore other strategies in the use of the phonics method with the aim of improving the pronunciation skills of elementary school students at different grades. Moreover, this study was conducted to improve students' pronunciation skills based on the previously mentioned problems.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The methodology used in this study was classroom action research (CAR) developed by American Social Psychologist, Kurt Z. Lewin (1890-1947). The CAR research design in this study is a collaborative classroom action research conducted by teachers and writers to improve students' pronunciation skills, this type of research seemed most appropriate. Purohman (2018:1) states that Action Research is a reflective process of progressive problem solving conducted by individuals who collaborate with others or become part of a "community of practitioners" striving to improve something or solve a problem. Kemmis and Taggart (1988) cited by Purohman (2018) state that the research is started by planning for action. Then the plan is implemented as an action in the classroom, and the action is then observed. The reflection is done to analyze the data obtained during the action. This study was

carried out in two cycles, each cycle consisting of two separate meetings. According to Mukminin, et al. (2020) cited by Asrul & Husda (2022) that If the results of the first cycle do not meet what is expected, then the need for a second cycle is carried out with several teaching media and makes significant results. Thus this study showed significant results in the second cycle.

The classroom Action Research (CAR) usually takes place in certain cycle and the procedure for this study may be seen in the activities of each cycle, which are listed below. 1) Planning. The writer plans teaching and learning activities that focus on the problems identified in the previous teaching and learning process, which is the lack of students' skills in English pronunciation. The plan includes preparation before teaching and learning activities such as lesson plans, audio visuals from native speakers, pictures of words and letters, and teaching material books to support the learning of words to be learned. 2) Action. To carry out the plan, the writer acts as a teacher and teaches the lesson that has already been planned and conducting research in the classroom where the problem has been identified. The teacher introduces each letter of the alphabet and its sound with phonics using audio-visual media performed by native speakers, then students practice repeatedly.

After that, students focus on several letters which are then arranged into a word. then students spell using phonics, where the letters in one word consist of 3-6 letters, then pronounce the word properly. The activity will be repeated with different words and letters. 3) Observation. Students' pronunciation will be observed by the teacher in this observation stage. Students' performance will be assessed in the activity of reading a text guided by the teacher. In this case, the teacher will identify some errors that appear in the students' pronunciation and will tell the students more specifically. In this case, the teacher records some points to know the extent of students' pronunciation skills in the process of using phonics. 4) Reflection. From the notes taken and the data that has been collected by measuring student performance, the author analyzes several important things. Thus the author can re-plan the next action, which changes a certain action or adds several more actions to improve the learning process.

The fifth grade of SDN Ciwidey Kota, Bandung Regency, was the focus of the study. fifth grade grade is divided into 2 classes, class 5A and class 5B, in this study the writers only examined class 5B with 28 students. The data consisted of their pronunciation skill scores before and after treatment using the phonetic method. In conducting this study, the writers acted as an English teacher who taught English pronunciation using the phonics method with

the aim of improving students' pronunciation skills. At the same time, the teacher's actual role was as a collaborator who helped the writers design the lesson plan and analyze the data.

As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted in two cycles. The pre-cycle was set up in a single meeting with the aim of examining and observing the students' pronunciation skills prior to the use of the phonics method. In cycle I, the writers arranged two meetings that included activities to introduce and learn the sounds of letters in English using the phonics method. Then, at the end of the meeting, a test was given to read the descriptive text to determine the extent to which students' pronunciation skills improved following the use of the phonics method. Then cycle II was carried out based on the results of observation and reflection on the first cycle that had been developed. There were two meetings in cycle II. The plan of all activities in this cycle is almost the same as the first cycle, only some of the strategies used are different, namely involving game activities in applying the phonics method. The game involved arranging the scrambled letters into a word as well as filling in the incomplete parts of a word with vowels. After that, at the end of the meeting, a reading test was conducted as in cycle I to find out the final results of the students' English pronunciation skills.

To analyze the data, some instruments were employed, including observation checklist, interviews, documentation, test and field notes. The observation checklist and field notes serve as tools used to determine whether the learning process follows the lesson plan or not. The writer gave an oral test that consists of reading teks descriptive to students which aimed to find out whether phonics method could improve the students' pronunciation skills. In the interview session, the teacher gave his views on learning pronunciation with and without using the phonics method, then students were also interviewed to find out how students opinion about learning English. then documentation was also done to analyze the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As previously stated, the research was conducted in two cycles, which implies that different results were obtained from each. Each cycle included the percentages of the students' scores and was concluded by a discussion. Their pronunciation skills were obtained from the scores evaluated through the reading test. Here are the activities are done in each cycle.

Pre-Cycle Activity

In the pre-cycle activity stage, students were not exposed to the phonics method or any other learning strategies. The writer and teacher collaborated to create examinations that directly assessed students' pronunciation skills. The test was a read aloud test on a descriptive text that had been planned by the writers. The text is very simple and the content is about describing animals according to the material from the students' English learning module. The activity intends to conduct a pre-test of pronunciation skills that are not taught with the phonics method.

Table 1. Pre-activity Scores Analysis

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Score Range</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Very Good	85 – 100	0	0%
Good	75 – 84	2	7%
Sufficient	60 – 74	10	35,8%
Poor	50 – 59	5	17,9%
Very Poor	0 – 49	11	39,2%
Total		28	100%

Based on the table, it can be seen that among the 28 students there are two students who scored in the "Good" category with a percentage of 7%. 10 students in the "Sufficient" category with 35.8% but 17.9% in the "Poor" category as 5 students scored below 60. And 11 students with 39.2% were unfortunately in the "Very poor" category. And the average student score was 52.85 this shows that the students' pronunciation skills are still low. This activity was conducted to see how the progress before and after using the phonics method. Students' pronunciation skills in this activity are still very low. Most students only guess and pronounce words by reading in Indonesian.

In this instance, most students revealed a lack of knowledge of letter sounds and their combinations to construct words. According to Karlina et al. (2020), English differs from Indonesian in that there is often inconsistency between written and spoken English. Thus, Paris (2019) argues for a phonics method approach to reading learning that teaches students to decode words by sounding out individual phonemes and combining them to form words, with the aim of developing students' phonemic awareness and enabling them to read fluently and accurately. Furthermore, throughout the pre-cycle activities, students showed a lack of confidence in pronouncing the words in the text. They appeared anxious when pronounce the words in the text, and were occasionally confused and hesitant. Also, certain students did not read words that were difficult to pronounce or pronounce them with Indonesian pronunciation. As a result, the fact that no students scored well indicates that students are still lacking phonics understanding while reading a word.

### Activity in Cycle I

The activities in this cycle used the phonics method, with the writer acting as a teacher providing a series of previously prepared lessons. During this phase, the teacher explains how a letter sound. Learning begins with understanding how the sounds of letters in English differ from those that were taught in the alphabet. Students pay attention to and imitate the audiovisual showing the introduction of the sounds of the alphabet's letters. Then, students complete a test based on the material that was prepared to assess their pronunciation skills. The following student assessment scores are classified.

Table 2. Scores Analysis in Cycle I

Categories	Score Range	Frequency	Percentages
Very Good	85 – 100	2	7%
Good	75 – 84	7	25%
Sufficient	60 – 74	15	57%
Poor	50 – 59	2	7%
Very Poor	0 – 49	2	7%
Total		28	100%

Based on the table, it can be seen that there are students who get very good scores. This shows an improvement from the pre-cycle activities. However, there is little change in improvement from the pre-cycle. In cycle I activities there were 2 students (7%) in the "Very Good" score category, 7 students "Good" (25%), the "Sufficient" score increased to 15 students (57%), 2 students (7%) in the "Poor" category and 2 students (7%) still in the "Very Poor" category. Based on this, the frequency percentage can be said to have changed. In addition, the average score of students showed an increase to 62.92. However, this cycle cannot be said to be successful because it has not met the minimum standard criteria based on school provisions, which is not less than 70.

Based on the activities in Cycle I, the teacher reintroduced the A-Z alphabet in English. The names of the letters of the alphabet are mentioned together by both the students and the teacher. The letters of the alphabet were then introduced using the phonics method, which involved learning the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. The introduction of these sounds is followed by examples of related words. Audio visuals from native speakers were employed along with music in the application. In this activity, students show an interest in hearing how letter sounds are pronounced. The teacher then shows pictures and words that represent the letters of the alphabet and has the students pronounce the words in the picture together. Furthermore, the teacher asks students to analyze the word and spell it using phonics before move on to more harder terms. This is intended to improve students' phonemes



awareness. According to Pancare (2018), cited by Tiyas & Aniuranti (2023), mastering phonics can enable students to integrate sound spelling patterns to figure out written words into spoken. During this cycle, the teacher also introduced short and long vowels using audio videos recorded by native speakers. The video includes examples of words representing short and long vowels. The teacher and students will then distinguish between short and long vowels.

Observations revealed that the phonics strategy had not been completely implemented. Some students still neglected to follow the directions. Some people continue to have difficulty distinguishing between letters and letter sounds. Furthermore, students continue to struggle with distinguishing between short and long vowels in words. Another issue that students face is that they are unfamiliar with the pronunciation of words in English because English is not used in daily life and is only taught in school, and students continue to show hesitancy and lack focus. In certain circumstances, the teacher delivers the content too fast, causing students to not absorb pronunciation lessons adequately. As a result, the author suggests making some changes to the exercises in the second cycle so that students can become adapted to English pronunciation and develop phoneme awareness when pronouncing words in sentences. As a result, modifications in strategy for using the phonics method, adding additional vocabulary to learn so that students get used to it and can identify it, and active student participation are predicted to maximize the phonics method's utilization.

#### Activity in Cycle II

Based on the first cycle, which showed little improvement in students' pronunciation abilities and other issues, the second cycle should be carried out after reflection. This reflection is required to assess the present difficulties and observe each circumstance. Similar to the first cycle, this activity was carried out across two meetings, each lasting 70 minutes. This cycle is intended to finish all phonics method activities. Students were given the same test, which consisted of reading simple descriptive text about animals. The sequence of learning activities in this cycle was the same as in the previous cycle, but the strategy of learning activities was changed. In this case, in addition to having students listen to audiovisuals from native speakers, the teacher involved game-based learning. The game included arranging the scrambled letters into a word and filling in the blanks with vowels. Each student is given a small piece of paper with diverse contents, such as a word with randomized letters and an incomplete word, which they then present to the teacher to pronounce and receive feedback on. It is hoped that students will analyze the words and how

they are pronounced. After everything is done, the teacher shows examples of new words in the form of sentences in the text, then analyzed. Then students and teachers practice distinguishing words that show short and long vowels. In this case, the students also practiced the pronunciation alternately between the teacher and the students repeatedly. Pronunciation continued to be practiced during the two meetings in this cycle. After the lesson was over, each student took a test, the same as the first cycle which was a simple descriptive text reading test. Their pronunciation skills were observed and examined. The scores are grouped into the following table.

Table 3. Scores Analysis in Cycle II

Categories	Score Range	Frequency	Percentages
Very Good	85 – 100	8	28,5%
Good	75 – 84	14	50%
Sufficient	60 – 74	6	21,4%
Poor	50 – 59	0	0%
Very Poor	0 – 49	0	0%
Total		28	100%

After observing the results of the first cycle, the second cycle was conducted based on the deficiencies shown from the first cycle. The first cycle did not show optimal results in order for students to improve their pronunciation skills. This the second cycle was necessary. The results showed that 28 students had 10 students who improved their pronunciation skills through the phonics method because their scores were between 85 and 100. This indicates that there are significant results compared to the first cycle. 14 students got 75 to 84 and there were no students who were categorized as "Poor" and "Very Poor". Thus, all students showed improvement in their pronunciation skills and met the minimum standard criteria set by the school. some important things were obtained by interviewing students and teachers.

Pronunciation abilities increase, and all students pass the minimum requirement; this shows the teacher's learning plan using the phonics method, as well as an implementation strategy that actively involves students and is easily understood by them. As explained by Paris (2019) that systematically learning pronunciation using phonics teaches children to engage in combining and blending letter sounds to read or write words, with this systematic approach can develop students' phonemic awareness and decoding skills, enabling students to read fluently and accurately in pronunciation. In addition, at the end of each lesson, the teacher provides motivation and encouragement by comments on the students' general pronunciation skills and gives small gifts such as candy, ensuring that students continue to be supported to practice English pronunciation on a regular basis.

Based on this, it was determined that students' pronunciation skills had improved. The writer also discovered some students who were still apprehensive and nervous, but attempted to say the term even though they were incorrect when assigned by the teacher. Students become more confident as they master phonics and discover solutions to overcome their difficulties in pronouncing words in English. Almost all students enjoy and are stimulated by audiovisual and game-based learning activities. They are excited to keep enhancing their pronunciation. Finally, they were able to pronounce English words correctly. As a result, the phonics method should be used in pronunciation instruction to engage students. The following is a comparison of students' pronunciation skills in pre-cycle, cycle I and cycle II activities presented in graph form.

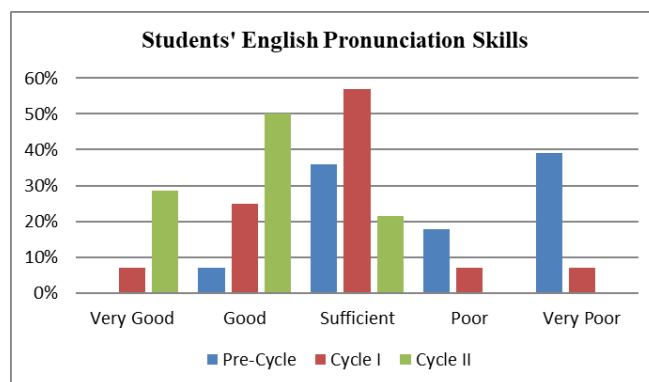


Figure 1. Flowchart of Pronunciation Skills through the Phonetic Method

From the graph above, the percentage of students' pronunciation skills using the phonics method is increasing. This can be seen from the three stages shown. First, the pre-cycle activities showed that students' skills in English pronunciation were still low. Then the first cycle showed an increase but not significant. Slowly the students' pronunciation skills improved by using the phonics method. Even so, the first cycle could not be said to be satisfactory because only a few students reached the "Very Good" category. To increase the score through the same phonics method applied, a second cycle is needed by updating the learning strategy, such as Mukminin, et al. (2020), Asrul & Husda (2022) stated that a second cycle is needed by adding some media that can support learning for significant results. Using audio visuals and some game activities as media and teaching strategies with the phonics method gives students the opportunity to be more active in practicing pronunciation. At least 50% of the students scored "Good" and 28.5% "Very Good", while the remaining 21.4% were in the "Sufficient" category. Thus, students' pronunciation skills have improved. At least 50% of the students scored "Good" and 28.5% "Very Good", while the remaining 21.4% were in the "Sufficient" category. Thus, students' pronunciation skills have improved. The purpose of

pronunciation skills is to make pronunciation understandable. As explained by Asrul & Husda (2022) that it is important for students to practice pronunciation because it plays a role in one's understanding, otherwise they cannot communicate effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the previously identified findings, it is determined that the phonics method plays an essential role in improving students' English pronunciation skills. Student scores have increased from pre-cycle to cycle I and cycle II. This shows that the phonics technique is beneficial in enhancing understanding of letter sounds since it considers how letters sound and the relationship between the sound and its spelling. So the writers concluded that using the phonic method in Classroom Action Research (CAR), could improve student pronunciation. The writers concludes that the proper technique to use phonics methods in teaching pronunciation in class to fifth-grade students at SDN Ciwidey Kota are (1) for students to listen to native speakers' pronunciations and attempt to pronounce repeated words. (2) The teacher integrates learning through activities, such as distributing the arrangement of letters in a word and having students follow it into a word form. (3) giving students a game of filling incomplete words with vowels. (4) students are given more words to practice pronunciation. (5) The teacher introduces new words, analyzes how the letters sound, and then lets the students practice repeated them together. The pre-cycle activity showed that the average student score was still low, which was only 52.85. Then the application of the phonics method was carried out to improve students' pronunciation skills and showed significant improvement. The average student score in cycle I was 62.92 and then the average score tied to 80.17 in cycle II. That way the phonics method is able to improve students' English pronunciation skills.

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