

# Vocational High School Students' Profile and their English Achievement

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**Abstract.** Vocational education has been given more attention in Indonesian education in the recent years. There have been many projects for vocational education since Jokowi Widodo took his presidential office in October 2014. In supporting government actions, vocational high school students need to improve their profile. Living in the global worlds requires the ability to interact with people from all over the world. The ability to communicate using English as the lingua franca is important. The purpose of the research reported here is, to prove whether the direct method is effective in improving vocational high school students' English pronunciation or not. This research design is a true experimental using post-test only. The population is students from one vocational high school in North Sulawesi. Sample of this research was year 11 students consisting of two classes class A (27 students) and class B (27 students). The instrument used in collecting data is tests. The results showed that the mean of the experimental group (36.99) statistically describes the students' improvement in pronouncing English words in which have been compared by result of the  $t_{observed}$  (2.897) exceed  $t_{critical}$  (1.943) at the level of significance 0.05. It means that there is a significant difference between the mean score of experimental group and control group regarding students' English pronunciation. This then supports the claim that 'rejects'  $H_0$  and 'accept'  $H_a$ . Based on the result, it could be concluded that the direct method is considered effective in improving students' English pronunciation.

## 1. Introduction

English teaching can be viewed as a system. It comprises some elements among others: teachers, students, curriculum, materials, methods, media and testing. These components are called as the system of English teaching. The material of teaching as an important component in the system of English teaching is indispensable. It is important because it is the core to be learned in the classroom. In the learning activities, there are many things that influence students in mastering foreign language, such as language skills, motivation and time spent for learning. Those are presented to support the students' ability in understanding the language. To maintain interaction of integrated-skills approach to language teaching, the emphasis should be on the interrelationship of skills. For example; reading ability will best be developed in association with writing, listening, and speaking activity. Even in those courses that may be labeled "reading", the goals will be best achieved by capitalizing on the interrelationship of skills.

In the implementation of teaching and learning the students are expected to know and master the materials, so that they can use English either in oral or in writing. By the interrelation of English skills, the pronunciation item is one of the most significant factors to influence students' progress in reading a kind of text. It is considered difficult because the English sound system differs with other language, and it can be presented explicitly as far as it is related to the theme or sub-theme being discussed. Reading in



the target language should be taught from the beginning of language instructions; however, the reading skill will be developed through practice with speaking. In this context, appropriate method and techniques are needed to help students develop their pronunciation. Several research studies have looked at English pronunciation [1-4] and suggested ways of overcoming problems.

Direct Method is one of the methods which is effective to improve students' English pronunciation. The teacher and students play their role as partners in the process of teaching and learning using direct methods [5]. It means the initiation of the interaction goes both ways, from teacher to students and from the students to teacher. Although it works on the four skills from the start, oral communication is considered as a basis. Thus, the reading and writing exercises are based upon what the students practice orally first. Pronunciation also receives attention right from the beginning of a course. This is clear that the goals of teacher who use the direct method intend that the students learn how to communicate, associate meaning and the target language directly. When the teacher introduces a new target language, word or phrase is demonstrated using *realia*, pictures, pantomime or gestures. The teacher never translates the words into students' native language. Students speak in the target language a great deal and communicating as if they are in real situations. Further, Larsen asserts that "In fact, the syllabus used in the direct method is based upon situations.

The oral communication skills will be built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small or intensive class [5]. In practice, therefore, classes based upon the direct method tradition are small, use only the second language as both a means of communication and instruction. Theoretically, the approach is also underpinned by a belief that language teaching should be based around phonetics and accurate pronunciation [6]. This then supports that how important students' English pronunciation is, including their articulation. Almost any 'method' can succeed when clients are willing to pay high prices for small class, individual attention, and intensive study. The direct method places teachers at the center of classroom activity, with critics arguing that learners, and success of the method itself, are too dependent on a teacher's individual skill and ability [6]. It means that use of the direct method depends on the teacher's performance how to apply it.

In applying the direct method, there are some techniques that are adapted when process of teaching and learning is done. They are reading aloud, question and answer exercise, getting students to self-correct, conversation practice, the use of minimal pairs, dictation, and the others [5]. This gives a signal that role of the techniques is indispensable in teaching and learning process. One of the techniques which most frequently cited barriers to reading aloud are lack of time [7]. As an English teacher, this certainly constitutes a challenge to spend more time to apply. The lack of time for using the technique, the teacher does not sometimes care this case; and it can influence student's improvement particularly on English pronunciation. Indeed, English teacher should have enough and or special time to make up this case. Because how other people can speak and understanding the target language if user of the language is not based on the pronunciation. This is a key to gaining full communicative competence and it is specifically to build a learner's articulatory competence [8].

In reading activity, when the students are asked to read a kind of reading text, the most emergent problem gained is difficult for them to read the reading passages, either sentence by sentence or paragraph, even when they are asked to pronounce the certain English words, they are not able to pronounce the words, although the teacher frequently employ the techniques but the students' improvement concerning English pronunciation has not still been proven. After the teacher observes deeper the students' problem, it was found that they are hard to pronounce English words. These are caused by differences between the English and Indonesian sound systems. The problem has existed for a long time since the first time taught at the Junior High School for a long time up till now the problem is still categorized as a crucial problem. Therefore, the teacher is motivated to investigate further including how to solve the problems. For instance: problems arise when students produce sounds of the English consonants such as the phoneme /ʃ/ in *she* with /s/ in *see*, and /z/ as in *zoo*; differentiation between consonant sounds /f/, /p/, /v/ as in *fish*, *enough*, *play*, *photo*, *vast*; consonant sounds /θ/ and /ð/, verbs that end with consonant sounds /t/ and /d/ as in *expect* becomes *expected*, *need* becomes *needed*, vowel /ə/ and /e/ as in *above*, *went*; and the others. Those are also caused by lack of understanding basic concept of

English particularly in teaching and learning pronunciation. It is proven that almost all indicators of school-based curriculum do not handle the theories of English pronunciation, the students are only asked to imitate or following the teacher's model without giving basic concept of the English. Thus, the purpose of conducting this research is, to prove whether the direct method is effective in improving students' English pronunciation or not. The hypothesis is "the students who are taught pronunciation using direct method, will get mean score higher than that of those who are not taught using direct method", with the level of significance 0.05 ( $H_a: \mu_1 \geq \mu_2$ ).

## 2. Methods

This research design is a true experimental using post-test only. In this design, initial differences between the groups are controlled by the random selection and random. The population of this research is students from one vocational high school in North Sulawesi. Sample of this research was at year 11 students consisting of two classes class A (27 students) and class B (27 students). The instrument used in collecting data is tests. Post-test was given to the experimental group after treatment, and to the control group without treatment. In *reading aloud practice* the students were given a kind of reading text for reading practice without underlining certain words with choosing 30 words of the text that became target of this study. In minimal pairs, they were given 30 words, and both were tested orally; next, the words were chosen to be items for dictation namely 30 words including verbs ended in consonant /t/, /d/, and suffix '-es' and '-ed'. In this study, the obtained data were analyzed by using *t*-test.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Six meetings were conducted to implement the three techniques in teaching and learning activity. In the first meeting, the experimental group was given a kind of reading text by underlining certain words which are assigned as target of the research. In meeting 2, reviewing the materials in meeting 1 including the emphasis on sounds of English words which are targeted in the study. Then, the use of minimal-pairs was given to know the difference of English sounds in detail either consonant [s, ʃ, z], [θ, ð], [f, p, v] or vowel sound [e] and [ə]; including the verbs ended in consonant *t* and *d* in meeting 3. In meeting 4, reviewing the materials in meeting 2 including emphasis on different sounds of the English words. In the fifth meeting, dictation was given by taking some words that had been taught on reading-aloud and the use of minimal-pairs above including verbs ended in consonant /t/, /d/, and verbs that added by suffix '-es' and '-ed'. Above to be as dictation drill. In meeting 6, reviewing all words that become target of this study from the beginning up to the end. Finally, the post-test was administered.

In this study, a one-tailed test at  $\alpha: .05$  (1.943) was planned before the study was conducted. From the result of calculation that  $t_{observed}$  is 2.897 at the .05. It falls between 2.132 and 2.352 of the observations. Since the absolute value of  $t_{observed}$  (2.897) exceeded the critical value of  $t$  (1.943), the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. It could be said that while the difference between means was in the expected direction, there is sufficient evidence to lead us to believe that this difference represents anything but a chance occurrence. This supports the claim that the direct method using three techniques is effective in improving students' English pronunciation.

## 4. Conclusions

The discussion leads to strongly conclude that the mean of the experimental group (36.99) statistically describes the students' improvement in pronouncing English words in which have been compared by result of the  $t_{observed}$  (2.897) exceed  $t_{critical}$  (1.943) at level of significance 0.05. This is then support the claim that 'rejects'  $H_o$  and 'accept'  $H_a$  which means that there is a significant difference between the mean score of experimental group and control group regarding students' English pronunciation. The students' difficulties in pronouncing English words can be overcome using the three techniques in the direct method namely reading aloud, minimal-pairs, and dictation. The students' errors are minimized

by treatment of the various techniques used. Thus, it could be concluded that direct method is effective in improving vocational high school students' English pronunciation.

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