

The Effectiveness of Jolly Phonics on English Pronunciation and Vocabulary Knowledge in a Kindergarten Class at a Private School in Nakhon Pathom

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the effectiveness of Jolly Phonics on English Pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge in a kindergarten class at a private school in Nakhon Pathom. The sample group was 24 Kindergarten 1 students who used Thai language in their daily activity but used English in their English class. The experimental instruments were the 15 phonics lesson plans that were specifically designed for these young learners. The data collecting instrument was an assessment form for the students' English pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge. The data were analyzed through mean, standard deviation, and percentage. The findings of the research were as follows:

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1. All of the 24 students' scores in English pronunciation ability passed the pre-set criteria of 70 percent at a very good level, namely 93 percent of the full score.
2. All of the 24 students' scores in English vocabulary knowledge passed the pre-set criteria of 70 percent at a very good level, that is, 92 percent of the full score.

Keywords: Jolly Phonics, Pronunciation, Vocabulary

Introduction

In today's world, multilingualism is becoming more and more important. In addition to its popularity in everyday communication, academia, business, entertainment, and employment opportunities, being able to speak a foreign language helps to make a real connection with people and to know more about diverse cultures, places, and lifestyles. The more proficient you are, the better you can express yourself. In 2015, the countries of Southeast Asia entered into a phase of regional integration known as ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations). When English has become an official tool for communication among the ASEAN member countries and its counterparts. Therefore, not only are English language skills extremely important for Thais for communicating with people from various countries and multicultural backgrounds, but in the Thai government sector as well. In order to prepare Thais for this situation, developing effective English users for intercultural communication has to be taken into consideration (Deerajiset, 2014).

In Thailand, English has been a compulsory element of the national education curriculum since 1980. In 2001, it was declared in the new national curriculum that English would be a compulsory foreign language subject starting from 6 years of age in primary education (Phothongsunan, 2019). Even though, Thai learners have to study English for more than 10 years from kindergarten to high school and even until university. According to the national test, the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in 2020 showed that the English average scores of primary school

students and high school students were 39.22 and 25.56 out of 100 respectively which can be considered as “very low” (Bureau of Educational Testing, 2022). Furthermore, according to the latest EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2022, Thailand fell 8 spots in the global ranking of non-native English-speaking countries. It currently languishes in the Very Low Proficiency group with a ranking of 97th out of 111 countries. In 2020, it was ranked 89th out of 100 countries. Upon examining the English-language classes, many researchers pointed to a few main factors contributing to the failure of English language teaching and learning: unqualified and poorly-trained teachers, poorly-motivated students, emphasis on grammar more than English fluency, fear of making mistakes and rare opportunities for student exposure to English outside of class time (Wiriyachitra, 2002). Bunnag (2018) stated that problems teaching English in Thailand can be divided into categories: teaching and learning problems, teacher problems; both Thai teachers and foreign teachers, management problems, English learning environment problems, criteria for assessing English language skills and curriculum problems.

Research suggests that birth through age 10 is the best time to introduce new languages to a young child. The child will learn the language faster, retain it better, and most often speak it with near-native pronunciation (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). Johnstone et al., (2005) mentioned that introducing reading and writing at an early age, alongside speaking and listening can be very beneficial not only to linguistic development but also to maintaining motivation for language learning throughout the years of primary school. In English language teaching, there are four language elements: structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling (Astuti, 2016). According to Macdonald (2002), pronunciation is a key element of the learning of oral skills in a second language. The lack of pronunciation skills also affects other language skills, especially vocabulary knowledge (Gilakjani, 2011). Understanding the meaning of the words is also essential. Since vocabulary knowledge is an important component of language learning everyone needs to keep learning and expanding their vocabulary to communicate successfully in different situations (Alqahtani, 2015).

According to the reasons mentioned above, the foundation of language learning must be taught and practiced in the early years. Phonics is one suitable way to practice and develop pronunciation correctly and clearly. It also helps students understand the meaning of words. Phonics is the study of the relationship between sounds and letters. Phonics instruction is not only for native speakers, it could be implemented in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, and it can help to improve anyone's skill by following step-by-step phonics instruction. Jolly Phonics program (developed in 1992 by Sue Lloyd and Sara Wernham) is a fun, multi-sensory, and child-centered approach to teaching literacy through synthetic and systematic phonics; a method of teaching English reading which first the letter sounds are taught and then builds up to blending these sounds together to get a full pronunciation of whole words. This approach includes strands that develop vocabulary and reading comprehension, and also provides structured decodable texts and structured writing practice to enable children to become fluent readers (Lloyd & Wernham, 2022). Additionally, phonics has never been incorporated into Thailand's Basic Core Education Curriculum, despite being supported by the National Strategy for Schools in The United States, England, and Australia as a useful method for helping young students acquire literacy skills during their early education.

Addressing the factors that hinder English learners, this research aims to instruct Jolly Phonics method to help young learners pronounce words correctly and also understand the meaning of words in order to build the proper foundation of early English literacy skills.

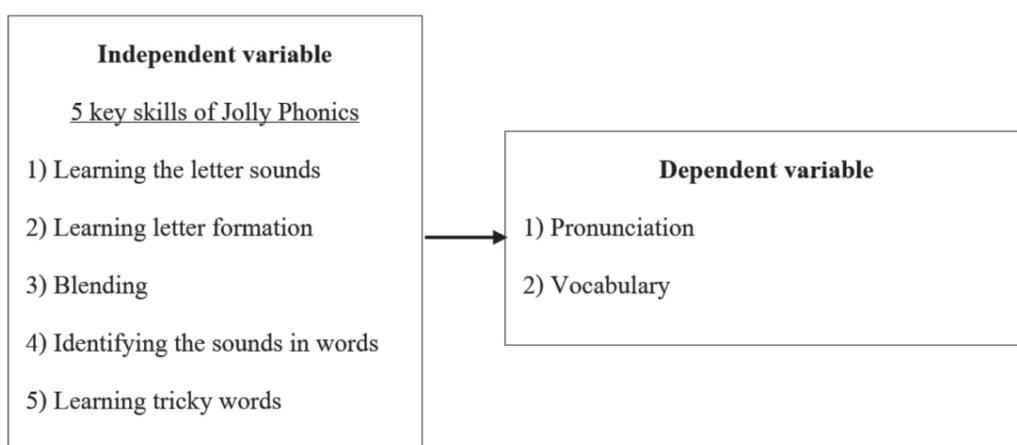
The Purpose of this Research

1. To study student's English pronunciation after learning through Jolly Phonics.
2. to study student's English vocabulary after learning through Jolly Phonics.

The Benefits of this Research

1. Benefit for teachers: provide guidelines for teaching young learners early English literacy in a fun, multi-sensory and child-centered approach through synthetic and systematic phonics
2. Benefits to young learners: help to enhance early English literacy skills

Area of the Study



Review of Related Literature

1. Foreign language learning during childhood

Many experts believe that learning a language before the age of ten years allows children to speak correctly and fluently as native people (Ferreira & Morrison, 1994). Children pick up foreign languages easily and naturally. Young children can learn to speak and write as naturally as they learn to walk (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011). A young age is regarded as the best time to acquire a second language. When young learners are exposed to a second language earlier, they will achieve better performance and proficiency in second language acquisition. In the long term, they will acquire the most success and acquire a second language more effectively (Hu, 2016).

2. History of Reading Instruction

For more than a century, since the mid-nineteenth century reading instruction has been involved in the battle between “Whole Word” and “Phonics”. There has been a constant debate over the years over the methods used for teaching children how to read. This should be looked at in more detail.

- 1800-1900: Most children who learn to read during the 19th century are taught by the famous McGuffey Readers. McGuffey described that the teachers could use this “The Word Method” (top-down or sight words) for teaching children how to read.
- 1930–1965: Whole Word becomes the dominant method for teaching reading in the United States, known as Look/Say. The most famous reader of this period is the beautifully illustrated Dick and Jane series
- 1965–2000: Another period of transition. According to the weight of the scientific evidence in Jeanne Chall’s books, it concludes that Synthetic Phonics, not Whole Word, leads not only to better word recognition but also to better comprehension. However, what takes its place is not the Synthetic Phonics. Instead, the Whole Word method is reaffirmed as a new model for teaching reading. It’s called Whole Language developed by Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith in the 1970s.
- 1997–2000: The US Congress convenes a National Reading Panel with the mandate to examine all reputable scientific research available on how to teach children to read, and then to determine the most effective method. After three years of effort, in 2000, the Panel completed its report, delivering a strong rebuke to whole language proponents. Researchers have discovered how to successfully teach children to read with five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.
- 2000–2009: Many members of the education establishment (professors in teaching colleges, many school administrators) do not react favorably to

the National Reading Panel's final report. What takes its place is called Balanced Literacy. The balanced literacy approach combines phonics and whole-language teaching techniques.

2009-Present: The United States developed the Common Core State Standards Initiative in 2009. The common core has a comprehensive description of the specific details of the English Language Arts Standards that include the areas of the alphabetic principle, print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and Fluency. It is up to the individual States and School Districts to develop plans to implement the standards. As of 2020, 41 States had adopted the standards, and in most cases, it has taken three or more years to have them implemented ("Phonics", n.d.).

3. Phonics instruction

Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. It teaches children to use these relationships to read and write words. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is more effective than non-systematic or no phonics instruction. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is the organized plan of instruction into a logical sequence with precise directions for the teaching. Both kindergarten and first-grade children who receive systematic phonics instruction are better at reading, and spelling words and also improve reading comprehension. Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is also beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read and who are at risk for developing future reading problems. In addition to phonics instruction, young children should strengthen their alphabet knowledge, participate in phonemic awareness activities, and listen to stories. They should also read texts and write letters, words, messages, and stories (Armbruster, 2010).

4. Pronunciation

Learning a foreign language is not easy because there are so many things to be mastered. The ability to speak is one of the most important things. When we speak with incorrect pronunciation, it will lead to misunderstanding. In English, most words have similar pronunciation but have different meanings so we have to pay attention to pronunciation. Therefore, pronunciation in speaking has a very important role. Teaching pronunciation in English is not easy. It requires a lot of effort and strong language skills including techniques to teach English pronunciation. There are many ways to teach reading, and using phonics is one of those. Phonic teaching is a method of teaching English sounds that develops phonemic awareness in students to improve their ability to recognize the sounds that a given word contains, manipulate phonemes, and distinguish between phonemes, all of which improve their reading and pronunciation skills. Many researchers found that phonics instruction is not only for native speakers; it can also be used with EFL students, and it can help anyone improve their pronunciation skills by following the step-by-step instructions (Martinez, 2011; Kurniati et al., 2015, Herrera et al., 2016).

5. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an essential part of language learning and it is also a basic step to learn English in written form as well as spoken form. The English language has one of the world's largest vocabulary sets. We can learn new vocabulary indirectly through everyday experiences or we can have someone directly teach or explain the meaning of a word to us (Tankersley, 2003). Focusing on vocabulary is useful for developing knowledge and skills in multiple aspects of language and literacy. Learning vocabulary is a continual process of language and literacy development, which begins in the early years of life, and continues through schooling and beyond (Department of Education, 2021). Phonics is one of the major components that offers a shortcut to word learning and helps children develop a large, fluent reading vocabulary. Several research studies have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of phonics instruction in enhancing young learners' vocabulary (Ren & Ma, 2017; Abdulrahman & Jullian, 2020).

6. Jolly Phonics

Jolly Phonics is a comprehensive program, based on the proven, fun, and multi-sensory synthetic phonics method that gets children reading and writing from an early age. Jolly Learning Ltd is an independent British publisher, founded in 1987. Jolly Phonics program has been developed by Sue Lloyd and Sara Wernham, who were primary school teachers at Woods Loke Primary School in England. There are essentially two stages to literacy learning: 1) Phonics stage - giving the basic ability to read and write. In the first stage, the letter sounds are taught in a fun, multisensory way. Children learn how to use the letter sounds to read and write words. 2) Grammar stage - giving the broader skills to be able to communicate well. In the grammar stage, the structure of the language is taught. This includes parts of speech, spelling, punctuation, and more. Children learn how to express themselves accurately and well. In the phonics stage, it is important to remember the five basic skills of Jolly Phonics 1) Learning the letter sounds 2) Learning letter formation 3) Blending 4) Identify the sounds in words 5) Learning tricky words. Jolly Phonics also provides a wide variety of resources for teachers to deliver the program in a fun and engaging way.

7. Research related to the effectiveness of Jolly Phonics

Ekpo et al. (2007) sought to find out the relative effects of Jolly Phonics as a fast-track strategy in enhancing primary one pupil's reading skills. A pretest-posttest experimental research design was adopted for the study. The sample consisted of 168 primary one pupils from five schools purposively selected from the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State. Two intact classes in each school were selected for the experimental and control with Jolly Phonics as the treatment for the experimental groups. The experiment group gained from 3-29 months reading age (5.3 to 5.7) in the Burt Test. The results reveal that Jolly Phonics was effective in enhancing pupils' reading skills.

Ariati et al (2018) sought to find out an effective strategy for enhancing children's English literacy using Jolly Phonics program. This study was conducted in one of

the innovative bilingual schools in Denpasar, Bali. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method as a research design and used observation, documentation, and interviews to collect the data from the teacher. The findings showed that the teacher had successfully implemented the 5 skills in Jolly Phonics through a variety of enjoyable techniques involving children's sight, sound, and kinesthetic means. Thus, implementing Jolly Phonics through the techniques explained will improve children's overall English literacy skills.

Mekawy et al. (2021) were to investigate the effectiveness of Jolly phonics strategy in developing English pronunciation skills of first-year primary pupils. The study adopted the two groups' pre and post-test design. The sample of this study included two classes from Elewa Elgededa Primary School. Each group consisted of 30 pupils. The findings of the study revealed that the pronunciation skills of the participants were developed as a result of the jolly phonics strategy.

Srikandewie and Yon (2021) studied the implementation of Jolly Phonics Method to improve the basic ability in spelling using the letter sounds. There are 10 students as a population in one class for K2 level (age 5 years) in Bilingual Kindergarten, Jakarta in Indonesia. The data that were obtained qualitatively and quantitatively show that Jolly Phonics Method could improve: (1) the student's ability to remember the letter that represents each sound is taught with an action, (2) the student's ability to pronounce the letter sounds correctly, (3) the student's ability in spelling the words correctly.

Methodology

This study used pre-experimental quantitative approaches with a group post-test only design to investigate the research questions to the aforementioned problem. The participants did not use English as their first language. They used Thai language in their daily activity and when it came to English class, they used English. It was a reason why pretest is not possible.

Population of the Study

Twenty-four Kindergarten 1 students from a private school in Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand (14 boys and 10 girls aged between 3-4 years) were the sample group in this study. The majority of participants had similar background and proficiency levels in English. They had just finished Phonics which focused on the initial sounds in the words. The students were studying in the second semester of academic year 2023 in November.

Instrument for Data Collection

1. The experimental instrument was fifteen phonics lesson plans that were specifically designed for Thai younger learners. The researcher had modified some parts of Jolly Phonics method to focus only on consonants and short vowels. The lesson plans were divided into two stages. In stage one; the lesson plans were taught in four groups to identify letters and sounds using the songs and actions for each letter. Each lesson was designed for each group as follows: Group 1: s, a, t, i, p, n Group 2: c, k, e, h, r, m, d Group 3: g, o, u, l, f, b Group 4: j, q, z, w, v, y, x. The second stage was to blend the sounds together to read each word and focus only on short vowels a, e, i, o, u in word recognition. The research will focus on blending CVC word (consonant-vowel-consonant). And each lesson was designed by using word families. A word family is a group of words that share a common pattern. In the lessons, the students were taught through Jolly Phonic instructions in five key skills 1) Learning the letter sounds 2) Learning letter formation 3) Blending 4) Identify the sounds in words 5) Learning tricky words.

2. English pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge test: The test was used to evaluate how each student pronounced each sound and blended the sounds to read words correctly using letter cards and CVC word cards. First, the researcher showed each letter card to the student and asked the student to pronounce each sound. Then the research showed each CVC word card and asked the student to blend the sounds together to read the word. After blending the word, the student picked up one picture card and showed it to the researcher. The participants

earned 1 point when they produced the sound corresponding to the letter in each item, read the word correctly in each item and chose the correct picture for each item.

Validity of Instrument

The Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC) was constructed. Three instruments; lesson plans, English pronunciation assessment, and English vocabulary knowledge assessment were validated by three experts. The researcher adapted the assessment checklist from Jolly Phonics reception checklist to measure the ability of students to pronounce letter sounds, blend the sounds together to read CVC words and identify the meaning of CVC words.

Three experts were asked to rate each item and whether it was congruent with the objectives using the evaluation constructed by the research. The data taken from three experts were interpreted. The Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) of each item of the lesson plan was 1.00 which was higher than 0.5. It was interpreted that the item was accepted. And the IOC value of each item of pronunciation and vocabulary assessment was between 0.60-1.00 which was higher than 0.5. It was interpreted that the item was accepted.

Method of Data Collection

All the participants were taught through Phonics instruction (Jolly Phonics) by the researcher as a teacher for 1 hour (60 minutes) in each lesson. The total number of teaching hours was 15 hours, from Monday to Friday. After the lessons had been taught, the research used data collection instruments to evaluate the students' pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge. The researcher and inter-rater evaluated each student with the same instrument. The participants took the test individually. It took fifteen minutes for each participant to finish this assessment.

Method of Data Analysis

After testing was completed. The scores from all 24 students and the scores from each student in English pronunciation test and vocabulary test were calculated to find the mean, standard deviation, and percentage, and then compared with the criteria to evaluate whether the criteria have been passed or not at level 70 percent of the full score is considered to have passed the criteria. The researcher adjusted the scores from the Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards (2010) because the target group was students who had more opportunities to use English than students in regular schools.

Findings

The scores from the two inter-raters were compared and analyzed using statistical methods in order to find out whether Jolly Phonics affected students' pronunciation and vocabulary in kindergarten. The results are shown in the table below.

N	List	\bar{X}	Mean	SD	Percentage	Meaning
24	Pronunciation	28	25.96	0.53	93	Very good
24	Vocabulary	10	9.17	0.29	92	Very good

From Table, it shows that the English pronunciation ability scores of all 24 students passed the specified criteria, which is 70 percent of the full score. The total mean score was 25.96, the standard deviation was 0.53, and the percentage was 93 at very good level. Furthermore, it also shows that the English vocabulary knowledge scores of all 24 students passed the specified criteria, which is 70 percent of the full score. The total mean score was 9.17, the standard deviation was 0.29, and the percentage was 92 at very good level.

Summary

1. From the data, it can be concluded that Jolly Phonics method is quite effective to be applied to students to improve pronunciation ability. Because the study of participants showed that they have good achievements. They passed the criteria of 70 percent after learning through Jolly Phonics. Furthermore, it was found that the students had scores on the English pronunciation ability measure higher than the specified criteria. From the findings of the students, they could pronounce most of the sounds correctly and clearly. However, after the students put the sounds together to make the word and pronounced the word, the sound at the end of some words was cut off or forgot to pronounce such as hat, pig, and bed. Because ending sounds do not exist in Thai languages, as a result, many students frequently make errors when pronouncing English ending sounds.

2. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Jolly Phonics method can help students develop and improve English vocabulary knowledge. Because from the results, The students passed the criteria of 70 percent after learning through Jolly Phonics. In addition, it was discovered that the students' scores on the English vocabulary knowledge test exceeded the specified criteria. From the findings of the students, it showed that for most students blending is relatively easy. However, some students found it difficult to sound out each letter and blend the word. There are two main reasons for the students not being able to blend the separate sounds of a word to form the complete word.

First, the students who were fluent at saying the sound immediately after they saw the letter, could put sounds together to make words and choose the picture cards correctly. However, The students who did know the letter sounds well enough. They had to pause to think. This made them lose track of the word. Moreover, there were some letters that made the learners get easily confused such as 'b' and 'd'. Also, there were some letters that have similar sound, especially vowel sounds /a/ /e/ /i/. The students had difficulty to differentiate between these vowel sounds. However after the teacher made the action to remind them of the letter sound, the students could make the letter sound correctly. Because of Jolly

Phonics method, each sound is taught with a song and an action, which helps children remember the letter that represent it.

Second, when the students made the first sound louder than the others in the word, this helped the students to remember the sound the word started with and made it easier to put sounds together to make the word. However, some sounds made a continuous sound such as /ssss/, /ffff/, /nnnn/, /rrrr/. When the students didn't put a 'schwa' (like an 'uh' sound) on the end of the letter sound while the students were blending the words that started with these sounds, e.g. s-u-n, f-a-n, some of them failed to hear the word.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was conducted at only one school with a small number of participants. It could be argued that the results of the study might not be generalizable to different school settings.

2. The difference can be more significant if these students have used this method before or taught it over a long period of time.

3. The teacher's knowledge and experiences might have impacted the outcome of the study. Comprehensive training could support teachers in using Jolly Phonics program effectively.

Recommendations for Future Research

First, the use of the jolly phonics method can be applied to English subjects not only on pronunciation and vocabulary ability but also to other topics.

Second, since Jolly Phonics is quite new to students and teachers, future research needs to be extended and include more numbers of participants.

Third, there should be more research to develop English pronunciation and vocabulary skills by using Jolly Phonics method at the kindergarten level.

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