Applying the Audio-Lingual Method to Improve EFL Learners' Pronunciation: A Study from Tenth Graders at SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu

Reniasni Kamidi[1], Mukrim[1], Hastini[1], Sudarkam R. Mertosono[1]

[1]Universitas Tadulako, Indonesia
*Correspondence: kamidireni@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out whether the Audio-lingual method is effective in improving students' pronunciation, particularly in word stress, among tenth-grade students of SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu. The research employed a quasi-experimental design involving 54 students, divided into an experimental group (n=25) and a control group (n=29) through total sampling technique. The experimental group was taught using the audio-lingual method, while the control group followed conventional methods. Data were collected using pre-tests and post-tests, and analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results showed that the experimental group achieved a higher mean post-test score (75.44) compared to the control group (61.69). Statistical analysis using SPSS version 26 showed a significance value (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. These results indicate that the Audio-Lingual Method is effective in improving students' pronunciation, specifically in mastering word stress in English.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation refers to the way in which we make the sound of word. The way to pronounce a word is by pushing air from the lungs up through the throat and vocal cords, through mouth, over the tongue and out between teeth and lips but sometimes air also passes through noses. English words have their own ways to pronounce. The spelling of a word does not determine the way the word is pronounce. It differs from Indonesian language in which a word is pronounce as its spelling (Sritonga et al., 2020; Yaumi et al., 2023; Youngsun et al., 2024). In English, each letter of a word can represents two or more sounds. This becomes confusing for English learners. That is why teaching pronunciation needs to be involved in teaching English. In learning a pronunciation, there are several important things that need to be learned, one of which is word stress (Aswad et al., 2019; Prihandoko et al., 2021; Sachiya et al., 2025).

Word stress is the sound on a syllable that sounds higher, longer, or louder. Emphasis on words can create a rhythm of language and can make it easier for listeners to understand the direction of our speech. The emphasis of words in English is not always the same. The emphasis can be at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. According to Bergem (1993), word stress is a word that is considered as a unified whole and not as a string of phonemes that are known individually and then combined into words. This makes the emphasis on words is one of the identities of a language which is very important and needs to be taught to students in schools.

Based on the 2013 curriculum, students must have communication skills where students are able to produce language and understand language skills, namely listening, writing, speaking, reading and pronunciation. To create good communication, students must have good pronunciation to convey what they are talking about. Teaching pronunciation in English has the goal of creating clarity. To make listeners comfortable and interested in what the speaker is talking about, of course, the speaker's pronunciation must be clear and understandable. In learning pronunciation, students must be taught word stress because it plays a very important role in the pronunciation ability itself. But in Indonesia, learning English especially pronunciation or word stress has not been taught effectively enough to students (Taylor, 1996; Amer & Amer, 2011; Weda et al., 2022; Junaid et al., 2024).

English is a language that uses quite a lot of word stress compared to other languages, including Bahasa. The difference in word emphasis in English and Indonesian is very different. When compared, word stress in Indonesian is not

as strong as in English, sometimes it is not even obvious at all. Indonesian pronunciation tends to be flat, for example in "po-si-si" and in English "po-si-tion". When we pronounce these two words, the word "po-si-si" does not have a strong stress like when pronouncing "po-SI-tion" where the syllable (SI) is sound higher, longer, or louder. This is what makes English pronunciation especially in word stress difficult for students in Indonesia. But students can overcome this problem by learning to use appropriate learning methods.

In this research, the researcher uses Audio-lingual as a method for learning pronunciation. Audio-lingual is a method that uses audio as a learning tool. In audio, various kinds of English words and English sentence are available, ranging from two syllables to four syllables which will be mentioned by native speakers one by one and then students will listen to them through the speakers. Mart (2013) also concluded that the Audio-lingual method aims to develop students' communicative competence by using dialogue and exercises. Previous studies have shown the effectiveness of the Audio-Lingual Method in improving pronunciation. For example, Wulandari (2015) found that students taught with this method performed better than those taught with conventional methods. Similarly, Ismawati (2019) confirmed that repeated listening and practice using the Audio-Lingual Method improved students' word pronunciation. Repetition of dialogue or pronunciation and practice will enable students to respond quickly and accurately in spoken language. The application of this method is to guide students to listen and then pay attention to what they have heard and then practice it repeatedly. This is done so that students can listen longer and more often to native speakers in pronouncing English words.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to find out whether the Audio-lingual method is effective in improving students' pronunciation, particularly in word stress. As noted by Badmus et al. (2012), this design is similar to true experimental research but differs in that the groups are not randomly assigned. The researcher used the design model proposed by Arikunto (2004), which is illustrated below:

Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Design (Adapted from Arikunto, 2004)

Experimental	O_1	X	O_2
Control	O_3		O_4

In this model, X represents the treatment using the Audio-lingual method, O1 and O3 are pre-tests for the experimental and control groups, and O2 and O4 are post-tests. Based on Arikunto's theory, this research design involved dividing the sample into two groups: an experimental group and a control group. The population of the study included all Grade X students at SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu, with a total of 75 students across three classes: XA, XB, and XC. The researcher used the total sampling technique, which according to Sugiyono (2007), is a sampling technique where the entire population is selected as the sample if it meets specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Class XB was chosen as the experimental group and class XA as the control group because they had similar characteristics in terms of student number, academic background, and English proficiency. Grade X was chosen because it represents the beginning of senior high school, a critical stage for developing foundational English language skills.

A pre-test was administered to both groups to measure their initial pronunciation level. After that, the experimental group received treatment using the Audio-lingual method, while the control group received conventional instruction. At the end of the treatment, a post-test was given to both groups using the same procedure: students read a paragraph aloud, and then pronounced selected words containing two to four syllables. Their pronunciation was assessed based on a scoring rubric that measured the accuracy of sounds and correct placement of stress, following the guidelines of Muhsin and Arief (2016):

Table 2. Scoring Rubric (Adapted from Muhsin and Arief, 2016)

No	Criteria	Score
1.	Correct pronunciation and word stress	4
2.	Correct pronunciation and incorrect word stress	3
3.	Wrong pronunciation and correct word stress	2
4.	Wrong pronunciation and wrong word stress	1
5	No Answer	0

Table 2 presents the scoring rubric used to assess students' pronunciation performance, specifically focusing on pronunciation accuracy and word stress. This rubric was adapted from Muhsin and Arief (2016). The highest score of 4 is given when a student produces both correct pronunciation and correct word stress. A score of 3 is given if the pronunciation is correct but the word stress is incorrect. A score of 2 is assigned when the pronunciation is incorrect but the word stress is correct. If both pronunciation and word stress are wrong, the student receives a score of 1. Students who do not provide any response are given a score of 0.

Table 3. Score Range, Category and Qualification

Score Range	Category	Qualification
90-100	Very good	Successful
80-89	Good	Success
70-79	Fair	Success
40-69	Poor	Failed
0-39	Very poor	Failed

Table 3 shows the classification of students' scores based on their performance levels. It includes five score ranges with corresponding categories and qualifications. Students who score between 90–100 are classified as Very Good and considered Successful. Scores from 80–89 fall into the Good category, while 70–79 are considered Fair—both of which are still qualified as Success. On the other hand, students who score between 40–69 are placed in the Poor category, and those with 0–39 fall into the Very Poor category; both are considered Failed. This table provides a clear guideline for interpreting students' achievement levels.

The data collection technique in this research involved performance assessment, where students were asked to read aloud a list of 15 English words containing two to four syllables. This was the only type of test used, focusing specifically on word pronunciation. Each student was given a printed sheet and took turns pronouncing the words out loud. Their voices were recorded to help the researcher analyze the pronunciation more accurately during both the pre-test and post-test phases. The aim was to assess how well the students improved after being taught using the Audio Lingual Method. The scoring was based on pronunciation accuracy and correct placement of word stress.

To analyze the results, the researcher applied the formula proposed by Arikunto (2012) as follows:

$\sum = X/N \times 100$

Where:

$\sum$ = students' standard score

X = students' right score

N = maximum score

100 = Constant number

Before comparing the results, the researcher conducted a normality test using SPSS version 26 to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution. The results showed that the data were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$), so the researcher used the Mann-Whitney U test instead of a parametric t-test. This non-parametric test is appropriate when the assumption of normality is not met because it compares two independent groups to find any significant differences. In this study, it was used to assess whether the Audio-Lingual Method significantly improved students' pronunciation compared to the conventional teaching method. The hypothesis testing was conducted at a 0.05 level of significance, with the following criteria:

If the significance value (p-value) is less than 0.05, it indicates a significant difference between the two groups. This supports the alternative hypothesis (H_a), meaning the Audio-Lingual Method has a positive effect on improving pronunciation.

If the significance value (p-value) is greater than 0.05, it means there is no significant difference between the groups. In this case, the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, indicating that the method did not have a significant effect.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1.Results

The researcher administered a pre-test to both the experimental and control classes to assess students' pronunciation, particularly in word stress. After the treatment using the Audio-Lingual Method, a post-test was conducted to evaluate their pronunciation improvement following the intervention. The pre-test and post-test results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Pre-test and Post-test Results of Experimental Class

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test Experimental	25	42	80	58.08	12.715
Post-test Experimental	25	55	94	75.44	10.821
Valid N (listwise)	25				

According to the descriptive statistical analysis presented in Table 4, the experimental class consisted of 25 students. The average pre-test score was 58.08, with the lowest score of 42 and the highest score of 80, indicating that the students' pronunciation skills, particularly in word stress, still needed improvement. After receiving treatment through the Audio-Lingual Method, the post-test scores showed a notable increase. The minimum score rose to 55, and the maximum score reached 94, with the average score improving to 75.44. This increase in the mean score from 58.08 to 75.44 clearly demonstrates significant progress in the students' pronunciation performance following the intervention

Pre-tests and post-tests were also administered to the control class, where the researcher used only conventional teaching methods. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 5. Pre-test and Post-test Result of Control Class

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test Control	29	44	83	60.21	11.926
Post-test Control	29	42	83	60.55	12.290
Valid N (listwise)	29				

According to Table 5, the control class comprised 29 students, with an average pre-test score of 60.21. The minimum score was 44, and the maximum score was 83. After conventional teaching methods were applied, the post-test results showed only a slight increase. The average post-test score was 60.55, with the minimum score dropping slightly to 42 and the maximum score remaining the same at 83. This minimal change in the mean score from 60.21 to 60.55 indicates that there was no significant improvement in students' pronunciation performance in the control class without the Audio-Lingual Method intervention.

The Shapiro-Wilk Test was used in this study to examine the normality of the data, as the sample size was less than 50. A significance value above 0.05 in this test suggests that the data are normally distributed. The results of the test are presented in the table below.

Table 6. Test of Normality

	Class	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pronunciation Performance	Pre-test Experimental (Audio-Lingual Method)	.146	25	.179	.904	25	.022
	Post-test Experimental (Audio-Lingual Method)	.156	25	.118	.952	25	.272

Pre-test (Conventional Method)	Control	.149	29	.099	.924	29	.039
Post-test (Conventional Method)	Control	.134	29	.196	.943	29	.123

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The normality test results, as shown in Table 6, reveal mixed outcomes across the pre-test and post-test data in both experimental and control classes. In the experimental class, the post-test data showed a Shapiro-Wilk significance value of 0.272, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the post-test scores are normally distributed. However, the pre-test in the same group had a significance value of 0.022, which is below 0.05, suggesting the data are not normally distributed.

Similarly, in the control class, the post-test yielded a Shapiro-Wilk value of 0.123, indicating a normal distribution, while the pre-test value was 0.039, which indicates a non-normal distribution. Because not all datasets met the assumption of normality, particularly the pre-tests in both classes, the researcher decided to use a non-parametric statistical method, specifically the Mann-Whitney U test, to compare the performance between the experimental and control groups. This test is suitable for identifying significant differences between two independent groups when the data are not normally distributed. The results of this comparison are presented in the following table:

Table 7. Mann-Whitney U Test

Test Statistics[a]

	Pronunciation
Mann-Whitney U	136.500
Wilcoxon W	571.500
Z	-3.932
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Class

As shown in the table above, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This result indicates that there is a significant difference in pronunciation improvement between the experimental and control groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

This means that the use of the Audio-Lingual Method significantly improved the pronunciation of tenth-grade students at SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu compared to conventional teaching methods. The result supports the effectiveness of the Audio-Lingual Method as a learning strategy for improving students' pronunciation skills in English.

3.2 Discussion

The pre-test results showed that the average students' pronunciation comprehension ability was still very low, both students in the experimental class and students in the control class. This is because pronunciation at school is not taught to students enough. The focus of learning which only focuses on speaking, reading and writing skills means that pronunciation, especially word stress, is not taught enough to students. They often pronounced English words based on spelling, not on how the words actually sound. This problem likely happens because English and Indonesian pronunciation systems are different. Indonesian usually has a flat intonation without strong stress on any syllable.

In English, word stress is very important to make speech clear and easy to understand. Each word has one syllable that is louder, longer, or higher than the others. When students do not know these stress patterns, their English speech can be hard to understand. Bergem (1993) pointed out that word stress helps treat a word as one whole unit, not just a group of separate sounds. This shows how important word stress is in speaking.

After the pre-test, the experimental class was taught using the Audio-lingual method. The students listened to native speakers on audio recordings and repeated the words and sentences they heard. This repetition helped students notice

word stress more and improved their ability to copy correct pronunciation. The post-test results showed clear improvement in the experimental class compared to the control class.

Previous studies support these findings. Wulandari (2015) found that students taught with the Audio-Lingual Method performed better in pronunciation than those who learned through conventional techniques. Likewise, Ismawati (2019) demonstrated that consistent listening and repetition through this method helped students improve their pronunciation of English words. These studies reinforce the results of this research, confirming that repetition and exposure to native pronunciation contribute greatly to mastering word stress.

Students also showed more interest during the lessons. Listening to native pronunciation many times helped them feel more confident and less afraid of making mistakes. They became more curious, involved, and motivated to improve their pronunciation.

Although the Audio-lingual method worked well for improving pronunciation, especially word stress, it had some weaknesses. The method focuses on repetition and drills, which can make learning boring and does not give much chance for creativity or practicing reading and writing. But for practicing pronunciation and helping students learn stress patterns in a new language, it was very useful. The results show that the Audio-lingual method had a strong positive effect on students' pronunciation skills. The structured listening and repetition helped students become more aware of word stress and improve their control over it.

Based on the discussion above, it can be seen that the Audio-lingual method has an influence in teaching students' understanding of pronunciation. Students who were taught the audio-lingual method experienced significant improvement. From these results, the researcher concluded that the use of the audio-lingual method improves pronunciation in word stress for class X students of SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be clearly concluded that the Audio-Lingual Method has a strong and positive effect on students' pronunciation, especially in mastering word stress. Before the treatment, students in both the experimental and control classes showed low ability in pronunciation. This weakness was mainly due to the lack of focus on pronunciation in the English curriculum, particularly in teaching word stress. Most students pronounced words based on spelling and not according to natural English stress patterns, which made their speech difficult to understand.

After the Audio-Lingual Method was applied in the experimental class, there was a significant improvement in students' pronunciation skills. Through consistent listening and repetition of native speaker audio, students were able to hear, notice, and imitate correct word stress patterns. This practice helped them produce more natural and intelligible English pronunciation. The improvement was supported by the post-test results, which showed much better performance in the experimental group compared to the control group.

In addition to the learning outcomes, the method also had a positive impact on student motivation. The repetition activities helped students feel more confident, less anxious, and more engaged in learning pronunciation. Although the method has some limitations, such as lack of creative activities, it proved to be highly effective in training students' awareness and control of word stress. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of the Audio-Lingual Method is a beneficial approach to improving students' pronunciation, particularly in mastering word stress, for tenth-grade students at SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu.

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