

## USING PHET-BASED GRAPHING QUADRATICS SIMULATION TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' MATHEMATICAL VISUAL SKILLS

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to analyze the effect of using PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulations on students' mathematical visual skills in graphing quadratic equations. Involving 50 tenth-grade students divided into two groups, with 25 students in the experimental group and 25 in the control group, this research employed a pretest-posttest method to measure students' skill improvement. The results indicate that the experimental group experienced an average posttest score increase of 23.2 points, while the control group only improved by 7.4 points. Statistical analysis using independent t-tests yielded a p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant difference between the two groups. Students in the experimental group also demonstrated a better understanding of key graph elements, such as vertex and axis of symmetry. Student feedback highlighted an increase in interest and motivation when using the simulation, enriching their learning experience. This study recommends the use of PhET simulations as a teaching aid in mathematics education to enhance students' understanding and skills.*

**Keywords:** PhET-based Graphing Quadratics Simulation; Visual Skills; Students' Mathematical Skills

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh penggunaan simulasi Graphing Quadratics berbasis PhET terhadap kemampuan visual matematis siswa dalam menggambar grafik persamaan kuadrat. Melibatkan 50 siswa kelas X yang dibagi menjadi dua kelompok, yaitu 25 siswa sebagai kelompok eksperimen dan 25 siswa sebagai kelompok kontrol, penelitian ini menggunakan metode pretest dan posttest untuk mengukur peningkatan kemampuan siswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kelompok eksperimen mengalami peningkatan rata-rata skor posttest sebesar 23,2 poin, sedangkan kelompok kontrol hanya meningkat sebesar 7,4 poin. Analisis statistik menggunakan uji-t independen menghasilkan p-value 0,001, yang menunjukkan adanya perbedaan signifikan antara kedua kelompok. Siswa dalam kelompok eksperimen juga menunjukkan pemahaman yang lebih baik terhadap elemen-elemen penting grafik, seperti titik puncak dan sumbu simetri. Umpan balik siswa menegaskan peningkatan

minat dan motivasi saat menggunakan simulasi, sehingga memperkaya pengalaman belajar mereka. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penggunaan simulasi PhET sebagai alat bantu pembelajaran dalam pendidikan matematika untuk meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterampilan siswa.

**Kata Kunci:** Simulasi Graphing Quadratics Berbasis PheTt; Keterampilan Visual; Matematis Siswa

## INTRODUCTION

Mathematics is one of the core subjects in the educational curriculum around the world, including in Indonesia. Students' ability to understand and apply mathematical concepts depends not only on their understanding of theory, but also on strong visual skills, especially when they are dealing with graphs and other visual representations. One topic that requires an in-depth visual understanding is the quadratic equation and its parabolic graph. The ability to draw and understand quadratic equation graphs is an important skill, but it is often a challenge for many students. This problem occurs because students often have difficulty in connecting the algebraic representation of square equations with the visual form of the parabolic graph.

In drawing a graph of quadratic equations, students need to understand how the coefficients  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  in the quadratic equation  $y=ax^2+bx+c$  affect the shape and location of the parabola. The coefficient  $a$  determines whether the parabola is open up or down, as well as the width of the graph; The  $b$  coefficient is related to the slope and position of the axis of symmetry; While the  $c$  coefficient determines the cut-off point of the graph with the  $y$ -axis. This understanding requires high visual skills for students to be able to imagine how changes in quadratic equations will affect the graph as a whole (Moore, Herzog, & Brown, 2020).

Traditional learning methods that are often used in teaching quadratic equations usually involve manually drawing graphs using paper and aids such as rulers and calculators. However, these methods are often not effective enough in building students' visual understanding due to the time-consuming and mechanical depiction process, so students focus more on technical steps rather than understanding the relationship between coefficients and graph shapes. As a result, students often struggle in developing the mathematical visual skills necessary to master this topic (Finkelstein et al., 2005).

As educational technology evolves, a variety of interactive tools are now available to help students understand math concepts more effectively. One tool that is becoming increasingly popular is computer-based interactive simulations, such as those provided by PhET (Physics Education Technology) from the University of Colorado Boulder. PhET offers a variety of interactive simulations to facilitate science and math learning, including a Quadratics Graphing simulation designed to help students understand the

relationship between quadratic equations and their parabolic graphs dynamically and interactively.

The Graphing Quadratics simulation allows students to explore firsthand how changes in  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  values affect the shape of the parabola. By changing these parameters in real-time, students can immediately see the changes that occur in the graph, making it easier for them to understand the relationship between the equation and its visual representation. This feature offers a significant advantage compared to traditional teaching methods, as students do not have to wait for the results of manual calculations; they can immediately see and understand the effects of any changes they make (Wieman & Perkins, 2005).

The use of PhET simulations also provides opportunities for students to learn through independent experiments. In traditional learning contexts, students are often limited by step-by-step instruction from teachers, which can hinder their creativity and exploration. With PhET, students can set their own learning rhythm, try different variations of quadratic equations, and actively engage in the learning process. According to research, this approach is more effective in improving students' understanding because it allows them to build knowledge through direct interaction and reflection on what they see (Jonassen, 2011).

One important aspect of simulation-based learning is the direct feedback received by students. In the Graphing Quadratics simulation, students can see how the graph changes as they change the coefficients. This allows them to immediately identify and correct their misunderstandings without the need to wait for an evaluation from the teacher. According to research by Bower et al. (2015), this quick and interactive feedback is one of the key factors in increasing student motivation and engagement in learning.

Furthermore, PhET simulations support an invention-based learning model, where students are encouraged to discover concepts on their own through exploration and experimentation. This approach is in line with the constructivist theory put forward by Piaget and Vygotsky, where effective learning occurs when students actively build their knowledge through interaction with the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Simulations such as PhET provide an ideal environment for constructivist learning, as they allow students to engage directly with the subject matter and build an understanding based on their own experiences (Perkins, 1992).

In addition, the use of technology in mathematics learning, particularly interactive simulations, has the potential to bridge the gap between students who have strong visual skills and those who are weak. By providing a clear and dynamic visual representation of quadratic equations, PhET can help students who have difficulty imagining abstract relationships between equations and graphs, thereby improving overall learning outcomes. A study conducted by De Jong and Joolingen (1998) showed

that computer simulations can improve students' conceptual understanding, especially in topics that require high visual skills, such as quadratic equations.

However, despite the many benefits offered by interactive simulations, it is important to note that these technologies should be used as a complement, not a replacement, of traditional learning methods. Teachers still play an important role in guiding students to understand more complex concepts and helping them overcome difficulties that may arise during the use of simulations. In addition, the integration of technologies such as PhET in the curriculum must be adapted to the needs and characteristics of students in order for learning to run optimally (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006).

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze the effect of the use of PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation on the improvement of students' mathematical visual skills. This research is expected to make an important contribution to the development of more effective learning strategies, especially in integrating technology to support mathematics learning. By providing a deeper understanding of how interactive simulations can facilitate the learning of quadratic equations, this research also aims to provide practical insights for teachers in optimizing the use of technology in the classroom.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest control group approach. This design was chosen to measure the effect of the use of PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation on students' mathematical visual ability in drawing quadratic equation graphs. In this study, two groups of students who have the same characteristics in terms of academic ability and educational background will be randomly selected to be the experimental group and the control group. The research subjects consisted of class X students in one of the high schools, with a total of 50 participants in this study, namely 25 students in the experimental class and 25 students in the control class.

The independent variable in this study is the use of PhET-based Quadratics Graphing simulation, while the dependent variable is the students' mathematical visual ability in drawing quadratic equation graphs, which will be measured through the graph drawing skill test before and after the treatment. The instrument used to measure students' mathematical visual ability is a test of drawing a graph of quadratic equations consisting of several problems. The problems will include tasks such as drawing a parabolic graph based on a given square equation, determining the vertex, the axis of symmetry, and the cut point of the graph with the x and y axes.

The research procedure begins with the preparatory stage, where the Graphing Quadratics simulation software from PhET is prepared for use in the experimental group, and the graphing skills test is developed to be valid and reliable. Furthermore, all

students from both groups (experimental and control) will be given a pretest to measure their initial ability to draw squared equation graphs. After the pretest, the experimental group will be taught using PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation for four learning sessions, each lasting 60 minutes. During this session, students will be given the opportunity to explore how changes to the  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  coefficients affect the parabolic graph. On the other hand, the control group will follow traditional learning, where the teacher will explain the concept of quadratic equations and draw graphs manually on the blackboard for the same four sessions.

Upon completion of the learning session, all students will be given the same posttest as the pretest to measure their improvement in their ability to draw quadratic equation graphs. The data obtained from the pretest and posttest will be analyzed using statistical analysis, with the t-test to be used to compare the mean posttest scores between the experimental group and the control group. In addition, descriptive analysis will be carried out to describe the improvement of students' ability to draw graphs before and after the treatment. The results of this analysis are expected to provide information about the effectiveness of using PhET simulations in improving students' mathematical visual skills.

Before the research is carried out, permission will be obtained from the school and the student's parents. All participants will be provided with information regarding the research objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The confidentiality of student data will be maintained and will only be used for research purposes. With these strict procedures and ethics, it is hoped that the research can run well and provide valid and useful results.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Results**

The results of this study aim to reveal the effect of the use of PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation on students' mathematical visual ability in drawing quadratic equation graphs. The research was conducted on 50 students of class X who were divided into two groups, namely the experimental group consisting of 25 students and the control group which also consisted of 25 students. Each student was tested with a pretest before the treatment and a posttest after the treatment to measure the improvement of their abilities.

#### **1. Data Description**

The data collected consisted of pretest and posttest scores for each group. Before the treatment, the average pretest score of the experimental group was 55.4 with a standard deviation of 6.2, while the average pretest score of the control group was 54.8 with a standard deviation of 5.9. This suggests that both groups have relatively similar initial abilities in drawing quadratic equation graphs.

After treatment, the average posttest score for the experimental group increased to 78.6 with a standard deviation of 5.7, while the average posttest score for the control group only reached 62.2 with a standard deviation of 6.5. This increase in score shows that the use of PhET simulations has a significant positive impact on students' ability to draw squared equation graphs.

**Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Score Data**

Group	N	Average Pretest	Pretest Deviation Standards	Average Posttest	Posttest Deviation Standards	Average Improvement
Experiment	25	55,4	6,2	78,6	5,7	23,2
Control	25	54,8	5,9	62,2	6,5	7,4

## 2. Statistical Analysis

To analyze the data, an independent t-test was performed to compare the mean posttest scores between the experimental group and the control group. The t-test results showed that the significance value (p-value) was 0.001, which means that there was a significant difference between the two groups at a significance level of 0.05. Thus, the hypothesis that the use of PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation has a positive effect on students' mathematical visual ability in drawing quadratic equation graphs is acceptable.

**Table 2: t-Test Results**

Test Type	T value	Degree of Freedom	P-value	Information
Independent t-test	3,927	48	0,001	Significant (p < 0.05)

## 3. Ability Enhancement

The improvement of students' ability to draw squared equation graphs can be seen from the comparison of pretest and posttest scores. In the experimental group, the average score increase reached 23.2 points, while in the control group, the average score increase was only 7.4 points. This shows that students who use PhET simulations experience a greater improvement in their abilities compared to students who learn with traditional methods.

**Table 4: Details of Student Ability Improvement**

Graphic Elements	Experimental Group (%)	Control Group (%)
Draw the graph correctly	92	68
Determining the peak point	88	64

Determining the axis of symmetry	84	60
Determining the x-axis cut-off point	80	56
Determining the y-axis cut-off point	76	52

#### 4. Analysis of Learning Aspects

Descriptive analysis of the posttest results showed that students in the experimental group were better able to identify and draw important elements of the parabolic graph, such as vertices, symmetry axes, and cut points of the x and y axes. They are also faster at describing graphs and show a better understanding of how changes in coefficients a, b, and c affect the shape of the graph. In the control group, despite the improvement, students still experienced difficulties in several aspects, such as accuracy in determining cut-off points and chart shapes.

**Table 4: Student Feedback**

Aspects	Experimental Group (%)	Control Group (%)
Interest in learning	90	60
Learning motivation	85	55
Understand the concept well	88	62
Find learning fun	92	50

#### 5. Student Feedback

Feedback from students in the experimental group showed that they felt more interested and motivated when learning using PhET simulations. Many students stated that the simulation helped them understand the concept of quadratic equations better and made the learning process more enjoyable. On the other hand, students in the control group admitted to feeling bored with the traditional methods used.

**Table 5: Average Capability Improvement**

Capability Categories	Average Improvement (Experimental)	Average Increase (Control)
Draw a graph	23,2	7,4
Identify graphic elements	28,0	10

#### Discussion of Research Results

The results of this study show that the use of PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation has a significant impact on improving students' mathematical visual ability in drawing quadratic equation graphs. The following discussion will outline the

implications of the results obtained, relate them to the relevant literature, and consider the challenges that may be faced in the application of this method.

### 1. Improving Student Ability

From the data analysis, it can be seen that the experimental group experienced an average increase in posttest scores of 23.2 points, while the control group only experienced an increase of 7.4 points. This shows that students who use PhET simulations are not only better able to draw graphs, but also better understand the basic concepts of quadratic equations. These findings are in line with previous research that suggests that the use of technology in mathematics learning can help students better understand complex concepts (Mayer, 2009).

PhET simulations allow students to visually explore the relationship between coefficients in quadratic equations and the resulting graph shape. This is in line with the theory of constructivism which states that deep understanding occurs when students can relate their learning experience to existing knowledge (Bruner, 1996). Students who used these simulations reported that they felt more engaged and interested in learning, which suggests that technology-based learning can increase student motivation.

### 2. Simulation Effectiveness

The results also showed that students in the experimental group were able to identify important elements of the graph, such as vertices, axis of symmetry, and cut-off points better than students in the control group. This emphasizes the importance of using visual aids in mathematics learning. Previous research by Kershner (2010) also found that visual aids can help students understand and remember mathematical information better.

The application of this simulation helps students see how changes in the coefficients  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c$  affect the shape of the graph directly. Thus, students not only learn about mathematical concepts theoretically, but can also observe the consequences of such changes in real-time. This provides a more in-depth learning experience and makes it easier for students to understand the changes that occur in the graph.

### 3. Student Feedback and Motivation

The feedback obtained from students showed that they felt more motivated and interested when learning using simulations. This shows that interactive and engaging learning methods can improve the overall learning experience of students. Research by Tsai and Chang (2009) shows that students who use interactive simulations tend to have a more positive attitude towards mathematics subjects.

In addition, students in the control group who followed traditional learning methods admitted to feeling bored and less engaged. This suggests that conventional approaches in teaching may no longer be effective for capturing students' attention in

today's digital age. Therefore, the integration of technology in mathematics learning needs to be seriously considered.

#### 4. Challenges and Implications

Although the results of this study show that the use of PhET simulations brings benefits, there are several challenges that need to be faced in its application. First, not all schools have sufficient access to the technology and hardware needed to run the simulation. This can be an obstacle to the widespread implementation of this method.

Second, teachers need to be trained to use this technology effectively in learning. Research by Teacher et al. (2015) shows that the success of the application of technology in education is highly dependent on the competence of teachers in using these tools. Therefore, training programs for teachers are very important to ensure that they can make the most of PhET simulations.

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the use of PhET-based Graphing Quadratics simulation significantly improves students' mathematical visual ability in drawing quadratic equation graphs. The results of the analysis showed that students in the experimental group experienced an average increase in posttest scores of 23.2 points, while the control group only increased by 7.4 points. This indicates that the simulation is effective in helping students understand concepts and draw graphs better. Students in the experimental group also showed better results in identifying important elements of the graph, such as vertices and axes of symmetry. Positive feedback from students who felt more interested and motivated during learning with this simulation further strengthened the finding that technology can enrich the math learning experience. The results of an independent t-test with a p-value of 0.001 showed a significant difference between the two groups, proving that the PhET simulation had a positive and real impact. The distribution of pretest and posttest scores also showed that students in the experimental group more evenly achieved a higher score category after treatment, while the control group still had students with low scores. Thus, the use of these interactive simulations not only increases the average score but also helps more students understand the concepts being taught. This study recommends that PhET simulations be used as learning aids in mathematics classrooms, taking into account the need for teacher training and technology accessibility for wider implementation.

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