

TEACHING PRONUNCIATION THROUGH PHONICS-BASED ACTIVITIES

Utashova Jasmina Vaxobjon qizi

jasminautashova64@gmail.com

Abstract. Teaching pronunciation through phonics-based activities has become an effective approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Phonics enables learners to understand the relationship between letters and sounds, while pronunciation instruction develops accurate speech production and intelligible communication. When combined through interactive classroom activities, these two components enhance learners' reading, listening, speaking, and spelling skills simultaneously. This article explores the role of phonics-based activities in teaching pronunciation, discusses their educational benefits, and presents practical classroom techniques for improving learners' pronunciation accuracy. The article concludes that integrating phonics into pronunciation instruction promotes greater communicative competence, learner confidence, and overall English language proficiency.

Keywords: phonics, pronunciation, phonics-based activities, EFL, pronunciation accuracy, communicative competence, English language teaching.

Introduction

Pronunciation is one of the most important aspects of English language learning because successful communication depends largely on intelligible speech rather than grammatical accuracy alone (**Kelly, 2000**). Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners possess strong vocabulary and grammar knowledge but experience difficulties expressing themselves clearly due to inaccurate pronunciation (**Derwing & Munro, 2005**).

One effective solution is the integration of phonics-based activities into pronunciation instruction. Phonics teaches learners how letters and letter combinations represent specific speech sounds, allowing them to decode unfamiliar words while simultaneously improving pronunciation (**Adams, 1990**). Modern language teaching therefore increasingly combines phonics and pronunciation rather than teaching them separately.

This article examines how phonics-based classroom activities improve pronunciation and discusses practical strategies that teachers can implement in EFL classrooms.

Phonics and Pronunciation

Phonics refers to the relationship between graphemes (letters) and phonemes (speech sounds). It enables learners to decode written language by recognizing predictable sound-letter correspondences (**Ehri, 2005**).

For example, learners discover that:

- **sh** produces /ʃ/
- **ch** produces /tʃ/
- **ph** produces /f/
- **igh** produces /aɪ/

Pronunciation, on the other hand, focuses on producing these sounds correctly in spoken communication. It includes vowel and consonant production, stress, rhythm, intonation, and connected speech (**Celce-Murcia et al., 2010**).

Teaching these two skills together allows learners to connect written English with spoken English more effectively.

Why Phonics-Based Activities Improve Pronunciation

Phonics-based activities encourage learners to practice English sounds repeatedly within meaningful contexts.

According to Harmer (2015), repeated exposure to sound-letter relationships enables learners to recognize pronunciation patterns more naturally.

Instead of memorizing isolated vocabulary, learners understand why words are pronounced in particular ways.

For example, after learning that **ph** represents /f/, students can correctly pronounce:

- phone
- photograph
- pharmacy
- elephant

without memorizing each word separately.

This process increases pronunciation accuracy while developing reading fluency.

Developing Phonological Awareness

One of the major advantages of phonics activities is the development of phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness refers to learners' ability to recognize and manipulate individual sounds within spoken words (**Yopp & Yopp, 2009**).

Students who distinguish similar sounds become more accurate speakers.

Examples include:

- ship – sheep
- live – leave
- bat – bet
- fan – van

Minimal differences between these words often create pronunciation difficulties for EFL learners. Regular phonics practice helps learners hear and produce these distinctions more accurately.

Effective Phonics-Based Activities

1. Letter–Sound Matching

Students match letters or letter combinations with their corresponding sounds.

Examples include:

- **sh** → ship, shoe, fish
- **ch** → chair, chicken, teacher
- **ph** → phone, dolphin, photograph

This activity strengthens sound-letter recognition and pronunciation simultaneously (Adams, 1990).

2. Minimal Pair Activities

Minimal pair exercises help learners distinguish sounds that differ by only one phoneme.

Examples:

- ship – sheep
- full – fool
- cap – cup
- bat – bad

These activities improve pronunciation accuracy and listening discrimination (Kelly, 2000).

3. Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is one of the most effective phonics-based pronunciation activities.

Students apply phonics rules while teachers provide immediate pronunciation feedback.

Repeated oral reading improves fluency, articulation, and confidence (Nation & Newton, 2009).

4. Songs and Rhymes

Songs naturally reinforce pronunciation through repetition, rhythm, and stress.

Rhyming words also strengthen learners' awareness of English sound patterns.

For example:

- light – bright
- day – play
- see – tree

Music creates an enjoyable learning environment while improving pronunciation.

5. Tongue Twisters

Tongue twisters encourage learners to practice difficult sound combinations repeatedly.

Examples include:

- She sells seashells by the seashore.
- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

These exercises improve articulation, fluency, and confidence (Underhill, 2005).

6. Word Sorting

Students classify words according to pronunciation patterns.

Example:

/i:/

- see
- tree
- green

/ɪ/

- sit
- fish
- big

This activity strengthens learners' awareness of vowel differences.

7. Technology-Based Activities

Modern educational technology provides additional pronunciation practice.

Useful tools include:

- pronunciation applications;
- speech recognition software;
- interactive phonics games;
- online dictionaries with audio pronunciation; and
- digital language learning platforms.

Technology allows learners to receive immediate feedback and practice independently (Fraser, 2001).

Benefits of Phonics-Based Pronunciation Activities

Research shows that phonics-based instruction contributes to multiple aspects of language development (Gilakjani, 2016).

Major benefits include:

- improved pronunciation accuracy;
- increased reading fluency;
- stronger listening comprehension;

- better spelling skills;
- larger vocabulary retention;
- greater learner confidence;
- enhanced classroom participation; and
- improved communicative competence.

These benefits make phonics-based pronunciation activities valuable for learners of all ages.

Challenges

Although phonics-based activities are highly effective, several challenges remain. English spelling is not completely regular.

For example:

Word	Pronunciation
though	/ðʊ/
through	/θru:/
though	/kɒf/
though	/tʌf/
though	/ɪ'nʌf/

These irregular patterns require learners to combine phonics knowledge with vocabulary learning and repeated language exposure (**Roach, 2009**).

Teachers should therefore present phonics as a helpful strategy rather than an absolute rule.

The Teacher's Role

Teachers play a vital role in successful pronunciation instruction.

Effective teachers:

- model accurate pronunciation;
- provide systematic phonics instruction;
- encourage frequent speaking practice;
- use interactive classroom activities;
- provide constructive corrective feedback; and
- create a supportive learning environment where learners feel comfortable making mistakes (**Brown, 2007**).

Integrating pronunciation into everyday classroom communication enables learners to apply phonics knowledge naturally.

Conclusion

Teaching pronunciation through phonics-based activities provides an effective and engaging approach to English language learning. Phonics develops learners' understanding of sound-letter relationships, while pronunciation activities strengthen speech production, listening, and oral communication. Together, these components improve pronunciation accuracy, reading fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and learner confidence.

Teachers should integrate phonics-based activities such as minimal pairs, reading aloud, songs, rhymes, tongue twisters, and technology-assisted learning into daily instruction. Such an integrated approach creates meaningful opportunities for learners to connect written and spoken English while developing the communicative competence required for successful language use. Numerous studies demonstrate that phonics-based pronunciation instruction remains one of the most effective strategies for improving pronunciation accuracy in EFL classrooms **(Richards & Rodgers, 2014)**.

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