

Phonics-Guided Reading for Students' Pronunciation Accuracy

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation remains a major challenge for young EFL learners, particularly in rural classrooms where students have limited exposure to English and often rely on first-language pronunciation patterns. This research explored the implementation of phonics-guided reading in supporting students' pronunciation accuracy at MI Nur Hayatul Islam, Probolinggo, Indonesia. Conducted over four weeks, the study involved one English teacher and fifteen fifth-grade students. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings revealed that phonics-guided reading helped students recognize sound-letter relationships more systematically and reduced their tendency to pronounce English words using Indonesian spelling patterns. Students also became more active and confident during reading activities. However, several challenges were identified, including limited instructional media, difficulties in distinguishing unfamiliar English sounds, and the teacher's limited experience in applying phonics instruction consistently. These findings suggest that phonics-guided reading can serve as a supportive approach for improving pronunciation awareness and classroom engagement among elementary EFL learners in rural contexts.

Keywords: *Phonics-Guided Reading, Pronunciation Accuracy, EFL Learners, Elementary Students, Qualitative Study*

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INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays an important role in English language learning, particularly for elementary students who are still developing foundational language skills. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, pronunciation accuracy contributes significantly to intelligibility and effective communication. However, many young EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in pronouncing English words due to limited exposure to authentic spoken English and insufficient pronunciation-focused instruction (Rahmani et al., 2025).

In many elementary classrooms, pronunciation teaching is still dominated by repetition and memorization activities without systematic explanation of sound-letter relationships. Although these practices may help students memorize vocabulary, they often fail to develop learners' understanding of how English sounds are produced and connected to written forms. Consequently, students tend to guess the pronunciation of unfamiliar words and rely heavily on their first-language phonological patterns. This issue is more apparent in rural EFL contexts where access to instructional resources and innovative teaching strategies remains limited (Herdiyanti et al., 2025).

Preliminary observation conducted at MI Nur Hayatul Islam, a rural elementary school in Probolinggo, Indonesia, revealed that many students experienced difficulties in pronouncing English words accurately. Most students read English words using Indonesian pronunciation patterns, such as pronouncing words based on their written spelling rather than their actual English sounds. Classroom instruction mainly emphasized repetition activities without explicit phonics guidance, causing students to depend on memorization rather than phonological understanding. These conditions indicate the need for a more structured

instructional approach that can help learners recognize sound-letter correspondence more meaningfully.

Phonics instruction has been widely recognized as an effective approach for introducing the relationship between letters and sounds. Through phonics-based learning, students are guided to decode words systematically and develop better pronunciation awareness (Sukkrong et al., 2026). Recent studies also indicate that phonics instruction positively contributes to pronunciation development and early reading skills among EFL learners (Klahan et al., 2026). Furthermore, guided reading activities provide structured opportunities for students to apply phonics knowledge in contextual reading practices while receiving direct teacher support and feedback.

Previous studies on phonics instruction have primarily focused on measuring students' reading achievement and pronunciation improvement through quantitative approaches. While these studies demonstrate the effectiveness of phonics-based instruction, they provide limited explanation regarding how phonics-guided reading is implemented within actual classroom interaction, particularly in rural elementary EFL settings. In addition, existing research rarely explores students' responses, learning experiences, and challenges encountered during the instructional process. As a result, the practical implementation of phonics-guided reading in supporting pronunciation accuracy among young EFL learners remains underexplored. Therefore, further investigation is needed to provide a deeper understanding of how phonics-guided reading is applied in real classroom contexts and how students respond to the approach.

This study explores the implementation of phonics-guided reading in supporting elementary students' pronunciation accuracy in a rural EFL classroom. The study focuses on three main aspects: the instructional implementation of phonics-guided reading, students' responses toward the learning activities, and the challenges encountered during the teaching and learning process. By emphasizing classroom interaction and learners' experiences, this study is expected to contribute to the understanding of pronunciation teaching practices for young EFL learners.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the implementation of phonics-guided reading in supporting elementary students' pronunciation accuracy. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding classroom interaction, students' responses, and teaching practices in their natural setting rather than measuring numerical improvement. Through this approach, the researcher was able to obtain detailed descriptions of the learning process and participants' experiences during the implementation of phonics-guided reading (Cook, 2025).

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at MI Nur Hayatul Islam, located in Sumberduren Village, Krucil District, Probolinggo Regency, Indonesia. The study was carried out over four weeks during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants consisted of one English teacher and fifteen fifth-grade students who participated in phonics-guided reading activities.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were considered capable of providing relevant information related to the research objectives (Andewi & Trinovita, 2024). In addition, ten students were selected for interviews based on their level of participation and their representation of different pronunciation abilities.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument for collecting and interpreting the data (Tisdell et al., 2025). To support the data collection process, several

supporting instruments were used, including an observation checklist, semi-structured interview guidelines, and documentation sheets.

The observation checklist was designed to record classroom activities, teacher instructions, students' pronunciation practices, and classroom interaction during phonics-guided reading sessions. Semi-structured interview guidelines were used to explore participants' responses, experiences, and challenges during the learning process. Documentation sheets were utilized to collect supporting materials such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' worksheets.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted during English learning sessions involving phonics-guided reading activities. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer in order to maintain the natural classroom environment. During the observations, field notes were written to record teaching procedures, teacher-student interaction, students' pronunciation practices, and classroom responses.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher and ten selected students to obtain deeper insights into their learning experiences and responses toward phonics-guided reading. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian to help participants express their opinions more comfortably and clearly. Each interview lasted approximately 10–15 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent before being transcribed for analysis.

Documentation was used to support and validate the data obtained from observations and interviews. The collected documents included lesson plans, teaching materials, students' worksheets, and classroom activity photographs.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (GÜMÜŞ, 2021). The analysis process consisted of several stages. First, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings and organized observation notes and documentation data. Second, the data were reduced by selecting relevant information related to the research focus. Third, the researcher coded the data by identifying recurring patterns and important statements related to instructional implementation, students' responses, and learning challenges.

After the coding process, similar codes were grouped into broader themes to answer the research questions. The data were then displayed descriptively in the form of thematic explanations and interpreted continuously throughout the analysis process. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified through continuous comparison among different data sources.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation and method triangulation were applied by comparing information obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, repeated observations were conducted to maintain data consistency and improve credibility. The researcher also rechecked several interview responses during the analysis process to ensure the accuracy of participants' statements.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Phonics-Guided Reading in Teaching Pronunciation

Based on classroom observations conducted at MI Nur Hayatul Islam, phonics-guided reading was implemented through several structured instructional stages. The teacher began the lesson by introducing individual letter sounds such as /b/, /d/, and /t/ before guiding

students to blend the sounds into simple words including cat, dog, and bag. During guided reading activities, students were asked to pronounce words individually while the teacher provided direct correction and pronunciation modeling.

The classroom interaction showed that students gradually became more aware of sound-letter relationships during the learning process. Instead of directly asking students to memorize vocabulary pronunciation, the teacher explained how each sound was produced and connected to written letters. Field notes also indicated that students actively repeated sounds after the teacher and attempted to correct their pronunciation independently.

One student stated, "Before learning phonics, I usually read English words like Indonesian words. After the teacher explained the sounds, I understood how to pronounce them better." Similarly, the teacher explained, "Students become more confident when they know the sounds first before reading the words."

The observation findings demonstrate that phonics-guided reading encouraged students to recognize pronunciation patterns more systematically and created more interactive classroom participation during reading activities.

Students' Responses toward the Implementation of Phonics-Guided Reading

The findings from classroom observations and interviews revealed that students showed generally positive responses toward the implementation of phonics-guided reading. Compared to previous learning activities that mainly focused on repetition, students appeared more active and enthusiastic during pronunciation practice sessions.

Several students reported that phonics instruction helped them read English words more easily because they learned the sounds before reading complete words. One student mentioned, "Now I do not only memorize the words, but I also know how the sounds are read." Another student stated, "Learning English becomes more interesting because we practice the sounds step by step."

In addition, students became more confident when participating in reading activities. Some students who were initially passive began volunteering to read words aloud, although pronunciation mistakes still occurred during several activities. Classroom observations also showed increased participation during sound repetition and guided reading practices.

However, some students still experienced difficulties in distinguishing unfamiliar English sounds, particularly sounds that do not exist in the Indonesian language. Several students continued to pronounce English words using Indonesian spelling patterns, especially when reading unfamiliar vocabulary.

Challenges in the Implementation of Phonics-Guided Reading

Despite the positive classroom responses, several challenges were identified during the implementation of phonics-guided reading. One major challenge was the strong influence of students' first-language pronunciation patterns. Many students still pronounced English words according to Indonesian spelling conventions. For example, some students pronounced the word cat as /cat/ instead of /kæt/.

Another challenge was related to the teacher's limited familiarity with phonics instruction. During the interview, the teacher admitted, "I am still learning how to apply phonics consistently because I did not previously teach pronunciation using this method." This condition affected the consistency of pronunciation instruction during classroom activities.

Limited instructional media also became an obstacle in the learning process. The classroom activities mainly relied on verbal explanation and repetition without sufficient visual or audio support. As a result, students sometimes found it difficult to understand unfamiliar English sounds. Furthermore, differences in students' learning abilities created additional challenges during classroom implementation. Some students were able to follow pronunciation practice quickly, while others required repeated explanation and more intensive guidance from the teacher.

Discussion

The findings indicate that phonics-guided reading supports students' pronunciation awareness by helping them understand sound-letter relationships more systematically. Through explicit phonics instruction and guided reading activities, students became more aware of how English sounds differ from Indonesian pronunciation patterns. This finding is consistent with Adane et al. (2025), who argue that phonics instruction helps learners decode words systematically and improves pronunciation development.

The implementation of guided reading activities also contributed to increased classroom participation and students' confidence during pronunciation practice. Interactive learning activities and direct teacher guidance encouraged students to participate more actively in reading sessions. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that structured and supportive learning environments positively influence students' engagement and motivation in language learning (Zainuddin & Abdullah, 2025).

In addition, the positive responses shown by students suggest that phonics-guided reading provides a more meaningful learning experience compared to repetition-based pronunciation teaching. Instead of merely memorizing word pronunciation, students gradually developed awareness of pronunciation patterns and sound production. Similar findings were reported by (Sukkrong et al., 2026), who found that phonics-based instruction contributes positively to pronunciation learning among young EFL learners.

However, the study also found several challenges during the implementation process. The influence of students' first language remained a significant obstacle, particularly when students encountered unfamiliar English sounds. This finding aligns with (Topal, 2024), who state that differences between first-language and target-language phonological systems often contribute to pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners.

Furthermore, limited teacher familiarity with phonics instruction and insufficient instructional media affected the effectiveness of classroom implementation (Aruna & Gopal, 2023; Fei, 2024; Muakhiroh, 2020; Prasetya, 2022). This indicates that successful phonics instruction requires not only appropriate teaching strategies but also adequate teacher preparation and learning resources, particularly in rural educational settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights that phonics-guided reading contributes not only to students' pronunciation awareness but also to their engagement and confidence during English learning activities. Through explicit sound-letter instruction and guided reading practice, students became more aware of English pronunciation patterns and gradually reduced their dependence on Indonesian spelling conventions. These findings indicate that pronunciation learning becomes more meaningful when students are guided to understand how sounds are formed rather than merely memorizing word pronunciation. The findings also demonstrate that phonics-guided reading can serve as a practical instructional approach for young EFL learners in rural classroom contexts where exposure to spoken English remains limited. However, the effectiveness of this approach is strongly influenced by teachers' pedagogical readiness, the availability of instructional media, and students' varying pronunciation abilities. Therefore, support for teacher professional development and the provision of more interactive learning resources are essential for improving pronunciation instruction in elementary EFL classrooms. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of how phonics-guided reading is implemented in real classroom settings and how students respond to the learning process. Future studies are recommended to explore the long-term impact of phonics-guided reading and combine qualitative classroom investigation with pronunciation assessment data to obtain broader insights into students' pronunciation development.

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