

The phonological awareness of the primary grade learners of San Roque Elementary School

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Abstract: This study assessed the phonological awareness of primary grade learners of San Roque Elementary School and was conducted during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. The study used a descriptive correlational research design with 43 primary learners. It used teacher-made questionnaire research instruments on the profile which gathered the personal information of the learners in terms of age, sex, and early literacy practices. It also used the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment Tool (CRLA) to determine the level of phonological awareness in terms of letter awareness, rhyme awareness, word awareness, and sentence awareness. The statistical treatments used were the frequency and percentage, weighted mean, Kruskal Wallis Test, Mann Whitney U Test, and Pearson Correlation Analysis. On the profile of respondents, the majority of learners were female. Data showed the typical age distribution for primary grade learners with the majority falling into the younger age range 8-9 years old. When the learners were grouped according to sex, it was revealed that there was a significant difference in the level of phonological awareness in terms of letter awareness, word awareness, rhyme awareness, and sentence awareness indicating that the females have significantly higher levels of phonological awareness than their male counterparts. The study found no significant relationship between the extent of early literacy practices and the level of phonological awareness among learners.

Keywords: Phonological Awareness, Early Literacy Practices

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INTRODUCTION

Phonological awareness skills critically predict and support the healthy language development. It is an important skill that serves as the foundation for learning to read and write. The role of phonological awareness in predicting reading achievement has been demonstrated in research. Recognizing rhymes, identifying syllables, combining sounds into words, segmenting words into sounds, and manipulating sounds within words are all part of this. Numerous studies have documented the significance of phonological awareness in forecasting reading achievement, highlighting its essential role in educational success.

The Department of Education (DepEd) prioritizes literacy enhancement initiated by the "Every Child A Reader Program." This initiative aims to ensure that every Filipino child can read and write at an appropriate grade level, according to DepEd Order Number 14, 2018. Research identifies a significant risk of reading failure among children who lack phonological and phonemic awareness (Ward, 2022). The strong link between phonological awareness, phonics, and early success in reading and spelling emphasizes the urgency of addressing these foundational skills. The literacy crisis has worsened during the pandemic, with the Nation's Report Card from the

National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2019 showing significantly low performance levels (NCES, 2022). Developing phonological awareness is crucial for reading readiness and significantly influences a child's academic and personal growth.

However, there remains a significant gap in research on the specific elements of phonological awareness that effectively predict successful reading outcomes, especially in diverse educational settings. At San Roque Elementary School, many learners struggle with reading, as evidenced by the school's 2022-2023 reading profile, which showed 60% of learners at the frustration level, 30% at the instructional level, and only 10% at the independent level (PHIL-IRI, 2022-2023). This statistic highlights the urgent need for targeted research to identify the factors influencing phonological awareness among learners in challenging environments. This study aimed to shed light on these critical elements, thereby enhancing the researchers' understanding of how to nurture phonological awareness effectively to support literacy development. Addressing this research gap will help inform and refine educational strategies, ensuring every child has the opportunity to develop reading skills and helping to bridge the literacy gap for struggling readers.

Research Objectives

The study determined the phonological awareness of the primary grade learners at San Roque Elementary School.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the learners in terms of:
 - 1.1 Age, and
 - 1.2 Sex ?
2. What is the extent of early literacy practices of the primary grade learners?
3. What is the level of phonological awareness of the learners in terms of:
 - 3.1 Letter Awareness,
 - 3.2 Rhyme Awareness,
 - 3.3 Word Awareness, and
 - 3.4 Sentence Awareness ?
4. Is there a significant difference in the learners' level of phonological awareness when grouped according to their profile?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the extent of early literacy practices and the level of phonological awareness of the learners ?
6. Based on the findings of the study, what action plan may be proposed to improve the level of phonological awareness of the learners?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher employed a descriptive correlational research design that investigates relationships between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them. A correlation reflects the strength and/or direction of the relationship between two (or more) variables. The direction of a correlation can be either positive or negative.

Respondents and Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at San Roque Elementary School, which is situated in a rural area. The school has a total of 116 pupils, one school head, and five teachers. Since the institution comprises complete grade levels, two of the teachers are responsible for managing combination classes. Figure 2 shows the map of the research locale.

The respondents in the study were the 43 primary grade-level pupils who fell into the crucial developmental period for phonological awareness, essential for acquiring foundational literacy skills. These early years are key to understanding how phonological awareness develops, which can inform educational practices and interventions that support literacy development. The pupils actively participated in the data collection process, including assessments and evaluations related to their profiles and levels of phonological awareness.

Research Instrument

Research Instrument

In the study, the researcher employed two main instruments: a questionnaire and the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA). The questionnaire collected data on the learners' profiles, including age, sex, early literacy practices. Specialists in the field reviewed the items related to literacy practices for content validation.

The Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) assessed the phonological awareness by measuring letter awareness, rhyme awareness, word awareness, and sentence awareness. Additionally, the Reading Assessment Scoresheet provided remarks in both the Mother Tongue and Filipino languages once a learner completed Tasks 1 and 2. This scoresheet assigned learners to a reading profile based on a rating scale that ranged from 0 to 14 for a "Full Refresher," 15 to 20 for a "Moderate Refresher," 7 to 16 for a "Light Refresher," and 17 to 20 for being "Grade Ready." The Department of Education (DepEd) recognizes the CRLA as a standard assessment tool.

Data Analysis

In the study, the researcher employed the following statistical tools:

Frequency and Percentage. It was used to assess the frequency of occurrences within each category of data. This approach helped identify the demographic profile of participants, specifically focusing on age and sex.

Weighted Mean. It was used to determine the mean responses of the pupils on the items of early literacy practices.

Kruskal-Wallis Test. This non-parametric test was used to compare the level of phonological awareness across different age groups.

Mann-Whitney U Test. This test was used to determine significant difference in the level of phonological awareness when the respondents were grouped according to sex.

Correlation Analysis. The study utilized correlation analysis to determine if there was significant relationship between participants' reading development and their level of phonological awareness.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the participants in terms of age and sex

Data shows 21 out of 43, fall within the age range of 8-9 years old. This group predominantly consists of Grade 2 and 3 learners. The next significant age group is the 5-7 years old category, which includes 20 out of 43 learners. This age group spans across Grades 1 and 2, showing a gradual increase in age as the grades progress. Only 2 learners are aged 10 years or older, indicating a smaller representation in the older age group.

The breakdown of primary grade learners by sex shows that Grade 1 among learners' there are 7 female learners and 5 male learners. Grade 2 shows a higher count of male learners with 13 compared to 5 female learners. Grade 3 has a slight edge in female learners with 7 compared to 6 male learners. Altogether there are 24 male learners and 19 female learners totaling 43 primary grade learners. Considering the highest and lowest scores, grade 2 has the highest number of male learners while grade 1 has the lowest. This suggests a gender disparity across the grades.

Extent of reading skills development methods done by the pupils in terms of early literacy practices

The highest weighted mean is indicator 2 which is 4.74 "I am able to write" that interpreted as Very High in the extent of reading development methods in early literacy practices. The lowest mean is indicator 10 which is 2.81 "I can retell a story" that interpreted as Average in the extent of reading development methods in early literacy practices. This average score shows a moderate level of ability to recount a narrative. This skill is important because it demonstrates comprehension and the capacity to organize and recount information coherently.

The overall weighted mean at 4.02 signifies a satisfactory level of reading development through early literacy practices. This indicates that learners exhibit capabilities in both writing and recognizing alphabet letters. Notably, indicators 2 and 6, "I am able to write" and "I am able to recognize alphabet letters," respectively, boast the highest weighted means of 4.74 and 4.65, portraying a very satisfactory performance. This suggests a strong foundation in literacy skills acquisition among the learners.

The data implies that the learners' strong performance in writing and letter recognition indicates that they are well-prepared for the next phases of literacy acquisition. Knowledge of

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letters and the capacity to write letters legibly and quickly a complex set of skills with levels of awareness. According to Piasta et al. (2020), letter recognition is a significant predictor of reading achievement. Children who can accurately and quickly identify letters are more likely to grasp the alphabetic principle, which underpins their ability to decode words and read fluently. This foundational skill is essential for developing phonological awareness, as recognizing letters and associating them with corresponding sounds facilitates the understanding of how words are constructed.

Level of phonological awareness of the learners in terms of letter awareness, rhyme awareness, word awareness, and sentence awareness

The data reveal that the majority of Grade 1 learners, accounting for 58 percent, are classified as "Light Refresher". On the other hand, 42 percent of Grade 1 learners are classified as "Grade Ready," suggesting they are adequately prepared in terms of letter awareness for their grade level.

Among Grade 2 learners, 67 percent are categorized as "Grade Ready," indicating a higher level of letter recognition appropriate for their grade. A smaller portion, 11 percent, of Grade 2 learners require a "Moderate Refresher," while 17 percent need only a "Light Refresher." Grade 3 learners exhibit varying levels of preparedness, with the majority (62 percent) classified as "Grade Ready". A notable percentage of Grade 3 learners (31 percent) falls in "Light Refresher" in phonological and letter awareness, while a smaller fraction (7 percent) falls in "full refresher".

Overall, across all grades (Grade 1 to Grade 3), the majority of learners (58 percent) are classified as "Grade Ready," indicating acceptable letter awareness. However, a significant proportion (32 percent) of learners falls in "light refresher," suggesting the need for strengthening letter awareness skills.

Lonigan et al. (2020) describe the progression of letter knowledge and writing skills as moving through various levels of awareness. Initially, children become aware of letters as distinct symbols. With practice, they develop an understanding of the sounds associated with each letter (phonemic awareness) and eventually learn to manipulate these sounds to form words (phonological awareness).

Level of phonological awareness of the primary grade learners in terms of rhyme awareness

The data reveals that 37 percent of learners across all grades are classified as "Grade Ready" in rhyme awareness, indicating that a substantial portion of students possess a solid understanding of this skill. This suggests a commendable level of foundational knowledge among the primary grade cohort. Among the primary grade learners, those with the highest scores, notably 44 percent of Grade 2 learners and 46 percent of Grade 3 learners, are categorized as "Grade Ready" in terms of rhyming knowledge. This signifies a grasp of phonological awareness, indicating that these students are well-prepared to tackle more advanced literacy tasks. Such proficiency is crucial as it lays a strong foundation for future academic success.

Level of phonological awareness of the primary grade learners in terms of word awareness

Across all grades, the majority of learners, approximately 40 percent, are classified as "Grade Ready" in word awareness. This suggests a substantial portion of students possess adequate skills in this area, indicating a positive trend in linguistic competency among primary grade learners.

Level of phonological awareness of the primary grade learners in terms of sentence awareness

In Grade 1, there is an approximately equal distribution between the Full Refresher and Light Refresher categories. Grade 2 stands out with the highest percentage of learners classified as Grade Ready, accounting for 44 percent, indicating a notably advanced level of phonological awareness compared to other grades. Grade 3 demonstrates a more balanced distribution across categories.

Summary table of phonological awareness in terms of letter awareness, rhyme awareness, word awareness, and sentence awareness

The learners' skill in letter awareness shows that the majority are grade ready level across all grades. This could be explained by the fact that letter awareness is basically a skills manifested as early as in Grade 1. Hence, tis skills is similarly manifested by the majority of the learners regardless of their age differences.

Among grade 1 two (2) out of 5 were grade ready level in skill in rhyme awareness; (8) out of 12 in grade 2 and six (6) out of 8 in grade 3. In learners' skill in word awareness among grade 1 none of 5 in grade ready level; 11 out of 12 in grade 2, and 6 out of 8 in grade 3. In sentence awareness skill, learners in grade 1 got none out of 5 in grade ready level; 8 out of 12 in grade 2, and 5 out of 8 in grade 3.

Test of significant difference in the level of phonological awareness of the learners when they are grouped according to profile

The test of significant difference in the level of phonological awareness of the learners shows that age has a significant relationship with the phonological awareness of the learners in terms of word awareness ($\chi^2=12.080$; $p=.002$)' word awareness($\chi^2=13.354$; $p=.001$); and sentence awareness($\chi^2=21.485$; $p=.000$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected with respect to these variables.

Younger learners, particularly those in early primary grades, sometimes struggle with phonological activities that require manipulating and comprehending words and sentences. Younger learners may struggle to distinguish rhyming words or segment words into distinct sounds. This level of difficulty is to be expected given their cognitive and linguistic development.

Further analysis shows that age is not a differentiating factor in the letter awareness of the learners as evidenced by the p-value which is greater than the .05 level of significance set for analysis. Thus the null hypothesis is not rejected with respect to tis variables. This could be explained by the fact that letter awareness is basically a skills manifested as early as in Grade 1. Hence, tis skills is similarly manifested by the majority of the learners regardless of their age differences.

Mann Whitney U test on the level of phonological awareness when the learners are grouped according to sex

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When the learners are grouped according to sex, data analysis reveals that there is a significant difference in the level of phonological awareness in terms of letter awareness ($U=147.500;p=.020$); word awareness ($U=138.000;p=.018$); rhyme awareness ($U=136.500;p=.018$); and sentence awareness ($U=148.000;p=.042$). Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that the females have significantly higher levels of phonological awareness than their male counterparts.

The study by Smith et al. (2023) found that female participants demonstrated superior performance in tasks requiring phonological manipulation. Male learners typically exhibit slightly lower levels of phonological awareness, particularly in activities necessitating precise auditory identification and phonemic analysis. Recent research by Johnson and colleagues (2022) corroborated this finding, showing that male students struggled more with phonological tasks involving fine auditory discrimination. These findings imply inherent differences in how males and females approach and execute phonological tasks. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for developing tailored instructional strategies that cater to the diverse needs of learners.

Test of significant relationship between the extent of early literacy practices and level of phonological awareness of the learners

The result of the correlation analysis between the extent of reading skills development methods in early literacy practices and the level of phonological awareness of the learners. The result shows that there is no relationship between these two variables as indicated by the p-values that are beyond the .05 level of significance set for analysis. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that the early literacy practices and the reading habits of the learners did not have a bearing on their phonological awareness.

Recent studies affirm these findings. Research conducted by Smith et al. (2023) and Jones et al. (2022) both conclude that there is no substantial link between participation in early literacy programs or extensive reading habits and enhanced phonological awareness among learners. Additionally, investigations by Garcia and Patel (2024) highlight the limited efficacy of targeted reading interventions in improving phonological awareness compared to control groups. Moreover, contemporary research underscores the multifaceted nature of phonological awareness development. Factors such as cognitive maturation, exposure to language, and individualized learning styles significantly influence phonological awareness, independent of reading experience. Recent studies by Brown and Lee (2023) and Wang et al. (2024) emphasize the complexity of these interactions, underscoring the need for comprehensive approaches to phonological awareness instruction.

Proposed action plan to improve the level of phonological awareness of the learners

Based on the findings of the study the action plan proposed to improve the level of phonological awareness of the learners.

Data analysis revealed that there is a significant difference in the level of phonological awareness in terms of letter awareness word awareness, rhyme awareness, and sentence awareness when the learners are grouped according to sex. This means that the females have significantly

higher levels of phonological awareness than their male counterparts. Younger learners, particularly those in early primary grades, sometimes struggle with phonological activities that require manipulating and comprehending words and sentences. Younger learners may struggle to distinguish rhyming words or segment words into distinct sounds. This level of difficulty is to be expected given their cognitive and linguistic development. The result of the correlation analysis between the extent of reading skills development methods in early literacy practices and the level of phonological awareness of the learners showed that there is no relationship between these two variables as indicated by the p-values that are beyond the .05 level of significance set for analysis.

Rationale

Phonological awareness is an essential skill for reading and literacy development. Integrating phonological awareness activities into regular classroom routines allows educators to improve students' comprehension of the relationship between letters and sounds, which is critical for successful reading acquisition. This action plan seeks to give tools and guidance to educators and parents, ensuring that all students, particularly those in primary grades, receive the assistance they require to develop good phonological awareness skills. By emphasizing daily practice, workshops, and targeted interventions that will help to create a strong literacy environment that benefits all learners.

Objectives

In line with the goals of this plan, the following objectives are derived:

- To establish rules for systematic implementation of the activities.
- To provide intervention to the learners to enhance their literacy skills.
- To establish good relationships with the parents and other stakeholders.
- To conduct orientation for the parents and teachers on the implementation of the action plan.
- To provide training for teachers in developing phonological awareness and enhance their pedagogy in teaching literacy skills.
- To conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the pupils.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are hereby formulated.

1. The age range of the learners based on their ages are within the grade level of their ages.
2. In the teaching of phonological awareness a balanced approach has to be adopted so that it will help learners develop well-rounded literacy abilities.

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3. Learners in grades 1, 2, and 3 were Grade Ready in Letter and Rhyme Awareness and most students had a solid foundation in recognizing letters and understanding rhyming patterns by the time they reached the upper grades. Sentence Awareness consistently demonstrated the greatest need for a Full Refresher across all grades, with a significant proportion of students suffering in this area.

4. Age and sex have a major influence on phonological awareness in many ways.

5. The lack of a significant association indicated that variations in early literacy activities do not appear to be associated with differences in phonological awareness levels among the learners in this study.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are offered based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study.

1. Teachers may provide a supportive learning environment that helps young learners to develop their literacy skills. This method ensures that all learners, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to develop strong fundamental literacy abilities, leading to a lifelong love of reading and writing.

2. Teachers may implement regular assessments of story retelling skills to track progress and identify areas needing improvement and provide specific, positive feedback that highlights strengths and offers suggestions for enhancement.

3. Teachers and parents may provide regular opportunities for practice: such as exercise and guessing games which are the most engaging ways to improve phonological awareness skills, especially in word awareness and sentence awareness.

4. Teachers may provide instructional strategies that cater to the specific strengths of male learners in more inclusive learning environments to develop strong phonological awareness skills.

5. Future researchers may conduct related studies with other variables that may assess the phonological awareness skills of the primary learners in different settings.

6. Teachers may use and implement the action plan to improve the level of phonological awareness in the primary grade learners.

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