

Effectiveness of Phonics Training to the Performance of Kindergarten Learners in Phonemic Awareness

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Abstract —Phonemic awareness is one of the pre-requisite skills in learning to read. Teachers must give attention in teaching the skill to achieve mastery of the letter names and sounds for reading words starts from this. Integrating differentiated teaching approaches and strategies like the use of phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness is essential. Thus, this study was formulated to evaluate the effectiveness of phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness to the performance of kindergarten learners. Utilizing the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool to determine the performance of kindergarten learners before and after the integration of phonics instruction and employing quasi-experimental research design while simple percentage and t-test of mean difference were the statistical tools used to interpret the result of the study. The study revealed a significant difference in the performances of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before and after the integration of phonics training in teaching. The result of the study implies that integrating phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness is effective. The dedication, patience and resourcefulness of the kindergarten teachers and the interactive materials and activities provided to the kindergarten learners had motivated and inspired them to learn phonemic awareness with very good performance.

Keywords — *Effectiveness, Phonics Training, Performance, Kindergarten Learners, Phonemic Awareness*

I. Introduction

Phonics usage refers to the practice of teaching and learning early reading skills by focusing the relationship between letters and their corresponding sounds in spoken language. It involves teaching the kindergarten learners how to decode words by recognizing the sounds that individual letters or group of letters make.

Phonics instruction helps learners understand the connections between written letters and the sounds they represent, which is crucial for building strong reading and spelling skills. By using phonics instruction, learners can sound out unfamiliar words and improve their ability to read and comprehend texts.

Kindergarten or early grade teachers employed phonics usage in teaching early literacy skills. The researcher, being a new kindergarten teacher, has conducted benchmarking activities to fellow kindergarten teachers and asked for the strategy they used in teaching early literacy skills which proved to be effective. As neophytes in teaching early grades, the researcher is searching for the appropriate teaching strategy in teaching early literacy skills. Thinking of utilizing phonics usage which has been proven to be effective based on the experiences of kindergarten teachers, plan to implement such. As based on the result on Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in the previous school year, most of the kindergarten pupils were able to recognize words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs with phonics usage as strategy in teaching early literacy skills. Phonemic awareness was developed making these learners achieve literacy performance on their grade level.

Phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of a student's ability to read fluently. This ability to hear sounds clearly, and to differentiate them, is what allows us to acquire language easily, and this knowledge of language is key to our understanding of what we read. As cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Paula Tallal (2012) explains, "To break the code for reading, a child must become 'phonologically aware' that words can be broken down into smaller units of sounds (phonemes) and that it is these sounds that the letters represent."

Phonemic awareness teaches students to both hear and manipulate sounds, and to understand that spoken words are made up of sequences of speech sounds. Through research, the researcher learned that **students who were able to identify phonemes rapidly were able to read more fluently because of this rapid processing.** Those students who took longer to process phonemes struggled with comprehension. It appeared that too much attention was required to decode the words, leaving less for interpreting what was read.

Fluent reading relies on students developing their phonemic awareness to the point of automaticity, freeing up their brain energy to easily comprehend what they are reading. Without securing their sound system by learning to automatically recall the 44 sounds of the English language, students rely on inefficient decoding methods and coping strategies like memorization. These skills may enable them to begin to read but as texts increase in complexity, students' comprehension begins to break down, as it becomes too challenging to understand what they are reading when they are focused on laboriously decoding every word. If we want students to gain mastery of the 44 sounds, they need to have repeated auditory exposure to each of the individual sounds and learn how to rapidly recognize each sound amongst other sounds.

Oral reading fluency is a key skill, which is a prerequisite for comprehension as emphasized by Tindal et al. (2016) and Rasinski (2014). They believe that fluency as a skill feed into comprehension, which is the goal of reading. According to DiSalle and Rasinski (2017), 90% of comprehension problems are due to the deficiency in oral fluency. Thus, students who have poor reading fluency in their early stage of academic life will likely have problems in later

academic stages. For this reason, it is essential to build and develop literacy skills in the early learning stage (Rasinski 2014).

Thus, it is in the above premise that the researcher motivated to conduct this study to evaluate the effectiveness of phonics training to the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness. A proposed improvement plan was formulated based on the findings of the study.

It is in the rationale that the researcher who is currently a kindergarten teacher in the above mentioned local, would like to delve worthy research undertaking that will benefit herself, the school she is currently teaching and that of her Graduate Program she is enrolled at.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of phonics training to the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness in San Sotero Elementary School, Javier II District, Leyte Division for School Year 2023-2024. The findings of the study were the basis for the proposed improvement plan.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before the training of phonics instruction?
2. What is the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness after the training of phonics instruction?
3. Is there a significant difference in the performances of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before and after the training of phonics instruction?
4. What improvement plan can be proposed based on the findings of this study?

II. Methodology

Design. This study employed the quasi-experimental research design utilizing the pre-test and post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of phonics training to the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness for School Year 2023-2024. San Sotero Elementary School, Javier II District, Leyte Division is the main locale of the study. The 24 kindergarten learners enrolled in the said locale for School Year 2023-2024 are the main respondents of the study. The instrument used in this study is the tool in Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). The Department of Education (DepEd) employs the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) as a tool to evaluate the reading ability of students in the early grades. A student's ability to read fluently, comprehend what they have read, and successfully convey their information is assessed on the EGRA, a standardized reading test. There are 5 key components of early grades that EGRA measure. These are alphabetic principles, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The alphabetic principle includes letter name identification, letter sound identification, syllable reading, nonword decoding and dictation. Moreover, the skills measures under phonemic

awareness are the initial sound identification and phoneme segmentation. For fluency it is the oral reading fluency is measured while on vocabulary, oral vocabulary, reading comprehension and listening comprehension. Lastly for comprehension, reading and listening comprehension is measured. The learner can be classified as Independent if the score is 90-100, Transitional for 75-89 and Emergent for 74 and below. This instrument is based on DepEd Order No. 57, series 2015, Utilization of Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA) Tools for System Assessment. This material is used to measure the pre-test and post-test literacy performance of the kindergarten pupils. Moreover, the researcher prepared a daily lesson plan using phonics instruction as a strategy in teaching phonemic awareness to the kindergarten learners. In addition, learning activities which emphasize learning phonemic awareness were also crafted. These materials were submitted to the District Kindergarten Coordinator for evaluation and adjustment before they are used in teaching. Further, the school head conducted monitoring through classroom observation using the GIYA tools and on-the-spot oral reading test will also be administered to track the progress of the learners. A matrix of activities was crafted to guide the teacher-researcher the flow of her study. This research focused on evaluating the effectiveness of phonics training to the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness through the pre-test and post-test and its significant difference. A Proposed Improvement Plan based on the findings of the study is the output.

Sampling. There are 24 kindergarten learners involved in this study. The research instruments were administered face-to-face with consent from the Local IATF and strictly following the prescribed Health Protocol during the face-to-face classes.

Research Procedure. The researcher prepared the research design and tools utilized in the study. Approval and recommendation from the Panel of Examiner of the Graduate Studies was sought. A letter request to conduct this study was forwarded to the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent. Upon approval, permission from the District Supervisor and School Head was secured before the actual gathering of data. Orientation of the participants and administration of the pre-test was done face-to-face after the approval of the permit from the parents of the respondents. Data privacy was emphasized also in the meeting. After accomplishing the pre-test, intervention was given within four weeks. The implementation of phonics instructions in teaching phonemic awareness was emphasized in the study. After the four-week intervention, the post-test was administered. Results of the tests were collected. Data were tallied and submitted for statistical treatment. Analysis and Interpretation of Data. Making of Proposed Improvement Plan followed.

Ethical Issues. The researcher properly secured the permission to conduct the study from the authorities through written communication. In the formulation of the intervention materials that was used in the study, the use of offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable language was avoided. The respondents' names and other personal data were not included in this study to protect their privacy. Participation of the respondents was also voluntary. Orientation was conducted for the respondents with their parents. In the orientation, issues and concerns were

addressed and consent to be included in the study were signed. The researcher-maintained objectivity in analyzing and discussing the results. All authors whose works were mentioned in this study were properly quoted and were acknowledged in the reference.

Treatment of Data. Simple Percentage was employed to evaluate the performances of the kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before and after the implementation of phonics instructions utilizing the learning activities crafted as learning materials in teaching. **t-Test of Mean Difference** was used to determine the significant difference in the performances of the kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness.

III. Results and Discussion

Table 1
Performance of Kindergarten Learners in Phonemic Awareness
Before the Intervention

Score Range	Description	PRE-TEST	
		Frequency	%
21-25	Excellent	0	0
16-20	Very Good	1	4
11-15	Good	3	13
6-10	Fair	2	8
1-5	Poor	18	75
Total		24	100
Weighted Mean		4.79	Poor

Table 1 presents the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before the implementation of phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness. It was revealed on the table that among the 24 kindergarten learners tested, 1 or 4% got a score of 16-20 which is very good, while 3 or 13% got a score of 11-15 which is good, 2 or 8% got a score of 6-10 which is fair and 18 or 75% got a score of 1-5 which is poor. Moreover, it was also shown on the table that the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before the integration of phonics instruction, the weighted mean is 4.79 which is interpreted as poor. The result shows that most of the kindergarten learners are beginners and adjusting to the new environment. There are few letter names and letter sounds learned by the kindergarten learners. Knowing that it is already a month since the opening of classes. This data implies that kindergarten learners need instructional strategy and approach which will boost their attention and willingness to learn phonemic awareness. Phonics instructions from the training attended by kindergarten teachers was used in this study to

help the kindergarten learners in learning phonemic awareness. Phonics instruction shapes readers foundationally as it develops phonemic awareness and decoding skills (Sonnenschein et al., 2010). Wilson (2012) explains that decoding skills enable readers to read fluently, which bridges phonics to comprehension. This supports readers as they apply meaning to text, which aids in comprehension (Wilson, 2012). A variety of phonics methods exist (Campbell, 2018). Whether foundational knowledge is taught explicitly, implicitly, or incidentally may impact the strategies applied and the achievement level of an early reader (Faust & Kandelshine-Waldman, 2011).

Table 2
Performance of Kindergarten Learners in Phonemic Awareness
After the Intervention

Score Range	Description	POST-TEST	
		Frequency	%
21-25	Excellent	7	29
16-20	Very Good	13	54
11-15	Good	4	17
6-10	Fair	0	0
1-5	Poor	0	0
Total		24	100
Weighted Mean		18.96	Very Good

Table 2 presents the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness after the integration of phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness. It was revealed on the table that after the integration of phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness, the performance of kindergarten learners has increased. It was shown on the table that among the 24 kindergarten learners tested, 7 or 29% got a score of 21-25 which is excellent, while 13 or 54% got a score of 16-20 which is very good and 4 or 17% got a score of 11-15 which is good. The result shows that the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness after the integration of phonics instruction has a weighted mean of 18.96 which is interpreted as very good. The result of the study shows that after the integration of phonics instruction, the performance of the kindergarten learners has improved. The phonics instructions used by kindergarten teachers and the materials and activities provided to them have helped in achieving the goal of the study. This implies that integration of phonics training is effective in achieving literacy performance among kindergarten learners. Cunningham (2017) shares a plethora of phonics strategies that support early readers. He believes that encoding tasks within spelling must be practiced by students to support decoding within text. Students need opportunities to integrate their explicit phonics instruction by applying it to meaningful texts. Inventive spelling in the classroom causes students to access background knowledge, known text, and phonics rules. Phonetic patterns serve a purpose, so instruction must

be taught on phonetic patterns and how to manipulate words based on known patterns. Students have unique backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and prior knowledge. Moreover, the amount of classroom time dedicated to reading instruction impacts students' reading skill progression. Tyler et al. (2015) recommends as much intervention time as possible, particularly for students who receive additional tiers of support. They also recommend that assessments take place outside of the instructional time.

Table 3
Test of Difference in the Performances of Kindergarten Learners in Phonemic Awareness Before and After the Intervention

Aspects	Test Scores		Computed T	Critical T	Decision	Interpretation
Kindergarten	Pre	4.79	2.136	0.334	Reject H ₀	Significant
	Post	18.96				

Table 3 presents the test of difference in the performance of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before and after the integration of phonics training in teaching. It was revealed on the table that the result of the pre-test performance of the kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness is 4.79 which increases to 18.96 in the post-test, had resulted to a computed value or t_a of 2.136 which is greater than the critical value of t of 0.334, so null hypothesis rejected. This means that there is a significant difference in the performances of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before and after the integration of phonics training in teaching. The result of the study implies that integrating phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness is effective. The dedication, patience and resourcefulness of the kindergarten teachers and the interactive materials and activities provided to the kindergarten learners had motivated and inspired them to learn phonemic awareness with very good performance. Effective phonics instruction takes individual needs of students into account and addresses them at an individual, personal level (Sonnenschein et al., 2010). Differentiation, accommodation, and modification are at the heart of successful instruction. Different viewpoints and ideas exist about when phonics instruction is most appropriate for readers (Tracey, 2017). Phonics instruction is generally geared toward early learners because it has been proven to be preventative, rather than a cure. It is a time-sensitive skill (Tyler et al., 2015). This explains why Reutzler et al. (2014) find value in providing simple instruction to early learners, recommending that phonics instruction be completed in the primary grades. Tyler et al. (2015) report that instruction in kindergarten and first grade were the most impactful. Suggate (2016) provides specificities, explaining that phonemic awareness should be targeted in preschool and kindergarten and that decoding skills should be targeted in first and

second grade. While grade-level guidelines are presented, several researchers emphasize the value of tailoring instruction to student needs.

IV. Conclusion

The study revealed a significant difference in the performances of kindergarten learners in phonemic awareness before and after the integration of phonics training in teaching. The result of the study implies that integrating phonics instruction in teaching phonemic awareness is effective. The dedication, patience and resourcefulness of the kindergarten teachers and the interactive materials and activities provided to the kindergarten learners had motivated and inspired them to learn phonemic awareness with very good performance.

V. Recommendations

1. Utilize the proposed improvement plan formulated.
2. All teachers must be given phonics training to assist kindergarten learners in learning phonemic awareness.
3. The Department of Education may fully support the continuing professional development of teachers by providing the necessary learning materials needed by them in the delivery of the lesson in phonemic awareness.
4. School Heads must allocate funds for the construction and production of learning materials to be used by the kindergarten learners in learning phonemic awareness.
5. Teachers and School Heads must formulate intervention activities and materials to help the learners improve their performance, especially in reading.
6. Teachers must be knowledgeable in providing additional learning support materials to the kindergarten learners.
7. Teachers must attend training or LAC sessions on the appropriate strategies and approaches in teaching literacy and its pre-requisite skills, and
8. Future researchers should replicate this study to include different locales and include different variables aside from the mentioned in this study.

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After she graduated her bachelor's degree, she was working from January 7, 2012-August 15, 2022, in Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) as a Community Empowerment Facilitator, Resource Speaker and Area Coordinator and June 04, 2019- July 31, 2021, Private School Teacher at Inopacan Parish Academy Inc. Inopacan, Leyte. While working and even in the time of pandemic having honed her teaching skills and knowledge in her chosen field. Fueling her passion for continuous improvement, she took up Master of Arts in Education major in Supervision and Administration and finished her course with complete academic requirements at Western Leyte College of Ormoc City, Inc in the year 2023.

She commenced her journey as a professional educator when she was hired last year as Teacher I in Department of Education (DepEd) on August 22, 2022, and currently assign in San Sotero Elementary School, Barangay San Sotero, Javier, Leyte.