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SY 2025

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09480112445

ABSTRACT

This action research aimed to determine the effectiveness of Systematic Phonics-Based Instruction in improving the early literacy skills of Grade 1 pupils at Dumingag Central Elementary School during School Year 2025–2026. The study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design involving 22 Grade 1 pupils who demonstrated difficulty in letter-sound recognition, decoding, and basic reading comprehension. Data were collected using the Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELA), and classroom observation checklist. The findings confirm that systematic phonics-based instruction significantly improves phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and reading confidence among early grade learners.

KEYWORDS:

phonics-based instruction; early literacy skills; Early Literacy Assessment tool (ELA)

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our school head, Sir Meljovin F. Dela Cruz, and the Grade 1 teacher, Ma'am Mohaima M. Alamada, for their support, encouragement, and cooperation throughout the conduct of this research. Their assistance and guidance helped make this study possible.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the Grade 1 pupils who participated in this study. Their active participation and willingness to learn made this research meaningful and successful.

We are deeply thankful to our instructor, Dr. Rey S. Pepito, for his valuable suggestions, patience, and continuous guidance in improving this study from beginning to end.

Lastly, we would like to thank our families and friends for their understanding, prayers, and moral support. Their encouragement inspired us to finish this work with dedication and perseverance. To all who contributed in one way or another, thank you very much.

Context and Rationale

In contemporary discussions on effective reading instruction, phonemic awareness (PA) continues to receive significant attention as a key factor in helping children develop early reading skills. Phonemic awareness refers to the ability to recognize and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words, which supports learners in decoding words and understanding the relationship between sounds and letters. Research indicates that learners who possess strong phonemic awareness skills are more likely to become successful readers because they can easily decode unfamiliar words and develop automatic word recognition (Miciak et al., 2021). Similarly, Veríssimo et al. (2021) found that phonological and phonemic awareness significantly contribute to reading acquisition and can help prevent reading difficulties among young learners.

As a result, learners who struggle during these early years often fall behind their peers, leading to lowered motivation, diminished self-confidence, and a long-term risk of academic underachievement. As stated by Lane et al., (2025) early intervention using structured, evidence-based reading strategies significantly improve literacy outcomes for young learners. These strategies include systematic phonics instruction, guided oral reading, repeated reading, and multisensory learning. Despite the proven effectiveness of these approaches, many teachers, particularly in low-resource or rural areas, continue to rely on generalized teaching methods that may not sufficiently support learners with reading difficulties.

That align with learners' individual needs and capacities. According to the World Literacy Foundation (2021), learning to read transforms lives, as reading serves as the foundation for acquiring knowledge, participating in cultural engagement, strengthening democratic participation, and achieving success in the workplace. In contemporary discussions about effective reading instruction, phonemic awareness (PA) continues to receive considerable attention as a key component in helping children develop early literacy skills.

However, debates still exist regarding the most effective methods of teaching reading. In the field of education, instructional approaches have often been This situation underscores the need for context-specific, research-based reading interventions shaped not only by teachers' classroom experiences but also by broader influences such as political priorities, economic considerations, and prevailing educational trends. Over the years, the debate has oscillated between meaning-centered or whole-language approaches and phonics-based instruction, with educators seeking a balanced understanding of how children learn to read. Despite these disagreements, a growing body of scientific research has provided clearer insights into reading development and effective instructional strategies.

The proposed Systematic Phonics-Based Instruction offers a structured approach that explicitly teaches sound-letter correspondences and blending of phonemes. Using multisensory strategies like visual aids, rhymes, and manipulatives, pupils will learn to decode and read words independently. This intervention aimed to strengthen early literacy, build reading confidence, and improve overall academic performance.

Action Research Questions

This study was conducted to determine the effectiveness and impact of Phonics-Based Instruction in improving the early literacy skills of Grade 1 pupils at Dumingag Central Elementary School during the School Year 2025–2026.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of early literacy skills among Grade 1 pupils before the implementation of phonics-based instruction?

2. What is the level of early literacy skills among Grade 1 pupils after the implementation of phonics-based instruction?
3. Is there is a significant different on the early literacy performance of Grade 1 pupils before and after the implementations of Phonics-Based instruction?

Proposed Innovation, Intervention, and Strategy

The proposed innovation integrates a systematic phonics-based instruction into the Grade 1 reading curriculum to strengthen pupils' early literacy skills. This approach focuses on developing phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, and decoding skills through engaging, multisensory learning experiences. The intervention will consist of daily 30-minute phonics sessions that include explicit teaching of sound-letter relationships, decoding activities, and guided reading practice. Teachers will use visual aids, rhymes, gestures, and manipulatives to make lessons interactive and meaningful. The strategy follows the action research cycle of plan, act, observe, and reflect, allowing the teacher-researcher to continuously monitor progress, make instructional adjustments, and enhance teaching practices to improve pupils' reading performance.

Action Research Methods

Research Design

The study employed a pre-experimental research design using pre-test and post-test measures one-group pretest-posttest design involving (22) Grade 1 pupils who demonstrated difficulty in letter-sound recognition, decoding, and basic reading comprehension.

Participant and/or other Sources of Data and Information

The participants of this study were 22 Grade 1 pupils from Dumingag Central Elementary School. The teacher-researcher conducted and facilitated the phonics-based instruction as part of the reading intervention. Data were gathered through pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, and teacher journals to determine pupils' improvement in early literacy skills and to document teaching and learning experiences.

Research Instrument

This study utilized three main instruments to collect both quantitative and qualitative data: a standardized Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELA), an Observation Checklist, and Interview Guides. Together, these instruments provided comprehensive insights into pupils' literacy skills, teaching practices, and engagement levels.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before conducting the study, the researchers sought formal permission from the School Principal of Dumingag Central Elementary School to carry out the research. Upon approval, the researchers coordinated with the Grade 1 teachers to discuss the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study. The research instruments Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELA),

Observation Checklist, and Interview Guides was validated by master teachers and literacy experts to ensure accuracy and appropriateness. The ELA measured pupils' early literacy skills in letter-sound recognition, decoding, and reading comprehension. The Observation Checklist assessed teachers' literacy teaching practices and pupil engagement.

Upon approval, the researchers coordinated with the Grade 1 teachers to discuss the purpose, objectives, and procedures of the study. The ELA pre-test was administered to identify pupils' literacy levels and least-mastered skills. Classroom observations were conducted to document instructional methods and pupil participation.

A post-test using the same ELA tool was administered after the observation and interview phases to measure pupils' improvement in literacy skills. Results from the pre-test, post-test, observations, and interviews were recorded, analyzed, and interpreted to determine pupils' progress and to better understand factors affecting early literacy learning.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using paired t-tests to determine significant improvement in literacy skills, while qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and challenges.

The pre-test and post test scores of the pupils were analyzed to measure their performance before and after the intervention. The computed results were then interpreted using the Department of Education (DepEd) grading scale as stated in DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015 – Classroom Assessment Policy.

The Mean Percentage Score (MPS) was computed using the following formula:

$$\text{MPS} = \frac{\text{Total Raw Score}}{\text{Number of Students}} \div \text{Number of Items} \times 100$$

Descriptors	Grading Scale	Remarks
Outstanding	90-100	Passed
Very Satisfactory	85-89	Passed
Satisfactory	80-84	Passed
Fairly Satisfactory	79-79	Passed
Did Not Meet Expectations	Below 75	Failed

To find out whether there is a significant difference between the pupils' performance before and after the implementation of phonics-based instruction, the paired sample t-test was used.

$$t = \frac{X_1 - X_2}{S_D / \sqrt{n}}$$

$\bar{X}_1$ = Mean of pre-test scores

$\bar{X}_2$ = Mean of post-test scores

SDS_DSD = Standard deviation of differences

n = Number of paired observations

The computed t -value was compared to the critical t -value at a 0.05 level of significance. If the computed value exceeds the critical value, it indicates a significant improvement in literacy performance after the intervention.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the level of early literacy skills of Grade 1 pupils before the implementation of phonics-based instruction. Out of the 22 pupils assessed, none achieved the Outstanding or Very Satisfactory level. Seven pupils (30.91%) reached the Satisfactory level, indicating that they could recognize letter sounds and decode simple words but still needed improvement in reading fluency. Meanwhile, nine pupils (42.73%) were categorized as Fairly Satisfactory. These pupils could recognize some letter sounds but had difficulty blending phonemes and decoding consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words independently. In addition, six pupils (27.27%) were classified as Did Not Meet Expectations, indicating that they experienced significant difficulty in recognizing letter sounds and decoding words. The computed overall mean of 2.30 with a standard deviation of 0.77 indicates that the early literacy level of the pupils before the intervention was Fairly Satisfactory. This result suggests that many pupils still had difficulties in phonemic awareness and decoding skills prior to the implementation of phonics-based instruction. These findings are supported by Ehri (2021), who emphasized that phonemic awareness is crucial for early reading success, as learners who struggle with sound recognition and decoding often have difficulty developing reading fluency.

Table 1

Level of Early Literacy Skills among Grade 1 Pupils Before the Implementation of Phonics-Based Instruction

Descriptor	Frequency	Percentage
O	0	0%
VS	0	0%
S	7	30.91%
FS	9	42.73%
DNE	6	27.27%
Total	22	100%

(Legend: O-Outstanding, VS-Very Satisfactory, S-Satisfactory, FS-Fairly Satisfactory, DNE-Did Not Meet Expectations)

Overall Mean: 2.30

Standard Deviation: 0.77

Interpretation: Fairly Satisfactory

Table 2

Level of Early Literacy Skills among Grade 1 Pupils After the Implementation of Phonics-Based Instruction

Descriptor	Frequency	Percentage
O	0	0%
VS	7	31.82%
S	15	68.18%
FS	0	0%
DNE	0	0%
Total	22	100%

(Legend: O-Outstanding, VS-Very Satisfactory, S-Satisfactory, FS-Fairly Satisfactory, DNE-Did Not Meet Expectations)

Overall Mean: 3.34

Standard Deviation: 0.48

Interpretation: Satisfactory

Table 2 presents the level of early literacy skills of Grade 1 pupils after the implementation of phonics-based instruction. The results show a noticeable improvement in literacy performance. Out of the 22 pupils assessed, fifteen pupils (68.18%) achieved the Satisfactory level, while seven pupils (31.82%) reached the Very Satisfactory level. This indicates that the majority of pupils were able to recognize letter sounds accurately and decode words independently after the intervention. Notably, no pupils were categorized as Fairly Satisfactory or Did Not Meet Expectations. The computed overall mean of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.48 indicates that the pupils' early literacy skills after the intervention were Satisfactory. This shows a clear improvement compared to the pre-intervention result, which was only Fairly Satisfactory. The findings indicate that phonics-based instruction helped improve pupils' decoding skills, word recognition, and reading fluency. These results are supported by Adams (2021), who stated that systematic phonics instruction significantly improves children's ability to read and recognize words independently.

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Findings

1. The post-assessment results indicate that Grade 1 pupils showed significant improvement after six weeks of structured phonics-based instruction. The overall mean score increased from **2.03** in the pre-test to 3.34 in the post-test, with a standard deviation decreasing from

- 3.57 to 0.48, suggesting more consistent performance across pupils. The paired-sample t-test confirmed that this improvement was highly significant ($t = 40.75$, $df = 217$, $p < 0.001$).
2. Analysis of skill indicators shows that pupils achieved at least Satisfactory performance, with 68% reaching Satisfactory and 32% achieving Very Satisfactory levels. Pupils demonstrated accurate recognition of letter sounds, blending of phonemes, correct decoding of simple words, and improved fluency and confidence in reading.¹

Conclusions

The study concludes that structured phonics-based instruction is highly effective in improving early literacy skills among Grade 1 pupils. Pupils showed significant gains in letter-sound recognition, word decoding, reading fluency, and reading confidence. Teacher interviews confirmed that integrating phonics into daily reading lessons fosters accurate reading and comprehension, supporting quantitative improvements observed in pre- and post-tests.

Overall, the research demonstrates that when phonics is taught in a systematic, engaging, and practical way, it can significantly bridge literacy gaps in young learners, making reading instruction more effective and meaningful.

Recommendations

Continue using systematic phonics-based instruction by providing daily practice in letter-sound recognition, blending, and decoding to help pupils strengthen their foundational reading skills. Teachers should also incorporate reading fluency activities, such as guided and repeated reading, to build pupils' confidence and improve their reading accuracy and speed. In addition, regular use of formative assessments is important to monitor pupils' progress and identify those who may need additional support or intervention in their reading development.

Action Research Work Plan and Timelines

Phase / Period	Activities	Description / Expected Output
Week 1	Preparation and Pre-Assessment	Conduct orientation for teachers and pupils; administer pre-test to determine baseline literacy levels; finalize instructional

		materials. Output: Baseline data and prepared material
Weeks 2–7	Implementation of Phonics-Based Instruction	Conduct daily 30-minute phonics sessions focusing on sound-letter correspondence, decoding, sight word recognition, and comprehension activities using multisensory approaches. Output: Improved phonemic awareness, decoding, and reading fluency among pupils.
Week 8	Post-Assessment and Data Collection	Administer post-test and gather qualitative data from classroom observations and teacher reflections. <i>Output:</i> Post-intervention literacy data and observation records.
Week 9	Data Analysis	Perform statistical analysis (paired t-test) and thematic analysis of qualitative data to determine literacy improvement. Output: Summary of findings and interpretation of results.
Week 10	Report Writing and Dissemination	Prepare the final action research report; present findings during LAC session; upload to DepEd E-Saliksik portal. Output: Completed report and dissemination materials.

Cost Estimates

Materials (phonics charts, flashcards, activity sheets): 500

Printing and supplies: 400

Miscellaneous (documentation, transportation): 300

Total: ₱1,200

Plans for Dissemination and Utilization

The findings will be shared with fellow teachers during Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions and conferences so they can also reflect its importance and implications. Results will inform reading program adjustments and be uploaded to the DepEd E-Saliksik repository for wider dissemination.

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Appendix A
Informed Consent/Assent Form

Appendix A



Republic of the Philippines
J.H. CERILLES STATE COLLEGE
 DUMINGAG CAMPUS
 Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur



MELJOVIN F. DELA CRUZ
 School Principal
 Dumingag Central Elementary School
 San Pablo, Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur

Sir:

Greetings of peace!

We, the undersigned student-researchers of J.H. Cerilles State College-Dumingag Campus, are currently working on our action research titled, "**Using Phonics-Based Instruction To Improve Early Literacy Skills among Grade 1 Pupils**". This study aims to determine the level of early literacy skills among the grade 1 regular pupils, Section Yellow and to determine how Phonics-Based Instruction helps them to Improve their Early Literacy Skills. The research will involve classroom observations, interviews, and the implementation designed to encourage engagement and confidence among pupils. Observation checklists, interview guides, and participation rating scales will serve as the primary research instruments.

We respectfully request your approval to conduct this study at Dumingag Central Elementary School and to allow the participation of Grade 1 pupils under the supervision of their classroom adviser. Rest assured that the research will uphold the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and ethical conduct. Parental consent and pupil assent will be obtained prior to data collection.

We sincerely hope for your favorable consideration and support of this endeavor. Thank you very much for your time and understanding.

Respectfully yours,

ANGELIE D. JOAQUIN

GENEVIE S. EBARSABAL

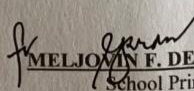
NIVIE ANGEL G. MAGLANGIT

JO-ANDIEL T. SIMBAJON.

JENICA T. SANTANDER

(Researchers).

Approved:


MELJOVIN F. DELA CRUZ Ed.D
 School Principal

Zamboanga Peninsula

Appendix B

I: Test Type- Pre-test & Post-test

Zamboanga Peninsula

Name: _____

Date: _____

Scale:	Interpretation:
5	Outstanding
4	Very Satisfactory
3	Satisfactory
2	Fairly Satisfactory
1	Did Not Meet Expectation

Directions: The teacher will assess the pupil's reading skills. Place ✓ in the column that best describes the level of performance demonstrated by the pupil.

No.	Skill Indicator	5 (O)	4 (VS)	3 (S)	2 (FS)	1 (DNE)
1	Recognizes letter sounds correctly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Identifies consonant sounds correctly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Identifies short vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, u)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Blends letter sounds to form simple words	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Reads simple CVC words	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Pronounces words clearly while reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Reads simple words independently	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Reads short sentences with minimal assistance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Shows confidence while reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Reads short sentences fluently	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Interview For Teachers

1. How do you incorporate phonics-based instruction into your reading sessions?

Start with a quick sound warm-up, then we spot sound patterns in what we read. We practice blending sounds to make words, and tie it to spelling when we write too.

2. What specific phonemic awareness activities do you use with your pupils?

I Spy' for first/last sounds, and using little boxes to count how many sounds are in a word. We clap or use letter tiles to make it stick.

3. How do you ensure all pupils, including struggling readers, participate actively?

"Split into small groups so I can help those who need it most. Keep tasks simple for struggling kids, use partner work so they're not alone, and make it fun with games – plus lots of praise to keep them going.

4. Which instructional strategies seem most effective for improving decoding and comprehension?

Teaching sound patterns one step at a time works best for decoding.

5. What challenges have you encountered while implementing phonics-based lessons (e.g., time, materials, learner diversity)?

Some kids need extra support, some of them has a short attention span.

6. What improvements have you observed in your pupils' reading performance since applying phonics-based instruction?

"Kids don't guess words anymore – they sound them out. They read more correctly and smoothly, so they can actually follow what the story says. Even kids who used to hate reading seem more confident now.

Pre-test:

Scale:	Interpretation:
5	Outstanding
4	Very Satisfactory
3	Satisfactory
2	Fairly Satisfactory
1	Did Not Meet Expectation

Skill indicators	5(O)	4(VS)	3(S)	2(FS)	1(DNE)
1.recognizes letter sounds correctly			10	7	5
2.Identifies consonant sounds correctly			10	7	5
3.identifies short vowel sounds (a,e,i,o,u)			7	10	5
4.blends letter sounds to form simple words			6	10	6
5.reads simple CVC words			5	13	4
6.pronounces words clearly while reading			6	7	9
7.reads simple words independently			6	8	8
8.reads short sentences with minimal assistance			6	13	3
9.shows confidence while reading			6	9	7
10.read short sentences fluently			6	7	9

Post-test:

Scale:	Interpretation:
5	Outstanding
4	Very Satisfactory
3	Satisfactory
2	Fairly Satisfactory
1	Did Not Meet Expectation

Skill indicators	5(O)	4(VS)	3(S)	2(FS)	1(DNE)
1.recognizes letter sounds correctly		8	14		
2.Identifies consonant sounds correctly		6	16		
3.identifies short vowel sounds (a,e,i,o,u)		12	10		
4.blends letter sounds to form simple words		9	13		
5.reads simple CVC words		8	14		
6.pronounces words clearly while reading		7	15		
7.reads simple words independently		7	15		
8.reads short sentences with minimal assistance		7	15		
9.shows confidence while reading		5	17		
10.read short sentences fluently		6	14		