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Research Article

Teachers' Readiness in Phonemic Awareness Instructions and the Reading Performance of the Grade II Pupils Zone 4, Division of Zambales

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ABSTRACT

Before a child learns to read printed materials, they need to become aware of how sounds in words work. Thus, a child needs to be phonemically aware to become a reader. One factor that could be associated with this is the readiness of teachers in phonemic awareness concepts before they teach for the pupils to spontaneously acquire phonemic awareness. This study of teachers' readiness in PA (Phonemic Awareness) instructions' relationship to reading performance of Grade 2 pupils builds upon this body of research by utilizing descriptive correlational research. This study examined further the relationship of the eighteen (18) teacher respondents' profile and their readiness in PA Instructions which revealed that highest educational attainment variable and attendance to seminars, trainings and workshops focusing on phonemic awareness is moderately associated with their readiness in PA instructions. Participants of the study are 497 Grade 2 pupils from nine (9) schools in Zone 4 Division of Zambales. Results revealed an improvement in the reading performance of the pupil participants, through a PHIL-IRI (Philippine Informal Reading Inventory Test- Oral Reading Test), as a result of highlighted readiness in PA Instructions. The conclusion that there is a significant relationship of the teachers' readiness in PA instructions and reading performance of Grade 2 pupils offer important information for teachers, educational leaders and other professionals to conduct professional development activities such as seminars, training, and workshops to ensure that the teachers are updated to the needs of the present generation of learners. Similar findings lead to the recommendation for future studies to include investigation into the relationship between the use of phonemic awareness instructional materials with fidelity and pupil achievement particularly in reading.

Keywords: Phonemic Awareness, Teacher Readiness, Reading Performance, Early Literacy, Grade II Pupils, Instructional Strategies, Zambales Division

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Background

In most cases, non-readers, slow readers and readers at risk are common in the classroom especially during the pupil's first two years in school. How often do beginning readers struggle because they lack thousands of hours of pre - rereading requisites many of their peers experienced? In Primary Grades classroom setting, this is normal yet a big hindrance that needs effective reading instructions to deal with. Based on the PHIL-IRI (Philippine Informal Reading Inventory Test – Oral Reading Test in English) results of this study, out of 497 Grade 2 pupils, 45 or 9.05 % were non-readers and 277 or 55.73 % of them falls under the frustration reading level. This is an alarming situation that most teachers are looking for answers on how to find solutions and stop the burden of having non-readers. There are lots of activities and instructions to be applied to develop these pupils. One of which is the phonemic awareness (PA) instructions. But the question is, how ready is the teacher in employing the PA instructions among the Grade 2 pupils? According to Armbruster, Lehr & Ed (2003). Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read. Phonemic awareness (PA) is the ability to identify, hear, and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words. Manipulating the sounds in words includes blending, stretching, or otherwise changing words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes. There is a need for a child to know how to manipulate the sounds within the spoken words. Being familiar with the alphabets alone does not mean that a child can read, but being familiar with the sounds of each letter in words, a child can easily distinguish the link between the print and the sound. Thus, helps the child to be phonemically aware and will become a reader. On the other hand, there is a need also for the educators to be knowledgeable in facilitating instructions on phonemic awareness in order for a child to be guided properly on his/her reading skills development. Primary teachers have important role in providing the phonemic awareness

skills for their pupils. Without the comprehensive understanding on the role of phonemic awareness skills, teacher may omit particular skills from their instructional practice that may place the learners at risk of reading difficulties. Since PA instructions is considered important in reading achievement, and since it guides the learners to develop from oral communication to becoming a reader, it is essential that it will always be included in the remedial reading or enrichment activities and it must always be visible in a primary classroom. The phonemic awareness instructions include the Rhyme/Aliteration; Oddity Tasks; Oral Blending; Oral Segmentation; Phonemic Manipulation and Linking Sounds to Spelling. These PA activities are usually employed by the primary teachers. They were doing these but they are not familiar or knowledgeable with the specific term for such activities. As the researcher have browsed and examined the curriculum guides, teacher's lesson plan and pupils' learning materials, phonemic awareness instructions are included. In this study, the researcher would like to determine the readiness of Grade 2 teachers in phonemic awareness instructions and its relation to the reading performance of the Grade II pupils.

Methods

Phonemic awareness has gathered momentum as a valuable tool to enhance children's abilities to read. In 1995, the California Department of Education focused on a better approach to reading through Superintendent's Reading Task Force called Every Child a Reader. The Reading Task Force report called for a balanced and comprehensive approach to early reading instruction and the activities and strategies most often associated with literature-based, integrated language arts" (California department of education, 1996). This current instructional component of a balanced and comprehensive early reading program is phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness falls under the larger umbrella of phonological awareness, and is a refinement of phonological awareness. Smith, Simmons, & Kame'enui (1998) stated that phonemic awareness is the "conscious ability to detect and manipulate

sounds (e.g., move, combine, and delete), access to the sound structure of language, awareness of sounds in spoken words in contrast to written words." Uhry (1999) described phonological awareness as paying attention to larger parts of oral language such as sentences and/or whole words, while phonemic awareness focuses on the individual sounds in words; meaning is never a consideration. Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds in words. In its simplest definition, it is the ability to delete, segment, and combine speech sounds into its abstract units. Although children will be able to hear phonemes, they may not be able to conceptualize them as units. This concept is even more complex than this description would suggest. Phonemic awareness must be based on a growing understanding of the alphabetic principle of English. There is sufficient evidence that many children basically understand this concept before they have been taught and have mastered the set of letter-to-sound correspondence (Adams, 1990). Furthermore, Phonemic awareness is the understanding that spoken words consists of a series of individual sounds (Ball and Blachman, 1991) which the linguist refer as the phonemes. It is the ability to focus on and manipulate phoneme in the spoken word (Ehri, Nunes Willows and Schuster, 2001).

Phonemic awareness is a cognitive skill which involves three elements—the phonemes, the explicit and conscious awareness to these linguistic units and the ability to explicitly manipulate such units (Hoover, 2002). Phonemes are the smallest parts of a sound in a spoken word that makes a difference in the word's meaning. The second element means that every child must know phonemes to learn the language. The third element means that the child must know the sound in spoken words to have mastery on letter and phonemic units.

Phonemic awareness is not an all-or -nothing trait which is either present or absent. Rather, it entails distinctive levels ranging from primitive to more advanced ones which reflect a growing understanding to the sound structure of language (Adams, 1990; Blevins, 1997; Hempenstall, 2003). Adams (1990) identified five level of phonemic awareness: 1) the ability

to hear rhymes and alliterations; 2) the ability to do oddity tasks; 3) the ability to blend separate sounds into words and split syllables orally; 4) ability to segment words orally into component phonemes and 5) the ability to manipulate phonemes by deleting or substituting the initial consonants of words. Blevins (1997) on the other hand, agreed with idea of Adam and summarizes the five levels of phonemic awareness as 1) rhyme and alliteration; 2) oddity tasks; 3) oral blending; 4) oral segmentation; 5) phonemic manipulation. Rhyming is one of the first concepts of phonemic awareness that pupils easily learn. Rhyming is the ability to hear two words that end the same way. Listening to and saying nursery rhymes or repetitive rhyming refrains helps learners hear rhyme. At later stages, they are able to produce the rhyming word. Alliteration or matching sounds on the other hand, can be series of words with the same beginning consonant sounds. Oddity Tasks includes identification of rhyming words, beginning consonants, ending consonants and medial sounds of a word. Oral Blending requires that learners put speech sounds together to make a word. Oral segmentation, this occurs when students are to separate the sounds they hear by phonemes (cat into /c/a/t/), syllables (mother into mo-ther), or onsets and rimes (pet into /p/et/). Children who are able to segment sounds can begin to learn to write the letters for the sounds they hear. In Phoneme manipulation, pupils are able to change one phoneme to another to make a new word. Lastly, Linking Sounds to spelling, if pupils will be able to do the varied PA activities they will be able spell words.

Teachers can use many activities to build the phonemic awareness of a child. These PA tasks includes: 1. Phoneme isolation – recognizing individual sounds in words. "Tell me the first sound in sun." (/s/); 2. Phoneme Identity – recognizing the common sound in different words. "Tell me the sound that is the same in bike, boy, bell" /b/; 3. Phoneme Categorization – recognizing the word with the odd sound in a sequence of 3 or 4 words. "Tell me the word that does not belong. "bus, bun, rug" /rug/; 4. Phoneme Blending – listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combining them to form a recognizable word. "What word is /h/

/a/ /t/? -hat; 5. Phoneme Segmentation – breaking a word into its sounds or by pronouncing or positioning a marker for each sound. “How many sounds/phonemes do you hear in bell? /b/ /e/ /l/ - 3; 6. Phoneme Manipulation can be through phoneme deletion and phoneme addition. Phoneme Deletion – stating

the word that remains when a specified phoneme is removed like “What is smile without /s/? mile; Phoneme Addition – stating the word that is formed when a specified phoneme is added like “What is pot with /s/? pots.” (Armbruster, Lehr, and Osborn, 2001).

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Teacher Respondents' Profile

Variable	Range	Frequency	%
AGE	20 – 30	1	5.56
	31 – 40	7	38.88
	41 – 50	8	44.44
	51 – 60	1	5.56
	61 – 65	1	5.56
Number of Years of Teaching Experience	0 – 5 years	3	16.67
	6 – 10 years	1	5.56
	11 – 20 years	9	50.00
	Over 20 years	5	27.77
Years of Teaching in Grade 2 Level	0 – 5 years	7	38.89
	6 – 10 years	3	16.67
	11 – 20 years	5	27.77
	Over 20 years	3	16.67
Years of Teaching English Subject	0 – 5 years	4	22.22
	6 – 10 years	3	16.67
	11 – 20 years	8	44.44
	Over 20 years	3	16.67
Highest Educational Attainment	BEED/BSED	12	66.67
	Masters Units	5	41.67
	FAR/CAR	0	0
	MAED	1	5.56
	Doctorate Degree	0	0
Number of Hours	0 hours	15	83.32
	16 hours	1	5.56
	48 hours	1	5.56
	64 hours	1	5.56

Seven or 38.89% of the teacher respondents are teaching in Grade 2 level for at least 5 years, while there three (3) who had been teaching the same grade level of pupils for 6-10

years. It is also shown on the table that 44.44% or 8 out of the 18 respondents are teaching in Grade 2 for more than eleven years.

Table 2
Frequency of Correct Answers on the Teacher's Readiness Test in
Phonemic Awareness Instruction

Teacher Respondents	Identifying the PA Terms & PA Tasks	Determining the PA Level of Pupils	Applying the Appropriate PA Instructions	TOTAL	Qualitative Equivalent
Teacher 1	10	5	16	31	Ready
Teacher 2	10	6	17	33	Ready
Teacher 3	10	3	13	26	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 4	8	9	12	29	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 5	8	8	10	26	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 6	5	9	10	24	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 7	12	6	10	28	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 8	9	2	9	20	Developing Readiness
Teacher 9	10	9	18	37	Ready
Teacher 10	9	4	16	29	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 11	11	9	18	38	Ready
Teacher 12	11	8	18	37	Ready
Teacher 13	12	9	7	28	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 14	11	8	7	26	Approaching Readiness
Teacher 15	10	5	16	31	Ready
Teacher 16	10	5	17	32	Ready
Teacher 17	9	12	19	40	Ready
Teacher 18	12	11	14	37	Ready
Mean	9.83	7.11	13.72		30.67 (Ready)

Gleaned from the table, the teacher respondents scored a mean of 9.83 out of the 12 items. This includes the awareness of the teach-

ers on synthesis of phonemes into words, segmentation at multiple phonological levels, phoneme deletion and substitution.

Table 3
Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Pupil Participants
According to Level of Reading Performance

Level	Word Recognition		Reading Comprehension		Overall Reading Performance	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Non-Reader	68	13.68	3	0.60	9	1.81
Frustration	181	36.42	56	11.27	128	15.76
Instructional	157	31.59	285	57.34	225	45.27
Independent	91	18.31	153	30.79	135	27.16
TOTAL	497	100	497	100	497	100

As shown on the table, there were only 91 pupils (18.31%) out of 497 of the participants are on Independent level in terms of word recognition, 157 pupils are on Instructional level, 181 on Frustration level, and 68 are categorized as Non-readers. Majority (36.42%) of the pupils are still in the Frustration Level when it comes to their word recognition skills. The ability to recognize that words are made up of discrete sounds and that these sounds can be

changed is essential to success in learning to read (Lundberg, Frost, & Petersen, 1988; Hoffman, Cunningham, Cunningham, & Yopp, 1998). Beginning readers must also be able to make the connection that words are made up of sounds and that sounds are made up of letters and letter combinations (Gunning, 1996). This understanding is the foundation on which to build solid reading skills.

Table 4
Correlation between Teacher's Readiness
and Profile of Teacher Respondents

		Teachers Readiness	AGE	Teaching Experience	Current Grade Level	English Subject	Highest Educational Attainment	Trainings Seminars
Teachers' Readiness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.258	-.427	.630*	.271*	.263*	.191*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.301	.077	.005	.028	.029	.045
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
AGE	Correlation Coefficient	-.258	1.000	.647**	.413	.175	-.079	-.211
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.301	.	.004	.088	.488	.756	.400
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Teaching Experience	Correlation Coefficient	-.427	.647*	1.000	.818**	.737**	-.177	-.046
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.077	.004	.	.000	.000	.482	.855
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Current Grade Level	Correlation Coefficient	.630*	.413	.818**	1.000	.716**	-.274	-.211
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.088	.000	.	.001	.271	.400
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
English Subject	Correlation Coefficient	.271*	.175	.737**	.716**	1.000	.048	.181
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.488	.000	.001	.	.850	.471
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Highest Educational Attainment	Correlation Coefficient	.263*	-.079	-.177	-.274	.048	1.000	.015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.756	.482	.271	.850	.	.952
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Trainings Seminars	Correlation Coefficient	.191*	-.211	-.046	-.211	.181	.015	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	.400	.855	.400	.471	.952	.
	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Results of the test revealed the there is no significant relationship between the Teacher's Readiness in PA Instruction and the profile variables Age ($r = -0.258$) and Teaching Experience($r = -0.427$) which are both not significant at 0.05 level. This adheres to the study of Scrivner (2009) that the readiness to PA Instructions does not depend on the teachers' age and the length of service in the teaching profession. There is a significant relationship between teachers' Readiness in PA Instructions and the number of years teaching in the Grade II Level ($r = 0.630$) which implies a moderate positive relationship, and the number of years

teaching English subject ($r = 0.271$), weak positive relationship. This shows that at 0.05 alpha level, teacher's readiness is significantly associated on their experience in teaching the current Grade II level and teaching English Subject, (Harris, Danna – 2016). Correlation also revealed that there is a significant relationship between Readiness in PA Instruction and teachers' Highest Educational Attainment ($r = 0.263$) which implies weak positive relationship, and the Trainings/Workshops/Seminars attended ($r = 0.191$) which both implies weak positive relationship and significant at 0.05 level.

Table 5
Correlation between Teacher's Readiness
and Level of Reading Performance of Grade 2 Pupils

		Teachers' Readiness	Level of Reading Performance
Teachers' Readiness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.440**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.002
	N	497	497
Level of Reading Performance	Correlation Coefficient	0.440**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.
	N	497	497

It can be gleaned that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between the Teacher's Readiness in PA Instruction and the Level of Reading Performance of pupils. This means that the reading performance of pupils is associated on the readiness of teachers in phonemic awareness instruction. Moreover, the improved phonemic awareness of pupils affected the level of reading performance of the pupils which could be accounted for by the teacher's awareness in PA Instruction. It is therefore critical that teachers are familiar with the concept of phonemic awareness before they teach for the pupils to spontaneously acquire phonemic awareness (Neuman, Copple, and Bredekamp – 2000).

Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers' readiness in PA instructions is positively related to number of years in teaching Grade 2 ($r = 0.630$); numbers of years in teaching the English subject ($r = 0.271$) and attendance to training / seminar / workshops on Phonemic Awareness Instructions ($r = 0.191$) at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$. Furthermore, it concludes that teachers' readiness in PA instructions is associated with the reading performance ($r = 0.440$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$) of Grade 2 pupils of Zone 4, Division of Zambales. Based on the gathered data and analysis of the results, the researcher came with the following: 1. Majority (83.32%) of the teacher respondents, are between 31 to 50 years. 2. Fourteen (77.77%) out of 18 teacher respondents are in the teaching profession for more than 10 years. 3. Seven (38.89%) out of 18 teacher respondents are teaching in Grade 2 for at least 5 years. 4. Five (27.77%) out of 18 respondents are teaching in Grade 2 for no less than eleven years. Eleven (11) out of eighteen (18) or 61.11% of the teacher respondents are teaching English subject for more than 11 years. 5. Majority (67.77%) of the teacher respondents are graduates of Baccalaureate Degree while 5 or 41.67% are pursuing their master's degree at present. Only 1 (5.56%) of the respondents is a full pledged MAED. Majority (83.32%) of the teacher respondents had no training/workshop/seminar in connection to PA Instructions. Only 3 of them or 16.68% of the respondents have attended

trainings and seminars. 6. One (1) out of the 18 teacher respondents is on Developing Readiness level, while the majority belongs to Approaching Readiness and Ready Level. On the average (30.67 or 31), the teacher respondents are Ready for the Phonemic Awareness Instructions. 7. Of the 497 pupils. Nine (9 or 1.81 %) were non-reader while 135 (27.16 %) were Independent readers. Majority (61.13%) were either Frustration or Instructional reader. 8. Teacher's Readiness was found out to be positively related to the number of years in teaching Grade 2 with $r = 0.630$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$ 9. It was found positively related to number of years in teaching the English subject with $r = 0.271$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$ 10. It was also found positively related to highest educational attainment with $r = 0.263$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$ 11. Likewise, it was found positively related to trainings/workshops/seminars attended with $r = 0.191$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$ 12. Teacher's readiness in PA Instruction was found to have moderate positively relationship with level of reading performance with $r = 0.440$ at $\alpha = .05$ and $df = 17$

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