

Socio-Cognitive Factors and Processes in Learning Beginning Reading Skills Using the Marungko Approach among Struggling Kindergarten Learners

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Abstract

This study examined the development of beginning reading skills among struggling kindergarten learners through the Marungko Approach while exploring the socio-cognitive factors that influence early literacy acquisition. Guided by Langer's socio-cognitive perspective of reading, the study investigated how cognitive processes and sociodemographic characteristics contribute to learners' beginning reading development. A mixed-methods case study employing a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design and qualitative case study with ethnographic processes was conducted among five purposively selected struggling kindergarten learners from Mandaluyong Addition Hills Elementary School during School Year 2024–2025. Data were collected using the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist, a researcher-developed Marungko Assessment Tool, observation checklists, mental noting, video recordings, parent interviews, and validated instructional materials. Quantitative analysis compared learners' pretest and posttest performance, while qualitative analysis examined learners' cognitive processes, learning experiences, and sociodemographic influences on reading development. The findings revealed significant improvements in picture recognition, letter-sound recognition, sound blending, recognition of Filipino function words, and reading of words, phrases, and simple sentences following the implementation of the Marungko Approach, although letter-writing improvement was not statistically significant. The intervention enabled learners to progress from recognizing letters and sounds to decoding words and comprehending connected text. The findings further showed that beginning reading development is shaped by multisensory learning, scaffolding, modeling, guided practice, repetition, parental involvement, and home literacy practices. The study concludes that the Marungko Approach effectively strengthens beginning reading skills among struggling kindergarten learners and recommends integrating socio-cognitive principles into early literacy instruction, reinforcing home-school partnerships, and developing literacy programs that consider learners' cognitive and social contexts. The study supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education by promoting effective and inclusive early literacy instruction and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities by addressing learning gaps among struggling readers. It also contributes to educational, community, and institutional sustainability by providing evidence that can strengthen literacy instruction and collaborative home-school support for young learners.

Keywords: Beginning Reading Skills, Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist, Kindergarten Learners, Marungko Approach, Mixed-Methods Case Study, Socio-Cognitive Development, Socio-Cognitive Factors, Struggling Readers

1. Introduction

Reading is a foundational skill that supports academic achievement, language development, and lifelong learning. Despite extensive literacy programs and interventions, early reading difficulties remain a significant concern globally and in the Philippines. International and national assessments continue to reveal low reading proficiency among young learners, highlighting the need for effective early literacy interventions. Research consistently emphasizes that phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, and early reading experiences are essential predictors of later academic success (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Kilpatrick, 2020; Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2020). This study examines the development of beginning reading skills among struggling kindergarten learners through the Marungko Approach while considering the socio-cognitive factors that influence reading acquisition.

1.1 Background of Beginning Reading Skills among Struggling Kindergarten Learners

Reading serves as the foundation for learning across all academic disciplines, making early literacy development a critical educational priority (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; Duke & Cartwright, 2023; Nation, 2022). However, reading difficulties continue to challenge Philippine basic education despite the implementation of numerous literacy programs. International assessments have identified a learning crisis in the country. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the World Bank's Learning Poverty report demonstrate that many Filipino learners continue to

experience difficulties in foundational reading (OECD, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Likewise, earlier OECD education reports emphasize the need for sustained literacy reforms (OECD, 2021). These findings underscore the urgent need to strengthen foundational literacy during the early years. Research further demonstrates that phonemic awareness and explicit phonics instruction are among the strongest predictors of beginning reading success, while strong early literacy skills contribute to long-term academic achievement (Kilpatrick, 2020; Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2020).

1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Beginning Reading Skills and the Marungko Approach

The reviewed literature consistently identifies foundational reading skills as progressing from phonemic awareness and phonics to decoding, word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. These interrelated skills enable learners to transition from recognizing letter-sound relationships to constructing meaning from text (Kilpatrick, 2020). Studies likewise emphasize that systematic and explicit phonics instruction effectively prevents reading difficulties and promotes fluent reading (Kilpatrick, 2020; Buckingham et al., 2022; Bowers, 2020; Greg, 2020). For Filipino learners, the Marungko Approach provides a structured phonics-based method that introduces letters according to their sounds rather than alphabetical order (Borabo et al., 2007; Boltron & Ramos, 2021; Balgua et al., 2022; Bernabe, 2024; Mabuti et al., 2024; Repaso & Macalisang, 2024; Valerio & Bautista, 2023). This approach is designed to strengthen beginning reading skills by systematically developing learners' ability to recognize sounds, blend syllables, and read meaningful words and sentences. The literature further highlights that while many studies demonstrate improvements in learners' reading performance through the Marungko Approach, most focus primarily on quantitative outcomes and provide limited discussion of the cognitive and socio-cognitive processes underlying reading development.

1.3 Global, National, and Local Context of Beginning Reading among Struggling Kindergarten Learners

Globally, many children continue to experience reading difficulties. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that only about one-third of fourth-grade learners achieved proficient reading levels, while many struggled with basic reading skills and comprehension. Early intervention studies likewise show that children who begin school with reading difficulties frequently fail to catch up without timely support. English Language Learners also demonstrate lower reading proficiency, emphasizing the importance of targeted literacy interventions. Nationally, the Department of Education has implemented several initiatives, including Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP), Project D.E.A.R., Reading Assistance Program, Summer Reading Camp, and National Reading Month, to strengthen early literacy. Nevertheless, Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) results and learning recovery reports continue to demonstrate persistent reading gaps among Filipino learners (Department of Education, 2018, 2021). Post-pandemic assessments further indicate substantial learning gaps, particularly among learners in rural and under-resourced schools. At the local level, Mandaluyong Addition Hills Elementary School continues to experience a considerable number of non-readers among Grades 1 to 3, based on Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment results. These findings reinforce the need for effective instructional approaches such as the Marungko Approach, which emphasizes systematic letter-sound instruction suited to Filipino beginning readers (Department of Education, 2011).

1.4 Socio-Cognitive and Reading Theories Underpinning the Marungko Approach

This study is grounded in the socio-cognitive perspective of reading, which views reading development as the product of interactions between cognitive processes and social experiences (Langer, 1996). Rather than considering reading as merely decoding written symbols, the theory emphasizes that learners actively construct meaning through social interaction, cultural experiences, and guided instruction. Langer's theory of envisionment building explains that readers develop understanding by connecting prior knowledge, social contexts, and textual information. This perspective further explains how readers build disciplinary literacy and academic understanding through meaningful engagement with texts (Langer, 2011). Guided by this framework, the study views the Marungko Approach as an instructional strategy whose effectiveness is shaped by both cognitive development and sociocultural influences during early literacy acquisition.

1.5 Research Gaps on the Socio-Cognitive Development of Beginning Reading Skills

Existing international and local studies consistently demonstrate that the Marungko Approach improves beginning reading skills, largely through experimental designs measuring learners' reading performance (Saljurga, 2021). However, previous research has given limited attention to the cognitive processes involved in reading acquisition and to the influence of sociodemographic characteristics on learners' reading development. Furthermore, most studies focus on achievement outcomes rather than examining reading as a socio-cognitive process. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates how cognitive and sociodemographic factors interact in the development of beginning reading skills among struggling kindergarten learners using the Marungko Approach.

1.6 Alignment of the Study with Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education

The study aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education by contributing evidence that supports effective early literacy instruction and equitable access to foundational reading skills. Strengthening beginning reading competencies through evidence-based instructional approaches such as the Marungko Approach promotes inclusive and quality education for young learners. The study also supports SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities by addressing learning gaps among struggling readers through early

intervention. These alignments are supported by the study's emphasis on improving foundational literacy and reducing disparities in early reading achievement.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Educational and Socio-Economic Sustainability

The study contributes primarily to educational sustainability by generating evidence that can improve early literacy instruction, curriculum development, and teacher practices. It also supports socio-economic sustainability, as strong literacy skills provide the foundation for lifelong learning and future educational opportunities. In addition, the study contributes to community and institutional sustainability by informing educators, curriculum developers, policymakers, and parents about strategies that strengthen beginning reading development through collaborative home-school support and evidence-based instructional practices.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods case study design involving five struggling kindergarten learners. The quantitative phase utilized a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design to determine changes in beginning reading skills before and after exposure to the Marungko Approach. A quasi-experimental design examines the effect of an intervention without randomly assigning participants to groups, often using existing groups for comparison (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative phase employed a case study with ethnographic processes, including prolonged classroom observation, close interaction with learners, and documentation of their behaviors, responses, and learning experiences in their natural setting. These approaches enabled the researcher to design appropriate instructional materials, monitor learner progress, and provide timely interventions. Participants were selected through teacher referrals and alphabet knowledge results indicating substantial difficulties in letter-sound recognition and word decoding. The study followed a three-phase process consisting of participant selection and baseline assessment, intervention and concurrent data collection, and post-intervention assessment with validation interviews.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Mandaluyong Addition Hills Elementary School (MAHES) in Barangay Addition Hills, Mandaluyong City. The school has approximately 2,400 pupils, including twelve kindergarten sections. The research was carried out in the Kinder-Orange and Kinder-Yellow classes under the supervision of the researcher. Reading intervention sessions were conducted for thirty minutes after regular class hours upon securing permission from the Schools Division Office, the school administration, and the participants' parents or guardians.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The participants consisted of five struggling kindergarten learners enrolled at Mandaluyong Addition Hills Elementary School during School Year 2024–2025. Selection was based on the results of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist, particularly the language domain indicating slight developmental delay. The participants, aged five to six years, demonstrated difficulties in identifying letters and their corresponding sounds, while several also experienced challenges in letter writing, capitalization, and recognizing Filipino words. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to maintain confidentiality throughout the study.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select five kindergarten learners who exhibited significant beginning reading difficulties. Participants were identified through teacher referrals and the results of the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist, focusing on learners with difficulties in letter-sound recognition and word decoding. All participants were in their first year of formal schooling and represented diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The selection ensured that the participants matched the objectives of the study and allowed an in-depth examination of their socio-cognitive development during the implementation of the Marungko Approach.

2.5 Research Instrument

Several research instruments were employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Checklist was used to identify struggling kindergarten learners based on their language development, particularly letter and sound recognition (Department of Education [DepEd], 2016). The Marungko Assessment Tool served as both the pretest and posttest, assessing learners' competencies across the four instructional levels of the Marungko Approach, including picture identification, letter-sound recognition, phonemic blending, word recognition, phrase reading, sentence reading, fluency, and comprehension. Mental noting complemented the assessment by documenting learners' reading behaviors, confidence, error patterns, and responses throughout the intervention, thereby enriching the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2014). Researcher-developed Marungko reading materials, worksheets, and flashcards aligned with the competencies of each instructional level were used during the intervention. These instructional materials incorporated evidence-based classroom literacy practices, including print referencing, vocabulary enrichment, and differentiated

assessment strategies that support early literacy development (Justice et al., 2020; Flack et al., 2022; Tomlinson & Moon, 2022). These materials underwent expert validation by two specialists in the Marungko Approach, whose recommendations regarding content, format, and additional learning activities were incorporated before implementation to strengthen the validity, clarity, and usability of the instruments.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection followed a systematic process beginning with participant identification using the ECD Checklist, preparation of instructional materials, and administration of the pretest. The intervention was conducted over eight weeks using researcher-developed Marungko reading materials and assessment activities. Parent interviews were simultaneously conducted to gather sociodemographic information. Throughout the intervention, learner progress was monitored using performance observation checklists, reading assessments, mental noting, video recordings, activity sheets, and weekly lesson plans. Continuous assessment enabled the researcher to monitor learners' reading development across the four levels of the Marungko Approach, while video recordings provided opportunities for repeated observation and enhanced the reliability of qualitative findings (McKenna & Stahl, 2015; Derry et al., 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Department of Education, 2020; Reece & Walker, 2007). Following the intervention, the posttest was administered and follow-up interviews with parents were conducted to validate the study's findings.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study integrated quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative analysis compared learners' pretest and posttest performances using the researcher-made Marungko Assessment Tool to determine improvements in beginning reading skills. Qualitative analysis involved systematic organization of observation data, mental noting, performance observation checklists, and video recordings to identify patterns in learners' reading behaviors, engagement, cognitive processes, and instructional responses. These qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results and supported comprehensive interpretation of the learners' socio-cognitive development during the intervention (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms throughout data analysis and reporting.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards throughout its implementation. Approval was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Mandaluyong City and the principal of Mandaluyong Addition Hills Elementary School. Parents or guardians provided informed consent for their children's participation, including permission for extended reading sessions and video documentation strictly for research purposes. Participants and their parents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without consequence. Individual reading sessions were conducted using researcher-developed Marungko materials, while learner progress was systematically monitored through performance observation checklists to ensure accurate documentation of beginning reading development.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Effect of the Marungko Approach on the Beginning Reading Skills of Struggling Kindergarten Learners

3.1.1 Unang Antas: Picture Recognition, Letter-Sound Recognition, and Letter Writing

The findings showed substantial improvement in learners' picture recognition and letter-sound recognition after the intervention. The mean score for recognizing pictures increased from 9.8 to 29.8, while recognition of letters and their corresponding sounds improved from 2.2 to 8.0. Both skills demonstrated statistically significant differences between the pretest and posttest, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Although letter-writing performance improved from a mean score of 5.4 to 7.6, the difference was not statistically significant, indicating that the intervention had a limited effect on learners' ability to write letter forms correctly. These findings indicate that the Marungko Approach effectively strengthened learners' foundational reading skills, supporting findings that systematic phonics and decoding instruction significantly improve early reading achievement (Castles et al., 2020; Seidenberg, 2021; Perfetti & Stafura, 2021). However, letter formation requires more sustained practice and the development of fine motor skills, explaining the absence of a statistically significant improvement in handwriting despite increased performance.

3.1.2 Ikalawang Antas: Sound Blending and Word Formation

The results revealed marked improvement in learners' ability to blend sounds and form meaningful words. Before the intervention, participants were unable to blend sounds, obtaining a mean score of 0. Following the implementation of the Marungko Approach, the mean score increased to 5.8, with the statistical test indicating a significant difference between the pretest and posttest. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. The improvement demonstrates that systematic phonics instruction enabled learners to progress from identifying individual sounds to combining them into meaningful words. The Marungko Approach effectively developed phonemic awareness and decoding skills, providing learners with the foundation necessary for independent word reading.

3.1.3 Ikatlong Antas: Recognition of Filipino Function Words

The findings showed that learners demonstrated significant gains in recognizing Filipino function words after the intervention. Participants initially obtained a mean score of 0, indicating no prior mastery of the targeted words. After instruction, the mean score increased to 5.4, and statistical analysis confirmed a significant difference between the pretest and posttest, resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. The results suggest that repeated exposure to commonly used Filipino function words through the Marungko Approach strengthened learners' word recognition and familiarity with basic grammatical markers. Mastery of these words enhanced learners' readiness for phrase and sentence reading by establishing a stronger vocabulary foundation.

3.1.4 Ikaapat na Antas: Reading Words, Phrases, and Sentences

The learners also demonstrated substantial improvement in reading words, phrases, and simple sentences. Their pretest mean score of 0 increased to 5.6 after the intervention. The statistical analysis yielded a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming the effectiveness of the intervention at the highest instructional level. The findings indicate that the Marungko Approach effectively supported learners' progression from isolated letter and sound recognition to connected reading. By systematically integrating previously acquired skills, learners developed greater fluency in reading words, phrases, and simple sentences, demonstrating improved foundational literacy and readiness for more advanced reading tasks.

3.2 Development of Beginning Reading Competencies among Struggling Kindergarten Learners

3.2.1 Initial Reading Abilities, Learning Difficulties, and Learning Gains

The findings showed that all five participants demonstrated substantial improvement in their beginning reading skills following the Marungko intervention. Before the intervention, learners possessed limited literacy abilities, such as recognizing familiar pictures and writing some letters, but consistently experienced difficulties in recognizing letters and their corresponding sounds, blending sounds, and writing letters or words correctly. Although participants differed in their initial abilities, all exhibited marked gains after the intervention. They became capable of identifying letters and producing their corresponding sounds, blending sounds to form meaningful and decodable words, reading short phrases and simple sentences with understanding, and writing upper- and lower-case letters with improved formation, although some learners still required occasional teacher guidance. Individual pretest and posttest scores also reflected consistent improvement: Danny (19–64), Allan (32–65), Jessica (9–61), Charlie (12–61), and Grace (10–60). The results indicate that the Marungko Approach effectively addressed learners' initial literacy difficulties by systematically strengthening foundational reading and writing competencies. Continuous exposure to structured phonics activities enabled learners to progress from basic picture recognition to accurate letter-sound correspondence, word decoding, and sentence reading. These findings are consistent with research emphasizing that repeated and structured literacy practice strengthens phonemic awareness, letter writing, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and comprehension. Repeated practice with letters and sounds improves learners' ability to connect letter forms with their corresponding sounds, while guided reading activities promote vocabulary growth and comprehension (Ehri, 2020; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2022; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Kim, Petscher, & Foorman, 2021).

3.2.2 Development of Danny's Beginning Reading Skills

Danny demonstrated steady improvement throughout the intervention. Initially, he could recognize pictures in English and write only his name using uppercase letters but experienced difficulty recognizing letters and their corresponding sounds and could not correctly write his full name. Following the intervention, he recognized and named pictures in both English and Filipino, wrote upper- and lower-case letters with correct formation, accurately identified letter sounds, blended sounds into meaningful words, and read short phrases and simple sentences with understanding. His performance improved from a pretest score of 19 to a posttest score of 64. Danny's progress demonstrates how systematic phonics instruction and guided practice strengthened his foundational literacy skills. Beginning with familiar vocabulary and progressing through letter recognition, sound identification, decoding, and sentence reading enabled him to develop greater confidence and competence in early reading. His learning trajectory illustrates the cumulative nature of literacy development, where mastery of foundational skills supports more advanced reading performance.

3.2.3 Development of Allan's Beginning Reading Skills

Allan initially demonstrated the ability to write letters and words legibly and recognize pictures in Filipino but experienced difficulty identifying letters and their corresponding sounds. After the intervention, he wrote more clearly, accurately identified letters and sounds, blended sounds into meaningful words, and successfully read short phrases and simple sentences with understanding. His reading performance increased from 32 in the pretest to 65 in the posttest. These findings indicate that Allan's existing writing skills provided a foundation for further literacy development through structured phonics instruction. The Marungko Approach strengthened his decoding abilities by systematically connecting letter recognition with sound production, allowing him to transition from isolated letter knowledge to fluent word and sentence reading.

3.2.4 Development of Jessica's Beginning Reading Skills

Jessica began the intervention with limited literacy skills. She could recognize only some Filipino pictures and experienced difficulties in letter recognition, sound identification, and legible writing. Following the intervention, she demonstrated improved letter formation, accurately identified letter sounds, blended sounds to form meaningful words, and read short phrases and simple sentences with comprehension, although she occasionally required teacher support during writing activities. Her score improved from 9 to 61. Jessica's progress highlights the value of consistent guided instruction in developing foundational literacy among learners with minimal prior reading skills. Systematic practice enabled her to acquire phonemic awareness, improve handwriting, and develop decoding skills that supported meaningful reading comprehension.

3.2.5 Development of Charlie's Beginning Reading Skills

Charlie initially struggled with letter writing, letter-sound recognition, and early decoding, relying mainly on picture recognition in Filipino. After the intervention, he demonstrated improved letter formation, accurately identified letters and sounds, blended sounds to form meaningful words, and read short phrases and simple sentences with understanding. His performance increased from 12 during the pretest to 61 during the posttest. The findings suggest that structured and meaningful learning activities enabled Charlie to overcome his initial literacy difficulties. Repeated guided practice strengthened his phonemic awareness and decoding skills, allowing him to progress from picture recognition to fluent beginning reading.

3.2.6 Development of Grace's Beginning Reading Skills

Grace initially demonstrated the ability to recognize some English and Filipino pictures and write letters, although she had difficulty maintaining correct letter formation and recognizing letter sounds. Following the intervention, she accurately recognized pictures, improved her letter formation, identified corresponding letter sounds, blended sounds into meaningful words, and successfully read short phrases and simple sentences with understanding. Her score increased from 10 to 60. Grace's improvement reflects the effectiveness of consistent guided practice in strengthening foundational literacy skills. Her progression from basic picture recognition to reading connected text demonstrates how systematic phonics instruction supported confidence, decoding ability, and reading comprehension among struggling kindergarten learners.

3.3 Socio-Cognitive Development of Beginning Reading Skills through the Marungko Approach

3.3.1 Level 1: Picture Recognition, Letter-Sound Recognition, and Letter Writing

The findings showed that learners developed beginning reading skills through multisensory learning processes involving picture recognition, contextualization, letter-sound instruction, visualizing, listening, singing, modeling, repetition, and guided letter writing. Learners first recognized familiar objects through pictures, connected them with their prior experiences, identified corresponding letters and sounds, and gradually learned correct letter formation through air writing, guided practice, and repeated writing activities. Classroom interactions further demonstrated that learners relied on sensory experiences, vocabulary recall, and repeated exposure to strengthen letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and handwriting. These findings indicate that the first level of the Marungko Approach supports early literacy by engaging learners' cognitive processes through multisensory instruction. Picture recognition activated prior knowledge and experience, while visualization, listening, singing, modeling, and repeated practice strengthened memory, phonemic awareness, and letter recognition. Guided air writing and handwriting activities also reinforced fine motor development and correct letter formation. These findings are consistent with Smith (2020), Brown (2019), Anderson & Pearson (2021), Jimenez & García (2021), Li & Xu (2023), Reading Rockets (2025), Orton-Gillingham (n.d.), Peabody IRIS (n.d.), Smith & Jones (2021), Lee & Park (2022), Edutopia (2025), Literacy Edventures (2025), Longcamp, Zerbato-Poudou, & Velay (2005), Garcia & Lopez (2021), and Chen & Wang (2022).

3.3.2 Level 2: Sound Blending and Word Formation

The results revealed that learners gradually progressed from recognizing individual letter sounds to blending them into meaningful and decodable words through scaffolding, modeling, guided imitation, and the use of visual symbols. Learners first identified individual phonemes before combining them into syllables and complete words under teacher guidance. Repeated practice enabled them to decode words with increasing confidence and independence. The findings suggest that scaffolding and explicit teacher modeling effectively developed learners' phonemic awareness and decoding skills. The gradual transition from isolated sounds to meaningful words enabled learners to internalize sound-symbol relationships while strengthening reading fluency and confidence. These findings support the theoretical importance of scaffolding, visual symbols, and modeling in early literacy development (Vygotsky, 1978) and are further supported by Johnson and Rivera (2021) and Kim and Park (2023), who emphasized the effectiveness of guided phonics instruction and sound blending in improving beginning reading skills.

3.3.3 Level 3: Recognition of Filipino Function Words

The findings showed that learners acquired Filipino function words through repeated teacher modeling, rote learning, guided reading, repeated oral practice, and writing activities. Learners repeatedly read, pronounced, and wrote commonly used Filipino articles until they became familiar with their pronunciation, spelling, and usage within simple language structures. Repeated exposure enabled learners to recognize these words more automatically and apply them during reading activities. These findings demonstrate that rote learning and teacher modeling strengthened learners' automatic recognition of frequently used Filipino function words, which are essential for sentence construction and reading comprehension. Consistent repetition, oral reading, and writing activities reinforced memory, word recognition, and reading fluency while increasing learners' confidence in using these words during reading. These findings are consistent with Cameron (2001), Snow (2010), and LINC (2020), which emphasize the value of repeated guided practice in developing early language and literacy skills.

3.3.4 Level 4: Construction of Phrases and Simple Sentences with Comprehension

The results indicated that learners integrated previously acquired letter-sound knowledge, word recognition, and Filipino function words to construct and read meaningful phrases and simple sentences. Through guided instruction, learners progressively combined familiar words into complete sentences, repeatedly practiced oral reading, and demonstrated comprehension by answering questions related to the sentences they had read. This stage reflected the application of accumulated literacy skills in meaningful reading contexts. These findings indicate that the highest level of the Marungko Approach promotes reading comprehension by enabling learners to integrate foundational literacy skills into connected reading. Guided sentence construction and comprehension activities strengthened learners' ability to organize ideas, understand meaning, and communicate effectively while building confidence in reading Filipino. These findings support the instructional principles of the Marungko Approach (Ali & Urbano, 2021), which emphasize the integration of previously learned skills to achieve meaningful comprehension and functional literacy.

3.3.5 Level 4: Construction of Phrases and Simple Sentences with Comprehension

The findings showed that learners integrated previously acquired letter-sound knowledge, word recognition, and Filipino function words to read and construct meaningful phrases and simple sentences. Through guided reading, repeated oral practice, and comprehension questioning, learners progressed from identifying individual words to reading complete sentences and demonstrating understanding by answering questions about the text. This developmental progression aligns with contemporary models of reading acquisition emphasizing decoding, language comprehension, and integrated literacy instruction (Kim, 2023; Kim, 2020; Petscher et al., 2020; Piasta et al., 2021). The instructional process emphasized the integration of earlier Marungko levels, allowing learners to apply accumulated literacy skills in meaningful reading situations. These findings indicate that sentence construction and comprehension represent the culmination of the Marungko Approach, where learners actively apply prior knowledge of sounds, words, and articles to create meaning from text. Guided practice and repeated reading strengthened comprehension, communication, and confidence in using Filipino. Repeated oral reading likewise contributes to the development of reading fluency, automaticity, and accurate word recognition among beginning readers by providing learners with multiple opportunities to practice decoding and build confidence in connected-text reading (Rasinski, 2021; Rasinski & Padak, 2021). The findings support the view that integrating foundational literacy skills promotes comprehension and meaningful language use (Ali & Urbano, 2021).

3.4 Sociodemographic Factors Influencing the Acquisition of Beginning Reading Skills

3.4.1 Family Background and Home Reading Practices

The findings revealed that the participants generally came from low-income households whose parents were employed in service-related or informal occupations. Most parents had completed only basic education, while one parent had attained college education. Despite financial and educational limitations, learners received varying degrees of literacy support at home. Mothers, grandmothers, and aunts commonly served as the primary facilitators of reading activities, providing follow-up lessons, handwriting practice, guided reading, and reinforcement of school learning. However, differences in work responsibilities and available time influenced the amount of support each learner received, resulting in varying home literacy experiences. The findings suggest that family socio-economic conditions, home literacy environments, and parental involvement strongly influenced learners' literacy development (Hamilton et al., 2021; Castro et al., 2021; Neuman et al., 2020; Sénéchal & Young, 2022; Sénéchal et al., 2022; Epstein, 2022). Previous studies likewise suggest that gender-related differences in reading motivation, engagement, and academic achievement may influence early literacy development, although these factors were beyond the primary focus of the present study (McGeown & Warhurst, 2020; Bouchard et al., 2021; Ready et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2022). While the present study did not specifically examine gender as a variable, these findings indicate that learner characteristics, together with family and home literacy experiences, may contribute to differences in beginning reading development. Although limited financial resources and demanding work schedules reduced some parents' capacity to provide continuous academic support, consistent involvement from mothers and other female family members helped reinforce classroom instruction through guided practice and repeated reading activities. These findings emphasize that early literacy development is shaped not only by instructional interventions but also by the interaction between learners' cognitive development and the social support available within the home environment.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the Marungko Approach effectively improved the beginning reading skills of struggling kindergarten learners by strengthening letter-sound recognition, sound blending, recognition of Filipino articles, and the reading of words, phrases, and simple sentences, although improvements in letter writing were not statistically significant. The findings further indicate that beginning reading development is a socio-cognitive process influenced by both cognitive factors embedded in each Marungko level and sociodemographic characteristics, including family background, parental involvement, educational attainment, gender roles, and home literacy practices, all of which contribute to learners' acquisition of foundational reading skills.

The study recommends integrating a socio-cognitive framework into early reading programs by emphasizing both cognitive processes and social contexts in literacy instruction. Teacher training and future research should focus on socio-cognitive models of early literacy, while home-school partnerships should be strengthened to support learners' reading development through collaborative literacy practices. Literacy materials should be designed to reflect learners' socio-cognitive characteristics and local contexts, future studies should further examine the role of affect in early literacy learning, and teachers are encouraged to apply the proposed teaching model to guide the implementation of the Marungko Approach according to the cognitive processes involved at each instructional level.

The study was limited to struggling kindergarten learners from a single public elementary school and focused on the implementation of the Marungko Approach in developing beginning reading skills within the context of the identified cognitive and sociodemographic factors. Consequently, the findings are specific to the participants and setting examined and provide a basis for further studies involving broader populations, additional socio-cognitive variables, and other dimensions of early literacy development.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for educational research. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of the Division of Mandaluyong City and the principal of Mandaluyong Addition Hills Elementary School. The rights, welfare, and confidentiality of the participants were safeguarded throughout the research process through the use of informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw without consequence, the use of pseudonyms to protect participants' identities, and the responsible documentation of research activities. Reading sessions and video recordings were conducted solely for research purposes, and learner progress was systematically monitored to ensure accurate documentation of beginning reading development.

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