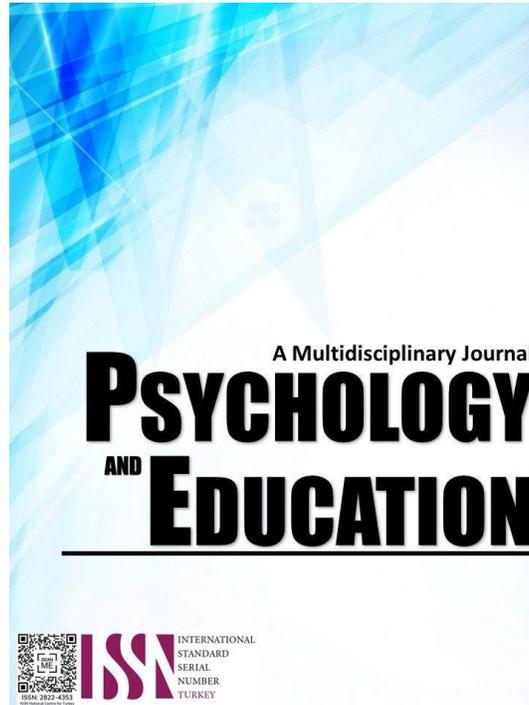


**LEARNING THROUGH PLAYING: IMPROVING PHONEMIC AWARENESS
IN KINDERGARTEN LEARNERS OF EUGENIO LLIDO
RAÑADA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**



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Learning through Playing: Improving Phonemic Awareness in Kindergarten Learners of Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Play-Based Approach in enhancing the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners at Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School, with a particular focus on letter recognition and letter sounding. Using a pre-test and post-test design, the research employed a test questionnaire to assess learners' phonemic skills before and after the intervention. The subjects were kindergarten learners identified as requiring immediate remediation due to significant gaps in phonemic awareness. Statistical analysis of pre-test results revealed deficiencies in both letter recognition and letter sounding, underscoring the urgent need for interventions. Following the implementation of the Play-Based Approach, post-test findings demonstrated notable improvements in letter recognition, as most learners advanced to higher skill levels. However, progress in letter sounding was minimal, indicating that challenges in this area persisted despite the intervention. In response to these findings, a supplementary reading program was developed to address learners' specific difficulties with letter sounding. This program integrates additional strategies and focused activities aimed at strengthening phonemic awareness skills. Overall, the results affirm that the Play-Based Approach is effective in improving letter recognition but highlight the need for complementary interventions to achieve more comprehensive improvements, particularly in letter sounding. The study recommends the continued implementation of the Play-Based Approach in early childhood education while incorporating targeted support mechanisms to address persistent areas of difficulty. It further emphasizes the importance of early literacy interventions that are engaging, developmentally appropriate, and adaptable to learners' evolving needs. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of play-based learning on literacy development and investigate effective strategies for integrating such approaches into standard curricula across diverse educational settings.

Keywords: *phonemic awareness, play-based approach, kindergarten*

Introduction

Kindergarten serves as the cornerstone of a learner's educational journey, laying the foundation for future academic success and fostering the development of essential reading skills. This first stage is crucial because it determines how a child will relate to reading and learning throughout their lives. Fostering early literacy and basic reading skills in young children has received a lot of attention since the Department of Education required kindergarten education in 2012.

However, teachers are under increased pressure to make sure learners meet the reading standard before advancing to higher grades because of kindergarten's increased responsibility. This transition has produced a conflict between stressing academic accomplishment and following developmentally appropriate techniques, such as play-based learning (Pyle et al., 2018). Although children's developmental needs remain steady, academic expectations for them have increased dramatically. Given the hurdles that learners encountered during their academic careers, laying a solid foundation in early literacy is critical.

In line with this viewpoint, the kindergarten curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of 5-year-old children by incorporating play-based activities that address physical, social, emotional, moral, and cognitive domains. A study by Moore (2020) discovered that play-based learning was an effective approach for teaching phonemic awareness and phonics, especially when guided by an adult. The research also found that learners were more engaged and participated more when they were involved in establishing the rules for games or activities.

This connection underscores the significance of improving phonemic awareness among kindergarten students at Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School, as it directly influences reading performance. Despite ongoing efforts to enhance early literacy, the Posttest results for the 2023-2024 academic year indicate persistent challenges and desirable approach, particularly in letter recognition and letter sounds. These findings reinforce the need for targeted interventions using effective play-based strategies to address these areas and support early literacy development. It is in this venture, that the researcher intends to go deeper study on the young learners learning through play based.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this study was to determine the use of play-based learning in improving the phonemic awareness of the kindergarten learners of Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School. Specifically, it sought to answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners in Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School before using the play-based approach in terms of:

- 1.1. letter recognition; and
- 1.2. letter sounding?
2. What is the level of phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners in Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School after using the play-based approach in terms of:
 - 2.1. letter recognition; and
 - 2.2. letter sounding?
3. Is there a significant difference between the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners in Eugeni Llido Rañada Elementary School before and after using the play-based approach?
4. What reading program can be developed out of the findings of the study?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design, a type of pre-experimental research method. This design was chosen to assess the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners at Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School before and after the implementation of a play-based approach to teaching phonemic awareness.

In a one-group pretest-posttest design, participants are exposed to a single intervention or treatment, and measurements are taken at two points in time: before the intervention (pretest) and after the intervention (posttest). This design allows the researcher to evaluate changes in the outcome variable, in this case, phonemic awareness skills, by comparing the pretest and posttest results. While this design does not include a control group for comparison, it is particularly effective for preliminary studies where the primary goal is to explore the potential effectiveness of an intervention (Choueiry, 2022).

The pretest provides a baseline measure of the participants' skills, while the posttest evaluates the impact of the intervention in this case, the play-based teaching approach. This design is practical in educational settings, where implementing randomized experimental designs may be logistically challenging. It allows researchers to gather data quickly and efficiently while still providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of a specific instructional method. By employing this research design, the study aimed to determine whether the play-based approach positively impacted on the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners and to provide a foundation for further research in this area.

Respondents

The subjects of this study are all Kindergarten learners of Eugenio Llido Ranada Elementary School for the school year 2024-2025. The table presents the distribution of subjects.

Table 1. *Subjects of the Study*

<i>Session</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
AM	6	15	21
PM	5	10	15
Total	11	25	36

Instrument

Quantitative data for this study were collected through standardized and contextualized assessment tools designed to evaluate the developmental progress of kindergarten learners. A primary tool employed was the Beginning Reading Test (Filipino/Tagalog) developed by the Division of South Cotabato. This test served as both a pre-test to assess baseline reading skills and a post-test to measure progress after interventions. The assessment evaluated key components of early literacy, including letter recognition, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and comprehension.

To ensure a holistic approach, the study also utilized other tools mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd) Orders No. 47, s. 2016, and No. 8, s. 2015. These orders highlight the importance of contextualized and developmentally appropriate assessments, such as the Early Childhood Development Checklist, the Kindergarten Progress Report Card, and Reading Readiness Assessments conducted biannually or as necessary. These instruments provided significant insights into the children's developmental status and literacy readiness.

Procedure

To fulfill the aims and objectives of the study and explore previous research, the quantitative method of data collection was most suitable, utilizing a one-group pre-test post-test pre-experimental design. The main goal of quantitative research was to collect numerically objective data through statistics on the volume of data collected from the subjects.

Based on this information, this method of data collection was appropriate for the study, which focused on the enhancement of phonemic awareness through play-based learning activities in kindergarten using pre-test and post-test assessments on localized materials from the Division of South Cotabato.

The researcher employed the following procedures to gather data relevant to the study: she obtained authorization to conduct the study from the Schools Division Superintendent in the Division of South Cotabato before administering the data collection materials. After receiving consent from the Schools Division Superintendent. Upon approval, the researcher approached the School Head and requested permission to conduct the research at their particular school. The researcher informed and oriented the learners' parents on the progress of the study.

The process began with the administration of a pre-test using the Beginning Reading Test (Filipino/Tagalog), a localized tool developed by the Division of South Cotabato. This assessment established a baseline for evaluating initial phonemic awareness skills, such as letter recognition and letter sound. To ensure reliability and validity, the pre-test was conducted.

Following this, the researcher implemented an intervention featuring play-based learning activities that were engaging, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with the developmental needs of kindergarten learners. Activities like phoneme matching games, sound scavenger hunts, and interactive storytelling incorporated localized and contextualized materials, creating a fun and interactive learning environment.

After the intervention, the same Beginning Reading Test was administered as a post-test to measure any improvements in the learners' phonemic awareness. Using identical tools for both assessments ensured consistency in data collection and allowed for accurate comparisons of pre-test and post-test results.

The data collected were then organized and analyzed using quantitative methods, specifically paired sample t-tests, to determine whether the intervention led to significant improvements in phonemic awareness. The analysis highlighted specific areas of improvement and evaluated the overall impact of the play-based learning activities.

This research was well planned to collect and analyze numerical data, providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of play-based learning activities in enhancing phonemic awareness among kindergarten learners. Utilizing a one-group pre-test post-test pre-experimental design, the study measured learners' phonemic awareness skills before and after the intervention, focusing on statistical comparisons to assess its impact.

Throughout the study, ethical research practices were upheld, including obtaining permissions from relevant authorities, securing informed consent from school personnel and parents, and ensuring objectivity in data collection and analysis. These procedures validated the study's findings, which demonstrated the significant positive effect of play-based learning on enhancing phonemic awareness among kindergarten learners.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data effectively, various statistical methods were employed. The pretest scores of the learners were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and mean to gain a clear understanding of their initial performance levels. These tools summarized the data and highlighted trends or patterns in the learners' baseline phonemic awareness. The frequency showed how many learners scored within specific ranges, while the percentage provided a proportionate view. The mean offered an average score, serving as a benchmark for comparison.

The posttest scores, gathered after the intervention, were analyzed using the same statistical tools frequency, percentage, and mean. This consistent approach ensured comparability and provided a clear understanding of how learners' performance changed. Frequency and percentage revealed shifts in performance levels, while the mean indicated the overall improvement. These results allowed for an objective assessment of the learners' progress. By comparing pretest and posttest data, the study aimed to measure the intervention's impact on phonemic awareness.

To determine the intervention's effectiveness, a paired T-Test was conducted. This statistical test was selected because it evaluates differences between two related samples, making it suitable for assessing the same group of learners before and after the intervention. The test measured whether the changes observed were statistically significant rather than occurring by chance. A significant result would indicate that the intervention contributed meaningfully to the learners' phonemic awareness development. This step was crucial in drawing conclusions about the intervention's success.

The paired T-Test process involved several key steps. First, the differences between each learner's pretest and posttest scores were calculated. These differences were used to compute the mean difference, standard deviation, and standard error. Next, the t-value was calculated using these values, providing a measure of the intervention's effect size. The t-value was then compared to the critical value from the t-distribution table at a specified significance level (e.g., 0.05). This comparison determined whether the null hypothesis of no significant difference could be rejected.

The results of these statistical analyses offered valuable insights into the effectiveness of the intervention. The frequency and percentage indicated changes in the distribution of scores, while the mean provided a quantitative measure of improvement. The paired T-Test confirmed whether these changes were statistically significant. Together, these methods ensured a comprehensive and reliable evaluation of the intervention's impact on kindergarten learners' phonemic awareness. By employing these rigorous statistical tools, the study achieved accurate and meaningful results.

Results and Discussion

This section deals with presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered in this study. The various results are presented in the succeeding tables with corresponding discussions and explanations. It also answers specific problems stated in previous chapter.

Level of Phonemic Awareness Skills of Kindergarten Learners Before Using the Play- Based Approach

Table 2 presents the level of phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners in Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School before using the play-based approach. In the level of phonemic awareness skills in terms of letter recognition of the kindergarten learners, 66.7% needs immediate remediation while 33.3% needs reinforcement. The mean of 11.22 is described as immediate remediation. This finding aligns with research like Heidecker's (2021), which points out that many kindergartners face difficulties with the basic literacy skills.

Along the way, all the kindergarten learners have low level of phonemic awareness skills in terms of letter sounding with 100.0%. The mean of 1.69 is described as immediate remediation. The learners find it difficult to recognize the sounds of letters. A similar pattern was observed in a study conducted at Tangway Loob Elementary School (2021), which also identify letter sound as a major area of concern for kindergartners. Conversely, Yee and Samad (2019) offering an alternative to play-based methods and demonstrating the potential of digital and interactive strategies, indicated that using hand gestures through digital video improved phonemic awareness among young learners.

Moreover, these findings are consistent with other structured literacy programs, like Early Reading Intervention (ERI) and Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing (LiPS). These programs, developed in the early 2000s, also emphasize the challenges young learners face with phonemic awareness as a barrier to reading readiness. While these programs rely on systematic and multisensory methods, they differ from play-based approaches, highlighting the variety of strategies available for improving early literacy skills.

Table 2. *Level of Phonemic Awareness Skills Before Using the Play- Based Approach*

Score	Letter Recognition		Letter Sounding	
	F	%	f	%
17 and above	12	33.3	0	0.0
0-16	24	66.7	36	100.0
Mean	11.22		1.69	
Description	Immediate Remediation		Immediate Remediation	

Legend: 0-16 - Immediate Remediation; 17-Above - Reinforcement

Level of Phonemic Awareness Skills of Kindergarten Learners After Using the Play-Based Approach

Table 3 presents the level of phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners in Eugenio Llido Rañada Elementary School after using the play-based approach. In the level of phonemic awareness skills in terms of letter recognition of the kindergarten learners, 52.8% need reinforcement and 47.2% need immediate remediation. The mean of 22.78 is described as reinforcement. This means that the kindergarten learners have high level of letter recognition skills after using the Play-Based Approach. Similar results were found in a study by Smith and Garcia (2020), which showed significant gains in letter recognition skills among kindergarten learners after incorporating interactive, play-based methods. This aligns with the idea that play-based learning can enhance engagement and retention for foundational literacy skills.

Additionally, a study by Thompson and Richards (2020) demonstrated that children exposed to letter-focused play-based activities, such as alphabet puzzles and letter-matching games, exhibited notable improvements in recognizing and identifying letters within just eight weeks of intervention. Their findings further validate the potential of play-based approaches in developing early literacy skills.

Likewise, Miller et al. (2021) found that play-based strategies, when integrated with storytelling and music, significantly improved letter recognition among preschool learners. They emphasized that multimodal activities engaging children through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences were particularly effective in reinforcing letter recognition skills.

On the contrary, the kindergarten learners have low level of phonemic awareness skills in terms of letter sounding with 80.6% described as immediate remediation. The other 19.4% of the kindergarten learners need reinforcement. The mean of 9.92 is described as immediate remediation. This means that the kindergarten learners need assistance in letter sound. They find it difficult to recognize the sounds of letters even after using the Play-Based Approach.

These results differ from a study by Brown and Lee (2019), which found that phonemic awareness in letter sounding improved significantly when play-based activities were combined with phonics-based instruction. Similarly, Fletcher and Warren (2021) point out that while play-based learning is great for engaging children and building some skills, it often works best when paired with more structured phonemic awareness programs.

Contrary to the present findings, a study by Hernandez et al. (2022) found that using play-based strategies alone without supplementary phonics instruction led to marked improvement in both letter recognition and letter sounding skills. Hernandez and colleagues emphasized that extended exposure to auditory and visual cues during play activities was sufficient for children to master phonemic

awareness. Their findings suggest that the effectiveness of the play-based approach may depend on the specific activities used and the duration of implementation. This difference highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to the learners' needs and ensuring activities target both letter recognition and sound association comprehensively

Table 3. *Level of Phonemic Awareness Skills of After Using the Play-Based*

Score	Letter Recognition		Letter Sounding	
	f	%	f	%
17 and above	19	52.8	7	19.4
0-16	17	47.2	29	80.6
Mean	22.78		9.92	
Description	Reinforcement		Immediate Remediation	

Legend: 0-16 - Immediate Remediation; 17-Above -Reinforcement

Difference between the Phonemic Awareness Skills of Kindergarten Learners Before and After Using the Play-Based Approach

Table 4 presents the difference between the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners before and after using the Play-Based Approach. Results show that there is a significant difference in the letter recognition skill of the kindergarten learners as evidenced by a t-computed value of 8.783 and a p-value of .000.

Table 5. *Difference between the Phonemic Awareness Skills Before and After Using the Play-Based Approach*

Phonemic Awareness Skill	Mean	SD	t computed	p-value	Remark
Letter Recognition					
Pretest	11.22	13.43	8.783	.000	Significant
Posttest	22.78	16.85			
Letter Sounding					
Pretest	1.69	3.838	8.997	.000	Significant
Posttest	9.92	7.201			
Over-all					
Pretest	12.92	15.58	10.295	.000	Significant
Posttest	32.69	23.44			

Similarly, in letter sounding, there is a significant difference in the phonemic awareness skills of kindergarten learners before and after in terms of letter sounding using the Play-Based Approach as supported by a t-computed value of 8.997 and a p-value of .000. This implies that using the Play-Based Approach is effective in improving phonemic awareness skills of the kindergarten learners in terms of letter recognition and letter sounding.

Additionally, overall results show that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of kindergarten learners before and after using the Play-Based Approach as supported by a t-computed value of 10.295 and a p-value of .000. This also implies that using the Play-Based Approach is effective in improving phonemic awareness skills of the kindergarten learners.

These findings support constructivist learning theories, which highlight how learners actively build knowledge by engaging in meaningful, hands-on experiences (Brown, 2020). The Play-Based Approach also connects with socio-cultural perspectives by using social interactions and culturally relevant activities to support and guide learning (Lee & Carter, 2021). This approach taps into the principles of multisensory learning, involving sight, sound, and movement to help children strengthen their phonemic awareness (Smith et al., 2023).

Furthermore, motivational theories underpin the effectiveness of this approach, as play fosters intrinsic motivation, engagement, and a positive attitude toward learning (Taylor & Green, 2022). Also, the inclusive pedagogical framework of the Play-Based Approach ensures that all learners, regardless of their individual differences, have equitable opportunities to develop foundational literacy skills (Johnson et al., 2024).

These results align with the findings of Jones and Mitchell (2021), who observed that play-based interventions significantly enhanced early literacy skills, particularly in letter recognition. They emphasized that child-centered, engaging activities foster deeper learning and better skill retention.

Conversely, Williams and Thompson (2020) reported findings that differed, noting that while play-based strategies were effective in improving general literacy skills, they were less impactful for phonemic awareness, particularly in letter sounding. Their study suggested that supplementing play-based learning with explicit phonics instruction yielded better results for developing sound-letter associations. Similarly, Harris et al. (2022) provided further support, highlighting that integrating multisensory techniques within playful learning environments enhances both letter recognition and letter sounding. However, they also noted that targeted phonemic instruction is essential for sustained improvements in phonemic awareness, especially for learners starting at lower skill levels.

Contrary to the present findings, a study by Zhang et al. (2023) found that while the Play-Based Approach enhanced social and



collaborative skills, its impact on phonemic awareness, particularly letter sounding, was minimal without direct and explicit phonics instruction. Zhang et al. suggested that the effectiveness of play-based learning is more pronounced in areas of general literacy rather than the granular development of phonemic skills.

Similarly, a study by Patel and Singh (2020) indicated that play-based learning alone may not provide sufficient structure to address specific phonemic deficiencies, particularly in populations with low baseline skills. They advocated for a blended approach, combining play-based methods with targeted phonemic awareness drills for better outcomes.

Lastly, Morales and Kim (2024) argued that while play-based activities promote engagement and enjoyment, they may not ensure consistent phonemic awareness gains across diverse learner groups. Their research highlighted the need for more structured and explicit teaching strategies to complement playful learning experiences, particularly in contexts where foundational literacy skills are lacking. Collectively, these studies underscore the value of play-based learning in early education, especially for engaging young learners and promoting holistic development (Smith et al., 2022). However, they also highlight the need for complementary strategies to address specific areas of phonemic awareness, such as letter sounding, to achieve sustained and comprehensive literacy outcomes.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the following are the conclusions. The kindergarten learners need immediate remediation in both letter recognition and letter sound before using the Play-Based Approach. The kindergarten learners showed progress in their phonemic awareness skills using the Play-Based Approach. While most learners improved their letter recognition, they still need reinforcement for full mastery. However, learners struggled with letter sounding, indicating a need for immediate remediation. These results highlight the effectiveness of the Play-Based Approach in enhancing phonemic awareness, particularly letter recognition. Nonetheless, additional strategies, such as selected phonics instruction, are necessary to address ongoing challenges in letter sounding. There is a significant difference in the pretest and posttest mean scores of the kindergarten learners before and after using the Play-Based Approach to improve their phonemic awareness skills. It implies that the Play-Based Approach is effective in improving phonemic awareness skills of the kindergarten learners in terms of letter recognition and letter sounds.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were hereby given. The teachers may help the kindergarten learners to improve their phonemic awareness skills by applying the Play-Based Approach. The teachers may look for other strategies in letter sound, since the learners find it difficult to recognize the sounds of letters even after using the Play-Based Approach. Replication of this study is recommended by considering other variables such as time of the application of the Play-Based Approach.

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