

The ES Claveria Approach in Kindergarten Teaching

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Phonological awareness refers to the ability to recognize and manipulate the spoken components of sentences and words. It encompasses noticing, analyzing, and working with the individual sounds of spoken language. This skill develops along a continuum and is widely recognized as foundational for both reading and spelling proficiency, as it underpins decoding and word construction in print. Evidence suggests that phonological awareness is particularly critical during the initial stages of reading development (Skubic et al., 2021; Milankov et al., 2021; Nkurunziza, 2024).

In the Philippine Basic Education system, kindergarten serves as the entry point of formal education where essential literacy skills, including early reading, are cultivated. Reading constitutes a cornerstone of learning, especially in the early years. However, in the context of the “new normal,” persistent challenges have emerged. Observations from grade school teachers reveal that, despite completing full weeks of in-person instruction, many learners exhibit weak reading fluency, limited comprehension, and a general hesitancy in oral reading. These challenges underscore the need for structured, evidence-based phonological awareness programs, such as the

ES Claveria Approach, which has been introduced as a targeted intervention.

International large-scale assessments reinforce these concerns. Results from PISA 2022 continue to highlight low reading performance among Filipino learners, situating the Philippines among countries facing significant literacy gaps. In response, the Department of Education has initiated the National Learning Recovery Program to address learning losses attributed to pandemic-related disruptions. While kindergarten learners were not directly affected by school closures during this period, it remains imperative to ground early education in systematic and effective strategies that ensure the mastery of foundational literacy skills. Consistent with the goals of the K–12 curriculum, the development of robust reading foundations must be prioritized from the earliest grade levels.

The ES Claveria Approach has been examined in prior research and has demonstrated promising results in strengthening phonological awareness (Amada, 2019; Bautista, 2019). The approach is built on a structured four-part lesson sequence. The initial lesson emphasizes recognition of the features and uses of pictures. The second lesson introduces learners to picture naming, focusing on the first syllable of each word, referred to as the pananda (cue). The third lesson enables learners, through repeated practice, to combine first syllables from different words to create new words, with the picture pananda serving as a visual aid when recall is uncertain. The final lesson transitions toward word formation in Filipino, reinforced by hand gestures: one finger signals learners to articulate only the first syllable, while two fingers indicate reading the complete word. This multisensory and scaffolded design facilitates phonological awareness, enhances memory recall, and fosters confidence, accuracy, and fluency in early reading.

Visual and Phonological Strategies to Enhance Reading in Early Learners

A growing body of research affirms the critical role of visual imagery in learning. Laskay-Horváth et al. (2025), for example, demonstrated that students who formed visual associations such as imagining a dog riding a bicycle down a street significantly outperformed peers who relied solely on rote repetition in recalling word groups. Visual supports, including posters, charts, and educational graphics, enhance comprehension by providing learners with clear, engaging references. Similarly, the ES Claveria Reading Technique, a visual and multisensory approach, has been shown to stimulate engagement and improve reading outcomes. Quiambao and Maguyon (2021) found that the method encourages learner motivation through the use of pictures, structured exercises, and parental involvement. Amada (2019) further reported that the technique's systematic use of pananda cues, syllables, words, phrases, and sentences supports literacy in the Mother Tongue. Complementary findings by Bautista (2022) revealed that struggling learners exhibited significant improvement in reading levels after a three-month intervention, further confirming the method's effectiveness.

Beyond instructional techniques, student engagement itself emerges as a central factor influencing reading achievement. Learners with weak reading skills often disengage when they perceive disparities in ability among peers (Wiseman, 2012). To counteract this, Jones and Brown (2013) emphasized the importance of offering a wide range of reading materials, including both print and digital texts, to enhance motivation and satisfaction. Multi-sensory and individualized interventions such as explicit instruction in phonological awareness, decoding, and segmentation skills

have proven particularly beneficial for learners requiring additional support. Guided reading allows educators to provide targeted assistance to individuals or small groups, focusing on specific strategies such as rereading, chunking, or phoneme segmentation. Research underscores the predictive value of phonological awareness for early word-reading (Park & Lombardino, 2013), while Kilpatrick (2016) highlighted the use of visual tokens to scaffold phonics and reinforce awareness of syllables and phonemes, thereby strengthening both recognition and comprehension.

Structured interventions further complement classroom strategies. Levelled Literacy Intervention (LLI), for example, has been shown to improve outcomes for kindergarten to Grade 2 students, with teachers affirming its benefits for struggling readers (Glass, 2018). Similarly, Reading Recovery delivered as daily, one-on-one instruction supplemented by home reading for 10 to 20 weeks has consistently accelerated literacy development (Clay, 2013; Jesson & Limbrick, 2014). Both approaches underscore the necessity of continuous teacher monitoring and active home–school communication to sustain post-intervention progress.

At the systems level, large-scale analyses provide critical insights into contextual challenges. Tomas et al. (2021), drawing on over 8,000 Filipino reading profiles, found that most learners remained at the frustration level due to weak mastery of reading elements, a prevalence of learners-at-risk, and an underdeveloped reading culture. Suggested interventions include targeted literacy programs, individual recovery sessions, and enrichment strategies, all of which may inform more responsive curricula. International evidence aligns with these findings. Wood (2019) observed that children entering kindergarten with literacy gaps made substantial gains through structured interventions, although some disparities persisted. Broader initiatives, such as USAID’s Basa

Pilipinas (2013–2018), demonstrate the potential of sustained, evidence-based reforms. Reaching over 1.8 million K–3 students, Basa enhanced reading performance by promoting government partnership, school-level implementation, and equitable access illustrating the value of contextualized, scalable, and inclusive interventions.

Finally, the role of reading as a foundation for language acquisition is especially salient for second-language learners. Chandran and Shah (2019) reported that Malaysian students, particularly reluctant readers, consistently displayed weak comprehension skills, underscoring the importance of continuous, structured reading interventions. Collectively, the evidence affirms that effective literacy development requires a combination of visual, phonological, multisensory, and systematic approaches, reinforced by strong teacher engagement and supportive learning environments. Together, these elements form the basis for sustainable improvements in reading outcomes, both within the Philippines and in comparable educational contexts.

The Effectiveness of ES Claveria Approach in Kindergarten Learners: A Case Study

This study examined the effectiveness of the ES Claveria Approach as an instructional tool for beginning reading among kindergarten learners in an elementary school in the District of Nabas, Aklan, Philippines, during School Year 2023–2024. Specifically, it aimed to (a) assess the learners' reading performance prior to and following the implementation of the ES Claveria Approach and (b) determine whether a significant difference existed in their reading performance as a result of the intervention.

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental design, wherein a single group of kindergarten learners was assessed before and after receiving instruction through the ES Claveria Approach to determine its effectiveness in improving early reading skills. A pre-test was administered to establish the learners' baseline reading abilities, followed by a post-test after the intervention to measure performance gains.

The research was conducted at a public elementary school in Aklan, Philippines. Participants were selected based on their demonstrated skills, abilities, and responsiveness to instruction. Of the 27 kindergarten pupils enrolled, 20 were identified as eligible for inclusion through teacher observations.

A researcher-developed assessment tool was utilized to measure learners' phonetic awareness, focusing on reading exercises with the 28 Filipino alphabets. The instrument employed a Likert-type scale adapted from the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA), with performance categorized as Grade Ready (26–28), Light Refresher (19–25), Moderate Refresher (11–18), and Full Refresher (0–10). To ensure validity, the tool underwent content review by a three-member expert panel, whose feedback was incorporated into the final version.

The intervention spanned one academic quarter, from November to January 2024. Daily one-hour sessions engaged learners in a structured sequence of activities. Instruction began with picture recognition, using images as pananda (cues) for associating words with visuals. Learners were then introduced to hand signals one finger for reading the first syllable and two fingers for reading the entire word to scaffold decoding skills. Once mastery was demonstrated, instruction progressed to word recognition without visual aids, relying solely on hand gestures. Learners were also

provided with hard copies of reading exercises for continued practice at home, with new activities introduced daily. A post-test was subsequently administered to evaluate the impact of the intervention.

Pre-test and post-test data were analyzed to determine learners’ levels of phonetic awareness and to assess improvements attributable to the intervention. Ethical standards were strictly observed. Informed consent was obtained from parents and the school principal, and participant confidentiality was safeguarded throughout the study. The design and implementation adhered to the study objectives while prioritizing the welfare and privacy of all learners.

Findings

Tables 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the learners’ performance before and after the ES Claveria Approach.

Table 1

Pretest and Posttest results

| | Identifying Letters | | Identifying Sounds | |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----|--------------------|----|
| | F | % | F | % |
| Pretest | | | | |
| Grade Ready | 19 | 95 | 7 | 35 |
| Light Refresher | 1 | 5 | 2 | 10 |
| Moderate Refresher | 0 | 0 | 6 | 30 |
| Full Refresher | 0 | 0 | 5 | 25 |
| Posttest | | | | |
| Grade Ready | 20 | 100 | 8 | 40 |
| Light Refresher | 0 | 0 | 9 | 45 |
| Moderate Refresher | 0 | 0 | 3 | 15 |
| Full Refresher | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

In terms of letter identification, results revealed that the majority of learners (95%) demonstrated excellent ability to recognize letters prior to the intervention. Only one learner scored below the Grade Ready level. The

standard deviation of 4.13 indicates relatively homogeneous performance, suggesting minimal variation in learners' letter recognition skills. This high level of proficiency may be attributed to parental involvement, as many families introduce children to the basics of reading at home to enable them to write their names before entering school.

By contrast, performance in sound recognition reflected a markedly different pattern. Only 35% of learners reached the Grade Ready level, while 25% were classified as Full Refresher, indicating significant gaps in phonemic awareness. The standard deviation of 10.65 points to wide variation in learners' sound recognition abilities, with some able to identify letters but unable to match them with corresponding sounds. This discrepancy may be linked to the common practice of introducing English letter sounds first, despite the language of instruction often being the learners' mother tongue, which shares stronger phonological similarities with Filipino, the national and official language. Nevertheless, learners remained highly engaged, as evidenced by their strong letter recognition performance, supporting the assertion that student engagement is essential to successful reading instruction (Wiseman, 2012).

Post-intervention results following the introduction of the ES Claveria Approach demonstrated notable improvements. With respect to letter recognition, all learners successfully identified every letter taught, indicating consistent mastery of the alphabet and reinforcing the effectiveness of the Claveria Approach at the beginning reading stage. Gains were also observed in sound recognition. No learners remained at the Full Refresher level after the intervention. The percentage of learners classified as Grade Ready increased from 35% to 40%, while those in the Light Refresher category rose markedly from 10% to 45%. The Moderate Refresher group remained constant at 15%. The post-test standard deviation

of 8.38, lower than that of the pre-test, suggests reduced variability in performance and more consistent gains among learners.

Overall, these results highlight the positive influence of high student engagement in enhancing reading outcomes (Wiseman, 2012) and align with the findings of McIntyre et al. (2006), which emphasize the significant role of classroom instruction in improving learners’ reading abilities.

Table 2 presents the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test, which compared learners’ pre-test and post-test performance in both letter and sound recognition.

Table 2

Test of significant difference

| Control Group Result | Mean Score | z-value | p-value | Decision |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Identifying Letters | | | | |
| Pretest | 25.60 (Grade Ready) | -2.988 | 0.003 ^s | Reject H_o |
| Posttest | 28.00 (Grade Ready) | | | |
| Identifying Sounds | | | | |
| Pretest | 12.55 (Light Refresher) | -3.632 | 0.000 ^s | Reject H_o |
| Posttest | 17.00 (Grade Ready) | | | |

Note: highly significant at .01 level of significance

With respect to letter identification, the obtained p-value of 0.003 indicates a highly significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, thereby warranting the rejection of the null hypothesis. This result demonstrates that learners’ performance in letter recognition improved substantially following the introduction of the ES Claveria Approach. Similarly, in sound recognition, the obtained p-value of 0.000 reflects an equally significant difference between pre-test and post-test results, providing strong evidence that learners’ phonemic awareness improved markedly over the course of the intervention. Taken together, these findings

confirm that the Claveria Approach effectively enhanced learners' early literacy skills, particularly in phonological awareness.

The results are consistent with prior studies. Bautista (2019) and Quiambao and Maguyon (2021) likewise reported that the Claveria Approach significantly strengthened learners' reading abilities through structured and multisensory strategies. Furthermore, the findings align with the recommendations of Park et al. (2023), who emphasized three critical practices for promoting early literacy and preventing future learning gaps: (a) delivering high-quality literacy instruction before kindergarten to build strong foundational skills, (b) continuously monitoring the development of all essential reading competencies including phonological awareness through kindergarten and first grade, and (c) providing targeted, evidence-based interventions at the earliest possible stage.

Collectively, these results underscore the importance of structured, multisensory, and evidence-driven instructional approaches in fostering foundational literacy. The demonstrated effectiveness of the ES Claveria Approach reinforces its potential as a viable tool for beginning reading instruction, with implications for both classroom practice and broader literacy initiatives.

Recommendations

It is recommended that learner profiling be conducted at the beginning of each school year to enable teachers to identify pupils with lower reading competencies and design appropriate assessment tools and interventions to support their literacy development. Teachers are likewise encouraged to continuously update their instructional practices by adopting evidence-based strategies and integrating innovative tools that enhance reading instruction.

Parents, as children’s first educators, should actively support their child’s mental, physical, and emotional readiness for school by fostering a home environment that nurtures early literacy skills. At the policy level, the Department of Education is urged to prioritize the provision of sustained professional development and adequate resources for primary teachers, particularly those in kindergarten, recognizing that this level lays the foundation for a child’s educational trajectory. Strengthening early literacy instruction at the kindergarten stage is therefore critical not only for improving immediate reading outcomes but also for achieving long-term educational progress in the Philippines.

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