Examining the Link between Phonological Awareness and Early Reading Readiness of Kindergarten Learners

Lilian N. Tarnate[1], Dennis B. Plando[2], Kaitlin Marie M. Opingo[3], Lilibeth C. Pinili[4], Helen O. Revalde[5], Reylan G. Capuno[6], Raymond C. Espina[7]

Cebu Technological University – Main Campus Cebu City, Philippines

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101000700

Received: 28 October 2026; Accepted: 03 November 2026; Published: 16 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness among Kindergarten learners in Tambongon Integrated School. Specifically, it assessed phonological awareness in terms of rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending, and early reading readiness in terms of letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness. The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. Using complete enumeration, two Kindergarten teachers assessed all 93 Kindergarten learners through a researcher-made observation checklist. Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient at the 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that the learners demonstrated an advanced level of phonological awareness and a high level of early reading readiness. More importantly, a significant positive relationship existed between the two variables, with rhyming skills and syllable awareness exhibiting strong positive correlations with early reading readiness, indicating that these foundational skills play a vital role in preparing learners for successful reading. The study concluded that stronger phonological awareness contributes to higher early reading readiness. It is therefore recommended that teachers implement the developed "Sound to Success: An Enhancement Guide for Phonological Awareness Development in Kindergarten" to strengthen early literacy instruction and further improve learners' reading readiness.

Keywords: Education, phonological awareness, early reading readiness, descriptive-correlational research, Tambongon Integrated School, San Remigio

INTRODUCTION

Early reading readiness is fundamental to learners' long-term literacy development, with phonological awareness identified as a key predictor of beginning reading success. Globally, studies have shown that phonological awareness, particularly skills such as rhyming, syllable segmentation, beginning sound identification, and sound blending, plays a critical role in enabling children to decode words and develop reading fluency. Kiss and Csapó (2025) emphasized that phonological awareness assessed during kindergarten significantly predicts early reading performance. They identified segmentation and synthesis as among the most challenging yet essential skills for young learners.

In the Philippine context, early reading challenges remain a persistent concern. Data from school reading profiles reveal that only about 10% of learners reach independent reading levels, while the majority remain at frustration and instructional levels (Badillo, 2025). Similarly, Galvez and Marquez (2025) found that kindergarten learners often perform below expected benchmarks in emergent literacy, particularly in phonological awareness. These concerns are further supported by findings from the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II) (2025), which reported that Cebu Province ranked 7th in the lowest reading performance. This indicates that literacy gaps persist even within relatively performing divisions.

At the local level, similar concerns are evident in Tambongon Integrated School. Based on classroom observations and teacher reports, many kindergarten learners can recognize letters but experience difficulty

with key phonological awareness skills such as identifying beginning sounds, producing rhymes, segmenting syllables, and blending sounds to form words. For instance, some learners are able to recite the alphabet but cannot consistently match sounds to corresponding letters, while others struggle to blend phonemes to read simple words. These challenges significantly influence early reading readiness components, including letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness. Supporting this observation, Ederio (2023) reported variability in phonological awareness skills among kindergarten learners, with only a moderate relationship found between phonological awareness and reading competency.

Despite existing international and Philippine studies affirming the importance of phonological awareness in early reading development, several gaps remain. Many studies examine phonological awareness as part of broader emergent literacy constructs or focus on intervention outcomes rather than directly analyzing its relationship with early reading readiness. Furthermore, most local studies focus on general reading performance in early grades without isolating phonological awareness as a distinct predictor variable. More importantly, there is limited empirical evidence in Cebu Province, that examines the relationship between specific domains of phonological awareness such as rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending and key indicators of early reading readiness such as letter recognition, letter sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness.

Given these gaps and the observed classroom challenges, there is a need to investigate the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness among kindergarten learners in the identified schools. Understanding this relationship would provide empirical evidence on which specific phonological awareness domains significantly influence reading readiness and would support the development of targeted instructional interventions.

Thus, this study aimed to determine the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of kindergarten learners in Tambongon Integrated School during the School Year 2025 to 2026. The findings would serve as a basis for developing a phonological awareness enhancement guide to strengthen early literacy instruction and improve reading readiness among young learners.

Theories

This study is anchored on three major theories that explain the development of early literacy skills and the role of phonological awareness in early reading readiness: Emergent Literacy Theory, the Alphabetic Principle, and Ehri's Four Phases of Word Reading Development. These theories collectively explain how children develop foundational literacy skills, acquire sound-symbol knowledge, and progress toward reading readiness.

Emergent literacy is founded on the idea that children begin developing knowledge and skills related to reading, writing, and language long before they receive formal education (Clay, 1966). Emergent literacy begins at birth as children naturally acquire language through everyday interactions and communication. As they grow, they develop increasingly complex speaking and listening skills that form the foundation for later reading and writing. During the preschool years, children learn to use language to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings while building essential literacy skills that prepare them for formal education (Septiani & Syaodih, 2021). Moreover, this theory refers to the foundational language and literacy skills that children develop before formal reading and writing instruction. It includes oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and early writing, which are acquired through meaningful interactions and everyday experiences in language-rich environments. These early skills provide the basis for later reading achievement and academic success (Lemire & Paul, 2026). This theory directly supports the early reading readiness variables of letter recognition, vocabulary development, and print awareness. Vygotsky (1978) further emphasized that learning occurs through social interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development, where guided instruction supports literacy growth.

Robust empirical support for Emergent Literacy Theory is demonstrated by a series of global and local investigations that link structural environments to early reading readiness. Globally, Lemire and Paul (2026) provided longitudinal evidence showing that baseline phonological awareness and oral language skills in

early childhood account for a major percentage of variance in formal reading achievement, acting as a critical cognitive buffer against future reading difficulties. This environmental dependency is further validated by Hsin and Wu (2021), whose experimental trials proved that interactive, dialogic storybook reading strategies, where educators deliberately emphasize word sounds and alliteration, sharply accelerate rhyme detection and phoneme isolation. Similarly, Neumann (2020) demonstrated that parent-guided exploration of environmental print coupled with deliberate letter-sounding significantly boosts both early phonetic interest and letter-sound knowledge in young learners.

In terms of instructional delivery mediums, Jiménez et al. (2024) established that phonetically aligned digital applications featuring real-time audio feedback loops function as a highly interactive modern environment that accelerates phonemic segmenting and blending. Conversely, the absence of these supportive settings creates severe developmental bottlenecks. In the Philippine context, Galvez and Marquez (2025) provided empirical evidence showing a high prevalence of emergent literacy delays, particularly in phoneme isolation and blending, among kindergarten learners who lacked print exposure and active language interactions in low-income home environments. Badillo (2025) reinforced these findings by comparing public and private settings, proving that children embedded in speech-saturated and highly interactive environments scored significantly higher on standardized phonological sensitivity diagnostics. Additionally, Septiani and Syaodih (2021) confirmed that a child's capacity to complexly utilize expressive language and distinctively isolate sounds within natural speech strongly dictates their subsequent success in formal decoding, indicating that early speech environments serve as the primary catalyst for early reading readiness.

The Alphabetic Principle explains that written language is based on systematic relationships between letters and sounds, providing the foundation for decoding and early reading acquisition. This principle supports the development of phonological awareness skills, including rhyming, syllable awareness, phoneme identification, segmentation, and blending. Recent evidence continues to identify phonological awareness as a key predictor of reading readiness and early literacy development.

Empirical evidence validating the direct relationship between this principle and early reading readiness is found in a large-scale meta-analysis by Odo (2021), which proved that structured, explicit phonological awareness combined with synthetic phonics instruction yields statistically significant, high-magnitude positive effects on both real word and pseudoword reading, accelerating a learner's transition into systematic decoding. Additionally, Míguez-Álvarez et al. (2022) provided global empirical validation through a cross-linguistic meta-analysis confirming that the strong relationship between early phonological sensitivity and subsequent reading success remains stable, positive, and invariant across various alphabetic languages, establishing it as a universal cognitive prerequisite. When children struggle to grasp this sound-symbol connection, targeted structural interventions are required. Eccles et al. (2021) provided longitudinal evidence showing that intensive, tier-2 small-group interventions focusing strictly on phonological remediation successfully altered the negative reading trajectory of over 80% of at-risk primary learners, bringing their reading readiness competencies up to age-appropriate baselines. Furthermore, Herrera et al. (2021) utilized a mixed-methods framework to demonstrate that explicit decoding and phonological training modules yielded universally positive literacy gains across culturally and linguistically diverse student demographics while significantly increasing instructional efficacy.

Ehri's Four Phases of Word Reading Development describe how children progress from the pre-alphabetic and partial alphabetic phases to the full and consolidated alphabetic phases as they acquire increasingly sophisticated letter-sound knowledge and word recognition skills. This theory supports the present study by explaining how phonological awareness enables children to transition from recognizing purely visual cues to decoding words through systematic letter-sound correspondences, thereby securing early reading readiness. Recent evidence continues to affirm that phonological awareness is a critical predictor of early reading development.

In the Philippine educational context, Abdon and Barrios (2022) provided empirical evidence for this developmental progression by demonstrating that kindergarten learners exposed to targeted phonological awareness instruction achieved significantly higher reading readiness and word-reading scores than those exposed to traditional unaligned reading routines, proving that direct training in sound segmenting and

blending moves children efficiently along Ehri's alphabetic continuum. The execution of this framework relies heavily on classroom leadership, as Arceo-Elemento and Capinpin (2024) demonstrated a significant positive correlation between a teacher's specialized pedagogical content knowledge of phonological awareness and the corresponding word-reading phases achieved by their classes.

Furthermore, this developmental progression encounters unique challenges in marginalized spaces. Santos (2022) exposed severe deficits in syllable deletion and initial sound identification tasks among entering public school kindergarteners in rural communities, attributing these delays to a critical lack of early literacy resources necessary to push learners out of the pre-alphabetic phase. Resolving these localized reading readiness deficits requires leveraging cross-linguistic frameworks. Villanueva (2023) provided empirical support via structural equation modeling showing that phonological awareness developed in a child's mother tongue (L1) directly transfers to and predicts reading readiness in secondary languages (L2/L3), allowing multilingual Filipino learners to navigate advanced alphabetic reading phases with significantly less resistance. Collectively, these recent studies provide strong empirical support for Ehri's theory by demonstrating that strong phonological awareness facilitates children's progression toward accurate, fluent, and multi-lingual word reading.

Legal Basis

Anchoring these theories and empirical findings within the Philippine educational system, three major legal bases directly mandate, support, and justify the execution of this study. First, the Republic Act No. 10157 (The Kindergarten Education Act) mandates kindergarten education as a compulsory and integral component of basic education, explicitly emphasizing that the curriculum must be designed to develop foundational literacy skills, including phonological awareness, to guarantee early reading readiness before primary schooling begins. Second, DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016 (The Omnibus Policy Guidelines on Kindergarten Education) provides concrete operational directives for implementing developmentally appropriate instruction, explicitly targeting the systematic cultivation of emergent literacy, language development, and phonetic exploration within child-centered environments. Finally, DepEd Department Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025 strengthens contemporary national reading interventions by mandating a focused focus on foundational sub-skills, explicitly identifying phonological awareness and decoding as the primary target mechanisms for correcting reading difficulties among early grade learners. These legal frameworks collectively ensure that early childhood literacy instruction is legally prioritized in kindergarten education and that reading readiness skills are systematically developed and measured.

In synthesis, Emergent Literacy Theory explains how early social and language environments shape foundational pre-reading behaviors; the Alphabetic Principle explains how children master the systematic sound-symbol relationships necessary for decoding; and Ehri's Four Phases of Word Reading Development explain how phonological awareness allows children to progress sequentially from visual guessers to accurate, fluent decoders. Supported by an international, national, and local empirical matrix of 15 distinct studies, these theories confirm that phonological awareness is a critical, non-negotiable foundation for early reading readiness. Together with the legal mandates of Republic Act No. 10157, DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016, and DepEd Memorandum No. 064, s. 2025, these frameworks provide a rigorous theoretical and policy-driven basis for examining the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness among kindergarten learners, directly justifying the development of targeted instructional interventions to optimize early literacy outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study examined the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness among kindergarten learners and aimed to provide a basis for a phonological awareness enhancement guide. The findings are expected to benefit the following stakeholders: Kindergarten learners, Kindergarten teachers, school administrators, parents and guardians, curriculum planners and policymakers, the researchers, and the future researchers.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to determine the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in Tambongon Integrated School in San Remegio during the School Year 2025–2026 as basis for phonological awareness enhancement guide.

Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the Kindergarten learners in terms of:

1.1 age;

1.2 gender; and

1.3 pre-kindergarten attendance?

2. What is the level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners in terms of:

2.1 Rhyming skills;

2.2 Syllable awareness;

2.3 Beginning sound identification; and

2.4 Sound blending?

3. What is the level of early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in terms of:

3.1 Letter recognition;

3.2 Letter-sound correspondence;

3.3 Vocabulary development; and

3.4 Print awareness?

4. Is there a significant relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners?

5. Based on the findings, what phonological awareness enhancement guide may be developed to support early reading readiness among Kindergarten learners?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section presented the research design, environment, respondents, instruments, procedures, and the statistical methods to be used for data analysis. It aims to provide a clear overview of the approaches and techniques applied throughout the study.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness among kindergarten learners. The descriptive component was used to determine the levels of phonological awareness and early reading readiness across their respective domains. The correlational component was used to examine whether a significant relationship existed between the two variables.

A descriptive-correlational design was appropriate for this study because it described the characteristics of

variables and examined the degree of relationship between them without manipulating any conditions or variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Since no intervention or experimental treatment was implemented, the study focused on naturally occurring literacy behaviors among kindergarten learners as observed and assessed by their teachers.

Correlational research determines the strength and direction of the relationship between variables using statistical measures such as the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2019). In this study, descriptive statistics such as the mean were used to determine the levels of phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness, while Pearson r was used to analyze the relationship between the two variables.

Through this design, the study determined whether higher levels of phonological awareness skills were significantly associated with higher levels of early reading readiness among kindergarten learners.

Environment

The study was conducted at Tambongon Integrated School, a public integrated school located in Tambongon, San Remigio, Cebu, Philippines, along Antonio Y. de Pio Highway. The school operates under the Department of Education and delivers the full K to 12 Basic Education Program, catering to learners from Kindergarten to Senior High School within one institution.

The school was established in 1939 as an elementary school serving the local community. In 2011, it was officially converted into an integrated school, marking a significant milestone that expanded its capacity to provide continuous and accessible education from early childhood to secondary level. This transition enabled the school to address issues on learner retention and accessibility, particularly for students in geographically distant barangays.

The school offers a comprehensive range of educational programs. At the elementary level, it focuses on foundational literacy and numeracy development, while the junior high school provides general secondary education aligned with national standards. In the senior high school department, the institution offers academic tracks designed to prepare learners for higher education and employment opportunities. Across all grade levels, the school implements the K to 12 curriculum, with emphasis on developing critical thinking, communication skills, and lifelong learning competencies.

Over the years, the school has achieved notable progress in curriculum implementation and learner development. It has actively participated in various district and division programs, including reading initiatives, numeracy enhancement activities, and school-based interventions aimed at improving learning outcomes. The school has also strengthened its literacy programs in response to national priorities, particularly in addressing early reading challenges among primary learners. These efforts reflect the institution’s commitment to providing quality, inclusive, and accessible education to learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds within the community.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a researcher-made Kindergarten Literacy Observation Scale designed to measure the phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners. The tool was developed based on established early literacy theories, particularly Emergent Literacy Theory, The Alphabetic Principle, and Ehri’s Four Phases of Word Reading, as well as the competencies outlined in the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide. Although it was not adapted from any standardized instrument, it was carefully constructed to ensure alignment with the developmental characteristics and literacy needs of Kindergarten learners.

The instrument consisted of three parts. Part I gathered the demographic profile of the learners in terms of age, gender, and pre-kindergarten attendance. Part II assessed phonological awareness skills in terms of rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending. Part III measured

early reading readiness in terms of letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness.

All items were rated by Kindergarten teachers using a four-point Likert scale: 4 (Always Demonstrated), 3 (Often Demonstrated), 2 (Sometimes Demonstrated), and 1 (Rarely Demonstrated). Higher scores indicated a stronger demonstration of phonological awareness and early reading readiness skills among learners.

Prior to field deployment, the structural integrity and contextual alignment of the tool were subjected to a rigorous face and content validation process. The validation panel consisted of three (3) external subject-matter experts chosen based on strict professional qualifications: one university professor specializing in early childhood education and curriculum development, one master teacher in primary grade reading instruction, and one education program supervisor in language and literacy. These validators systematically evaluated the initial item pool to ensure maximum content relevance, linguistic clarity, structural simplicity, and explicit alignment with the core research objectives. Valuable feedback regarding contextual modifications and item phrasing was incorporated into the final revision of the tool.

Following content validation, a pilot test was administered to a non-participating cohort of kindergarten pupils exhibiting identical characteristics to the actual target population. The gathered pilot data was subjected to statistical reliability testing to measure internal consistency. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.988 for Part II (Phonological Awareness Scale) and 0.987 for Part III (Early Reading Readiness Scale). These statistical outputs fall well above the standard acceptable threshold, indicating excellent internal consistency and verifying that the researcher-made instrument was highly dependable for formal data collection.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were collected in a systematic and ethical manner following three stages: preliminary stage, data gathering stage, and post-data gathering stage. The procedures were designed to ensure accuracy, validity, and ethical compliance in assessing kindergarten learners' phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness as evaluated by their teachers.

Preliminary Stage. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured formal approval from the Department of Education and the school head of the participating school. Since the study involved the evaluation of minors, informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of the kindergarten learners to ensure ethical compliance and data privacy. The consent process emphasized that the learners would not be directly tested by the researcher and that the information to be gathered would be based on teacher assessments.

An orientation was conducted with the two kindergarten teacher-respondents to explain the purpose of the study, the nature of the assessment tool, and the procedures for accomplishing the rating forms. This ensured that all teachers had a clear and uniform understanding of how to evaluate learners' phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness based on classroom observations and existing learner performance. The assessment instrument was reviewed and finalized before implementation to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and alignment with kindergarten-level competencies.

Data Gathering Stage. After securing all necessary permissions and finalizing the instrument, the researcher distributed the assessment forms to the teacher-respondents. The two kindergarten teachers accomplished the rating tools based on their actual classroom observations of the 84 kindergarten learners under their care. The teachers assessed each learner's phonological awareness in terms of rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending. They also evaluated early reading readiness in terms of letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness.

Teachers completed the assessment independently based on their professional judgment and classroom records to ensure accuracy and authenticity of data. The researcher monitored the process to ensure consistency in the completion of the instruments and to address any clarification needed regarding the rating

procedure. After completion, all assessment forms were collected and checked for completeness before encoding.

Post-Data Gathering Stage. After data collection, the researcher organized and coded all responses for analysis. Each teacher-respondent's assessment data was reviewed to ensure completeness and consistency. Any incomplete entries were documented but retained as part of the dataset to preserve data integrity. The encoded data were then prepared for statistical analysis to determine the level of phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of the kindergarten learners as assessed by their teachers, as well as the relationship between the two variables. All data were kept confidential and were used solely for research purposes. The findings were then organized and presented in the succeeding chapters in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Statistical Treatment

To ensure accurate interpretation of the data collected, the following statistical tools would be used in accordance with the objectives of the study:

Frequency Count. Frequency count was used to determine the number of kindergarten learners based on profile variables such as age, gender, and preschool attendance. This statistical tool was used to present the actual number of respondents in each category in a clear and organized manner.

Percentage. The percentage was used to describe the distribution of kindergarten learners according to their profile variables. This helped present the proportion of learners in each category relative to the total number of respondents, making the data easier to interpret and compare.

Weighted Mean. The weighted mean was used to determine the level of phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of kindergarten learners as assessed by their teachers. Using a four-point Likert scale, the weighted mean provided a numerical interpretation of the learners' performance in terms of rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, sound blending, letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness.

Standard Deviation. Standard deviation was used to measure the variability of the learners' phonological awareness and early reading readiness scores. This statistical tool determined whether the learners' performances were closely similar or widely varied in terms of literacy skills as assessed by their teachers.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r). Pearson r was used to determine the significant relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of kindergarten learners. This statistical tool measured the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. The results served as a basis for developing a phonological awareness enhancement guide to improve early reading readiness.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed strict ethical standards to ensure that all procedures were conducted with respect, integrity, and protection of the rights and welfare of all individuals involved. Since the study involved kindergarten learners as the subjects of assessment and kindergarten teachers as respondents, appropriate ethical safeguards were implemented throughout the research process.

Informed Consent. Informed consent was secured from the parents or legal guardians of the kindergarten learners prior to data collection. The consent form clearly explained the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and the use of teacher-based assessments to evaluate learners' phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness. Parents were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could refuse or withdraw consent at any time without any negative consequences for their children. In addition, informed consent was also obtained from the kindergarten teacher-respondents. Teachers were informed about the objectives of the study, their role as evaluators, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Voluntary Participation. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary for both teachers and learners (through parental consent). Teachers were given the freedom to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Likewise, learners were included in the assessment only upon parental approval. No form of coercion or pressure was applied at any point in the research process.

Confidentiality and Anonymity. Confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study. No names of learners or teachers were used in the data collection forms, analysis, or final report. Instead, coded identifiers were assigned to ensure anonymity. All collected data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Results were presented in aggregated form to ensure that no individual participant could be identified.

Protection of Participants' Rights. The rights of all participants were fully protected throughout the study. Learners were not directly tested by the researcher and were not exposed to any stressful or inappropriate procedures. Instead, their performance was assessed through teacher observations within normal classroom activities. Teachers' professional judgment was respected, and they were not required to provide any information beyond the scope of the study. All procedures were designed to ensure that participants were treated fairly, respectfully, and in accordance with ethical research standards.

Minimization of Risk. The study involved minimal risk since no experimental treatment or intrusive procedures were conducted. Data collection relied solely on teacher-based assessments of existing classroom performance. The process did not disrupt regular instructional activities and ensured that learners remained in a safe and familiar learning environment.

Compliance with Ethical Standards. The study complied with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Education and followed institutional research approval procedures prior to implementation. All stages of the research were conducted with transparency, accountability, and strict adherence to ethical principles to ensure the protection and welfare of learners, teachers, and the school community.

RESULTS

This chapter presented and interpreted the data on the phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of kindergarten learners in Tambongon Integrated School in San Remegio. It included the respondents' assessment of learners' phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness across the identified domains, as well as the relationship between these two variables. The findings served as the basis for a proposed phonological awareness enhancement guide aimed at strengthening early literacy instruction and improving reading readiness among kindergarten learners.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

This section presented the age, gender, and the pre-kindergarten attendance of the learners.

Age of the Learners

Age is included in this study because it represents the learner's developmental stage, which is closely associated with the acquisition of early literacy skills. In kindergarten, even small differences in age may influence attention span, language development, and readiness for phonological tasks such as sound recognition and blending. Examining age helps determine its association with learners' phonological awareness and early reading readiness.

Table 2

Age of the learners

Age (in years)	f	%
6	84	90.32

5	9	9.68
Total	**93**	**100**

Table 3

Gender of the learners

Gender	f	%
Female	42	45.16
Male	51	54.84
Total	**93**	**100**

The findings show that the majority of the Kindergarten learners (90.32%) are six years old, while only 9.68% are five years old. This indicates that most of the participants fall within the age prescribed by the Department of Education for Kindergarten enrollment. The distribution suggests that the respondents are generally at an appropriate developmental stage for acquiring foundational literacy skills, including phonological awareness and early reading readiness. Since only a small proportion of learners are younger than the recommended age, the class is relatively homogeneous in terms of developmental maturity.

The predominance of six-year-old learners may have contributed positively to the results of this study, particularly the advanced level of phonological awareness and the high level of early reading readiness. Children within this age range typically demonstrate greater cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development than younger learners, enabling them to recognize sounds, manipulate language, and participate effectively in literacy activities. Their increased exposure to language-rich environments at home and school may also have enhanced their readiness to engage in formal reading instruction.

The present finding is consistent with the study of Kim et al. (2020), who reported that age is positively associated with children's development of phonological awareness and beginning reading skills because older kindergarten learners generally possess more advanced language processing abilities. Likewise, Duncan et al. (2020) emphasized that children's developmental maturity significantly influences their acquisition of foundational literacy competencies during the early years of schooling. These studies support the present finding that learners who are within the expected age range are more likely to demonstrate readiness for literacy instruction.

The age profile of the respondents also strengthens the validity of the study since developmental differences caused by age were minimized. Consequently, the observed levels of phonological awareness and early reading readiness can be interpreted primarily as reflections of the learners' literacy development rather than variations in age.

Gender

Gender is considered in this study to determine whether there are possible differences between male and female kindergarten learners in developing phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness. Previous literacy development patterns suggest that gender may influence language exposure, participation in oral activities, and learning behaviors. Including gender allows for a more comprehensive understanding of learner differences in early literacy development.

The data reveal that 54.84% of the Kindergarten learners are male, while 45.16% are female. Although there are slightly more male learners than female learners, the distribution indicates that both sexes are adequately represented in the study. This balanced representation minimizes gender bias and provides a more comprehensive picture of the phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners. The slight predominance of male learners is not expected to substantially influence the overall findings of the study because early literacy development depends more on the quality of instruction, language exposure, and learning experiences than on biological sex. During the Kindergarten years, children

acquire foundational literacy skills through meaningful interactions with teachers, classmates, and their environment. Consequently, both male and female learners are capable of developing comparable levels of phonological awareness when provided with appropriate learning opportunities and instructional support.

The findings are supported by Quinn and Wagner (2021), who found that gender differences in phonological awareness and early literacy skills among young children are generally minimal when learners receive equitable access to literacy-rich environments. Similarly, Torppa et al. (2022) explained that although slight differences in language development may be observed between boys and girls, these differences become less pronounced when effective classroom instruction and early intervention programs are consistently implemented. This suggests that instructional experiences have a greater influence on literacy development than gender alone. The relatively balanced gender distribution in this study therefore provides confidence that the observed levels of phonological awareness and early reading readiness reflect the characteristics of the learner population rather than gender-related differences.

Pre-kindergarten Attendance

Pre-kindergarten attendance is included because early exposure to structured learning environments may influence the development of foundational literacy skills. Learners who attended pre-kindergarten may have prior experiences in letter recognition, sound awareness, and print exposure, which can contribute to higher levels of phonological awareness and reading readiness. This variable helps determine whether early childhood education experiences provide an advantage in preparing learners for formal reading instruction in kindergarten.

Table 4

Learners' Pre-Kindergarten attendance

Attendance	f	%
Yes	86	92.47
No	7	7.53
Total	**93**	**100**

Table 5

Level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners in terms of rhyming skills

S/N	**Indicators**	**WM**	**SD**	**Verbal Description**
1	Identifies rhyming words when heard orally	2.74	0.93	Advanced
2	Selects a rhyming word from given choices	2.74	0.9	Advanced
3	Produces a rhyming word independently	2.74	0.9	Advanced
4	Completes a rhyme in familiar patterns	2.74	0.9	Advanced
5	Distinguishes rhyming from non-rhyming words	2.74	0.9	Advanced
6	Participates actively in rhyming games	2.74	0.9	Advanced
7	Generates more than one rhyming word	2.74	0.9	Advanced
8	Responds accurately during rhyming activities	2.74	0.9	Advanced
	Aggregate Mean	**2.74**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.9**	**Advanced**

Legend: 3.25-4.00-Expert; 2.50-3.24-Advanced; 1.75-2.49-Intermediate; 1.00-1.74- Beginner

The results indicate that 92.47% of the Kindergarten learners attended pre-kindergarten, while only 7.53% had no prior preschool experience. This finding demonstrates that the vast majority of the learners had already been exposed to structured early childhood education before entering Kindergarten. Such exposure likely provided opportunities to develop essential pre-literacy skills, including letter recognition, vocabulary development, sound awareness, and print concepts.

The high percentage of learners with pre-kindergarten experience may explain why the respondents achieved advanced levels of phonological awareness and high levels of early reading readiness. Early childhood education exposes children to songs, storytelling, rhyming activities, alphabet games, and interactive language experiences that strengthen oral language and phonological processing skills. These learning experiences prepare children for more formal literacy instruction by establishing the foundational competencies necessary for successful reading acquisition. In contrast, learners without preschool experience may require additional instructional support to develop these foundational skills.

The findings support Duncan et al. (2020), who concluded that children who participate in quality preschool programs generally demonstrate stronger language development, phonological awareness, and emergent literacy skills than children without early childhood education experiences. Similarly, the National Institute for Early Education Research (2023) reported that participation in high-quality preschool programs significantly improves children's readiness for formal schooling by strengthening early literacy and language competencies. These findings reinforce the importance of preschool education as a foundation for later reading success.

The high rate of pre-kindergarten attendance among the respondents may therefore have contributed to the favorable literacy outcomes observed in this study. This finding underscores the importance of sustained investment in early childhood education programs to ensure that children enter Kindergarten equipped with the foundational skills necessary for successful reading development.

LEVEL OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SKILLS

The level of phonological awareness skills is a critical component in understanding kindergarten learners' readiness for early reading instruction. It refers to the learners' ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structures of spoken language, which serves as a foundational skill for decoding and word recognition. In this study, phonological awareness is assessed through key domains such as rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending. Determining the level of these skills provides important baseline information on how well learners can process and work with sounds in words, which is essential for the development of early reading readiness.

Rhyming Skills

This section presents the learners' level of awareness in rhyming skills. It reflects their ability to recognize and produce words with similar ending sounds, which is important for identifying sound patterns in language.

The findings revealed an aggregate mean of 2.74, interpreted as Advanced, indicating that the Kindergarten learners possess well-developed rhyming skills. The learners consistently demonstrated the ability to recognize, identify, produce, and distinguish rhyming words across all indicators. This suggests that they have developed sensitivity to similar ending sounds in spoken words, an essential component of phonological awareness that prepares children for reading acquisition.

The advanced level of rhyming skills may be attributed to the learners' regular participation in language-rich classroom activities such as nursery rhymes, storytelling, poems, songs, and word games. These instructional experiences expose children to repetitive sound patterns, enabling them to recognize similarities among words and develop auditory discrimination. Moreover, frequent oral language interactions both at home and in school provide opportunities for learners to strengthen their awareness of sound structures before formal reading instruction begins.

The present finding supports the study of Goswami (2021), who emphasized that rhyming ability is among the earliest manifestations of phonological awareness and serves as a strong predictor of beginning reading achievement. Similarly, Lonigan, Burgess, and Schatschneider (2021) explained that children who develop strong rhyming skills are generally better prepared to understand phonological patterns, facilitating word recognition and decoding during the early stages of reading instruction. These findings affirm that strengthening rhyming skills contributes significantly to learners' overall literacy development.

The advanced level of rhyming skills observed in this study indicates that the learners possess a strong foundation for acquiring more complex phonological skills. This finding highlights the importance of sustaining interactive literacy activities that reinforce children's awareness of sound patterns and support successful early reading development.

Syllable Awareness

This section presents the learners' level of awareness in syllable awareness. It shows their ability to segment words into syllables, helping them understand word structure and improve decoding skills.

Table 7 Level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners in terms of beginning sound identification

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Names objects that begin with given sound	3.24	0.84	Advanced
2	Recognizes beginning sounds in classroom objects	3.24	0.84	Advanced
3	Demonstrates consistency in identifying initial sounds	3.24	0.84	Advanced
	Aggregate Mean	**3.24**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.84**	**Advanced**

The results revealed an aggregate mean of 2.76, interpreted as Advanced, indicating that the Kindergarten learners demonstrate a high level of proficiency in identifying, segmenting, and manipulating syllables in spoken words. Their ability to clap, count, and distinguish syllables reflects an understanding of word structure, which is essential for phonological processing and decoding skills.

This finding suggests that the learners have acquired sufficient exposure to oral language activities that encourage them to analyze spoken words into meaningful sound units. Activities such as clapping syllables, singing action songs, chanting, and interactive storytelling may have contributed to the learners' ability to recognize syllable patterns. Such experiences strengthen children's awareness of word structures, making it easier for them to decode unfamiliar words and develop reading fluency.

The result is consistent with Anthony and Francis (2020), who reported that syllable awareness is a foundational component of phonological awareness because it enables children to recognize larger sound units before progressing to phonemic awareness. Likewise, Kim et al. (2020) found that learners with strong syllable awareness generally exhibit higher levels of reading readiness and perform better in beginning reading tasks than those with less developed phonological skills. These studies reinforce the importance of syllable awareness in promoting successful literacy acquisition.

The advanced level of syllable awareness obtained in this study indicates that the learners are developing essential phonological processing skills necessary for formal reading instruction. Maintaining instructional activities that strengthen syllable manipulation will further enhance learners' decoding and word recognition abilities.

Beginning Sound Identification

This section presents the learners' level of awareness in beginning sound identification. It indicates their

ability to recognize the initial sounds of words, a key skill in linking sounds to letters.

Table 6

Level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners in terms of syllable awareness

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Claps syllables correctly in familiar words	2.75	0.9	Advanced
2	Identifies syllables in own name	2.75	0.9	Advanced
3	Differentiates short and long words by syllables	2.75	0.9	Advanced
4	Segments unfamiliar simple words	2.76	0.89	Advanced
	Aggregate Mean	**2.76**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.9**	**Advanced**

The findings revealed an aggregate mean of 3.24, interpreted as Advanced, indicating that the Kindergarten learners consistently demonstrated proficiency in identifying the initial sounds of spoken words. The learners were able to recognize beginning sounds in familiar words and classroom objects, reflecting their growing ability to associate spoken sounds with letters.

The learners' high performance in this area may be attributed to regular phonics instruction and meaningful classroom activities that emphasize letter-sound relationships. Teachers often introduce beginning sounds through alphabet lessons, picture cards, environmental print, songs, and interactive games, allowing children to repeatedly connect spoken language with written symbols. These experiences strengthen learners' alphabetic knowledge and prepare them for word decoding during beginning reading.

The present finding supports Ehri (2020), who emphasized that recognizing beginning sounds is fundamental to the development of alphabetic knowledge because children learn to connect phonemes with corresponding letters. Likewise, Piasta and Wagner (2020) explained that beginning sound identification contributes significantly to children's decoding skills and serves as a reliable predictor of early reading achievement. Their findings support the present result, suggesting that mastery of beginning sound identification enhances learners' readiness for formal reading instruction.

The advanced performance observed in this study demonstrates that the learners have acquired an important prerequisite for reading development. Continued exposure to systematic phonics instruction and sound discrimination activities will further strengthen their ability to decode words accurately and efficiently.

Sound Blending

Table 9

Summary on the level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners

Components	WM	SD	Verbal Description
Rhyming Skills	2.74	0.9	Advanced
Syllable Awareness	2.76	0.9	Advanced
Beginning Sound Identification	3.24	0.84	Advanced
Sound Blending	3.24	0.84	Advanced
Grand Mean	**3**		
Grand Standard Deviation		**0.87**	**Advanced**

This section presents the learners' level of awareness in sound blending. It demonstrates their ability to combine individual sounds to form words, which is essential for fluent reading.

Table 8

Level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners in terms of sound blending

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Blends two phonemes correctly	3.24	0.84	Advanced
2	Blends sounds without visual prompts	3.24	0.84	Advanced
3	Blends sounds with minimal assistance	3.24	0.84	Advanced
4	Shows improvement in blending tasks	3.24	0.84	Advanced
	Aggregate Mean	**3.24**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.84**	**Advanced**

The results revealed an aggregate mean of 3.24, interpreted as Advanced, indicating that the Kindergarten learners possess a high level of proficiency in blending individual sounds to form meaningful words. The learners consistently demonstrated the ability to combine phonemes with minimal assistance, reflecting their readiness to apply phonological knowledge during beginning reading activities.

The advanced level of sound blending may have resulted from continuous exposure to phonics-based instruction and guided oral language exercises. Through repeated opportunities to blend sounds during classroom activities, learners become more capable of decoding unfamiliar words and recognizing sound-symbol relationships. These instructional experiences help learners move beyond recognizing isolated sounds toward constructing complete words, an essential step in reading development.

The finding supports Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2021), who emphasized that sound blending is a critical component of decoding because it enables beginning readers to combine individual phonemes into recognizable words. Similarly, Ehri (2020) explained that learners who develop strong blending skills are more successful in word recognition and reading fluency because they can efficiently integrate phonological information during reading. These studies provide evidence that sound blending is an indispensable skill in early literacy instruction.

The advanced level of sound blending demonstrated by the learners indicates that they have acquired one of the essential building blocks of reading. Sustaining phonics instruction and interactive blending activities will further strengthen learners' decoding abilities and overall reading readiness.

Summary

This section summarizes the Kindergarten learners' level of phonological awareness in terms of rhyming, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending. It presents their overall performance and highlights areas for further support in early literacy development.

The overall findings yielded a grand mean of 3.00, interpreted as Advanced, indicating that the Kindergarten learners possess well-developed phonological awareness skills across all four domains. Among the components, beginning sound identification and sound blending obtained the highest mean scores, while rhyming skills and syllable awareness also demonstrated advanced levels of proficiency. These results suggest that the learners have acquired the essential sound awareness skills necessary to support successful reading acquisition.

The advanced level of phonological awareness observed in this study may be attributed to the combined influence of developmentally appropriate classroom instruction, early childhood educational experiences, and consistent language exposure. Activities such as storytelling, nursery rhymes, phonics instruction, sound games, and interactive literacy exercises likely provided learners with meaningful opportunities to recognize, manipulate, and organize the sound structures of language. These experiences strengthen

children's ability to process spoken language, which serves as the foundation for decoding and word recognition.

The findings agree with Hulme and Snowling (2020), who identified phonological awareness as one of the strongest predictors of beginning reading success because it enables children to recognize and manipulate speech sounds before connecting them with printed symbols. Similarly, the International Literacy Association (2022) emphasized that systematic instruction in phonological awareness significantly improves children's reading readiness and later reading achievement. The consistency between the present findings and previous research highlights the importance of developing phonological awareness during the early years of education.

Overall, the advanced level of phonological awareness demonstrated by the learners indicates that they are academically prepared to engage in formal reading instruction. The findings further justify the development of the proposed enhancement guide, which seeks to sustain and strengthen learners' phonological awareness through structured, developmentally appropriate literacy activities.

Level of Early Reading Readiness

The level of early reading readiness is a key indicator of how prepared kindergarten learners are to engage in formal reading instruction. It refers to the extent to which learners demonstrate foundational literacy skills that support beginning reading, including letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness. In this study, early reading readiness is assessed through teacher observations of these specific domains to determine how well learners are prepared to transition into more structured reading activities in the early grades. Identifying the level of early reading readiness provides essential information for understanding learners' literacy development and for guiding appropriate instructional support.

Letter Recognition

This section presents the Kindergarten pupils' level of letter recognition, which reflects their ability to identify and name letters of the alphabet as a foundation for reading readiness.

Table 10

Level of early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in terms of letter recognition

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Identifies letters in random order	3.14	0.76	High
2	Identifies letters in environmental print	3.14	0.76	High
3	Identifies letters in own name	3.14	0.76	High
4	Participates in letter recognition activities	3.14	0.76	High
	Aggregate Mean	**3.14**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.76**	**High**

Legend: 3.25-4.00-Very High; 2.50-3.24-High; 1.75-2.49-Low; 1.00-1.74- Very Low

The findings revealed an aggregate mean of 3.14, interpreted as High, indicating that the Kindergarten learners possess a strong ability to recognize letters in different contexts. The learners demonstrated competence in identifying letters presented in random order, recognizing letters found in environmental print, identifying the letters in their own names, and actively participating in letter recognition activities.

These findings suggest that the learners have acquired one of the most fundamental prerequisites for beginning reading.

The learners' high level of letter recognition may be attributed to their consistent exposure to print-rich learning environments both at home and in school. Kindergarten classrooms commonly incorporate alphabet displays, storybooks, flashcards, charts, and interactive literacy activities that provide repeated opportunities for children to identify and name letters. Such experiences strengthen learners' familiarity with alphabet symbols and prepare them to establish meaningful connections between written letters and spoken language.

The findings supports National Center on Improving Literacy (2022) which reported that children who demonstrate strong letter knowledge during Kindergarten are more likely to become successful readers in the primary grades. These findings reinforce the importance of systematic alphabet instruction in promoting early literacy development.

Overall, the learners' high level of letter recognition indicates that they possess a solid foundation for learning more advanced reading skills. Continued exposure to print-rich environments and engaging alphabet activities will further strengthen their readiness for formal reading instruction.

Letter-Sound Correspondence

This section presents the pupils' level of letter-sound correspondence, which indicates their ability to connect letters with their corresponding sounds, an essential skill for decoding words.

Table 11

Level of early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in terms of letter-sound correspondence

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Differentiates letter names and sounds	3.14	0.76	High
2	Uses letter sounds in word formation	3.14	0.76	High
3	Identifies vowel sounds accurately	3.15	0.77	High
4	Applies letter sounds when blending	3.17	0.76	High
	Aggregate Mean	**3.15**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.76**	**High**

The results yielded an aggregate mean of 3.15, interpreted as High, indicating that the learners demonstrate a strong understanding of the relationship between letters and their corresponding sounds. The learners consistently differentiated letter names from sounds, identified vowel sounds accurately, used letter sounds in word formation, and applied these sounds during blending activities. These findings indicate that the learners are developing the alphabetic principle, which is fundamental to successful reading acquisition.

The high performance in letter-sound correspondence may be explained by learners' regular exposure to explicit phonics instruction and classroom activities that integrate alphabet learning with sound recognition. Teachers frequently employ picture cards, phonics songs, sound drills, and interactive reading activities that reinforce the association between letters and sounds. Through repeated practice, learners become more confident in applying these relationships when decoding simple words.

The findings are consistent with Ehri (2020), who explained that mastery of letter-sound correspondence forms the foundation of decoding and enables beginning readers to recognize unfamiliar words accurately. Likewise, Castles, Rastle, and Nation (2021) emphasized that systematic phonics instruction significantly

improves children's ability to connect letters with sounds, thereby accelerating reading development. These studies support the present findings by highlighting the importance of alphabetic knowledge in early literacy instruction.

The learners' high level of letter-sound correspondence demonstrates that they are developing the essential decoding skills required for beginning reading. Sustained phonics instruction and meaningful literacy experiences will further strengthen these competencies as learners progress to higher grade levels.

Vocabulary Development

This section presents the pupils' level of vocabulary development, which shows their understanding and use of words that support comprehension and communication skills.

Table 12

Level of early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in terms of vocabulary development

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Names common objects correctly	2.71	0.94	High
2	Uses age-appropriate vocabulary	2.71	0.94	High
3	Understands simple story words	2.71	0.94	High
4	Answers "what" and "who" questions	2.86	0.93	High
5	Uses newly learned words	2.71	0.94	High
6	Follows simple verbal instructions	2.71	0.94	High
7	Identifies objects from descriptions	2.71	0.94	High
8	Demonstrates vocabulary growth	2.71	0.94	High
	Aggregate Mean	**2.73**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.94**	**High**

The findings revealed an aggregate mean of 2.73, interpreted as High, indicating that the learners possess an adequate vocabulary appropriate for their developmental stage. The learners demonstrated the ability to name familiar objects, understand common words used in stories, answer simple comprehension questions, follow verbal instructions, and use age-appropriate vocabulary during classroom interactions. These findings suggest that the learners have developed sufficient oral language skills to support early reading and communication.

Although vocabulary development was rated high, it obtained the lowest mean among the four components of early reading readiness. This suggests that while learners possess functional vocabulary knowledge, continuous enrichment is still necessary to expose them to a broader range of words and language experiences. Vocabulary growth occurs gradually through meaningful interactions, storytelling, conversations, shared reading, and play-based learning experiences. Providing learners with diverse opportunities to hear and use new words will further enhance both language development and reading comprehension.

The findings support Wasik and Hindman (2020), who emphasized that vocabulary knowledge is essential for reading comprehension because children cannot understand written texts without first understanding the meanings of words. The findings agree with Morgan et al. (2020), who found that preschoolers' vocabulary and communication skills predicted later academic achievement. The very high vocabulary level observed in the present study highlights the importance of language-rich activities and meaningful conversations in supporting children's early literacy development.

The findings indicate that vocabulary instruction should remain an important focus in Kindergarten classrooms. Teachers may further strengthen learners' vocabulary through interactive storytelling, dialogic

reading, thematic discussions, and language-rich classroom activities that encourage children to actively use newly learned words.

Print Awareness

This section presents the pupils' level of print awareness, which reflects their understanding of how print works, including directionality, spacing, and the function of written language.

Table 13

Level of early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in terms of print awareness

S/N	Indicators	WM	SD	Verbal Description
1	Holds book correctly	2.75	0.9	High
2	Identifies front and back of book	2.99	0.8	High
3	Tracks print left to right	2.75	0.9	High
4	Recognizes that print carries meaning	2.75	0.9	High
5	Recognizes familiar environmental print	2.75	0.9	High
6	Understands top-to-bottom reading direction	2.75	0.9	High
7	Participates in shared reading sessions	2.8	0.92	High
	Aggregate Mean	**2.79**		
	Aggregate Standard Deviation		**0.89**	**High**

The results revealed an aggregate mean of 2.79, interpreted as High, indicating that the learners possess a good understanding of basic print concepts. They demonstrated the ability to identify the front and back of books, hold books correctly, recognize that print carries meaning, follow the direction of print, recognize environmental print, and participate actively during shared reading sessions. These findings suggest that the learners are becoming familiar with the conventions of written language, an important prerequisite for successful reading.

The learners' high level of print awareness may be attributed to regular classroom reading routines and meaningful exposure to printed materials. Storybook reading, classroom labels, environmental print, big books, and teacher-guided shared reading experiences help children understand how print functions and how written language conveys meaning. Frequent interactions with print encourage learners to develop confidence in handling books and understanding the mechanics of reading.

The findings are supported by Justice et al. (2020), who emphasized that print awareness provides children with foundational knowledge about written language, enabling them to understand reading conventions before formal instruction begins. Likewise, Neumann (2021) reported that children who are consistently exposed to print-rich environments demonstrate greater familiarity with books and written language, resulting in higher levels of reading readiness. These studies affirm the importance of creating literacy-rich classrooms that promote children's interaction with printed materials.

Overall, the learners' high level of print awareness demonstrates that they possess essential knowledge about the functions and organization of print. Maintaining meaningful reading experiences and access to diverse reading materials will continue to strengthen learners' readiness for formal reading instruction.

Summary

This section presents the summary of Kindergarten learners' level of phonological awareness skills. It provides an overview of their performance in rhyming, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending, highlighting their overall readiness for early reading development.

Table 14

Summary on the level of phonological awareness skills of Kindergarten learners

Components	**WM**	**SD**	**Verbal Description**
Letter Recognition	3.14	0.76	High
Letter-Sound Correspondence	3.15	0.76	High
Vocabulary Development	2.73	0.94	High
Print Awareness	2.79	0.89	High
Grand Mean	**2.95**		
Grand Standard Deviation		**0.84**	**High**

The overall findings yielded a grand mean of 2.95, interpreted as High, indicating that the Kindergarten learners possess a high level of early reading readiness. Among the four components, letter-sound correspondence obtained the highest mean, followed closely by letter recognition and print awareness, while vocabulary development recorded the lowest mean, although it remained within the high descriptive level. These findings indicate that the learners have developed the foundational literacy competencies necessary to engage successfully in beginning reading instruction.

The high level of early reading readiness observed in this study may be attributed to the learners' exposure to quality early childhood education, literacy-rich classroom environments, and developmentally appropriate instructional strategies. Activities such as shared reading, phonics instruction, storytelling, vocabulary enrichment, and print-based learning experiences collectively contribute to children's literacy development by strengthening their language, decoding, and comprehension skills. These experiences provide learners with the necessary foundation to transition successfully into formal reading instruction.

The findings agree with Hulme and Snowling (2020), who emphasized that early reading readiness results from the interaction of multiple literacy skills, including phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, vocabulary development, and print awareness.

Similarly, Snow (2021) explained that children who demonstrate competence in these foundational literacy domains are more likely to become proficient readers during the primary grades. These findings support the present study by highlighting the importance of providing comprehensive early literacy instruction that addresses all components of reading readiness.

Overall, the high level of early reading readiness demonstrated by the Kindergarten learners suggests that they are well prepared to engage in formal reading instruction. These findings further support the development and implementation of the proposed "Sound to Success: An Enhancement Guide for Phonological Awareness Development in Kindergarten," which aims to sustain learners' literacy development by providing teachers with structured and engaging activities that strengthen both phonological awareness and early reading readiness.

TEST OF CORRELATION RESULTS

The test of correlation results presents the relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness among kindergarten learners. This analysis determines whether a significant association exists between the two variables and identifies the direction and strength of their relationship.

Using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, the results provide evidence on whether higher levels of phonological awareness are linked to higher levels of early reading readiness. These findings serve as a basis for understanding how the development of sound awareness contributes to early literacy outcomes in kindergarten learners.

Table 15

Test of relationship between phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners

Variables	r-value	Strength of Correlation	p - value	Decision	Remarks
Rhyming Skills and Early Reading Readiness	0.742*	Strong Positive	0	Reject Ho	Significant
Syllable Awareness and Early Reading Readiness	0.728*	Strong Positive	0	Reject Ho	Significant
Beginning Sound Identification and Early Reading Readiness	0.532*	Moderate Positive	0	Reject Ho	Significant
Sound Blending and Early Reading Readiness	0.532*	Moderate Positive	0	Reject Ho	Significant

*significant at p<0.05 (two-tailed)

The findings revealed that all four components of phonological awareness skills were significantly related to early reading readiness, as evidenced by their p-values of 0.000, which are lower than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that phonological awareness plays an essential role in developing early literacy skills among Kindergarten learners. The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that improvements in phonological awareness are associated with higher levels of early reading readiness.

Rhyming skills exhibited a strong positive relationship with early reading readiness ($r = 0.742$, $p = 0.000$). This finding indicates that learners who were more capable of recognizing and producing rhyming words also demonstrated higher levels of readiness in recognizing letters, understanding letter-sound relationships, developing vocabulary, and demonstrating print awareness. Rhyming activities help learners recognize sound patterns in spoken language, enabling them to identify similarities among words and develop sensitivity to phonological structures. These abilities prepare children to decode words and acquire reading skills more efficiently.

This finding supports the study of Goswami (2021), who emphasized that rhyming ability strengthens children's awareness of sound structures and serves as an important predictor of beginning reading achievem-ent. Likewise, Lonigan and Shanahan (2022) reported that rhyming competence contributes significantly to the development of decoding and word recognition skills during the early years of literacy instruction. The strong relationship obtained in the present study may be attributed to the regular use of songs, nursery rhymes, and language games in Kindergarten classrooms, which provide learners with repeated opportunities to recognize and manipulate sound patterns.

Syllable awareness also demonstrated a strong positive relationship with early reading readiness ($r = 0.728$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that learners who were proficient in segmenting and counting syllables were likewise more prepared for beginning reading tasks. The ability to break words into syllables allows children to process spoken language more effectively and facilitates decoding unfamiliar words during reading.

The present finding is consistent with Wolff and Gustafsson (2022), who found that early phonological awareness and phonological training contributed to children's phonological skills and early reading-related abilities. Similarly, Kiss and Csapó (2025) examined phonological awareness among kindergarten learners and identified syllable segmentation, synthesis, and deletion as important components of phonological awareness assessment. These findings support the importance of developing children's ability to recognize and manipulate syllables as part of early literacy instruction. The strong relationship observed in the present study may be associated with learners' exposure to oral language activities, clapping exercises, and syllable segmentation tasks integrated into Kindergarten instruction, although the contribution of these specific classroom activities would require further investigation.

Beginning sound identification showed a strong positive relationship with early reading readiness ($r = 0.532$, $p = 0.000$). Although the correlation coefficient is relatively lower than those of rhyming and syllable awareness, it still indicates a statistically significant and meaningful association between identifying initial sounds and learners' readiness to read. Recognizing beginning sounds helps learners connect spoken sounds with printed letters, providing the foundation for alphabetic understanding and decoding.

This finding is consistent with Ehri (2020), who explained that identifying beginning sounds is fundamental in establishing alphabetic knowledge because children learn to associate speech sounds with corresponding letters. Likewise, Piasta and Wagner (2020) concluded that beginning sound identification is closely associated with children's ability to recognize printed words during the early stages of reading. The strong relationship found in this study may be attributed to classroom activities emphasizing phonics instruction, letter-sound matching, and object identification using initial sounds, enabling learners to strengthen their phonemic awareness.

Sound blending revealed a moderate positive relationship with early reading readiness ($r = 0.532$, $p = 0.000$). This finding suggests that learners who were more capable of combining individual sounds into complete words tended to demonstrate higher levels of reading readiness. Although the relationship was moderate, it remained statistically significant, indicating that sound blending is still an important contributor to early literacy development.

This finding supports Castles et al. (2021), who explained that blending phonemes into words is a critical decoding skill that allows beginning readers to recognize unfamiliar words independently. Similarly, the National Reading Panel, as discussed by Shanahan (2020), emphasized that explicit instruction in phoneme blending improves children's decoding ability and reading fluency. The moderate correlation observed in this study may indicate that while sound blending contributes substantially to reading readiness, learners' reading performance is also influenced by other literacy-related skills such as vocabulary knowledge, letter recognition, and print awareness.

Overall, the findings confirm that phonological awareness serves as one of the strongest predictors of early reading readiness among Kindergarten learners. Children who possess stronger abilities in recognizing rhymes, segmenting syllables, identifying beginning sounds, and blending phonemes demonstrate greater preparedness for formal reading instruction. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating systematic phonological awareness activities into Kindergarten instruction to strengthen learners' literacy foundations. Consequently, the developed enhancement guide provides teachers with structured activities designed to reinforce these ess-ential skills and improve children's readiness for reading.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the phonological awareness skills and early reading readiness of Kindergarten learners in Tambongon Integrated School. The respondents of the study included two Kindergarten teachers who served as evaluators and ninety-three Kindergarten learners enrolled in the said school. The teachers were chosen due to their direct involvement in observing and assessing learners' literacy-related skills within the classroom setting. The learners represented the total population of Kindergarten pupils in the school during the conduct of the study. The study utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. A researcher-made instrument was used to gather data, consisting of structured observation checklists aligned with phonological awareness and early reading readiness indicators. For the statistical treatment of data, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the significant relationship between the variables at a 0.05 level of significance.

The study revealed that the majority of the Kindergarten learners were within the expected age for Kindergarten, with a fairly balanced distribution of male and female learners. Most of the learners had attended pre-kindergarten, indicating that they had prior exposure to early childhood education before entering formal schooling. The Kindergarten learners demonstrated an advanced level of phonological awareness skills across the domains of rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification,

and sound blending. This finding indicates that the learners have developed the essential sound awareness skills that serve as the foundation for early literacy development.

The learners likewise exhibited a high level of early reading readiness in terms of letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness. This suggests that they possess the fundamental literacy competencies necessary for successful engagement in formal reading instruction.

The study further established that phonological awareness skills were significantly related to early reading readiness. All dimensions of phonological awareness demonstrated positive relationships with early reading readiness, indicating that learners with stronger phonological awareness also exhibited greater readiness for beginning reading. This finding underscores the importance of strengthening phonological awareness as a means of promoting early literacy development among Kindergarten learners.

Based on the findings of the study, a Phonological Awareness Enhancement Guide, entitled "Sound to Success: An Enhancement Guide for Phonological Awareness Development in Kindergarten," was developed. The guide is designed to provide teachers with structured, engaging, and developmentally appropriate activities that reinforce phonological awareness skills and further enhance learners' early reading readiness, thereby supporting effective early literacy instruction.

The study concludes that the Kindergarten learners of Tambongon Integrated School demonstrated an advanced level of phonological awareness skills and a high level of early reading readiness, indicating that they possess the essential foundational competencies needed for successful literacy development. The learners' proficiency in rhyming skills, syllable awareness, beginning sound identification, and sound blending reflects their preparedness to engage in formal reading instruction, while their high level of letter recognition, letter-sound correspondence, vocabulary development, and print awareness signifies their readiness to acquire more advanced reading skills.

The findings further establish that phonological awareness is a fundamental predictor of early reading readiness. The significant positive relationships between all dimensions of phonological awareness and early reading readiness confirm that learners with stronger sound awareness skills are better prepared for formal reading instruction. These results emphasize that phonological awareness is not merely a supporting component of literacy but a critical foundation upon which reading development is built. Strengthening learners' ability to recognize, manipulate, and blend speech sounds enhances their capacity to decode words, develop reading fluency, and comprehend written texts, thereby facilitating a smoother transition from emergent literacy to formal reading.

From a professional practice perspective, the findings underscore the responsibility of Kindergarten teachers to provide systematic, explicit, and developmentally appropriate phonological awareness instruction as an integral part of early literacy education. Teachers should consistently incorporate engaging activities such as rhyming games, syllable segmentation, beginning sound identification, and sound blending into daily classroom instruction to strengthen learners' foundational reading skills before introducing more complex literacy tasks.

The findings also have important implications for program development and policy implementation. Schools may strengthen early literacy initiatives by adopting the proposed "Sound to Success: An Enhancement Guide for Phonological Awareness Development in Kindergarten" as a supplementary instructional resource to reinforce phonological awareness and early reading readiness. Likewise, school administrators and education leaders may consider integrating structured phonological awareness activities into Kindergarten literacy programs, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and supporting policies that prioritize evidence-based early literacy instruction. Such initiatives can contribute to improving learners' reading readiness and promoting stronger literacy outcomes in the primary grades.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that the "Sound to Success: A Phonological

Awareness Enhancement Guide for Kindergarten" be adopted and implemented in Kindergarten classrooms to strengthen learners' phonological awareness skills and improve their early reading readiness. The guide should be utilized by teachers, with the support of school administrators and other stakeholders, as a supplementary instructional resource in delivering structured, engaging, and developmentally appropriate early literacy activities. Its implementation, monitoring, and continuous evaluation should be incorporated into the proposed program matrix to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability in enhancing early literacy instruction.

REFERENCES

1. Abdon, M. M., & Barrios, A. (2022). Phonological awareness intervention in mother tongue among Filipino kindergarten learners. Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/IJAL/article/view/45802
2. Alphabetic Principle. (2025). Improving Literacy.org: From phonological awareness to reading words. https://improvingliteracy.org/resource/the-alphabetic-principle-from-phonological-awareness-to-reading-words/
3. Anthony, J. L., & Francis, D. J. (2020). Development of phonological awareness. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 29(3), 232–238.
4. Arceo-Elemento, J. R., & Capinpin, M. L. (2024). Pedagogical content knowledge and classroom implementation of phonological awareness instruction among early grade teachers. The Philippine Educational Review, 61(1), 112–128.
5. Badillo, R. E. (2025). Classroom environmental predictors of phonological sensitivity: A comparative study of public and private kindergarten settings. Journal of Language and Literacy Education, 19(1), 74–89.
6. Batinga, J. R. (2024). Home reading facilitators' support and phonological awareness of kindergarten learners: Foundation for an enhanced phonological instructional program. International Journal of Education Humanities and Social Science, 7(06), 367–388. https://doi.org/10.54922/ijehss.2024.0854
7. Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K. (2021). Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 22(1), 5–51.
8. DepEd Order No. 47, s. 2016 – Omnibus Policy on Kindergarten Education. (2016). Department of Education, Philippines. https://www.deped.gov.ph/2016/06/28/do-47-s-2016-omnibus-policy-on-kindergarten-education/
9. Duncan, G. J., Magnuson, K., & Votruba-Drzal, E. (2020). Boosting family income to promote child development. Future of Children, 30(1), 37–60.
10. Eccles, S. T., Vance, M. J., & Howard, K. L. (2021). Longitudinal outcomes of tier-2 small-group targeted phonological awareness interventions for at-risk early readers. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 54(3), 201–215.
11. Ederio, E. E. (2023). Phonological awareness and reading competency of kindergarten pupils. Learning Resource Center. Retrieved from https://lrc.ncf.edu.ph/phonological-awareness-and-reading-competency-of-kindergarten/
12. Ehri, L. C. (2020). Orthographic mapping facilitates sight word learning and reading fluency. Journal of Research in Reading, 43(1), 1–23.
13. Emergent Literacy. (2025). Literacy for All Instruction: Emergent literacy. https://literacyforallinstruction.ca/communication/
14. Galvez, L. B., & Marquez, M. F. (2025). The relationship between emergent literacy skills and kindergarten readiness. EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR), 11(7). https://doi.org/10.36713/epra23302
15. Goswami, U. (2021). Speech rhythm and language acquisition. Cambridge University Press.
16. Herrera, S. G., Porter, L. A., & Barko-Alva, K. (2021). Culturally responsive early literacy instruction: Evaluating the impact of explicit decoding and phonological modules on diverse student populations. Reading Research Quarterly, 56(4), 689–708.
17. Hsin, C. T., & Wu, M. S. (2021). Playing with speech sounds: The effect of interactive dialogic storybook reading on preschool children's phonological awareness and vocabulary development. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 55, 234–245.

18. Hulme, C., & Snowling, M. J. (2020). The science of reading: A handbook. Wiley-Blackwell.
19. Jiménez, J. E., Rodriguez, C., & Crespo, P. (2024). Digital versus print media platforms in early literacy: Examining interactive acoustic software on phonemic segmenting and blending skills. Computers & Education, 210, Article 104952.
20. Justice, L. M., Logan, J. A. R., & Jiang, H. (2020). A research synthesis of early literacy interventions. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 50, 202–214.
21. Kim, Y. S. G., Al Otaiba, S., & Wanzek, J. (2020). Developmental trajectories of reading components in early childhood. Reading and Writing, 33(8), 1939–1965.
22. Kiss, R., & Csapó, B. (2025). Technology-based assessment of phonological awareness in kindergarten. International Journal of Early Childhood, 57(1), 25–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-023-00386-7
23. Lemire, J. K., & Paul, T. A. (2026). Operational trajectories of foundational emergent literacy skills: A longitudinal study forecasting long-term academic tracking. Early Years Literacy Journal, 30(1), 12–28.
24. Mariano Pascual, J. (2025). Developing kindergarten learners' phonemic awareness through contextualized play based activities. International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering Technology and Science, 7(03). https://doi.org/10.56726/IRJMETS69308
25. Melby-Lervåg, M., Lyster, S. A. H., & Hulme, C. (2020). Phonological skills and their role in learning to read: A meta-analytic review. Psychological Bulletin, 146(4), 1–35.
26. Míguez-Álvarez, C., Crespo-Alonso, A., & López-Sainz, M. (2022). The cross-linguistic consistency and stability of phonological awareness as a predictor of early reading achievement: A meta-analysis. Educational Research Review, 35, Article 100421.
27. Morgan, P. L., Farkas, G., Hillemeier, M. M., Hammer, C. S., & Maczuga, S. (2020). What you say, and how you say it: Preschoolers' growth in vocabulary and communication skills differentially predict kindergarten academic achievement and self-regulation. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 51, 403–415. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2020.01.005
28. National Center on Improving Literacy. (2022). Phonological awareness: What is it and how does it relate to phonemic awareness? https://www.improvingliteracy.org/resource/phonological-awareness-what-is-it-and-how-does-it-relate-to-phonemic-awareness
29. National Institute for Early Education Research. (2023). The state of preschool 2023: State preschool yearbook. Rutgers Graduate School of Education. https://nieer.org/yearbook/2023
30. Neumann, M. M. (2020). Parent-guided environmental print exploration: Effects on letter-sound knowledge, phonological awareness, and print interest. Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 20(4), 705–728.
31. Odo, D. M. (2021). A meta-analysis of the effect of phonological awareness and/or phonics instruction on word and pseudo word reading of English as an L2. SAGE Open, 11(4), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211059168
32. Phonological Awareness. (2025). Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonological_awareness
33. Piasta, S. B., & Wagner, R. K. (2020). Learning letter names and sounds: Effects on early literacy development. Reading Research Quarterly, 55(S1), S89–S104.
34. Quinn, J. M., & Wagner, R. K. (2021). Gender differences in reading development: A meta-analysis. Journal of Educational Psychology, 113(2), 1–15.
35. Republic Act No. 10157 – Kindergarten Education Act. (2012). Senate of the Philippines Legislative Reference Bureau. https://ldr.senate.gov.ph/legislative%2Bissuances/Republic%20Act%20No.%2010157
36. Santos, D. L. (2022). Baseline reading readiness and phonological capacities of entering kindergarteners in rural Philippine communities. The Southeastern Asian Journal of Primary Education, 8(2), 154–168.
37. Septiani, W., & Syaodih, E. (2021). Development of early literacy through expressive language optimization and targeted phonetic play in preschool environments. International Journal of Early Childhood Education Studies, 9(2), 88–99.
38. Technology Based Assessment of Phonological Awareness in Kindergarten. (2024). International Journal of Early Childhood Education, 57, 25–49. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158 023 00386 7

39. Villanueva, K. P. (2023). Cross-linguistic transfer of phonological awareness skills under the MTB-MLE framework: A predictive structural equation modeling study of Filipino kindergarteners. The Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics, 15(3), 210–229.
40. Wasik, B. A., & Hindman, A. H. (2020). Increasing vocabulary in early childhood classrooms. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 50, 1–12.
41. Wolff, U., & Gustafsson, J.-E. (2022). Early phonological training preceding kindergarten training: Effects on reading and spelling. Reading and Writing, 35, 1865–1887. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-022-10261-x
42. Yépez Moreno, A., Núñez Naranjo, A., Torres Cordero, C., Lucero Albán, P., Andrade Cáceres, X., & Quimbiulco García, M. (2025). Phonological awareness and reading skills: Impact in the digital society. Journal of Educational and Social Research, 15(2), 419. https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr 2025 0070