



SOUND BLENDING AND PLAY BASED TEACHING APPROACH TOWARDS LEARNING PERFORMANCE OF KINDERGARTEN PUPILS

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ABSTRACT :

This study investigated the effectiveness of sound blending and play-based teaching approaches on the learning performance of kindergarten pupils. It aimed to assess the impact of sound blending techniques on micro reading competencies including letter name and sound knowledge, initial sound identification, familiar and invented word reading and the role of play-based teaching through teacher-directed, student-centered and play-based instruction on pupils reading and writing abilities. The research further explored the relationship and influence of these teaching approaches on the kindergarten's learning outcomes. Employing a descriptive-correlational research design using survey methodology, the study was conducted across president Roxas and Antipas districts involving 54 teachers and selected pupil samples. Data collection utilized two-part questionnaire, analyzing sound blending through the Early Grade Reading Assessment Tool and play based teaching effectiveness. Pre test and posttest item analysis was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement tools.

The results indicated a low mastery level in sound blending competencies, whereas play-based teaching approaches received strong agreement ratings. Notably, both pretest and posttest scores exhibited significant improvements in mean and percentage scores, highlighting a positive impact on pupils' reading and writing performance. Furthermore, the study found a highly significant influence of sound blending and play-based teaching on learning outcomes, particularly in initial sound identification and unfamiliar nonword decoding. These findings underscore the pivotal role of integrated teaching methods in enhancing the reading and writing skills of kindergarten pupils, suggesting a need for incorporating both approaches in early childhood education curriculum.

INTRODUCTION:

The child's learning development begins as he or she enters Kindergarten, and this is very significant in the child's life because it is the transition period from home to formal schooling. Kindergarten teachers should have background on teaching early childhood development. Kindergarten teachers must employ different teaching strategies to impart knowledge meet child's varying needs and interests.

Inevitably, children are missing social interaction which is vital for learning and grooming due to the sudden closure of schools. School closures estimated to affect 1.5 billion students worldwide (Gustafsson 2021; UNESCO 2021). Consequently, academic achievement resulted to learning loss has created considerable challenges for teachers, students, and their parents (Aucejo, French, Araya, & Zafar, 2020)

Furthermore, school performance declines when the pupils return to school after a long break caused by pandemic. Some studies have reported this loss of learning to be as much as a quarter of all material learned during the prior school year. Teachers' concern over the decline of performance could be greater this year since the pandemic's distance learning made learning and retention even more challenging for pupils (Sullivan, 2021).

Consequently, Turla, (2021) revealed in his study *The Impact of Reading Module Guide in Familiarizing the Letter Sounds of The Kindergarten Pupils of Pianing Elementary School* showed that majority of the respondents obtained a very satisfactory level of performance in familiarizing the letter sounds and even learn different pictures of each illustration in the reading material. On the other hand despite this valuable information concerning the relevant impact of reading literacy in a country's economic growth, still there are many children around the world who are being labeled as "not good enough" in their reading literacy classes (Khalifaoui, 2018).

In the local setting, preschool education requires a stimulating environment that would bring about learning to its optimum level. Appropriate and suitable instructional materials help aid the teacher in ensuring that the lesson will bring about expected outcomes (Abyan, Caluza, & Plasigo, 2021). Nowadays, learning activities of children are more pressure on standardized testing and less on play, imagination and exploration (Moore, 2020). Noticeably, in the pre-test conducted by the schools at the beginning of classes, the learners' level of competence across identified micro -competencies fall at below average. Understandably, these learners were given exposure to some pre-reading concepts (Boltron, Ramos, 2021).

Little research has been carried out in the area of instructional strategies teachers use in early childhood settings (Thompson, 2017). There are few empirical studies that identify specific significance of one instructional strategy for children's development over the other. Few studies have addressed the topic of integrating developmental and academic perspectives together (Pyles, 2018)

It is in this context that the researcher found interest to conduct this study along with the objective of evaluating sound blending and play based teaching towards the learning performance of kindergarten pupils. Also, the researcher would like to consolidate proposed activities of the respondents in order to contribute towards improving the aforesaid approaches.

Statement of the Problem:

The study will be conducted to determine sound blending and play-based teaching approach towards learning performance of kindergarten pupils for the school year 2022-2023.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions.

1. What is the level of sound blending teaching approach in terms of
 1. letter name knowledge, letter sound knowledge, initial sound identification, familiar word reading and invented word reading?
2. What is the level of play based teaching approach in terms of teacher directed instruction, student centered instruction, and play-based instruction?
3. What is the learning performance of kindergarten pupils in reading and writing based on pre-test and post-test?
4. Is there a significant difference between the learning performance of kindergarten pupils in reading and writing based on pre-test and post-test?
5. Is there a significant relationship between sound blending approach and learning performance of kindergarten pupils?
6. Is there a significant relationship between play-based teaching approach and learning performance of kindergarten pupils?
7. Is there a significant influence of sound blending approach on learning performance of kindergarten pupils?
8. Is there a significant influence of play-based teaching approach on learning performance of kindergarten pupils?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a descriptive-correlation design because it aimed to determine the relationship between variables. According to Gay (1976), a descriptive survey involves the collection of data to test hypotheses or to answer questions concerning the status of the subject of the study. This involved description, analysis, and interpretation of the resulting data. Correlation was used to ascertain the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed in this study to determine the effectiveness of sound blending and play-based teaching approaches in facilitating learning in kindergarten.

Locale of the Study

This study was conducted among the Elementary Schools of President Roxas, covering three districts namely North, South, and Central District, and the entire district of Antipas, Cotabato.

Respondents of the Study

This study covered the Elementary Schools in Pres. Roxas and Antipas District, North Cotabato for the school year 2022-2023. Of the three districts of President Roxas, there are 43 Kindergarten teachers and 19 Kindergarten teachers of Antipas, Cotabato. Using the Slovin's formula. There are 54 respondents to represent the schools of President Roxas and Antipas, Cotabato.

Slovin's Formula

$$n = \frac{6N}{1+Ne^2}$$

Research Instrument

The researcher used survey questionnaires as the main instruments of the study. The measuring tool is adopted from a well-established and reputable platform that can be used for conducting research studies. On the other hand an assessment tool from the product of ongoing collaboration among a large community of scholars, practioners, government officials, and education development professionals to advance the cause o early reading assessment.

The first part of the instrument focused on the learning performance of pupils in the sound blending teaching approach to facilitate learning in kindergarten, indicated by its components using the Early Grade Reading Assessment Tool. This tool assessed the sound blending performance of the learners and was conducted through pretests and posttests.

The second part was designed to gather data on the play-based teaching approach to facilitate learning in kindergarten. It was adapted from the study of Sarah Sjoerdsma, (2016) using a tool from Survey Monkey. The statements in the survey were answered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The statements were mixed and neutral, enabling participants to respond honestly and without being influenced by the direction of the statements.

Data Gathering Procedure

In the conduct of the study, the researcher prepared a letter addressed to the School's Division Superintendent (SDS) and District Supervisor and delivered it personally to the concerned subjects of the study. The letter stipulated the researcher's interest and requested permission to conduct the study.

Next, the approved letter was furnished to the respective schools where the study was conducted, specifically at President Roxas, Cotabato. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to the teachers and gave a short orientation on the proper filling out of the content of the questionnaire.

Sampling Technique

This study used simple random sampling. Random sampling ensures that results obtained from the sample should approximate what would have been obtained if the entire population had been measured (Shadish et al., 2002). The simplest random sample allows all the units in the population to have an equal chance of being selected.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected and tabulated, analyzed and interpreted in the light of the objectives of the study. The most suitable statistical tools like frequency mean and description, Spearman-Rho will be used for descriptive-correlation analysis. The level of learning performance will be determine using the following mastery level.

Mastery Level	Description
96% - 100% -	Mastery (M)
86% - 95% -	Closely Approximately Mastery (CAM)
66% - 85% -	Moving Towards Mastery (MTM)
35% - 65% -	Average Mastery (AM)
15% - 34% -	Low Mastery (LM)
5% - 14% -	Very Low Mastery (VLM)
0% - 4% -	Absolutely No Mastery (ANM)

How the play-based teaching approach be described to facilitate learning will be determine using the Likert Scale

Correlation-Coefficient will be used to determine the relationship between the learning performance and the independent variables namely sound blending and play-based approach.

Cronbach's Alpha measures internal consistency of a test or scale. Calculate by correlating scores of each item with total score, then averaging these correlations. Ideal for reliability assessment.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The results of the study focus on sound blending and play based teaching approach to facilitate learning in kindergarten in Municipality of President Roxas and Antipas North Cotabato is hereby presented using the textual and tabular order. The in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data are presented sequentially following the statement of the problem posted in this study.

Sound Blending

The first research problem is focused on sound blending teaching approach in terms of letter name knowledge, letter sound knowledge, initial sound identification, familiar word reading and invented word reading.

This implies that there is a critical need to address and enhance the teaching methodologies for sound blending and reading competencies in early education. The findings suggest that the current strategies may not be sufficiently meeting the learning needs of students in areas like letter name knowledge, letter sound knowledge, and word reading skills. It points towards the necessity of adopting more effective, evidence-based instructional practices or interventions to improve these foundational reading skills at an early stage.

In support of the findings of the study, Walther (2019) emphasized the importance of sound blending and reading competencies in early education. This highlights the critical role that these foundational skills play in the development of young learners' reading abilities. Walther's research underlines the necessity for effective teaching strategies in this area to ensure that children build a strong base in reading, which is essential for their overall academic success and literacy development.

Play Based Teaching Approach

The second research question is focused on determining the level of play based teaching approach in terms of teacher directed instruction.

emphasis is placed on teacher-dominated decision-making in classrooms.

In support of the findings of the study, Danniels and Pyle, (2018) stated that direct instruction is a teacher-directed teaching method. This means that the teacher stands in front of a classroom and presents the information. The teachers give explicit, guided instructions to the students. Based on research, direct instruction is one of the most effective teaching strategies. Using the direct instruction method, students perform better in reading, math, and spelling than those who were not.

Moreover, among the eight (8) statements on the indicator student-centered instruction, the statement “The teachers’ primary role is a facilitator and a guide to student’s learning.” got the highest mean of 4.78 described as strongly agree, while the statement “The best learning happens through metacognition.” got the lowest mean of 4.24 described as strongly agree. The overall mean of the indicator student-centered instruction is 4.47 and is strongly agree.

Furthermore, the result of the study implies that educators predominantly view their role as facilitators in student learning, strongly endorsing this approach. However, there is a slightly less consensus on the importance of metacognition in learning, though it is still rated highly. Overall, there is a strong agreement on the effectiveness of student-centered instructional methods.

Similarly, the result of the study is supported by Lau (2020) which he emphasized that student centered learning aims to develop learner autonomy and independence. Thus, it allows students to actively participate in the discovery learning process. Students would consume the entire class time constructing a new understanding of the material being learned actively and proactively. A variety of hands-on activities are administered to promote successful learning. Students would be free to choose the tasks that help them to meet their objectives thereby focusing on applying what they learned. Moreover, Educators predominantly view their role as facilitators in student learning, strongly endorsing this approach. However, there is a slightly less consensus on the importance of metacognition in learning, though it is still rated highly.

Danniels and Pyle, (2018) mentioned that there are some level of adult involvement to extend additional learning within the play itself. In play-based instruction, children learn cooperatively with their peers, the teacher is a facilitator and a guide to learning, and children are directly involved in the discovery of their own knowledge.

Learning performance of kindergarten in terms of reading and writing.

The third research problem is focused on the learning performance of kindergarten pupils in reading and writing is pivotal in their educational journey. At this formative stage, educators focus on nurturing foundational literacy skills through engaging and age-appropriate methods. These early experiences shape children's abilities to decode language, comprehend text, and express ideas effectively, setting a crucial groundwork for their future academic success.

The shows the mean and percentage scores of the learning performance of kindergarten in terms of reading and writing. Both reading and writing got low mean and percentage score. This supports the idea of Hammill (2004), the best predictor of their later reading and spelling abilities are the children’s knowledge of letter names and sounds. Exposure to some reading concepts at a given time would result in a high mean and percentage score in their learning performance in terms of reading and writing during posttest.

The result is supported by Wood (2019) cited in her study that when teachers identify struggling students at the start of the school year and provide interventions that target the individual needs of these students, they can help close the gap in readiness skills.

Learning performance in terms of reading and writing.

Thus, there is a significant difference in pre and post-test level on the learning performance in reading and writing.

Both reading and writing require knowledge and familiarity with the alphabetic orthography of the language, it is not surprising that some degree of relationship exists between these two fundamental literacy skills. Despite the interrelationship between reading and writing, however, instruction in reading alone will not facilitate writing development nor will instruction in writing alone facilitate reading development.

The fifth research problem is focused on significant relationship between sound blending teaching approach and learning performance of kindergarten pupils in reading and writing.

Letter name knowledge in reading and writing

This implies that sound blending can refer to a student’s ability to merge three sounds together and come up with a word. Children's knowledge of letter names and shapes is a strong predictor of their success in learning to read.

Knowing letter names is strongly related to children's ability to remember the forms of written words and their ability to treat words as sequences of letters. Young children with high levels of letter name knowledge tend to develop better reading skills, and children who demonstrate extremely low letter name tend to experience difficulties in reading acquisition (National Research Council, 1998)

Letter sound knowledge in reading and writing

This indicates that knowledge of how letters correspond to sounds is another critical skill children must master to become successful readers. Letter-sound correspondences are typically taught through phonics-based approaches. Letter recognition refers to the ability to identify individual letters of the alphabet. It is an essential skill for children to develop as it is the foundation for learning to read and write. Children who have strong letter recognition skills are able to identify letters quickly and easily, which helps them learn new words and increases their reading fluency (Shaili, 2023)

Similarly, children's reading development is dependent on their understanding of the alphabetic principle - the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words, and to begin to read with fluency. (Texas Education Agency)

Initial sound identification in reading and writing

This suggests that beginning sounds activities give young children the chance to practice important phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Recognizing how sounds are the same, and how they're different, is referred to as sound discrimination.

Beginning sounds activities that incorporate letters are inherently phonics-based activities, more research has come out indicating that pairing letters with phonemic awareness activities is beneficial. It is important to remember that language development, learning to read, and learning to write include a multitude of skills that interweave to create a literate person (Catherine, 2023)

Familiar word identification in reading and writing

This suggests that familiar word identification is a reading readiness skill of the alphabetic principle. Reading acquisition is successful when a learner is able to automatically recognize many words.

Familiar word recognition enables young learners to read a sentence with ease. Recognition of words will not occur before a learner can identify a letter sound, letter name, and letter shape progressively. Familiar word recognition becomes the final alphabetic phase. This is a reading readiness skill which should not be underestimated at the onset of pre-school (Chepchumba Limo & Koross, 2018).

Unfamiliar word decoding in reading and writing

This implies that reading unfamiliar words is a significant challenge to learning to read. Reading things that are too difficult can trigger feelings of inadequacy and doubt in your abilities.

Many children in the early grades learn to memorize or recognize by sight a broad range of words. Exhaustion of this sight word vocabulary at around age 10 has been associated with the "fourth-grade slump" in the United States. To be successful readers, children must combine both decoding and sight recognition skills; tests that do not include a decoding exercise can overestimate children's ability to read unfamiliar words (as the words tested may be part of the sight recognition vocabulary (Section IV: EGRA Adaptation and Research Workshop).

The sixth research problem is focused on the significant relationship between play-based teaching approach and learning performance of kindergarten pupils in reading and writing.

The result in table 9 shows the relationship between play-based teaching approach and Learning performance of kindergarten pupils in reading and writing. The data revealed that all variables in play-based teaching have a low correlation to reading and writing.

The data revealed that student centered instruction has a negative non-significant relationship in reading ($r=-0.042$, $p=0.772$) and writing ($r=-0.069$, $p=0.635$). This suggests that the teacher's primary role is a facilitator and guide to students learning.

Furthermore, child-initiated learning centers promote learning through play by motivating students to engage in active learning experiences through learning centers and play promotes literacy skills in children by allowing them to apply their prior knowledge as well as use higher order thinking skills to gain new information independent of others. (Mielonen, & Paterson, 2009).

Teacher directed instruction in reading and writing.

Explicit instruction and opportunities to practice both skills are required for students to become proficient readers and writers.

However, instruction in reading alone will not facilitate writing development nor will instruction in writing alone facilitate reading development. The receptive and productive language tasks (reading and writing, respectively) may rely on similar processes, they nonetheless are independent skills that require students to apply their knowledge of the grapho-phonemic, spelling, and grammar rules of English in different ways. Furthermore, the independence of these skills may explain why it is possible for some students to be poor readers but good writers, or good readers and poor writers more commonly, simultaneously poor readers and poor writers or good readers and good writers ((K-12 Writing -Assessment Oregon K-12 Literacy Framework-Writing)

Play based instruction in reading and writing

This implies that play based instruction can be defined as instruction where teachers provide meaningful, hands-on learning experiences that allows children to learn through their play.

Consequently, the critical cognitive link between play and literacy is based on the theoretical assumption that representational skills acquired in pretend transformations to other symbolic forms, such as written language. A number of research findings support the assumption that children's level of pretend skills predicted their writing ability at birth. Positive and significant associations between three-year-old children's symbolic play and the use of metalinguistic verb (Roskos,2023).

Significant Influence of Sound Blending Approach and Learning Performance of Kindergarten Pupils

It discloses the data of sound blending approach which had significantly influence the learning performance of kindergarten pupils in terms of reading ($F = 2.127$, $\text{Prob} = 0.080$) having a probability that is higher than 0.05 level of significance.

Sound blending in terms of initial sound identification has significantly influenced learning performance of kindergarten pupils. This positive result indicates that beginning sounds activities give young children the chance to practice important phonemic awareness and phonics skills which are important in learning to read.

In like manner, the overall influence of sound blending, obtained a regression coefficient of (R^2) = 0.198 which means that sound blending, approach accounted is about 80.2% of the learning performance in term of reading. The remaining 19.8% attributed to other factors not included in this model.

Among others, only initial sound identification ($t\text{-value} = 2.144^*$, $p\text{-value} = .038$) appeared as best predictor, Consequently, it implies that the focus of blending instruction should shift to the phoneme level. This work can be challenging for students, so it can be useful to know which scaffolds can help students make the leap (Baker et al, 2018).

Significant influence of play-based teaching approach and learning performance of kindergarten pupils

The eighth research problem is focused on significant influence between play-based teaching approach and learning performance of kindergarten pupils.

It illustrates the data on play based teaching approach which had highly significant influence on the learning performance of kindergarten pupils ($F = 2.324^*$, $\text{Prob} = 0.050$) having a probability that is equal to 0.05 level of significance.

Similarly, play-based teaching approach obtained a regression coefficient of (R^2) = 0.213 which means that play-based teaching approach accounted is about 78.7% of the learning performance of kindergarten pupils. The remaining 21.3% attributed to other factors not included in this model.

Play has shown benefits children's development and learning. Different play contexts, such as free play and guided play, have been found to better support children's development and their academic learning" (Pyle et al., 2018). Among others initial sound identification ($t\text{-value} = 2.050^*$, $p\text{-value} = .047$) and unfamiliar nonword decoding ($t\text{-value} = 1.992^*$, $p\text{-value} = .050$) appeared as best predictor. Consequently, implies initial sounds helps in linking a child's oral language skills to written language. (Mishra, 2023) Moreover, children who to build nonsense words is a necessary skill when teaching kids to read. A child that can sound out any word blend correctly, whether the word exists or not, is a confident child that deeply understands their letter sounds (Sarah, 2023)

In a study conducted by Moore (2020) it was found that play-based learning was an effective strategy in teaching phonemic awareness and phonics when taught with an adult facilitator. When students were part of creating the rules for a game or activity, they were more engaged and participated more. With differing academic levels, students were able to both teach and learn from each other while playing, and play-based learning can be used along with current classroom routines and curriculum. Children's language, cognitive, social, and emotional development are typically nurtured during free play (Pyle et al., 2017).

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted to determine sound blending and play-based teaching approach towards learning performance of kindergarten pupils for the school year 2022-2023.

Specifically, it examined the level of sound blending teaching approach in terms of the micro competencies in reading such as letter name knowledge, letter sound knowledge, initial sound identification, familiar word reading and invented word reading; play based teaching approach in terms of teacher directed instruction, student centered instruction, and play-based instruction and the learning performance of kindergarten in terms of reading and writing. It further determined the significant relationship between sound blending and play based teaching approach in the learning performance of kindergartens and the significant influence of sound blending and play based teaching approach in reading and writing.

Descriptive-correlational research design using survey method was employed by the study that was conducted at President Roxas and Antipas covering all districts. Total number of the respondents were 54 teachers and selected pupils of the chosen schools as population samples.

A set of questionnaires consisting of two parts were used as research instruments of the study. The measuring tools were subjected to item analysis using pretest and posttest to ensure its reliability and validity. Part I consist of sound blending teaching approach to facilitate learning in kindergarten indicated by its component using the Early Grade Reading Assessment Tool. Part II covers the play-based teaching approach to facilitate learning in kindergarten.

The data were collected, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted. The statistical tools like frequency, mean and Spearman-Rho and descriptive-correlation were used in the study.

Findings of the study on sound blending result shows low mastery and on play-based teaching approach were rated strongly agree. Scores in pretest and posttest shows increase in the mean and percentage scores.

There was a highly significant influence on sound blending and play based teaching approach towards reading and writing. Likewise, initial sound identification and unfamiliar nonword decoding particularly the learning performance of kindergarten in reading and writing.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were formulated based on the findings and conclusions of the study.

1. The schools are encouraged to continually provide adequate training for teachers to enhance their skills teaching pre reading activities.
2. The schools are encouraged to give more views on play-based instruction in the preschool classroom
3. Teachers may use the available technology as one of their instructional materials for teaching to capture the interest of the pupils to listen and learn.
4. Teachers utilization of different strategies to keep the best pupils' performance at all throughout the school year is highly recommended.

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