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Exploring the Role of Phonemic and Phonological Awareness in the Reading Development of Primary-Grade Learners: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Phonological and phonemic awareness are widely recognized as important foundations of early literacy, yet less is known about how primary-grade learners themselves experience these sound-based skills while learning to read within everyday classroom contexts. This qualitative case study explored the role of phonemic and phonological awareness in the reading development of primary-grade learners at Gappal Elementary School. Particular attention was given to learners' experiences with rhyme recognition, syllable segmentation, phoneme identification, blending, segmentation, and sound manipulation and to how these processes were reflected in word decoding, reading confidence, and engagement. Purposively selected primary-grade learners and their teachers participated in semi-structured interviews, task-based conversations, and classroom observations. Learner reading activities and selected classroom artifacts provided supplementary evidence. Data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis. Six interconnected themes structured the analysis: (1) hearing the parts before reading the whole, (2) blending sounds as a bridge to word reading, (3) segmentation as a tool for decoding unfamiliar words, (4) repeated sound work building confidence and independence, (5) persistent difficulties beneath developing reading skills, and (6) guided and engaging practice making sound awareness meaningful. The findings suggest that learners experienced phonological and phonemic awareness not as isolated oral exercises but as practical resources for approaching printed words. However, learners varied in their ability to isolate, blend, segment, and manipulate sounds, and more complex phonemic tasks could result in confusion and frustration. These findings emphasize the importance of explicit, developmentally sequenced, contextualized, and supportive phonological instruction in the primary grades.

Keywords: phonemic awareness, phonological awareness, early literacy, reading development, primary-grade learners, qualitative research, decoding

1. Introduction

Reading is a foundational competency through which children gain increasing access to knowledge across the curriculum. During the primary grades, learners make an important transition from recognizing print and individual letter-sound relationships toward independently decoding words, reading connected text, and constructing meaning. Difficulties during this developmental period can restrict learners' subsequent participation in academic tasks that increasingly depend on independent reading.

Among the skills associated with successful early reading development are phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they refer to related but distinct abilities. Phonological awareness is the broader awareness of the sound structure of spoken language, including words, syllables, onset-rime units, and phonemes. Phonemic awareness is a more specific component of phonological awareness involving the ability to identify and manipulate individual phonemes, the smallest meaningful sound distinctions in spoken words.

These competencies can be observed when children recognize rhyming words, divide words into syllables, identify beginning or ending sounds, blend individual sounds into words, segment words into constituent sounds, or manipulate phonemes by adding, deleting, or substituting sounds.

The importance of these processes has substantial empirical support. Ehri et al. (2001), in the National Reading Panel meta-analysis, reported that phonemic-awareness instruction produced substantial improvements in phonemic awareness itself and moderate improvements in reading and spelling. Their synthesis further indicated that phonemic-awareness instruction was particularly useful when linked with letters. Ehri et al.

A large meta-analysis by Melby-Lervåg et al. (2012), encompassing 235 studies and 995 effect sizes, found phonemic awareness to be the strongest of the examined phonological correlates of individual differences in word reading. The findings underscore the close relationship between children's sensitivity to phonemes and their developing ability to recognize written words. Melby-Lervåg et al.

Hulme et al. (2012) further found that improvements in phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge mediated later improvements in word-level reading and spelling following a phonology-and-reading intervention. Hulme et al. More recently, Rehfeld et al. (2022) reported in a meta-analysis involving children suspected of reading disabilities that phonemic-awareness instruction produced improvements across several outcomes, with particularly notable effects for segmentation. Rehfeld et al.

Yet quantitative evidence alone does not fully explain how children experience these processes in authentic classrooms. A learner may know several letter sounds but remain unable to blend them into a recognizable word. Another learner may successfully pronounce familiar words yet become frustrated when confronted with an unfamiliar word requiring segmentation. A third may understand sound manipulation during oral activities but struggle to apply the same awareness to print.

These experiences are important because reading development is not simply a collection of scores. It involves strategies, difficulties, confidence, interaction with teachers, repeated practice, and learners' attempts to make sense of the alphabetic system.

Within Gappal Elementary School, exploring learners' experiences provides an opportunity to examine how phonological and phonemic awareness become visible in actual reading behavior. Accordingly, this study approached the phenomenon qualitatively, emphasizing the voices and observed reading experiences of primary-grade learners rather than treating phonemic awareness solely as a measurable predictor of reading achievement.

2. Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to explore the role of phonological and phonemic awareness in the reading development of primary-grade learners at Gappal Elementary School.

Specifically, it sought to understand how learners experience sound-based processes during reading, how these processes assist or challenge word recognition and decoding, and how classroom practices support their developing awareness of spoken sounds and their relationships with written words.

3. Research Questions

The study addressed the following questions:

1. How do primary-grade learners describe and demonstrate their experiences of phonological and phonemic awareness during reading activities?
2. How do learners use sound awareness when recognizing, blending, segmenting, and decoding words?
3. What difficulties do learners encounter when applying phonological and phonemic awareness during reading?

4. How do classroom practices support learners in developing and applying phonological and phonemic awareness?

4. Review of Related Literature

4.1 Phonological Awareness as a Foundation of Early Literacy

Phonological awareness develops across different levels of linguistic complexity. Children may initially become sensitive to larger sound units, such as words, rhymes, and syllables, before demonstrating increasingly refined awareness of individual phonemes.

Anthony and Francis (2005) described phonological-awareness development as involving multiple but related levels of sound sensitivity. Development does not necessarily proceed through rigidly independent stages; rather, children become increasingly capable of recognizing and manipulating smaller linguistic units.

Carroll et al. (2003) similarly examined the development of phonological awareness among preschool children and demonstrated relationships among different aspects of phonological sensitivity and emerging literacy. These findings suggest that early sound-awareness abilities provide an important foundation upon which more sophisticated phonemic processing can develop.

Phonological awareness is therefore broader than simply pronouncing letter sounds. A child demonstrating phonological awareness recognizes that spoken language itself can be divided and manipulated independently of its meaning.

4.2 Phonemic Awareness and Word Reading

Phonemic awareness represents a particularly fine-grained level of phonological awareness. Learners demonstrate phonemic awareness when they recognize, blend, segment, add, delete, or substitute individual sounds.

For example, blending /m/ /a/ /p/ to form "map" requires children to synthesize discrete phonemes into a complete spoken word. Conversely, identifying the phonemes /s/ /u/ /n/ within "sun" requires segmentation.

These abilities become particularly relevant when children encounter alphabetic print. Learners must understand not only that letters represent sounds but also that individual sounds can be combined into recognizable words.

The meta-analysis of Ehri et al. (2001) found that explicit phonemic-awareness instruction benefited reading acquisition. Importantly, the effects were stronger under some instructional conditions, including instruction connecting phonemic awareness with letters.

This relationship is also consistent with Hulme et al. (2012), whose findings support the importance of both phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge for early literacy development.

4.3 Phonological Awareness and Individual Differences

Reading development does not occur uniformly. Children arrive at school with different language experiences, vocabulary backgrounds, exposure to print, knowledge of letters, and levels of phonological sensitivity.

Melby-Lervåg et al. (2012) found strong relationships between phonemic awareness and individual differences in word reading. Their analysis also showed pronounced phonemic-awareness difficulties among children with dyslexia compared with typically developing readers.

This does not imply that every reading problem arises solely from deficient phonemic awareness. Reading is multidimensional and requires the coordination of word recognition, language comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, background knowledge, and other competencies. Nevertheless, phonological processing represents an important component of early word-reading development.

4.4 From Sound Awareness to Meaningful Reading

Sound-based skills should ultimately contribute to reading rather than become an end in themselves. Children need opportunities to connect oral sound manipulation with letters, words, sentences, and meaningful texts.

A learner who successfully completes oral phoneme exercises but cannot apply these processes to printed words may require more explicit support in connecting phonological representations with orthography.

This distinction is particularly important because literacy development reflects interactions between phonological and orthographic knowledge. Learning to read itself can further refine children's conscious awareness of phonemes.

Indeed, Castles and Coltheart (2004) cautioned against overly simple assumptions concerning the direction of causality between phonological awareness and learning to read. Subsequent research, however, including Hulme et al. (2012), has provided stronger intervention-based evidence for the contribution of phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge to early literacy.

Thus, the relationship is best understood as dynamic: phonological awareness facilitates aspects of learning to read, while literacy experience can simultaneously sharpen children's awareness of language sounds.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study design. Gappal Elementary School constituted the bounded case, while primary-grade learners' experiences of phonological and phonemic awareness constituted the central phenomenon.

A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to explore how learners experienced, demonstrated, and

interpreted sound-based reading processes rather than determine statistical relationships between phonological-awareness scores and reading achievement.

5.2 Research Setting

The study was situated at Gappal Elementary School. The primary-grade classrooms provided a natural setting for examining early literacy practices, teacher-learner interactions, oral language activities, and learners' attempts to decode printed words.

5.3 Participants

A defensible sample for this design would consist of purposively selected learners from Grades 1 to 3, supplemented by their primary-grade teachers.

For example, the study may include 12 learners—four from each primary grade—and three classroom teachers. Maximum-variation sampling may be used to include learners displaying different levels of reading independence.

The final manuscript should replace these proposed numbers with the actual number and characteristics of participants.

Learners may be selected based on the following criteria:

- officially enrolled in Grades 1–3 at Gappal Elementary School;
- regular exposure to classroom reading instruction;
- experience with phonological or phonemic-awareness activities;
- willingness to participate; and
- parental/guardian consent and child assent.

Teachers may be included because their observations help contextualize patterns evident in learners' reading experiences.

5.4 Data Collection

Four complementary sources of qualitative evidence may be employed.

First, task-based learner conversations can be conducted. Learners may be given developmentally appropriate activities involving rhyming, syllable segmentation, initial/final sound identification, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and simple manipulation.

Rather than scoring these tasks primarily as a test, the researcher observes how learners approach them and asks questions such as:

- "How did you know that word?"
- "What did you do when you did not know the word?"
- "Which part was difficult?"
- "Can you show me how you put the sounds together?"

Second, semi-structured interviews with teachers can explore patterns teachers observe in pupils' reading, instructional strategies, and persistent difficulties.

Third, classroom observations can document sound-based instruction, learner participation, teacher scaffolding, corrective feedback, and application to printed words.

Fourth, selected learner artifacts, such as reading activities, word-building exercises, worksheets, or teacher records, may supplement interview and observational evidence.

5.5 Data Analysis

Data may be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021).

Analysis involves:

1. repeated familiarization with interview transcripts and observational records;
2. generation of initial codes;
3. comparison of codes across learners and data sources;
4. construction of candidate themes;
5. review and refinement of themes;
6. definition and naming of themes; and

7. interpretation of themes in relation to the research questions and literature.

Possible initial codes may include "breaking words apart," "sounding out," "guessing from print," "difficulty blending," "confusing sounds," "teacher modeling," "repetition," "reading confidence," and "fear of mistakes."

5.6 Trustworthiness

Credibility may be strengthened through triangulation of learner conversations, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and learner artifacts.

Persistent observation can help distinguish isolated learner behaviors from recurring patterns. Teacher member reflection may be used to examine whether interpretations adequately represent classroom experiences.

A researcher audit trail should document coding decisions, theme development, and interpretive changes. Reflexive notes should also be maintained because researchers' prior beliefs concerning reading instruction can influence qualitative interpretation.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

Because participants include young children, ethical safeguards are especially important. Permission should be secured from the appropriate educational and institutional authorities.

Parents or guardians should provide informed consent, while learners should provide age-appropriate assent. Participation must be voluntary and unrelated to pupils' grades.

Pseudonyms or participant codes such as P1–P12 should replace pupils' names. Reading difficulties should never be reported in a manner that stigmatizes or publicly identifies individual children.

6. Findings and Discussion

The following thematic structure demonstrates how the completed Findings and Discussion section may be organized. The participant quotations are illustrative model quotations and must be checked against or replaced by actual transcript evidence before submission.

Theme 1: Hearing the Parts Before Reading the Whole

The first theme captures learners' developing realization that spoken words can be broken into smaller sound units. Learners who demonstrated sensitivity to syllables, rhymes, and individual sounds frequently described words in terms of "parts" that could be heard and separated.

One learner might explain:

"Kapag mahaba po iyong word, hinahati ko muna. Mas madaling basahin kapag paisa-isa iyong parts." (P2, Grade 2)

["When the word is long, I divide it first. It is easier to read when I work on the parts one at a time."]

Another learner may describe a similar experience:

"Kapag magkatunog iyong ending, mas madali ko pong napapansin at natatandaan iyong word." (P4, Grade 1)

["When the endings sound alike, I notice and remember the word more easily."]

These accounts illustrate phonological sensitivity at levels larger than individual phonemes. Recognizing rhymes and dividing spoken words into syllables can help children begin to conceptualize language as consisting of manipulable sound units.

Anthony and Francis (2005) conceptualize phonological awareness as developing across interrelated levels of phonological complexity. Thus, awareness of larger sound units can provide part of the developmental foundation for increasingly fine-grained attention to phonemes.

Importantly, the findings should not be interpreted as meaning that syllable awareness alone produces skilled reading. Rather, awareness that spoken language contains smaller units provides learners with a conceptual foundation for understanding how the alphabetic system represents speech.

Theme 2: "Putting the Sounds Together": Blending as a Bridge to Word Reading

Blending emerged as one of the most visible ways in which phonemic awareness supported word reading.

One learner might state:

"Kapag hindi ko po mabasa agad, sinasabi ko muna iyong sound ng bawat letter. Tapos pinagdudugtong ko hanggang mabuo iyong word." (P5, Grade 2)

["When I cannot read it immediately, I say the sound of each letter first. Then I put the sounds together until I form the word."]

Another participant may express the strategy more simply:

"Sound muna, tapos pagsasamahin ko. Doon ko po nalalaman iyong word." (P1, Grade 1)

["I do the sounds first and then put them together. That is how I know the word."]

These responses illustrate the functional relationship between phonemic blending and decoding. The learners were not merely demonstrating the ability to pronounce isolated phonemes; they were coordinating these sounds to access recognizable spoken words from print.

The interpretation is consistent with Ehri et al. (2001), whose meta-analysis found that phonemic-awareness instruction contributed to reading development, particularly when sound awareness was connected with letters.

However, blending was not equally automatic for all learners. A contrasting response might be:

"Alam ko po iyong sounds pero kapag pinagsama-sama na, minsan hindi ko alam kung anong word na siya." (P7, Grade 1)

["I know the sounds, but when I have to put them together, sometimes I do not know what word they make."]

This negative experience is theoretically important. Knowledge of individual letter sounds does not guarantee successful decoding. A learner may correctly produce separate phonemes yet experience difficulty integrating them rapidly enough to recognize the whole word.

Consequently, instruction needs to move beyond isolated letter-sound recitation toward repeated opportunities for blending sounds into meaningful words.

Theme 3: Breaking Words Apart to Decode Unfamiliar Words

Whereas blending required learners to combine sounds, segmentation required them to analyze whole words into smaller phonological units.

One participant might describe:

"Kapag bagong word po, tinitingnan ko kung anong sounds ang nasa loob. Isa-isa ko muna bago ko basahin nang buo." (P6, Grade 3)

["When it is a new word, I look at the sounds inside it. I work on them one at a time before reading the whole word."]

A teacher might similarly observe:

"The pupils who can hear and separate the sounds usually have something to fall back on when they encounter an unfamiliar word. Instead of immediately waiting for me to tell them the word, they try to work it out." (T2)

This theme suggests that phonemic segmentation may contribute to greater strategic independence. Learners who can consciously analyze constituent sounds have a possible strategy for approaching unfamiliar words rather than relying exclusively on memorization or teacher assistance.

The pattern is consistent with the strong relationship between phonemic awareness and word reading identified by Melby-Lervåg et al. (2012). Rehfeld et al. (2022) also found positive outcomes from phonemic-awareness instruction, including a medium average effect for segmentation among learners suspected of reading disability. Rehfeld et al.

However, some learners may depend too heavily on guessing:

"Kapag hindi ko po mabasa, minsan hinuhulaan ko na lang kung ano iyong word base sa first letter." (P8, Grade 2) ["When I cannot read it, sometimes I just guess the word based on the first letter."]

This negative case adds depth to the finding. It demonstrates that partial letter or sound knowledge can lead to inefficient reading strategies when learners do not systematically attend to all relevant phonemes and graphemes.

Theme 4: "I Can Try It Myself": Sound Awareness, Confidence, and Reading Independence

The fourth theme concerns the affective dimension accompanying developing sound awareness. Several learner experiences may reveal that successfully decoding words contributes to willingness to attempt unfamiliar text.

One learner might explain:

"Dati po kapag hindi ko alam iyong word, hinihintay ko si teacher. Ngayon tina-try ko muna iyong sounds. Minsan nababasa ko na mag-isa." (P9, Grade 2)

["Before, when I did not know a word, I waited for the teacher. Now I try the sounds first. Sometimes I can already read it by myself."]

Another might say:

"Mas gusto ko na pong magbasa kapag nakakabuo ako ng word kasi feeling ko kaya ko pala." (P3, Grade 1)

["I like reading more when I can form the word because I feel that I can actually do it."]

These statements should not be interpreted as demonstrating that phonemic awareness directly causes motivation. The qualitative data instead suggest that successful use of sound-based strategies may provide mastery experiences through which children perceive themselves as more capable readers.

Conversely, difficulties can carry an emotional cost:

"Kapag paulit-ulit ko pong hindi mapagsama iyong sounds, nahihiya na akong magbasa nang malakas kasi baka mali."

(P10, Grade 2) ["When I repeatedly cannot put the sounds together, I become embarrassed to read aloud because I might be wrong."]
This negative account is equally important. Difficulties with phonological processing are not purely technical. Repeated failure can affect classroom participation and willingness to take risks.
Teachers should therefore provide corrective support in ways that preserve learners' willingness to attempt unfamiliar words. Reading errors can be treated as opportunities for guided analysis rather than public failure.

Theme 5: Not All Sound Tasks Are Equally Easy
The fifth theme highlights differences in task difficulty.
Learners may demonstrate relative ease in recognizing beginning sounds yet struggle with medial sounds, final sounds, phoneme deletion, or substitution.
One learner might explain:
"Madali po iyong first sound. Pero kapag tinanggal iyong isang sound tapos tatanungin kung ano ang matitira, nahihirapan ako."(P11, Grade 3) ["The first sound is easy. But when one sound is removed and I am asked what remains, I find it difficult."]
Another may say:
"Minsan po magkalapit iyong tunog kaya nalilito ako kung anong letter iyong naririnig ko." (P7, Grade 1) ["Sometimes the sounds are very similar, so I become confused about which letter I am hearing."]

These experiences show why phonological awareness should not be treated as a single all-or-nothing competency. Children may demonstrate success at one level while continuing to struggle with another.
This interpretation accords with the developmental literature showing that phonological awareness involves different levels of linguistic complexity (Anthony & Francis, 2005). It also aligns with the broader evidence synthesized by Melby-Lervåg et al. (2012), which distinguishes phonemic awareness from other phonological skills.
Such variation carries an important instructional implication: difficulty with an advanced manipulation task should not automatically be interpreted as an inability to engage with phonological information generally. Teachers need to identify the specific level at which a learner experiences difficulty.

Theme 6: Guided, Repeated, and Engaging Practice Makes Sound Awareness Meaningful
The final theme concerns the instructional conditions supporting learners' developing sound awareness.
Learners may particularly value activities involving teacher modeling, repetition, word games, oral participation, letter manipulation, and gradual progression from easier to more difficult sound tasks.
One participant might explain:
"Mas madali po kapag ginagawa muna ni teacher tapos susunod kami. Kapag paulit-ulit, nasasanay na ako kung paano pagdudugtungin iyong sounds."(P12, Grade 1) ["It is easier when the teacher demonstrates first and then we follow. With repetition, I become used to how the sounds are blended."]
A teacher might report:
"Some pupils can identify sounds when we do them orally, but when the same sounds are connected to printed words, they still need prompting. Repetition and showing the letters while working with the sounds seem to help them make the connection."(T1)
The teacher's observation is particularly important because phonemic awareness should not remain disconnected from print once learners are ready to establish grapheme-phoneme relationships. Ehri et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis found phonemic-awareness instruction to be more effective under certain circumstances, including when letters were incorporated.
Hulme et al. (2012) similarly provide evidence for the importance of both phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge in the development of word-level literacy.
At the same time, repetitive instruction can become disengaging when implemented mechanically. A contrasting learner might explain:
"Kapag pare-pareho lang po iyong activity, minsan nakakasawa. Mas gusto ko po iyong may word game o may cards." (P5, Grade 2)
["When the activity is always the same, sometimes it becomes boring. I prefer activities with word games or cards."]
This negative response qualifies the argument for repetition. Practice is necessary, but repetition need not mean identical tasks. Teachers may maintain systematic skill development while varying activities and materials in developmentally appropriate ways.

7. Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, the six themes indicate that phonological and phonemic awareness may be understood as practical resources that primary-grade learners draw upon while learning to read.

The themes form an interconnected developmental picture:

Phonological sensitivity → awareness of sound units → phonemic blending and segmentation → application to printed words → increasing decoding independence

However, the experiences were not uniformly successful. Learners could recognize individual sounds without successfully blending them, rely on partial cues when encountering unfamiliar words, struggle with complex sound manipulation, or experience embarrassment when decoding attempts failed.

These negative cases are particularly valuable because they demonstrate that knowing some letter sounds is not equivalent to possessing fully developed phonemic awareness, and possessing phonemic awareness does not alone constitute complete reading competence.

The study therefore avoids reducing reading development to a single skill. Phonological and phonemic awareness are better regarded as important elements within a broader reading system that also involves orthographic knowledge, vocabulary, oral language, fluency, comprehension, motivation, and meaningful engagement with text.

The interpretation is supported by the broader empirical literature. Ehri et al. (2001) identified positive effects of phonemic-awareness instruction on reading, while Melby-Lervåg et al. (2012) identified phonemic awareness as a particularly strong correlate of individual differences in word reading. Hulme et al. (2012) further provide intervention-based evidence concerning phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge. Collectively, these studies strengthen the interpretation of the qualitative patterns while the present study contributes a contextual perspective on what these processes may look and feel like for children learning to read.

8. Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the role of phonemic and phonological awareness in the reading development of primary-grade learners at Gappal Elementary School.

The findings suggest that sound awareness becomes particularly meaningful when learners use it as a strategy for actual reading. Recognizing sound patterns and larger phonological units provides an early foundation, while phonemic blending and segmentation enable learners to work more systematically with individual sounds and their relationships to printed words.

Learners who can break unfamiliar words into manageable components and reconstruct their sounds may possess strategies that enable greater reading independence. Successful decoding attempts may also encourage confidence and willingness to engage with unfamiliar text.

However, the findings also emphasize substantial variation among learners. Some children may know individual sounds but struggle to blend them; others may recognize familiar words but rely on guessing when encountering unfamiliar ones. More complex phonemic manipulation can present additional difficulty.

Consequently, phonological and phonemic awareness should neither be treated as isolated drills nor assumed to develop automatically. Primary-grade learners require explicit, systematic, responsive, and engaging opportunities to hear, identify, blend, segment, and manipulate sounds and to connect these processes with letters and meaningful reading.

Ultimately, the importance of phonemic and phonological awareness lies not in learners' ability to complete sound exercises for their own sake, but in their growing ability to use knowledge of the sound structure of language to become more accurate, strategic, confident, and increasingly independent readers.

9. Recommendations

Based on the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Primary-grade teachers should systematically integrate age-appropriate phonological-awareness activities involving rhyming, syllables, sound identification, blending, segmentation, and manipulation.

2. Phonemic-awareness activities should be progressively connected with letters and printed words so that learners understand the relationship between spoken phonemes and written graphemes.

3. Teachers should closely observe learners who can produce individual letter sounds but remain unable to blend them successfully, as these pupils may require more explicit guided practice.

4. Sound-awareness activities should progress from more accessible tasks toward more complex phonemic manipulation rather than treating all phonological tasks as equivalent.

5. Teachers should combine systematic instruction with engaging practices such as word games, sound boxes, letter cards, oral activities, and guided word building.

6. Learners experiencing persistent phonological and decoding difficulties should receive timely targeted support rather than waiting until reading difficulties become more pronounced.

7. Reading errors should be addressed through supportive feedback to prevent struggling learners from associating oral reading with embarrassment or failure.

8. Future research may investigate the phenomenon across several elementary schools, compare learners across grade levels, or conduct longitudinal qualitative studies examining how individual children's phonological strategies change over time.

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