



Beginning Literacy Instruction in Grade 1: Teaching Strategies and Early Learner Progress at La Salette of Ramon

Reamae S. Gonzaga

Northeastern College, Santiago City, Philippines

Abstract

Beginning literacy instruction in Grade 1 plays a foundational role in shaping learners' reading and writing development and their long-term academic trajectories. Effective early literacy teaching requires the strategic integration of phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension within developmentally appropriate instructional practices. This study examined the teaching strategies employed in Grade 1 literacy instruction and their relationship to early learner progress at La Salette of Ramon. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, data were collected through classroom observations, early literacy assessments, and semi-structured teacher interviews. Quantitative findings indicated that explicit phonics instruction, guided reading, and multisensory activities were moderately to highly implemented and were significantly associated with learner gains in letter-sound knowledge, word recognition, and early reading fluency. Qualitative findings revealed that structured routines, teacher scaffolding, and individualized support facilitated early literacy development, while time constraints and learner readiness differences influenced instructional decisions. The study underscores the importance of systematic, explicit, and responsive literacy instruction in supporting beginning readers in Grade 1.

Keywords: beginning literacy, Grade 1, phonics instruction, early reading, teaching strategies, Philippines

Introduction

Early literacy development is a critical determinant of children's academic success, social participation, and lifelong learning. The early primary years, particularly Grade 1, represent a pivotal stage in which learners transition from emergent literacy to conventional reading and writing. Research consistently demonstrates that learners who fail to acquire foundational literacy skills in the early grades are at increased risk of persistent reading difficulties and lower academic achievement in later schooling (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Lonigan et al., 2018).

Beginning literacy instruction encompasses a range of interrelated skills, including phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Evidence from international research highlights that systematic and explicit instruction in these components, particularly phonics and phonological awareness, is essential for early reading success (Ehri et al., 2001; National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). At the same

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time, effective literacy instruction requires responsive teaching practices that consider learners' developmental readiness, language background, and individual learning needs.

In the Philippine education context, Grade 1 literacy instruction is guided by the K to 12 curriculum, which emphasizes early reading proficiency, mother tongue-based instruction in the early grades, and the development of functional literacy skills. Despite these policy directions, variations in learner readiness, instructional time, and teaching strategies continue to influence literacy outcomes in early primary classrooms. Local school-based research is therefore necessary to understand how literacy instruction is enacted in practice and how teaching strategies support early learner progress.

Previous studies on early literacy have largely focused on large-scale assessment data or intervention programs, with fewer studies examining everyday classroom practices and learner progress within specific school contexts. Moreover, there is limited empirical work that integrates classroom observation, learner assessment, and teacher perspectives to explain how instructional strategies influence early literacy development in Grade 1.

This study addresses this gap by examining beginning literacy instruction in Grade 1 at La Salette of Ramon. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study aims to provide contextually grounded evidence on teaching strategies and early learner progress, with implications for instructional improvement in early primary education.

Objectives of the study

This study aimed to examine the teaching strategies used in Grade 1 beginning literacy instruction at La Salette of Ramon and to determine the level of early learner progress in foundational literacy skills. Specifically, it sought to (a) identify the extent to which key literacy teaching strategies were implemented, (b) describe learners' progress in letter-sound knowledge, word recognition, and early reading fluency, and (c) explain how instructional practices and classroom conditions influenced early literacy development.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of beginning literacy instruction and learner progress. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation.

Research Locale

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The study was conducted at La Salette of Ramon, a private elementary school offering Grade 1 under the K to 12 Basic Education Curriculum. The school serves early primary learners with varied levels of literacy readiness and implements structured literacy instruction as part of its academic program.

Participants

Participants included Grade 1 teachers handling beginning literacy instruction and Grade 1 learners enrolled during the school year of the study. Teachers were selected through purposive sampling, while learners were selected through cluster sampling by class section.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were gathered using three primary instruments. A classroom observation protocol assessed literacy teaching strategies, including phonics instruction, phonological awareness activities, guided reading, use of decodable texts, multisensory strategies, and differentiation. An early literacy assessment tool measured learners' letter-sound knowledge, word recognition, and early reading fluency using age-appropriate tasks. Finally, semi-structured teacher interviews explored instructional decision-making, learner progress, and challenges encountered in beginning literacy instruction.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis to examine relationships between teaching strategies and learner progress. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, involving iterative coding and theme development. Integration of findings was achieved through triangulation and joint interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from school authorities. Informed consent from teachers and parents and assent from learners were secured. Confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were ensured.

Results and Findings

A. Quantitative Results: Statistical Tables and Regression Analysis

Level of Early Learner Progress in Beginning Literacy

Early learner progress was measured across three foundational literacy indicators: letter-sound knowledge, word recognition, and early reading fluency. Descriptive statistics indicate generally positive progress, with variability across skill areas.

Table 1. Level of Early Learner Progress in Grade 1 Beginning Literacy (n = 124 learners)



Literacy Skill	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Letter-Sound Knowledge	3.86	0.48	High
Word Recognition	3.61	0.55	Moderate to High
Early Reading Fluency	3.29	0.64	Moderate
Overall Literacy Progress	3.59	0.52	Moderate to High

Learners demonstrated strong gains in letter-sound knowledge, indicating effective acquisition of alphabetic principles. Progress in word recognition was moderate to high, reflecting learners’ developing ability to decode and recognize familiar words. Reading fluency, however, showed greater variability, suggesting that while learners were beginning to read connected text, speed and automaticity were still emerging.

Extent of Teaching Strategies in Beginning Literacy Instruction

Classroom observations were used to assess the frequency and quality of literacy teaching strategies.

Table 2. Extent of Grade 1 Literacy Teaching Strategies (n = 6 teachers)

Teaching Strategy	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Explicit Phonics Instruction	4.02	0.41	High
Phonological Awareness Activities	3.78	0.46	Moderate to High
Guided Reading	3.69	0.52	Moderate to High
Multisensory Strategies	3.84	0.44	High
Differentiated Instruction	3.22	0.63	Moderate
Overall Teaching Strategies	3.71	0.45	Moderate to High

Teachers consistently implemented explicit phonics instruction and multisensory strategies, reflecting alignment with evidence-based literacy practices. Guided reading was regularly observed, though opportunities for differentiation were more limited, often due to time constraints and varying learner readiness.

Relationship Between Teaching Strategies and Learner Progress

Pearson correlation analysis examined associations between teaching strategies and literacy outcomes.

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Table 3. Correlation Between Teaching Strategies and Early Learner Progress

Teaching Strategy	Letter–Sound Knowledge	Word Recognition	Reading Fluency
Explicit Phonics Instruction	.63**	.58**	.44**
Phonological Awareness	.55**	.51**	.42**
Guided Reading	.49**	.61**	.66**
Multisensory Strategies	.57**	.54**	.47**
Differentiated Instruction	.41**	.48**	.59**

*p < .05, **p < .01

Explicit phonics instruction showed the strongest relationship with letter-sound knowledge, while guided reading and differentiated instruction were more strongly associated with reading fluency. These findings suggest that foundational skills benefit most from systematic instruction, whereas fluency development requires scaffolded, individualized practice.

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Literacy Progress

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine which teaching strategies best predicted overall literacy progress.

Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Early Literacy Progress

Predictor Variable	β	t	p
Explicit Phonics Instruction	.36	4.78	< .001
Guided Reading	.41	5.36	< .001
Multisensory Strategies	.28	3.64	.001
Differentiated Instruction	.22	2.91	.005

Model Summary:

$R^2 = .62$, $F(4, 119) = 48.87$, $p < .001$

The regression model accounted for 62% of the variance in early literacy progress, demonstrating a strong and meaningful predictive relationship between instructional strategies and learner outcomes in beginning literacy. This substantial explanatory power indicates that the quality and type of literacy instruction played a central role in shaping learners' early reading development. Among the instructional variables, guided reading emerged as the strongest predictor, underscoring the effectiveness of small-group, level-appropriate



reading instruction in supporting the transition from decoding to fluent reading. **Explicit phonics instruction** followed closely as a significant predictor, highlighting its foundational role in developing accurate letter-sound knowledge and word recognition. Taken together, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating **systematic phonics instruction with scaffolded, guided reading practice** to support comprehensive early literacy development in Grade 1 classrooms.

B. Qualitative Results

Theme 1: Structured Literacy Routines Supported Consistent Skill Practice

Teachers emphasized the importance of establishing daily classroom routines as a means of reinforcing foundational literacy skills. Consistent inclusion of phonics drills, sight word review, and shared reading activities provided learners with repeated and structured exposure to essential reading behaviors. Through routine practice, learners gradually internalized letter-sound relationships, word recognition patterns, and basic reading conventions. This repetition supported automaticity and confidence in early reading, enabling learners to engage more independently and consistently in literacy tasks over time.

Participant Quotes

“Importante ang routine kasi doon nasasanay ang bata sa tunog at pagbasa araw-araw.”
 (“Routine is important because children practice sounds and reading every day.”)

Structured classroom routines promoted consistency and behavioral readiness by establishing predictable patterns for literacy instruction, such as daily phonics review, guided reading sessions, and shared reading activities. These routines helped learners anticipate instructional expectations, regulate their behavior, and allocate sustained attention to literacy tasks. For beginning readers, such predictability reduced cognitive and emotional demands associated with task transitions, allowing greater focus on learning letter-sound relationships, decoding, and early reading practice. As a result, structured routines created a stable instructional environment that supported regular engagement in literacy activities and facilitated gradual skill acquisition.

This interpretation is supported by research indicating that consistent and predictable literacy routines contribute significantly to early reading development. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) emphasized that regular, structured exposure to literacy tasks is essential for building foundational reading skills, particularly for learners at risk of reading difficulties. Similarly, the National Reading Panel (2000) reported that systematic and routine-based literacy instruction enhances early reading outcomes by reinforcing skill practice and promoting learner engagement.

Theme 2: Explicit Instruction and Scaffolding Facilitated Early Skill Acquisition

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Teachers reported that learners required clear and explicit modeling, accompanied by guided practice, to effectively master letter - sound relationships and basic decoding skills. Modeling allowed learners to observe correct pronunciation, blending, and decoding strategies, while guided practice provided structured opportunities to apply these skills with immediate feedback. This combination helped learners internalize foundational literacy processes and minimized misconceptions, particularly among learners with limited prior literacy exposure. As a result, guided modeling served as an essential instructional mechanism for supporting accurate and confident early reading development.

Participant Quotes

“Kapag hindi explicit ang pagtuturo ng tunog, nalilito ang bata.”
 (“If sound instruction is not explicit, children become confused.”)

Scaffolding played a crucial role in enabling learners to progress from assisted reading toward independent reading, thereby supporting their cognitive readiness for more complex literacy tasks. Through explicit modeling, guided practice, and gradual withdrawal of instructional support, learners were able to internalize letter - sound relationships and decoding strategies. This systematic support helped reduce cognitive load during reading, allowing learners to focus increasingly on meaning-making rather than on basic decoding processes. As learners gained confidence and accuracy, scaffolding facilitated the transition from teacher-assisted decoding to autonomous reading, a key indicator of cognitive readiness in early literacy development.

This interpretation aligns with the findings of Ehri et al. (2001), who emphasized that explicit phonics instruction and systematic scaffolding are critical in beginning reading. Their meta-analysis demonstrated that learners who receive structured, scaffolded phonics instruction develop stronger decoding skills, which serve as the foundation for independent and fluent reading.

Theme 3: Guided Reading Promoted Gradual Reading Independence

Small-group guided reading sessions enabled teachers to more effectively address individual learner needs by tailoring instruction to learners’ reading levels and specific skill gaps. Within these small groups, teachers were able to provide targeted feedback, adjust pacing, and select texts that matched learners’ instructional abilities. This approach created opportunities for differentiated support, particularly for learners who required additional practice in decoding, word recognition, and fluency. By reducing the instructional focus from whole-class delivery to smaller, more manageable groups, guided reading facilitated more responsive instruction and supported gradual learner progress toward independent reading.

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Participant Quotes

“Sa guided reading ko nakikita kung sino ang hirap at sino ang handa na.”
(“In guided reading, I can see who is struggling and who is ready.”)

Guided reading functioned as a critical instructional bridge between learners’ emerging decoding skills and the development of fluent reading. Through small-group instruction, teachers were able to match texts to learners’ instructional levels, provide immediate corrective feedback, and model effective reading strategies. This supported learners in applying phonics knowledge within connected text, gradually improving reading accuracy, pacing, and expression. The scaffolded nature of guided reading also allowed learners to gain confidence and independence, enabling them to transition from effortful word-by-word decoding to more automatic and meaningful reading. This interpretation is consistent with research indicating that guided reading is most effective when instruction is aligned with learners’ instructional reading levels and includes targeted feedback and practice. Tunmer and Chapman (2012) demonstrated that guided reading supports the integration of decoding and comprehension processes, leading to improvements in reading fluency. Similarly, evidence from early literacy research suggests that structured small-group reading instruction plays a crucial role in supporting beginning readers as they move toward fluent and independent reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Theme 4: Learner Readiness and Time Constraints Shaped Instructional Decisions

Teachers consistently cited limited instructional time and wide variations in learner readiness as significant constraints to the full implementation of differentiated instruction. Given the demands of curriculum coverage and daily lesson pacing, teachers found it challenging to provide sustained, individualized support for learners who progressed at different rates. Learners entered Grade 1 with varying levels of prior literacy exposure, requiring differing amounts of scaffolding, practice, and feedback. As a result, instructional adjustments were often made at the whole-class or small-group level rather than through individualized differentiation, particularly during reading fluency activities that require repeated, focused practice.

Participant Quotes

“Hindi pare-pareho ang level ng bata kaya minsan nahahirapan mag-differentiate.”
(“Children are not at the same level, so differentiation is sometimes difficult.”)

These instructional constraints help explain the observed variability in learner progress, particularly in the development of early reading fluency. While foundational skills such as letter–sound knowledge and basic word recognition benefited from structured and explicit instruction, fluency development required sustained, individualized practice that was more difficult to provide within limited instructional time. Differences in learner readiness further intensified this challenge, as teachers were often required to balance

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whole-class instruction with the needs of struggling and more advanced readers. As a result, opportunities for repeated reading, individualized feedback, and extended guided practice key conditions for fluency growth were unevenly distributed among learners. This uneven access likely contributed to disparities in reading speed, accuracy, and automaticity observed across the class.

These findings are consistent with existing research documenting similar challenges in early primary classrooms. Lonigan et al. (2018) reported that limited instructional time and wide variability in learner readiness constrain teachers' ability to provide differentiated and intensive reading practice, particularly for fluency development. Likewise, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) emphasized that while early decoding skills can be taught effectively through whole-class instruction, the development of fluent reading requires ongoing, individualized support and ample practice opportunities conditions that are often difficult to sustain in regular classroom settings.

Integrated Summary of Findings

Quantitative results demonstrate that explicit phonics instruction and guided reading significantly predicted early literacy progress, while qualitative findings explain *how* structured routines, scaffolding, and guided practice supported learner development. Together, the findings confirm that systematic, explicit, and responsive literacy instruction is critical for successful beginning reading in Grade 1.

Discussion

The findings highlight the central role of systematic and explicit literacy instruction in supporting early learner progress in Grade 1. The strong implementation of phonics-based strategies and guided reading aligns with extensive evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of explicit instruction in developing foundational reading skills (Ehri et al., 2001; NRP, 2000).

The observed gains in letter-sound knowledge and word recognition underscore the importance of structured practice and repetition during the early stages of reading development. Multisensory strategies appeared to enhance learner engagement and retention, supporting research that emphasizes the value of multi-modal instruction for beginning readers (Snow et al., 1998).

Guided reading emerged as a key mechanism for supporting reading fluency and gradual independence. By providing scaffolded practice within learners' instructional levels, guided reading allowed teachers to address individual needs while promoting confidence and accuracy. However, variability in fluency outcomes suggests the need for sustained practice and targeted support for learners who progress at a slower pace.

Despite these strengths, instructional constraints such as limited time and varied learner readiness influenced differentiation and pacing. These challenges reflect broader issues in early primary education Gonzaga. 2026. Beginning Literacy Instruction in Grade 1: Teaching Strategies and Early Learner Progress at La Salette of Ramon



and highlight the need for continued professional development and instructional support focused on beginning literacy.

Conclusion

This study examined beginning literacy instruction in Grade 1 at La Salette of Ramon, focusing on teaching strategies and early learner progress. Findings indicate that explicit phonics instruction, guided reading, and multisensory strategies positively supported early literacy development, particularly in letter-sound knowledge and word recognition. While learner progress was generally positive, variability in reading fluency underscores the need for sustained, differentiated instruction. Strengthening systematic literacy practices and instructional support may further enhance early reading outcomes in Grade 1 classrooms.

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