



Teachers' experiences with the Marungko Approach: Challenges and recommendations

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: March 20, 2026

Received in rev. form. April 25, 2026

Accepted: May 15, 2026

Published: June 10, 2026

Keywords: *literacy, beginning reading skills, early reading instruction, Marungko approach, teachers' experiences, phenomenological study*

ABSTRACT

This study examined the lived experiences of Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac as they implemented the Marungko Approach for beginning reading. Recognizing reading as a foundational literacy skill, the study sought to understand how teachers enact this structured, phonics-based program, the challenges they face, and the strategies they recommend to enhance instruction. Employing a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design, fifteen Grade 1 teachers were purposively selected as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. Findings indicate that teachers view the Marungko Approach as highly structured and learner-centered, employing stepwise phonics instruction, multisensory teaching, guided practice, interactive activities, and differentiated instruction to support learners' decoding skills, reading fluency, and confidence. Key challenges included variability in learner pacing, difficulties with sound blending, and limited instructional resources, whereas supportive classroom environments, motivated learners, and access to school-provided materials facilitated effective implementation. Teachers recommended enhancing the approach through interactive and multisensory resources, targeted support for struggling readers, ongoing professional development, collaborative peer networks, and scaffolded phonics-based activities. The study highlights the critical role of teacher expertise, adaptive strategies, and instructional resources in the successful implementation of structured phonics programs, offering practical insights to improve early literacy instruction and to inform policy and practice in primary education.

JEL Classification: I21

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Introduction

Reading is a foundational literacy skill that significantly influences learners' academic achievement and long-term educational outcomes. In the early grades, particularly Grade 1, reading proficiency enables learners to access information, understand instructions, and engage meaningfully in classroom learning.

Effective early reading instruction is therefore expected to be systematic, explicit, and developmentally appropriate, targeting essential components such as phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, which collectively support decoding and meaning-making processes (Dinoro et al., 2023; National Reading Panel, 2020).

However, large-scale assessment data indicate persistent concerns regarding learners' reading proficiency. Internationally, results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 show that Filipino learners perform significantly below the OECD average in reading literacy, with only a small proportion reaching minimum proficiency levels, reflecting systemic challenges in reading comprehension and higher-order literacy skills (OECD, 2023). These findings imply that reading difficulties observed in later schooling may originate from gaps in foundational literacy development.

At the national level, data from the Department of Education's Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) reveal that a considerable number of primary-grade learners remain at the emerging level of reading proficiency. Many learners struggle with basic decoding, blending, and word recognition skills necessary for independent reading (Department of Education, 2024). Locally, the beginning of the school year, CRLA results in the Schools Division of the City of Batac indicate that approximately 32.41% of Grade 1 learners are classified as emerging readers, meaning they can recognize letter sounds but have not yet developed the ability to read words independently (City Schools Division of Batac, 2025). These findings highlight a critical need to strengthen early reading instruction.

In response to these literacy challenges, schools have implemented structured reading interventions to improve foundational skills. One commonly adopted approach in Philippine classrooms is the Marungko Approach, a phonics-based instructional strategy that emphasizes systematic teaching of letter sounds, syllable formation, and word recognition. Research shows that the Marungko Approach improves phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and reading fluency among beginning readers (Perez & Villocino, 2025; Santos & De Vera, 2020). As an instructional method aligned with evidence-based phonics practices, the Marungko Approach plays an important role in supporting beginning readers and addressing early literacy gaps.

Given the central role of teachers in implementing reading instruction, understanding how they experience and enact the Marungko Approach in actual classroom settings is essential. While prior studies have examined the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach in improving reading skills, there is a lack of research that captures the first-hand experiences of teachers, including the challenges they face, the strategies they employ, and how they adapt instruction to meet diverse learner needs in real classroom contexts.

Thus, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of Grade 1 teachers using the Marungko Approach to teach reading, with the goal of generating insights to inform the enhancement of early literacy instruction and improve reading outcomes among beginning learners.

Review of related literature and studies

The purpose of this review is to situate the study within the existing body of knowledge on early literacy instruction, particularly phonics-based approaches and teachers' instructional experiences in beginning reading. By examining relevant literature, this section identifies gaps in current understanding regarding how teachers implement structured reading strategies, specifically the Marungko Approach, in real classroom contexts. It provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for foundational literacy development, evidence-based reading instruction, and teachers' roles in supporting emergent readers. The review also deepens understanding of the instructional challenges, enabling factors, and contextual conditions that influence the effectiveness of early reading interventions, highlighting how teachers' practices and experiences contribute to improving reading outcomes among beginning learners.

Foundations of early reading instruction

Reading is a foundational literacy skill critical to academic success and lifelong learning. Early reading proficiency enables learners to access curriculum content, understand instructions, and engage in classroom discussions (Carreker, 2015; National Reading Panel, 2020). Research shows that effective early literacy instruction is systematic, explicit, and developmentally sequenced, targeting core components such as phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These components are recognized predictors of reading success, with strong phonological skills particularly linked to later decoding and word recognition abilities (Connor, Morrison, & Petrella, 2022).

In the Philippines, persistent gaps in reading proficiency among primary learners have been documented at national and local levels, demonstrating the need for structured interventions (Cubillas, Cubillas, & Pizon, 2024). Studies show that without targeted early instruction, many learners advance to higher grades lacking mastery of essential reading skills, leading to long-term literacy deficits (Avergonzando & Polinar, 2025). This emphasizes the critical importance of early reading programs that equip teachers with research-based strategies and learners with foundational literacy competencies.

Large-scale assessments reveal that reading challenges persist beyond early classrooms into later grades. According to the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2024, the Philippines' average reading score remained similar to its 2019 level, with only about 27 % of Grade 5 learners reaching the minimum proficiency target and roughly half unable to understand simple texts, highlighting enduring foundational literacy gaps despite education reforms (SEA-PLM, as cited in Philstar.com; UNICEF, 2025). These findings suggest that weaknesses in early reading development can magnify as learners progress, reinforcing the need for effective early interventions.

Supporting evidence from longitudinal and large-scale assessments highlights the potential of early, structured reading support. A three-year analysis of the Comprehensive Rapid Literacy Assessment (CRLA) in Makati showed that systematic early intervention, particularly when combined with mother-tongue-based instruction, significantly reduced the number of learners requiring intensive literacy support across Grades 1–3. This suggests that early literacy frameworks and data-driven instruction can strengthen reading proficiency over time. These findings are consistent with more recent studies emphasizing the effectiveness of early intervention and mother-tongue-based instruction in improving

foundational literacy skills (UNESCO, 2016; Save the Children, 2018; World Bank, 2019). This reinforces calls for strong foundational programs that are responsive to learners' needs from the outset.

Furthermore, research on teacher strategies and reading instruction underscores the importance of supportive, evidence-based teaching practices. International studies show that need-supportive instruction, in which teachers respond to individual learners' needs and promote engagement with the text, is positively associated with higher reading achievement — a key insight for contexts like the Philippines, where reading performance has lagged behind regional peers (ScienceDirect, 2021). Such findings align with efforts to strengthen classroom practices that systematically build on phonics and comprehension skills.

Reading strategies of teachers

Teachers play a pivotal role in early reading instruction. Effective teachers integrate multiple reading strategies to support literacy acquisition, including phonics instruction, guided oral reading, repeated readings, interactive read-alouds, and multisensory approaches (Gambrell, Morrow, & Pennington, 2022; Pierson & Clark, 2021). Research indicates that teachers' selection and adaptation of strategies significantly influence learners' reading performance (Aguiling, 2025). Studies in the Philippine context suggest that combining systematic phonics instruction with learner-centered methods enhances reading fluency, word recognition, and comprehension among beginning readers (Arbiol & Jorgio, 2025). Furthermore, teacher professional development and ongoing support are essential for effective implementation, ensuring strategies are contextually responsive and tailored to learner needs (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024).

Teachers' instructional strategies in early reading go beyond phonics and guided reading to include tiered and differentiated instruction that tailors activities to learners' readiness levels. For example, action research conducted with early elementary learners in the Philippines highlighted the use of tiered instructional strategies to enhance reading comprehension, showing that strategic grouping and scaffolding help struggling readers build competence alongside their peers. These methods allow teachers to provide progressively challenging tasks tailored to individual students' needs, reinforcing key literacy skills such as phonemic awareness and vocabulary development (Ramos, 2023).

Correlational research in Nueva Ecija revealed that teachers' professional qualities — including planning, reflection, and adaptive strategies — are significantly associated with effective teaching practices that enhance reading comprehension. This suggests that teachers who continuously reflect on and adjust their instructional strategies tend to create more supportive learning environments, thereby improving primary pupils' reading outcomes. The findings emphasize that teaching strategies are not static techniques but dynamic processes that interact with teachers' professional dispositions and instructional decisions (Lao, 2022).

Local survey research on reading strategies in Philippine basic education found that teachers frequently use pre-reading activities and guided reading approaches as core elements of their instruction, with phonics and vocabulary exercises integrated to strengthen learners' foundational reading skills. The study noted that while alphabet skills were generally mastered, comprehension remained a challenge,

highlighting how varied strategies must work in tandem to support all components of reading development. This underscores the need for teachers to blend multiple strategies — from phonics and guided reading to vocabulary enrichment and comprehension checks — to address the full spectrum of early literacy skills (Villanueva & dela Cruz, 2021).

In multi-grade and linguistically diverse classrooms, such as those found in some Philippine contexts, teachers adapt their reading strategies to fit the varied needs of learners. Research on multi-grade reading instruction found that teachers often integrate contextualized reading practices, including storytelling, vocabulary drills, and comprehension activities, to support students across differing ability levels. These adaptations reflect how teachers modify canonical strategies to suit classroom realities, emphasizing flexibility and creativity in teacher practice (Gonzales & Santos, 2022).

Teacher professional development is another critical factor influencing the use of reading strategies. Evaluations of early literacy programs that included professional development components — such as mentoring, observation, and strategy training — reported that teachers strengthened their instructional skills in teaching phonics and assessing reading progress. These findings align with national calls to enhance teacher capacity through continuous training, enabling educators to implement evidence-based reading strategies with confidence and consistency (DepEd, 2024; Reyes, 2023).

Marungko Approach: Structure and theoretical basis

The Marungko Approach is a structured phonics-based instructional strategy widely implemented in Philippine primary classrooms to support beginning readers. Its theoretical foundation draws from behaviorist and constructivist principles, emphasizing a systematic progression from sound recognition to syllable blending and word formation. This sequential approach enables learners to develop decoding skills and early reading fluency, ensuring that foundational literacy skills are acquired in a developmentally appropriate manner (Boltron & Ramos, 2021).

A distinguishing feature of the Marungko Approach is its multisensory instructional design, which incorporates oral repetition, visual cues, and active learner participation. By engaging multiple senses simultaneously, the approach reinforces phonemic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, and word recognition. Multisensory strategies have been shown to improve retention and engagement among learners, particularly those who face difficulties in conventional reading instruction (Moats & Tolman, 2020).

Empirical studies highlight the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach in improving early reading outcomes. Bernabe (2024) reported significant improvements in oral reading fluency among Grade 1 learners exposed to Marungko-based instruction. Similarly, Mara (2024) found that Grade 2 students taught using Marungko achieved higher accuracy on decoding tasks than peers who received alternative reading strategies, demonstrating the approach's capacity to enhance both fluency and accuracy.

Local research also supports the Marungko Approach's applicability across diverse contexts. A study conducted in Zambales documented substantial pre-test-to-post-test gains in both decoding and comprehension among Grade 1 learners, confirming that systematic phonics instruction can improve

early literacy across diverse classroom environments (Balgua, Fabunan, & Farin, 2022). Intervention programs targeting emergent and struggling readers have likewise demonstrated that Marungko instruction strengthens phonemic awareness, decoding, and word-reading skills, making it an effective tool for remediation (Elli & Digo, 2025).

Overall, the Marungko Approach exemplifies an evidence-based strategy for early reading instruction that combines structured phonics, multisensory engagement, and systematic progression to develop foundational literacy skills. Research consistently shows that its implementation leads to improvements in decoding, fluency, and comprehension, reinforcing the importance of teacher expertise, consistent practice, and adaptation to learner needs in achieving reading success (Boltron & Ramos, 2021; Bernabe, 2024; Mara, 2024; Balgua, Fabunan, & Farin, 2022).

Instructional experiences of teachers using Marungko

Exploring the experiences of teachers who use the Marungko Approach is crucial to understanding how this phonics-based strategy is implemented in real classroom settings. Teachers play a central role in facilitating early literacy, interpreting instructional methods, and adapting strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Studies show that teachers often perceive the Marungko Approach positively, citing improvements in learner engagement, reading fluency, and comprehension (Aguiling, 2025). The structured, multisensory nature of the approach allows teachers to systematically scaffold reading skills, making it easier for students to progress from sound recognition to independent reading.

Despite these benefits, teachers also encounter challenges in implementing the Marungko Approach effectively. Common difficulties include limited instructional resources, large class sizes, and varying learner abilities, which can compromise instructional fidelity (Aguiling, 2025). Teachers must continuously adjust lesson pacing, grouping, and instructional techniques to ensure that all learners acquire foundational reading skills. Such challenges highlight the complex interplay between classroom context, teacher expertise, and the instructional approach.

Research on teacher experiences with reading interventions beyond Marungko shows similar patterns. Factors such as educator agency, professional development, classroom dynamics, and availability of teaching materials significantly influence how instructional strategies are enacted (Arbiol & Jorgio, 2025; Reyes, 2023). Understanding these experiences provides insight into how teachers navigate constraints while maintaining effective literacy instruction and informs recommendations for enhancing teacher support and early reading outcomes.

Overall, examining the instructional experiences of teachers using the Marungko Approach underscores the importance of combining structured methods with teacher adaptability and resource support. Teachers' perspectives provide valuable knowledge on how systematic phonics programs can be tailored to diverse learners, contributing to the broader goal of improving foundational literacy in primary education.

Implications for reading policy and practice

Philippine literacy research underscores the critical need for evidence-based early reading programs to address persistent literacy gaps among primary learners. National and local assessment data indicate that many students continue to struggle with foundational reading skills, highlighting the urgency for structured interventions that are both systematic and developmentally appropriate (Cubillas, Cubillas, & Pizon, 2024; National Reading Panel, 2020). These findings emphasize the role of policy in ensuring that early literacy instruction is grounded in research and tailored to meet learners' needs.

In response, the Department of Education (DepEd) has implemented policies that promote structured phonics programs, such as the Marungko Approach, recognizing their potential to improve decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills in beginning readers (DepEd, 2024). These initiatives also include professional development programs designed to equip teachers with instructional strategies aligned with evidence-based practices. By enhancing teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills, these programs aim to strengthen the quality of reading instruction in primary classrooms.

Policy initiatives further emphasize systematic reading instruction and early intervention for struggling learners. Early identification of reading difficulties and timely remediation are considered essential to prevent long-term literacy deficits and to promote equitable learning opportunities for all students (Avergonzado & Polinar, 2025; Reyes, 2023). Moreover, integrating structured phonics programs with ongoing assessment allows educators to monitor progress and adjust instruction based on learners' individual needs.

Finally, teacher capacity building is central to the success of these reading interventions. Supporting educators through training, instructional resources, and mentoring fosters greater fidelity in implementing structured programs like Marungko. By addressing both systemic and classroom-level factors, policy and practice initiatives can work together to enhance reading outcomes, ensuring that primary learners acquire the foundational literacy skills necessary for lifelong learning (Arbiol & Jorgio, 2025; DepEd, 2024).

Related studies

Recent empirical studies reinforce the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach and its application in early reading instruction. Bernabe (2024) conducted a quasi-experimental study demonstrating that Grade 1 learners exposed to the Marungko Approach significantly improved their oral reading fluency compared to peers who received conventional instruction. Balgua, Fabunan, and Farin (2022) reported that Marungko reading modules enhanced both decoding and comprehension among Grade 1 learners in Zambales, confirming the approach's applicability across different classroom contexts. Mara (2024) compared Marungko with other reading methods and found that learners taught using Marungko achieved faster mastery in decoding tasks. Intervention studies with struggling readers also reported improvements in phonemic awareness and word reading skills, highlighting Marungko's role in supporting remedial literacy programs (Elli & Digo, 2025).

Research on teachers' instructional experiences provides further insights into how structured reading strategies are implemented in real classroom settings. Aguilung (2025) explored primary teachers' perspectives on the Marungko Approach and found that while multisensory and scaffolded instruction improved engagement, challenges such as limited resources and heterogeneous learner needs necessitated teacher adaptations. Arbiol and Jorgio (2025) documented similar findings in other reading intervention programs, emphasizing that teacher agency, instructional creativity, and contextual factors shape the effectiveness of early reading strategies. Department of Education reports (DepEd, 2024) further underscore the importance of professional development and teacher support to enhance instructional quality. Collectively, these studies highlight the need to explore Grade 1 teachers' lived experiences with the Marungko Approach to understand how they navigate challenges, implement strategies, and contribute to early reading outcomes.

Collectively, the literature demonstrates that phonics-based strategies such as the Marungko Approach effectively enhance beginning reading, but the success of these interventions depends on teacher implementation, classroom context, and instructional resources. Understanding the lived experiences of Grade 1 teachers who use the Marungko Approach can provide actionable insights to improve early literacy instruction and inform future reading programs and policy interventions.

Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted the role of continuous **teacher professional development and collaborative learning communities** in maximizing the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach. Professional development programs that provide hands-on training in phonics instruction, lesson planning, and classroom management have been shown to enhance teachers' confidence and instructional fidelity (Reyes, 2023; Avergonzando & Polinar, 2025). Collaborative teacher networks, where educators share experiences, strategies, and resources, also contribute to better implementation and problem-solving in classrooms with diverse learner needs (Gambrell, Morrow, & Pennington, 2022). These findings suggest that the success of structured reading interventions depends not only on the methodology itself but also on the support, capacity-building, and professional agency of the teachers implementing it.

Statement of the problem

This study aims to explore Grade 1 teachers' experiences with the Marungko Approach to teaching reading. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac in using the Marungko Approach to teach beginning reading?
2. What difficulties do Grade 1 teachers encounter, and what factors help them in implementing the Marungko Approach in their reading instruction?
3. What recommendations do Grade 1 teachers suggest for improving the use of the Marungko Approach in teaching beginning reading?

Research methodology

This chapter presents the research design and sources of data, including the study locale, population, and sampling; the data-gathering instrument; and data analysis, along with its ethical standards.

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Grade 1 teachers using the Marungko Approach to teach beginning reading. This design is appropriate for capturing teachers' perspectives on their instructional strategies, the challenges they encounter, and their recommendations for improving reading instruction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on the essence of teachers' experiences, the study identifies common themes across classroom implementation, learner engagement, and professional practice, providing insights into how the Marungko Approach supports foundational literacy development within the Schools Division of the City of Batac.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted in the Schools Division of the City of Batac, Ilocos Norte, focusing on Grade 1 teachers in public elementary schools. This locale provides a meaningful context for exploring the experiences of teachers using the Marungko Approach to teach beginning reading, as it encompasses a diverse range of classrooms, student abilities, and instructional resources. The setting enables an in-depth understanding of how teachers implement structured phonics-based strategies, navigate challenges, and adapt their practices to support foundational literacy development among young learners.

Population and sampling

The participants of this study were 15 Grade 1 teachers from public elementary schools under the Schools Division of the City of Batac, Ilocos Norte. These teachers were purposively selected for their direct experience implementing the Marungko Approach to teaching beginning reading. Purposive sampling is appropriate for phenomenological research, which focuses on obtaining rich, in-depth descriptions of participants' lived experiences rather than generalizing findings to a larger population (Van Manen, 2016). The selected participants provide insights into both individual and collective experiences, strategies, and challenges in using the Marungko Approach, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of its classroom implementation.

Data gathering instruments

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interview questionnaires, consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses regarding the experiences, strategies, and challenges of Grade 1 teachers in using the Marungko Approach to teach beginning reading. The interview questions were carefully developed to align with the study's research questions and objectives, ensuring they capture rich qualitative data on classroom practices, instructional strategies, learner engagement, and factors affecting implementation. The instrument was validated through expert review by literacy specialists and experienced educators to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The interviews focused on key areas, including teachers'

instructional experiences, difficulties encountered, factors facilitating effective implementation, and recommendations for improving the use of the Marungko Approach in early reading instruction.

Data analysis tool

The responses from the online Google Form questionnaires were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, a systematic approach suitable for exploring teachers' lived experiences. The analysis began with familiarization, where the researcher carefully read all responses multiple times to gain a holistic understanding of the teachers' experiences, strategies, and challenges in using the Marungko Approach.

In the second phase, initial codes were generated by highlighting significant statements, key phrases, and meaningful patterns related to teaching strategies, difficulties, and recommendations in implementing the Marungko Approach. During the third phase, these codes were organized into potential themes, focusing on recurring patterns and shared experiences among the Grade 1 teachers.

The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining the themes to ensure they accurately represented the complexity of teachers' instructional experiences. This process included revisiting the raw data to verify that all relevant responses were accounted for. In the fifth phase, themes were clearly defined and labeled, reflecting essential aspects of the teachers' strategies, the difficulties encountered, and suggested improvements in using the Marungko Approach.

Finally, in the sixth phase, a comprehensive narrative was constructed to link the themes to the study's research questions, providing an in-depth understanding of how Grade 1 teachers implement the Marungko Approach and navigate challenges in early reading instruction. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary themes with selected participants for verification, and inter-coder reliability was ensured through collaboration with a second researcher to confirm consistent interpretation of the data.

Ethical considerations

The study ensured ethical standards were upheld. Digital informed consent was obtained, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. Responses from the online Google Form questionnaires were anonymized and securely stored to protect privacy. Safeguards were in place to address any concerns or discomfort arising from participation, ensuring the welfare and rights of the Grade 1 teachers were protected (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data presentation and analysis

Problem 1: What are the experiences of Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac in using the Marungko Approach to teach beginning reading?

Table 1. Experiences of Grade 1 teachers using the Marungko approach in teaching reading

Theme	Particulars	Frequency
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Structured instruction	phonics	Step-by-step teaching of letter sounds (review → new sound → blending → reading practice)	10
Use of instructional materials		Flashcards, charts, big books, pictures, and real objects	9
Interactive activities	learning	Songs, games, group work, peer reading	8
Improved skills	decoding	Learners can blend sounds and read unfamiliar words	10
Enhanced fluency	reading	Smoother reading of words and short sentences	8
Increased confidence	learner	More participation and willingness to read aloud	7
Multisensory teaching		Use of visuals, actions, body movements, and digital tools	9
Guided strategy	practice	“I do–We do–You do,” repetition and feedback	10
Differentiated instruction		Small groups, one-on-one sessions, and remedial teaching	7

NOTE: The frequencies presented were derived from responses to a Google Forms questionnaire by 15 Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac who participated in the study.

The findings indicate that Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac experience the Marungko Approach as a structured yet flexible framework for teaching beginning reading. Central to their experience is the consistent implementation of systematic phonics instruction ($f = 10$), characterized by a sequenced progression from reviewing prior letter sounds to introducing new sounds, modeling pronunciation, guided blending, and structured reading practice. Teachers emphasized that lessons begin with sound mastery before moving toward syllables, words, and short sentences. As one participant articulated,

“Using the Marungko Approach... is to use modeling, guided practice, and always introduce the letter sound... then teach them to read by syllable, then words, phrases, and then sentences (P4).”

This confirms that teachers operationalize the approach through explicit, scaffolded instruction—an instructional principle strongly supported in early literacy research (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Levesque & Carnine, 2019). The structured nature of the approach provides pedagogical clarity while ensuring learners develop dependable, sound–symbol correspondences.

Beyond structure, teachers’ experiences reveal a strong emphasis on engagement through instructional materials ($f = 9$) and interactive activities ($f = 8$). Respondents described integrating flashcards, charts, big books, real objects, songs, and games to make phonics instruction concrete and meaningful. One teacher explained,

“I start by reviewing previous sounds, then introduce new ones using pictures or real objects that are familiar to the students (P3).”

Another shared,

“I like to make lessons interactive and fun. I use songs, games, and flashcards to help students remember letter sounds (P1).”

These accounts illustrate that while the Marungko Approach is systematic, it is not rigid; teachers adapt delivery through multisensory and socially interactive strategies. Grounded in Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory, such practices reinforce the role of collaborative learning and scaffolding in literacy acquisition. Contemporary literacy scholarship likewise affirms that meaningful materials and participatory activities enhance engagement and strengthen foundational reading skills (Larson & Marsh, 2015; Toste & Heath, 2018).

Teachers’ narratives consistently point to observable improvements in learners’ decoding skills ($f = 10$), reading fluency ($f = 8$), and confidence ($f = 7$). Participants highlighted that focusing on letter sounds enables learners to decode unfamiliar words independently rather than rely on memorization. One respondent reflected,

“Because the Marungko Approach focuses on letter sounds first, my students become more confident in recognizing words on their own... They can sound out unfamiliar words more easily (P1).”

Another noted that students now.

“Read more smoothly and with less hesitation (P11).”

These observations align with empirical findings that systematic phonics instruction strengthens word recognition accuracy and reading automaticity (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2020; Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2018). Furthermore, increased learner participation and willingness to read aloud suggest that early decoding success contributes to improved reading self-efficacy and motivation, both of which are critical predictors of sustained literacy development (Toste & Heath, 2018).

The data also underscore the strategic and responsive dimensions of teachers’ implementation. Multisensory teaching ($f = 9$), guided practice using the “I do–We do–You do” model ($f = 10$), and differentiated instruction ($f = 7$) reflect teachers’ intentional efforts to scaffold learning and address diverse needs. Teachers described modeling pronunciation, providing immediate corrective feedback, conducting one-on-one reading sessions, and organizing small-group interventions. As one teacher stated,

“I check often to see who needs extra support, so no one gets left behind (P3).”

Such practices demonstrate alignment with evidence-based scaffolding and visible learning principles (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016), as well as research highlighting the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in early literacy classrooms (Allor, Gansle, & Champlin, 2014).

Taken together, the findings suggest that teachers experience the Marungko Approach not merely as a phonics program, but as a pedagogical system that integrates structure, engagement, scaffolding, and responsiveness. Its strength lies in its clear progression of skills combined with the teacher's adaptability to learner needs. Within the Schools Division of the City of Batac, the approach serves as both an instructional guide and a flexible framework that supports the cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions of early reading development.

Problem 2: What difficulties do Grade 1 teachers encounter, and what factors help them in implementing the Marungko Approach in their reading instruction?

Table 2. Difficulties and helping factors in implementing the Marungko approach in teaching reading

Theme	Particulars	Frequency
Challenges faced	Diverse learner pace: Some learners slow, some fast; short attention span	10
	Difficulty with sound blending: Confusion with similar sounds, consonant-vowel combinations	8
	Limited resources: Lack of materials like flashcards, books, and big charts	6
Student characteristics/classroom conditions	Supportive/motivated learners: Students with curiosity, home support, and strong listening skills	9
	Challenging learners: Shy, easily distracted, short attention span, no home support	7
	Classroom environment: Organized vs. noisy or crowded classrooms	6
School support/resources	Availability of materials: Flashcards, storybooks, charts, syllable boards	10
	Administrative & peer support: Mentoring, collaboration, remedial time, LAC sessions	8

NOTE: The frequencies presented were derived from responses to a Google Forms questionnaire by 15 Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac who participated in the study.

The analysis revealed several challenges that Grade 1 teachers face in implementing the Marungko Approach, as well as factors that facilitate its success. A key difficulty is the diverse pace of learners (f = 10), as some students quickly grasp letter sounds while others require more time and repetition. Teachers noted that maintaining attention during lessons can be challenging, especially for learners with short attention spans or limited home support. Difficulty with sound blending (f = 8) was also

highlighted, particularly when students confuse similar consonant-vowel combinations. Limited resources (f = 6), such as a lack of flashcards, storybooks, and large charts, further hindered instruction. One teacher shared,

“Some pupils read fast, but others still have difficulty. Sometimes, they also lose focus. But with patience and daily practice, they slowly get better at reading (P15).”

These challenges align with research showing that variability in early literacy skills requires careful pacing and repeated practice to ensure all learners develop decoding skills (Connor, Morrison, & Petrella, 2016; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018).

Regarding student characteristics and classroom conditions, supportive learners (f = 9), who are curious, motivated, and enjoy participating, facilitated the smoother implementation of the Marungko Approach. Conversely, challenging learners (f = 7), such as those who are shy, easily distracted, or lack home support, made instruction more difficult. Teachers emphasized that an organized, low-distraction classroom (f = 6) improves focus and engagement, while noisy or crowded environments limit learning. One teacher noted,

“Yes, students who are curious, motivated, and enjoy participating make the Marungko Approach much easier to implement. A classroom that’s lively but organized also helps (P1).”

On the other hand, learners who are easily distracted or shy can make it harder to keep everyone focused.” These observations are consistent with studies highlighting the importance of learner motivation and structured classroom environments in early reading outcomes (Toste & Heath, 2018; Connor et al., 2018).

School support and resources were identified as essential facilitators of successful implementation. Teachers highlighted the availability of instructional materials (f = 10), including flashcards, storybooks, charts, and syllable boards, as critical for reinforcing decoding, fluency, and engagement. Administrative and peer support (f = 8), such as mentoring, collaborative planning, remedial time, and LAC sessions, also helped teachers manage diverse learner needs. One teacher explained,

“Support from our school, like having enough teaching materials—flashcards, charts, and storybooks—really helps. Collaboration with other teachers to share strategies and tips also makes a big difference (P1).”

Remedial sessions, printable materials, and consistent follow-up at home further supported struggling learners. These findings align with research emphasizing that accessible resources, professional development, and collaborative teacher support strengthen instructional effectiveness and student achievement (Allor, Gansle, & Champlin, 2014; Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016).

Overall, while teachers face challenges related to learner variability, sound blending difficulties, limited resources, and classroom management, supportive student traits, organized environments, adequate

materials, and strong school and peer support significantly facilitate implementation. The interplay of these factors underscores that the success of the Marungko Approach depends not only on teacher competence but also on conditions that allow structured, learner-centered reading instruction to thrive. Teachers’ reflections highlight that with patience, consistent practice, interactive lessons, and school support, most learners gradually build confidence, decoding skills, and fluency, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach in Grade 1 classrooms.

Problem 3: What recommendations do Grade 1 teachers suggest for improving the use of the Marungko Approach in teaching beginning reading?

Table 3. Recommendations and Suggestions for Improving the Use of the Marungko Approach in Teaching Reading

Theme	Particulars	Frequency
Suggested improvements	More interactive resources: Games, digital tools, visuals, videos	9
	Extra support for struggling learners: Small-group practice, one-on-one sessions, repetition	8
	Teacher professional development: Training, workshops, seminars, mentoring	8
Teacher support needed	Training and workshops: Focused on the Marungko Approach, differentiated instruction	9
	Teaching materials: Ready-made guides, flashcards, storybooks	10
	Collaborative support: Peer sharing, mentoring, and classroom guidance	7
Additional strategies / materials	Phonics-based activities: Songs, storytelling, flashcards, digital apps	8
	Repetition & scaffolding: Step-by-step lessons, guided reading, daily practice	9
	Differentiated instruction: Handling slow learners, multi-level classes	7

NOTE: The frequencies presented were derived from responses to a Google Forms questionnaire by 15 Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac who participated in the study.

The analysis revealed that Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac provided several recommendations to improve the implementation of the Marungko Approach in teaching beginning reading. One of the most emphasized suggestions was the provision of more interactive and engaging resources (f = 9), including games, digital tools, visuals, and videos. Teachers highlighted that such materials could sustain learners’ motivation and attention during lessons. One teacher shared,

“I would suggest adding more interactive and engaging activities, like games or digital tools, to keep students motivated. More visuals and real-life examples for each sound would help, too (P8).”

Research shows that interactive and multimodal instructional materials enhance student engagement and comprehension in early literacy classrooms, especially when integrated with structured phonics instruction (Gillen & Hall, 2018; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2020). Incorporating these resources allows teachers to provide multisensory learning experiences, making abstract phonemic concepts more concrete for beginning readers.

Teachers also recommended providing extra support for struggling learners ($f = 8$) through small-group practice, one-on-one sessions, and repetition. Targeted interventions were seen as crucial in helping students who require additional time to master letter sounds and blending skills. A teacher noted,

“Also, giving extra support for slower learners, such as small-group sessions or short daily practice, could make the approach even more effective (P12).”

Evidence suggests that scaffolded instruction and individualized attention improve decoding skills, reading fluency, and learner confidence (Allor, Gansle, & Champlin, 2014; Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2018). Providing additional support ensures that advanced learners are challenged while slower learners are not left behind, promoting balanced classroom progress. Repetition and daily practice were particularly recommended to strengthen the retention of letter sounds and syllable blending. This strategy aligns with the Marungko Approach’s step-by-step sequence, reinforcing mastery through consistent application.

Professional development emerged as another critical recommendation ($f = 8$), including training, workshops, seminars, and mentoring focused on the Marungko Approach. Teachers emphasized that continuous learning and mentoring enhance their instructional confidence and ability to differentiate lessons. One participant explained,

“Teachers can be better supported by providing more training and workshops on the Marungko Approach, so they feel confident using it (P9).”

Research indicates that ongoing professional development equips teachers with evidence-based strategies and fosters effective classroom management, which is particularly important in multi-level Grade 1 classrooms (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016). Peer mentoring and collaborative sessions allow teachers to share best practices and address diverse learner needs. Regular workshops also provide opportunities to explore new instructional tools, digital resources, and assessment strategies. Such supports ultimately improve both teacher efficacy and student reading outcomes.

The availability of teaching materials was frequently highlighted ($f = 10$) as essential for effective implementation. Teachers noted that ready-made guides, flashcards, storybooks, and durable reading materials facilitate structured lessons and ensure that learners have sufficient opportunities for practice. One teacher mentioned,

“Yes! More hands-on materials, such as colorful flashcards, storybooks, and interactive games, would make lessons more engaging. Short videos or digital tools for practicing sounds could also help (P1).”

Research underscores the importance of adequate instructional materials in supporting learner engagement and enhancing early literacy acquisition (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Toste & Heath, 2018). Materials aligned with the Marungko sequence allow teachers to scaffold instruction and provide consistent exposure to phonics concepts. Access to high-quality resources also enables differentiated instruction for learners at varying readiness levels. Combined with interactive and multisensory activities, these materials enhance decoding skills and fluency.

Collaborative support among teachers was another prominent recommendation ($f = 7$), including peer sharing, mentoring, and classroom guidance. Teachers emphasized that collaboration promotes problem-solving, idea exchange, and practical strategies for handling diverse student needs. A respondent shared,

“Regular mentoring or sharing sessions with other teachers can give new ideas and practical tips, making it easier to address different student needs (P15).”

Studies suggest that professional learning communities strengthen instructional practices, support differentiated instruction, and improve literacy outcomes (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016). Collaborative networks also help teachers adapt lesson pacing and scaffold struggling readers without neglecting advanced learners. Sharing classroom strategies allows for more consistent implementation across sections. This professional support complements training and resources, creating a comprehensive system for effective reading instruction.

Teachers also recommended additional strategies to enhance the Marungko Approach, such as phonics-based activities ($f = 8$), step-by-step scaffolding with daily guided practice ($f = 9$), and differentiated instruction ($f = 7$). Techniques included songs, storytelling, audio-visual aids, manipulatives, and interactive games to make learning more concrete and enjoyable. One teacher noted,

“Additional strategies like incorporating games, storytelling, and group reading activities can make the Marungko Approach more engaging for Grade 1 learners. Providing more materials such as illustrated big books, flashcards, and audio-visual aids would support different learning styles (P8).”

Scaffolded repetition and guided practice were identified as essential for reinforcing sound-letter correspondence and blending skills. Differentiation ensures that learners with varying abilities, attention spans, and home support can progress at their own pace. Research confirms that multisensory, scaffolded, and individualized instruction enhances decoding, fluency, and reading engagement in early learners (Felix, Bricker, & Gallagher, 2015; Levesque & Carnine, 2019). Implementing these strategies alongside interactive materials maximizes the Marungko Approach’s effectiveness.

Overall, the recommendations from Grade 1 teachers demonstrate the interconnectedness of instructional resources, targeted support for struggling learners, teacher professional development, collaborative networks, and structured, differentiated teaching strategies. Teachers’ statements highlight the need for hands-on, multisensory materials, ongoing training, and classroom collaboration to effectively address the needs of diverse learners. As one teacher reflected,

“To make the Marungko Approach more effective for beginning readers, conducting one-on-one sessions for struggling readers, providing engaging materials, and implementing a structured home reading program can help ensure mastery of sounds and fluency (P14).”

These recommendations suggest that improving the Marungko Approach requires both material and human resources, as well as adaptive instructional practices. Strengthening these factors can enhance student engagement, reading confidence, and fluency. The findings have practical implications for school administrators and policymakers in allocating resources, designing teacher training programs, and facilitating collaborative networks. Ultimately, the study supports the notion that structured, learner-centered approaches like Marungko can be optimized through integrated instructional, professional, and institutional strategies.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac operationalize the Marungko Approach as a structured yet flexible phonics-based pedagogical framework, integrating systematic phonics sequences, multisensory modalities, guided practice, interactive learning activities, and differentiated instructional strategies to enhance learners' decoding proficiency, reading fluency, and self-efficacy.

From a theoretical perspective, these results contribute to early literacy research by elucidating how structured phonics programs are enacted within authentic classroom contexts, highlighting the synergistic interplay of teacher agency, instructional resources, and learner heterogeneity in shaping reading instruction, consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory on scaffolded learning and corroborating empirical evidence on the efficacy of explicit phonics instruction (Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2020).

Practically, the study underscores the criticality of ongoing professional development, access to adequate instructional materials, and collaborative teacher support networks to address instructional challenges such as heterogeneous learner pacing, difficulties in sound blending, limited teaching resources, and classroom management constraints, reflecting literature that contextual and environmental variables significantly mediate early reading outcomes (Connor, Morrison, & Petrella, 2016; Gillen & Hall, 2018). Participants' recommendations for interactive instructional materials, scaffolded interventions for struggling learners, and structured collaborative frameworks provide actionable strategies that can optimize the implementation of the Marungko Approach and inform school-level policies aimed at enhancing early literacy instruction (Felix, Bricker, & Gallagher, 2015; Allor, Gansle, & Champlin, 2014).

Despite these contributions, the study exhibits limitations that may constrain the generalizability and interpretation of its findings. The purposive sample of fifteen Grade 1 teachers from a single school division may not capture the full spectrum of experiences across diverse educational contexts, and reliance on self-reported data via structured interviews introduces potential response bias. Moreover, the absence of direct classroom observation or longitudinal tracking precludes verification of the sustained

impact of reported instructional strategies on learners' reading outcomes. Despite these constraints, the study provides nuanced insights into the enactment of structured phonics-based instruction, emphasizing the interdependence of pedagogical strategies, teacher competence, learner characteristics, and contextual enablers in fostering effective early literacy development, offering both theoretical enrichment and empirically grounded guidance for policy and practice in primary education.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences, challenges, and recommendations of Grade 1 teachers in the Schools Division of the City of Batac regarding the implementation of the Marungko Approach in teaching beginning reading. The findings reveal that while the Marungko Approach serves as an effective structured literacy program, its success is mediated by multiple factors, including learner characteristics, classroom conditions, teacher preparedness, and institutional support. Teachers consistently highlighted variability in learners' paces, difficulties with sound blending, and limited access to instructional materials as significant challenges, particularly for students requiring additional support. These challenges underscore the need for adaptive instructional strategies, such as scaffolded and differentiated instruction, guided practice, and multisensory approaches, to ensure all learners acquire foundational reading skills.

The study further demonstrated that supportive learner traits, organized classroom environments, and access to school resources substantially facilitate the effective application of the Marungko Approach. Motivated students with strong listening skills and home support exhibited smoother progression, while crowded or noisy classrooms and learners with short attention spans posed additional hurdles. Teacher professional development, peer collaboration, and availability of teaching materials were repeatedly identified as critical enablers of instructional effectiveness, highlighting the importance of continuous training, mentoring, and institutional investment in literacy programs. These factors collectively illustrate the interplay between instructional competence, learner readiness, and contextual support in shaping reading outcomes.

Moreover, teachers proposed practical recommendations for enhancing the Marungko Approach, emphasizing the integration of interactive and multisensory resources, targeted interventions for struggling learners, scaffolded repetition, and differentiated instructional strategies. They advocated for expanded access to teaching materials, professional development opportunities, and collaborative networks to support adaptive and inclusive instruction. The respondents' insights reveal that optimizing the Marungko Approach requires not only pedagogical refinement but also comprehensive systemic support, including parental engagement, administrative guidance, and resource provision.

In conclusion, the study affirms that the Marungko Approach is a valuable early literacy framework that promotes decoding, reading fluency, and learner confidence when implemented effectively. Its successful application depends on a holistic approach that integrates teacher competence, learner-centered strategies, adequate instructional resources, and supportive classroom and school environments. The findings provide evidence that structured, step-by-step reading programs can be strengthened through targeted professional development, interactive learning materials, and strategic interventions for

diverse learners. Future research may examine the longitudinal impact of these strategies on reading proficiency and literacy engagement, further informing policies and practices aimed at achieving universal literacy in early education.

Author's contribution: The paper is written by the author

Ethical statement: The study was conducted after obtaining informed consent from the respondents.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest

Funding: The study was funded by the author

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