

Exploring the Experiences in the Implementation of Marungko Approach in Multigrade Classes

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Abstract— This case study explores the experiences of teachers and learners in the implementation of the Marungko Approach in multigrade classes, specifically in Grades 1 and 2 in one of the schools in the district of Badiangan, Iloilo, Philippines. The study draws on teacher and learner questionnaire responses to examine the effectiveness, challenges, and overall impact of the approach in a multigrade setting. Findings from teacher responses highlight that the Marungko Approach significantly improves the reading skills of multigrade learners and is relatively easy to integrate into multigrade instruction. Teachers observed that learners enjoy the activities, particularly those involving interactive materials, and that the approach effectively addresses individual differences by supporting phonemic awareness through its structured sequence of letters. Moreover, parental involvement was noted as a positive factor in sustaining learner engagement. However, teachers also acknowledged that the multigrade setup poses challenges, particularly in resource allocation and classroom management. Despite these difficulties, the approach was found to increase learners' motivation to read, leading to strong support for its continued implementation in multigrade settings. Learner feedback corroborates these findings, with most students reporting that Marungko lessons are easy to understand and that they enjoy learning through activities such as flashcards. Learners expressed greater confidence in reading compared to before, and many indicated that they can now read syllables more easily. This study reports that the Marungko

Approach is an effective and engaging strategy for improving literacy in multigrade classrooms. While challenges remain in terms of resources and instructional adjustments, both teachers and learners affirm its positive impact, underscoring the need for sustained support and integration of the approach in early grade multigrade education.

Keywords— Marungko Approach; early literacy; phonemic awareness; multigrade classes, multigrade teaching; reading fluency; reading comprehension; teacher implementation; learner engagement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Multigrade classes are educational settings where a single teacher instructs students from two or more grade levels within the same classroom. This approach is often implemented in rural or remote areas where student populations are small and resources are limited. Multigrade teaching requires innovative strategies, as educators must balance diverse learning needs, design flexible lesson plans, and foster peer-to-peer collaboration. While it presents challenges such as workload management and curriculum integration, multigrade classes also offer unique opportunities for

personalized learning, community involvement, and the development of independent study skills among students. Examining these classrooms provides valuable insights into how education systems adapt to constraints while still striving to deliver quality learning experiences (UNESCO, 2023; Little, 2022).

Reading is a fundamental skill that enables learners to decode symbols and derive meaning from written texts, with its ultimate goal being comprehension, evaluation, and application in everyday life. In the Philippine educational context, however, many early-

grade learners continue to struggle with basic literacy skills such as letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and decoding (Hacutina, 2025). These challenges are further magnified in multigrade classrooms, where teachers simultaneously handle learners of varying grade levels and reading abilities, often requiring adaptive strategies to meet diverse needs (Aguana, 2019; Maquiling, 2022). Studies highlight that without targeted interventions, literacy gaps persist across grade levels, underscoring the urgency of strengthening reading instruction in multigrade settings (Maquiling, 2022; Aguana, 2019). Recent evidence likewise indicates that many Filipino learners continue to experience significant reading difficulties despite the implementation of national literacy initiatives, particularly in geographically isolated and disadvantaged schools (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024; World Bank, 2022).

To address literacy gaps, the Marungko Approach was introduced in the Philippines as a phonics-based reading strategy. Developed in Marungko, Angat, Bulacan, by Nooraihan Ali and Josefina Urbano, the method emphasizes mastery of letter sounds through a phono-syllabic technique, teaching learners to recognize individual sounds and blend them into syllables and words. The approach begins with the most frequently used letters (m, s, a, i, o) before progressing to others, ensuring learners build a strong foundation in phonemic awareness. This structured progression makes the Marungko Approach particularly relevant in multigrade settings, where teachers must cater to diverse reading levels and provide differentiated instruction. Exploring the experiences of teachers and learners implementing the Marungko Approach in multigrade classes is therefore critical. It sheds light on how literacy instruction can be adapted to resource-constrained environments and highlights the potential of phonics-based strategies to improve reading outcomes among early-grade learners. Recent empirical studies have consistently shown that systematic phonics instruction significantly improves word recognition, decoding skills, reading fluency, and comprehension among beginning readers, especially those at risk of reading failure (Ehri, 2020; Castles et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2023).

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2022) highlighted a pressing concern regarding literacy in the Philippines, revealing that Filipino students ranked among the lowest globally in reading performance. This alarming outcome raises critical questions about the effectiveness of literacy instruction in the country. In rural schools, particularly those with multigrade setups, teachers frequently observe that many learners struggle with foundational skills such as recognizing sounds, blending syllables, and reading fluently. These difficulties often hinder comprehension and contribute to persistently low reading profiles, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to strengthen literacy education in marginalized contexts. Similarly, the Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM, 2024) reported that many learners in the region, including the Philippines, continue to perform below expected proficiency levels in reading literacy, highlighting persistent challenges in foundational literacy instruction.

To address these challenges, the Marungko Approach was implemented in the District of Badiangan. Developed by Santos (2015), the approach introduces letters based on sound frequency rather than alphabetical order, emphasizing phonemic awareness, blending, and decoding skills. Previous studies (National Reading Panel, 2000; Abidin, 2012) have shown that phonics-based methods like Marungko effectively support early literacy development. More recent investigations likewise affirm that explicit phonics instruction remains one of the most effective evidence-based approaches for developing foundational literacy among beginning readers and learners in multilingual educational contexts (Castles et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

In multigrade classrooms, where teachers simultaneously handle learners from different grade levels, the implementation of reading programs such as the Marungko Approach presents both opportunities and challenges. The district of Badiangan, with its Grade 1 and Grade 2 multigrade classes, provides a unique setting to explore how this approach is experienced by both teachers and learners. This case study focused on teacher and learner perceptions

through questionnaires. Teachers provided insights into instructional practices, challenges, and perceived outcomes, while learners shared their experiences of engagement and confidence in reading. Although numerous studies have evaluated the effectiveness of phonics-based interventions, relatively few have examined how teachers and learners experience their implementation in multigrade classrooms, particularly within rural Philippine schools. This contextual gap underscores the importance of documenting local experiences that can inform literacy policies and classroom practices (DepEd, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

This study aimed to contribute to the growing body of research on early literacy interventions in multigrade classrooms by documenting the experiences of teachers and learners in implementing the Marungko Approach. Therefore, this case study explores the experiences of teachers and learners in implementing the Marungko Approach in multigrade classes in Badiangan, Iloilo, Philippines, focusing on both its strengths and the challenges encountered. By examining these perspectives, the study aims to provide insights into how the approach can be sustained and enhanced to better serve the literacy needs of multigrade learners.

Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of multigrade learners in using the Marungko Approach?
2. What challenges and successes do teachers encounter in implementing the Marungko Approach in multigrade classrooms?
3. How effective is the Marungko Approach perceived to be in improving reading skills among multigrade learners?
4. What recommendations can be drawn to enhance the implementation of the Marungko Approach in similar educational contexts?

II. METHODOLOGY

1. Research Design

This study employed a case study research design to explore the implementation of the Marungko Approach in multigrade classes, specifically among Grades 1 and 2 learners in the District of Badiangan,

Iloilo, Philippines. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to teachers and learners to determine their perceptions and experiences regarding the implementation of the Marungko Approach. To complement these findings, qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers, allowing the researchers to gain deeper insights into the contextual challenges, instructional practices, and successful strategies employed in multigrade classrooms. The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence provided a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness and implementation of the Marungko Approach in enhancing literacy instruction among multigrade learners.

2. Locale of the Study

The research was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Badiangan, Iloilo, Philippines that implement multigrade classes in Grades 1 and 2. These schools were chosen because they represent the unique instructional setting where the Marungko Approach is applied to diverse learners simultaneously.

3. Participants

The participants of this study consisted of Grade 1 and Grade 2 multigrade teachers and their respective learners from selected public elementary schools in the District of Badiangan, Iloilo, where the Marungko Approach is implemented. The teacher participants included all multigrade teachers handling Grades 1 and 2 who were actively utilizing the Marungko Approach as part of their literacy instruction. Meanwhile, the learner participants comprised Grade 1 and Grade 2 pupils enrolled in these multigrade classes and who were directly exposed to the implementation of the Marungko Approach. The selection of both teachers and learners enabled the researchers to obtain complementary perspectives on the effectiveness, implementation, challenges, and overall experiences associated with the use of the Marungko Approach in multigrade classroom settings.

4. Research Instruments

a. Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire consisted of 10 items designed to assess teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Marungko Approach in multigrade instruction. The instrument covered key dimensions, including its effectiveness in improving learners' reading skills, ease of integration into multigrade teaching, learner enjoyment and engagement, availability of instructional resources, ability to address individual learner differences, enhancement of phonemic awareness, parental involvement, challenges encountered during implementation, learner motivation, and the sustainability of the approach in multigrade classrooms. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), enabling the researchers to quantify teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and implementation of the Marungko Approach.

b. Learner Questionnaire

The learner questionnaire consisted of five simplified items designed to assess young learners' experiences and perceptions of the Marungko Approach. The items were constructed using child-friendly language to ensure comprehension among Grade 1 and Grade 2 pupils. The questionnaire focused on key aspects of the learners' experiences, including the ease of understanding the lessons, enjoyment of the learning activities, confidence in reading, ability to read syllables, and perceived improvement in their reading skills after exposure to the Marungko Approach. Responses were collected using a dichotomous Yes–No scale, allowing learners to provide simple and appropriate responses based on their experiences with the reading program.

5. Data Collection Procedure

1. Permission and Ethical Considerations

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researchers secured the necessary approval from the Schools District Supervisor and the respective school heads of the participating public elementary schools in the District of Badiangan, Iloilo. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process.

Informed consent was obtained from all teacher participants after they were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study, while assent was secured from the learner participants to ensure their voluntary participation. The researchers also assured all participants that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for academic and research purposes.

2. Administration of the Questionnaires

Following the approval of the concerned authorities, the structured questionnaires were administered to the participants. The teacher questionnaire was self-administered, allowing the respondents to independently accomplish the instrument based on their experiences in implementing the Marungko Approach. In contrast, the learner questionnaire was administered by the researchers with the assistance of the classroom teachers to ensure that the questions were clearly explained and understood by the Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners. This process helped ensure the accuracy and reliability of the learners' responses.

3. Supplementary Data Gathering

To complement and validate the quantitative findings, supplementary qualitative data were collected through classroom observations and informal interviews with the teacher participants. Classroom observations enabled the researchers to examine the actual implementation of the Marungko Approach, learner engagement, classroom interactions, and instructional practices in the multigrade setting. Informal interviews were likewise conducted to gain deeper insights into the teachers' experiences, instructional strategies, challenges encountered, and successful practices in implementing the Marungko Approach.

The integration of these qualitative data with the questionnaire responses provided a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Marungko Approach in multigrade classrooms.

6. Data Analysis

Quantitative Data: Responses were tallied and analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean). Teacher and learner responses were compared to identify alignment or gaps.

Qualitative Data: Observation notes and interview transcripts were coded thematically. Themes included learner engagement, instructional challenges and resource adequacy.

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study to protect the rights and welfare of all participants. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained by ensuring that no personally identifiable information was disclosed in the questionnaires, interview transcripts, or the presentation of the findings. Codes or pseudonyms were used where necessary to protect the identities of both teachers and learners.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants were informed of the purpose, procedures,

potential benefits, and minimal risks associated with the research before providing their informed consent. Teacher participants voluntarily signed informed consent forms, while assent was obtained from the learner participants with the approval of their parents or guardians, where applicable.

Participants were likewise informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty or adverse consequences.

Furthermore, all information and data collected during the study were treated with the utmost confidentiality and were used solely for academic and research purposes. The data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers to ensure compliance with ethical standards in educational research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Teachers' Responses on the Implementation of the Marungko Approach (n=6)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Improves reading skills	6	0	0	0	0
Easy to integrate	6	0	0	0	0
Learners enjoy activities	6	0	0	0	0
Enough materials/resources	0	0	0	6	0
Addresses individual differences	6	0	0	0	0
Effective letter sequence	6	0	0	0	0
Parental involvement evident	0	0	0	6	0
Multigrade setup poses challenges	6	0	0	0	0
Improves learner motivation	6	0	0	0	0
Should continue implementation	6	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Learners' Responses on the Implementation of the Marungko Approach (n=30)

Sequence Preference	Frequency
Alphabetical sequence	2
Marungko sequence	28

Table 3. Learners' Preference in Learning Letters (n=30)

Question	Yes	No
Easy to understand lessons	30	0
Enjoy activities (flashcards)	30	0
More confident in reading	30	0
Can read syllables easily	30	0
Helps improve reading	30	0

The findings reveal a highly positive perception of the Marungko Approach among both teachers and learners in multigrade classes. All six teachers strongly agreed that the approach improves reading skills, is easy to integrate, and motivates learners. They also observed that learners enjoy the activities and that the sequence of letters supports phonemic awareness.

This aligns with the learners' unanimous responses, where all 30 indicated that Marungko lessons are easy to understand, enjoyable, and effective in boosting confidence and reading ability. However, two critical challenges emerged: Lack of materials and resources: All teachers disagreed that sufficient materials are available, highlighting a need for instructional aids such as flashcards, charts, and storybooks.

Limited parental involvement: Teachers unanimously disagreed that parents are actively engaged in Marungko lessons, suggesting that home-school collaboration remains weak.

Additionally, teachers acknowledged that the multigrade setup itself poses challenges, particularly in managing diverse learners simultaneously. Despite these difficulties, they strongly supported the continued implementation of the Marungko Approach, recognizing its effectiveness in addressing individual differences and fostering literacy. Learners' responses further validate the teachers' observations. Every learner reported improved confidence and ability to read syllables, with 28 out of 30 preferring the Marungko sequence over the traditional alphabetical order. This preference underscores the effectiveness of the Marungko sequence in scaffolding phonemic awareness and literacy development.

Insights from Teacher Interviews

Challenges encountered: Insufficient materials, difficulty in managing multigrade classes, and minimal parental support. **Strategies used:** Creative improvisation of materials, peer tutoring, and differentiated instruction.

Indicators of improvement: Learners' increased confidence, ability to decode syllables, and active participation in reading activities.

Needed support: Provision of more instructional materials, training workshops, and stronger parental involvement.

Despite the positive responses, teachers acknowledged challenges in multigrade implementation, particularly in managing diverse learner needs and limited resources. This highlights the importance of sustained support, adequate materials, and teacher creativity in ensuring effective delivery.

The Marungko Approach proves to be an effective strategy in enhancing literacy among multigrade learners in the District of Badiangan, Iloilo Philippines. While its implementation is challenged by resource limitations and weak parental involvement, both teachers and learners strongly affirm its benefits. Strengthening material support and fostering home-school partnerships will further maximize its impact.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study confirms that the Marungko Approach is positively experienced by both teachers and learners in multigrade classrooms. Teachers strongly support its continued implementation, while learners affirm its role in boosting confidence and reading ability.

The findings demonstrate that the Marungko Approach is both feasible and effective in multigrade classrooms. Teachers consistently implement it, learners respond positively, and despite challenges in resources and multigrade management, the approach is sustainable.

The findings of this case study affirm the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach in enhancing the reading proficiency of multigrade learners.

Both teachers and learners consistently recognized its pedagogical value, particularly in strengthening phonemic awareness, fostering learner confidence, and cultivating motivation to read.

Learners demonstrated a clear preference for the Marungko sequence over the conventional alphabetical order, thereby validating its instructional strength in scaffolding literacy development.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified several challenges that constrain its full implementation. Chief among these are the lack of sufficient instructional materials and resources, which impede consistent delivery of lessons, and the limited parental involvement, which restricts reinforcement of reading skills beyond the classroom.

Furthermore, the inherent complexities of the multigrade classroom environment—such as managing diverse learner needs—pose additional difficulties. Nevertheless, teachers employed adaptive strategies, including improvisation, peer tutoring, and differentiated instruction, to mitigate these challenges.

Overall, the evidence strongly supports the continued adoption of the Marungko Approach in multigrade settings. However, its long-term success requires systemic support in the form of adequate resources, strengthened parental engagement, and sustained teacher development.

The overall findings emphasize the relevance and sustainability of the Marungko Approach as a strategy for literacy development in diverse classroom contexts. This case study contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting phonics-based instruction and underscores practical implications for teacher training, resource provision, and literacy program design in rural schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study contributes to filling the gap in literature by documenting the lived experiences of multigrade learners and teachers, emphasizing both the effectiveness and the contextual challenges of Marungko implementation. However, challenges in resources and multigrade management remain.

These results reinforce the value of Marungko as a foundational literacy strategy and justify continued investment in teacher training, materials, and support systems. While challenges in resource availability and multigrade classroom management were acknowledged.

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are advanced to enhance the

implementation and sustainability of the Marungko Approach:

1. **Instructional Support:** Provide sufficient teaching materials such as flashcards, charts, storybooks, and phonics-based resources to ensure effective lesson delivery. Develop digital and low-cost versions of Marungko materials to address resource limitations, particularly in remote or underfunded schools.

2. **Teacher Development:** Organize training workshops and seminars to equip teachers with effective strategies for managing multigrade classrooms using the Marungko Approach. Encourage the establishment of peer learning communities to facilitate the exchange of best practices among educators.

3. **Parental Involvement:** Strengthen home-school collaboration by orienting parents on the principles of the Marungko Approach and providing simple take-home activities. Implement literacy-focused parent engagement programs, such as reading sessions and workshops, to foster active participation in learners' literacy development.

4. **Classroom Management** o Promote peer tutoring and cooperative learning strategies to maximize learner engagement in multigrade settings. Integrate differentiated instruction techniques to more effectively address individual learner differences.

5. **Policy and Sustainability** o Allocate budgetary support for instructional materials, teacher training, and parental engagement initiatives to ensure long-term sustainability.

Final Note

The Marungko Approach has demonstrated significant potential as a literacy intervention in multigrade classrooms. Addressing the identified gaps in instructional resources, parental involvement, and classroom management will not only enhance its immediate impact but also secure its sustainability as a cornerstone of literacy development in diverse educational contexts. The case study demonstrates that the Marungko Approach is highly effective and well-received in multigrade classrooms. Both teachers and

learners reported positive experiences, suggesting that the approach should be sustained and further supported with adequate resources and training.

V. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers sincerely express their gratitude to the Schools District Supervisor of Badiangan, Iloilo, the participating school heads, teachers, and learners for their invaluable cooperation and participation in this study. Their willingness to share their experiences made this research possible. The researchers also extend their appreciation to their Course Facilitator for the guidance and encouragement provided throughout the conduct of the study. Finally, heartfelt thanks are given to everyone who contributed their time, support, and expertise, making the successful completion of this research possible.

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