

A Modification of Mother Tongue Literacy Instruction for Pupils with Mixed Vocabularies

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Abstract

The positive effects of using mother tongue on children's educational development have been confirmed in several studies. Mother tongue approaches in teaching reading, however, assume that learners have strong first language foundation. This study described the experiences of the 37 grade one pupils using mixed vocabularies during the initial implementation of the mother tongue primer-track method and after the introduction of its modifications. An embedded mixed method design was used to describe the modification made and its effect. Direct observations, individual and group interviews, and pretest and posttest mean score comparisons were done. The results after the modifications showed an increased mean score of the participants and recorded lesser instructional difficulties. The results imply that the mother tongue primer-track may not work for Waray children having mixed vocabularies. The study recommends the conduct of prior studies to determine first language complexity before the adoption of any literacy instruction strategy.

Keywords: mother tongue; multilingual education; literacy instruction; mixed vocabularies, primer-track method

1.0 Introduction

The study of Cummins (2001) emphasized that the use of a language other than one's native tongue amounts to a language and cultural contempt. This is the issue that the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) wants to address. Malone (2004) further explained that the mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) has the primary goal of helping learners become multilingual individuals with a strong educational foundation in their native language.

Several studies have confirmed the positive effects of using mother tongue on children's linguistic and educational development (Azurin, 2010; Dekker, 2003; Krashen, 2001; Malone, 2008, 2010; Oyzon et al., 2014; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Walter, 1991). Studies identified the use of mother tongue in the classroom to increase class participation, boost the self-esteem of the students (Wa-Mbaleka, 2015) as well as to assist in the explanation of new English terms (Alberto, Gabinete & Rañola, 2016).

However, studies of Gacheche (2010) and Ghimire (2012) likewise stressed the difficulties in implementing a mother tongue program in a multilingual setting such as the Philippines. Tupas (2015) pointed that the implementation of the mother tongue program is up against ideological and structural challenges which should not be disregarded. Meanwhile, some studies (Alberto, Gabinete, & Rañola, 2016; Malone, 2008, Wa-Mbaleka, 2014) similarly found the limited mother tongue vocabulary of the teachers who were previously taught in English as a challenge in the program implementation. In the same studies, issues on understanding deep terminologies, the difficulty in spelling the local words, the scarcity of teaching materials, and the lack of teacher trainings were identified.

Other studies (Metila, 2009; Metila, Pradilla & Williams, 2016) have found that classrooms implementing the mother tongue program would often resort to code-switching in its instruction. This implied a flexibility in the policy allowing for pragmatic decisions to address instructional gaps at the expense of the policy goals such as the reduction of students' mother tongue exposure. The gaps, however, in the policy guidelines have been viewed by the teachers and administrators as opportunities to address local needs such as the use of the actual dominant language by the children and not the language which has been historically used (Metila, Pradilla & Williams, 2016).

To address these gaps and difficulties, teacher-trainings for the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education had been conducted following the issuance of Department of Education Order No. 74, s, 2009 and Department of Education Order No. 18, s, 2011, particularly with the use of a primer for literacy instruction using the two-track method.

However, one effect of the assimilation policies adhered to in the past can be observed in the mixed vocabularies used by today's Waray children in the Philippines. They are found to be more familiar with English vocabularies as observed in their constant language shifts in daily conversations. For instance, a pupil shared her experience this way: "*Nakadto ako, ak big sister, and ak parents ha mall. Didto man kam nachurch. Nag-eat kami KFC chicken tas nagbuy kam ice cream. Katapos, nagwatch na kam movie, an Ice Age ngani, teacher. Super funny hiya, teacher!*" (*I, together with my big sister and parents, went to the mall. We went to church there. We ate KFC chicken and bought ice cream. Then, we watched the movie Ice Age. It was super funny, teacher!*)

This answer infers an emerging language trend among the Warays. Since recent studies and approaches in teaching reading were all based on the assumption that the learner has a strong first language foundation, how then should Waray literacy instruction proceed for this type of learners?

The results of the first phase of the study (Sanchez, 2013) disclosed that the primer track method in mother tongue instruction needs to be modified for Waray speakers using mixed vocabularies to be more effective. What modifications then are necessary in the primer-track method to suit the needs of Waray learners?

A review of related literature shows that no study on modifications of the mother tongue primer-track method for children with mixed vocabularies had been made. Will changing the process in teaching the Waray primer change the results? Will modifications in literacy instruction prove to be effective in an emerging Waray language trend?

2.0 Methodology

An embedded mixed method design was used to describe the modifications made on the primer-track method and the effect on student learning. The participants in the study were 37 grade one pupils of an Integrated Laboratory School in the Waray region of the Philippines. All the 37 pupils in the chosen class were confirmed to have mixed vocabularies of Waray, Filipino, and English in their daily conversations through a preliminary survey conducted.

To determine the reading proficiency of the participants, the checklist of the 100 Most Common Words in Waray (Oyzon, 2012) was used for the pretest and posttest after three weeks of implementing the modifications in the primer-track method.

In analyzing the data, methodological triangulation was used (Diehl, Guion & McDonald, 2011). The pretest results served as bases in dividing the participants to three groups. The three participants with perfect scores were assigned to the first group, the seven participants with scores between zero to 100 were assigned to the second group, while the 27 participants who got zero were assigned to the third group.

In the implementation of the modifications made in the primer-track approach, a daily conference with the practice teachers was also done to record their findings and to keep track of the new groupings for the next day depending on the progress of each participant aside from individual and group interviews conducted. The participants' behavior and responses were recorded and thematically analyzed. With the data, the researcher tried to determine how effective the modification of the method is for Waray children with mixed vocabularies.

3.0 Implementation of the Primer-Track Method

In the first phase of the study (Sanchez, 2013), the researcher designed a Waray primer using the accuracy track or the primer-track method in teaching reading following the rules given by Malone (2010) and the Waray orthography developed by Nolasco, Oyzon, and Ramos (2012).

A frequency count done revealed the order of recurrent Waray sounds which was used as basis for the sequence of participants' lessons. The vowel sounds were found to follow the order of /a/, /i/, /u/ while the consonant sounds follow the order of /n/, /h/, /k/, /t/, /ng/, /m/, /g/, /r/, /y/, /p/, /s/, /l/, /d/, /b/, /w/. The borrowed sounds were /e/, /o/, /c/, /f/, /j/, /q/, /ñ/, /v/, /x/, and /z/.

The results of the initial implementation showed a big gap in the scores of the participants with background in reading and pupils classified as beginning readers. A number of challenges were also identified such as difficulty in understanding the keywords given in the primer, the resort to syllabic reading because of a long keyword which is a characteristic of Waray language, and the confusion in reading vowel combinations.

4.0 Results and Discussions

4.1 The Primer-Track Method and its Modifications

Several recommendations were given based on the results and implications on the initial implementation of the primer-track method. Some of these were to revise the flow of lessons using the accuracy track in a Waray primer, design a better approach for Waray learners using mixed vocabularies, dispense with the initial use of key pictures and use them instead in the enhancement stage, introduce meaningful key words at the later stage for beginning readers, and to emphasize the Waray syllabic pattern of consonant-vowel (CV) or consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) (Oyzon, 2012) in teaching, and to utilize cross-age tutors or peer-tutors in classroom instruction.

From these recommendations, the researcher modified the approach in teaching reading. However, the same sequence of sounds was used in teaching from the results of the frequency count. The flow of lessons continued moving on the next sounds not introduced yet in the previous weeks. Initially, three practice teachers were chosen to act as teachers/tutors on the first day of introducing the modifications made with one teacher assigned to each group. The number of practice teachers serving as tutors increased daily as respondents' acquisition of sounds progress. The class then was divided into several small groups depending on their reading ability. There were also individual instructions done whenever a particular stage had either one learner left or had one advanced learner. For example, in a group of four pupils to whom the combination of vowel sounds and /n/, /h/, /k/ are introduced, there will be individualized instruction if from among them, one will be left in this sound combination the next day while the rest moves to vowel sounds and /n/, /h/, /k/, and /t/ combination. The same holds true when three pupils were left with one pupil moving to the next sound combination.

For the pupils to move to the next stage, a perfect score in the daily assessment and reading review was required. The assessment given to them was a checklist of 10 words in the sound combination learned for the day. An example of a checklist for the combination of vowel sounds and consonant sounds /n/, /h/, /k/ is given below:

Butangi hin (/) kun asya an kabasa ngan (x) kun dire.	
_____ 1. ka	_____ 6. kaon
_____ 2. ko	_____ 7. kain
_____ 3. kan	_____ 8. kahon
_____ 4. kiha	_____ 9. huka
_____ 5. kaha	_____ 10. hika

Another set of 10 different words following the same combination was given as an assignment. The respondents had to read perfectly the words given as an assignment and as an assessment in the previous day before they can move to the next sound combination to re-check mastery.

The lesson started with the introduction of the new sound for the day and its symbol instead of starting with keywords which may be unfamiliar to them. This new sound was then paired with vowels in the *ka, ke, ki, ko, ku* and *ak, ek, ik, ok, uk* pattern to correct the addition of vowel sounds in reading a Waray word ending with a consonant sound. Once mastered, previously learned sounds were added in a consonant-vowel (CV) or consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) pattern like *kan* to much longer words like *ako* and *kahon*. Before the introduction of these longer words, the respondents were asked to read syllables incorporating the earlier sound combination mastered like *na, ano, hak* and *nok* and were subsequently encouraged to form words in Waray they know of. After these activities, the teachers introduced pictures giving the equivalent term in Waray in case respondents failed to do so. The teachers utilized riddles, games, and other strategies in motivating the children to learn the Waray keywords. Once words following the sound combination for the day were read perfectly, short phrases were introduced to short sentences. Advanced respondents were given short stories, too. However, these phrases, sentences, and short stories follow the same sound combination. Writing activities were incorporated at the later part of the instruction.

4.2 Posttest Results and Observations

All respondents in the initial implementation of the primer-track method gained only a mean score of 9.65 from a pretest mean score of 20.49 to 30.14 in the posttest. The second group of participants got an increased mean score of 32.57 from 65.43 in the pretest to 98.00 in the posttest while the third group got only a posttest mean score of 4.7.

After modifications in the method of instruction, the second group got an increased mean score of 2.00 from 98.00 to 100.00 while the third group increased their reading performance up to a mean score of 89.15.

Moreover, observations showed that the primer-track model of introducing one symbol at a time aided the children with mixed vocabularies. Problems with unfamiliar pictures and keywords were minimized. The teachers, too, had fewer struggles in finding key words for each sound combination. When presented with a long keyword, the participants did not cover anymore the Waray words with the tendency of exposing one syllable after another. It was observed that there was less confusion on reading words with vowel sound combinations such as in reading *tuok* (cry) as *tuk* or *lain* (different) as *lin*, *lan* or *lani* since the learners were already exposed to syllabic reading. There was also less omission of consonant sounds appearing at the end or middle of each word like *tikadto* (heading for) and *kusog* (strength) read as *tikato* and *kuso*. The participants were also able to correct themselves whenever they add vowel sounds in reading a word ending with a consonant sound. Guessing during the lesson was minimized, too. Furthermore, the participants were made aware of their daily achievement motivating them to move to the next stage everyday. The games and riddles introduced encouraged them to study and equip themselves with Waray vocabularies.

5.0 Implications

Generally, the participants performed well with the modifications introduced in the Waray literacy instruction. Comparing the respective pretest and posttest scores of the second and third group of participants in the initial implementation conducted, it can be observed that only those who were able to read some words given in the pretest achieved a higher mean. The 27 pupils who got no scores in the pretest gained only a very low mean value after the three-week initial implementation without the modifications.

This suggests that the accuracy track method used in mother tongue-based primers applies more to those who have been exposed to reading already and those who started as readers, be it in the mother tongue or in any other language, in a setting of Waray pupils with mixed vocabularies. Beginning readers have difficulty following the process in this MTBMLE primer-track approach.

The scores of all the groups, however, soared when the reading instruction was modified. The gap in the participants' scores from the initial implementation and after the introduction of the modifications show that the mother tongue accuracy-track, as is, may not work for Waray children having mixed vocabularies. This implies that there is a need to change the method used in teaching reading depending on the linguistic ability of the pupils and the complexity of the first language.

5.1 Recommendations

The Philippines is a culturally and linguistically diverse country with its own language peculiarities. Therefore, in the implementation of the mother tongue-based multilingual education, studies on the type of learners and as to whether the MTB two-track method applies to them should be conducted

first. It is further recommended to study first the complexities of the native tongue before adopting a strategy or method of teaching.

Studies in applying peer-tutoring strategy and in employing the help of excellent readers in a class should also be done especially in the movement of learners from one stage to another.

The study, likewise, recommends the conduct of similar studies in classroom having learners with mixed vocabularies to further improve mother tongue instruction.

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