

'Big Books' as Mother Tongue-Based Instructional Materials in Bicol for Grade One Pupils

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Abstract - *Language experts claim that it is easier for pupils to learn when the mother tongue is used in the teaching learning process including the learning of a second language. This study determined the reading comprehension level of Grade I pupils in Bulusan Central School for school year 2013-2014 as input in developing big books written in the vernacular that can be used as reading materials for Grade I pupils. Results of the evaluation revealed that they belong to the frustration and instructional levels in the literal skill; mostly are frustration readers along interpretative and evaluative skills; but are independent readers along applied skills; hence, they have low level of reading comprehension. Based on the result of the study, three big books as MTB-MLE instructional materials in Bicol were produced to develop or enhance Grade I pupils' reading comprehension. Teaching guides were likewise developed.*

Key words: *Education, MTB-MLE, instructional materials, reading comprehension*

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most important variables affecting education. Indeed, we will not achieve Education for All (EFA) unless we provide children with opportunity to learn in their mother tongue. The use of mother tongue or home languages is a key to increasing access to school and facilitating learning, including learning of L2. Using the vernacular or the child's first language makes it easier for him to learn how to read and write as well as to learn concepts in academic subjects including the learning of a second or other languages. Thus, it is more advantageous if the familiar language is used in the early years of the child's educational programs. This enables them to acquire early reading skills faster than using a foreign language [1].

Likewise, language professionals also claim that in the early years of development, learning is more facilitated when the language used is similar to that which is spoken by their parents, siblings and friends. In addition, using a familiar language to teach beginning literacy helps learners to understand sound-symbol or meaning-symbol correspondence. When students know the language, learning to read is most

efficient and students can employ psycholinguistics guessing games. Learning to communicate through writing is facilitated as soon as they become familiar with the orthographic rules (or other written) system of language [2].

The 2010 curriculum for elementary school has been radically changed from a bilingual to trilingual one with the addition of the mother tongue as medium of instruction aside from Filipino and English. This was anchored on DepEd Order No. 74 s. 2009 [3] which calls for "Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE). This is a research based initiative in basic education conducted by local and foreign researchers which has proven the advantage of using the learners' first language in so far as the enhancement of learning outcomes and attainment of quality are concerned [4].

The Secretary of Higher Education herself, Patricia Licuanan [5] claims that using the first language or the vernacular helps the students learn better. This will not only improve the quality of education but will also be the tool for learning and improving a second or foreign language like English. She also asserts that there is damaging effect in using

English as the medium of instruction since students don't learn well as much as they do when teaching is done in their first language.

Furthermore, studies claimed that children who were taught effectively using their mother tongue perform better in school; thus become literate to that language. On the other hand, children who were discouraged to use their mother tongue consequently risked their personal and conceptual foundation for learning.

This is strengthened by the results of local and international studies which have shown the superiority of using the pupils' home language inside the classroom during their early years of schooling. Such research claim that it produces learners who can easily adapt to learn a second (Filipino) and third (English) language and can learn other concepts better and faster. This fundamental change in the use of the mother tongue in school will nevertheless create some problems. Hence, this necessitates the production of new instructional materials and modules using the local dialects which have long been ignored as formal tools in facilitating the teaching and learning process.

This need for new instructional material has been supported by DepEd Order No. 90 series of 2011 [6] which recommend the learning materials that can be produced for MTB-MLE instructions. These are stories printed in big book or in small book formats, and flash or activity cards using letters and numbers. Also included are basic sight words or grade level words and picture dictionary; and thematic picture chart for oral literacy [7]. Strickland and Morrow [8] also explained that a big book one of the learning materials that can be produced using pupils' native language. Big books contain reading materials printed in bigger book format for children's use. These are usually narratives which are quite appealing for children because of big illustrations which could entice them to be involved in print and later in reading.

A study on the use of big books approach was done by Nambiar [9] to see how well it can be applied to the teaching of reading in English to non-native learners of the language. It also determined the effect of big books on the early reading instruction in the ESL classroom. Findings revealed a strong relationship between reading success in school and early reading experiences at home.

In addition, the paper of Gacheche [10] underscored some of the potential benefits of a mother

tongue-based education system. It reiterated that it improves learning outcomes, strengthens the development of native or local languages and provides an avenue in acquiring literacy in languages of wider communication. On the other hand, the paper also discussed some of the challenges attached it. This concerned teachers, instructional materials, language-in-education policy and planning, nation-building and language status. Nevertheless, the paper offered potential suggestions to address said concerns.

In like manner, Espinosa [11] stressed that an instructional material of any form is an important tool in the process of learning. It does not only enhance knowledge, thinking and problem solving skills of learners' but also enables them to achieve the learning objectives effectively and interestingly. Thus, wise and creative thinking of the teacher is advised to provide exciting ways to present visuals that enhance learning. Further, she said that the rapid development of eye catching materials nowadays has had a great influence on various realms of teaching and learning. Since people are embracing those changes, there is a need to develop a strategy that will make learning possible and interesting.

As observed, there are perennial problems that confront teachers in their daily performance of their basic jobs. They are faced with the low academic performance of pupils, as revealed by the achievement test and PHIL-IRI results, which is brought by their poor reading skills and study habits as well as the prevailing problems of school administrators and teachers on lack of reading resources for MTB-MLE.

Similarly, in the Bicol Region, particularly in Sorsogon province the same problem on the lack of instructional materials written in Sorsogon vernacular is also being experienced by Grades 1 to 3 teachers. Hence, the researchers have been driven by this urgent need to develop their own learning materials for their pupils. Likewise, this collaborative research between the professor of Sorsogon State College School of Graduate Studies and her students who are teaching in Cumadcad Elementary School, Cabagahan Elementary School and Tinampo Elementary School in the different divisions of Sorsogon is aimed at determining the comprehension level of Grade 1 pupils to serve as basis in developing big books in Bicol vernacular particularly in Bulusan, Sorsogon dialect.

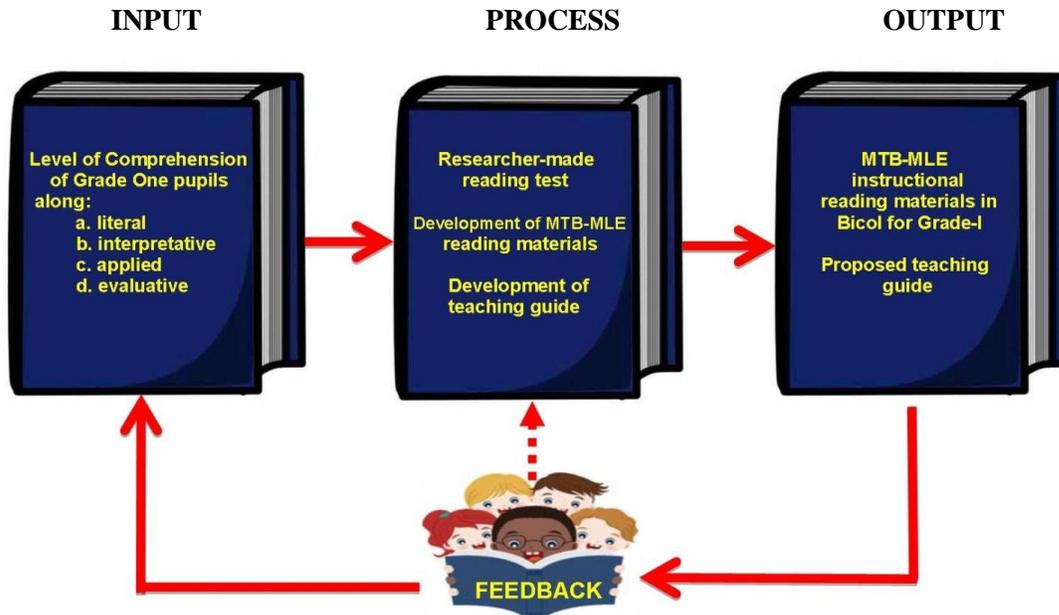


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research determined the reading comprehension level of Grade 1 pupils in Bulusan Central School for S.Y. 2013-2014 as input in developing big books as MTB-MLE reading materials in Bicol particularly in Bulusan, Sorsogon dialect. Specifically, it determined the reading comprehension of Grade-I pupils along the literal, interpretative, evaluative and applied level; developed MTB-MLE reading materials in Bicol enhance the reading comprehension of the pupils; and designed teaching guides based on the developed reading materials.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This present study utilized the systems approach of input, process, and output and this is shown in the conceptual paradigm as Figure 1.

The input is the level of reading comprehension of Grade 1 pupils along literal, interpretative, applied and evaluative. The process is a validated researcher-made reading test, development of big books, and teaching guide. The outputs of this study are the developed big books as MTB-MLE reading materials which aimed to improve the reading comprehension levels of Grade 1 pupils under MTB-MLE program and the proposed teaching guide. On the other hand, the feedback can be utilized as basis to improve the output for future researchers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive-developmental research which made use of validated researcher-made test composed of 25 items. There are 30 items in the original test for the dry run, however after checking, and doing item analysis some items were revised or improved, changed and deleted. The dry run was conducted last March 16, 2013 while the validated test was administered last July 29, 2013.

Thirty (30) Grade 1 pupils of Bulusan Central School for school year 2013-2014 were chosen as the subjects of the study out of three Grade 1 classes. They were selected through purposively sampling since they are the pupils of one of the researchers. To describe the comprehension level of Grade-I pupils, a researcher-made test was used as evaluation instrument. The test was validated to selected pupils in another class. After improving some items, a 30-item test was finalized and given to the pupil respondents as the main instrument in data gathering. The Phil-IRI has been adapted to describe the pupils' level of comprehension where: 80% - 100% are classified as independent readers; 59% - 79% as instructional readers; and 58% - below as frustration readers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The level of comprehension of Grade 1 pupils along literal, interpretative, applied and evaluation is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Level of Reading Comprehension of Grade 1 Pupils

Levels of Comprehension	f	%
A. Literal		
a. Independent	5	16
b. Instructional	11	37
c. Frustration	14	47
B. Interpretative		
a. Independent	4	13
b. Instructional	10	33
c. Frustration	16	54
C. Applied		
a. Independent	17	57
b. Instructional	12	40
c. Frustration	1	3
D. Evaluation		
a. Independent	2	7
b. Instructional	7	23
c. Frustration	21	70

The table indicates that in terms of literal level, out of 30 pupils, only 5 or 16 percent belongs to the independent level, while 11 or 37 percent falls under instructional level, and 14 or 47 percent are classified under frustration level. This implies that pupils have not yet developed the proficiency in the literal level or first level of reading comprehension. This low level of reading proficiency maybe attributed to the limited exposure in reading activities in as much as the test was given only on the month of July. Although the test was given in the vernacular, yet this is not the only factor that would guarantee the acquisition of the pupils' desired proficiency level which may be attained through constant reading activities and by using *big books* wherein illustrations aid in the pupils' understanding are suggested or implied.

For the interpretative level, same table shows that 54 percent of the pupils belong to frustration level, while the rest are instructional and independent readers. This data means that majority of the pupils have not yet gained competence in reading between the lines and in the surface level. This data also indicates that the pupils find more difficulty in the interpretative level as compared to the literal level because of the increase in the percentage in frustration level readers. To attain proficiency in the interpretative level, Hermosa [12] stated that pupils should be able to answer questions not directly stated in the text but which are suggested or implied.

On the other hand, in terms of applied comprehension, majority or 57 percent of the pupils belong to the independent readers; 40 percent are instructional while 3 percent are frustration readers. This data denotes that pupils have attained the desired reading proficiency in applying the text to real life situations. Hermosa [12] also stated that this level stresses reading for use and for values and clarification. The reading act “nears completion as the child uses his reading in some practical way . . . (also when) his emotions are stirred; his attitudes and purposes are modified; indeed, his innermost being is involved.”

Lastly, for the evaluative level, a greater percentage of pupils (70%) belong to frustration level, 23 percent are instructional, while only 7 percent are independent readers. This data indicates that pupils find difficulty in judging what has been read. This also indicates that the Grade 1 pupils have not yet gained the competence in making personal judgment in text in terms of accuracy, value, truthfulness and relevance of the content or theme because of their young age. This may be attributed to the fact that they are poor in the literal and in the interpretative levels, hence it follows that they are weak in the higher order reading skills.

On the average, the Grade 1 pupils have low level of reading comprehension along the literal, interpretative and evaluative skills but higher comprehension along applied skills. This result is not so surprising considering that the text was given on the second month of the classes. This data suggests that the reading teachers should intensify their reading lessons and focus on the three types of skills. The reading materials or the big books that were developed have considered this result.

2. Development of Big Books as MTB-MLE Reading Materials in Bicol for Grade 1 Pupils

As earlier discussed, pupils were found weak along literal, interpretative and evaluative skills. These findings served as inputs in the development of the three big books which were all written in the local dialect to facilitate understanding of the stories. Certain criteria such as suitability of the story to the pupils' level of interest and experience, use of appropriate sentence structures and vocabulary, and the choice of the theme, plot, character and setting were all considered in crafting the stories. Added to

these are the colorful illustrations which were aimed to attract and motivate pupils to read the stories.

Further, the teaching guides that were designed provided objectives, motive questions and unlocking of difficulties so that pupils will find the lessons meaningful and easier to understand. The pupils will be made to read the stories aloud after the first reading by the teacher. Constant reading even after the formal lessons (during the pupils' free time) coupled with the teacher's initiative and appropriate strategies will eventually improve the pupils' level of comprehension particularly along the identified weaknesses.

An instructional material of any form is an important tool in the process of learning. It does not only enhance knowledge, thinking and problem solving skills of learner but also enables them to achieve the learning objectives effectively and interestingly. Thus, wise and creative thinking of the teacher is advised to provide exciting ways to present visual that enhances learning [11].

This present study considered producing three big books in Bicol Bulusan dialect as the output of the study. Big books, according to Strickland and Morrow [8] contain reading materials printed in bigger book format for children's use measuring 18 to 20 inches tall with print of at least an inch high. The size and clarity of the print and illustrations would entice attention of children to focus on the book from a distance of at least 15 feet.

The choice of the big book format was anchored on the various advantages in teaching reading to young children as cited and claimed in previous literatures and studies. Because of its enlarged book format, it can be situated in the classroom where the children can see the prints and illustrations as the teachers read to them the story which is similar to how their parents read at home. Also, the bigger prints serve as an eye-catcher for young learners to focus their attention to the reading material and activity [13]. Further, the bigger size of the reading material enables the pupils to follow exactly what the teacher is modeling which include her thinking process, her intention to enable the pupils to get meaning of the print, correct phrasing and chunking. And lastly, the enlarged size of big book captures young children's curiosity and interest, and motivates them to focus on the reading activity.

Thus, the researchers of this present study produced *big books* which primarily aimed to develop reading comprehension of Grade 1 pupils particularly

along the skills which were found weak. These big books are entitled: *An Talapang na si Kokak Pukak* (The Frog named Kokak Pokak), *Si Mam Mara* (Teacher Mara), and *An Bakasyon sa Baryo Berde* (The Vacation at Barangay Berde). Said books were originally written in three Bicol vernaculars of Cumadcad, Castilla, Matnog and Bulusan Sorsogon dialects, respectively, but were later translated to Bicol Bulusan, Sorsogon dialect. The three stories inculcate values of respect for elders, concern for others, and appreciation and care for the environment.

These big books were illustrated by an elementary teacher who has had some formal training in drafting and drawing stories. The stories were first printed in small size coupon bond as well as their illustrations. These were shown to some grade one teachers and to the researchers for evaluation and critiquing. The comments and suggestions were given to the illustrator. Most of the comments were on the choice of colors, balance and uniformity of images or faces of the characters. These suggestions were considered in the final copy and illustration in the big books.

3. Development of Teaching Guides

The proposed teaching guides were also designed for each big book to help other teachers in using said materials. The guides include the objectives and strategies to be employed, the subject matter, the learning activities for a) pre-reading which covers motivation, unlocking of difficult words, book orientation, giving of motive questions, b) active reading (first reading by the teacher while pupils listen and second reading where pupils have to interact with the text).

These are followed by post reading where the teacher asks some interactive questions. Enrichment activity is also included. Evaluation follows the entire activity to test the pupils' level of comprehension. Assignment is likewise included.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grade-I pupils of Bulusan Central School belong to the frustration and instructional levels in the literal skills; mostly are frustration readers along interpretative and evaluative skills; but are independent readers along applied skills. Hence, they have low level of reading comprehension. Three *big books* as MTB-MLE instructional materials in Bicol particularly in the Bulusan, Sorsogon dialect are produced to develop or enhance the Grade I pupils'

reading comprehension. Teaching guides are developed to aid teachers in using the reading materials in Bicol. More reading materials in Bicol be developed and used to the pupils inside the classroom and even at home. The developed *big books* are used in teaching reading by other Grade 1 teachers to help develop or enhance pupils' reading comprehension. Grade 1 teachers should also make reading materials and have them tried by other teachers. The proposed teaching guide may be used by other grade one teachers. Their level of acceptability may be determined through another research. The big books may be translated to other dialects in the province or the country to maximize their use.

The study was limited to only one class as its sample composed of 30 pupils. Hence, another study in other districts or divisions in Sorsogon province may be done using a bigger group of respondents, probably three or more sections in the same grade level or in grades two or three. Another study may also be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the three big books as instructional materials.

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