

Improving Beginning Reading Literacy through Marungko Approach

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Abstract

The development of reading competence among young children is fundamentally crucial in improving educational outcomes and has far-reaching implications. In fact, the competence to read by an individual can transform him into a valuable economic asset for a country as pointed out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). However, despite this fact on the implied relationship of reading competence to a country's economic growth, the Philippines turned out to be the last among 79 countries based on the report provided by the OECD through its Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2019 of which Filipino students around the age of 15 got a rating of 340 points in reading comprehension, lower than the average of 487 points. Thus, this study contends that this reading comprehension problem can be intervened and corrected by educators at the ground level by developing reading comprehension skills through an effective beginning reading teaching approach for its learners at the beginning reading stage to authentically develop and solidify the foundational reading competencies of the learners such as the ability to identify letter name, identify letter sound, discriminate initial sound, read familiar words and read oral passage before promoting them to the next level. It is in this context that beginning reading teachers may explore beginning reading teaching approaches such as the Marungko approach to help improve in the teaching of these foundational reading competencies. Thus, this quasi-experimental study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Marungko Approach in developing these foundational reading competencies of Grade 1 Learners. Findings reveal that there is a significant difference between the pre and post-test level of beginning reading competencies being tested. Hence it is concluded that Marungko Approach is an effective key in improving the learners' reading performance in the beginning reading stage which is also a crucial foundation in the development of more micro-competencies in reading resulting to an improved and solidified reading comprehension skills that are crucial in the higher level of the educative process.

Keywords: illiteracy, teaching beginning reading, Marungko approach, quasi-experimental

INTRODUCTION

Teaching young children to read is the cornerstone of improving educational outcomes and has far-reaching implications. Unless they learn to read at an early age, children cannot absorb more advanced skills and content that rely on reading. Children who do not learn to read in the early grades risk falling further and further behind in later ones, as they cannot absorb printed information, follow written instructions, or communicate well in writing according to Gove and Wetterberg (2011). This implies two specific points which include the value of having good

foundational competencies in the beginning reading stage so as to allow every learner to move forward in the succeeding competencies and that reading competence is crucial in developing the rest of the educational outcomes. Hence as pointed out by Anstey and Bull (2004) that despite the modern advances in information technology and the development of a range of communication tools in the advance world, learning to read remains important in the sense that reading is primarily the gateway to a lot of information and competencies across aspects of life. This is why poor reading skills is always considered a challenge since this would yield disappointing results and as emphasized by Hanushek & Woessman (2009), often early dropout from the education system and in the aggregate, reading and learning achievement are central to economic productivity and growth. This concept is anchored on their study that it is learning rather than years of schooling that contributes to a country's economic growth: a 10 percent increase in the share of scholars reaching basic literacy translates into an annual rate of growth at 0.3 percentage points above it might rather be for that country.

Despite this valuable information concerning the relevant impact of reading literacy in a country's economic growth, still there are many children around the world who are being labeled as "not good enough" in their reading literacy classes according to Khalfaoui (2018). Reading literacy refers to understanding, evaluating, using and engaging with written text to participate in the society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential (OECD, 2019b). In this case, it could mean that they have poor foundational reading competencies in beginning reading such as the ability to identify letter name, identify letter sound, discriminate initial sound, read familiar words and read oral passage. Hence, the failure to solidify these foundational reading skills at the beginning reading stage somehow can create a ripple effect in the latter years of a child's quest in developing higher competencies in reading and ultimately in other aspects of life as well, as emphasized by Brink and Nel (2019) when they cited OECD, that early reading literacy is one of the foremost important aspects of a child's first years in his academic journey. Children need reading literacy to progress through life.

Due to the fact that reading competence has significant impact to the economic growth of a country, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) through its Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) examines what students know in reading, mathematics and science, and what they can do with what they know. PISA provides the foremost comprehensive and rigorous international assessment of student learning outcomes to date. Results from PISA indicate the standard and equity of learning outcomes attained all over the world, and permit educators and policy makers to find out from the policies and practices applied in other countries.

In the case of the Philippines, data shows through the Program for International Assessment (PISA) in 2019, that Filipino students around the age of 15 got a rating of 340 points in reading comprehension, lower than the average of 487 points which consequently made the Philippines to be the last among 79 countries as reiterated by Manaog (2020). This fact requires Philippine educators to revisit the traces of developing reading comprehension skills for its learners down to the beginning reading stage. For it is believed that the vital element in the acquisition of these useful and advance information is the ability to decode and comprehend this information starting from the most basic reading competencies such as the ability to identify letter name, identify letter sound, discriminate initial sound, read familiar words and read oral passage. Since without truly developing these basic reading competencies then consequently, the rippling problematic

effects will be seen. It is in this context that basic reading competencies come in and play critically in the process of acquisition of this information which are found through written texts that were made by brilliant thinkers in order to make sure that the information is intact as these are passed on from generation to generation. Relatively, in the context of reading, according to Shea and Ceprano (2017), the written texts are intended as a form of communication between an author and the reader and in order for this to be accomplished, the reader must have constructed meaning with the composition, grasping ideas and information, analyzing and evaluating content for accuracy, and making connections with background knowledge and life experiences – including social, cultural, educational, and other demographics – to succeed in between and beyond lines so as to detect stated and implied meanings. Relative to this, Shea and Ceprano (2017) added that understanding would vary as readers dig for information in a text and synthesize it with personal schema in the process of constructing meaning since in reading, according Bourgoin and Dicks (2019), readers draw upon various sources of information such as meaning, language structures, and phonological and visual information as well as strategies in order to monitor their reading, search for information, and correct their reading.

Hence, the construction of meaning with the composition along with the ability to grasp ideas and information as well as other related higher reading competencies require the basic skills of decoding messages such as those mentioned earlier as foundational reading skills in the beginning reading stage like the ability to identify letter name, identify letter sound, discriminate initial sound, read familiar words and read oral passage. This is why De Belen (2017), stressed that beginning reading is important in grade one and that because of this, teachers in beginning reading in particular should plan and provide effective reading program as contended by Edelman (2017) in order to improve and develop the reading competencies of their learners.

Thus, along this concept, teachers need to do innovations and or adopt acceptable teaching reading approaches in order to cater the needs of the learners in the process of learning such as the development of the ability to identify letter name, identify letter sound, discriminate initial sound, read familiar words and read oral passage in the beginning reading stage. This means that regardless of what teaching reading approach a teacher uses, the same goal should always be in sight that is to develop these foundational reading competencies for the learner to ultimately become more productive later on.

The Marungko Approach

Consonant to this, the study was conducted to find possible fitting solution through a teaching reading approach called Marungko that may help beginning reading teachers in unlocking the keys of illiteracy in reading. The Marungko approach is designed to equip Grade One learners the necessary reading skills to improve their reading achievement. Basically, according to Ali and Urbano (1967), Marungko approach being associated with phonics was first introduced to two teachers in De Los Santos Community School in Marungko, Angat, Bulacan, Philippines. Guided by this reading approach, Laud and Reyno (2014) pointed that children are taught to know the letter sound of the Filipino alphabet. Hence, this was embraced as a Philippine program for phonics instruction intended to improve the comprehension skills of beginning readers through the needed materials according to Talley (2017).

In the study of Bustos-Orosa and Ferrer (2013), they discovered that in several public schools in the Philippines such as the case of Mananao Elementary School in San Manuel, Isabela, Philippines, the beginning reading teachers used Marungko approach being considered as an alternative approach in teaching reading for beginning readers, instead of following the La Cartilla de Gretel approach which is a completely phonetic approach to reading and writing that takes the learners from the simple to the complex stage of competencies. In other words, the student will learn to read and write by first learning the letter sounds, then syllable sounds and then forming words.

Moreover, according to Bustos-Orosa and Ferrer (2013), traditionally, the phonics instruction program used in Philippine schools is the La Cartilla de Gretel approach. This has its roots in the country's colonial past with Spain and in both languages having a regular orthography. The new Filipino alphabet is composed of the following 28 letter-sounds: a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, ñ, ng, o, p, r, s, t, u, w, x, y, z. Of these letters, 20 letters are from the traditional Filipino alphabet, called abakada, and 8 letters are from the Spanish alphabet (c, f, j, ñ, q, v, x, z). Spanish instruction in letter-sound correspondence has traditionally been syllabic (Moustafa & Colon cited in Bustos-Orosa and Ferrer, 2013). The La Cartilla de Gretel approach is based on this method of breaking down and analyzing a word into syllables. Children are taught a group of syllables, following on the sequence of the consonants of the alphabet, that are then varied by one vowel (i.e., ba, be, bi, bo, bu). They are then taught to mix these syllables into words, (e.g. /ba/ /ta/ for bata, meaning child in Filipino) or to breakdown up these syllable chunks to a printed word.

Bustos-Orosa and Ferrer (2013) added that in recent years however, the Marungko Approach has been used as an alternative beginning reading program, in lieu of the La Cartilla de Gretel approach, in most public schools in the Philippines. In the Marungko Approach, letter-sound correspondence is taught at the phonemic level. There is a specified sequence of letter and letter sounds to be taught to the children. The Marungko sequence is arranged according to the most frequent to the least occurring letters in the Filipino language. The sequence of letter-sounds taught in the Marungko approach is as follows: m, s, a, i, o, b, e, u, t, k, l, y, n, g, ng, p, r, d, h, w, c, f, j, ñ, q, v, x, z. Unlike phonics instruction programs in English wherein vowels are introduced after the consonants, the Marungko Approach introduces vowels at the start of the sequence alongside with some consonants. For example, the sequence starts with the letters, m, s, and a. Phonemic manipulation of blending letter sounds into words is introduced at this level. Children are then encouraged to form up words using these three (3) letters ("masa", "sama" etc). For instance, after teaching the letter sounds of m, s, a, i, o, b, e, u, students are asked to read the subsequent words: ube (purple yam), ubo (cough), uso (modern), usa (deer). After reading words, students read phrases with words made from these letters (e.g. ang ubas sa mesa, grapes on the table) the phrases for students' progress to sentences using letter combinations (e.g., May ubas si Ela. Ela has grapes.).

In addition, sounding out or deciphering is one way of the learner in learning how to read and this is emphasized in this approach. Hence, in this approach on reading, the alphabets are rather pronounced than read. The approach follows the steps of showing the letter and naming it in front and pronouncing it properly and aloud, having the learners write the letter on the air, floor or in their desk repeatedly, showing to learners the pictures which name starts with the letter being introduced in the class, having the learners pronounce the first letter of the picture shown

repeatedly, then when mastery is evident, combining sounds of consonant and vowel to create a syllable then word.

Generally, the Marungko approach according to Flores (2014) is a "phono-syllabic" method. Meaning, the letter-sounds are taught in correspondence to the phonemic level (Yayen, 2018). This is why as pointed out by Faustino, Santos, Distajo and Ladia (2013), there is a specified common and familiar pattern of letters that are taught such as *m, s, a, i, o, b, e, u* and so on based from the Filipino language, for the purpose of helping the learners arrange their thoughts and ideas. As what Yayen (2018) pointed out that when certain patterns of letter sounds are already taught; the phonemic manipulation of blending sound letters is presented to create words and that the learners are encouraged to produce words using the letters that are learned from the pattern of letters. Then the learners are guided to read the different words that are produced. Eventually, the words that were produced can be put together to create units of thoughts in form of phrases or sentences which consequently will be read by the learners said Bustos-Orosa and Ferrer (2013).

In this context, the study aimed on answering the following questions: (1) What is the level of reading competencies of Grade 1 learners before using Marungko Approach along the micro-competence of identifying letter sounds, identifying initial sounds, reading familiar words and reading oral passage?, (2) What is the level of reading competencies of grade one learner after using Marungko Approach in these aforementioned micro-competencies?, and (3) Is there a significant mean gain difference in the level of reading competencies before and after using Marungko Approach? The research was conducted for the general reason of finding a way for the beginning reading teachers to be guided as to how the positive transfer of reading competencies will be done. The specific goal is to create beginning reading instruction guide by the teaching reading approach being tested in the study. Hence this is because if Marungko approach proved to be significantly effective in the academic context of these learners, then the door for freedom from illiteracy is found and that a reading instruction guide can be created anchoring on the data at hand.

METHODOLOGY

The research was done using quasi-experimental design as introduced by Cook and Campbell (1979). This design is also known as the non-randomized, pre-post-intervention design. This is used to test the causal hypothesis if the Marungko approach to be introduced will provide significant difference in the level of micro-reading competencies of the beginning reading learners. Moreover, this design was used due to the fact that it is not feasible to conduct a randomized controlled trial in the context of the study.

The study was conducted in Tuyom Elementary School of Carcar City Division in Cebu, Philippines. Like any other schools, Tuyom Elementary School is also struggling to produce learners with strong foundational reading competencies. Relevant to the design, the study is participated by 30 grade one learners. The learners involved are all in Grade one and that they are non-repeaters and they all belong to an age bracket of 7.0-7.5 years old. In addition, these learners were already part of the pre-elementary program which is mandatory under the K-12 curriculum adopted by the Department of Education in the Philippines.

Due to ethical consideration, the quasi-experimental design mentioned earlier was used since it is unethical to create a controlled and experimental group using randomization. This is because their parents do not provide consent on dividing the number into two groups. The consent given was only for the students to be participant for the general study.

Hence, in order to find out the effect of the independent variable which is the introduction of Marungko approach to the learners, first the learners' reading competencies level were pre-tested across the micro-competencies after teaching them using the La Cartilla de Gretel approach which is a completely phonetic approach to reading and writing that takes the student from the simple to the complex. In other words, the student will learn to read and write by first learning letter sounds, then syllable sounds, then forming words. This process lasted for ten weeks corresponding to the allotted two-week time frame for each micro-competency with exactly three hours per session in each week. On the other hand, in the next ten weeks, the same process was undertaken with the same amount of time allotted per micro-competency in every week. However, this time, the learners were taught using the Marungko approach. Ultimately, the post-test was given to see the learners' reading competencies level after exposure to Marungko approach.

The level of competencies was tested through the adapted tool from the Department of Education known as EGRA or called the Early Grade Reading Assessment. It consisted of 320 items spread across the identified micro-competencies. The results of the pre and the post tests were used to find the significant difference at 0.05 level of significance using the z-test as statistical treatment. It was used to determine whether the population means are different when the variances are known.

RESULTS

The study reveals that when teaching beginning reading to the learners through Cartilla approach, their level of reading competencies is only at the below average level as shown in Table 1 across the micro-competencies of reading such as identifying letter names, identifying letter sounds, identifying initial sounds, reading familiar words, and reading oral passage.

Table 1. Level of Reading Competencies before Using Marungko Approach

Micro-Competencies	Above Average (61-90)		Average (31-60)		Below Average (30-below)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
• Identifying letter names	0	0	0	0	30	100
• Identifying letter sounds	0	0	0	0	30	100
• Identifying initial sounds	0	0	0	0	30	100
• Reading familiar Words	0	0	0	0	30	100
• Reading oral passage	0	0	0	0	30	100

In addition, after the learners were exposed to beginning reading using the Marungko approach, the learners' reading competencies is found to have improved from average to above average level as observed in Table 2 across the micro-competencies of reading such as identifying letter names, identifying letter sounds, identifying initial sounds, reading familiar words, and reading oral passage.

Table 2. Level of Reading Competencies after Using Marungko Approach

Micro-Competencies	Above Average (61-90)		Average (31-60)		Below Average (30-below)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
• Identifying letter names	17	56.66	13	43.33	0	0
• Identifying letter sounds	15	50.00	15	50.00	0	0
• Identifying initial sounds	22	73.33	8	26.67	0	0
• Reading familiar Words	16	53.34	14	46.66	0	0
• Reading oral passage	11	36.67	19	63.33	0	0

Lastly, Table 3 presents the mean gain difference level of reading competencies before and after using Marungko Approach. Using Z-test to determine the significant difference, the result of the statistical treatment shows that among all identified micro-competencies in reading, such as identifying letter names, identifying letter sounds, identifying initial sounds, reading familiar words, and reading oral passage, all have yielded a computed z-value that is higher than the critical z-value of 1.96. Moreover, when the computed z-value are transformed into the computed p-value using the formula $=1-NORM.S.DIST(z,TRUE)$ where z is the computed z-value, ultimately it yielded to 0.000 across all foundational micro-competencies. The computed p-value result is highly possible considering the high computed z-value and that the sample size is at thirty.

Table 3. Mean Gain Difference in the Level of Reading Competencies before and after using Marungko Approach

Foundational Micro-Reading Competencies										
Test	Identifying Letter Names		Identifying Letter Sounds		Identifying Initial Sounds		Reading Familiar Words		Reading Oral Passage	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
No. of Items	90	90	90	90	10	10	40	40	90	90
SD	6.92	20.63	7.18	20.69	1.77	1.81	4.94	11.08	3.7	5.92
Computed value (z)	12.26		11.17		9.78		9.65		17.97	
Critical Value (z)	1.96		1.96		1.96		1.96		1.96	
Computed P-Value	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
Decision	Reject Ho		Reject Ho		Reject Ho		Reject Ho		Reject Ho	
Interpretation	Significant		Significant		Significant		Significant		Significant	

According to Miller and Miller (2004) the lower the sample size, the more possibility for the computed z-value to blow and on contrary, the higher the sample size, the more likely the data to converge. Hence, in this case, since the computed p-value is lower or smaller than the level of significance at 0.05, then the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus there is significant difference in the pre and post-test level of foundational micro-competencies in reading. These data mean that there is a significant difference in the learners' level of reading competencies before and after they were exposed to Marungko approach being utilized by the teacher.

DISCUSSION

Noticeably, in the pre-test, the learners' level of competence across identified micro-competencies fall at below average. This means that these learners do not have enough competence to identify letter names, identify letter sounds, identify initial sounds, reading familiar words, and reading oral passage. Understandably, these learners were given exposure to some pre-reading concepts in their kindergarten level as required in the language, literacy and communication domain reflected in the K-12 curriculum as expressed by Republic Act 10157 also known as the kindergarten education act. This domain provides opportunities on early literacy learning for self-expression through language using the native tongue or the child's mother tongue. Children are expected to develop communicative skills in their mother tongue. They are also expected to develop more positive attitudes toward reading, writing, and to view themselves as effective users and learners of language. Clearly, the learners' exposure is done in the mother-tongue which is considerably valuable in learning more reading concepts in the learners' latter years. The mother tongue in this case is viewed as a valuable medium in the development of foundational skills such as in the context of reading.

In this case, following the concept of the La Cartilla de Gretel Approach in teaching beginning reading, through the use of the mother tongue of the learners, they were taught from the most basic concepts of reading by attempting to let them at least identify letter names of the alphabet which simply requires good memory in associating the letter symbol following the alphabetical order. This is because consistent with Piasta and Wagner (2010), alphabet knowledge is a hallmark of early literacy and facilitating its development has become a primary objective of pre-school instruction and intervention. Hence, done initially, through songs, the learners were introduced to the entire set of letters comprising the alphabet and later on, one by one each letter is introduced along with its corresponding names. The teacher repeatedly provided the name of the letter and showed the corresponding letter symbol for identification.

Eventually, the learners were exposed to identify the sounds of these letters as introduced by the teacher through audio-lingual process in which the learners were parroting to perform the appropriate production of the sound of each letter of which it was still according to the order of appearance of the letters in the alphabet. From there, the letters were paired to form common syllables prior to elevating their exposure into reading monosyllabic to polysyllabic words of which are supported by pictures and that these words are commonly found in the learners' day-to-day life. Ultimately, learners were exposed to short oral passages comprised of simple or basic sight words in monosyllabic and polysyllabic form.

The poor performance of the learners in reading competencies as portrayed in their below average level in the pre-test can be associated to their failure to embrace the basic competence of decoding letter symbol and associating its name and as well as its corresponding sound. This situation evidently came up despite the clarity of the instructional medium which is the mother tongue of the learners. Somehow, in the given time provided to the learners, they have difficulty recalling appropriately each letter's name. Though noticeably, only the first five letters in the alphabetical sequence are commonly recalled correctly.

Expectedly, in the concept of learning from simple to complex competencies, the learners' poor foundational competence surely results to problems in the development of complex competencies such as in this case the reading of sight words in monosyllabic and polysyllabic formation and the simple oral passages. This is because as mentioned by Hammill (2004), the best predictor of their later reading and spelling abilities are the children's knowledge of letter names and sounds. Hence their lack of competence in naming letters simply expectedly results to a chain of failure in other higher competencies such as the case of combining these letters to form syllables and eventually into words. This fact is supported by McBride-Chang (1999) that letter name and letter sound knowledge predict subsequent literacy skills independently of other important predictors including phonological awareness and oral language. Simply, these learners if will continually have poor knowledge of letter names and sounds, they will be more likely to struggle with learning to read and be classified as having reading disabilities according to Torppa (2006) and if not intervened will consequently fall further behind their peers in reading acquisition, leading to gaps in spelling, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills according to Torgesen (2002).

On the contrary, when Marungko approach was utilized within the teaching of those identified foundational micro-competencies, the learners' level of competencies has improved and fall at the average and above average as shown in Table 2. In fact, if examined closely, majority of those learners demonstrated an above average level across micro-competencies. Clearly, the utilization of the Marungko approach provided positive end in developing the learners' reading competencies like the skill to identify letter name, identify letter sound, discriminate initial sound, read familiar words and read oral passage. While it is true that there are many factors that affect students' acquisition of reading skills and successful display of them as mentioned by Esmer & Günes (2019), alongside this finding, it is also right to mention that the teaching approach in reading is a crucial tool which will be explored and maximized by the teacher albeit the reading process is assumed to be influenced by various factors associated with the reader, the text, and the tasks or items consistent with Khorramdel, Pokropek, Joo, Kirsch, and Halderman (2020) like within the study of Walgermo, Foldnes, Per, & Solheim, (2018) when they acknowledged that both literacy interest and reader self-concept are considered important for students' learning and for the growth of reading skills. Hence, the teaching beginning reading approach can help the teacher navigate within the teaching-learning process alongside the teacher's pedagogical skills which can affect in improving the learners' performance consistent with Ramos (2021), in such case, the development of the foundational competencies in reading.

This finding is associated to the unique process of introducing the learners the micro-reading foundational competencies following the Marungko approach due to the approach's distinct way of introducing vowels at the start of the sequence along with some consonants and its early exposure to phonemic manipulation of blending letter sounds into words rather than forcing the learners to break down and analyze a word into syllables as mentioned by Bustos-Orosa and

Ferrer (2013). Simply, despite the thought that reading may be a difficult and sophisticated process that needs many cognitive skills as mentioned by Koyuncu & Firat (2020) from the study of Adams (1990), the very fact points to the thought that when simplified and this existing simple process is further atomized into an easier way which somehow the method meets the demand of the learners, during this context at the start of early reading stage, then the approach will prove to be effective. Hence, as mentioned by Yayen (2018), so as to support teaching reading successfully, it is important to think about how beginning readers learn. The development of reading comprehension skills in the beginning readers is significantly important because it is a foundation of learning other academic areas within the classroom. As added by Jeon (2012) that the child who learns to read well will very likely encounter less difficulty in all academic subjects. When a student has difficulty in reading, generally, all academic areas are influenced.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Marungko Approach is an effective alternative in the teaching of the micro-reading competencies in beginning reading. Through this, beginning reading teachers can now have a way to transform their learners into a successful reader in the end. In addition, the use of Marungko Approach in the beginning reading stage can help solidify these skills to become strong foundations for higher reading competencies. In this manner, learners will truly possess the desired reading comprehension skills which are crucial for every productive individual. Thus, with the ultimate possession of comprehension skills, the learners at the end are converted into valuable asset of the country.

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