

Ilokano Songs as supplementary materials in Teaching Descriptive Paragraph



Original Research Article

ISSN : 2456-1045 (Online)

(ICV-LNG/Impact Value): 3.08

(GIF) Impact Factor: 2.174

Publishing Copyright @ International Journal Foundation

Journal Code: ARJMD/L

Category : LANGUAGE

Volume : 19.0 / Chapter- IX

Journal Website: www.jour

Paper Received: 06.12.2017

Paper Accep



Name of the Authors:

Kevin R. Cabasal¹, *Rommel V. Tabula²

¹ Researcher, Mariano Marcos State University, Batac City, Philippines

² TESOL Specialist, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, Tak, Thailand

Citation of the Article

Cabasal K.R.; Tabula R.V. (2017) Ilokano Songs as supplementary materials in Teaching Descriptive Paragraph; Advance Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Discoveries.19.0.C-9 (2017):40-45; available at : <http://www.journalresearchifj.com>

ABSTRACT

Previous studies found that songs provide students with authentic language as they are exposed to the real language produced for native speakers. This study aimed to assess the writing performance of the students in an ESL context using Ilokano songs as supplementary materials in teaching descriptive paragraph. The quasi-experimental method, specifically, the pretest-posttest research design, was utilized. It involved two intact classes of first year BS Pharmacy students enrolled in English 2. Twenty students with similar academic-related attributes comprised each groups – the control and experimental. Fowler & Coe's (1976) Language Proficiency Test, TOEFL (2003) Test of Writing; and a researcher-made Composition Writing Rubrics were used to obtain the data. Three independent raters scored the students' written outputs, which were analyzed and interpreted statistically using frequency and percentages, mean, and ANOVA. Results disclosed that the pretests of the control group ($\bar{x}=2.53$) and the experimental group ($\bar{x}=2.54$) are numerically almost similar. However, the experimental group ($\bar{x}=3.57$) outperformed the control group ($\bar{x}=3.15$) in their posttests. Significant difference between the writing performance level of the two groups was found as shown by its overall mean difference of 1.033 and t-value of 7.974 at 0.01 probability level. In conclusion, Ilokano songs are generally commendable as instructional materials in teaching descriptive paragraph.

Keywords :

Descriptive paragraph,
ESL context,
Ilokano songs,
supplementary materials,
writing performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Background

From the moment language started to evolve, song became an essential part of human existence. Tracing the civilization of men and nations, song performed several functions in praise and worship, ceremonies, celebrations, entertainment, literacy among others. Ancient conquerors used songs to communicate orders among their uneducated armies in conquering the world. Early rhetoricians even utilized songs to govern most illiterate societies. Beyond civilization and culture, songs have been used for education for centuries.

In English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) classroom, songs have been recognized by numerous researchers and teachers as valuable source for language acquisition. Mora (2000) advocated that songs have an affirmative effect on the learners' language acquisition and the capability to retrieve easily the lexical patterns stored in musical memory for oral interaction at the later stage. Abbott (2002) stipulated that songs have the power to motivate learners and the capacity to enrich vocabulary knowledge, develop cultural awareness and transform classes into enjoyable sessions. Rahbar and Khodabakhsh (2013) substantiated that integrating English songs in EFL classes can make learning more enjoyable and bring authentic insights to the classroom environs. Zoghi and Shoari (2015) further accorded that songs can have a significant affirmative effect in language learning.

Inevitably, song is omnipresent in today's culture; and virtually, it is the soundtrack of learners' lives. Multiple researchers considered songs as a good communicative classroom resource due to the most frequent and meaningful language exposures they provide with the learners. For instance, Li and Brand (2009) displayed how songs can promote pleasurable manner of presenting or reviewing vocabulary, teaching pronunciation, and demonstrating sentence structures and patterns. On the other hand, Arevalo (2010) studied the use of songs to enhance listening and to promote culture in EFL classes. His findings indicated that song integration in language classes can foster listening skills and develops students' awareness about cultural and social issues. In addition, Patel and Laud (2007) designed an experiment in investigating the efficacy of utilizing song lyrics to enhance reading fluency ability of middle school students. The results revealed that the usage of songs can increase learners' reading fluency rates as evident in their posttest compared to their initial pretest ability scores.

Objectives

This study aimed to assess the writing performance of the students in an English as a Second Language context using Ilokano songs as supplementary materials in teaching descriptive paragraph. Specifically, it sought to purport the following: 1) to determine the level of students' writing performance in the experimental and control groups in the initial and final descriptive paragraphs in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics; and 2) to find out the significant difference between the students' performance levels in writing descriptive paragraph in the control and experimental groups.

Literature Review

Several studies across continents reported the benefits found in using songs to enrich learners' retention and recall of vocabulary (Alipour, Gorjian and Zafari, 2012; Koksal, Yagisan and Cekic, 2013; Zoghi and Shoari, 2015), to improve attitudes and social interactions (Lopera, 2003; Brouillette, 2009; Hallam, 2010), to enhance language teaching and learning (Ransdell and Gilroy, 2001; Ara, 2009; Crowther, 2011), and to stimulate brain development (Schlaug, Norton, Overy and Winner, 2005; Barrett,

Ashley, Strait and Kraus, 2013). In this sense, the utilization of songs in English language classroom is an effective technique in the teaching-learning process, because it can enliven the learners' cognitive function. In like manner, working with songs can eliminate stressfulness in teaching because it can help teachers maintain a positive and productive environment. Through songs or music integration, the lesson can become more interesting and intrinsically motivating. Moreover, the harmonic atmosphere that music creates would build good rapport between teachers and students. This virtual relationship among them is truly imperative for an effective learning. It enhances the interaction inside the classroom and consequently, empowers the students. Using songs as classroom resource provides interesting classes and offers several opportunities to create innovative activities that attract students' attention and develop dexterity towards foreign language.

Numerous authors in Asia also stated the merits and usage of songs in the classroom such as vocabulary acquisition (Abidin, Mohammadi, Singh, Azman and Souriyavongsa, 2011; Heidari and Araghi, 2015), pronunciation competence (Farmand and Pourgharib, 2013), listening proficiency (Kuswoyo, 2013; Hadian, 2015; Kim and Kang, 2015; Rezaei and Ahour, 2015), reading comprehension (Gorjian, Alipour and Saffarian, 2012) and cultural awareness (Brand, 2007). It is evident in these studies that the utilization of songs in language learning broadens the students' linguistic knowledge and communicative competence and stimulates their cultural awareness. Pan, Brown and Tsay (2013) further demonstrated the efficacy of songs in language classroom through exploring the views of Taiwanese public secondary school EFL teachers in teaching English in Taiwan. Results unveiled that teachers strongly believe in the pedagogical value of songs and firmly adhere in their effectiveness to assist learners' language acquisition.

Apart from these studies that dealt with the innumerable virtues of songs as valuable source for language learning and teaching, Shen (2009) provided theoretical arguments and practical support for using English songs in ELT. What makes a song an impeccable tool for language education are the breadth and depth of its culture and themes, the wealth of its idiomatic and poetic expressions, the richness of its therapeutic functions and other virtues. Since serious writing may bore EFL learners, the many intrinsic merits of songs should be utilized in creative writing (Shen, 2009). In like manner, Paquette and Rieg (2008) concurred that music can be implemented into practical activities in reading and writing. Through exposure to the song lyrics, students learn grammatical structures and enrich their reading and writing skills. In addition, Mol (2009) indicated that there are enthralling lexical or idiomatic expressions and undisclosed stories or messages in the lyrics of songs that provide students an avenue for reflection and discussion. The rebuttal of ideas presented in the group would redound to scientific or technical and imaginative or literary writing. Finally, Neisa (2008) affirmed that music is essential to writing skills because it can manifests explications of any subject through compositions or essays and can arouse creative and imaginative thinking.

The aforementioned literatures have shown how scholars have explored and acknowledged the benefits of integrating music in ESL/EFL teaching and learning. Though they displayed the many intrinsic values of utilizing songs to teach the different aspects of the target language, none of these researches have attempted to explore the meritorious benefits of utilizing local songs to teach paragraph writing. The body of literatures presented was limited to the use of English songs to assist L2 or FL learners with learning English. Accordingly, this research was conducted to support the effect of using songs in teaching descriptive paragraphs to higher education students. Thus, this study contextualized the localization of song usage, which is the Ilokano songs, as the intervention in teaching descriptive paragraph.

Framework

This study was anchored on the Second Language Acquisition Theory elaborated by Corder (1957), Selinker (1972), and Krashen (1980) and the Pragmatic Theory proposed by John Dewey (2012).

SLA as an interdisciplinary field suggests that the acquisition of language is driven solely by comprehensible input or a language that learners can understand. The learners' ability to write descriptive paragraph depends upon the accuracy, fluency and complexity of the language they acquired. The craftsmanship of their written outputs depends on their linguistic knowledge and cultural awareness to the acquired second language. Thus, the Ilokano songs were utilized as vehicle for acquisition and intellectualization of English as their L2 while enriching their linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their L1, the Ilokano language.

The Pragmatic Theory, applied to education, is explained through the philosophy or educational principle of learning by doing. The study tried to elucidate an approach to the teaching of writing descriptive paragraph through the use of Ilokano songs as authentic materials. The participants were exposed to the process approach to writing wherein they were taught the principles of paragraph writing as they experienced crafting descriptive texts at the same time. In the end, the subjects of the study were able to construct descriptive paragraph with refinement of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and proper use of mechanics. In other words, they produced written outputs that meet the standards of effective paragraph through learning by doing with the aid of Ilokano songs as tool for teaching. Thus, they learned the techniques in writing by immersing themselves with different writing activities.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Setting

The experimental study was conducted during the second semester of academic year 2015-2016, specifically November 2015, at the College of Health Sciences, Mariano Marcos State University, Batac City, Philippines. This educational institution is the first multi-campus state university north of Manila. It is considered as the center of higher education learning and research in the Ilocos region. The campus comprised of six colleges with flagship courses in Agriculture, Agricultural Engineering, Ceramics Engineering, Biology, Mathematics and Information Technology. The College of Health Sciences was considered as the research site because it is where the researcher's supervising teacher assigned to handle two intact classes of same degree program.

Research Design

The study employed the quasi-experimental method, specifically, the pretest-posttest research design. This involved two groups of participants – the control group and the experimental group. A pretest was administered to both groups to ensure equality of their entry requirements for the experimental phase. The traditional approach to teaching or lecture method was used for the control group while the experimental group was exposed to the use of Ilokano songs as supplementary materials in teaching descriptive paragraph.

Research Instruments

The researchers implemented four instruments in gathering the data. The first instrument was a Language Proficiency Test devised by Fowler & Coe (1976). This instrument ensured homogeneity of the sample population. The second one was a descriptive paragraph writing exam based on the TOEFL (2003) Test of Writing. This test

included three topics. Each of the participants chose one of the topics for writing a descriptive paragraph. They were suggested to write a minimum of 150 words but not to exceed 250 words. The paragraphs were scored by three raters who were experts of the field. The third one was a Composition Writing Rubrics to rate the pretest and posttest essays of the subjects. Finally, the lyrics of Ilokano songs, discs and CD player, LCD projector and laptop were utilized as materials in the teaching-learning process.

Respondents of the Study

The subjects considered in this study were the two sections of first year BS in Pharmacy students of the Mariano Marcos State University. They were heterogeneously enrolled in English 2 (Writing in the Discipline) during the second semester of the school year 2015-2016. The BS Pharm-1B was chosen as the control group while the BS Pharm-1C was considered as the experimental group. The selection of the subjects was based on their Final Grade in English 1 (Study and Thinking Skills in English) and their ratings in Language Proficiency Test as comparability requirements. The ranking method was used to match the subjects in both groups. Twenty students comprised the control group; and another 20 students comprised the experimental group. Students, who failed to complete the experimental phase and with extreme grades and ratings were not included in the study.

Research Ethics Protocol

The researchers complied with the research ethics protocol by seeking clearance from the university ethics review board. Documents to conduct the study were presented to the research ethics committee for approval. Having cleared to pursue the research, the authors explained to the participants the nature, objectives, advantages and risks of their participation. In the informed consent, both of them agreed upon the terms and conditions to participate the study. Thus, the subjects considered for the experimental study were those who assented to the informed consent.

III. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS AND GRAPHICAL PRESENTATION

The data were treated statistically through mean and ANOVA. Mean was used to determine the level of writing performance of the two groups of subjects in their pretests and posttests. On the other hand, ANOVA was utilized to ascertain the significant difference between the scores of the participants in both pretest and posttest.

Table 1. Level of writing performance in the pretest of the control group and experimental group

Performance Indicators	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Mean	Descriptive Value	Mean	Descriptive Value
Content	2.68	Good	2.75	Good
Organization	2.5	Fair	2.43	Fair
Vocabulary	2.52	Fair	2.58	Fair
Language Use	2.6	Fair	2.6	Fair
Mechanics	2.33	Fair	2.32	Fair
Overall	2.53	Fair	2.54	Fair

Legend:

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 4.21 – 5.00 | Excellent |
| 3.41 – 4.20 | Very Good |
| 2.61 – 3.40 | Good |
| 1.81 – 2.60 | Fair |

Table 2. Writing performance in the posttest of the control group and experimental group

Performance Indicators	Control Group		Experimental Group	
	Mean	Descriptive Value	Mean	Descriptive Value
Content	3.23	Good	3.77	Very Good
Organization	3.12	Good	3.57	Very Good
Vocabulary	3.13	Good	3.6	Very Good
Language Use	3.13	Good	3.57	Very Good
Mechanics	3.13	Good	3.35	Good
Overall	3.15	Good	3.57	Very Good

Legend:

4.21 – 5.00	Excellent
3.41 – 4.20	Very Good
2.61 – 3.40	Good
1.81 – 2.60	Fair
1.00 – 1.80	Poor

Table 3. Significant difference between the mean ratings of control group and experimental group

Performance Indicators	Md	t-value	Significance
Content	1.017	7.949	0.000*
Organization	1.133	7.392	0.000*
Vocabulary	1.017	6.376	0.000*
Language Use	0.967	9.006	0.000*
Mechanics	1.033	5.929	0.000*
Overall	1.033	7.974	0.000*

*Significant at 0.01 probability level (2-tailed)

IV. RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS

The study hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the writing performance levels of the students who were exposed to Ilokano songs as supplementary materials in writing descriptive paragraph and the students who received the normal instruction.

Level of Writing Performance of the Control Group and Experimental Group in their Pretests and Posttests

To begin with, the Final Grade of the students in English 1 (Study and Thinking Skills) from the two intact classes were obtained, ranked and matched before the conduct of the study. It was found that the general weighted averages of the two groups of participants registered at 1.91 (see Appendix). This means that they are perfectly matched regarding grades in their previous subject in English.

Another entry requirement for the experimental phase was the rating of the participants in their Language Proficiency Test, which was administered after seeking their informed consent and after setting the standards for the experimental study. Results showed that both groups obtained a mean score of 27 which means Average. It could be inferred that the two intact classes are comparable and have equal attributes with regards to proficiency in the English language.

As shown in Table 1, the pretests of the control group and the experimental group in writing descriptive paragraph are numerically almost similar as evidenced by their means of 2.53 and 2.54, respectively. This means that the two groups are generally and equally Fair in writing before the experimental stage. This result implies that the students have not yet fully developed their passion in writing descriptive paragraph due to their inadequate knowledge on mechanics, insufficient skill in organizing ideas, limited vocabulary, and deficient language use.

When taken singly, all the five performance indicators of both groups are equal in terms of descriptive interpretations. Of the five indicators, it emerged that the content of their written outputs is the highest with the mean scores of 2.68 for the control group and 2.75 for the experimental group described as Good. This means that both groups of subjects performed similarly in terms of content.

Furthermore, Table 1 reveals that organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanics were rated Fair equally for both control group and experimental group. Whereas the control group was rated 2.5, 2.52, 2.6, and 2.33 respectively, the experimental group garnered the respective means of 2.43, 2.58, 2.6, and 2.32.

In Table 2, it indicated that there is a remarkable difference between the posttest mean ratings of the two groups of subjects. It could be gleaned on the table that the experimental group outperformed the control group in their posttest. Comparing the results of the posttests, the overall mean (3.57) of the experimental group interpreted as Very Good is relatively higher than the composite mean (3.15) of the control group described as Good. This result implies that the experimental group received higher amount of learning in their posttest. This indicates that the use of Ilokano songs as supplementary materials to teach descriptive paragraph has a very good effect to the learners. The result of this study jives with the tenet of Paquette and Rieg (2008) that integrating experiences with music in the classroom supports English language learners' literacy development. The findings further provide supports to the claim of Zoghi and Shoari (2015) that song utilization in an EFL class can have a significant affirmative effect in language learning. Moreover, it strengthens the thoughts of Ransdell and Gilroy (2001) that employing songs in language teaching accelerates the process of language learning.

Of the five indicators of writing performance, content obtained the highest rating for both groups registering 3.77 or Very Good for the experimental and 3.23 or Good for the control. This implies that the written outputs of the two groups are substantial. However, the higher rating of the experimental group manifests better learning experience they have received during the teaching-learning process. This means that the usage of songs as authentic materials possesses valuable effects in teaching students to organize a content-wise descriptive paragraph. The findings of the study reinforce the assertion of Abbott (2002) and Abdolmanafi-Rokni and Ataei (2014) that songs have the power to enrich the different components of language such as content and organization which was found by Wenyu and Qiufang (2002) in their study on the influence of L1 thinking in L2 writing. The intrinsic merits of songs in the content, organization, vocabulary and language use in descriptive writing also strengthens the theoretical argument of Shen (2009) that songs are effective tools in writing creative works. The results also complement the proposition of Paquette and Rieg (2008) that students' writing skills are enhanced when songs are implemented in the teaching process because of the learners' exposure to the themes and grammatical structures of the language.

On the other hand, mechanics came out as the least rated dimension of writing in the experimental group with a mean rating of 3.35 or Good. The result may be due to the absurdity and deviation on the use of punctuation marks and capitalization in the lyrics of the songs. In the case of control group, organization garnered the lowest rating of 3.12 interpreted as Good. This means that organizing thoughts into words and sentences seemed difficult in the posttest of the control group. The weakness of the experimental group in mechanics and the flaw of the control group in organization seem congruent to the findings of Wenyu and Qiufang (2002).

that the measured difficulties of Chinese students in writing were mostly vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Significant Difference between the Writing Performance Mean Scores of the Control Group and Experimental Group

To commence the problem, the data were subjected to Analysis of Variance to determine the significant difference between the performance mean scores of the two groups of subjects.

As indicated in Table 3, there exists a significant difference between the writing performance level of the control group and the experimental group as manifested by its overall mean difference of 1.033 and t-value of 7.974 at 0.01 level of significance. Given that overall, there is a significant difference between the performance mean scores of the two groups, it follows that the content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics of their written outputs are also significantly different at 0.01 probability level with their respective mean differences of 1.017, 1.133, 1.017, 0.967, and 1.033. This implies that the intervention used in the experimental study is effective. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the students' performance level in writing descriptive paragraph in the control and experimental groups is rejected.

The use of Ilokano songs as supplementary materials in teaching descriptive paragraph has been proven as effective in this study. The efficacy of the intervention supports the contention of Saslow, Ascher and Notarpietro (2007) that songs do not only improve teaching-learning encounter but also reinforce vocabulary, grammar and other aspects of the English language. In congruence, Li and Brand (2009) stated that music is a good way of teaching vocabulary, language use and meaning because the unknown words will create a sense of curiosity in the learners. Eventually, the participants' ability to write very good descriptive paragraph also boosts the claim of Neisa (2008) that music is essential to writing skills because it can arouse creative thinking and assist in the explications of subject for writing.

In this study, the use of Ilokano songs as supplementary materials in teaching descriptive paragraph was the core of the experimental research inquiry. Its limitations were based primarily on the nature of purposive sampling and the difficulty of random selection. The availability and convenience of the subjects, who are first year BS in Pharmacy students enrolled in English 2 (Writing in the Discipline), limited the sampling substantially.

To avoid threats to validity and reliability, each class was provided with the same amount of teaching-learning experience. Both classes: 1) had similar learning schedule (that is, 3:00-4:00 P.M., MWF, for the control class; and 4:00-5:00 P.M., MWF, for the experimental class; 2) had received similar number of teaching hours (one hour each meeting) and met three times a week; 3) had been taught similar writing lessons and had been given similar classroom activities; 4) had been given similar writing prompts/tasks; 5) had followed similar rhetorical writing pattern (descriptive); 6) had used similar writing materials (black/blue-inked pen and 8.5" x 13" coupon bond); 7) had created equal number of essay drafts (1 rough draft and 1 final draft); and 8) had been handled by the same teacher, who is the main author of this study. Similar rubrics were used to assess and score/grade students' descriptive paragraphs. Moreover, the drafts were rated/scored by three independent trained teacher-raters from the same college.

To handle halo effect on rating/scoring, the subjects were instructed not to write their real names on their drafts. Instead, student identification numbers were used in their papers for objectivity and ethical considerations. As regards

rating of drafts, the researchers were not involved in this activity.

V. CONCLUSION

The following conclusions were drawn in light of the findings of the current study. First, the experimental group's improved performance from the pretest relative to posttest was an indication that the Ilokano song intervention was effective. Second, the lower level of writing performance of the control group in their posttest was a manifestation that they were not able to write well-crafted outputs when the teacher used normal instruction that lack novelty and appeal. Lastly, there was a significant difference between the two groups of participants in their ability to produce descriptive paragraphs. The experimental group exhibited more interest in writing than the control group as reflected by the findings of the study. Students produced better written outputs when the lessons used Ilokano songs that they are familiar with, those that they could easily comprehend, and those that they found appealing in melody and tempo. In conclusion, Ilokano songs are generally commendable as instructional materials in teaching descriptive paragraph. Thus, the findings yielded in this study affirmed the theoretical assertions of Zoghi and Shoari (2015), Abbott (2002) and Mora (2000) that songs have significant effects on the students' language learning, especially in the components of descriptive writing, which Shen (2009), Paquette and Rieg (2008), and Neisa (2008) ignited in their studies.

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Corresponding Author :**Rommel V. Tabula***

TESOL Specialist, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna Tak, Tak, Thailand, rommeltabula127519[at]gmail[dot]com, ORCID No. 0000-0003-2691-6749)

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The Paper was presented in the “ 19th International Programme Committee Conference on ‘ Language on Society ’ at Washington Convention Centre, Washington, USA on 9th December 2017 and the paper is awarded “ **BEST PAPER AWARD** ” in the Category of ‘ LANGUAGE ’ for the month of November-2017 Issue.