

The Balanced Language Approach Program Based on Hangeul Characteristics and Its Impact on the Reading Motivation and Word Reading Ability of Young Children

Soon Hwan Kim¹⁾

Ewha Womans University

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the appropriate language approach method befitting the characteristics of the Korean alphabet, Hangeul, and after developing and applying a program based on a balanced language approach, to examine its effect on the reading motivation level and word-reading ability of young children. The participants of this study were 58 five-year-old children who were attending two kindergartens located in Seoul. For eight weeks, a balanced language approach-based program was administered to the test group of the kindergarteners, while the comparative group continued to participate in the whole language approach-based program. To evaluate the overall reading motivation level of the children, the "Me and My Reading Scale" by Gambrell, Palmer and Coding (1993) was used. To evaluate their word-reading skills, tools developed by Choi (2007) were used. The tests were administered prior to and after the program to all the participating children. In order to evaluate the effect of the balanced language approach, the difference between pre-program and post-program test scores for each group was analyzed through the matched paired t-test. After the eight-week program, the test group, which participated in the balanced language approach-based program showed a statistically significant improvement in reading motivation. The test group, which participated in the balanced language approach-based program, also showed a significantly higher development in word-reading than the comparative group, which participated in the whole language approach-based program.

Keywords : balanced language approach, Korean alphabet, reading motivation, word reading ability

Corresponding author, ¹⁾ksh6220@ewha.ac.kr

Introduction

Language is a means that enables human being to establish relations with each other and perform each one's task in everyday life. The communication between human being through which mutual relations are established is also achieved through written words, in addition to the vocalized form of language. Written language is created by changing meaningful vocal sound into written characters and using them, and through this process, humans are able to communicate more expansively. The use of systematic and creative vocalized language and written language is a characteristic unique to human being (Jalongo, 2000 ; Kim, Kim & Kim , 2006).

Early childhood is a very important time for language acquisition. Since early childhood is a critical period in which not only the foundation of language is formed but also literacy development begins to take shape, the issue of how particular linguistic stimulations are experienced during early childhood is significant as an indicator of the formation of the foundation for literacy development and the development of literacy ability in the later stage. The studies indicating that the early childhood literacy experience has a deep connection to the literacy ability and academic achievement later in primary school (Donat, 2006; Hwang, 2010; Jones, Martha et al., 2010; Reutzel & Fargo, 2010) further support the importance of literacy experience in early childhood. Of these, the study by Hussien (1998), which showed that reading motivation has an important impact on reading achievement and that reading ability improves with the increase in reading motivation, stipulated that increase in reading motivation is an important factor for perceiving the usefulness of reading and understanding its value. That is, the study indicated that reading motivation, signifying an intention to read and a positive feeling towards reading, is the primary goal of reading education which has the power to make continued reading possible (Morrow, 2001). Moffett and Wagner (1983) also noted that when reading motivation is increased by providing a wide and meaningful range of language experience to young children through storybook reading, questioning, writing from dictation, and small-group studying, children learn to enjoy reading on their own.

Since reading and writing in particular are fundamental and essential elements of learning, research and arguments have continued on the issue of how to efficiently teach reading and writing to young children, along with the importance of early childhood literacy education.

The arguments over the methods of reading and writing for young children are basically fueled by two divided approaches resulting from the changing perspectives regarding literacy development theories; namely, the traditional learning method of the code emphasis approach that emphasizes formal learning and the whole language approach that emphasizes meaning from the socio-psychological linguistic aspect (Adams, 1990). In recent times, however, as more attention is being paid to discussions on more effective teaching methods rather than to divisive arguments, emphasis is being placed on the need for a balanced approach that prescribes teaching both approach methods in a balanced manner (Fitzgerald, 1999; Morrow, 2001).

The whole language approach considers literacy development as a comprehensive and meaningful process (Lee, 2000). It refers to the belief and teaching strategy of interrelating the overall meaning of language in natural situations, while breaking away from artificial and segmented listening, speaking, reading and writing lessons (Lee, 2005). It involves not merely receiving thoughts through words but understanding the meaning of written words in interaction with the previous experiences or knowledge of the reader. However, according to Juel (1998), the whole language approach, since it focuses from the start on the high reading level of understanding the meaning of written words, leads to ignoring individual differences that occur in the process of learning to read. Because phonological awareness is the foundation of reading, it is important to have phonological representation and phonological awareness first and then be able to phonologically decode written words in order to do basic reading. Young children raised in a literacy environment lacking linguistic stimulation, however, do not acquire such basic reading skills and consequently cannot attempt to read. The situation becomes worse as the gap widens between such children and other young children who already possess reading skills.

Generally young children use two different types of strategies when reading. First of all when young children encounter a familiar word, they read it as a single entity without regard to the letters composing the word. As a single image, a familiar word is recognized like an ideogram without a separate decoding process. But when young children encounter a new or unknown word, they have to read the word by each separate letter (Bus & Van Ijzendor, 1999). Because whole-word language experience based on familiar words is emphasized in the whole language approach and hence it can enhance reading familiar words, however this

approach does not present a strategy for reading unfamiliar words. Also, a person who reads well, by using situational clues or context, is able to infer and comprehend the meaning of a word better than a person who has poor reading skills. Young children who cannot read well, however, attempt to read by inferring the meaning of words from the contextual information (Greg & Manabu, 2009; Joslin, 1994). Hence if word recognition does not automatically occur with speed and ease, a young child has to guess in recognizing a word by using situational clues or context. This attention to using contextual information for word recognition fills up the active memory to the limit and consequently a child is unable to utilize the contextual information for comprehension. Ultimately, without automatic, quick and accurate word recognition, the comprehension level is reduced. For accurate and quick word recognition, decoding training that can promote phonological encoding process must be provided at the same time (Lee, 2004). In order to read, young children must learn how to decode. Such decoding skill is not naturally acquired but learned through training (Hoff, 2007).

From this aspect the whole language approach has been much criticized and it began to fall out of favor for failing to teach the basic reading skills for young children. With the establishment of the National Reading Panel (2000), a government-supported institute, in the US in 1997, more effort was made to create a literacy environment where no child was left behind. Reading Their Way (RTW), developed as part of such effort, sought out a new reading method based on the balanced language approach. RTW embraced only the best aspects of the whole language approach and the code emphasis approach. It not only taught phonemic awareness and phonics, lower case awareness and spelling, but also emphasized the elements of contextual reading, writing and comprehension. Together with these elements, RTW's use of family-related decodable picture books resulted in high achievements. The emphasis of this approach is that young children, even if in the same age group, have different learning preparedness, tendencies and interests, and thus the teacher's educational treatment may differ depending on the individual student. This is the reason for implementing the balanced approach that emphasizes both the whole language approach and the code emphasis approach (Donat, 2006). In order for young children to read fluently, the method of grasping meaning from the overall context and the basic skills required for comprehension need to be taught together.

The pedagogic method developed to meet this need is the balanced language approach. That is, the balanced language approach is a teaching method that integrates the strengths of both the whole language approach and the code emphasis approach in a balanced way. It requires explicitly teaching the basic skills needed for reading and, at the same time, doing such teaching through familiar and meaningful reading combined with the existing knowledge of young children, as is done in the whole language approach (J. Oh, 2010). Since the 1980s, the whole language approach has come into wide use in Korea due to the influence of the US, and the belief in this teaching method is still maintained. However, although keenly following the trend change in the US toward criticizing the whole language approach, Korean researchers are currently exploring language teaching methods that take into account the characteristics of Hangeul, which differ from those of English, rather than uncritically embracing American language teaching methods (Lee, 2004; Lee, 2004; Song, 2005). While the societal and parental demands regarding literacy education are increasing, Kindergarten teacher is still experiencing confusion concerning the efficacy of the whole language approach and the code emphasis approach, and the debate continues on which approach is more suitable for young children learning Hangeul.

Languages of the world primarily have only one characteristic of being either a phonemic or syllabic alphabet and of being made of either phonograms or ideograms. Hangeul is a typical phonemic alphabet, with separate consonants and vowels. An alphabet with a phoneme, the smallest segment of utterance, as the most fundamental alphabetic unit is referred to as a phonemic alphabet. These phonemes collectively compose syllables and words (Lee, 2000). Hangeul is also written in syllabic unit blocks. Usually with a phonemic alphabet, writing by principle consists of placing the phonemes sequentially in a row, like in English. In contrast, writing is done in block units in a logographic writing system, such as Chinese, where each character forms a single meaningful word, and in a syllabic writing system, like Japanese, where each character represents one syllable. Hangeul, however, although it is a phonemic alphabet, follows a block-unit writing method where the consonants and vowels are bound in a single block unit as with a syllabic alphabet (Lee, 2004). Hangeul has a clear and regular sound-alphabet correspondence, and consists of phonograms that can express a rich range of sounds. Phonograms refer to alphabet expressing the sounds of speech as symbols. In Hangeul, with its consonants and vowels almost all utterances can be

expressed as they are sounded. Here the same sounds are always written with the same letters and the pronunciation of a given letter is always the same. That is, the same letter, no matter in which word it is included, is pronounced as the same sound, and thus a sound can be accurately expressed with a letter and a letter can be read accurately as a given sound. Since the pronunciation of a letter is always identical in Hangeul, it is easy to do phonetic transcription with the alphabet and it is also easy to learn spelling (S. Lee, 2008).

In terms of notation, Hangeul adopts ideographicism. Ideographicism refers to notating language not according to pronunciation but by segmenting the original nuclear morphemes in order to reveal the meaning of a word. Hence Hangeul adopts ideographicism that places more importance on meaning than sound in terms of notation. So Hangeul is a phonemic alphabet written in block-units like a syllabic alphabet and consists of phonograms yet adopts ideographicism in terms of notation. It is indeed a language of very peculiar qualities with contradictory linguistic duality (Lee, 2004). Depending on the language characteristics, for a phonemic alphabet and phonogram system, a bottom-up language teaching method based on phonology is more appropriate and requires training of distinguishing letters and repetitive training on phonological laws. More fitting for a syllabic alphabet and ideogram system is a comprehensive top-down language teaching method through which meaning of words are inferred and recognized based on much experience of words in everyday life and on situation and context (Stickland, 1998).

Arguments about these two language teaching methods continue to this day, but each has its strengths and weaknesses, and there is no single language teaching method that is more effective for all languages. When the dualistic characteristics of Hangeul are considered, it can be seen that teaching language by emphasizing one particular aspect cannot be an efficient language teaching method. Thus language teaching must be done based on the balanced approach where the whole language approach and the code emphasis approach achieve a balance. Meaningful language teaching is done through literary experience by applying the whole language approach, and a variety of phonological awareness activities must be provided to young children so that they can experience the correspondence between phonemes and graphemes (Morrow, 2001).

When the latest studies are examined, the majority opinion supports the balanced approach that embraces both the whole language and the code emphasis approaches, rather than leaning

toward one or the other, and teaches meaning and skills through various means as the best way to meet the diverse individual needs of young children. Therefore, in order to verify this view in the Korean environment, there is a need for a study on the effects of an effective language education approach appropriate for Hangeul characteristics. Domestically, studies on the awareness and literacy beliefs of teachers have been done (Lee, 2002; Lee, 2005; Heo, 2006; M. Oh, 2010), and studies comparing and verifying the effects of the whole language approach and the balanced language approach continue to be done (Lee, 2000; Lee, 2008; Hwang, 2010). However, there is not enough information to make generalizations from the results of these studies. Hence the aim of this study is to investigate the language approach appropriate for Hangeul characteristics, develop and apply a program based on a balanced language approach, and then by determining its impact on the reading motivation and word reading ability of young children, provide the basic data needed to establish the future direction for a more appropriate reading education of young children. The research questions selected for this study are as follows:

- In terms of improving young children's reading motivation, is there a difference between the balanced language approach program and whole language approach program based on Hangeul characteristics?
- In terms of improving young children's reading ability, is there a difference between the balanced language approach program and whole language approach program based on Hangeul characteristics?

Methods

Subjects

The subjects for this study are 58 five-year-old children attending 2 private kindergartens in Seoul. The two institutions are located in middle class communities with similar socio-economic backgrounds. The teachers at both institutions had equal teaching experience of four years. The subject institutions both engage in literacy activities based on the whole

language approach. In order to apply the balanced language approach based on Hangeul characteristics, the subject children were divided into a comparative group and a test group.

Instruments

Children's Language and Thinking Ability Test. This test was performed in order to verify the homogeneity of the test and comparative groups. The test tool developed by Joo Young-hee (1982) based on extraction and translation of the conversation details from the examination of young children by Black, Rose and Berlin (1978) and the activities of Peabody Language Development Kits developed by Dunn, Horton and Smith (1981) was used. The goal of the test was to determine the language, thinking and cognition development levels of children from ages 4 to 7. The composition of questions consists of four sub-tests, on perception-based function, analytical function, comprehensive function and reasoning function, and the whole test includes a total of 80 questions, with 20 questions for each sub-test. The scoring is on a five-point basis, from 0 to 4, with a possible total score range of 0 to 320 points. The test tool reliability calculated by the odd-even method was .75.

Reading Motivation Test. In order to test children's reading motivation, Gambrell, Palmer and Coding's (1993) Me and My Reading Scale modified to fit young children's level by Myung Hyeon-Ok (2001) was used. The test is composed of 14 questions, and after reading each question, the researcher checked the response of the child. Each question was scored on a scale of 1 to 3 points, and the points for each question were totaled for each child, with the score range from 12 to 36 points. The content validity of the test tool was verified by a child education specialist. The Cronbach's α of the test questions was shown to be .85.

Word Reading Ability Test. The tool developed by Choi Na-Ya (2007) was used to test word reading ability. This tool is composed of 20 each of real, similar, and low-frequency two-syllable words which are made to have a diversified CV/CVC syllable combination and a uniform distribution of consonants and vowels over initial, medial and final sounds by simple linguistic manipulation. Real words understandable at the subject children's age level were chosen. Similar words were created by changing the initial consonants of real words so that

they are phonologically valid for the Korean language but do not have any meaning. Low-frequency words were composed by using characters that are virtually or never used in the Korean language.

These different types of words were read in order by each category, and scoring for accurate reading of the words by syllable were based on a scale of 0, 1, and 2, for 40 points total for each category and 120 points total for the entire test. The Cronbach's α was shown to be .99 for real and similar words and .98 for low-frequency words.

Procedure

In order to determine the goodness-of-fit and turnaround time of the test tool, a preliminary testing was performed on 10 children from kindergarten A in Seoul. The reading motivation test was done by recording the response of a child to a chosen picture card, and the word reading ability test was done by having a child read in order from start to finish the words written on cards by each word type, as had been done in the preceding study (Choi, 2007). From the preliminary test results, no difficulty in test implementation or any other problem was found.

This study was done for two months, from April 6 to June 10, 2010. For 8 weeks, a balanced language approach-based program was applied to the test group children, while a whole language approach-based program, as in the past, was applied to the comparative group children. A pre-testing prior the program application and a post-testing after the program application were done on all of the subject children.

Six weeks before this study was launched, the researcher began assisting through theoretical review the participating test group teacher in understanding the characteristics and the teaching method of the balanced language approach, and together with the teacher, made a concrete plan for teaching Hangeul reading through the balanced language approach. During the 8 weeks in which the study took place, weekly consultation and review sessions were held with two child education experts to ensure the activities of the weekly teaching plan chosen by the researcher and the teacher were based on the balanced language approach.

The composition of the balanced language approach program was based on the study by Dahl and Scharer (2000), and it is divided into teacher-led activity, teacher/children-led

Table 1. *Activity and Activity Details*

Classification	Activity	Activity Detail
Teacher-Led Activity	Reading to a large group	- Predicting and discussing a book's content - Changing a story's content - Reading repeated words, new words and fun words
	Reading to a small group	- Finding out about the author or illustrator - Presenting contents of reading - Reading together
	Teaching reading	- Recognizing characters - Finding out about the formations of consonants and vowels - Finding out about punctuation marks and signs - Pronouncing characters with difficult pronunciations - Finding out about the meanings of difficult words - Finding out about the formation of characters
Teacher/Children-Led Activity	Reading and doing music together	- Making word cards from song lyrics - Reading to the beat of rhythmic instruments - Making boards with song lyrics written on them - Composing children's poetry
	Experiencing language	- Reading easy books - Finding fun passages in a book - Reading about favorite characters - Playing word chase games - Making up stories
	Helping with reading	- Finding out about reading attitudes - Reading together - Providing tape recordings of children's stories and poetry
Children-Led Activity	Play acting	- Reading the details of discussions about play acting - Writing and reading scripts together - Making posters - Making invitations and admission tickets
	Playing library	- Turning an area of the classroom into a library, making library cards and playing library - Children bringing books from home, swapping and reading them - Visiting an actual library, discussing and writing about the visit

activity, and children-led activity classifications. Based on the weekly education plans worked out under agreement by the test group and comparative group teachers, teacher-centered teaching and child-centered learning were combined in various ways to provide fluid and diverse data for group formation. For the test group, the balanced language approach-based program was implemented and diverse literacy environment configurations, teaching aids,

and picture books appropriate for the topics were chosen and provided. Although the daily life topics and application of the topics were identical, the test group teacher provided lessons that were differentiated from those of the comparative group teacher in terms of environmental configurations and after-class activity plans that allow balanced language approach-based individual interactions, large and small group learning, and balanced language education. The specific activities and details are given below.

Table 2. Test Group and Comparative Group Activity Detail Example

	Activity Type	Activity Name	Activity Detail
Test Group	Book Reading	We Are Family	Activity 1: First reading -Reading the title together -Anticipating the content from the cover -Reading the content -Recalling the content
			Activity 2: Second reading -Finding fun expressions in the story -Asking about difficult words -Finding onomatopoeia and mimetic words in the story -Reading the story in various ways
			Activity 3: Phonological awareness activity -Finding and reading onomatopoeia and mimetic words in the story -Choosing words to write down -Teacher demonstration of writing the selected words(teaching stroke order) -Child writing the selected words -Changing the vowels of the selected words and reading
	Free choice activity time	Language	-Reading the “We Are Family” book (individually) -Writing onomatopoeia and mimetic words
		Music	-Reading lyrics -Playing musical instruments and singing -Counting the word “Daddy” in the lyrics
		Math Manipulate	-After creating the face of each family member, describing the person’s role and identifying the person by name
Comparative Group	Book Reading		-Anticipating the content from the cover -Listening to the story and discussing impressions about it -Recalling the content
	Free choice activity time	Language	-Reading the book “We Are Family”
		Music	-Playing “Take Heart, Daddy” on an instrument
		Math, Manipulate	-Playing a game using the “Like Daddy Like Mommy” game board.

Data Analysis

In order to verify the homogeneity between the subject groups of children, the children's language and thinking ability scores were analyzed by using the two dependent samples t-test between the groups. Also, in order to verify the impact of the balanced program based on Hangeul characteristics on the children's reading motivation and word reading ability, the changes in reading motivation and word reading ability of the test and comparative groups prior to and after the application of the balanced program were investigated. The difference between pre-program and post-program test scores for each group was analyzed through the matched paired t-test.

Results

Language and Thinking Ability Test

The results of the language and thinking ability test performed to verify the homogeneity of the children are as follows. The test was done on two groups: the test group chosen for the balanced language approach program based on Hangeul characteristics and the comparative group chosen for the whole language approach. The language and thinking ability test scores for the two groups (Joo, 1982) are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3. *Language and Thinking Ability Test on Children's Groups* *n*=29

Classification	Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Language and Thinking Ability Test	Comparative Group	273.21	19.28	1.87
	Test Group	260.79	30.67	

Examination of the language and thinking ability scores of the subject groups showed that the average language and thinking ability scores for the comparative group and the test group were 273.21 (*SD*=19.28) and 260.79 (*SD*=30.67), respectively. With *t*=1.87, the averages of

the two groups did not show a statistically significant difference. The two groups therefore can be considered homogeneous.

Children's Reading Motivation

In order to find out whether there is any effect on the reading motivation of young children by the balanced language approach program based on Hangeul characteristics, the pre- and post-program tests of reading motivation for the comparative and test groups were compared and the results are given in Table 4 below.

Table 4. *Effect on Children's Reading Motivation* n=29

Classification		Test Period	Reading Motivation	Reading Motivation Score Difference	<i>t</i>
			<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Reading Motivation	Comparative Group	Pre-Program Test	26.24(3.52)	1.93(3.28)	2.24*
		Post-Program Test	28.17(2.83)		
	Test Group	Pre-Program Test	25.62(3.86)	3.65(2.53)	
		Post-Program Test	29.38(2.91)		

* $p < .05$

Examination of the reading motivation pre-program test scores showed that the average scores of the comparative group and the test group were 26.24 ($SD=3.52$) and 25.62 ($SD=3.86$), respectively.

There was a difference in the average scores but no statistically significant difference was shown. Comparison of the pre- and post-program tests done to determine the impact of the balanced language approach program on children's reading motivation showed a statistically significant difference ($t=2.24$, $p < .05$) in the post-program test scores between the comparative and test groups.

That is, it can be garnered that the balanced approach based on Hangeul characteristics has a positive effect on young children's reading motivation

Children's Reading Ability Development

In order to find out whether the balanced language approach program based on Hangeul characteristics has an improvement effect on children's reading ability, the pre- and post-program test score differences for the comparative and test groups' reading ability sub-tests (real words, similar words, and low-frequency words) and overall reading ability tests were compared. The results are given in Table 5 below.

Table 5. *Improvement Difference in the Real Words Sub-Test of the Reading Ability Test*

Classification		Test Period	Reading Score	Reading Score Difference	<i>t</i>
			<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Real Words	Comparative Group	Pre-Program Test	33.03(12.83)	1.38(3.40)	2.30*
		Post-Program Test	34.41(10.09)		
	Test Group	Pre-Program Test	33.62(8.82)	3.41(3.33)	
		Post-Program Test	37.03(7.46)		

* $p < .05$

Comparison of the pre- and post-program test results between the groups to determine the effect of the balanced language approach program on children's reading ability showed the test group to have a higher score difference ($M=3.41$) than the comparative group ($M=1.38$) for the real words sub-test of the word reading ability test, showing a statistically significant difference ($t=2.30$, $p<.05$). That is, in terms of the real words sub-test, it can be garnered that the reading ability of the test group children improved from the balanced approach program.

Comparison of the pre- and post-program test results between the groups to determine the effect of the balanced language approach program on children's reading ability showed the test group to have a higher score difference ($M=3.72$) than the comparative group ($M=1.21$) for the similar words sub-test, showing a statistically significant difference ($t=2.65$, $p<.05$). That is, it can be garnered that the reading ability of the test group children improved from the balanced approach program in terms of the similar words sub-test of the children's word reading ability test.

Table 6. *Improvement Difference in the Similar Words Sub-Test of the Children's Reading Ability Test*

Classification		Test Period	Reading Score	Reading Score Difference	<i>t</i>
			<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Similar Words	Comparative Group	Pre-Program Test	30.28(13.58)	1.21(3.50)	2.65*
		Post-Program Test	31.48(11.86)		
	Test Group	Pre-Program Test	30.97(11.71)	3.72(3.71)	
		Post-Program Test	34.69(8.92)		

* $p < .05$

Table 7. *Improvement Difference in the Low-Frequency Words Sub-Test of the Children's Reading Ability Test*

Classification		Test Period	Reading Score	Reading Score Difference	<i>t</i>
			<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Low-Frequency Words	Comparative Group	Pre-Program Test	22.41(13.65)	.59(4.26)	3.64**
		Post-Program Test	23.00(14.09)		
	Test Group	Pre-Program Test	22.76(13.51)	4.45(3.80)	
		Post-Program Test	27.21(12.62)		

** $p < .01$

Comparison of the pre- and post-program tests between the groups to determine the effect of the balanced language approach program on children's reading ability showed the test group to have a higher score difference ($M=4.45$) than the comparative group ($M=.59$) for the low-frequency words sub-test, showing a statistically significant difference ($t=3.64$, $p<.01$). That is, it can be garnered that the reading ability of the test group children improved from the balanced approach program in terms of the low-frequency words sub-test of the children's word reading ability test.

Examination of the post-program test scores to determine the effect of the balanced language approach program, on improving children's reading ability showed the average scores of the comparative group and the test group to be 85.72 ($SD=38.59$) and 88.90

Table 8. *Improvement Difference in Children's Reading Ability*

Classification		Test Period	Reading Score	Reading Score Difference	<i>t</i>
			<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>M(SD)</i>	
Reading Ability	Comparative Group	Pre-Program Test	85.72(38.59)	3.17(8.11)	3.96***
		Post-Program Test	87.34(32.14)		
	Test Group	Pre-Program Test	88.90(34.96)	11.59(8.06)	
		Post-Program Test	98.93(27.34)		

*** $p < .001$

($SD=34.96$), respectively. There was a slight difference in the average scores but it was not statistically significant. Comparison of the pre- and post-program test scores of the comparative and test groups subsequent to implementing the balanced language approach showed a statistically significant difference ($t=3.96$, $p<.001$) in the overall reading ability test results. That is, it can be garnered that the balanced approach program based on Hangeul characteristics has a positive effect on improving children's word reading ability.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the appropriate language approach method befitting the characteristics of the Korean alphabet, Hangeul, and after developing and applying a program based on a balanced language approach, to examine its effect on the reading motivation level and word-reading ability of young children. The discussion of the study results is given below.

First, in terms of improving children's reading motivation, the group under the balanced language approach-based program showed statistically significant improvement compared to the group under only the whole language approach. Reading motivation is valuable as an important strategy for recognizing the usefulness and value of reading, for helping to construct meaning which is the final objective of reading, and for supporting independent reading. When studies that mention the importance of reading motivation are examined,

Clifton (1990) asserts that enhancing reading motivation is an effective strategy for supporting independent reading for a young child and establishing the goal of reading, and that in order to improve reading ability, reading motivation must be enhanced by providing a young child with ample linguistic experience of meaningful situations and of communicative characteristics of language such as grapheme-phoneme correspondence (Moffett and Wagner, 1983). Therefore, in order to have a young child read fluently, the method of grasping meaning from the overall context and the basic functions needed for decoding must be taught together through the balanced language approach (Hwang, 2010). Also in this study, following the same vein as the view that the basic skills needed for reading should be explicitly taught, and that as in the whole language approach, motivation should be continuously nurtured through reading integrated with the knowledge already possessed by and familiar and meaningful to young children (J. Oh, 2010), the subject children were induced to participate in reading through experiencing the balanced language approach program based on Hangeul characteristics that nurtured the desire to read and through the systematic and direct experience that built confidence. This overall process is seen to have provided the opportunity for improving young children's reading motivation.

Second, comparison of the increase in the children's word reading ability from the pre- and post-program tests on the two subject groups showed that, in the case of the group under just the whole language approach-based program, there was no significant impact on word reading ability development; whereas, in the case of the group under the balanced language approach-based program, the effect on word reading ability development was shown to be statistically significant. This proves the effectiveness of the balanced language approach-based program for word reading. This also conforms to the conclusion that the balanced program is effective in young children's reading development, which had been reached in previous research such as the study on the effect of literacy program on young children's reading and writing development (Lee, 2000) and the study on the development and application effect of balanced children's program (S. Lee, 2008). Moreover, considering the results from previous research on the effect of alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness and processing ability (Choi, 2007), on the development and effect of literacy program based on Hangeul characteristics (Lim, 2007) and on children's reading and writing education appropriate for Hangeul characteristics (Lee, 2004), it can be said the balanced language approach appropriate for

Hangeul characteristics is effective in developing young children's word reading skills.

In the balanced language education approach, language experience must be provided to young children within meaningful situations and contexts, and at the same time, word awareness and understanding must also be promoted. In order to implement this education method, Strickland (1998) and Fowler (1998) recommend adopting a whole-part-whole method in the balanced language education approach. Accordingly, in this study, the first stage consisted of presenting writings that include the reading skills to be taught and then having discussions about meaning. In this stage, inducing reading motivation was emphasized more than accurate pronunciation. The second stage consisted of explicitly teaching the basic functions of reading (part) where the children learn to distinguish the consonant and vowel shapes and sounds as well as learn to construct characters with consonants and vowels and read them. Once code-based reading of characters is achieved to some extent, the children are able to read almost all easy words although they may not understand the meanings. The third stage consists of discarding the analytical code emphasis approach after reaching the level of reading almost all easy words and then proceeding with teaching by returning to the meaning emphasis approach to understand or construct meaning (whole). As such, the balanced language education approach is a third approach that bridges the teacher-centric teaching method and the child-centric whole language approach and consists of the activities that accomplish equally the three dimensions of reading "to the child," "with the child," and "by the child" (Hwang, 2010).

Therefore reading at a child education institution should be started as a whole process that takes into account the level and the interests of the children. There also should be faith in the functional use of reading, and the techniques and strategies for phonological awareness, word awareness, and understanding of spelling, which had not been part of a whole language program, should be treated with importance (Lee, 2000; J. Lee, 2008). Accordingly, in the literacy approach based on the balanced language approach, there is a need to develop diverse language programs that can apply the faith in the whole and code emphasis approaches in a balanced manner. Instead of uncritical acceptance of foreign education methods, there is a need to develop a program appropriate for the characteristics of Korea and Hangeul. Recently multiracial nations have been adopting, as a new trend in the balanced language approach, the assessment-oriented teaching method that demands more academic teaching (Lee, 2004; Song,

2005). This is connected to the educational goals of the nations seeking to raise their educational level through academic teaching methods. In the case of Korea, already overflowing with private education of reading and writing, diverse approaches and programs appropriate for Korea's environment and circumstances should be developed by incorporating defining elements such as reading motivation, interest, and attitude, rather than the cognitive aspects of reading.

The limitation of this study and suggestions for subsequent studies are as follows. This study investigated the effect of the balanced language approach on word reading ability. Aside from examining the effect on word reading ability, further study can be done on the effect of the balanced language approach on sentence reading or writing. Since the effect of reading motivation on word reading is shown to be significant, the investigation of what impact positive attitude or motivation with respect to reading has on the overall literacy ability should be continued. Also, in implementing the balanced language approach, the teacher's awareness or attitude appears to have an important effect. Hence further study can be done on how the effect of the balanced language approach appears differently depending on the teacher's education level, awareness, and attitude. Finally, in terms of sample size and study period, there is a limitation to generalizing the results of this study. A follow-up study should be done in which the balanced language approach is applied to a more diverse sample of young children's education institutions over a longer period.

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