Boost Sight Reading Skills of Students Using Melodic Ostinato

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Abstract
The purpose of the study was to boost the sight-reading skills of the grade six students through the use of melodic ostinato patterns as a strategy. Prior to the demonstration teaching, information about the current status of music education in the provincial setting was gathered and generated through field observations and interviews with selected students and music teachers. It was noted that teachers who handled music classes were not really music major graduates. This served as one factor why the application of musical concepts particularly in sight-reading was not given emphasis in the classroom teaching. Guided by Orff, Campbell and Scott-Kassner's philosophy of sequential learning, a strategic framework that uses the *melodic ostinato* patterns with three phases: (1) rhythm patterns (2) melodic patterns (3) part-singing, was created as a guide in teaching sight-reading. The study was implemented to twenty-three (23) students in Marinduque province. There were individual and group skills tests and performance-based tests given to assess the strength of the student's sight-reading ability. Findings indicated that sight-reading plays a significant role in the development of student's music literacy. Since *melodic ostinato* patterns were executed repeatedly, it increases retention on the pitch, rhythm, and duration of notes and rests. The summary of scores showed that through simple *melodic ostinato* patterns, students' sight-reading skills can be developed upon following the step by step procedure outlined in this study. The students were able to read musical score through individualized and group interpretations. And having been able to sight-read, it allowed the students to perform larger piece of music like part singing.

Keywords: melodic ostinato, sight-reading, part-singing, music education, music literacy

Introduction

One of the most important goals that a music educator should strive for is to assist their students in becoming self-sufficient learners. Fast, accurate sight-reading is one of the skills that will help a teacher and student reach this goal. Sight-reading ability directly affects the speed and quality of the student's music literacy, especially for those at the elementary levels. (Kuo, 2012) In the Philippines, music instruction in sight-reading for some schools is typically challenging. In spite of the utilization of the new K-12 music curriculum, the reality in meeting the objectives and standards may be less than adequate. Furthermore, the difficulty in teaching sight-reading in the classroom increases due to different factors such as teacher quality and development; readiness in coping with the new curriculum; dearth of relevant materials and funding; and implementation of music literacy and assessment in the classroom. (NCCA, 2017)

With these in mind, an interview and diagnostic test in chosen schools in the province of Marinduque, Philippines were conducted to find out the current situation of music literacy and instructions in sight-reading. According to Mrs. Aracelli M. Rolluqui, the school directress of Escuela de Gratia Plena, teaching sight-reading has always been an ongoing problem in their school because they don't have a trained music teacher. Therefore, the school's music curriculum focused mainly on the theoretical aspects with less emphasis given to the application of musical concepts. It was evident from the result of the diagnostic tests that more than half of the total number of grade six students can identify basic musical concepts and can visually recognize musical symbols. However, students have difficulties in interpreting the musical notations.

The researcher thus initiated to do a thorough study that aimed to apply effective strategies using *melodic ostinato* patterns in sight-reading. It aimed to promote the development of music literacy that will reduce the percentage of elementary students who cannot read music at sight.

Based on the purpose stated above, the following questions were explored: (a) Is the strategy of using *melodic ostinato* patterns effective in sight reading? (b) Did the students develop music literacy through this strategic design? (c) What is the effect of *melodic ostinato* patterns on student's sight-singing achievement?

The researcher believed that students should not be taught using the rote method alone. They were expected to learn how to interpret musical notations independently. It is through *melodic ostinato* patterns that students can better create and understand character of simultaneously sounding pitches, their meaning, relationships, and usage in the musical piece. In this strategy, students who develop better sight-reading skills will learn new music faster, improve accuracy and increase their level of self-confidence, while singing in harmony will add an exciting dimension and appreciation to their musical experiences.

Review of Related Literature

The development of sight-reading abilities requires some set of skills such as pitch and rhythm reading; it relies upon preformed internal auditory representation of pitches or pitch relations (Gudmundsdottir, 2010). There are several philosophies about pedagogical tools and the appropriate age to introduce reading music from a

staff. Amongst music educators, better sight-readers tend to be better performers. This philosophy is parallel to Holmes (2009) instruction on the development of sight-singing skills which states that the ability to read and notate music is considered to be an essential ingredient of musical understanding and is vital to independent musical performance. According to Dr. Michelle L. Louer (2016), singing is the fundamental basis of students' music education; and it therefore is placed at the center of all their musical activities. Singing, in particular, is an ideal tool for developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in a holistic way. Similarly, it develops personal meaning for the child by relating specific vocabulary to his or her schema. (Huffman, 2017)

Studies on "Elemental Music Making" by Watson (2017), which uses the Orff approach, showed that rhythm is the most important part of music-making. All learning is through active participation, and children had difficulty learning how to read or write music until they have a basic sense of rhythm and melody. The inner intonation was used by Yang (2014) in his classroom teaching, which was initially formed by practicing intervals in sight-singing and through familiarization of relationships among basic pitches and sounds. Irish and O'Reilly (1999) affirmed this study in their Music Arts Education Teacher Guidelines which showed that the most vital departure in the performing strand is the inclusion of music literacy as an integral element of song singing.

The study by Huffman (2017), stated that *ostinati* enhanced repetitive stories that were based on cumulative language. He stressed that any rhythmic, rhyming verse that fits a steady beat works well with this strategy. *Ostinati* can include speech, song, body percussion, instruments, and movement. Findings showed that from keeping a steady beat, the child progresses to an awareness of the rhythm pattern and later to an *ostinato*. Moreover, in the study of musical skill development done by Tucker (2007), it emphasized that students are required to master automaticity, the ability to perform a task through repetition and drill without thinking consciously about it.

The study of Noyes (2010), showed that singing in harmony is an interesting, motivating, and rewarding skill for children. It is a skill which should be sequentially developed by utilizing appropriate activities and materials. Two part-singing, as used by Chris Moore (2013), showed that the voices adjust and balance with each other, and the advantages of singing in two parts can hardly be overestimated. Furthermore, Casarow (2016) explained that the path to harmony must first be paved with a clear unison sound. Beginning with a simple rhythmic *ostinato* and moving towards *melodic ostinati.*

Framework and Methodology

The concepts presented in this study were guided by the principles of Orff, Campbell, and Scott-Kassner. They believed in the sequential methods of teaching wherein students were expected to master a specific skill before proceeding to the next. Combining Orff's approach of allowing the learners to use various activities while learning rhythm patterns, applying imitation strategies during part-singing was believed to be an effective strategy which leads to better sight-reading skills.

Carl Orff specified that rhythm is considered the foundation of music-making, with acknowledgment of the rhythm of spoken language as its source. Beginning experiences are designed to awaken the natural human rhythmic sense and to reinforce and use it as a primary component in expanding musical ability. Orff's starting point is rhythm. He believes it to be the basis of all music, even stronger than melody. (Walter, 1958) Rhythm was first introduced as growing out of speech patterns by using rhythmic accents of the spoken language. He treats language as being inseparable from music and movement. All of this was learned through experience rather than explanation because Orff believes insight into first-hand experience of life "develops, unaided, its first principles." (Pleasants, 1956)

After the speech patterns were enhanced, come after were bodily movements. Here, rhythmical formulas were interpreted by clapping, stamping, and dancing. These exercises were used to accompany single instrumental melodies, speech patterns, and songs. Walter (1959) states that melody was made to grow out of rhythm. It begins by using a range of only two notes.

Then, the researcher referred to Patricia Shehan Campbell and Carol Scott-Kassner (1995) who discussed part-singing. When children have developed the perceptual and productive skills that come with singing in tune, the next natural stage is to sing in harmony. In testing children's ability to sing in independent groups, songs with active melodies were sung simultaneously with a sustained pitch. Among the first attempts of singing in parts is the use of a repeated melodic pattern or *ostinato* to accompany the melody. *Ostinato* parts were created by examining the melody for its harmonic possibilities, and sampling on a pitched instrument one or two measure segments that go well harmonically with each measure of the song.

This research was guided by the strategic framework shown in Figure no. 1. The framework exhibits how melodic ostinato patterns were used as a strategy in teaching sight-reading to the elementary grade students. There were three strategies executed consecutively. As a preparatory activity, observations and interviews were conducted to determine the students' musical literacy specifically in reading and singing notes. Moreover, a diagnostic test was given as an initial assessment to identify student's weaknesses and strengths regarding the interpretation of musical concepts. Execution of the detailed learning-activities follow. At the end of every meeting, the researcher evaluated the skills of students to prove the effectiveness of the given strategies.

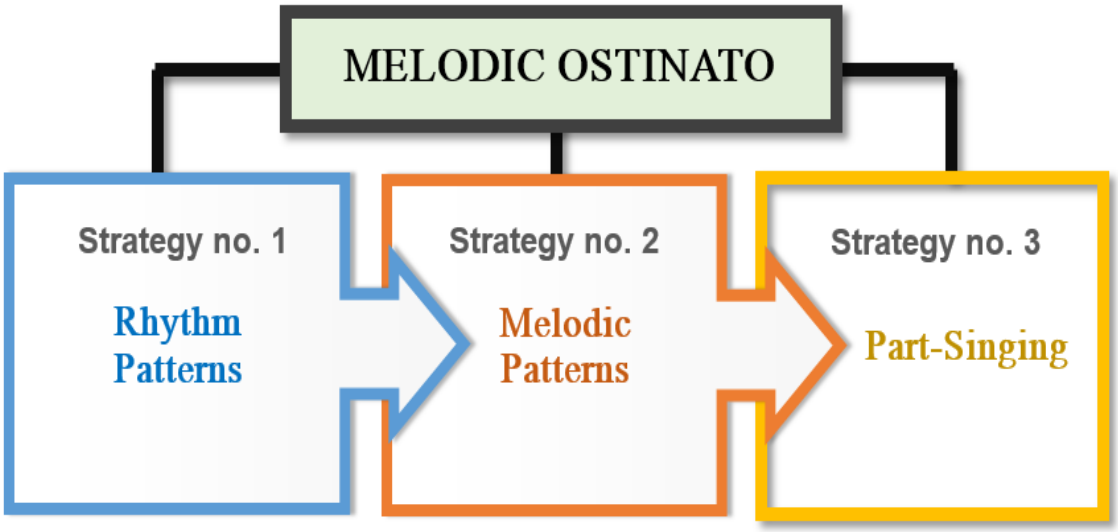

Figure No. 1: Strategy Framework in Teaching Sight Reading

In the first part of the process, the researcher builds up a sense of rhythm by introducing the four kinds of notes and rests. The second step was to learn how to read and clap the rhythm patterns with correct durations in 2/2 and 4/4-time signature. These rhythm patterns were repetitively studied until the students obtained mastery. It was a concept that will help develop students' sight-reading skills. In the next step, the short rhythm patterns formulated from the learned songs *Magtanim ay Di Biro* and *Magsayaw Magsaya* were introduced and executed through reading, chanting, clapping, and eventually involve body movements. By executing the rhythmic patterns repeatedly, the students get fast retention in the beats and accurate duration of each note and rest. This technique was significant for the grade six students who don't have a background in sight-reading.

The most efficient way to build up a sense of pitch accuracy is through singing. In the second part of the process, the students sang the notes of the C major scale and determined the intervals of one note to another using tonal movements. The tonal movements used were stepwise, skips and repetition. Then, the rhythm patterns from the previous strategy was notated melodically using the notes of the C Major scale**.** It was repeatedly sang using the sol-fa syllables. Motivating the students to learn was a vital part in learning. Therefore, to be proficient in singing the melodic patterns, games like the question and answer game, and guessing the tune by pairs were incorporated. The goal of this strategy was to create a fun environment while learning.

After pitch retention was acquired, the notated patterns sang with sol-fa syllables were incorporated with words and lyrics. Words used in the exercises were composed of the lyrics of the learned songs *Magtanim ay Di Biro* and *Magsayaw Magsaya*. The rhythm patterns and melodic patterns learned in strategy 1 and 2 were used as materials in part singing. These *melodic ostinato* patterns were in key of C major and consist of 8 measures for each set. Notes moved stepwise, skip wise and in repetitive manner. The intervals were ranging from unison, minor second (m2) up to perfect fifth (P5). From these patterns, the students were encouraged to create harmony through part-singing. While singing the melodic ostinato patterns concurrently with the main melody of the songs, harmonic lines were produced. And for a better

dynamics in the harmonization, it was reiterated to sing the *melodic ostinato* softer than the main melody of the song.

The study was implemented to twenty-three (23) sixth-grade students of Escuela de Gratia Plena, in the third quarter of the school year 2016-2017. It is a private educational institution located at Sta. Cruz Marinduque, Philippines. It covered nine (9) meetings during the third grading period of the school year 2016-2017. New materials, nine (9) learning plans for forty-five (45) minutes class, and assessment tools were incorporated. At the end of each strategy, the teacher evaluated each of the students' performance in class. It was in the form of individual and small group assessment. For individual tests, students sight-read the given *melodic ostinato* patterns using sol-fa syllables and with words/lyrics. In group test, they were evaluated according to their performance in part singing. The teacher based the assessments in the given rubrics (see Figure no. 2) which contain specific criteria to evaluate the skills of students in sight-reading new sets of rhythmic and melodic patterns.

Skills Test in Music
Escuela de Gratia Plena Inc.
School Year 2016-2017

Skills Tests No. 3: Melodic Ostinato Date: _____

CRITERIA	Sing the melodic patterns with accurate pitch	Sing the melodic patterns with accurate rhythm	Keep a steady beat while singing the melodic ostinato patterns	Pronounce fluently the words of the melodic ostinato patterns	**TOTAL**
1. Student A					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					

Manner of Grading
5 : Excellent 4 : Very Good 3 : Good 2 : Fair

Figure No. 2: Rubrics of Skills Test no. 3

Assessment Results and Findings

Skills Tests

The researcher's reflection during the study offered some interesting findings. In Skills Test no. 1 the student's ability in reading and clapping sets of rhythmic patterns were measured. First, it was observed that few students can hardly identify the names, symbols, and values of notes and rests. Second, the student's efficiency in recognizing individual notes was observed, subsequently repetitive drills of the patterns. They began to interpret the rhythm patterns independently towards the end of the lesson. Results of the skills test show that students who hardly identified the value and symbols of notes and rests, spent more time in interpreting the rhythmic patterns than

those students who can recognize the symbols by first sight. Students who interpreted rhythmic notations independently became enthusiastic about the new way of learning, and so they were eager to learn more pieces of music.

There were some technical issues observed as the singing of melodic patterns began. The initial observation during this strategy showed that singing with a starting tone given by a human voice was more effective than referring to a musical instrument. At the beginning of the process, some students had difficulty in singing the correct pitch of the notes. Moreover, the researcher also noticed that most of the students tend to be out of tune while singing intervals of P4 (C to F) and M6 (C to A). These patterns were repeated in a slow and fast tempo until the retention of a single pitch appeared to be independent. Notes F and A were also stressed to articulate the correct musical phrase. As a result of Skills Test no.2, 75% of the total number of students sang confidently the given melodic notations. Students performed the patterns without relying on their teacher and the keyboard. To reinforce learning specifically the correct pitch of each note, students were advised to exercise singing at home since mastery of these skills require time and continuous practice. It was a good starting point for the students to strive more as it was their first time to do this kind of activity. It is hoped that later on they will be able to sight-read a larger piece of music.

In the next strategy, it was observed that few students took time to process the correct execution of the melodic ostinato patterns. Along with recognizing the musical symbols and the correct rhythmic patterns, students also needed to execute them at a given pace. At the beginning of the process, they thought singing notes was easy, but considering all the elements to be followed, they realized that it was challenging. The contextual and expressional aspects created in the process of learning further challenges the students to perform independently. The repetitive interpretation of the rhythmic and melodic patterns in the first two strategies were essential in learning how to execute the melodic ostinato patterns by sight. During their skills tests, they were able to sing repeated melodic patterns with correct pitch, rhythm and proper voice projection using sol-fa syllables even if it wasn't free of errors. It was noted that the key to retention of a skill in sight-reading is the relentless correct repetition of it.

In Skills Test no. 4 (see Figure no. 3), it was observed that the student's ability in sight-reading the *melodic ostinato* patterns with words/lyrics became faster and more precise. Although there was a tendency for an overly projected voices, students were reminded to modulate it into soft singing. Part of the process was to understand the production of a good quality of voices. Another important thing to emphasize on was their improved pronunciation of words. Through these simple patterns, the students appreciated singing and gained interest in reading more musical notations.

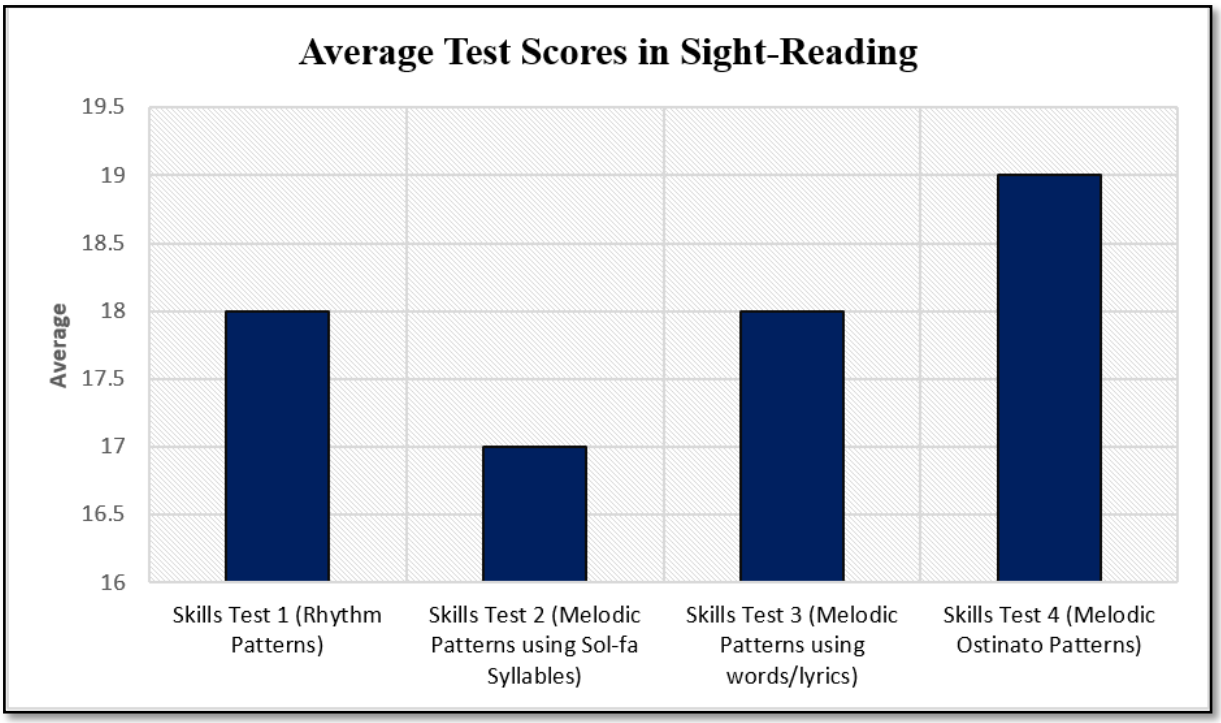

Figure No. 3: Average Test Scores in Sight-reading

Performance Based Test

Through the step by step process using the *melodic ostinato* patterns in boosting the students' sight-reading skills, it necessarily connects their reading ability with their performance ability. During their performance-based tests, students were challenged to perform the songs in two part-singing. They were assigned into two groups to sing the main melody of the song simultaneously with the *melodic ostinato* patterns. Creating harmony through part singing became easy for the students since they went through the sequential process of learning. Their dynamics were well-balanced for everyone to hear the harmony of the piece.

The results of the skills tests and performance-based tests are detailed in Figure No. 4. The average of the combined tests (see Figure no. 5) were measured based on the performance indicator as shown in figure no. 6. Findings showed that six (6) students or 26% of the total class population obtained an excellent performance. Eleven (11) out of 23 students, which is 48% of the total class population, achieved a very good performance. Four (4) students or 17% got a good performance while only two (2) or 9% obtained a fair performance. In general, the results of performance-based tests reflect the time and effort of the students in learning how to read notes accurately by sight.

NAME OF STUDENTS	SKILLS TEST				TOTAL 40%	CULMINATING ACTIVITY		TOTAL 60%	GRAND TOTAL 100%
	ST 1.0	ST 2.0	ST 3.0	ST 4.0		CA 1.0	CA 2.0		
Student No. 1	17	16	14	15	**31**	23	22	**54**	**85**
Student No. 2	20	19	18	19	**38**	25	24	**58.8**	**96.8**
Student No. 3	18	16	19	19	**36**	23	22	**54**	**90**
Student No. 4	19	18	18	18	**36.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**95.3**
Student No. 5	18	19	18	19	**37**	23	22	**54**	**91**
Student No. 6	20	19	19	19	**38.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**97.3**
Student No. 7	18	19	19	18	**37**	23	22	**54**	**91**
Student No. 8	17	16	14	14	**30.5**	23	22	**54**	**84.5**
Student No. 9	18	18	19	18	**36.5**	23	22	**54**	**90.5**
Student No. 10	18	18	19	18	**36.5**	23	22	**54**	**90.5**
Student No. 11	19	18	19	18	**37**	25	24	**58.8**	**95.8**
Student No. 12	17	16	18	18	**34.5**	23	22	**54**	**88.5**
Student No. 13	17	19	18	18	**36**	23	22	**54**	**90**
Student No. 14	18	16	18	18	**35**	23	22	**54**	**89**
Student No. 15	17	19	18	19	**36.5**	23	22	**54**	**90.5**
Student No. 16	20	18	19	19	**38**	25	24	**58.8**	**96.8**
Student No. 17	19	16	18	18	**35.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**94.3**
Student No. 18	20	18	19	20	**38.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**97.3**
Student No. 19	20	18	19	19	**38**	25	24	**58.8**	**96.8**
Student No. 21	19	18	18	18	**36.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**95.3**
Student No. 21	20	18	17	18	**36.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**95.3**
Student No. 22	19	18	18	18	**36.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**95.3**
Student No. 23	19	18	18	18	**36.5**	25	24	**58.8**	**95.3**

Legend:
CA- Culminating Activity
ST- Skills Test
ST 1.0 & ST 2.0 - Group Test
ST 3.0 & ST 4.0 - Individual Test

Figure no. 4: Results of the Skills Tests and Performance-Based Tests

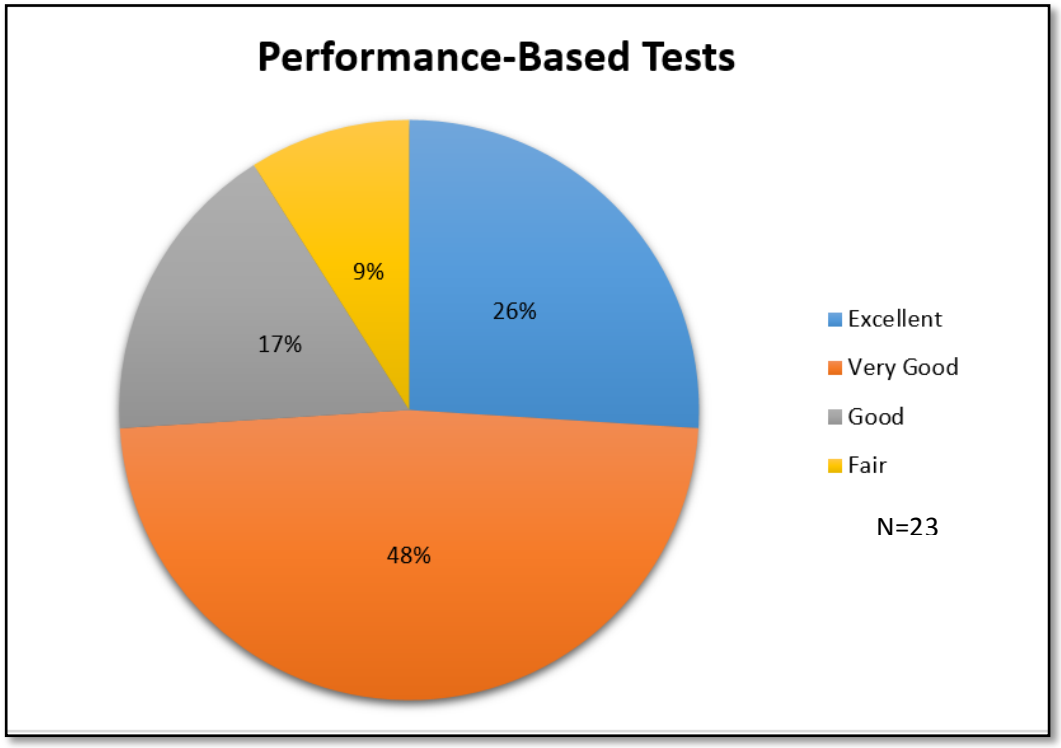

Figure No. 5: Results of the Performance-Based Tests

RATING	EQUIVALENT
96- 100 %	EXCELLENT
91-95 %	VERY GOOD
86-90 %	GOOD
80-85%	FAIR
75-79 %	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
70-74%	FAILED

Figure No. 6: Performance Indicator

Students' Reflection

Students showed their appreciation as they answered a short reflection paper. They recognized that the process of learning was engaging and fun. According to them, *melodic ostinato* helped them to recall the pitch and rhythm of the notes. One student mentioned that at first, it was hard for her to hit the right notes, but upon the repetitive practice using *melodic ostinato patterns*, she became skillful in singing notes with correct pitch. Another student regarded part-singing as a challenge but the sequential process of using melodic ostinato patterns improved their way of learning. Most students also expressed their desire to have more similar activities in the remaining quarter.

Music Teacher's Remarks

As a remark from the school music teacher, he found *melodic ostinato* as an effective strategy to improve further his teaching skills in note-reading. According to him, the demonstration teaching was an eye-opener to teachers who are hesitant to teach music because they lack the skills needed to interpret musical notations. Upon using the same strategy in his music classes in the succeeding quarter, results showed a more meaningful process of learning. His music classes became more engaging and interactive. He started to maximize the utilization of the anchor charts posted in the classroom. The listening materials he used became more suitable for the students' age and level.

Conclusion

There are three main strengths of the study. First, it has allowed the interactions of the students in the process of learning how to sight-read. To sight-read music successfully, students learned how to read and clap rhythm patterns, sing the correct pitch the notes with different tonal movements, and execute simultaneously sets of rhythmic and melodic patterns using sol-fa syllables and words. Students also paid attention to the other musical symbols written in the score. These are elements that comprised the overall structure of the music like time signature, tempo, dynamic marks, and phrasing. Being able to sight-read, students became open to explore new things like part-singing. Students had the opportunity to express themselves and appreciate singing while creating two-part voices. The results of the study coincide

with Orff's description that students further develop their music literacy with continuous note reading and singing.

Secondly, this study is socially valuable that it aids the problem of Escuela de Gratia Plena in the interpretation of musical concepts, particularly in sight-reading. To better understand a concept, it should pass through our senses first. This study allowed the students to develop their ability to sing at their own speed—it takes time, experience, and progression. The students who have less experience in this skill application proved that *melodic ostinato* is an effective strategy in developing their musical literacy.

Lastly, this research served as a helpful strategy for the school who doesn't have a trained music teacher. It helped Escuela de Gratia Plena to implement the application and interpretation of musical concepts in their curriculum. This study motivated Mr. Pineda to improve his teaching practices using a more interactive classroom strategy learned in this demonstration teaching.

In general, this research proved that the use of *melodic ostinato patterns is* effective in boosting the sight reading skills of students. The key to retention of correct pitch and note duration is the relentless correct repetition of the patterns. Through *melodic ostinato* patterns, the students acquired a deep understanding of the musical concepts and notations that they are singing. Now, students can better create and understand the character of simultaneously sounding pitches, its meaning, relationships, and usage in the musical piece.

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