

**How the Use of Music and Movement Impacts the
Learning of Reading Skills by Preschoolers**

**by
Christine Augustine**

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Abstract

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Preschool years are considered the “prime time” for children to develop physical, social, cognitive, and language development. The most critical issue in current education is the poor development of reading skills among children. It is proved that integrating music into children’s daily activities promotes literacy development, particularly with English language learners. Unfortunately, music is not emphasized in Malaysian government preschools as music teachers lack knowledge and teaching skills. The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of music and movement on the reading skills of 40 five-year-old preschoolers at a university preschool. This study sought to evaluate three reading skills or subtests— Print Knowledge, Definitional Vocabulary, and Phonological Awareness. The intervention was comprised of musical activities that included songs or singing nursery rhymes and body movements.

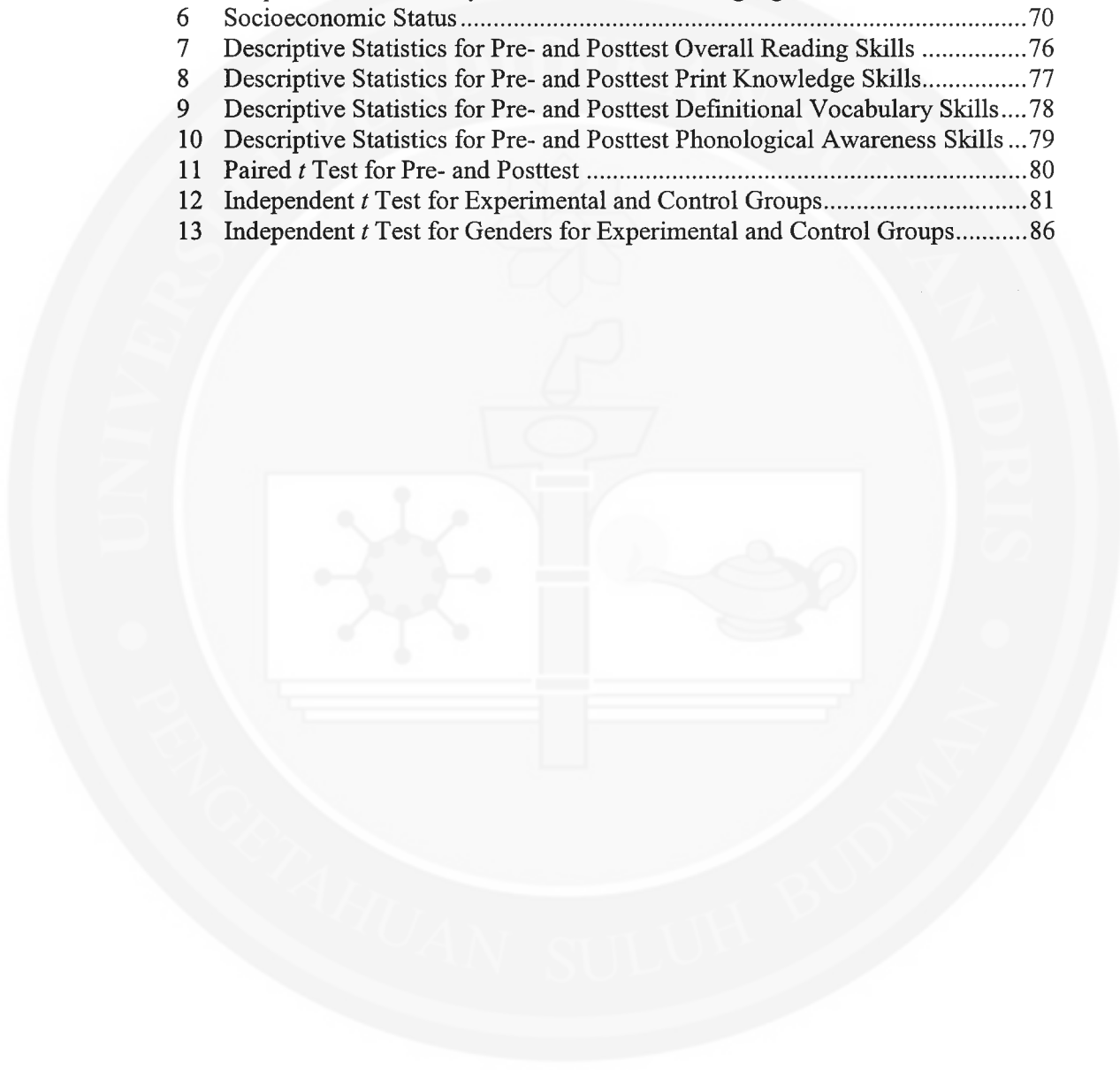
This quasi-experimental design utilized the Test of Preschool Early Literacy that measures early literacy skills for preschoolers. The results showed that music and movement activities impacted preschoolers in the overall reading skills ($p = .02$), print knowledge ($p = .005$), and definitional vocabulary ($p = .03$) after the intervention but did not impact the phonological awareness skills ($p = .18$). These findings confirmed that music and movement enhanced literacy skills for a duration of 6 weeks. Many opportunities should be included for children so they can be thoroughly engaged in music and literacy activities. Teachers should be equipped with sufficient skills and knowledge and also implement a high-quality music program to develop effective reading skills.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the Malaysian education system, preschools follow the national private education curriculum, which requires children to form basic skills in preparation for primary school. According to Ministry of Education (2004), the basic skills include socialization and personality development that teaches communication, social skills, and the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic). It is an excellent time, or the “prime time,” for children at this level to develop physical, social, cognitive, and communication domains as well as language development.

According to the Malaysian Education Act (1996), preschool education is a program for children 4- to 6-years-old. Under the national preschool curriculum, the subject of music is part of the creative and aesthetic component (Chan & Kwan, 2010). Two of the four objectives of the components allow students to appreciate nature’s beauty through creative performance and express motion creatively. To achieve these objectives in the music area, three main contents and groupings were identified: (a) music enjoyment—listening, sound exploration, and instrument activities; (b) singing—listening and song; and (c) creative movement. Chan and Kwan explained that although each objective has subitems detailing the activities, the grouping of the activities still lacks clarity because a number of items do not reflect the exact activities.

Chan and Kwan (2010) also found that government preschools did not emphasize music activities. The majority of the respondents only devoted 10-20 minutes daily to music activities. Only 12.5% of teachers practiced music and movement daily. On the brighter side, regarding personal and social development, most respondents agreed that music is useful in enhancing human skills such as creativity (100.0%), language (98.0%), and social skills (96.6%).

Music can transform a classroom into a positive learning environment where children can succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. In addition, integrating music into children's daily activities promotes literacy development, particularly with English language learners (Ahmad, Ghazali, Abdullah, & Ali, 2004; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Therefore, it is important for the Malaysian preschool curriculum to emphasize music instruction because it is proven to enhance the learning power of young children.

The topic. This study examined the effect between music and movement and reading skills at preschool. This study sought to evaluate three reading skills of 5-year-old preschoolers—vocabulary, phonological awareness, and print knowledge.

The research problem. Government preschools in Malaysia use the national language, Malay, as a medium of instruction. English is considered the second national language and should be taught at least 2 hours per week (International Bureau of Education, 2010). This problem results in literacy weakness in English among preschoolers in government schools. Ahmad et al. (2004) affirmed that many children do not know any English when they attend school. The authors believe it is very important to introduce English as a medium of communication among preschoolers so they can increase their confidence in conversing with others. Ahmad et al. also suggested that teachers should use simple and basic instructions in English to build a constructive environment in the classroom and so the children can develop their listening skills. One innovative way to introduce English to preschoolers is to create activities that involve more listening skills and motor development to enhance their use of the English language.

The main objectives of teaching reading in accordance with the Malaysian national preschool curriculum are to recognize letters of the alphabet, read simple and

familiar words, and read simple sentences independently (Ahmad et al., 2004). It is the responsibility of teachers to create environments that encourage children to communicate because music is an intrinsic motivator that facilitates children to communicate freely and establish connections in their surroundings (Salmon, 2010).

This study looked into the musical activities that help children learn English, including songs or singing rhymes and body movements. This approach gives the students new experiences and opportunities to explore music in a more creative and interactive manner as well as increasing their reading skills.

Justification. In Malaysian government preschools, music and movement are not being emphasized as much as any other subject. Malay and English languages, cognitive and creativity and aesthetic, and Islamic or moral education are taught twice a week; meanwhile, Malay language and creativity and aesthetic and physical and movement and cognitive are taught only once a week (Masnan, 2005). Besides that, Chan and Kwan (2010) mentioned there is a lack of appreciation of music and music education, as well as low perception from the public in Malaysia. The main reason behind these issues is because music is not taught by specialists or music graduates (Bainger, 2010; Chan & Kwan, 2010). A teacher's ability or skill is questioned constantly in the academic world. In his research in Malaysian educational context, Mah, Chan, Ang, and Bahaman (2003) found that more than 50% of his respondents, who were teacher trainees, lacked any formal education before their entry into the program (Chan & Kwan, 2010). Chan and Kwan also stated that teachers in government preschools conduct music activities using audiovisual equipment such as CDs, cassettes, video, television, and untuned percussion instruments.

English teachers as well as music teachers in Malaysian preschools lack

knowledge and teaching skills. Tahar, Toran, Mohd, and Bari (2010) highlighted that the Malaysian education system faced the issue of reading incompetency among students. One of the main causes is that many teachers lack the ability or skills to teach children how to read or provide a high-quality education (Ali, Aziz, & Majzub, 2011). They found many teachers could not identify or implement effective teaching and learning strategies to enhance students' reading skills. Unfortunately, the activity-based strategies were ignored when the teachers began to depend completely on books instead of using them as a foundation. As a result, learning became dull and children began to lose interest in developing their language skills.

Deficiencies in the evidence. Research on music, movement, and reading skills in preschoolers has been one of the main concerns in many Western and European countries (McEwing, 2011; Molenda & Bhavnagri, 2009; Moreno, Friesen, & Bialystok, 2011; Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Pica, 2010; Register, Darrow, Standley, & Swedberg, 2007; Salmon, 2010). Although importance is given to literacy or reading skills in Malaysian government preschools (Ahmad et al., 2004; Tahar et al., 2010), music and movement have always been trivial. However, research in music, movement, and reading skills is far less relevant to Malaysian music educational context (Ali et al., 2011; Yahaya, 2008). Therefore, it was important to study this topic from the Malaysian education perspective because there are differences between countries in terms of culture, language acquisition, and socioeconomic status (SES). Malaysia is a multicultural country and the medium of instruction in government schools is generally in Malay language. In addition, parents' education level also plays important role in their child's cognitive development. It relates to their ability and understanding on how to help their children to learn to read at home (Majzub & Kurnia, 2010).

Audience. This study impacted music and English preschool teachers and the school because the findings showed how the use of music and movement affect reading skills. This study also benefited the preschoolers because they got to experience and explore English language through music and movement activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this experiment study was to assess the effect of music and movement on English reading skills of preschoolers at a university preschool. The independent variable was musical activities, which can defined as singing songs or rhymes (Paquette & Rieg, 2008) and body movements such as walking, marching, hopping, jumping, turning, and galloping (Dow, 2010). The dependent variable was reading skills as measured by the Test of Preschool Early Literacy (TOPEL, Lonigan, Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 2007), including the Definitional Vocabulary, Phonological Awareness, and Print Knowledge subtests.

Definition of Terms

Music. This term refers to activities of listening and singing songs, chants, and rhymes (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

Movement. This term refers to the use motor skills to walk, march, hop, jump, turn, and gallop (Dow, 2010).

Phonological awareness. Lonigan et al. (2009) defined this term as “the ability to detect, apprehend, or manipulate the sound structure of oral language independent of meaning. It is commonly measured by tasks requiring matching, blending, deleting, or counting sounds within words” (p. 345).

Print knowledge skills. This term refers to aspects of print, identifying letters, letter-sound correspondences and written words, and saying letters (Lonigan et al., 2007).

Reading skills. This term refers to one of four literacy skills, other than writing, listening, and speaking (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

Vocabulary. *New Oxford American Dictionary* (Stevenson & Lindberg, 2010) defined this term as “the body of words used in a particular language” or a part of such a body of “words used on a particular occasion or in a particular sphere” (p. 8722).



Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of using music and movement on reading skills of preschoolers. The literature review of this study consisted of five key areas. The first section highlights research related to the theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and zone of proximal development (ZPD) theory. It explains in detail about Vygotsky's framework, which was based on four main components: (a) children construct their knowledge of the world, (b) development occurs within a social context, (c) learning can lead to development, and (d) language is important for cognitive development (Greata, 2006; Smidt, 2009). The second section of the literature discusses about the respondents of this study—5-year-old preschoolers.

Supporting this relationship, the third section discusses about the importance and effects of music and movement followed by the literacy skills that emphasize reading skills. The reading skills are composed of three basic components—print knowledge, vocabulary, and phonological awareness. The fourth section of the literature investigated the relationship between music, movement, and literacy. Finally, this chapter provides the literature on gender differences between male and female children's literacy or reading achievements.

Theoretical Framework

There are many approaches to promoting the development of knowledge and skills in children through music and movement. This study was based on sociocultural theory and ZPD developed by a Russian lawyer, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). His fascination with psychology and how children solve problems has influenced early childhood education. Vygotsky believed that culture has a great effect on a child's development (Greata, 2006). Vygotsky formulated his theory of sociocultural cognitive

development while working in the Soviet Union. His work only became known in the West in the 1980s where it became more important to the current educational practice (Louis, 2009).

Louis (2009) mentioned that Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural cognitive development consists of three core elements: culture, language, and social interaction. Among the three, culture is considered the most important as it drives cognitive development. Language takes the role of facilitator in the social interaction where culture fosters cognitive development. Louis also pointed out about the value of this theory that social interaction is not only beneficial but is entirely crucial to cognitive development. In other words, if social interaction is lacking, then cognitive development does not advance; if social interaction is ineffective, then cognitive development is hindered. Wang (2007) also mentioned that the meaning of context and content would not exist without social and cultural interaction. At this stage, the implication of "from unknown to the known" would vanish. Hence, collaboration serves as a great stimulus of socialization in human psychological development. Collaboration learning helps students to interact with learning tools and peers in group activities where they express and conceptualize their understanding as well as participate in solving problems, complete their tasks, or generate new ideas.

Vygotsky believed that how children think and their actions are accomplished through their interactions with adults and older children. There are four basic principles underlying the Vygotskian framework: (a) children construct their knowledge of the world, (b) development occurs within a social context, (c) learning can lead to development, and (d) language is important for cognitive development (Greata, 2006; Smidt, 2009).

Children construct their knowledge of the world. Vygotsky's theory of

knowledge acquisition is called social constructivism. Social constructivism evades the idea that individual cognition is the only generating force in knowledge construction. This theory stimulates knowledge as a culturally generated in cooperation and understanding with other (Hyslop & Strobel, 2008), where it is created and developed intensely to solve real-life problems that occur within that culture and society (Eun, 2010).

In a classroom setting, this theory is based on the social interactions among students along with a personal critical thinking process. Ideas are constructed through interactions with the teacher and among peers and from experience to have a personal meaning for the student (Powell & Kalina, 2009). In other words, Nuthall (as cited in Wang, 2007) explained that cognitive constructivism focuses on learners as individuals who "construct their own knowledge as they involve in the processes of understanding and able to distinguish logic of their classroom experience" (p. 150). Cognitive constructivism demonstrates that new knowledge is constantly constructed and built on previous knowledge. Identified as a learner-centered approach, the teacher intends to stimulate and understand each individual's previous knowledge and assists in constructing new knowledge.

The aim toward the construction of knowledge is that of recognizing teaching and learning as a process rather than a product (Eun, 2010). This understanding basically defines knowledge as something to be cocreated among teachers and students as they participate in review or inquiry-based activities that assist in solving real-life problems. Eun added that as part of the teaching and learning process, it is crucial for teachers to enable students to challenge eminent beliefs, knowledge and rules of practice constantly

and to create new knowledge based on exploration, experiments, and collaborative thinking. By frequently doing these, teachers are engaged in reviewing the process. Eun also stressed that teachers are responsible to expand the knowledge of the learners beyond their time and place by connecting them to the past and future and other parts of the world by demonstrating these processes themselves. In this manner, teachers pause the development process while they nurture or scaffold it by expanding students' current understanding so new knowledge systems and connections between them may be constantly generated.

Development occurs within a social context. Eun (2008) and Wang (2007) indicated that the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's sociocultural term is built upon the social origin and cultural mechanisms of development. Vygotsky stressed that only by interacting with the physical world and with other humans can people develop knowledge of reality.

According to Bodrova and Leong (2005), the nature of the cultural implementation that are obtained and the result of their achievement are determined by the interactions that occur between children and their social environment. It is the basic source of development where the transition from preschool to school age, including the issue of school readiness, can be perceived. The description of this transition is the change in the nature of the interactions involved in schooling and expectations related on being a student. It means that the way adults interact with children other than what adults expect children are capable to do changes between preschool and elementary school.

Eun (2008) explained that development arises from the internalization of social interaction through the concept of mediation. It is a mechanism that motivates the transformation of those external forms of social interaction to internalized forms of

mental functions. Vygotsky identified three categories of mediation: (a) material tools, (b) symbolic systems, and (c) another human being. This is the initial stage for preschool children as they use the cultural tools to transform perception and activate other cognitive processes such as attention, memory, and thinking (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Eun, 2008). As the capabilities develop, Bodrova and Leong (2005) stated these children make the transition from being “slaves to the environment” to becoming “masters of their own behavior” (p. 438). Bodrova and Leong added that for children to adjust themselves to the social situation of development of school, they must be alert or take chances of the opportunities they will face in the future. To increase the alertness, children have to participate in school activities and get involve in social interactions with teachers and peers. These interactions scaffold development by offering the support essential for children to encounter the challenges in their school.

Learning can lead to development. According to Wang (2007), Vygotsky stated that learning is rooted within social events, where social interaction plays a major role in the improvement of learning. Exploring the connection between development and education, Vygotsky and his colleagues regarded learning to be the driving force of development (Eun, 2010). He stated that the ability to apply learned knowledge and skills as tools for effective problem solving in all ranges of human existence is a main indicator of development, which is the principal aim of education. Children, in their schooling years, not only achieve content knowledge but also learn how to acquire through the development of approaches such as taking initiative, planning ahead, and focusing throughout a task (Chen, Masur, & McNamee, 2011).

Children’s learning most effectively occurs in what Vygotsky calls the ZPD (Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Greata, 2006; Smidt, 2009). Children learn to carry out

their tasks individually and successfully when they are given proper help from adults (Ali et al., 2011; Hussin, 2008), more capable peers, or someone more knowledgeable (Louis, 2009; Sluss & Stremmel, 2004). The ZPD comprises the child's potential achievements or tasks the child has not yet learned. The child is assisted by an adult by breaking down a task into manageable units, giving instruction verbally, pointing out problems, and encouraging the child. The child cooperates with the adult, picking up ideas, and becomes more proficient. Once the child comprehends what is taught, the adult lets the child take charge to complete the task (Greata, 2006).

Hussin (2008) explained that learning occurs when learners have met the given objectives after being able to perform expected tasks or behavior at the end of a lesson. According to Compernelle and Williams (2012), Vygotsky viewed children's learning as a mediated process in the development method. In his book, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Vygotsky (1978) argued that every purpose or function in the child's cultural development appears twice: (a) on the social level, between people (interpsychological or intermental) and (b) on the individual level, inside the child (intrapsychological or intramental). It is the interrelationship between teaching, learning, and development (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Chen et al., 2010; Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Eun, 2010; Smidt, 2009).

Hussin (2008) and Powell and Kalina (2009) also clarified that when a student is at the ZPD for a particular task, providing the suitable support or aid (scaffolding) will give the learners some motivation to accomplish a given task. Power and Kalina explained that "scaffolding is an assisted learning process that supports the ZPD" (p. 244). In other words, it is to get to the next level of understanding of every student from the guidance of teachers, peers, or other adults. Once the students master the task, the

scaffolding can be removed and the students will have the ability to complete it on their own. A more skillful individual can give coaching and scaffolding at the beginning stage in order for the student to accomplish the given task. The intervention of this process could also be between the student and adults, such as parent, teacher, caretaker, language instructor, or peers who have already learned the job. Eun (2010) stated that the interactive nature is realized as teachers and students engage in collaborative activities with mutual goals and purposes that are constantly negotiated through conversations.

In terms of music, there are three types of learning styles: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. The auditory is the music itself, visual is the pictures or words, and kinesthetic is motion or dance (Yahaya, 2008). Yahaya (2008) added that music trains the mind for higher forms of thinking. The more the children learn, the more their neurons are stimulated to develop and contain more information. These three learning styles will make children succeed and aid their learning more positively. Learning music helps a child become a well-rounded individual. The benefits of learning music also include assisting in holding attention and increasing retention of information. Salmon (2010) pointed out that when children are initially exposed to music and its relationship with language and literacy, teachers will be able to identify or create their ZPD and scaffold listening, oral, and written language.

Language is important for cognitive development. According to Compernelle and Williams (2012), Vygotsky claimed that higher forms of human mental functioning are determined by symbolic tools. Language is the most important symbolic tools humans can use to establish themselves and others' social and mental functioning. In a classroom environment, Powell and Kalina (2009) explained that language usage is the significant process in a social constructivist setting. According to the authors, Vygotsky stated that

language boosts learning and that it precedes knowledge or thinking.

In this theory, it is clearly seen that learning and development act as mediated processes where language plays a crucial role (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Vygotsky's theory of language suggests that children gain knowledge through their engagement in social experiences. It also emphasizes the development of language where it plays a very significant role in children's acquisition of higher psychological processes. Vygotsky believed that language comprises the main sign-in behavior during children's cognitive development because it releases them from the restrictions of their immediate surroundings (Driscoll, 2005).

Driscoll (2005) stated Vygotsky also indicated that language is totally embedded in the cultural structures of the learner, which cannot be detached from the equation.

Thinking is mediated when language is used in practice and instruction. In accordance, the development of thinking is closely tied to language. Instructors can identify how much learning has occurred by using language in expressing themselves. Then again, it allows students to voice their opinion and evaluate their own information input.

Language should be used regularly in learning because it also acts as a problem-solving tool (De Leon, 2012). Eun (2010) also stressed that language as a communication tool engages all students in the instructional process to negotiate and generate knowledge.

These forms of conversation will be developed to assist individuals in problem solving, reasoning, and logical thinking.

Music, an important element in a child's culture, increases the child's development. Salmon (2010) emphasized there is a natural connection between thinking, music, and language. Salmon noted, "Language and thought cannot be separated. Most language processes occur in the left hemisphere of the brain, music processes occur in the

right hemisphere” (p. 938), where a balance between both hemispheres can be created by the use of music in language or literacy accomplishments (Milovanov & Tervaniemi, 2011; Salmon, 2010). Salmon asserted that music is a language of learning that leads children in talking, reading, drawing, and writing. Yahaya (2008) added that songs, chants, poems, and raps will increase memory of content facts and details as well as retrieve information easily later. In addition, there was a significant relationship between musical aptitude and second-language linguistic skills. It has been learned that participants with advanced musical aptitude also had advanced foreign language pronunciation skills (Milovanov & Tervaniemi, 2011).

In Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, play is an important element that contributes to language development and conceptual meaning. Children acquire social and cognitive abilities that are essential for learning and also develop a sense of relatedness through the experiences in play. The sense of relatedness is defined as a need for belonging to a group or culture (Lillemyr, Sobstad, Marder, & Flowerday, 2011). Ali et al. (2011) also added that learning through play in preschool offers young children with highly engaging and meaningful context necessary for early literacy concepts and skills.

Vygotsky also explained that through play, children learn skills for how to control their bodies, develop communication and thinking skills, and learn how to communicate with others in a social environment (Ali et al., 2011; Driscoll, 2005; Salmon, 2010; Smidt, 2009). Chen et al. (2011) clarified that for young children, school is a primary social environment. The main form of learning for preschool children is play, which is likely to be child-directed and open-ended. It slowly changes when they move to higher grades where their approaches to learning are socialized to a more goal-oriented structure and better performance demands. Chen et al. further explained that teachers play an

important role in guiding children's approaches through their capabilities of behavior and performance, design of the classroom environment, the day-to-day schedule they set for children, as well as the instructional strategies they would use.

According to Wang (2007), play is essential for children to move from one level to the next in cognitive development. When they interact physically and socially with an object, children conceptualize and express ideas and their thinking changes from the concrete to the abstracts. Sluss and Stremmel (2004) explained that the relationship between social context and cognitive development can be observed when the ZPD is created in a play and more capable or skilled peers serve as mediators in assisting performance. Moreover, comprehending the role of more skilled peers during play is crucial for identifying how children develop higher-level thinking skills. With this, it is clear that play provides a ground for cognitive growth and development and has effects for education.

Preschoolers

Parents and educators of young children play important roles in their social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. As children enter formal schooling, teachers begin to play an important role in children's development (Lynch, 2010). Guillen and Bermejo (2011) stated that English has become the additional language in many countries around the world. For this reason, schools are required to provide effective educational programs in order to cultivate competent bilingual skills in both teaching and the learning process. Each culture influences the patterns of language of a child where the school environment is capable to enhance its use (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005). Children from diverse cultures bring diverse language acquisition to the learning processes. As a result, teachers face challenges to meet each individual need of the

students and also to distinguish which approaches works best to increase English language development.

Identifying a child-driven awareness to support diverse learning is the toughest part of any classroom study no matter short- or long-term (Kampmann & Bowne, 2011). Whatever is the basis of the foundation, the most important thing is to spark the children's interest to a level that promotes questions and curiosity. Foley (2006) highlighted that young children are obviously full of energy, thus, it is very challenging to sit preschoolers down to educate them about the world without being engaged in it. They choose to be involved in their own learning where the author describes the children as dry sponges, immersing in every experience they can.

According to Greata (2006), the classic learning at the preschool level is composed of learning to count, matching items, distinguishing the similarities and differences, identifying shapes, coloring, recognizing letters and numbers, and identifying emotions along with gender and pretends. Pica (2004) added that the preschool years are the best period to take advantage of children's interest with words to encourage an appreciation for the language arts. Using nursery rhymes, stories, poems, and songs to inspire movement by expressing themselves also develops their vocabulary skills. Children at this age have powerful curiosity and active imaginations. Thus, teachers can stretch these valuable tools by giving them opportunities to imagine, explore, and discover through music and movement.

Yazejian and Peisner-Feinberg (2009) expressed concern over the fact that creative arts activities, such as music and movement experiences, which are important components of high-quality preschool programs, have been viewed as secondary to activities and materials that were formerly considered important for children's cognitive

and academic readiness for school. Denac (2008) verified that the preschool period is an essential period for boosting and sustaining awareness in all music activities. This is because constructive musical experiences or understandings in this period are able to stimulate the acceptance of values linking to music and the development of an attitude toward the general music culture in older children, youths, and also in adults.

In the Malaysian education system, preschool education (kindergarten) is for children aged 4-6 years and is provided by several government agencies, private bodies, and voluntary organizations. In *World Data on Education*, the International Bureau of Education (2010) stated that The Education Act of 1996 incorporated preschool education as part of the national school system. All kindergartens are subjected to follow the curriculum guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education. Of the eight general objectives stated, this study was based on four of the objectives that were connected to the study. These objectives enabled the students to (a) master basic communication skills, (b) master the basics of the English language, (c) appreciate physical activities as a basis for good health, and (d) develop critical-thinking skills through inquiry and the use of all the senses (International Bureau of Education, 2010).

Effective curriculum is necessary to be included as developmentally appropriate instruction in early literacy skills for preschool children as well as in teaching strategies (Ali et al., 2011). Wasik (2010) also emphasized that a curriculum is essential because it provides a guiding framework for teachers as well as supply materials to support instruction. A well-developed curriculum also offers suitable notions for activities and appropriate tasks to educate young children specific concepts that will impact their learning in a certain manner. Zaporozhets, who implemented Vygotsky's ideas into practice, highlighted that preschool years are not only a preparation time for school, but it

is a significant time to make a unique contribution to human development, cognitive, social, and emotional, that cannot be replaced later (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

In Malaysia, the curriculum stresses that children are required to learn two languages to enhance their communication skills which is the native language, Malay, and the second language, English. Ahmad et al. (2004) found that the English language proficiency in Malaysia was still far from satisfactory even after years of exposure to the language. Coppola (2005) proved that children living in a home where their native language was spoken other than English could be a hindrance to their literacy attainment as early as preschool years. Because only a small percentage of students are exposed to the two languages at birth, most of them are exposed when they entered preschool. In the Malaysian native language context, knowledge gained in Malay language is also available in English language, where both use the same alphabets or written symbols.

Coppola (2005) asserted that young children develop language proficiency by exposure and influence to the language usage around them. Factors that contribute to children's dual language proficiency include access to speakers of each language, the choice of language used by their families, and the role of each language in the community and school. In some cases, educators underestimate the knowledge that children possess or neglect cultural and family experiences and in what way it contributes to their lives (Young, 2009). Therefore, Young (2009) suggested that for teachers, professional learning opportunities seem to be a valuable prospect as teachers can apply new learning, which suits the environment they are in. In addition, it is essential to implement effective method or strategy in teaching English language in preschools where children acquire the target language by listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Ahmad et al., 2004).

Preschool music teachers, besides English preschool teachers, face numerous

challenges in educating young children because there are also many deficits on their behalf. Chan and Kwan (2010), referring to the music education in Malaysian preschools, affirmed two major issues: (a) low perception towards music and music education by the society and (b) music teachers' lack of readiness and teaching skills. Chan and Kwan discovered that the questions pertaining to the confidence level of the music teachers' teaching skills showed only 30% of total number. Obviously, the teachers were not skilled or capable enough to perform their duties as music teachers. To prevent this problem, Chan and Kwan stressed that training in music pedagogy, will equip teachers with the pertinent skills to conduct various music activities that are necessary in preschool music education. It is also important to raise the perception of the teachers and increase their teaching competency in order to provide effective music instruction to young learners.

Because music is a universal language allied with moods, feelings, and memories, teachers should assimilate music into their language curriculum to stimulate children's prior knowledge and encourage thinking skills (Salmon, 2010). Teachers should use music to build an atmosphere that encourages children to communicate because music is an inherent motivator that assists children to form connections with their world, increasing their desire to communicate their thoughts. Foley (2006) believed that when children are having fun, substantial learning is taking place. Teachers are responsible to provide ample practice for children to speak in English by using short poems or nursery rhymes as a start. Young children love nursery rhymes and they can be used as an activity that enables them to practice using the language (Ahmad et al., 2004). The research findings of Baleghizadeh and Dargahi (2010) verified that nursery rhymes were very advantageous to children, mainly to those learning English as a foreign language.