

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING VOCABULARY THROUGH NURSERY RHYMES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to measure the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary through music. The samples of the study were 30 early childhood teachers in Sarawak. Quantitative approach was used and the design of the study was an online survey. An instrument was developed which focuses on the investigating early childhood teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary through music. The findings highlighted that the teachers emphasised the teaching of vocabulary in English language learning should be fun and engaging for the young English language learners. The implication of the study suggests that teachers must be professionally-trained to use nursery rhymes and songs in teaching vocabulary in early childhood classroom.

Keywords: young learners, perception, early childhood teacher, music, vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Second language learners confront myriad challenges throughout elementary school. In the early grades, oral communication and the acquisition of new vocabulary are paramount to their success in reading and writing. Nursery rhymes are short and simple rhyming verses, songs, or stories which are usually designed, told or sung for little children (Danielson, 2000). Not only do songs provide pleasure, but they also enhance language practice and positively affect vocabulary acquisition and memorization (Kuśnierek, 2016). The use of nursery rhymes in classroom can expand their involuntary internal mental repetition that stimulates language acquisition. Ismail et al. (2019) proposed that scientists discovered that the human brain may be installed with preference for music and some forms of intelligence are triggered by music. There are two types of musical or singing interaction. The first style is a soothing go-to-sleep lullaby-style interaction. The second style, is a playful, upbeat adult behaviour that is rhythmic and joyful (Machado, 2013). Shwetha (2013) mentioned that nursery rhymes are composed of fantastic and charming stories, vibrant language and colourful characters. These rhymes have caught the minds of children and fascinated them for centuries.

Statement of Problem

Although, it is common for early childhood teachers to use nursery rhymes or songs in their practice, it is still not clear what their perceptions are on the use of nursery rhymes to as a

pedagogical tool in the context of teaching English vocabulary as a second language in Malaysian preschool settings.

National Standard Preschool Curriculum (2017 Revision) highlights music to be integrated into creative and aesthetic components (Chan & Kwan, 2010). However, they also found that government preschools did not emphasise music activities in their practice. The majority of the respondents only devoted 10-20 minutes daily to music activities. Only 12.5% of teachers practiced music and movement daily. If this is the case of overall use of music in preschool education in Malaysia, it is very important to investigate the early childhood teachers' perspectives on using nursery rhymes or songs to teach vocabulary.

Objective of the Study

The objectives of this research were to:

1. examine teachers' perspectives towards learning vocabulary through music and songs

Literature Review

Coyle and Gracia (2014) examined English vocabulary acquisition in Spanish preschool children as measured before and after three 30 minutes lessons based on the popular songs entitled "The Wheels on the Bus". The findings showed a significant improvement for receptive vocabulary. However, there was not significant improvement for productive vocabulary. In the same vein, Rohmah (2020) and Zaidon and Ayob (2013) investigated the improvement of students' vocabulary through nursery rhymes on English young learners. The findings highlighted that nursery rhymes improved children's vocabulary mastery.

Coyle and Gracia (2014) and Rohmah (2020) studied the vocabulary acquisition of preschool children through quantitative approach. Suriyani Kesuma (2017), on the other hand, explored the amount of vocabulary that was acquired by a four years old child through the nursery rhymes using qualitative approach. The primary method for the study was observation. The findings showed that the child was able to use the words learned through the nursery rhymes. The nursery rhymes increased the amount of vocabulary as well as created fun learning environment. Similarly, Neaum (2012) identified that nursery rhymes can enhance the language acquisition and development of children hence help them to become literate in their earlier years. Nursery rhymes offer the opportunity to use and enjoy language in different ways and it is up to the teachers to choose suitable nursery rhymes based on children's cognitive development

METODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Kumar (2019) research design is an overview of methodological decisions taken. Quantitative approach was adopted for the research. The design chosen was a survey to examine the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary through music, to know the teaching method used by early childhood teacher and also the effectiveness of music and songs in young learners' vocabulary mastery. This

research was also designed to motivate early childhood teacher to adopt music and songs approach in vocabulary teaching and learning process in order to improve children's learning.

Research Sample

In this research, the samples were early childhood teachers in Sarawak. The researchers used random sampling method. The samples that had been used in this research are randomly selected from the target population. There was a total of 50 respondents participated in this research and answered the questionnaire. The researchers randomly selected 30 respondents from early childhood teachers in order to collect data and information regarding early childhood teachers' perception on the effectiveness and advantages of music and songs on young learners' vocabulary mastery.

Instrument

The researchers used questionnaire as the instrument to collect data for this research. A questionnaire was designed which consisted of four sections and 30 questions to investigate early childhood teachers' perspectives towards the effectiveness, importance as well as the advantages of using nursery rhymes as a play-based learning in young learners' vocabulary mastery. Structure of questionnaire was as the followings. The questionnaire consists of 4 sections, which includes:

- a) Section 1: Demographic data,
- b) Section 2: Perception of early childhood teachers toward vocabulary teaching
- c) Section 3: Perception of early childhood teachers on play-based learning
- d) Section 4: Perception of early childhood teachers on effectiveness and advantages of play-based learning in young learners' vocabulary mastery

Section 1 consisted of 4 questions regarding respondents' demographic data such as gender, age, ethnicity and level of education. Section 2 consists of 10 questions regarding respondents' perception on young learners' vocabulary teaching. This section aims to know early childhood teacher's perception toward the importance of vocabulary in English language learning for young learner. Section 3 consists of 10 questions on respondents' perception toward music-based learning as well as the importance of music and songs in young learners' learning process. The purpose of this section is to know early childhood teacher's perception on music and how music helps in young learners' academic activities. Section 4 consists of 10 questions. This section aims to know the respondents' perception toward on the effectiveness and advantages of music in young learners' vocabulary mastery.

Measures

In this questionnaire, Likert scale was used to gather the data on early childhood teacher's perception in section 2, 3 & 4. It is represented by Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

Table 1
 Likert Scale

Scale	Score
Strongly Disagree	1
Disagree	2
Neutral	3
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5

Data Collection Method and Procedure

In this study, the researchers used a quantitative method which is questionnaire in the data collecting process. The respondent of this study consists of 30 early childhood teachers from Sarawak. They participated in this research by answering the questionnaire which was distributed online by the researchers. Prior to the online survey, the researchers consulted with academic advisor, designed the set of questionnaires. The data collection was conducted during July 2020 and the whole completed questionnaire was collected after 24 hours. The researchers chose to conduct this study online because of the global pandemic COVID-19 where Malaysia was under a preventive measure and everyone was restricted by Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented by Malaysia government to deal with the pandemic. Therefore, the online questionnaire was more convenient for the researchers as well as for the participants as it was neither costly nor time consuming.

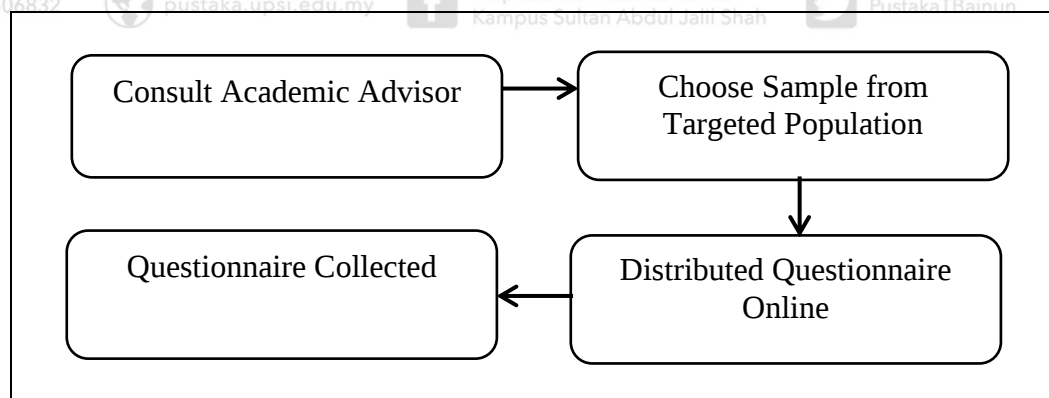


Figure 1: Data Collection Procedure

Data Analysis

Kumar (2019) defined analysis as both qualitative and quantitative methods (i.e. with and without numerical information) of processing and summarizing information. In this research, a descriptive quantitative analysis was used while analysing data. Descriptive quantitative analysis means simple statistics relate description of sample to description of population. Statistical software, SPSS V27 was used to analyse and visualize the data.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the data collected from the distribution of questionnaires (N=30), male respondents outnumbered the female respondents with 53.3% (n=16) against 20.0% (n=14) respectively. The respondents of this research were divided into four (4) groups with different age ranging from 19 years old below, 20 – 24 years old, 25 – 29 years old and 30 years old and above. The age group of 20 - 24 years old contributed 46.7 % (n=14) which slightly outnumbered the age group of 25 - 29 years old which contributed to 43.33% (n=11). The age group of 30 and above contributed 16.7% (n=5). However, there were no respondents from the age range of 19 years old and under. In this research, Malay respondents occupied the highest percentage which was 33.3% (n=10) while Indian was the minority which contributed only 6.7% (n=2). The second higher percentage of respondents was from the ethnicity of Chinese who represented a percentage of 30.0% (n=9). The respondents from others also have a percentage of 30.0% (n=9). The majority of the respondents have their highest education qualification of degree which contributed to 53.3% (n=16). Five respondents have a diploma education level which contributed to 16.7% while five of them have Master as their highest education qualification (16.7%). The respondents who have STPM/Matriculation education level contributed the lowest 13.3% (n=4).

Table 2
 Demographic Profile of the Respondent (N=30)

		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	16	53.3
	Female	14	47.7
	Total	30	100.0
Age	19 and below	0	0
	20-24 years old	14	36.7
	25-29 years old	11	46.7
	30 years old and above	5	16.7
	Total	30	100.0
Race	Malay	10	33.3
	Indian	2	6.7
	Chinese	9	30.0
	Others	9	30.0
	Total	30	100.0
Highest Level of Education	STPM / Matriculation	4	13.3
	Diploma	5	16.7
	Degree	16	53.3
	Master	5	16.7
	Total	30	100.0

Table 3 showed the result of data analysis of early childhood teacher's perception on the importance of vocabulary in English language learning for young learners. The researchers conducted mean analysis based on the data collected and the mean value of each statement is within the range of strongly agree as shown in Table 3. Therefore, the findings indicated that early childhood teachers strongly agree that vocabulary was important in English language learning for young learners.

Table 3
Perception of Early Childhood Teachers toward the Importance of Vocabulary in English Language Learning for Young Learners

No.	Item	Scale					Mean	Level of Agreement
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Vocabulary is important for young learners.	-	-	-	3	27	4.90	Strongly Agree
2.	Vocabulary is essential in learning English language.	-	-	-	4	26	4.87	Strongly Agree
3.	Vocabulary can help children to think and learn about the world.	-	-	1	4	25	4.67	Strongly Agree
4.	Vocabulary let young learners to express their feelings and thought.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
5.	Vocabulary development can improve all areas of communication skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing).	-	-	-	6	24	4.80	Strongly Agree
6.	Vocabulary can help young learner in understanding what other people says.	-	-	-	3	27	4.90	Strongly Agree
7.	Vocabulary can help young learner to communicate better with others.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
8.	Vocabulary can helps in the development of grammar.	-	-	-	4	26	4.87	Strongly Agree
9.	Vocabulary able to helps in young learner's language and cognitive development.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
10.	Vocabulary helps young learner to use English effectively.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree

Table 4 shows the summarised result of data analysis on early childhood teachers' perceptions on music and its importance in young learners' learning process. The researchers conducted mean analysis based on the data collected and the mean value of each statement was within the range of Strongly Agree as shown in Table 4. Therefore, this indicated that early childhood teachers strongly agree that music is important and essential for young learner's learning process.

Table 4
Perception of Early Childhood Teachers toward Music and Its Importance in Young Learners' Learning Process

No.	Item	Scale					Mean	Level of Agreement
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Music is an important part of children's early development.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
2.	Music helps in development of brain.	-	-	-	4	26	4.80	Strongly Agree

3.	Music can improve children's performance in academic activities.	-	-	1	5	23	4.60	Agree Strongly Agree
4.	Music helps in development of communication skill.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
5.	Music provides long-term positive consequences on children's learning.	-	-	-	6	24	4.80	Strongly Agree
6.	Music contributes to children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.	-	-	-	7	23	4.77	Strongly Agree
7.	Music provides opportunity to develop children's unique potential.	-	-	2	5	24	4.86	Strongly Agree
8.	Music enables children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to resolve conflict.	-	-	1	8	21	4.93	Strongly Agree
9.	Music let children to explore and discover the world around them.	-	-	-	7	23	4.77	Strongly Agree
10.	Music let children learn better in vocabulary learning.	-	-	-	4	26	4.80	Strongly Agree

Table 5 shows the summarised result of data analysis on early childhood teachers' perception on the effectiveness and advantages of music in young learners' vocabulary mastery. The researcher conducted mean analysis based on the data collected and the mean value of each statement is within the range of strongly agree as shown in Table 5. Therefore, the findings indicated that early childhood teachers strongly agree that music was effective and had many advantages in young learners' vocabulary mastery.

Table 5
Perception of Early Childhood Teachers on the Effectiveness and Advantages of Music in Young Learners' Vocabulary Mastery

No.	Item	Scale					Mean	Level of Mean Value
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Young learner shows more interest in learning through music.	-	-	-	7	23	4.77	Strongly Agree
2.	Music able to motivate young learner in classroom.	-	-	-	2	28	4.60	Strongly Agree
3.	Young learners able to enjoy throughout the learning process.	-	-	-	2	28	4.93	Strongly Agree
4.	Music able to enhance young learner's interest in learning English vocabulary.	-	-	-	6	24	4.80	Strongly Agree
5.	Young learners able to pay full attention in the class.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
6.	Young learner prefers music in classroom.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
7.	Young learner feels energetic	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree

	when using music in vocabulary learning.							Agree
8.	Young learner can understand better when teacher teach vocabulary through music.	-	-	-	6	24	4.80	Strongly Agree
9.	Music able to maintain learner's interest in vocabulary learning.	-	-	-	5	25	4.83	Strongly Agree
10.	Young learner able to learn much more through music.	-	-	-	2	28	4.93	Strongly Agree

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

The analysis of data shows that the early childhood teachers perceived that it was important to teach English vocabulary in a fun way. The teachers also felt that there were advantages of vocabulary learning through music such as it supported young learners' learning process (Mamat & Ason, 2014). The teachers perceived that it was effective to teach vocabulary through nursery rhymes and songs. The overall findings highlighted that the teachers emphasised the teaching of vocabulary in English language learning should be fun and engaging for the young English language learners. The implication of the study suggests that teachers must be professionally-trained to use nursery rhymes and songs in teaching vocabulary in early childhood classroom.

Recommendation

Music is not presented here as a panacea, replacing all other methods as the only viable teaching tool. It should, however, be considered an important teaching method that is an acceptable tool for classroom instruction. As such, music and song may not only be entertaining, but also may provide numerous benefits to students.

In relation to use of music in teaching vocabulary, teacher-training institutions should revise their teacher training programs and hold new courses which enable students to practice and develop their musical skills and activities in English language classes. Seminars and workshops should be organized for the language teachers in secondary schools so that they can keep up to date with the latest developments and approaches. As the language teaching is an interdisciplinary field, music and English language teachers can unite their efforts to develop the language teaching materials. In doing so they can produce rich sources of language-teaching materials integrated with music.

CONCLUSION

The research on motivation, language acquisition, and learner-input reveals that songs can have a positive impact in these areas of second language education. Songs are part of the students' real world and, therefore, offer an immediate and authentic link to classroom learning as well as a window into culture. The research on language acquisition indicates that nursery rhymes and songs can be successfully incorporated into pedagogical contexts to develop vocabulary, grammar and functional skills, in addition to listening and speaking

skills. The “song that sticks in my head” phenomenon can also prove to be very helpful in acquiring and retaining language.

Finally, taking learners’ choice into consideration when developing and scheduling language courses has shown to have an impact on motivating and empowering learners to learn (Arshad & Sook Ching, 2017). While this study is not definite in studying vocabulary enhancement techniques using nursery rhymes in supporting second language acquisition for preschool children, it provides a platform for the teachers to practice among the best pedagogical approaches and teaching materials presented to nurture the children in their English language education journey.

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