

Enhancing Vocabulary in Preschoolers: Teaching English Through Songs

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Abstract. This action research investigated the effectiveness of using songs to enhance English vocabulary among young learners. The study involved nine participants consisting of three children aged five years old and six children aged six years old. The research followed the action research cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection. English songs related to daily greetings and routines, body parts and movements, animals, vegetables and numbers were used as teaching tools during the lessons. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test assessments, classroom observations, and the researcher's reflective journal. The findings showed an improvement in pupils' vocabulary knowledge, with the average score increasing from 6.4 in the pre-test to 11.9 in the post-test. Observations also indicated increased participation, enthusiasm, and confidence among pupils during song-based activities. The study concludes that using songs is an effective and engaging strategy for improving English vocabulary learning among young learners.

Keywords: Song-based learning, English vocabulary, Early childhood education, Action research, Language acquisition, Classroom engagement

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1. Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period for language development, during which children acquire foundational communication skills essential for both academic and social growth. In today's globalised context, English has emerged as a pivotal language for communication, education, and future opportunities. Consequently, introducing English vocabulary to preschoolers is crucial for fostering early confidence and competence in language use.

However, many preschoolers encounter challenges in learning English vocabulary due to limited exposure, short attention spans, and a lack of engaging learning experiences. Traditional teaching methods that emphasise drills and memorisation may fail to maintain young children's interest or promote meaningful learning. Educators, therefore, face the challenge of devising creative and child-friendly methods that motivate learners while facilitating language acquisition.

Songs are widely acknowledged as an effective instructional tool in early childhood education. Through rhythm, repetition, and melody, songs naturally capture children's attention and create a joyful learning environment. They contribute to improved pronunciation, memory retention, and word recognition, making language learning more enjoyable and meaningful. Additionally, songs promote active participation and support multisensory learning, which is crucial for young learners.

This action research aims to enhance vocabulary among preschoolers by integrating English songs into daily teaching practices. The study seeks to examine how song-based instruction affects children's vocabulary acquisition, engagement, and overall learning outcomes. By implementing and

reflecting on song-centred teaching strategies, this research endeavours to identify effective methods for improving English vocabulary learning in early childhood classrooms. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for educators in developing more interactive and effective language teaching approaches for preschool learners.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employs an action research design, encompassing planning, action, observation, and reflection. The researcher implemented song-based instruction to enhance vocabulary learning and evaluated its effectiveness through ongoing reflection and data collection.

Participants

The study involved preschool pupils from the researcher's class, comprising three children aged five and six children aged six. The participants were observed over a 12-week period.

Research Instruments

The following instruments were utilized for data collection:

- a. Observation checklist to record pupils' participation and behaviours
- b. Pre-test and post-test to assess vocabulary improvement
- c. Teacher's reflective journal
- d. Worksheets and oral activities

Procedure

This research procedure follows the general procedure of a classroom action research which is described in a cycle as shown in the following figure.

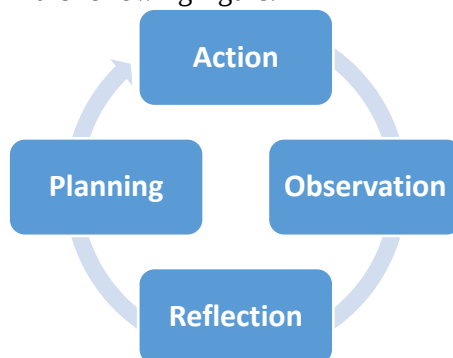


Figure 1. Procedure of a classroom action research

- a. Planning: Suitable English songs related to targeted vocabulary topics such as daily greetings and routines, body parts and movements, animals, and numbers were selected.
- b. Action: The songs were introduced during English lessons, accompanied by gestures, visuals, and repetition activities.
- c. Observation: Pupils' responses, participation, and progress were recorded throughout the lessons.
- d. Reflection: The data were analysed to evaluate the strategy's effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

3. Results and Discussion

Findings

This section presents the study's findings based on the action research cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The objective was to assess the effectiveness of teaching English vocabulary to preschoolers using songs.

Planning

During the planning stage, the researcher identified vocabulary topics suitable for preschool learners and relevant to their daily experiences, such as daily greetings and routines, body parts and movements, animals, vegetables, and numbers. Simple, repetitive English songs with clear lyrics and engaging rhythms were selected to aid young learners' comprehension.

Teaching materials, including flashcards, pictures, and simple actions, were prepared to accompany the songs. These materials aimed to help pupils' associate vocabulary with visual and physical cues, enhancing the learning process's meaningfulness and interactivity.

Action

During implementation, the researcher introduced the selected songs in English lessons. Each lesson commenced with the teacher playing or singing the song while pupils listened and observed. Subsequently, the teacher guided pupils to sing along while performing simple gestures and movements related to the vocabulary.

For instance, during the body parts lesson, pupils sang songs while pointing to parts such as their head, shoulders, knees, and toes. In the animal lesson, pupils imitated animal sounds and movements while singing. The numbers songs encouraged pupils to count aloud while performing actions like clapping or jumping.

Repetition of songs across several lessons familiarized pupils with the vocabulary. Pupils were encouraged to actively participate by singing, repeating words, and responding to the teacher's prompts.

Observation

During observation, the researcher recorded pupils' participation, engagement, and progress throughout the lessons. It was observed that pupils exhibited heightened interest when songs were incorporated into English lessons. Many pupils appeared more enthusiastic and willing to participate than in previous lessons relying on traditional methods.

Gestures and movements aided pupils in remembering vocabulary more effectively. Pupils were able to recognize and repeat words such as greetings, numbers, and animal names with increased confidence. Over time, more pupils correctly responded when asked to identify vocabulary related to the songs.

The observation checklist also indicated a rise in pupils' participation. Most pupils actively sang along, followed movements, and attempted to pronounce English words. Compared to the study's outset, pupils demonstrated improved attention and engagement during English learning activities.

Reflection

Analysis of observations and pupils' performance revealed that teaching English vocabulary through songs was an effective strategy for preschool learners. The integration of music, repetition, gestures, and visual aids facilitated pupils' understanding and retention of new words.

Findings also indicated that songs created a more enjoyable and relaxed learning environment. Pupils were less hesitant to speak English and more motivated to participate in classroom activities, suggesting that song-based learning enhances both vocabulary acquisition and learner engagement.

However, some areas for improvement were identified. Some pupils required additional repetition and visual support to fully grasp certain words. Future lessons might incorporate more visual materials, slower pacing of songs, and opportunities for small group practice.

Overall, findings suggest that incorporating songs into English lessons can significantly support vocabulary learning among preschool pupils. The strategy not only improves word recognition but also fosters active participation and positive attitudes toward learning English.

Data Analysis

Data collected in this study were analysed using descriptive quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were derived from pre-test and post-test results, while qualitative data were gathered from classroom observations and the researcher's reflective journal. The analysis aimed to determine whether songs improved pupils' English vocabulary learning.

The study involved nine pupils from the researcher's class, consisting of:

Table 1. Number and age of pupils

Age	Number of Pupils
5 years old	3 pupils
6 years old	6 pupils
Total	9 pupils

Pre-test and Post-test Results

A pre-test was conducted before implementing song-based lessons to assess pupils' initial vocabulary knowledge. Following several song-based lessons, a post-test was administered to evaluate pupils' improvement.

The test comprised 15 vocabulary items related to:

- Daily greetings and routine (e.g., good morning, goodbye)
- Body parts and movements (e.g., head, walk, jump)
- Animals (e.g., crocodile, jellyfish)
- Vegetables (e.g., cabbage, corn, carrot)
- Numbers (e.g., one, two, three, four, five)

Table 2. Individual Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Pupil	Age	Pre-Test (15)	Post-Test (15)	Improvement
P1	5	5	10	+5
P2	5	6	11	+5
P3	5	4	9	+5
P4	6	7	12	+5
P5	6	8	13	+5
P6	6	6	12	+6
P7	6	7	13	+6
P8	6	8	14	+6
P9	6	7	13	+6

Table 3. Average Scores

Test	Total Score	Average Score	Percentage
Pre-test	58	6.4/ 15	42.7%
Post-test	107	11.9/ 15	79.3%

Interpretation of Test Results

The results demonstrate a clear enhancement in pupils' vocabulary knowledge following the implementation of song-based learning activities. The average score increased from 6.4 in the pre-test to 11.9 in the post-test, indicating significant improvement in pupils' ability to recognize and recall English vocabulary. All nine pupils exhibited improvement in their scores. Even younger pupils aged five years showed progress, suggesting that songs were effective for early learners with limited English exposure.

Observation Findings

Classroom observations were conducted throughout the teaching sessions to evaluate pupils' participation, engagement, and response to songs. The observation checklist focused on behaviors such as singing along with the teacher, performing gestures and movements, repeating English vocabulary, and responding to teacher's questions.

Observations revealed that pupils were more attentive and enthusiastic when songs were integrated into lessons. Many pupils actively participated by singing, clapping, and performing actions related to the vocabulary. For example, during the body parts song, pupils correctly pointed to their eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and hands while singing. During the animal song, pupils imitated animal sounds and movements, aiding vocabulary retention. The numbers song encouraged pupils to count aloud and confidently repeat number words. Overall, most pupils demonstrated high levels of engagement and participation during song-based activities.

Reflective Journal Findings

The researcher's reflective journal provided additional insights into the teaching strategy's effectiveness. Reflections indicated that pupils appeared more motivated and confident when learning English through songs. The repetitive nature of songs enabled pupils to retain vocabulary more effectively. Pupils who were initially shy gradually became more willing to participate in singing and speaking activities. However, some pupils required additional visual support and repetition to fully comprehend certain vocabulary items.

Summary of Findings

The combined quantitative and qualitative data suggest that teaching English through songs positively impacted pupils' vocabulary development. Key findings include significant improvement in pupils' post-test scores compared to pre-test scores, heightened engagement and participation during song-based lessons, and enhanced vocabulary retention and pronunciation through repetition and actions. The strategy proved effective for both younger (five years old) and older (six years old) pupils. Overall, the results indicate that integrating songs into English lessons is an effective and enjoyable method for advancing vocabulary learning among young learners.

Discussion

The objective of this action research was to determine whether teaching English vocabulary through songs could enhance vocabulary learning among young learners. Findings from pre-test and post-test results, classroom observations, and the researcher's reflective journal indicate that using songs positively impacted pupils' vocabulary development and classroom engagement.

The comparison between pre-test and post-test results demonstrated a clear improvement in pupils' vocabulary knowledge. The average score rose from 6.4 in the pre-test to 11.9 in the post-test, signifying that pupils recognized and recalled more English words following song-based activities. This suggests that songs reinforced vocabulary learning through repetition, rhythm, and meaningful context.

Study findings align with previous research indicating that songs enhance language learning among young learners. According to Murphey (1992), songs provide repetitive and meaningful language input, aiding vocabulary retention. Similarly, Millington (2011) stated that songs improve learners' motivation and vocabulary retention by combining language with rhythm and melody. The improvement observed in pupils' test scores reflects these findings.

In addition to vocabulary enhancement, classroom observations revealed increased engagement and enthusiasm during English lessons when songs were employed. Pupils actively participated by singing, repeating words, and performing gestures related to vocabulary. This increased participation suggests that songs foster a more enjoyable and interactive learning environment. These findings corroborate Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2002), who observed that songs create a relaxed classroom atmosphere encouraging participation and reducing language learning anxiety.

Gestures and movements during songs also contributed to pupils' understanding and memory of new words. For example, when learning body parts, pupils pointed to their head, shoulders, knees, and toes while singing. This multisensory approach enabled pupils to associate words with actions, facilitating vocabulary retention. This supports Cameron (2001), who emphasized that young learners benefit from activities integrating movement, sound, and language.

Additionally, the researcher's reflective journal indicated that pupils became more confident in pronouncing English words and more willing to participate in classroom activities. Even initially shy pupils gradually joined in singing and vocabulary repetition. This suggests that songs can boost learners' confidence and encourage active English use. However, the study also noted challenges, such as some pupils requiring additional repetition and visual support to fully understand certain vocabulary items. This suggests that while songs are effective, they should be supplemented with other teaching aids like pictures, flashcards, and demonstrations to support comprehension.

Overall, the study's findings demonstrate that songs are a potent teaching strategy for enhancing English vocabulary learning among young learners. The integration of music, repetition, and movement not only enriched pupils' vocabulary knowledge but also increased their motivation and classroom participation.

4. Conclusion

This action research aimed to enhance English vocabulary among young learners through song integration during classroom instruction. The study involved nine participants: three children aged five and six children aged six. The research adhered to the action research cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection.

Study findings revealed that incorporating songs into English lessons significantly improved pupils' vocabulary learning. The comparison between pre-test and post-test results showed a clear improvement in vocabulary knowledge, with average scores increasing from 6.4 in the pre-test to 11.9 in the post-test, demonstrating pupils' enhanced ability to recognize and recall English words post-intervention.

In addition to quantitative results, classroom observations and the researcher's reflective journal highlighted that pupils were more engaged and enthusiastic during song-based activities. The use of gestures, repetition, and visual aids facilitated pupils' understanding and retention of new vocabulary. Pupils also demonstrated greater confidence in pronouncing English words and engaging in classroom activities.

Overall, the findings suggest that using songs is an effective and enjoyable strategy for teaching English vocabulary to young learners. The approach not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also fosters a positive and interactive learning environment.

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