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Nursery Rhymes: Its Effectiveness in Teaching of English among Pre-Schoolers

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Abstract
Nursery rhymes play an important role in young children as they help develop their English language. This study investigated the teachers' perceptions on the use of lyrics and animation of the nursery rhymes in helping pre-schoolers to learn vocabulary skills and spelling of English words as well as improving their grammar knowledge. The study employed a survey design among 48 kindergarten teachers using a Google link form. The preliminary findings indicated that generally the teachers agree that nursery rhymes should be used in the teaching of English as the initial results indicated that preschool children's acquisition of new words and grammar was significant using nursery rhymes. This shows that nursery rhymes not only motivate pre-schoolers to learn the language but also create a platform to encourage them to be more interactive while listening to the rhymes.
Keywords: Pre-Schoolers, Nursery Rhymes, Learning, Teaching, English Language

Introduction

Nursery rhymes are simple traditional songs or poems composed by anonymous poets with highly rhythmic nursery verses and tightly rhymed for children to listen, sing along, and enjoy (Martinez, 2017). Although they seem simple, they consist of appropriate word orders, sentence structures and grammatical elements which children as young as four to six years old can grasp a lot of information from them. Thus, introducing English nursery rhymes in kindergarten is a good way to encourage the children to learn English since most children in that age group are very interested in singing and to a large extent acting out the lyrics of the songs. Furthermore, using nursery rhymes in the classroom can break the monotonous teaching approach as well as make the teaching and learning process more creative and interactive. This can be accommodated in the curriculum (Blondel & Miller, 2001).

It is reckoned that language acquisition among primary school children can be heightened by using rhymes and songs in the classroom as they enclose new lexicon, culture, pronunciation, and intonation in an easy and adaptable way for the children. These are done in a way that is quite easy for the children to follow and learn steadily. Nursery rhymes, or silly poems were created before the 1600s and they were intended to entertain young children and soothe babies. Over time, children enjoyed reciting nursery rhymes at home, in school, and at play as part of the daily lives. Reilly and Ward claimed that the rich colourful language in traditional songs tend to expand children's vocabulary going beyond the narrow range of their own day-to-day encounters (Reilly & Ward, 2003). This environment creates an alternate learning environment to impoverish learning to make it substantive and comprehensive DeCastro, 2000). Teaching of nursery rhymes have been in practice for long to enhance linguistic, cognitive, affective, and cultural attributes (Prosic-Santovac, 2015). By using nursery rhymes in the teaching of English it is a wonderful way for teachers to connect language with song and rhyme in a natural manner. Nursery rhymes such as "Humpty Dumpty," "Little Miss Muffet" or "Jack and Jill" are often used as teaching materials as well as for fulfilled teaching and learning for pre-schoolers and teachers. It is believed that this interaction makes nursery rhymes as an essential tool in transmission and learning of language and knowledge (Gauthier & Lejeune, 2008).

Dunst, Meter, and Deborah (2011) argued that nursery rhyme experience and knowledge expedited children's phonological processing skills and print-related outcomes which anchored the association between nursery rhymes and literacy improvement among young children (Bryant et. al., 1989). The fact that nursery rhymes are more about the rhythm and sound of words rather than their actual meaning can explain why nursery rhymes can easily improve phonological awareness skills. Children like the loudness and rhythm of the words in nursery rhymes, even though they don't have a complete understanding of their meaning, or even a poor knowledge of it (de Santis, 1986).

As English language is the international language, parents strive and ensure that their children have a good grasp in the language like fluent in reading, acquire a wide range of vocabulary and able to apply English grammar rightfully so that their children can communicate confidently in English.

However, they are aware that the acquisition of the above learning skills is not an easy task but quite the opposite. It is not easy for children, especially preschool children, to learn

English. As such, this study highlights the fact that teaching and learning of English language for children has become a "large-scale wave" around the globe (Brewster & Ellis, 2004). Therefore, this study accentuates and suggests starting teaching English language in the early stages of children's life, namely, at the age of 5-6 years old. It is recommended to teach English to preschool children in a simple, active, engaging, attractive and enjoyable way. Subsequently, one of the best media for teaching English to pre-schoolers is through nursery rhymes. Sayakhan and Bradley's (2019) research indicated that children who start learning nursery rhymes, songs, chants, and rhythmic poems at an early age significantly enhance their early reading skills and phonemic awareness. In addition, Paradisa (2015) agreed that children can improve their grammar through exposure to nursery rhymes. Also, to acquire and master all four language skills, pre-schoolers continuously and periodically need to have exposure to nursery rhymes as part of their kindergarten teaching program (Cardany, 2017). This study aims to analyse the use of nursery rhymes in teaching the English language at preschools.

1.   Do the pre-schoolers learn English language from nursery rhymes?
2.   Is there a significance of teaching experience and teachers' perception of the pre-schoolers learn
        English using nursery rhymes?

Theoretical Framework
    This study is designed based on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-constructivism theory to explain how the learning process takes place during early childhood stage through nursery rhymes who emphasised that children observe, interact, learn, and gradually internalise new knowledge and skills from their more capable peers and adults (Pianta, 2006). In other words, children's interests are directly impacted by the adults and their environments (Dickson & Neuman, 2006). As children engage in literacy activities, it obviously develops their literacy skills (Adamson et al., 2016). Learning nursery rhymes creates an avenue and situation which expedite interactions among children, nursery rhymes and adults like teachers, etc. that works on children's zones of proximal development. This also opens a platform for children to acquire on new knowledge and skills. Hence, educators need to concentrate on new thoughts and ideas while teaching and reciting nursery rhymes with children to develop linguistic and musical skills which is an explicit way of teaching and learning for children where it is possible to take place between two recitations of the same nursery rhyme (Justice & Kadevarek, 2004).

    The teacher can start by focusing on the phonemic the words in the rhyme to teach vocabulary. Hence, explicit instruction is integrated in the natural context of nursery rhymes. Besides, repetitious revelation to nursery rhymes is a positive approach in developing literacy and musical development in children (Dunst et al., 2011). Therefore, exposing children to linguistic and musical challenges in nursery rhymes is crucial in developing and improving their literacy and musical skills at a tender age.

    This study aims to formulate a comprehensive framework by integrating theories of first and second language learning. This framework is expected to progress through a critical appraisal of the monitor model (Krashen, 1982). It is also conferred with Krashen's five hypotheses and research findings. The study concludes with a call for a more encompassing theory in developing people's ability to use a second language.

Materials and Methods

This quantitative study was carried out by collecting data through a questionnaire through Google Form links. A total of 50 pre-school teachers from Selangor and Malacca, Malaysia was randomly selected to participate in this study. However, only 47 responses were complete for analysis. Five respondents were randomly chosen for a structured semi-structured interview. All of them were 20 years and above. 93.62% of the respondents were female while 6.38% were males. The majority (72.35%) of respondents were from the age group of 21- 30, followed by 14.89% of 31- 40 while 41-50 and 51-60 years of age were 6.38% respectively. 36.17% of respondents had a work experience of less than 1 year. 19.15% of respondents worked for 1-2 years, 12.77% worked for 2-5 years and 31.91% worked for more than 5 years.

Research Instruments

A set of questionnaires was adapted from (Arumugan et al., 2012). The questionnaire consisted of Part A eliciting demographic details while Part B elicit teachers' perspectives about children learning the English language through nursery rhymes. The questions were asked in the form 5-point like scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Moderate, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree) to allow the respondent express how much they agree or disagree with the statements provided in the questions. Five teachers were randomly chosen to validate the quantitative data. The questionnaire data was moved to the Meta-Calculator program to see the response frequency and do the best statistical test. The research questions were answered using the application-generated statistic.

Research Schedule and Procedure

This study had four phases to guide the research group in completing the project. The phases are illustrated below.
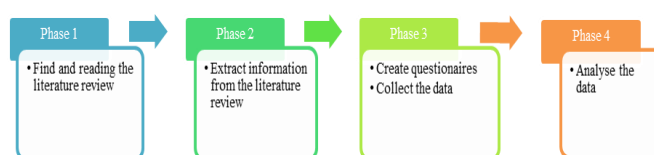

Figure 1. Four phases

Results and Discussion

Teacher Perceptions on Using Nursery Rhymes to Teach English

Table 1 reveals that 97.9% respondents firmly believed that "nursery rhymes can be used as preschool teaching aid" and "help in learning English language". Dunsmore (2019) argued that young children gain substantially from learning a foreign language through games and songs. They found that English classes are enjoyable and engaging. Therefore, it is inevitable for teachers to use songs and games in classrooms to make their instruction more exciting.

Moreover, 95.7% of respondents agreed that nursery rhymes improve preschool vocabulary. Besides, young children also learn new words through nursery rhymes and improve their vocabulary while they encounter new words and meanings (Healy, n.d.). This gives these young children an opportunity to construe words and understand the meaning through contextual clues hinted by the story. Young children easily learn along with the appealing and catchy tune and lyric which help to improve their spelling ability.

Furthermore, 93.6% of the respondents agree of "I love teaching English using nursery rhymes" and they believed that the nursery rhymes help children to learn English in the early stage. Harper's study (2011) indicated that nursery rhymes are compelling developing determiner among preschool children. Nursery rhymes have been proven to develop phonemic skill which improved young children's reading, spelling, and other literacy skills.

Is there a significance of teaching experience and teachers' perception of the pre-schoolers learn English using nursery rhymes?

The goal of this study is to see if the teaching experience and the perception of the pre-schoolers learn English from nursery rhymes with the use of the ANOVA test. The results are presented in the categories of degrees of freedom (df), mean square, F and Sig. (The significance).

From the ANOVA test, only one item showed a significant difference between teaching experience and the understanding of pre-schoolers to learn English from nursery rhymes. When asked if the respondents agreed, $F=2.458$ with a significance of 0.015376, which is less than 0.05, indicates that a significant difference between teaching experience and their ability to use nursery rhymes to teach the English language in preschools.

"One of the big problems we all face, whether teaching English to children or adults, is maintaining learners' interest throughout our lessons" (Harper, 2011, p. 66). Consequently, we often must be very creative in the techniques we use. Simpson (2015) concluded that "what makes music such a great teaching tool is its universal appeal, connecting all cultures and languages; thus, makes it one of the best and most motivating resources in the classroom, regardless of the age or background of the learner." "Rhyming teaches children how language works. It helps them notice and work with the sounds within words. Rhymes help children experience the rhythm of language. As they recite nursery rhymes, they learn to speak with animated voices. Someday they will read with expression, too. When children are familiar with a nursery rhyme or rhyming book, they learn to anticipate the rhyming word. This prepares them to make predictions when they read, another important reading skill". Similarly, Paradisa (2015) argued that nursery rhymes can be a useful tool to teach English language to young children and applications for nursery rhymes include a variety of nursery rhymes that teachers can use as visual aids to navigate. In a similar vein, Sayakhan and Bradley (2019) agreed that nursery rhymes teaching is considered an effective method for teaching young kindergarten learners English as a foreign language.

In the semi-structured interview, all the five pre-school teachers said that pre-schoolers learn English through nursery rhymes. They noticed that the kids learn more vocabulary faster with nursery rhymes, that they tend to enjoy them a lot, that drives their imagination, because children really love to sing. They also learn to speak, sing, and spell through nursery rhymes because they can easily absorb words through songs. Thus, that is why their curiosity arises when they ask the meaning of those nursery rhyme words. Nursery rhymes seems to stimulate the interest of pre-schoolers to learn English.

Table 1
Teachers' Perception of Children learning English through Nursery Rhymes

Items	Mean	SD	Agree	Moderately agree	Disagree
Nursery rhymes can be used as preschool teaching aid	4.62	0.52856	97.9%	2.1%	0.0%
Nursery rhymes improve pre-schooler's vocabulary	4.53	0.58425	95.7%	4.3%	0.0%
Pre-schoolers learn English through nursery rhymes	4.30	0.62258	91.5%	8.5%	0.0%
Nursery rhymes teach the pre-schoolers grammar	3.87	0.87519	72.3%	19.1%	8.5%
Nursery rhymes help children to learn English in early stage	4.51	0.62109	93.6%	6.4%	0.0%
Nursery rhymes help in learning English language.	4.55	0.54408	97.9%	2.1%	0.0%
Teaching nursery rhymes can instil good values in children.	4.38	0.67737	89.4%	10.6%	0.0%
I love teaching English using nursery rhymes.	4.57	0.61661	93.6%	6.4%	0.0%

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Preschoolers learn English through nursery rhymes	4.2979	.62258	47
Teaching Experience	2.4043	1.27960	47

Table 3
Significance of teaching experience and teachers' perception of the pre-schoolers learning English from nursery rhymes

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.924	1	.924	2.458	.124[2]
	Residual	16.906	45	.376		
	Total	17.830	46			

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Do nursery rhymes teach the pre-schoolers grammar?	3.8723	.87519	47
Experience	2.4043	1.27960	47

Table 5
Pearson correlation test between teaching experience and teachers' perception of the nursery rhymes help to teach grammar.

Correlations		Nursery rhymes teach the pre-schooler grammar	Teaching Experience
Pearson Correlation	Nursery rhymes teach the pre-schooler grammar Teaching	1.000	.358
	Experience	.358	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Nursery rhymes teach the pre-schooler grammar	.	.007
	Experience	.007	.
N	Nursery rhymes teach the pre-schooler grammar	47	47
	Experience	47	47

Table 5 shows the Pearson Correlation Test in use. Findings indicate that teaching experience, and teachers' perceptions of nursery rhymes help to teach grammar to pre-schoolers that are interrelated. Most nursery rhymes are simple, repeated, and rhythmical. It makes children understand what they learned easily because "nursery rhymes teach grammar, word order, vocabulary, rhythm, and pronunciation altogether and there are claims that young learners have short attention span" (Sayakhan & Bradley, 2019). Hence, these applications provide tools that attracts young learners "attention as supporting media for teachers". Nursery rhymes provide oral assistance to children and help them increase their hearing sensitivity. They are part of the pre-literacy skills of children and are an important component of their cognitive development. Nursery rhyme contribution to the children's language and educational foundations cannot be misconstrued because the rhymes and songs can be used anywhere at any time; thus, they are one of our most portable modes of play (KBYU Eleven Organisation, 2010).

In terms of nursery rhyme helps teach grammar, although some teachers disagreed with the idea, more than half responded positively as at 95% of the significance level, there is a relationship between the teaching experience of teachers and the nursery rhymes that help to teach grammar is 0.007, which is less than 0.05. In fact, the findings of the interview showed that nearly all respondents believed that nursery rhymes could teach pre-schoolers grammar, but it requires consistent practice and exposure. In fact, due to the obvious fun nature of nursery rhymes, pre-schoolers can also listen and sing along to nursery rhymes at home. This enables them to practice subconsciously, which seems to equip they with some basic grammar when they enter primary school. Moreover, if they have learned some basic grammar skills,

the teaching of English would be easier for both the teacher and them. The respondent who disagreed with the statement on grammar argued that nursery rhymes are most likely to teach pre-schoolers vocabulary as she believed that grammar needs more time to be learned and is very heavy for pre-schoolers.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that nursery rhymes are an effective teaching aid to teach pre-schoolers English language. Children learn more vocabulary faster with nursery rhymes, that they tend to enjoy them a lot, which stimulates their imagination, because children really love to sing. Furthermore, they learn to speak, sing, and spell through nursery rhymes because of their quick nature in understanding words through songs. Additionally, most teachers view that nursery rhymes would help them quickly stimulate children's interest in learning new things. Learning English through rhyme makes the lesson more fun. Thus, it is apparent that nursery rhymes are effective tools in teaching English language to young learners, and nursery rhyme applications include a variety of nursery rhymes that teachers can use as visual aids to navigate their teaching (Paradisa, 2015). This is a great way to connect language with song and rhyme, and it is undoubtedly very natural to use nursery rhymes to teach English.

Some nursery rhymes are simple, repetitive, and rhythmic; thus, it makes it easier for children to understand what they learn. Teachers' views are in line with that of Pinter's (2006) that pre-schoolers can learn grammar through nursery rhymes quite effortlessly. However, teaching grammar requires consistent practice and exposure. The fact that because of the obvious fun nature of nursery rhymes, pre-schoolers can listen and sing along to nursery rhymes at home, which allows them to practice the language subconsciously. Therefore, nursery rhymes not only promote the growth of children's language skills such as reading, writing, listening and speech skills but also facilitate their pronunciation, song rhythm, grammar, and vocabulary learning.

This study, based on the findings, indicates that nursery rhymes help kindergarten children improve their second language skills such as developing their auditory skills like discerning between sounds and developing the ear for the music of words. With emerging technologies to improve learning, nursery rhymes have become a tool of assisting pre-schoolers to learn English language. Based on Sayakhan and Bradley's (2019) study, learning of nursery rhymes, songs, chants, and rhythmic poems at a tender age can heighten reading skills and phonemic cognizance. Furthermore, many kindergarten teachers agreed that nursery rhymes are attractive, interesting, and enjoyable ways to interact with children in helping them learn English language, widen their vocabulary, and deepen their understanding of English grammar. This research may be useful for kindergarten teachers to create more interesting environment outside of the classroom and to establish effective methods of learning.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and discussions, there are some suggestions for teachers to consider. First, teachers need to be aware of the perceptions of pre-schoolers with the functions of nursery rhymes in English language teaching and learning. It is important to know which nursery rhymes are best for learning English for pre-schoolers so they can participate more in the learning environment. Besides, teachers can encourage pre-schoolers to practise and listen to more nursery rhymes to build their confidence in learning English. This method helps pre-schoolers improve their English language as nursery rhymes offer many benefits

that allow children to learn and understand the English language as a second language in an easy, effective, and productive way.

Besides, teachers can get the latest nursery rhymes songs and videos from a variety of sources via latest technology. Children may not be familiar with old material which can cause them to easily lose focus while listening for studying purposes. Various modern cartoon songs tend seem to raise children's interest children to learn and understand English. Once they are drawn to the familiar latest rhymes, this will facilitate their learning and increase their interest in English language. For future research, it would be more reliable to investigate the diversity issues regarding the relevance of nursery rhymes at pre-school level by involving all teachers and children in the country in getting more significant views on nursery rhymes. In addition, further study can also investigate if nursery rhymes can be an important tool in teaching and learning English language at higher levels, namely primary, secondary, and even tertiary. Besides that, future research must be broadened by including a qualitative analysis of the nursery rhymes. In addition, research on the correlation between using nursery rhymes in improving language skills such as reading, or writing would shed further light on the use of nursey rhymes.

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