

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Study of Using Nursery Rhymes as an Instructional Strategy in ELT Classroom

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Abstract

Music soothes, relaxes, and motivates irrespective of age. We listen to music for pleasure among other reasons. It creates a refreshing effect. Nonetheless, it is rarely exploited as a learning tool by teachers and students. Conversely, it occupies a larger portion of student's and teacher's interests. The use of music serves a dual purpose: It motivates and, consequently, helps to enrich learning as an enjoyable affair. Music/songs may be used through three levels. It would mark the gradual development of learning using music. First, using music as an element of entertainment, moving on to use it to state the interface between music and learning and concluding with using music to learn specific language skills and linguistic units. The article elaborates on how using nursery rhymes as an instructional strategy in ELT classroom can be effective in language learning skills and grammatical components.

Keywords: *Music, Pedagogy, Nursery Rhymes, ELT*

1. Introduction

Language classroom interaction often remains tedious. However, using music/songs can prove one of the efficient ways of making a classroom lively. Music may offer a vital change in the routine procedure of the classroom. Howard Gardner (1983), a professor of psychology at Harvard University, proposed the theory of multiple intelligences. He advocates musical intelligence as one of them. This can be worked on in a variety of classroom situations for pedagogical purposes. Thus, the present attempt is to initiate a discussion about how to use music/songs as a pedagogical tool in ELT classroom, working on students' interests and motivation.

2. Review of Related Literature

Dunst, Merter, and Hamby (2011) conducted a review study in which they reviewed the relationships between nursery rhymes and literacy development. The outcomes stated that nursery rhymes were useful in phonological processing skills with young learners. Bolduc, Lefebvre, and Pirkenne (2012) conducted a study to assess the efficiency of nursery rhymes. The objective of the study

was to see how nursery rhymes can foster the development of skills in musical and phonological processing. The study assessed the effectiveness of nursery rhymes in four learning conditions. It supports significant improvement in students exposed to nursery rhymes with music. Green, Peterson, and Lewis (2006) conducted a survey which involved 180 educators engaged in early childhood centres in the U.S. The objective was to know about the nature of language and literacy activities they have in the classes. The survey recorded that approximately 85% of them use familiar nursery rhymes/songs as a part of their activities.

Peterson (2000) conducted a study wherein children supposed to master skills about language and mathematics through an intervention of music. The findings stated that the students instructed through music improved in language and reading. Further, this ascertains that the pronunciation of new words can be better with listening to music. Therefore, music can strengthen the correlation between language and music. Mohanty and Hejmadi (1992) investigated the learners' ability to learn the names of body parts and creativity. The experiment conducted was in three different conditions: a. verbal instruction only, b. verbal instruction with the addition of music, and c. non-training group. The experiment findings showed higher test scores for the experimental group instructed orally with the supplement of music. Thus, music proved useful as a source of instruction to develop the cognitive abilities of the students.

Regina and Li (1998) advocate the use of songs and believe that "they are an invaluable tool to develop students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing and can be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives, and adverbs". Many love music of different genres. It has recently been identified that use of songs has been a great idea. This potentially decreases the affective filters in the learning process that Krashen refers to in his Affective Filter Hypothesis. Krashan (1981) believes that "for effective learning the affective filter must be weak. A weak affective filter means that a positive attitude to learning is present" (p. 45). In this relation, music can help learners minimize the effect of affective factors.

Eken (1996) identified eight reasons for using songs in the language classroom: 1. Songs can be used to introduce a new topic or vocabulary. 2. Songs can be a good source to practice intensive and extensive listening. 3. Songs exhibit emotions and attitudes. The teacher can organize discussion around emotions expressed in the song. 4. Songs can help the teacher work on learner's errors indirectly. 5. The theme of the song can be discussed in pairs and groups for a rich understanding of the poem. 6. Songs can be used to create a relaxed atmosphere. 7. Songs can be used to tap the imagination and creativity of learners. 8. Songs can be used to help learners stay motivated during the lesson. These are several reasons among others for using songs in the classroom to make language learning as entertaining as possible. It is upon the teacher how to make most effective use of songs to introduce a learning unit, build activities around songs for varied language components.

Music in the language class has an emotional filter. A more empathically involved learner in a task/activity can have an increased degree of attention for the task being done. Thus, music largely works upon the emotional balance of an individual. It helps us concentrate and get involved in the

activity we do. More to add, Chanda, et al. (2016) point out that music evokes a wide range of emotions in the human mind

from exhilaration to relaxation, a joy to sadness, fear to comfort and even combinations of these. Many people use music to regulate mood and arousal much as they use caffeine or alcohol. Neurosurgeons use it to enhance concentration, armies to coordinate movements and increase cooperation, workers to improve attention and vigilance and athletes to increase stamina and motion. (Chanda, et al., 2016, p.12)

3. Objectives

- To know how use of nursery rhymes affect learner motivation
- To examine usefulness of nursery rhymes in teaching parts of speech in English
- To analyze use of nursery rhymes as an instructional strategy.

4. Participants

The subjects of the study were 36 first-year students of a Bachelor of Commerce. The study adapted the two groups of post-test experimental design. The control and experimental group had 20 students. The control group had 09 male students and 11 female students. The experimental group had 06 males and 14 females. The students were among the age group of 18-20 years. They had access to English from the first standard as a third language. The students hardly have any exposure to English outside the classroom. They are rural in terms of social, economic and geographical perspective.

5. Methodology

The researcher used a survey method to collect the data on students' exposure to music in general and more specifically to nursery rhymes. The nature of the study is experimental. Thus, the normative survey method is coupled with experimental design. The researcher used three data collection tools: questionnaire post-test and feedback. The questionnaire had 10 open-ended questions with multiple options. The questions were about nature of music students listen to, favourite music genre, the effect of music on individuals, place of music in an individual's life, a relation of music and learning, and use of music in the classroom, etc. Another tool was the post-test. The study was quasi-experimental. It involved two group post-test design. The objective of the post-test was to know what effect the use of music had on students' motivation and learning of English. How well the experiment worked as an instructional strategy too was the focus. The test had three sections: Fill in the gaps, match the pairs, and identify the word category. The test aimed to know how the experimental group performs after instructing using nursery rhyme as an instructional strategy. It was also to compare the performance of the experimental group with the controlled group which was not exposed to the use of nursery rhyme.

6. The Experiments

The research and theoretical basis have enriched my understanding of the use of songs. Specifically, I got to know how songs that are part of our daily life can be a potential source for learning. So, I decided to work on it and choose a song/rhyme that is famous, easy to vocalize and simple in the lexicon. This was done to make sure that my first-year students of a Bachelor of Commerce do not get embarrassed by an unknown song. For the first experiment (13 January 2019), I chose the popular nursery rhyme; *twinkle, twinkle little star* (Appendix D). The song is popular with simple words (I could trace that only two words out of 54 caused difficulty for students to make out. I intended to lead the students from simple to difficult. For the second (15 January 2019) and third experiments (16 January 2019), I put a list of nursery rhymes before my students and asked them about their most popular/favourite nursery rhyme among the given. 14 out of 20 students (Experimental Group) were in favour of *Wheels on the bus go round and round* and 16 out of 20 were in favour of *Jack and Jill went up the Hill* for the third experiment.

6.1. Classroom Experiment 1

Objective: To catch learners' attention and gradually lead them to the activity.

To help learners practice purposive listening.

Class: F.Y.B.Com. (Compulsory English)

Time: 50 Minutes (Approximately)

Language Components: Listening

The text (Nursery Rhyme): Twinkle Twinkle Little Star (Appendix D)

In class

- The teacher divided the class into pairs.
- Each pair had a paper to note down the lines of the nursery rhyme.
- The teacher played the audio of the nursery rhyme.
- He then muted the voice and played a video of the song.
- The students had to identify and note down each line of the song by watching the video.
- The pair with appropriate lyrics got the reward.

6.2. Classroom Experiment 2

Objective: To identify and practice parts of speech

Class: F.Y.B.Com. (Compulsory English)

Time: 50 Minutes (Approximately)

Language Components: Listening, Noun, Verb, Preposition

The Text: Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round (Appendix D)

In Class

- The teacher divided the class into pairs.
- The teacher gave a handout to each pair.

- The handout had the text of the song but with missing words.
- The teacher played the video.
- The students worked in pairs to fill in the gaps in the text while listening to the song.
- The teacher gave a worksheet to each pair having match the pair exercise.
- The teacher again played the video.
- The pair had to match the words from column A with their parts of speech in B.

6.3. Classroom Experiment 3

Objective: To identify and practice use of past tense

Class: F.Y.B.Com. (Compulsory English)

Time: 50 Minutes (Approximately)

Language Components: Listening, past tense (irregular form)

The Text: Jack and Jill went up the Hill (Appendix D)

In Class

- The teacher offered each pair a handout.
- The teacher played the nursery rhyme.
- The students had to circle the verbs and mark their tense.
- The pair then replaces the names Jack and Jill with their names and rewrites the rhyme.
- The pair could also change the verbs appropriately.
- At the end, the teacher explained the concept of irregular past tense.

At the end of these three experiments, the teacher gave a feedback form (Appendix C). The form was meant to note the students' experiences about three experiments with nursery rhymes. The form had ten statements on a Likert scale. The students were to mark the statements on a five-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This would offer the teacher a possible picture of the usefulness of nursery rhyme in the language classroom.

7. Analysis and Discussion

The descriptive analysis and presentation of the Questionnaire, post-test and feedback are done. The objective was to determine how the use of nursery rhymes helped students enrich their understanding of language skills and select grammatical components. The data collected is analysed with statistical tools like mean, percentage, and SD.

7.1. Questionnaire

The majority of the participants like to listen to music. They either know the nursery rhyme or learnt it as a part of their study in early years of schooling. The teacher built on their interest in music. The questionnaire intended to know the place of music in the students' lives. The following description elaborates on the student responses to the questionnaire.

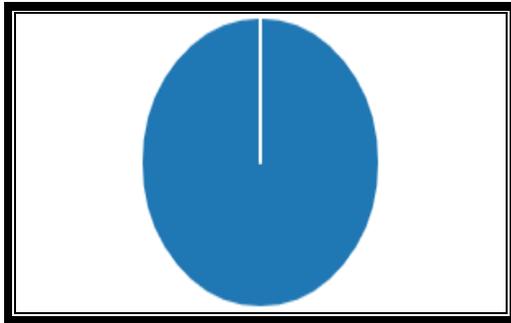


Chart 1 Do you like music/song?

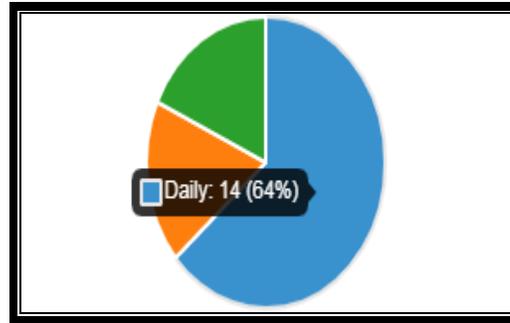


Chart 2 How often do you listen to music/song?

All the participants (chart 1) like music. It has an important place in their lives as individuals. It helps them stay motivated. Among the participants 64% (chart 2) listen to music/songs every day. This supported the teacher to avail nursery rhymes as an instructional strategy for effective learning outcomes.

Chart 3

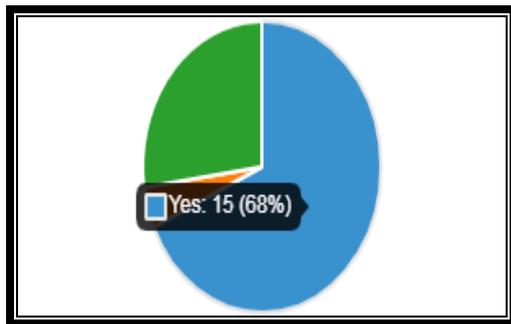
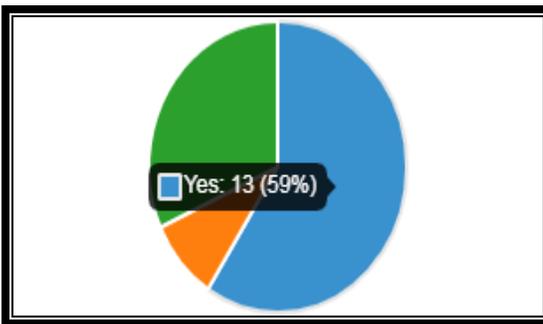


Chart 4



Do you think Nursery Rhymes can help in learning of English? Would you like your teacher use Nursery Rhymes in the class?

The participants (68%) believed that nursery rhymes can prove a useful tool in learning English. They could find a connection between their interest in music and its relation to the learning of the English language. They even in favour (59%) of the use of nursery rhyme in the class as a part of instructional design. The teacher built on the responses of the participants. He designed the activities accordingly.

The participants put their views in favour of the benefits of nursery rhymes in learning English. Here are a few responses from the participants.

1. Increases motivation and attention.
2. They give the happiness of the childhood
3. It will help to make our English conversation fluent
4. I think Nursery Rhymes helps us to learning English and remember us our childhood.
5. It helps in learning of English.
6. Repetition of rhymes and stories is good for the brain
7. Mind fresh
8. Sounds interesting
9. Pronunciation is clear with this

10. Because it gives the happiness of childhood
11. Listening to nursery rhymes not only relax to our mind but also it recaptures our old day's
12. Fresh the mood for good study
13. Easy to reading and singing simple words small words so fast speaking
14. It increases the interest in poetry
15. Nursery Rhymes Offer oral support to us and aid in our development of hearing awareness.
16. Nursery rhymes offer oral support to us and aid in their development of hearing awareness.
17. It can help in learning of English.
18. Helps to remember what is taught,
19. The stanza of the poems will be easy to remember.

7.2. Post-Test

The scores of the participants (controlled and experimental) were analysed in Microsoft excel. The post-test analysis indicates a higher mean score of the experimental group than the controlled group. The experimental group participants scored higher in post-test. The following table details the mean, SD and the relative difference in the scores.

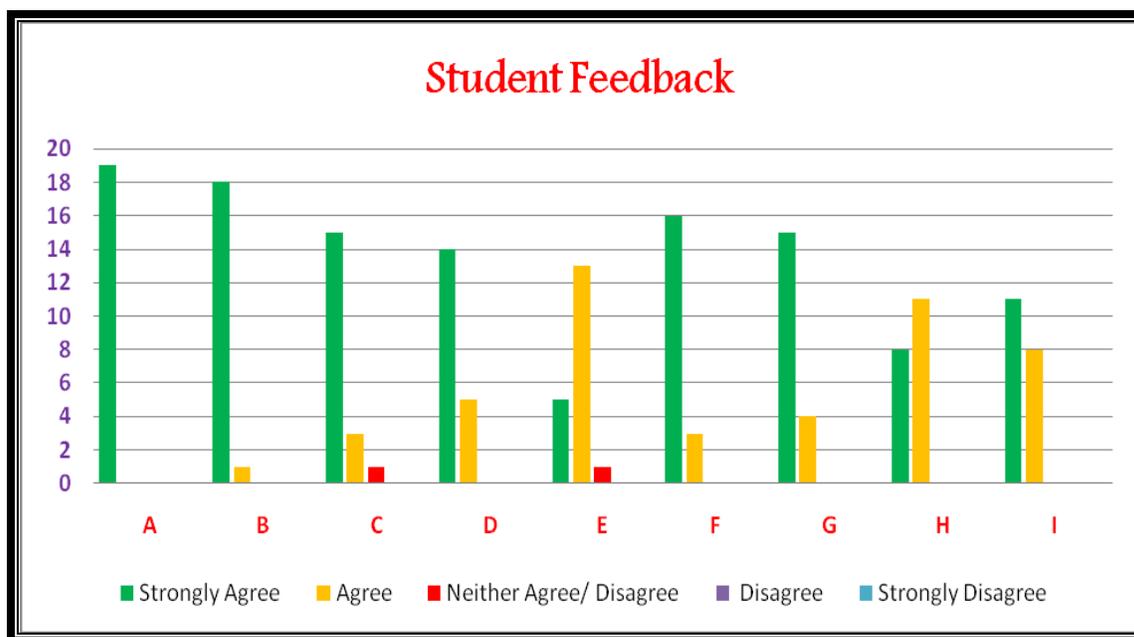
Table 1

Group	Students	Mean	Difference	SD
Controlled	20	5.55	6.09	1.69
Experimental	20	12.45		1.53

The participants in the experimental group were instructed using nursery rhymes. The mean score of the experimental group is **12.45** and it is higher than the controlled group **5.55**. The difference is **6.09**. The standard deviation for the experimental group is **1.53** and for the controlled group, it is **1.69**. The statistical results support the assumption that using nursery rhymes helped the participants (Experimental) perform better than the participants of the controlled group. The latter were not instructed using nursery rhyme. The statistical difference in mean score validates that the use of nursery rhymes helped the participants of the experimental group perform better compare to their counterparts in the controlled group.

7.3. Feedback Analysis

Chart 5



The feedback of the participants was recorded on a five-point Likert scale. They responded to the ten statements. Each statement has responses from strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree to strongly disagree. Student's feedback indicates the effectiveness of nursery rhymes. Specifically, the use of nursery rhymes made learning interesting. All the participants (100%) agreed upon its role in making learning interesting. Even, the participants (100%) responded to the use of nursery rhymes as effective in learning English. It was also responded to be an effective instructional strategy. They responded that learning was student-centric and teacher dominance was reduced. Nursery rhymes helped students to collaborate with peers and created more opportunities to use English. The participants also suggested the use of nursery rhymes to learn other components of the English language. In response to the question asking for more comments, the participants provided these responses; *Nursery rhymes are interesting, I enjoyed the class, Very nice class, Good one, Excellent, Good, Nice, Good.*

8. Pedagogical Implications

The results of the experimental study suggest the usefulness of nursery rhymes. Specifically, it focused on learning of language skills and select grammatical components. Thus, strategic training to the teachers in using nursery rhymes as a part of the instructional strategy would make the learning process more efficient. They can also prove a crucial resource for teachers to build on students' motivation. Many students believe English is the most difficult subject in the curriculum. The present strategy may also help the teacher to create a face-saving classroom atmosphere. This can bring in a collaborative approach in the language classroom. Teacher will collaborate as a facilitator and look after more student involvement. Alongside, the teacher can move a little beyond the textbook for potential resources. It can

also affect the way the teacher plans and executes lesson plans. Detailed studies with more resources may yield more authentic information on teacher's pedagogical behaviour. Use of nursery rhymes as a part of the instructional design may also help the students to gradually move from passive presence to the active one in the class. The teacher may build activities (Pair/group) around the nursery rhyme that would facilitate to strengthen inter-member relation among students. Students may have an assignment based on a nursery rhyme focusing on select components of language use.

9. Conclusion

Music/song potentially works on students' interests and motivation, materializing and resulting in student participation. This participation is to be exploited further by the teacher. He/ she can devise an activity using songs to address the learning component. Now the question arises is what songs can we select and how? It demands the teacher work seriously at selection and gradation level. He/she needs to give serious thought to it and maximize the opportunities that a song offers. To come out of this dilemma, the teacher may ask the following questions. First, will the song interest my students? Second, are the lyrics of the song clear and audible? Third, is the song appropriate to the level of difficulty of my students? Fourth, is it suitable for language skills or structural units? Fifth, is the pronunciation natural enough to present/adapt it as a model? The action research explored how the use of songs, more specifically nursery rhymes, can be a potential source of instructional material. The findings showed a gradual change in the classroom atmosphere where the target students were more proactive than earlier. Noticeable differences were; students were more attentive, they were put in pairs so less embarrassed, a more noisy classroom (I would prefer a noisy classroom over a meditation room), and most importantly, the backbenchers were readily involved who otherwise prefer to remain as an audience.

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