Using Familiar Melodies to Develop K-Learners' Vocabulary

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Abstract *–Studies show the role of songs in enhancing brain development. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of familiar melodies in the vocabulary development of the kindergarten learners. Using a two-group pretest-posttest design, the experimental group (N=25) was taught using familiar melodies and the control group (N=25) was taught using conventional method. The results showed that the experimental group had significant improvement in their vocabulary performance. The study provides evidence that songs with familiar melodies are effective in developing the vocabulary of kindergarten learners.*

Keywords *– familiar melodies, pedagogical songs, kindergarten, vocabulary development.*

INTRODUCTION

Research over the last decade has shown that songs can enhance brain development in children. Using songs in the classroom during instruction can promote higher academic performance [1] – [5]. It is argued that using songs in the classroom which are familiar to the learners makes learning meaningful.

Studies reveal that music is linked to educational benefits for language acquisition. Developmental theories, i.e., Piaget and Vygotsky's theories informed this study. In Piaget's cognitive theory, cognition is central in children's development. In Piaget's constructivism, the students learn best when they are actively constructing information and knowledge (p. 48). Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the role of interaction among peers through interactive and collaborative learning for language development [6].

In the multiple intelligences theory, Gardner [7] has identified musical intelligence and linguistic intelligence as two of the nine intelligences. Linguistic ability promotes cognitive tasks [8], cultures, (e.g., folk songs [9]) and educational systems, e.g. multilingualism [8], [10].Interestingly, research has linked songs to enhance linguistic ability. There is growing evidence linking songs with the development of vocabulary. In this study, familiar melodies refer to the pedagogical songs [4], which used children's nursery rhymes as tunes for the songs in learning the target vocabulary. Wallace [3] maintains that melody aids memorability, i.e., "melody can chunk the text into melodic phrases and link textual phrases with similar melodic contours" (p.1482). Moreover, melodies provide an information-rich context that is critically connected to the text [3], represent thoughts, e.g., cultural values linked to social significance of education [9] (p.83) and symbolize feelings [4],[5], and possess rhythmic patterns for text recall [2], [3].

For several decades, in developed countries, e.g., Singapore, China, South Korea, and Japan, music training is required at the elementary and middle school levels. Results from international assessments, e.g., Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies, point that these countries top the test [11]. For example, in Japan, music teaching has been included in music textbooks for schools [12]. Recently, evidence from Asian study demonstrates that songs may indeed contain important pedagogical value [13]. Songs were effective in promoting English vocabulary acquisition in Chinese kindergarten learners over a period of 15 classes of 40 minutes [13]. In the Philippines, however, music training is relegated to the background.

Scant literature postulates that familiar melodies are plausible educational alternatives that can enhance the kindergarten learners' skills on identification, comprehension and analysis. Researchers revealed (e.g.,[14]) that "melodies in language teaching provide a rich-sounding environment". Some researchers exposed that familiar melodies facilitate recall [2],[3],[15]. Trainor and Corrigall [16] claimed that music enhances memory and language skills. Additionally, using melodies to facilitate learning was documented in different age groups, learning areas and level of intensity. In a study among 6 to 15-year-

old boys, researchers [17] showed that those who underwent music training had better verbal memory than their counterparts. In a meta-analysis of 24 correlational studies involving sample sizes of over 500,000 students, revealed a strong positive association between music instruction and reading test scores [18]. In other meta-analysis of 30 studies has shown similar significant effects [19]. A variety of pedagogical songs interventions were examined to look for an effect on vocabulary skills. Based on the meta-analysis, Standley [19], all schedules of intervention were equally effective regardless of the level of intervention intensity (eg, daily, intense, short-term, or weekly).

Literature reveals that using familiar melodies in kindergarten learners is scarce. A scholar [20] believed that although using songs are common in young learners' classrooms, the practices of using songs received little to no empirical studies. In consonance, more researches are needed to enrich this area to provide empirical evidence among kindergarten teachers. Consequently, promotes production of developmentally appropriate instructional materials.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of familiar melodies in the vocabulary development among kindergarten learners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Research design

The study used quasi-experimental two-group pretest-posttest design to determine the effectiveness of familiar melodies in the vocabulary development of kindergarten learners. Quasi-experimental was deemed appropriate an intact group. Gribbons and Herman [21] argued that it is useful when random assignment was not possible or practical.

Research Participants

The study was conducted in the third quarter of academic year 2009-2010 at Labangon Elementary School, in Labangon, Cebu City. The preschool is under the supervision of the Department of Education. The experimental group (EG) was composed of 25 respondents (male = 12, female = 13) while the control group (CG) was composed of 25 respondents (male = 14, female = 11). Both groups were identified through lottery and were matched in age (average of 6 years). Majority of the respondents came from average income family, live in the urban area and all of them had undergone pre-kindergarten schooling.

Instrumentation

Familiar melodies such as *Jack and Jill*, My Toes, My Knees, *B-I-N-G-O*, *The Farmer in the Dell*, *Sally Go Round the Sun*, *Deep and Wide*, *Clap, Clap your Hands* were used as tunes in teaching the target words. These nursery rhymes were chosen because these are very familiar to children based on the researcher's experience in handling kindergarten learners. The terms that were contained in these melodies were words that begin with consonant blends /cr/, /tr/, /br/, /dr/, /tr/, /cl/, /fl/, /pl/, eg, crow, crab, crown. These consonant blends were used because these were in accordance with the kindergarten language teacher's course guide for the third quarter. The researchers composed the songs while an expert was consulted regarding the arrangement and textual accommodation of these songs (see appendix).

The test had three parts: Identification, Comprehension, and Analysis. In the Identification part, the teacher asked the learner to identify the word that the teacher said by marking the correct picture with a check mark. In the Comprehension part, the learner answered the question of the teacher by underlining the picture of the correct answer. (e.g., Which one is the opposite of sad?) In the Analysis category, the learners had to analyze the question of the teacher and encircle the picture of the right answer. (e.g., Ela plays a lot. She becomes very thirsty. What would Ela do?)

The vocabulary test used in the study was pre-tested in a similar group of children that were not part of the experimental group. Using Cronbach alpha, the instrument was found to have a strong reliability coefficient ($\alpha=0.73$).

Data Collection Procedure

This study considered the profile of the vocabulary development of the preschool learners based on the results of the pretest and posttest. The test was divided into three parts; 1) identification, 2) comprehension, and 3) analysis.

Approval for conducting the test was secured from the office of the principal prior to the beginning of the study. First a pretest was administered to determine the respondents' level of understanding. The performance of both groups did not significantly vary. The researchers then taught the 36 target words to the respondents in eight weeks. The control group

was taught using conventional methods. The learner was presented with target word, encourage to produce the word and target word is associated with picture. The treatment group learned the target vocabulary using songs with melodies that were familiar to the children on top of the conventional method. A posttest was administered to both groups to determine changes in vocabulary after the intervention. Participant observations were recorded to describe kindergarten learners' interactions during the learning period [22].

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for human participants were strictly followed [23]. Parents and classroom teacher were explicitly informed on the purpose of the study. Communication with the school head was secured. An informed consent was obtained from the respondents and the respective parents. Utmost confidentiality was observed.

Statistical treatment of data

The mean increment score [24] was used to determine the change of the score before and after the intervention and a *t*-test was conducted to determine the significant differences between the experimental and control groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of familiar melodies in the vocabulary development of children. Vocabulary development was measured as composite scores in identification, comprehension and analysis skills. In the pre-intervention phase, both experimental and control groups were homogenous.

Figure 1. Mean increment scores

Figure 1 shows the differences of the incremental score of the respondents in vocabulary development. Results showed significant differences in the respondents' incremental scores in vocabulary, $t(48) = 3.99$, p<.05). Results showed significant differences in the respondents' incremental scores in vocabulary, $t(df) = t(48) = 3.99$, p<.05). Results further showed that the experimental group (EG) scored significantly higher than the control group (CG) ($M = 32.44$, $SD = 10.02$ and $M = 21.84$, $SD = 8.67$).

Examining closely, in identification, the students in the EG($M = 11.60$, $SD = 3.16$) scored significantly higher than the CG($M = 8.12$, $SD = 3.21$), $t(48) = 3.77$, $p<.05$. Likewise, in comprehension, the incremental scores of the students in the EG ($M = 10.40$, $SD = 3.63$) was significantly higher than those in the CG ($M = 7.16$, $SD = 3.06$), $t(48) = 3.41$, $p<.05$. This result holds true also for the ability to analyze. The incremental score of the EG ($M = 10.44$, $SD = 3.50$) was higher than the CG ($M=6.48$, $SD = 2.84$),$t(48) = 4.39$, $p<.05$.

The results of this study provide evidence that melodies are effective in developing vocabulary in kindergarten learners. Singing the lyrics greatly helped in the remembering and understanding of the meaning of the words. Researchers [2], [3] suggested that "rhythm may provide a schematic frame to which text can be attached". When young learners are familiar with the rhythm or melody, it can facilitate recall of the target words [2], [3]. Furthermore, this study confirms the findings of [20], [24], [25] which suggest that singing words promotes cognitive ability and could develop the vocabulary of kindergarten learners. Intervention programs, i.e., familiar melodies in kindergarten learners may have benefits [14], e.g., helps students to "concentrate and connect with their inner self, stimulating creative processes, eliminate distracting sounds from in or outside the classroom, and foster a relaxed but motivating and productive classroom atmosphere" and can eventually lead to the "development of children's receptive knowledge of vocabulary" [27]. Schon et al. [28] have shown that in learning a new language, "motivational and structuring properties of music in song" would enhance learning.

Warming [22] argued that participant observation is suitable to describe interactions among young learners. It was observed in this study that singing made the class livelier. The children were eager to answer the questions of the teacher as seen in their bright faces. They raised their hands with much
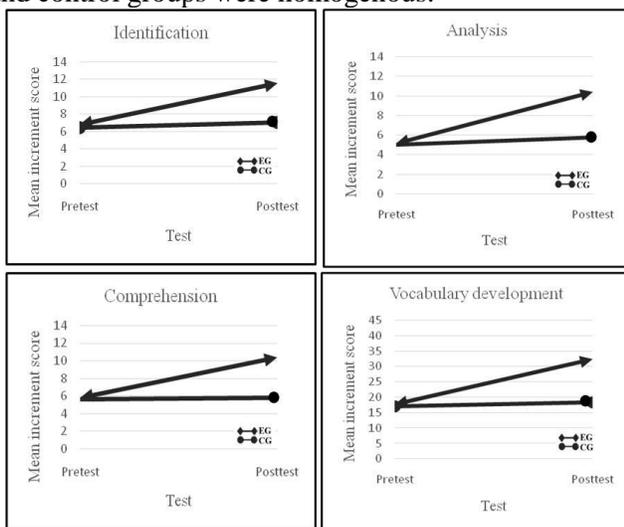
anticipation to be called by the teacher. It was also noted that the learners were delighted to sing the songs containing the target words. This was evident when they sang with high energy level and insisted on the teacher to keep playing the accompaniment so they could sing along. The findings are consistent with Vygotsky's theory which asserts that interaction among peers and with more knowledgeable others play a major role in learning. While it was observed that the learners in the control group enjoyed and learned the lessons through the colorful pictures, games, puzzles and other activities, it was clear that the experimental group had more enjoyment in the learning process because of the songs. The children exposed to familiar melodies were excited about learning in part because they expected to learn another song. It was also observed that all the students participated without being prompted to cooperate. This study corroborates Piaget's theory which contends that learners learn best when they are actively involved in the construction of knowledge [6].

It should be emphasized, however, that students who studied using the conventional learning environment also showed improvement in their learning outcomes. This increase in learning means that students can learn information regardless of the way in which the material is presented. However, comparing the improvement of the students in traditional classrooms and those taught with the familiar melodies, the former group's improvement was much less than the latter. Apparently, a possible reason for this difference was how the information was taught. This corroborates the prior study [23], that interventions which actively engage learners can result to improved performance.

This study adds to the literature that classroom environment infused with familiar melody can significantly contribute to vocabulary development of kindergarten learners [2], [14], [16], [17], [28].The results suggest that familiar melodies are a plausible educational alternative that can enhance the kindergarten learners' skills in identification, comprehension and analysis.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Familiar melodies familiar to kindergarten learners positively affect performance in vocabulary development. Music enhances the learners' memory and language skills. This study, however, has given rise to several questions. This study was conducted in an intact classroom, although both groups were homogeneous during the study, it does not account for ability to read. Future study may focus on the effects of familiar melodies to good and poor readers. The timing of the intervention during the study was consonant blends, pre-requisite skills were assumed to have been mastered, however, it is worthwhile to use familiar melodies in learning pre-requisite skills.

APPENDIX

'cl' songs based on Clap, clap, clap your hands by Emile J. Dalcrose

Clap, clap, clap your hands
Clap, clap, clap your hands together
Clap, clap, clap your hands
Clap, clap, clap your hands together
Clem the clown comes to class bringing a big clock
Clem the clown comes to class bringing a big clock

'cr' song based on nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill"

Creg the crow sat on the crib while eating crunchy crispies
A crab passed by and took the crumbs
then crawled back to the ocean

'fl' song based on "farmer in the dell"

The heavy rain is coming
The flood is quickly flowing
Please call the shepherd boy
To keep his flock safe
When the flood is o'er
The pretty flow'rs are gone
It also messed floor of some
And flu might also come

'dr' song based on '"sally go round the sun"

A drake swims in the pond
He drinks with so much fun
He sees a floating wooden drum
He drags it all he can

'pl' song based on "B-I-N-G-O"

There was a farmer had a plow pulled by his carabao
He plowed, plowed and plowed
He plowed, plowed and plowed
He plowed, plowed the plain
To make plots to plant some grain

'tr' song based on "Ching a Leya"
>   Ching a leya listen to words sounds
>   Ching a leya listen to words sounds
>   Trucks begin with 'tr' and so does the train
>   What about tray and the word trash can
>   Trucks begin with 'tr' and so does the train
>   What about tray and the word trash can

'br' song based on "Deep and Wide"
>   Brent the groom Brent the groom has a bride
>   who likes to eat some bread
>   She has a broom, she has a brush
>   And she gives joy to her "love"

'gl' songs based on "my toes my knees"
>   If someone will ask a glass of water
>   Would you be glad to share what you have
>   You'd surely turn the glum into glee
>   If you are willing to give

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