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The Effects of English Songs in Learning Vocabulary for Young Learners

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Abstract

This research is aimed to proof that English songs can be used as interesting tools to teach English for kids, especially for teaching vocabulary. As mentioned by Millington (2011), the crucial effect of using songs is to help learners to be more enjoyable in learning. A song is something which is closed to the kids and singing is an activity which is fun for them. Besides, song lyrics consist of simple daily words. Teaching English using songs can be used as an alternative tool because kids learn those words unconsciously. This research was conducted in Poncokusumo, a village located in Malang, Jawa Timur. The participants were seven elementary school students from two different schools. They were eight until ten years old. One student was from State Elementary School and six students were from private elementary school. The reason of choosing this village is because there was no research using English songs conducted there. Another reason is because the learners' and parents' knowledge about English songs is limited. Compared to a year ago, the internet connection is much better today, but they do not have any references to access the English songs from the internet, especially to use them as tools for learning English. Some steps were done by giving pretest, treatment, posttest, and conducting interview. Pretest was done to know the participants' knowledge related to the songs that were used. Then, the treatment was done by teaching those participants using songs that were chosen. In this step, the song lyrics used had simple words and easy to remember. After that, the posttest was done to get the results of the treatment. In the last step, one-by-one interview was conducted to gain some results related to the learners' responses toward the use of songs in learning English vocabulary.

Keywords: young learners, songs, teaching vocabulary

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English, especially for young learners, is always challenging. The different characteristics of young learners force teachers to always find a proper strategy in teaching. Teachers need to be careful in using the material, especially in choosing the basic vocabulary that they want to introduce to the young learners.

Vocabulary is very crucial in teaching and learning English. It is hard to imagine the success of communication without using words. As mentioned by McCarthy (1990), although the students are good in grammar and pronunciation, a meaningful communication cannot happen without words. However, teaching vocabulary does not always work well.

Teachers often face some common problems related to learners' confidence, brave, and motivation in learning English vocabulary. Some of them tend to be silent and passive in learning process or they do not pay attention on the teacher's explanation because they feel bored. These problems, as result, slow down the teaching and learning process.

To face those problems, teachers need be very creative to find some interesting techniques for young learners. One of the techniques which can be used is by using song. This is based on the characteristics of young learners who like something fun and enjoyable.

Song can be used as an alternative technique in teaching English since it provides the opportunity for vocabulary practice. Typically, many children's songs have simple words and sentence structure or pattern that can become set in the mind of the learner. Besides, using song in the classroom is enjoyable. Most children enjoy singing. They usually respond well in using songs in the classroom. This situation can help maintaining learners' motivation in learning English because they feel relaxed and fun. This is useful to gain students' interest and to rich their higher level of achievement especially in mastering vocabulary.

Commonly, songs contain certain topic that can be useful to teach vocabulary in context. For instance, the song "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" could be used to review names of animals, or the song "I'm Sorry/ Excuse Me" could be used to teach some basic nice words. Some of the vocabulary and language used in

traditional and popular English songs; however, it can cause difficulties for students because of their use of low frequency words. Therefore, teacher should select the song carefully to complement the target vocabulary in teaching English.

As it has been mentioned before, although learners are good in grammar and pronunciation, a meaningful communication cannot happen without words (McCarthy, 1990). This statement shows that vocabulary is very crucial beyond other components in learning English. By neglecting the use of grammar and pronunciation, this research will only focus on the use of songs in teaching vocabulary to younger learners. In addition, this research only focuses on the children songs uploaded by Cocomelon YouTube channel which is very popular nowadays.

In general, the use of songs in teaching vocabulary faces some pros and contras. Considering all the issues, specifically, this study is designed to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Can song lyrics be used to improve learners' vocabulary?
2. How are the learners' responses toward the use of songs in learning English vocabulary?

The objectives of this study were to examine the use of song lyrics in improving learners' vocabulary and to analyze the learners' responses toward the use of songs in learning English vocabulary.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Benefits of Using Songs in the Classroom

Some previous studies found that using songs in the classroom is beneficial (Millington, 2011; Džanić & Pejić, 2016). Millington (2011) points out that the main influence of using songs is to help learners to be more enjoyable in learning. Then, he found that songs can be used to help learners improve their pronunciation and listening skills. Songs can also be used to teach vocabulary and sentence structure.

Songs bring positive impacts on the young learners' vocabulary (Džanić & Pejić, 2016). They found that songs are relevant for any different learning styles and any different setting. They also agree that songs are important to be used by

language teachers to build inspiring and encouraging environments in order to increase learners' motivation in learning.

According to Stanislawczyk and Yavener (as cited in Kuśnierek, 2016), a song is an advantageous tool and a teacher should take advantage of it during linguistic practice. They also emphasize the importance of the engagement learners get when listening to songs or creating own lyrics. Some benefits of using songs in the classroom are explained as follows:

Motivation

A motivation is one of the important components that must be owned by the learners in studying. As mentioned by Dorneyi (2007), learning a language is a long-term process and learners are in charge of their learning at length. By using song, the learners feel fun and enjoyable in learning and it can increase their motivation. Songs contain authentic language; provide vocabulary, grammar, and cultural aspects which are easily obtainable (HINDÉMÈ, et. all, 2018).

Positive Atmosphere

Murphey (1992) mentions that "the use of music and songs can stimulate very positive associations to the study of a language, which otherwise may only be seen as a laborious task, entailing exams, frustration, and corrections". People typically equate songs with pleasure that is why they connect learning through songs with an enjoyable situation.

Cultural and Historical Knowledge

By using songs, learners will have a chance to gain a deeper understanding about the culture of target language. Shen states, "language and music are interwoven in songs to communicate cultural reality in a very unique way" (2009). This means that through the songs, cultural knowledge are spread and informed in the form of lyrics combined with certain music. To young learners, teachers can give them some songs about historical events in the target language. For instance, "Teddy Bear's Picnic" with lyrics written by Jimmy Kennedy in 1932 introduces the learners about an annual event "Teddy Bear Picnic Day" celebrated by people in the United States, Canada, Australia, and few parts of Europe on July 10 of every

year. On this day, people take their kids along with their teddy bears for picnic since these dolls are always the kid's favourite companion in those countries sometimes even until they grow up to adults. The parents commonly bring their kids go to the beach, park, lake, or forest for lunch.

Linguistic Knowledge

Another benefit of using songs in English classroom is that they provide linguistic knowledge, such as grammar, vocabulary items, and pronunciation. By using songs, students can frequently learn new information without any desire to do so. While singing the songs, they feel happy and do not realize that they are also learning new knowledge at the same time. They can just follow the music and imitate the way how some words are pronounced in the target language. While singing, they can also connect their body movements to the meaning of the words in the songs, especially when they relate to their body parts. Students can practice lots of English vocabulary using songs, such as animals (Old McDonald had a Farm), vehicles (The Wheels on the Bus), actions (If You're Happy and You Know It), Numbers (Ten in the Bed), and so on.

Disadvantages of using songs

The previous explanation mentioned some benefits of including songs in English language classroom. However, there are some disadvantages of using songs in the classroom that should be considered by teachers. Firstly, some students often feel too excited since songs make them feel fun, as result, they may forget about the discipline in the class. Secondly, there are some possibilities for students just to be interested in listening and singing the songs and not in working or studying. Thirdly, some students may dislike the songs chosen by teachers because they have different musical tastes. Fourthly, some songs contain limited words, too much slang words, and bad grammar. Finally, there are songs that focus on sensitive subjects such as aggression and misogyny and thus such songs may confuse or shame the learners.

Criteria for a Song Selection

Basically, there are no rigid guidelines that teachers should follow when choosing songs in English classroom. According to Griffiee (as cited in Kuśnierek, 2016), there are four criteria that teachers should take into consideration: the class, the teacher, classroom opportunities, and music.

Firstly, knowing the learners' ages is important. It is useful to decide the type of the songs that can be used. Young learners may like simple words related to concrete things, rather than complex and abstract things, such as envy or suffering. Besides, teachers should remember that the class which consists of different criteria of students may have different musical tastes. Secondly, teachers should choose songs that have instructional value and it should not be just for fun. Thirdly, teachers should provide opportunities to the classroom to choose the songs they like then select suitable ones. Lastly, the music should not be played loudly since it may disturb other classes.

Songs in the EFL Classroom

Saricoban and Metin (2000) considered songs to be able to improve the four skill areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. There are two mechanisms involved in listening to the song and the two can be used when songs are used in the classroom (Schoepp, 2016). The first is bottom-up processing where the listener translates the sounds into words, sentences, and meanings. The second is top-down processing where the listener makes use of context information to interpret a message's meaning.

According to Cameron (2001), there are three stages in language learning for young learners. Those stages are preparation, core activity, and follow up. In preparation stage, the teacher starts the class by activating the vocabulary of the learners. This may be achieved using a variety of approaches, depending on the teachers or class size. In activating vocabulary, teachers may use a human body image to evoke vocabulary. In core activity, teachers teach the class using appropriate songs depending on the topic. The last, follow up can be done by checking the students' vocabulary after memorizing the words through the songs.

METHOD

Approach of the Study

In conducting this study, the right approach has to be chosen. The approach used in this study was descriptive qualitative which used "One Group Pretest and Posttest Design" in order to find out the effects of the use English song in increasing students' vocabulary achievement. The design used a group of young learners, as the experimental group which received the treatment of using English song as media in teaching. In this research, pretest was given before the researcher taught the learners in order to measure the learners' competence before they were given the treatment. Then, treatment was given by playing two different songs for five times audiovisually. This treatment was done to see the students' vocabulary achievement. Posttest was given after teaching the students by using English song and to measure how far the students' improvement after they got the treatment.

Data Source

The researcher took data from a group of elementary students in Poncokusumo village. It is located at the eastern end of Malang, Jawa Timur. The participants of this study were seven Indonesian students who were between eight until ten years old. They were studying at two different schools: one student was from State Elementary School and six students were from private elementary school. The students' mother tongues were Javanese and they often used it in their daily conversation. Although the internet connection in this village is much better today, but the learners' and parents' knowledge about English songs was limited. They did not have any references to access the English songs from the internet, especially to use them as tools for learning English.

Technique of Collecting Data

In this research, there were three steps of phase done by researcher to gain the data: Pretest, posttest, and one-to-one interview. Pretest was given before the researcher taught the learners by using English songs and it was given in order to measure the students' competence before they were given the treatment. Then, treatment was conducted by playing two different songs for five times of each

song. The songs chosen were “Head Shoulders Knees and Toes” and “Little Fingers”. In the treatment phase, the researcher also showed the visual form of the song and asked the learners to follow the body movements performed on the video. After that, posttest was given after teaching the students by using English song to measure how far the students’ improvement after they got the treatment. If the result shows that there is no difference between pretest and posttest, it can be concluded that using songs to teach vocabulary in this case is failed. If the results show that the post test score is increasing, it can be concluded that using songs in teaching vocabulary is successful. The last, one-to-one interview was conducted to gain information related to the students’ perceptions toward the use of songs in learning English.

Method of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, since there were three main sources of data: students’ pretest, posttest results, and interview, three separated analysis processes were conducted. In pretest step, the students were given some pictures of words that would appear in the songs, but the researcher did not provide any clue about the songs. After that, the students were asked to guess or to translate those words in Indonesia. Then, the researcher analyzed the students’ background knowledge about those words. After that, the treatment was given to the students by playing two different songs. The songs chosen were those who had simple and easy vocabulary. While singing, the researcher also pointed the objects which were sung together. For instance, in “Little Fingers”, the researcher also used her finger to show number in English. Another example is in the song “Head Shoulders Knees and Toes”, the researcher also pointed the pictures of human body while singing the song. By singing more than three times, it was argued that the students would be able to memorize the words they got from the song.

In the posttest step, the students were given a test and asked to guess the words related to the pretest. The test was individually, so the students must have answered the questions based on their own understanding. The last, the researchers conducted one-to-one interview to get information related to students’ perception of using songs in learning English. The interview took five to ten

minutes long. After that, the data gained from the pretest, posttest, and interview of the students were analyzed by researcher to find out whether using songs in teaching English was successful and effective or not.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this section, the researcher will first present the comparison of participants' pretest and posttest scores. This is aimed to answer the first research question about whether song lyrics can be used to improve learners' vocabulary or not and the learners' perceptions about using songs in learning English vocabulary.

- a. Can song lyrics be used to improve learners' vocabulary?

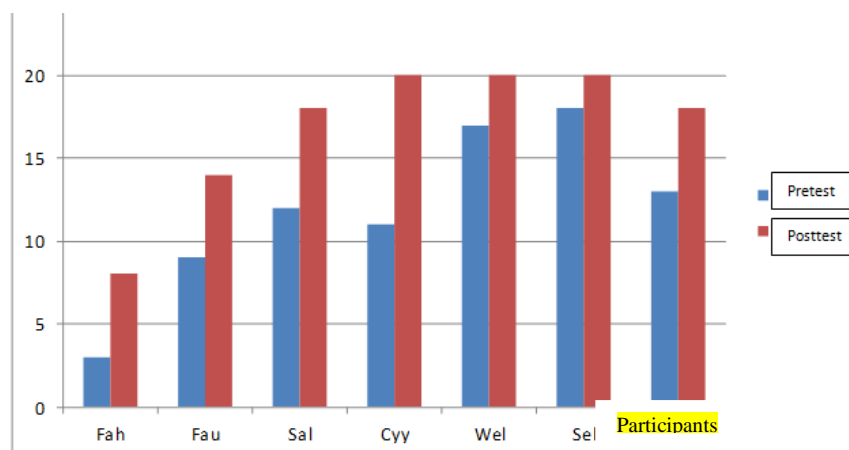


Figure 4.1. The Comparison of Participants' Pretest and Posttest Scores

In the Figure 4.1. above, the 7 participants were shown in the horizontal line, while the scores related to their correct answers were shown in the vertical line. By comparing the participants' pretest (blue color) and posttest (red one), it was found that all participants' posttest points were higher than their pretest ones. This showed that all of the participants' points were increasing.

From the total of 20 questions in the pretest and 20 questions in the posttest, Fah was able to answer 3 correct answers in the pretest and 8 correct answers in the posttest, then Fau could answer 9 correct answers in the pretest and 14 correct answers in the posttest. This shows that their scores were increased by 5 points. In the pretest, Sal's point was 12 and Ayy's point was 13, while in the posttest, Sal's point was 18 and Ayy's point was 19. Both participants

increased their points by 6. Then, Cyy's point in the pretest was 11 and her point in the posttest was 20. It meant that Cyy's score was increased by 9 points. Wel's point in the pretest was 17 and hers in the posttest was 20 which was increased by 3 points. Then, Sel's point was 18 in the pretest and 20 in the posttest which showed that she added 2 more points.

In sum, most of the learners were able to memorize the words they learned from the songs, especially when the researcher also used body movement while singing. For instance, in the song "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes", the researcher asked the learners to touch their body while singing. At first, some learners were not sure about which part of body they should touch. Some of them tried to copy their friends. However, after they repeated the songs for 5 times and when it came to the posttest, most of them were able to memorize the words that they did not know in the pretest.

By comparing the pretest and posttest, it is concluded that all participants' posttest scores are higher than their pretest ones. This shows that the use of songs is successful to help young learners learning English vocabulary.

- b. How are the learners' responses toward the use of songs in learning English vocabulary?

In this section, the researcher conducted one-to-one interview to the learners to gain some answers related to their responses about using songs in learning English vocabulary. The learners mentioned that using songs in learning made them happy and fun. Some students felt shy at first, but they finally were able to be more confident. For instance, when the researcher asked them, one by one, to lead their friends to sing in front of the class, Fah, Sal, and Fau seemed unconfident, but they finally could manage it and performed well.

Among all participants, Wel was the only student who was still studying English at her school. She said that she was taught by her teacher learning English by using song when she was at kindergarten. After that, the teachers never taught her to use English songs. She wished that she was able to learn English song at class since it was so fun. In contrast, the rest of six participants did not have any English subject in their school. They ever learned English by using song when they were at their kindergarten. After that, they never learned English subject at school

until now. They said that they wanted to learn English again especially by using songs for it is enjoyable.

Discussion

Some studies related to the use of songs in teaching English vocabulary have been done by some researchers (Coyle & Gracia, 2014; Džanić & Pejić, 2016). Coyle & Gracia (2014) found that “most of the young learners in this study acquired some receptive vocabulary knowledge from the song input and follow-up activities.” By using songs, 68 per cent of those learners were successful in learning new words. This result is similar to this present study about the use of songs in helping young learners to acquire new language. However, different to the previous one, the result of this study is quite interesting since it shows that 100 per cent of the young learners were able to learn new vocabulary through the songs.

The previous study conducted by Džanić & Pejić (2016) was also similar to the present one. They mentioned that songs are effective used in language learning. It is interesting since, in their research, they compare the learners into two different learning environments: visual - auditory and only auditory. The result showed that the learners with auditory learning environment performed slightly better results in vocabulary retention. According to them, audio-visual learning caused distraction for some learners since it made them more focused on the things showed on the video, and not the activity they should did, such as singing and memorizing the words with movements. In contrast, this research focused on the use of visual-auditory learning environment which indicates positive results. The participants said that the visual was also useful to help them to memorize the words and movements.

However, based on the survey conducted by Džanić & Pejić (2016), it is found that not all learners completely enjoyed the song classes. This result can be connected to Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory which showed that different learners have different characteristics and intelligences. It was possible for some learners who were quiet and not very active did not like learning English using songs. This is totally contrast with this study which shows that all participants enjoy the class conducted by using English songs.

CONCLUSION

This present research has analyzed the way how songs can be used as tools in teaching English vocabulary. A song is something which is closed to the kids and singing is an activity which is fun for them. Besides, song lyrics consist of simple daily words. Teaching English using songs can be used as an alternative tool because kids learn those words unconsciously. The participants were seven elementary school students from two different schools in Poncokusumo, Malang, Jawa Timur. They were eight until ten years old. One student was from State Elementary School and six students were from private elementary school.

The findings and the analyses of this research show that the participants' posttest points are higher than their pretest points. From the total of 20 questions in the pretest and 20 questions in the posttest, Cyy's score was increased by 9 points, Sal and Ayy increased their points by 6, Fah and Fau's scores were increased by 5 points, Wel's point was increased by 3 points, and Sel added 2 more points. This shows that all learners' posttest points are increasing. In sum, most of the learners were able to memorize the words they learned from the songs, especially when the researcher also used body movement while singing.

In addition, from the interview process, it is found that all of the students have positive responses about including songs in learning English even they feel happy and fun in learning process. Moreover, they wish that their English teacher could teach them using songs at school like what they experienced when they were at kindergarten.

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