

THE IMPACT OF USING SINGING ACTIVITIES IN ENHANCING READING SKILLS AMONG KINDERGARTEN STUDENT: A CASE STUDY IN PUTRAJAYA**RASHID BIN HAMZAH**

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rashid.hamzah@yahoo.com**Abstract**

This case study investigates the relationship between singing activities and the improvement of reading skills among kindergarten students. The primary aim is to determine whether there is a significant difference in the percentage of scores between pre-tests and post-tests in recognizing open syllables, closed syllables, words, and simple sentences. The subject of the study is a six-year-old male kindergarten student in Putrajaya. The research methodology includes a pre-test conducted before the introduction of singing activities and a post-test administered two weeks later to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities. Observations of the student's behavior during both tests and interviews with the parents before and after the intervention were also conducted. The findings reveal a notable improvement in the respondent's reading skills, with higher scores in recognizing syllables, words, and sentences post-intervention. The respondent also demonstrated increased interest and engagement in reading activities following the introduction of singing. This study suggests that singing activities can effectively enhance early reading skills and foster a positive attitude towards reading.

Keywords: Music, Preschool Students, Reading, Singing.

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most significant contributors to the development of a country's social and economic capital. The country's educational philosophy emphasizes spiritual education, a curriculum suitable for its multicultural society, and the fundamental abilities of the 3Rs (Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) (Alhabshi & Hakim, 2010).

Preschool education is important in building children's confidence from a psychological perspective and provides early exposure to the school environment. In Malaysia, preschools have been established to lay the foundation for the development of attitudes, knowledge, skills, competitiveness, and creativity necessary for children to adapt before transitioning to primary education. Preschools also serve as the basis for the physical and mental learning and development process for growing children. Yasin et al. (2019) argue that preschool children are exposed to a more formal learning environment compared to their home environment.

Jantan, Resad, & Fauzi (2016) stated that playing techniques at the preschool level have become synonymous due to children's inherent nature to prefer playing. Through this approach, children do not get bored while learning. One technique to enhance speaking and reading skills and to aid in memory retention is through the use of singing techniques (Augustine, 2015). Preschool children, especially in kindergartens, find it easier to remember things through singing techniques because singing involves rhythmic pronunciation that is easier to recall.

The study conducted in New England by Baleghizadeh & Dargahi (2010) also proved that rhythmic pronunciation successfully enhances children's reading skills because this technique stimulates children's memory more effectively. Children are also seen to be more enthusiastic about learning words pronounced using the singing technique repeatedly. Augustine (2015) argued that because children enjoy playing, singing techniques make children more social with their classmates, cheerful, and capture their attention.

For this study, it measures the effectiveness of singing activities across different syllable types. The study involves examining how singing activities impact reading skills across different types of syllables, including open syllables (e.g., "ba"), closed syllables (e.g., "bat"), and potentially other syllable types. By analyzing the effect of singing activities on each syllable type, the study aims to determine if certain types of syllables are more effectively enhanced through singing activities.

Next, to identify specific reading skills enhanced at the word level. Through singing activities, it involves assessing factors such as phonemic awareness, decoding skills, and word recognition abilities to determine how singing activities contribute to the development of these skills among kindergarten students. In addition, at the sentence level, it involves assessing students' abilities to comprehend and fluently read sentences after participating in singing activities. By analyzing performance at the sentence level, the study aims to determine the broader effects of singing activities on reading comprehension and fluency. The study also can determine whether singing activities can improve the reading skills of the children at varies across different difficulty levels.

Problem statement

Traditional teaching techniques bore students.

Puteh (2008) states that the failure of teachers to utilize effective teaching and learning processes leads to students becoming inattentive, bored, and uninterested in going to school. These students will fall behind in their studies and ultimately struggle with reading, writing, arithmetic, and critical thinking skills.

The reading skills level among kindergarten students is still insufficient.

Timbang, Mahamod, & Hamat (2011) stated that some students fail to master reading skills within the expected timeframe. There are still students who do not recognize letters even after entering the school system. Consequently, without reading skills, students will lag behind in mastering all subjects that inherently require reading skills.

Students are slow to recognize letters and syllables.

Through the teaching techniques employed by preschool teachers, the researcher aims to assess the reading skills level of kindergarten students. The lazy attitude of students who lack interest in reading causes them to be unwilling to acquire this skill. Additionally, the family environment that fosters a reading culture at home is lacking. Parents are unwilling to invest a small amount of money to buy reading materials for their children, leading to a lack of practice in reading skills.

The failure of teachers to use effective techniques.

The failure of teachers to use effective techniques in capturing the interest of kindergarten students in reading. Teachers need to have high creativity to engage the students' interest. The government can also provide suitable training to kindergarten teachers before they are placed in selected kindergartens.

Research Objectives

- i) To identify whether there is a significant difference in the percentage of students' scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests for recognizing open syllables.
- ii) To identify whether there is a significant difference in the percentage of students' scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests for recognizing closed syllables.
- iii) To identify whether there is a significant difference in the percentage of students' scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests at the word level.
- iv) To identify whether there is a significant difference in the percentage of students' scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests at the easy sentence level.

Research questions

- i. What is the difference in the percentage of students' scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests for recognizing open syllables?
- ii. What is the difference in the percentage of scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests for recognizing closed syllables?
- iii. What is the difference in the percentage of scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests at the word level?

iv. What is the difference in the percentage of students' scores in pre-tests compared to post-tests at the easy sentence level?

Significance of the study

This study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of singing activities on reading skills among kindergarten students. The research also provides relevant information regarding the holistic development of students, emphasizing not only academic focus but also positive behavior during teaching and learning sessions. Through music and singing, positive behavior among children can be nurtured as they are easier to manage during teaching and learning sessions.

Singing has long been recognized as one of a powerful educational tool that can capture children's attention, stimulate their creativity, and enhance their memory retention. By incorporating music and singing into the curriculum, teachers can create a fun and interactive learning environment that promotes active engagement and participation among students.

The findings from this study can serve as a guide for kindergarten teachers in Malaysia to manage and conduct teaching and learning activities more systematically and creatively, ensuring that students remain engaged while absorbing the knowledge being imparted. Additionally, researchers can analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching techniques used based on the study's findings. Moreover, for novice teachers, this study can serve as a guide to review effective teaching techniques employed by experienced preschool teachers.

Limitations of the study

This study is limited to kindergartens under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (KPM). Only kindergartens within the Federal Territory of Putrajaya were chosen as the focus of the researcher. The involvement was limited to a 6-year-old student selected as the sample. The student's reading skills will be assessed after undergoing singing activities facilitated by the teacher.

Due to the ongoing global pandemic of the Coronavirus or Covid-19, the researcher faced challenges in conducting the study, especially activities involving kindergartens. This is because the National Union of the Teaching Profession in Peninsular Malaysia (NUTP) has requested the government to postpone the reopening of preschools and kindergartens, originally scheduled to commence on July 1, 2020 (Astroawani.com, 2020).

A qualitative approach was employed in this study, using a purposive sampling method for the case study design. The purpose of this sampling method was to select one child from a selected kindergarten in Putrajaya to determine the effectiveness of singing activities in enhancing reading skills. Among the other limitations faced by the researcher is that the student will be monitored for two weeks, being evaluated before and after the singing activities. The researcher experienced time constraints in monitoring the student during teaching and learning sessions, as well as during the exercises provided

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The researcher employed a qualitative test design in the conducted case study. In this study, the researcher administered a pre-test to kindergarten students, evaluating their ability to identify open syllables, closed syllables, word levels, and, at a more advanced stage, sentence structures. After two weeks, a post-test was conducted following a teaching and learning session incorporating singing activities aimed at enhancing the students' reading skills.

Research samples

In this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling, selecting a six-year-old kindergarten student from a kindergarten in Putrajaya to represent the kindergarten student population in the Federal Territory of Putrajaya.

Research instruments

Pre-Test

The pre-test was conducted on the samples before the singing technique was employed to enhance their reading skills. The test format involved providing the samples with reading materials, and they were required to read aloud in front of the examiner. The samples were given reading materials containing open syllables, closed syllables, words, and simple sentences.

Observation

Next, the researcher observed the samples for two weeks. This was done to identify suitable songs for children that could enhance their reading skills. The researcher aimed to find songs that resonate with the children. During this period, the researcher noted information related to the singing activities, including behavior, the selected songs for the samples, as well as any issues that arose during the study period.

Post-Test

The post-test was conducted after two weeks of implementing the singing activities in the teaching and learning sessions for the samples. The researcher tested the samples by providing two sets of questions: one set of questions identical to those in the pre-test and another set of questions different from the pre-test. The purpose of this was to assess whether the samples were able to recognize open syllables, closed syllables, word levels, and, at a more advanced stage, sentence structures after the singing activities were employed.

Parent Interviews

The researcher prepared a set of concise questions for face-to-face interviews. Among the questions asked by the researcher were:

- 1) What were the parents' feelings before the singing technique was used to enhance their child's reading skills in the study?
- 2) How did the parents feel after the singing technique was employed to enhance their child's reading skills in the study?
- 3) Are the parents happy with their child's progress?

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Below is the result form the test done by the researcher:

Table 1: Pre-test and post-test analysis

	Pre-test (%)	Post-test (%)
Open syllables	45	85
Closed syllables	35	80
Word	35	70
Easy sentence	30	60

The results of the pre and post-tests conducted showed an improvement in reading skills among the samples. At the open syllable level, the study revealed that the samples scored 45 percent in the pre-test, and there was an increase to 85 percent in the post-test after the singing activity was implemented.

At the closed syllable level, the samples scored 35 percent in the pre-test, and there was an improvement to 80 percent after the singing activity was conducted for two weeks.

At the word level, there was an increase, although not very high, from 35 percent in the pre-test to 70 percent in the post-test. The same trend was observed for easy sentence levels, where there was an improvement in reading skills among the samples but not as significant, from 30 percent in the pre-test to 60 percent in the post-test.

The researcher observed that the samples found it easier to master reading skills in open and closed syllables. However, they struggled with reading at the word and easy sentence levels. The samples were seen to memorize the easy sentences used, but they were not able to use them effectively when the music was not played.

Observation Analysis

For the observation, the researcher could only conduct observations during the pre-test and post-test sessions. The researcher met with the samples only to administer the pre-test, accompanied by the samples' parents. Initially, the behavior of the samples appeared shy and they were hesitant to interact with the researcher because it was their first time meeting the researcher. The samples also seemed unsure and lacked confidence in their answers during the reading activity test.

After two weeks, the researcher met with the samples again following the singing activity. The samples appeared calmer and more relaxed when interacting with the researcher. They were able to answer the post-test questions well. Additionally, the parents of the samples encouraged them to use singing for other subjects because the singing technique was easier for children of their age to remember.

Interview Analysis with Sample Parents

In response to the first question regarding how the parents felt before the singing technique was used to improve the samples' reading skills, the mother of a sample firstly lacked confidence in the singing activity. She believed that singing would only distract her child from learning:

"I was not sure if my child could use singing techniques to improve his reading skills."

However, the father believed that the samples should be given the opportunity to explore and learn through various methods, including singing activities:

"My child enjoys watching cartoons on YouTube.com. Maybe by introducing this singing technique, my child would prefer using it by finding suitable songs for learning."

In response to the second question about how the parents felt after the singing technique was used to enhance the samples' reading skills, the mother began to realize that learning to read was not just about spelling and recognizing letters:

"After my child used this singing activity, I noticed some improvement in his reading! I thought singing activities in kindergarten were just for fun. But looking at his answers, my child finds it easier to remember."

The father then believed that singing activities could be used to improve children's reading skills rather than wasting time watching meaningless videos:

"Now we can introduce him (the child) to other songs that can benefit him... instead of him listening to songs without meaning, it is better if he listens to songs that can help him in his studies."

In response to the third question about whether the parents were happy with their children's progress, both sets of parents were satisfied with their children's reading skills:

"Definitely happy! Now they can learn together with their siblings."

"Anything that helps my child becomes smarter, I am happy."

As a result, the sample parents were not confident that singing activities could help their children improve their reading skills before the use of the singing activity. They believed that singing activities, whether in school or online, were merely entertainment for children. Additionally, the busy schedules of both sets of parents, who were working, made it challenging for them to focus on their children's activities and development, especially in learning.

After the introduction of the singing activity to the samples, the parents believed that singing activities could be used as one of the techniques to help their children in learning. The children were observed to be more focused and could remember word segments because of the rhythmic pronunciation while reading. However, the sample parents also considered singing activities as an additional technique rather than a sole method for learning.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Study and Discussion

Reading skills need to be introduced to children from an early age. A study by the National Library in 2005 found that Malaysians only read two books per year. In 2014, an interim study report stated that Malaysians read 15 books per year (Malaysiakini, 2019).

In efforts to encourage reading, various programs have been implemented, including the International Book Festival. The Ministry of Education has also launched the National Reading Decade campaign aimed at creating a globally knowledgeable society focused on reading for knowledge and cultural enrichment (Berita Harian, 2018).

Based on the analysis of pre and post-tests conducted on the samples, the researcher found that the samples had a high level of interest in using singing activities to enhance their reading skills. To become skilled learners, students can be trained and instilled with interest in what they do.

Relationship between Singing Activity and Open Syllable Recognition Skills

Open syllables generally end with vowels, such as a, e, i, o, and u. Through singing, teachers can introduce words suitable for their level and sing them together. Initially, teachers can use two-syllable words like pipi (cheek), gigi (teeth), sisi (side), and so on. Later, three or four open syllable words like kereta (car), kamera (camera), tomato, and others can be introduced.

Relationship between Singing Activity and Closed Syllable Recognition Skills

In the initial stage, teachers can use the same singing technique as open syllable teaching, employing easy closed syllables like beg (bag), jam (clock), tikus (mouse), and others, ensuring children do not get confused.

Relationship between Singing Activity and Word Recognition Skills

At the word level, children can recognize words through the lyrics of the songs sung. Lyrics serve as reading materials where children need to read them to recognize the words. While reading the lyrics, children will rhythmically pronounce them following the song's tempo. This trains them to read during singing activities in teaching and learning sessions.

Relationship between Singing Activity and Easy Sentence Reading Skills

When children sing, they need to articulate words within sentences. Once they recognize words, they can indirectly read easy sentences. Through singing activities, repetitive lyrics help children memorize and master easy sentences. Choosing suitable songs is essential to ensure they can read sentences better.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Implications for Children

Singing elements can be incorporated into memorization techniques to captivate children's interest and enhance their memory. According to Hamzah et al. (2017), before singing, individuals should be trained to memorize the song lyrics. Therefore, when singing activities are used in reading, children find it easier to remember by rhythmically reciting the lyrics. Rhythmic songs and lyrics are easier to remember and read, especially for children. Most children's songs are simple and repetitive.

Implications for Parents

In informal settings, parents should encourage their children about the importance of reading and writing at home. Parents need to be good examples by reading with their children, sharing interesting stories from books, or using the internet to find suitable songs for additional teaching and learning materials at home. In addition, parents can take their children to the library and buy them suitable books.

Implications for Kindergartens/Preschools

In kindergarten, music, movement, and drama are elements used through various engaging, creative, and entertaining activities. Teaching and learning activities involving music and singing make children experience, move, and enact characters in class activities.

Moreover, music activities can be used in groups where children need to interact with other peers. This can enhance their social skills. Through group activities, children can creatively and imaginatively express their feelings. Singing activities in reading help children enhance their imagination and creativity naturally (Samsudin & Abu Bakar, 2018).

Implications for the Government

In order to promote the National Language Decade Campaign 2021-2030 (Kempen Dekad Membaca Kebangsaan 2021-2030), which was launched by the former Minister of Education, Dr. Maszlee Malik, the government has planned various interesting programs.

The government is developing reading activity infrastructures such as book fairs, e-book corridors, book city academies, Malay Language museums, and literature in major cities. Numerous book fairs are organized every year as a step to bring Malaysians closer to the practice of reading. Digital or e-books are also something new that can encourage and facilitate public access to reading.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Apart from singing activities, there are many other ways to enhance reading skills among children, especially kindergarten students. One of them is drill practice. Children should be given sufficient practice to familiarize themselves with the skills they want to master. Parents and teachers need to instill the importance and interest in reading to avoid boredom and enable better mastery of reading skills.

School teachers also need to be creative in using effective techniques suitable for students' age and skills. Edutainment activities are one of the techniques that kindergartens can use during teaching and learning sessions. Children will explore, discover, and construct experiences naturally through the edutainment approach (Jantan, Resad & Mohd Fauzi, 2016). The study conducted by Jantan, Resad & Mohd Fauzi (2016) found that children experienced positive emotional development, and there was an improvement in reading and writing skills.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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