TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE UTILIZATION OF NURSERY RHYMES TO IMPROVE YOUNG CHILDREN'S ENGLISH VOCABULARY

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi guru terhadap penggunaan lagu anak (nursery rhymes) dalam pembelajaran kosakata Bahasa Inggris untuk anak usia dini. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif melalui observasi kelas dan kuesioner kepada dua guru taman kanak-kanak di Bogor. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan lagu anak sebagai media pembelajaran. Lagu anak dinilai efektif meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata, menciptakan suasana kelas yang menyenangkan, serta meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa. Lagu yang bersifat repetitif dan mengandung unsur gerak serta ritme, memudahkan siswa mengingat kosakata baru. Lagu anak terbukti menjadi metode alternatif yang menyenangkan dan bermanfaat untuk pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris bagi anak usia dini.

Kata kunci *: Lagu anak, kosakata, anak usia dini, pembelajaran bahasa, persepsi guru*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore teachers' perceptions on the use of nursery rhymes in teaching English vocabulary to young learners. A qualitative approach was applied through classroom observation and teacher questionnaires in a kindergarten in Bogor. The results reveal that teachers have positive perceptions of using nursery rhymes as a learning tool. They find nursery rhymes effective in enhancing vocabulary mastery, creating a joyful classroom atmosphere, and increasing student engagement. The repetitive and rhythmic nature of songs helps students remember new words more easily. Nursery rhymes thus serve as an enjoyable and effective alternative method for young learners in English language instruction.

Keywords: Nursery rhymes, vocabulary, young learners, language learning, teacher perception

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary plays a central role in English language learning, particularly for young learners who are still developing their basic communication skills. It is widely recognized as a core component of language proficiency that supports learners in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Richards, 2002). In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language, meaning that most children receive limited exposure outside of school. This makes vocabulary instruction in early education even more critical. According to Mary and Michelle (2011), both home and school environments significantly influence children's vocabulary development, and even when children appear to know a word, their understanding may still be superficial.

Young learners are children aged 5 to 12 (Kasihani, 2007) possess unique characteristics that affect how they acquire language. They are curious, active, and respond well to instruction that involves visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements (Suryana, 2022). Teaching vocabulary to this group requires creative, concrete, and engaging methods. One such method is the use of nursery rhymes simple, rhythmic, and repetitive songs or poems that can capture children's attention while reinforcing vocabulary and phonological awareness (Martinez, 2017 and Sayakhan, 2019). These rhymes have been shown to enhance not only pronunciation and listening skills, but also support cognitive development through repetition, rhythm, and storytelling structures (Millington, 2011)

Previous studies have provided strong evidence of the educational value of nursery rhymes. De Mello et al. (2022) found that nursery rhymes improved vocabulary and grammar acquisition in preschoolers and created a more interactive learning environment. Sayakhan and Bradley (2019) emphasized their role in early reading and phonics development, while Purwanti and Arshad (2020) demonstrated their effectiveness in increasing vocabulary mastery among Indonesian primary students.

While these studies affirm the benefits of nursery rhymes, most focus on student outcomes rather than teachers' perspectives. However, teachers' perceptions are vital, as their beliefs influence how effectively instructional strategies are implemented. Therefore, this study aims to explore teachers' perceptions of using nursery rhymes as a medium for teaching English vocabulary to young learners in an Indonesian kindergarten context.

METHOD

This section outlines the methodology employed in the research. It includes the research design, setting and participants, data collection instruments, and research procedures. Each part is discussed in detail below.

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore and understand the phenomena as experienced by the participants. According to Arikunto (2013), qualitative research is aimed at understanding human behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions through a naturalistic and descriptive process. As Gay et al. (2006) explain, qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into phenomena of particular interest. In this study, the researcher interacted directly with the natural setting to describe the perspectives and experiences of teachers and students, without the use of statistical analysis. This design allowed for in-depth observation and reflection on classroom practices involving nursery rhymes in vocabulary instruction.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted over three days in November 2024 at a kindergarten in Bogor, Indonesia. The participants consisted of young children aged 4–6 years and their English teachers. The selected participants were those directly involved in using nursery rhymes as part of their English language instruction. The researcher observed classroom activities during regular school hours. This study applied a descriptive research approach, aiming to provide a detailed picture of the classroom environment and instructional practices. The study is theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning. The interactions between teachers and students serve as an important aspect of understanding how vocabulary development occurs through nursery rhymes.

Data Collection

In this study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument for data collection. The tools used to support this process were classroom observations and a mixed-method questionnaire consisting of both open-ended and closed-ended items. The data collection process focused on how vocabulary was taught through nursery rhymes and how teachers and students interacted during the activities. While the researcher did not actively participate in the teaching process, they observed the lessons and documented the interactions.

Questionnaire and Observation

A mixed-method questionnaire was used, consisting of ten items grouped into three main themes: (1)teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of nursery rhymes for vocabulary development (4 items), (2)teachers' views on the classroom atmosphere when using nursery rhymes (3 items), and (3)general attitudes toward using rhymes in vocabulary learning (3 items). The format combined closed-ended questions (agree/disagree) with open-ended prompts for reasons, enabling both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The questionnaire items were adapted from previous studies by De Mello et al. (2022) and Nazara (2019). For the classroom observation was used to document teacher-student interaction and the application of nursery rhymes in vocabulary instruction. According to Jebur et al. (2021), observation is a useful tool to monitor both verbal and non-verbal behaviors in a teaching and learning environment. The researcher used a non-structured observation method, which is more flexible and allows for natural and contextual insights. The observation process involved three stages: (1)preparation, (2)reflection, and (3)analysis. This approach helped identify patterns, teaching strengths, and areas needing improvement. Key behaviors such as student responses, teacher explanations, demonstrations, encouragement, and the use of rhymes were closely monitored.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study regarding kindergarten teachers' perceptions on the use of nursery rhymes in teaching English vocabulary to young learners.

Result

Data were collected using a combination of closed- and open-ended questionnaires administered to two teachers, along with classroom observations conducted across three sessions in December 2024. The findings are categorized into three major themes: (1) teachers' perceptions on vocabulary development, (2) teachers' perceptions on classroom atmosphere, and (3) teachers' perceptions on student engagement.

1. Nursery Rhymes and Vocabulary Development

Both teachers strongly agreed that nursery rhymes serve as an effective tool for teaching vocabulary to young learners.(see the appendix 1) The repetitive and rhythmic nature of nursery rhymes aids memory retention and helps students understand vocabulary in context. Teacher A noted that the fun delivery of rhymes through song and dance suits the developmental stage of kindergarten students. Teacher B emphasized that rhythm and movement not only attract students' attention but also support their ability to remember and use new vocabulary. Observation results confirmed this, showing that students enthusiastically mimicked vocabulary from songs like "Baby Shark" and "Family Fingers", gradually expanding their word knowledge to include terms like "uncle," "aunty," "niece," and "nephew". Students demonstrated both passive recognition and active use of vocabulary, even engaging in role-play by taking on the role of "teacher" during the lessons.

2. Nursery Rhymes and Classroom Atmosphere

Teachers perceived nursery rhymes as a powerful way to create a joyful and interactive classroom environment. Both teachers agreed that rhymes improved classroom energy and student mood, making vocabulary lessons more enjoyable. Teacher A observed that singing and dancing activities helped student focus and enthusiasm. Teacher B emphasized the emotional response triggered by rhythm, noting that students were more motivated to participate. Observations supported this: students appeared excited, engaged, and socially connected while performing rhymes. Visual media and group participation further reinforced a sense of togetherness and comfort in the classroom.

3. Nursery Rhymes and Student Engagement

Nursery rhymes were also found to significantly enhance student engagement. According to both teachers, children actively responded to the use of songs, showing enthusiasm both in class and at home by repeating newly learned vocabulary. While some students were in the first day shy, they gradually became confident and eager to participate. Observation data revealed a clear increase in engagement over timefrom basic participation in the first session to confident leadership in the third session, where students guided their peers in singing and asking questions. This shift reflected the transition from passive learning to active, self-directed involvement.

Discussion

The findings support previous research (e.g., Sayakhan, 2019; De Mello et al., 2022; Purwanti & Arshad, 2020) showing that nursery rhymes are not only entertaining but also pedagogically valuable in language learning. Teachers recognized the benefits of nursery rhymes in helping young learners develop vocabulary, enjoy a dynamic classroom atmosphere, and become more engaged in the learning process. These findings also align with Vygotsky's theory of constructivism, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and playful learning in cognitive development.

Overall, the results suggest that nursery rhymes are an effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate method for supporting vocabulary acquisition among young English learners. They foster not only language growth but also emotional, social, and cognitive engagement both in and beyond the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that nursery rhymes are an effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate medium for teaching English vocabulary to young learners. Their simple structure, repetitive lyrics, and rhythmic melodies help children absorb and retain new vocabulary naturally and joyfully. The findings indicate that nursery rhymes not only support vocabulary acquisition but also promote active participation, emotional involvement, and enthusiasm in the classroom. Both teachers involved in the study expressed positive perceptions of this method, highlighting the suitability of nursery rhymes for early childhood learning. Furthermore, observations revealed that students often continued using the vocabulary outside the classroom, indicating a strong transfer of learning. Overall, the use of nursery rhymes fosters a meaningful, interactive,

and enjoyable language learning environment for kindergarten students.

Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, several suggestions are proposed for educators, institutions, and future researchers. For kindergarten teachers, it is recommended to regularly incorporate nursery rhymes into English vocabulary instruction. This method not only simplifies the introduction of new words but also creates a more engaging and enjoyable learning atmosphere that encourages active student participation. Teachers are advised to select songs that align with both the learning themes and the students' language proficiency levels in order to maximize instructional effectiveness.

From an institutional perspective, schools should provide adequate support in the form of learning facilities, access to music-based teaching materials, and professional development opportunities. Creating a thematic nursery rhyme song bank and fostering a psychologically supportive classroom environment can significantly enhance the success of vocabulary learning using this method.

Finally, future researchers are encouraged to explore broader aspects of nursery rhyme implementation. While this study focused on teachers' perceptions, further research could examine the impact of nursery rhymes on other language skills such as listening comprehension, pronunciation, or speaking fluency. Moreover, there is potential for developing digital learning media that combine music, visuals, and interactive features to further enrich early childhood English education.

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