

VOCABULARY ACQUISITION THROUGH ACTION-BASED ANIMATED SONGS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membandingkan pemerolehan kosakata antara anak prasekolah dan anak usia sekolah dasar melalui *action-based animated songs*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan observasi terhadap anak usia 4–5 tahun dan 7–8 tahun selama empat kali pertemuan menggunakan lagu “*If You’re Happy and You Know It*.” Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua kelompok mengalami peningkatan kosakata, namun anak prasekolah lebih menunjukkan pemahaman melalui tindakan fisik, sedangkan anak usia sekolah dasar mampu menggunakan kosakata secara verbal dan mandiri. Temuan ini mendukung teori Second Language Acquisition yang menekankan pentingnya input yang dapat dipahami dan pembelajaran berbasis aksi dalam pemerolehan kosakata anak.

Kata kunci: pemerolehan kosakata, lagu berbasis aksi, anak usia dini.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare vocabulary acquisition between preschool and elementary school children through action-based animated songs. A descriptive qualitative method was employed using observation of children aged 4–5 and 7–8 years during four learning sessions using the song “If You’re Happy and You Know It.” The findings show that both groups improved their vocabulary, with preschool children demonstrating understanding mainly through physical actions, while elementary school children were able to use vocabulary verbally and independently. These results support Second Language Acquisition theory, emphasizing comprehensible input and action-based learning in vocabulary development.

Keywords: *vocabulary acquisition, action-based songs, young learners*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed children’s daily lives, particularly in how they interact, play, and learn language. In early childhood, children are increasingly exposed to digital media such as animated videos, educational applications, and online audiovisual content accessed through digital devices. This exposure has become an important part of children’s linguistic environment and may influence early language development. Previous studies suggest that digital media can support language learning when it provides meaningful auditory and visual input that attracts children’s attention and facilitates comprehension (Topçu &

Diğer, 2022). However, language development in early childhood is not determined solely by the amount of media exposure, but also by the quality of interaction and engagement experienced by the child, as this period is critical for developing linguistic competence (Al-Harbi, 2019). When used appropriately, digital media can create enjoyable and interactive learning experiences that enhance children’s motivation and support language development (Hikmah, n.d.)

Songs are widely recognized as an effective medium for supporting vocabulary acquisition in language learning. Learning vocabulary through songs allows learners to encounter new words repeatedly in meaningful and

enjoyable contexts, which helps improve retention and recall. The repetition of lyrics, combined with rhythm and melody, facilitates vocabulary learning by lowering learners' anxiety and increasing motivation. Research shows that the use of English songs in language learning significantly improves vocabulary acquisition by providing authentic language input and supporting the transfer of receptive vocabulary into productive use (Azmin Md Zamin et al., 2020).

In addition to songs, gesture-based learning through the Total Physical Response (TPR) method has been shown to be effective in supporting action-based vocabulary learning. TPR emphasizes the connection between language input and physical actions, allowing learners to associate new vocabulary with meaningful gestures and movements. By involving learners in physical activities, this method enhances memory retention and vocabulary recall while engaging learners through visual, auditory, and kinesthetic experiences. Moreover, TPR creates a relaxed learning environment that reduces anxiety and encourages active participation, which supports long-term vocabulary acquisition (Ziyoda & Dilraboxon, n.d.-a).

The effectiveness of using songs and action-based learning such as Total Physical Response in vocabulary instruction can be explained through Krashen's theory of Second Language Acquisition. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that they can understand while focusing on meaning rather than explicit language forms. Songs and physical actions provide rich contextual support that helps learners interpret new vocabulary, making the input more accessible and meaningful. Krashen emphasizes that language is acquired subconsciously in low-anxiety environments, where learners are not pressured to produce language before they are ready (Jaelani, A., Rafli, Z., & Murtadho, F., 2025). Therefore, learning activities that involve music, gestures, and meaningful actions support vocabulary acquisition by supplying comprehensible input that facilitates natural language development (Bailey & Kadhum Fahad, 2021).

Despite the potential benefits of songs and action-based learning for vocabulary acquisition,

there is still limited research that compares vocabulary learning outcomes between children at different educational levels. In particular, studies that focus on action-based animated songs commonly used in early language learning, such as "If You're Happy and You Know It," and compare preschool and elementary school learners remain scarce. Therefore, further research is needed to explore how children from different age groups acquire vocabulary through action-based animated songs.

Research Question

Based on the background of the study and the research gap identified in previous studies, this mini research is guided by the following research question:

1. How do preschool and elementary school children differ in acquiring vocabulary from action-based animated songs?

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. To identify how preschool and elementary school children acquire vocabulary through action-based animated songs.
2. To compare the differences in vocabulary acquisition between preschool and elementary school children after exposure to action-based animated songs.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance:

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the field of Second Language Acquisition, particularly in vocabulary learning among young learners. By examining vocabulary acquisition through action-based animated songs, this study provides empirical evidence on how multimodal input combining music, animation, and physical movement supports language acquisition. In addition, this research expands existing literature by comparing vocabulary learning outcomes between preschool and elementary school children, an area that has received limited attention in previous studies.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, this study offers valuable insights for teachers, educators, and curriculum designers regarding the use of action-based animated songs in vocabulary instruction. The findings may help educators select age-appropriate teaching strategies and media, particularly in using songs such as “If You’re Happy and You Know It” to support vocabulary learning through movement and interaction. This study also provides guidance for early childhood and elementary educators in designing engaging and effective language learning activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the process by which learners acquire a language other than their first language. SLA involves exposure to meaningful language input, interaction, and communication in natural or instructional contexts. For young learners, language acquisition tends to occur implicitly through listening and responding to language rather than through explicit grammar instruction. Children acquire a second language more effectively when learning activities are meaningful, contextualized, and enjoyable, allowing them to process language naturally and gradually build linguistic competence (Batu, 2024)

Krashen’s Input Hypothesis

Krashen’s theory of Second Language Acquisition emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input and emotional factors in the language learning process. According to the Input Hypothesis, learners acquire language when they are exposed to input that is slightly above their current level of proficiency ($i+1$). In addition, Krashen highlights the role of the affective filter, which refers to emotional variables such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence. When learners experience low anxiety and high motivation, the affective filter is lowered, allowing language acquisition to occur more effectively. Therefore, learning environments that are enjoyable and pressure-free support natural language acquisition, particularly for young learners (Bailey & Kadhum Fahad, 2021).

Vocabulary Acquisition in Children

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of second language learning, as vocabulary knowledge enables learners to understand and express meaning. Children acquire vocabulary more effectively when new words are presented repeatedly in meaningful contexts and supported by visual and auditory input. Vocabulary learning in children often occurs incidentally through exposure rather than through direct memorization. Repetition and contextual use of words help children form strong associations between words and their meanings, which supports long-term retention and recall (Al-Harbi, 2019).

Songs as a Medium for Vocabulary Learning

Songs are widely recognized as an effective medium for vocabulary learning, especially for young learners. Songs provide repetitive exposure to language through lyrics, rhythm, and melody, which facilitates vocabulary retention. The enjoyable nature of songs increases learners’ motivation and reduces anxiety, creating a positive learning atmosphere. Through songs, learners are exposed to authentic language input in a meaningful and engaging way, allowing them to acquire vocabulary naturally while focusing on meaning rather than form (Azmin Md Zamin et al., 2020)

Total Physical Response (TPR) and Action-Based Learning

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method that integrates language input with physical movement. This method is based on the principle that comprehension precedes production in language acquisition. By responding to language through actions and gestures, learners are able to associate vocabulary with physical experiences, which enhances memory retention and understanding. TPR creates an active and low-anxiety learning environment that supports natural language acquisition, making it particularly effective for young learners (Ziyoda & Dilraboxon, n.d.-).

Animated Songs in Language Learning

Animated songs are an effective medium in early language learning because they combine visual animation and musical elements that support children’s language development. (Susanti,

n.d.) explain that audiovisual media such as animated films and nursery rhymes provide rich and meaningful language input that attracts children's attention and maintains engagement during learning activities. Animated songs present language through moving images, rhythm, and repetition, which help children understand vocabulary in context and remember language patterns more easily. The combination of visual and auditory input also supports multisensory learning, allowing children to process language through multiple channels, which enhances comprehension and language acquisition in early childhood.

Previous Related Studies

A previous study conducted by (Rezeki, 2021) investigated children's language acquisition through the animated series *Omar & Hana*. The study focused on how children acquired vocabulary through repeated exposure to animated content that combined visual and auditory input. The findings showed that the *Omar & Hana* animation contributed positively to children's vocabulary development, as learners were able to understand and use new words naturally in daily communication through continuous exposure to the animation.

However, the study mainly examined animated narrative content and did not emphasize action-based learning that requires children to respond physically to language input. In addition, the research focused on a limited age group and did not compare vocabulary acquisition between children at different educational levels, such as preschool and elementary school learners. As a result, differences in vocabulary acquisition based on age and learning stage were not explored.

In contrast, the present study focuses on action-based animated songs, specifically "*If You're Happy and You Know It*," which integrates vocabulary learning with physical movement. This study also compares vocabulary acquisition between preschool and elementary school children, thereby addressing the limitations of the previous study and filling the research gap related to age differences and action-based animated song learning.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design using observation to explore how children acquire vocabulary through action-based animated songs. The participants consisted of two groups of children based on age and educational level: preschool children aged 4–5 years and elementary school children aged 7–8 years. These groups were selected to examine differences in vocabulary acquisition between younger and older learners.

The data were collected through four observation meetings for each group. During each meeting, the children were exposed to the same action-based animated song, "*If You're Happy and You Know It*." The researcher observed the children's behaviors and responses while they watched and followed the song. Observations were recorded in the form of descriptive field notes, focusing on children's attention, physical responses to the actions, verbal reactions, and overall engagement during the activity.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The observation notes from all meetings were reviewed and compared to identify patterns and differences in vocabulary acquisition between preschool and elementary school children. Repeated observations were conducted to ensure the credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION RESULT

Day 1 – Song Introduction

The first meeting focused on introducing the song "*If You're Happy and You Know It*." The session began with a motivational warm-up activity in the form of clapping to gain students' attention and increase their enthusiasm. The song was played and repeated 3–5 times gradually, with short motivational activities inserted between repetitions to maintain students' focus. At this stage, students were not required to respond actively, and no rewards were given because the lesson was still at the initial exposure stage.

Table 1. observation day 1

No	Observation Aspect	Preschool Children (4–5 years old)	School-aged Children (7–8 years old)
1.	Warm-up activity	Followed the clapping with teacher guidance	Followed the clapping enthusiastically
2.	Response to the song	Listened attentively and watched the video	Listened attentively and noticed the rhythm
3.	Verbal participation	Not observed	Not observed
4.	Non-verbal participation	Sat calmly and paid attention	Followed the rhythm slightly
5.	Vocabulary understanding	Not observed	Not observed
6.	Reward	Not given	Not given

At this stage, students were still receiving language input. They tended to listen and observe rather than actively participate. Repeating the song 3–5 times with motivational breaks helped maintain attention and prepared students for more active involvement in the following sessions.

Day 2 – Vocabulary Meaning Explanation (Teacher-led)

The second meeting began with a clapping warm-up. The teacher explicitly explained the meanings of vocabulary items such as *happy*, *clap your hands*, *stamp your feet*, and *say hooray*, accompanied by gestures to support comprehension. The song was repeated 3–5 times, and rewards were introduced to encourage students' participation.

Table 2. observation day 2

No	Observation Aspect	Preschool Children (4–5 years old)	School-aged Children (7–8 years old)
1.	Warm-up activity	Followed the clapping	Followed the clapping independently

		with teacher assistance	
2.	Response to the song	Listened and occasionally followed gestures	Followed the clapping independently
3.	Verbal participation	Inconsistent	Answered teacher's questions about vocabulary
4.	Non-verbal participation	Followed actions such as <i>clap your hands</i> and <i>stamp your feet</i>	Active, accurate, and confident movements
5.	Vocabulary understanding	Began to recognize meanings through teacher modeling	Able to identify simple word meanings
6.	Reward	Given to students who attempted to participate	Given to active responders

Preschool children began to recognize vocabulary meanings through teacher demonstrations and gestures, although verbal responses were still limited. In contrast, school-aged children showed more spontaneous verbal responses and could partially sing the song. Rewards increased students' confidence and motivation to participate.

Day 3 – Practice and Active Participation

In the third meeting, students were encouraged to come forward and demonstrate the song instructions. A guessing game involving objects from the teacher's bag was used as a warm-up to increase enthusiasm. The song was repeated 3–5 times with short motivational activities in between, and rewards were given to active participants.

Table 3. observation day 3

No	Observation Aspect	Preschool Children (4-5 years old)	School-aged Children (7-8 years old)
1.	Warm-up activity	Participated in guessing games with enthusiastically	Participated in guessing games with enthusiastically
2.	Response to the song	Followed the song and actions in groups	Sang and performed actions correctly
3.	Verbal participation	Limited, mostly silent imitation	Answered questions and gave examples
4.	Non-verbal participation	Followed instructions within the group	Active, accurate, and confident movements
5.	Vocabulary understanding	Understood instructions with group support	Able to explain vocabulary meanings
6.	Reward	Given for group cooperation	Given for individual participation

Preschool children still required group support to perform actions and understand vocabulary. School-aged children, however, were able to perform the actions independently and explain vocabulary meanings with confidence.

Day 4 – Reinforcement and Independence

The fourth meeting emphasized reinforcement of vocabulary and learner independence. A right-left direction game was used as a warm-up activity. The song was repeated 3-5 times, interspersed with motivational activities. Rewards were given to students who actively participated both verbally and non-verbally.

Table 4. observation day 4

No	Observation Aspect	Preschool Children (4-5 years old)	School-aged Children (7-8 years old)
1.	Warm-up activity	Followed right-left game in groups with enthusiastically	Followed right-left game in groups with enthusiastically
2.	Response to the song	Followed actions, understood meanings, worked in groups	Sang and performed instructions independently
3.	Verbal participation	Began to say some words, still hesitant	Used vocabulary and meanings fluently
4.	Non-verbal participation	Followed movements within the group	Accurate, confident, and independent movements
5.	Vocabulary understanding	Understood meanings through context and gestures	Fully understood and explained meanings
6.	Reward	Given for individual participation	Given for individual participation

By the final session, students demonstrated **improved vocabulary mastery**. Preschool children showed understanding through actions and group collaboration, while school-aged children were able to perform and explain vocabulary independently. Warm-up activities and rewards played an important role in maintaining motivation and confidence.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that action-based animated songs support vocabulary learning mainly through listening and speaking activities. However, the development of vocabulary comprehension and production differs between preschool and elementary school children due to age and developmental readiness. These differences can be observed through indicators of

listening comprehension and speaking production across the four meetings.

During the first meeting, learning outcomes were primarily reflected in listening skills. Both preschool and school-aged children demonstrated listening comprehension by paying attention to the song, watching the video, and responding to rhythm through clapping. These behaviors indicate that students were processing language input through listening, even though no speaking production was observed. At this stage, students focused on recognizing sounds, rhythm, and intonation rather than producing vocabulary orally. This reflects the initial input stage of language acquisition, where exposure plays a key role in building familiarity with new language.

In the second meeting, listening comprehension became more visible through students' responses to teacher explanations and gestures. Preschool children showed comprehension by following actions such as clapping hands and stamping feet, which indicates that they understood vocabulary meanings through listening supported by physical movement. However, their speaking production was still limited and mostly occurred through imitation. In contrast, school-aged children demonstrated stronger listening comprehension by answering teacher questions related to vocabulary meanings. Their speaking production began to emerge through short verbal responses and partial singing, showing early oral use of the target vocabulary.

The third meeting showed a clearer progression from listening to speaking. Preschool children demonstrated listening comprehension by following instructions and actions within their groups, suggesting that they understood spoken input even though they rarely produced spoken language. Their speaking production remained minimal and was mostly non-verbal. Meanwhile, school-aged children showed strong listening comprehension by responding accurately to instructions and performing actions independently. Their speaking production was more evident, as they answered questions, gave simple examples, and used vocabulary orally with greater confidence.

By the fourth meeting, both listening comprehension and speaking production showed noticeable improvement. Preschool children demonstrated improved listening comprehension

by understanding instructions and vocabulary meanings through repetition, gestures, and context. Their speaking production began to appear through the use of a few vocabulary items, although they were still hesitant and relied on group support. On the other hand, school-aged children demonstrated full listening comprehension and were able to understand instructions independently. Their speaking production was fluent and confident, as they could use vocabulary accurately and explain meanings without teacher assistance.

Overall, the findings suggest that listening comprehension developed earlier than speaking production in both age groups. Preschool children relied more on listening and physical responses to show understanding, while elementary school children progressed more quickly from listening to speaking. These results are consistent with Second Language Acquisition theory, which emphasizes that language development is gradual and influenced by age and cognitive readiness. Action-based animated songs provided meaningful input, repetition, and a supportive learning environment that helped lower learners' anxiety and increase motivation.

Although this study focused primarily on listening and speaking skills, the vocabulary gained through action-based animated songs has broader implications for other language skills. Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental foundation for language learning and supports the development of reading and writing skills. When children understand and can produce vocabulary orally, they are better prepared to recognize words in written texts and use them in simple written forms at later stages. Therefore, this study suggests that action-based animated songs not only enhance listening and speaking development, but also have the potential to support children's reading and writing skills in future learning contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that action-based animated songs, particularly "*If You're Happy and You Know It*," are effective in supporting vocabulary acquisition among young learners. The combination of music, animation, repetition, and physical movement provides meaningful and comprehensible input that helps children understand and remember new vocabulary. Through repeated exposure across four meetings,

both preschool and elementary school children showed improvement in vocabulary understanding, engagement, and participation. These findings support Second Language Acquisition theories, especially Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Total Physical Response (TPR), which emphasize low-anxiety learning environments, meaningful input, and the connection between language and physical action.

However, differences were found between the two age groups in how vocabulary was acquired and demonstrated. Preschool children mainly showed comprehension through physical actions and group participation, with limited verbal production, while elementary school children demonstrated more independent performance, accurate movements, and fluent verbal use of vocabulary. This indicates that age and educational level influence the pace and depth of vocabulary acquisition. Therefore, action-based animated songs are beneficial for both groups, but instructional strategies should be adapted to learners' developmental stages to maximize vocabulary learning outcomes.

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