

Exploring rhymes and songs strategies in improving spoken English language skills among lower primary school pupils

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Abstract: *This study is designed to promote spoken English language among primary school pupils in Nigerian primary schools. Three highly trained English education specialists with knowledge of phonology were further trained on the use of rhymes and songs to promote participation and in-depth language learning among early primary school pupils. Each of the teachers worked with a trained research assistant. The researchers only monitored the study to ensure that each teacher followed the correct procedure. The rhymes and songs were projected on white boards for pupils to follow. Reading, spelling, speaking and singing were repeatedly employed to encourage participation, learning and retention. The study lasted six weeks after which measurements were made. A purposive sample of 60 primary one pupils, with boys and girls in equal proportion was drawn from three equivalent classrooms in three distantly located schools. Teachers Instructional Guide and Pupils Reading Skills and oral language Tests were used as instruments. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Rhymes and song proved to be effective strategies for promoting good English language speaking skill among the pupils.*

Key Words: *spoken English language, primary school, rhymes, songs, outputs*

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I. Introduction

Language is a means of thinking and transferring culture from one generation to another as well as for the exchange information and ideas. It is also a means of communication among people. The popularity of English language in this regard has enabled many countries emphasize the teaching of English languages in preference to their native language to its citizens. In a short period of time English displaced other languages and became the dominant language of communication worldwide. Its domination continues to extend. The modern world of media, mass communication, and Internet demands a good knowledge of English language, especially of spoken English. Every person wishing to get the benefits of modern education, research, science, trade, etc., knows that it is impossible without a working knowledge of the English language and good communication skills.

Speaking is one of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). It is the means through which learners can communicate with others to achieve certain goals such as to express their opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints. Furthermore, in almost every setting, speaking is the most frequently used language skill. Speaking is the most distinguishing feature of human beings from the other animals, as all human beings are born to speak their native language. Nunan (2002) stated that in learning a second or foreign language, most of the learners find speaking the most difficult skill to have a success because it needs oral communication that consists of both speaking and listening.

Burkart & Sheppard (2004) opined that success in learning a language is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language. Therefore, speaking is probably a priority for most learners at every level. Speaking instruction is important because it helps EFL/ESL students acquire speaking skills and therefore converse spontaneously and naturally with native speakers. Celce-Murcia, (2001) had argued that if the right speaking activities are taught in the classroom, speaking can raise general learners' motivation and make the English language classroom a fun and dynamic place for learners.

Effective communication by means of speaking usually creates a number of benefits for both speakers and listeners. In general, for learners it is essential to understand spoken utterances and give appropriate answers. When children have peer interaction, they are in the process of distinguishing sounds by involving their mental processes and try to practice them. It is by whispering, singing, talking, and shouting that they can acquire knowledge of and reproduction of a variety of the words with different sounds. In this process, children express rhythmic sequences, repeat words and sentences and listen to the sounds.

As described by York (2011), nursery rhymes are simple poetry in nature written in particular with specific language that young children can learn and enjoy. As reported by York most nursery rhymes can be

divided into several lines with special beats each. The scholar believes that beats help children to have a better attention to the lines and then produce the rhymes. Nurturing the elementary classroom environment with meaningful music activities may help young children in developing skills necessary for success (Wiggins, 2007). Bring music into the classroom as an engaging and stimulating element of literacy education has been suggested by the researcher as a motivating factor. The scholar further opined that engaging children in reading activities that keep their interest stimulates participation and learning; music and songs have the potential to lure children into a web of enjoyment. Hill-Clarke & Robinson, (2004) opined that music is an important part of everyday life and that when naturally woven into a child's active day can be effective in helping children to remember information in a number of different areas.

It has been found that music can help pupils in their literacy growth in different ways. The use of songs increases oral language development because when pupils hear and sing songs, they start to develop background knowledge (Register, 2004; Fisher & MacDonald, 2001; Anvari, Trainor, Woodside & Levy, 2002). In addition, songs and rhymes can be a fun way to encourage young pupils to be active participants in learning. Learning to rhyme is a key element in building a good foundation for learning to speak. Songs and rhymes aid memory and learning skills as well as help children improve listening and speaking skills (Mascle, 2009).

Borich (2000) suggests that effective teachers are those who use meaningful verbal praise to get and keep students actively participating in the learning process. The role of the good language teacher is to design, assign and monitor task and activities in the classroom to develop the interest and willingness of the pupils to learn. Pedagogical knowledge refers to the ability of the teacher to help the learner acquire knowledge by imparting training with effective teaching methodology. It also refers to the ability of the teacher to integrate lesson based on student's interest and also incorporating teaching strategies based on the students' proficiency levels. Cruickshank, Jenkins & Metcalf (2003) opined that effective teachers are generally positive minded individuals who believe in the success of their students as well as their own ability to help student to achieve.

Monitoring effort is defined as instructional activities provided by the teacher to keep track of students' understanding of the subject being taught. Monitoring generally involves the following interpersonal behaviours: questioning students during classroom discussions, one-to-one interaction with students, overseeing group work and so on.

According to Ur (2012) communicating orally and fluently in informal interaction is the primary goal for many learners. For that purpose, designing classroom activities to improve students' ability to promote oral fluency is of great importance. Ur (2012) states that getting students to talk is more difficult than to make them read, write or listen during language courses. Thus, teachers should promote student talk activities through proper monitoring. When utterances of children are well monitored by the teachers or caregivers, they tend to produce good output thereby ensuring quality in language learning

Statement of the problem

It is a general knowledge that most young Nigerians speak and write poorly in English language. It is however believed that the situation could be corrected by appropriate practical language instructional practices implemented by trained experts. This study therefore investigated the effectiveness of monitored outputs on primary school children's spoken English language when taught through rhymes and songs.

Null hypotheses: The following null hypotheses were tested in the course of this study:

- (i) There is no significant main effect of strategy of teaching on the achievement of pupils in spoken English language in the study
- (ii) There is no significant main effect of gender on the achievement of children in spoken English language in the study
- (iii) There is no significant effect of strategy of teaching on acquisition of speaking skills by lower primary school pupils

Method of study:

The study adopted quasi-experimental pretest, post-test control group design. Two experimental groups and one control group were involved in the study. The three participating schools had highly trained English education teachers, who were further trained for two weeks on implementation of the strategy that was randomized for the schools. The step by step lesson presentations were monitored by the researchers and assistants during both the training and the lesson implementation proper. The pretest was first administered before the commencement of the treatment. The experimental groups were taught using rhymes and songs, while the control group was taught using the traditional strategy of repeating or copying the teacher's presentation.

Sample of the study

Purposive sampling technique was used to select boys and girls in equal proportion from primary one class in each of three equivalent mixed gender schools that are distantly located from one another. The final sample size was sixty (60) boys and girls who completed the study.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used for this study. The Teacher Instructional Guide (TIG) and the Pupils Reading Skills and Speaking Test (PRSSST). The TIG was a step by step guide for teachers on how to carry out the teaching activity for the purpose of this study, while the PRST was administered to the pupils to test their speaking skill on the last day of study. Each pupil was given three minutes to talk on any topic of interest to the pupil. A modified form of PRST was administered on the first day of study as pretest.

Results of data analysis:

The descriptive statistics of pupils’ achievement on PRSSST is displayed in Table 1

Table 1 :Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Total score

Study group of subjects	Gender of subjects	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Rhymes	Male	13.9000	1.19722	10
	Female	13.3000	1.82878	10
	Total	13.6000	1.53554	20
Songs	Male	10.7000	1.33749	10
	Female	10.7000	3.12872	10
	Total	10.7000	2.34184	20
Traditional	Male	10.2000	1.68655	10
	Female	11.1000	2.23358	10
	Total	10.6500	1.98083	20
Total	Male	11.6000	2.15918	30
	Female	11.7000	2.64119	30
	Total	11.6500	2.39225	60

The data obtained from measurements during the study showed that differences existed among the mean achievement scores of study groups and also among male and female participants. The Grand mean score was 11.650, while the group means score for rhymes was 13.342 and the group means score for Songs strategy was 10.978. The traditional strategy obtained a group mean score of 10.630 when adjusted for covariates. In order to give further explanation and or interpretation to these observed differences in the achievement mean scores of study groups and also gender groups, the data was subjected to the analysis of variance using the pretest scores as covariates, which is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of variance of the achievement scores of participants

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: achievement score

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	151.679 ^a	6	25.280	7.205	.000
Intercept	1131.215	1	1131.215	322.386	.000
Pretest	31.729	1	31.729	9.043	.004
STUDYGROUP	82.841	2	41.420	11.804	.000
Gender	1.315	1	1.315	.375	.543
STUDYGROUP * Gender	2.844	2	1.422	.405	.669
Error	185.971	53	3.509		
Total	8481.000	60			
Corrected Total	337.650	59			

a. R Squared = .449 (Adjusted R Squared = .387)

Table 2 contains the analysis of variance of the achievement scores of participants in this study, according to study groups and gender. The data in Table 2 shows that the pretest scores that was used as covariates is significant, confirming the need for analysis of covariance. The results of the pretests administered at the commencement of the study were used as correlates of the achievement test scores in order to be able to determine the effect of treatment in this study. The result the analysis of variance is discussed according to the order of propounded null hypotheses.

Null hypothesis 1: There is no significant effect of study grouping on the achievement of participants in spoken English language.

The data in Table 2 shows that the effect of study grouping was significant on spoken English language achievement of the study groups;

$$[F_{(2, 60)} = 11.804; p < .05].$$

Null hypothesis 1 was therefore rejected. Since there were three study groups in this experiment [Group A = Rhymes; Group B = Songs; Group C = Traditional]; pair-wise comparison of group mean scores was therefore conducted in order to find out the group/s that caused the rejection of the null hypothesis. The results are contained in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparison of mean achievement scores of treatment groups: Grand mean score = 11.650

(I) Study grp. of subjects	(j) Study grp. of subjects	(I - j) Mean difference	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95 % confidence interval ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rhymes	Songs	2.363*	.619	.000	1.122	3.604
	Traditional	2.711*	.598	.000	1.513	3.910
Songs	Rhymes	-2.363*	.619	.000	-3.604	-1.122
	Traditional	.348	.601	.565	-.856	1.553
Traditional	Rhymes	-2.711*	.598	.000	-3.190	-1.513
	Songs	-.348	.601	.565	-1.553	.856

Based on estimated marginal means

* = The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

b. = Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (Equivalent to no adjustments)

The results in Table 3 show that the use of rhymes as a teaching strategy is significantly better than the use of songs [Mean difference = 2.363], and also significantly better than the traditional strategy [Mean difference = 2.711]. In addition, the use of songs as teaching strategy produced a higher group mean achievement score than the use of the traditional instructional strategy; [Mean difference = .348]. However, the difference between the mean scores of Songs strategy and traditional strategy [.348] was not significant. This result implies that the use of songs as a teaching strategy and the use of traditional strategy produce equivalent effects on the achievement in spoken English language.

Null hypothesis 2: There is no significant main effect of gender on achievement in spoken English language in the study.

The results in Table 3 show that the main effect of gender on the speaking achievement of boys and girls was not significant in this study:

$$[F_{(1, 60)} = .375; p > .05].$$

Null hypothesis 2 was not therefore rejected.

Null hypothesis 3: There is no significant effect of strategy of teaching on acquisition of speaking skills by lower primary school pupils.

The data for speaking skills scores of pupils were analyzed in order to determine the effect of teaching strategy on speaking skills output of pupils if any. The descriptive statistics of speaking skills performance component of the total oral output of pupils is presented in Table 4

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of speaking skills scores of pupils

Dependent Variable: Speaking skills score

Study group of subjects	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Rhymes	4.2500	.71635	20
Songs	3.4000	.75394	20
Traditional	3.3500	.81273	20
Total	3.6667	.85701	60

The speaking skills performance data in Table 4 revealed that the group means varied in the order: 4.25: 3.40: 3.35 for Rhymes, Songs and Traditional strategy groups respectively. Although the groups' mean scores were very close, further analyses were carried out in order to ascertain the significance of the differences in treatment groups speaking skills mean scores. The analysis is contained in Table 5.

Table 5: Analysis of variance of speaking scores of pupils according to treatment groups
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Speaking score

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Intercept	Hypothesis	149.374	1	149.374	106.312	.000
	Error	6.262	4.456	1.405 ^a		
Pretest	Hypothesis	.166	1	.166	.282	.598
	Error	32.934	56	.588 ^b		
STUDYGROUP	Hypothesis	9.173	2	4.586	7.798	.001
	Error	32.934	56	.588 ^b		

a. .204 MS(STUDYGROUP) + .796 MS(Error)

b. MS(Error)

The analysis of variance of the speaking scores of pupils in Table 5, reveals that the effect of strategy of teaching on the speaking scores of pupils is significant:

$$[F(2, 56) = 7.798; p < .05].$$

Null hypothesis 3 was therefore rejected. In order to determine the strategy or strategies that differed significantly, pair wise comparisons of treatment group mean scores was conducted. The result of the comparisons is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Pair wise comparisons of treatment groups mean speaking skills achievement scores for treatment groups

(I) Study grp. Of subjects	(J) Study grp. Of subjects	Mean Difference (I - J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rhymes	Songs	.813*	.252	.002	.307	1.318
	Traditional	.883*	.245	.001	.394	1.373
Songs	Rhymes	-.813*	.252	.002	-1.318	-.307
	Traditional	.071	.246	.775	-.421	.563
Traditional	Rhymes	-.883*	.245	.001	-1.373	-.394
	Songs	-.071	.246	.775	-.563	.421

Based on estimated marginal means

- The mean difference is significant at .05 level
- b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).

The data in Table 6 reveals that rhymes is significantly better than songs (mean difference = .813; p = .002). Also, Rhymes is also significantly better than traditional strategy (Mean difference = .883; p = .001). Finally, songs strategy and traditional strategy produced mean difference that were not significant (Mean difference = .071; p > .07). It therefore follows that rhymes strategy was most effective, followed by songs strategy for the purpose of improving pupils' speaking skills. However, songs strategy and traditional strategy were statistically equivalent in this regard.

II. Discussion:

This study was designed to investigate the effect of monitored presentation of rhythmic materials such as poetry, rhymes, and other sets of similarly sounding words and phrases, to young school children as a strategy for teaching spoken English language. Monitored sonic materials presentations were used in another set of equivalent classrooms. The intent was to determine their efficacy in English language learning when compared with the traditional strategy that had been viewed by most educators as poor teaching strategy (Oduolowu, 2003).

The results of this study have shown that employing rhymes as a strategy for teaching spoken English language was more effective than the use of songs and the traditional technique of repeating or copying the teachers' outputs. This finding is similar to those of Wiggins (2007) and York (2011). It was found that the use of songs was also effective but not as effective as the use of rhymes. This finding agrees with the submission of Hill-Clark and Robinson (2004) that music is an effective part of children's daily life, and can help them remember and use information. In speaking, children need active and fast strategies for making quick and effective linkages between what they know learn and what they speak. Rhymes and songs appear to have provided the needed assistance to the children for efficient coordinated speaking.

It was found that the use of sonic presentations as done in this study produced a higher mean achievement for spoken English language than the use of traditional teaching strategy, although the mean difference was not statistically significant. This finding supports the use of sonic strategy to teach children in preference to teacher talk and alphabet name memorization that are employed by the traditional strategy.

III. Conclusion:

This study has shown that the use of rhymes and songs to teach young children spoken English language could produce good results. The study has also shown that when both the teaching process and the learners' participation are monitored to ensure requisite diligence on the part of teachers and learners, rewarding outcomes are produced. Again the study has shown that the use of teaching strategies that engage learners in tasks that are pleasurable often yield commendable results and equitable gender effects (Iroegbu and Iroegbu, 2016). Such results tend to exemplify methods and strategies that could be employed to eliminate gender disparity in achievement and should be encouraged.

IV. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

- 1). Teachers should regularly employ the use of nursery rhymes in teaching language skills to young children to improve their spoken English language performance.
- 2). Nursery rhymes should be adopted in teaching language skills especially speaking skill to older children for improved English language proficiency.
- 3). Monitoring of both the teaching process and learner participation in class work should be revitalized in the school system to promote school learning outcomes.

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