

SONGS, RHYME, GAMES: Getting Children Drawn in the Language Class Through Fun Activities

A. Wahyuni Ratu

SMPN.1 Malino

uniratu@yahoo.com

Abstract: Boredom makes children disinterested in the language classroom. Certain fun activities could be applied as the strategy of getting children drawn in the language class and to ensure a natural anxiety-free language learning environment. Songs, rhymes and games were fun activities and effective technique to be used for children in the language class. This paper gives a perspective on the usefulness of Songs, rhymes and games in English language class especially in SMP level to ensure a stress-free environment for beginner English learners by providing the required conditions so that the children learn English with a lot of amusement in the classroom.

Keywords: songs, rhyme, games, English class

1. Introduction

Critical period hypothesis recommends early language learning. The earlier children start learning a second language, the higher are their chances of becoming more proficient as opposed to their learning of it later. The theory suggested most appropriate time to learn another language is between six and thirteen years of age.

According to the theory there is a biologically specific period of life when language can be learnt more easily. Researchers like Lenneberg (1967) and Bickerton (1981) mention the same that after the critical period, certain abilities of acquiring a language decrease.

Second language acquisition reaches a critical stage during puberty, after which people usually do not learn a second language. Therefore Linguistics professor Dr. Susan Curtiss, in a book by Curtan and Dahlberg (2004), shared opinions,

“The power to learn a language is so great in the young that it doesn’t seem to matter how many languages you seem to throw their way...They can learn as many spoken language as you” allow them to hear systematically and regularly at the same time. Children just have this capacity. Their brain is ripe to do this”.

Similarly, according to Curtan and Dahlberg (2004), the main factor in building foreign language proficiency is the amount of time spent for learning the language. They state, “When language learning begins earlier, it can go on longer and provide more practice and experience, leading ultimately to greater fluency and effectiveness”. However, although children have immense ability to learn a language, the methods and techniques of teaching children are not

same as they are for adults and a wrong method of teaching could bring a totally opposite result. Therefore, it is also very important to consider what stops children from learning a language. One thing that prevents children from learning a language is when they feel uncomfortable or under pressure in the language class. Also they cannot easily understand the theoretical concepts of grammar rules of a language and as a result, learning rules confuses them even more. Again, because of their short attention spans, children cannot concentrate on tedious activities for long durations.

Consequently, boredom makes children disinterested in the classroom. Another very important reason for children to stop learning a language is if there is excessive correction by the teacher. Research shows that some of these traditional educational practices in classroom teaching may have the effect of preventing rather than helping children to learn well. Therefore, it is true that no one can force a child to learn a language. However, by providing favorable environment, useful resources, carefully structured input and practice opportunities, a positive learning atmosphere can be ensured in the children’s class. Children, thus, learn a second language better if they have more opportunities to be exposed to it. Another way they and also by feeling a sense of confidence.

Finally, they feel motivated and learn better if a natural and stress free environment can be provided in the language class.

2. Ways of getting children involved in learning English

In order to get children involved in the language class and to ensure a natural anxiety-free language learning environment certain techniques could be applied. One of the best ways of getting children

drawn in the language class is through fun activities.

Among the fun activities songs, rhymes and games are the most effective ones to be used for children in the language class. Also they are fantastic materials for the language teachers to use with young learners because of their unlimited benefits.

2.1 Songs

Nothing can be as effective as songs in children's language class. Children learn a language very naturally if they enjoy what they are doing in the class. It has been said that children have a natural taste for songs and because of that English language teachers around the world use such enjoyable and supportive means for children to improve language learning and acquisition.

Singing a song can be also a source of motivation, interest and enjoyment, it is much easier for children to imitate and remember language acquire a language is by using all their senses and by getting fully involved; by observing and copying sounds and gestures and by watching and listening.

They also learn through exploring, experimenting, making mistakes and checking their understanding by repetition than words which are just 'spoken'. Again, a song or a chant can be used very effectively to teach children the sounds and rhythm of the language and to reinforce structures and vocabulary. Moreover songs contain words and expressions of high frequency and offer repetition.

The stress and intonation pattern of the spoken language can be taught through songs. Probably this is the reason why many language teachers aware of the fact that songs can be a wonderful medium for natural language acquisition. And the fact many teachers have been using English language songs to help children pick up their English through enjoyable activities.

2.2 Rhymes

It is only natural for young children to be active as it is their nature to be energetic and playful. Action rhymes captivate young students and help teachers convert their natural energy and enthusiasm into meaningful learning experiences. Action rhymes also help even beginners associate words and phrases with meanings.

Many primary level language learners respond very well to rhymes. Some of the reasons may be the rhythm; the repetition and most importantly the fun involved in rhymes get children naturally drawn to it. Although these young learners can initially find it very difficult to remember how to say complete phrases in a foreign language, they remember whole rhymes with ease. For example the rhythm and physical action involved in action rhymes like 'Head, shoulders, knees and toes' provide fun drills of vocabulary for parts of the body. This kind of rhymes also involves lots of repetition which is very effective in children's language class as children love to repeat and mimic words and sounds. Thus, through this kind of activity they naturally pick up the language with its accurate sound, words and sentences.

2.3 Games

It is widely documented that English language games improve learning, and with children, they are one of the most effective classroom tools. Just like songs and rhymes, games also provide wonderful atmosphere in the children's language class.

The first reason it is a learning cycle working in their favor, since games make learning fun, children are willing participants and are not just present in class because they have to be. Students pay more attention because when they enjoy themselves, they do better, feel better about them, and do even better.

Next reason is playing a game has a purpose and an outcome. In order to play, students have to say things. Therefore, they have a reason to communicate and this makes them want to know and learn more. In addition to this, games stimulate and motivate children to a new level. They know that if they do not pay attention, they will not be able to play the game well and they will let their team down so they make more effort to join in and learn as much as possible.

The proverb 'repetition is the mother of skill' becomes very meaningful during the games in children's language class as students get to use the language all the time with a lot of repetition. Although repetition is boring in some cases, during games it is fun for children. Also because of the fun involved in the game a massive amount of vocabulary and grammar can be revised in a short time because it is very difficult for learners to remember vocabulary if they never use it.

Furthermore, the physical movement involved in some of the games also helps keep children stimulated and alert. Children naturally have a lot of energy and are not good at attending formal lessons for long periods, and so if they participate in a game involving physical movements from time to time, they will never get impatient and bored.

Most importantly, the philosophy of encouragement incorporated into these games increases confidence in all students. Usually this does not just mean they get better at only English, but in all subjects in school. This in turn makes the teachers more motivated and optimistic, and they can really make a difference in their lessons. Apart from all this, language games like any other games involve learners in a healthy competition that can help them learn more. "As long as no one is forced to participate, competition can be positive and encourage player discovery, examination and learning." Thus, creating the right type of language games can foster this healthy, beneficial competition in the classroom.

Finally language games create a bond between the teacher and their students, which is fulfilling for the teacher and students alike. In short, if used properly by the teacher, games are excellent ways whereby children have fun and at the same time acquire a language. So, it can be said that English language games actually give students a reason to communicate, and a context for speaking practice.

4. Recommendations for ELT Teachers

Many research showed that the children who take interest in their foreign language lessons at primary school automatically develop an interest to learn that language even if there are no fun activities but serious lessons at the secondary level. The high motivation resulting from enjoyable lessons in the primary schools where learning takes place through songs, rhymes, games, story telling and other interesting activities is retained throughout their academic life. (Brewster and Ellis, 2004:11)

However, it is also true that considering our socio-economic situation especially in Indonesia, it is perhaps not possible to revolutionize English teaching overnight. Apart from this, our Education Ministry along with the new curriculum has been trying their best to bring in improvements in English teaching for quite a long time and there have been a lot of changes in the curriculum of English education. But despite all these efforts, little improvement has taken place in the overall English proficiency among the students. And this is only because of inaccurate teaching techniques of English at the primary level.

Therefore, if things have to be changed, our focus should be on the primary level. As the art of teaching English to young learners is a specific skill which needs specific training to be performed effectively, training the English teachers who teach at the primary level should be the first priority of the

government. Teachers need to understand how children learn a language. In addition, the curriculum needs a thorough change according to the needs and interests of the children including a lot of useful fun activities like songs rhymes and games. Moreover, children's scripts need to be corrected according to their level to encourage creativity and discourage memorization. The exam system also has to change so that the authority does not force the teachers to promote memorization among the children.

At the primary level, teachers should have a lucrative pay scale so that skilled teachers feel motivated to join primary schools. Besides, in order to get the best outcome from a language policy, all related factors like teachers, teacher supervisors, teacher trainers, curriculum developers and assessment specialists should work together and a proper coordination should be made to make language policy effective. The idea behind the coordination is to ensure the expected result from the policy by providing the students with material resources, appropriate course books, and other aids including properly trained teachers[1].

Most importantly, in order to make language learning effective, child psychology and age have to be given the highest priority. That is the reason why any policy regarding children's education should be tailored to suit young learners.

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