



TEACHING CHILDREN THROUGH SONGS, CHANTS AND RHYMES

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Abstract:

Since English has become an international language, more and more people learn English. The importance of English as a world language has made people to learn English as early as possible. Teaching English as a foreign language to young learner needs special approach since young learners have special characteristics, they have their own way of learning. The forms of fun activities for children are songs, chants and rhymes. The main objective of this article is to emphasize the importance of using rhymes and songs in the teaching of English as a foreign language to young learners. Their functions, criteria for election and the ways of presenting them to the class will also be analysed. Songs, chants and rhymes are amazing tool for teaching language, especially to children. Young learners pick up pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and rhythm of the language.

Keywords: children, learn, songs, chants, rhymes

Introduction

English has become the main language of communication all over the world and early learning of English in the school context is becoming more common. Teaching of English from primary education is very common in European countries including my country, Kosovo. Learning English starts at the age of 8 and 9.

Teaching children can be immensely rewarding, teachers who has experienced that can tell about it. But it's not fun and games all the time, and sometimes it's just not that easy. English teachers who wish to teach children must be aware of the challenges

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and difficulties they may encounter, and prepare accordingly. But still the young age is different, children learn a language faster than adults, they do not learn through traditional language teaching methods. Through fun activities children can learn a language better as learning becomes natural for them since these activities do not make them conscious that they are learning a language.

Children learn better through interesting activities and for this reason songs, rhymes and chants are very useful tools for teaching them a foreign language. Actually these are the tools that help children learn in an enjoyable environment without making them feel the pressure of learning a foreign language.

Songs, chants and rhymes are full of lexicon, they use authentic language and students can take advantage of their repetition and musicality, contributing to the learning of new expressions. When students listen to them again and again they acquire and receive a great language input unconsciously. They also help to create a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere, motivating students in the learning and introducing fun and happiness in the foreign language classroom.

Songs, chants and rhymes work wonderfully as a part of an ESL program for children, for a non-native speaker at the beginning stage it is clearly easier to sing or recite a rhyme in English than it is to communicate personal information, wants or needs. The rhythm and rhymes naturally appealing to a child, the child is eager to be a part of the rhythm and to participate in reciting the rhyme. A class in which every child feels welcomed as a participating member is a vital factor in effective teaching. Sharing the rhymes and songs as a group relaxes the tensions of competition and of inhibition. Songs, chants and rhyme are easy to memorize, the children derive visible satisfaction and confidence from this newly acquired fluency that comes so quickly.

Most primary school teachers generally use songs as a teaching technique and Cameron (2001) claims that the use of songs and rhymes is also important for young learners in foreign language classrooms. Likewise, Johnstone (2002) claims that teachers of young learners may make an important contribution to children's early language education by introducing their classes to recorded songs, and Demirel (2004) claims that the most effective way to teach listening comprehension, pronunciation, and dictation to young learners is through teaching songs.

The behaviorist theory

Behaviorism is a theory of learning that was influential in the 1940s and 1950s, especially in the United States. With regard to language learning, the best-known proponent of this psychological theory was B.F. Skinner (1957). Traditional behaviorists

hypothesized that when children imitated the language produced by those around them, their attempts to produce what they heard received 'positive reinforcement'. This could take the form of praise or just successful communication. Thus encouraged by their environment, children would continue to imitate and practice these sounds and patterns until they formed 'habits' of correct language use. According to this view the quality and quantity of the language the child hears, as well as the consistency of the reinforcement offered by others in the environment, would shape the child's language behavior. This theory gives great importance to the environment as the source of everything the child needs to learn.

First of all we will want the classroom to be bright and colourful, with windows the children can see out of, and with enough room for different activities to be taking place. We might expect them to be working in groups in different parts of the classroom, changing their activity every ten minutes or so. '*We are obviously*', Susan Halliwell writes, '*not talking about classrooms where children spend all their time sitting still in rows or talking only to the teacher*' (1992). Because children love discovering things, and because they respond well to being asked to use their imagination, they may well be involved in puzzle-like activities, in making things, in drawing things, in games, in physical movement or in songs.

Listening skill

Listening is an active process, as the mind actively engages in making meaning. It is therefore our duty as teachers to ensure that the materials we use are comprehensible to our young learners, as well as within the range of what they are developmentally ready for. Listening is also hard work! And can be stressful! So in order to maximize the potential for acquisition of language, we need to ensure that our young learners are not stressed about this process.

Activities that can be carried out with songs in foreign language classes can be classified in three groups as pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities. Here, a teacher should carefully think about what a student will do before, while and after listening. Below are some recommendations regarding these activity stages and activities a teacher can use in these stages.

Pre-listening activities

The purpose of this stage is to prepare the students linguistically, educationally, thematically and psychologically for the text. Students might be introduced to the topic

and key vocabulary. Before playing a song to students, it is necessary to introduce the topic, the keywords and the simple grammatical structure.

While-listening Activities

During this stage, which might be seen as the main focus of the lesson, students perform tasks and activities which directly exploit the song. To deal with while-listening step, teachers can ask learners to:

- Fill in the blanks with the correct words
- Rearrange the words to make sense
- Choose the appropriate words from the box
- Choose a suitable form word from a pair of given words

Post-listening activities

This third stage typically involves follow-up activities which practice the productive skills of speaking and writing in various ways. In the post stage, it is the song or text which provides the stimulus for further activities which enhance other language skills. During this stage, the tasks and activities will almost certainly involve the integration of previously-taught language with new language and ideas recently introduced through the song. And, of course, once students have done all this work, their reward might be to sing the song together.

Music

Music is a powerful stimulus for student engagement precisely because it speaks directly to our emotions while still allowing us to use our brains to analyse it and its effects if we so wish. According to Lo and Li (1998), songs are able to change the monotonous mood in the class and with the smoothing effect of music; they provide a comfortable class environment so that students can develop their lingual skills more easily. Besides, utilizing songs in class environment amuses students, helps them feel relaxed and get rid of their negative attitudes towards a foreign language while learning a lingual structure through a song (Sarıçoban, 2000).

A piece of music can change the atmosphere in a classroom, it can amuse and entertain. Children have a natural taste for music and because of that English language teachers around the world use such enjoyable and supportive means for children to improve language learning and acquisition. (Cakir, <http://iteslj.org>, 1999) Music and poetry are also an essential part of foreign language learning for young learners (Philips 1993: 100)

Murphey believes that music has the power to engrave itself into our brains, stating that “*songs work on our short or long term memory*” and are therefore adequate tools for using in the language classroom (1992.p.3)

Music being a source of motivation, interest and enjoyment, it is much easier for children to imitate and remember language 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.

When and how to use songs, chants and rhymes?

Songs, chants and rhymes can be used at the beginning, during or at the end of any lesson. We may use them in many different ways in the language classroom: as short warm-ups to start our lessons, to introduce new language, to revise and practice language, to change the mood or to get everyone’s attention. When using music within our English classroom, we must select songs that are suitable for the age group we are teaching and make clear which language aspect we are going to practice or reinforce (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, spelling, etc.). We can build up the following record chart which will help us to analyse the full potential of each song and rhyme. In order to work with songs, chants and rhymes, it is recommendable to follow some steps:

- Playing the song or rhyme for pupils to listen to.
- Singing the song or rhyme by ourselves, using mime, gestures or visual aids to represent high frequency words or expressions (flashcards, pictures, mime, puppets...).
- Reading and singing the song with the whole class.

Chants and rhymes can be recited by ourselves, while showing the accompanying pictures and then children could recite them along with us.

And here is a list of what we can do with a song adapted from Tim Murphey (1992: 9-10) and other resources of activities in teaching English through songs, and I selected some activities which are suitable for children:

1. Listen
2. Sing, whistle, tap, and snap fingers while we listen
3. Sing without listening to any recording
4. Use songs and music to set or change an atmosphere or mood, as ‘background furnishing’
5. Use songs and music to make a social environment, form a feeling of community, dance, make friends

6. Study grammar
7. Practice selective listening comprehension
8. Translate songs
9. Write dialogues using the words of a song
10. Dictate a song
11. Use a song for gap-fill,
12. Use music for background to other activities
13. Practice pronunciation, intonation, and stress
14. Break the routine
15. Do choral repetition
16. Teach vocabulary
17. Teach culture
18. Have fun

If we look at this list carefully, we can see that all four skills (speaking, reading, listening, and writing) can be very well and equally practiced.

A Collection of Songs, Chants and Rhymes

Colors

Purple, yellow, green and blue,
green and blue,

Purple, yellow, green and blue,
green and blue,

Black, white brown, red orange too;

Purple, yellow, green and blue,
green and blue,

(Stand up when you sing your colour word) What's your favourite colour?

(Numbers and Present continuous Tense)

One, Two, I'm Tying My Shoe!

One, two, I'm tying my shoe!

Three, four, he's closing the door.

Five, six, she's picking up sticks.

Seven, eight, they are painting the gate.

Nine, ten, they're catching a hen.

Eleven twelve, he's putting books on the shelves.

Thirteen, fourteen, boys are talking.

Fifteen, sixteen, girls are singing.
Seventeen, eighteen, they are skating.
Nineteen, twenty, my plate's empty!

In the Park

Oh, she's swinging on the swing in front of me.
Oh, she's swinging on the swing in front of me.
Oh, she's swinging on the swing, she's swinging on the swing,
she's swinging on the swing in front of me.
Oh, she's sliding down the slide in front of me.
Oh, she's sliding down the slide in front of me.
Oh, she's sliding down the slide, sliding down the slide,
she's sliding down the slide in front of me.
Oh, she's climbing a tree in front of me.
Oh, she's climbing a tree in front of me.
Oh, she's climbing a tree, climbing a tree,
she's climbing a tree in front of me.
Oh, she's hiding under the bench in front of me.
Oh, she's hiding under the bench in front of me.
Oh, she's hiding under the bench, hiding under the bench,
she's hiding under the bench in front of me.

Days of the Week

Sneeze on Monday, hug your mother.
Sneeze on Tuesday, play with brother.
Sneeze on Wednesday, find a cat.
Sneeze on Thursday, lose your hat.
Sneeze on Friday, have a good day.
Sneeze on Saturday, see friends on Sunday.

My Day

This is the way I wash my face,
wash my face, wash my face.
This is the way I wash my face,
wash my face in the morning.
This is the way I brush my teeth,
brush my teeth, brush my teeth.

This is the way I brush my teeth,
brush my teeth in the morning
This is the way I comb my hair,
comb my hair, comb my hair.
This is the way I comb my hair,
comb my hair in the morning.

I'm a Little Teapot,

I'm a little teapot,
Short and *stout*
Here is my handle,
Here is my *spout*.

Where's mine? Is this mine?

Where's mine? Is this mine? No, that's hers.
Where's mine? Is this mine? No, that's his.
Where are mine? Are these mine? No, they are theirs.
Where are mine? Where are mine? Yours are there, on the chair.
Where? On the chair.

Conclusion

They make larger vocabulary background, like expressions and useful sentences. They help to develop listening and speaking skills. Songs will help learners become familiar with word stress and intonation, and the rhythm with which words are spoken or sung also helps memorization. And once memorized, children will repeat it again and again. They also hear informal or colloquial English that they may encounter outside the classroom and they become familiar with parts of the foreign culture, seeing it as enrichment for their own life.

Affectively it is good to stimulate children's interest in the new language, to bring fun and variety to learning, to provide a relaxed atmosphere, to motivate to learn to be active, to give encouragement, even children are shy or slow learning, coming out and losing their embarrassment.

"Children are active learners and thinkers." (Piaget, 1970)

"Children learn through social interaction." (Vygotsky, 1962)

“Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.” Plato

“Make English active and fun!”

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