

Enriching Students' Vocabulary Using English Pop Songs

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Abstract

This study aimed at enriching kindergarten students' English vocabulary was conducted in Singa School, Jakarta. The 21 students of the K-2 grade who participated in a two-cycled action research were taught vocabularies by using pop-songs. The quantitative data, collected using tests, and the qualitative data, collected using observation and document study techniques indicated that the use of pop-songs enriched the participants' vocabulary, as shown by the increase of the mean scores of the tests conducted, i.e. 33.57 (in the pre-test) to 50 (post-test of cycle I) to and 80 (post-test of cycle II), and the use of stories in each cycle significantly enriched the students' vocabulary mastery. The t-tests in the two cycles resulted $t_{\text{count}} (7.087) > t_{\text{table}} (1.725)$ and $t_{\text{count}} (9.216) > t_{\text{table}} (1.725)$, respectively. Based on the findings, it could be concluded that the use of pop-songs was effective to enrich kindergarten students' vocabulary.

Keywords: vocabulary, pop-songs, classroom action research

Introduction

Due to its increasing use as the first international language, English is now considered a language everybody has to master. Therefore, the language is now learned at every level of education, from kindergarten to university. In Indonesia, affected by the theory that the sooner one learns a foreign language the better his mastery will be, kindergartens, especially in large cities, includes English in their curricula. Parents, realizing the high importance of English, are enthusiastic to send their children to such kindergarten.

To be proficient in English, the learner has to master the four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and language components (grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary). Among these components, vocabulary is crucial to master by kindergarten students, because the more words young children know, the more they are able to comprehend what they hear or read and to communicate their thoughts and feelings. According to Biemiller (2006), there is a strong link between vocabulary development and later literacy development. The ability to read-for-meaning requires knowledge of word meanings. If students' vocabulary is poor, they will not be able to comprehend what they encounter in a text or listen to in a conversation. On the other hand, the more vocabulary someone masters in English the easier it is for him to communicate and understand English itself. Flohr (2010, p. 2) accentuated that students need to learn vocabulary because otherwise they will not be able to express and articulate themselves in a way that other students or native speakers of English can understand them. In the context of EFL teaching, Griva (2009) stated that vocabulary learning has been considered fundamental and inseparable in the area of language teaching.

Despite high importance of vocabulary in English learning and communication, and the urgency of building large vocabulary in children, the present writer found that many students attending kindergarten face some problems in enriching their vocabulary. When they were asked about the vocabulary they learnt in previous sessions the majority of them did forget. Their results of vocabulary tests indicated none of them achieved the minimum completeness standard (≥ 70). As a consequence, they often lost focus and motivation, were unable to express what they want to communicate, and found English difficult to master.

Theoretically, to facilitate young learners' vocabulary development, teachers need to examine the way they interact with the children. Teachers should recognize how children's language develops and how important meaningful language interaction is for their learning. Language development is supported through an adult and child interaction with one another. Children who are asked open-ended questions, encouraged to expand on their language, and provided with feedback to their comments and questions have more opportunities to talk and use language and are therefore more likely to develop

language. Children learn language, and particularly vocabulary, by being exposed to language in meaningful contexts and by having to use language in purposeful and functional ways (Adger, Hoyle, & Dickinson, 2004).

There are actually many techniques, media, and activities teachers can use to boost young learners' vocabulary. As far as those techniques, media, and activities access the children's prior knowledge, build new vocabulary upon familiar ideas, and create new experiences for understanding, they are worth using. Best practices in vocabulary development have shown that such techniques, media, and activities will create lessons in which children are participating and actively involved and such conditions will help to reinforce what is being taught. For instances, teachers can assign the students to sing and act out targeted unknown vocabulary to make them become engaged in their learning. Students can also be assigned to play games or listen to stories. Such activities could be repeated several times to help the students remember definitions and word meanings.

Current studies have indicated that songs are one of the most effective materials teachers can use to enrich young learners' vocabulary. Researches on child language acquisition have revealed it is necessary to repeat lexical items many times before they are internalize by children. Songs provide an outstanding means of repeating, reinforcing, and enlarging vocabulary and are suitable for children. A song likes *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*, for instance, could be effectively used to introduce or revise parts of the body for immediate use. i.e. head, shoulders, knees, toes, eyes, ears, mouth, nose and to introduce related verbs for recognition. i.e. to eat, to smell, to hear, to see. The song *I Can Sing a Rainbow* could be very useful for reviewing color names.

In addition, by letting the children listen to, sing, discuss, and play with songs, they are building important background knowledge that they will draw upon during later, listening, reading, speaking, writing experiences. Gilles, Andre, Dye & Pfannenstiel (1998) found that with each new song, students learn concepts and word meanings that they will encounter in print. This is in line with Medina's (2002) belief that music is an area where children who face language obstacles can be successful in acquiring vocabulary and grammar. The results of relevant studies, (such as Schunk, 1999 and Overy, 2000) revealed that young children who received vocabulary instruction in a second language, along with songs and rhythmic discrimination activities, incorporated more words into their receptive and active vocabularies.

Based on the background above, the researcher in this current study would like to see whether the use of pop-songs as a complementary teaching activity significantly enrich her K-2 grade students' EFL vocabulary. During the study, the researcher selected pop-songs containing words the students have in their textbooks. The songs, selected from Ester (2005) were regarded as complementary learning materials. Specifically, the study addressed the

following research questions: (1) How does the use of pop-songs affect the K-2 grade students' EFL vocabulary learning? (2) Does the use of pop-songs enrich the K-2 grade students' EFL vocabulary? It is hoped that this action research will shed light on the way and the benefits of using pop-songs in young learners' EFL classrooms.

Action Hypothesis

In line with the research questions above, the action hypothesis of this study is stated as follow: "If pop-songs are used, the K-2 grade students' EFL vocabulary will be enriched."

Literature Review

Vocabulary, defined by Hatch and Brown (1995, p. 1) as "a list or set of words for a particular language or a list or set of word that individual speakers of language might use" is one of the language components which have to be mastered by the students in learning a new language. It means that vocabulary should be made a core component in English learning, because if the students lack in vocabulary, they will face difficulties for learning and using English. McCharthy (2003) emphasized that the biggest component of any language course is vocabulary. Thornbury (2002) said without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p.12). Realizing the essence of vocabulary in both learning and communication, it is very urgent for teachers to help the students enrich their vocabulary.

Many researches, like Xiaowei (2010) found that learning vocabulary by using some methods will help the student to enrich their vocabulary. Some interesting techniques that are potential to make English lessons more exciting and motivating for young learners include realia, picture, story reading, mime, action, gestures and songs. Among these, music and songs are one of the most effective.

Research and practices have revealed the effectiveness of using music and songs to teach second or foreign languages. This is shown by the frequent use of music and songs in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms all over the world. Huy Le (2007) observed that music is highly valued by both EFL students and teachers in Vietnam in the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Other reports by teachers from the United States (Baez, 1993), Taiwan (Katchen, 1988), Japan (Moriya, 1988), and Mexico (Domoney and Harris, 1993) support the importance and usefulness of music and music activities in the teaching of ESL learners.

There are several reasons why songs, particularly pop songs, might be helpful for EFL learners. The first reason is their flexibility. Songs can be used for a number of purposes and there are many reasons why songs can be considered a important pedagogical tool for language learning in general and

for vocabulary development in particular. Songs can be useful tools in the learning of vocabulary, sentence structures, and sentence patterns, not to mention their reflectivity of mother tongue culture (Murphey, 1992). Second, using songs in the classroom will make learning fun. Most children enjoy singing and usually respond well to using songs in the classroom, because songs, in particular choral singing, can help to create a relaxed and informal atmosphere that makes the classroom a nonthreatening environment. The reduction of anxiety will help increase student interest and motivate them to learn the target language. Third, according to Murphey's (1992) analysis, popular songs use language commonly associated with the level of 11-year-old native English speakers. So the comparatively simple vocabulary is appropriate for students learning English. Also, song lyrics are presented within a repetitive structure and song vocabulary usually contains common, short words with numerous pronouns. The language of songs, like real speech, is conversational; lyrics are sung at a slower rate with more pauses between utterances. Finally, there is the very obvious beat in pop music. According to Weikart (1998), it is the beat which helps English learners develop "a sense of inner timing and allows children to speak or read in whole sentences instead of just one word at a time" (p. B-1). These factors enable learners to relate to and understand song lyrics (Lems, 2005).

Based on these reasons, it is obvious that music and songs are a great language package that bundles culture, vocabulary, listening, grammar and a host of other language components in just a few rhymes, and for many people from all around the world, the first exposure to English is through popular song lyrics, moreover, the use of music in language classes puts students at ease, makes them more attentive and can increase their desire to learn a language (Medina, 1993 and Mishan, 2005). Medina (1993) explicated a wide variety of useful vocabulary items can be acquired through popular songs, and Murphey (1992) revealed that using students' favorite songs to teach vocabulary creates endless opportunities for revision which is fundamental for storing the information in long term memory.

Pop songs or pop music is the commercial record music which is often oriented towards young people and usually consists of relatively short and simple love songs. There is a feature of pop songs, which can be inferred from the name itself, namely that it is popular. The popularity of pop songs ensures that they are very potential to motivate students to learn language. Domoney and Harris argued that the involvement of more time and more attention in the English classroom pop song activity can motivate students since the activity uses their knowledge, their music, and their language (1993, p. 235). It is believed that pop songs make the teaching and learning activity meaningful and useful and, as a result, students may welcome the involvement of pop songs in English teaching and learning.

One of the well-known procedures of using songs to teach language was developed by Cameron (1997). She stated that, stated that classroom tasks for young learners have three stages which “once identified, can be analyzed, adapted, and expanded” (p. 347) and noted that “it has been common practice for many years to plan reading activities in three stages: pre-reading, reading and post-reading” (2001, p. 32). Cameron adds that this has been adapted for mainstream task-based learning by Skehan (1996, cited in Cameron, 2001) and adopts it herself with the following labels (Cameron, 2001):



The core activity is central to the language learning task and without the core, the task would collapse. The preparation activities should help to prepare the students to complete the core activity successfully. This might include pre-teaching of language items or activating topic vocabulary. The follow-up stage then should build on the completion of the core activity (Cameron, 2001, p. 32). Each of the stage is briefly described in the following section.

The main aim of the preparation stage is to make the students ready to do the planned activity in the core stage. This could be done using a number of methods, depending on the resources available to the teacher or the size of class. If, for instance, the objective to achieve in the core stage is to enable students to associate words that name parts of the body with their own parts of the body, the teacher can design total physical response activities or prepare interesting pictures parts of the body. To activate the vocabulary, the teacher could point her own eye and ask the students, “What’s this?” Students reply, “Eye!” The teacher continues, “What you can use an for?” Students reply, “To see!” The teacher could ask, “How many eyes do you have?”, “What’s the color of my eyes?” and so on. The students should be encouraged to answer the questions.

The teacher then can move to the core stage. To involve the students and maximize interest, it would be advantageous to sing the song several times in the core, each time varying the pace or volume and having the students perform actions and sing along chorally. For example, the teacher could begin by asking the students to sing the word *head* at first, and have the students shake their heads or make other interesting activities suitable with the head.

After singing the song in the core activity, in the follow-up stage they are encouraged to use the vocabulary from the song. This, of course, depends on the class level, available resources, and the number of the students in the classroom. The follow-up stage could be used to develop written production, either through writing sentences or gap-fill activities, or oral production where the vocabulary learned is used in a situational role-play.

Methodology

This study is a two-cycled action research which was conducted in two month (May to June 2012) in Singa School, Jakarta. The participants of the research were the 21 K-2 students taught by the researcher. Before the study was conducted, their English vocabulary mastery was approximately of the same level.

The data was collected using test and non-test instruments. The test technique was used to collect quantitative data derived from the participants' vocabulary achievement. Non-test techniques were used to collect qualitative data, including: observation, documentation, and interview. Tests were carried out three times; the pre-test, post test I, and post test II. The non-test techniques were carried out using observation sheet, documentation and interview guide. To analyze the quantitative data obtained from the tests, t-test was employed by using SPSS version 17. To analyze the qualitative data, the descriptive analysis technique was employed.

To guarantee the validity of the qualitative data obtained in this study, methodological, theoretical, and time triangulations were employed. The methodological triangulation was administered by using more than one method for data collection, i.e. observations, interviews, and tests. The theoretical triangulation was carried out by using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon. The time triangulation was conducted by collecting data in different times (two cycles) and from different sources (students, observer, and tests). The success indicator used in this study was the minimum passing standard at Singa School, Jakarta, i.e. the score of ≥ 70.0 .

Findings

In addition to the students' lack of vocabulary, this action research was also triggered by the fact that most of the students had low motivation and was not excited to participate in the lessons. Their initial poor vocabulary was reflected by the scores they obtained in the pre-test held in May 25, 2012. (See table 1 below)

Table 1: Participants' Pre-Test Scores

No	Range of Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	81—100	Excellent	0	0
2	70—80	Good	0	0
3	51—69	Fair	7	33.33
4	0—50	Fail	14	66.67
Total			21	100

This table shows none of the student had attained the minimum standard, only 33.33% obtained “fair” scores, and the rests got “fail” scores. The mean score of the whole students in this pre-test was 33.57.

Report of Cycle 1

1. Planning

The first cycle was planned to overcome the problems identified during the initial observation, i.e. (1) students lacked of vocabulary; (2) students were not enthusiastic; (3) students couldn't focus. To solve the problems, the researcher planned to provide interesting learning atmosphere by including songs.

2. Acting

The actions of Cycle I were conducted in four meetings on June 4, 6, 8, and 11, 2012. The short stories read in these sessions were *Part of the Body (verse 1)*, *Part of the Body (verse 2)*, *One Finger, One Thumb Keep Moving*, and *If You're Happy* respectively, The first meeting was started by telling the students that the class will sing together starting from that session. After activating the vocabulary to learn, the teacher let the students sing the songs. When every student was able to sing it quite well, they were asked to sing it again using movement. Then in the follow up stage, were assigned to do some items of exercise. In the end of the learning, the researcher reviewed the taught vocabularies and evaluated students' answers. The same procedure was done in the next meetings. It was shown that students were very excited to follow the lesson using songs; they loved singing together, although during the first meeting some students were not confident enough. In the forth meeting the researcher gave the last exercise which was also used as the post test of Cycle I.

3. Observing

During the implementation of the actions in the first cycle, a colleague of the researcher was asked to observe the process, especially the students' activity. Table 2 recapitulates the result of observations in every meeting in Cycle I. As shown by the table, that in the first session only 40% of the activity was fulfilled by the students. However, the fulfillment increased to 60% in the second session, 80% in the third, and 100% in the fourth.

In addition to the observation conducted by the researcher's colleague, the process of teaching was also assessed using interview. This technique was conducted to see the students' perception on the employment of songs. Table 3 recapitulates the results of the interview conducted after the fourth session of action in Cycle I.

The responses of the students indicated that only three fourth of them love songs. The number of those who were excited to use songs in learning was

even smaller (61.59%). more than a half of them found it's hard to memorize words using songs.

Table 2: Observation Results of Cycle I

No	Students' Activity	Sessions			
		I	II	III	IV
1	Students greet teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Students are excited to follow the lesson	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Students concentrate during the lesson	x	✓	✓	✓
4	Students ask some questions	x	x	✓	✓
5	Students do the worksheet properly	x	x	x	✓
Total		2	3	4	5
Percentage		40%	60%	80%	100%

Table 3: Interview Result of Cycle I

No	Questions	Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
1	Do you like to sing a song?	15	71.3	6	28.7
2	Are you excited when the teacher taught using songs?	13	61.9	8	30.1
3	Can you memorize more than two words after singing a song?	10	47.6	11	52.4
4	Do you get trouble to pronounce the words contained in the song given?	13	61.9	8	30.1
5	Is it easy to memorize words by using a song?	11	52.4	10	47.6

Table 4: Participants' Post-Test Scores of Cycle I

No	Range of Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	81—100	Excellent	0	0
2	70—80	Good	2	10
3	51—69	Fair	14	66
4	0—50	Fail	5	24
Total			21	100

Based on the scores they obtained in post test I, only 10% of the students passed pass the minimum passing standard and the other 90% achieved below it. However, while in the pre-test 66.67% students got the scores categorized in “fail”, in the post test I only 24% of them got the scores

categorized in this level. The mean score obtained by students in post-test I was 50 (see Table 4).

4. Reflecting

After carrying out the observations on the implementation of the learning cycle I, the researcher conducted further analysis and reflection on all activities undertaken. It was found in cycle I that students around one fourth of the students did not like singing. This was confirmed through the result of the observation. They were excited but could not concentrate during the lesson, especially in the first session. Only in the last session they could participate quite well in the five activities observed. To a certain extent, it was due to the fact that using songs to learn was a new experience to them. Their perception, enthusiasm and involvement will improve after they adept to it.

The increase of the mean scores (from 33.57 in the pre-test to 50 in the post test I) did indicate improvement. However, since 90% of the students still got the score below the passing grade, the results were not yet satisfactorily. Therefore, the teacher planned to perform better classroom management by providing better attention to every individual in the class.

Report of Cycle II

1. Planning

Since Cycle II had not yet given satisfactorily results, in Cycle II the researcher made a plan to provide more lively and interesting activities and paying greater attention to each individual in the classroom.

2. Acting

The actions of Cycle I were conducted in four meetings on June 15, June 18, June 20, and June 22, 2012. The songs used in these sessions were related to fruits, i.e. *Apples and Bananas*, *We at Apples in Many Ways*, *Eat some Fruits*, and *Pineapples*, respectively. The first meeting was started by repeating explanation about the goal of singing in their learning to the students. The students were also stimulated to pay more attention by emphasizing that the songs they would have are very interesting.

3. Observing

Just like in Cycle I, during the implementation of the actions in the second cycle, a colleague helped the researcher to observe the process, especially the students' activity. The result of observations in every meeting in Cycle II is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Observation Results of Cycle II

No	Students' Activity	Sessions			
		I	II	III	IV
1	Students greet teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Students are excited to follow the lesson	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Students concentrate during the lesson	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Students ask some questions	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Students do the worksheet properly	x	x	✓	✓
Total		4	4	5	5
Percentage		80%	80%	100%	100%

As shown in the table, in the all sessions all students were exited, concentrated, and active. However, they could not yet do the worksheet properly in the first two sessions. These findings were quite relevant to the results of interview. The majority (85.71%) of students now liked singing. More than 90% was even exited in the teaching using songs, although only around three fourth of them could memorize words they learnt through songs and found no difficulty to pronounce the words. (See table 6).

Table 6: Interview Result of Cycle II

No	Questions	Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
1	Do you like to sing a song?	18	85.71	3	14.29
2	Are you excited when the teacher taught using songs?	19	90.48	2	9.52
3	Can you memorize more than two words after singing a song?	15	71.43	11	52.4
4	Do you get trouble to pronounce the words contained in the song given?	5	23.81	16	76.19
5	Is it easy to memorize words by using a song?	16	76.19	5	23.81

Based on the scores they obtained in post test II, 42.86% of the students had achieved excellent category; 38% attained the “good” category; and only less than 20% who had not passed the minimum passing standard (see Table 7). The mean score of post test II was 80.

4. Reflecting

Based on the reflection made on the data obtained in the observing stage in this cycle, the researcher realized that the class had made a good progress. Since the mean score of the class (80) had passed the passing grade (70), the teacher decided to stop the study.

Table 7: Participants' Post-Test Scores of Cycle II

No	Range of Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	81—100	Excellent	9	42.86
2	70—80	Good	8	38.09
3	51—69	Fair	4	19.5
4	0—50	Fail	0	0
Total			21	100

Hypothesis Test

To compare the students' achievement in vocabulary learning before and after Cycle I was conducted, a paired-samples t-test was administered using the SPSS version 17 program. The result is presented in Table 11 below.

Table 8: T-test result of the Pre-Test and Post-Test I

Paired Samples Test					
	Paired Differences		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Cycle I – Pre Test	11.59285	21.26430	7.087	20	.000

Table 8 reveals that the t-count is 7.087 with the significant sig. (2-tailed) 0.000. Whereas the t-table with the significant level 0.05 and degrees of freedom (df) = $n-1 = 20$ is 1.725. Since t-count (7.087) > t-table (1.725), we can say there was a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test I. Specifically, this result suggests that when students are taught vocabularies using songs, their vocabulary is enriched.

Using the SPSS version 17 program, a paired-samples t-test was administered to compare the students' achievement in vocabulary learning before and after Cycle II was conducted. Table 9 reveals that the value of t-count with a significance value (Sig. (2-tailed)) of 0.000 is 9.216. The t-table with the significant level 0.05 and degrees of freedom (df) = $n-1 = 20$ is 1.725. Since t-count (9.216) > t-table (21.725), we can say there was a significant difference between the score of post-test I and post-test I. This suggests that use of songs for teaching vocabularies in Cycle II had significantly increased their achievement.

Table 9: t-test result of the Post-Test I and Post Test II

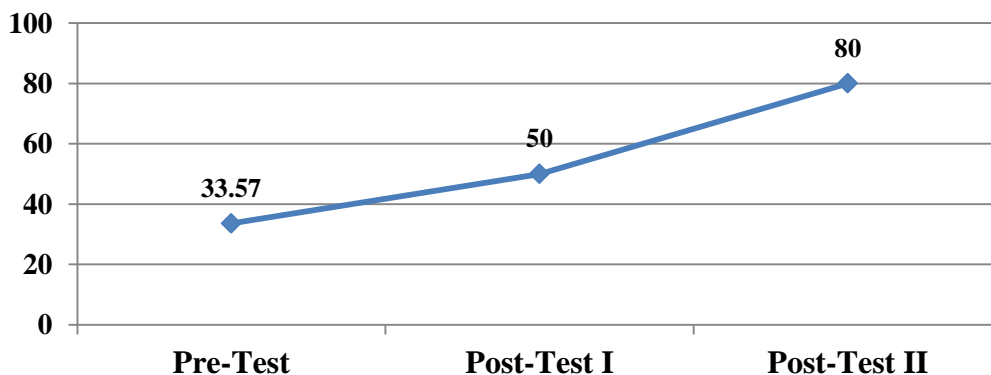
		Paired Samples Test				
		Paired Differences				
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Cycle II - Cycle I	23.21012	36.78988	9.216	20	.000

All two paired-samples t-tests above disclose that the use of songs significantly enriched the students' vocabulary in each cycle. Therefore, the action hypothesis "If the reading stories technique is used, the K-1 grade students' EFL vocabulary mastery will increase" is accepted.

Discussion

The data obtained in cycle I revealed that 71.3% of the participants loved stories, and even smaller than that (61.9%) felt exited to learn vocabulary using songs. Less than a half could memorize more than two words found in a song they had sung, and 61% got trouble to pronounce the words in the songs. Finally, more than a half found it was difficult to memorize words by using songs. However, in Cycle II the number of those who showed good attitudes towards the use of songs to learn increased. Now, more than 85% loved songs; more than 90% felt exited to learn using songs; almost three fourth could memorize more than two words found in a song; less than one fourth got trouble to pronounce the words in the songs; and almost three fourth found it easy to memorize words by using songs.

Chart 1: Participants' Tests Mean Score



These findings indicate that as they became more adept, their interest and enthusiasm grew. This growth of positive perception positively affected their engagement in the learning process. In Cycle II, all students began to be active in asking questions. They also managed to properly do the worksheets in the last two sessions of this cycle. Along with their increasing engagement, their achievement increased, as shown by the increase of the mean scores from the pre-test to post-test Cycle I and to post-test of Cycle II. (See chart 1).

Conclusion

The hypothesis tests proved that the use of pop songs enriched the students' vocabulary. The qualitative data revealed that the students' increase of vocabulary achievement went hand in hand with their engagement in the learning process. Along with the improvement in class management, attention to every individual, and performance in using the songs, the students' enthusiasm and involvement kept on increasing from cycle to cycle. This increase of engagement then increased their achievement, as shown by the results of post-tests conducted at the end of both cycles.

Realizing its high effectiveness, kindergarten EFL teachers are recommended to use songs to boost young learners' vocabulary development. While implementing the technique, teachers should make sure that students be fully engaged in the activities carried along the preparation, core, and follow-up stages.

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