Using Action Songs to Promote Fun English Learning at Elementary School*)

Abstract

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The aim of the article is to explain the use of action songs in English classes at elementary schools. This will cover the discussion on some theoretical reasons of using action songs in the English classes, explanation about how to select and use them (e.g. three bear song and Pinocchio song), in the classroom. The use of songs in English classes has been suggested since it is believed that these will make young learners get more benefits. However, English teachers cannot just take any song to the classroom. She/he must be able to analyze, select and use songs which meet the needs of the students and also support the objectives of the English teaching and learning. There are many types of songs and one of these is action song type. A fun and joyful class atmosphere is a situation that is beneficial for learners, but only fun is not enough. Teachers should be able to create a fun but educating English class. Action songs are songs which are completed with particular body movements that support the meaning of the song. To be able to implement these kinds of songs in the classrooms, there are some considerations that teachers should take, for example the size of the class, types of the actions, possible follow-up activities and many more.

Introduction

Songs have become an important part of human culture and civilization. They are used in many social and cultural occasions and have traditionally used as an educational tool. Therefore, it is widely believed that songs can be used to promote learning amongst people, including children.

One type of songs which children like most is action song. This type of songs usually requires body movements of the whole parts of the body or only some parts of it. In relation to English language learning for children, action songs are considered as powerful resources which help their language development. By nature, children enjoy playing and singing songs and they will get a lot of benefits when they were exposed to particular English songs in the English classroom. This paper intends to explain the use of action songs in English classes at elementary schools. At first, it outlines some theoretical reasons of using action songs in the English classroom. Then, it identifies and explains some possible action songs that can be used in the classroom and how to use them in the English classroom.

Songs as Useful Learning Resources

Songs and languages might have some similar features. By using songs, people can express themselves. Similar to songs, language is also a means used by people to express their thought, feeling or concern about particular things. Goodger (n.d.:4) mentions that music and language share some common elements. First "physically, both of them made up of sound waves which our ears capture and our brains process into a meaningful, recognizable code." Language, except the sign language, and songs are firstly captured by ears and then they proceeded by the brains. Second, both of them "communicate emotions and meanings." In everyday life, they often function as canal for human to express idea, opinion, feeling, emotion, and dream. Third, they both have an "intrinsic phonology namely rhythm and accentuation, key and intonation". Song is defined as a short piece of music with words to be sung. In language, particularly English certain features like tune, intonation, stress also exist and give impact to meanings. Goodger also mentioned that "the notes in a melody correspond to the phonemes in words; change the order of the notes in a tune and it loses its sense. It is exactly the same for phonemes in words, phrases and sentences."

Participating in action songs is another support reading technique that will aid in language development. Here are some of the benefits of using action songs as proposed by Cord foundation:

a. "allow for self expression, encouraging a child's own response in his or her use of body and speech."

b. "encourage students to participate verbally."

c. "provide relaxation (a legitimate opportunity to wiggle and move around)."

d. "assist the child in learning to follow directions."

e. "increase attention span."

f. "develop listening skills."

g. "teach order and sequence."

h. "help teach number concepts."

i. " increase manual dexterity and muscular control."

Action songs are songs with movements for miming and role-playing the words and the language structures. Using action songs is considered beneficial as the accompanying actions or gestures help to strengthen meaning and at the same time channel high levels of energy positively (Brewster et.al., 2002: 163). The reasons of using songs in the class include cognitive reasons, affective reasons, linguistic reasons, cultural reason, and social reasons. Krashen (1982), who proposed affective filter hypothesis, has argued that optimal learning occurs when the affective filter is weak. Songs help teachers creating a favorable learning atmosphere for their students which furthermore lead to the low level of affective filter. Bringing songs to the classroom allow learner to enjoy stress-free learning situation. Brewster et al.(2002: 163) mention that songs help to develop concentration, memory and coordination. Repetition is a feature which is common in songs. Repetition allows children to guess what comes next and 'consolidate language items.' The variety provided by songs changes the pace and the nuance of the lesson and caters for different learning style.

Singing action songs is not only a great way to incorporate music in child's life but also helps develop motor skills. According to Jolly (1975) in Milington (2011: 134), using songs can also give students chances to get a better understanding of the culture of the target language. Shen (2009: 88) in Milington (2011: 134) states that music and language are combined

(interwoven) in songs to communicate cultural reality in a very unique way. Brewsters et al (2002: 149) mention that songs are useful for younger learners and allow them to compare these English songs with their own. Songs reflect cultures, so children can learn aspects of culture from songs. One most important thing is that songs contain genuine and authentic linguistic resources. Using songs then can prepare students for the genuine and authentic use of language they will face. The exposure to authentic English is an important factor in promoting language learning. From songs the children can learn new vocabularies and expressions as well as pronunciation. Songs are useful for practicing pronunciation (Brewster et al., 2002: 163). They further mention that parts of pronunciation practices provided by songs include individual sounds, sounds in connected speech, stress, rhythm and intonation. They emphasize that songs are good for ear training. In other words, songs help the children practice pronunciation of English sounds, including stress and rhythm, in a natural way. Singing together is a shared social experience and helps develop class and group identity (Brewster, 2002: 163).

Preparing and Selecting Songs

Before the advancement of information and technology, it was really hard for Indonesian English teachers to access the authentic learning resources and bring them to the classes. Fortunately, with the expanding popularity of the Internet and the World Wide Web into both the classrooms and lives of students, music and lyrics have been made easier to access (Schoepp, 2011). Thousands of English songs suitable for young learners are now available on the Internet. Teachers can download them anytime and use them to support the teaching and learning process. One popular website that allows teachers to access the action songs is www.youtube.com. However, the English teachers cannot just take any song to the classroom. Before using the songs, teachers must first select the songs.

In preparing and selecting the song, the teachers should first familiarize themselves with the aims and the ministry documents that provide guidelines. Therefore, teachers should have complete understanding about their language program and documents relevant to it. Before choosing particular song, it is significant to firstly decide the teaching and learning **objective**s. The objectives should be in line with the overall aims of the teaching program and the action songs should be related to these teaching objectives. In Indonesia, the teachers are expected to use the Guidelines of English Teaching and Learning Practice in Elementary Schools issued by

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the government of Indonesia. The objective of the teaching learning process should be based on this guide. Based on the guideline, the teachers are expected to provide a fun learning atmosphere. This kind of situation can be built by making use of songs in the class. In this case, teachers should be able to match the teaching and learning objectives and the learning resources.

It has been noted that the songs used must reflect the objectives of the English teaching and learning. After deciding the objective, one other important part of the song selection stage is **analyzing**. In analyzing the songs, teachers have to bear in mind the aspects related to the grammatical features as well as the meaning of the song. This implies that they have to present all their English knowledge and consider the cultural information, values, human relations as well as feelings embedded in the song. When the song is going to be used as an input text, the teacher should firstly check whether the songs provide sufficient and good language model for the students. They need to investigate, for example, what kind of language focus it provides, the pronunciation and grammar used in the songs, and also the tune of the song. Furthermore, they also need to examine carefully the length of the lyric as well as words' density and difficulty. Last but not least, the age of the students should also be considered in song selection.

Brewster et.al. (2002: 171) suggest the teachers to develop their own song repertoire to help them analyze the full potential of each song. Below is the example of a song record which is developed as tools to analyze action songs as adapted from Brewster et.al (2002).

Table 1 Example of Self-Developed Action Songs Repertoire

No	Title	Language focus	Cultural, Curriculum, Topic or Story link	lyric	Suitable grade
1	Pinocchio	1. Giving instruction 2. Asking someone to do something	• Parts of the body (Arms, legs, chin) • Pinocchio story	Everybody in, everybody out, everybody turn around, everybody shouts, everybody ready, here we go, let's do the Pinocchio…(etc)	1-4
2	Three bears	1. Describing something 2. Giving exclamation 3. Giving information	• Family (father, mother) • Animal (bear) • Three bears and Goldilock story	Look, there are 3 bears stay in a same house, father bear, mother bear, little bear. Father bear is very fat, mother bear is very slim, lithe bear is so	All grades

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				cute I could die, what a happy family.	
3	Teddy Bear	1. Giving instructions	• Daily Activities • Animals • Teddy bear story	Teddy bear, Teddy Bear turn around, teddy Bear Teddy Bear touch the ground, Teddy Bear Teddy Bear shine your shoes, Teddy Bear Teddy Bear touch your toes Teddy bear, teddy bear, Go upstairs. Say your prayers. Teddy bear, teddy bear, Turn out the light. Teddy bear, teddy bear, Say good night.	All grades
4	I am a little Teapot	1. Describing something 2. Giving information	• Things at house •	I am a little teapot short and stouts. Here's my handle and here's my spout. Whenever I get all steamed up, I just shout. Tip me over and pour me out.	All grade

In selecting the action songs, the body movement accompanying the songs should also be examined carefully. The actions or body movement should also fit learners' needs and characteristics. While some of the songs require partial body movement, for example Tommy Thumb and Do You Have Low Ears songs, some others involve total body movement. The example of these are Pinocchio, Three bears, Hockey Pokey, I am a Little Teapot. Here below is the explanation and the example of possible body movement for Pinocchio song.

The body movement of Pinocchio song is associated with Pinocchio, a character in a famous Pinocchio story. The children are asked to mimic Pinocchio. Laughter and smile may spread around the room as the children and teacher act out this song. The story of Pinocchio teaches the importance of discipline, honesty and also loyalty. In the classroom, this song can be used together with the Pinocchio story. This song can be accessed easily on youtube.com. The lyric and the actions of this song are presented in the table below.

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Table 2 Lyric and Body Movement of Pinocchio Song

Lyric	Body Movement
*Everybody in	move forward
Everybody out	move back
Everybody turn around	Turn around
Everybody shout: Hey	Jump up and shout "Hey!"
Everybody ready. Here we go.	Put your hands on your hips and sway side to side
Let's do the Pinocchio.	Make a Pinocchio nose by putting two fists in front of your nose, and then make it "grow" by moving one hand forward.
**Right arm	Hold up your right arm as if it were a puppet's arm. Keep your right arm up as you dance in and out. (sing back* to **)
***Left arm!	Hold up your left arm. Keep your right and left arm up as you dance in and out. (sing back* to ***)
****Right leg!	Kick your right leg. Keep your right and left arm up, and kick your right leg as you dance in and out. (sing back* to ****)
*****Left leg!	Kick your left leg. Keep your right and left arm up and kick your right leg and left leg as you dance in and out. (sing back* to *****)
******Chin up!	Nod your head up and down. Keep your right and left arm up and kick your right leg and left leg and nod your head up and down as you dance in and out. (sing back* to *****)
********Turn around!	Spin. Keep your right and left arm up and kick your right leg and left leg and nod your head up and down as you dance in and out. (sing back* to ********)
*********Sit down!	Sit down.

Adapting Songs

During the search of the action songs for English classes, teachers may find non-English songs with fun, interesting and challenging body movements. Some of the teachers may think of translating them to English. Translating can be categorized as **adapting,** i.e. making changes in response to specific need of the learners, teachers or situation.

Teachers can adapt particular songs to reach the teaching and learning objectives. However, this is not always easy and often time consuming. As non-native speaker of English, it is possible for them to make some grammatical mistakes or mispronounce some words.

This happened for example in a song titled Three Bears. The Korean version of Three Bears song is famous amongst Indonesian teenagers as it appears in a Korean drama some years

ago. The song, which is accompanied with funny and entertaining body movement, is usually sung by kindergarten students. The Korean Lyric is given bellow.

> *Gom se mari ga han jibbe iso*
>
> *Appa Gom, Omma gom, aegi gom*
>
> *Appa gom eun tungtung hae*
>
> *Omma gom eun nal shin eh*
>
> *Aegi gom eun nomu kiyowo*
>
> *Ussu ussu chal~handa*

One of the English versions of this Korean childhood song can be seen and downloaded in Youtube.com. However, it is found that this song is not correctly translated. The translation of *Gom se mari ga// han ji-be isso//* given in this song is "*Look, there **is** three bears all in the same house." this sentence is ungrammatical since it contains a mistake, i.e. *There is three bears. The correct one should be "there are three bears."

The Three Bears song is often chose because it provides funny body movement that allows students and teacher to have a nice time in the class. However, it is important to note that teachers' preferences should also meet with the learning objectives. It is a must for the teacher to correct the mistake before using it. Teachers are obliged to a mistake-free song to the learners because learners will model it. Below is the English lyric and the body movement of the Three Bears song.

Table 3 Lyric and Body Movement of Three Bears Song

Lyric	Body Movement
Look, there are 3 bears,	Put both hands on your wrists, bend up and down or move the shoulders up and down.
All in a same house	Put one left hand forward, followed by the right hand, form a triangle shape
Father bear	Put both hands up and down
Mother bear	Slap/pat both wrists gently using the backside of the palms
Little bear	Slap the palms gently on the bottom
Father bear is very fat	Join the arms together, make a big circle in front of the stomach with both hands, turn the body to the left and right
Mother bear is very slim	Put both hands up above the head, put them down slowly while forming curves or similar to S letter,
Little bear is so cute I	Put both hands up, put it down while shaking the body; or and

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| could die | move/stamp the foot quickly. |
| What a happy family | Put hands beside the body, bend the wrist with palms facing the ground, push twice while moving the shoulders and then turn around while clapping hands |

Using Action Songs in the English Class

As explained by Brewster (2002: 168) songs can be used in many different ways. They can be used as warmers, as activity transition filler, and closers. They can also be used to introduce new language, to practice language, to revise language, to change the mood, to get everyone's attention, to revise language, to channel high level of energy or to integrate with storytelling, topic work or cross-curricular work.

Teaching the Action Song

Making students remember the words, structure, grammar patter is one of problems in English language teaching. Introducing new song, particularly action songs is one way to help them remember these. In vocabulary learning, students learn better when they do, mime or point at the things mentioned. In teaching the students how to sing the song there are several steps that can be done. The following are some activities that should be done as suggested by Cord Foundation:

a. letter a large sign or use pocket chart to serve as a teleprompter.

b. be enthusiastic, use those songs that you enjoy.

c. demonstrate appropriate actions as you say or sing the words to the group.

d. replay the action encouraging the children to imitate only the action.

e. do the actions again allowing those who wish to participate with both action and words.

f. keep actions and words slow enough so that children do not have trouble keeping up.

g. repeat often enough for children to become familiar with them.

h. occasionally send parents the words and music so they concurrently can be used at home.

Brewster et.al. (2002:168) offer a flexible framework of how to use songs. Their framework can also be used as guideline of teaching action songs to young learners. One of the frameworks is giving a written record of the text. However, it is suggested that the **written words** of the action song should **not** be seen until the class has learned the song and can perform

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it (Goodger). Below are some relevant frameworks of how to use the action songs which is adapted from Brewster et al.

a. The teacher should set the context (by telling the purpose or background information)

b. The teacher is suggested to pre-teach any necessary vocabulary using visual aids, actions, realia, puppets, etc

c. playing on cassette or sing the song should be done to allow children to listen, show understanding, familiarize themselves with the rhythm, tune, etc

d. Teacher invites children to listen, repeat and practice by joining in and learning to sing

e. Teacher gives a written record of the text.

f. Teacher encourages them to compare with similar type in their language

g. Students present or perform the songs.

Action Song-Based Learning Tasks

It is useful to consider Cameron's stages in "Task" for Young Learners. She (2001, p. 32) divides the tasks into three namely preparation, core activity and follow up. Cameron argues that the core activity is vital to the language learning task and without the core, the task would fail. The preparation activities should help to prepare the students to accomplish the core activity. Pre-teaching of language items or activating topic vocabulary is one form of preparation activity which is done prior to the core activity. The follow-up stage then should build on the completion of the core activity. Action songs can be used in the classroom as the complement or follow-up activities for other learning activities, for example after telling the story of Pinocchio the class is continued with singing and acting out the Pinocchio song.

Some possible activities associated with action songs are given below.

1. Guessing

Before, during or after singing the song the teachers may ask some questions to the students. The questions might be: *What is the song about? Would you like the song? What will happen next?*

2. Arranging words into sentences

The children are asked to arrange some words into meaningful sentences based on the information they get from the song. For example:

put	left	hand	in	your	You	Put…………………..

3. Matching (isolated vocabulary)

   The children practice the vocabulary by matching the word mentioned in the song with a suitable picture, or with its synonym.

1. Mouth 2. ears	A. B.

4. Listen and Tick

   The children are asked to identify some words mentioned in the songs. Then they tick on the box provided.

5. Saying True or False

   The children are asked to judge whether something is true or false based on the song.

6. Arranging sentences based on songs

   The children are asked to order the sequence of the song.

7. Completing the song

   The children are asked to fill in the banks to complete the text of the song.

8. Acting out the song

   The children are ask to act out the song (without singing)

9. Miming and guessing

   The teacher mime a particular movement and children have o guess the name or the meaning of the actions.

10. Performing the songs

    The children are asked to perform the songs together.

Conclusion

   Songs has traditionally been used as educational resources. The combination of rhythm and rhyme, melody and mime help the children learn English effectively. The action song is a

means through which novice words and structure are presented in a unique way. The final aim of using action songs in the English classrooms is of course to enable learners to acquire English so they can use it for communicative purposes. There are various games and activities that can be done in the classroom prior to singing, during the singing and after singing the action song. Teacher should select the action songs very carefully by considering several aspects such as learning objectives, features of the action songs and learners' characteristics.

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