



The Impact of Nursery Rhymes on Enhancing Speaking Skills of Grade Three and Four Students

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This action research study examined the impact of nursery rhymes on enhancing the speaking skills of grade three and four students. The study was conducted in an elementary school setting, with a focus on identifying whether the incorporation of nursery rhymes into the curriculum could effectively improve the speaking abilities of young learners.

The study employed a quantitative approach involving pre-test and post-test. The study began by assessing the speaking skills of grade three and four students through pre-tests, which included tasks such as pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency and confidence.

The findings of this action research suggest that nursery rhymes have a positive impact on enhancing the speaking skills of grade three and four students. The quantitative analysis post-test result revealed a significant improvement in students' speaking abilities after the integration of nursery rhymes into the curriculum.

This research highlights the potential benefits of incorporating nursery rhymes into elementary education as a means to enhance speaking skills. The study provides valuable insights for

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educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers interested in improving language education for grade three and four students. Further, research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of nursery rhyme integration and its applicability in diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Nursery rhymes; speaking skills; research.

1. INTRODUCTION

“English has become an indispensable means of communication worldwide and has spread throughout the world as a global language. Its significance is evident in various sectors such as medicine, engineering, education, business, technology, banking, and tourism, owing to its adaptability, versatility, and abundant vocabulary” (Roa, 2019).

“In the 1960s, during the reign of Bhutan's third King, English was introduced as a Second Language (ESL) in Bhutan. Since then, it has been an integral part of the curriculum, taught as a major subject in all grades from Pre-Primary to XII” [1]. As per the Royal Education Council [2], “the English curriculum (Pre-primary to XII) in Bhutan centers on four main modes of discourse: Reading and Literature, Listening and Speaking, Writing, and Language and Grammar. These modes aim to provide students with a comprehensive language learning experience, fostering their abilities in reading, listening, speaking, writing, and understanding language structures and grammar. Further, in Bhutan, English language is used not only as the language of instruction in schools and universities, but also as the official language throughout the country and for everyday communication, both oral and written”.

Effective communication is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in a child's development and academic success. Among the various aspects of communication, speaking skills hold significant importance as they form the basis for expressing ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Speaking skills refer to the ability of an individual to communicate effectively and fluently in a spoken language [3-5]. It involves the capacity to express thoughts, ideas, and emotions clearly and coherently through speech. Proficient speaking skills encompass various aspects, including pronunciation, intonation, grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to initiate and sustain conversations with others. Mastering speaking skills allows individuals to express themselves, participate in discussions, convey information, and engage in meaningful exchanges with others.

Linse [6] asserts that “mastering English, especially speaking skill, is importantly needed for the students to allow them to communicate effectively with other people globally. Further, strong and effective speaking skills facilitate classroom participation, group discussions, and presentations. Students who can articulate their knowledge and insights confidently often perform better in various subjects”. Singay [1] conducted research and discovered that “speaking English poses a significant challenge for ESL students in Bhutanese schools. Despite English being used as a language of instruction in Bhutan for over five decades, the majority of ESL students continue to struggle with speaking confidently and fluently in English. There are lots of reasons for not being able to communicate in English: lack of opportunities, motivation, confidence, exposure and fear of committing mistakes”. Savasc [7] explains that “the fear of public failure, the fear of making mistakes and the lack of confidence are the factors that affect ESL students’ participation in speaking activities”. “Further, difficulty of speaking in the class is the most probably the result of anxiety, this is because students fear to make mistakes with respect to all aspects like pronunciation, fluency and grammatical errors while speaking” [8].

“In Bhutanese classrooms, students are not given enough time to practice oral communication skills, especially in primary classes” [1]. “As a result, they have very little exposure to language education and are unable to speak even a simple phrase. This demonstrates how unmotivated students are to use English in the classroom. Speaking skills among ESL students are impacted by a lack of self-assurance and low learning motivation” [9].

Additionally, research conducted by Sherub and Dorji (2013) revealed that “primary school teachers in Bhutan tended to employ a limited range of strategies and materials, neglecting the individual needs and interests of students”. “It is crucial to recognize that effective teaching at any level necessitates exposing students to a diverse array of learning materials to maintain their engagement and cater to their varied learning

requirements. Among the four language skills, speaking was identified as the most challenging, primarily attributed to language teachers using outdated teaching methods” [10-15].

Enhancing the speaking skills of Bhutanese students requires the adoption of diverse teaching techniques. This study, therefore, explored and analyzed the effectiveness of nursery rhymes in improving the speaking skills of students in classes three and four.

1.1 Background of the Study

English is an important subject in the Bhutanese education system, and it plays a significant role in communication, higher education, and global interactions. Realizing its importance, it has been taught as a major subject from pre-primary to degree level. However, the analysis of grade ten students' result reveals that their scores in writing, listening, and speaking skills are significantly lower compared to the other skills. Specifically, the students scored 35.83% in writing, 35.72% in listening, and 33.66% in speaking Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment [BCSEA], [16]. Speaking skill is one of the most essential skills for efficient communication and interaction. Speaking is regarded as the most important of the four fundamental language abilities to master when studying a foreign or second language. Harmer [17] emphasized that speaking should receive equal importance as literary skills in both native and second language learning. Many individuals consider mastering the speaking skill as the most crucial aspect of acquiring a second or foreign language, and success is gauged by the ability to engage in meaningful conversations using that language.

Having served for more than 20 years in the teaching services, the researcher has also observed and experienced that many Bhutanese students face challenges in learning English due to its complex nature, requiring mastery of four essential strands that are integral to the curriculum. In particular, the researcher has observed that most of the students are hesitant to speak English in classroom discussions and other settings [18,19]. This issue has become more apparent after teaching English to classes three and four students at Patshaling Primary School in Tsirang for more than three years. Students in these grades hardly response in English when they are asked questions and assigned group tasks, instead they land up in

communicating and discussing in their mother tongue which hindered their speaking skills and academic performance. Thus, this research is being carried out with the following objectives;

1. To enhance the speaking skills of classes three and four students with the use of English nursery rhymes.
2. To improve the communication skills of third and fourth grade students
3. To boost students' confidence in speaking English

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“Learner autonomy is a term exists against traditional way of teaching and learning. It is a system of individualization or learner independence. It is such a process in which there is system of creating capacity to take charge of decision- making in all the area basically determined by an institution, teacher, or textbook. Convincingly, autonomy involves students having a range of learning strategies which they are able to apply flexibility in different contexts. Teachers can scaffold students to develop learning strategies through learner training in the classroom. Simultaneously, it is approach of awareness raising, encouraging for reflection, and providing opportunity to perform actions” [20].

2.1 Speaking Skill

Speaking is an oral skill to express our feeling, thought, and opinions to others. Moreover, speaking is an activity that the speaker communicates and delivers the message and the listener can process the messages. According to Nunan (2003), “Speaking is a productive oral skill that involves making systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. In speaking, students learn how to deliver ideas according to the context they are speaking, produce a sentence, and express language with good pronunciation and comprehensible language”. Brown (2004) points out that “speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information”(p.140). From the explanation above it can be concluded that speaking is an interactive process of constructing systematic meaning that involves producing and receiving information from the speaker. Further, Khorashadyzadeh [21] states that “speaking needs not only the learners' understanding

about the way to produce the linguistic competence such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary but also comprehension about sociolinguistic competence such as when, why, and how to speak”.

According to Omari (2015), “there are many sub skills to speaking like accuracy, fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and comprehensibility which helps the speaker in communicating with others and adds that the ability to make use of the above skills is called speaking skill of a person”. “The development of these skills is necessary to become a proficient English speaker. Students with good skills in reading, listening and writing are speculated to possess better speaking ability, however, it is found that students in general are hesitant to speak in English” (Lindblad, 2011).

According to Richards [22] states that “the mastery of speaking skill in English is a priority for many second language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. It means that second language learning as the effective way to improve their speaking skill. They can increase the ability in spoken language. Thus, speaking has become an important factor that needs to be mastered in order to become fluent and achieve success in spoken communication”.

2.2 Nursery Rhymes

Nursery rhymes are short, traditional poems or songs for young children. They are often characterized by simple and repetitive language, catchy rhythms, and easy-to-remember melodies. Nursery rhymes have been passed down through generations and are an integral part of early childhood education and entertainment. Danielson (2000) defines, the meaning of nursery rhymes that they are verses told or sung to little children. Similarly, Pratama (2017) states that nursery rhymes are known as verse often sung for children. In addition, nursery rhymes are normal poetries that easily found in local area and the language used in rhymes are a specific language depends on each community (York, 2011). To sum up, nursery rhymes are referred to short poems or songs normally sung to little children, and generally found in a local community. The language used will rely on the native community where nursery rhymes were created. Nursery rhymes are considered as an important tool for children’s development in

several skills. First, nursery rhymes enhance children’s pronunciation. Nursery rhymes are the important supporter for children in any age to improve or enhance English pronunciation (Sari, 2008; Sayakhan & Bradley, 2019). When children hear the vowels and consonants through the rhymes, they would try to imitate the sounds (Kenny, 2015). Similarly, when parents or caregivers rhyming or singing for children, this is the way to help children to learn words and practice the pitch, and also help children to understand volume and rhythm, and children who listened to nursery rhymes would imitate the sound that they hear, and that is one of the ways to improve pronunciation (Stephens, 2018).

Researchers have also explored the use of nursery rhymes in language intervention programs for students with speech and language difficulties. In line with this, Yopp and Yopp (2006) demonstrated that incorporating nursery rhymes into intervention sessions led to enhanced speech production and increased engagement among pre-schoolers with language delays. These findings suggest that nursery rhymes can be valuable resources for educators working with students requiring additional support in speaking skills. Davidson [23] asserts that participating in group singing activities can enhance their self- esteem and encourage them to express themselves more fluently. The feeling of accomplishment that comes from successfully memorizing and reciting nursery rhymes can empower students to speak with confidence in various social situations. Moreover, Haden et al. [24] affirm that children who regularly engage with nursery rhymes have a more extensive vocabulary and are better able to express themselves verbally. Nursery rhymes introduce young learners to a wide range of vocabulary in a context that is easy to understand and remember. This exposure to new words and phrases helps grade three and four students expand their vocabulary, which is essential for effective communication.

Similarly, Genç and O’Malley (2010) conducted a study using nursery rhymes with young learners of English and found that rhyming patterns and rhythmic structures facilitated language acquisition, pronunciation, and speaking fluency. This research highlights the potential of nursery rhymes as engaging and effective tools for ESL/EFL educators. Further, beyond the early years, nursery rhymes can continue to play a role in enhancing speaking skills by fostering creativity and confidence in students. By

encouraging students to create their own rhymes or modify existing ones, teachers can stimulate imagination and self-expression, thereby improving oral communication abilities (Weiss & Weitzman, 2003).

The literature reviewed here consistently supports the notion that nursery rhymes are valuable resources for enhancing students' speaking skills. From early language development to language intervention and ESL/EFL contexts, nursery rhymes have demonstrated their efficacy in fostering phonological awareness, pronunciation, speaking fluency, and overall language confidence. Moreover, incorporating nursery rhymes into classroom activities can make language learning enjoyable and engaging for students of all ages. Educators should embrace these findings and consider integrating nursery rhymes creatively into their curriculum to promote effective speaking skills among their students. Further, research is warranted to explore the long-term impact of nursery rhymes on speaking proficiency and its transferability to other language domains.

2.3 Overarching Research Question

How can I enhance the speaking skills of classes three and four students through nursery rhymes?

2.3.1 Sub-questions

1. How does the incorporation of nursery rhymes into the English language curriculum affect the speaking skills of grade three and four students?
2. Are there any significant differences in speaking proficiency of students after using nursery rhymes as a teaching tool?
3. What specific aspects of speaking skills, such as pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary, show improvement as a result of using nursery rhymes in language instruction?

2.3.2 Significance of the study

This study is of immense significance as it investigated the effectiveness of nursery rhymes in enhancing students' speaking skills.

1. The findings of this study provide a new body of literature that would be invaluable to research scholars interested in

exploring speaking skills and their relationship with nursery rhymes.

2. The study provides teachers with useful pedagogical techniques that they could effectively use to improve the speaking skills of their learners.
3. The findings are useful to students learning a second language, enabling them to acquire vital techniques necessary for improving their speaking skills.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a one group pre-test-post-test experimental research design [25] to examine the effectiveness of English nursery rhymes in enhancing students' speaking skills of the grade three and four students.

3.1 Sample

The study used a convenience sampling technique. The total sample size comprises of 23 students consisting 11 boys and 12 girls of Patshaling Primary School, Tsirang, Bhutan.

3.2 Research Instrument

This study adopted the instrument namely speaking proficiency test. The speaking proficiency test was administered twice to the sample group to compare the improvement of the students' speaking skills. The pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study and the post-test after the intervention. The students were rated based on four components of speaking; fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Speaking rubrics developed by REC, Bhutan in 2014 was used to evaluate the speaking test.

3.3 Intervention Phase - Nursery Rhymes Integration

In the intervention phase, the researcher implemented a structured program that integrated nursery rhymes into the regular curriculum for grade three and four students. The goal was to assess the impact of nursery rhymes on enhancing the speaking skills of students. Nursery rhymes were selected for their rhythmic and repetitive nature, which can aid in language development, pronunciation, and fluency. The intervention was carried out for 6 weeks.

3.4 Implementation Steps

1. Nursery Rhyme Selection

Selected a set of age-appropriate nursery rhymes that were engaging and had clear, repetitive patterns. Ensured that the rhymes were suitable for both grade three and four students.

2. Integration into Curriculum

- a. Scheduled a dedicated time for nursery rhyme sessions at the beginning of the session.
- b. Allocated 10-15minutes per session for nursery rhyme activities.

3. Activities

Started each session by reciting the selected nursery rhyme together as a class.

- a. Discussed the meaning of the rhyme and explained any unfamiliar words or phrases.

- b. Encouraged students to repeat the rhyme in pairs or small groups.
- c. Assigned creative tasks related to the rhyme, such as drawing, acting, or storytelling.

4. Monitoring and Assessment

- a. Conducted pre-intervention assessments of students' speaking skills, including pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence in speaking.
- b. Kept a record of each student's progress throughout the intervention phase.
- c. Gathered data on students' speaking skills through observations, and student assessments

3.5 Data Interpretation and Findings

Table 1 displays the pre-test and post-test scores of the sample group. The individual student's post-test scores revealed that their speaking ability had significantly improved. The individual pre-test scores ranged from 35.4 to 66, while the post-test scores ranged from 52 to 81.4, indicating a significant improvement in the post-test scores.

Table 1. Pre-test and post-test scores of individual student in speaking

Student No.	Pre-test (100)	Post-test (100)	Score difference
1	45	52.8	7.8
2	46.2	58.2	12
3	48.9	52	3.1
4	53.1	67.4	14.3
5	45	52	7
6	58.2	72	13.8
7	40.4	55.4	15
8	47.3	52	4.7
9	50.7	65.3	14.6
10	42	52	10
11	62.5	80.4	17.9
12	41	52.4	11.4
13	56	67.3	11.3
14	48	58.3	10.3
15	45	52	7
16	35.4	48.9	13.5
17	44.4	60	15.6
18	65.3	81.8	16.5
19	45	56.7	11.7
20	38.7	48.1	9.4
21	50	58.4	8.4
22	66	71.4	5.4
23	39.5	48.3	8.8

Table 2. Comparison of pre-test and post-test score sample group

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean difference	P value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Sample Group	48.42	8.2	59.27	9.8	10.8	.000

Table 2 shows the scores of the pre-test and post-test of the sample group. The pre-test mean was 48.42, with a standard deviation of 8.2. The post-test mean score was 59.27 with a 9.8 standard deviation. The mean difference between the pre-test and the post-test was 10.8, showing an increase in the mean score of the post-test. Furthermore, the significance value, which stands at .000 and is below the threshold of 0.05 ($P < 0.05$), signifies a statistically significant improvement in post-test scores compared to the pre-test scores within the sample group. The analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores clearly indicates that the incorporation of nursery rhymes into the curriculum significantly improved the speaking skills of students in grades three and four.

4. DISCUSSION

The study established that the incorporation of nursery rhymes in the curriculum supports in improving students speaking ability. Data gathered through the speaking proficiency test of grade three and four before and after the interventions exhibited that the post-test mean score 59.27 was significantly higher than the pre-test mean score 48.42 with the mean difference of 10.8. Nursery rhymes can be considered as an essential tool in early language development. Which is characterized by rhyme, rhythm, and repetition, which can significantly contribute to language acquisition. The finding aligns with Vygotsky [26] who suggests that social interaction, such as singing nursery rhymes with caregivers or teachers, plays a pivotal role in language development. Repeated exposure to nursery rhymes helps children understand the sounds, rhythms, and patterns of their native language, leading to improved speaking skills.

The study also found that exposure to nursery rhymes contributed to an increase in students' vocabulary. Through repetition and contextual understanding of words within the rhymes, students were able to expand their word bank and use these words more confidently in their spoken language [27,28]. This was consistent with the findings of Haden et al. [24], who assert that children who regularly engage with nursery

rhymes have a more extensive vocabulary and are better able to express themselves verbally. Nursery rhymes introduce young learners to a wide range of vocabulary in a context that is easy to understand and remember. This exposure to new words and phrases helps grade three and four students expand their vocabulary, which is essential for effective communication [29,30].

Further, another significant outcome of the research was the boost in students' confidence in speaking. As they became more familiar with the nursery rhymes and practiced reciting them, students became more comfortable in expressing themselves verbally. The study also revealed that consistent engagement with nursery rhymes led to improved fluency in speaking. Students who participated in nursery rhyme activities were able to speak more fluently and coherently, with fewer pauses and hesitations. The result corroborated with the findings of Werker et al. [31], who found that children who engage with nursery rhymes exhibit better speech sound discrimination, an essential skill for clear and effective communication. The result also reinforced the study of Davidson [23], who established that participating in group singing activities can enhance their self-esteem and encourage them to express themselves more fluently. The feeling of accomplishment that comes from successfully memorizing and reciting nursery rhymes can empower students to speak with confidence in various social situations.

5. CONCLUSION

The study has provided valuable insights into the potential benefits of integrating nursery rhymes into the curriculum. The study demonstrated that regular engagement with nursery rhymes led to noticeable improvements in students' pronunciation and articulation skills. This suggests that nursery rhymes are an effective tool for enhancing phonological awareness. Nursery rhymes also played a crucial role in expanding students' vocabulary. Through repetition and contextual understanding within the rhymes, students were able to acquire and confidently use new words in their spoken language.

Further, Students who actively participated in nursery rhyme activities showed enhanced confidence in their speaking abilities. The repetitive nature of nursery rhymes allowed students to develop their speaking skills in a comfortable and encouraging environment. Lastly, consistent exposure to nursery rhymes led to improved fluency in students' speech. They were able to express themselves more smoothly and coherently, with reduced hesitations. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating nursery rhymes into educational practices and highlight the potential benefits they offer for language development.

The study also highlights the effectiveness of nursery rhymes in improving pronunciation, articulation, vocabulary acquisition, confidence in speaking, and overall fluency. The findings suggest that nursery rhymes can be an essential component of the language curriculum for primary students, offering a simple yet impactful method for improving oral communication skills. Moreover, educators should consider integrating nursery rhymes more systematically into the curriculum to foster better speaking skills among students. Additionally, further studies could examine the impact of nursery rhymes on other areas of language learning, such as listening comprehension and reading skills, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their educational value.

6. LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted in a single school, with a limited number of grade three and four students. A larger and more diverse sample would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, this research was conducted over a relatively short time frame. A longitudinal study could provide insights into the long-term effects of nursery rhyme exposure on speaking skills.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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