



The Use of Music in Language Acquisition and Meaning in Children: A Case Study of Selected Schools in the Accra Metropolis

Ndah Divine Selorm^{1*}, Jessica Amoah²

¹*Creative Arts Department, SDA College of Education, Koforidua, Ghana*

²*Creative Arts Department, St Monica's College of Education, Ashanti Mampong, Ghana*

***Corresponding Author:** *Ndah Divine Selorm, Creative Arts Department, SDA College of Education, Koforidua, Ghana*

Abstract: *The focus of the paper was to explore the types of musical genres that teachers normally used in the classroom at the Accra Metropolis in Accra Ghana to help their learners to acquire language for that matter vocabulary in their environment; and in addition discussed how the musical types are used specifically to help learners to acquire language during teaching and learning situation. The study made use of interview and observation to gather data and the research paradigm took the form of both qualitative and quantitative; with learners, parents and teachers serving as the target population from which accessible population for the study was drawn. The study therefore revealed musical types such as hymns, gospel, rhymes, folk songs, Poetic and action songs as those that are frequently used to aid pupils to acquire language in their environment. It came out also that, these musical types are performed during school assemblies, worship, games, graduation and at the dining sessions in the schools thereby intensifying acquisition of language. The study therefore recommended that, policy makers and parents should pay attention to music in the lives of children because music helps them to acquire vocabulary and learn faster in their environment and school setting.*

Keywords: *Musical genres, Language acquisition, Learning, Vocabulary*

1. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary acquisition concerns how people expand the number of words they understand when learning a new language. This includes both first and second languages acquisition. Vocabulary refers to words and it is divided into two types: functional words that perform a role in grammar and lexical words that provide information. A child's vocabulary acquisition falls into a long- running debate over nature and nurture. Nature theory means children are born with certain linguistic tools, while nurture asserts that all tools are handed down from the people around the child as they grow up. Linguists have agreed that vocabulary acquisition is 100 percent nurtured. If nature provided children with an inbuilt vocabulary, then the child would speak the language of his or her parents or all children would be pre- programmed with the same proto- language. This is clearly not the case, so studies in vocabulary acquisition focus on how children learn words.

Music and language share quite a lot of common features. On one hand, both stem from the processing of sounds; on the other, both are used by their authors or speakers to convey a message, although language is much more precise than music, whose effect is mainly emotional. At another level, music and language have intrinsic features in common, such as pitch, volume, prominence, stress, tone, rhythm, and pauses. Another shared feature of language and music is that both of them are studied through exposure. No language can be acquired without oral or written input (or visual input, in the case of sign language), and in a similar fashion, one acquires notions of music from what he or she hears around the environment; the more reason why music from other cultures often sounds odd to someone outside that cultural setting

(Gardner, 1993) pointed out in his theory of multiple intelligences that human beings, potentially and educationally speaking, have many different intelligences and capacities that could be stimulated in

the classroom. One of the main implications for employing this theory is that learners need not only be taught to increase their verbal, spatial, and numerical intelligences, but also to nurture their musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. Surprisingly, music is capable of providing solution to all the areas of the child's ideal sensory system. The question is that are young children going through the process of nurturing at the pre-school? What songs are teachers using to enhance the child's language acquisition and meaning at school?

It has been observed by many scholars that, young children learn best by doing as music and movement promote active involvement in developing vocabulary and mastering a wealth of skills and concepts. Increasing a child's vocabulary is one of the many benefits of music (and movement) activities. Words that describe movement are a fundamental part of language. Therefore, to enhance a child's movement vocabulary is to enhance a child's overall vocabulary. As children improve vocabulary and language comprehension, they also improve movement skills, developing coordination, balance, strength and endurance.

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Many studies have discussed how language is acquired, but as to how music could be used to aid language acquisition in the classroom, empirical evidence and observation have shown that, much has not been done. It is as a result of this that this study is done to explore the genre of songs that teachers use to aid language acquisition, and also discuss how the songs are used to facilitate language acquisition in the classroom.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To explore the types of musical genres that teachers use to aid learners in language acquisition.
2. To explore how the songs could be used to facilitate language acquisition among learners in classroom.

4. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

4.1. Language

Language is typically viewed as fundamental to human intelligence. Music, while recognized as a human universal, is often treated as an ancillary ability one dependent on or derivative of language. In contrast, it is argued that, it is more productive from a developmental perspective to describe spoken language as a special type of music. A review of existing studies presents a compelling case that musical hearing and ability is essential to language acquisition. In addition, the researchers challenge the prevailing view that music cognition matures more slowly than language and is more difficult; instead, they support that music learning matches the speed and effort of language acquisition. They can conclude that music merits a central place in understanding of human development. Just as infants yearn to walk, they have an accelerated drive for language: by age three or four, a child has essentially become competent in his or her native language. While linguistic abilities will continue to be refined, all of the requisite skills for processing and performing of speech have been acquired (Kuhl,2004) Music is recognized as a universal feature of human cognition: every healthy human is born with the ability to appreciate it.

However, music's role in human development is often viewed as ancillary and slower to mature. According to Wilson (2012), whereas language acquisition in children is fast and largely autonomous, music is acquired more slowly and depends on substantial teaching and practice. Pinker (1997) has described music as "auditory cheese cake, an exquisite confection" without any biological utility. Language and music are deeply entangled in early life and develop along parallel tracks. He agrees that, Music is an art concerned with combining vocal or instrumental sounds for beauty of form or emotional expression, usually according to cultural standards of rhythm, melody, and, in most Western music, harmony. Music most often implies sounds with distinct pitches that are arranged into melodies and organized into patterns of rhythm and metre. Music is an art that, in one guise or another, permeates every human society. Music is an art concerned with combining vocal or instrumental sounds for beauty of form or emotional expression, usually according to cultural standards of rhythm, melody, and, in most Western music, harmony.

4.2. Music and Language Acquisition

The actual use of music to enhance language acquisition was pioneered in the 1970s by Bulgarian psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov who developed Suggestopedia, which involves the use of background baroque music to holistically enhance language acquisition. Quast (1999) sets out to explore the effects of Suggestopedic learning on students with technical giftedness. There were two main aims to his study: 1) to demonstrate the effect of various background conditions on group learning, and 2) to explore the specific background effects in relation to certain student characteristics

4.3. Music's Effect on Phonological and Phonemic Developments

To acquire a language, infants have to discover which phonetic distinctions will be utilized in the language of their culture. Early in life, infants discriminate among virtually all the phonetic units of the world's languages. According to Kuhl et al (2006), as individuals reach adulthood, such universal phonetic capacity diminishes, and foreign phonetic discrimination becomes more difficult.

Musical instructions can have an exciting impact on young children's phonological awareness, as many respected educational researchers recommend integrating music into phonological awareness instruction. These researchers recommend songs, specifically rhyming songs, as an effective mechanism for building phonemic awareness with children in early childhood classrooms (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg & Beeler, 1998).

A study by Stanford researchers (Gaab et al, 2005) found that musical training improves how the brain processes the spoken word. In particular, the research found that musical instructions and experience help the brain improve its ability to distinguish between rapidly changing sounds, referred to as auditory processing. This auditory processing is critical to developing phonemic awareness, a necessary aspect of foreign language acquisition.

Beyond integrating songs into early literacy instruction, recent brain and other educational research suggests that providing young children with music instruction builds essential brain functioning leading to increased growth in phonemic awareness.

Building an understanding of the sounds within words must begin with an ability to discriminate similarities and differences in sounds. Not surprisingly, then, researchers have found a link between musical pitch discrimination and reading ability in young children. First grade children were tested on both phonemic awareness and musical pitch awareness. The researchers found a high degree of correlation between phonemic awareness and pitch discrimination. The ability to perceive slight differences in phonemes appeared to depend on the ability to extract information about the frequencies of the speech sounds. Singing provides VYC an opening to the world of phonemes.

Rhyming lyrics and repeating verses contribute to language play, or language development. Researchers have proposed that "carefully structured musical training should be an essential component of the primary school curriculum" (Lamb & Gregory, 1993).

4.4. Music Learning to Engage Children

Music is important to children. Some wish to listen to it alone through headphones, while some are inclined to hum, sing, and whistle or chant it. Some want to play it on a musical instrument, solo or with friends. Others enjoy dancing to it and thus music gives rise to physical response. Some wish to create brand new music and poems, plays and dances to go with it. Whether listening, singing, playing, moving or creating music, musical experiences are prominent in the lives of children. They themselves as well as their spokespersons such as parents, teachers, and guardians attest to this fact. (Campbell 1998)

4.5. Children's Musical Capabilities

Gardner (1993) suggests in his theory of multiple intelligence that, while children may demonstrate greater strength in one of the seven intelligences, all children possess musical abilities that can be nurtured through instruction. Christopher Small (1998), a sociologist concerned with the manner in which humans participate in the musical process, coined the term "*musicking*" to embrace children and adults in the acts of singing, playing, and moving to music, noting that all are capable of more than some societies allow. In various forms and degrees, children possess the capacity to become

more musical than they may currently demonstrate. Children quite naturally listen, sing, dance, play, and express themselves musically, with little or no previous training. When learning experiences are tailored to develop their musical abilities, the complete musician inside them begin to emerge. Certainly, some variance is evident among children regarding the extent to which particular musical intelligence, or specific musical talent, can be developed. Some may prefer to sing rather than to play, and some may be driven towards creating original musical expressions.

Children are capable of careful and attentive listening, so they are able to perceive and understand the musical language they will create or recreate. Some children will need greater help in focusing their listening and may require the removal of aural and visual distracters so that they might tune in to the components of a song or musical work. Through directed listening, children will learn a vocabulary of a recurring melodic and rhythmic phrase that represent a given musical style or culture and that may reappear in music they perform or in their original improvisations and compositions.

5. METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed both the qualitative and quantitative paradigm to ensure the complete execution of the research objectives. The study made use of interview and observation to collect data for the study.

5.1. The Study Population

The targeted population for this research was basically pupils, Parents, and Teachers from selected pre-schools in the Ashieduketeke sub-metro in the Accra Metropolis.

5.2. Sampling Methods for the Study

A convenient sample of 78 subjects was selected from six pre-schools.

The sample included:

- 30 pupils (five from each school)
- 30 teachers (five from each school) and
- 18 parents (three from each school).

5.3. Sampling Procedures

The researchers targeted a sample of 30 individual teachers who teach in the selected pre-schools. The logic behind this decision was to gain an in-depth understanding of Participants' perceptions of their experiences in using music as a medium to develop the vocabularies of the child. Individual interviews were conducted. Also, a total number of 18 parents were interviewed. These were parents who brought their wards right into the school.

A total of 30 learners in a class from six different schools were observed as well. The split page verbatim method was used to record observations in and out of the classroom, so that evidence, through specific examples of the teacher's approach, could be realized. Classroom observations and reflections in addition to the researcher's field notes were made use of. The breakdown of the sampling could be seen on table 1 below:

Table1. *Sampling distribution table*

| CATEGORY | NUMBER | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Teachers | 30 | 38.4 % |
| Children | 30 | 38.4 % |
| Parents | 18 | 23% |
| Total | 78 | 100% |

Source: *Field Data 2021*

5.4. Source of Data

Data for this study was sought from primary and secondary sources. The principal source of primary data was from the field that is going down to the people and interacting with them. Meanwhile the secondary source of data was obtained from published materials such as; books, journals, periodicals and bulletins. The outcomes presented in this paper were however the buildup of the analysis drawn from the data and information from all these sources.

5.5. Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected in the form of interviews and observation. The authors used interview guide to sample the views of the teachers and parents and guardians. Also, careful observations on children's indoor and outdoor musical game activities were made with the help of appropriate audio and video recording devices. Reflections on the study, its process and the researchers' discoveries were recorded daily after classroom observations, in a handwritten journal. These two methods of gathering data were used to ensure the results were consistent with the data collected

The Design of the Observation

The researchers observed the responses of children in connection to vocabulary, body movement and general expression and performance of each music or song.

The researchers employed both general and focused observations during visits to the schools and homes; which were intended to bring out the true picture of the happenings or activities in the child's living environment. The use of Audio and Video Gadgets (AVG) were sufficiently managed to assist with the exactness of the findings.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Initial organization of the data occurred as field notes were written in comments and questions recorded in a journal and audio tapes of interviews made and reviewed. As observers, the researchers began reflecting on events as they occurred and began to identify emerging themes. Audiotapes and field notes were transcribed into word processed form and coded by date. The researchers followed Creswell's suggestion of writing out the findings in the form of memos and summaries of field notes. Feedback was obtained from the teacher and parent participant on the summaries. Categories by which to group data were then developed, based on the research purpose and questions

This was done by clustering margin comments into themes and taken a step further by linking the themes with verbatim example. By this, the researchers had reflected deeply enough on the experience to feel "grounded" or immersed in the data. The authors were then able to organize and write a description of the cases.

7. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Types of Songs Teachers Use to aid Learners Acquire Language

The study indicated that, variety of songs is taught to pre - school children. Majority of them use Rhymes. Some use song types like hymns, folk song, gospel songs, action songs and poems. The table below throws more light on this.

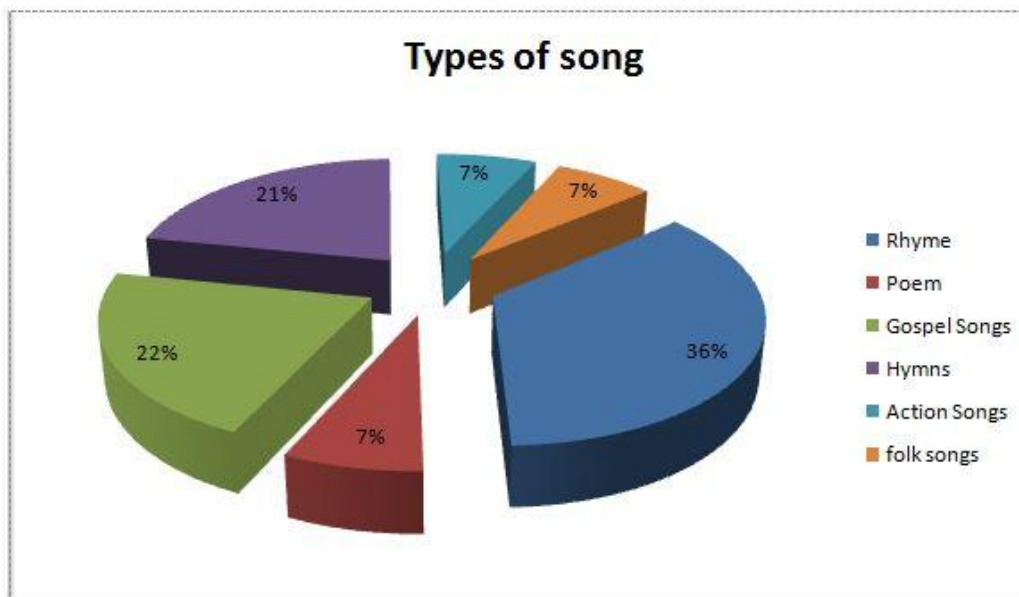


Fig2. Types of songs respondents use often

Source: Field Survey 2021

The chart above indicates that, among the following songs: rhyme, poem, gospel, hymns, action songs and folk songs, actions songs are used most. Respondents explained, it was because it has gotten more actions and movements than the other songs and it involves the children so much. Also hymns were also used so much because the school is a Methodist Mission School. Next were gospel songs. Although the rest were not left out, they were not making so much use of them.

Informants explained that, these types of songs mostly involve action. With the action songs, actions always dominate the performance, for example, “One-Two Buckle my shoe”. In the music, the teacher is expected to perform the buckling action for the kids to see what buckling means or is so that they can always perform the action when asked to do so or even use the vocabulary among themselves. They also opined that, Poems for instant are recited with actions and movements. These actions help the child to understand the vocabularies in them.

In addition, a few argued that, most rhymes and children’s songs do not have big words in the sentences. Besides, their compositions are not complicating. They have words that the child can deal with especially, words that they can always remember without difficulty. The participants stressed that, they teach these songs with meanings and they believe the children get the understanding from the movements and actions that go with the songs. Sometimes they go to the extent of even narrating the stories behind the songs.

Furthermore, gospel songs and hymns also draw the child closer to God and teaches them to be God fearing and good followers of Christ, they said. Talk of Folk songs for example, it was said that, it always remind the children of stories told and anytime you raise the song, the kids can tell you the details of the story.

8. HOW SONGS FACILITATE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

According to participants in the Wesley Methodist School, music helps the teachers a lot. In the first place the songs always served as a prelude for the children in their lessons. As a result, it makes the children happy and always prepares them cognitively for the day’s lesson.

Some participant opined that, most of the children were admitted into the preschool at a very tender age. Meaning that, they come there without knowing how to talk or speak. As a result, it is in the preschool that some come to learn how to talk. This activity is mostly enhanced through singing, because it is through the songs that these children learn to speak and for some of them, enhance their vocabulary. During the singing of the songs, they pick up words and make meaning quickly because of the actions and movements and sometimes dances that accompany the songs. It makes them very active too.

Furthermore, these teachers observed that, the learning style of children is different from the elderly. When one observes how children learn, it has been noted that they love to play and sing and so they learn through these means. They cannot learn like older people. When we use music in our teaching it helps them because they pick words from songs faster, releases boredom and also helps the child to understand the topics teachers bring on board which obviously, would have a bearing on the song, the teachers said.

Participant reported how songs help in vocabulary acquisition in preschool pupils. They said, Action and movements play vital roles in comprehension hence acquisition of vocabularies. Through actions and movements like jumping, clapping and dancing, the children get to understand the vocabularies in the song. Without the actions and movements, the songs are like any conversation. Even in day- to - day chats and conversation in society, gestures which involve actions and movements are employed.

The lyrics of the songs help the pupils to identify terms which are used in daily life activities. Even if they don't understand it at all at this stage, they grow to find or get their own understanding of the words apart from what teachers explain to them. Also, most children come to love the songs and their actions before they even understand or get the meaning of the song. They get the vocabularies from these songs as they perform and move along the stages, said the teachers. Through the repetitions of the songs the children absorb the vocabulary. They grasp vocabularies and concepts quickly. Participants indicated that, there are some specific activities in the school that can't be done without music. The table below throws more light.

Table Illustrating Some Specific Activities Done with the Use of Music

Table3.*Use of music in specific activities*

| Activity | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| During assembly | 3 | 21.4% |
| Worship | 2 | 14.29% |
| Games | 5 | 36.71% |
| Graduation day | 3 | 21.4% |
| Before eating | 1 | 7.14% |

Source: *Field Survey 2021*

Table 3 shows a total of 14 respondents in the Wesley Methodist pre -school who were interviewed on activities done with the use of music. Out of this fourteen, three (3) which is 21% of them admitted that music is always used at their Assembly ground. Two (2) of them, which represent fourteen (14 %), mentioned that, songs were always used at worship. Five of them (5), which points 36 % on the table, submitted that almost all their games have some sort of music. This they said creates more stimulation in the games the children engage in, in the school. Graduation days were not left out. Twenty one (21%) of the participants again stated they use music during graduation ceremonies. Finally, (1) teacher, thus 7 % affirmed the use of music during the eating hours.

Reflecting on the figures on the table above, the researchers deduced that, at the John Wesley Methodist Kindergarten, an amount of music is always used in all the activities in the school. This is both in the classroom and outside the classroom during school hours.

In general, informants submitted that, their learners respond so well to music during the above mentioned activities. They said, it is during these activities that pupil's exhibit some of the songs with actions taught in class hence helping them to acquire vocabulary. An example of one of Such songs is notated below:

HIPOPOTAMUS

Transcribed by
Jessica Amoah

Hi po po ta mus mus Hi po

6
po ta mus mus H I P for the

11
hip hip P O P O for the hi po poo

16
T A - - - for the ta

21
M U S for the HI PO PO TA MUS MUS

The above song teaches pupils how to spell Hippopotamus. According to informants, the children learn how to spell the name of the animal hippopotamus from this particular song. They also come to understand that, there is an animal which exist and it is known as such. In addition, they learn the correct pronunciation of Hippopotamus as they sing this song.

Furthermore, the study revealed that. Some of the lyrics of the songs help the children to count, keep time and move within the pulse of the songs.

8.1. Using Music to Teach Parts of the Body

Body parts are a fun subject to teach because there is already a song in English that most children recognize as *My Head, my shoulders, my knees and my toes*. It is a song that was sung by the teacher as well as the students and involved moving and interaction, which was a fun way of learning especially for young learners. Before the lesson, the teacher talked about the song and asked her pupils if they have heard it before. After that, they went through the body parts orally with the movements. After, the task itself involved singing the song for the children and then asking them to stand up and sing along. Since most of the children had already heard the melody of the song, it was very easy to sing together. Later the teacher showed the pupils pictures of each body part, one at a time and the learners have to raise their hand to say which body part is being displayed. Since the song only teaches a few body parts like the head, the hand, legs, and stomach, this subject was taught again where the teacher included other body parts such as arms, eye, ear, mouth, neck and knee.

Notation of “my head my shoulder my knee my toe” is as follows:

BODY PARTS

Transcribed by
Jessica Amoah

My head my shoul der my knees my toes

5 My head my shoul der my knees my toes

9 My head my shoul der my knees my toes

13 they all be long to me

The image shows a musical score for the song 'BODY PARTS'. It consists of four staves of music in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The lyrics are: 'My head my shoul der my knees my toes', 'My head my shoul der my knees my toes', 'My head my shoul der my knees my toes', and 'they all be long to me'. The score includes measure numbers 1, 5, 9, and 13.

My head, my shoulder my knees and toe

My head, my shoulder my knees and toes

My head, my shoulder my knees and toes

They all belong to me



Plate1. Pupils performing song relating to the body parts

Credit: The researchers

8.2. Using Music to teach the Days of the Week

There are songs to be sung about the weekdays that are ideal for teachers to sing with their student. At the beginning, the teacher asked what day it is, what day it is tomorrow and so on to see if the students are familiar with the names of the weekdays. After that, the teacher recited a rhyme about the weekdays for the students to learn and then ask them to participate by repeating along the second time. Reciting together created an entertaining atmosphere that makes the lesson more memorable. The rhyme was written in both English and Ga. Each day's name in English had a correspondent in

Ga. The teacher handed each student a paper where all the days of the weeks were written down and each day has numbers from 1-7. The children were supposed to draw a circle around the right number for each day, so for Wednesday, they would draw a circle around 3 to show that it is the third day of the week. This was done verbally as the teacher asked the children one at a time.

Basically, young learners were not required to know how to write or spell words correctly, but by giving them handouts with words printed on them as well as drawings or numbers, the learners might subconsciously learn to recognize how the words look like and it could help them in their language learning as time passes. Below is the rhyme and notated song used to teach the days of the week at one of the schools visited.

Days of the Week Rhyme

Monday –Ju

Tuesday - Jufo

Wednesday -Sho

Thursday –Soo

Friday –Sohaa

Saturday -Hoo

Sunday -Hogbaa

Days of the week

Transcribed by
Jessica Amoah

There are se ven days there are se ven days there are se ven days in a week

Sun day Mon day Tues day We ns day Thurs day Fri day Sat ur day

Sun day Mon day Tues day We nes day Thuurs day Fri day Sat ur day

8.3. Using Music to Teach Colors

Teaching colors is similar to teaching letters and numbers. Most children already know the colors in their native language and can distinguish between the basic ones, such as red and green. What needs to be taught is the correct pronunciation of the words. Pre listening, the teacher tells the students about the colors around them and asks the students what colors they are wearing. This involved the pupil's participation, which they often enjoy at this age. She then did an exhibition of the colors for the young pupils to see the colors and hear the right pronunciation in a song. The teacher used a rhyme that is simple and focused on what is being taught at the time. She taught three colors only, for the start. Later, the teacher handed out a black and white picture to each student and ask them to color it a certain way, like a blue shirt, a red hat and yellow boots. It is up to the students to choose the correct color and complete the assignment. This way the children have heard the word and connected it visually while coloring. A picture of a traffic light was used during one of the lessons to teach rhyme on colours in the traffic light. See the picture below on Plate 2:



Plate2. *Picture of a traffic light as teaching learning resource in classroom*

Photograph: *The researchers*

Colors (Rhyme)

When you see a traffic light

There is something you must know

RED means Stop

YELLOW means Get Ready

GREEN means Go GoGo andGo

Below are the learners performing a rhyme on Colours



Plate3. *School children performing rhyme on meaning of colours in Traffic light*

9. CONCLUSION

The study sought to find out the type of songs that are used to aid language acquisition among learners in some selected schools in the Accra Metropolis in Ghana. The study revealed that songs in the genres of hymns, gospel, rhymes, folk and action songs are used to help children to acquire language. In addition, these songs are used with actions such as gestures, movement and language and all these facilitate the children to acquire the vocabularies enough to speak.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Music educators in the study area should prepare books on children playtime songs and activities and run timely programs for pre-school teachers to enable them know the basics in song selection for use in the classroom as well as sharpen their basic compositional skills to help them create their own songs as he or she prepares for a lesson. Tertiary institution in the country should run special music program for early childhood teachers which would prepare the preschool teachers to read, write and enlighten them on the use of music in the educational activities of children.

2. It will be very helpful for parents to afford materials like (CDs that have recordings of rhymes, action songs, folk music and musical plays, toy musical instruments etc.) For their kids because music is not just for fun but rather it develops the child's' intelligence.

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AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Ndah Divine Selorm, is a lecturer in Music and Dance at the Seventh Day Adventist College of Education, Koforidua Ghana. He has some Journal and Book Publications to his credit. He as well lectures on part- time basis at the College of Distance Education, University of Cape Coast and University of Education, Winneba all in Ghana. His research interest includes using traditional musical instruments as communication devices in Ghanaian setting, Impact of Performing Arts in society.



Jessica Amoah, Holds Master of Philosophy in Music Education from the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. She currently lectures at St. Monica's College of Education, Asante Mampong. She is into African Music and Early Childhood education. She has many publications to her credit. Her research interest includes; early childhood Education and Traditional Music and Cultural Education.

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