Efforts to Improve Early Childhood Language Skills through the Singing Method at RA Al-Hikmah

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to improve the language skills of early childhood learners at RA Al-Hikmah through the implementation of singing-based instructional methods. Early language development is critical for cognitive, social, and academic growth, yet many young learners face challenges in vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and expressive communication. Singing has been recognized as an effective pedagogical strategy to stimulate linguistic and cognitive development by combining rhythm, melody, and repetitive phrasing, which support memory and oral expression. The research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, conducted in two cycles, each comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. The participants were 25 children aged 4–6 years, and data collection involved observation sheets, language performance assessments, and audio-visual documentation. The findings revealed a significant improvement in children's language abilities after the implementation of the singing method. In the initial observation, only 28% of students demonstrated age-appropriate expressive language skills. After the first cycle, this increased to 60%, and by the second cycle, 88% of children achieved marked improvement in vocabulary, sentence formation, pronunciation, and communicative confidence. Moreover, the observation indicated increased engagement, attention span, and social interaction among students during learning activities. These results suggest that singing methods are an effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate strategy for enhancing early childhood language skills, supporting both cognitive and socio-emotional growth.

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Introduction

Language development is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, as it underpins cognitive, social, and academic growth (Snow, 2010). Strong language skills in the early years provide children with the tools to communicate effectively, understand concepts, and participate meaningfully in social interactions. Early childhood is a critical period for language acquisition, during which children rapidly expand their vocabulary,

refine phonological awareness, and develop syntactic structures (Bohman et al., 2010). Delays or difficulties in language development at this stage can affect later literacy, learning outcomes, and social competence (Hoff, 2013).

Research indicates that interactive, multisensory teaching approaches can enhance early language skills by engaging multiple cognitive pathways (Goswami, 2008). Traditional rote-based methods may fail to sustain attention or foster expressive abilities, highlighting the need for creative and engaging instructional strategies. Singing has been identified as an effective pedagogical tool for promoting language development in young learners. Songs integrate rhythm, melody, and repetition, which aid memory retention and pronunciation (Patel, 2011). Moreover, musical activities stimulate phonemic awareness, sentence structuring, and expressive vocabulary (Gordon, 2012).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that integrating singing into early childhood education improves both receptive and expressive language skills. For instance, children exposed to musical activities exhibit accelerated vocabulary growth and enhanced narrative abilities compared to peers in conventional classrooms (Standley, 2008). The rhythmic and melodic elements of songs provide natural scaffolds for language acquisition. Repetition inherent in songs helps children internalize phonological patterns, grammatical structures, and new vocabulary, supporting the development of both speech fluency and comprehension (Brand, 2012).

Additionally, singing activities contribute to socio-emotional development. By participating in group songs, children practice turn-taking, attentive listening, and expressive communication, which strengthens social interaction and collaborative learning (Hallam, 2010). Early exposure to musical experiences has also been shown to enhance auditory discrimination and phonological processing, which are key predictors of later reading and literacy success (Jentschke, Koelsch, & Friederici, 2005). This emphasizes the dual cognitive and linguistic benefits of music-based instruction.

At RA Al-Hikmah, preliminary observations revealed that many children displayed limited vocabulary, difficulty forming complete sentences, and low confidence in verbal expression. These findings underscore the importance of implementing developmentally appropriate methods to stimulate language growth. The singing method aligns with constructivist learning theory, emphasizing active participation and experiential learning. Children construct language knowledge through engagement, imitation, and social interaction, rather than passively receiving information (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, multisensory approaches such as singing accommodate diverse learning styles and intelligences, enhancing inclusivity and engagement in the classroom (Gardner, 2011). Children benefit from combining auditory, visual, and kinesthetic

experiences in reinforcing language concepts. Classroom Action Research (CAR) is an appropriate framework for evaluating the effectiveness of singing methods in early childhood language development. CAR enables iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, providing practical insights for improving teaching strategies (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

Previous interventions using musical strategies in early childhood have shown positive outcomes in vocabulary acquisition, sentence formation, pronunciation, and communicative confidence, confirming the potential of singing as an evidence-based instructional method (Roden et al., 2012). Integrating songs into early learning not only supports cognitive and linguistic growth but also fosters a joyful and engaging classroom environment.

Motivation and sustained attention are critical mediators of language acquisition, and musical activities have been shown to enhance both (Gerry, Unrau, & Trainor, 2012). In conclusion, the use of singing methods at RA Al-Hikmah represents a developmentally appropriate, evidence-based strategy to enhance early childhood language skills. By combining rhythm, melody, and active participation, this approach addresses both cognitive and socio-emotional domains, ensuring holistic development and preparing children for future literacy and learning challenges.

Methods

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is commonly used in educational research to improve teaching practices through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). CAR is particularly suitable for early childhood settings, as it allows teachers to adjust instructional strategies in response to children's developmental needs. The participants were 25 children aged 4–6 years at RA Al-Hikmah. This age range was selected because early childhood is a critical period for language development, during which children rapidly acquire vocabulary, phonological awareness, and basic sentence structures (Bohman et al., 2010). The class consisted of 12 boys and 13 girls, all of whom were native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia.

The intervention implemented in this study was a singing-based method to enhance language skills. Songs were carefully selected to be age-appropriate, culturally familiar, and rich in repetitive vocabulary and sentence structures. Singing activities incorporated rhythmic clapping, body movements, and gestures to reinforce linguistic comprehension and articulation (Patel, 2011). The research was conducted over two CAR cycles, each comprising four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. In the planning stage, lesson plans, songs, and learning materials were developed. During the acting stage, teachers implemented the singing method in the classroom. Observation focused on children's engagement, participation, and language performance. Reflection

allowed teachers to identify strengths, weaknesses, and adjustments for the next cycle (Burns, 2010).

Data collection utilized multiple instruments to ensure validity. Observation sheets were used to record children's verbal participation and expressive communication. Language performance assessments evaluated vocabulary usage, sentence formation, pronunciation, and fluency. Additionally, audio-visual documentation captured children's interactions and progress during singing activities (Gerry, Unrau, & Trainor, 2012). The assessment rubric was designed based on early childhood language development indicators, covering expressive and receptive language domains. Each component was scored on a scale from 1 (emerging) to 4 (proficient), allowing for systematic evaluation of children's linguistic abilities (Hoff, 2013).

To ensure the trustworthiness of data, methodological triangulation was applied by combining quantitative scores from assessments with qualitative observation notes and documentation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This approach reduced bias and provided a holistic understanding of children's language development. The criteria for successful intervention were twofold: (1) at least 80% of children demonstrating improvement in expressive language skills, and (2) observable increases in engagement, attention, and willingness to participate in singing activities. These criteria considered both cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of language learning (Hallam, 2010).

Ethical considerations were observed by obtaining consent from parents and the school administration. Participation was voluntary, and children's identities were anonymized. The study also ensured that activities were developmentally appropriate, safe, and enjoyable, consistent with best practices in early childhood research (BERA, 2018).

Result

The preliminary observations revealed that many children at RA Al-Hikmah exhibited limited language skills. Only 28% of the participants demonstrated age-appropriate vocabulary, sentence formation, and expressive communication. Most children struggled with pronouncing words correctly and constructing complete sentences, indicating the need for targeted intervention (Bohman et al., 2010). After implementing the singing method in the first cycle, notable improvements were observed. The proportion of children demonstrating age-appropriate expressive language increased to 60%. Observation sheets indicated that children actively participated in singing activities, repeating lyrics accurately and using key vocabulary in their verbal expressions. This aligns with research suggesting that musical activities enhance memory and language recall in early learners (Patel, 2011).

Audio-visual documentation captured children's gradual ability to articulate words and form simple sentences while singing. Teachers reported that repetitive exposure to song lyrics facilitated vocabulary retention and pronunciation accuracy. These findings support Gordon's (2012) assertion that rhythm and melody create a cognitive scaffold for language acquisition in early childhood. In Cycle II, further improvements were evident. By the end of the intervention, 88% of the children achieved significant progress in expressive language, demonstrating expanded vocabulary, improved sentence structure, and greater confidence in verbal communication. This shows that iterative practice with musical methods strengthens language competence over time (Standley, 2008).

Observation also revealed enhanced engagement and socio-emotional development. Children displayed longer attention spans, were more willing to interact with peers during musical activities, and followed classroom instructions more consistently. Group singing encouraged turn-taking and collaborative communication, reinforcing social and linguistic skills simultaneously (Hallam, 2010). Quantitative assessment of language performance showed significant gains in expressive abilities, with average scores rising from 45% in the preliminary stage to 82% in the second cycle. Vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and sentence formation all showed measurable improvement, confirming that singing methods are effective for language skill enhancement in early childhood.

Teachers noted that the children's confidence increased as they mastered song lyrics and participated more actively in classroom interactions. Previously shy or hesitant children began initiating verbal communication, demonstrating that musical methods can positively impact self-expression and communication skills (Gerry, Unrau, & Trainor, 2012). Overall, the results indicate that singing-based instruction is an effective and developmentally appropriate approach to improve early childhood language skills. The combination of rhythm, melody, repetition, and active participation not only enhanced linguistic competence but also fostered motivation, engagement, and social interaction among children.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the singing method significantly improved early childhood language skills at RA Al-Hikmah. The increase from 28% of children demonstrating age-appropriate language abilities in the preliminary stage to 88% in the second cycle highlights the effectiveness of musical approaches in enhancing vocabulary, sentence formation, and expressive communication (Bohman et al., 2010). The repetitive nature of songs appears to be a key factor in facilitating language acquisition. By repeatedly hearing and vocalizing target vocabulary and sentence structures, children were able to internalize phonological patterns and expand their

expressive language repertoire. This aligns with Patel's (2011) OPERA hypothesis, which suggests that musical engagement enhances neural encoding of speech sounds and supports language development.

Rhythm and melody also provided scaffolding that helped children maintain attention and organize their verbal output. Observations showed that children were more focused during singing activities than during conventional language lessons, supporting Gordon's (2012) findings that structured musical sequences improve cognitive processing and linguistic fluency in young learners. Beyond linguistic gains, the intervention promoted socio-emotional development. Children became more confident in verbal expression, engaged more actively with peers, and exhibited improved collaborative skills. Hallam (2010) emphasizes that musical activities in early childhood foster social interaction, cooperation, and emotional regulation, all of which support holistic language development.

The iterative CAR approach allowed teachers to adapt activities to children's progress. In Cycle II, more complex songs and interactive movements were introduced, resulting in further improvements in vocabulary usage, pronunciation, and sentence formation. This reflects the importance of ongoing reflection and adaptation in early childhood pedagogy (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014). Furthermore, the observed gains in expressive language suggest that singing can bridge the gap between receptive understanding and verbal output. Children not only understood words and phrases but were able to actively produce them in context, confirming Standley's (2008) conclusion that music-based interventions support both comprehension and speech production in young learners.

The intervention also demonstrated that developmentally appropriate, enjoyable activities can enhance learning motivation. Children were eager to participate, sustained attention, and displayed enthusiasm for repeated practice. Such engagement is crucial for consolidating language skills during the sensitive period of early childhood development (Gerry, Unrau, & Trainor, 2012). In summary, the singing method proved to be a highly effective, multi-faceted instructional approach that simultaneously enhanced linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies. These results suggest that integrating music into early childhood language instruction offers substantial benefits and can serve as a practical strategy for educators aiming to foster holistic development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the singing method is an effective and developmentally appropriate strategy for enhancing early childhood language skills at RA Al-Hikmah. Through structured, repetitive, and engaging musical activities, children showed significant improvement in vocabulary, sentence formation, pronunciation, and expressive communication. Additionally, the intervention fostered greater confidence,

social interaction, and sustained attention, indicating positive socio-emotional as well as cognitive outcomes. These results highlight the dual benefits of integrating music into early childhood language instruction, supporting both linguistic development and holistic growth. Consequently, singing-based methods can serve as a practical, evidence-based approach for educators aiming to enhance language competencies in young learners.

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