

Sing and Move – Removing Static English Language Classroom

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Abstract

Very often in Taiwan, elementary students learn passively in English language classroom. The learning environment is static and students appear to be shy, quiet and intimidated. Nevertheless, once outside the classroom, they become energetic, physical active and talkative. Young children's characteristics might need to be considered in a language classroom to maximize their engagement in learning. Providing multiple ways to learn and the elements of songs and body movements might bring improvement to their learning. This study aims to explore the effect of the integration of songs, jazz chants, and body movements in elementary English lessons on students' learning outcome in a four-day English summer camp. Twenty-two Grade 2 to Grade 6 students participated in this study. A pre-test and a post-test of the learning content were given at the beginning and at the end of the camp. The results showed significant improvement in reading, speaking and writing.

Keywords: second language learning, elementary education, English language, learning outcome

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Introduction

In Taiwan, elementary schools often seek opportunities to improve their students' English ability. At elementary level, without the pressure of national exams, the English language curriculum can be more flexible. Nevertheless, with many subjects to be included in students' class schedules, English lessons are very limited. There may be only up to two lessons each week. Therefore, some elementary schools will consider summer camps as extra learning opportunities for their students.

Considering the nature of students at the elementary level, they are often described to be energetic and physically active, spontaneous and not afraid to speak out and participate (Shin & Crandall, 2014). However, in Taiwan, when learning English in traditional classrooms where the learning environment is static and students are involved in mechanical exercises, some elementary students tend to be shy, passive and intimidated. It seems that their behavior in traditional classrooms is contradictory to their natural characteristics. English lessons, therefore, may need to be designed with young children's characteristics in mind. Hence, it may affect their engagement in learning. Furthermore, even young children might have their preferred learning styles in different circumstances and possess multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; Gardner, 1999). Providing young children with multiple ways to learn may improve their learning outcome (Dunn & Dunn, 1978; Gilakjani, 2012; Hattie, 2011). Thus, in contrast to traditional English classrooms, English lessons can be designed to engage young children physically with the use of songs, jazz chants and body movements. This study aims to explore the effect of the integration of these elements in elementary English lessons on students' learning outcome in a four-day English summer camp.

The context of the study

This study was done in the form of industry-academia cooperation and was initiated by a local elementary school. The local elementary was seeking cooperation opportunities with a university to conduct an English summer camp for their students, who were passive and shy in English lessons. The aims of the English summer camp were to provide their students with extra English learning opportunities and more engaging English learning activities in the summer. The integration of songs, jazz chants and body movements in English lessons might provide different English learning experiences to the students, which might improve their engagement in the classroom and learning outcome.

In this study, five junior university students designed a four-day English summer camp for an elementary school in Taiwan. They were pursuing a bachelor's degree in foreign language instruction at a university in southern Taiwan. This degree program aims to prepare students to be EFL teachers. These five student teachers did this four-day English summer camp in July as part of their graduation project. They started preparing four months before the English camp took place under the guidance of their advisor. They needed to organize all the camp activities, design English lessons, produce learning materials and teaching aids and teach in the camp.

The target elementary school is located in southern Taiwan. It is a relatively small school with 12 classes from grade two to grade six (two class per grade) comparing to

other elementary schools in the cities. Formal English classes are provided starting from grade three onwards. Before the English summer camp took place, the target elementary school recruited 23 of their students between grade two and grade six to join this summer camp. They were divided into two classes – Class A (12 students) and Class B (11 students). Each class contained mixed grade students ranging from grade two to grade six (see Table 1). The student teachers designed six 40-minute English lessons integrating songs, rhythms and body movements (see Table 2). There were two topics, Animals and Body Parts. Each topic contained three units. Topic 1 – *Body Parts* included (1) *Build Up Yourself*, (2) *Body Up*, and (3) *Moving All of Us*. Topic 2 – *Animals* included (1) *Where is the Animals?*, (2) *Animals Difference*, and (3) *Animals Up and Down*. On the fourth day of the camp, each class had to participate in an English performance event showing what they had learned from the lessons, e.g. singing a song with actions. Class A performed the body part song and Class B performed the animal jazz chant. To prepare for the event, three lessons distributed in the afternoon on the first, second and third days of the camp were assigned for students to practice their performances. The aims of the lessons were to develop students’ interests in learning English and improve their learning outcome of English through songs, jazz chants and body movements.

Table 1. Distribution of students in Class A and Class B

Grades	Number of students in Class A	Number of students in Class B
Grade 2	5	4
Grade 3	3	4
Grade 4	2	2
Grade 5	1	1
Grade 6	1	0
	Total = 12	Total = 11

Table 2. Lessons arrangement for Class A in the camp

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Date	7/6 (Mon)	7/7 (Tue)	7/8 (Wed)	7/9 (Thurs)
Time				
8:00~8:30	Sign-In			
8:30~9:00	Briefing	Morning Exercises	Morning Exercises	Morning Exercises & Photo Taking
9:00~9:10	Break			
9:10~9:50	Pretest & Welcoming	Body Up!	Animals Discovery	Animals Up and Down!
9:50~10:00	Break			
10:00~10:40	Build up yourself!	Review Activities	Review Activities	Review Activities & Post Test
10:40~10:50	Break			
10:50~11:30	Review Activities	Moving All of Us!	Animals' Difference	Final Performance Rehearsal
11:40~12:50	Lunch & Lunch Break			
13:00~13:40	Final Performance Practice	Final Performance Practice	Final Performance Practice	Final Performance & Farewell
13:40~13:50	Break			
13:50~14:30	Group Activities	Group Activities	Group Activities	

Research Method

Twenty-two out of the 23 second-graders to sixth-graders participated in the 4-day English summer camp stated above (One second-grader was excluded due to her incompleteness of her post-test). A learning styles survey was given to the participants to find out their dominant learning styles (visual, auditory and tactile/kinesthetic learning styles) at the beginning of the camp. The survey was adapted from the Elementary Learning Style Inventory (2012) by Stetson and Associates, Inc. originally contained 30 items (10 items for each learning style) in English. Only five items from each learning style were selected and translated into Chinese to make the survey in this study in order to reduce the possible fatigue effect when answering the survey for young children. The participants checked the items that they thought described them. The number of checks were added, recorded and analyzed according to the three learning styles. Also, they were given a survey of eight questions asking about their previous English learning experiences and a pre-test of the lesson content in the summer camp. There were four sections – listening (5 items; 20 points), writing (8 items; 32 points), reading (6 items; 24 points) and speaking (6 items; 24 points) in the pre-test. During the camp, the participants received six 40-minute English lessons under two topics – Body Parts and Animals, which included the elements of songs, jazz chants, and body movements. At the end of the camp, the participants were given a post-test, which was the same as the pre-test. The scores of the pre-test and post-tests were analyzed using dependent-sample t-tests on the Social Science Statistics website (<http://www.socscistatistics.com/tests/ttestdependent/Default2.aspx>). The data of the previous English learning experience survey and feedbacks were analyzed manually.

Results

The results of the previous learning experience survey revealed that most of the participants (89%) liked English. Forty-two percent of them had learned English for over two years. Half of them believed that English was very important to them. Among the choices of means of learning English, the participants seemed to like various means of learning, such as games, music, videos and DIY, instead of a particular one. Almost all of them (96%) liked to have group work, and the teaching contents (54%) were the main factor that affected that willingness to learn English. Among the four skills of English, they thought that they were slightly weaker in writing (31%) and speaking (31%) than listening (15%) and reading (23%). Furthermore, they thought that tactile/kinesthetic activities (54%), especially playing games, helped them remember better while learning English.

The learning styles survey showed that the participants had higher scores on tactile/Kinesthetic learning style, followed by auditory learning style and then visual learning style. The differences were more obvious for third graders and above (see Table 3).

Table 3. Results of the learning styles survey

Grades	Visual	Auditory	Tactile/Kinesthetic
Grade 2 (n=8)	3.4	3.8	3.9
Grade 3 (n=6)	2.6	3.1	3.6
Grade 4-6 (n=7)	1.7	2.1	3.1
Grade 2-6 (n=21)	2.6	3.0	3.5

The analyses of pre-test and post-test showed significant improvement in learning outcome in reading, speaking and writing ($P < 0.05$) with mean differences at 6.00, 7.64, and 9.45 respectively while listening did not show a significant difference ($P > 0.10$) (see Table 4 and 5). The participants had the best scores in listening (18.36; 91.8% and 18.00; 90.0% respectively) and the lowest scores in writing (5.82; 18.2% and 15.27; 47.7% respectively) in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 4. The means and standard deviations of the listening, reading, speaking and writing scores of the pre-test and post-test

Language Skills (Total Scores)	Pre-test Scores n=22		Post-test Scores n=22	
	Means	SD	Means	SD
Listening (20)	18.36	4.39	18.00	5.20
Reading (24)	13.27	6.80	19.27	5.74
Speaking (24)	11.45	8.03	19.09	4.77
Writing (32)	5.82	7.48	15.27	11.08

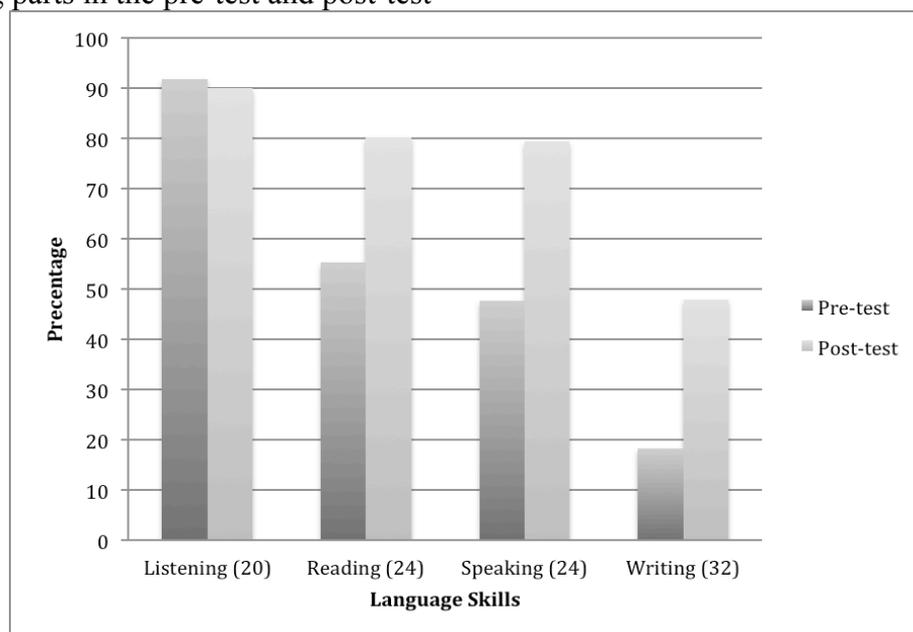
Table 5. Significance of listening, reading, speaking and writing scores between the pre-test and post-test

Language skills	Mean Difference	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening		
Pre – Post	-0.36	0.754
Reading		
Pre – Post	6.00	0.004
Speaking		
Pre – Post	7.64	0.000
Writing		
Pre – Post	9.45	0.001

Table 6. The scores in percentages of the listening, reading, speaking and writing parts in the pre-test and post-test

Language Skills (Total Scores)	Pre-test Scores n=22		Post-test Scores n=22	
	Means	%	Means	%
Listening (20)	18.36	91.8	18.00	90.0
Reading (24)	13.27	55.3	19.27	80.3
Speaking (24)	11.45	47.7	19.09	79.5
Writing (32)	5.82	18.2	15.27	47.8

Graph 1. Bar chart of the scores in percentages of the listening, reading, speaking and writing parts in the pre-test and post-test



Discussion and conclusion

English summer camps can be provided as extra English learning opportunities for elementary students in Taiwan. The integration of songs, jazz chants and body movements in elementary English lessons could be beneficial to the learning outcome of students who were passive and shy in their regular English language classrooms. The results of this study showed significant improvement in reading, speaking and writing.

According to the results of the learning style survey, the participants had a higher rating on tactile/kinesthetic learning style. The participants were more likely to learn best through movements and using their body and hands. In this study, songs, jazz chants and body movements were integrated in the English lessons in the summer camp. The significant improvement of the reading, speaking and writing scores after the post-test indicated that the elements of songs, jazz chants and body movements might have facilitated the participants' learning. Regarding to listening, the participants had very high scores (18.39; 91.8%) in the pre-test and therefore the test might not able to assess improvement in the post-test.

In the previous English learning experience survey, the participants expressed that they were weaker in speaking and writing, which are productive skills. Compared to receptive skills, listening and reading, productive skills are relatively more demanding and more difficult to master. The results of the pre-test and post-test confirmed this phenomenon. The participants had higher scores in listening and reading and lower scores in speaking and writing in both the pre-test and post-test. It appeared that writing was the most difficult for the students. Nevertheless, the post-test results showed that the participants made great progress in speaking (from 47.7% to 79.5% and in writing (from 18.2% to 47.8).

Based on the results of this study, integration of songs, jazz chants and body movements in elementary English language classrooms should be encouraged. Teachers of English may add some of these elements in their current lessons. They may modify their teaching materials into songs and jazz chants, and they also can create body movements for their teaching materials when applicable.

Nonetheless, there were limitations in this study. Other variables, such as the teachers' performance and peer interactions in the class, might also have contributed to the significant improvement of the learning outcome. Without a control group, it would not be able to single out the causes of the positive effects. Furthermore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations due to the small sample size and could only be applied to similar situations. Therefore, further research should be done in various settings.

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