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## Rhyming the Rhyme: Rhymes and Songs as Inputs and Instruments for familiarising Children with the English Language

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### INTRODUCTION

Children are active and curious. They like actions and songs. When they sing and do actions, they actually learn things by doing. It is not just learning by doing, it is also learning to do things by doing things. Rhymes and songs are useful for creating phonemic awareness among learners, and they are the predictors of a child's reading development. This paper tries to list the benefits of using rhymes and songs as inputs for the development of literacy and cognitive skills in children, and prepare them for listening, speaking, reading, and in due course, writing. The paper also presents some strategies for the teaching-learning of rhymes and songs. Strategies like snowballing, echo principle, choral and closed eye singing make rhymes interesting, and draw the attention of children to themes and help them acquire a language. Thus,

rhymes and songs become inputs for language processing, leading to language acquisition.

### WHAT DO RHYMES DO?

Children find rhymes entertaining for their rhythm. The rhymes and songs engage them with music, ideas and language used. Rhymes motivate the children to repeat, recite, practise and remember. This 'repeat, recite and practise' is not just mechanical for it enables the children to repeat or recite. As a result, the children undergo sensory experiences, emotions and thoughts, along with fun and humour. Sensory training is essential for the children to understand action and pragmatics of language, i.e., language in action, in a way speech acts. Let us see how rhymes serve as instruments for language, cognitive, emotional and social development. Most of these ideas have been drawn from various

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sources, primarily Monro (year not mentioned) and Kenney (2005).

### **Language development**

Nursery rhymes are short and easy to repeat, so they become children's first sentences. Therefore, when the children hear and sing nursery rhymes, they:

- hear the sounds vowels and consonants make, and learn how to put these sounds together to make words.
- practise pitch, volume and voice inflection, as well as, rhythm of a language.
- hear new words that they would not hear in everyday language (like 'fetch' and 'pail' in 'Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water').

### **Cognitive development**

- Since nursery rhymes are patterns, they help the children learn, memorise and recall.
- The events and characters in rhymes trigger and exercise the imagination of the learners.
- Nursery rhymes, usually, narrate a story with a beginning, middle and an end. This teaches the children that the events happen in a sequence, and they begin to learn how to understand the stories and follow along.
- Many rhymes also use numbers, counting and other math words that the children need to learn, such as size and weight.

- Nursery rhymes introduce alliteration (like 'Goosie Goosie Gander'), onomatopoeia (like 'Baa Baa Black Sheep') and imaginative imagery. 'Imaginative imagery' is a creative process that human beings experience subconsciously and it is expressed through dreams and daydreams. Sometimes, we wonder that we have had dreams that we never imagined, which are related to us, and the characters and events are strange. Some rhymes provide experiences, which kindle the creative expressions of children. They hear these rhymes and enact what they imagine the characters to be doing.

### **Physical development**

- Children develop muscles of their mouth and tongue by producing different sounds while reciting rhymes.
- Rhymes that involve movement help with coordination.
- In a dramatic play, children use their entire body to enact the nursery rhymes they hear.

### **Social and emotional development**

- Sharing nursery rhymes provides a safe and secure bond between parents and children, and between teachers and children.
- Positive physical touch between a parent and a child or between children, for example clapping during rhymes, is important for social development.

- Funny nursery rhymes allow children to develop a sense of humour.
- Nursery rhyme characters experience different emotions. These can help children identify their own emotions and understand the emotions of others.
- When children enact nursery rhyme stories they hear, they learn to imagine, become creative and express themselves.

### SOME STRATEGIES TO USE RHYMES

(Recitation with actions)

Let us recite a rhyme. We will touch the respective body parts as we sing.

*Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

*Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

#### **Snowballing principle**

In snowballing principle, the teacher first recites or speaks aloud a sequence (a chunk of a rhyme) and increases the sequence longer. The students repeat in the same way as shown below. People play snowballing during the snow season by rolling a small snowball, which accumulates more and more snow by the time it reaches down the hill.

*Teacher: This is...*

*Students: This is...*

*Teacher: This is a cat.*

*Students: This is a cat.*

*Teacher: This is a cat and a cat.*

*Students: This is a cat and a cat.*

Here is how a rhyme is done

*Teacher: Come on students! Repeat after me.*

*Teacher: Head, shoulders...*

*Students: Head, shoulders...*

*Teacher: Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Students: Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Teacher: Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

*Students: Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

*Teacher: Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Students: Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Head, shoulders, knees and toes*

*Teacher: Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

*Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

*Students: Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

*Eyes, ears, mouth and nose*

The teacher must take care and make the children sing or recite as one wants. It takes some time to make the children come to an understanding. The teacher may go around the class as they sing. Snowballing is an effective technique.

## **Echo principle**

Echo principle is asking the children to imagine hearing echoes from a mountain (the teacher pretends to be a mountain). When we speak aloud near a hill or in a closed room, we can hear the echo of our own voice. This technique of echo is used to make the learners appreciate the rhyme, and internalise words and phrases. They hear the words and the echo, and repeat after the teacher. Let us do the following rhyme applying this principle.

*One little, two little, three little fingers,  
Four little, five little, six little fingers,  
Seven little, eight little, nine little fingers,  
Ten little fingers here  
Ten little, nine little, eight little fingers,  
Seven little, six little, five little fingers,  
Four little, three little, two little fingers,  
One little finger here*

Now, let us do the following rhyme with echo principle.

*Teacher: One little, two little...*

*Students: One little, two little...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: One little, two little, three little fingers...*

*Students: One little, two little, three little fingers...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Four little, five little, six little fingers...*

*Students: Four little, five little, six little fingers...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Seven little, eight little, nine little fingers...*

*Students: Seven little, eight little, nine little fingers...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Ten little fingers here...*

*Students: Ten little fingers here...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Ten little, nine little, eight little fingers...*

*Students: Ten little, nine little, eight little fingers...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Seven little, six little, five little fingers...*

*Students: Seven little, six little, five little fingers...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Four little, three little, two little fingers...*

*Students: Four little, three little, two little fingers...*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: One little finger here*

*Students: One little finger here*

*(Students echo)*

*Teacher: Do you still hear the echo? Keep echoing.*

## **Cumulative choral speaking**

Children are divided into groups and sing or recite the rhymes in parts.

*'One, two, buckle my shoe'*

*Group 1: One, two,*

*Buckle my shoe.*

*Group 2: Three, four,*

*Knock at the door.*

Group 3: Five, six,  
Pick up the sticks.  
Group 4: Seven, eight  
Lay them straight.  
Group 5: Nine, ten,  
A big fat hen.  
All: One, two,  
Buckle my shoe.  
Three, four,  
Knock at the door.  
Five, six,  
Pick up the sticks.  
Seven, eight,  
Lay them straight.  
Nine, ten,  
A big fat hen.

**Repeat after me!**

Hello, children! How often do you travel in a bus? Do you go to school by a bus? Do you like to travel long distance in a bus? Come on, let us go round-and-round in a bus. Repeat, after me.

*'Bus! Bus! Bus!'*

Teacher: *The wheels on the bus go  
round and round,  
round and round,  
round and round.*

Students: *The wheels on the bus go  
round and round,  
round and round,  
round and round.*

Teacher: *The wheels on the bus go  
round and round,  
All the way to town.*

Students: *The wheels on the bus go  
round and round,  
All the way to town.*

Teacher: *The wipers on the bus go  
swish, swish, swish,  
swish, swish, swish,  
swish, swish, swish.*

Students: *The wipers on the bus go  
swish, swish, swish,  
swish, swish, swish,  
swish, swish, swish.*

Teacher: *The wipers on the bus go  
swish, swish, swish,  
All the way to town.*

Students: *The wipers on the bus go  
swish, swish, swish,  
All the way to town.*

Teacher: *The people on the bus go  
up and down,  
up and down,  
up and down.*

Students: *The people on the bus go  
up and down,  
up and down,  
up and down.*

Teacher: *The people on the bus go  
up and down,  
All the way to town.*

Students: *The people on the bus go  
up and down,  
All the way to town.*

Teacher: *The horn on the bus goes  
beep, beep, beep,  
beep, beep, beep.*

Students: *The horn on the bus goes  
beep, beep, beep,  
beep, beep, beep.*

Teacher: *beep, beep, beep,  
beep, beep, beep,  
beep, beep, beep.*

Students: *beep, beep, beep,  
beep, beep, beep,  
beep, beep, beep.*

Teacher: *The horn on the bus goes  
beep, beep, beep,  
All the way to town.*

Students: *The horn on the bus goes  
beep, beep, beep,  
All the way to town.*

Teacher: *The horn on the bus goes  
beep, beep, beep,  
All the way to town.*

Students: *The horn on the bus goes  
beep, beep, beep,  
All the way to town.*

This is an interesting poem, in which the learners can sing well when divided into small groups. Use these type of songs and rhymes for 'repeat

after me' technique. 'Repeat after me' is a common and popular teaching technique one can find in classrooms. This can be done by asking the children to listen to the teacher or a child and watch the person sing the rhyme while the other children repeat the lines in a similar manner. Singing with actions will also help.

Enabling the children to memorise a poem with understanding becomes easier through snowballing and echo techniques. Rote memory is not going to help much as the children will not know the meaning of the poem. The above techniques make the children memorise without stress.

The National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER) has a number of rhymes, songs and stories in audio form using the techniques and strategies discussed in this paper. They are also available with NCERT (2016) in DVD form. Use rhymes and songs as language inputs through which the children can receive, process and acquire a language as they engage with the language.

## REFERENCES

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