

Socio-emotional Impact of Popular English Nursery Rhymes on Children

Prachi Ghildyal*

Abstract

The quality of the curriculum of a nation may be gauged by its relevance to the country's sociocultural context. The early years are the most significant for a child's overall development. Preschool education is the first stage of organised education. Therefore, the curriculum must aim at providing an emotionally supportive, culturally relevant, and interactive and friendly environment to young learners. This paper tries to sensitise schools, teachers and parents to be cautious about what they expose their children to. It also presents an analysis of English nursery rhymes, a type of content, usually, included in the preschool curriculum. It tries to study the socio-emotional impact of these nursery rhymes on the young minds.

INTRODUCTION

The foundation of lifelong learning, inclusive and equitable quality education lies in the way children are prepared to approach schooling and learning. Research studies suggest that children learn well in language rich, joyful and play based environment (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette and Thomas, 2014). Nursery rhymes have been a part of preschool education in India for decades. They are fun to recite, and thus, can render

a conducive environment to children's holistic development. Language based play can serve as an effective medium to foster development in areas of physical health and well-being, language and cognitive development, and socio-emotional development (Mullen, 2017). However, one needs to be cautious about the socio-emotional impact that these resources have on the young minds.

This paper tries to analyse nursery rhymes, a type of resource often

*Assistant Professor, North East Regional Institute of Education, Shillong, Meghalaya.

used in the preschool curriculum in India. It attempts to sensitise the educational stakeholders, most importantly, parents and teachers, about the kind of rhymes the young minds are exposed to. This, however, is not an exhaustive analysis.

Merely memorising the content is not enough. One needs to ensure whatever children learn is fun, meaningful and useful.

The genesis of many English rhymes reveals that they originated in different cultural contexts and periods. However, it must be noted that the contexts, in which they were first written, were very different from the twenty-first century, and therefore, they may appear incongruous to some extent. Hence, a major determinant of the quality of preschool education would be the curriculum. Among other things, the quality of the curriculum may be gauged by its relevance to the sociocultural context.

Preschoolers in India are parroted to recite a number of nursery rhymes. These may be in the local or regional language, as well as, English, depending on the policy followed by the school and the State. However, quite a number of parents aspire that their children speak in English from a young age due to the social status attached to the language. Therefore, most preschools teach English nursery rhymes, which have originated in different cultural contexts and periods, to children.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse popular English nursery rhymes with respect to their socio-emotional impact on children
- To build a rationale for using socio-emotionally appropriate nursery rhymes in preschool

ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH NURSERY RHYMES

Children, studying in preschool, repeat rhymes after the teacher without understanding the meaning. It is observed that the 'rhyme' only 'rhymes' and helps the children focus just on the 'sounds'. This paper analyses four popular English nursery rhymes, which almost every child attending preschool is parroted in the classroom to recite.

Jack and Jill...

The striking feature of this rhyme is its content. It seems illogical to go uphill to fetch water as it characteristically always flows downwards. Further, the consequences for both Jack and Jill of taking up the task prove to be risky and harmful. However, it is observed that most children enjoy the rhyme and the action lying therein.

*Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.*

Mickey on the railway line...

The rhyme talks about Mickey, a piggy, walking on a railway line. While collecting stones on the railway track, Mickey is knocked down by a train engine. Mickey seems upset over the incident and complains about it to the engine driver, who does not pay heed to it. It seems that the rhyme is implicitly teaching children not to care about others and be indifferent to situations, where a person is in pain or meets an accident. There is ample research on subliminal studies, indicating how attitudes are influenced by imperceptible messages.

*Mickey on the railway picking up stones
Down came an engine and broke Mickey's bones
Ha, said Mickey, that's not fair
Oh, said the engine driver, I don't care.*

Johnny, Johnny...

It is a popular rhyme and probably one of the first that a child learns to recite at school. On the surface, it seems to be a fun rhyme about a naughty little boy named 'Johnny'. However, an in-depth analysis gives a different impression of the father, who makes the child open the mouth to check if

*Johnny, Johnny.
Yes, papa?
Eating sugar?
No, papa.
Telling lies?
No, papa.
Open your mouth.
Ha ha ha!*

he is 'lying'. If the child has actually been eating sugar and denying it, then the negative trait of lying gets communicated. Therefore, if Johnny is not eating sugar and is saying so but the father does not believe him, then this conveys distrust on the part of a parent. However, one may interpret the last line, i.e., "Ha, ha, ha", as a happy ending, emphasising the fun content.

Rain, rain, go away...

This is a fun rhyme, which most children are taught to recite at school. The rhyme was created in England, where rain was a daily affair. This rhyme appears to be in tandem with the expression of children worldwide and India is no exception as many do not want rain to play a spoilsport while they joyfully play outdoor games. However, with India, primarily, being an agricultural country, rain is associated with positive imagery. It is looked forward to by all, especially, children, who enjoy playing in the rain like sailing paper boats on rainwater, etc.

*Rain, rain, go away
Come again another day.
Rain, rain, go away
Little Johnny wants to play.*

CONCLUSION

It may, thus, be inferred that mere memorisation of rhymes makes a child secretly abhor the noble values of empathy, tolerance and sensitivity. It is observed that children simply repeat rhymes without understanding

the meaning. Therefore, it is important to consider the impact of nursery rhymes on children as they implicitly affect their behaviour, thoughts and beliefs. There are several research studies, indicating that the brain may be programmed or influenced subliminally. It needs to be studied

the way the meaning of the rhymes is explained by parents and teachers as it greatly influences the young minds. Moreover, care must be taken in selecting what the young learners are exposed to in the form of rhymes, lullabies and stories, as these shape their core values.

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