The efficacy of songs in the Acquisition of English Articles and Nouns in a Multilingual Setting in Kenya, Africa: A case study of Grade 4 Class in Kenyan Primary Schools

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Abstract

This research was conducted using a pretest-posttest paradigm to test the efficacy of songs in the acquisition of English articles and nouns by learners in a multilingual setting in Kenya, Africa. Two Grade Four classes in two elementary schools, one in an urban area and the other in a rural setting, were sampled for this study. A pretest on articles and noun plural formation was administered in each school, marked and results recorded. The experimental class was exposed to a Task-Based Language teaching method that utilised songs as a tool of teaching, while the control class was exposed to regular teaching. A posttest, the same test administered as a pretest, was given to the two groups. The scores recorded in both tests were analyzed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and analysis presented in tables and graphs. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was then employed. The general finding is that the use of songs in the teaching of English as a second language is effective as attested by the high performance of the experimental classes in the two schools.

Introduction

The acquisition of a second language calls for a set of skills that must be acquired in the early stages of an individual's life (Littlewood, 1987, p.4). Krashen (1981, p.1) notes that a second language is considered to be fully acquired if a speaker can successfully participate in "meaningful conversation." Therefore, meaningful and interesting activities need to be employed so that the acquisition process can be successful. As Brown (2000, p.1) notes:

> Learning a second language is a long and complex undertaking. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting.

In order to appeal to the pupils' learning styles and to make learning interesting, songs, rhymes and games can be effective methods for teaching children a foreign language (Rosova, 2007). In the same vein, Ara (2009) notes that children learn a second language better if they have more opportunities to be exposed to interesting activities. These methods can be employed in children's classes to utilize their ability to learn a second language. Songs, the subject of our study, are one of the methods which can reinforce the grammatical structures taught in the classroom (Salcedo, 2002). Songs, indeed, are essential parts of human culture (Salcedo, 2002). According to Kern (2008), songs can be used in several ways in order to capture children's attention and guide them through the learning environment. Kern (2008) also argues that songs are a vehicle in which children can explore the world and interact with their social environment. As such, songs can be exceptional media and motivator for encouraging children's learning and development in English.

Cook (2007, p. 25) notes that English is a very important language in the whole

world, as it "is now taught as the main foreign language in virtually every country, and is used for business and education." It is also accessible to a substantial proportion of the world's population. English in Kenya is learned throughout the primary school. In standard one to three, English is taught as a subject, while Mother Tongue is used as the medium of instruction. In standard four to eight, English is taught as a subject and is used as the medium of instruction in other subjects (Kenya Institute of Education, 2002). Therefore, the use of songs is critical to the successful teaching and learning of English articles and plural forms for the acquisition of a sufficient command of English.

Using songs, therefore, can be an effective technique in the teaching-learning process, because it can stimulate learners' cognitive function. Songs have become an integral part of our language experience, and if used in consonance with a language lesson, they can be of great value (Schoepp, 2001). Gobbi (2001, p. 23) notes that songs enhance learners' receptivity and can be an effective technique of teaching. Rosova (2007), for example, argues that a language is easier to express in songs than in speech. Pupils, therefore, cannot easily understand the theoretical concepts of grammar rules of a language, and, as a result, learning rules confuse them even more. This paper, therefore, determines the effectiveness of songs in the teaching of articles and plural forms in English as a Second Language at the primary level in the English curriculum in Kenya.

The study of the English article system has gained currency in recent years (Morrett, 2011). While some languages have articles, many languages, among them many African languages, do not determine object definiteness or indefiniteness based on an article system (Morrett, 2011). The popularity of the topic arises from several reasons one of which is that English articles are among the free morphemes that occur most frequently in English (Master, 1997). Master (1997) notes that errors with these two words automatically mark a person out as a non-native speaker and call into question the person's general competence in their English. Master (1997, p. 216) puts it succinctly, "imperfect control (of the use of articles) may … suggest imperfect knowledge." It is, therefore, imperative for learners of English as a second language to learn the usage of articles and plural nouns using songs as the media. As noted by Butler (2002, p.475), the correct use of articles is dependent on an improved grasp of the notion of countability.

Statement of Research

Songs have been shown to be effective teaching tools in the area of foreign language instruction (Simpson and Lynn, 2002:1). However, studies on the use of songs as pedagogical tools in the teaching of English grammar and, specifically, articles and nouns in a classroom have been rare (Medina, 2002). Rosova (2007), for example, notes that the only place music and song is slow to catch on has been in school. "The same view is also shared by Falioni (1993:98) who states that the use of music use in the foreign language classroom has long been valued, but "all too often, music in the classroom has been relegated to recreation and entertainment status.

The premise of this paper is that the introduction of songs in the teaching of articles and plural forms in English will help language acquisition. Ionin and Wexler (2003), for example, claim that learners of English as a second language (L2) have difficulty acquiring English articles. In particular, learners often use the articles inappropriately as they do not appear to have mastered the semantics of English articles. The understanding of articles in English will also affect the mastery of nouns.

It is also the option of this study that although the use of songs is generally endorsed by English-as-a-Second-Language teachers, few empirical studies have formally assessed songs' actual effectiveness on language learning and,

specially, how songs are effective vehicles in the teaching of articles and plural forms in English. This study was therefore intended to fill these gaps in the body of knowledge.

Rationale of the study

A lot of research has investigated the benefit of using English songs for young learners in language acquisition (Hsu, 2002). Moriya (1988), for example, looks at the value of using songs for pronunciation practice with Asian learners of English; Read (2007) and Saricoban and Metin (2000) investigate how songs can help to improve listening skills of the young learners, while Domoney (1993) exam the using of pop music in EFL students. However, as also noted in the introduction of this paper, songs and their effectiveness in the teaching of articles and nouns in English have not been extensively studied. Medina (1993) notes that using music to teach a foreign language or a second language is more than merely a mood-setter or entertainment factor. Falioni (1993:98), on the other hand, notes that "practically all grammar points can be found in music texts, and the texts also offer a wide variety of vocabulary." It is with this in mind that this paper zeros in on the teaching of articles in English, using songs as a vehicle for their acquisition.

In addition, this study will be significant for language policy and all related stakeholders like teachers, teacher supervisors, teacher trainers, curriculum developers and assessment specialists since the importance of songs in education cannot be gainsaid. Saricoban and Metin (2000) also note that songs are one of the most interesting and culturally rich resources that teachers and teacher trainers can employ in a language classroom to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary and rhythm.

Moreover, the use of songs in teaching can provide students with authentic activities, authentic language, motivation, good pronunciation, new vocabulary and opportunities to use the language (Ward, 1991). Murphey (1992:3), for example, believes that music has the power to engrave itself into our brains, stating that "songs work on our short-and long-term memory" and are, therefore, adequate tools for using in the language classroom. Since music is part of the student's everyday life, using it to learn the second language can enhance student learning (Shtakser, 2001). Learning English through songs, therefore, also provides a relaxing atmosphere for students (Lo and Fai 1998:8) since many activities which employ songs can reinforce the recalling and retention process as they are highly memorable and motivating (Saricoban and Metin, 2000).

Studies on Songs in Language Teaching

There is a variety of educational literature discussing the use of songs in the English-as-Second-Language class-room (Kramer, 2001). For example, Ara (2009) explores the use of songs, rhymes and games in teaching English to young learners in Bangladesh. He argues that songs, rhymes and games can be very effective tools for teaching children a foreign language and suggests that they should be incorporated at the primary level English curriculum in Bangladesh.

Brand (2007), on the other hand, explain how songs are used in sensitizing Chinese English as Second Language learners to the importance of effective intercultural communication. Brand (2007) notes that songs not only teach vocabulary, grammar, rhythmic speech, phrases, and meanings, but they are a sort of ambassador of a culture. Songs are embedded within a culture, its values, symbols, and beliefs and, therefore, offer students of English-as-a-Second-Language lessons in grasping the nature and style of a particular culture (Brand, 2007)

Turnipsed (1976:1) notes that: "auditory discrimination has been found to be the 'leading factor' in reading readiness. Using an experimental group and a control

group for his research, Turnipsed (1976), found out that the experimental group scored significantly higher than the control group in reading, mathematics, and language arts test. Cristofaro (2011) examines language learning through songs, Karaoke and internet. Other studies by teachers in the United States (Baez, 1993), Taiwan (Katchen, 1988), Mexico (Domoney and Harris, 1993) and South Africa (Puhl, 1989) reinforce the importance of songs and music activities in the teaching of English-as-a-Second-Language. Could this be the same in Kenyan schools where English is learned as a second language in a multilingual setup?

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study was designed to investigate the relationship between an independent variable (the efficacy of songs in teaching articles and nouns in English) and linguistic dependent variables (performance of learners in English). This research was conducted using a pretest-posttest paradigm to test the efficacy of songs in the acquisition of English articles and plural forms in a multilingual setting.

Sites, Population and Sample Size

Two primary schools, one from Nairobi County, Thika Road Christian School, and the other from Nyeri County, Karatina District Education Board Primary School, were purposively sampled for this study. To achieve the aims of the study, data were collected from pupils of Grade 4 classes studying English-as-a-Second-Language. The underlying principle of purposive sampling method entails identifying in advance the target variables. The researchers visited the schools for permission from the head teachers to undertake the research as well as to ascertain that the learners had not been introduced to the two areas of grammar in Grade 4. During the visit, the researchers established that there were trained teachers of English in the two institutions. The researchers also obtained information on the class composition and learner characteristics from schools records. The two primary schools were coded as School A and B respectively. The first school, Thika Road Chirstian School, was coded as School A. Two Grade 4 classes of School B were used for the study, and each class had a research sample of 30 learners. That is Group 1a and Group 1b. The second school, Karatina District Education Board Primary school, was coded as School B. Two Grade 4 classes of School B were also used for the study, and each class had a research sample of 52 learners.

Predictor Variable: The Use of Songs in the Teaching of Articles and Nouns in English

The use of songs in the teaching of articles and nouns was the independent variable in the study. Thirty learners in School A were all in Grade 4, while the 52 learners in School B were also in the same Grade 4. The same songs for experimental classes, pretest, posttest, marking schemes were employed to the two schools.

Data collection Procedures

Pre-test and post-test were administered by the two researchers to obtain the scores for this study. Since the aim of this research was to test the efficacy of songs in the acquisition of English articles and nouns in a multilingual setting in Kenya, the tests were developed based on the revised English syllabus (Kenya Institute of Education, 2002). A pretest was administered to the two Grade 4 classes, marked and results recorded. The experimental class was exposed to a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) that utilised songs as a methodology of teaching, while the control class was exposed to regular teaching. A posttest, the same test administered as a pretest, was given to the two groups. The two researchers scored the posttests and generated quantitative data which have been analyzed.

Methods for Quantifying the Linguistic Dependent Variables and Data Analysis

All learners in Schools A and B were taught the same topics of articles and nouns in English. Test 1 (cf. Appendix A) was based on articles, while Test 2 (cf. Appendix B) was on nouns in English. Each test contained twenty questions. The tests were developed based on revised English syllabus (Kenya Institute of Education, 2002). The pre-test was administered by the two researchers to School A and School B during the first day. The pre-tests were marked and the scores recorded. On the second day, the experimental groups, that is, School Aa and School Ba were exposed to the topics of articles and the formation of plural forms using songs as a teaching method for a period of 35 minutes. The two songs which captured the rules of grammar and plural forms were used to explain the grammatical rules. The control groups, that is School A Ab and School Bb, were only taught the rules of articles and formation of plural forms for 35 minutes, but were not exposed to the use of songs as a method of teaching grammar in English. On the third day, a post-test was administered to both School A and School B. The post-test was the same test administered as the pretest. The researchers scored the pre-tests and post-tests and generated quantitative data for analysis.

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). There was need for the linguistic data to be analyzed statistically to establish whether there was any correlation between the use of songs as a method of teaching articles and nouns in English and performances. To accomplish this, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was employed. The data were thus further analyzed for means, standard deviations and *t*-test for significance. The Levene's Test for Equality of Variances demonstrated whether the observed differences between two sample means were purely random or whether there were real differences between the means. In the application of the Levene's Test for equality of Variances, the researchers wished to see whether variability in the dependent linguistic variables was statistically significant so that it could be concluded that the means were different. The results were then presented in tables showing means and standard deviations and levels of statistical significance. The test scores for both experimental and control groups in the two schools are in Appendices E,F, G and H.

Finding

The tables below present the results of data analysis and the interpretation, and the discussion of the emerging patterns is based on these results.

Table 1: Article-Test-Group Statistics

Using of song		N	Mean	Std. Deviations	Std. Error Mean
Article test	Experimental	30	1.9333	1.43679	.26232
	Control	30	-.1000	1.80707	.32993

From the table above, the means of the experimental group and the control group are 1.9333 and -1000 respectively, whereas their respective standard deviations are 1.43679 and 1.80707. Compared to the two samples, there is a higher mean improvement with sample that learned using songs than the sample that learned without.

Table 2: Independent Samples Test for Articles

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	**t-test for Equality of Means**							
									95% confidence interval of difference
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Article Test									
Equal variances assumed	.922	.341	4.824	58	.000	2.03333	.42150	1.18961	2.87706
Equal variances not assumed			4.824	55.197	.000	2.03333	.42150	1.18869	2.87797

The above table excerpt from SPSS indicates that the degree of freedom is 58. Finding the critical t at 58 degrees of freedom at 0.05 confidence level is 2.02. Since the computed t test is 4.824 which significantly greater than 2.02, then we conclude that there is a significant difference between the means of the two variables. The difference in the means is 2.0333, and the standard deviations indicate high efficacy of songs in the learning of articles. The t test confirms a significant difference between the means of the two groups. Generally, the results indicate a very high efficacy of the songs in the teaching of articles.

Table 3: Group Statistics for Nouns

Using of song		**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviations**	**Std. Error Mean**
Noun test improved score	Experimental	30	1.8333	1.46413	.26731
	Control	30	.3000	1.29055	.23562

From the table above, the mean of the experimental and the control groups are 1.8333 and .3000 respectively, whereas their respective standard deviations and 1.46413 and 1.29055. The difference in means is 1.5333 which is quite high. The t test also indicates that the teaching of the nouns using songs improves the result a lot. Generally, the teaching of nouns is highly improved by the use of songs. It is even more pronounced in articles than nouns.

Table 4: Independence Samples Test for Nouns

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	**t-test for Equality of Means**						
								95% confidence interval of difference
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Article Test									
Equal variances assumed	.083	.774	4.303	58	.000	1.53333	.35633	.82006	2.24661
Equal variances not assumed			4.303	57.100	.000	1.53333	.35633	.81982	2.24685

The above table excerpt from SPSS indicates the degrees of freedom are 58. Finding the critical t at 58 degrees of freedom at 0.05 confidence level is 2.02. Since the computed t test is 4.303, which is greater than 2.02, then we conclude that there is a significant difference between the means of the two variables.

Statistical Analysis for Data Collected in School B

Table 5: Group Statistics for Nouns

Using of song		**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviations**	**Std. Error Mean**
Noun test improved score	Experimental	52	6.2885	1.44625	.20056
	Control	52	3.3462	1.23486	.17124

From the table above, the mean of the experimental group and the control group are 6.2885 and 3.3462 respectively, whereas their respective standard deviations are 1.44625 and 1.23486. The mean differences between the experimental and controlled group are 2.9423 which quite high. It, therefore, means that the use of song in the teaching of articles and plural forms brought a lot of improvement in the performance which is also reflected on the large value of t of 11.157 compared to the critical value of 1.98.

Table 6: Independent Samples Test for Articles

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	**t-test for Equality of Means**						
								95% confidence interval of difference
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Article Test									
Equal variances assumed	2.097	.151	11.157	102	.000	2.94231	.26372	2.41922	3.46540
Equal variances not assumed			11.157	99.555	.000	2.94231	.26372	2.41907	3.46555

The above table excerpt from SPSS indicates that the degree of freedom is 102. The critical t at 102 degrees of freedom at 0.05 confidence level is 1.98. Since the computed t test is 11.157 which is significantly greater than 1.98; then we conclude that there is a significant difference between the means of the two variables. From the table above, the means of the experimental group and the control group are 4.9615 and 3.34627115 respectively, whereas their respective standard deviations are 1.87827 and 1.22613. The difference in the means of the two groups is 1.2500. This is slightly lower than that of the articles, but there is generally a high significance after the teaching of songs. The same is reflected by the t-test.

Table 7: Group Statistics for Nouns

Using of song		**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviations**	**Std. Error Mean**
Noun test improved score	Experimental	52	4.9615	1.87827	.26047
	Control	52	3.7115	1.22613	.17003

From the table above, the means of the experimental group and the control group are 4.9615 and 3.34627115 respectively, whereas their respective standard deviations are 1.87827 and 1.22613 respectively.

Table 8: Independent Samples Test for Nouns

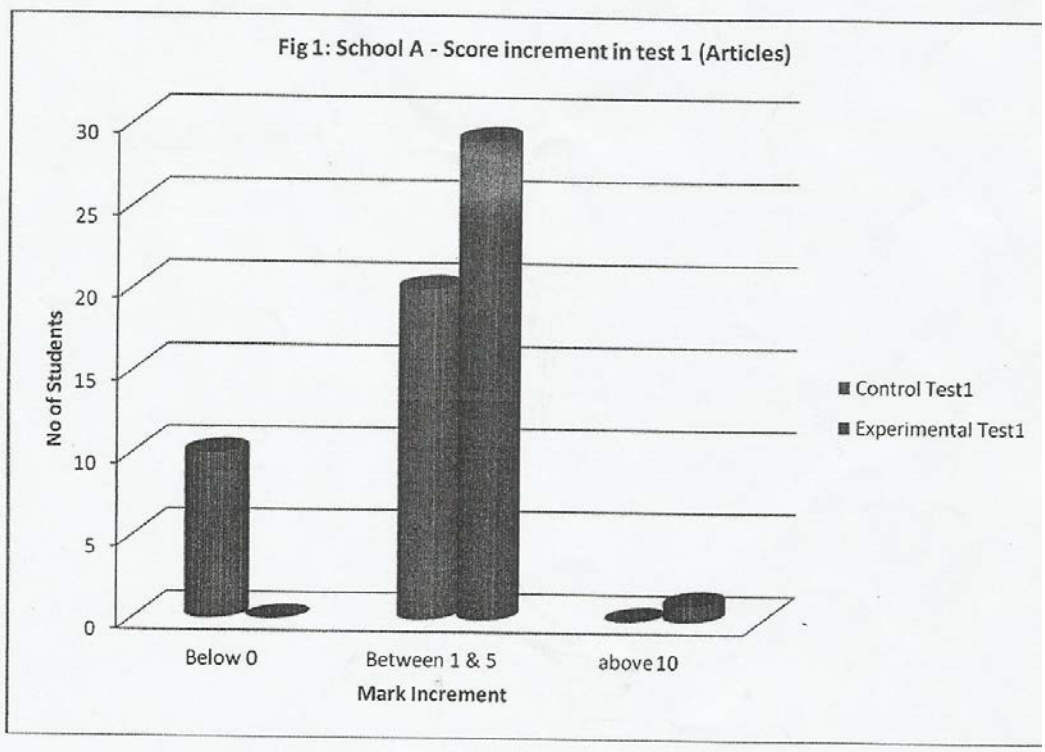
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	**t-test for Equality of Means**						
								95% confidence interval of difference
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Article Test									
Equal variances assumed	4.558	.035	4.019	102	.000	1.25000	.31106	.63302	1.86698
Equal variances not assumed			4.019	87.786	.000	1.25000	.31106	.63182	1.86818

The above table excerpt from SPSS indicates that the degree of freedom of 102. The critical t at 102 degrees of freedom 0.05 confidence level is 1.98. Since the computed t test is 4.019, which is significantly greater than 1.98, then we conclude that there is a significant difference between the means of the two variables.

Further, the study found out that there was improvement of performance in the experimental groups in the two schools as indicated in the tables below.

Table 9: Improvement of Scores in School A (Articles)

	Control		**Experimental**	
Mark Increment range	**Control Test 1**	**Control Test 2**	**Experimental Test 1**	**Experimental Test 2**
Below 0	10	9	0	1
Between 1 and 5	20	21	29	28
above 10	0	0	1	1


Fig 1: School A - Score increment in test 1 (Articles)
No of Students
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Below 0
Between 1 & 5
above 10
Mark Increment
Control Test1
Experimental Test1

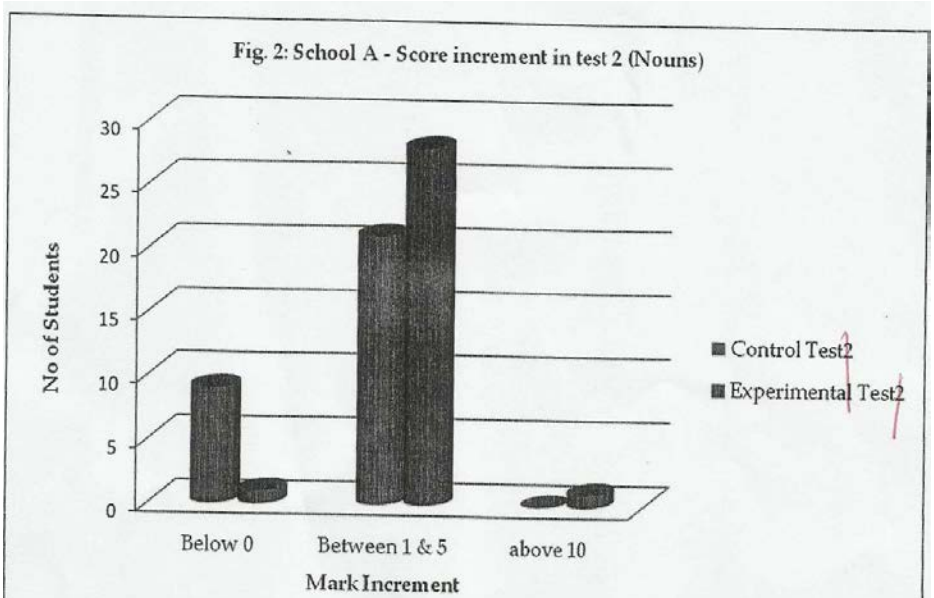
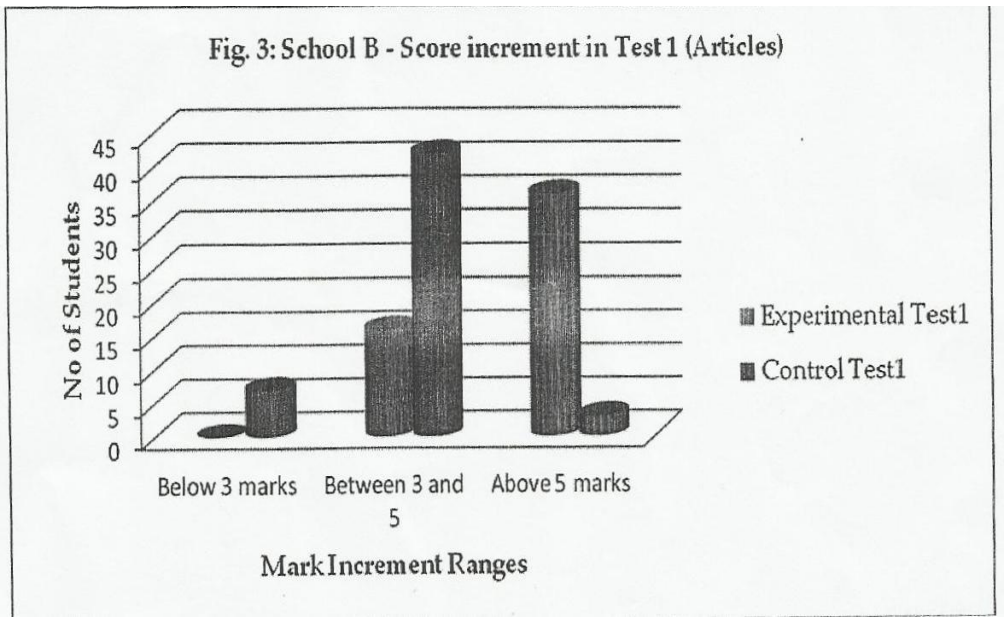
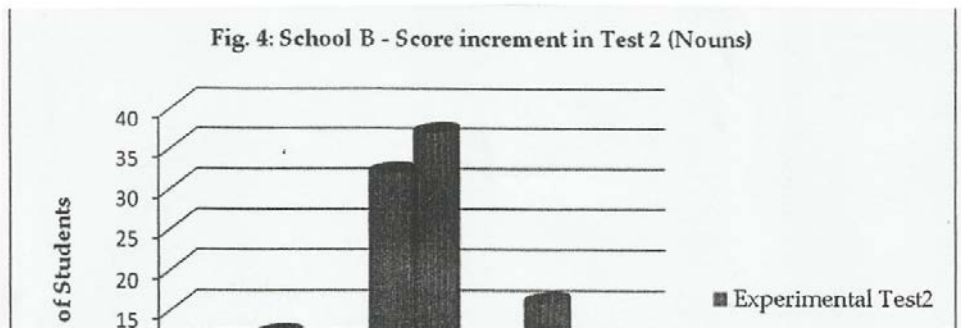

Fig. 2: School A - Score increment in test 2 (Nouns)
No of Students
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Below 0
Between 1 & 5
above 10
Mark Increment
Control Test2
Experimental Test2

Table 10: Improvement in Scores in School B

	Experimental		Control	
Mark Increment range	**Experimental Test 1**	**Experimental Test 2**	**Control Test 1**	**Control Test 2**
Below3 marks	0	4	7	12
Between 3 and 5	16	32	42	37
above 5 marks	36	16	3	3





Discussion of Findings

The general finding of the study indicates that the use of songs in the teaching of grammar is effective and subsequently influences performance. This suggests that there are many benefits to be derived in using the songs in language teaching, thus concurring with what many educators have repeatedly noted (Curtain and Pesola, 1994 and Schoepp, 2001).

Linguistic functions help to enlarge the vocabulary background of children, develop pupils' listening and speaking skills, introduce and familiarize children with the target language culture, improve children's pronunciation, teach various language functions, recall grammatical points and develop auditory discrimination (Schoepp, 2001). Songs also develop the linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Murphey, 1992). According to Lo and Fai (1998), songs are able to change the monotonous mood in the class and with the smoothing effect of music; they provide a conducive learning environment so that students can develop their linguistic skills more easily. In this way, songs help students to develop confidence for language learning (Sahin, 2008). According to Schoepp (2001), since songs feature examples of daily language, they can help students get prepared for the language they will encounter in daily life. It was observed during the research that informed our study that the learners interacted in English freely with one another as they worked on the tune and agreed on the best mode of presentation, thus enhancing development of vocabulary and perhaps use of the very structures being focused on in class.

Secondly, affective function add fun to learning, motivates children to participate, help teachers get closer to their children, stimulate children's interest in the new language and create a lively atmosphere in the language class (Schoepp, 2001). For the affective aspect, song may play a joyful role which brings entertainment atmosphere (Gregersen, 2003). According to Schoepp (2001), perhaps the greatest benefit to using songs in the classroom is that they can be fun. Pleasure for its own sake is an important part of learning a language, something which is often overlooked by teachers, and songs can add interest to the classroom routine and potentially improve student motivation (Schoepp, 2001). During our research, we observed that the learners enjoyed singing, and this provided a conducive learning atmosphere.

Thirdly, songs may also have cognitive functions, they might enhance learner's memorization by the repetition of songs in cognition perspective (Schoepp, 2001). Music therapy also strongly supports and facilitates inclusion of children with special needs in various educational settings (Wilson, 2002). Songs offer many codes that strengthen student memory, including choruses, rhymes and melodies (Maley, 1987). Therefore, these codes in songs increase the children's cognitive functionality that is important for language

learning and teaching of songs in language teaching. Ayotte (2004:10) argues that both music and language share the "same auditory, perceptive, and cognitive mechanisms that impose a structure on auditory information received by the senses". The learners in our study could have been helped much in remembering rules of the article use and plural formation by the songs that they had learned and sung.

Implication

The findings of this paper indicate that the use of songs could have implications in the teaching of articles and nouns to grade 4 learners in English. The findings could, therefore, persuade administrators of the value of using songs in a second-language classroom. Specifically, the addition of songs in lesson planning on a regular basis could have a long-term influence on language students' performance (Sevik, 2011). Teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers and assessment specialists should work together, and a proper coordination should be made up to the use of songs in the teaching of English become effective (Brewster and Ellis, 2004).

Jensen (2000) claims that many teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about songs as many teacher-training programmes do not train the use of songs in language teaching. Therefore, teachers of English as a Second Language should undergo in-service programme to train them on the use of songs as a methodology of teaching English. This view is consonant with Sharpe's (2001) view that while planning the primary modern foreign language curriculum, oral methods such as songs should also be included in the curriculum. Bourke (2006) and Halliwell (1993) also emphasize the importance of songs in the curriculum by arguing that a syllabus for young learners should be experimentally appropriate. Thus, it should contain songs, chants and rhymes. Indeed, Rumley (1999) succinctly argues that songs help children to learn as they provide a safe, non-threatening atmosphere for students, who are normally tense when speaking English in a classroom setting (Saricoban and Metin, 2000). This study strengthens the previous research findings about the role of songs in teaching English to young learners.

Moreover, Saricoban and Metin (2000) point out that the use of songs is enhanting and culturally rich and should be used in language classrooms. Songs also offer a change from routine classroom activities and develop students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Songs can be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives and adverbs (Saricoban and Metin, 2000).

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the efficacy of songs in the teaching of grammar in elementary schools, nothing that there are many benefits to be accrued from the same. The statistical analysis has shown that there is significant improvement in performance in the tests given to the groups that apply songs in their learning. This finding implies that teachers of languages should utilize songs in their language classrooms for maximum enjoyment and acquisition of various language structures being focused on. In so doing, teachers will be creating a conductive learning atmosphere for their learners, and this in turn will help in the improvement of learners' performance.

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