



Using Action Song to Improve the Ability in Using Punctuation Among Year Three Pupils

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the use of action song to improve the usage of punctuation among Year 3 pupils in a primary school in Johor. The whole class of eighteen pupils were selected as the target group. The teaching strategy comprised of the action song and the signs of punctuation marks such as full stop and comma. This study adopts a classroom action research. Tests, teacher's reflective journal and interview were used to gather the data for the study. The findings showed improvement when comparing the pupils' results in the tests before and after the implementation of action songs they were able to use the punctuations of full stop and comma correctly in the sentences. The findings also showed that the pupils were motivated to learn English and the strategy used improved the teacher's teaching practice. A few suggestions were given to improve the strategy for the next cycle of action research.

Keywords: action song; punctuation; English language

A. Introduction

In an English language classroom, song is often used by teachers to help their students to acquire a second language. Through songs, students can learn new vocabulary, grammar, and they can also improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing (Neila, 2013). In this study, song is used to improve the pupils' usage of punctuation in writing.

Punctuation is used in writing to imitate speech. When we speak, usually we use voice projection, body language and even gestures to indicate our meaning. For example, when we ask a question, our voice rises at the end of a sentence. This rising tone is a vocal question mark. When we make a statement our voice drops at the end of the sentence. This flatter tone is a vocal period. When we verbally list items we pause after each item. This verbal pause is a vocal comma. Similarly, punctuation is one of the most helpful tools to use in writing in order to make a sentence clearly delivered but it is a problem faced by the pupils in writing. According to Muslim (2014), several shortcomings which have covered most of the basics of good writing among which are paragraphing, ideas, grammar, spelling, punctuation and handwriting. It shows that punctuation is one of the basics of good writing skills. Dunaway (2013) explained that children feel they don't even need to learn the rules of grammar, punctuation, and

capitalisation. However, all these rules need to be learnt in constructing meaningful sentences especially punctuation. Above all, between sentences, the most common marks of punctuation are comma and full stop.

When it comes to punctuation, pupils sometimes have doubt to use it. Or even worse, they seem to diminish the role of punctuation to a level that leads to the complex effects it can have. When marking students' exercises, the lack or inappropriate use of punctuation marks has always been penalised as part of grammar errors because the true meaning of the sentences is not delivered well.

Based on my past teaching experiences during the practicum, I found that pupils are careless and do not see the importance of putting full stop at the end of the sentence. They often forgot to put the full stop although their teacher has reminded them to do so. According to Straus (2008), a full stop is used at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement. However, the pupils tend to leave the full stop although the task is only asking them to write the sentences.

The same problem happens when pupils do not place a comma between items in listing. Pupils do not notice comma is a valuable and useful tool in a sentence which helps them to separate things in a list. As Straus (2008) stressed that to avoid confusion, we need to use commas to separate words and word groups with a series of three or more. However the pupils neglected the commas between each item and they write those words continuously in a sentence. When teachers read the sentence, this can cause confusion due to the lack of punctuation marks. Therefore, it is the aim of this study to use action song as a strategy to help pupils in the correct usage of punctuation marks especially comma and full stop.

For preliminary investigation, I designed a diagnostic test related to punctuation of full stop and comma in writing. In the diagnostic test, I constructed five questions regarding full stop and comma. The test was given to a class of 18 pupils in which they needed to rewrite the sentences by putting the correct punctuations. Based on the results of the diagnostic test, I found that 13 pupils scored lower than 50% in the use of comma and 4 pupils scored lower than 50% in the use of full stop. This showed that most pupils had problem in using punctuations especially comma.

According to Alker (2000), omission or inappropriate use of punctuation can be the result of poor understanding of what a sentence is. Pupils who cannot identify the right place to put comma in sentences will encounter problem in constructing a sentence. Within sentences, the most common mark is the comma. This problem is due to the reason that pupils do not understand the significance of placing comma in separating things in sentences. Pupils must use comma to separate items in a list or a series. A series or a list is defined as three or more. If there is a list of three or more items, they should use a comma to separate them. To overcome this problem, I have come up with an idea of using action song to improve the usage of punctuation among the pupils.

The following research questions were formulated in order to meet the research objectives.

1. How does action song improve pupils' understanding in using full stop and comma correctly in the sentences?
2. How does the use of action song increase the pupils' motivation in learning English?
3. How does the use of action song improve my teaching practice?

B. Literature Review

1. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences

Action song is children's songs that are sung with finger, hand and body movements. It offers children with a wide variety of fun and playful ways to learn language. In this research, I adopt Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence (2006) with specified learning styles such as bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and linguistic learning styles when I teach the pupils on the use of punctuation marks using the action song.

When singing the action song, the pupils move their body. This involves the learning style of bodily-kinaesthetic when they use their hands to hold the signs of full stop and comma while singing the punctuation action song which I had adapted from a children's song. Davis (2007) stated that the kinaesthetic learners use movement to enhance hand-eye coordination and concentration. As we know that, pupils' concentration is very limited. Therefore, through movement, this kind of learners helps themselves to keep the momentum to stay focused in the lesson.

According to Dixon & McPhee (2001), they view that ability to perform and respond to music is independent from other intelligences. Children love to use their voices, bodies and

imagination when they sing along and enjoy the music. Clark (2011) explains learners with learning style of music are sensitive to pitch, melody, rhythm, and tone as in a composer. Usually this type of children loves music but they are also sensitive to sounds in their environments. Their performance in study will be better if there is music in the background.

Besides, interpersonal also acts as one of the learning styles to be implemented in the action song. When singing the action song, the pupils interact and help their peers when they need to raise the respective signs according to the lyrics they sang. According to Dixon & McPhee (2001), when people have developed interpersonal intelligence to a high degree, they often attain high social status. Without the use of this intelligence, we are unable to exist as social beings. As long as the pupils interact with each other while singing the action song, I believe that this strategy can help them to improve their interpersonal skill.

Another learning style is linguistic. The lyric in the song requires the pupils to read before they could sing the song. This type of learning style is sensitive to the meaning and order of words as in a poet (Clark, 2011). The lyrics of the song contain words used effectively. Normally, the pupils at a young age group have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words. They like to read, play word games, and make up poetry or stories. By using the lyrics of the song, they can be taught by saying the words and reading the lyrics together. Regarding the use of punctuation action song as the strategy, I can see that the song could help this kind of children to improve their understanding towards punctuation usage because they indirectly comprehend the content of the song through singing activity.

2. Usage of Punctuation in Writing

Punctuation is the system of signs or symbols given to a reader to show how a sentence is constructed and how it should be read. Correct punctuation is essential for clear and effective writing. It helps reader to understand the writer's message. As Krizan et al. (2010) stated that when we write, punctuation helps our readers understand our message. Punctuation tells our readers where one thought ends and the next begin; it helps emphasise ideas and clarify meaning. Therefore, it is necessary for the pupils to have full understanding of punctuation marks especially full stop and comma. The basic signs of punctuations are comma, full stop, capital letters, exclamation mark, and question mark. Pontecorvo et al. (2014) said that today the normativity of the spelling of words is not found in the use of punctuation marks. Except for a rather limited list of compulsory conventions (e.g., initial capital letter; full stop at the end of a paragraph, followed by a capital letter; comma in a list of nouns), the rest is a matter of choice.

I identified this problem during my practicum in the previous school when the pupils did not put full stop at the end of sentence even though it was so simple for them. They did not see the significance of putting the full stop in sentences. Besides, the pupils also encountered the problem in separating the items in a list because they did not comprehend the usage of comma in sentence. Teachers are often confused by the pupils when reading their sentences which contained items in a list. Sometimes, pupils just put the comma in the sentence wrongly. According to Alker (2000), both primary and secondary teachers believed that a lack of understanding of where to place punctuation and of its purpose was a major factor with pupils who experienced difficulties. Pupils tend to neglect full stop or comma because they did not comprehend the function of those punctuations in writing. This factor contributes to the existence of punctuation mistake happened in written language. Pupils who understand and know the purpose of writing and punctuation can punctuate correctly by placing those full stops and comma in the right place. This is supported by Alker (2000) that punctuation is used with greater accuracy when the pupils are motivated and have a clear sense of purpose and reader, as an example when they write letters and news reports.

Awad (2012) explained where many times the tone is ignored, the readers are free to interpret the tone the way they want and this may lead to confusing situations, and it is worse than grammatical mistakes when students keep making mistake in placing the punctuation. Awad (2012) also agreed that punctuation is an occupational hazard for almost any teacher, as hundreds of hours are given over correcting the vagrant punctuation of students. Correcting pupils' mistake due to punctuation problems has become the routine of teacher nowadays. Teacher needs to find solution to curb this situation from happening because there are other topics in English that need to be emphasised rather that keep reminding the same old mistake in the class.

3. Using Action Song in Classroom

I had chosen action song as the strategy because song can motivate the pupils to learn indirectly. As stated by Neila (2013), music has always been very important in her students' learning process. They feel more confident when using songs in the English lessons. They didn't feel pressured to talk in English, or shy if they had to sing in front of others, it felt natural to them. Krouse (1988) also agreed that with active singing in the classroom, the students discover new language structures and vocabulary incidentally and spontaneously and they can transfer that to conversation situations.

Besides, songs also have proved that it is one of the ways in learning which makes pupils to acquire the knowledge because it helps children to listen to it in a relax mood and enjoy it at the meantime. According to Yau (2015), songs have proved to be the most impressive characteristics of ESL programmes, that they are helpful listening materials, and the most relaxing and language learning strategy for young learners of English. In addition, they are vital and indispensable elements of English learning and teaching in young learners' scenario.

I found that song could help pupils to remember the cues when it came to punctuation. This is because song can help the children learn in a fun way. After seeing how pupils learned and interacted between each other during the English lessons when I exposed them to singing English songs, I decided to create something personal and meaningful based on real work and real experiences that can be used as a reference in future teaching situations.

C. Methodology

1. Research Design

The research design is action research. Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) explained that action research is a research done by particular people on their own work, to help them improve what they do, including how they work with and for others. Zeni (2001) also supported that action research involves practitioners in studying their own professional practice and framing their own questions and it has the immediate goal to assess, develop or improve their practice.

The model used for this study is Kemmis & McTaggart (1988) action research model. They proposed a spiral model comprising of four steps: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The figure below shows the steps I had taken to carry out this action research.

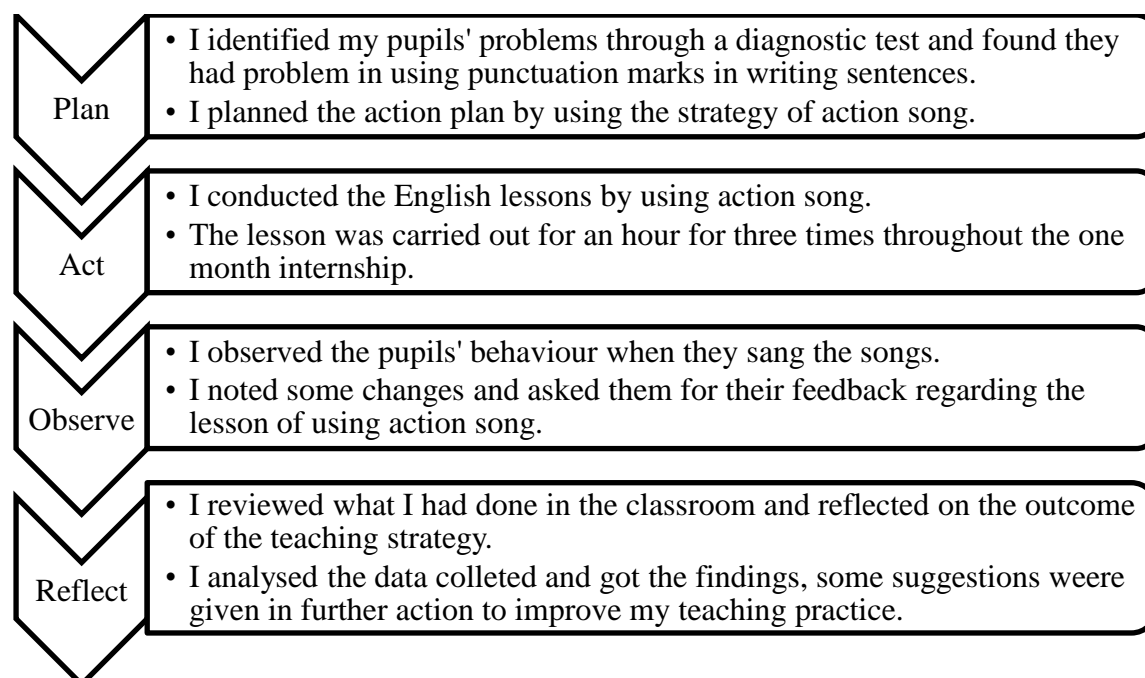


Figure 1: The Four Steps in Action Research Cycle

2. Participants

The targeted participants were eighteen pupils from a primary school in Johor, Malaysia. They were in Year 3 and in an average of nine years old. They had low proficiency in English and did not have motivation to learn the subject. I taught them as a teacher trainee during the 12-week practicum. Based on the information I gained from their English teacher, half of the pupils were involved in the Literacy and Numeracy (LINUS) programme in which these pupils are poor in the basic skills of reading, writing and counting. They could not read and pronounce words

correctly without teacher's guidance. The pupils also did not understand simple English words such as "search", "around" and "lucky". These participants did not practise and use English at all though during English period in school.

3. Procedure of Data Collection

The strategy that I applied for the target group was by using action song to teach the cues in placing full stop and comma correctly in sentences. Since the participants could not remember where they must put punctuation of full stop and comma in sentences, I changed some lyrics which contained examples for each punctuation involved.

At first, I administered a test before the implementation took place. By using this test, I gave them marks based on the full stop and comma which were used correctly. Their result would be compared with the result of another test that would be given later.

Then, I asked the participants to sing 'If You Are Happy' song. This song is popular and the participants could sing it easily. Then, the participants were asked to do the action while singing the song. The participants sang the action song repeatedly so that they were familiar with it.

After that, I introduced the adapted action song which followed the rhythm of 'If You Are Happy'. I asked them to read the lyrics and explained each line of the song which was related to the punctuation and showed the signs of full stop and comma which were found in the lyrics of that song. I adapted the lyrics so that the pupils could remember the cues to use full stop and comma at the right places in the sentences. While singing the songs the participants were given the signs of full stop and comma and they raised the correct sign at the right part of the lyric. Below is the lyric of the adapted song:

If you finish a sentence,
You put full stop.
Full stop! (raise full stop sign)

If you finish a sentence,
You put full stop.
Full stop! (raise full stop sign)

Leman eats an ice cream
Full stop at the end,
Leman eats an ice cream (full stop)

If you want to list items,
You use comma.
Comma! (raise comma sign)

If you want to list items,
You use comma.
Comma! (raise comma sign)

Ice cream (comma) yogurt (comma) sandwich (comma) and milk (full stop)

I wrote reflective journals after each lesson to identify my strength and weaknesses in the lesson. I also wrote down their behaviour and responses while singing the song. The information gathered would help me to improve my teaching practice.

Next, I administered another test to the participants after the implementation. The marks of both tests were compared to see the differences before and after the intervention.

Lastly, the interview session was conducted by asking the participants regarding their opinions regarding the action song and English lesson. The questions were asked in dual language which were English and Malay and the responses of the participants were jotted down and recorded. The next process that I needed to do was to translate the responses to English and to transcribe the interview and did the coding process to find out the emerging themes.

4. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were tests, teacher's reflective journal and interview. I chose the tests to collect data because I could see the differences of pupils' performance before and after the implementation of the strategy. According to Cheeseman & McDonough (2013), teachers need to fulfil their school requirements for "topic" assessment which often took the

form of pre- and post-evaluations. Both tests used the same questions. The test consisted of ten questions which required participants to rewrite the sentences by using comma and full stop correctly in the sentences. It was designed with the supervision of the lecturer and checked by both lecturer and the English teacher in school. The scores for both tests were shown in a table to make them more organised the results were compared to see the pupils' improvement in using the punctuation marks after the implementation.

I wrote the reflective journal after every lesson to reflect about the teaching strategy regarding punctuation of full stop and comma and any new idea. According to Borg (2001), the collective message emerging from this work is that reflective writing can provide much insight into the personal and often implicit processes which teachers experience in their work and development, and that these written accounts have benefits for the writer. Therefore, reflective journal helped me to reflect on my experiences and improve my teaching practice.

Lastly, I carried out a semi-structured interview to gather the data for this research. According to Harris & Brown (2010), in a semi-structured interview, interviewers begin with a small set of open-ended questions, but spend considerable time probing participant responses, encouraging them to provide detail and clarification; these data are generally analysed qualitatively. The questions were asked by using Malay Language and they were translated to English. The pupils' answers were written and recorded during the interview session. By using interview, I believed that the participants could give detail answer for each question. This type of method would enable me to get the participants' opinion on whether the action song helped in motivating them to learn punctuations.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

After all the needed data had been gathered, I analysed those data according to their procedure. This step was so important to see whether the strategy had brought any improvement to the target group in using full stop and comma correctly in the sentences. The pre-test and post-test were analysed descriptively while teacher's reflective journal and interview were analysed qualitatively through the coding process until themes were emerged.

(a) Tests

The questions given for the tests before and after the implementation were the same. These tests were given to see the improvement of the participants before and after the implementation of action song. The result of the tests is shown in the bar graph below:

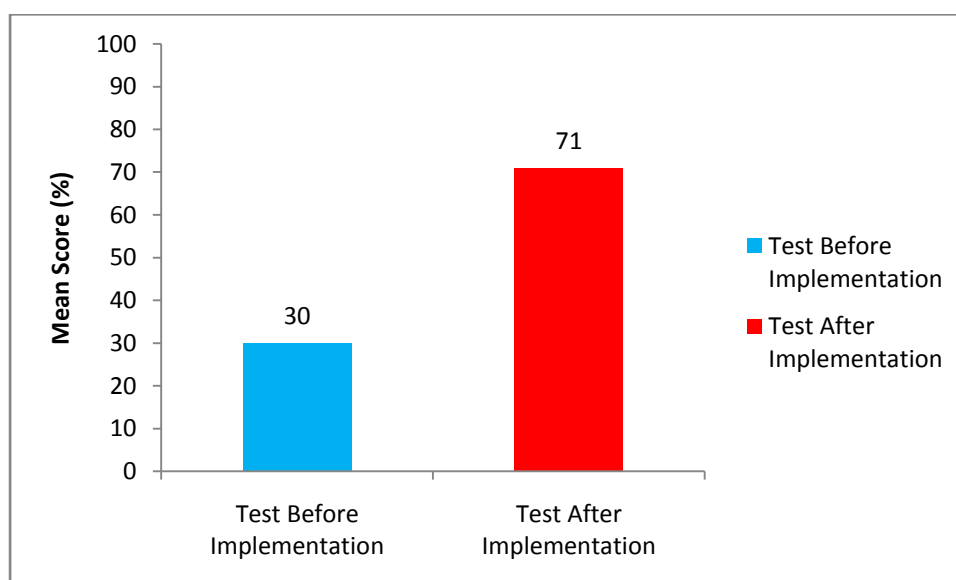


Figure 2: The Results of the Tests

Figure 2 shows the participants' performances for the two tests. The mean score for test before implementation was 30% while the mean score for test after implementation was 71%. It indicated an increase of 41%. Based on the analysis, I concluded that all the participants had improved in using comma and full stops correctly in the sentences. This showed that through action song, most of the participants was able to understand and could use more correctly the punctuations of full stop and comma in the sentences.

(b) Teacher's Reflective Journal and Interview

The reflective journal and interviewed were analysed and the themes emerged were improved understanding and increased motivation.

(i) Improved understanding

Based on the teacher's reflective journal that I had written, I found that the action song improved the participants' understanding. This was because I included the punctuations of full stop and comma and their function in the lyrics in the action song. Hence, the participants remembered the cues to put those punctuations correctly in sentences while singing the song. The lyrics and the rhythm of the song helped them remember the lyrics of the song. They comprehended the lyrics before singing the whole song with the action. The participants also agreed in the interview that the action song helped them to understand the punctuation of full stop and comma. They were able to use full stop and comma correctly in sentences. They told that the lyrics in the action song guided them where to put full stop and comma in the sentences correctly.

(ii) Increased Motivation

I also found that by using action song which had familiar rhythm, it made the pupils enjoyed the lesson very much. They knew the song because they were very familiar with the rhythm of "If You Are Happy" song. I could see that the participants were much immersed with the song they sang and they were motivated to sing loudly and happily. This showed that the adapted action song really increased their motivation.

When the participants really enjoyed singing the action song, indirectly, they comprehended the use of punctuations of full stop and comma at the same time. They enjoyed the song and raised the given signs at the same time. Sometimes, they continued singing the song though the English lesson was over. The action song helped to prevent the participants from feeling boredom in the activities. By using the strategy of action song, I helped the participants to learn about the punctuations in a fun way.

The participants also agreed that the use of signs had motivated them to learn English instead of singing the song solely. The presence of the given signs made them excited because they needed to stay focused in order to use the correct signs at the specific parts in the action song. Furthermore, each participant had their own signs and they could fully take part in the activity without any disturbance from peers. The action song also met their interest which was singing and they liked showing the signs given. Therefore, the participants could pay attention during the lesson. They engaged with the singing activity and the rhythm "If You Are Happy" song attracted the participants to enjoy the action song since they had already known and familiar with the song.

D. Findings and Discussion

The findings were discussed based on the research questions formulated in the earlier section.

Research Question 1: How does action song improve pupils' understanding in using full stop and comma correctly in the sentences?

The results from the tests had shown the pupils improved in their use of full stop and comma correctly in sentences. They scored higher in the test after implementation in which they gained 71% for the mean score when compared to the test before implementation when they only gained 30% for the mean score.

Through the comparison between the tests, it showed that the strategy of action song was effective to help the pupils to use full stop and comma correctly in sentences. According to Ara (2009), children learn better through interesting activities and for this reason, songs, rhymes and games are very useful tools for teaching them a foreign language. Pupils were able to remember the cues to put those punctuations by singing the action song. Therefore, the action song really helped the pupils to learn the second language in teaching and learning process.

Research Question 2: How does action song increase the pupils' motivation in learning English?

The action song had increased the pupils' motivation to learn English. This was because the rhythm of the action song was suitable with the participants' level while the action in the song attracted the participants to take part in the lesson. The rhythm of "If You Are Happy" song made them enjoyed singing the song because they were familiar with it. When pupils were familiarised with the rhythm, they felt less burdens to learn English. According to Ara (2009),

one thing that prevents children from learning a language is when they feel uncomfortable or under pressure in the language class.

While singing the song, the action included at some part of the song, for instance, raising the signs also triggered the participants to keep participating in the learning session. Ara (2009) also said that actually these are the tools that help children learn in an enjoyable environment without making them feel the pressure of learning a foreign language. Pupils would give their full co-operation towards the lesson when they enjoyed it.

Research Question 3: How does action song improve my teaching practice?

By using the action song as the strategy, it improved my teaching practice. I found out that the explanation of lyrics and the lyrics itself helped the participants in understanding. They understood the words used in the lyrics and the examples given in the song. According to Ara (2009), action songs also help the beginners to associate words and phrases with meanings. The meanings of the action song were very important for the pupils. Hence, I noticed that, in order to make the participants understand about the song, I must explain first what were the songs about and the meaning of the lyrics.

The expressions from the participants also helped me realise the participants must understand the song first before singing it. Besides, the singing activity met their interest and led them enjoyed the song very much. Ara (2009) also stated that action songs captivate young students and help teachers convert their natural energy and enthusiasm into meaningful learning experiences. Teacher who knows how to tackle the situation can lead the pupils to learn the topic. Therefore, I learnt I should make my lesson fun and enjoyable and this will help me to improve my teaching practice.

E. Conclusion

In conclusion, action song is a tool that teachers can use to teach English in the classroom. The findings had showed that the action song improved pupils' understanding in using punctuation correctly in the sentences. They were able to understand the function and usage of punctuation marks such as comma and full stop. Besides, action song also increased the pupils' interest in learning English and what is important is action song served as a good strategy for me to deliver the teaching and learning process in a fun way.

After implementing the strategy of action song, I noticed some improvement can be made although the action song had already shown the positive changes towards the participants' learning process regarding the related topic.

Based on my observations, I identified that some parts of the action song could be changed. For example, teacher can ask the pupils to play a game by changing the content in the lyrics, for example, other punctuations such as question mark or exclamation mark. According to Kuan (2012), it is believed that the mood of play could have its face value that facilitates creativity. Through this way, it triggers the pupils to think creatively. Pupils' creativity can be developed because it leads them to think critically and out of the box to find the suitable lyrics suit with the rhythm of the song.

Furthermore, teacher should integrate the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) skill which is one of the most demanding trends in education nowadays. According to Carmona and Marin (2013), the ICT is more than ever living in our society and they are important parts of the education. Therefore, teacher can use the LCD projector to show the lyrics to the pupils in front of the classroom rather than displaying it on the mahjong paper. In addition, by integrating ICT in the classroom activities, it costs less than mahjong paper. Carmona and Marin (2013) also stated that by incorporating these technological trends into the educational system a higher quality education can be provided at a cheaper cost and spread over a larger segment of the population. Furthermore, it can assist teacher to make any changes to the lyrics easily during the intervention.

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