

## Improving 3–5 Year Old Children’s Vocabulary, Listening, and Speaking Skills of English as a Second Language through Sociodramatic Play

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### ABSTRACT

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*The purposes of this study were to analyze 3–5 year old children’s vocabulary, listening and speaking skills as they engaged in sociodramatic play that was set around air transportation theme. The classroom action research design for this study was done in three cycles. It utilized an opportunity that the teacher provided for fourteen research subjects to use language for multiple functions within the context of sociodramatic play by encouraging the subjects to listen to other people, and to speak up their feelings and ideas by implementing the vocabulary they have learned. The data analysis in this research showed that the implementation of sociodramatic play improved the vocabulary, the listening and the speaking skills of 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school.*

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## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Based on the writer’s experience in teaching the research subjects and the observation that the writer took as the class teacher, it was found that the nursery students demonstrated poor vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. The majority of the students who came from non-English speaking countries, namely Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Japan understood and spoke very minimum English. In fact, they were required to understand English and be able to use it as it was the language of instructions used in the school. The students had been taught English as an isolated subject in which they were encouraged to memorize words and the sound of the alphabet learned. The fact resulted to the minimum understanding the students demonstrate in the lesson taught; they did not seem to listen to the teacher nor did they showed effort in memorizing the words. The only active ones were only the English speaking children. The lack of skills in English affected the students in understanding the other lessons, as all lessons were delivered in English.

It was decided that it might be beneficial to use sociodramatic play as the vehicle to improve students’ vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. Sociodramatic play started to occur when children reach 3 years of age, and it can be a good medium for children to improve their oral language skills, as they are involved in sociodramatic play, they have to choose a role and maintain the play by communicating with each other.

In this research, the problems that the writer analyzed were:

- 1) How are the conditions of the vocabulary, the listening and the speaking skills of the 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school prior to the implementation of sociodramatic play?
- 2) How is the implementation of sociodramatic play to improve vocabulary, listening and speaking skills of 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school?
- 3) To what extent has sociodramatic play improved the 3–5 year old Nursery children of ABC school’s vocabulary, listening and speaking skills of English as a second language?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research was grounded on theories of children of 3–5 year old, play, sociodramatic play, vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills in the context of English as a second language.

### ***Children of 3–5 Year Old***

Early childhood is the most rapid development period in human life. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional, and physical growth of children. Young children are typically quite active and their attention span is quite short. They like to move around rather than sitting still, and they are highly inquisitive. They most enjoy exploring their surroundings (Bagnato, 2007).

At this age, children enter a stage where self-esteem and confidence need to be nurtured carefully. As their physical, language and social abilities grow rapidly, children need support, recognition, and praise that are constantly given. At this stage, children also feel the urge to be more self-sufficient, however if they think they do not have the skills required and things do not work out, they easily get frustrated. Their need for routines also develops, they can become upset or angry if the routines are misplaced. They begin to play imaginatively and cooperatively with other children. They show an improving awareness of their relationships and connections with other people (Thwaites, 2008).

### ***Play***

Play can be defined as a child’s work (Singer & Singer, 2005). It is an enjoyable activity, in which the children participate voluntarily, and it focuses on the process rather than results (Sheridan, 2011). Play is also defined as a symbolic, meaningful activity. It is pleasurable, episodic, and rule-governed by the children (Pramling-Samuelsson & Fleeer, 2009).

Play is believed as the leading source of development (Frost et al., 2012), play has been related to brain development (Frost et al., 2012), play stimulates innovation in language (Bruner, 1983; Garvey, 1977 in Wortham, 2006), play introduces and clarifies new words and concepts (Chukovsky, 1971; Smilansky, 1968 in Wortham, 2006), play motivates language use and practice (Bruner, 1983; Garvey, 1977; Garvey & Hogan, 1973; Smilansky, 1968; Vygotsky, 1967 in Wortham, 2006), and play encourages verbal thinking (Vygotsky, 1962 in Wortham, 2006).

### ***Sociodramatic Play***

Sociodramatic play is similar to role/pretend play. The only difference between these two plays is that sociodramatic play is always shared and sustained. Sociodramatic play usually has a verbalized ongoing theme or theory. It also involves the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature and involves plots, props, and roles (Moyses, 2012). Sociodramatic play demands children to use their language abilities as they signify the person, object, and situational transformations that occur in pretense play and they also have to identify and elaborate on play themes as they unfold during the play episode (Christie & Roskos, 2006).

### ***Vocabulary Learning on Second Language***

Learning vocabulary on second language is different from learning vocabulary on the first language as the learner has already developed conceptual and semantic system linked to the first language. This is why learning second language needs a mapping of the new language onto an existing conceptual meaning (Takac, 2008). Takac’s explanation matched with Berk’s (2012) that children begin to connect the vocabulary they newly get with the concept by doing fast mapping which allows them to develop their language skills rapidly.

### ***Listening Skills in Learning English as a Second Language***

Listening is a basic skill in the first language acquisition and is crucial in second language learning. Bently and Bacon suggested that listeners, as they listen, create meaning from oral input because listening is an active process that plays a critical part of language learning generally and particularly in the process of learning a second language (Bozorgian & Pillay, 2013). Initially, children learn to speak by listening to what is said to them and creatively putting things into words themselves. Dawes (2008) described the characteristic of children who are listening well: 1) look at the person who is talking, 2) keep eye contact, nod, look interested, 3) keep relatively still and calm, and 4) are able to recall what was said.

### ***Speaking Skills in Learning English as a Second Language***

Speaking usually needs someone to listen to. Children can provide one another with just the right audience, especially if they know what to listen out for – that is, if they understand how to evaluate what they hear and provide helpful feedback. By learning how to listen actively, children gain insight into their own capacity to act as a speaker.

Children start their speaking experience by moving from an informal approximation of what they hear to a joining in with what their community says and how they say it. They learn to speak by copying others. Speaking aloud in school helps children to develop the skills and

confidence they need to communicate in a range of contexts (Dawes, 2008). Dawes added that there are several indicators that can be seen from a potentially good speaker. They are: 1) able to speak clearly, 2) speaking with enthusiasm, 3) are using the word by building on what others have said, and 4) giving sensible answers/responds.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this research is classroom action research. The classroom action research was conducted in three cycles. Each cycle included 1) Planning a change, 2) Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, and 3) Reflecting on these processes and consequences (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2008).

This research was conducted with fourteen preschool children: five boys and nine girls. The boys were 3.5 to 3.9 years old, and the girls were 3.3 to 4.4 years old. The children came from mixed ethnicities: 8 children are Indonesian, 1 girl is Japanese, 2 boys are Indian, 1 girl is Malaysian, 1 girl is a Canadian, and 1 boy is a mix of Indonesian-American.

In this research, the data was collected through observation, informal conversational interview with the parents, and the secondary document. The research method applied in this study was a qualitative method, in which the analysis of data was done descriptively and displayed in tables and diagrams.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results in this research achieved from the rubrics scores, the observation, and the interviews with the parents. The findings were described by following the research questions. Based on the observation that underwent in this research, it was found that:

### *The Prior Conditions*

When the writer did the pre-observation, it was found that the conditions of the subjects’ vocabulary and listening skills prior to the implementation of sociodramatic play were categorized as starting and their speaking skills were categorized as emerging. It was found that the class average for vocabulary was 1.9 from the scale of 1-4, and the class average for listening skills was 1.7 from the scale of 1-4, while the class average for speaking skills was 2.0 from the scale of 1-4. The calculations are as follow:

**Table 1.** Students’ prior score

No	Research Subjects	Vocabulary Pretest	Listening Skills Pretest	Speaking Skills Pretest
1	AE	2	2	2.2
2	AT	1	1	1
3	JA	1.3	1.8	1
4	KE	1	1	1.2
5	KM	3	3.3	3.4
6	KT	1	1	1
7	KW	2.3	1.5	2.2
8	LT	2	1.5	2.4
9	MS	1	1	1
10	RC	3	1.5	3.6
11	RL	1	1	1
12	RS	3.3	3	3.8

13	<b>SD</b>	2	2	2
14	<b>SG</b>	2.7	2	2.8
<b>Class Average</b>		<b>1.9</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.0</b>

### ***The Implementation of Sociodramatic Play***

Based on 3 cycles (weeks) of implementing sociodramatic play about airplane, it was found that the implementation of sociodramatic play did improve the 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school’s vocabulary, listening and speaking skills.

The subjects seemed to use most of the words taught as well as to use more English words than their mother tongue. The significant thing to find was the teacher seemed to play a big role as a model in terms of uttering the words and simple phrases: not only that they began to use the words taught to them in proper use and context, they also imitated simple phrases that were used by the teacher.

These findings supported the theory stated by Christ et al. (2010) that young children predominantly acquire vocabulary by hearing new words used in their environment, through conversations, television, and being read storybooks aloud. However, they do not passively acquire words when they hear them. Children learn new vocabulary only if the words pick their interest. In this research, the teacher’s utterances seemed to capture the children’s interests, as the children began to imitate her words and expressions.

The most interesting thing to observe was how the children began to competitively say that they were going to go by airplane. It was triggered by the statement of the teacher: “I will go to Australia by airplane on holiday”. Most subjects started to imitate her sentence by saying, “I will go to Singapore with airplane” (KM), “I will go to Australia with airplane” (KT), “I...uh...I...will...(pause)...go to...uh...India...with airplane” (RL).

It was found that not only did RL imitate the teacher, but he also learnt a lot from his peer, KM, by observing and imitating him. The finding of the research supported the previous research done by Susan Fraser and Patricia Wakefield in their journal titled *Fostering Second Language Development Through Play in a Multilingual Classroom* (Fraser & Wakefield, 1986). They found that a child whose language is more advanced than the others could do peer coaching to their peers, as it happened to RL who looked up to KM and learnt English utterances from him.

It was also found that there were certain words that were popular, as they were used many times by the subjects. Of all 30 words taught, the words that were mostly uttered were “airplane”, “ticket”, “go”, “pilot”, “airport”, “fly”, “attention”, “buckle”, and “seatbelt”. This findings proved the theory of Konishi et al. (2014) who stated that children learn the words they hear most, they learn words for things and events that interest them. They learn words better in a way that is interactive and responsive rather than passive contexts favor vocabulary learning.

During the implementation of sociodramatic play, the research subjects listened to the teacher much better. They followed instructions better even though they were not playing sociodramatically, especially when the teacher talked to them in a playful way.

To see the results in each cycle, the writer concluded each cycle in the following explanations:

#### 1) Cycle I

The cycle I was conducted on 11–15 April 2016. It began with the planning, action, observation, and reflection. As cycle I ended, the writer began to analyze the data to see how much improvement did the research subjects make after the cycle I classroom action research. The writer calculated the class average that had been described in chapter III, and it could be seen in the diagram below:

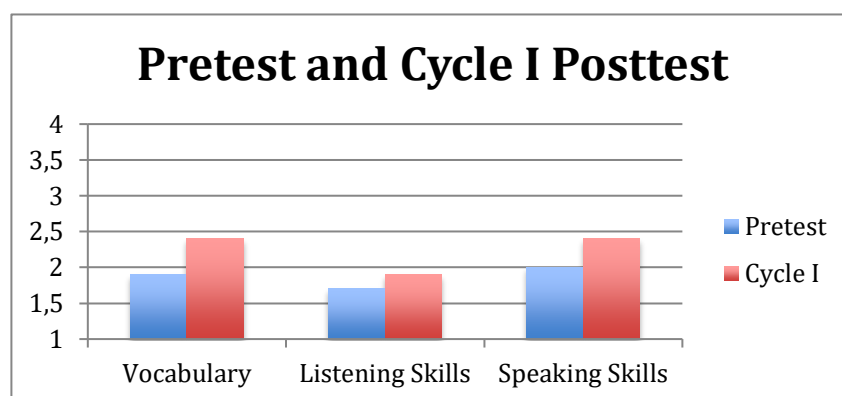


Figure 1.  
Pretest and Cycle I Diagram

From the diagram above, it could be concluded that sociodramatic play improved the vocabulary, listening and the speaking skills of the 3–5 year old nursery class children of the ABC school, as the class average of the vocabulary improved from 1.9 in the pretest to 2.4 (from the scale of 1-4) in the cycle I posttest. While the listening skills improved from 1.7 in the pretest to 1.9 (from the scale of 1-4) in the cycle I posttest, and the speaking skills improved from 2 in the pretest to 2.4 (from the scale of 1-4) in the cycle I posttest.

## 2) Cycle II

Cycle II began on 25 April and ended on 29 April 2016. It was started with planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. As cycle II ended, the writer began to analyze the data by calculating the normalized gain for each subject and the average of the class. The result was then compared with the cycle I.

Based on the individual normalized gain calculation, the result showed that 6 out of 14 research subjects’ vocabulary moderately (medium) improved and 2 out of 14 showed that through the implementation of sociodramatic play, their vocabulary highly improved. 7 out of 14 research subjects’ listening skills moderately (medium) improved, and 1 out of 14 showed high improvement in her listening skills. 8 out of 14 research subjects’ speaking skills also moderately (medium) improved after the implementation of sociodramatic play in cycle II, and 2 out of 14 showed high improvement in their speaking skills.

As for the improvement that is viewed for the whole class, it could be seen in the diagram below:

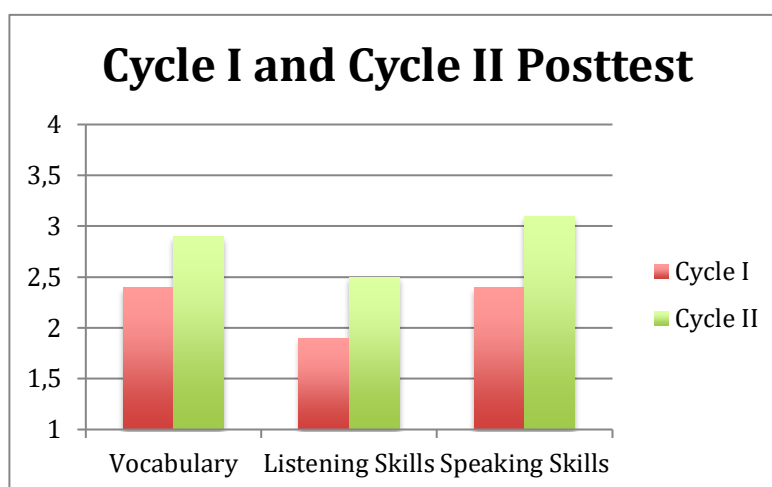


Figure 2.

### Cycle I and Cycle II Diagram

From the diagram above, it could be concluded that sociodramatic play improved the vocabulary, listening and the speaking skills of the 3–5 year old nursery class children of the ABC school, as the class average of the vocabulary improved from 2.4 in cycle I posttest to 2.9 (from the scale of 1-4) in the cycle II posttest. While the listening skills improved from 1.9 in cycle I posttest to 2.5 (from the scale of 1-4) in the cycle II posttest, and the speaking skills improved from 2.4 in cycle I posttest to 3.1 (from the scale of 1-4) in the cycle II posttest.

### 3) Cycle III

Cycle III was conducted on 9–13 May 2016. In this cycle, the sociodramatic play was to encourage the research subjects to listen to instructions as well as to express their wants as they were involved in a play.

As cycle III ended, the writer began to analyze the data by calculating individual normalised gain and also by calculating class average. Based on the individual normalized gain calculation, the result showed that 3 out of 14 research subjects’ vocabulary highly improved, 1 out of 14 showed that through the implementation of sociodramatic play, their vocabulary moderately (medium) improved, and 10 out of 14 research subjects’ vocabulary lowly improved compared to cycle II individual gain.

As for the listening skills, 3 out of 14 subjects’ listening skills improved highly after the implementation of sociodramatic play, 6 out of 14 subjects improved their listening skills moderately, and 2 subjects showed low improvement.

The data analysis of subjects’ speaking skills after the implementation of sociodramatic play showed that 6 out of 14 subjects’ speaking skills showed high improvement, 7 out of 14 subjects made moderate improvement, and 1 subject made low improvement.

As for the improvement that is viewed for the whole class, it could be seen as follows:

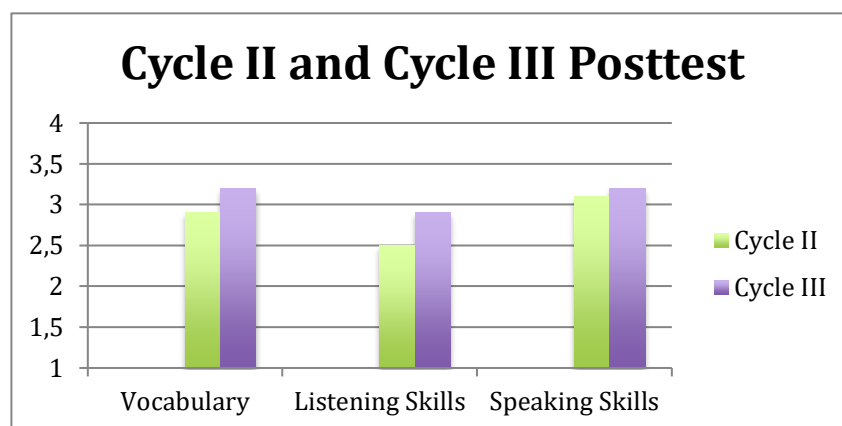


Figure 3.  
Cycle I and Cycle II Diagram

The diagram above showed the subjects’ improvement obtained in vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. Subjects’ vocabulary improved from 2.9 in cycle II posttest to 3.2 (from the scale 1-4) in cycle III posttest. Subjects’ listening skills improved from 2.5 in cycle II posttest to 2.9 (from the scale 1-4) in cycle III posttest, and their speaking skills improved from 3.1 in cycle II posttest to 3.2 (from the scale 1-4) in cycle III posttest.

### ***The Extension of Sociodramatic Play to Improve the 3-5 Year Old Nursery Children of ABC***

### ***School’s Vocabulary, Listening, and Speaking Skills of English As A Second Language***

As cycle I, II, and III ended, the writer analyzed the data by calculating the individual normalized gain to see to what extent has sociodramatic play improved the 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school’s vocabulary, listening and speaking skills.

As to see the class’ improvement, the writer analyzed the data by comparing the results obtained in pretest, cycle I posttest, cycle II posttest, and cycle III posttest to see to what extent has sociodramatic play improved the 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school’s vocabulary, listening and speaking skills. The results could be seen as follows:

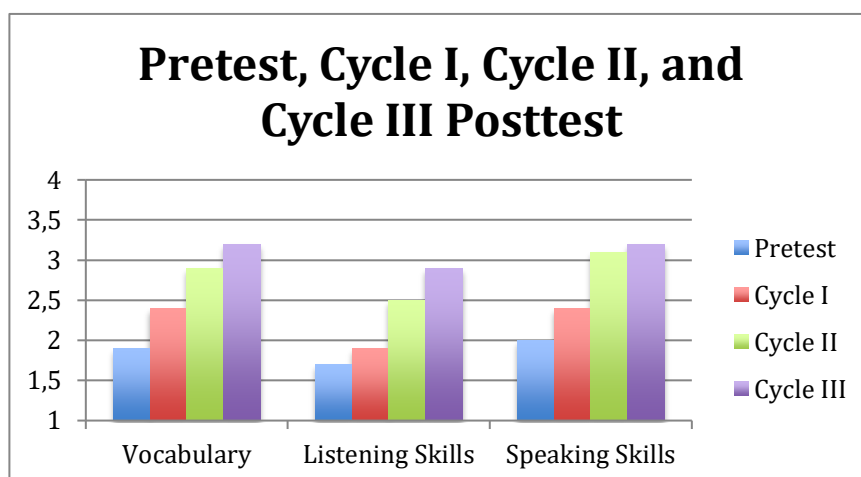


Figure 4.  
Cycle II and Cycle III Diagram

The diagram above showed the subjects’ improvement obtained in vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. Subjects’ vocabulary improved from 2.9 in cycle II posttest to 3.2 (from the scale 1-4) in cycle III posttest. Subjects’ listening skills improved from 2.5 in cycle II posttest to 2.9 (from the scale 1-4) in cycle III posttest, and their speaking skills improved from 3.1 in cycle II posttest to 3.2 (from the scale 1-4) in cycle III posttest.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### ***Conclusions***

Based on the observation and the data analysis, it could be concluded that the conditions of 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school’s vocabulary and listening skills prior to the implementation of sociodramatic play were categorized as starting and their speaking skills were categorized as emerging.

However, their vocabulary, listening and speaking skills seemed to improve after the implementation of sociodramatic play. It was found that sociodramatic play indeed promoted the 3–5 year old nursery children of ABC school’s language. The subjects seemed to use most of the words taught as well as to use more English words than their mother tongue. The teacher seemed to give positive influence to the subjects as they spoke new words by imitating her. The implementation of sociodramatic play let the subjects to listen to the teacher much better. They followed instructions better even though they were not playing sociodrama, especially when the teacher talked to them in a playful way.

The data analysis found that the implementation of sociodramatic play on the 3–5 year old Nursery children of ABC school improved their vocabulary, listening and speaking skills



to a moderate (medium) extent, as the normalized gain calculation resulted 0.6 for each variable.

### ***Limitations***

By reflecting on the research that took place in the nursery class of ABC School, the writer found a number of limitations, they were:

- 1) The time was limited. The writer conducted the research only in 6 weeks time with 3 weeks off research. The research was conducted in alternating week: 1 week research, and 1 week recess.
- 2) The writer was often distracted by other matters, not only did she find research subjects’ progressing language, but also other areas of development that need to be improved, namely social skills and emotional skills. Often some subjects were found arguing or fighting over props and roles.
- 3) The scoring was done merely by the writer with the help of her co-teacher. Therefore, only 1 set of data was collected.

### ***Recommendations***

There are many possible implications to be studied because language, dramatic/pretend play, and learning have a complex relationship. Sociodramatic play contexts in the nursery class of ABC school provide unique opportunities for young children to become adept at communicating their feelings and ideas, as they practice to make their imaginative suggestions intelligible to their play partners.

Sociodramatic play in the nursery class of ABC school provides experiences for children to practice and master their communicative competence. Sometimes, children’s play ideas may conflict with those of their peers, but in the process of negotiating pretend scripts and incorporating their partner’s suggestions, young children learn to accommodate different perspectives. Thus, sociodramatic play in the nursery class of ABC school provides an educational setting for young children to refine their ideas and communicative skills to create shared meaning.

Sociodramatic play in the nursery class of ABC school also provides peer teaching experience. As the children begin to extend their play and connect it with their experiences, a child will unconsciously share the vocabulary she/he has to her/his peers, and when the vocabulary is interesting enough to hear, most likely other children will imitate and use the vocabulary.

The finding in the research that took place in the nursery class of ABC school supported the findings of Rajapaksha’s research (2016, pp. 15–22). He stated in his journal that sociodramatic play created a language rich environment and offered many opportunities to develop oral language skills in children, particularly for children who communicate rarely in the classroom activities.

The finding in this research also supported Galeano (2011, pp. 324–352) whom in her journal titled *Scaffolding Productive Language Skills through Sociodramatic Play* found that sociodramatic play significantly increased one research subject’s utterance and the number of second language words she produced with the help of her native speaker peers.

### ***Suggestions***

During the planning of sociodramatic play in the nursery class of ABC school, the writer prepared an imitation of an airplane from used boxes. The preparation took a lot of effort and time. The result was worth the effort, as the research subjects enjoyed playing it all the time. However, it seemed to be challenging to implement in other places. The suggestion that could be given is to make simple props that could be easily found, depending on the theme discussed

in the classroom. Basically, children of 3–5 years old enjoy playing sociodramatically, regardless the props. They could transform almost anything into their supporting props. In this research, the girls of the research subjects used a lid of biscuit can as a make up palette, while in other occasions, the boys of the research subjects used the same lid to be a steering wheel for their airplane.

In this research, it was found that the subjects could easily memorized the words that were interesting for them, and they showed understanding in the words as they used it in proper contexts. The finding supported the theory of “six principles to vocabulary learning” belongs to Konishi et al. (2014), that children learn the words they hear most, and they learn words for things and events that interest them. For those who are interested to use vocabulary learning in their research, it should be remembered that the words that are going to be taught should be interesting and repeated.

For further research, it will be interesting to analyze if the implementation of sociodramatic play could improve children’s social and emotional skills as well as their creativity. This idea was born during observation when the writer saw that the research subjects argued a lot and fought quite often over the props and a role, and some of them creatively manipulated other objects as props. Thus, the writer thought that sociodramatic play would be a great vehicle to develop social and emotional skills as well as children’s creativity.

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