

Exploring Integrated Teaching and Learning through Action Songs: A Participatory Action Research Study in Grade One Classes at Kabwata Primary School, Zambia

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Abstract

This study explores the use of action songs as a pedagogical tool in early childhood education (ECE) within Zambia's mainstream education system. It addresses challenges faced by teachers in implementing integrated teaching methods. The study involved two grade one classes, one taught traditionally and the other using action songs, actions, and storytelling by the researcher. Employing participatory action research, the study assessed the impact of action songs on classroom organisation, cooperation, student participation, and subject integration. The findings indicated that action songs improved classroom management, fostered cooperation and participation, and facilitated subject integration. Educators are encouraged to incorporate action songs into their teaching methods, emphasising teacher training and resources. This study underscores the value of action songs in enhancing ECE teaching and learning.

Keywords: Action songs, early childhood education, integrated teaching and learning, participatory action research, Zambia.

1. Introduction

Neuroscientific research has underscored the significance of integrated and play-based methodologies in early childhood education (ECE), shedding light on the need for such approaches (Fleer, 2010; OECD, 2007). Drawing on learners' social and cultural experiences and connecting them to real-life issues, integrated teaching and learning involves active participation, responsive teaching, and thematic subject matter presentation (Beane, 2005; Brown, 2016). Play and integrated teaching and learning methods are lauded for providing diverse experiences that can enhance cognition, social development, emotional growth, and physical skills (Marbina, Church & Tayler, 2016). To specifically address the integration of play and learning, this study

adopts action songs as a pedagogical tool, defining action songs as those involving fine and motor skills.

Philpott's study (2001) elucidates the links between bodily movement, music, and cognition in the context of general learning. It underscores the importance of experiential learning through bodily action, both outwardly through the body and inwardly through the mind, emphasising the progression from learning with the body to learning with the mind (Philpott, 2001). Scholars such as Abril (2011), Marsh and Young (2006), and Campbell (2002) point out that music is inherently associated with physical and conceptual movement. Consequently, music knowledge is expressed through dynamic bodily engagement, sensory-motor experiences, active learning, and play (Philpott, 2001).

Given the distinctive characteristics of ECE, marked by hands-on activities and sensory experiences (Pound, 2002; Jordan-Decarbo & Nelson, 2002), integrated teaching and learning with action songs aligns with experiential learning principles. Experiential learning, propagated by empiricists like John Locke (1632-1704) and later championed by John Dewey (1859-1952) under the banner of progressive education, emphasises learning through direct experience (Adkins & Simmons, 2002). Experiential learning involves constructing knowledge, skills, and values from firsthand sensory experiences (Adkins & Simmons, 2002). This approach is associated with terms such as learning by doing, experiential learning, and outdoor education (Dregson, 1995).

For music education, experiential learning is exemplified by Emile Jacques Dalcroze's methodology, which utilises bodily movement to engage with the world and foster learning (Philpott, 2001). By incorporating sensory and muscular stimulation activities, Dalcroze's approach harmonises the mind and body in the learning process (Abril,

2011). Additionally, action songs align with music as musical arts in Africa, where music integrates song, dance, and drama in performances (Nzewi, 2003). In some African cultures, such as the Tumbuka and Chewa tribes in Zambia, play is inseparable from singing, games, and dance among children (Mtonga, 2012). In this study, action songs are used to maximize sensory experiences, encompassing touch, sight, and hearing through singing, actions, object manipulation, and storytelling, all aimed at facilitating integrated teaching and learning in ECE.

2. Background

Zambia, located in south-central Africa with over 72 languages, has adopted English as the official language and language of instruction, although ECE instruction has shifted to local languages (Zambia, 2005). Early childhood education was initially integrated into the education system before Zambia's independence in 1964, with guidelines established by the Day Nurseries Act of 1957. Post-independence, nurseries were placed under the Ministry of Local Government and Housing in community structures known as welfare halls. ECE continued to be recognized as part of the education system, with various policies recommending the use of local songs, dances, stories, and play-based pedagogies to promote holistic child development (Education Reform, 1977; Focus on Learning, 1992; Educating Our Future, 1996; Educating the Nation, 2005).

The government gradually delegated the responsibility of running pre-schools and employing pre-school teachers to local authorities and voluntary agencies, eventually transitioning this responsibility to individuals, churches, and other non-governmental organizations, leading to various settings such as day care centers, nursery schools, and reception/pre-schools (Educating Our Future, 1996). In 2011, the government formally integrated ECE into the mainstream education system, and in 2014, the

Ministry of General Education (MoGE) incorporated ECE centers into government primary schools (Guidelines for the Implementation of Inclusive Education and Special Education in Zambia: Policy, Practices, and Procedures 2016). Internationally, ECE encompasses the age group from birth to eight years (Follari, 2007; Hujala & Niikko, 2011; Jordan-Decarbo & Nelson, 2002), meaning that all forms of pre-schooling to grade two in primary school are considered part of ECE in Zambia (Education Reforms, 1977).

Over time, the focus on ECE in Zambia has evolved from justifying its existence to addressing matters of content, context, and implementation (Kalinde, 2017; Matafwali & Munsaka, 2011). Scholars such as Matafwali and Munsaka (2011) stress the importance of focusing on "what" and "how" children are taught within the context of the Ministry of Education's efforts. Beyond Zambia, there has been growing dissatisfaction with the transplantation of cognitive methodologies typical of upper primary school into ECE, as evidenced by various scholars (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2010; Castle & Renee, 2014; UNESCO, 2013). This raises questions about the most effective methods for teaching young children (Mooney, 2013). Educational theory has increasingly emphasized approaches that promote "learning through engagement and active involvement in creative and collaborative processes that lead to the construction of knowledge" (Stavrou, 2012:39). There is also a suggestion that teachers should seek innovative methods to enable young learners to develop a deep understanding of important subject matter (Bransford et al., 2000:6).

2.1 Problem statement

The current study addresses two key issues identified in prior research. Firstly, a study of twenty Zambian preschools revealed that teachers often struggled to align songs

with subject matter and had a limited repertoire, primarily consisting of English Sunday school songs (Kalinde, 2017). Secondly, another investigation highlighted a deficiency in teachers' skills when it comes to integrating subjects in early childhood education (ECE) (Early Childhood Education Teacher's Diploma Syllabus, 2015; Kalinde, 2013). As a result, this study aims to investigate how action songs can be effectively utilized to provide integrated teaching and learning experiences in grade one classes.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: Experiential Learning Theory

The study's theoretical framework draws from experiential learning theory, as proposed by Kolb. According to this theory, effective learning involves a cyclical process that includes concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Action songs in the context of ECE align well with Kolb's model. These songs provide a hands-on and experiential approach to learning, allowing students to actively participate in musical activities, reflect on their experiences, grasp abstract concepts through rhythm and melody, and experiment with different musical elements. This aligns with Kolb's idea that learning is most effective when it engages students in experiential and reflective processes.

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in the epistemological perspective of pragmatism (Goldkuhl, 2012:2) as it seeks "intervention and change" through practical research. Notably, Creswell (2014) and Feilzer (2010:11) have expressed reservations regarding the use of interpretive approaches within the pragmatic paradigm, often confining it to mixed methods research. However, there is a contention that action research, primarily qualitative, can align with the pragmatic paradigm (Hammond, 2013; Goldkuhl, 2012). This fusion of pragmatism into what may appear as an interpretive approach provides

researchers with flexible options for employing "what works tactics" (Armitage, 2007) and selecting methods that are most suitable for the specific research context, focusing on "what fits for the situation" (Stark 2014:89).

The study unfolded within a natural setting comprising two grade one classes, and its qualitative approach is in alignment with Mouton's perspective (2001). Employing a case study design, the primary aim was to comprehensively explore and understand a phenomenon rather than merely explaining it (Kumar, 2014; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Given that the study originated from the researcher's identification of a problem stemming from earlier studies and the subsequent collaborative action taken with practitioners, the participatory action research (PAR) design was deemed most suitable (Kumar, 2014; Fernie & Smith, 2010; Hofstee, 2010).

Participatory action research follows a cyclical process, commencing with the identification of a problem, followed by data collection and analysis, action to address the problem, and evaluation of the intervention's outcomes (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). The key processes within PAR can be summarized as intervention, evaluation, and reflection (Davison, Martinsons & Kock, 2004; Fernie & Smith. 2010). Due to constraints posed by the school calendar, a condensed four-week short cycle of PAR was employed (Hopkins, 2002). Data analysis encompassed the identification of themes derived from a range of coded notes, which emerged from various sources, including classroom observations, researcher's actions and participation, focus group discussions, and recorded videos.

The study was conducted at Kabwata Primary School, situated in the capital city of Zambia, Lusaka, in 2014. While the school is located in a predominantly middle-income area, it serves students from low-income areas such as Chawama, Kuku, and

Misisi (Zambia 2010). Students from these low-income areas often exhibit lower literacy levels and may not have a high level of proficiency in English (Hujala & Niikko, 2011; STEP-UP Zambia, 2014). Therefore, the action songs created for this study seamlessly blended fundamental English words with vocabulary from Bemba, Nyanja, and Lunda, which are indigenous languages commonly spoken in Zambia. This choice was made for the sake of practicality, as these languages are ones that the researcher is familiar with.

Kabwata Primary School was chosen for its convenience, and the deputy head teacher, who was also a music teacher, was likely to appreciate the potential benefits of the study. The study involved two female grade one teachers and two grade one classes, which we refer to as Group A and Group B, consisting of 25 and 22 pupils, respectively. Group A received instruction using traditional teacher-centered methods, where the teacher primarily conveyed subject matter through lectures, writing on the board, and intermittent questioning, with pupil responses often taking the form of chorus-like chants. Group B, on the other hand, was taught by the researcher over a period of 16 lessons using action songs, interactive question-and-answer sessions, and storytelling. Both groups covered the same content over a two-week period, during which the researcher observed the teachers in Group A and the teachers observed the researcher in Group B.

3.1 Data Collection

Data for the study were collected through classroom observations, researcher actions, and focus group discussions, supplemented by video recordings. The researcher observed teachers in both Group A and Group B during one week, focusing on aspects such as teacher actions, student responses, lesson activities, classroom arrangement,

lesson sequencing, lesson delivery, and subject matter coverage. Similarly, the teachers observed the researcher's lessons with action songs for one week, providing feedback using observation sheets that included the same aspects emphasized during the researcher's observations. Teachers were also encouraged to make comments on any additional aspects not covered in the observation sheet. Subsequently, focus group discussions were conducted with the teachers to facilitate their evaluation of the researcher's teaching approach using action songs in comparison to their own instructional methods.

A cycle of action research adopted for the study is shown in the figure below:

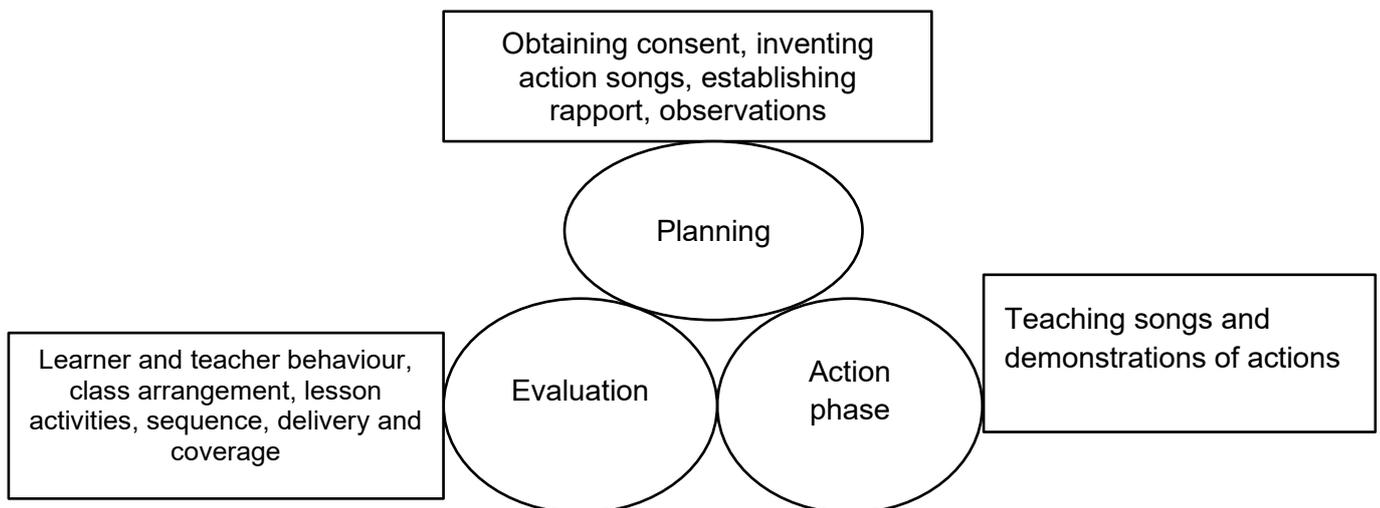


Figure 1: A cycle of action research

The action cycle, as illustrated in Figure 1, comprises three primary phases: the planning and preparation phase, the action phase, and the evaluation phase, each involving specific activities as delineated below:

3.1.1 Planning Phase

As previously mentioned, the impetus for this study stemmed from prior research that highlighted challenges faced by teachers in implementing integrated teaching approaches and the limited use of songs in teaching and learning. This informed the

intervention strategy employed in this study (Davison et al., 2004). The planning phase encompassed four main activities:

a) Obtaining Consent: Ethical and regulatory compliance required obtaining consent from the Ministry of Education Science, Vocational Training, and Early Education (MESVTEE) and the school administration for conducting research in government schools in Zambia (see Appendix A). Additional consent was sought from the parents of the pupils, as video recordings were planned for later analysis (see Appendix B).

b) Composing Action Songs: In this phase, 14 action songs were composed, drawing content from selected topics within three subject areas—Creative and Technology Studies, Social and Development Studies, and Integrated Science—taken from the Grade One syllabus. This was done with the intent of facilitating integration into thematic teaching.

c) Establishing Rapport: Building rapport with teachers and school staff was essential to convey the research objectives and secure their acceptance. This process involved the school administration introducing the researcher to the teachers and students.

d) Observing Regular Classes: To gain insight into the existing teaching and learning practices, the researcher spent two weeks observing regular classes.

3.1.2 Action Phase

The action phase involved implementing interventions aimed at addressing the identified deficiencies in teaching and learning using songs, as observed in previous studies. Given the absence of specific teaching methods recommended for action songs, the researcher adapted a four-step action song procedural model, integrating conventional lesson presentation elements (introduction, development, and conclusion) with the narration of subject matter as stories. This model aimed to enhance the effectiveness of action songs in teaching and learning.

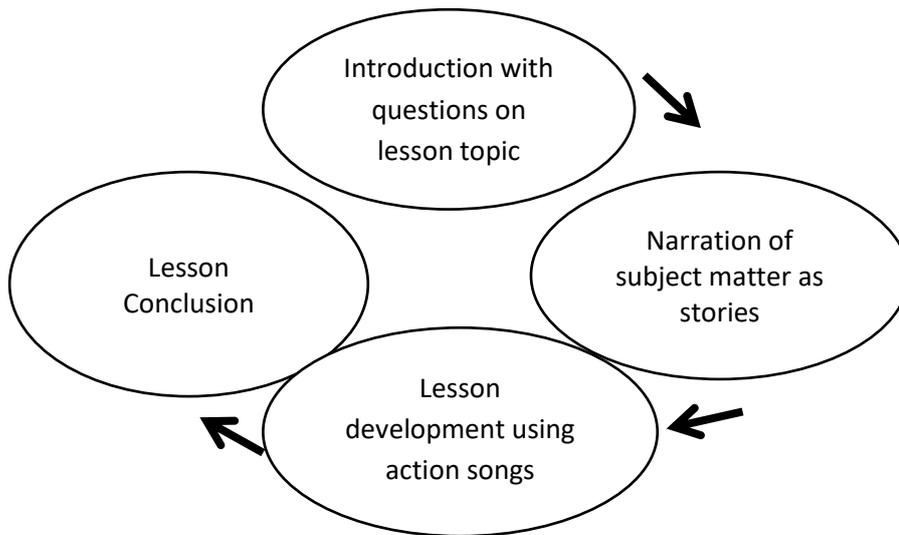


Figure 2: Action songs procedural model

3.2 Steps in the lessons with action songs

The teaching approach involving action songs in this study followed a structured four-step model that aimed to promote integrated teaching and experiential learning, aligning with the principles of the integrated curriculum (Brewer, 2014). The four steps, while interconnected, provided a framework for instructional continuity rather than distinct phases within the teaching and learning process, allowing each step to build upon the previous one. This model was designed to encourage experiential learning in the following manner:

3.2.1 Introduction with Questions on the Topic

In the initial phase, learners were encouraged to express their existing knowledge, thoughts, and explanations related to the upcoming topic. The introduction involved a series of "how" and "why" questions posed to the learners to assess their prior knowledge, ideas, and experiences regarding the subject matter (Jacobs, Vakalisa, & Gawe, 2011).

3.2.2 Narration of Subject Matter as Stories

Following the introduction, the subject matter was presented to the learners in the form of a story, which typically began with a familiar call to story time, such as "once upon a time." This call was met with a response from the learners, creating an engaging ritual. Additionally, local language versions were used to engage the learners further, emphasizing the collective nature of storytelling.

3.2.3 Lesson Development Using Action Songs

The main teaching and learning activities in the lessons revolved around singing and actions. The songs were composed to align with topics from various subject areas, emphasizing lesson content. While musical aspects like dynamics and tempo were highlighted, the focus was primarily on lyrics rather than musical notation. The songs incorporated local languages, such as Bemba, Nyanja, and Lunda, along with a few English words. Simple instruments like drums and shakers were used for percussion, and songs were taught to the learners through rote learning. The actions included gross motor movements (e.g., dancing, walking) and fine motor control activities (e.g., playing homemade instruments).

3.2.4 Lesson Conclusion

Each lesson concluded with a recollection session, where the learners sat in a circle and engaged in a brief question-and-answer session to review key aspects of the lesson. This provided an opportunity to gauge what the learners had retained and to reinforce any concepts that needed further emphasis. Learners were also allowed to sing briefly with accompanying actions, serving as a memory aid for the questions asked.

3.3 Evaluation Phase

The third phase of the action research cycle involved evaluation. During this phase, teachers observed and evaluated the 16 sessions in which action songs were taught by the researcher. Through focus group discussions, teachers were provided with the opportunity to discuss and assess their own teaching practices in comparison to the researcher's methods. This collaborative evaluation process aimed to generate ideas for improved practice.

3.4 Findings and Discussion

The study addressed three main research objectives concerning the use of action songs for integrated teaching and learning, the ways in which this approach enhanced teaching and learning, and teachers' perspectives on the use of action songs in education and challenges that teachers face in integrated teaching. The analysis of data from class observations, video recordings, researcher actions, participation, and focus group discussions yielded several key themes as follows:

3.4.1 Classroom organisation and management

In classrooms with teachers, desks were pre-arranged and fixed in rows. Lessons with action songs however assumed formations of standing in circle or row, or sitting on the carpet as opposed to the traditional row sitting at desks. These class arrangements naturally allowed more space, freer movements and interactions as learners could also see each other easily and in turn the researcher could also see them all. Teacher 2 observed that desks inhibited the organisation of lessons that encourage interaction between teachers and learners. She suggested that desks could only be used when learners are required to write.

Teacher 1 added that the row class arrangements meant that learners in the middle and back row are usually the ones that easily became distracted. She added that since it was not possible to hide, anyone making noise, distracting others and not participating could easily be seen and cautioned by the teacher and other children as well in lessons with action songs. Teacher two expressed that using action songs in a bigger class could assist in class organisation and acknowledged having learnt a great deal from lessons with action songs how to vary class arrangement. She also said, 'our classes are usually big and the children require a lot of effort to monitor.'

While the teacher may not be fully in control of the physical elements of classrooms, they can determine classroom arrangements that encourage interaction. By reducing distractions and allowing interactions between teachers and learners and learners themselves through varied class arrangements, lessons with action songs can be said to optimize teaching and learning by (McLeod et.al, 2003; Evertson et.al 2000).

3.4.2 Enhanced interest and focus to learn

In lessons conducted by the usual class teachers, most learners showed unsettled tendencies by wanting to see what was happening outside through the windows and making noise. As a result, teachers frequently reminded them to sit still, keep quiet and copy notes from the chalk board. In lessons by the researcher, learners showed enthusiasm to participate in the lesson activities. From observation and teacher responses, learners seemed to enjoy lessons with action songs more as evidenced by laughter, and resistance to end the lessons. Teacher 1 further noted that most teaching and learning time was wasted in organising and controlling classes on a daily basis. In the lessons with action songs however, she observed that class control happened more easily.

The behaviour of learners in lessons with action songs can be considered as indication of motivation to learn (Cook, 2005). As argued by Ryan and Deci (2009), children should not be 'under pressure' to learn. What gives them joy' in this case, action songs should comprise a great part of their learning. This observation concurs with another study that learners "are more focused in music than in non-music classes (Moore, 2002) .

Action songs involving rigorous percussive actions of instrument playing, stone tapping and dancing seemed to be more preferred as children insisted that they be repeated. This finding concurs with a study with children by Moore (2002) which showed that children enjoy moving and singing together and show preference for songs with more actions. The significance of this finding for learning is postulated by Philpott (2001) who argues that 'learning and cognition can be found in dynamic sensory experiences and physical actions of the body.'

3.4.3 Improved co-operative and participative teaching and learning

In lessons with regular teachers, learner participation was limited to responding to teacher's questions and copying notes from the chalkboard. On the other hand, teaching and learning using actions songs was characterised by two forms of co-operation and participation; between the researcher and learners and among learners themselves. For instance, co-operative learning was evident when learners were heard saying, *iwe utichedweka endesa* ('You are delaying us, make it quick'), *osachita so iwe* ('don't do it that way'), *simwamene ba totela* so ('that's not how the clapping should be'), *kwasala iwe* ('you are the one remaining'), *waluvyanya* ('you have done incorrectly'), *bwezaniponi futi* ('do that again'), *ikanikoninzelu manje ka* ('you must pay attention now').

In a session that used the action song *kakulya takachepa* ('food is never little'), learners performed in groups of four, striking the floor with stones and passing the stone to the next child at the phrase *mpelako* ('give me'). The challenge noted in this activity was that some learners were passing the stones haphazardly thus disrupting the flow and rhythm of the song. In one of the groups, a learner drew a square to precisely show that the stone must be placed at the corner of each square where each one was positioned. This helped to bring order in the activity and showed that when children are let to co-operate, they encounter opportunities that require them to resolve challenges of learning on their own.

The action described here also implies that learners take the responsibility to remind and guide each other to ensure that everyone sticks to the activities of the lesson. Reminding each other to focus turned out forceful at times thus requiring me to calm the situation down. In the shared activities "being regulated by others and regulating others will occur more evenly" (Bodrova & Leong, 2007:83), as learners feel accountable to make the learning a success. Learners seemed to negotiate roles and take roles only when it was their turn. It was a 'less of me and more of us' kind of interaction. For pupils, this can be understood as moving from "egocentric thinking and behaviour to more socially acceptable behaviour" (Grobler, 1990:32).

In lessons with action songs, collaborative and participative learning was enhanced by activities that involved learners doing activities in groups of two, four or whole group. Working together in groups has been noted as important in promoting friendships which are considered important for learning (Lillemyr, Søbstad, Marder, & Flowerday, 2011:1). According to Wiggins (2010:67), learner interactions help broaden participants point of view. Jacobs et al. (2001) describe participative learning as 'a

way of teaching in which learners work together to ensure that all members in their groups have learnt and assimilated the same content'. Co-operative learning is done in smaller groups with intent "to maximise own learning and that of others" (Bitzer, 2004).

Regular lessons with classroom teachers limited learner's activities to copying notes from the chalkboard and clapping when one of gives a correct answer with a song "well done, well done such a good boy/girl, no jealous". Lessons with action songs were however planned to involve activities at every stage. As a result, there was no prolonged time in which the learners just sat and listened to the researcher. The introduction has a series of questions broken down into smaller components to cover all aspects of the topic and narrations of subject matter as stories. Stories involved learners in giving responses to puzzles that were raised in the stories. During the development of the lessons, singing of the songs was done with solo and response parts to involve the learners. In addition, each song involved actions such as walking, turning around, jumping, clapping hands, holding hands, foot stamping, acting out the words to song stories using body gestures and playing own made instruments.

The action songs activities seemed to translate the classroom into the familiar natural setting of children's play. Consequently a "hands-on" and "minds on" (Levstik, 2010) learning occurred in a seemingly "less serious" context. Active learning is understood to involve the body, cognition and social dimensions (Philpott, 2001:87). The inclusion of active learning is also supported by Philpott (2001) that learning or "experience is always dynamic and never static" (pp.81). In order for children from birth through the primary grade to learn, they must be physically, mentally and socially active (pp.80)

and that “pupils develop best by doing and making music in a programme of active learning” (pp.88).

Even though the researcher was initially pre-occupied with meeting lesson objectives, opportunities to encourage positive dispositions that maybe considered as other forms of learning were also realised. These were mainly social and emotional in nature requiring a child to say sorry for accidentally stepping on the other and resolving conflicts that arose when taking turns and roles. They also included helping to resolving conflict among pupils and encouraging patience and tolerance with pupils that seemed to be ‘messing up’ especially in group work.

The off shots of activities and experiences of the teaching learning interactions are described as incidental learning in which learning that is not planned by either the teacher or the learner but occurs (Konetes, 2011). Brewer (2014) is of the view that instances of incidental learning may not easily be attainable in less active formal settings where “learning plans” are strictly followed. Incidental learning is most likely to occur in classes characterised by ‘social interaction and active involvement.’

3.4.6 Comprehensive coverage of subject matter

Lessons with action songs assumed an integrated approach on creating thematic topics from various subjects. For instance a topic on road safety in social and development studies also taught and emphasised aspects of sound and dynamics in Music and colour in Art. A topic on animals in integrated science, also illustrated sound in music by imitating sounds made by the animals involved. Art was featured in the lesson by identifying animal pictures from books and colouring them. Another topic on the community included a discussion on independence as a country’s birthday and how it relates to each child’s birthday thus covering a history topic in social studies. A

topic that placed awareness on child abuse was integrated with dancing and the playing of musical instruments.

In an integrated single lesson, learners may acquire knowledge of different subject areas simultaneously (Bredekamp, 2011) thereby helping them to relate to the world as a whole (Seefeldt et.al, 2014). Seefeldt et al. (2014:23) argue that “it is difficult for children to make sense of or remember abstract concepts such as colours, mathematical symbols, letter sounds, or the importance of facts [...] when they are presented at random or devoid of any meaningful context”. Integrated learning also enhances transfer of learning by placing the content ‘in multiple contexts’ and presenting instances that can facilitate a broader and varied view of understanding (Brandford et al. 2000).

Both teachers 1 and 2 acknowledged that using action song in an integrated manner was helpful in covering much more content in a shorter time than is normally the case. Teacher 1 said that the lessons covered a lot of content easily but she felt children need to be given time to write. Teacher 2 said, “I think I can cover so many topics like this, usually I don’t manage to teach everything during the school term.” Contardi, Fall, Flora, Gandee and Treadway (2000) confirm that the time allocated to teaching subjects singly is not usually adequate.

3.4.7 Demand for planning in teaching with action songs

During the focus group discussion, teacher 1 said, “there is no doubt that teaching using action songs requires much work but that it has many benefits.” She added that “perhaps I just need to be a bit creative since there is no need to buy expensive things to as water bottles and stones worked well.” Teacher 2 also echoed the demand for planning and preparation in lessons with actions songs by saying, “it seemed like too

much work went into preparing and planning for such lessons, and I wish we had books that could show us how to do all that.” Both teachers noted limitations in their abilities to invent new songs. Teacher 2 said, “I don’t have skills in composing songs but from what I observed from you, I think I can try.” Teacher 1 wanted to know if they were any basic skills I could share on composing songs. I suggested that they could replace the words in familiar songs with subject matter that they intended to teach as a start. From the teacher responses, it can be concluded that even though using action songs in teaching demands intense planning, it immense positive influences on teaching and learning compared to the traditional method of teaching by telling.

PAR enabled insight into important questions on teachers’ creative skills in creating songs and using methods that support active, interactive and integrated teaching and learning. Teachers recognised creative teaching skills as key in effective teaching and learning in the study. As stated in UNESCO report (2013:38), an education system is only as good as its teachers as regards how they organise content and use instructional methods. A general lack of creativity was found among teachers in other studies by Stavrou (2012), Barnes (2001) and Coulson and Burke (2013). According to Barnes (2001:96,97) the emphasis on knowledge transmission is evidence that teachers may have “a mastery of content but lack [...] pedagogical skills. The UNESCO (2013:26) report however showed that in most low income countries, most teachers are products of defective education systems and may lack in core subject matter let alone how to deliver it to their learners. In retrospect, this points to a greater need for musical practical skills in teacher training. It can be assumed that there is lack of practical guidance on how song and play (actions), which are topics in the teacher training syllabus, can be used as part of daily teaching practice. Overall, the minimal emphasis given to music and play in teacher training indicates that the realisation of

playful learning as recommended in the ECE policy of Zambia (2012:29) is yet to be implemented.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the remarkable potential of action songs in early childhood education (ECE), offering valuable insights that carry implications for both classroom practices and teacher training programs. One crucial implication is the need for schools and educators to rethink classroom organization and management. The comparison between traditional classrooms, characterized by rows of desks that limit movement and interaction, and action song-based classrooms with flexible arrangements, underscores the importance of creating open and engaging learning environments. Schools should consider adopting more flexible classroom layouts that allow for freer movements and interactions among students. This approach can foster a sense of openness and engagement, ultimately enhancing the learning experience.

Moreover, this study underscores the significance of injecting joy and enthusiasm into the learning process through action songs. Traditional teaching methods often result in learner restlessness and disinterest, leading to distractions and disruptive behavior. However, action songs have been shown to captivate learners, sparking active participation, enjoyment, and a reluctance to end lessons. This change in behavior suggests heightened motivation and self-driven learning experiences. Therefore, educators should strive to integrate joy and engagement into their teaching methods, aligning with the idea that learning should be enjoyable and self-motivated.

Furthermore, this research highlights the benefits of promoting cooperative and participative teaching and learning. In traditional classrooms, learner participation tends to be limited to responding to the teacher's questions and copying notes. Action

song-based lessons, on the other hand, encourage cooperation between the teacher and learners and collaboration among peers. Learners actively engage in cooperative learning, offering suggestions, correcting each other, and helping to overcome challenges. These experiences not only enhance academic participation but also foster essential social skills such as teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution. Therefore, educators should encourage cooperative and collaborative learning experiences that extend beyond academics to enrich learners' interpersonal skills.

Additionally, the study emphasizes the value of integrated teaching methods like action songs. Lessons with action songs embrace an integrated approach that allows learners to explore thematic topics derived from multiple subject areas simultaneously. This approach enhances learners' comprehension by providing multiple perspectives on a topic and facilitates the efficient coverage of subject matter within a shorter timeframe. As a result, educators should consider adopting integrated teaching methods to optimize subject coverage and deepen learners' understanding of complex topics.

Lastly, the demand for planning and preparation when using action songs in teaching cannot be overlooked. This study underscores the importance of thorough planning, creativity, and resourcefulness. Teachers expressed a desire for guidance on composing songs and practical skills development in teacher training programs. To address this need, teacher training programs should incorporate modules on creative teaching methods, including action songs, equipping educators with the tools and skills necessary to design engaging and effective lessons.

3.6 Recommendations

Based on the findings and observations outlined in the study, several recommendations can be formulated to enhance teaching and learning through the incorporation of action songs in early childhood education (ECE) settings:

Flexible Classroom Arrangements: Educators should consider adopting more flexible classroom arrangements, such as standing in circles or rows, or sitting on the floor, when using action songs in ECE. These arrangements allow for better visibility, increased interaction among learners, and a conducive environment for active participation. Teachers should be encouraged to explore alternative seating arrangements to promote engagement.

Active Learning Strategies: Teachers should integrate action songs and other active learning strategies into their teaching methods to enhance learners' interest and focus. Action songs can serve as a powerful tool to capture learners' attention, reduce restlessness, and increase motivation. Educators should be trained in utilizing active learning techniques effectively.

Promotion of Cooperative Learning: Action songs promote cooperative learning and peer interaction. Educators should encourage collaboration among learners, allowing them to offer suggestions, correct each other, and work together on tasks. Group activities should be integrated into lessons to foster friendships and expand learners' perspectives. Teachers should be trained to facilitate cooperative learning effectively.

Integrated Teaching and Subject Coverage: Embrace an integrated approach to teaching by incorporating subject matter from various domains into lessons with action songs. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of topics and facilitates knowledge transfer. Teacher training programs should emphasize

integrated teaching methods and provide educators with resources to develop integrated lesson plans.

Support for Teacher Creativity: Recognize the importance of creativity in teaching with action songs. Teachers should be encouraged to explore creative ways of using action songs in their lessons. Practical guidance and training on song composition and creative teaching methods should be integrated into teacher training programs.

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APPENDIX

The table below presents songs, their English interpretations, actions, subject areas and topics taught: (The C and R denote the call and response parts respectively).

Song	Actions	Subject Area
<i>Kwasha mukwenu (Lunda)</i>	Stepping the beat	Social and development studies
C: <i>Kwasha mukwenu mama</i>	Clapping to the rhythm	
Help your friend mum	Clapping the beat	Topic
R: <i>Kwasha mukenu</i>	Call and response	Helping each other
Help your friend		
C: How we live in Africa		
R: <i>Kwasha mukwenu</i>		
Help your friend		
C: Helping each other		
R: <i>Kwasha mukwenu</i>		
Help your friend		

<p><i>Tubatotele (Bemba)</i></p> <p>C: <i>Tubatotele</i></p> <p>R: Hand clap (ta ta)</p> <p>C: <i>Tubatotele</i></p> <p>R: Hand clap (tate ta)</p> <p>All: <i>Twikatane, twikale panshi, twiminine, tushunguluke, shunguluke</i> (Lets hold hands, sit down, stand up, turn around, turn around)</p>	<p>Clapping the crotchet and quaver patterns</p> <p>Clapping at varying tempo (fast and slow)</p> <p>Holding hands</p> <p>Siting and standing</p> <p>Turning around</p>	<p>Integrated science</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>Keeping the environment clean</p>
<p>Oo Zambia</p> <p>C: Oo Zambia</p> <p>R: Zambia Zambia Zambia</p> <p>C: Oo Zambia</p> <p>R: Zambia ni ziko langa</p>	<p>Walking to the rhythm of the song</p> <p>Walking inwards and outwards hands akimbo</p> <p>Call and response</p> <p>Clapping hands</p>	<p>Integrated science</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>Animals</p>
<p><i>Ndine Zambitious</i></p> <p>C: <i>Ndine Zambitious</i></p> <p>I am Zambitious</p> <p>R: <i>Ndiwe Zambitious</i></p> <p>We are Zambitious</p> <p>All: Let us <i>Zam</i> tell it</p>	<p>Hand clapping</p> <p>Pointing at self and others</p> <p>Gestures of washing the body, combing hair, and brushing teeth</p>	<p>Integrated science</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>Keeping the human body clean</p>

<p>All: Clean my body every day, wash my hair every day, brush my teeth everyday</p>		
<p><i>Aalila mwana adandaula</i> (Nyanja) C: <i>Aalila mwana adandaula</i> The child is crying, the child is complaining R: <i>Aalila mwana adandaula</i> The child is crying, the child is complaining C: <i>Nilekeni neo nipunzile,</i> <i>nilekeni neo nikule</i> Allow me me to go to school, allow me to grow All: Eee</p>	<p>Dancing in turns Hand clapping Playing simple instruments (shakers, drums)</p>	<p>Social and development studies Topic Awareness on child abuse</p>
<p><i>Ngoma yalila ngoma (Nyanja)</i> C: <i>Ngoma yalila ngoma</i> The drum is playing R: <i>Ngoma yalila ngoma</i> The drum is playing C: <i>Yakwatu</i> (Our drum sound) R: <i>Ngoma yalila ngoma</i> The drum is playing</p>	<p>Dancing in turns Playing simple instruments (shakers, drums Demonstrate long and short note values by clapping and using shakers and drums Clapping the beat</p>	<p>Social and development studies Topic Community</p>

<p><i>Kakulya takachepa (Bemba)</i></p> <p>C: <i>Kakulya takachepa</i></p> <p>Food is never too little to share</p> <p>R: <i>Mpelako mune</i></p> <p>Give me some my friend</p> <p>C: <i>Kakulya takachepa</i></p> <p>Food is never too little to share</p> <p>R: <i>Mpelako mune</i></p> <p>Give me some my friend</p> <p>All: <i>mpelako, mpelako, kakulya takachepa</i></p> <p>Give me some, give me some, food is never too little to share</p>	<p>Tapping the rhythm on the floor with stones</p> <p>Singing and playing in groups</p> <p>Kneeling</p>	<p>Social and development studies</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>Sharing food</p>
<p>Ae Ae</p> <p>C: Ae Ae</p> <p>R: Ae Ae</p> <p>C: Ae Ae</p> <p>R: Ae Ae</p>	<p>Singing in pairs</p> <p>Hand clapping games</p> <p>Touching body parts</p> <p>Demonstrate tempo (fast and slow)</p>	<p>Integrated science</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>The human body</p>
<p><i>Rape, Kalembula, Chibwabwa (Bemba)</i></p> <p>C: <i>Rape, kalembula, Chibwabwa</i></p> <p>Kales, sweet potato leaves, pumpkin leaves</p> <p>R: <i>Tulelya</i></p>	<p>Tapping the rhythm of the song on the floor with stones</p> <p>-in groups of four</p> <p>Tapping the rhythm of the words</p>	<p>Social and development studies</p> <p>Topic</p> <p>Healthy eating</p>

<p>we should eat</p> <p><i>C: Impwa, delelele, lubanda,</i></p> <p>All these vegetables</p> <p>R: <i>Tulelya</i></p> <p>we should eat</p> <p>All: <i>Fyonsi ifi fisuma kumubili</i></p> <p>All these are good for the body</p> <p>All: Keeping body healthy</p>		
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