

Utilizing Music and Songs to enhance young learners' motivation in English classroom

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Abstract: *One of the main challenges English language teachers face in their daily classes is to find creative ways of sustaining their students' interest in language learning, which can often be perceived as dull and tedious. Music and songs, which have a universal appeal and ubiquitous presence in most people's daily lives, have all the prerequisites to become an effective teaching resource in this respect. However, this useful resource appears to be underutilized by English language teachers, which is attributable to the lack of understanding of its theoretical rationale and benefits. The present paper aims to analyze the role and potential of music and songs in English language teaching in the light of current research and literature. Research findings suggest that the effective use of music and songs in language teaching has the potential to address multiple intelligences, reduce anxiety, increase motivation, facilitate memory retention and establish an affectively conducive learning environment. Moreover, music and songs can be utilized to enhance the learning of almost every aspect of the target language, to develop cultural awareness and to foster students' creativity. Apart from discussing theoretical arguments and empirical evidence in support of using music and songs in language instruction, the paper provides practical suggestions for integrating music activities into English classrooms. It is hoped that a larger number of teachers will deem music and songs a valuable educational tool which they can use to engage their students both affectively and cognitively and to promote effective and enjoyable language teaching and learning.*

Keywords: *Music, Songs, English Language Teaching, young learners, Creativity*

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I. Introduction

Music is present almost everywhere and is an integral part of our everyday lives. We listen to music when we are happy and when we are upset, while exercising, studying, working, resting, running, driving and flying. We hear it on the radio and television, in cinemas, at sports and cultural events, at weddings, in restaurants and shopping malls, and when we are placed on hold during a telephone call. Music has been efficiently exploited in the film and advertising industry because of its capacity to evoke strong emotions and trigger memory, apart from being enjoyable.

Music is not only pleasant to hear (hence the expression music to one's ears), but also beneficial to health and well-being, which explains why it is frequently used as a therapeutic tool. As studies have shown, listening to certain kinds of music can improve mood, decrease depression, reduce stress, relieve pain (e.g. for surgery patients), stabilize heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate, help consume less food, boost the immune system, help treat insomnia, increase exercise endurance and improve running motivation and performance (Drazen & Woods, 2003; Harmat, Takács, & Bodizs, 2008; Karageorghis et al., 2009; Trappe, 2009; Cervellin & Lippi, 2011; Snyder, Snaterse, & Donelan, 2012; Chanda & Levitin, 2013; Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, & Huron, 2013). Moreover, a recent study found that listening to "happy music" facilitates divergent thinking, which is a key element of creativity (Ritter & Ferguson, 2017). Hence, music is not only a form of art meant for entertainment, but also a kind of healing art or a medicine for the soul and body, in a manner of speaking. At the same time, music can be used for educational purposes, especially in language teaching.

One of the main challenges English language teachers face in their daily classes is to find creative ways of sustaining their students' interest in language learning, which can often be perceived as dull and tedious. Music and songs, which have a universal appeal and ubiquitous presence in most people's daily lives, have all the prerequisites to become an effective teaching resource in this respect. However, this useful resource appears to be underutilized by English language teachers, which is largely attributable to the lack of understanding of its theoretical rationale and how to exploit it in the classrooms as well as the scarcity of publications on this subject (González, 2007; Salcedo, 2010; Engh, 2013). The present paper aims to analyze the role and potential of music and songs in English language teaching in the light of current research and literature. After discussing

theoretical arguments and empirical evidence in support of using music and songs in language instruction, the paper will provide some practical suggestions for integrating music activities into English language teaching. It is obvious that the present paper cannot claim to provide an exhaustive account of all the possible ways music can be used in English classrooms, which depend on each individual teacher's resourcefulness and creativity.

Rationale for Using Music and Songs

In this section, we will discuss some of the main reasons for using music and songs in language teaching that are supported by theory and research.

Music and Language The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, developed by Gardner (1983) on the basis of research in several disciplines (including psychology, brain science, genetics and anthropology), asserts that human beings possess a set of relatively independent intellectual capacities that they draw on individually and corporately, rather than a single intelligence measured by traditional IQ tests. These multiple intelligences include linguistic intelligence (analyzing and creating oral and written language); logical-mathematical intelligence (making calculations and solving abstract problems); musical intelligence (discerning and expressing different sound patterns); spatial intelligence (perceiving the visual-spatial world and forming mental imagery); bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (using physical skills to produce things and solve problems); interpersonal intelligence (understanding other people's moods and interacting with them); intrapersonal intelligence (knowing oneself and directing one's actions accordingly) and naturalistic intelligence (identifying living beings and features of the natural world) (Davis, Christodoulou, Seider & Gardner, 2011). According to Gardner (2013), these intelligences are combined in a different fashion in each individual and "strength (or weakness) in one intelligence does not predict strength (or weakness) in any other intelligences". He further notes that only two intelligences - linguistic and logical-mathematical - have been valued and tested for in modern schools (Davis, Christodoulou, Seider & Gardner, 2011).

One of the main educational implications of this theory is that ideas, concepts and skills should be taught in different ways so that as many of the intelligences as possible can be exploited to develop a particular intelligence. Even if language teachers may not be interested in developing musical intelligence per se, they can still tap their students' musical intelligence and interest so as to help them achieve mastery in the target language. Irrespective of whether or not a teacher and students have received musical training, music and songs can be easily integrated into classroom activities and thus function as a teaching tool in a way similar to audiovisual material or computer software that are employed in language education. Classroom activities involving music and songs can be used in a variety of ways to improve the learner's interpersonal, intrapersonal and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences in addition to musical and linguistic intelligences (Failoni, 1993; Campbell, Campbell & Dickinson, 1996; Abbott, 2002).

Music and Affect

The major implication of the Affective Filter Hypothesis is that a prerequisite for successful second language acquisition is a low-anxiety, non-threatening classroom atmosphere that arouses positive emotions in learners. This is where music and songs can play a facilitative role. It is very likely that learners will feel lower levels of anxiety and inhibition if songs are used in teaching new concepts and vocabulary (Metaxa, 2013). While listening to music can help learners feel relaxed and become creative (Mora, 2000), group singing can "lower the walls between people, decrease competitive instincts and build cooperation" (Jackson & Joyce, 2003, p. 7). Singing songs can also boost learners' self-confidence as it enables them to master certain English words and expressions contained in the lyrics, which they will be able to use in speaking later on. It is a pleasant experience for learners to simply listen to music or to sing in chorus (Medina, 2002), which is often absent in language classrooms. As Richard (1969) points out: "Pleasure for its own sake is an important part of language learning, a fact which is often overlooked by the teacher in his quest for teaching points, or by the course designer focusing on presentation or repetition" (p. 24). Furthermore, the use of music in the classroom can benefit teachers as well and make language teaching less stressful. As stated by Brown (1998), music "can help make teaching more enjoyable by bringing us closer to our students and, more importantly, closer to ourselves" (p. 68).

Music and Memory As stated by Thornbury (2006), "There is no learning without memory, and language learning in particular, with the enormous load of vocabulary that it requires, is largely a memory task" (p. 129). Successful second language learning implies that learners can memorize the studied material and call on it whenever they need it while using the language. Several authors point out that music and songs can facilitate the long-term retention of the words, phrases and formulaic sequences that learners need to memorize (Mora, 2000; Abbott, 2002; Lake, 2002; Lowe, 2007; Kerekes, 2015).

A number of studies on second and foreign language learners have shown the positive effect of music and songs on the retention and recall of words, phrases and longer text (Medina, 1990; Salcedo, 2002; Legg 2009; Ludke, 2010; Salcedo 2010; Rukholm, 2011; Coyle & Gómez Gracia, 2014). Notably, the study by

Salcedo (2010) investigated the effect of utilizing songs on text recall and involuntary mental rehearsal (din) in Spanish language classrooms for English native-speaker students at a university in the United States. Results demonstrated that using songs led to a better text recall as compared to text passage. With regard to involuntary mental rehearsal, two thirds of the students in the “music group” reported experiencing the din as opposed to one third of students in the “text group” (Salcedo, 2010). A recent comprehensive research project by Tegge (2015) involving 568 teachers of 20 languages in 41 countries investigated “whether songs as they are frequently used in language teaching rather than as they potentially should be used” (p. 4) have a beneficial effect on lexical learning. Based on the findings from three separate studies exploring various ways songs can be used in second language teaching, the researcher concluded that “the way teachers currently tend to use songs in language classrooms around the world can benefit lexical learning, in particular the consolidation of already familiar vocabulary and the acquisition of deep word knowledge beyond a first form-meaning connection” (Tegge, 2015, p. 197). She further noted that “while certain structural characteristics of songs have the potential of rendering text (and the lexis therein) memorable, it is the way that songs tend to be exploited in the classroom that capitalizes on this mnemonic potential” (Tegge, 2015, p. ii).

Selecting Music and Songs

There are plenty of songs available, especially online. But, not every song is suitable for teaching purposes. There are a number of factors that teachers should take into account when choosing a song for ESL classroom activities.

1) Purpose of the Song

Above all, the song to be used should have instructional value. It is crucial to determine what students can learn from or practise with a song and select songs that are related to the theme, grammatical structures or vocabulary covered in the class. Simple songs with recurring grammar features are suitable for grammar activities, while more sophisticated songs that contain idioms and metaphors are useful for practising vocabulary. As far as listening activities are concerned, it is recommended to use songs with appropriate repetition, moderate tempo and simpler syntax. When there is a need to focus on pronunciation, songs with colloquial speech are ideal for practising reduction and linking. Songs that tell exciting stories can serve as topics for classroom discussions and written assignments (Abbott, 2002; Salcedo, 2002; González, 2007). Apart from vocal music, instrumental compositions can also be used for speaking and writing activities, whereby the teacher can prompt the students to express their feelings and associations in relation to particular melodies.

2) The Age and Proficiency Level of the Students

It goes without saying that the music and songs to be selected should correspond to the age and proficiency level of the students. For young learners, it is beneficial to use nursery or children’s songs, which native-speaking infants are usually taught, because they are characterized by overall natural and rhythmic language with appropriate vocabulary and grammar as well as enjoyable phrase repetitions (Failoni, 1993; Zogota 2011). Similarly, songs produced especially for English language learners with controlled grammar and vocabulary can suit both young and adult beginners, though authentic songs of appropriate level of difficulty would hold greater appeal. In particular teenagers would definitely prefer learning English through popular songs, which can be used as an excellent opportunity to spark their interest in language learning. Although popular music can be helpful in learning the target language and its culture, several authors encourage the use of folk songs, which generally have superior prosodic quality, often tell a story and contain relatively simple melodies (Spicher & Sweeney, 2007; Zogota, 2011). No matter what type of songs teachers select, it is crucial to make sure that they are neither too easy to challenge the learners nor too difficult lest they leave them feeling frustrated. Apart from the language used in the songs, the themes ought to be suitable for the students’ age and interests (Abbott, 2002; González, 2007).

3) Language Content and Quality of the Song

It is vital to examine the language content and quality of the song by listening to it prior to presenting it to the learners. Songs can contain non-standard language, grammatically incorrect sentences, altered vocabulary, not well pronounced words and abbreviations. It is therefore important to choose, as far as possible, the songs written in standard language with lyrics identical in their written and recorded form and free from any confusing or inappropriate references. At the same time, the recording should be of good quality and the lyrics should be clear and easily distinguishable from the instrumental accompaniment (Lems; 2001; Abbott, 2002; Ashmore, 2011).

4) Musical Preferences of the Students and the Teacher

Several authors suggest that the students’ musical preferences should be taken into consideration when choosing songs for music activities. Lems (2001) states it would motivate students to deal with newest popular

songs or older hits, whose lyrics they might have heard but do not know very well. Likewise, Murphey (1992) recommends allowing students to put forward their choices as to the songs to be used as new material in the class so that they become actively engaged in the learning process. In addition to students' preferences, the musical taste of the teacher is also important. As stated by Lems (2001), "because teachers will show care and effort when presenting songs they are especially fond of, their favorites are also good". Similarly, Griffee (1992) emphasizes the importance of considering both the students' and the teacher's musical preferences: "It is not wise to use music that you do not like. It is also unwise to use music students do not like. The answer is to find common ground" (pp. 6-7). It is therefore advisable to ask the students to suggest song lyrics of their choice and to select the ones that have instructional values and are most popular with the students. Alternatively, teachers can make a list of different songs and let students choose, which will also involve them in their own learning.

5) Format of the Song

Music can be used either in audio or video format. While audio recordings are more readily available, music videos provide contextual information and can activate students' background knowledge, thereby enhancing comprehension. As stated by Marone (2018), teachers can explore "their multimodal features (music, lyrics, and moving images) and their multilayered meanings to increase students' linguistic and cultural competence" (p. 1). It is crucial, however, that teachers carefully select music videos to be used in the lessons paying special attention to their content and messages. As it is sometimes the case with popular music pieces, a song containing suitable lyrics can be debased due to its music video, which becomes inappropriate for the classroom use.

6) Classroom Opportunities

Teachers should also consider the availability of resources when they design music activities for the classroom. Such basic equipment as a computer with loudspeakers and a video projector will be needed to play songs or music videos in the classroom. In addition, music activities should be possibly conducted in large classrooms with appropriate acoustics. Lastly, care should be taken not to play music loudly so as not to cause inconvenience to other classes (Griffee 1992; Abbott, 2002).

Structuring Music Activities

Once teachers have selected the appropriate songs, they can design or adapt numerous classroom activities that can address all language skills. In order to make the experience of learning with music and songs as meaningful as possible for students, it is recommended to divide the music activities into three stages: pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening (Abbott, 2002; González, 2007; Lorenzutti, 2014; see Table 1).

Table 1: Three Stages of a Song

Pre-listening stage	While -listening stage	Post-listening stage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Warm – up questions - Presenting of key vocabulary, phrases or grammar stutures - Pridiction activities (song title, content and theme, singer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognizing theme-specific words or grammatical form (e.g. colors, animals...) - Odering words , lines.. - Listening for detail (gap-fill, true/false, short answers...) - Matching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - singing/ chanting (for prounciation and fluecy) - retell the story in the song - Discuss the message of the song - Write a summary of the story told in the song - Read an article related to the topic of the song

Creative Music Activities

Apart from the activities mentioned above, teachers can use music in the classroom in various ways that go beyond listening to music and exploiting the song lyrics. Below are some student-centered music activities that can stimulate students' creativity, while also developing their language skills. Free-write/free-draw to the music: The teacher can play different types of music and ask the students to write or draw how they feel about them. Every student can also make up their own stories for the music piece (Lems, 2001; Budden, 2008).

Writing alternative verses of lyrics: Students can be encouraged to write their own lyrics, keeping the original mood or style. Students can do it in groups or individually, whereby each group or student will be responsible for writing a new part of the lyrics. In this way, the alternative lyrics of the entire song can be prepared and presented in the class (Shen, 2009; Simpson, 2015).

Planning (and filming) a music video: Groups of students can plan a music video for the song, focusing on the characters, the location and the storyline. After each group has explained the specific details of its plan for the music video in the class, the students can choose the one based on which the actual filming can be done (Simpson, 2015).

Preparing a lyric video: Students can prepare song lyric visualization videos by using song lyrics and relevant images. By doing this project, the students will not only be challenged to show their creativity and interpretive skills but they will also need to demonstrate that they clearly understand the vocabulary in the song so that they can pick up befitting images based on their understanding of the song (Lems, 2016).

Presenting on a musician or music genre: Students can be asked to make a presentation on a chosen musician or music style. In this project students are given the freedom to organize their entire project, including research on the topic of their interest and the presentation of their findings.

As a result, the students can develop their academic skills, practice their oral and organizational skills (Lems, 2018). As a matter of fact, the ideas discussed above only scrape the surface, considering the large number of creative ways that can be found for the adaptation of music and songs to the language classroom. In addition to pedagogical resource books (e.g., Griffiee, 1992; Murphey, 1992; Paterson & Willis, 2008; Arnold & Herrick, 2017) and articles on the use of music and songs in ESL/EFL classrooms (e.g., Failoni, 1993; Lems, 2001, 2016, 2018; Abbott, 2002; Budden, 2008; Lorenzutti, 2014; Simpson, 2015), there are several websites (e.g., tefltunes.com, tuneintoenglish.com) containing ready-made songbased lesson plans and classroom activities for various proficiency levels, which ESL teachers can adapt to fit the needs of their students.

II. Conclusion

Nowadays, the role of a teacher is not only educating but also motivating students who regard traditional ways of learning as dull and boring. Therefore, language teachers are supposed to show creativity and enthusiasm as well as openness to new ideas and challenges, while also keeping a balance between serious learning and amusement. Music and songs provide teachers with a rich and authentic resource that they can utilize to promote student engagement in the classrooms and to make a satisfactory connection between entertainment and learning. As the review of recent research and literature suggests, the effective use of music and songs in language teaching has the potential to address multiple intelligences, reduce anxiety, increase motivation, facilitate memory retention and establish an affectively conducive learning environment. In addition to making lessons more interesting, music and songs can be used to enhance the learning of almost every aspect of the target language, to develop cultural awareness and to foster students' creativity.

It is hoped that a larger number of English teachers will deem music and songs a valuable educational tool which they can use to engage their students both affectively and cognitively as well as to promote effective and enjoyable language teaching and learning. For a successful implementation it is vital that teachers select appropriate music and songs that are related to lesson objectives and then carefully design or adapt classroom activities that will help to achieve them.

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