

# Music and songs in teaching english



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There is a belief that first musical instruments appeared as early as speech, which means that the language of words and that of music were formed in parallel, completing and enriching each other. That is why language of words shows so much similarity to music. Both speech and music are characterized by rhythm and melody. Close associations of language and music have rooted in people's mind very deeply. People often use metaphorically the name of one to refer to the other: they call pleasant words "music to their ears", "face the music" when accepting criticism or punishment for something they have done, use the phrase "the language of music" to describe a way of expressing meaning through sounds. Sound and word are combined to give birth to pieces of vocal music, where music brings to light the internal sense of the text, reveals what is hidden between the lines. So it is natural to teach language with the help of music and songs. Moreover, a great number of scholars consider music and songs to be the most productive and effective ways of teaching a foreign language.

The role of music and songs in teaching English is very important. Using songs and music is one of the tools a teacher can use to teach English to the class, regardless of the age of the learner. Songs and music are a tie that binds all cultures and languages and, therefore, the best way to make learning English fun. Jeremy Harmer in his book "How to Teach English" emphasizes the importance of music as a learning tool by stating that music is a strong incentive for student engagement because "it speaks directly to our emotions while still allowing us to use our brains to analyse it and its effects if we so wish" (Harmer 319); and it plays a multifunctional role in the process of learning a foreign language, it has the power of creating a

propitious atmosphere, “ it can amuse and entertain, and it can make satisfactory connection between the world of leisure and the world of learning in the classroom” (Harmer 319). Tim Murphey, indicates two chief assets in the usage of music and songs in relation to language learning: “ music is highly memorable; it is highly motivating, especially for children, adolescents, and young adult learners” (Murphey 4).

Nevertheless, the role of songs and music in teaching English is often underestimated, and activities involving them are often neglected by teachers. The usage of music and songs in the classroom: “ has often been met with ridicule and a cautionary statement that although students were enjoying class, they were not learning” (Salcedo, “ The Effects of Songs in the Foreign Language Classroom on Text Recall and involuntary Mental Rehearsal”). Teachers usually think that students will not take music and songs seriously at English classes; they will have too much fun and will not pay any attention to the pedagogical aim of the song. It is not rare to hear teachers ask questions like ‘ What do music and songs have to do with language learning?’, ‘ What do you do with a song besides listen to it and possibly sing with it?’, ‘ What else can be done with the song besides gap-filling?’ This testifies to the fact that teachers are often unaware of the opportunities songs and music can present. There are different opinions, but it is for sure that it is a good way to make foreign language learning much more effective to learners of different age and different levels. Teachers who want to keep their students interested and motivated should use songs and music activities, since, according to Larry M. Lynch, it has lots of advantages: Songs almost always contain authentic, natural language;

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A variety of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs;

Songs are usually very easily obtainable;

Songs can be selected to suit the needs and interests of the students;

Grammar and cultural aspects can be introduced through songs;

Time length is easily controlled;

Students can experience a wide range of accents;

Song lyrics can be used in relating to situations of the world around us;

Students think songs are natural and fun.

(Lynch, “ 9 Reasons Why You Should Use Songs to Teach English as a Foreign Language.”)

Songs and music are invaluable in teaching English at elementary level. No other materials give the teacher such a broad range of possibilities for teaching various aspects of English. An illustration of language in action, the song can be subjected to linguistic analysis or turned into an exercise.

Through the use of songs English pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar can be effectively taught. According to Cameron there are three stages of a song as a task for elementary level students:

preparation stage (it is very important to activate the vocabulary and to form basic sentence structures in this stage);

core stage (the best way to involve students and raise their interest in this stage is to sing the song several times in the core, changing pace or volume and making students perform actions and sing along chorally);

follow-up stage (attempts to be a successful completion of the core stage )

(Millington, “ Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners”).

Songs can be used to develop students’ listening skills. They improve listening skills ‘ because they provide students with practice listening to different forms of intonation and rhythm” (Millington, “ Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners”). Songs can be really helpful in practicing listening skills “ warm-up work can provide a basis for students to make predictions before listening; listening activities can encourage listening for gist or listening for detail” (Hancock 7). Their advantage lies in the fact that they usually go at slower speed than speeches or dialogues; words, phrases, sentences are being sung which usually means that they are uttered more slowly and often more distinctly than in case of speaking. There is a wide range of song-based listening activities for students at elementary level:

picture discussion (the teacher presents some key words and/or the title from the lyrics and asks students to predict what the song is about);

‘ snippets of information’ (the teacher plays the first few seconds of the song and asks students to predict from the mood of the music what the song is about);

picture selection (the teacher shows students two or more alternative pictures, magazine photos perhaps, and asks them to say which one best matches the contents or mood of the lyric and why);

“ sequencing” (the teacher gives students a copy of the lyric with the lines in the wrong order or cut into strips, and students listen and put them in the right order).

While listening to songs students hear the language used so that they can both imitate the pronunciation and also subconsciously acquire some of its sounds and patterns. During the process of listening to songs, students subconsciously acquire some of English sounds and patterns. When it comes to singing, they imitate the pronunciation, learning to use rhythm and stress correctly. The task of learning the correct use of stress and rhythm becomes simpler because students are lead by the rhythm of a song. There are a few activities which students at elementary level can do with a song to practice pronunciation. The most effective one is repeating certain parts of the lyric (drilling).

Songs are equally suitable for teaching vocabulary at elementary level.

Teachers may use them for two purposes: either to present new vocabulary items or to practise the familiar ones. Often songs represent “ a theme or topic that can provide the context for vocabulary learning” (Millington, “ Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners”). Neil Millington in the article “ Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners” gives examples of two songs: “ Teaching Practice Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” serves to review body parts, or “ I Can Sing a Rainbow” which is

helpful for reviewing color names (Millington, “ Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners”). The repetition of monosyllabic words in children’s songs can help improving vocabulary acquisition (Millington, “ Using Songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners”). There are songs which can be used as the basis for dramatization. Tim Murphey states that at elementary level the dramatization of the song can be useful to express, through gestures, the meaning of some actions (Murphey 121). The age-old technique of asking students to perform actions with words has become popular because of well-documented research that shows it to be very effective. The idea is that if students can move and do what is said matching words to the actions, language is learnt more deeply.

Songs can be a good source of topics for discussion and different classroom activities at elementary level. The plot of the song is a good basis for story telling while characters in the song can serve as a basis for role play. By interpreting and converting song lyrics into prose and discussing the style of the song students have a chance to develop their productive skills – speaking and writing. The main speaking activities for elementary level are:

role-play (the teacher asks students to imagine that they are characters of the given song);

continue the story (students may be asked to imagine how the characters ended up in the situation they are in.);

Particular attention should be paid to the choice of songs. Mark Hancock (Hancock 3) thinks that just because a student might not choose to listen to a certain song outside the classroom, does not mean that the student would

not enjoy it as part of a learning activity. Teachers are not advised to present the song as something students are supposed to like. Thus, any song could be used for teaching purposes. According to Tim Murphey, any song can be useful and motivating, however teachers should use the students' choice of music and song as much as possible (Murphey 14). Another important issue is whether teachers should always use authentic songs or not. According to Jeremy Harmer, listening material as well as the kind of tasks which go with it are determined by the level of students (Harmer 319).

Music and songs in English classroom are important and useful tools. This is a great formula for keeping students always interested in the language they learn. With their help students can not only learn English but also relax and enjoy their class. There are benefits to using songs in the classroom; however, more often than not, songs are used relatively ineffective, often as activities between learning. No matter how enjoyable or memorable singing songs can be, it will not teach learners to use the language and will not give them the ability to communicate in another language. Reframing songs into tasks according to preparation, core, and follow-up stages enhance song's potential as teaching and learning tools. Songs and music can be used for practicing different aspects of English, and all learning skills can be improved.