



## DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE THROUGH MUSIC IN EFL CLASSROOM

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When I first started to learn English, I waited anxiously to learn all the skills of the language, and particularly, to learn songs in English. What a better and quick way to gain knowledge and confidence in oral language than through music?

Young children seem to be naturally "wired" for sound and rhythm (Davies, 2000). Songs are very valuable in developing powerful access to the new language by being enjoyable, fostering confidence, and, increasing attention span and motivation to learn. I've been thinking a lot lately about teacher-student interaction in the EFL classroom and the possibility of producing the target language through songs.

A common problem for EFL teachers is how to deal with a passive class where students are irresponsible and avoid interaction. In fact, this can be a frustrating experience for both parties. So, how can teachers ease anxiety and encourage students to use the target language in the EFL classroom? How can teachers utilize songs to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere?

English in Palestine is limited to a few hours per week of formal classroom instruction. Learners desperately need increased exposure to the foreign language. Oral language is an interactive and social process, and using songs is a natural way to experience rich language in a pleasurable way (Woodall & Ziembrock). In fact, there are a number of reasons introduced throughout the literature for using songs in the classroom. Particularly, there a number of affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons. Songs, according to many scholars, are among the best ways of teaching a foreign language. The authors of Spectrum Prentice-Hall Regents Publications state that songs are an important aspect of culture, representing the history, folklore, and current idiom of a country. Singing can build students' confidence by allowing them to enjoy a degree of fluency in English before they have achieved it in speaking." Also, songs can be incorporated into all language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking). The World Wide Web, being prevalent in both the classroom and students' daily lives has made access to English music and lyrics easier.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis is one of five proposed hypotheses developed by Steven Krashen. This hypothesis is related to language learning and it appeals to teachers because it provides an explanation as to why some learners learn and others do not. Krashen (1982) explains that for optimal learning to occur, the affective filter must be weak, which means that a positive attitude towards learning is present. If the affective filter is strong, the learner will not seek language input and, in turn, will not be open to language acquisition. Songs are one method for achieving a weak affective filter and promoting language learning. Saricoban and Metin (2000) have found that songs can develop the four skill areas of reading, speaking, writing and listening. King (1996, p46) states that songs can be used to:

- Present a topic, a language point, lexis, etc.

- Practice a language point, lexis, etc.
- Focus on common learner errors in a more direct way.
- Encourage extensive and intensive listening.
- Stimulate discussion of attitude and feelings.
- Encourage creativity and use of imagination.
- Provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere.
- Bring variety and fun to learning.

Lo and Li (1998) offer similar suggestions, writing that songs provide a break from classroom routine, and that learning through songs develops a non-threatening classroom atmosphere in which the four skills can be enhanced. The belief that songs provide enjoyment and develop language skills is also noted by several other authors, including: (Adamowski, 1997; Bechtold, 1983; Domoney&Harris, 1993; Griffee, 1992; Guglimino, 1986; Lems, 1984; Little, 1983 and Monreal, 1982).

The enjoyment aspect of learning language through songs is directly related to affective factors. Music has always been a way for children to remember stories and learn about the world around them. Using music as a stimulus can affect one's emotions and make information easier to remember. Most teachers use songs that have connections with the structure or part of speech they are teaching. They may reform a lyric or delete words to suit the level of ability. They can begin with different rhyming patterns and other written texts (Woodall & Ziembrock).

Songs also present opportunities for developing automaticity, which is the main cognitive reason for using songs in the classroom. Gatabonton and Segalwitz (1988, p473) define automaticity as "a component of language fluency which involves both knowing what to say and producing language rapidly without pauses." Using songs can help automatize the language development process. The repetitive style of the song lends itself to an activity where students create their own present progressive sentences based upon their own interest. After listening to the song, students create their own lyrics following the tune of the song.

The effects of music (including all types of rhymes and songs) on the emotions are commonly known, but the effects of music on the brain and thinking are also demonstrable. Research has shown that during an electroencephalogram (EEG), music can change brain waves and make the brain more receptive to learning. Music connects the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain so that they work together and make learning quick and easy. Brain function is increased when listening to music and studies have shown that music promotes more complex thinking. It can make connections between emotions, thinking and learning (Davies, 2000).