The Effect of Using Songs On Young Learners and Their Motivation for Learning English

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Abstract

Songs are appreciated for their linguistic, pedagogical, cultural and entertaining features and they are precious language learning materials. They can be used to teach and develop every aspect of a language. This paper aims to verify these claims and confirm the effectiveness of using songs as a means to improve young learners’ English language vocabulary and to determine whether songs influence young learners’ motivation to learn English. The paper deals with theoretical explanations of young learners, listening skills, and different aspects of using and teaching songs. It also discusses how songs influence motivation and the connection of songs with some language learning theories. The analytical part of the paper explains the procedure and the results obtained from the pre-tests, post-tests and delayed tests for three different children’s songs as well as from the questionnaire that was done in order to collect information about motivation provided by songs. The results showed that songs have a positive influence on vocabulary retention of young learners. Whatever setting is used, aural or aural/visual, the results prove that songs are suitable for different learning styles, they encourage positive learning experience, and enhance their knowledge. Songs aid motivation and help learners develop a love for language learning. Students motivated in this way are imaginative, creative, and eager to learn and succeed.

Key Words: Songs, ESL, Young Learners, Motivation, Vocabulary, Listening Skills

Introduction

Teaching English to young learners cannot be seen only as teaching the language. This challenging process needs to consider the social and cognitive development of learners. In order to do this, it is necessary to create an atmosphere that resembles the one which is natural to children. One of the best ways to create such a natural, anxiety-free environment is through interesting activities. Songs certainly belong to the group of fun activities which serve as useful tools for learning the language and which do not put pressure on students to immediately produce the language but to start doing it only when they are ready.

Songs are one type of listening activity that have a broad potential. Music and songs are essential parts of growing and learning. Children love to sing and teachers naturally use songs to teach them concepts and language in a fun way. Some of the significant characteristics of songs are that they are fun and can keep the students excited. However, the most important feature of songs is repetition. They contain language patterns, but also develop listening skills, pronunciation and rhythm, and provide a fun atmosphere. Even if the teachers play songs multiple times a day, the majority of students probably would not get bored. In addition, songs are very beneficial types of activities. There are so many aspects of a language that can be delivered and recycled through the use of songs. They can be used at any stage of a lesson and there are many ways to incorporate them into a lesson. Sometimes, they are used just as gap fillers and warm-ups, sometimes as the main part of a lesson, but sometimes they are there to provide a fun atmosphere.
Considering all these benefits of songs in language learning, this paper further discovers to what extent songs improve vocabulary retention. It also covers whether audio-visual and textual representation of language material provide better grounds for language acquisition than audio alone. Moreover, it shows that songs have a strong influence on young learners and their motivation to learn English.

**Songs and Young Learners**

The main goal of English language learning is the development of communication skills, as well as maintaining interest and motivation for learning English. In order to accomplish these goals, it is necessary for the content to be closely related to learners’ real life and materials need to be adjusted to different learning styles. This means that the lessons should abound in versatile activities. Songs are examples of such activities which due to their nature, fun content, and relaxing features influence the development of language in children. For young learners, songs, such as popular pop-rock songs, traditional and educational songs, rhymes and chants, present an excellent source of language. Students can not only learn and practice different segments of English through songs, but also satisfy the specific characteristics of their age. Children, in general, like songs, and if songs are used for learning a language, then children enthusiastically accept them. One key factor is that children are not aware of the fact that they are learning through songs, and therefore they see them as a pleasant and fun part of English lessons. Apart from this, songs serve as a good source of pronunciation, intonation, and accent practice, but also as a practice of listening skills and vocabulary development.

**Types of Songs for Young Learners**

If well planned, applied and evaluated, songs can become useful tools for language teaching and learning. Also, if the right songs are chosen, learning can become a fun and memorable experience. In order to accomplish this, a division between different song types and their purposes needs to be made. House (1997: 19) makes a distinction between traditional songs and songs written specially for young learners. She states that children are normally familiar with the former type, while the latter are, as their name suggests, specially written for a textbook to support certain vocabulary and grammar points. Similarly, Ur (1992: 65) makes the distinction between the specially-composed English teaching songs and the authentic ones. She explains that the first type of songs is used to teach vocabulary and language structures, as well as to aid oral language production. The authentic songs, on the other hand, are a matter of cultural aspect and entertainment. Murphey (1992: 121) presents a different typology of songs for young learners. He clarifies that there are jazz chants and Total Physical Response (TPR) or action songs. Jazz chants are rhythmic expressions in a situational context without background music. They develop listening comprehension skills and reinforce rhythm, intonation, specific language structures, and vocabulary. TPR songs require students to respond physically to what they hear and sing only when they are ready to do so.

Using the appropriate songs is of critical importance. Whether they are specially written for learning English or authentic, it is crucial to choose songs that suit children’s level of English as well as their interest since, as widely accepted, children enjoy simple and catchy songs. The love of repetition and the need to move, common to all young children, make songs integral parts of English lessons.

**Songs in Teaching English to Young Learners**

It is proven that children love playing, singing songs, and experiencing English with their senses. Therefore, Bourke (2006: 281) asserts that a syllabus for young second language learners should be experientially appropriate and certainly contain songs, rhymes, and chants. Similarly, Martin (2000: 69) points out that songs and rhymes represent powerful features of primary language programs. Having this in mind, teachers have to do anything to make their learners happy, cheerful, and satisfied. Consequently, they need to make sure to choose songs and activities which are fun but also fit the curriculum and the theme of their lessons.
Children learn best when they are exposed to real-life contexts (Paul, 1996: 6). This statement is explained by an assertion that children prefer doing things they like doing outside the classroom. Teachers need to have in mind that some children love active participation and physical movement while others do not like to be physically involved. What also needs to be taken into consideration is whether or not songs are motivational and provide an emotional experience. This is clarified by the fact that children need to be emotionally involved in the learning process which abounds in play-like activities which are likeable and fun, but promote learning. Researchers agree (Jolly, 1975: 14; Shin, J.K., 2006) that songs are useful teaching aids which raise and maintain students’ motivation, especially in cases when they are catchy and supported with colorful visuals, realia (objects from real life used in classroom instruction), and movement. These supplements add additional sensory and visual input which in turn enhance learning.

Songs, chants, poems, and rhymes play an important role in early language development. They represent a flexible resource which allows teachers to use and adapt them in a variety of ways so as to suit the needs of their learners. Children easily absorb and reproduce the language of songs. They serve as an excellent memory tool. The repetition of words, language structures, and rhythm enhance learning and they stick easily in learners’ minds. In order to make this a memorable experience, it is important to choose songs that children find enjoyable and not boring and do not give children the feeling of being forced to listen to songs that are not appealing to them.

To recap, songs and rhymes are essential in young learners’ classroom for a number of reasons. First of all, they are children’s favorite language activities which contain repetitive language and set phrases. Furthermore, they develop listening comprehension, they teach pronunciation, intonation and stress in a natural way, and teach vocabulary and language structures of the song. In addition, songs help children build their confidence by allowing them to join in no matter how good their English is. They also build group dynamics. And finally, if a song appeals to children they usually sing it on their own, outside the classroom (Roth, 1998: 53). According to Green (in Nelson and Son, 1986) the rhythm that verses of a song contain aids the development of children’s language fluency, while rhyming words of a song help children focus on pronouncing them correctly. She also believes that the children who were continually exposed to songs at their early age increase their vocabulary and build their confidence in using the target language.

Everything that has been said so far can be extended with Sevik’s (2011: 1029-1030) list of the most remarkable characteristics of using songs with young learners. He concluded that:

- Listening comprehension is best taught through songs.
- Songs represent the strong feature of modern primary language programmes.
- Songs may extend young learners’ attention span.
- Songs are great tool for language learning at an early age.
- Songs are regarded as an excellent memory tool.
- Songs provide a variety of comprehensible input.
- Songs create a safe and natural classroom ethos.
- Songs are extremely repetitive and result in language fluency.
- Songs abound in cultural content.

In addition, songs are beneficial for various reasons in English classes; Griffie (1988) identified the following reasons:

1. Songs and music lower anxiety. If they are introduced in the early years of language learning, songs and music tend to create enjoyable, anxiety-free environment.
2. Songs are useful for teaching vocabulary.
3. Songs serve as an excellent listening material.
4. Songs can be used as supplemental texts in the end of the lesson, on special occasions or as an additional component for vocabulary development.
5. Songs and music can be used to support grammar presentation, practice and revision.
6. Songs and music bring various cultures into the classroom.
Similarly, Murphy (1992) discusses the benefits of songs, and asserts that songs aid the development of language in young children and influence short- and long-term memory. He adds that songs are short, self-contained texts and recordings which contain simple, repetitive, conversational language. Due to their joyful nature they provide variety and fun and aid relaxation and group dynamics. Therefore, it can be concluded that by listening to songs in English lessons children may benefit in many areas. Being repetitive does not mean that songs are dull, but instead they offer children opportunity to drill and acquire the language in a fun way. Furthermore, songs assist learners in developing their vocabulary and

...provide meaningful contexts for teaching vocabulary because they deal with relevant topics and include forms and functions that can reinforce common themes and structures that are being covered in the language program (Abbott, 2002).

In addition, songs are a great opportunity to teach a foreign language culture. This cultural element can be found in, for example, children’s songs, Christmas carols, and counting songs.

Activities with Songs

A large number of activities can be used with songs. There is no aspect of a language to which songs cannot be adapted. Any activity that can be used with the four skills, vocabulary or grammar can be modified to be used with songs. However, some activities work better with young learners than with older ones. “Listen and repeat” (Scott and Ytreberg, 1991) and “Listen and do” (Şevik, 2012: 10) such as listen and draw, mime, dance, point, match, and color are types of activities that work well with young learners. Murphey (1992: 17) states that young learners will enthusiastically accept any kind of songs. It all depends on teacher’s imagination.

How to Teach a Song?

Every teacher may have his/her own way of using songs in his/her lessons. Regardless of the way it is taught, the key to successful use of a song is its application. That is to say that the presentation and activities have to suit young learners’ characteristics, their mastery of the language and their interests. In order to accomplish this, a certain technique has to be applied. The suggested, but flexible, procedure is as follows (Brewster et al., 2002):

Set the context.
Use visual aids to introduce new vocabulary.
Play or sing the song to familiarize students with it.
Do further listening activity.
Practice pronunciation (intonation, rhythm and stress).
Encourage students to join in and do actions or mime. Repeat the song several times.
Give students written text of the song. The text can further be used for multiple activities, such as: gap-fill, listen and sequence, illustrate, match pictures with line, etc.
Invite students to compare the song with a similar one in their own language.
Sing the song with the whole class.

When using songs, it is of immense importance not to teach the target language structures but to let children learn and discover the language on their own. In this process they need to get the feeling of success. The language needs to be presented at an attainable rate as well as to connect previous words and language structures to the ones that will be learned in the near future. While doing this a “Questioning Cycle” (Paul, 1996: 7) occurs. The questioning cycle explains how learners process the new language in a song. They first recognize the new language forms, and then they want to learn them because they need them for the activity they like. So, they try to understand the words by finding out their meanings. After that, they use this new language and connect it with other words from the song. In this way learners develop positive attitude and willingness to learn.

However, there are stages that need to be followed in order to achieve the learning goal, but also to satisfy intellectual and personal needs of each individual student. The first stage is creating a purpose for
listening which in turn can motivate students to participate in it. Therefore, the pre-listening stage plays an important role. In this phase, teachers introduce necessary language points and intrigue learners’ imagination. Furthermore, children must not be bored while listening to the song, so they need to have a specific task to do. These are while-listening activities where learners process the information learned in the introductory part of the lesson. Finally, they need to use this information and also increase the educational value of the song. In this post-listening stage, the focus is normally on developing the skills.

Just as with any listening activity, songs are used following the three stages. Sevik (2012: 13-14), in his recent article, however, suggests pre-teaching activities, while-teaching activities, post-teaching activities, and follow-up activities. The proposed stages, nevertheless, can be used with children for any type of songs. As Sevik (ibid.) explained, in order to raise children’s interest, in the introductory part of the lesson, teachers should show visuals related to the vocabulary in the song and ask them to predict the content. Then, using visuals accompanied with actions, teachers read and explain the title of the song. Next, teachers ask students to say any words in English that they can associate with the title of the song and write those words on the board. Lastly, teachers use actions and pictures from the young learners’ books to explain the meanings of new words. By learning and revising lexical items in advance, children are encouraged to concentrate more on these specific language items while listening to the song.

The comprehension of the song comes along with while-listening activities. At this stage, students are required to participate actively while they listen to the song. However, the song has to be played multiple (at least three to four) times so that students can learn the song and accompanying movements.

- When listening to the song for the first time, children do not do anything except listen to the music and the words.
- The second time children listen to the song, they watch the teacher singing and doing the actions. Children still do not sing, but only do the actions.
- The third time they listen to the song children try to sing along with the recording or the teacher.
- And finally, while listening to the song the fourth time, children sing along with the recording or the teacher and do the actions. This stage can be repeated several times.

The final stage in the listening process usually leads into communicative activities. At this point, it is a good idea to prepare activities in which students compete, play, or act. In order to be able to activate and practice the knowledge in the lessons that follow, teachers need to prepare appropriate follow-up activities such as a handout with pictures of the vocabulary from the song and blank spaces for students to write the correct words or a set of flashcards with a key word on each for individuals, pairs, or small groups to listen carefully and pile up the flashcards in the order they hear.

**Songs as a Motivation Source**

The notion of motivation is difficult to explain because “different people are motivated by different things” (House, 1997: 10). As House explains, children need to be motivated individually or within a group. By encouraging an individual child, the teacher stimulates and maintains interest in English. During this process teachers should be realistic about each individual student’s abilities. Teachers also need to vary the group dynamics and in this way support the development of social interaction within a group of learners. In order to maintain positive motivation, these techniques should be planned in advance for each lesson.

Motivation of young foreign language learners needs to be built gradually, making sure that the target structures are introduced in an easily attainable order. For this reason, songs serve as a perfect medium for achieving motivation. By using songs, children can get the feeling of success on an individual level, but also as being part of a group. They should not, at any time, feel forced, but encouraged and motivated to participate in the activity, as well as have a sense of enjoyment of singing with the rest of the group.
Therefore, songs, as claimed by scholars, are highly motivational because they increase understanding, and inspire and motivate students to learn, making the act of learning fun.

Songs’ most noteworthy characteristic in a language learning context is the ability to affect and change students’ mood. These may have a positive or a negative effect on motivation. The emotion that songs evoke in students may transfer to motivation, making a stronger bond with the language and the desire to learn. Repetition and simple language structures are probably the reasons why students are more motivated by songs than any other type of text and are stimulated to understand the content of the songs.

**Description of the Study**

The influence of different visual and audio sources has not been a subject of many studies. In fact, these types of sources have not, to the best of our knowledge, been researched together. Therefore, we decided to research their effect on the acquisition of lexical items.

**Defining the Context**

The context in which participants are situated is the Primary school “Mejdan”, in Tuzla. Students of primary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina start learning English in the first grade as a mandatory school subject, and continue learning it until the end of their schooling. Students in the first two grades of primary school have one forty-five-minute class period a week, or 35 classes a year. The EFL (English Foreign Language) syllabi for young learners in the first and second grades of primary schools focus on the acquisition of basic vocabulary items and language structures as well as on the development of love for learning English. Young learners of English in Bosnia and Herzegovina have almost no contact with English native speakers. Their only exposure to English comes through media (mainly cartoons and children’s TV programs) and English language classes.

**Aim**

The aim of the study is to explore to what extent the selected audio and/or video of the selected songs supported with written lyrics influence the acquisition of vocabulary items and the level of motivation that the use of songs creates. For the purpose of this study, two second grade classes (three lessons each), consisting of students between the ages of 7 and 8, were taught under different conditions. One class was exposed to audio recordings of the songs, whereas the second class was taught with the video of the songs which included lyrics. In order to examine the level of motivation provided by the songs, the students completed a questionnaire. Based on the theoretical part of the research and the advantages of the songs in the EFL classes, especially when they are supported with different visual and other aids, the present study seeks to answer the following questions:

Does the combination of audio, video and textual form of the songs have a higher influence on vocabulary acquisition than the audio format of the songs alone?

Does the use of songs in English language classes influence the level of motivation and interest for learning English?

**Sample**

The study was carried out among 28 second grade (7-8 years of age) primary students of “Mejdan” primary school, in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participating students had been learning English for two years, one forty-five-minute lesson a week. They had very little experience in learning English, therefore the obtained information would have high validity. All students’ parents signed the informed consent form for their children to participate in the study. For the purpose of the research, classes are named Class A (experimental group: EG) and Class B (control group: CG).
One child in the EG was excluded from the overall results because he was not present in all English classes because he moved abroad with his family. While in the CG, two students with learning disabilities were excluded from the overall results: one of them had speaking problems and could not speak or write in proper Bosnian and her speech was difficult to understand because she mumbled. She was also absent from the majority of English classes. The other student in this class lacked general knowledge in all subjects. She also could not speak or write well in Bosnian. Both of them worked with a school special education teacher, who supported them in the learning process.

**The Instruments and Procedure**

The study is based on the results obtained from three types of tests for each song: pre-test, post-test, and delayed test and questionnaire survey. The tests aim to get the results of the students’ previous knowledge of the words, the knowledge of the vocabulary after one lesson, and the acquired knowledge at the end of the term. It is important to mention that the pre-test was done in the earlier lesson before the lesson when the song was presented, whereas the post-test was done one lesson after the presentation. The delayed tests were done at the end of the term. The questionnaire consists of fifteen questions which refer to students’ opinion on the English language in school and songs in English classes. The questionnaire was done in Bosnian due to students’ insufficient knowledge of English.

The lessons were taught by one of the authors of this study. The participants were taught following slightly different methodologies and using different aids. The songs used in both classes were the same. The three songs that were used are “I Like Chicken” (made-for-EFL song), “Head and Shoulders,” (traditional song) and “If You’re Happy” (traditional song adapted for the use with young learners). Lessons were created following the stages suggested by Sevik (2012: 13-14). However, the procedures done in the control group differ only in the type of aid used to present the songs. In the EG, the songs were presented in a video format together with lyrics, whereas in the CG students only listened to the songs in audio format without any visual support.

**Results and Discussion**

Over the period of one term, three tests were given to students to test what learning had occurred, and to see which learning conditions more influenced the acquisition of presented lexical items. The words were tested by means of listening and tests. The results obtained from the three tests were used to compare the two methodologies and to answer the study questions. The same tests were given in both classes.

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Table 1: Overall results of the pre-test, the post-test and the delayed test for the “I like chicken” song

The pre-test was done prior to the presentation of the song. Its aim was to test learners’ present knowledge so that the results can be compared with the results of the post-test and the delayed test. In the pre-test for the “I Like Chicken” song, students were asked to listen to the teacher reading the sentences, choose the right child, and draw him/her a “happy” or a “yucky” face. The figures of overall results of the first pre-test (Table 1) show that the knowledge of target words and structures varied in both groups. Most students, 91.6% in EG and 83.33% in CG, were familiar with the form “I like chicken.” The second form in the order of familiarity was “I like juice.” Students were less familiar with the other two structures (“I don’t like fish” and “I don’t like ice cream.”).
The post-test for this song involved the teacher reading the sentences and students drawing a “happy” or a “yucky” face and the right food item in the plate. The overall results obtained from the post-test for the “I Like Chicken” song indicate that students in the EG recognized on average 3.4 words (84.61%), while students in the CG remembered on average 2.8 words (71.15%). The results varied in each group. The CG displayed better results in retention of the following food words: “ice cream” (84.61%) and “fish” (100%), whereas the students in the EG showed better knowledge of “like/dislike” expressions (84.61%-100%). The CG students, on the other hand, showed poor knowledge of such expressions, ranging from 15.38% to 84.61%.

The delayed test consisted of six empty boxes and two children with no mouth drawn. The students were asked by their teacher to identify what the two children in the pictures like or do not like eating or drinking and to draw either a “happy” or a “yucky” face and appropriate food items in the empty boxes. It is evident that the majority of children, by the end of the term, acquired the target words and phrases (Table 1). Only one child in both groups made a mistake with the word “ice cream.”

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Table 2

**Overall results of the pre-test, post-test and delayed test for the “Head And Shoulders” song**

The pre-test for the “Head and Shoulders” song consisted of eight pictures representing words from the song that students had to number in the correct order. The teacher said the words and the students listened and wrote the correct number in the circle below the corresponding picture. There were four words (“eye,” “nose,” “mouth,” “head”) students had learned before. The overall results (Table 2) of the pre-test show a low percentage of familiarity with the words in both groups, 37.5% (3 words) in the EG and 31.25% (2.5 words) in the CG. The previous knowledge in both classes was different. The word “nose” was the word that a majority of students (EG – 61.53%; CG – 66.66%) in both classes were familiar with. The second word in order of familiarity for the EG was the word “head” (53.84%) and for the CG that was the word “eye” (58.33%). Students in both classes performed less than fifty percent of knowledge for other six tested words.

The post-test for the “Head and Shoulders” song included one picture that students had to color according to what they heard. The picture represented a monster. The teacher first said the color and asked students to show the color so as to check that every student has the correct colored pencil. Then, the teacher invited students to listen and color different body parts as she instructed them. The number of correct answers increased in both groups (Table 2) a week later when the students were given the post-test. Overall results show that the learners in the CG (89.42%) demonstrated better retention of the target words, whereas this percentage is significantly lower in the EG (77.67%). The students in the CG showed better retention of almost every word. They all knew the words “head,” and “nose,” 92.30% of them knew the words “ear” and “shoulder,” 84.61% of students from this group recognized and remembered the words “eye” and “knee.” In the EG, on the other hand, the highest score (85.71%) was for the words “eye,” “nose,” “toe” and “shoulder.” 78.57% of students from this group recalled the word “head,” while 64.28% of them remembered the words “mouth” and “knee.”

The delayed test involved cutting out pictures and gluing them in the correct place. The students were first asked to cut the eight pictures representing the target words. Next, they were instructed to listen to the teacher saying the word and a number and then to choose from the eight pictures and glue the correct one.
under the right number. At the end of the term, students were given the delayed test for the “Head and Shoulders” song with results of 75% for Class A and slightly better results for Class B, 82.69% (Table 2). The results indicate that Class B students recalled more than 80% of the words taught, while in Class A the recalled percentage was slightly lower. The students in the CG were better than students in the EG at recognizing and remembering almost all words.

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Table 3

Overall results of the pre-test, post-test and delayed test for the “If You’re Happy” song

The pre-test for the “If You’re Happy” song contained one picture. In this test the students’ task was to listen to the teacher saying the number and describing what children in the picture do and how they feel. The words were dictated in the following order: “sleepy, happy, angry, scared, clap your hands, stamp your feet, take a nap and say “Oh, no!””. The initial test aimed to check students’ previous knowledge of the target words from the “If You’re Happy” song. Table 3 indicates that overall results for the CG are slightly better than those for the EG. The number of correct answers in the CG was 45.83% (3.66), while this percentage for the EG was 41.67% (3.33).

In the post-test for this song students were asked to match the emotions and commands with the correct pictures. The teacher read the phrases and the students listened and matched. The post-test results indicate that learning occurred in both classes. Numbers show a significant increase in knowledge in both groups (Table 3). The CG again demonstrated better knowledge of the target words with the result of about 80% (6.41 words). The EG, on the other hand, recognized and remembered about 70% (5.61 words) of the words and phrases learned. The percentage of correct answers was higher for most words in the CG.

Finally, eight pictures were included in the delayed test for the “If You’re Happy” song. The students’ task was to cut out the eight pictures and then listen to the teacher saying the words, choose the right picture, and glue it under the given number. The delayed test for the “If You’re Happy” song shows the results of 77.88% (6.23) for the EG and 77.68% (6.21) for the CG (Table 9). These overall results indicate the increase in knowledge of the EG students, while there is a minor decrease in retention of words and phrases in the CG. The success percentages for each word varied and they range from about 61% to about 92%.

After testing both groups on the material covered, it was found that the group provided only with audio recordings of the songs performed slightly better results in vocabulary retention. The theoretical explanation for such results is that information processing requires different degrees of cognitive effort. Visual representation accompanied with sound and text allows storing of information and creates a mental image of the input and thereby should produce a stronger relationship than the one created only through aural channels (Linse, 2005). However, the results performed by the Control Group cannot be disregarded and do not fit completely into this explanation. They show that audio without visual support also offers a good foundation for learning the language. In other words, the results prove the hypothesis wrong. They show that visuals, such as video or pictures, are not a key to success in vocabulary retention. They certainly support learning but are not crucial in such activities. In fact, aural representation has proven to be a very powerful means of language presentation.

The explanation for such results could be that songs, as stated in Krashen’s “affective filter hypothesis”, due to their fun and appealing nature, decrease anxiety and stress and in turn lower the affective filter necessary for success in language learning. For this reason, songs may not need any extra support in order
to be memorized and in order to enhance vocabulary retention. As Paul (1996: 6) claims, different learners prefer different types of song activities and presentations. Therefore, video as a type of a visual, may represent a distraction for some students and focus their attention more on what is happening in the video, rather than on what they should be doing (singing and connecting the words with movements). As such, songs are suitable for different learning styles, they encourage positive learning experience, boost learners’ confidence and develop positive attitudes towards the language they want to learn.

**Results of the Questionnaire**

The analysis of students’ motivation is based on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted among 26 (EG and CG) students in total: eight girls and eighteen boys. They are all at the starter level of English. The questionnaire aims to measure the level to which songs influence motivation for learning English. The questionnaire consists of three parts and fifteen questions. The first part contains three questions and refer to English and activities in general. The second part includes ten statements with two possibilities, and the third question asks students to give their own opinion on songs. The questionnaire was made in Bosnian. According to the respondents, they did not have any difficulty in responding to the questionnaire.

In questions 1-3 the respondents were asked to choose whether they like English classes or not (Q1), what they most like doing in English (Q2), and what they least like doing in English classes (Q3). Questions 4-15 were Yes and No questions. They are statements where students are given options to select yes or no. Questions 16 and 17 are open-ended questions which ask students to state the reason for liking or disliking songs in English classes.

All but one student like English language classes. This shows that young learners enjoy learning English and certainly represent a good material for further language development. The students’ choice of most and least liked activities in English classes is shown in Table 4. The numbers in the table show the results of the overall rank of activities as specified by students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>activity</th>
<th>Most Liked Activity (%)</th>
<th>Least Liked Activity (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EG</td>
<td>CG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drawing</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>singing songs</td>
<td>30.76</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dancing</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>14.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coloring</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>42.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>listening to stories</td>
<td>7.69</td>
<td>7.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>writing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

_Students’ choice of most and least liked activities in English classes_

Note. The highest percentage is in boldface.

As it can be seen from the table, the first activity in the order of likeliness in the EG is drawing, whereas coloring is the most liked activity in the CG. Singing songs takes the second place in this order, while dancing is shown not to be the activity that most students like. Writing is not a favorite activity for any of the students. The least liked activity, on the other hand, is writing. Five out of thirteen students (38.46%) in the EG and three out of fourteen (21.43%) in the CG are not fans of dancing. Only one student (CG), out of all twenty six, does not like singing songs.

The second part of the questionnaire is connected to statements about songs. The results are presented in Table 5.
In questions 4-14 students were asked to choose “Yes” or “No” for the given statements (Table 5). As it is evident from the table all students in the EG like listening to English songs. However, two out of thirteen students did not like singing English songs. One student thought that songs are boring whereas, all students liked the songs played by their teacher in English classes. Most of them (84.61%) had fun when singing songs, while nine out of thirteen (69.23%) enjoyed dancing while listening to songs. They all liked when their teacher sang and danced together with them. Watching and listening to songs on TV was liked by the majority of students (92.30%). They all claim that they learned some words from the songs they listened in the English class, that they (92.30%) quickly remembered English songs, and that most of them (84.61%) listened to English songs at home.

In the CG, on the other hand, three out of fourteen students (Table 5) did not like listening to songs in English and four of them did not like singing in English classes. A small number of them (21.43%) considered songs as boring. There are also students (14.29%) who did not like songs played by their teacher. The majority of students thought it was fun when they sang songs in English classes and most of them liked dancing while singing as well as when the teacher sang and danced with them. The majority liked watching and listening to songs on TV. Twelve of them (85.71%) claimed they learned some words from the songs and ten of them (71.42%) had the ability to quickly remember the songs. Half of the students sang English songs at home.

And finally, in the last two questions students were asked to write the reason why they really like or dislike songs in the English language classroom. They were supposed to complete only one statement, depending on what answer they chose in question 4. The majority of students commented that songs are fun and interesting. Some of the comments are given below:

I like English songs because they are nice, interesting and educational.
I like English songs because they are not boring, and they are nice.
I like English songs because they are fun.
I like English songs because they are fun and I can learn from them.
I don’t like English songs because they are boring.
I don’t like English songs because they are not fun, but I remember them.
I don’t like English songs because they are ugly.

According to the survey results, the use of songs with young learners has proven to be a great success. The fact that the majority of students like singing and listening to English songs, that they enjoy the songs presented during the research period, that they love watching them on TV or dancing along, that they learn language items, as well as that they sing these songs outside the classroom are clear indicators that songs positively influence students’ attitudes and motivation for language learning. The survey also has confirmed
that repetition and simple language of the songs, as pointed out by different linguists, influence the level of motivation. Children simply enjoyed listening to the songs containing repetitive language structure and did not seem to get bored by repeating them many times. This finding proves Jolly’s (1975: 13) assertion that repetition in songs eliminates boredom and maintains motivation through active participation and enjoyable sounds of music.

However, as the survey discovered, there were students who did not completely enjoy these song classes. One explanation of this supports Paul’s (2004: 6) claim that some children like quieter and not very active learning activities. Another explanation of this finding can be found in Gardner’s multiple intelligences theory which claims that every person learns differently and possesses several intelligences, but also asserts that these intelligences are not necessarily equally-developed (Harmer, 2001: 46; Brown, 2000: 100; Brewster et al., 2003: 35). This makes some intelligences more and some less dominant in a person. Therefore, the children with dominant musical or kinesthetic intelligence are the ones who probably enjoyed song classes more than the children with other dominant intelligences.

Conclusion

The study examined the level to which visual and aural representation of language through songs influence acquisition in the second grade students of Primary School “Mejdan”, in Tuzla. Its aim was to reveal how students learn in different (visual and auditory, and only auditory) learning environments. Furthermore, it also offered an insight into what learning conditions provide a better impact on learners.

Finally, the study revealed how songs motivate learners to learn English.

The results showed that songs have a positive influence on vocabulary retention of young learners. Whatever setting is used, aural or aural/visual, the results prove that songs are suitable for different learning styles, they encourage positive learning experience and enhance their knowledge. The findings, furthermore, confirm the belief of many researchers (House, 1997; Jolly, 1975; Shin, J.K., 2006) that songs serve as an important motivator in the language learning process. It becomes clear that it is crucial for language teachers to create inspiring and encouraging environments in order to increase learners’ motivation. A universal appeal which songs have aids motivation and helps learners to develop love for language learning. Students motivated in this way are imaginative, creative, and eager to learn and succeed. The study proves these beliefs and shows that the second grade students were unquestionably motivated, enthusiastically participated and enjoyed singing activities.

To sum up, the research explains that the class atmosphere is very important. It is easily achieved with the activities natural to a child’s development level, such as songs. Songs can have a great impact on learners because of their multi-modal characteristics and may connect with the language in many different ways. Singing helps practice listening skills, vocalize the words and expressions and practice their pronunciation, and if students dance along with singing then it connects the language with gestures and movements. The readiness with which young children accept songs helps teachers include them as their classroom routine and create an enjoyable and inspiring atmosphere. Therefore, no matter what type of song representation or activity teachers choose, the research has proven that songs definitely influence language acquisition and enhance motivation. Thus, they should be a main component of any young learner’s language program.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations need to be noted regarding the research on the effect of songs on young learners. First of all, a small number of students participating in the research do not provide a holistic result because students involved in the research do not represent the majority of young language learners. Secondly, the number of students who took part in the research varied. Some students were present in the presentation classes but not in the classes when other students were tested. Also, the research is limited only to the acquisition of vocabulary and does not focus on other aspects of language such as pronunciation or
grammar. Considering all these limitations, there is a need to conduct more research about the use of songs with young learners.

References


