

## **The Attitudes Of Teachers And Students Towards Using Songs For Teaching English In Misratah Primary Schools**

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**Abstract:** This paper examined the attitudes of Libyan primary school teachers and students towards using songs as a facilitating tool for teaching English in classes. The study is divided into two parts; the first part is based on a questionnaire which was administered to 50 English teachers of primary schools in Misrata who were chosen randomly. For more understanding five teachers were interviewed. The second part was based on observation to a primary class. For more accuracy, a video-recording was used for the class. The objective of this study was to show how songs can help students to learn and enjoy English at the same time; for teachers, to know to deal with the large number of students per class complexity and how to use these activities in classes.

The result showed that both teachers and students had positive attitudes for teaching and learning English through songs. Comments added by the teachers and students are included and evaluated in the study. This study also suggested that song activities should be widely applied in teaching different grades, such as high level learners or even elder learners learning.

**Key words:** Songs – affective reasons – cognitive reasons – linguistic reasons – motivation - vocabulary – skills – communicative competence – learning – English language.

### **Introduction**

The value of songs in motivating students to learn English is widely recognized by English as second language (ESL). Songs have the capacity to motivate learners and they can be used in adult English classes to increase vocabulary, expand cultural knowledge; and they make language lessons enjoyable. Singing songs makes the language classroom entertaining and

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relaxing, and provides a nonthreatening atmosphere which soothes learners. In fact, there are a number of reasons introduced throughout the literature for using songs in the classroom. Particularly, there are number of affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons. Songs, according to many scholars, Martin (1983); Mitchell (1983); Jalongo& Bromley (1984); McCarthey (1985); Medina (2000) are among the best ways of teaching a foreign language(EFL). Singing can build students' confidence by allowing them to enjoy a degree of fluency in English before they have achieved it in speaking. Moreover, songs can be incorporated into all language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking). Using songs or music in English fields may contribute to language acquisition in several dimensions. For instance, songs or music can attract children's attentions in affective aspect, in the linguistic aspect also singing activity has a great benefit to develop the phonemic awareness abilities and speech sequence. I believe that songs are one of the essential tools facilitating language learners' motivation and influence their emotion, such as reducing anxiety. Young learners need to have fun with English, thus they must be engaged in enjoyable activities which are designed specifically for young learners, such as songs, chants and storytelling. In addition, teachers must use approaches for teaching language within a meaningful context and effective techniques for making language input comprehensible and encouraging student participation. Students enjoy singing songs which introduce vocabulary, intonation, pronunciation, grammar, culture, and more, all in a format that is fun for pupils and they will remember them for a long time even after class is over.

For learning a song students have to use their listening skills. This activity will improve their ability to hear and understand words and sentences. Their comprehension will also increase as they analyse the meaning of a song. Songs are authentic and meaningful material because they often provide frequent repetitions, tell a story, or provide comments about life. Songs can also be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives, and adverbs. All of these activities can play an important role in enhancing language learning.

### **Literature review**

Linguists define language as an instrument used by human beings to communicate and interact with others. Nevertheless, Spanish music therapist Patxidel Campo (1997) asserts that in any oral interaction only 15% of the information issued corresponds to verbal language, while 70% of the message is performed through body language; the final 15% belongs to intonation, the musical character of language. This importance of body language can be easily observed by watching a television debate with the volume turned off. The body language clearly indicates the mood and attitude of the members, and even their agreement or disagreement with what the other speakers are saying. (Fonseca 2000).

Music and language share a number of features. On the one hand, both come from the giving out of sounds; on the other hand, they are used together by authors/speakers to convey a message, although language is much more perfect than music, whose effect is principally emotional. In addition, music and language have basic characteristics in common, for example pitch, volume, prominence, stress, tone, rhythm and pauses. A more shared characteristic of language and music is that we learn both of them through exposure.

It is necessary for students to have a positive attitude in regard to learning. Krashen (1982) explains that for best learning to occur the affective filter must be weak. A weak affective filter means a positive attitude towards learning. If the affective filter is strong the learner will not search for language input.

A positive atmosphere has provided to language learning. Teachers are responsible for finding this positive environment, and songs are one method for achieving this weak affective filter that teachers need to promote language learning. Using rhythm, chanting and songs can increase the attention and interest of the students while motivating them to learn. Saricoban and Metin (2000) have found that songs can develop the four skills of language: reading, speaking, writing and listening.

Songs usually stick to the students' minds, and unlike anything else; are not forgotten so easily. Therefore, the use of songs in a classroom should be to teachers' advantage, providing a number of various activities to practice

listening comprehension. This theoretical rationale will focus on the reasons for using songs in Primary classrooms by proving their efficacy as a learning tool.

Some authors have studied this technique to verify this effectiveness. Medina (2002) thinks the main advantage of using songs and music is the enjoyable experience they bring to students and the relaxed atmosphere they create in a class. The more relaxed the students, the more receptive to learning they are. In addition, through songs, learners are exposed to authentic examples of the second language. It is also important to know that music and songs in the classroom can stimulate positive associations to the study of a language, which otherwise may only be associated with exams, frustration and corrections. Also, not every student will have the opportunity to go abroad to practice English in real life, but there are opportunities to listen to English in a useful way. Among others, Rixon (1993) suggests that pop music is a relation with the English speaking world.

Lake (2003) supports the idea of using music and songs in the English lessons for various reasons. As he suggests, language and music are closely tied together in the brain when processing pitch, rhythm and syntactical phrasing. Music provides a fun and relaxing way to acquire process and produce English. Through songs, language learners get to see the beauty and variability of English and therefore they become more interested in the English language. Music also helps them to understand some cultural differences and the various pronunciations of English.

Brown (2006) agrees with other authors on the listening skills and cultural knowledge benefits music gives to students and teachers of English, and adds another important value of the use of music in a language classroom. There is a lot of music that was written specially for (ELT), now days a lot of TV channels product and present such songs, although these have met some criticism in that they lack originality and musical appeal.

Lems (1996) suggests that a most important aspect is that teachers should like the songs that they want to use and they should also want to share them. It is also important that the chosen songs contain words that are easily comprehensible. To be able to provide oral practice, it is necessary to use songs with enough repetitions. Songs should be popular, likely to be listened

to by students outside the lessons, and well-written, from a native speaker point of view. Additional considerations regarding level should be taken into account, too. When introducing songs to a low level class, these songs should have a limited vocabulary, no more than 16 lines of text and lots of repetitions. “Songs for students of the intermediate level should contain manageable load of vocabulary, limited total text length and should not be heavily embedded” (Lems 1996).

There are two processes involved in listening, and both can be used when songs are played in the classroom. The activity selected for a particular song will determine which of these processes is active. Cullen (1999) states that the first is bottom-up processing, where the listener builds up the sounds into words, sentences and meaning. The second is top down processing, where the listener uses background knowledge to understand the meaning of a message. Practicing both of these processes is essential for developing listening comprehension.

There are many techniques for teaching English songs. It is hard to say which skills are unique. Teachers can use gap-filling, predicting, piecing together, spotting mistakes, translation, comprehension questions, dictation, and discussion of song theme or role playing, among others.

As illustrated, I believe that songs, rhymes and games are wonderful materials in that respect. They are comprehensible, enjoyable, authentic and full of language we need in real life. They are part of our lives and they are around us. All we need is to share them with our students with a little planning before we enter the class. In the light of the above research, this study investigates the attitudes of some Libyan teachers and students towards using songs for teaching English.

### **The aim of the study**

The issue of using songs in teaching English classrooms has grown in importance in all over the world. However, in Libyan public schools, the issue has not received any attention and no studies have been carried out to identify the role of songs in learning English. Since research to date has paid no attention to this issue in the Libyan context, I have been motivated to undertake such investigation to find out the attitudes of Libyan teachers and students towards employing songs in EFL classrooms. The study will be

conducted in a primary school in Misratah city and includes two main groups: EFL teachers and students in one classroom in the primary class. It aims at providing a solution to students' low speaking proficiency in English and to the complexity of working with a large number of students per class.

### **Research questions**

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the Libyan teachers and students' attitudes towards using songs in teaching EFL to young learners (YLS)?
- What do Libyan EFL teachers think about the effectiveness of using songs in teaching EFL to YLS?
- What are the problems encountered in terms of content?
- How can songs promote students' oral production?
- How do students react towards the proposed activities using songs in English?
- What are the suggestions and views put forward by the teachers and students as to teaching English through songs?

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants**

The study included fifty (50) teachers of primary schools of Misrata city. They were chosen randomly, to respond to a questionnaire of fifteen statements, and one classroom of thirty (30) students, aged between 11 and 12, from the 5th grade of a primary school. The students were taught by one of the 50 teachers. The reason for including other teachers was that other classes were taught by different teachers, and it would be helpful to investigate whether they shared the same attitudes to get a clear picture of this particular context.

#### **Instruments**

To collect data from teachers, questionnaires and interviews were employed. The researcher attended some classes to observe, for more understanding, video recording of the activities for English classes. Those were used in the first stages and during the implementation of activities using songs in English.

Similar to the questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews will require the interviewees to clarify their attitudes towards using songs and

explain their reasons for accepting or rejecting these techniques. Interviews were restricted five teachers among who was the teacher of the class under investigation. The interviewees' responses were recorded in notes during and after the interviews. The interviews were conducted during my last visit to the school. The interviews consisted of open questions to find out more information that might not appear from the questionnaires.

Several activities were designed for using songs (downloaded from, [www.dreamenglish.com](http://www.dreamenglish.com)) to teach English, which used in the investigated class. I examined the effectiveness of the activities observing and registering in field notes and video recording students' attitudes or reactions, and changes in oral production when they engaged in such activities. Video recording of the activities was done in English classes: Those were used in the first stages and during the implementation of activities using songs in English. They allowed us to observe and analyze aspects such as reactions or attitudes toward the proposed activities and the changes in students' oral production. Each one of the activities was recorded, in video, and we took field notes for each English class. These let me identify students' attitudes and the changes in their oral production.

### **Advantages and disadvantages of using songs**

Below are some advantages and disadvantages that authors have studied about the use of songs in Primary classroom. Murphey (1992), in his work "Music and Songs" exposes some disadvantages of the use of the songs:

- Teachers do not take the music seriously.
- It can disturb adjacent lessons.
- You can lose control of the class easily.
- The vocabulary of the songs is too poor.
- Expressions are different to the rules of grammar and this can lead to make mistakes.
- Teachers do not know how to develop material successfully.
- A teacher or student may not like singing.
- The songs go out of fashion soon.

In the same work, Murphey also presents different reasons why songs should be used in primary classroom. Some of these reasons and benefits include:

- Is easier to sing the language than to speak it.
- Songs act both in short and long term memory.
- Songs contain repeats that teachers can use.
- They are more motivating than repetitions in other texts.
- Songs lead students to identify themselves with the text.

They make the group relax, have fun at the same time they give harmony to the group. Also, Griffé, in “Songs in Actions” (1992), has proposed reasons for using songs in Primary classrooms:

- They set up a positive and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
- They are an actual input of the target language. In addition, you can work on the rhythm of language study.
- They have a cultural component so it can be used to work the history and culture of other countries.
- You can work as a more real text.
- Can be worked as complement for course material.
- The interest of the students in the songs can motivate them to participate in class, in the language itself and in the language learning process.

After these reasons on the use of songs for learning English, we can deduce that the use of songs in the Primary foreign language classroom has more advantages than disadvantages. We can also see that the use of this technique has affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons. These affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons for using songs are all grounded in learning theory, and provide insights into the benefits of using songs in Primary classrooms.

### **Limits of the research**

The scope of the research was confined to the 2011-2012 academic years and to 50 teachers of primary schools and 30 students of one primary school in Misrata.

### **Data analyses**

The data collected were analyzed on the basis of frequency and percentage. On the other hand, data analyzing method was applied to the analysis of open-ended questions. Frequencies and percentages were taken into account to analyze the data.

### **Results and discussion**



The results obtained from the analysis of data for each item in questionnaire for teachers will be illustrated in three tables and a discussion about each table will follow.

**Table 1.** Teachers’ attitudes toward using songs in teaching English in our primary classes. (n=50).

No	Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Undecided	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I believe that songs should be an essential part of the English language teaching curriculum for young learners.	25	50	23	46	1	2	–	–	1	2
6	I believe that songs present many opportunities for young learners to show their skills in many language areas.	16	32	27	54	1	2	–	–	6	12
9	I believe that, because songs are usually ‘performed’ in groups, there is no feeling of shyness for the individual.	26	52	21	42	1	2	–	–	2	4
11	I think that teachers must use songs only for fun, and breaking down boredom.	3	6	7	14	25	50	7	14	8	16
14	I believe that songs are very important in developing the listening skills of	29	58	19	38	1	2	1	2	–	–

young learners.										
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Table 1 showed that, teachers’ attitudes toward using songs in teaching (EFL) classes in Misrata were explored by means of five statements. The analysis of the results for the first statement revealed that almost all of the participating EFL teachers, (96%) believed that songs should be an essential part of the English language teaching curriculum for young learners, (2%) disagreed with statement one, and (2%) stated that they were undecided.

Results of the sixth statement indicated that the majority of EFL teachers, (86%) believed that songs presented many opportunities for young learners to show their skills in many language areas, (2%) disagreed with statement six and (12%) stated that they were undecided. The results of the ninth statement showed that, (94%) of the participants believed that because songs are usually ‘performed’ in groups, there was no feeling of shyness for the individual, (2%) disagreed with the statement nine and (4%) stated that they were undecided. The results of the eleventh statement, I think that teachers must use songs only for fun, and breaking down boredom. Showed that, (20%) of the teachers agreed with, (64%) disagreed with the statement eleven and (16%) stated that they were undecided (the highest percentage of indecisiveness in relation to teacher attitudes).

Finally, the results for statement fourteen indicated that (96%) of the participating EFL teachers believed that songs are very important in developing the listening skills of young learners and (4%) disagreed with the fourteenth statement.

Overall, it was possible to argue that the participating EFL teachers have very positive attitudes towards using songs in teaching English to YLs. And it could be said that this finding strengthened teachers’ positive attitudes toward using songs in YLs EFL contexts.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Undecided
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Statement						e		disagre		ed	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2	I believe that songs accelerate the memorization of vocabulary.	28	56	21	42	–	–	–	–	1	2
4	I believe that songs provide a large amount of repetition which results in automatic use of the target language.	25	50	20	40	2	4	–	–	3	6
8	I believe that songs are a highly motivating and entertaining way of teaching English, especially for young learners.	32	64	18	36	–	–	–	–	–	–
12	I believe that songs are not very effective in teaching English to young learners.	1	2	2	4	22	44	22	44	3	6
15	I believe that using songs can lower students' anxiety toward learning English.	17	34	25	50	4	8	2	4	2	4

Table 2. Teachers' thoughts about the effectiveness of using songs in teaching English in our primary classes (n=50).

As could be seen from Table 2, teachers' thoughts about the effectiveness of using songs in teaching English to YLs were explored by means of five statements. The analysis of the results for the second statement of the questionnaire revealed that almost all of the participating EFL teachers, (98%) believed that songs accelerated the memorization of vocabulary. The rest, (2%) stated that they were undecided.

Results of the fourth statement of the questionnaire indicated that the great majority of EFL teachers, (90%) believed that songs provide a large amount of repetition which resulted in automatic use of the target language. (6%) stated that they were undecided, and (4%) disagreed with the same statement.

Results for the eighth statement of the questionnaire showed that all of the participating EFL teachers (100%) believed that songs were a highly motivating and entertaining way of teaching English, especially for YLs.

Results of the twelfth statement of the questionnaire showed that the great majority of the teachers, (88%) disagreed with this statement that songs were not very effective in teaching English to YLs. (6%) stated that they were undecided, and (6%) agreed with statement twelve.

Finally, the responses for statement No. 15 of the questionnaire showed that the majority of the teachers, (84%) believed that using songs could lower students' anxiety toward learning English. (4%) stated that they were undecided, and (12%) disagreed with the same statement.

Overall, it was possible to argue that the participating EFL teachers had very positive thoughts about the effectiveness of using songs in teaching English to YLs. Depending on the analysis of teacher responses deriving from this research, it could be said that the most effective means of using songs in teaching English to YLs was that songs were highly motivating and entertaining with (100%). The second was that songs accelerated the memorization of vocabulary with (98%). The third was that songs provided a large amount of repetition with (90%). The fourth was that songs could lower students' anxiety toward learning English with (84%). Teacher' responses to statement twelve, in a way confirm these results as the teachers disagreed with this statement that songs were not very effective in teaching English to YLs with (88%).

**Table 3.** Problems that encounter using songs in teaching English in our primary classes.(n=50).

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided
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		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3	I believe that I do not have enough resources to use as songs.	11	22	25	50	10	20	3	6	1	2
5	I find it difficult to find an appropriate song for every topic of the English language curriculum.	19	38	21	42	6	12	–	–	4	8
7	I believe that using songs to teach English may distract students' attention during the lesson.	13	26	9	18	16	32	7	14	5	10
10	The cassettes, CDs and VCD or DVD are not available for the subjects	–	–	2	4	23	46	20	40	5	10
13	I believe that I cannot measure students' knowledge of English when I use songs in my classes.	6	12	16	32	10	20	1	2	17	34

As could be seen from Table 3, Problems that encountered using songs in teaching English in Libyan primary classes were explored by means of five statements. The analysis of the results for the third statement of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of the participating EFL teachers, (72%) believed that they did not have enough resources to use as songs. (26%) disagreed with statement three, and (2%) stated that they were undecided.

Results of the fifth statement of the questionnaire showed that the majority of EFL teachers, (80%) found it difficult to find an appropriate song for every topic of the English language syllabus. (12%) disagreed with statement five, and (8%) stated that they were undecided.

Results for the seventh statement of the questionnaire showed that (44%) of the participating teachers, believed that using songs to teach English might distract students' attention during the lesson. (10%) stated that they were undecided, and (46%) disagreed with this statement. The ten statement of the questionnaire asked whether the cassettes, VCD or DVD available for the subjects, results revealed that the great majority of the participating EFL teachers couldn't find them easily (86%) disagreed with this statement. (10%) stated that they were undecided, and (4%) agreed with the same statement.

Finally, the results for statement thirteen indicated that (44%) of the participating teachers believed that they couldnot measure students' knowledge of English when they used songs in their classes. (34%) stated that they were undecided, and (22%) disagreed with statement thirteen. Overall, the majority (72%) thought that they did not have enough resources to use as songs, and the majority (80%) found it difficult to find appropriate songs.

These findings showed that the majority of the participating teachers had problems in finding and reaching to appropriate songs. The percentage of those who believed that using songs to teach English might distract students' attention was (44%) and those who disagreed with this (46%) were almost equal. This finding showed that half of the participating EFL teachers had problems about the ways related to how to present and teach songs to YLs. They needed to training about the ways of presenting and teaching English through songs to YLs without distracting students' attention.

In observation stage for the class, the focus of the project was to encourage students' oral production using English songs in class. Therefore, a set of activities was designed. The data analysis showed two kinds of students' attitudes towards activities when using songs for teaching English. Some attitudes appeared with more frequency than others did; therefore, they were described according to that order. Our findings also showed important changes in students' oral production. To begin with, the first outcome that emerged from our data indicated that songs were generators of favorable factors such as motivation, participation, cooperation, relaxation and self-confidence. Moreover, the use of these activities showed important changes in students' oral production. For example, their pronunciation was perfect,

they spoke clearly and quickly, interacted more with one another, and spoke more when the topic was interesting for them, they were speaking spontaneously and automatically, and they were very interested and motivated.

In view of the findings, we consider that this attitude was a key element to be generated in the classroom because it allowed students to feel motivated, improve learning and became more spontaneous when speaking in English.

They are presented in Table 1.

BEFORE	WHEN USING SONGS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They didn't participate much in class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They spoke more when the topic is interesting for them.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They used words or short phrases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They spoke using reasons and opinions about chosen songs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They reduced their interaction with the teacher to present the lesson or homework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students interacted more with one another.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They spoke slowly and mispronounced words.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most students spoke clearly and more quickly.</li> </ul>

In relation to this aspect, it was observed and registered in the field notes that before implementing the activities, our students had low levels of oral production. Then, during the development of the tasks, the collected data showed that students have made a notable progress. Clearly, these kinds of activities encouraged them to speak English. Before the implementation, we observed that our students did not participate much in class. The video recordings showed they were shy and afraid to speak in English. Most of them preferred for the teacher to speak in Arabic. After the new activities of songs were implemented, students spoke more in English; they showed more willingness to speak when the situation was meaningful for them. Another change in students' oral production was observed when students interacted among themselves. Then, the video recordings showed students asking each

other questions, sharing information and speaking in Arabic or sometimes in English during the preparation of the activities. Group work functions as an integration tool, speaking was more clearly and quickly, this change was observed in most students' oral production. We could see during the development of all the proposed activities that many students were more spontaneous and confident when speaking.

### **Conclusion**

In specific, this study sought to explore Libyan EFL teachers and students' attitudes toward using songs, teacher thoughts about the effectiveness of songs, and their frequency of using songs and accessibility. As I have already illustrated EFL teachers seem to have strong beliefs, and positive attitudes about the pedagogical value of songs. However, having a closer look at the Libyan EFL curriculum for fifth grade, one comes to realize that songs are not given the necessary attention on a systematical basis. Therefore, depending on the strong beliefs of teachers about the pedagogical value of using songs, I believe that songs should be approached on a structured and systematical basis in Libya.

Findings showed that Problems which encounter using songs in teaching English in our primary classes, come across to a dilemma with the teachers stated very positive feelings about the pedagogical value of songs, further the teachers found it difficult to find appropriate songs and believed that they do not have enough resources to use as songs. In a way these findings strengthen my earlier argument that songs are not planed as an aid manner in Libyan EFL settings and that there was a need for a structured and systematical approach regarding songs.

On the other hand, after the implementation of this action-research in the class, I could conclude that classroom research processes definitively helped improve our classes and achieve very good results with our students. In this specific case, we aimed at encouraging oral production through the use of songs and, from that point of view, I could say the following; when students were given songs in their class activities, they showed some attitudes that I considered favorable to promoting oral production. Most of students were motivation, participation, cooperation, relaxation and self-confidence. In



addition, they were pleased with the different proposed activities around songs given.

There was improvement in oral production when they focused on expressing their ideas freely more than when they were concerned about accuracy. Students spoke more in English when they talked about songs, both in English and Arabic because the topics were interesting for them. As a result, they showed much more motivation, participation and better class work.

To sum up, the implementation of the different activities using songs in English seemed a successful strategy to encourage oral production in students and it showed satisfactory results for them (for teachers and for the school).

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