

Using Music for Developing Language Skills in the English Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

From the birth of humanity to religion and science, music has been an integral part of the existence of mankind. Music, whether natural or man-made, has undeniable impacts on the psyche and the overall wellbeing of an individual. It is only natural that in the field of learning too, music can have an impeccable influence. In almost every sphere of life, we can feel the presence and importance of music. Language, like music, is a mirror of culture and society. It evolves with time while capturing diverse aspects of cultures and civilisations. Since speech functions and music functions depend on each other, it becomes fairly obvious, that music impacts neural pathways in the human brain, thus influencing human's ability to communicate. Music and language are vibrational in nature. Musical hearing is essential for acquiring, processing and producing language. Several independent language learners pick up language items from songs. A lot of essential skills can also be developed among learners. Students with certain learning disabilities can enormously benefit from learning through music. This article will cover each of these areas and will explore practical ideas and approaches of implementing music to teach language. A sample lesson plan, comprising stages and tasks, is analysed, along with a list of suggested songs for different language structures. On the whole, this article aims to capture the importance of music in human life and its prominence in language acquisition.

Keywords: psyche, vibrational, learning disabilities, lesson plan, language acquisition

INTRODUCTION

According to the article, "Importance of Music in Human Life", published on www.targetstudy.com, (last updated on 19-Sep-2018), any activity pertaining to music, involves our senses and inspire brain development. Music impacts all areas like intellectual, social-emotional, motor, language, and general literacy. According to Marc Silver, in the article, 'Why Did Humans invent Music?', published in National Geographic, on 23 August 2013, "theorists believe music was an attempt at social glue, a way to bring early humans together into a close-knit community." Music and language processing in the brain also tend to overlap, as depicted by brain imaging studies

Music inspires learning languages, building an awareness of phonology, and enhanced language skills. Learning through movement exhibit marked improvements in children's memory.

Music makes us Creative. Music instills creativity, innovation and imagination. Furthermore, it gives an impetus to our comprehension skills.

Music makes learning engaging and fun. Music is undeniably an effective medium for developing retention. Learning a song is easier and quicker than learning the curriculum, since the human mind enjoys music. This technique is particularly applicable while learning a foreign language, as well. Simply humming a song can help a learner pick up linguistic items and remember it, too. (Simpson, Adam J. 2015) The rhythm and music in poems make learning more exciting. Several rhymes and poems taught to us in our early childhood are still vivid in many of our memories. Even multiplication tables are taught to students through music.

Music stirs emotions. Whether we are ecstatic, or crestfallen, exhausted or distraught, lonely or cheerful, there is a type of music for every emotion we feel. Many people associate certain vivid memories or stages of their lives with certain songs.

Music therapy is particularly helpful in curing several chronic ailments. Several hospitals have started using music therapy in their treatment process. It is beneficial for patients suffering from cancer, depression, muscle pains or children suffering from ADD.

IMPACT OF MUSIC ON LANGUAGE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

“Music education in early childhood is valuable for every child’s language skills” (Franklin et al., 2008; Wan, Demaine, Zipse, Norton, & Schlaug, 2010). Regardless of a learner’s first language, music positively impacts language learning, including these ways:

Music helps in developing Linguistic Skills: From the early years, children develop language skills through songs, rhymes and poems. Even before they begin to speak, read or write, children can identify voice, tones and words. While listening to music, in the form of songs or rhymes or poems, the lexis used in them have a pronounced influence on the minds of children. They begin to process the underlying message or meaning that the musical piece tries to convey. Children also focus on the meanings of the words used in songs or poems. As a result, music becomes yet another language for them. They develop a command on the language used in music. (Varnes, David 2016)

Music enhances Listening Skills in Children: Music enables children to differentiate between the different melodies, voices or tones. It leads to explicit understanding and meaning of different voice textures: soft, hard or loud. They also get exposed to the different moods of a person which are communicated by using music and different tones.

Music is a great medium to teach language structures: A fun way to learn vocabulary items can be through lyrics of songs help learners with contextualized lexical items. It also exposes them to the form, meaning and pronunciation of the target language.

Music motivates movement: Movement and music go hand-in-hand. People often respond to music by moving their bodies along with the rhythm. Learners often perform several actions while tuning in to music- shaking the body, tapping the feet or actions with hands and gestures. Consequently, it develops their coordination skills and a sense of rhythm.

Music can influence moods: In a learning environment, an excellent way to get learners settled, relaxed or even to steer their minds towards a certain direction/ context, can often be easily done through the right choice of music.

Music develops skills: Music not only helps learn language items, but also boosts confidence, leadership qualities and teamwork. When the whole class sings together, it generates a harmless and non-threatening space for learners to form and express opinions spontaneously. Confidence in children increases automatically when they learn about voice projection and speech clarity(Dygała, Magdalena 2016). This increase in confidence positively impacts all other facets of their lives, thus helping them flourish in other aspects of life.

Music boosts confidence: Reticent children are more expressive when they have a song to sing. With increased confidence, children are often forthcoming in singing solo parts, which in turn enables their peers to see them in a new light.

Music boosts team spirit: Singing in a group, helps learners discover the sheer joy of working together in a team. Singing in a group makes children collaborate with each other and be good team players, especially when the success of the song depends on the team’s performance.

Music increases cultural understanding: Communication is incomplete without language or culture. In several occasions, miscommunication often takes place because of inaccurate cultural assumptions, not just because of the words. Music stands as the sole universal language, connecting societies and cultures, throughout history. By comprehending and examining the lyrics and context of a song, learners can attain a better grasp of foreign culture.

Music can be used to develop classroom management and routines: Several teachers complain that their classes have a difficult time preparing themselves for the beginning or end of class.(O’shea, Brendan 2019) For these classes, a routine song can play wonders; students recognize it as a call to return to their seats and focus on the lesson.

EFFECT OF MUSIC ON LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

In the article, *Making Music Boosts Brain’s Language Skills*, published on February 22, 2010, in National Geographic, (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/2/100220-music-brains-language-stroke-dyslexia/>) Victoria Jaggard claims that people with learning and developmental disorders, such as dyslexia, struggle to focus on sounds, for example, such students might strain to pay attention to the teacher’s words in a noisy classroom.

Hence, musical experience could be used as a significant remedy for children suffering from dyslexia and other learning disabilities.

According to British Association for Music Therapy, (<https://www.bamt.org/music-therapy/what-is-music-therapy.html>), "Music therapy can help in many clinical situations, particularly where communication is difficult due to illness, injury or disability". Music therapy can develop a sense of autonomy, a clearer sense of self, boosting self-esteem and confidence, encouraging teamwork, augmenting communicative skills, thus reducing the need to use behaviour to convey anguish or frustration.(Jaggard, Victoria 2010) It also enables personal and psychological development, by supporting the ability to introspect and process difficult feelings and emotions.

According to Sally Writes, in her blog 'How Learning to Play Music Can Benefit Children With Special Needs', posted on June 19, 2017, in Protected Tomorrows (<https://protectedtomorrows.com/blog/2017/06/19/how-learning-to-play-music-can-benefit-children-with-special-needs/>), music aids youngsters in numerous mental areas, irrespective of their special needs. Children with limited cognition start feeling good about themselves and feel relaxed through a musical outlet.

Children with language problems can benefit from musical lessons that focus on vocalisation. Learners with ADD or ADHD find it easy to concentrate on the musical constituents of a song. Reluctantly, it helps in longer retention. (Alinte, Camelia 2013)

Music education can also establish a greater sense of reason and organization skills, since music largely rests on on the patterns of sound and rhythm. When learners with special needs create and play music, they are often filled with a sense of achievement, coupled with enhanced cognition.

AUTONOMOUS LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH MUSIC

Independent learners of the language often pick up language items from the songs they listen to. Often music lovers are noticed to speak in a style similar to that of their favourite singer or band. Evidences prove, over time, that music can prove to be an effortless teacher of language. Just by singing along, students can learn language structures faster and in a flowing manner, without being conscious about the process(Forgeard, M., Schlaug, G., Norton, A., et al. 2008). Consequently, this way of learning fosters longer retention. However, it is imperative to be vigilant about what type of music we choose. Nonetheless, with some guidance on choice of songs, learners can substantially benefit by learning through music.

USING MUSIC IN CLASSROOM- PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Using music can be particularly significant in an ESL or EFL classroom. It not only helps identify/notice language items in context but also improves their ability to retain information. Most importantly, the ability of music in bringing together cultures and languages, irrespective of the learners' ages and cultural backgrounds, makes it an impeccable teaching tool.

A few practical ideas to use in classroom can be-

Before you play any music: It is prudent to find out students' choice of music. While teaching young learners, songs with repetitive verses can be used with ease and students can understand better. For advanced level users of the language, songs with complex language structures and concepts can be explored.

Warm-up: Music can be used as a nice lead-in to a lesson, to introduce a concept, for example, or just to warm them up for a lesson. For instance, Michael Jackson's 'Earth song' can be used to discuss environmental concerns.(Silver, Marc- 2013) Debates, discussions and even role-plays can be designed around the same theme. A song with an easily repeated chorus is helpful in such cases.

Changing the mood: Music affects the moods of listeners. For example, if students have been involved in a kinaesthetic activity/ session, slower music can have a calming effect on them. Alternatively, if they have been seated for a long time, or if the session is right after lunch, it's wise to play some foot-tapping music.

Guess the title: Before listening to the song, students can be shown some images related to the song/ singer/ band which they need to guess. Being able to predict is an important skill that can be transferred to other aspects of learning as well. Predicting is more than making a guess (Patel, A. D. (2008). It is using what we already know and applying it to a new situation. When learners predict, they make a connection between what they know and what they don't know yet. Predicting forces learners to use visual or lexical clues to create meaning. For example, before listening to Sting's 'Englishman in New

York', students can be shown pictures of the Big Ben and Statue of Liberty. Once they have studied the pictures, they can predict the title of the song.

Grammar: Music is particularly useful in teaching grammatical structures, since our brains are wired to process information and new language naturally when presented in a certain rhythm. After working through the lyrics of a song and discussing the context, students can focus on some examples of a grammar structure. For instance, while teaching present perfect continuous, I use the song, In the Shadows by The Rasmus. I use the lyrics as a worksheet, without the past participles and main verbs in the lines with target language. The context of the song further helps to establish the use and meaning of present perfect continuous tense. While teaching adjectives, songs with lots of adjectives should ideally be selected, such as Lenka's 'Everything at once'.

Vocabulary: Music can serve to be an excellent tool in teaching lexical items. Teaching them about different genres can be particularly useful to widen their knowledge base about music. One suggestion can be to play soft music while students enlist a few adjectives that pop up in their mind. These words can then be shared with their peers for feedback and comparison. Advanced learners can discuss the meanings and usage of the words from the context. Playing different genres of music like reggae, blues, rock etc. can also trigger different kind of emotions, perspectives and opinions among learners, while expanding their knowledge about music, language and culture. A gapped lyrics worksheet can be shared with them before they listen to the song and predict the words for the blanks. After completing the lyrics, the meanings of the target vocabulary can be elicited/ explored from the context.

Creative writing: Leo Tolstoy believed: 'Music is the shorthand of emotions'. I believe it is a powerfully stimulating tool for most individuals, arousing beautiful emotions. We can play, for example, 'What a wonderful world' by Louis Armstrong. Students can close their eyes and imagine a glorious or a successful day in their life. Post listening to the song, they can sketch what they've just imagined, share it with a partner and get them to predict what the picture means. This will open them up to discussions, narrations, story-telling, etc., which in a way will help them dig deep into their own experiences. Teacher can also teach words, grammatical structures to describe experiences and feelings. This can be followed by a writing task and then a gallery-walk for everyone to read the different experiences from the class.

Write the next verse: After a song has been explored, a productive task can be dividing them into small groups and asking them to add another verse, without diluting the style of the original song. The new verse can be evaluated by peers and discussion can follow based on that. The whole class can also write their own song. Such activities can be experimented with both young and adult learners. They promote creativity and team spirit among learners, along with developing their writing and speaking skills. (Blood, A. J., & Zatorre, R. J. (2001))

Interview the music band: After listening to a song, a productive task can be students working on a role play to interview the band/ singer. Low level users of the language can watch an interview first, to seek help with format and question types. Then they can design their own questions to interview the band/ singer for the role-play. Advanced level learners can be encouraged to brainstorm simple as well as complex interview questions. Afterwards, students role play the dialogues in groups. This task boosts listening, speaking and writing skills, all in the same task.

Translation: Many educators feel strongly against the use of L1 or vernacular language in the classroom. However, there are often perks of using songs in the regional language in classroom. Students can translate a song in regional language to English. The original song being in a familiar language helps them to understand the context easily. This type of activity is highly enjoyable and creative.

A reward: Many ESL students enjoy listening to songs. It changes the mood swiftly and is effective as an attention grabber. It also lifts up the spirits of the learners. Hence, a successful lesson or highly participative class can be rewarded with learner's favourite musical piece at the end of the class.


Illustrate the Song: It is important to find different ways of engaging learners in expressing their ideas and opinions. An idea to surprise learners is to invite them to illustrate their comprehension of the song. Post that, learners can write what they feel about their drawing and what it means. (Brown, S., & Parsons, L. M. July 2008) After peer feedback, this can be followed up with giving a front-of-class presentation with the illustration. This activity involves several skills and motivates learners to be participative and introspective.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Target audience: adult learners; intermediate and above

Main aim of the lesson:	By the end of the lesson, Ss will be able to understand and use the second conditional to discuss hypothetical situations.
Target language	TL: - If I had a million dollars, I'd buy you a house.
Form:	IF- clause: If+past simple Main clause: would+infinitive
Materials:	If I had a million dollars song by Barenaked Ladies – LyricFind

Table1: Sample Lesson Plan

Stage	Procedure	Interaction
Lead in	<p>Show Ss pictures of hypothetical situations.</p>  <p>Instruct them to take a look at the pictures and think what is common in them. They get a minute to come up with the answer.</p>	T-Ss Ss-T
Pre-listening task	Tell Ss they have one million dollars and could spend it on anything they want. What are the things they would like to do with the money? Elicit ideas from Ss and introduce the TL.	Ss-T
Listening for gist	<p>Students listen to the song once and answer the following in pairs.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> In the song, does he have a million dollars? Is it possible for him to have a million dollars in future? Is there a big possibility or a small possibility that he will get million dollars? Is getting so much money a real or imaginary situation? 	SSS
Listening for details	<p>Students listen to the song again and fill out a gapped lyrics worksheet:</p> <p>Example:</p> <p>Listen and fill in the gaps with the correct word</p> <p>(1) _____ a million dollars Well (2) _____ you a (3) _____ And if I had a million dollars I (4) _____ you (5) _____ for your house (maybe a nice chesterfield or an ottoman) Check with peers.</p>	SS
Clarification	<p>Ss do a guided discovery task to focus on meaning and form of target language.</p> <p>Ss use the lyrics text to answer CCQs (meaning) related to meaning, form and pronunciation. Micro-teach where appropriate.</p> <p>Task: (MEANING) True or false:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Second conditional is used to discuss hypothetical situations (<i>True</i>) Second conditional is used to talk about past time. (<i>False</i>) Second conditional is used to talk about present and future time. (<i>False</i>) 	T-Ss Ss-T

	<p>4. There are two clauses in second conditional statements: if-clause and main-clause. (<i>True</i>)</p> <p>5. The two clauses cannot be interchanged. (<i>False</i>)</p> <p>(FORM) Fill in the table below.</p> <p>1. If I had a million dollars, I'd buy you a house.</p> <p>2. If I had a million dollars, I'd build a tree fort in our yard.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="352 394 1179 501"> <tr> <td><i>If</i> clause</td> <td>Conditional clause</td> </tr> <tr> <td>If + past tense</td> <td>Would + bare infinitive</td> </tr> <tr> <td>If I had a million dollars</td> <td>I'd buy you a house.</td> </tr> </table> <p>(PRONUNCIATION) Mark the stresses correctly.</p> <p><i>If I had a million dollars, I'd buy you a house.</i></p>	<i>If</i> clause	Conditional clause	If + past tense	Would + bare infinitive	If I had a million dollars	I'd buy you a house.																
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<p>Controlled practice</p>	<p>Ss are given a gap-fill activity. They will have to use the correct form of the verb in brackets.</p> <p>An example will be done for the Ss.</p> <p>Fill in the gaps with the correct form of verb in the bracket.</p> <p>If you 1) had (have) the opportunity, 2) would you listen (you/listen) to what other people said about you behind your back?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think so. I 3) _____ (be) too worried about what I might hear. • If someone 4) _____ (do) something really unkind to you, 5) _____ (you/take) revenge? • I don't think so. I 6) _____ (try) to forget about it and focus on other things. 	<p>SSS</p>																					
<p>Free practice</p>	<p>Put the students in groups. Demonstrate the activity before setting the task. Ss make conditional sentences about how life would be without these particular items. Distribute one set of card for one team. Each group gets one set of cards. The students pick up a card each and construct second conditional sentences about what life would be like without that item on the card. The S has to define the item without mentioning it. If a participant guesses the item right, they win and keep the card. For wrong answers, students get 3 attempts. After 3 failed attempts, the student explaining or the speaker,s retains the card.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="352 1346 1283 1722"> <tr> <td>Internet</td> <td>Clothes</td> <td>the moon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Computers</td> <td>Oil</td> <td>rhythm</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Paper</td> <td>Science</td> <td>television</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Teachers</td> <td>social media</td> <td>police</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Banks</td> <td>imagination</td> <td>fire</td> </tr> <tr> <td>public transport</td> <td>alarm clocks</td> <td>mobile phones</td> </tr> <tr> <td>to sleep</td> <td>Cars</td> <td>gravity</td> </tr> </table>	Internet	Clothes	the moon	Computers	Oil	rhythm	Paper	Science	television	Teachers	social media	police	Banks	imagination	fire	public transport	alarm clocks	mobile phones	to sleep	Cars	gravity	<p>T-Ss</p>
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Table2: Sample Lessons Plan with exercises
LIST OF SONGS AND RESPECTIVE TOPICS

- “Yesterday” by The Beatles- to teach past simple verb forms
- “Friday I’m in Love” by The Cure- to teach days of the week to elementary level learners or small children
- “My Favorite Things” from The Sound of Music- to get students to discuss their favorite things, coupled with illustration; to teach vocabulary items and pronunciation
- Cocomelon-Nursery Rhymes (on YouTube)- host of songs for pre-primary and primary kids

- “The Man in the Mirror” by Michael Jackson- to discuss national and global issues, political issues; to discuss retrospection among upper-intermediate and advanced level learners; to lead in to group discussion sessions on such issues; to set writing tasks on similar themes
- “All my Loving” by The Beatles- to teach structures for future time
- “If I had a million dollars” by Barenaked Ladies- to teach second conditionals
- “Summer of 69” by Bryan Adams- to teach language structures for past time
- “You Belong with Me” by Taylor Swift- to teach grammar for present time
- “I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking” by U2- to teach present perfect
- “Magical Kisses” by Savage Garden- to teach ‘will’ for future time.

CONCLUSION

Music plays a very significant role in most of our lives. It augments our brain functions and associated aptitudes. It helps developing skills in young and adult learners and also aids in teaching them. Music can be used as an essential component of language lessons. Working with students with learning disabilities can also be more productive with the aid of music. The importance of music can be felt in every aspect of life and should be an integral aspect of our day-to-day life.

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