THE EFFECT OF SONGS ON PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION

Research Article

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Abstract

In language classes songs have been used for many years. Many studies have pointed out that students can take advantage of music in classes in terms of learning grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The present study aims to explore how songs affect the motivation of the students in primary level. The dominant/sequential design of the mixed methods approach was applied to the study. The quantitative data were elicited with a quasi-experimental design and qualitative data were collected by means of observations. The data were collected from the students of a state elementary school in a rural area of Denizli province during the winter semester of 2017-2018 education year. The participants were 25 5th graders; 17 girls and 8 boys. Descriptive analyses were used in order to form the frequencies and percentages of the quantitative data. A matrix was created in Microsoft Word and by means of Excel the average scores of three dimensions of motivation, participation, interest and attention. The perceptions of the observers were elicited and analyzed by means of content analysis. The results of the research pointed out that the students were more motivated and eager to participate into the activities when songs were used in their classes. The perceptions of the students and teachers were similar.

Keywords: Motivation, songs, young learners, interest, learning English

1. Introduction

Acquiring a language is a path which begins in the womb and keeps on going till the end of the life. In L1 acquisition, there is a natural and spontaneous order formed by environment and cognitive process. Littlewood (1987) asserted that there is a crucial period which was mentioned earlier as a term critical period by Penfield in the early times of 1900 to get some basic skills of language.

Kömür and Şener (2005) pointed out in their inquiry that a learner can get through the learning process easier than usual if the input can make sense for them in many circumstances. From this perspective, using songs in classes is one of the most important elements for young learners. We can advocate this theory from two different aspects; first one is explained with the affective filter theory of Krashen. According to Krashen (1982, 1985, 1988, 1991), negative emotions to learning are resulted from the passive moods, including low motivation, low self-esteem, and high anxiety. Krashen (1985) expresses that the language learners can improve the skill much better when they have participated eagerly; they have high autonomy and they feel less nervous compared to those who are more anxious and less eager for learning. Students who have a low level of motivation, low self-esteem, and high anxiety will encounter a wall

when it comes to acquiring language and will not be able to progress as naturally or as quickly as their peers who are not blocked by these factors.

In this study, we focus on the motivation factor of all affective filters. Many researchers say that motivation is the key element in learning. Gardner has a definition for the motivation which has three main issues such as struggle, accomplishment and desired behavior. According to Gardner, motivation questions the reason why the individual acts in this way. Gardner introduces two kinds of motivation and these are instrumental and integrative. He advocates that the person who is intrinsically motivated wants to learn out of curiosity for the features of the target language like climate, life style, religion etc; however, the person who is instrumentally motivated has more different goals from the other learners, s/he learns to make money or get a job as they have rather pragmatic reasons. When we think about the classroom atmosphere and learning, we mostly deal with integrative motivation. The intrinsically motivated learner is eager to take the input and takes part in the classroom activities voluntarily. Moreover, the activities that make sense for the students increase the level of motivation. Using songs is one of the ways to achieve this (Gardner, 1985).

The first aspect of using songs is explained in terms of the theory of affective filter. And the second aspect is the relationship between music and learning. Maess and Koelsch (2001) mentioned that the studies carried out by neuroscientists offer that the activities of music and language have similar mental and cognitive processes; moreover, they point out that they use the same mechanism in the brain in terms of structural way. Especially, in primary level, it is beneficial to activate the part of the brain that is responsible both language and music. It is widely acknowledged that the attention span of young learners is much shorter than that of adult learners. For that reason, it is useful to include the music into the language classes. Edden (1998, p. 139) pointed the connection between language and music as given below:

"Music and language sit comfortably together…Historically, we can think of storytelling and song being used as an exchange, as entertainment, even as a work aid… With younger people there are some largely unexplored and underestimated opportunities for teachers to develop language through musical activities" (Edden,1998 as cited in Kömür, 2005, p. 110)

As for the learning theories, the audio-lingual method is the pioneer of using music in classes. Following it, another theory is Suggestopedia which is based on the idea how human brain work efficiently while learning; and so it is beneficial to use this method in younger levels. What makes this method special and useful is to take advantage of Baroque music to teach. Baroque is kind of music beating 60 in each minute and having unique rhythm and helps the brain to keep the learning material for the maximum level (Apriana & Islamiyah, 2011).

Rhalmi (2009) stated that Baroque music is useful to create a suitable atmosphere for learning as it decreases the anxiety and increase the retention of the input. Besides this theory, another current method supporting the use of music in classes is CLT. There is suggestion that is put forwarded by CLT and it mentions that there are three basic variables emphasizing the communication. Tasks: the activities used in classes should be meaningful to improve learning process. Communication: the daily language should be used in classes. Meaning: authentic and meaningful input facilitate learning.

Songs have all three criteria given above for being authentic, meaningful and communicative. Tavil and Işisağ (2009) pointed out that songs are rather helpful for language teaching; younger students can learn and remember the words easier; and also they feel more motivated with the help of meaningful and appealing devices like songs and games while learning new vocabulary.

Chen and Chen (2009) studied the role of English popular songs on students' motivation and the relationships between learning motivation and learning performance. They came to an end with an idea that the students felt more eager to engage in communicative assignments and

most of the students desired to learn English popular songs. After completing the activities, the students were observed to feel satisfied with their English skills.

In a different context, in Palestine, El-Nahhal (2011) examined the effectiveness of children songs on developing the vocabulary level of young learners by adopting a quasi-experimental approach. It was found that majority of the students were interested in learning English popular songs and their learning motivation increased after using songs.

In Turkish context, the study carried out by Kömür et al., (2005) revealed that most of the students and the teachers taking part in the study emphasized the contribution of songs to vocabulary teaching. In the studies conducted by Sarıgöz (2003), Tavil and İşisağ (2009), it was found that using songs promoted the acquisition of the language as one of the elements of multiple intelligence.

From the above display, it can be seen that researchers have investigated the role of songs on developing learners' vocabulary, increasing their motivation and listening and speaking skills, and teaching correct pronunciation. In this study we focused on the motivational effect of songs. We are convinced of the fact that the linkage between teaching English song in classes and their motivation effect on the atmosphere. Especially, in primary levels using songs is a crucial point to increase the level of enthusiasm and motivation in class atmosphere. Thus, what is intended in the present study is to search the outcome of using songs in EFL classes in terms of motivating the primary school students. So the research question is 'How does the use of songs affect the motivation in primary level?'

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and Setting

The present study was administrated in a state school in Turkey. The students have prejudices against learning English as it is difficult. And, the town where the school is located is economically powerful due to livestock farming and mining activities. For that reason, the students feel they have a wealthy future thanks to their families and they do not need to learn a foreign language for a successful professional or educational life.

This study was administered with 25 eleven-year old participant students from 5th grades. These students were chosen for the study because songs and music weren't used up in their class until the date when the study was conducted.

2.2. Instruments

The study was carried out by using mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach with the help of observations and a questionnaire used a pre and posttest.

For the observation, observation template was used to promote data collection. The template consisted of sub-titles of motivation. These parts were about details of the classroom motivation such as motivation, participation, interest and attention. Observation template had both narrative and a closed section with a score (from 0-5) for the subtitles of the motivation. The other English teacher in the school filled the template twice. The questionnaire was conducted as pre-and post-tests. The questionnaire designed by Aguirre, et al., (2016) was conducted as pre-and post-test. The first one was applied before songs were used in class and the second one was applied at the end of a process that lasted two weeks. (For two weeks, songs were used.) The pre and posttest were the same tests to reach reliable and valid results; but the second one had one extra question mentioning songs used in the classes. The songs are the ones given at the end of the units of the course book for 5th grades of ministry of national education.

The students were given about 10 minutes to fill in the parts given in the questionnaire. The main topic mentioned in the questions were about interest, motivation for English learning and songs in class.

For the reliability of the study, the back translation was used.

2.3. Process

The aim of this study was to determine whether using songs increases motivation or not. The fieldwork lasted two weeks. At the beginning of the study, a pre-test was conducted to test the level of their motivation and interest in learning English. For each week, one song was chosen; for the first week, the song at the end of unit 2 revising how to give directions was taught. For the second week, the song at the end of unit 3 revising game verbs was taught.

In total, two songs were taught. To check the input whether it was taken or not, these songs were chosen. Besides, the observation template was filled for each week in the class when the song was sung. The colleague wrote down some remarks and comments on the template and scored the students' behavior during the lesson. Moreover, she noted their gestures, mimics, their willingness to sing the song and vice versa, hesitation, interest and attention.

3. Findings

In this study, the data (qualitative and quantitative) were collected to test the role of the songs on the students 'motivation in the primary level. Firstly, the results of the questionnaire conducted at the beginning and at the end were analyzed; afterwards, the Qual data-observations were given by conducting a content analysis. The data collected by means of the pre and post tests were analyzed to determine the differences.

3.1 Students' Questionnaires

Table 1. *The students' perceptions about their English classes with or without songs*

	Pre-test	Post-test			
1.Do you like English?				..	..
Nothing	0 (0%)	0(0%)			
A little bit	7 (28 %)	6(24%)			
More or less	8(32%)	8(32%)			
A lot	10 (40%)	11 (44)			
2. Do you think it is important to learn English?			..	..	.. ..
No,I don't	0 (0 %)	0 (0%)			
A little bit	4(16 %)	1 (4%)			
Yes, I do	8(32 %)	10 (40%)			
Yes, I like it a lot	13 (52 %)	14 (56 %)			
3.Do you like your English class?					
Nothing	0 (0%)	0 (0%)			
A little bit	6 (24 %)	3 (12%)			
More or less	8 (32%)	11 (44%)			
A lot	11 (40%)	11 (44%)			

4. What do you think about today's class?		
I didn't like it at all	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
I didn't like it	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
I liked it	8 (32%)	4 (16%)
I liked it a lot	15 (60%)	21 (84%)

5. Do you like to participate in your English class?		
No,I don't	0 (0 %)	0 (0%)
A little bit	8 (32 %)	2 (8 %)
Yes, I do	9 (36 %)	11 (44%)
Yes, I like it a lot	8 (32 %)	12 (48 %)

6. What encourages you to learn English?		
Reading books	5 (20 %)	1 (4%)
Listening songs	14 (56%)	16 (64%)
Watching movies	11 (40%)	9 (36%)
Writing exercises	9 (36 %)	6 (24 %)
Listening to audio	9 (36 %)	5 (20%)

7. How many times do you think songs should be used in your English class?		
Never	----	0 (5%)
Sometimes	----	5 (20 %)
In some classes	----	12 (48%)
In all classes	----	8 (32 %)

The analysis was completed by using Microsoft Excel. The data were recorded in Excel as a beginning step soon after the students all filled the necessary blanks appropriately. To get frequencies and percentages, descriptive analyses were preferred. The students expressed their opinions and perspectives via questionnaires.

When we look at table 1, it can be seen that there is slight increase on the first three questions. Do you like English? / Do you think that it is important to learn English? / Do you like your English class? 'The percentages of the students responded positively and very positively increased slightly from %10 to %11, % 13 to %14, %11 to %11.

On the fourth question 'What do you think about today's class? the percentages increased from %15 to % 21, on the fifth question 'Do you like to participate in your English class? the percentages increased from %8 to % 12. These two questions present a rise between the different classes, with or without songs.

On sixth question, the answers given listening and singing songs increased from %56 to %64. And the extra question included only in the post test shows that more than half of the students prefer songs in English classes. %48 of the students think that songs should be used in most classes and % 32 of the students think that songs should be used in all classes.

When generally viewed, using song in classes made a positive impact on students' motivation. As Edden (1998) suggested in his article, music and language are interrelated. This table is given as an example for this relationship.

3.2. Observation Templates

For each week, an observation template was filled and these templates were applied in song classes to observe the effects of songs on students' motivation, interest, participation and attention. The templates were filled twice to get more reliable results. And, the scores were shown below in the table.

Table 2. *Average score of the observer from 0 (worst) to 5 (best)*

	First Week Observation	Second Week Observation
Participation	4	5
Interest	4	4
Attention	3	4
Motivation	4	5
Average	3.75	4.5

Regarding analysis, it was evaluated according to the scale written on the template (0-5). The table presents that the score is above average. In detail, it will be held in four sections:

3.2.1. Participation

In the first week, the first song about directions was taught. The students eagerly participated and tried to learn the song. They used gestures, body movements by singing. They tried to imitate the songs even if they couldn't pronounce correctly. The majority of the students attempted to be active and chosen in the activities. In the second week, it was observed that most of the students learnt the first song and they were ready to learn the second one. And they were more eager than first week. While they were singing, they danced enthusiastically.

3.2.2. Interest

When we mentioned about interest part, the observer noted that some students sang the involuntarily and they showed low interest. These students didn't want to participate; but the other students didn't seem to get distracted by anything. These circumstances are valid both for first and second week.

3.2.3. Attention

In terms of attention, in the first week of the study, another point observed during the lesson was that the row where the students were seating affected their motivation level ;in that the frontier rows paid more attention than the rest of the class Some students found difficult to catch the rhythm of the song; so, they got distracted after a while. In the second week, the

attention level of the students seated in the back was higher than the first week. Almost all students got involved in singing.

3.2.4. Motivation

In both weeks, it was concluded that nearly all class weren't seated as they try to do what the teacher instructed; they imitated the body movements of the instructor; they participated the group activities voluntarily. Besides, the students often desired to learn what was excepted from them and they tried to obey the rules; they answered both in written and orally. The students had fun while they were carrying out the activities. They were mostly silent and impatient for being part of the activities. In general, the classes with songs were more interactive and cheerful.

4. Discussion

This study examined the efficiency of songs in teaching English to young learners in terms of motivation. Our findings obtained both Qual and Quant data demonstrated that songs affected the students in a positive way. When we compare the class atmosphere before and after the study, we can certainly make an affirmation that students felt more motivated and enthusiastic for learning English

Our findings demonstrate that songs were effective in increasing the students 'motivation. When we compare the class atmosphere before and after the study, we can certainly make an affirmation that students felt more motivated and enthusiastic for learning English. As one of the known facts, using songs in ESL and EFL classes is widely adopted in language teaching world (Aguirre, Bustinza & Garvich, 2015).

One of the aspect that we can conclude from this study is the answers given by the students to the question what the most motivating activity was for them. And 'listening and singing songs' was one of the sections that was preferred more than the others. The fact that songs are actually useful in creating more interactive and motivating place for children can be accepted as a reason (Aguirre, Bustinza & Garvich, 2015). In addition, songs often offer a change from routine classroom activities. Songs and similar materials like chants that mostly attract young learners are quite famous; on the other hand, the classes with adult learners aren't decorated with these kind of materials (Tavil & Işisağ, 2009).

In this study, it was aimed to determine how the songs effect the students' motivation. In many studies, the effect of songs on learning vocabulary, pronunciation was studied; but the studies about its effect on motivation are limited. For that reason we focused on the motivational effect of songs as, songs can stimulate a positive emotional attitude to language learning (Tavil & Işisağ, 2009).

Despite the positive findings just reviews, one of the difficulties observed is that surveying with children is very complicated as they can change their minds easily and their metacognitive status and abilities don't exactly match with the needs for completing a survey. For that reason, the observation process was included as well as the questionnaires to get more reliable results.

In terms of the limitations of this study, the results are restricted and it cannot be said that it can be generalized to other contexts due the fact that the population of the students is small and this study was applied to only one class.

What made this research innovative is that this study focused on the motivational element of songs rather than its effect on grammatical, lexical function.

5. Conclusion

Teaching English has gained great attention for the recent years. Especially, in primary levels, the studies to increase motivation and interest for English have attracted the many researchers. As the rhythm and music are one of the main parts of teaching to young learners, songs are inevitable in primary level while more sophisticated activities can be preferred with adult learners. With the help of music, a routine classroom can turn into enthusiastic and exciting place. This leads to increase of motivation, interest and participation. In primary level, it is challenging to control the whole class effectively, what is needed is to create some different activities to attract the students. This can be done with the help of songs. Likewise, the interaction between song and motivation was supported by many studies. So far, the effects of songs on vocabulary and pronunciation were emphasized but the motivational aspect of it weren't fully examined. For that reason, this study can be a starting way for further studies.

As a suggestion, it could be said that the comparison of two different levels –young and adult- could be interesting. There are known methods and materials for children and further research could be done for popular audiovisual materials. To thıs end it is suggested that teachers include songs in their classes to increase students' intrinsic motivation to help them develop their listening and speaking skills, to increase their vocabulary level and to make them learn within a group.

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