

## The Effect of Songs on the Fluency of the Junior High School Students in Iran

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**Abstract:** *This study sought to investigate how different types of the pedagogical songs i.e. Grammar-based or vocabulary-based songs affect the oral fluency of Iranian junior high school students. To this end, 40 students from a same junior high school in Isfahan were randomly chosen to serve as the participants of the study, they were then divided into two groups (classes); One experimental (EG) and one control group (CG). In the EG after teaching each unit of the book, a related song from the book Song For Third Graders was practiced with the students. Before starting the research a pre-test was taken and three raters scored the participant's oral fluency. After the treatment phase (three months) the participants subsequently sat for a post-test and the same raters scored their oral fluency (the pre-test and the post-test scoring was according to Oral Proficiency Scoring Categories (Brown, 2001)). The statistical results indicated that a meaningful difference was spotted between the groups; accordingly, it can be claimed that teaching grammar or vocabulary through songs brought about considerable improvement in the oral fluency. The result of this study can be beneficial for all the teachers of schools and institutes.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical songs, Oral fluency, Oral Proficiency Scoring Categories*

### 1. Introduction

Learning a second language is a fairly tough challenge which demands lots of considerable effort to be done satisfactorily. To cope with such a formidable task, alternative strategies and processes are at work. Each and every single individual has his/her own unique style of performing the task. Teachers and the environment in which one learns are also of considerable significance with regard to how successfully the process is undergone. As a matter of fact, second language learning is a multifaceted task which can be roughly divided into its sub-components. Listening, Speaking, reading, and writing are the most significant skills a person is to be familiar with. Speaking and listening have long been said to go hand in hand since they are in a way related to aural perceptions of human beings. These two skills are really important since for most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with knowing that language. The reason can be attributed to the fact that speaking and listening are the most fundamental means of communication (Celce- Murcia, 2001, p. 103). Fluency is a factor that can be of importance with respect to speaking. Fluency, as most L2 teachers claim, is a difficult concept to define. Derwing et al. (2004) believe that the difficulty can be attributed to the fact

that the concept embraces a variety of aspects of language. In fact, with the advent of communicative approach in the field of second language teaching, it is no longer acceptable to be merely concerned with the issues related to accuracy alone; fluency is of the same significance in the present teaching methodologies. On the other hand, Murphy (1991) still holds that a teacher teaching speaking is said to be always connecting speaking, listening, and pronunciation together; the main focus is on speaking, though. As Rebecca Hughes points out, to become a proficient speaker in spontaneous speaking contexts, puts lots of load on the speakers mind since all basic building blocks of vocabulary and grammar, fluency and pronunciation are on his/her shoulder. A wide variety of strategies can be used to associate listening and speaking together. To name a few, using audio tracks, teaching through conversations and discussions, having native speakers in class, watching movies, listening to songs can be mentioned (Celce- Murcia, 2001, p. 106). Depending on the age of the students as well as some teacher-related factors, of course, one or a couple of the most fitting afore-mentioned strategies may be implemented in each class.

Since the present study is primarily concerned with the junior high school students, songs are assumed to be regarded as the variable affecting fluency. Chants and songs have actually been proven to be helpful in building children's proficiency, vocabulary, stress patterns and intonation. They have also been noted to have effects on the way students are familiarized with the target culture (Celce- Murcia, 2001, p. 142). Since little has been done on the relation of songs and fluency, the researcher of the present study has directed attention towards considering the above-mentioned variables on junior high school students.

### *1.1.Literature review*

As mentioned before, teachers have a hard time defining Fluency since it's a multifaceted concept which is to be measured and examined in different ways. Taking the extreme difficulty of providing a concise definition of fluency into account, Brown has suggested some alternative definitions. Hartmann & Stork (1976) suggest that "a person is said to be a fluent speaker of a language when he can use its structures accurately whilst concentrating on content rather than form, using the units and patterns automatically at normal conversational speed when they are needed." Brumfit (1984), on the other hand, defines fluency as "the natural language use." Based on Hedge's (1993) definition, however, Fluency is "the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness or undue hesitation" (Celce- Murcia, 2001, p. 104). Hedge (1993) also proposes another still more holistic definition of fluency which holds that when a speaker uses language naturally while focusing on meaning, using speaking strategies and when overt correction is actually minimized, the speaker is said to be fluent. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency is the ability to read a text with speed, accuracy and proper expression. Fluent readers are capable of recognizing words automatically, reading aloud effortlessly and with expression, and they do not have to concentrate on decoding,

and can focus on comprehension. Generally speaking, oral fluency is primarily referred to as the qualities which give speech the features of being natural and normal including native-like use of pausing, stress, rhythm, intonation, rate of speaking, and use of interruptions and interjections. The Cambridge Online Advanced Learner's Dictionary provides one definition in simple terms for the learner:

□ Adjective – When a person is fluent, they can speak a language easily, well and quickly. Example: She's fluent in French.

□ When a language is fluent, it is spoken easily and without many pauses. Example: He speaks fluent Chinese. He's a fluent Russian speaker.

Oral fluency, in this research, means being able to speak effortlessly, with few hesitations and with a good level of comprehension. In classroom contexts, teachers have to choose the best methods of fluency instruction fitting for their students and classroom. According to Dr. Jack Richards "fluency is developed by creating classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings and work to avoid communication breakdowns". Gardner has distinguished eight distinct domains of intelligence, including verbal-linguistic, mathematical, logical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner 41-43 as cited in *The role of music in language learning-* Masoud Hashemi, Masoud Azizinezhad, 2011). The linguistic and musical intelligences are separate, but the two cooperate and the final result is stronger due to the fact that they work together. Music and songs in Foreign Language classes are used for several reasons. The major reason is the pleasant atmosphere it brings about in the classroom. Students associate to songs as part of amusement rather than work and find learning vocabulary and structures through songs entertaining rather than tedious and boring. This holds true especially with pop songs which are part of youth culture. Better familiarity with these songs improves students' status within the peer group and therefore stimulates learning. These songs also mostly tend to relate to problems interesting to young people and the students identify with the singers and want to understand the words. In fact, music has been proven to emulate the way caregivers talk to their children, or *motherese*, which has been shown to increase their understanding and acquisition of language (Palmer & Kelly 539, as cited in *The role of music in language learning-* Masoud Hashemi, Masoud Azizinezhad, 2011). This, in effect, will provide students, and more commonly the younger ones with an atmosphere in which they feel at ease. This, for sure, has some advantages which can facilitate learning in the best possible way. The students are in fact more open to share ideas and feelings; they do not experience the unfamiliarity of the foreign language context with much difficulty. Songs may influence language acquisition in various ways. In the first place, the emotional aspects of a song can simply increase the level of arousal and attention. Secondly, from a perceptual point of view, Pitch being available, the ability of phonological discrimination will be dramatically optimized, since syllable change is often clearly

distinguished by a change in pitch. And the last but not the least, the permanent mapping of musical and linguistic structure may substantially enhance the operation of learning mechanisms (Daniele Schön, Maud Boyer, Sylvain Moreno, et. al., 2008). The use of catchy chants and songs in class will enable the students to instantly realize the gist; in case the vocabulary and grammatical structures are clearly elaborated on, of course (Celce- Murcia, 2001, p. 142). As related to neuro-linguistics, recent findings have shown that the networks functioning for language and music perception are somehow interrelated (Koelsch & Siebel, 2005; Maess, Koelsch, Gunter, & Friederici, 2001 as cited in *Songs as an aid for language acquisition*, Daniele Schön a, Maud Boyer b, Sylvain Moreno, et.al, 2008). Songs have been proven to have a two-faceted influence on language learning process. In the first place, Langfit (1994) believes that songs can be used as the tools to effectively reduce the anxiety of students associated with being in an unfamiliar, new situation. On the other hand, songs have been demonstrated to hold close ties with the mental processing of language (Fiske, 1993; Heller & Campbell, 1981; Sloboda, 1985; Swain, 1986). Since in first language acquisition aural perceptions are mainly involved, It can also be suggested that songs are helpful in second language acquisition because songs, as well, have actually been proven to be related to aural properties of human beings (Jackendolf, 2003, as cited in *The Application of Humorous Song in EFL Classrooms and Its Effects on Listening Comprehension*, Hossein Vahid Dastjerdi, et.al, 2010). Using the songs in class is, in essence, associated with relaxation and a kind of tension-free atmosphere which is in touch with suggestopedia and in effect accelerates learning process (Larsen freeman, 2000).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

The population from which the participants of this research were selected was all third grade students of Namnabat junior high school in Esfahan. Among all the students in this junior high school a total number of 40 students were randomly selected. All the students were only males, and the same in terms of age. After the selection, these participants were divided into two classes, one whose teacher used the book „*Songs for Third Graders*’ and practiced its educational level related songs and the other one whose teacher neither used the book nor any other songs at all. The students with whom the teacher practiced the songs were considered as the experimental group and those whose teacher didn’t do the job were taken as the control group. To be convinced of the sameness of the instruction it should be mentioned that both classes had the same teacher so it can be concluded that there would be little or no difference in presenting the materials except using songs. Since the students weren’t from different schools the cultural factors were somehow under control.

### 2.2. Materials

A pre-test was given to participants of both CG (control group) and EG (experimental group) to determine their fluency level and to see if there would be any difference between their test scores after the instruction. Scoring the participant's fluency was based on the Oral Proficiency Scoring Categories (Brown, 2001, pp. 406-407) (see Appendix 1) and it was done by 3 different experienced teachers. The study was based on the use of Native American songs collected in my book „*Songs for Third Graders*’. The songs in this book were collected from different sources like some American sites, books, videos and so on. Then they were classified according to the level of the students in this grade some of them were topic-based and some were grammar-based.

### 2.3. Procedure

All third grade junior high school students in Iran use Right Path3 book as their course material, so it furthers the homogeneity of the participants. As it was pointed out both the EG and CG had the same teacher in this study and they were in the same school, this way, most of affective factors were under control. Before the treatment, as pre-test the students were interviewed by being asked some oral questions and their answers were recorded. Then the students' recorded answers were scored by 3 different experienced teachers. After four weeks of treatment (using songs for teaching) in order to see the students' progress in fluency, the participants were given a post-test; they were interviewed and scored once again just like the procedure used in pre-test and they were scored by the same three experienced teachers.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The present study attempted to find an answer to the research question which is primarily about the effect of applying grammar-based and vocabulary-based songs on oral fluency. Since scoring fluency of the students is a subjective task three experienced raters were hired to do the job, then the inter-rater reliability between the scores of pre-test and post-test separately was calculated. The results reveal the fact that there was an inter-rater reliability among the scores of pre-test and post-test (see Appendix 2). An independent t-test was conducted to compare the post-test scores of control group and experimental group. There was a significant difference in the control group, as it can be seen below. In other words, the treatment group revealed improved fluency scores immediately after they had received instruction through songs, but this was not the case with the control group. Regarding the significance level of the t-test for post-test, the difference in the mean scores within the two groups seems to be significant. So it can be concluded that this difference isn't by chance; it's the effect of song on the fluency of the participants. Comparison of the outcomes related to the experimental and control groups' pretest and posttest scores would elaborate the point that songs are proven to be of significance as considered to be a kind of effective in-class activity on junior high school students' fluency

level. In fact the present corpora gives a useful overall picture of ways in which variation might occur depending on the use of songs versus presenting the material without the use thereof.

#### *t*-Test for Pretest

Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Experimental	20	2.57	1.103	.247
Control	20	2.68	1.127	.252

t-test for the Pretest (**Not significant**)

T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
-.331	38	.743	-.11

#### *t*-Test for Posttest

Descriptive Statistics for the Posttest

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Experimental	20	3.43	.962	.215

Group	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Experimental	20	3.43	.962	.215
Control	20	2.82	.895	.200

t-test for the Posttest (**Significant, therefore the hypothesis is retained**)

T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
2.097	38	.043	.61

#### 4. Conclusion

For a considerable period of time the value of in-class activities in second or foreign language contexts has been highly debated and its practice often neglected. This study, as a result, made an attempt to cast some more light on the use of level-related songs on Iranian Junior high school students. In order to contribute to the need for further research on the value of providing students with a pleasant classroom atmosphere, it has tried to find the answer to investigate the following line of research; the effect of grammar-based and vocabulary-based songs on participants' oral fluency. The outcome of this study corroborates the hypotheses; regarding the fact that experimental group learners enhanced their fluency and songs have a moderately profound effect on their fluency. The research presented here is part of an enormous amount of literature that provides evidence for the advantages of song in language classrooms. The same line of research could be followed with respect to other variables, namely age, gender, level of proficiency and etc. It is therefore of vital importance for researchers and teaching experts to identify issues, in-class strategies, and techniques for helping students to help themselves through various types of research designs. Though this study, examining primarily a controlled experimental treatment, clearly has its own limits, it nevertheless provides specific evidence that can help teachers weigh some of their feedback options more meticulously. More accurately speaking, further research would need to be undertaken to see if this finding also applies to other ages, at other proficiency levels and whether it is also true for other funny, in-class activities which are associated with music.

#### References: