



Full Length Research Article

USING AND EXPLOITING SONGS IN THE CLASSROOM; DO THEY WORK? A CASE STUDY IN TEACHING EFL TO STUDENTS OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study has mainly attempted to find out whether or not using songs in teaching EFL class works; looking from the aspects of students' enthusiasm, interest, participation, and their performance in pronunciation. It also aims to examine the types of songs used in teaching this level of students. Additionally, it will assess if the use of songs in teaching and learning process in the classroom can improve the students' performance and achievement in listening and vocabulary by using mixed method, which is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The results reveal that using and exploiting songs in the classroom really work. All students show their enthusiasm, interest, and participation in teaching and learning activities through songs in the classroom and they can pronounce English words clearly. Some of them can even do that accurately. They actively and eagerly participate during the lesson. These have been shown by the results of interview and direct observation. Several songs have been chosen to teach this level of students based on some particular criteria: the songs have to relate to their lessons in the textbook that they use, the level of difficulty has to be suitable with their level of education, and the songs have to contain the language functions and the grammar points to be taught. Another result is that the students' performance and achievement, especially in listening and vocabulary have been better. This has been proved by the improvement of their scores in the post-test (compared to the ones in the pre-test).

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching EFL in Indonesia is interesting but it is challenging for several teachers, especially for those who do not teach in top urban schools. There are many contributing factors to the challenging condition of teaching EFL in rural schools, one of them is how to improve students' motivation and willingness to study. Students in rural schools do not have as much motivation as the ones who study in top schools in urban areas in learning EFL. In an informal interview with several students of rural schools, it has been found out that these students do not have motivation in learning English because of two main reasons. The first one concerns with cultural context. The students do not think that English is important to learn because it does not belong to their culture. They further assert that they do not need to study English because it is neither their national nor their daily language. Their additional reason relates to physical context, in which they say that even if they can speak English well, they will never use it in communication because they never see any English native speakers visit their places.

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These are several main reasons why they have such a low motivation to learn English. There are also several other minor reasons stated by them, such as English is a boring subject, they do not understand what their teachers teach, the materials and the way their teachers teach are not interesting, et cetera. Relating to the students' reasons mentioned earlier, a conclusion can be drawn that they actually need a more fun, relaxed, and easy way in learning. Once they are interested in this subject, they will be motivated easier. The students can learn effectively if they have motivation in learning the subject. In this case, English teachers have to be creative enough to respond to this situation. They have to be able to find interesting ways to teach their students and to boost their motivation at the same time and so the students will not be bored but enthusiastic in learning English. Teachers have to be able to create a positive teaching atmosphere to help their students learn in a more enjoyable way. Teaching and learning process does not have to be conducted in serious and complicated ways but teachers can successfully teach their students by engaging them in interesting and attractive activities, such as using games, pictures, songs, et cetera. Bringing music into the classroom is an interesting way of teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language.

It can be applied by using and exploiting songs in teaching EFL class which is not new at all. Many teachers around the world have already tried it and numerous studies have also been focused on this area. Most of the results shows that it is good and effective to use songs in teaching and learning process in the classroom. This study will not only look at the general issue of whether or not the use of songs works in teaching EFL students of Junior High School in Indonesia, but it will also look at the specific issues about how songs can contribute to the students' enthusiasm, interest, participation, and the way they pronounce English words. It will further look at the improvement and achievement in students' listening and vocabulary.

Literature Review

Many English teachers still do not consider presenting songs in the classroom as a teaching method in teaching EFL class because the use of songs is seen as set of entertaining activities only and not for learning. Activities dealing with songs are thought as leisure activities which are not supposed to be conducted in the classroom during teaching-learning process. Besides, the use of songs does not usually appear in the syllabus. According to some teachers, teaching and learning process itself has to deal with serious matters. However, the concept of learning through songs can be useful in the foreign language classroom. It can be applied by all teachers in the classroom as long as it relates to the overall topic of the lesson and has a clear lexical or structural focus.

The word "song" is very familiar for everyone in this world. Songs have become a part of our lives. There are several practical experiences where we usually use them in our daily lives, either in formal or informal occasions, as has been mentioned by Gugliemino (1986), songs are usually used in religious services, they can also be sung anywhere by anyone; it can be on the street, in the bathroom, and in the classroom during the teaching and learning process. Songs may come in many genres and languages. English songs are very popular for almost all EFL students in Indonesia. Although they do not really understand the lyrics and what the songs are about, they enjoy listening and singing along with the singer(s). Teachers can take advantage of the popularity of English songs to be used as a teaching media to teach their students.

Many English teachers as well as experts and researchers have tried out the use of songs in the classroom and they feel satisfied and positive about the result (Harmer, 2001; Ocak, 2012; Lynch, 2008; Shen, 2009). Learners of a second and/or foreign language, in this case, English, are assumed to have great interest in singing as well as listening to songs, particularly, English songs. Based on my experience, I have seen many students in Indonesia really enjoy the experience of teaching and learning English by using songs in the classroom. Unfortunately, most teachers are not considered songs as a pedagogical tool in the classroom. Teachers tend to stick to the traditional pedagogical tool, which is textbook, to be used in their teaching activity. Besides, songs are not clearly stated in the curriculum as the core unit to teach. However, blending songs with teaching and learning process and integrating them into the lessons can actually be great if teachers know how to maximally use them in the classroom. They can be considered as valuable pedagogical tools looking from the advantages shared by Millington (2011) as follows: songs are flexible and they can be used for various purposes and reasons.

He further adds that one of the most important reasons of using songs in the classroom which is not being noticed and is almost ignored by many teachers is they are fun. In this case, being able to create enjoyment in teaching is very important for teachers as it can directly improve the students' motivation in learning (Millington, 2011). Teachers can use songs in teaching and learning process in the classroom for various reasons; *affective, cognitive, linguistic, social, and cultural*. It depends on teachers what aspect to focus on and to give more attention to. However, in this writing, I will only focus on the affective, cognitive, and linguistic reasons because those are the reasons I am looking at in my study.

- In *affective* reason, teachers can use songs to promote language learning in order to improve students' English knowledge and skills. In this respect, Eken (1996:46) explores the benefits of using songs, such as, to present a topic, a language point, lexis, etc., to practice a language point, lexis, etc., to focus on common learner errors in a more direct way, to encourage extensive and intensive listening, to stimulate discussion of attitudes and feelings, to encourage creativity and use of imagination, to provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere, to bring variety and fun to learning. Mora (2000) by using 'melody approach' has found out that songs do not only affect the way the students pronounce the words but also their whole process in acquiring the language.
- When we are talking about *cognitive reason*, we refer to the way learners can automatically develop the language they are learning. This is supported by Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988:473) who define automaticity as "a component of language fluency which involves both knowing what to say and producing language rapidly without pauses." One way of doing this is by creating repetitive exercises for students, and imaginative, creative, and innovative English teachers can create this kind of tasks by using songs.
- The *linguistic* reason strongly relates to both affective and cognitive reasons. In this reason, teachers tend to use songs to teach authentic language to students. Several studies find that songs can be functioned as a source of learning outside the classroom. They contain authentic language that can be used by students to use in communication with its native speakers (Domoney and Harris, 1993; Little, 1983).

Using English songs, especially the popular ones, in teaching EFL students can be very advantageous as stated by Baoan (2008); the advantages are: the students' motivation can be increased, especially if teachers use their favorite songs and try to link them to the language learned. By doing this, the students will not only learn the linguistic aspects of the language they are learning (English), but they will also learn about its culture by using authentic language through songs. In addition, the students can explore the new knowledge dealing with the issues of histories and culture of the target language. Another benefit of using song is students will not experience learning under pressure because song itself will make them fun and enjoy the learning situation. This will make students feel confident and relaxed to involve in learning activities without being shy and hesitating (Cullen (1998, 1999). Students will not work under pressure if teachers use songs because there is a change in the classroom atmosphere, from negative to

positive, uncomfortable to comfortable, passive to active, and the changings can make students not only happy and enjoy to participate in the teaching learning process but also be able express their opinions and ideas during the learning process (Lo and Li, 1998). Teachers can use songs to teach the grammar points and language functions. Besides, songs can also be used to direct the students to the use of authentic language contained in the songs as has been mentioned earlier. There have been many positive attitudes toward the use of songs in the classroom. It is because songs are easy to be applied in a relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere and teachers can involve all students in teaching and learning process. Four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and two language components (grammar and vocabulary) of students can be improved through songs. However, listening skill and pronunciation are the two aspects which have been focused on by many researchers and practitioners. "Songs can be one of the most enjoyable ways to practice and develop listening skills" (Sevik, 2012:10). Another positive attitude about the effectiveness of using songs in teaching listening, pronunciation, and dictation has been suggested by Demirel (2004). Orlova (2003) has further suggested teachers explore more activities in using songs in the classroom, such as; practice the patterns of rhyming, stressing, and using correct intonation; teach vocabulary based on the songs; look at grammar points, in this case, try to look at tenses used in the songs and explain to students; discuss the content of the songs and get students to practise speaking; improve students' listening skill through the songs used; and be creative in designing various tasks focus on developing students' writing skills. Murphey (1992) has similar thoughts with others that songs can be used to improve students' listening skills, vocabulary, as well as speaking skills and other language components, such as vocabulary, sentence structures, and sentence patterns. This is in a line with my previous research finding that there is a strong relationship between listening to music (English songs) and students' English skills (listening and speaking), and this has been proved by not only their scores but also their performance in the classroom (Djahimo, 2015).

Basically, all English songs can be used in teaching EFL students as long as they fit the lesson(s) based on the textbook used by the students and they can be adapted with students' level of education. There are 3 factors in determining what songs to be used in the classroom. First, teachers have to be careful in choosing songs based on the lessons stated in the syllabus. The students' text book can be used as a reference in choosing the songs. Before choosing what song(s) to be used, teachers have to match what to learn, in this case, the grammar points and/or language functions, with the content of the songs, whether or not the song(s) contain the target of the lesson. Second, the songs have to suit the students' level of ability. In selecting the song(s), teachers need to choose the appropriate one(s) based on the students' level of education, neither too difficult nor too easy. The songs should have simple lyrics to make easier for students to listen and understand. Third, the chosen songs have to contain particular aspects, either grammar points or language functions, that teachers want to discuss and explore in teaching and learning activity. It is going to be easier to explain the aspects of the lesson by using songs because basically songs are memorable and enjoyable, not only for adults but also for young learners. In short, teachers have to select songs selectively and purposively.

Various techniques and instructions can be created by using songs since different techniques as well as instructions are required to teach different skills. For instance, in teaching listening, teachers can create filling-gap and answering questions activities; in teaching vocabulary, teachers might use activities dealing with synonym, antonym, and word association, and in the teaching of speaking, more discussion activity about students' interpretation of the song(s) can be performed. Generally, the overall teaching and learning activity consists of 3 stages; pre listening to song(s), while listening to song(s), and post listening to song(s) and through these three stages, students can be exposed to many kinds of activities, either individually or in pairs or they can also work in groups.

METHODS

Aim

This study is aimed at examining if the use of songs in teaching EFL class works, looking from the aspects of students' enthusiasm, interest, participation, and their performance in pronunciation. It also aims to examine the types of songs used in teaching the first grade students of Junior High Schools in 3 rural schools in Indonesia. Additionally, it will assess if the use of songs in teaching and learning process in the classroom can improve the students' performance and achievement in listening and vocabulary.

Significance of the Study

This study is basically expected to introduce the concept of using and exploiting songs in the classroom to English teachers, especially, to those who teach in the rural schools of Indonesia. Through this writing, English teachers will be informed that various teaching techniques and instructions can be created by using songs considering that different techniques as well as instructions are required to teach different skills. Another significant point of this study is to help EFL teachers, particularly, the ones who teach in rural areas find an easy, relaxed, and enjoyable way to teach their students and to build up their motivation and willingness to learn English.

Subject

30 students of the first grade of Junior High Schools in Indonesia have been involved to become the research sample. There are some features about students who have been involved in this study, as follows; these students who just graduated from Elementary School had never learned English before; they consist of both males and females (15 males and 15 females) whose ages are between 12 to 14 years old.

Data Collection

The data has been collected by using several research instruments. They are interview, observation, field-note and tests (vocabulary and listening skill).

Data Analysis

Although this study has employed mixed methods, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative designs, but the main interpretation in this study is explained in a qualitative way, which is used to identify the following things; whether or

not using songs in teaching EFL class works; looking from the aspects of students' enthusiasm, interest, participation, and their performance in pronunciation; and the types of songs used in the classroom. A Quantification and simple analysis have been used in analyzing the students' results of pre-and post-test. Its aim is to find out the average and the difference of the students' scores of pre-test and post-test in order to know their achievement in listening and vocabulary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are three questions to be answered through this research and in this section, each question will be answered and discussed further.

Using and exploiting songs in the classroom, does it work?

The research results show that using songs in teaching and learning activity in the classroom works. It can be seen from the aspects of students' enthusiasm, interest, participation and their performance in pronunciation. Below is the table of summary of the findings based on observation and interview to show the relationship between the results of observation and interview:

OBSERVATION	INTERVIEW
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The students show their enthusiasm and interest in the classroom. The students participate well during the teaching and learning process. The students can pronounce English words clearly, and some of them can even do that accurately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T: Do you like learning English with songs? S: Yes, I really like this way of learning. I want my teacher to use songs everytime he teaches English. T: Do you like doing the tasks after listening to the songs? S: Yes. The tasks become easier after listening to the songs and being explained. I can do all the tasks correctly. T: Can you say 'shoulders'? S: eh.. 'shoulder'..? T: 'shoulders'..don't forget s.. S: 'Shoulders'..Am I right?

Based on the observation, all students were really enthusiastic in joining the lessons. They showed their interests by singing energetically, answering every question asked (no matter it was right or wrong), and asking about things they did not understand. The class was quite noisy during the lesson but it was in a positive sense. The students were noisy because they actively discussed and interacted with each other as well as with their teacher. They also tried to sing the new song individually or in groups. In the first stage, the teacher introduced the song used in the lesson by playing it for several times using video player. The students watched and listened quietly. Although it was a new song for them, but some of them sang along with the singer(s).

After that, the teacher turned off the player and taught the students how to sing the song slowly. She wrote down the lyrics of the song on the blackboard and pronounced every word for the students to repeat. When they were ready, the song was played again, and this time the students sang along with their teacher and the singer(s). If they had to imitate the action(s) showed by the singer(s) from the video while singing, the teacher would ask them to do that. The exercises were given after all students enjoyed singing and could pronounce the words in the song accurately. Teacher designed the tasks based on the specific lesson she wanted to explore to her students. Whenever the students forgot something related to the song they just sang, she played that part again to remind them.

The interaction went really well during the teaching and learning process. It seemed that the traditional interaction, which is teacher to students, did not happen here as the interaction went from student to student and also from student to teacher. The use of songs in teaching activity did not only encourage the students to work together as a class, but also to give opportunity to each and every student to share his/her ideas and cooperatively work with his/her other friends. They asked each other the things that they did not understand and also busily compared their answers to one another. They even could express their opinions to teacher without feeling afraid or hesitating. Overall, it can be said that the teaching and learning atmosphere was very positive because all students seemed to actively participate in it. The students were also active in searching the meanings of words that they did not understand in their dictionaries (they had almost never used their dictionaries at all before). During the observation, it can be seen that the students really enjoyed their learning activity and it seemed like they did not realize that they were in a learning situation. This is in a line with what has been suggested by Lo and Li (1998) that songs can make students not work under pressure because they can learn in a positive, comfortable and active atmosphere which will allow them to feel free in expressing their opinions without hesitating.

Cullen (1998, 1999) has also supported this idea about how songs can make students forget their shyness and hesitation. The use of songs in teaching and learning process in this study has helped the students to motivate themselves in learning this subject as well as to encourage them to speak up and share their opinions and answers to the rest of the class. The results of this finding have been strengthened by the results of the interviews. 10 out of 30 students have been randomly selected to represent their other friends to be interviewed. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, but sometimes their local dialect was used to make them easier to understand the questions. Their answers have then been translated into English for the purpose of writing this article. Based on their answers, it can be concluded that all of them were happy with the way they had learned English by using songs. Although some students did not really like singing, they enjoyed singing together with their friends and in this activity and always took part in every lesson. It can also be revealed from their answers that they could learn to pronounce English words correctly and remember them easily by using songs. Below are several other samples of the interview extracts to show the students' enthusiasm and interest in using songs in the classroom:

Interviewer	: <i>Do you like singing?</i>
Student	: <i>Yes, I do.</i>
Interviewer	: <i>Do you like learning English with songs?</i>
Student	: <i>I like it. It's really interesting to learn</i>

English through songs. I'm not bored and sleepy.

- Interviewer : *Do you like the song we just sang?*
 Student : *Yes, it's a good song.. I can say all the alphabets in English by singing that song.*
- Interviewer : *Do you usually sing?*
 Student : *No, actually, I don't really like singing. But I like singing together with my friends in the classroom.*
- Interviewer : *Is English difficult?*
 Student : *Yes, it's difficult. I don't like to pronounce English words, because it's not the same as it is in Bahasa Indonesia. In English, the way a word is written is different from the way it's read or pronounced.*
- Interviewer : *Then how can you remember how to pronounce the words?*
 Student : *I used to ask my English teacher before, but after listening to and singing the songs, it's easier for me to remember how to pronounce the words sung in the songs.*

What types of song can be used to teach this level of student?

This study reveals that the types of songs that can be used to teach this level of students are *simple songs* which are based on their lessons in the textbook. We cannot teach them songs that do not relate to their lessons in the textbook because eventually, the students have to face final examination by the end of every semester, in which all questions will be taken from their daily lessons from the textbook that they use. The songs should be simple considering that these students are beginners in learning English. If we choose complicated songs then it will be hard for the students to learn from them. So *the level of difficulty* is the main issue here. Another important point about type of songs to choose is about *the focus of the lesson*. In this case, the songs have to match with that focus of the lesson that we want to teach, either grammar points or language functions. If we aim to teach them grammar points, for example, present continuous tense, then we have to find songs contain that tense in the lyrics. If we aim at teaching them language functions, for example, identifying parts of the human body, then we have to find particular songs which contain parts of human body in the lyrics.

Can the use of songs in the teaching and learning process in the classroom improve the students' performance and achievement in listening and vocabulary?

In coming to the answer of this question, a set of procedures has been conducted, as follows: first of all, a test was given to students as their pre-test, aimed at testing their performance and achievement in vocabulary and listening. The students' work was checked and scored before teaching them with songs. This teaching activity was conducted in six meetings under three different topics, namely *English Alphabet, Numbers, and Parts of Human Body*. Beside teaching them about alphabets, numbers, and parts of human body, these three topics also aimed at teaching them several language functions and grammar points, such as tenses (Simple Present Tense and Present Continuous Tense), nouns (singular and plural), simple verbs, greetings, telling times, identifying parts of human body, et cetera. In this case, different songs were

selected to teach different topics. The post-test was finally given as the final step. The scores of the students' pre-test have then been compared to the ones of the post-test by using a quantification and simple analysis to find out the average and the difference of their scores in both tests, and here is the summary of the results:

N	Average Pre-Test	Average Post-Test	Difference
30	60.12	78.77	18.65

The result of the computation says that the students' average of pre-test is 60.12 and their average of post-test is 78.77. The difference between their pre-test and post-test is 18.65. It can be clearly seen from the result that the students' performance and achievement in listening and vocabulary have improved after being taught with songs. However, it has to be admitted that the analysis of the students' score did not go through further statistical analysis to find the more accurate number for the significant difference. Another limitation of this study is that this study only has limited aims and has been conducted for a short period of time, that is why, the analysis hasn't been done deeply and thoroughly and there are some aspects dealing with the long term issues are not observable.

Conclusions and suggestion

The first purpose of this article is to highlight whether or not the use of songs in the classroom works. The second purpose is to state the types of songs that can be used in teaching EFL students, and the third purpose is to inform whether or not the use of songs can improve the students' achievement in listening and vocabulary. Teaching and learning process can be effective in a serious setting, but it can be more effective in a fun and relaxed situation, in this case, by using songs as a teaching media. This study tells us that basically, using and exploiting songs in the classroom works. Generally, songs can improve students' ability in English, especially their listening skills and vocabulary. In addition, using songs in teaching these students can particularly boost up their motivation and change them from passive to active students. However, in selecting the songs, teachers have to consider that songs to be used have to be adapted with the students' lesson from the text book used and the linguistic aspects to be explored in teaching and learning activity. In short, teachers have to be creative to design interesting teaching materials from the songs to make their students enjoy their activities in teaching learning process.

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