

# MUSICAL ADVENTURES IN THE CLASSROOM: ENHANCING YOUNG LEARNERS' VOCABULARY ACQUISITION THROUGH SONG-BASED ACTIVITIES

Shpresa DRAGOBUZHDA

*South East European University SEEU, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication, North Macedonia  
TA at University Kadri Zeka - Gjilan, Kosovo  
Corresponding Author e-mail: shpresa.veseli92@gmail.com*

---

## Abstract

“Most students enjoy listening and analyzing songs because of the fact that music is everywhere and they are always in contact with music” (Arevalo, 2010, p. 130-131).

The use of music has always been crucial in English language settings, especially for young language learners. Songs are easily accessible and include vocabulary, emotions, pronunciation, and topics (Arevalo, 2010).

Hereby, this study examines the effectiveness of incorporating song-based activities to improve vocabulary acquisition among English language learners in the classroom, especially young learners.

The first objective is to theoretically investigate the influence of song-based activities on young learners' vocabulary acquisition in English language learning settings.

Also, the inclusion of songs and activities related to songs in English textbooks used in Kosovo elementary schools are examined.

The use of songs not only leads to enhanced vocabulary retention but also motivates young learners of English, engages them in tasks, and makes them have enjoyable learning experiences.

This study will serve as a background for further empirical and deep research into English language classes in Kosovo settings.

*Keywords:* Music, vocabulary, English as a foreign language, acquisition;

---

## 1. Introduction

Music has always been considered a powerful tool in EFL classes, especially in classes with young learners. It engages learners by providing them with a relaxed and fun class, a break from textbooks, and enables vocabulary acquisition in a non-threatening, naturalistic manner.

The use of music and songs in an EFL classroom potentially stimulates language acquisition, fosters cultural awareness, and promotes a positive learning experience.

According to Jazvin, (2024), *‘teachers who use music as a teaching tool during EFL education create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere which benefits students’ motivation to further engage in language learning.*

"Children's early vocabulary acquisition is a crucial predictor of their later academic success and overall language proficiency. In recent years, educators and researchers have increasingly turned to innovative and engaging methods to facilitate this process.

Among such methods, the use of song-based activities is considered to have particular attention, since they potentially enhance foreign language acquisition.

By using songs and their patterns, the language learning process becomes enjoyable for kids and motivates them to naturally acquire new language words and concepts.

Bono said that ‘music can change the world because it can change the people’, by highlighting the impact of music. In early childhood education, especially in the process of language acquisition, the intervention of music can facilitate language learning by ensuring vocabulary richness and literacy skills.

Traditional language learning in Kosovo is still part of instruction, and this leads to a lack of

dynamic and interactive elements to engage young learners in naturalistic language acquisition. Such methods can fail to engage young learners in language composition, and educators need to seek more innovative and effective strategies to include in their classes and curriculum. Song-based language activities have emerged as a promising tool in engaging young learners to acquire language components.

Such rhythmic and melodic elements of songs make them an appealing medium for teaching new vocabulary to young learners.

By examining emotional, cognitive and cultural dimensions, this study seeks to reveal why songs can provide a powerful tool for language acquisition.

By relying on theoretical aspects, valuable insights for educators and language teachers will be provided which will contribute to the changing of teaching methods, and teachers' training, and will enable them to seek more innovative and effective strategies, especially in the education system in public schools in Kosovo.

Recently, in the era of English language classes song-based activities, as an encouraging tool to acquire the language.

However, the practical use of songs in language classes is a promising tool and a discussed area. In Kosovo schools, there is a notable gap in understanding the theoretical mechanisms that imply the effectiveness and benefits of English vocabulary acquisition.

Hereby, this paper will try to explore the theoretical foundations of using song-based activities in the process of language learning, in order to improve vocabulary acquisition in young learners.

The following sections will present a review of relevant literature, and outline the objectives and research questions of the study, by reviewing the existing literature on the educational use of music and vocabulary acquisition; also, the relevant learning and teaching theories will be discussed which will suggest the challenges of incorporating song-based activities in early childhood language education and the potential benefits.

Eventually, this study reveals that a well theoretical review and an established song-based language class can offer a unique approach to vocabulary acquisition, that will further apply in the educational backgrounds.

*1.2 Aim of the research:* The primary objective of this study is to examine theoretically the impact of song-based activities on the vocabulary acquisition of young learners in English language learning environments. Additionally, the study explores the incorporation of songs and song-related activities in the English textbooks used in elementary schools across Kosovo.

## **2. A review of the theories on music and vocabulary acquisition**

This study will first use a theoretical review, by following a model of theories and models that were previously studied.

This study focuses on the use of song-based activities to enhance vocabulary acquisition among young English language learners in the classroom.

Many teachers like to use music and song in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Good motivational tools, music and song are fun and relaxing, and they provide a class with variety and a break from textbook study.

According to Patel (2008) 'language and music define us as human'. Both of these comprise complex and meaningful sound consequences that naturally are so similar and easy to be combined. The connection between language and music has barely been discussed and explored, especially in the field of education and language learning.

Teaching English to young learners has been a crucial process that is broadly discussed, especially when English is being taught as a foreign or a second language. Uchida (2001) argues

that language is easily acquired and learned until the age of three. Krashen (1975: 10) supports this theory by stating that a kid's brain changes rapidly and it has twice as many connections as an adult's brain.

Also, Brotherson (2005) claims that the most important time to learn a second language is from birth to ten years of age.

In this rapidly changing era, children are being exposed to a lot of information and language structures, and it is crucial to offer discussions, theories, and suggestions that benefit the adequate acquisition of such information.

Concerning the teaching process, according to Brown (2001: 87-90), there are five components that can help teachers to teach languages to children: *'Attention Span, Sensory input, Affective factors, and Authentic, Meaningful language'*.

However, theory often does not meet the needs of language classes, but introducing songs to a language class can be important since it grows and develops the child's vocabulary in an easy way. By signing, children express their inner feelings, become social, and communicate easily with their friends by avoiding the anxiety that they may have.

Combining music with language learning in Swedish secondary schools provides students with cognitive, motivational, and linguistic benefits that prompt language development (Rieb & Cohen, 2023). I

### **3. Theoretical Foundations of Vocabulary Acquisition through song-based activities**

Theoretical foundations of vocabulary acquisition through song-based activities derive from various linguistic, cognitive, and educational frameworks.

Regarding these theories' music, particularly songs, can enhance language learning, including vocabulary acquisition, by creating an engaging environment and a multi-sensory one.

Some of the main theories that are relevant to understanding how song-based activities and vocabulary acquisition.

#### ***1. Krashen's input hypothesis***

One of the theories that supports the inclusion of songs in language classes is Krashen's input hypothesis which suggests that learners acquire language effectively by being exposed to comprehensible input that is a bit beyond their level of proficiency.

In this case, songs serve as an ideal source of comprehension because they expose learners to rhyme, context clues, and repetition, which make unfamiliar words more accessible.

Language learners also acquire new vocabulary through context, repetition, melody, etc.

#### ***2. Dual-Coding Theory***

The DCT is simply the combination of words with visuals, such as images, diagrams, or graphic organizers. Basically, it suggests that the combination of verbal and visual representations of the information provided helps to recall and acquire the information better.

Allan Pavio's theory posits that in song-based activities learners are simultaneously exposed to linguistic content and auditory or musical input. This 'Dual Coding' improves memory and vocabulary input.

Music is considered a reminder that allows learners to recall words easily due to the association between music and language.

### **3. Total Physical Response (TPR)**

This theory was first introduced by the American psychologist Dr. James Asher, who signifies the role of physical movement in language acquisition. Songs engage learners physically, either through gestures, clapping, or dancing which helps improve vocabulary.

When language learners combine physical actions with words in a song, long-term memory is established. According to Kumar & Sandaran (2018), the TPR is built around the coordination of speech and actions.

### **4. Affective Filter Hypothesis**

This hypothesis is part of Krashen's broader theory of second language acquisition, which focuses on how emotional factors influence language learning.

According to this theory, there are various factors that influence language, or in this case vocabulary acquisition.

Motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence are the three categories that play a role in second language acquisition. Songs can lower the affective filter by making the learning environment more enjoyable, reducing anxiety, and increasing motivation.

### **5. Connectionism**

One of the theories that supports the use of songs in the language learning process is the Connectionism model which suggests that the learners acquire vocabulary easily by being exposed repeatedly to words and patterns in various contexts. Hereby, songs provide a rich source of repeated language input. In addition, music is described to be the "*language of teenagers*" where relatable and inspirational experiences are expressed through the music they are listening to (Laclair, 2017).

Many other models and theories support the acquisition of vocabulary through the use of songs and music in language classes. A combination of comprehensible yet challenging input (Krashen), the relation of multiple senses (Dual-Coding and Multisensory Learning), and providing a low-stress, emotionally supportive environment (Affective Filter Hypothesis), song-based activities provide an effective and holistic approach to language learning, especially in acquiring new vocabulary.

## **4. The use of music and songs in language classes**

The importance of music presence in language acquisition is also explained through the Multiple Intelligence model, which signifies that different types of intelligences can be included in the language acquisition process, so students who possess different intelligences and talents can thrive in their language development. (Rieb & Cohen, 2023).

Two of these intelligences include *linguistic-verbal* and *musical intelligences*.

Humans are born with these two intelligences, and even babies in the womb can distinguish different types of music and can differentiate their native language from other languages.

This shows that music and language coexist together in humans.

If language learners are allowed to listen to and read songs, then they will eventually develop students language skills in English.

Jazvin (2024), considers that English syllabuses are full of songs, especially for the ages 6-9, by implying that it is teachers' responsibility to educate students in a way that allows them to express their language acquisition through songs and music.

Cepeda (2014), claims that it is necessary to implement a lexical approach in the classroom, by

directing it to the ‘naturally occurring language’ which triggers the learners’ awareness of the lexical nature of language. So, the lexical approach basically shows how lexis, phonology, and grammar interact in ways that affect the learner directly by storing new vocabulary.

On the other hand, Uchida (2000) suggests that not just the songs, but also the color figures and photographs that are shown through songs have a huge physical warm-up booster for kids. These are the so-called ‘Concrete concepts’ that teachers should use in the classroom, and avoid abstract usage.

Medina (2000), considers that to grow and develop the process of a child’s vocabulary mastery, the inclusion of music is more than necessary. This is how children express their feelings, communicate, and play together with their friends.

Choosing adequate songs and rhythms in the classroom matters, and teachers should be careful and consider some criteria that not only develop the pupils’ emotional, social, and physical aspects but also their vocabulary, pronunciation, and other skills of a language.

## **5. Kosovo’s case in integrating music into language classes**

*5.1 The Existing Situation in Kosovo Schools and Textbooks Related to Music Integration into Language Classes:* In Kosovo, the integration of music into English language classes has shown promising potential, supported by the increasing availability of online resources and the high levels of motivation among students to engage in English learning. Many English teachers in Kosovo are well-prepared and experienced, often more so than their counterparts in other subjects, enabling them to deliver effective language instruction. While traditional methods, such as grammar exercises and reading comprehension, remain prevalent, teachers increasingly recognize the value of incorporating music and other dynamic teaching strategies. Although song-based activities are not yet a standard component of classroom practices, the enthusiasm and capability of both teachers and students create an encouraging environment for exploring innovative approaches to language learning, including the use of music to enhance vocabulary acquisition and student engagement.

The English textbooks used in Kosovo’s elementary schools in the past predominantly followed traditional methods of language instruction, with a focus on grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary exercises. While there were some references to songs or musical activities, these were generally limited to specific chapters or exercises and were not integrated as a regular part of the curriculum.

According to Hermida (2019), teaching English for Young Learners has been broadly discussed in many academic writings. Young learners are closely regarded to have a massive memory that can be potentially filled by any information: Cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of song-based learning activities.

Kosovo’s curriculum is based on the Finnish curriculum, which suggests the integration of lay and music for learning and achieving learning goals.

Regarding English language learning, which has a major role in kids’ vocabulary development, since a lot of 1st-grade pupils have already mastered English vocabulary. Being an English teacher for 10 years, enabled me to review the texts I have used so far in my English classes. For a period of 7 years now, the Yazoo books (Pearson editions) for grades 1-3 have been used, which include a lot of songs and vocabulary exercises. But the problem is, that the books provided would never come completed, but only the hard copy of the Pupils’ book and Activity book, and the other accompanying resources were not provided, nor the online platform or any other source, like CD or any audio record.

So far, it was the teachers’ sole responsibility to provide songs and vocabulary for their pupils and to find alternative resources to provide those songs and vocabulary.

However, recently this situation has changed since additional textbooks have been introduced.



The English textbooks used in Kosovo schools, primarily those published by Pearson, are of high quality and provide extensive resources to support language learning. These textbooks include a variety of exercises designed to promote vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and reading comprehension. While some of the books feature songs and musical activities, they are not consistently integrated throughout the curriculum. However, the resources provided by Pearson offer great potential for enhancing language learning through song-based activities, with some textbooks including supplementary audio and interactive materials.

These books have been analyzed for 1 month, focusing on the music exercises, song use, and vocabulary exercises.

Most of the exercises in The Yazoo starter book for 1st grade are songs and listening exercises, followed by vocabulary exercises. The Yazoo Level 1 Book for 2nd grade also focuses on song inclusion in each unit and vocabulary exercises; the Yazoo Level 2 Book for 3rd grade also comprises 2 songs per unit.

But, the 4th grade book Today starter includes just a few songs, but a lot of listening exercises. However, the inclusion of the songs in these books should not limit teachers to include songs in their classes.

They can adapt any song online to the topic they are teaching, and focus not only on the textbooks.

According to a study by Neithanantan & Hua (2023), they included two songs in their study: *'Head, shoulders, knees and toes'* and *'If you are happy and you know it..'*, where hundred-twenty pupils of 5th grade participated in the class observation and post-test, and the results were amazing since it was shown that the inclusion of songs, increases vocabulary, and makes the learning more joyful, makes pupils more enthusiastic to learn and help them understand and acquire more English vocabulary.

By expanding the use of these musical resources, teachers could create a more engaging and holistic language learning experience that reinforces vocabulary acquisition and enhances student motivation.

## **6. Challenges and Limitations of Song-Based Activities**

Most of the advantages and benefits of using song-based activities in English classes were mentioned in the study, meanwhile, in this section, some of the challenges and limitations of using song-based activities will be shown. The limited suitability for all age groups is a major obstacle, because young students may enjoy songs, but older learners and adults may find it embarrassing and less engaging, perceiving them as childish or irrelevant to their learning goals. Also, individual music tastes can vary, making it hard to select appropriate songs for all students.

Some songs might use advanced vocabulary, slang, and idiomatic expressions and that is why the language level appropriateness is sometimes challenging for teachers.

One of the major problems in including songs in English classes is the lack of technology and other resources. Some schools might not have access to the necessary technological tools, such as speakers, projectors, and internet connection to apply song-based activities.

There may be also financial constraints to purchase licenses or assess high-quality resources.

Overall, there may be other factors that prevail over the inclusion of songs into English classes, like assessment challenges, time management, risk of interpretation, language limitations of teachers, and lack of training for teachers, but addressing these challenges requires thoughtful planning, flexibility, and a balance between creative methods and traditional approaches in English language teaching.

## 7. Conclusion

This theoretical research paper tried to bring insights into theories and existing methodologies, that enable the use of songs in vocabulary acquisition for young English learners. Among many theories that describe the relevance and importance of using songs in English language classes, the current situation in Kosovo's schools was also described from the writer's point of view, who is an English teacher.

This study will contribute to further research on music use and its effects in English classrooms with young learners and adult learners. More empirical research will be necessary to shed light on the real situations in the English classes. Furthermore, it will contribute to making insights into different phenomena in classes where English is taught as a second or foreign language.

## References

- [1]. Allen, V. F. (1983). *Teaching vocabulary techniques*. Oxford University Press.
- [2]. Bales, D. (2013). Building baby's brain: The role of music. Retrieved from <https://www.helendoron.com/how-music-helps-young-learners-acquirelanguage/>
- [3]. Brotherson, S. (2005). Understanding brain development in young children. Retrieved from <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/famsci/fs609w.htm>
- [4]. Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge University Press.
- [5]. Cepeda, I. N. (2014). *Teaching vocabulary through songs* [PDF]. Universidad FASTA, Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, Licenciatura en Inglés. Retrieved from [http://redi.ufasta.edu.ar:8082/jspui/bitstream/123456789/612/1/Cepeda\\_IN\\_2014.pdf](http://redi.ufasta.edu.ar:8082/jspui/bitstream/123456789/612/1/Cepeda_IN_2014.pdf)
- [6]. Covill, C., & Perrett, J. (2010). *Yazoo global level 1*. Pearson Education Limited.
- [7]. Efrizal, D. (2012). Improving students' speaking through communicative language teaching method, 20(2). Retrieved from [http://www.ijhsnet.com/journals/vol\\_2\\_No\\_20\\_special\\_issue\\_October\\_2012/12.pdf](http://www.ijhsnet.com/journals/vol_2_No_20_special_issue_October_2012/12.pdf)
- [8]. European Training Foundation. (2023). *Kosovo: Education and training system monitor 2023*. European Training Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-05/Kosovo%202023.pdf>
- [9]. Hermida, R. (Year). Vocabulary acquisition for young learners through songs [PDF]. Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. Retrieved from <https://mau.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1848922/FULLTEXT02.pdf>
- [10]. Ismeti, E. (2021). The challenges of learning English as a foreign language in communicative approaches in higher education. *Prizren Social Science Journal*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.32936/pssj.v5i1>
- [11]. Kozanolou, D., & Perrett, A. (2011). *Yazoo starter pupils' book for Kosovo pack*. Pearson Education Limited.
- [12]. Laclair, L. (2017). Why teens need their music, part I: 4 secrets for parents, backed by research. *HuffPost*. Retrieved from [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-teens-need-their-musi\\_b\\_9113178](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-teens-need-their-musi_b_9113178)
- [13]. Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2013). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.
- [14]. Neithanantan, P., & Hua, T. K. (2023). Song as a vocabulary booster for young learners. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 12(2), 1948–1963.
- [15]. Patel, A. D. (2008). *Music, language, and the brain*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from [https://books.google.me/books?id=U0wR6\\_6loQAC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.me/books?id=U0wR6_6loQAC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- [16]. Perrett, J., Covill, C., & Pritchard, G. (Year). *Yazoo global level 2 pupil's book*. Pearson Education Limited.
- [17]. Pinter, A. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*. Oxford University Press.
- [18]. Young, W. K. (2021). Engaging exam-oriented students in communicative language teaching by 'packaging' learning English through songs as exam practice. *RELC Journal*, 54(1), 280-290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220978542>