

# Influence of Songs in Primary School Students' Motivation for Learning English in Lima, Peru

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Received: December 9, 2015 Accepted: January 17, 2016 Online Published: January 18, 2016

doi:10.5539/elt.v9n2p178

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n2p178>

## Abstract

Many studies have shown that using music and songs while learning a new language can be of great benefit to students in aspects such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. However, the use of songs in class as motivation to learn English is a subject that has not been explored thoroughly. The purpose of this study is to explore how the use of songs in English helps motivating students while learning English as a Second Language (ESL). The participants were primary school students at a private school located in the Lima Metropolitan Area. This study used a mixed-method design that included observations carried out by the research team and questionnaires completed by students. The results show that students are motivated to participate and become more engaged in classroom activities when songs are used in their English classes. This result was more strongly confirmed with the observations than with the questionnaires.

**Keywords:** English as a Second Language (ESL), learning, motivation, primary education, songs

## 1. Introduction

Many studies argue that songs have benefits that stimulate learning English (Salcedo, 2002) and that songs make learning a second language easier (Defaz, 2011). Most studies focus on the benefits of music or songs for vocabulary acquisition (Joyce, 2011; Medina, 1990; Schunk, 1999), retention of information, involuntary mental exercise, grammar (Rosová, 2007), pronunciation (Sigurðardóttir, 2012) or familiarization with the target culture (Salcedo, 2002). Students can learn new vocabulary or improve their pronunciation if songs are used in class. All in all, songs can help to learn a new language because the student's learning process becomes unconscious.

While many studies discuss the benefits of using music or songs to teach a language (Bartle, 1962), very few focus centrally on motivation. These studies deal with this subject from a broader point of view, for example, the use of songs for learning English (Rosová, 2007) or even for learning languages in general (Sigurðardóttir 2012). Although some of these studies mention motivation (Rosová, 2007; Salcedo, 2002), it is not their core element. It is important to remember that "students' motivation and interest is essential for learning" (Gardner, 1985; Iantorno & Papa 1979; Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 129). Many children find listening to songs entertaining. Hence, their interest in learning a new language could be enhanced given that songs provide a more fun and dynamic way to learn: "the addition of songs to the foreign language classroom as a teaching method may be a way to focus student attention, and produce a more committed learner" (Failoni, 1993).

Furthermore, it is important to point out that not all students feel the same way about learning a new language. Some of them might have a negative attitude towards it, which translates into a negative predisposition (Sigurðardóttir, 2012). Thus, it is important to find ways to change these preconceptions and help motivate language learners. Among the different options that can be used (illustrated books, Internet, movies, etc.), we chose songs because "it is possible to present a significant part of the children's world in class and to establish friendly relationships with students through song use" (Iantorno & Papa, 1979). Also, music is an element that sparks most children's interest: "Musical intelligence is very often overlooked, and although music is not everyone's strongest intelligence, it is usually something that most children (...) can appreciate (...)" (Sigurðardóttir, 2012).

Taking everything into account, we believe that it is important to study the link between song use in English teaching and the motivation it might create. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how the use of songs in

class helps to motivate learning ESL for primary school students.

Lastly, this subject was chosen because "when children start their foreign language learning, using songs should be a general activity because it has so many qualities that will engage students and make them more positive towards learning languages". (Sigurðardóttir, 2012).

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1 Participants*

This study was conducted in Lima, the capital of Peru. It has 8.693.387 inhabitants (INEI, 2014). In this city, the predominant native language is Spanish. However, English is currently the most used language in the world (Michel, 2014) in different fields such as science, technology and education, and it has international reach (Niño-Puello, 2013). This is the reason why there are many bilingual schools and schools that teach ESL in Lima. In the Lima Metropolitan Area there are a total of 8,047 schools: 77.6 % public schools and 22.4 % private schools (Mapcity, 2014). This study was carried out at a private catholic school that teaches ESL: Colegio Parroquial Santa Cruz, in Callao. The participants were third grade students. In total, 56 students took part in this study – 28 students in each of the two third grade classrooms. In both classrooms, the students were between 7 and 9 years old. Most of them were 8 years old (86 % in Classroom A and 89 % in Classroom B).

### *2.2 Materials*

This study has a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative) approach that uses observations and questionnaires. For the observations, observation templates were used (Appendix 3: Observation template) in order to facilitate data collection. The observation templates were divided into sections. These contained information about the following dimensions of motivation that focused on student's behavior: motivation, participation, interest, and attention. These guidelines included an open section, with narrative and open perceptions, and a closed section with a score (from 0 to 5) about each dimension of motivation. Two authors (DA, DB) filled out an observation template for each class. In order to avoid interfering with the class or the results of the observations, this activity was not recorded in audio or video.

The questionnaires conducted were of two types. The first one (Appendix 1: Questionnaire A) was carried out at the end of a class without songs and the second one (Appendix 2: Questionnaire B) at the end of a class with songs. The first questionnaire had 7 questions and the second one had 10. Both questionnaires were self-administered and conducted in person. However, considering that the participants were children, the researchers monitored the applications and verified that each questionnaire was properly completed. The estimated time for the questionnaire application was 10 minutes. The questions included were related to learning English (interest, importance and motivation) and the use of songs in class (interest in the use of songs in English, songs in general, class environment and the frequency of song use in class).

### *2.3 Procedure*

The fieldwork consisted on attending two English classes, one without music and one with music, in two sections (four classes in total). During each class, researchers completed an observation template. At the end of each class, a questionnaire was administered to each student. First, this process was implemented for a class without the use of songs and, a week later, for a class with songs playing. The same process was carried out in both third grade classrooms.

Regarding the analysis, all the data collected in the observation guides were reviewed first. A matrix was created in Microsoft Word to compare what each researcher had observed in each class (with and without the use of songs). For the quantitative analysis, Microsoft Excel was used. After it was verified that the questionnaires were properly completed, the data was registered in Excel to begin with the analysis. Descriptive analyses were used to generate frequencies and percentages. The questionnaires provide the perspectives from the students' points of view, whereas the observations show both of the researcher's perspectives.

## **3. Results**

### *3.1 Students' Questionnaires*

Table 1 presents the students' perceptions of English classes that used and did not use songs for each classroom. On the question "Do you like your English class?" it can be seen that the percentage of students who responded that they liked it "a lot" increased in both classrooms from the class that did not use songs to the class that did.

On the questions "What did you think about today's class?" and "Do you like to participate in your English class?" there was a slight decrease in the positive perceptions between the class that did not use songs to the class

that in effect did. However, in general, the perceptions in these questions were positive or very positive.

Finally, in the question "What encourages you to learn English?" the answer "Listening and singing songs" increased from 39 % to 57% in classroom A, and from 36% to 50% in classroom B. This was also the preferred learning strategy in classroom B and one of the two favorite strategies in classroom A. Also, other responses show that students prefer methods that involve the use of audio, because the alternative "Watching videos and movies" increased from 21% to 46% and from 29% to 39% in each classroom. Likewise, the alternative "Listening to audios of conversations, people talking on the radio, etc." increased slightly from 18% to 21% and from 25% to 39%.

Table 1. Third grade students' perceptions of their English classes with and without the use of songs, Lima Metropolitan Area, Peru, 2015

	Classroom A, N=28		Classroom B, N= 28	
	Without songs N (%)	With songs N (%)	Without songs N (%)	With songs N (%)
<b>Do you like your English class?</b>				
Nothing or a little bit	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	4 (14%)	4 (14%)
More or less	8 (29%)	5 (18%)	9 (32%)	3 (11%)
A lot	19 (68%)	22 (79%)	15 (54%)	21 (75%)
<b>What did you think about today's class?</b>				
I didn't like it	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)
I liked it	3 (11%)	7 (25%)	4 (14%)	10 (36%)
I liked it a lot	25 (89%)	21 (75%)	24 (86%)	16 (57%)
<b>Do you like to participate in your English class?</b>				
No, I don't	0 (0%)	1 (4%)	4 (14%)	3 (11%)
Yes, I do	5 (18%)	5 (18%)	9 (32%)	8 (29%)
Yes, I like it a lot	23 (82%)	22 (79%)	18 (64%)	17 (61%)
<b>What encourages you to learn English?</b>				
Listening and singing songs	11 (39%)	16 (57%)	10 (36%)	14 (50%)
Reading books and tales	11 (39%)	9 (32%)	13 (46%)	9 (32%)
Writing exercises and assignments	16 (57%)	16 (57%)	5 (18%)	4 (14%)
Watching videos and movies	6 (21%)	13 (46%)	8 (29%)	11 (39%)
Listening to audios of conversations, people talking on the radio, etc.	5 (18%)	6 (21%)	7 (25%)	11 (39%)

### 3.2 Fieldwork

The research team carried out observations. During their fieldwork, the research team was able to gather information about motivation, especially its three main dimensions.

#### 3.2.1 Motivation

In general, in classes with no music at all, students were usually doing activities not related to the class's topic, they

did not follow directions, and they looked apathetic. In addition, they did not seem to be interested in keeping up with the class at different moments. On the contrary, when there was a song playing, we observed that all the children stood up in order to imitate the teacher and that they showed a great desire for participating in groups. Moreover, children frequently asked questions about the activities they had to do, and they wanted to participate by writing on the board. They also seemed to be very happy when doing class activities or assignments. Students followed the teacher's instructions and they behave in a quiet way. Furthermore, they looked more enthusiastic, and they felt more involved because of the use of one song. At different times, they really wanted to start doing class activities. For example, they were singing songs in class (even with no instructions), and they truly desire to go to the front. In general, the classroom environment became more positive and cheerful when there was song playing in the background, if we compare it with the class with no music.

### 3.2.2 Participation

In classes with no music at all, students rarely participated. They did not raise their hands and did not want to write on the board. However, they had to participate, even if they were not taking their own initiative. Therefore, the teacher decided to indicate who had to speak or who had to go to the board. Without the teacher's intervention, students were mostly silent; however, sometimes they only wanted to participate if they had to imitate or repeat what the teacher was saying. On the other hand, in classes with songs in the background, students participated a lot, and were imitating at all times. They also wanted to be part of the games and competitions proposed by the teacher. For example, when the teacher wanted some students for the different activities (such as singing or imitating others), most children raised their hands and strove to be chosen by the teacher.

### 3.2.3 Interest

Regarding the interest aspect, we noted that only some students showed interest in the class were any song was played, because they asked the teacher questions about class activities, then they took notes. However, the other students preferred to do other things, such as play with toys, draw or paint, talk to each other or even sleep. In general, most of them were uninterested until the teacher called their attention. In contrast, in the class with music, children remembered the song they had sung before and they were even imitating when the teacher was in the front of the class. In many cases, children continued singing even when the song had finished. In addition, when the teacher was in the front of the class and there was a song playing, students did not seem to get distracted by anything. Under these circumstances, we observed that students felt more "awake" when there was music.

### 3.2.4 Attention

Regarding the attention aspect, in the class with no songs in the background, we noted that children who were seating in the front of the class were paying more attention, compared to those seated in the back. One of the reasons for this could be the fact that they were closer to the teacher. Besides, children seating in the back were playing, talking, and making disturbances. Even if the teacher asked them to be quiet, many students just ignored her. In addition, it seemed that some students were paying attention only when the teacher was looking at them; because when the teacher was writing on the board, students got quickly distracted. In the class with music, we noticed that students were not making a lot of noise. Even if some students were still distracted, the number of distracted students was small. Moreover, if the teacher told them to stop talking or pay attention, students were more likely to do so. At different moments, students were quiet and paid attention to their teacher, especially when they were hearing a song. When students had to start singing the song, the entire classroom felt involved with this activity. Therefore, we noted that students were quieter than usual and less restless when there was music in the class.

Table 2. Researchers' scores on English classes that used songs and did not use songs. Classroom: Third grade students. Place: Lima Metropolitan Area, Peru. Year: 2015

Item	CLASSROOM A			CLASSROOM B		
	Average score of the two observers			Average score of the two observers		
	From 0 (worst) to 5 (best)			From 0 (worst) to 5 (best)		
	Class with music	with no music	Class using songs	Class with music	with no music	Class using songs
<b>Participation</b>	2		4	3		3
<b>Interest</b>	2		3	2		4
<b>Pay attention</b>	2		3	2		4
<b>Motivation</b>	1		3	2		4
<b>Average</b>	<b>1.75</b>		<b>3.25</b>	<b>2.25</b>		<b>3.75</b>

In general, we see that there was a change between the class using songs and the class with no music. In fact, we observed that there was a change in the attitude and enthusiasm of children. This is also reflected in Table 2, which shows the scores given by the two observers during classes. Comparing both classes, scores increase in all items from the class with no music to the class that used songs except in one item, which stays the same.

#### 4. Discussion

Our results demonstrate that songs had a positive influence on the students. We can certainly make this affirmation, since we noticed that there was a good change from the class with no music to the class with music. As a matter of fact, the use of songs was the most preferred strategy for students when learning English. Finally, the observations documented positive changes in almost all the dimensions of motivation when comparing both classes.

When we asked children which activities they preferred when learning English, we noted that "listening and singing songs" was their preferred activity, and this is good because singing songs have a positive impact on students' motivation and are a rich resource (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Ratnasari, 2007). Besides, we asked this question in both classes, and we noted that more children selected this category when there was a song playing in the class. The reason for this could be that songs create a more interactive and relaxing environment (Larsen-Freeman, 1985; Vosniadou, 2000). In addition, songs help students to feel safe in a learning environment (Anshel & Kipper, 1988; Lems, 2006). Songs help our brains to concentrate, and process and retain larger amount of information (Sigurðardóttir, 2012). A boring class can become pleasant and interesting with the use of songs, because music gives students a fun and relaxing pause (Iantorno y Papa 1979). In addition, the use of songs not only plays an important role in learning another language (Rosová, 2007), but also increases the students' interest for learning another language. In the same way, songs help students to recognize or deal with new words that will capture their attention (Sigurðardóttir, 2012), and will increase their vocabulary (Rodriguez, 2010). Similarly, the fact of being exposed to songs had a positive influence on students' aptitude, because songs have an "extraordinary force" that can move all people (Valdez, 2000). Other activities that involved the use of audio had a positive evaluation by students. Some of these activities are "watch videos and movies" and "listen to audio conversations, listen to people talking on the radio."

It is important to highlight the fact that students were more willing to participate when the teacher used a song. The reason for this could be that songs stimulate students to participate more actively (Valdez, 2000). This was the most remarkable point between both classes, because students seemed very disinterested in the class with no songs. For this reason, they did not care too much about participating. On the other hand, students seemed to be more committed to the activities when there was a song playing in the class; they paid more attention and they were more involved with the activities.

Despite the positive findings just reviewed, the surveys with the child participants did not show a positive change in motivation and perception of English class between the class without and with music. This could have happened for different reasons. First, children's opinions can be volatile, since we know that they change their minds easily. Second, surveying children is complicated, because they are not accustomed to completing surveys. However, we are confident in concluding that the children that participated here were more motivated by and participated more in the classes with music given our triangulation of the data with a second method. As observers and people who do not have a close relationship with the classroom environment, we were able to detect large changes in the children's

behavior when comparing both classes. In classes with music, students exhibited greater aptitude, which was demonstrated through their behavior. Class activities that involved songs enabled students to use all their abilities and therefore, students did not get bored and they felt more motivated to learn.

Among the limitations of this study, we can mention that the results are non-generalizable to other contexts or populations because the number of students is small, and all students come from only one school. Nevertheless, we consider that it is a great "first approach" to this subject in primary education in Lima, where there are private schools. This study also can be important for all the area of Peru and Latin America. Furthermore, surveys had limited information because the participants were children. In consequence, it was difficult to gather complex information or big amount of information. Regarding the strengths of this study, we noted that it was very useful to use two methods (qualitative and quantitative) because it allowed us to do deeper research on the students' topics of interest. With this in mind, we were able to collect both the standpoint of the children (through surveys) and the standpoint of the researchers (through the observations). In the same way, we can say that even if there are a lot of studies related to "songs as a resource" for teaching English (Gaston; 1968) when internalizing grammar structures (Sigurðardóttir, 2012), enhancing pronunciation (Rosová, 2007), etc., these studies do not focus on how a song can also be motivational element. Thus, this research is innovative.

## 5. Conclusions

Students showed a greater willingness to study English as a second language in classes with songs. In classes with no music, students did not pay much attention, they did not seem to be interested in the class topic, they got distracted very easily, and they seemed to be unmotivated. On the other hand, in classes with music, students were more engaged with the class and interested in the class topic. In addition, they were paying more attention, they participated more frequently, and they were carrying out all their tasks with more energy and enthusiasm. In summary, we can say that there is a correlation between songs and students' motivation.

The results of this study demonstrate that students can have a positive aptitude to learn English as a second language if teachers use appropriate songs in their classes. The reason for this is that songs create a favorable environment in the classroom and encourage students to be more committed to class activities. Furthermore, students preferred to do activities that involved audiovisual materials (not only songs but also videos, movies and audios).

Finally, this research could serve as a benchmark. In that sense, other research can be carried out on the same subject; future research could focus on students' motivation when learning English as a second language. Moreover, this research could be used as a starting point to carry out similar studies with adults in order to explore whether a song can serve as a motivator element when learning English. Besides this, it would be interesting to contrast both situations (children and adults). Additionally, more research could be done about what the most preferred audiovisual materials for children are. In this way, we could investigate children's most preferred materials, and the most effective materials for teaching English as a second language.

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**Appendix 1**

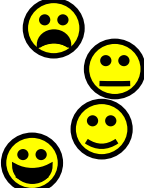
**Questionnaire A**

**QUESTIONS**


**1. Information**

1a. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

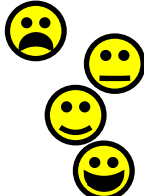
**2. Do you like English? (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)**

- 1. Nothing
  - 2. A Little bit
  - 3. More or less
  - 4. A lot
- 

**3. Do you think that it is important to learn English? (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)**

- 1. No, I don't
  - 2. A little bit
  - 3. Yes, I do
  - 4. Yes, I like it a lot
- 

**4. Do you like your English class? (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)**

- 1. Nothing
  - 2. A Little bit
  - 3. More or less
  - 4. A lot
- 

**4a. Why do you think like this about your English class? (Write your answer)**

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5. **What did you think about today's class?** (Mark only one option with an "X" in the square next to the answer you chose)

- 1. I didn't like it at all
- 2. I didn't like it
- 3. I liked it
- 4. I liked it a lot



6. **Do you like to participate in your English class?** (Mark only one option with an "X" in the square next to the answer you chose)

- 1. No, I don't
- 2. A little bit
- 3. Yes, I do
- 4. Yes, I like it a lot



7. **What encourages you to learn English?** (Mark all the options you want with an "X" in the square next to the answer(s) you chose)

- 1. Reading books and tales
- 2. Listening and singing songs
- 3. Watching videos and movies
- 4. Writing exercises and assignments
- 5. Listening to audios of conversations, people talking on the radio, etc.
- 6. Other (Write your answer):

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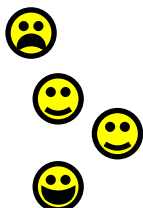
**Appendix 2**  
**Questionnaire B**  
**QUESTIONS**

**1. Information**

1a. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Do you like your English class?** (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)

- 1. Nothing
- 2. A little bit
- 3. More or less
- 4. A lot



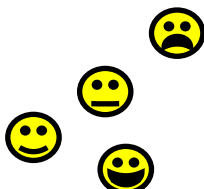
**2a. Why do you feel that way about your English class?** (Write your answer)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

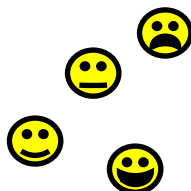
**3. What did you think about today's class?** (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)

- 1. I didn't like it at all
- 2. I didn't like it
- 3. I liked it
- 4. I like it



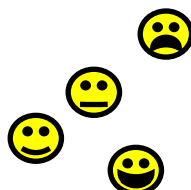
**4. Do you like to participate in your English class?** (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)

- 1. No, not at all
- 2. No, I don't
- 3. Yes, I do
- 4. Yes, I like it a lot



**5. Do you like the use of songs in your English class?** (Mark only one option with an “X” in the square next to the answer you chose)

- 1. No, not at all
- 2. No, I don't
- 3. Yes, I do
- 4. Yes, I like it a lot



**5a. Why do you think in that way about the use of songs? (Write your answer)**

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**6. How many times do you think songs should be used in your English class? (Mark only one option with an "X" in the square next to the answer you chose)**

- 1. Never
- 2. Sometimes
- 3. In most classes
- 4. In all classes

**7. What was the topic of today's class? (Write your answer)**

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**8. Do you remember what songs were playing during today's class? Which ones? (Write your answer)**

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**9. Did you like that the teacher used those songs? (Write your answer)**

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**10. Apart from those songs, what else would have encouraged you? (Mark only one option with an "X" in the square next to the answer you chose)**

- 1. Reading books and tales
- 2. Listening and singing songs
- 3. Watching videos and movies
- 4. Writing exercises and assignments
- 5. Listening to audios of conversations, people talking on the radio, etc.
- 6. Other (Write your answer):

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**Appendix 3**

**Observation template**

**OBSERVATION TEMPLATE**

Name of the observer: \_\_\_\_\_

No. of students \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

Class with or without songs: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Start time: \_\_\_\_\_ End time: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Average score of the class</b>					
<b>5: Very good</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1: Very bad</b>					

<b>Students' behavior</b>	<b>Notes</b>	<b>Comments/notes/remarks</b>
Do they <b>participate</b> or not? Score:		
Do they show <b>interest</b> or not? Score:		
Do they <b>pay attention</b> or not? Score:		

Are they <b>motivated</b> or not? Score:		
Other aspects: _____ _____ Score:		

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