

Incorporating Music Into The Economics Classroom: A Comparison Of Two Teaching Methods

Jane Aw Yang Huey, Mara University, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

There is always something mysterious about music as it affects us so powerfully. This paper looks at the role of music in enhancing students' understanding of economic concepts, such as money and inflation. Music lyrics were used as a source for teaching some economic concepts to a group of Office Management (OM) students. A quiz was given to test the students' knowledge of these concepts. A comparison of marks was made with another group of Quantity Surveying (QS) students who were taught the same economic concepts but without promoting music integration in the classroom. Both groups of students were given the same quiz and both groups were taking Principles of Economics, a course for non-business majors. There was a difference in learning outcomes between the two groups of students. Students learning economic concepts in music recorded a higher value of mean and mode in their results compared with the other group of students who were taught the same economic concepts without music as a resource. The t-test result did not show any significant difference between male and female students. The quiz results are not affected by gender factor. The same conclusion also applied to the stream factor. The t-test result did not show any significant difference between science and arts stream students, hence the quiz results are not affected by stream factor. This study shows that music incorporated into the classroom can help students understand concepts better and the quiz results seem to give support to the theoretical claim that music helps students concentrate better.

Keywords: economic concepts; music lyrics; teaching methods; learning outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Development of Education in Malaysia has undergone many changes over the years. *Prime Minister* Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak wants the New Economic Model (NEM) to focus on revitalizing the country's education. NEM stresses creativity and innovation, hence the importance of making greater use of active, student-centred learning methods in the classrooms. Results from a Third National Survey of Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Economics Course by Michael Watts and William E. Becker shows that there was evidence of slow growth in the use of other teaching methods with less use of “chalk and talk” for making classrooms more engaging places. By 2005, although chalkboard presentations were still dominant, classroom references to the popular financial press, drama or music were used more often.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several researches that have been made regarding the use of music in the classroom. According to Jackie Buckner, a teacher at Frank Kohn Elementary School, California, music is sometimes the incentive needed for the student who has given up on school. She asserts that everyone has a gift to explore and develop. Part of a teacher's job is to assist students in locating and developing these gifts. Ann Fennel, a director of Music Ventures, a program that trains teachers how to integrate music into the curriculum describes the benefits of using music in the classroom. She asserted that a teacher has to open up every door, to every child, to let them discover their infinite possibilities. She said teachers shouldn't take away the opportunity for children to find their strengths in school.

Music also promotes wonder. Professor Norman Weinberger, Ph.D., a professor in the department of Psychobiology at the University of California, Irvine said “Arts education appears to really bring out the best in students, capitalizing on their natural curiosity and allowing it to flourish in a varied, stimulating environment.” (Prescott 2005). Students enjoy, gain nourishment from, and build their confidence through participation in the arts. (singing, dancing, music, drawing, painting, handicrafts, designing etc.)

The National Association for Music Education (MENC), USA (2002) shows that skills learned through the discipline of music are transferable to study skills, communication skills, and cognitive skills, which are useful in every part of any curriculum. A research done in 2001 shows music can enhance a child’s skills in academics. When a child learns to play a musical instrument, the child also enhances other capabilities of his or her brain as well. Studies are showing that music can make students smart. It has been shown that high school music students score higher on SATs in both verbal and math than their peers. (Profile of SAT and Achievement Test Takers, The College Board, compiled by Music Educators Conference, 2001)

Catchy tunes and phrases provide children with an easy way to recite and remember facts. Foster, J. (2004) mentioned the effectiveness of learning mathematics multiplication facts for young scholars between the ages of 6 and 10 through songs and popular music in his research. Foster, J. provide evidence and included testimonials from the young scholars’ parents about the effectiveness of this approach. Math educator Robyn Silbey from Maryland also encourages teachers using music to help students recall basic multiplication facts. In this strategy the kids are involved in teaching and learning. It helps students memorize better and it’s fun too.

Dr. Dianne Connell, a tenured professor of Education and director of the Master’s program in learning disabilities at Rivier College in New Hampshire, has been studying the art and science of learning for most of her lifetime. Dr. Connell has developed left-brain and right-brain teaching techniques to help students to get the most out of their lessons. Music strengthens the right side of the brain. This is an important characteristic because studies have shown that the more parts of the brain that are used, the better the user’s synapses develop (Connell 2007).

According to Jennifer Wagaman (2008), music can create a smoother, quicker transition between activities. Teachers should consider various songs that may help to emphasize and reinforce the skills that they are introducing or reviewing when planning their lessons. Teachers should also include as much opportunity for student involvement as possible so that they can reach every learning style in the classroom.

Music affects our feelings and energy levels (Chris Boyd Brewer 1995). Research has shown that music can increase students’ energy level. There is a relationship between energy level and performance level. A 16-year-old student Yuhanis Kadis from Bedok Green Secondary School, Singapore was one of the top three N-level scorers in the country. According to Yuhanis, her teacher Madam Hazwah make sure the energy level in the classroom was always high. Fun lessons make Yuhanis realised the joy of learning and make her one of the top student. (The Straits Times, December 21, 2009)

Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia said research had shown that children exposed to music perform better than those who are not. He added that countries with good academic performance, such as Hungary, the Netherlands, the United States and Japan, gave emphasis to music education. The use of music in the early development of children encourages critical thinking and improves psychomotor skills. (The Star, October 1, 2010)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i) To study the effectiveness of using music to teach economic concepts by comparing the quiz results of the two groups of students.
- ii) To find out whether the quiz results are affected by gender and stream factors.

RESULTS

About 10% of the QS students obtained 90 to 100 marks meanwhile another 40% of them obtained 80 to 89 marks. A quarter of them gained 70 to 74 marks. 19.4% of them gained 75 to 79 marks and the rest 3.2% gained below 70 marks.

OM students however showed better results. Almost 90% of them scored 80 marks and above. The remaining 10% on the other hand scored at least 70 marks and above.

63% of the OM students are female and 37% of them are male.

63% of OM students are from Arts stream and 37% of them are from Science stream.

Table 1: T-Test For Significance Between Male And Female Students

	Group	Mean	Standard	t	Significant
Marks Obtained	Male	76.80	6.763	-1.041	Not significant
	Female	79.39	7.013		

The t-test result did not show any significant difference between male and female students. Therefore we can conclude that the quiz results are not affected by gender factor.

Table 2: T-Test For Significance Between Science And Arts Stream Students

	Group	Mean	Standard	t	Significant
Marks Obtained	Science	78.19	6.403	0.116	Not significant
	Arts	77.75	10.996		

The same conclusion is also applied to the stream factor. There is no significant difference between science and arts stream students.

CONCLUSION

Incorporate music in the economics classroom can help students understand economic concepts better. OM students' achievement (with promoting music integration in the classroom) is better than QS students (without promoting music integration in the classroom). Higher quiz marks is due to the effectiveness of using music lyrics as a resource for teaching economic concepts. The quiz results are not affected by gender and stream factors.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Jane A. Y. Huey received the B.Ec. (Hons) degree in Analytical Economics from University of Malaya in 1990 and the M.Ec. degree in Applied Economics from University Putra Malaysia in 2001. She is currently an economics lecturer at a public university. She has written books on music, math and economics. Her current research interests include consumer expenditure patterns, music economics and agricultural economics. E-mail: auyg39@gmail.com

REFERENCES

1. Brewer, Chris. (1995). *Music and Learning: Seven Ways to Use Music in the Classroom*. Tequesta, Florida: LifeSounds.
2. Foster, J. (2004). Using My Music To Teach Me Math. In R. Ferdig et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 2004* (pp. 4411-4412). Chesapeake, VA: AACE.

3. Hall, Joshua C. and Lawson, Robert A. and Mateer, G. Dirk. (2008). From Abba to Zeppelin, Led: Using Music to Teach Economics, *Journal of Economic Education*, Helen Dwight Reid Foundation, vol. 39(1), pages 107.
4. Becker, W.E. and Watts, M. (2008). A little more than chalk and talk: Results from a Third National Survey of Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Economics Courses, *Journal of Economic Education*, vol. 39(3), pp. 273-286.
5. Wagaman, J. (2008). Using Music to Teach Young Children. http://curriculalessons.suite101.com/article.cfm/using_music_to_teach_young_children
6. The National Association for Music Education (MENC), USA. <http://www.menc.org>
7. Music In The Classroom. <http://teacher.scholastic.com>
8. Why Music Matters? http://www.iampify.com/store/product_details/Philosophy-Talk/Why-Music-Matters
9. Benefits Of Using Music In The Classroom. <http://www.songsforteaching.com>
10. Left Brain vs. Right Brain Teaching Techniques. <http://www.funderstanding.com/content/right-brain-vs-left-brain-2>
11. <http://dianeconnell.org/>
12. The Straits Times, Singapore, December 21, 2009. Fun Lessons Make A Dream Come True.
13. The Star, Malaysia, October 1, 2010. Music Good For Kids.