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The Impact/s of Music on Language Learners' Performance

Marzieh Mashayekh^{a*}, Masoud Hashemi^b

^a Department Of English, Kazeroon Branch , Islamic Azad University, Kazeroon , Iran

^b Department Of English, Toyserkan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Toyserkan , 6581685184, Iran

Abstract

"In every part of the ancient world, music and musical instruments served magical or 'therapeutic' purposes rather than aesthetic ones" (Bancroft 4). Plato believed that "musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten... making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful" (Jowett 271). Meaningful communication is a multimodal construct, a large part of which is musical. Spanish music therapist Patxi Del Campo (1997) asserts, "In any oral interaction only 15% of the information corresponds to verbal language, while 70% of the message is performed through body language; the final 15% belongs to intonation, the musical character of language" (as cited in Mora, p.147). Mora asserts that a child can imitate the rhythm and musical contours of the language long before he can say the words, and caretakers of young children will agree. She says that musical aspects of language, tone, pauses, stress, and timbre are sonorous units into which phonemes, the consonant and vowel sounds of language, are later placed (Mora 149). A significant amount of work is still being done regarding areas of the brain, but most teachers use the terms right brain and left-brain informally to describe a continuum between tasks perceived as feeling and artistic and those that seem thinking and scientific. For example, Regina Richards claims, "music, rhythm, and movement... create a link between the right brain's processing of music and rhythm and the left brain's processing of verbal information" (Richards 109).

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1. Introduction

1.1 what is music?

According to Webster's II: New Riverside University Dictionary, music is "the art of arranging tones in an orderly sequence so as to produce a unified and continuous composition". In reality, music does not have any one concrete meaning. Music has different meanings for different people. Music is unique in each person's life. To a musician, music is their life. They eat, breathe, and live music. Music is their passion. For others, music is a hobby, a pastime. Music is something that arouses interest and is pleasurable. Music is a means of relaxation for some, while others simply enjoy listening to the sounds, melodies, and rhythms that music brings to their ears, minds, and hearts.

1.2 The importance of music in our life

Different kinds of birds have different cries, songs and melodies to communicate about their world. Similarly music is used by human beings to express their thoughts and feelings about their inner world as well as their social world. It is hard to imagine a culture without music. Thus, music can be seen as the soul of human culture. In the context of education, music has become a popular subject in primary and secondary education and it is an established academic subject in tertiary education.

Music is an essential part of human existence. Life without art is possible but it would be boring. Humankind has the burning desire to create, whatever it may be and however tiny or grand. The interaction with sound is unavoidable, either to make it or take pleasure in it. People have always found music significant in their lives, whether for enjoyment in listening, the emotional response, performing, or creating. This is no different for classical music or contemporary concert music. Both music have immense worth for our society; however, the problem we all know in this field is that this music is little known and hence underappreciated. As a musician and artist it is my responsibility that others can learn to enjoy the art for which I have utter passion.

Soon after birth we hear our first melodies as our mothers hum soothing lullabies to help us sleep. We learn nursery rhymes that are designed to both entertain and educate us in our preschool years, which help build the framework for the social and language skills we need to function in society. We're taught music in school, and some of us participate in the school marching band, orchestra, or theater. We sing church hymns to help build our spiritual being, and patriotic songs to give us a sense of national identity. In every step of our lives music places another brick on the foundation of who we are. Music helps each one of us find our unique social niche, bringing us together with other folks that share similar interests. It documents the history of social and cultural changes in society, and is always in a state of perpetual evolution, combining new ideas with older ones to create a sound that's unique to each generation. Familiar songs help us recall special moments in our lives, such as our first love, or maybe our first kiss.

1.3 Music and its effects of children

Children who are fortunate enough to be exposed to weekly music lessons, choir rehearsals, creative movement, or general music classes reap many benefits. We all love watching little children dance around the room with little or no inhibition, singing along with their favorite songs in a voice that's clear and strong, though maybe a little out of tune. Music is an obvious outlet for self-expression and creativity.

But far beyond providing an opportunity to sing and dance, researchers have shown that a strong musical education provides so much more. Music, for example, develops self-discipline. The child who allots time for practicing each day is known to develop similar habits in conjunction with other subjects as well. Organizational skills increase and the child learns what it takes to be "good" at something.

Ensemble experience also builds teamwork. Band members or choristers learn the importance of being a reliable member of a group and are educated as to the importance of being a team player and not necessarily always "the star." Participation in music ensembles also promotes responsibility. For example, if you're the only tenor in the middle school chorus, you need to be sure that you show up for rehearsals!

Scientists have also discovered that learning to read music or play a musical instrument develops higher thinking skills. The child who is skilled at music excels at problem-solving, evaluation, and analysis. Music reading uses the same portion of the brain that's used in mathematical thinking. That's why so many adept musicians are also quite good in math.

For those who don't excel academically, however, music can serve to build self-esteem. For some children, music is their one chance to shine in the middle of a day that's filled with academic subjects that fry their brain. Singing the solo at the annual holiday concert may provide one particular child with the only kudos they receive all year long. That's why school music programs are so important.

Studies also show that "music kids" are less likely to become involved with inappropriate habits, like drinking or drug use. A child that spends his after school time in the band room with others who enjoy similar interests rarely gets entangled in destructive habits.

1.4 The impact/s of music on language learning

Halpern (1999, p1,) states that "of the many factors that influence learning, few are as far-reaching - or little understood - as sound and music". When one thinks of music, the first thing in mind is enjoyment. Its entertaining function is widespread in many human activities, individually and collectively. The sound of music brings into the world its magic power to activate the mind when it is dormant, to soothe the soul when it is in turmoil, and to heal the body when it is hurt. Its magic power is the reason why children love to play with songs and rhymes even at an early age in life. Babies ,even inside their mothers, show some appreciation to music when exposed to it. The sound of singing among villagers across a rice field in Asian countries turns a hard-working day into a festive one. An image of a mother singing her baby to sleep has a lasting impact on many individuals who have experienced such tender human interaction. It is unthinkable to see human existence without music. According to Neuenfeldt (1998), Aboriginal musicians in Australia use music in school curricula in a unique way. Over the past decade, they have been introducing Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into schools at all levels by performing and teaching with the Aboriginal musical instrument 'didjeridu'. The music incorporates an empowering social context in an entertainment format to convey indigenous interpretation of Australian life.

Harwood (1998) argues that context affects both the musical content children learn (choice of repertoire, stylistic conventions) and how they attempt to learn it (problem solving skills and strategies). Through exposure to multiple contexts where music learning occurs, (formal and informal, school, home, church, playground) children acquire different understandings about what it means to be a music maker and learner. Smith (1998) carried out a study on trialing the intercultural communication of Indigenous Australian music and dance, through a specified series of teaching and learning strategies, to urban west-centric primary school settings. Campbell (1998) studied children's engagement in music beyond school, including the manner by which the various folkways, technologies, and institutional settings help them to perpetuate and preserve particular musical expressions and experiences. According to Campbell, discussion of music in children's play, the use and function of music in their lives, and the means by which they are musically en-culturated will lead to a consideration of music's place in their schooling.

Music generally manifests in tune, melody, rhyme, and lyrics. The role of music can be divided into two aspects: participant-orientated and performance-orientated. The former refers to the joy that music brings to each individual as an active music experience. They are actually involved in the performing act such as singing a song, whistling a tune, or playing a musical instrument. The latter focuses on the product such as a performance on stage, a record or cassette of songs normally performed by well-known artists. The dichotomy of participant-orientated process and performance-orientated process is also seen in sport activities in which participants are either performers or viewers. This distinction will be taken into account in discussing a Vietnam-based study on the role of music in second language learning to be dealt with later in this paper. Researchers have shown that personality factors play an important part in second language learning (Heyde, 1979; Brown 1994). Some studies revealed that self-esteem appears to be an important variable in second language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Brodkey & Shore, 1976; Watkin et al., 1991). Personality, emotion and self-esteem are powerful affective factors in human learning. Human beings are emotional creatures. At the heart of all thought and meaning and action is emotion. As "intellectual" as we would like to think we are, we are influenced by our emotions. It is only logical, then, to look at the affective (emotional) domain for some of the most answers to the problems of contrasting the differences between first and second language acquisition.(Brown, 1994, p.61).

Suggestopedia was introduced by Lozano (1979) which stresses the significance of mental calmness in learning. Suggestopedia is a method of second language teaching that capitalises on relaxed states of mind for maximum retention of material. Music plays a vital part in this teaching method. For example, Baroque music, with its 60 beats per minutes and its specific rhythm creates a kind of "relaxed concentration" for active learning (Ostrand & Schroeder, 1979, p. 65).

The role of music in learning can be described in terms of enhancement of social harmony, motivation force, and tool for learning.

- Enhancement of social harmony: One of the most important factors for achieving teaching and learning effectiveness is social harmony among learners. In a classroom, children often sing together to celebrate birthday, to play games together, to appreciate the feeling of togetherness.
- Motivation force: Music is used to soothe the mind, to relax the mind and body. Music enables learners to be free from pressure and stress.
- Tool for learning: Music is deliberately used to teach language, society and culture. Songs encode cultural meanings, inspiration, and worldviews. In other words, songs tell thousands of human stories.

The following ideas show how music should be used to enhance English teaching and learning.

- *Songs for teaching speaking and listening*: Songs sung by native English speakers are of great value to the teaching of speaking and listening. Students should listen to the singing first to have a feeling for the songs. After two or three times of listening to a song, students work in small groups to write down the lyrics of the song. Finally the song is written on the board with the help the teacher and students. In regard to speaking, students sing the song together while the Cassette-recorded singing is played. For beginning English classes, singing helps students to 'tune in' with the target language so that initial stage of language and cultural shock can be avoided.

I think songs can be used to teach English. I normally let my students listen to a song first. Then I show them the words. Then they listen to the song again at the same time looking at the words. Finally we all sing together. They seem to like it. (Sample 7)

Karaoke is very useful in teaching English. We like it as we can listen to the song and read the words at the same time. We also learn many interesting words from different songs. When I just listened to a song, I didn't understand, but the worlds on the screen helped a lot. Karaoke is very popular in Vietnam, but we must make use of it in language teaching in classes. (Sample 8).

- Projects on English music: Several projects on the use of English songs for learning were suggested by the interviewees. For instance, students should collect songs according to themes such as songs about rivers and mountains, student life, travelling, places, seasons of the year, war etc..For a writing-project, students can translate English songs into Vietnamese and vice versa. This provides students opportunities to discuss different EFL issues such as cultural consideration in translation, linguistic genres in music lyrics, and linguistic errors.

- Linguistic awareness: students can discuss differences between spoken and written language on the basis of lyrics and singing. Attention can be drawn to different varieties of English such as dialects and sociolects. Folk songs from different English speaking countries such as America, Canada, Australia, Ireland can be a great resource for teaching linguistic and cultural awareness.

When I listen to Western country music, I could feel the country accent. We often discuss cultural features in songs from different countries. It is more interesting than just reading from a book. (Sample 9)

2. Conclusion

Language teachers should familiarize themselves with the pedagogical applications of music in language classes and the effect/s of music on thought and behavior of language learners. Furthermore, music therapists should provide input towards student educational agendas. It is not common practice to invite a music therapist into the classroom setting, but few highly effective methods of teaching are. A therapist's musical expertise could bring new ways of integrating music into the language class. Since music is international it is a powerful international communication toll which could be shared, and enjoyed by people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Music brings people together. Music enables learners to relax in a learning atmosphere: Music helps to create a soothing and enjoyable environment for learning. It reduces pressure and tension in the class. Students do not feel threatened. When students all sing together, they somehow become very close. Language learners can talk and joke. Music bridges the gap between teachers and students: In a modern society, teachers are perceived as superior, occupying the rank above students' parents. Teacher is the source of wisdom, which cannot be challenged by students. The relationship between teachers and students is hierarchical. However, music helps to bring teachers and students closer together. They share the same interest, which is music. They participate in

various academic and social activities together to pursue and promote music. Teachers who can sing and like to sing with students are normally very popular. The magic of music is that it can bring people together. We get on so well together. When we get together to rehearse a performance, we drink coffee, listening to music, and talk about college life. Music makes language learning interesting.

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