

IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH SONGS AT THE EFL LESSONS

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Abstract: *Speaking is one of English skills that should be mastered by the EFL students. The article promotes the strategic use of music (the songs) in the EFL classrooms to motivate learners as they practice and produce the target language and actively participate in the EFL lessons. The author describes the ways of using English songs as a main resource in conjunction with different kind of activities thus giving the EFL students the opportunity to learn English in a fun way.*

Keywords: *speaking skills, target language, interactive process, comprehension, meaningful activities.*

Teaching speaking skills to EFL learners is not an easy task since the learners are not exposed to the foreign language before. To do this, language teachers should provide a situation in order to use appropriate methods, strategies and instruments in order to teach speaking skills. Furthermore, the EFL teacher should use a model of teaching speaking skills which gives a real exposure to the target language in a real context through watching or listening to authentic materials.

Speaking is one of the most important and necessary language skills. This is an activity used by the people to communicate with each other. Many classroom activities can be planned to keep the students' component vibrant in the EFL classrooms, where the teacher must foster an environment that can support genuine dialogue.

During the time, different scholars tried to give a definition of speaking. According to Fulcher, speaking is the use of language to communicate with others. From this statement can be concluded that people use language to interact with others to share information and to express themselves. Thus, this *“skill must be mastered by the learners to communicate successful, but to be able to do this, learners should have sufficient knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, different structure of English language”* [4, p. 23]. According to Fulcher, speaking is the verbal use of language to communicate with others.

Speaking is an interactive process of creating meaning that comprises information production, reception, and processing, according to Burns and Joyce. Burns and Joyce defined speaking is an *“interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information”* [2, p. 12]. It is because in speaking we can know the students' ability in produce the target language.

Speaking is not simply expressing something orally. However, the EFL learners need to acquire some speaking aspects to have a good speaking. According to Harris (1994) there are five aspects of speaking skill such as: *comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and fluency*. Brown (1993) adds to these aspects, one aspect of speaking as *accuracy*. Undoubtedly, through the development of speaking skills, the EFL teachers also have the possibility *“to improve other students' skills such as: an accurate pronunciation, intonation and fluency, by being direct partakers when singing songs repeatedly”* [1, p. 168]. This fact certainly helps the learners to create a real environ-

ment of confidence to let them feel that they are able to sing naturally and in turn being able to communicate effectively in an oral way.

According to Oradee (2012) teachers should construct a variation of English-speaking activities which motivate students to learn, so they interact in discussions, propose solution of problems, and participate in role-playings as meaningful activities in the EFL classroom. All of these lead learners to a better and successful performance in learning English; motivating them to be more active in the foreign classroom.

The use of songs in the EFL classroom is a very important pedagogical resource for English language teachers, which helps them develop students' communication skills.

Using songs in EFL classes is a good chance for language students to express themselves freely as lyrics, in general, are open to interpretations. The research shows that building the skill of speaking around song teaching provides a good opportunity to discuss the lyrics as freely as possible even with children from primary classes. The teacher may establish a kind of group discussion, for example, on the psychological state of the singer whether they are happy, sad, disgusted, anxious, lonely, embarrassed or angry (Lavery, 2001). This leads to discuss with students the theme of the song in general. We should keep in mind, the theme should be well chosen in that it can relate reality to the students' inner worlds. Moving from the general atmosphere of the song to that of the classroom, the teacher may ask the students about their standpoints of the topic, raising the situation about what students would do if they were put in the same situation. Lavery (ibid.) has further pointed out that teachers may use "role play" activities after listening to the song. What the teacher has to do here is to ask two students, for instance, to play the roles of the song's characters in front of the class.

Morales (2008) states that EFL teachers have to be careful in choosing a song for students. It should have the right characteristics to fulfil students' needs in terms of the learners' context and the possibilities the song gives them. Therefore, careful selection of the songs is important according to the level of speaking skills that the students have, topic of the lesson, and according to students' interest.

There are many activities and ideas that some authors highlight to promote speaking skills with songs; for instance, according to Lavery [ibid., p. 36], EFL teachers may ask their students to prepare an oral project at home. Students may choose a singer or a band and prepare a biography for them, including their favourite songs, the musical instruments they play with, and so on so forth. Coming to the classroom, students have to deliver their oral presentations about what they have chosen themselves to talk about.

Analysing the songs presented in the basic textbook English, A2.1 we enumerate only two songs ("We work hard, busy, busy", "I spy with my little eye"), and the authors suggest the students only to watch the video scanning the QR code, to listen and to sing the song not providing any classroom or home activities.

The song „Peaceful World” is appropriate to the 5th form EFL learners, and has the aim to teach the values all over the world. It is considered a good way to create a joyful learning environment and helps learners be enthusiastic about the lesson. The song is much more than tones and lyrics. It contains social values that are so important for learners to know and rather actual nowadays. This song can be used to discuss peace, more than focusing on grammar.

Peaceful World

We see a peaceful world in unity and
we sing a song of love and harmony
No more hate and no more fear,
no more pain, no more tears
Coming together one and all
hand in hand, across the land...



(by Jan and Randy Prichard)

As *pre-listening activities* we suggest the following:

Activity 1: to give a paper pigeon to every student and to ask them to write some values which are the most important in the world. After that we suggest to create a collage with paper pigeons in the middle and their selected values.



Activity 2: to think and write the suitable words in the crossword where the key word is "peace" as in the sample made by us.

H O P E
 F R E E D O M
 F A I T H
 C A L M
 B R E A T H

As *while-listening activities* we suggest the following:

- 1) Arranging the lyrics in the right order.
- 2) Choose the correct word. The students listen to the song and choose the word that they hear: We see a peaceful world in *unity/ disorder*; No more *hate/ love* and no more *fear/ smile*.
- 3) Listen for words. Give the students a list of words (*stress, fear, love, hate, happiness, etc.*) and tell them that one of the words is extra. The students listen to the song, ticking off the words as they hear them.
- 4) Matching. Give the students the beginning of each line of the song and ask them to match with the end of the sentence.

As *post-listening activities* we suggest the following task for developing their speaking skills:

- a) **Group work.** In small groups, the students have to discuss about *what people need to do*, to live in peace. They will make a list of advice and present it to the whole class.
- b) **Pair/ group work.** In groups of three or four, the learners have to create *symbols of peace* and to describe it in two-three sentences.
- c) **Individual work.** The teacher asks the learners to close their eyes and to listen to the song again. Then learners are asked to continue the sentences:

When I think about peace I see...

When I think about peace I hear...

When I think about peace I feel...

When I think about peace I smell...

When I think about peace I taste... .

Reaching the goals of understanding and applying English in any communicational process is important for both: students and teachers. The ability to speak is developed through the following questions: about the topic of the song, a specific phrase, sentence or part of the song lyrics, or the message contained in it; or the questions can contain personal information or learners' own experiences.

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