# Preparing Student Teachers to Use Songs in English Language Classrooms

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The use of songs in language teaching has many attested benefits. However, teacher education courses seldom focus on how to effectively implement songs or include practice teaching them. This study surveyed the experiences of 22 second-year undergraduate student teachers enrolled in a teacher training course designed specifically to address this issue. In addition to introducing a wide variety of song types to be used at various school levels, the course aimed at improving participants' understanding of the benefits and challenges of song use in language teaching and at prompting consideration of the numerous relevant factors involved in appropriate song selection and lesson planning, principally through participant-led song-based demonstration lessons. Post-course survey results showed that most participants felt better prepared to use songs effectively in their future teaching. However, they also indicated a perceived need for further methodological instruction in this area.

言語教育における歌の使用は、すでに多くの利点が証明されている。しかし、教員養成課程では、歌の効果的な導入方法や、歌を教える練習に焦点が当てられることはほとんどない。本研究では、この問題を解決するために特別に企画された教員養成課程に在籍中の学部2年生22名の経験を調査した。小中高といった様々な学校レベルで使用される多種多様な歌を紹介することに加えて、このコースでは、言語教育において歌を利用する利点と課題について参加者の理解を深め、授業計画や適切な歌の選択を含む様々な関連要因について考察を促すことを目的としている。これは主に、参加者主導の歌をベースとした模擬授業で行われた。コース終了後のアンケート結果によると、ほとんどの参加者は、今後の授業で効果的に歌を使用する準備が整ったと感じていた。しかし、彼らはまた、この分野でのさらなる方法論的指導の必要性も認識したことを示した。

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ccording to the Course of Study guidelines for foreign language activities and foreign language education in elementary schools, MEXT (2017a) not only recommends the use of songs but also provides information on their effectiveness as well as tips for teachers to consider. For example, teachers are encouraged to include chants to familiarize students with the intonation and rhythm of English and to help them understand the differences between English and Japanese. However, no mention is made of English songs in the guidelines for foreign language education in either junior high schools (MEXT, 2017b) or senior high schools (MEXT, 2018), suggesting perhaps a limited understanding of the benefits of using them at the secondary level and possibly explaining their exclusion from teacher training.

Although language educators and researchers often claim the use of songs in language classrooms to be beneficial, the published literature has seldom focused on preparing teachers to take advantage of them, thus arguably resulting in their underutilization. To address this issue, after a summary of recognized benefits of using songs and recommendations for implementing them, this paper will report the findings of an investigation into the experiences of a cohort of pre-service teachers of English who completed a university-level teacher training course for second-year students specifically focusing on song use in language teaching.

#### Benefits of Song Use in Language Classrooms

The benefits of using songs in the language classroom extend into five key areas: language learning, socio-emotional growth, physical development, cognitive development, and cultural understanding.

In terms of language learning, songs can help students remember phrasal verbs and collocations due to the catchy tunes and repetitive lyrics they employ. By using modified cloze tasks during the listening of songs, teachers can additionally focus students' attention on specific parts of speech or points of grammar. Songs also expose learners to numerous examples of connected and contracted speech, which can often be picked up implicitly with sufficient listening and singing practice. Songs are particularly suited to children since children are often spontaneous, have short attention spans, and do not learn grammar through explicit explanations (Shin & Crandall, 2013). However, songs can be used to promote language learning at any grade level if they are carefully selected to suit learning objec-

Listening to and singing songs can also promote socio-emotional growth. For instance, singing together as a class can foster greater trust, cooperation, and group cohesion (Engh, 2013). As listening to songs involves less performance pressure than listening to spontaneous speech, song use in English classes is often thought to be relaxing as well. In fact, classroom research has shown song

use not only to reduce students' anxiety (Dolean, 2016; Yuce, 2018) but also to increase motivation, especially with young learners (Chen & Chen, 2009). Motivated students with low anxiety levels can interact more positively with their classmates, thus creating a more positive learning environment. Learning songs by heart can boost confidence and encourage learners to sing outside of class as well.

A third benefit of including songs in the language classroom is that singing encourages students to practice the sounds of English, thus furthering physical development of the muscles required to produce them. Since English is a stress-timed language and prosody is difficult to teach, many teachers find it beneficial to use songs and chants for this purpose (Forester, 2006). Not only can the rhythm and intonation of songs accustom learners to more naturally imitating new sounds, but it can also eventually lead to better pronunciation overall. In fact, Curtain and Dahl (2016) point out that in the early stages of language learning students often have a better accent when they sing than when they speak in a second language.

Another benefit of using songs in the language classroom is that learning songs can stimulate cognitive abilities. As Murphey (1990) posits in his treatment of the "song stuck in my head phenomenon," the repetitive nature of songs can help listeners enjoyably develop their fluency while memorizing chunks of language, especially when accompanied with actions, such as those engendered by the variety of activities suggested in Murphey's (1992) *Music and Song*. Moreover, by using songs in their classrooms, language teachers can activate multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), not only linguistic but also musical and bodily-kinesthetic.

A final major benefit of using songs in English classrooms is that it fosters greater cultural understanding. Engh (2013) notes that pop songs can provide a rich, authentic resource for teaching culture by introducing foreign cultural norms and values. Pop songs, in particular, can expose students to colloquial language and introduce culture through not only the lyrics but also through music videos. For example, One Direction's music video for the song "One Thing" shows many famous locations in London. For many students, music videos may be their main source of exposure to authentic language and foreign youth culture, both of which may serve to bolster motivation to learn about other cultures and to become aware of and accept cultural differences. Likewise, they may lead students to notice cultural similarities and develop stronger connections with English-speaking cultures.

In short, song use is beneficial not only for lan-

guage learning but also for socio-emotional growth, physical development, cognitive development, and cultural understanding. Next, I will discuss how songs should be included in English lessons.

#### **Planning Lessons with Songs**

When deciding to incorporate songs in their lesson plans, teachers need to keep in mind several points, such as the purpose and timing of song use, the amount of time to be spent listening or singing, and the decision whether or not to utilize music videos, with or without subtitles. Then they must plan the flow of activities within the lesson. Some junior and senior high school English teachers model their song-based lessons on the recommended task flow of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). For example, Thornbury and Watkins (2007) suggest the following CLT-style lesson plan:

- 1. Set context/vocabulary task/warm-up task
- 2. Practice gist listening for basic content
- 3. Practice intensive listening for details
- 4. Utilize lyrics to work on understanding the songs or specific language expressions
- 5. Practice a language skill speaking, writing, listening, reading

The flow of this type of lesson plan is adaptable and can easily be incorporated into junior and senior high school lessons including modified cloze tasks for intensive listening practice.

In addition to the CLT-style lesson format, two other approaches to elementary and junior high school lesson planning also bear mentioning. The first of these is Cameron's (2001) "preparation, core activity, follow-up" model, which is particularly well suited for using short and easy songs. The second is Sevik's (2012) "Listen and Do" lesson plan guidelines, which require students to read song lyrics line by line before engaging in singing practice. Research on young first-language learners has shown little difference in singing accuracy whether learning songs phrase by phrase or simply by singing the whole song repeatedly from the start (Persellin & Bateman, 2009). However, the phrase-by-phrase technique, whereby each phrase is sung by the teacher and then echoed by the learners, is often preferred for longer songs or ones with difficult melodies (Sarrazin, 2016). In any case, the key features of Sevik's lesson design are one or more initial lead-in activities, followed by a main teaching activity, and ending with a final follow-up activity, all of which closely resemble Cameron's recommended task stages. Generally, it is advantageous to plan song-based lessons according to such guidelines,

but songs may also be utilized as warm-up tasks or as enjoyable review activities at the end of lessons.

## Preparing Student Teachers to Use Songs in Their Classrooms

Many Japanese universities offer courses featuring the use of songs to learn English vocabulary, expressions, and culture, but semester-long teacher training courses focusing on song implementation in future English classes, such as the one that will be described here, are rather uncommon. The course in question was specifically designed to help student teachers understand how to choose songs and create lesson plans for a wide range of teaching situations. The course introduced students to many different types of songs, including traditional songs, phonics songs, chants, finger play songs, clapping songs, action songs, jump rope songs, event songs, transition songs, songs within picture books, pop songs, songs from movies, and even songs produced specifically to entertain children, such as those by The Wiggles. Table 1 lists the titles of some of the songs used in the course that are suitable for general classroom use, although songs containing inappropriate language or cultural stereotypes were also used to generate discussion on those issues. The songs included in this course were presented in various ways to provide example lesson plans, task types, or discussion topics so as to prepare students for implementing songs in their teaching practices or future classes.

**Table 1**Sample of Songs Introduced in the Course

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Title	Artist/(Song Type)		
"Try everything"	Shakira		
"Happier"	Marshmello & Bastille		
"Beautiful"	Christina Aguilera		
"You Gotta Be"	Desree		
"Ocean Eyes"	Billie Eilish		
"The Wheels on the Bus"	(action song)		
"Trick or Treating"	(event song)		
"Make New Friends"	(girl guide song)		
"Mommy Finger, Mommy Finger, Where Are You?"	(finger song)		
"Miss Mary Mack"	(clapping song)		
"I Wiggle My Fingers"	(transition song)		

Title	Artist/(Song Type)
"Months of the Year Syllable Song"	Jack Hartmann
"Apples, Peaches, Pears, and Plums"	(jump rope song)

During the course, some general tips were provided for teaching songs. For instance, in addition to the number of times listening to or singing a song, the student teachers were encouraged to carefully consider ways of scaffolding language learning through various gist and intensive listening tasks, and ways of including simple musical instruments and movement as well as how to incorporate these ideas into their lesson plans.

#### Methodology Research Questions (RQs)

This study was guided by three research questions:

- RQ1. What were student teachers' past experiences of lessons using English songs as students in elementary, junior high, and high school?
- RQ2. At the end of the training course on using English songs, what did the student teachers learn?
- RQ3. What do student teachers want more of in a course focusing on how to teach English with songs?

#### **Participants**

The participants were 22 of the 25 second-year undergraduate students enrolled in a teacher training course on English song use at a Japanese national university for teacher education during the autumn/winter semester of 2020, when Covid-19 measures were eased and then tightened. The potential number of participants at the university was limited by the number of students accepted for English specialization courses according to results from standardised English tests given during first-year studies.

The study participants included 5 males and 17 females. Nearly two thirds of them (14 of the 22) indicated that they were aspiring to be elementary school teachers. Two students intended to teach at preschool level and two others at senior high school level. The remaining four students were preparing to teach at the junior high school level.

#### Instrument

A survey in English (see Appendix) was made available through Microsoft Teams at the end of the course. This survey comprised 24 questions, mainly four-to-five-option multiple-choice items, divided into three sections: previous classroom experiences with English songs, future teaching goals, and views and comments on the course. Also at the end of the course, in addition to the survey, the students were asked to reflect on their classmates' as well as their own short pair demonstration lesson using an English song.

#### Results and Discussion

Regarding the first research question, aimed at determining student teachers' experiences of English lessons using songs in elementary, junior high, and senior high school, the survey results showed that nearly all the participants had listened to English songs in classes at all three school levels. Most also indicated having learned to *sing* English songs in elementary school, and exactly half reported having learned to sing whole songs in English in junior and senior high school. The students who indicated having practiced singing English songs stated that the songs were mainly pop songs or event-related songs, such as Christmas songs like "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." The most frequently mentioned pop group was One Direction, most likely introduced by their English teacher or ALT, as the pop songs included in recommended English textbooks tend to be relatively older. For example, the latest editions of the junior high school English textbooks feature songs by Stevie Wonder, Carole King, The Carpenters, John Lennon, and Paul McCartney. Table 2 lists some of the songs and artists that the respondents had remembered from their junior and senior high school lessons. By contrast, the main songs students had encountered in elementary school were "ABC songs", "Bingo", "Hello song"; "Weekday song", "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes", and "Phonics" songs. Some new elementary school textbooks include similar song titles as well as traditional songs, pop songs, action songs, and chants. Overall, the results showed that only a relatively limited number of songs had been used in the elementary school English classes that the student teachers had personally experienced.

During the course, the student teachers were provided with a wide range of information about choosing and using songs. More importantly, however, they were also required to reflect on the reasons why their previous teachers may have chosen certain songs. The survey responses showed

that most participants believed the main purpose of song use in elementary school teaching to be that of a lesson warm-up, although learner motivation and the introduction of new language were common answers as well. The responses also showed that the same was true of English song use at the junior and senior high school levels. As such beliefs about past experiences with songs may influence the way future teachers choose to include songs in their own English lessons, the training course in this study focused on specific teaching methods and learning tasks to raise student-teacher awareness of their various challenges and benefits. For example, noticing and acquiring new language may be achieved through several listenings to the same song within a single lesson; however, learning to actually sing a song may require many more repetitions, along with productive practice, to successfully attain mastery.

**Table 2**Songs Encountered in English Lessons in Junior and Senior High School (N=22)

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Title	Artist
"Let It Go" (from Disney's <i>Frozen</i> )	Idina Menzel
"Story of My Life"	One Direction
"Live While We Are Young"	One Direction
"One Thing"	One Direction
"Shake It Off"	Taylor Swift
"Last Christmas"	Wham!
"Santa Claus"	(unknown)
"All I Want for Christmas"	Mariah Carey
"We Wish You a Merry Christmas"	(unknown)
"Girlfriend"	Avril Lavigne
"We Are the World"	U.S.A. for Africa
"Call Me Maybe"	Carly Rae Jepsen
"Let It Be"	The Beatles

Concerning the second research question, aimed at determining what the student teachers had learned from their experience on the course, two thirds of the survey respondents indicated a *basic* understanding of the benefits of English song use, the rest reporting a *clear* understanding. Similar results were obtained regarding understanding of the problems with using English songs.

When asked whether they had sufficient access to English songs to prepare for their demonstration lesson, the vast majority responded affirmatively. The resources students were introduced to during the course included a number of useful websites. such as Super Simple Songs, Lyricstraining, and YouTube, as well as a song list prepared in advance by the instructor. Additionally, when asked about the utility of the demonstration lessons themselves, all respondents answered positively, indicating that it was beneficial to experience them from a student perspective. As shown in Table 3, these demonstration lessons featured a wide range of songs, roughly half of which were children's songs while the other half were pop songs, reflecting the eventual school level they might target.

**Table 3**Songs Featured in Short Pair Demonstration Lessons (N=20)

Title	Artist	Song Type
"Do You Want to Build a Snowman?"	Kristen Bell	Disney song - Frozen Movie
"The Teddy Bear Song"		Children's song
"Bingo"		Children's song
"If You're Happy and You Know It"		Children's song
"One Potato, Two Potatoes"		Children's song
"Paprika (English version)"	Foorin	Japanese pop song
"Last Christmas"	Wham!	Event song
"Story of My Life"	One Direction	Pop song
"Fight Song"	Rachel Platten	Pop song
"Top of the World"	Carpenters	Pop song

According to the survey participants' comments, the most effective song for English teaching introduced in the demonstration lessons was Rachel Platten's "Fight Song," because of its positive lyrics. Respondents also commented that songs such as "The Teddy Bear Song," "If You're Happy and You Know It," "Paprika," and "Do You Want to Build a Snowman?" helped them learn more about different ways to utilize English songs.

These song-based demonstration lessons produced several clear positive benefits, not only for those planning and teaching them but also for the other participants. Firstly, they provided new insights into various possibilities for lesson preparation, by showcasing different ways of choosing songs and task types, presenting new language, introducing culture, creating learning materials, and adding movement. Secondly, they modeled exemplary teaching practices, including clear lesson instructions, well-designed learning aids, effective classroom management strategies, positive classroom interactions, and enthusiastic peer support. One respondent's comment about the course is provided below:

I'm glad that I was able to learn a lot about English lessons using songs. By doing the mock lessons, I was able to do more practical activities, and I learned a lot from other groups so it was a lot of learning.

A few presenters experienced technical difficulties compelling them to make impromptu changes to their lesson plans. This experience was important not only for the students teaching the lessons but also for those observing, as it allowed them to see how others overcame problems by not overly relying on technology. The student teachers provided detailed comments about their demonstration lessons, including both positive and negative comments about their experiences teaching an English song. On the positive side, many students expressed confidence in their song choice, language focus, selected tasks, lesson flow, and class atmosphere during their lessons. On the negative side, some students commented on issues related to their short demonstration lessons, especially difficulty maintaining an appropriate lesson tempo, problems creating writing tasks, lack of movement around the classroom, overreliance on their lesson script, forgetting to praise students' efforts, limited interaction with students, and inability to effectively utilize presentation slides.

The final research question aimed to identify what student teachers would like in a course on planning lessons using English songs. Most of the survey respondents expressed a desire to learn more about teaching songs, especially at the elementary level. Due to the complexity of making lesson plans using songs at junior and senior high school level, many of the examples used in the course were related to pop songs, leaving relatively less time for introducing and practicing songs aimed at elementary school. Only a few students commented that they would have liked more information on actual song

examples, time to prepare for the demonstration lesson, or time to practice singing songs.

One limitation of this study was that, due to Covid-19 restrictions, this course was taught partly online via Microsoft Teams, which may have influenced the results in some unexpected ways. In particular, group discussion and feedback were limited. However, nearly all of the demonstration lessons were conducted face to face.

#### Conclusion

Since most student teachers have experienced songs at all levels of their English education, their views on how to include songs in their future teaching are likely to be influenced by their previous English song experiences. However, by participating in a teacher training course on song usage, they are more likely to carefully consider its actual benefits and challenges. Moreover, by planning and teaching short demonstration lessons using songs, student teachers can improve their awareness of different ways to prepare lessons as well as obtain feedback from not only their instructor but also their classmates. Finally, many student teachers in this study were able to understand the basic benefits and challenges of using English songs through a 15-week course, but most wanted additional information on ways to actually teach songs rather than learn to sing them. Thus, teacher training courses on English song use need to provide not only opportunities to learn new songs but also instruction on teaching methods and task design as well as time to practice planning and teaching lessons to ensure that future teachers understand how to effectively implement songs in their English classes.

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Her research interests include early EFL literacy development and second language acquisition.

#### **Appendix**

## **Questionnaire on Previous Experiences with English Songs**

#### Elementary school classes

- 1. Did you practice *listening to songs* to learn English in your elementary school classes?
- 2. Did you ever *learn to sing* any English songs in elementary school
- 3. What songs did your teachers' use? Song types:

  Example titles:
- 4. When did your elementary school English teachers' use songs? *More than 1 answer is okay.* a) warm up b) introduce language c) introduce content d) motivation e) whole lesson

#### Junior high school or high school classes

- Did you practice *listening to songs* to learn English in your junior high school or high school classes?
- 6. Did you ever *learn to completely sing* any English songs in junior high school or high school classes? Yes No
- 7. What songs did your teachers' use?
  Song types:
  Example titles:
- 8. When did your junior high school English teachers' use songs?

  a) warmup b) introduce language c) introduce content d) motivation e) whole lesson

#### Private English school

- 9. Did you practice *listening to songs* to learn English in your after school English classes?
- 10. Did you ever *learn to sing* any English songs in after school English classes?
- 11. What songs did your teachers' use? Song types:
  Example titles:
- 12. When did your English teachers' use songs?
  a) warm up b) introduce language c) introduce content d) motivation e) whole lesson

#### Future Teaching Goals

- 13. What school level would you *mainly* like to teach in the future?

  a) preschool b) elementary school c) junior high school d) high school e) other
- 14. What grade would you like to use songs in English classes?

(circle grades you would you with songs) More than 1 answer is okay.

2 3 4 5 6

15. What grade/s is the most effective to use songs? Why?

#### Content in this course

- 16. Do you better understand the benefits of English songs from this course?a) clearly understand b) basically understand c) partly understand e) remains unclear
- 17. Do you better understand the problems of using English songs from this course?a) clearly understand b) basically understand c) partly understand e) remains unclear
- 18. Was it easy for you to access a range of songs from the internet? Yes No
- 19. Was the pair work task requiring you to prepare a lesson plan using a song and teaching your plan useful for you? Yes No
- 20. What would you like to practice more in this course?a) practicing song lessonsb) preparing song lessonsc) singing songs d) \_\_\_\_\_
- 21. What would you like more information about? songs b) ways of teaching songs c) preparing song lessons d)\_\_\_\_\_
- 22. Do you think watching other lesson demonstrations was useful? Yes No
- 23. Which pair presentation/s did you learn the most from? Name the song.
- 24. Any other comments/opinions?

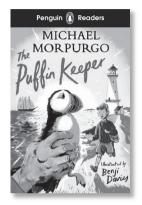


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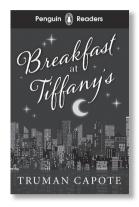
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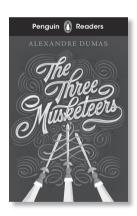
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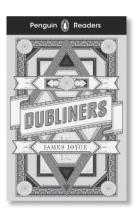


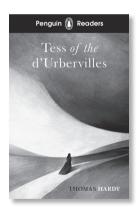


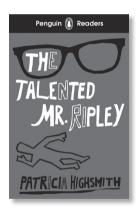


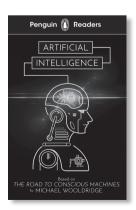
















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