

# Using Songs in Teaching Oral Skills to Young Learners: Teachers' Views and Attitudes

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## Abstract

The major aim of this descriptive research study was to explore the views and attitudes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Saudi Arabia about using songs when Teaching English to Young Learner (TEYL) oral skills (listening and speaking) specifically. The opinions of English language teachers in primary school in Jeddah (n=89) were collected through the use of one instrument which is questionnaire. The data were generated using the IBM SPSS Statistics 22® program. The results demonstrated that most of the teachers surveyed realize the pedagogical value of using songs when teaching English oral skills to Young Learner (YL), however, they do not use songs because of their religious and cultural beliefs. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should be provided with chants that are free of musical instruments to avoid any controversies with cultural or religious beliefs. The development of a website that contains educational songs and is designed specifically to suit Saudi EFL teachers' needs is strongly recommended.

**Keywords:** EFL, TEYL, YL, Songs

## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades, Teaching English to Young Learner (TEYL) has become a field of its own. Cameron (2003) describes this expansion as a phenomena that needs the attention of all those involved in the Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESOL) field. There are two rationales for adopting an early start in English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. The first one relates to the fact that English has emerged as the lingua franca (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2014) as well as the major language for communication around the world (Rich, 2014). The second rationale is due to the widely held belief that teaching English as a foreign language before the critical period of 12 or 13 years old will help students acquire the language more easily (Shin, 2006).

In Saudi Arabia, TEYL was first officially introduced to elementary schools in 2004, starting with grade 6 (12-year-old) pupils, and was later extended down to grade 4 (9-year-old pupils) in 2011. According to the Saudi Ministry of Education, English is taught in the primary level to develop students' interest and confidence in English and to nurture positive attitudes toward learning the language. In addition, it is believed that teaching English at the primary level will help YLs acquire basic communicative skills and proceed to high school with a responsible degree of proficiency (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Teaching oral skills, (listening and speaking) skills have an important place in language programs around the world (Richards, 2008). To develop the communication skills of YLs in particular, teaching oral skills should be given priority. Cameron (2003) indicates that teaching YLs to read and write in English is not natural nor straightforward. Thus, introducing listening and speaking first in language teaching courses is logical because it follows the natural flow of acquiring a first language. In other words, when we learn a language we will first hear, then speak and later on we learn how to write or read. The teaching of oral skills to YLs is not an easy task for teachers. Teachers need to modify their teaching techniques to suit the needs of YLs who are naturally active and energetic. In this context, the use of songs when TEYL is effective.

Songs are used as a teaching technique in YL classrooms for many reasons. First, students love songs and enjoy learning and singing. Second, songs help students imitate and remember words. It is said that every child has the ability to sing from the earliest cultures and probably before human learned to speak (Cifuentes, 2006). Songs promote speaking skills and stimulate students' imagination. Orlova (2003) indicates that using songs and chants in YL classrooms serve several methodological purposes such as teaching listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary as well as practicing the rhythm, stress and the intonation patterns of the English language.

EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia apply the grammar translation method in their classes and neglect communicative approach and critical thinking skills. The use of movies, songs, and graphic novels to motivate students and enhance their learning is largely neglected inside the Saudi EFL classrooms (Sofi, 2015). Most Saudi students fail to speak English fluently because teachers do not use authentic materials inside their classes (Alherbi, 2015). Thus, implementing modern strategies - in this case songs - in oral language teaching is crucial.

However, cultural challenges may arise because while teachers may be aware of the importance of using songs in their YL classes, some of them may resist using songs due to their cultural and religious beliefs. The prominent attitude toward using songs in education in Saudi Arabia is negative. This negativity comes from cultural and religious upbringing.

The significant effect of songs and its positive effects when teaching English oral skills to YLs motivate the researcher to examine teachers' beliefs, thoughts and attitudes toward using them. Though some researchers have discussed teaching methodologies to improve Saudi students English language proficiency as well as researches on the cultural perspectives of teaching English in Saudi Arabia (Sofi, 2015, Hussain & Nasseef 2013), there are no published researches or articles that discuss the use of songs in EFL young learner classrooms in the Saudi context. In this study, the researcher examines Saudi EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards using songs when teaching oral skills ( listening and speaking) to YL.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

The majority of Saudi primary school teachers underestimate the importance of using songs as a tool to enhance the teaching of English oral skills in YLs classrooms. They either believe that songs are time consuming activities, or they assume that using songs is culturally or religiously inappropriate.

### *1.2 Objectives*

This research study investigates the following:

1.2.1 Teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts on the pedagogical value of using songs in their young learner (YL) classrooms specifically when teaching oral skills (listening and speaking);

1.2.2 The frequency of use and accessibility of Saudi EFL teachers to appropriate songs.

### *1.3 The Significance of the Research Study*

This study is expected to make a significant contribution to the way English oral skills are taught to YLs. In particular, it will attract the attention of teachers of EFL young learners to the pedagogical impact of using songs when teaching oral skills.

### *1.4 Research Questions*

1.4.1. What are the teachers' beliefs, attitudes and thoughts towards using songs when teaching English oral skills in their YL classes?

1.4.2 Do EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia have easy access to appropriate songs?

1.4.3 How often do EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia use songs in their young learner EFL classrooms?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theories to consider when using songs in teaching EFL

#### 2.1.1 Stephen Krashen

The Input Hypothesis explains how a learner acquires a second language and how second language acquisition takes place. According to Krashen, The Input Hypothesis is the acquisition that occurs when one gets exposure to language that is comprehensible and is slightly beyond their current level, referred to as  $i+1$  (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The  $i$  symbol is the learner's current stage of language proficiency while the  $+1$  symbol refers to the next step beyond that stage. The input hypothesis states that one acquires language by focusing on meaning through listening first, and structure and grammar develop gradually (Krashen, 1982). The application of this hypothesis turns the classrooms into an interesting place for second language acquisition practically, when songs are used to develop listening skills. Understanding this theory helps us to see that the use of songs in YL classrooms is both valuable and effective. Learners must be exposed to songs that are slightly challenging for them, and teachers have to make the lyrics comprehensible by using pictures or other realia.

Another hypothesis dealing with the use of songs in EFL classrooms is the Affective Filter, which was developed by Stephen Krashen in 1982. The hypothesis explains why some people are capable of learning a second language while others are not. According to this hypothesis, language acquisition depends largely on learners' inner feelings - that is the learner's affect (Medina, 2002). Krashen (1985) states that if the affective filter is up then, the input is prevented from passing through. Affect, from Krashen's perspective, includes factors such as motivation, attitude, self-confidence and anxiety (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Krashen indicates that the affective filter hypothesis implies that teachers' pedagogical goals should not only include comprehensible input but should also create a situation that encourages a low filter (Krashen, 1982). The practical application of this theory gives value to strategies that lower the student's affective filter such as the use of songs, chants, and games.

#### 2.1.2. Gardner's Theory

According to Gardner's theory, each human being is unique and intelligent in at least seven different ways. The seven types of intelligence are verbal-linguistic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, musical-rhythmic, logical-mathematical and intrapersonal. More specifically, musical intelligence, which is the research focus of this study, is related to learners' skills in composing, performing and appreciating music (Gardner, 1999). Researchers have proven the effect of music in the language classroom. Fonseca and Arnold (2004) state that the development of musical intelligence in EFL classes creates a relaxed atmosphere that motivates students and helps them to be more productive. Therefore, when exploring musical intelligence, the use of songs becomes worthwhile. Students who have strong musical intelligence are interested in rhythms, sounds, and patterns. Activities such as singing songs, writing lyrics and creating rhythmic patterns are the best way to teach learners with musical intelligence. Based on this theory, encouraging young learners to clap the beat as they sing or

say a rhyme helps them to develop a sense of rhythm in English (Bas, 2008).

## 2.2 *Young Learners (YLS)*

### 2.2.1 Teaching English to Young Learner (TEYL)

TEYL requires both the knowledge of young learners' characteristics and, tied to this, theories of second language acquisition. The implication of the above mentioned theories inside the classroom requires teachers to utilize different techniques to create a healthy environment where learning becomes successful and effective.

One of the best ways to create a stress-free environment is by incorporating fun activities. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) state that "most activities for the younger learners should include movement and involve the senses" (p. 5). These activities include songs, rhymes, and games. Further, knowing that young learners have short attention spans, a variety of activity such as pair work/ group work, games and role plays is appreciated. In addition, Scott and Ytreberg (1990) suggest that since children are comfortable with routines, teachers should "use familiar situations, familiar activities, repeat stories, rhymes, etc." (p. 6). Establishing a routine has the advantage of lowering the students' anxiety, making them feel secure - which is consistent with the affective filter theory.

When teaching YLS a foreign language, teachers have to take into account that YLS are capable of learning if they are introduced with activities that are within their abilities. Phillips (1993) indicates that "the manner in which children learn a foreign language depends on their developmental stage" (p. 6).

## 2.3 *The Importance of Songs in EFL Classrooms*

### 2.3.1. Definition of Songs

Hornby (1995) first defines a song as a short poem that is set with music and intended to be sung. Further, Ratnasari (2007) defines a song as an artwork that is intended for singing with or without instrumental accompaniments. El-Nahhal (2011) sees children's songs as "music, instruments, tunes and rhymes, and it is not an ordinary message or ordinary words but according to specific rhymes, repetition and structure" (p.18). Though most of the previous definitions of researchers link songs with music, Ratanasari's definition gives a clear indication that songs can be used with or without instrumental accompaniments. The main frame of this research study therefore, is to emphasize the use of songs in separation from musical instruments. It considers songs to be words that rhyme perfectly to give a sense of melody that is repeated, as in the use of chants.

### 2.3.2 Reasons for using Songs in YL EFL classrooms

When primary school students are taught a language other than their mother tongue, they experience anxiety and fear. They feel that they are unable to follow the teacher's instruction in the target language because they sense insecurity and boredom.

Combining the target language with melody can have several advantages in language teaching. Songs have the power to reduce anxiety and provide a harmonious classroom.

Tseng (2012) mentions that in order to create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, teachers should use activities like songs to decrease anxiety. In addition, Keskin (2011) indicates that one of the most important advantages of using songs in the EFL classroom is that they increase students' motivation and save the lesson from being boring and monotonous. Songs convey meaning and tell memorable stories. Songs are active, short, and repetitive and contain vocabulary that enriches a child's linguistic input. Shen (2009) also mentions that songs are rich with different topics and expressions that will "echo in the learner's heart" (p. 88). Fras and Polona (2015) indicate that songs are a useful tool for adding variety to language classrooms. Songs are used to teach vocabulary and grammar along with sounds and stress. They also can be used in a variety of classroom activities such as listening comprehension, vocabulary and pronunciation practice, translation and discussion.

### 2.3.3 Songs as Pedagogical Tools

Teachers should be aware of the purpose of using songs inside their classes. They are not teaching students how to sing but they are teaching a language. Sevik (2012) mentions that teachers should not be carried away by the rhythm of the songs and its enjoyable atmosphere. Using songs without a significant purpose will make students feel bored and lose their interest eventually. Thus, when utilizing songs in EFL classes there are certain aspects to be considered. Keskin (2011), mentions that the age of the students, their interests, their language level and the language of the songs should be taken into account before choosing songs. There are plenty of activities that could be developed when using songs such as; information gap activities, finding synonyms and antonyms, learning vocabulary, creating discussion and clarifying doubts about abbreviations or slangs (Perez, 2013).

These activities are carried out through three different stages. The first stage is pre listening, in this stage students should be prepared for what they are going to hear and what are they expected to do. The second stage is listening activities, in this stage students control their comprehension skills and focus on listening to the text. They find the answer to the given task for example, filling the gaps, matching, answering multiple choice or open-ended questions about the songs. The last stage is post-listening, here students practice other skills besides listening. At this stage, students may improve their speaking skills by talking about how they feel after listening to the songs ( Keskin, 2011).

### 2.4 Previous Research on Using Songs in Teaching the Oral Skills

Some articles have proved that using songs in teaching the oral skills is a valuable technique. Sevik (2012) conducted a theoretical study in his research *Developing Young Learners' Listening Skills through Songs*, to discuss the importance of songs as listening activities in YL EFL classes. He concludes that listening skill is not a passive skill but a priority in language teaching. Listening activities provide comprehensible input for young learners from which they will eventually speak. Listening activities can be accompanied by visual images and physical motions to attract young learners. Songs, when selected carefully, provide a rich input for young learners, that helps them to learn the language. The repetitive nature of songs, the joy songs impose on learners along with the power of melody and the content of the lyrics reinforces the acquisition of the language. He adds that the use of songs in young

learners classes provide the occasion of real language in meaningful situations.

Similarly, Millington's (2011) study entitled *Using songs Effectively to Teach English to Young Learners*, is a theoretical one. It discusses how songs can help improve students' listening skills and pronunciation. He provides a practical examples of how songs can be used as a language task. He explains that to maximize the advantages of songs, songs should be developed into language learning tasks. Singing in itself will not teach learners to use the language, but developing a song from an activity to a task with preparation, core, and follow up stages will help to maximize the potential of songs as a teaching tool. Furthermore, songs can be adapted to fit in with the curriculum or language point to be taught. By adapting a song, teachers will have the advantage of selecting a particular language feature such as syntax, vocabulary or simple conversation and incorporate it into the song. In this way teachers will save time searching for new songs.

Arevalo (2010), in his research, the use of songs as a tool to work on listening and culture in EFL classes, examines the listening performance of students throughout the development of six workshops based on songs. He conducted an action research with four types of instruments; questionnaire, classroom observation, students' documents, and a semi-structured interview. Based on his findings he states that songs are "the most suitable type of authentic material to develop listening comprehension" (p.130). Songs can develop listening comprehension when teachers select the appropriate songs and design meaningful listening task. In addition, his findings indicate that listening to music increases students' motivation and their attention spans. Learning through songs is more interesting for the students. They are more likely to participate in the class because of the simple conversational language that songs provide. He also finds that through songs students become familiar with native speakers' pronunciation. Thus, they get to learn grammar automatically without even realizing it.

Similarly, Romero, Bernal, and Olivares (2012), in their study *Using Songs to Encourage Sixth Graders to Develop English Speaking Skills*, conducted an action research to examine students' oral production when taking part in activities that involve songs. For collecting the data, they observed their English classes and applied a survey. Based on their study, songs ought to be an important part of daily teaching activities. They found that using music made students more motivated and gave them the opportunity to talk in a non-threatening environment. When songs are selected carefully and matches the students' need, they encourage the students to practise vocabulary and develop confidence.

Other researchers like Tse (2015), Sevik (2011), and Hejjawi (2007), investigate teachers' perspectives on using songs when teaching English. Tse's (2015) study entitled *Malaysian Teachers' Perspectives on Using Songs in English Language Teaching*, is descriptive in nature with an aim to surveying the perceptive of Malaysian ESL teachers towards using songs in their English classes. The participants were 60 Malaysian teachers and one instrument, questionnaire, was applied. Based on his findings, the majority of Malaysian teachers view songs as an important pedagogical tool that should be employed in ESL curriculum programs. The results of the study indicated that most teachers perceive songs as

important in promoting listening skills. However, the cultural background of the EFL Saudi participants in this particular research study is different from Malaysian ESL teachers in Tse's study.

Sevik's (2011) Teachers' Views About Using Songs in Teaching English to Young Learner, research is a descriptive study, which aims to explore teachers' views about using songs. The participants were 52 Turkish EFL teachers and the instrument used was a questionnaire. The findings of his study reveals that most primary Turkish EFL teachers consider songs to be an important and necessary part of teaching English in young learners' classrooms. They believe that songs are very important in developing the listening skills of YLs. They also agree that songs are fun and full of pedagogical value because songs present many opportunities for young learners to show their skills in different language areas. The current study benefits from such an established research in adopting the same questionnaire. However, this research study differs from Sevik's study regarding the cultural background of the participants.

In a similar context of Saudi Arabia Hejjawi (2007), conducted a research study entitled Teachers' and students' attitudes toward the use of music in UAE English language classrooms, that investigates the use of music in English language classrooms in the UAE, as well as teachers' and students' attitudes toward music use in language teaching and learning. She utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques for collecting data. The participants were 80 experienced secondary and college level teachers and 80 secondary and college level students. Her findings indicate that teachers from both levels struggled in implementing music, do not know how to use songs, think that using songs is time consuming, do not have equipment to utilize songs in their classes, and therefore decided to ignore it. Her results reveal that the participating Arab teachers have major religious and cultural considerations that stopped most of them from using songs in their language classrooms. On the other hand, her findings reveal that only a small percentage of students had serious religious concerns in terms of listening to music or accepting songs in their ESL classrooms. The majority of the participating students respected the Islamic teaching that does not allow music background in their language classrooms.

### *2.5 Culture and Education in the Saudi context*

Education in Saudi Arabia has always been closely linked to religion and social customs. Every subject is to be taught within a general religious goal or purpose. The Ministry of Education, for example, includes a religious goal for teaching English as a second language. According to Article No. 50 of Saudi Arabian education policy, one of the objectives of teaching English is as follows:

*Furnishing the students with at least one of the living languages, in addition to their original language, to enable them to acquire knowledge and sciences from other communities and to participate in the service of Islam and humanity (AlHajailan, 2003, p. 23).*

The Saudi community, being very conservative, usually cautiously pursues anything that contradicts their culture. Thus, Saudi teachers tend to be very cautious when it comes to the



application of new teaching methods and techniques. They limit their techniques and methods to the old, traditional way of teaching such as the grammar translation method. They favor this method because it is easy to conduct and applicable (Aqel, 2013). When it comes to using songs in the classroom, the idea is often completely neglected due to the fact that many Saudi citizens believe that singing is not only culturally inappropriate but religiously forbidden. Shah, Hussain, and Nasseef (2013) mention in their study that teachers in Saudi Arabia in particular, experience the interference of social taboos in their classrooms.

### *2.6 The Rhythmic Sense of Saudi Children*

In spite of the conservative nature of Saudi Arabia, rhythm, chants, and drums form an essential part of their culture and religion. Saudi's children grow up singing the religious song Tala AlBadro Alena which was sung by the Prophet Mohammed's (peace be upon him) disciples when he first arrived in Madina. Children often sing that song at school, at home, and when playing with their friends. They also grow up reading and listening to the Quran, which contains rhythmic verses and should be read with "Tarteel." Al-Rageb (2011) states that rhythmic structure is one of the core components of the Quranic style.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research Design and Instrument*

This study adopts a descriptive study design, which is comprised of a quantitative survey that was conducted among elementary EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia. In doing this study, the researcher obtained data by using one tool, which is a questionnaire. The questionnaire survey used is adopted from Sevik's research (2011), "Teacher views about using songs in teaching English to young learners". The questionnaire is composed of 22 items and was administrated over the internet. Some of the questions were adopted to fit the culture of the target samples and the purpose of the study. In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were informed about the purpose of the research study. In addition, a consent form has been signed by the participants before starting the questionnaire. In the second part, the participants were asked to fill in demographic information about their gender, age, and teaching experience. In the third part, they were asked to choose the best answer, which represents their opinion about using songs in teaching English oral skills to young learners. The participants were asked to respond to the items by indicating their level of agreement using a five-point Likert scale. The five options are agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and undecided

#### *3.1.2. Participants*

The participants of the study consisted of 89 Saudi EFL teachers who work at an elementary school in the city of Jeddah. There were 18 male teachers and 71 female teachers who participated voluntarily in this study.

With regards to the demographic data collected from the participants, Figure 1 indicates the gender, ages, and years of experience each participant had.

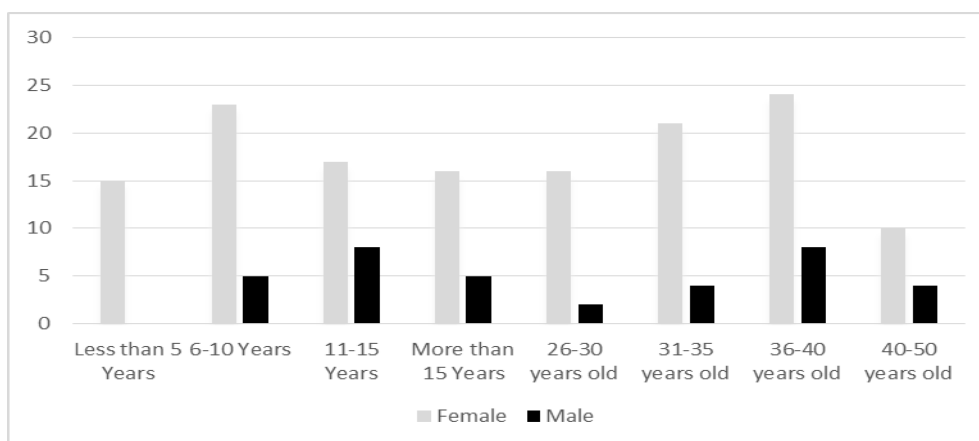


Figure 1. Gender, age, and years of experience of each participant

### 3.1.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was immediately performed once all the participants completed the online questionnaire hosted on ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). The primary data file downloaded from [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) was in MS Excel® 2013 format and a carbon copy with made and entered into an SPSS® file format. The questions were divided into two main groups. The first group was the demographic group which included gender, age and years of experience (Questions 1-3). The second group, which formed the bulk of the survey, included the questions related to using songs in the YL classrooms (Questions 4-22). The second group was further divided into four subgroups where the first group contained questions 4-8 which related to teachers' beliefs and were coded A1,A2,A3@X, A4 and A5 respectively. The connotation 'X' was given to indicate a statement that contradicts the assumption of pedagogical benefits of songs in the EFL YLs' classrooms. The second subgroup contained questions 9-14 which related to the teachers' attitudes towards using songs in the EFL YLs' classrooms and were coded B1@X, B2@X, B3@X, B4@X, B5@X and B6@X respectively. The third subgroup contained questions 15-19 which related to the teachers' beliefs with regards to the effectiveness of using songs in the EFL YLs' classrooms. These statements were coded C1, C2, C3, C4@X and C5 respectively. The fourth and final subgroup contained questions 20, 21 and 22, which related to the frequency and accessibility of songs in the EFL YLs' classrooms and were coded D1, D2 and D3 respectively. The designation of subgroups was important since each subgroup is related to a particular issue. The first subgroup (Subgroup A) is related to the general perceptions and beliefs of the EFL YLs' teachers of pedagogical importance of songs. The second subgroup (Subgroup B) is related to the negative indicators of using songs in the YLs' EFL classrooms. The third subgroup (Subgroup C) is related to positive indicators of using songs in the YLs' EFL classrooms (barring C4@X). The fourth subgroup (Subgroup D) is related to the frequency of using songs in YLs' EFL classrooms.

## 4. Results

The results obtained from the analysis of the responses to the statements are given in six tables. Each will be discussed separately.

#### 4.1 Questions Related to Teachers' Beliefs

As can be seen from table 1, (91%) of the participants agreed that songs should be an essential part of the English language teaching curriculum for YLs. Results of statement A2 indicate that a large portion of the participants (92%) believed that songs provide an opportunity for learners to practice speaking. Statement A3@X asks if participants agree to the statement that “songs do not have pedagogical value and should be used only for fun”. The results of the analysis of the responses reveal that more than (73%) of the participants disagreed with the statement while (12%) were undecided and (15%) of the participants agreed with the statement. The results of the analysis of the responses to statement A4 reveal that (90%) of the participants believed that songs are a very important tool in developing YLs listening skills. Finally, nearly all participants (93%) believed that songs are fun and full of pedagogical value.

Up to this point, teachers' beliefs seem to be compatible with the findings of earlier research studies, which demonstrated that songs are a valuable pedagogical tool that can be used to teach both listening and speaking skills to young learners. Responses to statement A1 indicate that there is a strong agreement on accepting the pedagogical value of songs in the YL EFL classrooms and that is due to the fact that the participants (teachers) ought to have seen the benefits first hand either in their classrooms or in a colleague's classroom. Furthermore, the participants perceive (authentic) songs as providing plenty of opportunities to explore phonics that occur in those songs. The results of this study are in agreement with a similar study conducted by Tse (2015) in a Malaysian context. In Tse's research study, the correspondents believed that songs should be a vital and an indispensable element of ESL learning and teaching in a YL scenario.

According to the participants of this study, songs are a valuable tool when teaching English to YLs because they create a joyful atmosphere that helps to develop students' skills in many language areas. Most of the participants agreed that songs are fun and full of pedagogical values none of them disagreed with the statement. This finding is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis that emphasizes the importance of a positive atmosphere when learning a language.

Table 1. Teachers' beliefs about pedagogical value of using songs when teaching oral skills to YL

| Statements   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| A1- I believe that songs should be an essential part of the English language teaching curriculum for young learners. | 46             | 45    | 5         | 3        | 0                 |
| A2- I believe that songs present opportunities for young learners to show their skills in many language areas,       | 40             | 52    | 7         | 1        | 0                 |

|   |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| specifically speaking.  |    |    |    |    |    |
| A3@X- I think songs do not have pedagogical value and should be used only for fun.                | 4  | 11 | 12 | 55 | 18 |
| A4- I believe that songs are very important in developing the listening skills of young learners. | 44 | 46 | 10 | 0  | 0  |
| A5- I believe that songs are fun and full of pedagogical value.                                   | 48 | 45 | 7  | 0  | 0  |

#### 4.1.2 Questions Related to Teachers' Attitudes

Table 2 reflects the participants' attitudes towards using songs when teaching English to YLs. As revealed by the participants, (71%) of their responses indicate that they do not have enough resources to use songs inside their classes. Thirteen percent stated that they were undecided while only (16%) disagreed with statement B1. Additionally, (80%) of the participants stated that they found it difficult to find an appropriate song for every topic in the English language curriculum. The participants who were undecided shared similar percentages in statement B2 with those who disagreed at (10%). Furthermore, (26%) of the participants believed that using songs may distract students' attention from the main objective of the EFL lesson while the majority however (48%), disagreed with this statement B3@X, with (26%) undecided. Responses to statement B4@X reveal that similar percentages are given to those who agreed that using songs inside their classes is time consuming and to those who are undecided (34%) while (32%) disagreed with the statement. Twenty eight percent of the participants believed that they could not measure students' knowledge of English when using songs while (32%) disagreed. The highest percentage of participants (40%) stated that they were undecided with regards to how to measure students' level of L2 (English) knowledge through songs. Lastly, the results of the analysis of the responses to statement B6@X reveal that (78%) of the participants think that the use of songs inside their EFL classes is culturally inappropriate, while (3 %) were undecided and (19%) disagreed with the statement.

Overall, the findings show that the majority of the participants (71%) did not have enough resources to use songs in their classrooms and the vast majority (80%) found it difficult to find appropriate songs. These findings indicate that the majority of the participating Saudi EFL teachers have encountered problems when searching for suitable and appropriate songs. This finding resembles the findings of a similar research study conducted by Sevik (2011) where the majority of his participants declared that they found it difficult to find appropriate songs for classroom use. However, the difference between the two findings is most likely the cause of the difficulties. The Turkish participants in Sevik's (2011) research were not familiar with online websites that provide such appropriate songs. In this study, the probable cause of this problem is related to two main issues. First, classrooms are not equipped with efficient

technological devices needed to display songs or worse; teachers are not trained to use such equipment. Al-Seghayer (2014) mentions that Saudi classrooms suffer from an unavailability of adequate teaching resources which results in teachers relying heavily and in some cases, solely on textbooks. Al-Seghayer adds that the unavailability of these teaching resources has several negative consequences. For example, students will not be exposed to authentic listening materials and accordingly, may lose motivation. The second issue is related specifically to the Saudi cultural context, which is that most educational songs found on the Internet contain instrumental music, which thus restricts Saudi EFL teachers from using the songs in their classrooms, hindering their initiative.

The majority of the respondents do not believe that songs distract students' attention away from the goals of the lesson. This means that these teachers can present songs in their classes successfully without distracting the students' attention. Nevertheless, (34%) of the participants believed that using songs in the classroom is time consuming. This belief reflects the researcher's proposed hypothesis that Saudi EFL teachers may ignore the use of songs according to their personal belief that songs are time consuming activities. Furthermore, even though (32%) of the participating Saudi EFL teachers stated that they can evaluate their students' progress through songs, a large portion (40%) remained undecided. Thus, the researcher suggests that these teachers may need to be trained in the current best practices in teaching oral skills, particularly through the use of songs. Accordingly, these teachers would then better understand that songs should be introduced through language learning tasks and not in isolation. In totality, (78%) of the participants thought that using songs in their classes would be inappropriate and contradicts their cultural beliefs. The results of this statement correspond to the previous results on Hejjawi's (2007), study when her participants reveal that they have major religious and cultural considerations that prevent them from using songs in their language classrooms.

Table 2. Teachers attitudes toward using songs when teaching oral skills to YLs

| Statements  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| B1- I believe that I do not have enough resources to use songs inside my classrooms.                    | 43             | 28    | 13        | 15       | 1                 |
| B2- I find it difficult to find an appropriate song for every topic of the English language curriculum. | 43             | 37    | 10        | 9        | 1                 |
| B3@X- I believe that using songs to teach English may distract students' attention during the lesson.   | 10             | 16    | 26        | 40       | 8                 |
| B4@X- I believe that using songs in my  | 9              | 25    | 34        | 29       | 3                 |

|  |     |     |    |     |    |
|--|-----|-----|----|-----|----|
| English class can be time consuming.   |     |     |    |     |    |
| B5@X- I believe that I cannot measure students' knowledge of English when I use songs in my classes. | 7   | 21  | 40 | 28  | 4  |
| B6@X- I believe that using songs inside my classes is culturally inappropriate.                      | 28% | 50% | 3% | 17% | 2% |

#### 4.1.3 Questions Related to Teachers' Thoughts

Reviewing table 3, the participants reveal their thoughts and beliefs with regards to the effectiveness of using songs when teaching oral skills. The results of the analysis of responses to statement C1 revealed that the majority of the participants (91%) believed that songs accelerate the memorization of vocabulary. Only (1%) disagreed with the statement and the rest (6%) stated that they are undecided. Moreover, a large portion of the participants (92%) agreed with statement C2 that songs provide a significant amount of repetition, which results in an automatic use of the target language. The remaining (3%) disagreed and (4%) were undecided. Results of the analysis of responses to statement C3 indicate that (92%) of the participating EFL teachers believed that songs are a highly motivating and entertaining way of teaching English, especially for young learners. Results of the responses to statement C4@x indicated that the majority of the participants disagreed with the statement that songs are not very effective in teaching English to young learners while (10%) agreed with the statement and (15%) were undecided. Finally, the results of the analysis of the responses to statement C5 indicated that the majority of the participants (61%) believed that using songs could lower students' anxiety toward speaking English. Here, (9%) stated that they were undecided and (29%) disagreed with the statement.

Overall, the findings echo previous research studies on the effectiveness of using songs when teaching oral skills to YLs. Listening to songs is not only considered interesting to the YLs, but also offers a large help to them in learning vocabulary more easily (Dew, 2013). The participating Saudi EFL teachers' believed that using songs inside YLs classrooms lowers anxiety and creates a relaxing atmosphere that promotes speaking. This result is in agreement with the findings of Cifuentes' (2006) research study. His findings indicate that songs generate favorable factors such as motivation, relaxation, self-confidence and a positive attitude – all of which promote oral production. From these results, it can be argued that Saudi EFL teachers have very positive thoughts about the effectiveness of using songs when teaching oral skills.

Table 3. Teacher's thoughts about the effectiveness of using songs when teaching oral skills to YLs.

| <b>Statements</b> | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Undecided</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
|                   |                       |              |                  |                 |                          |

|   |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| C1- I believe that songs accelerate the memorization of vocabulary.   | 55 | 36 | 8  | 1  | 0  |
| C2- I believe that songs provide a large amount of repetition, which results in automatic use of the target language.     | 56 | 36 | 5  | 3  | 0  |
| C3- I believe that songs are a highly motivating and entertaining way of teaching English, especially for young learners. | 64 | 28 | 4  | 4  | 0  |
| C4@X- I believe that songs are not very effective in teaching English to young learners.                                  | 3  | 7  | 14 | 60 | 16 |
| C5- I believe that using songs can lower students' anxiety toward speaking English.                                       | 31 | 30 | 10 | 22 | 7  |

#### 4.1.4 Do EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia have easy access to appropriate songs?

To answer this question, the participants were given one statement. Results of the responses to this statement (D1) revealed that (41%) of the participants agreed with the statement that they can easily access and find appropriate songs to use in their classes while (31%) disagreed with the statement and (29%) were undecided.

This finding is surprising because when asked “I find it difficult to find an appropriate song for every topic of the English language curriculum” the majority of the participants (80%) stated that they found it difficult to find appropriate songs. It is possible to interpret this apparent differences in responses to the two statements in that the participating EFL Saudi teachers could easily have easy access to songs when they are equipped with the appropriate materials. For example, when the internet connection is available in classrooms, teachers can access to songs easily. Secondly, teachers may mean that they use the songs found in students’ textbooks, which may be available with the use of classroom CD players or computers

Table 4. Accessibility to songs

| <b>Statement</b>   | <b>Strongly Agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Undecided</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Strongly Disagree</b> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| D1- I can easily access and find appropriate songs to use in my classes. | 15                    | 26           | 28               | 24              | 7                        |

#### 4.1.5 How often do EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia use songs in their YL EFL classrooms?

To answer this question the participants were given two statements dealing with the frequency with which they use songs inside the YL EFL classes. Results of the analysis of the responses to statement D2 depict that (78%) of the participating EFL teachers use songs in their classes as much as possible while (11%) disagreed with the statement indicating that they did not use songs as much as possible while (10%) were undecided. The results of the analysis of the responses to statement 19 indicate that the majority of teachers (27%) use one song in class every two weeks, followed by once a week (22.5%), once per month (18%), once every three weeks (14.6%), once a year (12.4%), once every two months (3.4%) and finally once a term (2.2%)

Based on the data analysis, most of the participating teachers seem to be using songs inside their YLs' EFL classrooms as much as they can. More specifically, it can be said that if teachers have easy access to songs, then they are more likely to use songs as much as possible. The analysis of song usage indicated that the most preferred frequency of song usage is every two weeks and once per week. The least preferred frequencies amongst the participants seemed to be once per a term and once per two months.

Table 5. Frequency of song usage

| Question   | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| D2- I use songs in my classes as much as possible. | 30             | 49    | 10        | 11       | 0                 |

Table 6. I teach one song to young learners

|                     | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent |
|---------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|
| One per week        | 20        | 22.5    | 22.5          |
| One per two weeks   | 24        | 27.0    | 27.0          |
| One per three weeks | 13        | 14.6    | 14.6          |
| One per month       | 16.       | 18.0    | 18.0          |
| One per two months  | 3         | 3.4     | 3.4           |
| One per a term      | 2         | 2.2     | 2.2           |
| One per a year      | 11        | 12.4    | 12.4          |

## 5. Conclusion

The primary aim of this research study was to investigate Saudi EFL teachers, specifically



elementary school teachers, about their opinions on using songs when teaching EFL to YLs. After reviewing the relevant literature, there are several conclusions which can be drawn. First, it is clearly indicated in the literature and research studies that songs are a valuable tool to teaching English oral skills (listening and speaking) specifically to young learners. Second, songs are considered a valuable technique because they help to lower students' anxiety and increase motivation. Third, songs should be a vital element when designing EFL curriculum for YLs.

Looking closely at the research findings about teachers' beliefs about the pedagogical value of using songs when teaching oral skills in this study, it can be clearly seen that the findings of this study are parallel with the findings of earlier research studies about songs as an important pedagogical tool. Considering the results of the study, it is possible to conclude that Saudi EFL teachers in elementary schools are aware of the pedagogical value of using songs when teaching oral skill. The majority of the participants believe that songs should be an essential part of the English language curriculum for YLs. Furthermore, they believed that songs present opportunities for YLs to speak and practice the language. Additionally, they also believed songs to be a very important factor in developing listening skills. Evaluated overall, the findings of the current research study clearly indicate that Saudi EFL teachers are in favor of using songs and they have positive opinions about the pedagogical value of using songs when teaching English oral skills to YLs. However, if we examine both the Saudi EFL curriculum for YLs and the teaching methodology applied by most Saudi teachers we find the following. First, the Saudi EFL curriculum for YLs gives little (if any) attention to songs. Second, EFL teachers in the Saudi context neglect using modern strategies such as the use of songs in their classes and usually stick to the grammar translation method.

Although the majority of the participants have positive views about the pedagogical value of using songs, this does not mean that they are comfortable to use songs in their classes. EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia usually follow certain beliefs about how and what to teach. These beliefs are based on their religious and cultural background. The results that show teachers' attitude towards using songs in their classrooms present a dilemma that contradicts the teachers' beliefs about the pedagogical value of songs. In spite of their positive opinions about the pedagogical value of songs, the majority of the participants find it difficult to locate appropriate songs, do not have enough resources to use songs in their classes, believe that using songs is time consuming and consider using songs in their classes to be culturally inappropriate. These findings strengthen the researcher's initial arguments and do not reject the hypothesis that Saudi EFL teachers may ignore the use of songs according to their beliefs that songs are time consuming and culturally inappropriate.

The findings that present teachers' thoughts about the effectiveness of using songs when teaching oral skills to YLs replicate both the current research findings that present teachers' beliefs about the pedagogical value of using songs and the earlier research findings (Millington, 2011, Arevalo, 2010, Ratnasari, 2007, Cifuentes, 2006). This strengthens the researcher's second hypothesis that songs are an important pedagogical tool, that might contribute to developing EFL oral language skills. A promising finding is that the majority of the participants surveyed believe that songs are a highly motivating technique of teaching

English to YLs, that songs accelerate the memorization of vocabulary, that songs provide a large amount of needed repetition and that songs lower students' anxiety.

Reviewing the findings, the researcher reveals that another dilemma comes to surface. Even though the participants state that they think using songs is time consuming and culturally inappropriate, the majority of those participants state that they use songs as much possible and that they have easy access to songs. This seemingly contradicting view could be interpreted by saying that teachers use the songs that are available to them (i.e. in their textbooks) and accordingly use these resources as much as possible.

### *5.2 Limitation of the Study*

Despite the research findings, there is an important limitation that need to be taken into consideration. The use of questionnaire as the only mean to explore teachers' beliefs is theoretical but not practical. Even though a quantitative survey make it easier to quantify the results and their corresponding analysis, a qualitative study would provide more valuable and personalized views reflecting the teacher's deeper beliefs and opinions relating to this controversial matter.

### *5.3 Suggestions for Further Study*

Considering the findings of the current research study the researcher recommends the following

- 1- Additional research in this topic should utilize qualitative interviews and observations to elicit more responses from teachers. Sincerely, the researcher believes that teachers answered according to their beliefs, however it would be much better to use interview to provide more detailed information about the role of EFL teachers' beliefs when using songs in their YLs classes.
- 2- Develop websites that contain music free songs that suit the Saudi culture and are designed specifically to teach English oral skills.
- 3- Further studies should be conducted to explore the best method of presenting songs in YL classes.

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