# The Effectiveness of Using Songs in YouTube to Improve Vocabulary Competence among Upper Secondary School Studies

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Abstract—This study investigated whether learners exposed to songs using YouTube would experience a change in vocabulary competence compared to those exposed to the traditional teacher-fronted approach. To fulfil this purpose, 68 Form Four students were selected from a government-run secondary school located in Kedah, Malaysia. These participants were then divided into two equal groups of experimental and control. The study was carried out over a six-week course (12 sessions). A vocabulary test was administered as a pretest for both groups prior to the treatment. There were twelve sessions of vocabulary lessons conducted with both groups in which the experimental group adopted songs and the control group underwent the traditional teacher-fronted approach. Data was gathered through a vocabulary pretest and posttest, on-going observations, and journal entries. Results revealed that the experimental group experienced a significant improvement in their vocabulary competence compared to the control group. Some recommendations are finally presented based on research findings.

Index Terms—song, YouTube, vocabulary competence, secondary school learner

## I. INTRODUCTION

Songs have been a part of our lives for as long as we can remember. Guglielmino (1986, cited in Schoepp, 2001) mentioned adults sing at religious services, bars, in the shower and listen to songs on the car radio. Songs have become an essential part of our language experience and if used in coordination with a language lesson, they can be of great value. Fortunately, with the expanding prevalence of the internet and specifically the World Wide Web into both the classrooms and lives of students, access to music and lyrics has been made easier. This study focuses on the effectiveness of using songs in YouTube to improve the vocabulary competence among upper secondary school students.

Almost everyone loves music. It is part of our language and life from birth onwards. As babies, we hear lullabies. As young children, we play, sing and dance to a myriad of nursery rhymes. As adolescents, we are consumed by the beat of famous music artists throughout the world in our daily lives. Music permeates television, movies, theatre and even the news. When we exercise, work, play, worship, etc., music is there to support or change every mood and emotion. A likable tune is played, hummed or sung, at times in our heads, as we go about our everyday lives. So, why not include music and songs in language learning as well? Accordingly, this paper would be a great favour to show the effectiveness of using songs in YouTube to improve the vocabulary competence among upper secondary school students.

# A. Background of the Study

In Malaysia, vocabulary learning is a neglected area in English language teaching and more research is needed in this field. Learning vocabulary is a very complex issue. According to Nation (2001), second language learners need to know very large numbers of words as this may be useful for them in the long-term as learning vocabulary should not be a short-term goal.

Vocabulary teaching and learning is an integral part in the Malaysian's English Language Curriculum. Most students face difficulties when they communicate in English because they lack the needed English vocabulary especially when it involves complicated words. Therefore, it is significant to explore deeper on these difficulties as well as provide innovative ideas in order to improve the teaching and learning of vocabulary. The first thing to be done is to look at the strategies that the students use to learn new English words and make them aware that there are many vocabulary learning strategies that they could use in learning new words, especially in a language other than their mother tongue. As a result, this study was conducted to find out the effectiveness of using songs in YouTube to improve the vocabulary competence among upper secondary school students.

#### B. Problem Statement

There is poor vocabulary competence among upper secondary school students in the school where the study conducted. This is due to the lack of reading and speaking in the target language. Words are the basic unit of language form. Without sufficient vocabulary, students cannot communicate effectively or express their ideas. Having limited vocabulary is also a barrier that prevents students from learning a language. If learners do not know how to expand their vocabulary, they gradually lose interest in learning. Many students consider learning vocabulary a tedious job. Generally, they have lack of interests in learning English language as they find it a dry and difficult subject to learn. As a result, most students dislike learning English; and although they attend English lessons, they are not interested in learning or speaking English properly.

# C. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effects of using songs in YouTube to improve the vocabulary competence among secondary school students as a part of the learning process in the classroom. Vocabulary learning is considered by many teachers and students as an important factor in learning a foreign language. Thus, it is vital to find beneficial and interesting ways to teach vocabulary in the English Language lessons.

# D. Research Questions and Hypothesis

Based on the objective of the study, the following research questions can be built:

- 1: Is there a significant difference in vocabulary competence between the method of using songs in YouTube and the traditional method of teaching?
- 2: Is there a significant difference in vocabulary competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional method of teaching?
- 3: Is there a significant difference in vocabulary competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the method of using songs in YouTube?

Accordingly, from the above questions, the following null hypothesis can be derived:

- H<sub>0</sub>1: There is no significant difference in vocabulary competence between the method of using songs in YouTube and the traditional method of teaching.
- $H_02$ : There is no significant difference in vocabulary competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the traditional method of teaching.
- $H_03$ : There is no significant difference in vocabulary competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who undergo the method of using songs in YouTube.

#### II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Songs are one of the most captivating and culturally rich resources that can be easily used in language classrooms. Songs offer a change from routine classroom activities. They are precious resources to develop students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They can also be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives and adverbs. Lo and Li (1998) declare that learning English through songs also provide a non-threatening atmosphere for students who are usually tense when speaking English in a formal classroom. Songs also give new insights into the target culture. They are the means through which cultural themes are presented effectively.

## A. YouTube and Songs

YouTube is famously known as an internet video search website (*USAToday*, 2006). Kelsey (2010) defines it as a website where you can upload and share videos. It uses Adobe Flash Video technology to display a wide variety of user-generated content, video content, including movie clips, television clips and music videos as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. Unregistered users can watch the videos for free, while

registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. Songs can be directly used to teach vocabulary in the English language lessons. This would instantly motivate students to learn the language as they are able to view the video clips as well as read the lyrics projected on the screen. While singing, they are able to read the lyrics and this indirectly encourages them to learn new words. As stated by Barska (2006), the most important factor in language learning is the motivation, which is why English language teachers have always tried to find new strategies in their lessons. Teachers should be vigilant in selecting appropriate songs in YouTube to be implemented in the teaching of vocabulary lessons.

Dowse (2009) expresses that the YouTube website provides a wide variety of content suitable for English teaching and it should be effectively manipulated by the teachers in the language classroom. He states that using successful techniques and appealing tools especially songs to teach new vocabulary items make students find words easier to remember and become more motivated in class. By engaging in a pleasurable experience, they are relaxed and their inhibitions about acquiring a second language are lessened. Those who are taught in a fun and creative way, love attending the lessons and this in turn becomes a great way for teachers to achieve success with their students. The use of internet technologies like the YouTube website to teach vocabulary is one of these experiences.

# B. Songs and the English Language

For many people whose first language is not English or they did not learn English as a second language in school like in some European countries for instance Belgium and Moldova (Ottilie, 2010; Xmarabout, 2010), their first exposure to English may probably be through popular songs. Lynch (2005) points out in his article that language teachers should use songs as part of their English language teaching. Among the reasons given are that songs contain natural language, are easily obtainable, and are natural and fun. He also states that a variety of new vocabulary can be introduced as well as cultural aspects and even different types of English accents. Songs can be selected to suit the needs and interests of students. The lyrics of songs can be used in relating to situations of the world around the students. Overall, he concludes that songs can offer an enjoyable speaking, listening, vocabulary and language practice.

In addition, Orlova (2003) notes that for the last two decades, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) methodology has been actively considering the possibility of using music and songs in class. Based on her 10-year experience of incorporating songs in the language teaching, she claims the use of songs in language classes puts students at ease, makes them more attentive and can increase their desire to learn a language. Music offers a versatile way to look at the language and can be used to reinforce and improve speaking, listening comprehension, vocabulary and phrasing. This is supported by Beare (2010) in his article on using music for the ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom. He reports that using music in the beginning of a lesson is a great way to introduce new vocabularies to students and get them thinking in the right direction, meaning that they will know what the lesson will be about.

Lo and Li (1998) offered similar suggestions. They suggest that songs provide a break from the normal class routine and that learning English through songs develops a non-threatening classroom atmosphere in which the four language skills can be enhanced. The belief that songs provide enjoyment and develop language skills is also noted by several authors as stated before.

# C. Word Smart and Music Smart

The aspect of enjoyment in learning language through songs is directly related to affective factors. Students learn in many different ways. Smith (2008) states that Howard Gardner had come up with a theory of multiple intelligences in which he proposed that each person has several different intelligences that work together but exist with different strengths in different individuals. Among these intelligences, the word smart and number smart intelligences have dominated the traditional teaching and learning process in schools. The other intelligences have been overlooked or neglected. If teachers are able to develop ways to teach their students by engaging all the intelligences, the possibilities for the students' success will increase. One way is to use songs, which uses the music smart intelligence. Songs can be composed and sung related to the subject or theme being taught. Composing lyrics for songs will be associated with the word smart intelligence; therefore, students will be involved in more than one intelligence at a time as suggested by Gardner.

# D. Theoretical Perspective

Apart from Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence, another theory which can be related with the study is Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition. This theory consists of five main hypotheses. One of the proposed hypotheses is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. According to Schütz (2007), this hypothesis represents Krashen's view that a number of affective variables play a supportive role in second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low-level of anxiety are better equipped to learn a second language compared with learners with low motivation and low self-esteem. The former become more successful to learn a new language while the latter create a mental block which prevents them to learn the language successfully.

Schoepp (2001) describes the Affective Filter Hypothesis in Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition as an explanation of how the affective factors relate to language learning. It is appealing to teachers since this hypothesis can support reasons as to why some students learn and why others do not. Teachers, of course, have long recognised the

need for students to have a positive attitude towards learning. With reference to this hypothesis, teachers need to provide an atmosphere which is conducive to language learning. Optimal learning occurs when the affective filter is weak. This results in a positive attitude towards the learning process. If the affective filter is strong, the students do not seek the language input and also do not be open for the language learning as well. Therefore, using songs in the teaching and learning process leads to achieving the weak affective filter and thus promoting language learning.

#### III. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the independent variable was the use of songs in YouTube. This is the treatment used with the experimental group. The dependent variable was the vocabulary competence which was measured by the difference in the mean scores between the pretest and posttest for both groups.

The study took the form of a quasi-experiment adopting the quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection. Therefore, there were an experimental group and a control group. The treatment carried out on the experimental group provided the quantitative data. The empirical evidence collected was used to explain the results of the effectiveness from the usage of English songs in YouTube to improve the vocabulary competence among secondary students. As for the data collected using the qualitative method, on-going observations were carried out and students were asked to write journal entries throughout the six weeks of treatment.

# A. Research Operation Plan

This study was implemented in 8 stages and each stage contained specific tasks or programmes. In the first stage, the researchers reviewed literature associated with the field of study. In the second stage, findings from the first stage were gathered pertaining to the study in which the researchers desired to carry out. Next, the research objective and research questions developed in the third stage. In this stage, the methodology and measuring instruments to be used were also planned. The fourth stage involved in selecting suitable songs in YouTube to be used for the study. The songs were selected according to various criteria such as having comprehensible lyrics, moderate tempos, and not being popular among the students.

In the fifth stage, interesting activities related to the vocabulary competence based on the selected songs were planned out and included. Some of these activities were: sing-along, cloze text, sequencing words and phrases in song verses, guessing song-meanings through context as well as creating own lyrics using the same melody of the song used during the lesson. The lessons then were carried out in the sixth stage and data was collected through on-going observations and journal entries written by the participants in addition to vocabulary tests which served as pretest and posttest.

In the seventh stage, data analysis was performed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program. The data analysis included an independent sample t-test and paired t-test to ascertain the change that occurred within the two groups. Qualitative data was analysed based on the researchers' observations and the journal entries written by the participants. The final stage included reporting whether the research questions have been answered or not based on the findings.

# B. Sampling

A total of 68 Form Four students in the government-run schools in Sungai Petani, Kedah, Malaysia were selected as the participants for this study. In order to avoid any misinterpretation of invalidity, the researchers decided to use two heterogeneous groups from the arts stream. The only difference between the two groups was that one group – the experimental group— was exposed to the treatment of using songs in YouTube while the other group – the control group— experienced the traditional teacher-fronted method. There were 34 participants in each group.

For the purpose of qualitative data collection, nine participants were chosen from each group. Thus, a total of 18 participants were chosen from the sample. They represented three different proficiency levels: above-average, average and below-average. The reason of choosing the participants according to proficiency level was to ensure that the teachers had given equal attention to them all and did not just concentrate on participants with below-average proficiency level. This is especially important for the experimental group so that all participants in the experimental group would be given equal attention during the treatment of using songs in YouTube to improve their vocabulary competence.

# C. Instruments

This study utilised three types of measuring instruments: vocabulary test, on-going observation and journal entries. The utilisation of these methods was to advocate the use of different methods of data collection and different data sources to ensure accuracy, validity, reliability and credibility of the information and data gathered. The use of the quantitative method was to provide an overall picture to the problem in the study while the two qualitative methods were used with 18 selected participants from the sample to provide in-depth information of the study.

# 1. Vocabulary test

A vocabulary test was conducted at the beginning of the study with both groups as a pretest before the start of the treatment. The purpose of this pretest was to ascertain the level of vocabulary competence of the participants in both

groups. Another vocabulary test was also administered after the sixth week of treatment as a posttest. This was to see if there had been any differences with the mean scores of the pretest.

# 2. On-going observation

On-going observation of the learners' vocabulary competence was guided by the research objective and research questions. Weekly observations were carried out with both groups. Each observation took an hour. The researchers focused on aspects relevant to the study. Events happening in the class were recorded in the order of which they occurred, documenting the participants' performances in the class throughout the observations.

#### 3. Journal entries

The participants were asked to write journal entries regarding the type of lessons they received and how they felt about these lessons. Feedback gathered from these journal entries enabled the researchers to identify whether any change had taken effect after the implementation of the songs in YouTube to improve vocabulary competence.

#### D. Data Collection Procedure

The administration of the study began right after the school reopened. A vocabulary test, which served as a pretest, was given to the participants. Two weeks after the pretest, the treatment of the study was carried out for a six-week time period.

The experimental group received vocabulary lessons with the treatment of using songs in YouTube. The lesson implementations included choosing materials associated with the English syllabus and the cycles of experiential learning: briefing, running the session, debriefing and following-up.

The control, on the other hand, did not receive any treatment process. Instead, this group was taught using the traditional teacher-fronted method without the use of songs throughout the six-week study. However, the group did undergo vocabulary-based lessons such as knowing the meaning of words and guessing the meaning of words.

Both groups were observed by the researchers, examining the lessons taught by the teachers. Participants' preparations, behaviours, responses and class presentation were also observed. After the sixth week, both groups were given a vocabulary test which served as the posttest.

# E. Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data was analysed according to the type of data. Quantitative data was analysed using the SPSS programme while qualitative data was interpreted based on the class observations and journal entries.

#### 1. Vocabulary test

Data collected from the pretest and posttest was calculated in the form of scores. The scores were processed using SPSS using the same scale of measurement. The differences of the two tests for each student were computed. An independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the two groups. The t-test was employed to assess whether the mean difference or the change between pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group differed significantly from those in test scores of the control group.

## 2. On-going observation

For both the experimental and control groups, the participants' vocabulary performance was observed and evaluated by using the checklist which consisted of the salient components of the dependent variables in the study. The observations were intended to provide useful data related to the participants' vocabulary competence as the effect of undergoing the method of using songs in YouTube.

# 3. Journal entries

Eighteen journal entries from the participants were selected comprising of nine journal entries from each group. The participants were asked to write about what they thought and felt about the teaching methods presented to them as well as if these teaching methods helped them improve their English vocabulary competence.

# IV. FINDINGS

The data gathered through vocabulary tests was tabulated using the SPSS programme and analysed using an independent sample t-test and a paired t-test. The results are represented in tables that follow.

# A. Findings from Vocabulary Test

Table I shows the group statistics results from the pretest and posttest scores of the control group and experimental group. The results in Table I show that both groups had undergone changes in their vocabulary proficiency throughout the six-week study. This can be seen in the increase of the mean scores between the pretest and posttest of both groups. However, the mean difference in the control group is lower than the mean difference of the experimental group. This reflects that the experimental group had shown a far larger improvement in vocabulary competence as compared to the control group.

TABLE I. GROUP STATISTICS

Group	Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference		
Control	Pretest	34	55.50	14.769	0.95		
	Posttest	34	56.24	16.360	0.85		
Experimental	Pretest	34	56.35	12.060	7.07		
	Posttest	34	64.21	15.965	7.97		

## 1. Research question 1

The first research question aimed to find if there is a significant difference in vocabulary competence between the method of using songs in YouTube and the traditional method of teaching. The results can be seen from the independent sample t-test in Table II.

TABLE II.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLE T-TEST

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variences		T-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confid Interval of t Difference Lower		
Posttest	Equal variances assumed	1.537	0.219	-2.770	66	0.007	-9.971	3.599	-17.157	-2.785	
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.770	64.467	0.007	-9.971	3.599	-17.160	-2.781	

Table II shows that there was a significant difference between the methods of teaching used for the experimental and control groups, where the p-value was 0.007. This is lower than the set criterion where the hypothesis will be rejected if  $p \le 0.05$ . Therefore, from Table II, the first null hypothesis is rejected and the first research question is answered, concluding that there is a significant difference in vocabulary competence between the method of using songs in YouTube and the traditional method of teaching.

## 2. Research question 2

The second research question intended to find out if there is a significant difference in vocabulary competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who underwent the traditional method of teaching. The results of the paired t-test can be seen in Table III.

TABLE III. PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST

		Paired Difference							
				Std.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Std.	Error					Sig. (2-
		Mean	Deviation	Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	tailed)
Pair 1	Control Group Pretest – Control Group Posttest	-0.853	6.738	1.156	-3.204	1.498	738	33	0.466
Pair 2	Experimental Group Pretest – Experimental Group Posttest	-7.971	17.960	3.080	-14.237	-1.704	-2.588	33	0.014

Table III demonstrates a clear picture of the statistic scores for both groups. The mean difference for the pretest and posttest of the control group is -0.853. On the other hand, the mean difference for the experimental group is -7.971 which reveals a larger difference. However, the p-value for the control is 0.466 which is higher than the criterion,  $p \le 0.05$ , therefore, it is not statistically significant. Thus, the second null hypothesis failed to be rejected, concluding that there is no significant difference in vocabulary competence between the pretest and posttest mean scores for the participants who underwent the traditional method of teaching.

# 3. Research question 3

The third research question intended to probe if there is a significant difference in vocabulary competence between the pretest and posttest mean scores for the participants who underwent the method of using songs in YouTube. The results can be seen in Table III above.

The p-value for the experimental group is 0.014, which is lower than the criterion,  $p \le 0.05$ ; therefore, there is a statistically significant difference. The third hypothesis is rejected, concluding that there is a significant difference in vocabulary competence between pretest and posttest mean scores for those who underwent the method of using songs in YouTube.

# B. Findings from Observations

Throughout the six-week time period of the treatment, both groups where observed for a total of 12 times. Each group was observed using an observation checklist, which comprised of four components. In general, the observations were carried out to examine the changes in the participants' vocabulary competence through the implementation of using songs in YouTube.

It was observed that during the implementation of the songs, the experimental group was divided into pairs and small groups of four. Throughout the activities, participants were seen to be very enthusiastic in the lessons as they enjoyed listening to songs projected using the YouTube website. However, there were participants who showed some confusion during the lesson, especially for the activities where they had to guess the meaning of words using the context and rhyming words. Nevertheless, as the activities went on, they revealed positive changes in interest as well as in vocabulary competence. They were able to answer the tasks given correctly and able to provide oral responses as well.

On the contrary, the same did not happen with the control group. They took a longer time to improve on their vocabulary competence through activities such as reading comprehension and grammar exercises focusing on the vocabulary component. They did not show much interest in the lesson conducted although there were some improvements in their vocabulary competence.

# C. Findings from Journal Entries

A total of 18 participants' journal entries were selected from the sample. Nine of the journal entries were from the participants in the experimental group, while the other nine were from the control group. These journal entries contained their responses and feelings towards the teaching methods in which they received.

The journal entries from the participants in the experimental group revealed positive feelings towards the method they received. They expressed that they were able to learn new words as well as ways of guessing meaning of words through the context of the songs provided. Most of them wrote that they enjoyed singing, listening to songs and viewing the video clips with lyrics, so they were able to follow the lessons well. Some mentioned that at first they could not capture the words while the songs were being played. However, after a few repetitions, they were able to hear the words thus improving their listening as well as reading skills.

As for the journal entries from the control group, some of the participants expressed that they felt the lessons were quite dry and monotonous. However, they were able to learn some new words. They felt that the teacher was more exam-oriented and focused more on techniques of answering questions for exam purposes.

On the whole, there were improvements in the vocabulary competence in both groups. The participants in both groups were able to participate in the activities. Nevertheless, the participants in the experimental group portrayed better enthusiasm in their vocabulary activities involving songs shown on YouTube as compared to the control group.

# V. DISCUSSION

This study was formulated to discover the improvement in vocabulary competence by using songs in YouTube which were carried out over the course of six weeks and a total of 12 sessions. The vocabulary pretest and posttest were administered with both groups at the beginning of the study and at the end of treatment period respectively. The data obtained was used to show the changes between the experimental and the control groups. As to provide in-depth knowledge of the findings, observations were also carried out during the English lessons for both groups. Both groups were observed by the researchers guided by a checklist. In addition to observations, the participants were required to write journal entries where 18 journal entries of the participants from the samples were selected to be reviewed.

Based on the quantitative findings and data obtained from the pretest and posttest, it was derived that the participants who went through the method of using songs in YouTube to improve vocabulary for six weeks experienced more significant improvement in their vocabulary competence. This was prevalent when the paired t-test was conducted and the mean difference obtained was larger than that of the control group. Throughout the six-week observational period, the researchers noticed changes in vocabulary competence among the participants though it did not take effect immediately. In addition, the changes were more consistent in the experimental group as compared to the control group. The participants in the control group did not show much improvement in their vocabulary competence as compared to the experimental group. Besides, through their journal entries, it was revealed that they found the lessons quite monotonous, and that their teacher probed too much for the answers. In other words, the lessons were more teacher-centred.

# VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the limitations the researchers have come across, there is a need for a further research to be conducted with a bigger sample size. It will help to obtain more data, confirm the findings and enable the drawing of a more concrete conclusion with regard to the effects of using songs to improve vocabulary competence. Furthermore, a longer experimental period is needed to enable the researcher to draw a more valid conclusion and to see whether the improvements are consistent. Apart from that, more efforts are needed to validate and confirm the findings especially in the transcription of data gained through observations.

#### VII. CONCLUSION

Like other learning activities, using songs to improve vocabulary competence among participants will only be effective if it is properly planned. There are several factors that contribute to the feasibility and effectiveness of such learning processes. The main focus of this study was to ascertain whether the implementation of songs in YouTube had any positive effects on the participants' vocabulary competence. As a matter of fact, the findings have shed light that the experimental group had far more significant improvement in their vocabulary competence as compared to the control group. This is because they went through the process of social interactions and discussions with their peers. They were given more opportunity to work independently in the target language as opposed to the control group. The control group, on the other hand, went through the traditional teacher-fronted approach and was given limited opportunity for interaction.

In conclusion, using songs in YouTube to improve the vocabulary competence among secondary school students is indeed an interesting and effective method. With proper planning and song selections, students will be able to learn more new words effectively.

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