

# A Review of Studies on action Songs among ESL Learners to Improve English

Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh and Sankaran Jeganmohan

**Abstract---** *This paper reviews literature on using songs particularly action songs among ESL/EFL students. Several recent studies have found out action songs help the pupils to improve their English language skills. The use of action songs is hoped to help the pupils to enjoy learning during English lessons and to help them to be more focused and active in the lessons. Findings from the reviewed revealed that songs particularly action songs can improve students' English proficiency skills, motivation and attitude with regard to the use of songs in classroom and teachers' and students' perception of using songs. It shows that songs strengthen memory and recall, increase language skills and promote social skills and cooperation.*

**Keywords---** *Action Songs, Active Participation, ESL Classroom, ESL Learners.*

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to converse and communicate in English has become increasingly important in today's era of globalisation. It cannot be refuted, as it is now the world's lingua franca. In many aspects of everyday life, the importance of English can be seen particularly in education, economics and also social interaction. The fact that strong communication skills have a huge effect on a country as a whole is undeniable.

In the setting of the Malaysian ESL classroom, it is normal to see students being passive during English lessons. One of the major problems faced by teachers is the inability of the students to express their views in the second language orally. Many studies reveal that pupils enjoy coming to class when teachers incorporate fun teaching such as using songs, games, technology based during the lesson. Teachers can aid students to improve their engagement through songs and thus encourage more engaging and meaningful involvement in the classroom.

Songs are a major part of human culture and society. Songs are becoming an essential part of our language learning, and they can be of great benefit when used in a language lesson (Jafre Abidin et.al., 2011). Thus, using songs can enhance learning among pupils. An example of a type of song which pupils prefer is action song.

This type of song is sung with actions involved and mimed. It is a powerful resource for the young learners in learning English language which helps in their language development. By essence, children love playing and singing songs and when exposed to specific English songs in the ESL classroom, they can get a lot of benefits. The main aim of using action songs in ESL classes is to allow pupils to move from singing the language in the songs to using it effectively in meaningful conversations. Thus, it is probably a very good idea to use action songs in an ESL classroom to promote better students' participation in the English lessons.

---

*Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh, English Language & Literature Department, Faculty of Language & Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.*

*Sankaran Jeganmohan, English Language & Literature Department, Faculty of Language & Communication, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.*

## II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Educators need to explore methods and materials that will best help these pupils because of the rapidly rising populations of English as second language (ESL) pupils in our schools. The purpose of this study is to explore and illuminate possible relationship between action songs and ESL pupils' participation level in class by establishing action songs as a basic tool in encouraging them to actively participate during the English lesson.

Hence, this paper seeks to present information on the issues related to using songs particularly action songs in an ESL classroom based on the past literature review done by other researchers. Through the use of document analysis technique, problems and findings examined by previous researchers addressing the usage of songs will be explicitly described in this paper in the form of a table, as shown below.

## III. REVIEW METHOD

No.	Title of the article, author, journal and year	Types of study	Research design	Main findings
1.	Article Title: Use of Action Songs and Total Physical Response to Promote Development of Listening Skills among Year 4, Low Enrolment-Tamil Vernacular Primary School Students in Malaysia. Author: Uthaya Kumar, S & Sandaran, S.C Year: 2018	Quantitative	Group-Experimental design	Result from post-test shows that positive correlation can be seen between students' performance and the intervention they underwent. It clearly shows a significant improvement in their scores of post-test.
2.	Article Title : Using Action Song to Improve the Ability in Using Punctuation Among Year Three Pupils Year: 2016	Mixed mode- Qualitative and Quantitative	Action Research	The test results showed that pupils have improved their use of full stop and comma accurately in the sentences after action song was used. Action song had boosted the enthusiasm of pupils to learn English.
3.	Article Title : Improving Students Vocabulary By Using Songs and Game Authors: Evi Susanti I Year: 2013	Quantitative	Action Research	Students scored 90.0 mean score test on cycle 3 showing significant improvement after using songs and games. Students began to be active and understood what they should do in the class after songs had been introduced.
4.	Article Title: The Effectiveness of Using Songs and Dialogues to Teach Students' Pronunciation Author: Ummul Izzah, Alim Sukrisno Year: 2017	Quantitative	Experimental	Results revealed that students from experimental group were able to pronounce most of the phrases correctly based on the post-test pronunciation transcription. Results also revealed that English songs have a significant improvement on students' pronunciation. Students also got enthusiastic in learning a new language when English songs are used in class.
5.	Article Title: Malaysian Teacher's Perspectives on Using Songs in English Language Teaching Author: Andrew Yau Hau Tse Year: January 2015	Quantitative	Descriptive study- Survey	90% of the ESL teachers agree that English curriculum should be included with songs. 73.3% ESL teachers (73.3%) agree that songs offer a better platform for young learners to express their skills in many language areas. 90.2% of teachers consider songs as essential for the development of listening skills.
6.	Article Title: Pupils' Motivation and Attitudes Towards the Use of English Songs in Rural Primary English Classroom	Quantitative	Survey Research Design	The usage of English songs in rural classroom resulted in a positive attitude displayed by weak and intermediate pupils. Both weak and intermediate pupils agreed

	Year: 2019			strongly with Item 4, stating that the songs used in the classroom make the learning process more exciting.
7.	Article Title: Pupils' Perceptions on the Use of Action Songs in Teaching and Learning Vocabulary Year: 2019	Qualitative	Action Research	Constructive feedbacks were exhibited by all of the pupils when action songs are used during the lesson. Interview results showed that all the pupils agreed that they were getting better in vocabulary.
8.	Article Title: The Effects of Action Song on the Development of Body-Image and Body-Part Identification in Hearing-Impaired Preschool Children Year: 1974	Quantitative	Experimental group	Post measure self-drawing task had shown point gains in five out of six participants. Test sign shows a statistically significant result as the p-value is 0.03 level. The outcome of this study indicates that music can be a valuable tool for teaching chosen concepts to hearing-impaired children.
9.	Article Title: Using Action Songs in Teaching Action Words to Young ESL Learners Year: 2016	Mixed Method	Action Research	The result shows that action words can be attained more effectively when action songs are used in the teaching and learning process. The results show that students prefer the incorporation of songs in the teaching of action words
10.	Article Title: Using Songs to Reduce Language Anxiety in Speaking English in ESL Classroom Author: Irina Emmanuella Anak Ejeng & Harwati Hashim Year: January 2020	Qualitative	-----	Pupils are scared to communicate in English as they are afraid of making mistakes and becoming the laughing stock of their friends. Pupils feel more comfortable communicating in English when songs are implemented in the lesson.
11.	Article Title: Effects of Songs on the Development of Vocabulary Among First Grade EFL Learners Author: Gulsum Cevikbas, Nergis Yumurtaci, Enisa Mede Year: 2018	Qualitative	Case study	Results revealed that most students have increased in terms of the number of correct answers in the post-test as compared to pre-test results after songs were used in class. Analysis of teacher's reflections show that students' vocabulary performance increased after songs were used.
12.	Article Title: Influence of Songs in Primary School Students' Motivation for Learning English in Lima, Peru Year: 2016	Qualitative and Quantitative	Mixed Method	Results demonstrate that songs had a positive impact on the students. Observations results show that positive changes can be seen on motivation level of students when songs are used in the classroom. Observation scores increase in all items such as participation, interest, pay attention and motivation from the class with no music to the class that used songs except in one item, which stays the same.
13.	Article Title: The Effect of Using Songs On Young Learners and Their Motivation for Learning English Year: October 2016	Quantitative	Experimental	Analysis showed that songs had a positive impact on the retention of young learner's vocabulary. Results also show that songs are appropriate for various types of learning and act as an important source of motivation for language learning.
14.	Article Title: The role of music and songs in teaching English vocabulary to students Author: Anna Kusnierek Year: 2016	Quantitative	Experimental and Survey	86% from 28 learners agree that learning vocabulary through songs is a good method. 72% of the students said that they find the lesson to be more appealing and liked the lesson when songs are used. Results indicate that the performance of experimental group is better than the control group in the post-test.

Based on 14 journal articles reviewed, the researcher can see a systematic and scientific procedure of data collection, compilation, analysis, interpretation and implication on using songs in an ESL classroom. The researchers of the 14 journal articles prepared a theoretical framework which justifies the use of songs as a resource for teaching and learning English among ESL/EFL learners. Most of the researchers of the 14 journal articles also discussed on the advantages and disadvantages on using songs to teach English proficiency skills among students and the potential benefits for students in learning language using this resource. The researchers have conducted an in depth study to get a valid result on using songs in an ESL/EFL classroom.

Besides that, after reviewing all the 14 articles, the researcher can see various research designs been used by the researchers of the articles. The differences between these studies are based on one group (with-in group design) and two groups (between-subjects design). Based on the findings of the 14 journal articles, the researcher can conclude that songs have a powerful impact on participants mind set and academic performance. This can be seen where all the journal articles agree that songs motivates active participation in learning. Based on the 14 journal articles reviewed, the types of analysis used are pre-test and post-test, SPSS: Paired t-test analysis, mean score, thematic analysis, percentages, descriptive analysis, statistical analysis, content analysis, variations and standard deviation. The researcher can see that out of 14 studies reviewed, researchers of previous study prefer to use Quantitative design to conduct their research compared to Qualitative design.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

Changes happening in developed countries pose a challenge to educational systems in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (R. Malik, 2018). The adjustment of the curriculum material to current societal needs becomes a critical problem to support this process. Thus, incorporating songs into almost any class can be a great way to teach content. Songs are incredibly significant for all children to learn and can contribute to greater brain growth, increased communication with people and even relief from stress. The study of using songs was carried out worldwide in many disciplines. Songs can be included as a part of language teacher's teaching repertoire. Songs incorporate authentic words, are easy to access and are enjoyable for the students. They are able to give priceless language practice in and out of classroom. However, in this part, the focus is only on using songs particularly action songs to improve students' English proficiency skills, motivation and attitude with regard to the use of songs in classroom and teachers' and students' perception of using songs. It reveals that songs strengthen memory and recall, increase language skills and promote social skills and cooperation.

Uthaya Kumarand Sandaran (2018) conducted a study to examine the usage of action songs and total physical response to facilitate Listening Skills growth before and after the intervention was used among Year 4 students in Low Enrolment Tamil Vernacular Primary school in Malaysia. In this study, the method used is quantitative. The study used group experimental design with 7 students and interview with five graduate English Language teachers. The findings in this study show that the mean score obtained for the pre-test and post-test are 34.29 and 50.57. These show a significant improvement between the mean scores. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a positive correlation between students' performance and the use of action songs in promoting development of Listening skills. Another finding in this study shows that novice teachers are more engaged in teaching listening skills compared to

senior teachers as they have been exposed to the new format of KSSR during their training period. In summary, they concluded that it is imperative for teachers to use action songs to develop students listening skills as action songs are highly entertaining.

A study by Yee Bee Choo and Nurdalilah Razemi (2016) was conducted to examine the use of action songs in enhancing punctuation use. They used action research as their method of research. The study was carried out with a sample of 18 students from a primary school in Johor, Malaysia. In the end, the researchers found out that the students had shown significant improvement in using full stop and comma accurately in sentences based on the test results. Pupils were also highly motivated and participated actively during the learning process as the rhythm of the action songs attracted their interest to take part in the lesson.

Evi Susanti (2012) carried out a study to investigate the use of songs and game to improve students' vocabulary achievement. The method used is action research with 24 second grade students to be observed on the achievement of the body parts vocabulary. The findings indicate that there was a significant difference between the mean score in cycle 3 which showed that all students in second grade of SD Kristen Kanaan Sungai Raya Dalam reached the Minimum Standard Scores (KKM). The findings also show that songs and games help students to be able to spell and write vocabulary correctly and to participate actively in teaching and learning process.

Ummul Izzah and Alim Sukrisno (2017) carried out a study to examine the efficiency of using songs and dialogues to teach students' pronunciation in pronouncing simple phrases. A total of 48 students from grade 7 had been chosen from class 7D and 7E. Each class consisted of 24 students and they were divided into experimental group (7D) and control group (7E). The findings revealed that experimental group students were able to pronounce most of the phrases correctly. The mean score pronunciation of post-test for experimental group is 28.95 compared to mean score of pre-test 21.875. Results revealed that English songs and dialogues have a significant improvement on students' pronunciation. Students also get enthusiastic in learning a new language when songs are used in class. In conclusion, the impact of English songs is very significant in students' improvement.

Andrew Yau Hau Tse (2015) conducted a study with the main objective to identify the perspective of ESL teachers on the use of songs to teach English to pupils. The study used descriptive study and survey design involving 60 Malaysian ESL teachers from Kuantan and Gambang primary schools. The primary school teachers were given questionnaires and they needed to complete all the eighteen questions. The study's findings are 90.2% of teachers consider songs as a valuable tool for fostering listening skills. 90% of ESL teachers in the study agree that songs should be included in the English curriculum. The ESL teachers used action songs as they believe songs postulate students the opportunity to present their skills in many language fields. Finally, 80% of teachers acknowledge that songs can appease the anxiety of the students in learning English. In summary, the data collected suggested that ESL teachers have a positive perception on the effectiveness of using songs in teaching English lesson.

Joyce Joel and Parilah Mohd Shah (2018) aimed to examine pupils' attitude and motivation by using English songs in rural primary English classroom. There were a total of 60 pupils who took part in this preliminary study. They were aged between 10 and 12 years old. They were considered weak and intermediate pupils. The pupils were asked to answer Likert Scale questionnaires in 30 minutes. Then, the data was analysed by looking at specific

evidence on attitudes and motivation of students in regard to using English songs in rural primary school. The findings show that both weak and intermediate pupils strongly agreed that learning English is more enjoyable through songs. In conclusion, the quantitative evidence from the questionnaires supports the usage of songs to increase students' motivation and attitudes in an ESL classroom.

Another study conducted by Maimunah Sohot and Melor Md. Yunus (2018) was carried out to determine the perception of Year 4 pupils on using action songs in enhancing vocabulary acquisition. This study used action research as the research design which involved 20 Year 4 pupils from an urban school. This study found out that not only pupils' motivation increased when suitable action songs were used but they also felt less burdened and could concentrate during the lesson. Thus, action songs lowers pupils' anxiety, removes their insecurities and encourages them to learn vocabulary.

There is a study by Galloway and Marjorie (2015) which presented the quantitative findings relating six hearing impaired children's body-image development and improvement by using action songs. The study finds out that five out of the six students exhibit point gains on the self-drawing post measure task. Finally, the sign test shows a significant difference between the pre and post scores at .03 level which indicates action songs can be used to teach hearing-impaired children.

Noor Arina Nadiah Abdul Razak & Melor Md Yunus (2016) conducted a study to find out the effectiveness of using action songs in helping low proficiency learners to improve their vocabulary acquisition. Mixed method which focused more on quantitative examines students' acquisition on action words using conventional teaching method versus integration of action songs. This study used 35 Year 3 students aged nine years' old. These students are from East Coast of Malaysia. The findings revealed that learners acquire action words more efficiently when action songs are used during the lesson. Secondly, results reveal that students enjoy learning vocabulary through action songs as it makes the learning more interesting and engaging. It also suggests that using action songs is a good approach to help low competence ESL learners in understanding action words.

Irina Emmanuella Anak Ejeng and Harwati Hashim (2020) conducted a study to find out the effectiveness of using songs to reduce students' anxiety. The method used for this study is Qualitative method. The result from the questionnaire shows students' anxiety and insecurities caused them to become unable to utter their words in English. Using songs to reduce students' anxiety proved to be successful in this study as songs help to motivate and boost their confidence. The result is parallel with some other studies such Izzah & Sukrisno (2017) who revealed that students get to pronounce the words correctly when songs are used and they become more confident to use the new vocabulary when they are speaking.

Gulsum Cevikbas, Nergis Yumurtaci & Enisa Mede (2018) conducted a case study to examine the development of vocabulary among first grade EFL learners with the use of songs. They used a bounded case study approach which includes picture drawings, teacher's reflections and pre and post vocabulary tests in exploring students' improvement in terms of their vocabulary. The finding of this study is the use of songs had positively affected every student's vocabulary development. Songs also had removed students' anxiety and provide students with an entertaining and stress-free environment.

A study conducted by Diego Arguirre, Daisy Bustinza and Mijail Garvich (2016) identified how songs can motivate ESL learners to learn English. Therefore a mixed-method design employed to analyse the data gathered from researchers' observation and students' questionnaires involving 56 students aged between 7 and 9 years old. The study concluded that students prefer to learn English through songs as songs had a positive impact on students' motivation. Students become more confident in learning another language as songs create a more interactive and conducive environment. Students were also participating actively during the lesson and were more committed in completing the activities carried out during the lesson.

Nihada and Alisa conducted a research study in 2016 with the objective to explore on how songs enhance vocabulary acquisition and the motivation level of students in learning English. The study used experimental design and questionnaire survey involving 28 second year students of primary school. The findings of this research show that some students were not keen on learning English through songs as they preferred to be in a quieter place. As a whole, this study reports that most of the students have a positive influence on the retention of the vocabulary when songs are used during the lesson. Findings also reveal that songs create an enjoyable atmosphere for students and this increases students' motivation in the class by participating actively during the lesson.

A study by Kusnierek (2016) meant to explore on the role of music and songs for better vocabulary memorisation. This research was conducted via a quantitative approach and the methods used were experimental and survey. It involved 28 fifth grade learners from a primary school. The result shows that there were two students who did not prefer learning vocabulary using songs. This result is similar to another study done by Nihada D. D & Alisa P (2016) that reported students did not like songs in class as they prefer to learn in a quieter place. Apart from the two students, the other students acknowledged that learning vocabulary through songs was a good method as songs help them to better memorise the vocabulary. The findings also reveal that students can be exposed to a wide range of new vocabulary through songs.

The studies reviewed showed that teachers to use action songs to develop students listening skills as action songs are highly entertaining (Uthaya Kumarand Sandaran, 2018), action songs attracted students' interest to take part in the lesson (Yee Bee Choo and Nurdalilah Razemi, 2016), songs and games help students to be able to spell and write vocabulary correctly (Evi Susanti, 2012), the impact of English songs is very significant in students' improvement (Ummul Izzah & Alim Sukrisno, 2017), ESL teachers have a positive perception on the effectiveness of using songs in teaching English lesson (Andrew Yau Hau Tse, 2015), the usage of songs to increase students' motivation and attitudes in an ESL classroom (Joyce Joel and Parilah Mohd Shah, 2018), action songs lowers pupils' anxiety, removes their insecurities and encourages them to learn vocabulary (Maimunah Sohoh and Melor Md. Yunus, 2018), action songs can be a used to teach hearing-impaired children (Galloway and Marjorie, 2015), using action songs is a good approach to help low competence ESL learners in understanding action words (Noor Arina Nadiyah Abdul Razak & Melor Md Yunus, 2016), students get to pronounce the words correctly when songs are used and they become more confident to use the new vocabulary when they are speaking (Irina Emmanuella Anak Ejeng & Harwati Hashim, 2020), Songs also had removed students' anxiety and provide students with an entertaining and stress-free environment (Gulsum Cevikbas, Nergis Yumurtaci & Enisa Mede, 2018), songs could assist students to complete the activities carried out during the lesson (Diego Arguirre, Daisy Bustinza & Mijail

Garvich, 2016), songs create an enjoyable atmosphere for students and this increases students' motivation in the class by participating actively during the lesson (Nihada & Alisa, 2016) and students can be exposed to a wide range of new vocabulary through songs (Anna Kusnierek, 2016).

## V. CONCLUSION

Songs can produce calm and positive atmosphere in the lesson. Based on Krashen's theory, calm atmosphere could reduce the affective filter and thus, the learners would be able to get the input easily. The strength of using songs in these studies was it actively involved the pupils. The pupils were required to do the actions while singing the song. This really helped the pupils who were passive to be more active during the lesson. Apart from that, using songs made the lessons fun and interesting. Action songs is used to encourage passive pupils to participate actively in the English lesson and it turns out to be very successful and able to solve the problems among the pupils.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Aguirre, D., Bustinza, D., & Garvich, M. (2016). Influence of Songs in Primary School Students Motivation for Learning English in Lima, Peru. *English Language Teaching*, 9(2), 178.
- [2] Anna Kusnierek (2016). The Role of Music and Songs in Teaching English Vocabulary to Students. (2016). *World Scientific News*, 43(1), 1–55.
- [3] Bee Choo, Yee & Razemi, Nurdalilah. (2016). Using Action Song to Improve the Ability in Using Punctuation among Year Three Pupils. *Journal of English Education*. 1. 124-132.
- [4] Çevikbaş, G., Yumurtacı, N., & Mede, E. (2018). Effects of Songs on the Development of Vocabulary among First Grade EFL Learners.
- [5] Džanić, N. D., & Pejić, A. (2016). The Effect of Using Songs on Young Learners and Their Motivation for Learning English. *NETSOL: New Trends in Social and Liberal Sciences*, 1(2), 40–54.
- [6] Ejeng, I. E. A., Hashim, H., & Duan, S. S. (2020). Using Songs to Reduce Language Anxiety In Speaking English in ESL Classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 10(2), 151–165.
- [7] Evi Susanti I, Improving student's vocabulary by using songs and game, *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran* Vol 2, No 4 (2013): April 2013 (2013)
- [8] Galloway, H. F., & Bean, M. F. (1974). The Effects of Action Songs on the Development of Body-Image and Body-Part Identification in Hearing-Impaired Preschool Children. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 11(3), 125–134. doi: 10.1093/jmt/11.3.125
- [9] Jafre, Mohamad & Pour-Mohammadi, Majid & Singh, Kiranjit & Azman, Rahima & Souriyavongsa, Thongma. (2011). The Effectiveness of Using Songs in YouTube to Improve Vocabulary Competence among Upper Secondary School Studies. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. 1.
- [10] Joel, J., & Shah, P. M. (2019). Pupils Motivation and Attitudes towards the Use of English Songs in Rural Primary English Classroom. *International Journal of New Technology and Research*, 4(12).
- [11] Kumar, S. U., & Sandaran, S. C. (2018). Use of Action Songs and Total Physical Response to Promote the Development of Listening Skills among Year 4, Low Enrolment-Tamil Vernacular Primary School Students in Malaysia. *LSP International Journal*, 5(2).
- [12] Malik, Ranbir. (2018). Educational Challenges in 21ST Century and Sustainable Development. *Journal of Sustainable Development Education and Research*. 2. 9. 10.17509/jsder.v2i1.12266.
- [13] Razak, N.A., & Yunus, M.M. (2016). Using Action Songs in Teaching Action Words to Young ESL Learners.
- [14] Sohot, M.B., & Yunus, M.M. (2019). Pupils' Perceptions on the Use of Action Songs in Teaching and Learning Vocabulary.
- [15] Tse, A. Y. H. (2015). Malaysian Teachers Perspectives on Using Songs in English Language Teaching. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 5(1), 87–89.
- [16] Ummul Izzah and Alim Sukrisno, The effectiveness of using songs and dialogues to teach students pronunciation, *English Education Journal* 7 (2017), no. 2.