

USING SONGS AND SHORT STORIES TO DEVELOP LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS AT A2 LEVEL

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Abstract: *The integration of authentic and semi-authentic materials such as songs and short stories in English language classrooms has gained increasing attention in recent years. At the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), learners often struggle to understand spoken input and express themselves orally due to limited vocabulary, slow processing speed, and lack of motivation. This article explores the pedagogical potential of songs and short stories as tools to enhance listening and speaking skills among A2 learners. Drawing on recent research in language pedagogy and applied linguistics, the study examines how these materials support language input, pronunciation awareness, vocabulary retention, and communicative fluency. Results from reviewed studies and classroom-based implementations reveal that songs and short stories promote deeper engagement, improve pronunciation accuracy, and strengthen the link between comprehension and production. The article concludes with practical strategies for teachers to integrate musical and narrative resources effectively into the A2 classroom context.*

Keywords: *A2 learners, songs, short stories, listening comprehension, speaking fluency, communicative competence*

Introduction

Listening and speaking are at the core of communicative competence, yet they remain among the most challenging skills for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), especially at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [1]. At this stage, learners can understand short phrases and simple sentences about familiar topics but often face difficulties

comprehending authentic spoken input or expressing ideas fluently and accurately. Their limited vocabulary range, restricted grammatical knowledge, and difficulties in processing natural speech speed often hinder oral communication[2].

Traditional language instruction at this level tends to prioritize grammar and vocabulary drills over active communication. Listening exercises in many A2 classrooms rely on textbook-based dialogues that, while controlled, lack the natural rhythm, stress, and intonation patterns of real speech. Similarly, speaking practice is often confined to mechanical question–answer exchanges or rote memorization. As a result, learners may understand classroom English but struggle with spontaneous conversation or real-life listening comprehension [3].

In recent decades, researchers and practitioners have emphasized the importance of authentic materials in bridging this gap. Among them, songs and short stories have emerged as highly effective pedagogical tools for developing receptive and productive language skills [4][5]. Songs expose learners to natural pronunciation, rhythm, and melody, while short stories present meaningful linguistic input through narrative structure and context. Both genres provide emotionally engaging and memorable input, which helps learners internalize vocabulary, syntax, and discourse patterns [6].

From a psycholinguistic perspective, songs aid *bottom-up processing*—the decoding of sounds, words, and intonation—by providing repetitive and rhythmically organized language input. Short stories, in contrast, support *top-down processing*, encouraging learners to use contextual clues, prediction, and inferencing to construct meaning [7]. When combined in an integrated curriculum, they can address both decoding and comprehension processes simultaneously, leading to more balanced language development.

Furthermore, both songs and stories contribute to the affective domain of learning. They reduce anxiety, increase motivation, and create positive emotional associations with the target language. As Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis* [8] suggests, learners acquire language more effectively when they are relaxed,

motivated, and emotionally engaged. Songs, through their rhythm and melody, can lower inhibition, while stories connect learning with imagination and empathy.

Therefore, this study explores how songs and short stories can be systematically used to enhance listening comprehension and speaking fluency among A2 learners of English. It examines their linguistic, cognitive, and affective benefits, reviews empirical findings from applied linguistics research, and proposes pedagogical strategies for integrating these materials into communicative language teaching. The goal is not only to improve language proficiency but also to demonstrate how culturally and emotionally resonant materials can transform the A2 classroom into an engaging, interactive, and effective learning environment.

Methods

This research is based on a qualitative literature review and pedagogical synthesis of empirical studies published between 2000 and 2024 in peer-reviewed journals and educational databases such as ERIC, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

Studies focusing on the use of songs or short stories in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

Research involving A1–B1 learners, with special reference to A2-level contexts.

Classroom-based interventions measuring effects on listening or speaking skills.

Studies addressing reading/writing only or focusing on higher proficiency levels (B2–C2) were excluded.

Selected studies were analyzed thematically to identify recurring benefits, challenges, and pedagogical strategies. Additional theoretical sources from applied linguistics were used to interpret findings.

Results

1. The Effect of Songs on Listening and Speaking Development

Songs serve as a powerful input source for listening comprehension. Due to their rhythmic and repetitive structure, they enhance learners' ability to recognize phonological patterns, stress, and intonation[4]. Studies show that regular exposure

to songs helps A2 learners decode connected speech, improve word segmentation, and internalize lexical chunks [6].

In speaking practice, songs encourage imitation of pronunciation, rhythm, and melody of the target language. Repetition of song lyrics supports pronunciation accuracy and fluency [8]. Moreover, singing reduces affective barriers such as anxiety, increasing learners' willingness to communicate.

2. The Role of Short Stories in Listening and Speaking

Short stories provide contextualized and meaningful listening input. They foster top-down comprehension strategies, enabling learners to predict, infer, and summarize information [9]. At the A2 level, stories with clear narrative structures—beginning, middle, and end—help learners follow the sequence of events and understand the gist even when some vocabulary remains unknown.

When retelling or discussing short stories, students practice speaking in a low-pressure, meaningful context. The narrative format naturally promotes coherence, sequencing devices, and functional language use such as describing, hypothesizing, or expressing opinions [5]. Empirical findings indicate that storytelling tasks improve both accuracy and fluency by linking listening input to oral output.

3. Integrated Use of Songs and Stories

Combining songs and short stories has shown synergistic effects. For instance, teachers can use a song to introduce a theme, followed by a story on a similar topic, thereby reinforcing key vocabulary and expressions [6] [8]. Classroom experiments demonstrate improved listening test performance and longer, more coherent spoken responses when both materials are integrated in thematic cycles.

Discussion

The analysis suggests that both songs and short stories are effective mediating tools between input and output for A2 learners. They facilitate bottom-up listening processes (decoding sounds and words) through repetition and rhythm, while also promoting top-down comprehension via contextual storytelling.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, songs help learners internalize prosody and natural speech rhythm, improving automaticity in listening and speaking [4]. Short stories, by contrast, stimulate cognitive engagement and discourse awareness, enabling learners to produce connected speech.

The affective dimension is equally important: songs and stories increase motivation, emotional connection, and classroom participation. Learners often feel less inhibited when speaking through story retelling or singing activities. This aligns with Krashen's [8] *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which suggests that lower anxiety and higher motivation facilitate input acquisition.

However, challenges remain. Selecting age-appropriate, level-adjusted materials is essential. Many authentic songs contain slang or cultural references difficult for A2 learners. Similarly, ungraded stories may overwhelm learners linguistically. Teachers must therefore use graded content, visual aids, and comprehension scaffolding before and after listening activities.

Conclusion

The findings of this study strongly support the use of songs and short stories as effective pedagogical resources for developing listening and speaking skills at the A2 level. Both forms of input provide authentic, motivating, and cognitively stimulating exposure to the English language, which bridges the traditional gap between comprehension and communication.

Through rhythmic repetition and natural pronunciation, songs enhance phonological awareness, intonation, and prosodic fluency, helping learners decode real-life speech more effectively. They also offer repeated exposure to lexical and grammatical patterns, reinforcing memory retention. Meanwhile, short stories enrich learners' contextual comprehension, narrative competence, and discourse organization. Retelling and discussing stories engage learners in meaningful speaking activities that go beyond isolated sentence production, encouraging them to form connected, coherent, and expressive speech.

Another crucial contribution of these materials lies in their affective value. Songs and stories naturally engage emotions, imagination, and empathy—factors

that foster intrinsic motivation and lower anxiety. This emotional engagement makes language input more memorable and increases learners' willingness to participate actively in communicative tasks. When learners enjoy the materials, they listen more attentively and speak more confidently.

However, the study also emphasizes the importance of careful material selection. Teachers must choose songs and stories appropriate for the A2 level—linguistically manageable, thematically relevant, and culturally sensitive. Simplified or graded content may be necessary to prevent frustration or cognitive overload. Additionally, digital platforms such as YouTube, BBC Learning English, and ESL podcast archives can provide valuable supplementary materials for modern classrooms.

In conclusion, songs and short stories are more than entertainment; they are powerful linguistic instruments that connect cognitive, emotional, and communicative dimensions of learning. When used strategically, they not only develop listening and speaking competence but also cultivate learners' confidence, cultural understanding, and love for language learning. Future studies should further investigate long-term effects of such integration, particularly in Central Asian and Uzbek contexts, where culturally adapted materials could play a significant role in making English language education more meaningful and sustainable.

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