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Impact of English Songs on Young Iranian EFL Learners' Homophone Learning: Literacy in Focus

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Abstract

Teaching English to children can be challenging, particularly when addressing homophones, which often create confusion in spoken and written communication. This study investigated the impact of English songs on the homophone learning of young Iranian EFL learners. Utilizing a quasi-experimental pretest-treatment-posttest design, the research involved two groups of 30 children: one group from 4 to 7 (preschool group) and another from 7 to 9 years old (primary school group). The participants in both groups listened to and sang along with songs, however, visual aids with spelling were applied for the participants of the 7 to 9-year-old group. Paired and independent t-tests were utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the songs in enhancing homophone learning. The results indicated that using songs significantly improved homophone learning of preschool and primary school learners, however, primary school students outperformed their preschool counterparts. Incorporating English songs, therefore, can be an effective strategy to improve the homophone learning of Iranian EFL children.

Keywords: English songs, Homophones, Language acquisition, Literacy development, Young Iranian EFL children

1. Introduction

Teaching the English language to children can be challenging, particularly regarding homophones. Homophones are words that share the same pronunciation but have different meanings and spellings. They are a

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specific type of homonyms, which encompass words that are either pronounced or spelled the same but carry distinct meanings (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1999). Homophones specifically refer to words that sound alike but may be written differently, such as "write" and "right" or "flower" and "flour" (Joshi, 2014). Homophones can occasionally lead to confusion in both spoken and written communication. The reason can be spelling differences, auditory similarity, memory challenges, contextual understanding, and language variations, which may cause children difficulties when learning English homophones. (Treiman & Cassar, 1996). However, understanding the context and recognizing the specific meanings and spellings of homophones are essential for accurate comprehension and usage.

Songs are a recognized tool for effective language learning due to their ability to engage students by increasing motivation and reducing anxiety (Bokiev et al., 2018; Kumar et al., 2022), creating positive learning environments, and enhancing memory retention (Febrina, 2023; Busse et al., 2018). Research suggests songs' utility across language instruction phases improves communicative competence (Febrina, 2023), while also promoting cultural awareness and connecting learners with new cultures (Lê, 2023), impacting both cognitive and emotional development (Bao, 2023).

Understanding and using homophones correctly can pose difficulties for young learners. However, incorporating songs into the teaching process can transform language instruction into an engaging and interactive experience, making learning both enjoyable and memorable (Moje et al., 2004). Using songs to teach homophones is an engaging and interactive method that can help young children learn and retain these important language skills (Browne et al., 2014).

Teaching homophones with songs and games has several benefits for young children's language development. One significant benefit is that it makes learning fun and engaging, which can improve children's motivation and interest in language learning. Research has shown that engaging children in learning activities can be an effective way to improve their academic performance (Ginsburg et al., 2008).

Another benefit of teaching homophones with songs is that it helps children remember the words and their meanings. Repetition is a key component of learning, and using songs and games to teach homophones allows for repeated exposure to the words in a fun and memorable way (Kuo et al., 2020). This repetition can help children remember the words and their meanings, improving their language skills and comprehension.

Several teaching methods are effective when using songs and games to teach homophones to young children. One effective method is to use interactive activities, such as matching games or fill-in-the-blank exercises, to reinforce the concepts taught in the songs (Kuo et al., 2020). These activities allow children to practice applying what they have learned in a fun and interactive way.

In summary, utilizing songs as a teaching method for homophones offers numerous benefits. The engaging and memorable nature of songs captures students' attention and aids in their retention of the concepts. By incorporating gestures, actions, and interactive activities, educators can create a comprehensive learning experience that enhances students' understanding of homophones. Through these effective teaching methods, songs can play a valuable role in facilitating the mastery of homophones in the classroom. So, the objectives of this study were structured to investigate the impact of English songs on the homophone learning of young Iranian learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Specifically, the study aimed to achieve the following objectives: 1. To assess the current level of homophone understanding; and 2. To examine the influence of English songs on homophone acquisition. These objectives are designed to provide a comprehensive framework for investigating the impact of English songs on homophone learning among young Iranian EFL learners, thereby contributing to the existing literature on literacy development in EFL contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Homophone

Homophones are words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings and spellings, which can pose challenges for language learners, particularly in developing accurate reading and writing abilities, especially for EFL learners (Sakuma et al.,1998; Madani & Mahmoodi Nasrabadi, 2017). And according to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary homophones are words that share the same pronunciation but have different meanings and spellings. They are a specific type of homonyms, which encompass words that are either pronounced or spelled the same but carry distinct meanings (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1999). Homophones specifically refer to words that sound alike but may be written differently, such as "write" and "right" or "flower" and "flour"(Joshi, 2014).

Teaching homophones to young children can be challenging as it requires them to understand the concept of words that sound the same but have different meanings. Using songs to teach homophones is an engaging

and interactive method that can help young children learn and retain these important language skills (Browne et al., 2014).

2.2. Importance of Songs in Language a Foreign Language

Providing children with information through multiple means, including music, songs, pictures, physical activities, and gestures, has been considered an effective way to support their learning, including their L2/FL learning. For example, in the Total Physical Response approach (Asher, 1986), an approach still frequently used in young L2/FL classrooms, learners are asked to respond to their teachers' or peers' commands (e.g., "Stand up!") by demonstrating physical actions. We also have some evidence showing that bilingual children are better than their monolingual counterparts at using a speaker's referential cues (e.g., eye gazing and pointing) to narrow down the meaning of words in fast mapping (Yow et al., 2017).

Songs and music have long been a popular instructional strategy for young L2/FL learners as well as young L1 learners. It is often believed that songs and music motivate children to learn the target language, and the rhythmic and structural properties of songs and music assist children's lexical memory (Davis, 2017).

Haghverdi and Abdpur (2013) investigate how songs and movies influence the language proficiency of high school students. The study involved 60 male and female students from Saee English Language Institute in Dehdasht, who were randomly assigned to either an experimental group or a control group for English learning. Data were gathered using a pre/post-achievement test and a questionnaire, both crafted by the researchers. The results from these tools were analyzed through independent samples t-tests and paired samples t-tests to assess the impact of songs and movies on language acquisition. The findings indicated that incorporating songs and movies significantly improved the students' skills in listening, reading, vocabulary, and grammar.

Chaingam and Suriyatham (2020) studied the effectiveness of using songs on vocabulary learning and retention. The participants of this study consisted of 23 primary school students. They were required to learn vocabulary by using three different songs: "How Far I'll Go," "Try Everything," and "Let It Go," and then they took a vocabulary test. The data were collected by English song activities and an English vocabulary test. The result showed that songs had a positive influence on vocabulary learning and retention. Using songs in class for primary students increased their vocabulary learning.

Hassani and Hadizadeh (2021) assessed the effect of using English songs on Iranian preschool students' speaking proficiency in Kerman. Fifty preschool students aged 5-6 participated in the study. At the beginning of the study, a pre-test of speaking was administered to the participants of the study. Then, they were assigned into two groups, 25 students were in the control group and 25 students were in the experimental group. English songs were used to expand the students' speaking proficiency in the experimental group and the participants of the control group utilized conventional methods of teaching speaking skills. After the treatment, a speaking post-test was administered to the participants of both groups to assess the effect of treatments on their speaking ability. The results of the study indicated that English songs had a significant effect on the speaking ability of Iranian preschool students in Kerman.

Magnussen and Sukying (2021) examined whether songs and total physical response (TPR) can facilitate preschoolers' vocabulary acquisition in a Thai EFL context. Seventy-two preschoolers, aged four to five, were taught 12 target words using TPR, songs, and a mix of both methods (TPR&S) in three classrooms for six weeks. The findings revealed that singing and TPR and the mix of both methods significantly improved the participants' vocabulary acquisition, with the (TPR&S) method having a more positive impact on the participants' vocabulary acquisition than either singing or TPR alone.

Rougnø (2021) found in her study of Norwegian first-graders that teaching through song showed significant vocabulary improvement. All learners had increased their vocabulary, particularly in words that were explicitly taught through song. Compared to the control group, the difference in improvement was subtle, making it impossible to conclude the superiority of techniques. Through a questionnaire, Rougnø (2021) discovered that all 102 teacher respondents used songs or music in their English lessons, and over 25% said they always used songs or music in their lessons. The post-test for the pupils revealed that the research group performed better on words taught in all the lessons of the course, and on non-transparent words, leading Rougnø (2021) to the conclusion that song might strengthen the learning of non-transparent words.

Herail (2022) examined whether teaching with songs and gestures is effective in promoting accurate use of English and motivation to participate in class orally, in speaking activities, and in improving the memorization of vocabulary in primary school. To answer these questions, multiple methods were used to gather data in a Portuguese 3rd-

grade class of 22 students over the course of three and a half months: observation grids, tests, and questionnaires. Results were satisfying overall whenever songs and gestures were used together: test grades were high and observation grids showed high vocabulary oral production and gesture reproduction. The students corroborated this in their questionnaires by agreeing in high numbers that songs and gestures helped them memorize English vocabulary.

Zhang et al. (2023) assessed the effect of a three-session classroom-based training program involving singing songs with familiar melodies on second-language pronunciation and vocabulary learning among ninety-five adolescent Chinese ESL learners (M = 14.04 years). Participants learned the lyrics in English of three songs whose melodies were familiar to them either by singing or reciting the lyrics, following a native English singer/instructor. Before and after training, participants performed two vocabulary tasks (picture-naming and word meaning recall tasks) and two pronunciation tasks (word and sentence oral-reading tasks). The results revealed that although both groups showed gains in vocabulary and pronunciation after training, the singing group outperformed the speech group. These findings support the value of using songs with familiar melodies to teach second languages at the early stages of learning in an ESL classroom context.

2.3. Literacy Development in the EFL Context: Strategies and Challenges

To effectively utilize songs as a teaching method for homophones, educators can employ several strategic approaches. First, the selection or creation of songs that specifically emphasize homophones is essential. The lyrics should be crafted to highlight these homophones within context, providing clear examples that illustrate their different meanings. Research indicates that songs with catchy melodies and rhythms significantly enhance memory retention, making it easier for students to recall the associated words and concepts (Febrina, 2023; Kumar et al., 2022). This aligns with findings that suggest music serves as an efficient tool in language instruction, combining linguistic elements with cultural themes to engage learners more deeply (Kumar et al., 2022).

In addition to carefully chosen lyrics, incorporating gestures or actions into the song can further enrich the learning experience. By performing specific movements or hand gestures that correspond to each homophone, students can reinforce their understanding through visual and kinesthetic learning modalities. This multi-sensory approach has been shown to facilitate deeper cognitive connections, as it allows students to link

auditory information from the song with physical actions (Bokiev et al., 2018). Such integration of movement not only aids in memory retention but also enhances student engagement, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective (Bokiev et al., 2018).

Moreover, interactive activities can be seamlessly integrated into song-based lessons. For instance, teachers can develop worksheets or games that require students to identify homophones within the lyrics or match them with their correct meanings. These activities promote active participation and provide opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts (Kumar et al., 2022). Engaging students in this manner not only reinforces their understanding of homophones but also fosters a collaborative learning environment where students can learn from one another (Febrina, 2023).

2.4. Related Studies in Learning Homophones

Studies of children's acquisition of homophones or pseudo-homophones (familiar words used with a novel meaning, e.g., egg used to refer to a jackhammer) in laboratory settings generally support the idea that children under the age of five adhere to a one-to-one mapping assumption and fail to learn homophones. In particular, when the contrastive meaning of a word is available, children struggle to interpret even familiar homophones and appear not to entertain the possibility that a familiar word might have a second meaning but do not typically have trouble learning the meaning of a completely novel word (Casenhiser, 2005; Storkel & Maekawa, 2005 for important exceptions). Such findings indicate that learning a new phonological string with a new meaning may be easier than attaching a new meaning to an existing phonological form. These studies constitute strong support for the use of a one-to-one mapping assumption as a guiding principle for word learning. In controlled settings, children struggle to learn homophones.

Because homophones are difficult to learn, we expect that they should be absent or dispreferred in languages. In line with this idea, several studies revealed some diachronic pressures against homophony (Wedel et al., 2013). For example, Wedel et al. (2013) showed that two sounds are less likely to merge if they result in a larger amount of homophony in the language. Yet, despite the presence of such pressures, and children's learning difficulties, homophony is a common occurrence across languages (about 4% of word forms are homophones, Dautriche et al., 2015), especially among shorter words, which are the most frequently used part of the lexicon (Piantadosi et al., 2012). This fact seems to challenge theories arguing that the properties of language are shaped by

biases and limitations on human cognitive systems (e.g., Christiansen & Chater, 2008).

One possibility is that children are equipped with cognitive structures to support multiple meanings at a very young age. Studies of polysemy find cross-linguistic regularities in polysemes that point to likely cognitive biases in how people entertain polysemous meanings (Srinivasan & Rabagliati, 2015). Children's ability to interpret multiple related meanings appears to develop in tandem with certain conceptual abilities. For example, as children become better able to recruit world knowledge and context during language processing, they become able to interpret different classes of denominal verbs (Srinivasan & Barner, 2013). Lippeveld and Oshima-Takane (2015) found evidence that children's experience with polysemous words contributes to their ability to interpret novel instances of such words. In their study, two-and-a-half-year-olds whose mothers produced both noun and verb tokens of familiar noun/verb polysemes during a brief interaction were able to interpret denominal verb uses of a novel noun, but those children whose mothers did not produce cross-category uses of noun/verb polysemes showed chance performance at the task.

Considering the influence of English songs on vocabulary learning and the impact of understanding homophones on literacy development, this study investigated the influence of English songs on the learning of homophones among young Iranian EFL learners, with a particular emphasis on literacy development. In this regard, the researchers formulated the following three research questions:

1. Does using songs significantly affect the homophone learning of Iranian EFL preschool learners?
2. Does using songs significantly affect the homophone learning of Iranian EFL primary school learners?
3. Does literacy make any difference in the homophone learning of Iranian EFL young learners?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design due to its primary goal of investigating the causal relationship between the use of songs as a teaching tool and the homophone learning outcomes of Iranian EFL preschool and primary school learners. Quantitative research is particularly suitable for examining objective theories and relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the independent variable was the use of songs, and the dependent variable was

homophone learning, measured objectively using Oxford Placement Test, as well as pre-and post-tests. Statistical analysis of the test scores enabled the researchers to determine the significance of any observed differences in homophone learning between groups and the potential generalizability of findings to similar EFL learner populations (Muijs, 2010). Moreover, practical and ethical considerations within the participating schools precluded the random assignment of students to treatment conditions (Cook & Campbell, 1986). Consequently, a quasi-experimental design was employed. This design involved comparing the homophone learning outcomes of a preschool class with that of a primary class receiving song-based instruction (Campbell & Stanley, 2015).

3.2. Participants

This investigation involved children aged 4 to 9 attending Margosian Academy, divided into two age groups: 4-6 and 7-9. Participants were selected based on their scores on the Oxford placement test, using a convenience sampling method due to logistical constraints (Cohen et al., 2002). While this non-random approach limits the generalizability of findings (Gall et al., 1996), its efficiency was suitable for this exploratory study examining the impact of English songs on homophone learning in EFL learners, and a quasi-experimental design helped mitigate potential threats to internal validity (Anderson-Cook, 2005). Conducted at Margosian Academy, a private coeducational school in Isfahan, Iran, during the 2023 academic year, the study included 60 Persian-speaking children (41 male, 19 female) aged 4-9. These students were assigned to two groups: a preschool group and a primary school group.

Table 1. *Demographic Background of the Participants*

No. of Students	60
Gender	Female (n=19)- Male (n=41)
Native Language	Persian
Age	4-9
Institute	Margosian Academy, Isfahan, Iran
Academic Years	2023

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. The Oxford Placement Test

This study, conducted within an institutional setting to select elementary-level participants, utilized homogeneous classes. To further ensure consistency across groups, the Oxford Placement Test for Young Learners was administered before the pretest. This test is considered reliable and valid, having been used with learners globally (Allen, 1992). The test comprises two sections: Language Use and Listening, each with

individual scores. The Language Use section assesses vocabulary, functional language, and grammar, while the Listening section evaluates the ability to listen for detail and gist through short and extended listening tasks.

3.3.2. Pre-test and Post-test

The Pre-test and post-test were based on Dear Deer: A Book of Homophones (Gene Barretta, 2007) and the song that was worked on in class. The tests were identical for two age groups, and both the pre-test and post-test questions were the same. The teacher designed the tests utilizing the final exams at the academy, and the time given to answer the 20 questions was 20 minutes. The test items required arranging the words in the homophonic book in the same order as the song in the video, along with the corresponding images. Arranging the words was preferred over multiple-choice tests because it requires active participation from learners, tests deeper understanding, reduces the guessing, and necessitates that students rely on their knowledge and understanding rather than chance. The songs were selected based on the children's level. These pre-tests and post-tests enabled us to measure the impact of our teaching methods and evaluate the effectiveness of the songs in improving homophone learning.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process occurred at Margosian Academy over 45 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. As per the academy's guidelines, the 'Family and Friends' book was used as the primary curriculum (Appendix B). For both groups, the last 15 minutes of each session were dedicated to homophone instruction using the Dear Deer book by Gene Barretta (2007) and various songs from StoryBots. The songs were carefully selected based on the children's English proficiency level. These songs were presented via video format, incorporating both images and spelling. This visual component directly addressed literacy development alongside auditory learning for older participants.

Throughout these sessions, the groups received explicit instruction on homophones. This included direct explanations of their meanings and spellings, contextual examples, and interactive activities. For the 7-9-year-old group, spelling was visually emphasized using color-coded words displayed beneath the images in the videos. Both age groups participated in sing-alongs and repetitive listening activities to enhance memory and pronunciation. Implicit feedback was provided through encouragement and positive reinforcement during sing-alongs and

interactive exercises. Teachers also offered brief corrections during these activities, however, the priority was engagement, so interrupting the songs was minimized.

For the 4-6 year old experimental group, data collection was primarily observational. Teachers recorded participation levels during sing-alongs and engagement in interactive activities. Given their age, pre- and post-tests were administered individually and orally, focusing on comprehension and word association skills. Children were shown pictures and asked to name the objects, then asked to identify which of two spoken homophones matched the image. To accommodate this group's shorter attention spans and limited literacy skills, testing sessions were kept brief and engaging.

3.5. Scoring Stage

The scoring of both pre-and post-tests was based on a simple, objective criterion: the accurate arrangement of words and matching of associated images in the order presented in the "Dear Deer" homophone book and StoryBots songs. A reference key was developed directly from the sequence of homophones as they appeared in the song lyrics and book illustrations.

Each correctly arranged word-image pair was awarded one point. Since the tests consisted of 20 items (word-image pairs), the maximum possible score for each test was 20. Points were only awarded for completely correct matches; partially correct answers did not receive any credit. This approach was adopted to ensure a clear, unambiguous measure of the participants' understanding and recall of the specific homophone pairs covered during the study.

The scoring process was carried out by the researcher, and to ensure reliability, a second independent rater scored a randomly selected 30% of the tests. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, resulting in a coefficient of .92, indicating a high level of agreement between the two raters. This rigorous scoring procedure was designed to minimize subjectivity and enhance the validity of the research findings (adapted from guidelines in Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.6. Data Analysis Procedure

Both paired and independent t-tests were used as the statistical techniques. A T-test is a statistical test that is used to compare the means of two groups. In this research, T-tests were utilized to analyze the data, considering songs as independent variables and homophones as the dependent variable. Paired T-test was run to answer the first and the

second research questions. To answer the third research question, an independent T-test was utilized.

4. Results

As was delineated before, data analyses were run to answer the research questions of this study.

4.1. Results of Research Question One

The pre-and post-test scores of the homophone test of preschool learners were compared using a paired-sample t-test, the findings of which are presented below.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-test Scores of Pre-School Learners*

	Mean	**N**	**SD**	**Std. Error Mean**
Pre-test	7.8	30	.8	.14
Post-test	15.16	30	1.11	.2

As shown in Table 2, the mean of the post-test scores of preschool learners is higher than that of the pre-test. Yet, we need to check the following table to see if the difference between the two means was significant.

Table 3. *Paired Samples T-Test for Pre- and Post-test of Pre-School Learners*

				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**	**Lower**	**Upper**	**t**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**
post – pre	7.36	1.18	.21	6.92	7.81	33.98	29	.00

As shown in Table 3, there was a statistically significant difference in the homophones scores from the pre-test (M = 7.8, SD = .8) to the post-test (M= 15.16, SD = 1.11), t (29) = 33.98, p= .00 (two-tailed). The mean increase in vocabulary scores was 7.36, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 6.92 to 7.81. The eta squared statistic (.95) indicated a large effect size. It can be concluded that songs improved the homophone learning of preschool learners.

4.2. Results of Research Question Two

The second research question sought to find whether using songs significantly affected the homophone learning of Iranian EFL primary school learners. The pre-and post-test scores of the homophone test of primary school learners were compared using a paired-sample t-test, the findings of which are presented below.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics of Pre- and Post-test Scores of Primary School Learners*

	Mean	N	SD	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	11.5	30	14.65	2.67
Post-test	17.8	30	.99	.18

As shown in Table 4, the mean of the post-test scores of primary school learners is higher than that of the pre-test. Yet, we need to check the following table to see if the difference between the two means was significant.

Table 5. *Paired Samples T-Test for Pre- and Post-test of Primary School Learners*

				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
post – pre	6.3	14.83	2.7	.76	11.83	2.32	29	.02

As shown in Table 5, there was a statistically significant difference in the homophones scores from the pre-test (M = 11.5, SD = 14.65) to the post-test (M= 17.8 SD = .99), t (29) = 2.32, p= .02 (two-tailed). The mean increase in vocabulary scores was 6.3, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .76 to 11.83. The eta squared statistic (.15) indicated a medium effect size. It can be concluded that songs improved the homophone learning of primary school learners.

4.3. Results of Research Question Three

The third research question was: Does literacy make any difference in the homophone learning of young Iranian EFL learners? An independent samples t-test was run to compare the post-test scores of preschool and primary school learners.

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics of Post-Test Scores of Both Groups*

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
pre-school learners	30	15.16	1.11	.2
primary school learners	30	17.8	.99	.18

Primary school learners obtained higher scores in the post-test of homophones (Table 6). An independent-sample t-test was run to see if the difference between the two groups was significant.

Table 7. *Independent Samples T-Test for Post-Test Scores of Both Groups*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.95	.33	-9.63	58	.00	-2.63	.27	-3.18	-2.08
Equal variances not assumed			-9.63	57.26	.00	-2.63	.27	-3.18	-2.08

There was a significant difference between post-test scores of preschool (M = 15.16, SD = 1.11) and primary school (M = 17.8, SD = .99) groups; t (58) = -9.63, p = .00, two-tailed) (Table 7). The magnitude of the differences in the means was large (eta squared = .61). In general, the primary school group outperformed the preschool group in the homophone post-test.

5. Discussion

The first research question of the study sought to find whether using songs significantly affected the homophone learning of Iranian EFL preschool learners. The results of comparing the pre-and post-test scores of preschool learners revealed that songs improved the homophone learning of preschool learners. This suggests that even at a young age, the combination of auditory and visual stimuli provided by songs can effectively enhance vocabulary acquisition, specifically for challenging concepts like homophones.

The finding for the beneficial effect of songs for preschoolers is consistent with Magnussen and Sukying (2021), who examined whether songs and total physical response (TPR) can facilitate preschoolers' vocabulary acquisition in a Thai EFL context. Seventy-two preschoolers aged four to five, were taught 12 target words using TPR, songs, and a mix of both methods (TPR&S) in three classrooms for six weeks. The findings revealed that singing and TPR and the mix of both methods significantly improved the participants' vocabulary acquisition, with the (TPR&S) method having a more positive impact on the participants' vocabulary acquisition than either singing or TPR alone.

Besides, Hassani and Hadizadeh (2021) assessed the effect of using English songs on Iranian preschool students' speaking proficiency in Kerman. Fifty preschool students aged 5-6 participated in the study. At

the beginning of the study, a pre-test of speaking was administered to the participants of the study. Then, they were assigned into two groups, 25 students were in the control group and 25 students were in the experimental group. English songs were used to expand the students' speaking proficiency in the experimental group and the participants of the control group utilized conventional methods of teaching speaking skills. After the treatment, a speaking post-test was administered to the participants of both groups to assess the effect of treatments on their speaking ability. The results of the study indicated that English songs had a significant effect on the speaking ability of Iranian preschool students in Kerman. This study is relevant because, like our research, it demonstrates the positive effect of English songs on language learning outcomes for young Iranian learners. While their focus was on speaking proficiency, it provides further evidence that songs are an effective pedagogical tool for this specific population.

The second research question aimed to determine if songs significantly affected homophone learning in primary school learners. The findings indicated a positive impact, with songs enhancing homophone acquisition in this age group as well. The results of comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of primary school learners revealed that songs improved the homophone learning of primary school learners. This extends the evidence supporting the use of songs in EFL classrooms, demonstrating their effectiveness across different age ranges within elementary education.

Consistent with the finding of this question, Chaingam and Suriyatham (2020) studied the effectiveness of using songs on vocabulary learning and retention. The participants of this study consisted of 23 primary school students. They were required to learn vocabulary by using three different songs: "How Far I'll Go", "Try Everything" and "Let It Go", then took a vocabulary test. The data were collected by English song activities and an English vocabulary test. The result showed that songs have a positive influence on vocabulary learning and retention. Using songs in class for primary students increased their vocabulary learning. Students also retained the vocabulary after one week at (52.17%).

Rougnø (2021) found in her study of Norwegian first-graders that teaching through song showed significant vocabulary improvement. All learners had increased their vocabulary, particularly in words that were explicitly taught through song. Compared to the control group, the difference in improvement was subtle, making it impossible to draw a conclusion about the superiority of techniques. This study, while

conducted in a different context (Norwegian first-graders), supports our findings by showing that songs can lead to vocabulary gains. However, the subtle difference compared to the control group highlights the importance of considering other factors that might influence learning, such as literacy skills, which our study further investigates.

The third research question explored the influence of literacy on homophone learning, revealing that primary school learners outperformed their pre-school counterparts. This underscores the critical role of literacy skills in mastering complex linguistic concepts such as homophones. While songs benefit both groups, the ability to read and connect spellings to sounds appears to provide a significant advantage.

This aligns with theories of language acquisition, such as the "Lexical Quality Hypothesis" (Perfetti, 2007), which posits that strong phonological and orthographic representations are crucial for reading comprehension and vocabulary development. The primary school students, with their developing literacy skills, likely possessed more robust lexical representations, enabling them to better process and retain the information presented in the songs.

Furthermore, the study's findings can be viewed through the lens of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), which emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning. The older learners, having more experience with formal education and literacy instruction, were likely better equipped to engage with the learning materials and benefit from the teacher's guidance. The integration of visual aids (spellings) for this group served as an effective scaffolding strategy, facilitating their understanding and retention of homophones.

The finding regarding literacy and the superior performance of primary school learners contrasts, in a way, with the results regarding the impact of songs on preschool learners (research question 1). While songs significantly improved homophone learning for pre-schoolers, their lack of developed literacy skills limited their ability to fully leverage the intervention compared to the primary school group. This suggests that while songs are a valuable tool for vocabulary acquisition at a young age, literacy development is a crucial factor in maximizing the benefits of such interventions, particularly when dealing with complex linguistic features like homophones. Also, compared to results from question two (research question 2), primary learners could use spelling to improve their word meaning to the extent that pre-schoolers couldn't benefit from. The obtained result corresponds with the finding of Davis's (2017) study that confirmed that songs and music motivate children to learn the target

language and that the rhythmic and structural properties of songs and music assist children's lexical memory.

This highlights the interplay between auditory learning (songs) and literacy development (reading) in EFL education. Future research should explore how to best integrate these two modalities to maximize learning outcomes for young language learners. This underscores the importance of incorporating literacy-based activities alongside song-based instruction, particularly for older learners who have already begun to develop their reading and writing skills.

6. Conclusion and Implications of the Study

This study investigated the effect of English songs on homophone learning among young Iranian EFL learners. The findings revealed that songs significantly improved homophone acquisition for both preschool and primary school students, with primary school learners demonstrating greater gains.

These results have several important implications for students, teachers, and educational institutions. For students, the incorporation of songs offers a fun and engaging method for enhancing vocabulary acquisition, particularly for complex concepts like homophones. Songs can also improve listening comprehension and increase motivation. Moreover, students benefit from combining literacy-based activities with song-based instruction. For teachers, the research suggests that songs are an effective pedagogical tool that should be incorporated into lesson plans, especially when teaching challenging language aspects. Teachers can further enhance the learning experience by using multisensory activities and carefully selecting age-appropriate materials, supplementing them with explicit spelling and grammar instruction for older learners. Educational institutions should recognize the value of song-based learning by incorporating it into curriculum development, providing professional development opportunities for teachers, and allocating resources for high-quality learning materials.

Despite the insightful findings brought about by the present investigation, some limitations need to be pointed out. First of all, findings from such a small-scale research cannot be assumed to generalize to other contexts. In addition to the limited sample of the subjects, the time span during which the teaching procedure took place was limited. Further studies with different materials and larger sample sizes in different contexts are needed to increase the generalization of the findings. Another limitation of the study was related to homophone complexity. Some

homophones may be inherently more difficult for EFL learners to grasp than others which might influence the findings and conclusions.

Future researchers are recommended to conduct a longitudinal study to investigate and evaluate the use of songs in vocabulary learning, especially homophones. One possible research method is design-based research, which allows a researcher to see how teaching homophones by song can be revised and improved further. This could potentially yield a more in-depth understanding as well as more rigorous practical guidelines for an L2 context. In addition to vocabulary, future studies can be extended to other components of language, such as listening, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar.

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