

Using Song Lyrics in the Classroom: Assessing the Utility of Song Lyrics for the Acquisition of a Foreign Language

Besarta Zhaku-Kondri
Veleshta, 6334, Struga Macedonia
arta.zh@hotmail.com

Keywords: Song lyrics, Foreign language acquisition (English), Pre-test, Post-test, Primary school

Abstract. This study examines the effect of the song lyrics in acquiring a foreign language. Moreover, it shows how the use of the song's lyrics, such as the lyrics of the famous songs, increases the pupils' ability to understand the spoken and written form of English, and their ability to recognize the written form of the new vocabulary. Moreover, it shows the usefulness of song lyrics in practicing grammar of the target language. Furthermore, this study examines the effect of using song lyrics in increasing pupils' motivation in learning a foreign language. The main objective of the study is not just to discover whether the lyrics of the songs have a positive effect in acquiring a foreign language, but to discover why the use of song lyrics in the classroom is effective in English language learning. To achieve this aim, twenty-three eight grade and thirty- four seven grade learners were examined so fifty-seven pupils who study English as a foreign language. This research took place in the primary school Nuri Mazari in Dollogozhda, Struga. The learners were divided into two groups, the control and the experimental group. Each group contains one eight-grade class and one seven-grade class. Both of the groups took a pre- and a post-test. At the beginning of the study, pupils took the pre-test. It examined the learners' current knowledge about English. At the end of the study, pupils took the post-test, which examined the learners' knowledge after the study took place. In this way, the learners' progress in learning English and the effect of song lyrics in pupils' motivation is more obvious. The pre-test results of the control group were a little bit higher than the experimental group. However, the results gathered from the post-test indicate that the experimental group who used song lyrics outperformed the control group who did not use song lyrics.

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning a foreign language is not easy; therefore, teachers should find different methods to make the lessons more enjoyable. Using songs in the classroom would be a great way of teaching English. Nowadays it is easier for the teachers to find songs and song lyrics because they can find them on the Internet. There are numerous ways and activities that teachers can use the songs for language learning. However, teachers should be very careful in selecting songs, in order to have positive effects in language learning. They should meet the pupils' needs and the requirements of the lesson.

1.1 Research Hypotheses

-The use of song lyrics in foreign language classrooms has a positive effect in practicing

grammar of a foreign language

- Song lyrics enhance the pupils' ability to understand the spoken and written form of English, and their ability to recognize the written form of new vocabulary
- The use of song lyrics in the classroom enhances the pupils' motivation towards learning a second language.

2. Literature review

Music has been used for ESL/EFL class for decades (Grünert, 2009, p. 2) [1]. However, the development of technology has made changes in the usage of songs for learning purposes. Nowadays, it is easier for the teachers to use songs in the classroom (Schoepp, 2001) because they can find the songs and the lyrics on the Internet. In his article, Reasons for Using Songs in the ESL/EFL Classroom he has studied the work done by other researchers, Gugliemino (1986), Cullen (1999), Krashen (1982), Saricoban and Metin (2000), Eken (1996, p. 46) etc. In primary schools, the foreign language should be learned in an enjoyable way [2]. The songs are a type of class activities which are considered as enjoyable and stress free for language learning (No Author, 'Teacher's page: Methodology,' BBC, 2010). It is mentioned in this article that songs in combination with rhymes and rhythms are very useful in learning the language, the intonation and the pronunciation of the language, which they are learning [3]. The usage of songs in the target language learning means the opportunity to develop the four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing (Grünert, 2009, p. 10). According to him, rehearsal is the most important factor that helps people to put things they learn in their long-term memory. Moreover, Grünert (2009) considers songs as the most suitable activity for rehearsal [1]. Children like to repeat things; even though they do not know their meaning, their desire to repeat things, makes children able to remember them (Nelson, 1983, p. 45) [4]. LeLoup and Ponterio are two researchers who have studied the use of songs in the classroom. They suggested that the song lyrics serve as authentic materials in the target language classes. Moreover, they stated that the use of songs in foreign language classes is very practical; teachers can use the songs for different activities and purposes. Songs can serve as vocabulary activity, presenting or reinforcing the new vocabulary; grammar activity, reinforcement of the particular grammar structure; listening activity, practicing listening skills, etc [5]. According to Grünert (2009) "A song is a lot more than just words on paper. It conveys a message"(p. 8) [1]. LeLoup and Ponterio (2001) mentioned that the enjoyable aspect of the songs helps the learner to learn easier and to remember better words and expressions that they have learnt through songs in the target language; moreover, using songs in the classroom serves as an enjoyable activity for foreign language teachers, too [5]. However, Sears (1998) found "rhymes and songs are not only an enjoyable means of reinforcing second language students' language learning; they are also a valuable potential means of giving very young children an understanding of the use of text to express meaning" (p. 140). In the target language classes, where L2 learners are children, the use of elements form from the children's own culture will increase the effectiveness of the use of music, songs and rhythm in the classroom (Sears 1998, p. 123); moreover, children's familiarity with the songs is an important aspect of the use of songs in the classroom [6]. Mishan (2005), claims that in English language teaching classes, learners are familiar with the English songs (p. 196) [7].

3. Research methodology

3.1 Description of the study procedure

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of the song's lyrics in acquiring English as a foreign language by Albanian primary school pupils. The activities of this research took place in the state primary school Nuri Mazari in Dologozhda, Struga. For doing this research in this school,

I asked for permission from the school authorities. Moreover, I had a meeting with the children's parents and explained to them what the research was about, and then I asked them for permission to observe their children. Since I had the permission from the school authorities and the pupils' parents to observe the learners and to do the study, I observed the learners for eight weeks.

3.2 Forming the groups, describing each group

In all state primary schools in Macedonia, school authorities arrange students into groups. They were arranged into groups in the first grade, and they were not rearranged each year. For this study, each group had a different name. One of these groups was the experimental group and the other was the control one. I as their teacher randomly decided which the experimental group was and which the control one was. Since these were two different groups, I did not use the same way of teaching in both groups.

The Control group received three English lessons per week. During each class, the control group received teacher instruction lessons based on the course book material. The experimental group also received three English classes per week. However, in addition, to the teacher instruction lessons and the usage of the same textbook as the control group, the experimental group also received song's lyrics.

3.3 Participants

Fifty-seven primary school pupils, who study English as a foreign language participated in this research. The number of pupils was not the same in each class. Twenty-three eight grade and thirty-four seven-grade learners were examined. The learners were divided into two groups, the control and the experimental group. Each group contains one eighth grade class and one seven grade class. Both of the groups took a pre- and a post-test.

3.4 Materials

3.4.1 Textbook

Dream Team is a set of books; it consists of four series, Dream Team-Starter, Dream Team 1, Dream Team 2, and Dream Team 3. These books are designed for different levels, and they are appropriate for foreign learners of English. Each of them consists of two books, Dream Team-Teacher's Book and Dream Team Student's Book, a workbook, cassettes and a test booklet. Eight-grade learner use Dream Team 3 and seven-grade learners use Dream Team 2.

3.4.2 Digital materials, song based lessons for ESL/EFL teaching

Nowadays is not difficult to find song lyrics since teachers can find them on the Internet. Many web pages provide the song and the song's lyrics at the same time. Teachers just have to be careful in choosing the songs' lyrics for using in the classroom. They have to be appropriate for the context, pupils' level and the purpose of learning.

3.4.3 Examples of song's lyrics

The tables, that are given below, are created to show the most important aspects of the song lyrics, such as, the topics that are taught through this particular song, the new vocabulary that is practiced by using this game and song, language skills that the learners develop, language expressions, and type of the lesson

Table 1. An example of the main aspects of one of the songs used for the research, the song called Hurt-Christina Aguilera.

| Song | Topics | Tenses/verbs | Would -I would/Would I.? / I wouldn't |
|--------------------|------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Christina Aguilera | Vocabulary | Saw, told, walked, knew, know, done, forgive, hurt, hurting, feel, tell, was, | Language expressions |

| | | | |
|--|----------------------|--|---|
| | | help, looking, are, am do, have, look, see, looking back, try, etc | |
| | Language skills | Listening Reading Speaking Writing | 1 st -level heading |
| | Language expressions | 1 st -leI saw your face You told me how proud you were I walked away If only I knew What I know today Thank you for all you've forgiven all your mistakes I've hurt myself by hurting you I feel broke inside | I would hold you in my arms I would take the pain away There's nothing I wouldn't do Would you tell me I was wrong? Would you help me understand |
| | Type of the lesson | Practice, Repetition, Reinforcement | |

Table 2. An example of the main aspects of one of the songs used for the research, the song called Little Things - One Direction.

| | | | | |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Song | <i>Little Things - One Direction</i> | | | |
| Topic | Vocabulary | Language Skills | Language expressions | Type of the lesson |
| Describing a person | Hand, cheeks, eyes, smile, stomach, thighs, dimples, back, bottom, spine, mouth, voice | Listening Reading Speaking | Bear this in mind It was meant to be Freckles on your cheeks The crinkles by your eyes The dimples in your back At the bottom of your spine Slip out of my mouth Talk in your sleep You've never loved the sound of your voice on tape Squeeze into your jeans | Presentation of the new vocabulary |
| | | | | Practice, repetition and reinforcement of new vocabulary |

Table 3. An example of the main aspects of one of the songs used for the research, the song called Imagine – John Lennon

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| Song | <i>Imagine-John Lennon</i> | | | |
| Topic | Vocabulary | Language Skills | Language expressions | Type of the lesson |
| Describing an imaginary situation | Imagine, hell, countries, religion, possessions Hunger, kill, die, | Listening Reading Speaking | It's easy if you try Above us only sky Nothing to kill or die for you may say I hope someday | Presentation of the new vocabulary |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| | Life, peace, Sharing, join, possessions, below | | You'll join us I wonder if you can No need for Sharing all the world I'm a dreamer I'm not the only one Life in peace | Practice, repetition and reinforcement of new vocabulary |
|--|---|--|---|--|

3.4.4 A Syllabus based on Songs Lyrics

The time needed for this research was eight weeks. In order for everything to go well, I designed an eight-week's syllabus, based on computer song's lyrics. This syllabus was used for song-based lessons. The experimental group used this syllabus, whereas the control group worked in the same topics, but the approach was different. Instead of using song's lyrics to learn the new vocabulary and to practice spoken and written forms of English, the control group used the textbook.

3.4.5 Pre-test and Post-tests

In this research, pupils were evaluated two times. First, they had to complete a pre-test, which was used to evaluate the pupils' current knowledge about tenses in English, that they already had learned, and their ability to use I would / Would I..? / I wouldn't. Then, pupils had to complete a post-test, which was used to evaluate the students' knowledge after the study. The post-test was similar to the pre-test, but besides the pre-test material it also tested students' knowledge about the new vocabulary that the students learnt during the study. It is the vocabulary about parts of the body - description of a person and describing an event in English.

3.4.6 Pupils' Questionnaire

After the study took place, the experimental group had to fill in a questionnaire, called Pupils' Questionnaire, prepared for this study. It contained simple questions about the song-based lessons, such as, do you think it is easier to learn new words through song lyrics, is it more enjoyable to learn new words through song lyrics, do you think you are more motivated to learn new vocabulary using, is it easier to practice grammar through the song's lyrics, etc. Students' opinion can be different from the teacher's perspective about the effectiveness of the application of a new method in the classroom. Therefore, the questionnaire was used to get information about students' motivation in learning a foreign language through song lyrics, seen from students' point of view.

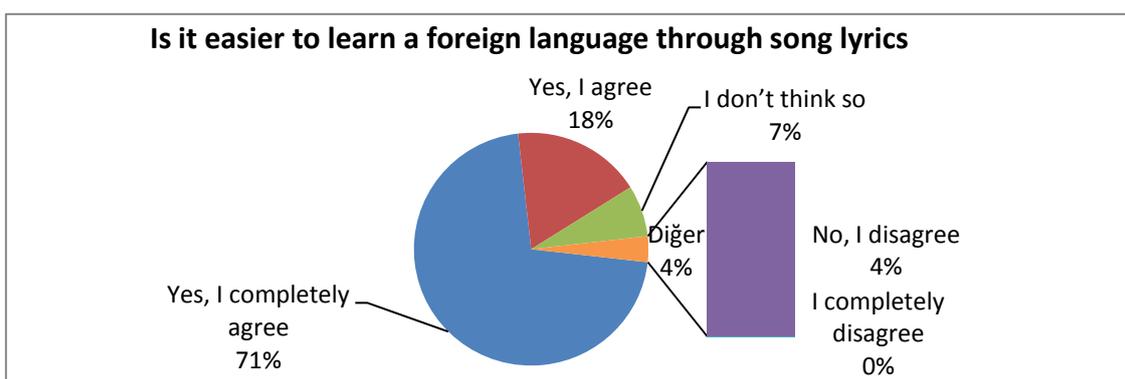


Fig. 1. An example of a question of the Pupils' questionnaire

3.5 Description of the study procedure

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of the song's lyrics in acquiring English as a foreign language by Albanian primary school pupils. The activities of this research took place in the state primary school Nuri Mazari in Dollogozhda, Struga. For doing this research in this school, I asked for permission from the school authorities. Moreover, I had a meeting with the children's

parents and explained to them what the research was about, and then I asked them for permission to observe their children. Since I had the permission from the school authorities and the pupils' parents to observe the learners and to do the study, I observed the learners for eight weeks.

4. Findings/Results

The same criterion was used to evaluate both the pre- and the post- test. The grades from 1-5 were used to evaluate the pupils' pre- and post-tests. Grades from 1, the lowest grade of 5, the highest grade, are used in state primary schools in Macedonia.

Table 4. Pre-test results of the control group.

| The experimental group | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Grades | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| Eight-grade pupils | | | | | | |
| PUPIL 1 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 2 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 3 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 4 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 5 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 8 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 9 | | | | * | | 1 |
| Seven-grade class | | | | | | |
| PUPIL 1 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 2 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 3 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 4 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 5 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 8 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 9 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 10 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 11 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 12 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 13 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 14 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 15 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 16 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 17 | * | | | | | 5 |
| | The average grade on the pre-test | | | | | 2.884 |

The table above shows the pre-test results of the experimental group. The average grade of the whole group was 2.884

Table 5. Post-test results of the control group.

| The control group | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Grades | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| PUPIL 1 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 2 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 3 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 4 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 5 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 8 | | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 9 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 10 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 11 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 12 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 13 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 14 | * | | | | | 5 |
| Seven-grade class | | | | | | |
| PUPIL 1 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 2 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 3 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 4 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 5 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 8 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 9 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 10 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 11 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 12 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 13 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 14 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 15 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 16 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 17 | | | | | * | 1 |
| | The average grade of the pre-test | | | | | 2.903 |

The table above shows the pre-test results of the control group. The average grade of the whole group in the pre- test was 2.903

Table 6. Post-test results of the experimental group.

| The experimental group | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Grades | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| Eight-grade pupils | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--------|
| PUPIL 1 | | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 2 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 3 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 4 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 5 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 8 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 9 | | | | * | | 2 |
| Seven-grade class | | | | | | |
| PUPIL 1 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 2 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 3 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 4 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 5 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 8 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 9 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 10 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 11 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 12 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 13 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 14 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 15 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 16 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 17 | * | | | | | 5 |
| The average grade of the post-test | | | | | | 3.1538 |

The table above shows the post-test results of the experimental group. The average grade for the whole group in the post-test was 3.1538

Table 7. Post-test results of the experimental group.

| The control group | | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grades | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | |
| PUPIL 1 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 2 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 3 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 4 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 5 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 8 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 9 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 10 | | | * | | | 3 |

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| PUPIL 11 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 12 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 13 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 14 | * | | | | | 5 |
| Seven-grade class | | | | | | |
| PUPIL 1 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 2 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 3 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 4 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 5 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 6 | | | * | | | 3 |
| PUPIL 7 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 8 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 9 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 10 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 11 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 12 | | | | * | | 2 |
| PUPIL 13 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 14 | * | | | | | 5 |
| PUPIL 15 | | * | | | | 4 |
| PUPIL 16 | | | | | * | 1 |
| PUPIL 17 | | | | | * | 1 |
| The average grade of the post-test | | | | | | 2.838 |

The table above shows the post-test results of the control group. The average grade for the whole group in the post-test was 2.838

5. Discussion and analysis

The control and the experimental group started the study almost from the same position. The average grade of the experimental group was just a bit lower than the control group. The average grade of the control group in the pre-test was 2.903; whereas, the average grade for the experimental group in the pre-test was 2.884. So, the difference between the pre-test results of the experimental and the control group pre-test results was 0.019 (0.65%). So, the control group pre-test results were just 0.65% higher than the experimental group pre-test results. After the study took place, the average grade of both the control and the experimental group changed. The average grade of the control group in the post-test was 2.838; the average grade of the experimental group in the post-test was 3.153. So, the results of the control group after the study were a bit lower than before the study- they were 0.071 (2.445%) lower than the pre-test results. On the other hand, the experimental group performed better in the post-test than the pre-test. The post-test results of the experimental group were 0.269 (8.53155%) higher than the pre-test results. The post-test results of the experimental group were 0.315 (9.990%) higher than the post-test results of the control group. So, the experimental group outperformed the control group. It means that the songs' lyrics had a positive effect on language learning and practicing the grammar of the foreign language. Moreover, they helped the pupils to practice understanding of the spoken and written English, and recognize the written form of new vocabulary.

6. Conclusions

The results of the study show that our hypotheses at the beginning of the study are true. Both groups started the study somehow from the same starting point because the difference was not very big.

The experimental group pre-test results were a bit lower than the control group pre-test results, the average grade of the both groups has been different just for 0.019 (0.65%); however, this was not a huge difference between them. These results show that the pupils' current knowledge about English is almost at the same level. After eight weeks, the experimental group who received song based lessons achieved to outperform the control group who received only teacher based instructions. The experimental group post-test results were 0.315 (9.990%) higher than the control group post-test results. So, the experimental group post-test results were better than the control group post-test results. The song used in the classroom increases the pupils' ability to learn a second language. They were useful for practicing grammar of English. Moreover, it increases the pupils' ability to understand the spoken and written English and especially their ability to recognize the written form of the new vocabulary.

The outcomes of the pupil questionnaire showed that the usage of songs' lyrics enhances the pupils' motivation for learning a second language.

References

- [1] Grünert, R. (2009). *Teaching English through songs*. Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag.
- [2] Schoepp, K. (2001). Reasons for Using Songs in the ESL/EFL Classroom *Internet TESOL Journal*. Volume 8 (II). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Schoepp-Songs.html>.
- [3] (No, Author), 2010, "teacher's page: Methodology.BBC Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryfrench/teachers/methodology_html.shtml
- [4] Nelson, K. E. (Ed.). (1983). *Children's language (Vol. 4)*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Inc.
- [5] LeLope, J.W., & Ponterio, R. (2001) 'On the net: Finding lyrics online' *Language Learning & Technology* Volume 5(III) Retrieved from http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:E9z_cwwCYZoJ:llt.msu.edu/vol5num3/pdf/on_the_net.pdf+Finding+Song+Lyrics+Online&hl=en&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESjlg8Sk7YPsBBDR6KG33bhOdStlkbea-gAvjJvSQWlQn-cU-a-Sep7final0reJGUE0iaeAiyhrn8pfUcM7znZVyGwVCr75nRObgWQnQ0YZYFvqSJR4p_INNc6F-Ik2Pntmj6_&sig=AHIEtbRYedM6TB4VGYr63wD9vAtYopK8yQ
- [6] Sears, C. (1998). *Second language students in mainstream classrooms: A handout for teachers in international schools (parents' and teachers' guides, No.2)*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- [7] Mishan, F. (2005). *Designing authenticity into language learning materials*. Bristol and Portland, Oregon: Intellect, Ltd.