

# Singing as a Tool for English Pronunciation Improvement

## *An Experimental Study*



Author: Lina Carlsson

Supervisor: Dr. Francis M. Hult

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Campus Helsingborg

## **Abstract**

This experimental study was conducted in an upper secondary school in the south of Sweden. The aim was to examine whether singing could act as a tool for improving English pronunciation among Swedish learners in the ages 16-17. The experiment consisted of three parts: a pre-test, a singing session and a post-test. There were one experiment group and one control group in order to compare and analyze. The results of the two tests were audio recorded by using a dictaphone. The analysis of the results showed no evident signs of improvement although slight changes and improvements of pronunciation did occur. In order to claim that singing generates long-lasting results the study would have to be more extensive and include more learners. The learner's opinions about involving elements of singing and music in the teaching of English were also investigated through a small set of questions which the learners answered in writing after the experiment. The results showed that learners are highly positive towards incorporating music in the classic teaching methods of the English course.

**Keywords:** Pronunciation, ESL, Singing, Music, Motivation, Upper secondary school

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## **1. Introduction**

Music is something we all have an opinion about and that we all have a relationship to. We listen to music in different places through our everyday lives. We even choose to include various kind of music in our most important occasions in life such as funerals, weddings and celebrations. This is the reality for the average student in Sweden as well. Learners in upper secondary schools hear music in shops, at the gym, in coffee shops, in the car and often the lyrics are sung in English. Nancy and Ron Brown (1997) mean that if music is constantly present in our society, why not use it in language teaching? There are almost endless ways of incorporating music into the curriculum. Themes can be built around different songs, learners can use songs to memorize information and story writing can be inspired by songs (Brown & Brown, 1997). Yukiko S. Jolly, who wrote about songs in the ESL classroom in 1975, argued that putting words to music could even help learners with pronunciation.

This experimental study will investigate if singing in English could work as a helpful tool for practicing English pronunciation. Can teachers use singing in order to help their students to achieve a more accurate pronunciation? Also, what do learners think about incorporating elements of music in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom?

## **2. Music in Language Learning**

The effects of including music in language teaching have been investigated in multiple studies worldwide and many researchers reach positive results. There are, for example, benefits from using the rhythms that the music provides in order to achieve flow in speech. The method of singing has long been used to treat medical conditions like stammering and Parkinson's disease (Wan et. al., 2010). Batista (2008) means that, "Another relevant reason for the use of songs in the classroom is that they are among the best ways of teaching a foreign language. Consequently, they can develop and integrate the four basic skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, in a natural and harmonic way in the language classroom" (p. 158). Teachers can also use music in order to set, for example, a calm, creative or focused mood in the classroom. This can be done by adding certain background music during exercises (Batista, 2008). Above all, it appears that music can work as a good motivation for learners to engage more in activities for ESL learning (Domoney & Harris, ).

### **2.1 Music and Learning**

When looking at music and its impact on learners, it has been noticed in previous studies that young children hear music in other ways than adults. For example, Paquette and Reig (2008) write about a boy who was "caught" dancing around with his umbrella. He said he was listening to the music of the rain. By studying children with literacy difficulties the research duo found that no matter what kind of musical genre children listen to, or if they compose music of their own, it will help develop their skills in reading, writing, listening as well as speaking (Paquette & Reig, 2008). Elissa Seeman (2008) means that it would be foolish not to take advantage of the "musical soundscape" the children are in.

Singing songs and reading nursery rhymes creates opportunities to learn speech elements during childhood. These songs and rhymes also increase a child's vocabulary (Seeman, 2008).

In the learning process, learners use their mind and brains in multiple ways. If teachers would add an element of music to the teaching, the learners would activate more of their senses which are being used to learn new skills and take in new information. Learning while using a wider range of our senses and modalities will help the knowledge and information stick with us and learning becomes more long-lasting (Brown & Brown, 1997).

## **2.2 Popular Music and Motivation**

In a Mexican study on secondary students, Domoney and Harris (1993) found that the learners' most common and frequent experience of English outside the ESL classroom was through popular music. They argue that bringing pop music into the classroom, and use it as part of the teaching, would enhance students' motivation to put effort into school tasks and activities. The learners would feel like it is *their* knowledge, music and language that are being used and they would feel more eager to engage in the activities (Domoney & Harris, 1993). Harmer (2007) for example, describes how music can trigger the writing process and how students who are uninspired can write stories "the music wants them to tell" instead of having to come up with brand new stories.

Beach et al. (2011) gives a number of examples on how to work with music in order to tie in to social and cultural problems. Many songs arise from issues in society and by using a musical angle to tackle these problems, they might be easier to discuss in class. In the book we receive multiple examples of useful songs such as "Sunday bloody Sunday" by U2, "Dear landlord" by Bob Dylan and "A change is gonna come" by Sam Cooke. These songs can be used as a lead in to discussion tasks or for the students to write analyses of. Domoney and Harris (1993) state, "Rather than being seen as discrete, marginal items, pop music activities

such as these are worth linking, elaborating, and treating as more central in a secondary school programme.” (p. 240) However, Batista (2008) mentions the importance of using songs the students would actually listen to in order to make teaching and the classroom environment as authentic as possible. If the music played would be something that the learners would never listen to in their spare time they would perhaps not feel as motivated from it.

### **2.3 Phonology and the Importance of “Accurate” Pronunciation**

Roohani (2013) argues that pronunciation is far more important than what is expressed in syllabuses worldwide. Whether we want to or not we will be evaluated and perceived by the way we speak and pronounce the individual words. Rhythm and intonation of speech should match what the listener expects in order to be understood (Roohani, 2013).

The research field of pronunciation is called phonology and one of the aims of phonology is to answer why some L2 learners have issues pronouncing new speech phonemes (Rogerson-Revell, 2011). Learning and practicing pronunciation enhances the chance of being understood as well as the ability to understand others (Roohani, 2013).

The most common accents taught in Swedish schools are British English and American English. It is important for the teacher to choose his or her target accent (Rogerson-Revell, 2011). The teacher is the main role-model in the classroom along with audio material available. To have a target accent that the learners can relate their own pronunciation to, can act as a motivator for them. There are clear instructions in the Swedish curriculum (available at [skolverket.se](http://skolverket.se)) about giving students “the opportunity to develop correctness in their use of language in speech and writing” (p. 1). One interpretation of this could be that students should be able to develop a correct pronunciation while using speech skills in multiple ways. The criteria for the different grades in English 5,6 and 7 does not mention pronunciation

explicitly, but talks about flow, clearness and if the student can use English fluently (Skolverket, 2013<sup>1</sup>).

## **2.4 Singing in English**

There are different ways of working with pronunciation in the ESL classroom. By, for example, incorporating singing in the learning activities teachers can increase the number of opportunities for learners to produce speech. For some learners it will be easier to sing in a group than speaking alone. One example of this is given by Lori Fitzgerald (1994) who shares, “I especially focused on one shy girl who hardly spoke in Spanish. She was singing along with the rest of them.” (p. 82). Elissa Seeman (2008) points out that singing can also help learners with pronunciation as it draws attention to the phonemes of the words and by dividing words into smaller units they can be easier to pronounce. Teachers and instructors can enhance the awareness of difficult phonetic elements of speech and by singing and focus on smaller speech units the learners can receive a more accurate pronunciation.

Yukiko S. Jolly (1975) describes songs as “the middle ground between linguistics and musicology” (p. 11) because of its possession of both communicative aspects as well as being entertaining. She points out pronunciation as one of the skills which would benefit from using songs as a tool for foreign language teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> The curriculum was written and introduced in 2011 while the translation, which is cited here, was written in 2013.

### **3. Methodology**

This is an experimental study where the learners did a pre-test, the experimental treatment and a post-test. The pre- and post-tests consisted of three sentences each (see Appendix) and were recorded using a dictaphone. The class was divided into two groups, an experimental group and a control group. After the experiment the participants shared their thoughts on how they felt about including music in the English language education. The following section will describe the procedure more thoroughly.

#### **3.1 The Research Questions**

In the process of creating these research questions I wanted to combine my two future teaching subjects, Music and English. As the background section of this essay suggests, the connection between the two already exists and the subjects could benefit from a close collaboration. It would be interesting to conduct a hands-on project which connected these different, but yet similar, areas. Consequently, as a foundation for this experimental study, these three research questions were created:

- Could singing English song lyrics help learners to improve their English pronunciation?
- Will the analysis of the pre- and post-test in this experiment show any improvements in English pronunciation among the participants?
- Do upper secondary students (in Helsingborg) find singing useful while practicing their English pronunciation?

#### **3.2 The Participants**

In the search for suitable participants for this study, an upper secondary school

in the south of Sweden was contacted via e-mail and the principal forwarded the message to an English teacher at the school. During a couple of weeks, the teacher and I planned the set up for the experiment and when it would take place. The initial thought was to include students from two programmes, one Arts Programme, with a music profile, and one Handicrafts Programme, in order to compare different types of students of dissimilar musical backgrounds. Unfortunately, the majority of the students in the Handicrafts class did not wish to record the pre- and post-test, which meant that their results could not be included in the experiment.

The students who actually participated in the study were 13 students in the ages 16-17. They were in the second year of upper secondary school and studied English 6. The class consisted of both boys and girls, proportionally even. After speaking to the teacher of the class and hearing her advice, I decided to use Swedish as the language of instruction. This decision was made to minimize the misunderstandings and to save time.

### **3.3 The Experimental Procedure**

The learners were divided into two groups, the experiment group and the control group. By using a pre-test and a post-test (see Appendix) this study was able to be conducted as a quasi-experiment (Nunan, 1992, p. 41). The two tests consisted of three sentences each which the participants of the study read out loud. While the students read the test sentences an audio recorder was used in order to record the learners' voices.

Before the experiment was conducted the test sentences were piloted on two students, not included in the study, who were similar in age to the test subjects. This was made to make sure that the sentences were not offensive or improper and to determine if the sentences were understandable. Two specific phonemes were highly represented in the sentences in order to facilitate and focus the analysis. The phonemes chosen were /θ/ (as in "thing") and /ð/ (as in

“that”). These two phonemes are known to be hard to pronounce in an accurate manner for many learners of English as a second or foreign language (Rogerson-Revell, 2011). As Davidsen-Nielsen and Harder (1987) also points out, Scandinavian learners have trouble getting these two phonemes right because they do not exist in the Scandinavian mother tongues.

After the pre-test, the students in the experiment group were asked to listen to and sing along to a song which was “*Wonderful Things*” by Ryan Corn. He is an American singer-songwriter and the song is a calm and easily sung pop song with non-offensive lyrics which are presented below. The lyrics are printed here with permission from Keith Stancil. Words containing the phonemes chosen for analysis, /θ/ and /ð/, are in bold.

### Wonderful Things

“I've done terrible **things**

And I've done unspeakable **things**

But you've done wonderful **things** to save me.

My heart's been harder **than** rocks

And my mind's been darker **than** dark

But you've done wonderful **things** to change me.

I just **think** about **the** way

I did **without** you

Loving me **the** way you do.

On **this** side of **things** I see

Clearly my deceit

And life's better living **with** you”

The phonemes chosen for analysis were highly represented in the song lyrics of the verse and chorus and the learners received a printed version of the lyrics to make the learning process of the song faster and easier. The first verse and chorus of “Wonderful things” were sung 8 times and this took approximately 10 minutes.

While the experiment group was singing, the control group listened to a playlist of instrumental music similar to the guitar music in “Wonderful Things”. This was done in order to prove that any improvement in the experiment group's pronunciation was due to singing and not listening to the music alone. After the groups had been separated and completed the singing and listening, the students were asked to read the sentences of the post-test. These were recorded in the same way as the pre-test and afterwards they were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet, IPA (Roach, 2009). In the final analysis, the results of the pre- and post-test were compared and the aim was to listen to the chosen phonemes and see if there were any differences in the students’ speech production.

### **3.4 The Learners’ Opinions about Including Music in English Teaching**

In order to answer the third research question of this essay, the students were asked to leave a comment on two questions after the experiment. These were written on the white board in the classroom and the learners wrote their answers on a piece of paper which was then handed in. Since the students did not write their names on the paper, they were anonymous in this process. Similarly to the instructions of the experiment, this was also done in Swedish in order to avoid that the learners would feel constrained by language barriers. The two questions were:

1. Tror du att sång på engelska kan hjälpa elever med engelskt uttal?  
*(Do you think that singing in English could help students with English pronunciation?)*
2. Tycker du att det skulle vara roligt med mer musik i engelskundervisningen?  
*(Do you think that it would be fun to have more music in the English education/course?)*

The comments were interpreted with an inductive approach (Nunan, 1992) meaning that there were no pre-existing categories. After reading through the answers, a few themes could be discerned and these will be presented in the end of the following section.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The following segment of this essay contains the results of the pre-test and post-test in the form of two tables. The results for each word in the tests will be presented in phonetics and also further explained below each table. There are slight changes in the results when we compare the pre-and post-test, some students performed better and some actually performed worse. Although we cannot prove that this method for practicing pronunciation is a quick-fix, we can see that some students might have been helped somewhat by this singing method. Finally, in section 4.4, the results of the small survey on students' opinions about incorporating music in the ESL classroom will be displayed and discussed.

### 4.1 Pre-test

These were the sentences in the pre-test (with the analyzed phonemes in bold):

1. **That** made me **think** of a few **things**.
2. Last **month**, **there** was a **thunderstorm** in **the** USA.
3. **Thank** you for **the** present **that** you gave me.

All together the pre-test sentences included ten words which contained either the phoneme /ð/ or /θ/. In the table below the students' pronunciation are listed for each word.

### 4.1.1 Pre-test results.

Table 1		that	think	things	month	there	thunderstorm	the	thank	the	that
Experiment group	Student 1	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeə/	/θʌndəstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 3	/dæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeə/	/θʌndəstɔ:rm/	/ə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 5	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/deər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 7	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərʃtɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 9	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 11	/dæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnf/	/deər/	/fʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 13	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeəd/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
Control group	Student 2	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 4	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	-
	Student 6	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnθ/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
	Student 8	/dæt/	/θɪŋk/	/fɪŋz/	/mʌnt/	/deər/	/fʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ə/	/dæt/
	Student 10	/ðæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnf/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/ðə/	/ðæt/
Student 12	/dæt/	/θɪŋk/	/θɪŋz/	/mʌnt/	/ðeər/	/θʌndərstɔ:rm/	/ðə/	/θæŋk/	/də/	/ðæt/	
% accurate pronunciation of /ð/ and /θ/		<b>69 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>92 %</b>	<b>69 %</b>	<b>77 %</b>	<b>85 %</b>	<b>92 %</b>	<b>100 %</b>	<b>85 %</b>	<b>85 %</b>

Table 1: Pre-test results

The first word was “that”. There were four students (student 3, 11, 8 and 12) who struggled with pronouncing /ð/ in the word. They placed the tongue a bit too far back which made them produce the phoneme /d/ instead. The same thing happened in word number 5; “there” was pronounced with a /d/ instead of a /ð/ by three students (student 5, 11 and 8). We can see that two of these students are the same students who struggled with the first word. One thing to mention about these two words is that while “that” initiates a sentence, “there” is in the middle of a sentence directly after the phoneme /θ/. Even though it is the same phoneme they have different preconditions.

Four students (11, 8, 10 and 12) had issues with the word “month” which has got the phoneme /θ/ in the end. They pronounced it either as /t/ or /f/. Two of these students also had issues with the word “thunderstorm”. Here the phoneme /θ/ simply became /f/. Another word containing the phoneme /θ/ was “things”. Here, only one student (number 8) struggled with the pronunciation and /θ/ became /f/.

While looking at the first “the”, we can see that student 3 simply did not pronounce the phoneme /ð/. The word was said very fast and this resulted in an inaudible

speech sound. Two students did not pronounce the second “the” correctly. One of them replaced /ð/ with /d/ and the other one left out the phoneme /ð/.

The last word, “that”, was pronounced in an inaccurate way by two students (student 4 and 8). Student 8 replaced /ð/ with /d/ and student 4 left the whole word out due to fast speech. There were two words which were pronounced in an accurate way by all students were “think” and “thank”.

## 4.2 Post-test

These were the sentences in the post-test (with the analyzed phonemes in bold):

1. **That** was a **thoughtful thing** to do.
2. I'm out of **breath**, **there** was a **thousand** flies **that** chased me.
3. **Thursday** is **the** worst day **that** I can **think** of.

All together the post-test sentences included eleven words which contained either the phoneme /ð/ or /θ/. In the table below the students’ pronunciation are listed for each word.

### 4.2.1. Post-test results

Table 2		that	thoughtful	thing	breath	there	thousand	that	Thursday	the	that	think
Experiment group	Student 1	/ðæt/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðə/	/θaʊz(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:zdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 3	/ðæ/	/θɔ: f(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋθ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/taʊs(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/æd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 5	/ðæt/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/θaʊz(ə)nd/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rzdeɪ/	/ðə/	-	/θɪŋk/
	Student 7	/ðæd/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/θaʊz(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 9	/ðæ/	/θɔ: f(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/θaʊz(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rzdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 11	/dæd/	/θɔ: f(ɔ)l/	/fɪŋ/	/bref/	/deər/	/faʊs(ə)n/	/ðæt/	(Tuesdays)	/ðə/	/dæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 13	/ðæt/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/θaʊs(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:zdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
Control group	Student 2	/ðæ/	/θatf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/θaʊs(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 4	/ðæ/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/ðeər/	/θaʊz(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rzdeɪ/	/ðə/	-	/θɪŋk/
	Student 6	/ðæd/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/bret/	/ðeər/	/θaʊs(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 8	/dæ/	/fɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/breθ/	/deər/	/faʊs(ə)n/	/ðæt/	/fɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/dæ/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 10	/ðæt/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/bref/	/deər/	/θaʊs(ə)nd/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/ðæd/	/θɪŋk/
	Student 12	/ðæt/	/θɔ:tf(ɔ)l/	/θɪŋ/	/bret/	/deər/	/θaʊs(ə)nd/	/ðæt/	/θɜ:rsdeɪ/	/ðə/	/dæd/	/θɪŋk/
% accurate pronunciation of /ð/ and /θ/		85 %	92 %	92 %	69 %	69 %	77 %	100 %	85 %	100 %	54 %	100 %

Table 2: Post-test results

Two students (Student 8 and 11) still struggle with the pronunciation of /ð/ in the first word “that”. Similarly to the Pre-test, they replaced /ð/ with /d/. What is worth noticing is that the other two students (3 and 12), who did struggle with “that” before, are now accurate in their pronunciation. On the other hand, the last “that” was pronounced in a non-accurate way by six students, student 3,5,11, 4, 8 and 12. They either replaced /ð/ with /d/ or left the whole word out. In the word “there”, four students replaced /ð/ with /d/.

Next, let us look at the words containing the phoneme /θ/. Student 8 was the only one to pronounce the word “thoughtful” in a non-accurate way. The phoneme /θ/ was replaced with /f/. We can see the same problem in the third word “thing”, where student 11 also replaced /θ/ with /f/. Student 8 did not pronounce “Thursday” correctly either. The phoneme /θ/ was replaced with /f/ so this is a reoccurring issue for this particular student. While looking at the word “Thursday” we can just quickly see that Student 11 misread the sentence and read “Tuesdays” instead. Three students (student 3, 11 and 8) had issues with pronouncing the word “thousand”. They either replaced /θ/ with /f/ or /t/.

Four students had issues with the word “breath”, this time it was Students 11, 6, 10 and 12. They pronounced it either as “t” or “f”. Three of the students were the same who had issues with the word “month” in the pre-test which also ended with the phoneme /θ/. The three words which all students pronounced accurately were the second “that”, “the” and “think”.

### **4.3 Discussion**

The next section contains a discussion about the findings in the pre- and post-test. I will underline some interesting cases of improvement and some surprising cases of impairment. There will also be a discussion about the flaws of this experiment and thoughts

on what could have been more successful in the conduction of the process.

**4.3.1 Comparing the pre-test and the post-test.** The post-test results showed small changes. Most problems reoccurred in the post-test, the same type of th-phonemes were still hard to pronounce, overall the phoneme /ð/ tended to be pronounced like /d/ and /θ/ became either /f/ or in some cases /t/.

What was surprising to see in these results was that, over all, the learners performed less well in the post-test. One explanation to this could be that the words were more difficult to say or that the combinations of words in the sentences were harder to pronounce. Also, when the post-test took place, I had been present in the class during 30 minutes and some learners, who might have been nervous in the pre-test, could have calmed down as a result of getting used to the situation. This could have led to a “sloppy” and more relaxed pronunciation.

While analyzing the post-test, patterns appear which shows that the learners who were making mistakes in the pre-test are making the same mistakes now. A good example is Student 11. This learner had issues with several words in both the pre- and post-test, but actually performed better in the pre-test. Since this learner was in the experiment group, we can draw the conclusion that the amount of singing that the group got was not enough to help this learner with the pronunciation.

Another student, who was also in the Experimental group, is Student 5. He or she had trouble pronouncing the word “there” in the pre-test but if we look at the post-test, the same word is pronounced correctly. This could mean that singing might have helped this learner with the pronunciation of this word. However, the learner could have had a slip of the tongue in the pre-test which, in that case, did not reflect his or her true pronunciation.

Student 8 had trouble pronouncing quite a few of the words in both the pre-test and the post-test. This student was in the control group so by this we can draw the conclusion that the music alone (which the control group listened to) did not help the student with his or her pronunciation.

There was one learner who had American English as a first language and mother tongue and that was Student 4. As the result show, this student's pronunciation is accurate however, two words were not audible (the last "that" in both pre- and post-test). This was due to his or her fast speech and not a sign of inaccurate pronunciation.

When it comes to preferred pronunciation in the classroom, the English teacher who is teaching these two classes does not teach a specific pronunciation, neither American nor British. She mentioned that she might sound a bit more British but when teaching pronunciation, she presents both British and American speech sounds. Therefore, the teaching would not direct the students towards a specific accent and this would also be the reason why we see both British and American pronunciation in the results. This would not influence the chosen phonemes, but can be seen when taking a closer look at the phoneme /t/ in the words "thunderstorm" or "Thursday". Some ending consonants are left out due to British pronunciation; this can be spotted while analyzing the words "there" and "that" for example.

Nevertheless, the students in the experimental group seemed to enjoy singing together and they picked up the melody quickly. Since this was a class who studied music together on a daily basis, they were probably comfortable singing with each other which might have helped them in this particular experiment.

**4.3.2 Problems with the experiment.** The Handicraft class, that initially would have been included in my study, was not as cooperative as the Arts class. It might have something to do with how the experiment was introduced. It was made quite clear that it was a voluntary

project for them to participate in. What was very unfortunate was that most of the students were not keen on recording their voices and therefore they did not want to participate in the experiment. The teacher commented on this and mentioned that the class was a bit shy.

Another flaw in the conduction of the experiment in the Handicrafts class was that I tried to save time by asking the students to record their voices themselves and send the audio files to me, in an e-mail. The original instructions the class was given can be seen in the Appendix (written in Swedish). The fact that the students were given the task to make their own recordings, made it possible for them to listen to the recording and not sending it if they were not happy with the result. This was probably a big factor as to why there were no results to analyze from this class.

Even if the class who participated in the study was an Arts class with a profile in music it might be worth mentioning that the teacher does not use music and singing as a method for teaching English. Fitzgerald (1994) highlights Kodaly's philosophy that music should be valued as high as a core subject. He meant that frequent integration of musical elements in the education would lead to greater acquisition of speech and language among learners. This might be the reason why we do not see improving results in this short and brief study. The learners did not receive enough musical treatment for the effect to be visible or audible.

#### **4.4 Students' Opinions about Incorporating Music in the ESL Classroom**

There were four clear categories which emerged from the inductive analysis of the comments. First and foremost, the vast majority was very positive towards incorporating music in the ESL classroom. The second category was related to the correctness of the singer or role-model that the learner is trying to imitate. Thirdly, some students pointed out that singing in English demands that the learner would have to use several skills simultaneously,

for example, listening and singing at the same time. Lastly, there were some students who thought that variation in the teaching would be beneficial for English teaching.

The comments from the students showed that they were very positive towards including music and singing in the English teaching. A few students even mentioned that they already had personal experience from improving their pronunciation through singing. One student wrote: “Yes, I really think so! I think and feel for myself that singing has helped me to get a better pronunciation, so it's going to be exciting to know.”

There were a few students who mentioned the importance of correct pronunciation of the original singer: “Yes, I think so, but only if they pronounce the words in the song the right way. Often they adjust words to the song so that it sounds good rhythmically.” As we could read in the background of this study, Rogerson-Revell (2011) underlines the importance of having a target accent to relate to as a learner. This comment might show that the student wants and needs a role model to imitate, for example, the teacher or the artist singing in a certain song.

In one comment we can see that many modalities would be used while singing. The student writes: “Yes, I think so, because then you both listen to the song and then you sing.” This comment goes hand in hand with Elissa Seeman’s study from 2008, who means that music can correct students in another way than a teacher can. By hearing the phonemes being sung, learners can correct themselves.

One student thought that more music in the English education would be fun, but everyone would not sing along or participate. This is something we, as teachers, should be aware of and consider and it shows that we can never take for granted that students will play along with the tasks the teachers have planned. In spite of this, there is still research, which was briefly discussed in the section 2.4 of this essay, which underlines the fact that for some

students it can be easier to sing along in a group of other learners than to speak by themselves (Fitzgerald, 1994).

Among the 34 comments there were 33 that were positive towards the idea that singing in English might help students with English pronunciation. The one who did not think singing would be helpful wrote: “Well, I don't think it helps that much. But it might be good with some variation in the teaching.”

As mentioned in the methodology section of this essay, one of the classes I intended to use in the study did not wish to record themselves. Although there was not a result to use in the experiment, they did comment on the questions about incorporating music in the English classroom. The important message I got from that analysis is that almost all students thought that it would be a good idea to include music in English education, whether they were in a music programme or another one, like the students in the Handicrafts programme. Music seems to appeal to most learners. It was interesting to learn that both classes were equally positive towards incorporating music in the ESL classroom and there seems to be something about music that makes learners feel more motivated.

## **5. Conclusion**

In the last section of this essay, I will summarize some thoughts about events that could have progressed more smoothly, problems that occurred during the procedure of the experiment and things to consider carefully in future attempts of carrying out a similar project. I will also underline what I consider to be the important findings of this study which could help English teachers as they might approach music in a different way after reading this essay.

### **5.1 Limitations of the Study**

There were a few elements of this study which were not optimal for the outcome of the experiment and among these were the introduction of the procedure in the first class (the Handicrafts class). When introducing the students to the experiment, I mentioned to them that their participation in the study was not obligatory. The fact that I underlined this information might have made the class reluctant to participate since it might have sounded more serious than what it actually was. I did learn from this and in the second class, I briefly mentioned that I would be happy if they wanted to participate.

This project was only a short experiment which cannot demonstrate with certainty that singing actually works as a tool for practicing pronunciation. Due to time limitations and a small number of participants there are simply not enough results to discern patterns or behaviors which would establish singing as a well-functioning tool for teaching pronunciation within this age group. Nevertheless, there are results and opinions from the students which suggest that a case study, stretching over a longer period of time, would give more substantial material to analyze.

## **5.2 Suggestions for Further Research**

As stated previously, a case study would be optimal for studying the long-term effects of using music and/or songs in the ESL classroom. This would make it possible to measure results in more ways than used in this study, as well as including more genres, rhythmical elements or emotions. Another way to make the study more reliable would be to expand the number of participants in order to attain a wider range of results.

I also believe that it would be highly rewarding to make a similar experiment or case study in other age groups too, for example in kindergarten where the learning of language and new skills is quick and built on acquisition. Another target group, who most likely would demand a different approach, is older people who have not been exposed to English as much and frequently as the younger generations in Sweden have.

The teachers' opinions and experiences are also an interesting topic for further research. An investigation, perhaps made alongside a case study, could be done in the form of interviews. One could interview teachers before, during and after a project where English and Music is taught simultaneously, for example.

## **5.3. Information for Teachers**

A project like this one is, indeed, too small to show any proper evidence of that incorporating one musical element, in this case singing, in the ESL classroom would improve the learners' pronunciation of English. It will take a larger number of subjects and a longer and more regular musical treatment to see patterns and long-lasting results. However, the signs about learners' engagement in music that we can see in their comments would make it relevant to conduct a large-scale case study where students would learn language through

elements of music for a longer period of time. This would make it easier to see progress and improvement among the students.

What English teachers can learn from this experimental study is that learners generally like music. All but one of the participants of this study, were positive and happy about including music in the English education in order to improve pronunciation and a majority of them believed that it would actually work. If language teachers would incorporate musical elements in their teaching, we would see a more dynamic and varying method of teaching and it would most likely make students more engaged in school activities.

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## Appendix:

### Pre- and Post-test

#### Kontrollmeningar:

Läs meningarna och spela in dem. Döp ljud-filerna till ditt nummer, din klass och om det är före- eller eftermeningarna (exempelvis: "4ES1före eller "18HV2efter") Skicka dem i ett mail till: [mgyl3lca@student.lu.se](mailto:mgyl3lca@student.lu.se). Stort tack för din hjälp!

#### **Före** experimentet:

1. That made me think of a few things.
2. Last month, there was a thunderstorm in the USA.
3. Thank you for the present that you gave me.

#### **Efter** experimentet:

1. That was a thoughtful thing to do.
2. I'm out of breath, there was a thousand flies that chased me.
3. Thursday is the worst day that I can think of.