Students' Responses to the Use of Songs in the EFL Classroom at a Public School in Bogotá: A Critical Approach[1]

Respuestas de los Estudiantes al Uso de Canciones en la Clase de Inglés en un Colegio Público de Bogotá: Un Enfoque Crítico

Nilsen Palacios and Claudia Marcela Chapetón[2]*
IED Fabio Lozano Simonelli,
Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Colombia

Abstract

This article reports the findings of an action research stydy aiming at fostering interest, participation, and self-expression in an EFL classroom at a public school in Usme, in the southeast of Bogotá. The study focuses on students' responses to the use of songs with social content within a framework of literacy as a situated social practice and taking a critical view of pedagogy. A group of 11th graders participated in the study. Data was collected through questionnaires, field notes, interviews, and artifacts of students' work. Results indicate that using songs as a socially-situated literacy practice in the EFL class can encourage students to participate in a more active and critical way. It can also trigger meaningful connections to real life issues allowing students to read the world and build bonds with their peers, using music as an opportunity to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a comfortable, respectful, and friendly environment.

Keywords: Responses to songs, songs with social content, EFL in a public school classroom, literacy as a situated social practice, critical pedagogy.

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Resumen

Este artículo reporta los hallazgos de un proyecto de investigación acción cuyo objetivo general era promover el interés, la participación y la expresión en la clase de inglés en un colegio público de Usme, al suroriente de Bogotá. El estudio se enfoca particularmente en el análisis de las respuestas de los estudiantes al uso de canciones con contenido social en inglés, entendida como práctica social situada y bajo la perspectiva de la pedagogía crítica. Un grupo de estudiantes de once grado participó en el estudio. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de cuestionarios, notas de campo, entrevistas y artefactos producidos por los estudiantes. Los resultados indican que el uso de canciones como una práctica social situada en la clase de inglés puede motivar a los estudiantes a participar de manera más activa y crítica. También puede generar conexiones significativas con aspectos de la vida real permitiendo hacer lecturas del mundo y construir lazos con compañeros de clase mediante el uso de la música como una oportunidad para expresar y compartir ideas, pensamientos y sentimientos en un ambiente de aprendizaje armonioso, respetuoso y amigable.

Palabras clave: Respuestas al uso de canciones, canciones con contenido social, inglés como lengua extranjera en colegio público, alfabetización como práctica social situada, pedagogía crítica.

Resumo

Este artigo reporta as descobertas de um projeto de pesquisa ação cujo objetivo geral era promover o interesse, a participação e a expressão na classe de inglês em um colégio público de Usme, no sul-oriente de Bogotá. O estudo se enfoca particularmente na análise das respostas dos estudantes ao uso de canções com conteúdo social em inglês, entendida como prática social situada e sob a perspectiva da pedagogia crítica. Um grupo de estudantes de terceiro ano do ensino médio participou no estudo. Os dados foram coletados através de questionários, anotações de campo, entrevistas e artefatos produzidos pelos estudantes. Os resultados indicam que o uso de canções, como uma prática social situada na aula de inglês pode motivar os estudantes a participar de maneira mais ativa e crítica. Também pode gerar conexões significativas com aspectos da vida real, permitindo fazer leituras do mundo e construir laços com colegas de aula mediante o uso da música, como uma oportunidade para expressar e compartilhar ideias, pensamentos e sentimentos em um ambiente de aprendizagem harmonioso, respeitoso e amigável.

Palavras chave: Respostas ao uso de canções, canções com conteúdo social, inglês como língua estrangeira em colégio público, alfabetização como prática social localizada, pedagogia crítica.

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Introduction

The growing importance of learning and teaching English as a foreign language in the different levels of education in Colombia has given rise to a number of efforts by teacher-researchers to look into classroom practices with the aim of improving and/or transforming those practices. Many problematic situations have been identified as starting points for conducting research in this field. However, when it comes to teaching English in the public school setting, the most salient obstacles perceived by EFL teachers are related to the lack of interest students have in learning the foreign language. Informal talks with colleagues and observations of our own experience tell us that it can be quite difficult to get adolescent students in public schools interested in participating in the EFL class. Students in this particular socially deprived setting, which is characterized by increasing urban violence, few opportunities for social promotion, and economic adversity (Guzmán, 2006; Parga, 2011), seem not to be motivated to take an active role in the class sessions for a number of possible reasons. They may feel learning the foreign language is not relevant since they do not need it for authentic communicative purposes in their social surroundings. They may also feel distanced from the foreign language since they have little contact with it. They may not have confidence enough to talk or interact in English (Duarte, Tinjacá, & Carrero, 2012), or they may simply not like it.

In view of this problematic situation present in the particular context where this study took place, it was our purpose to propose a course of action in which participants could (and would want to) engage in the development of class activities. Using a critical approach that takes literacy as a situated social practice, songs with social content were used as a pedagogical strategy to foster self-expression, reflection, and meaningful participation in the EFL class.

Songs can be used as authentic communicative performances (Guevara & Ordoñez, 2012) as they contain authentic language that is produced in situated contexts that refer to real life issues. Further, students' interest, involvement, and participation in EFL learning can be encouraged through songs that can be selected to suit their needs, interests, and likes, thus personalizing learning. Finally, using songs with social content as a literacy practice in the EFL classroom may allow students to find opportunities to freely express their opinions, feelings, life experiences, and ideas while establishing meaningful connections with their personal context. The main objective of the study we report here was to describe 11th grade students' responses to the use of songs with social content in the EFL classroom when songs are approached

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from a critical perspective within a framework of literacy as a situated social practice.

Literature Review

Traditional views of literacy see it as the ability we have to read and to write by coding and decoding language from a text. Going beyond this traditional perspective, this study takes a socio-cultural approach that sees literacy as constructed and produced "by historically and culturally situated social practices of which reading and writing are only bits, bits that are differently composed and situated in different social practices" (Gee, 2003, p. 42). We consider school-based practices as social and situated since they take place in particular social contexts and through interactions that are situated in a specific moment. Literacy in this study is thus understood as a situated social practice (Baynham, 1995) where both contextual and individual aspects are relevant.

According to Giroux (2001), literacy should be understood as a set of discourse forms and cultural competencies that make it possible to establish and recognize the relations and experiences that exist between learners and the world. In this way, literacy can also be a reference for critique. It is necessary that human beings locate themselves in their own histories in order to become agents, thus expanding the possibilities of human life on freedom. Also, Freire (1985) states that literacy has to be predominately social; he considers that teachers need to use methodologies which change the learners' view, and that these methodologies have to encourage students to be critical of their own reality. He also points out that to understand the nature of being social is to learn to read the world. Similarly, Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that literacy is social because language is a social process developed through situated interactions between individuals; these interactions are held through literacy and they imply interpreting, analyzing, and taking actions in relation to social realities. One of this study's aims of developing literacy as a situated social practice through the use of songs with social content was to allow students to feel free to express their opinions, ideas, and feelings. It was also sought to provide them with the opportunities to read the world and to contribute to the EFL class development, becoming the main agents of their own histories.

Baynham (1995) points out that literacy has social purposes. When we are creating and switching over meaning, it is recognized in context, and students should be able to understand meaning as a social power with a critical point of view since literacy is a "concrete human activity" (p. 1). In this way, he refers to the concept of critical literacy,

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and defines it as the use of reading or writing to reach social purposes in contexts of use. From this critical perspective, literacy allows people to live within a community, establishing ties with the society, and having critical perspectives in the context where they exist. Baynham (1995) also states that what makes literacy critical could be an approach in which the main idea is to provide literate people with the opportunity to go beyond traditional practices of reading and writing, and to encourage them to ask, analyze, and propose about their environment. In this way, individuals may be able to develop critical awareness through readings of the world.

This study is based on the assumption that a critical approach to language education needs to focus on contextual issues and the ways in which research looks to transform the current situation (Pennycook, 2004). With a transformative pedagogy in mind, this study goes beyond the linguistic features present in the text so that students can interact with it to "transcend their own environments" (Freire & Macedo, 1987), and to free students' voices so that they can express their ideas, opinions, and feelings about the practices in which they are immersed. Freirean critical pedagogy (Freire, 1985, 1998, 2002) argues that the underclasses should educate themselves, developing an emancipatory education which allows individuals to undertake a transformation from object to subject and become more fully developed human beings. In classroom practices, students should thus find opportunities to thematize issues of study, engage in dialogue with teachers, and fully participate in the educational process. This requires the construction of learning opportunities that foster empowerment and social transformation rather than, as Kellner (2000) puts it, conforming to dominant views and values. In sum, as McLaren (2006) points out, critical pedagogy has to go further than teaching sets of rules and structures to be used in a mechanical way. It aims to create awareness of purposeful social problems not only making classroom teaching and learning more meaningful but also empowering students to take a critical position and active roles that pursue transformative objectives.

With this critical approach in mind, songs are seen in this study as texts that can be read by every individual from their own perspectives having critical positions. Texts are understood as "everything possible to be read and to be rewritten; our own realities and life experiences are texts we can read aloud and rewrite by being critical readers of them" (Chapetón, 2007, p. 30). Text in this study refers to the contents of the songs that have a social nature. Songs, as texts, can be read and interpreted by each individual, allowing students to bring to mind issues of their real life contexts, connecting those with the way in which social processes are being portrayed in the songs, and thus, encouraging an

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active role in the development of class activities. Accordingly, instead of finding information in the songs, this critical approach allows students to interact with them and shape texts by reacting and responding aesthetically (Rosenblatt, 2002) through their emotions, sensations, tensions, and current lived ideas and experiences (Chapetón, 2005).

It is widely accepted that using songs in the EFL classroom can be a great source of motivation, interest, and enjoyment that can trigger emotions, help to develop an aesthetic taste (Cakir, 1999), enhance learner involvement, and encourage students to learn the foreign language. This is done by providing a relaxed environment and a change from the routine procedures in the classroom (Giudice, 1986; Reeve & Williamson, 1987, Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 1992). Research into this pedagogical strategy has shown that songs are very useful tools to build up language abilities, especially oral skills, vocabulary, and grammar (Castro & Navarro, 2014; Cuestas, 2006; Duarte, et al., 2012; Perez, 2010). It has been found that songs also serve as a vehicle that helps students express themselves in a comfortable way. Cuestas (2006) offered her tenth graders opportunities to choose and talk about their favorite songs in class. This not only improved learners' oral production but helped them express their ideas freely displaying favorable attitudes such as participation, relaxation, cooperation, and self-confidence. Duarte et al. (2012) used songs to encourage sixth graders to learn new vocabulary and pronunciation. Unknowingly, students also developed teamwork and created a non-threatening environment that fostered confidence and motivation to learn the foreign language.

Methodology

Research Design

This is a qualitative study. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), qualitative research is an approach of inquiry that looks into human behavior as it occurs naturally in its social, situated, particular, and local context. The qualitative method used in this study attempts not only to examine and describe what, where, or when a situation happens but also why and how people react and respond in front of that specific situation. Thus, data is described and interpreted in order to elicit meaning from the participants, gain understanding of their responses to the use of songs with a critical approach, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Since the main goal is not only to describe the phenomenon but also to intervene in order to offer possibilities for transformation through

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an action plan, this study follows an action research approach. Sagor (2000) states that action research "is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those taking the action" (p. 34). Thus, action research is a classroom-based research guided by teachers in order to reflect upon teaching practices. In addition to reflection, it is a cyclical process that entails planning informed action, implementing action, and doing observation in order to identify ways in which teaching practices can be improved.

Context and Participants

This research was carried out at a public school in the locality of Usme, in the South of Bogotá. A group of 42 students in 11th grade participated in the study. They were between 15 and 19 years old. All of them belong to the second level of a system of six socio-economic levels or *strata* in the city. Most of them belong to low income families in which the parents did not have access to education. Finally, it is important to mention that participants live in a context in which there are a variety of social problems related to violence, forced displacement, poverty, drugs, and gangs. As shown by an initial questionnaire, most of these students spend most of their free time with their friends on the streets or they stay alone at home because their parents have to work all day long. In addition, none of them has taken any English course in other institutions.

Data Collection Instruments

Four instruments were designed, piloted, and used to gather data: questionnaires, field notes, interviews, and students' artifacts. In order to build the students' profile and learn about their music background, interests and preferences, an initial questionnaire was administered. To observe students' interactions and participation in the EFL classroom, field notes were systematically taken for ten weeks, in two class sessions per week. Also, three semi-structured interviews were used at the end of each cycle in order to explore students' opinions, perceptions, and feelings about the process that was being carried out. Students' productions (artifacts) were collected in different moments of each cycle and they provided information about the activities carried out in each class session in which a song was used. A final questionnaire was administered after the intervention had taken place in order to look at the outcomes of the experience of using songs with a critical approach.

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The instructional design, developed in three cycles, pursued themes related to different aspects of the students' lives (their social

context, their relationships with others, and themselves). Three songs with social content were selected along with students and used in each one of the cycles (for a total of nine songs[3]). According to Griffee (1995), songs can create a friendly atmosphere, which is important for language learning. Songs also frequently bring to mind particular feelings, ideas, and experiences that are more straightforwardly unforgettable. The song activities designed for this study involved the use of both video and audio (the former only when the resources were available at the school) and allowed students to express feelings, thoughts, ideas, and opinions freely, regardless of their command of the foreign language. Since the main purpose was to describe their responses and reactions to the use of songs in the EFL classroom, students were free to express themselves in the language they felt more comfortable with. Because of the low level of English these public school students have, their responses were expressed in Spanish, their mother tongue.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

With the aim of gaining insights from the data gathered, this qualitative study used the grounded approach for data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This inductive method starts with line-by-line examinations of the raw data from the different instruments and allows findings to emerge through interacting with them. This process involved naming and labelling, grouping, finding relations, and displaying data in mind maps, always using grounded codes. As Freeman (1998) suggests, following this way of analyzing data permits researchers to have a complete perspective of the situation being studied and the innovative role of the activities implemented. The process involved what Freeman (1998) calls *making the regular appear new* as well as looking at the regular development of classes and activities from an innovative standpoint.

Results

This study sought to discover how students respond and react to the use of songs with social content in the EFL classroom when songs are approached within a framework of literacy as a situated social practice.

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[3] The songs used in this study were: "Eagle Fly Free" (Helloween), "Gangsters' Paradise" (Coolio), "Where is the Love" (Black Eyed Peas), "Welcome to my Life" (Simple Plan), "Family Portrait" (Pink), "Another Day in Paradise" (Phil Collins), "It's my Life" (Bon Jovi) and "Freewill" (Rush).

Three main themes emerged from the analysis of the data: 1) becoming interested in learning English through songs, 2) songs as a possibility to read the world, and 3) building up relationships with peers.

Becoming Interested in Learning English

This refers to the way students' reacted towards the use of songs with social content in the EFL classroom. First, the data showed that the students demonstrated a positive change of attitude towards class activities. It was discovered that when songs with social content are used within a framework of literacy as a situated social practice, students are more likely to become interested in participating in the EFL class:

> **S40:** Well, I liked the activities a lot because with those songs I felt I had a better performance in [the EFL] class.
>
> (Final questionnaire, December 5)[4]

> **S18:** I think this is a good proposal because that way the lessons are a lot more dynamic and we learn more about English and this makes us feel more inclined towards the subject because sometimes it is only grammar and exercises and one starts getting annoyed in class.
>
> (Final questionnaire, December 5)[5]

Phillips (2003) claims that songs are a significant element in the development of any language. He considers music and rhythms important in the learning process for learners and teachers to have as a useful instrument in all aspects of learning a language. Music can help in learning structures and vocabulary, but the most relevant aspect is that learners take pleasure in learning through music.

Through their responses to the use of songs in the EFL class, students showed that they felt free and motivated to participate. It was found that these responses were given mostly because of the use of songs with an approach that focused on the content. As illustrated below, students showed interest in the activities being carried out; there is initiative, motivation, and commitment:

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[4] Original Spanish: **S40**: "Pues a mí me gustaron mucho las actividades porque con esas canciones yo me sentí con un mejor desempeño en la clase."

[5] **S18**: "Me parece una propuesta buena ya que así las clases son más dinámicas y aprendemos más sobre el inglés y esto nos hace inclinarnos más hacia la materia porque es que a veces eso es solo gramática y ejercicios y uno le coge como fastidio a la materia."

The student S4 volunteers to participate in presenting the activity; he is paying attention to the directions.

(Field notes, November 2)

S34: The activities we did in class were very interesting because, for the first time, I felt motivated to participate in the English class because I didn't like it before, but I could participate expressing what I think and feel about things that happen to us.

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[6]

These responses indicate that songs can be considered as a way to awaken students' interest in learning English. Students can become motivated to learning the foreign language through the use of songs with a critical approach since they can find it enjoyable, interesting, and a means to express themselves through activities related to real contexts. The following excerpts show that students can become interested in learning English through songs because it was easier to learn in this way. Since music is something that students like, they also remarked that the classes became more dynamic:

The student S3 says that learning English this way is "más chévere" (much cooler) because he can enjoy it and develop the activities in an easier way.

(Field notes, November 2)

S39: I think it's cool to work like this in class because it makes it easier to learn.

(2nd interview, November 15)[7]

S8: When we work with this type of activities I learn more, and [I realize] that English is not that difficult to learn as it seems to be if you work [in class] doing activities that are so cool.

(1st interview, October 30)[8]

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[6] **S34:** Las actividades desarrolladas en clase fueron muy interesantes ya que por primera vez me sentí motivado a participar en la clase de inglés porque antes no me gustaba, pero pude participar expresando lo que pienso y siento de cosas que nos pasan.

[7] **S39:** Me parece bacano trabajar así porque es más sencillo aprender.

[8] **S8:** Al trabajar con este tipo de actividades aprendo más, y que el inglés no es tan difícil como parece si se trabaja haciendo trabajos tan chéveres.

Students also stated that they were interested in learning English by using different strategies that allowed them to be more engaged, avoiding the common lack of interest in the foreign language. This issue may hint at the importance of using activities that involve real life issues that go beyond the teaching of grammatical structures in the EFL classroom. This seems to arouse students' interest in the development of the activities that give them opportunities for practicing other issues of the language such as pronunciation and vocabulary:

S8: Well, one learns vocabulary and understands the song.

(2nd interview, November 15)[9]

S7: In my opinion, one learns in a different way that is not that common and that makes it more interesting than just repeating grammar although it is important to be able to get on better in the simple issues of the English [language].

(2nd interview, November 15)[10]

S13: I liked this methodology better because I learned a little bit more about the pronunciation of words that I didn't know and this was through songs that made the class more enjoyable and I started to see English [the language] as something cool.

(3rd interview, December 3)[11]

We can see here that students became interested in working in class using songs as it allowed them to look at English learning from a different perspective. They were able to work in a better way because they were interested in learning in a different way from the one they were used to. In the following excerpt taken from the final questionnaire, a student mentions how comfortable he feels because songs allow him to learn more vocabulary developing activities related to his daily life:

S11: I think it is very interesting to use songs in the English class because through them [the songs] we can remember and learn very important

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[9] **S8:** pues uno aprende vocabulario y entiende la canción.

[10] **S7:** Para mí uno aprende de forma diferente y por lo tanto no tan común y eso lo hace más interesante que solo repetir gramática aunque esta sea importante para poder desenvolverse mejor en lo simple del inglés.

[11] **S13:** Me gustó más esta metodología porque aprendí un poco más sobre pronunciación de palabras que no conocía y esto por medio de canciones que hacían más divertida la clase y empecé a ver el inglés como algo más chévere.

words that are frequent in the English language, and also relate them with our everyday lives. In addition, the class becomes more dynamic and with things that are easy to find [in everyday life].

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[12]

The student observes that songs not only helped him to improve his language skills, but also helped him to make connections to his real life experiences and allowed him to be interested in learning English. As illustrated in the next excerpt, this was due to the nature of the song content and the approach that was used permitting students to work in a comfortable and different way:

S25: This is a nice experience, we learn more because of the use of songs with those themes [social content]. Besides, the class work we produced was of good quality. In addition, we can apply concepts we learned and in that way increase fluency in the language. I think one learns in a different way.

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[13]

It can be said that students regard working with songs as useful not only for improving their English skills through this kind of activities, but also because it provides them with the opportunity to become active agents who can participate and contribute to the classroom activities.

In this research, most students' responses contributed to the successful development of the process. However, there were some reactions from students that hindered class work or did not facilitate the activities using songs, mainly because they found it difficult to comprehend the lyrics, as shown in the following students' responses:

S29: I did this handicraft this way because that's what I understood from the song and I don't think it was that good.

(Student's artifact, October 25)[14]

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[12] **S11:** Me parece muy interesante el uso de canciones en las clases ya que por medio de estas podemos grabarnos y aprender palabras muy importantes que son frecuentes en el idioma inglés, y además relacionar las vivencias diarias. También la clase se vuelve más dinámica y con cosas que son fáciles de encontrar.

[13] **S25:** Es una experiencia buena porque aprendemos más debido al uso de canciones con estas temáticas; además los trabajos que se elaboraron fueron muy buenos; además podemos aplicar conceptos vistos y así tener fluidez en el idioma. Creo que se aprende de manera diferente.

[14] **S29:** Realicé esta maqueta así porque fue lo que comprendí de la canción y no me pareció tan buena.

S12: Some songs didn't allow me to work well [in class] because it was difficult to me to understand the lyrics, but anyway I did all the activities.

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[15]

At the beginning, using songs with social content for enhancing literacy as a situated social practice motivated different responses among the students, including panic because the foreign language made them feel limited. The data revealed that at the beginning of the process the students felt scared or embarrassed due to the fact that their level of English was not very high; however, as the study advanced, they realized that the topics discussed in the songs facilitated and motivated their participation and interactions during the activities:

S4: At the beginning, I thought it was going to be more difficult to express my opinions and to reflect because it's a little bit embarrassing, but with the use of songs it gives an idea of how my life experiences are related to the songs. This gives me more self-confidence to express myself.

(3rd interview, December 3)[16]

Songs as a Possibility to Read the World

Considering Chapetón's (2007) definition of text as something that goes beyond the printed word, in this study, songs are understood as texts that allow students to read the world and be active agents in their immediate context and in the society. In this regard, the data showed that songs with social content could become a way to read and understand the world and through this reading, participate actively in the EFL classroom. Students had the possibility to state their critical positions in order to share their different perspectives about the way they see and understand what happens around them and in the world in general, as shown below:

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[15] **S12:** Algunas canciones no me permitieron trabajar bien porque me era más difícil entenderlas, pero de igual manera realicé todas las actividades.

[16] **S4:** Al comienzo pensé que iba a ser más difícil expresar opiniones y reflexionar ya que da un poco de vergüenza, pero con el uso de canciones da una idea de cómo se relacionan mis vivencias con la canción dándome así más confianza al expresarme.

S29: Each person has a way to see the world, and these songs make you see the reality captured in the lyrics. They [the song lyrics] also make you take a position on issues that affect us in our everyday life.

(Student' artifact, November 8)[17]

S12: Each person sees the world in a different way, but this does not stop you to change the way you see it if you can create links with people you thought were different from you.

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[18]

As Freire (1998) states, as teachers we have the responsibility of providing students with the tools for thinking critically about their real issues. Here, we can see that songs allowed students to express their points of view, assuming critical positions and expressing how they see the world. We observed that students can question everything around them (Giroux, 1994) in the process of reading the word and the world (Freire, 2002) through songs in the EFL class. Through the class activities, students acknowledged that each person is different and has different points of view but this does not limit the construction of a relationship with the world they live in, reflecting upon it, and sharing their experiences:

S1: Gangs are part of our everyday life in the neighborhood but I think that those are disoriented guys that steal and rob and can't control themselves, but if measures were taken everything could change, because anyway I have some friends who belong to gangs.

(3rd interview, December 3)[19]

S6: The experience we had with the workshops was very enriching because of the way we could see the world. [I could] see how I am emotionally, if I could fix those situations, how could I fix them, and

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[17] **S29:** Cada persona tiene su forma de ver el mundo y estas canciones hacen que uno pueda ver la realidad plasmada en letras y asumir una posición frente a los hechos que nos afectan, en nuestro diario vivir.

[18] **S12:** Cada persona ve diferente el mundo pero esto no impide que uno cambie la manera de verlo y pueda crear vínculos con personas que creía diferentes.

[19] **S1:** Las pandillas es el diario vivir en el barrio pero yo creo que ellos son muchachos desorientados que roban y atracan y no se controlan, pero si se tomaran medidas todo cambiaría, porque igual yo tengo algunos amigos que pertenecen a pandillas.

see who are the ones next to me, who are the ones by my side, and all these through songs that are meaningful in my context. That is why I feel confident when presenting my class work and expressing my points of view.

(3rd interview, December 3)[20]

Students expressed that they wanted to be active agents in the society, constructing a better immediate world, making their learning process more useful, and taking part in class and the development of society. It is evident that students became aware of their important role in the construction of a friendlier environment. The data revealed that working with this type of activities made students conscious about things they can do that contribute to constructing and living in a better social environment from a more realistic perspective using songs as a possible way to read the world.

S14: The activities were good because one can construct a better social environment from the content of the song that is from a different country, but that contains the reality of the world.

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[21]

Data showed that when students read the world they used literacy as a situated social practice recognizing their surroundings, being critical of their own reality, and also emitting a judgment of the world's current situation. When understanding the lyrics of the songs, students related the songs to daily life issues, and listened to their classmates' points of views and experiences as they interpreted and expressed what they thought about a problematic situation:

S40: My cartoon is like that, with two crossed guns, because gangs cross offenses, bullets, and everything they can to terrify.

(Students' artifact, October 23)[22]

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[20] **S6:** La experiencia vivida con los talleres fue muy enriquecedora por la forma de ver el mundo, de cómo estoy sentimentalmente, de si puedo arreglar estas situaciones, de qué forma y quiénes están a mi alrededor, de quiénes son los que me rodean, y esto a través de canciones que son significativas en mi contexto y por eso siento confianza al exponer mis trabajos y puntos de vista.

[21] **S14:** Las actividades fueron buenas porque uno construye un mejor entorno social, a partir del contenido de una canción que además es de otro país, pero contiene la realidad del mundo.

[22] S40: Mi caricatura es así con dos armas cruzadas porque las pandillas cruzan ofensas, balas y todo lo que pueden para atemorizar.

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A student expresses what he thinks about the song making a reflection about his social and personal reality.

(Field notes, November 29)

S4: When I understood the lyrics of the songs, which talk about cultural and social issues, I understood that I'm not alien to those situations.

(Students' artifact, October 11)[23]

It was possible to see that students were interested in learning English through song activities that were meaningful for them and allowed them to express what affected their personal and social lives. On the other hand, students' self-confidence was constructed because they liked songs with social content, and the activities that were implemented made them feel encouraged to read the realities of their worlds. Since actual facts were present in the songs, and they were related to the students' environments, students were able to make connections to their social realities and share experiences in a natural, spontaneous way. This social-situated reading and sharing encouraged participation and interaction in the EFL classroom and promoted the construction of (better) relationships, as discussed in the next section.

Building Relationships with Peers

This category shows how working with songs with social content can help students to build better relationships with peers and become self-confident regardless of their different points of view. When students developed activities with songs, they established better relationships with peers as they interacted from a different perspective. Here, the construction of a relationship goes beyond the practice of the foreign language and grammar; it means social interaction when sharing readings of the world and joint construction in the EFL classroom.

S15: The experience with these workshops is very enriching because of the way one can see the world and the way one can share with classmates thus building a closer relationship through the songs and the topics brought up [by the songs].

(2nd interview, November 15)[24]

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[23] **S4:** Cuando entendí las canciones que hablan de temas culturales y sociales comprendí que no soy ajena a esas situaciones

[24] **S15:** La experiencia con estos talleres es muy enriquecedora en la forma de ver el mundo y de compartir con los compañeros creando así una relación más cercana a través de las canciones y las temáticas planteadas.

Students used songs to reflect on how they could contribute to solving social issues in their daily life interaction; they discovered that they had the tools to listen to each other, discuss through dialogic interaction, and create a better environment by recognizing that there are different ways to read the world, which even if not shared, are also important. Thus, they acknowledged the fact that each person is different and has different points of view, which does not hinder the construction of a relationship with partners as can be seen in the following excerpts:

S7: I can say that each person sees the world in a different way and that those songs, in certain moments, make you be more open to the opinions and life expectations [of other classmates] thus motivating me to be more coherent.

(Final questionnaire, December 5)[25]

S4: The way I see the world after working with the songs and discuss with my classmates is the same, but the difference is that now I know how others think. Although the world is the same, I learned to see the difference understanding that I'm not the only one who is right, because there are a lot more thoughts/ideas that are different but are important as well.

(3rd interview, December 3)[26]

S10: The activities are cool 'cause they allow us to reflect upon each song and find the social content. Besides, [the song contents allow me] to be more critical about my surroundings and be able to interact more with my classmates and have a better relation with my school surroundings.

(1st interview, October 30)[27]

Students stated that they were cautious to present their ideas and feelings about the topics of the songs, but at the same time, it was significant for them to construct their meaningful points of view

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[25] **S7:** Puedo decir que cada persona ve de forma diferente el mundo y que estas canciones en ciertas ocasiones hacen que uno sea más abierto a las opiniones y expectativas de vida así motivándome a ser más coherente.

[26] **S4:** La manera de ver el mundo después de trabajar con las canciones y discutir con mis compañeros es igual, sino que la diferencia es que ya sé cómo piensan los demás, aunque el mundo sea igual, aprendí a ver la diferencia entendiendo que no sólo yo tengo la razón. Porque hay muchos pensamientos que son diferentes y también importantes.

[27] **S10:** Las actividades son chéveres pues nos permiten reflexionar sobre cada canción y encontrar el contenido social, y además a ser más crítica sobre mi entorno y así interactuar más con mis compañeros y tener una mejor relación en mi entorno escolar.

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for connecting with their classmates and being able to communicate in a meaningful way. In this respect, Giroux (1994) states that critical pedagogy allows building up relationships among students and teachers and students. He states that relationships need to be based on reciprocal confidence and respect, and for this reason, they can interact in a better way.

> **S31:** Songs with this type of contents help us to express our point of view from our daily school life making us be more [mature] (…) besides I can express without fear what I feel.

> (Final questionnaire, December 5)[28]

The data also showed that students liked sharing their work with their partners because they considered they had the ability to do it, and that what they did was quite valuable. It was thus implied that students wanted to establish better relationships with their peers, and to do this, they expressed that they were careful to present their ideas and feelings. In addition, the activities not only made them recognize that they may share similar points of view (affiliation) but also allowed, facilitated, and motivated students to help each other (cooperation), creating supportive and affective ties among them:

> **S1:** With some of my classmates we shared [had the same] ideas without knowing until we started to develop the activities with songs.

> (3rd interview, December 3)[29]

> **S7:** I'm not good at drawing but a classmate helped me, I just explained to him what I wanted.

> (Students' artifact, October 23)[30]

Students constructed relationships with others when they felt confident in showing their work because they felt there was a respectful position towards others' points of view. As previous experience with this particular group of students had shown, it was usual that students

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[28] **S31:** Las canciones con ese tipo de contenido nos ayudan a dar nuestro punto de vista desde nuestra convivencia haciéndonos más personas (…) además puedo expresar lo que yo siento sin sentir temor.

[29] **S1:** Con algunos compañeros compartimos ideas sin saberlo hasta que empezamos a realizar las actividades con canciones.

[30] **S7:** Yo soy mala dibujando pero un compañero me ayudó, yo solo le expliqué lo que quería.

did not respect others' points of view, but the data demonstrated that during the development of the activities in this study, students assumed a respectful position towards their classmates' ideas and opinions. This can be exemplified in the next excerpt obtained from the final questionnaire:

> **S6:** I like to share with my classmates because we interact in different forms[sic] and this kind of activities allow[sic] us to have different points of views.

> (Final questionnaire, December 5)

The data showed that students liked to share thoughts with classmates through dialogic interaction and using different song-related activities in the process of developing literacy as a situated social practice. This allowed them to be self-confident, taking into account their classmates' voices and expressing what they felt, thought, and believed without any restrictions. Data has revealed in this study that students can show active participation in social construction through a critical approach in the EFL class. According to Giroux (2001), literacy should be understood as a set of discourse forms and cultural competencies that make it possible to establish and recognize the relations and experience that exist between the learners and the world, all of this through interactions, in this case in the foreign language classes.

Conclusions

After examining students' responses and reactions to the use of songs with social content in the EFL class, we can say that taking literacy as a situated social practice within a critical approach encouraged students to participate in a more active and critical way. It also helped them interact with their peers using music as an opportunity to share ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a comfortable, respectful environment.

Students showed a positive attitude towards the use of songs with social content which seemed to spark their interest in both participating in the EFL class and learning the foreign language. The study showed that when songs are related to students' real lives, they feel motivated, committed, and willing to take an active part in the class as it becomes enjoyable and meaningful. It was also found that using songs with this approach can have a facilitating role that helps students shorten the felt distance with the L2.

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Results also indicate that using songs as a social-situated literacy practice in the EFL class can trigger connections to real life issues allowing students to read the world, going beyond the printed word, and to express critical positions towards their reality. Through the activities, the students were able to question what happens around them and to become active participants in society, sharing their experiences and expressing their points of view.

One of the most salient findings of this qualitative action research is that using songs, framed within this critical approach, can be a powerful tool to build relationships among peers. The class activities allowed students to listen to each other, find similarities and differences in their opinions, help each other, and value their peers' voices. Consequently, they found themselves creating bonds with their classmates and most importantly, building up a respectful, comfortable, and friendly environment in the EFL class.

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Authors

***Nilsen Palacios** holds a BA in Modern Languages (Spanish and English) from the *Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas*, Colombia and an MA in Foreign Language Teaching from the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Colombia*. He is an EFL teacher for the Secretary of Education in Bogotá at *IED Fabio Lozano Simonelli.*

***Claudia Marcela Chapetón** holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Barcelona (Spain), an MA in Applied Linguistics and a BA in English and Spanish, both from the *Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas* (Colombia). She is an Associate Professor at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia* (Colombia) where she teaches postgraduate seminars on TESOL Research. Her research interests include reading, literacy as a situated social practice, critical pedagogy, metaphorical uses of language, and corpus linguistics. She has authored school and university EFL teaching materials and textbooks.

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