The Use of Song as a Tool to Work on Listening Comprehension in Iranian EFL Classes

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Abstract
Helping English learners acquire a foreign language effectively is an essential issue which needs to be investigated. Obtaining a good listening comprehension which acts as a basis for the development of the other skills is very important. This study intended to explore and see whether using authentic English songs can improve the EFL learners’ listening comprehension. This paper reported the results of this study which was implemented on two groups in Tarlak English institute in Bandar Anzali. The study determined the effect of English songs on the language learners’ listening comprehension. This study was executed on 40 intermediate level students who were assigned to two groups as the control group and the experimental group. A pre and postlistening test was applied to both groups. The findings showed that the use of English songs had statistically significant impact on the language learners’ listening comprehension.

Keywords
The Listening Skill, Authentic Material, Authentic Songs, Iranian EFL Learners.

Introduction
According to Hayati (2009) studies on foreign language learning indicate that comprehensible input has a critical role in both language learning and comprehensible output. The listening skill is a receptive skill that is crucial in providing input for learners. However, this skill is being taught in Iranian foreign language learning context in a way that most English learners cannot master it and face numerous problems in their forthcoming studies and also in their real life.

It was confirmed by Harmar (1998) that listening helps students acquire language subsequently and listening is an exposure to language that is a basic need for anyone who wants to learn a foreign language. Just like a first language, learners should listen to the intonation and pronunciation of a word or idea and it is then that they can finally start talking in that tongue. Similarly, Devine (1982) said that listening is the primary means that provides incoming ideas and information. With the help of incoming information, we can better decide on what to say on a topic. It gives them ideas on not only the topics that are to be spoken about but also teaches them new phrases, words, and idioms.

Until recently, research on the use of song as an authentic pedagogical tool in the foreign language classroom has been rare. According to Failoni (1993), the utilization of music in the foreign language classroom has long been valued, but in most cases, it has been considered of entertainment status and nothing more teachers reveals that in comparison to other methodological ideas, only a few articles were related to this subject.

This study aims to expand research regarding the use of songs in foreign language teaching. It also seeks to show that students would benefit from the addition of song into the material covered by textbooks used in classrooms. This study would also show the effect of songs on the listening comprehension. The thrust of the proposed study on the foreign language teaching field would change the input focus from spoken or read texts to a musically based focus.

The present study indicates that the use of music could have strong implications on developing the listening skill, and the results could inform administrators of the value of using songs in the foreign language classroom. Furthermore, the addition of music in lesson planning on a regular basis could have a long-term influence on language students’ performance. The purpose of this study is to show the value of music as a teaching tool and to provide further insight into the topic by adding to the research knowledge. This research studied the effect of song on the listening comprehension and cultural awareness in the foreign language classroom.

Research Question
Does listening to songs have any statistically significant impact on the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners?

Method
In this study, the researcher selected 100 language learners from 5 classes among different branches of Tarlak English Language Institute in Bandar Anzali. The learners were all female, between the ages of 19 to 25, and all of them were intermediate level students. The responses of 2 classes were reliable to examine, since they had similar prelistening test results. Therefore, 40 learners were chosen for this study.

The instruments of this study consisted of one listening comprehension pretest, one listening comprehension posttest (based on the Interchange Third Edition/Passages Placement Testing Program), three authentic songs (An Englishman in New York by Sting, Driving Home for Christmas by Chris Rea, and Where is the Love? by Black Eyed Peas), and three sets of listening comprehension class activities based on song.

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lyrics. These materials were selected under the observation of the advisor.

In order to carry out the study and to find two homogeneous classes to assign as the experimental and control groups, 5 classes containing 20-28 intermediate level language learners of different branches of Tarlak Foreign Language Institute in Bandar Anzali were selected. In each class, only 20 members were asked to participate in the research. So the Objective Listening Comprehension skill pre-test, with 20 multiple choice questions, was administered to the 100 learners and according to the statistical analysis two homogeneous classes, each with 20 participants, had been selected to continue the project. Then, during 5 sessions which were held for about a month and a half, the experimental group, instead of listening to the usual audio clips, listened to the three selected authentic songs and worked on the activities. The content of the activities were chosen in a way that pointed the learners’ attention to listening comprehension. However, during these 5 sessions, the control group worked on the institute’s books audio clips which didn’t have any musical sections. When the treatment sections were finished, both classes took part in the listening comprehension posttest and answered the same questions.

Firstly, the mean, standard deviation and the ANOVA of the 100 listening comprehension pretest answers were analyzed to find two homogeneous groups. Furthermore, a paired sample t-test was used for the posttests since a paired sample t-test is used to compare two population means with two samples in which observations in one sample can be paired with observations in the other sample.

**Results**

The **Listening Scores for Groups A, B, C, D, and E**

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the listening scores for groups A, B, C, D, and E.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening-Group A</th>
<th>Listening-Group B</th>
<th>Listening-Group C</th>
<th>Listening-Group D</th>
<th>Listening-Group E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Valid</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

According to table 1, the mean of the listening scores for group A is 7.05, the median is 7.00, the mode is 4, the standard deviation is 2.23, the minimum is 4.00, and the maximum is 11. The mean of the listening scores for group B is 6.05, the median is 6.00, the mode is 5, the standard deviation is 1.87, the minimum is 3.00, and the maximum is 10. The mean of the listening scores for group C is 7.05, the median is 7.00, the mode is 7, the standard deviation is 2.60, the minimum is 3.00, and the maximum is 12. The mean of the listening scores for group D is 6.90, the median is 7.00, the mode is 6, the standard deviation is 1.68, the minimum is 4.00, and the maximum is 10. The mean of the listening scores for group E is 7.35, the median is 7.50, the mode is 4, the standard deviation is 2.73, the minimum is 3.00, and the maximum is 12.

Therefore, the means of the listening scores for groups A (the experimental group) and C (the control group) are equal so they will be chosen as the study groups.

**Analysis of the Hypothesis**

Considering table 2, the t-test result is -3.11 and the level of significance of this test is 0.006 which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected and the research hypothesis is accepted. That is, there is statistically significant difference between the listening pretest and posttest scores and considering the above table, the posttest scores are higher.

In order to understand the true impact of using music in the classroom, the same statistics were used for the control group’s pre and postlistening tests. Table 3 shows the results of a t-test for the control group which had only taken a pre and postlistening test.

Considering table 3, the t test is set at -1.07 and the test’s level of significance is set at 0.29 which is more than 0.05 so the null hypothesis is accepted and the research hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between the listening pretest and posttest scores. It can be maintained that music does have a statistically significant impact on the participants’ listening skill.

**Conclusions**

As it was mentioned before, the findings of the study showed that exposure to authentic songs contributes to helping learners develop their listening skill. For this development, careful lesson planning following the principles of communication is vital in the foreign language classroom. This study showed that by changing the method of teaching the listening skill in EFL classes and using authentic songs instead of following the prescribed structure for the listening section in institutional EFL books, which mostly ignore the musical part for intermediate level learners, unlike beginner learners who are commonly faced with music and songs, would lead to better results. This can help the learners communicate better with native speakers in the future as they can listen as well as speak better in authentic situations.

These findings uphold arguments made much earlier by researchers who concluded that learners, with suitable instructional planning by the teacher, can extract the specific meaning from oral authentic texts that simultaneously improve their listening comprehension skill. Monteiro (2010) tried to find the relationship between the use of authentic listening material in EFL classrooms and the learners’ ability to understand recorded oral English texts. The results of this study showed that increased exposure to authentic listening materials helped learners develop their listening skill and made them able to understand more in real life situations.

The results reported here could influence the use of songs in foreign language classroom practice. The findings indicate that songs have definite pedagogical value. The results of the scores show an advantage in listening comprehension for the three used songs. The use of song in the EFL classroom can make learning more pleasant and interesting. At the same time, students learn the target language and feel comfortable in a relaxing atmosphere. This helps them lower their affective filter, and become more receptive toward learning. According to Rafiee, Kassaian and Dastjerdi (2010), using songs in a classroom environment created a more positive learning attitude in the students and reduced the students’ negative feelings about the language.

Through this method, creating cultural awareness is simultaneous with promoting knowledge of the target language. Apart from teacher endeavors in the pedagogical area, the learners’ role is also important; that is, they are recommended to need authentic material provided in various sources such as the Internet, magazines, newspapers, etc.
In order to take notes to create topics to discuss with their partners in supplementary sessions. Internet chat rooms full of native speakers are highly beneficial especially when they are run with the idea of asking about the culture of both communities, which itself will develop many topics, for instance, national customs, geographical location, climate, history, academic level, traffic, etc. They can learn the language, culture, and transfer some of their own knowledge as well in these situations. All of these exchanges of information will lead to cross-cultural understanding. These methods also cause ambiguity tolerance on the part of learners. Teachers should care for students’ feedback and assess the benefit of their intercultural communicative competence.

**References**


**Table 2. Paired Samples Test for the Analysis of the Hypothesis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre test Listening of Group A - Post test</td>
<td>-.65</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>-1.08 to -.21</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening of Group A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3. Paired Samples Test for the Analysis of the Control Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest Listening of Group C - Posttest Listening of Group C</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.59 to .19</td>
<td>-1.07</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to take notes to create topics to discuss with their partners in supplementary sessions. Internet chat rooms full of native speakers are highly beneficial especially when they are run with the idea of asking about the culture of both communities, which itself will develop many topics, for instance, national customs, geographical location, climate, history, academic level, traffic, etc. They can learn the language, culture, and transfer some of their own knowledge as well in these situations. All of these exchanges of information will lead to cross-cultural understanding. These methods also cause ambiguity tolerance on the part of learners. Teachers should care for students’ feedback and assess the benefit of their intercultural communicative competence.

**References**