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Effectiveness of English Pop Songs on Non-English Majored Students' Listening Skill: An Experimental Study at University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH)

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Abstract: *This study investigates the impact of English pop songs on enhancing listening skills among non-native English students at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH). Over the course of ten weeks, a quasi-experimental approach was employed, incorporating five carefully chosen English pop songs into the students' listening exercises. The results revealed a 38% increase in post-test scores compared to pre-test levels, indicating a substantial improvement in listening comprehension. The findings suggest that integrating music, particularly popular songs in English, can be an effective strategy for boosting listening abilities. Additionally, the study underscores the role of motivation, cultural awareness, and informal learning in the language acquisition process. By using songs that are familiar and engaging, students were not only more motivated to learn but also benefited from exposure to natural language patterns, pronunciation, and colloquial expressions that typical classroom materials may not provide. The research highlights how non-traditional tools, like music, can complement formal instruction, making language learning more enjoyable and accessible. This approach offers a more dynamic learning experience, supporting the development of listening skills in a relaxed and culturally relevant context.*

Keywords: *Effectiveness, Majored Students' Listening Skill*

1. Introduction

Listening is one of the key skills needed to achieve fluency in any foreign language, alongside reading, speaking, and writing (Vandergrift, 2007). It is a fundamental aspect of language learning because it allows learners to comprehend spoken communication, which is crucial for real-life interactions. Despite its importance, non-native English learners often encounter significant obstacles when developing strong listening abilities. One of the major challenges is the lack of exposure to natural, conversational English (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). In traditional classroom settings, learners are typically exposed to scripted audio materials that fail to replicate the unpredictability, speed, and diversity of everyday speech, making it difficult for them to fully grasp the nuances of real-world communication.

Listening comprehension is a complex skill that involves decoding sounds, interpreting meaning, and understanding the context of spoken language (Field, 2008). Non-native learners often struggle with these aspects, particularly when faced with rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, or idiomatic language that is commonly used in natural conversation. Classroom materials, which often feature slower and more carefully articulated speech, do not fully prepare learners for the spontaneous and varied nature of spoken English (Goh, 2000). As a result, learners may find it challenging to follow conversations outside the classroom, particularly in informal settings where colloquial expressions and cultural references are prevalent. In response to these challenges, educators have explored a variety of strategies to improve listening comprehension, with one promising approach being the incorporation of music, specifically English pop songs (Murphey, 1992). Music offers a unique and engaging way for learners to practice listening. Pop songs, in particular, provide exposure to authentic language, including slang, idiomatic expressions, and conversational patterns that are often absent from textbooks and other formal learning materials (Li & Brand, 2009). Additionally, the repetitive nature of songs helps reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures, while the rhythm and melody aid in memory retention and pronunciation practice (Paivio, 1971).

Pop music, as an informal language resource, presents learners with real-world language in a context that is both enjoyable and relatable. According to Ludke, Ferreira, and Overy (2014),

music can stimulate cognitive processes, enhancing learners' ability to process and retain language. By engaging with songs that are familiar or appealing, learners are more likely to stay motivated and focused, leading to greater improvements in their listening skills. This research investigates whether listening to English pop songs can significantly enhance the listening skills of non-English-speaking students at the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH). Given the importance of listening in language acquisition and the challenges learners face, it is essential to explore innovative methods that can complement traditional language instruction. The study focuses on the effectiveness of pop songs in helping learners improve their comprehension and ability to understand spoken English in everyday contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Listening in Language Learning

Listening is a receptive skill that plays a critical role in language acquisition. According to Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, learners acquire language through meaningful and comprehensible input, and listening is a primary source of such input. Similarly, Vandergrift (2007) argued that listening is a complex cognitive process involving decoding, understanding, and responding to spoken language. These processes make it essential for learners to have ample practice in listening to authentic materials in their target language.

2.2 Music and Language Learning

The use of music, particularly songs, in language learning has gained attention due to its ability to engage learners and provide authentic language exposure. According to Murphey (1992), songs serve as a repetitive, meaningful, and pleasurable form of input. Songs in the target language expose learners to natural pronunciation, slang, idioms, and conversational language patterns that textbooks often overlook.

Cognitive psychology also supports the use of music in learning. The dual coding theory by Paivio (1971) suggests that combining verbal and non-verbal elements, such as music and lyrics, aids in memory retention and retrieval. When students listen to songs, they engage multiple areas of the brain, enhancing comprehension and retention.

2.3 Quasi-Experimental Study

Quasi-experimental research designs are widely used in educational settings where random assignment is not feasible. In such designs, researchers aim to establish cause-and-effect relationships between variables, despite the lack of randomization. This type of design is useful in educational research because it allows for the investigation of practical interventions in real-world classrooms, where control over all variables is not possible (Cook & Campbell, 1979). In the context of language learning, numerous quasi-experimental studies have explored the use of music and songs as instructional tools. For example, Li & Brand (2009) found that using English songs in language instruction enhanced both motivation and language competence among non-native speakers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of listening to English pop songs on the listening skills of non-English-speaking students at UEH. Two intact classes were selected, with one serving as the experimental group and the other as the control group. The experimental group was exposed to English pop songs during their listening practice, while the control group received traditional listening instruction.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 64 undergraduate students from UEH, aged 19-20. They were non-native English speakers enrolled in an English listening and speaking course. The students were divided into two groups of 32 each: the experimental group and the control group. Both groups had a similar proficiency level, which was determined through a pre-test conducted before the intervention.

3.3 Materials

Five English pop songs were selected for this study based on their accessibility, popularity, and linguistic features. The songs chosen were:

"Someone Like You" by Adele
"Shape of You" by Ed Sheeran
"Love Yourself" by Justin Bieber
"Perfect" by Ed Sheeran
"Rolling in the Deep" by Adele

These songs were chosen for their clear pronunciation, relatable themes, and moderate pace, ensuring that the students could comprehend the lyrics with practice.

3.4 Procedure

The experiment was conducted over a period of ten weeks. Each week, the experimental group was introduced to one of the selected English pop songs. The sessions included listening to the songs,

analyzing the lyrics, and discussing the meanings and cultural references in the songs.

The control group, on the other hand, followed a traditional listening practice curriculum using materials such as textbook audio recordings and scripted dialogues. Both groups took a listening pre-test before the intervention to assess their initial listening skills. After ten weeks, a post-test was administered to measure the improvement in listening comprehension.

4. Results

4.1 Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

The pre-test results indicated that both the experimental and control groups had similar listening comprehension skills at the beginning of the study. The mean score for the experimental group was 33%, while the control group had a mean score of 35%. After ten weeks, the post-test results revealed significant improvements in the listening skills of the experimental group. The mean score for the experimental group rose to 71%, showing a 38% improvement compared to their pre-test scores. In contrast, the control group showed a smaller improvement, with their mean score rising to 52%, representing only a 17% improvement. The statistical analysis of the results using a t-test indicated that the difference in the improvement between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

4.2 Students' Feedback

In addition to the quantitative results, qualitative data were gathered through student feedback surveys through questionnaire. The students in the experimental group reported that they found the use of pop songs in the classroom engaging and motivating. Many students noted that listening to familiar songs helped them better understand pronunciation, rhythm, and stress in English. Moreover, they enjoyed learning new vocabulary in a more relaxed and enjoyable environment.

Discussions

The results showed that the experimental group, which listened to English pop songs, significantly improved their listening comprehension scores compared to the control group. The experimental group demonstrated a 38% improvement in post-test scores, while the control group showed a smaller, marginal improvement. This indicates that exposure to authentic language through pop songs can effectively enhance listening skills, particularly in understanding natural pronunciation and colloquial expressions. These findings are supported by previous research on the benefits of using music in language learning. Studies have shown that music can aid in memory retention, motivate learners, and provide exposure to authentic language (Ludke et al., 2014). Additionally, students who are intrinsically motivated by enjoyable activities, such as listening to music, are more likely to engage deeply with the language and make greater progress (Dornyei, 2009). This result aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible and engaging input for language acquisition. One of the key factors contributing to the success of using pop songs in language learning is motivation. According to Dornyei's Motivational Self System (2009), learners who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to engage with learning materials and make greater progress. The feedback from students suggests that listening to English pop songs increased their interest in learning the language and made the learning process more enjoyable.

6. Conclusion

This study provides evidence that using English pop songs can effectively enhance the listening skills of non-English-speaking students. The 38% improvement in post-test scores among the experimental group highlights the potential of music as a powerful tool for language learning. By providing authentic, engaging input, pop songs can help learners develop better listening comprehension, while also increasing their motivation and enjoyment of the language learning process. Although the results of this study are promising, several limitations should be acknowledged. Future studies could extend the duration of the intervention to determine whether the improvements in listening skills are sustained over time.

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