

The effectiveness of using English songs to teach grammar

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Abstract: *The research was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of English songs and the responses of students towards using English songs to teach grammar in class. The participants included 40 first-year non-English majored students at Khanh Hoa University. Questionnaire, group interviews and class observation were employed to examine their grammar achievement as well as responses towards the implementation of English songs. The results indicate using English songs could help to improve students' grammar learning and they had positive responses towards this method.*

Keywords: *English grammar, English songs, effectiveness, students' responses*

1. Introduction

Learning grammar is very important for the students in order they can speak and write English appropriately (Fadhilawati, 2019). Therefore, grammar has always been an important concern for any teachers or instructors because it requires not only of professional knowledge, experience and skills but also of proper teaching methods. Without a suitable set of activities and techniques, grammar teaching and learning would become dull, frustrating and even demotivating. As a teacher in charge of teaching grammar for many classes at Khanh Hoa University, I myself have encountered quite a few difficulties in making my lessons effective and interesting to students. Especially, I have observed and seen many students feel bored, unhappy and disappointed when learning English grammar. Some even can not remember simple grammar rules and the way they used grammar was quite unnatural. Therefore, I decided to apply English songs which are said to have many advantages into my grammar lessons.

It can be seen clearly that most of the studies focused on the role of music and songs in language learning and teaching in general. This paper therefore focuses on evaluating the use of English songs into teaching grammar for first-year non-English majored students at Khanh Hoa University. Besides finding out how English songs can improve students' grammar learning, the main concentration is also on discovering the responses of students towards this new teaching method. Therefore, in order to achieve the aim of the study, the two following research questions were examined:

1. How can using English songs improve students' grammar learning?

2. How do students respond to using English songs to teach Grammar in class?

2. Content

2.1. Review literature on benefits of English songs

Quite a few studies and articles had clearly proved the important role of music and songs in language teaching and learning. For example, Saricoban and Metin (2000) point out that using songs in classroom is not only amusing but also relaxing and can help get rid of negative attitude towards language learning and through providing authenticity and context they make the grammar points more understandable and easy. Songs are one of the most popular tools for classroom instruction, a potential device to promote language ability and a powerful tool to reduce learners' inhibitions (Speckman, 2004; Saglam and Kayaoglu, 2010). Similarly, Mashayekh and Hashemi (2011) agrees that songs in class have great influences on learners' thoughts, behaviour, and motivation. Especially, according to Cruz-Cruz (2005), as an abundant source for language learning and teaching, songs bring us new experiences. Keskin (2011) also shares this view point by stating that songs help remove anxiety and stress when learning foreign languages.

2.2. The study

* Participants

Forty first-year non-English majored students at Khanh Hoa University participated in this study. They were all the age of eighteen and had compulsorily learned English for at least seven years at school.

* Data collection instruments, procedures

The study was conducted in 10 weeks from the beginning of October 2023 to the middle of December 2023. The researcher used different English songs with a variety of activities related to songs to teach grammatical points taken from the coursebook “*Life A1*” by Helen Stephenson, Paul Dummett and John Hughes.

In this study, questionnaire, group interviews and class observation were used. Firstly, the students were asked to complete a questionnaire of seven questions, including three for personal information and four related to learning grammar with and without songs. In addition, group interview was also utilized. Eight students were randomly selected and divided into two groups for interviews with similar questions regarding learning grammar with and without English songs from the questionnaire. Simultaneously, class observation was employed. All data were coded. The number of questionnaires received were calculated to determine the total responses which were organized into specific groups and those with dominant number of answers were highlighted for later cross-check. Excell spreadsheets were then used to show the total distribution of answers about the new teaching method. Responses from taped interviews were written down on pieces of paper into transcripts. These responses were also categorized into different groups corresponding to those from questionnaire. The same process was conducted with the field notes taken from the class observations. Finally, all the data collected from these three sources were compared and contrasted to find out similarities and differences.

2.3. Findings and discussion

All the data collected from the questionnaires, the interviews and the class observations focused on these two areas.

* How English songs can improve students’ grammar learning

In the questionnaire, the questions were designed to focus on students’ own assessment of differences and/or improvements when learning grammar with and without the support of English songs. 77.5% of the forty students surveyed agreed that learning grammar with English songs made them feel relaxed and around 70% reported that it could make the lessons more enjoyable while the figures for these were 0% for traditional grammar classes. The responses from the interviews also supported this

with 6 out of 8 interviewees (75%). The field notes from class observations also noticed that many of the students felt comfortable during the lessons.

Moreover, the number of participants who agreed with the two choices that learning grammar with or without songs helped remember rules more easily and learn them in a natural way also revealed a significant difference. With 65% and 57.5% compared with 7.5% and 2.5%, songs created quite a far distance between the two methods. The results from the interviews were in a same vein with 6 and 4 respondents having the same answers. Class observations also noted that the students were using the grammar structures they had learnt more confidently in writing and speaking activities and the number of mistakes were significantly reduced.

Similarly, only 4 (about 10%) agreed that traditional grammar lessons helped them understand the meanings of grammar structures more clearly. However, no responses from the interviews mentioned this opinion. On the contrary, more than 50% of the answers from the questionnaires and nearly 38% responses from the interviews indicated that songs helped to make the meanings of grammar structures much clearer and more understandable.

Of all the 40 students surveyed, 2.5% agreed that learning in a traditional class helped understand how grammar structure is used in a particular context and 5% reported that learning with songs would help them with this problem. Especially, none agreed with the idea that grammar lessons improve cultural knowledge whether they were taught with or without the support of songs. These results were also homogeneous to those recorded from the interviews.

* The responses of students towards using English songs in grammar learning

77.5% of the participants agreed that traditional grammar lessons were boring. Over 62% of the interviewees reported the same feelings. However, there was only 0% from both the questionnaires and the interviews agreeing that learning grammar through English songs was boring. Throughout the class observations, the researcher also found that when learning with songs, the students were quite interested in the activities and were willing to take part in them. Moreover, 62.5% of the participants agreed that they were under stress when learning grammar in a traditional class while the figure was only 2.5% when the lessons were taught with songs.

Correspondingly, 6 out of 8 interviewees said that they quite often felt tense when lessons were instructed traditionally with theories and lots of practice exercises while only one interviewee suggested the same emotion when learning with songs. This was clearly shown through the researcher's notes. The same situation was with the number of students who felt worried when learning grammar. While 22.5% of the participants agreed that they were worried when learning grammar with traditional activities, none experienced the same emotion when attending the class with songs. The responses from the interviews and class observations also revealed similar results.

85% of participants expressed happiness and 67.5% showed enthusiasm when learning grammar with songs while only 2.5% showed the same feelings when learning grammar in a traditional class. Additionally, nearly 88% of the interviewees agreed that they were happy when participating in the grammar lessons with the new method. Throughout the class observations, the researcher also saw the students' laughters when they joined in the activities.

Findings from the study suggested that using English songs in teaching grammar could have better effects on students in comparison with a traditional class. Using English songs could make grammar lessons much less challenging and confusing because it could enable the students to understand, remember the grammar rules more easily and use them in a more natural way. Furthermore, it could make the lessons more relaxing, enjoyable and helped students feel comfortable when taking part in the lessons.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the research helped to clarify how the use of songs could help to improve students' grammar learning and how the students responded towards this innovative teaching method. Through the investigation, it was clear that learning with English songs not only enabled the students to remember the grammar rules more easily, understand more about the meanings of the grammar structures and use them more naturally but also made the grammar lessons much more relaxing, enjoyable and far less challenging. In addition, learning with songs played a critical role in getting rid of the students' stress and worries. More importantly, the research also found out that the students showed positive responses towards using songs to learn grammar.

Most of the students felt happy and enthusiastic when they were taught grammar with English songs instead of feeling bored or worried when they had to learn in a traditional class.

Furthermore, there were some limitations while conducting the research. The first one is about the small size of the sample. Another limitation is constrain of the time and the limited capability of the author. Finally, one more limitation was about the missing notes during class observation. As I was playing the two roles at the same time – the teacher and researcher, sometimes it was quite difficult for me to take full notes of what I noticed during the class time. In spite of its limitations, the conducting of this research were quite beneficial for my teaching career in the future.

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