

From Lyrics to Understanding: The Role of Songs in Improving Students' Listening Abilities

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of using songs on improving students' listening comprehension skills in an English language learning context. The research employed a mixed-methods design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of songs in enhancing listening abilities. A total of 50 secondary school students participated, divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was exposed to song-based listening exercises, while the control group engaged in traditional listening activities. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to assess improvements in listening comprehension, and interviews and classroom observations were conducted to gather qualitative insights. The results showed a significant improvement in the listening comprehension scores of the experimental group, with a marked increase in their ability to identify key information, understand context, and recognize spoken words and phrases. The control group, on the other hand, showed limited improvement. Qualitative data revealed that students in the experimental group found the song-based exercises engaging and enjoyable, which contributed to higher motivation and better retention of language concepts. Songs, particularly with varying tempos and genres, provided students with authentic language input and exposed them to different speech patterns, further enhancing their listening skills. This study highlights the effectiveness of songs in improving listening comprehension and suggests that incorporating songs into language teaching can foster a more engaging and motivating learning environment. The findings also emphasize the need for careful song selection to align with students' language proficiency and interests. Further research is recommended to examine the long-term effects of song-based listening exercises and explore the influence of song characteristics on different aspects of listening comprehension.

Keywords: language learning, listening comprehension, listening skills, music in language teaching, songs in education

Introduction

Listening is a critical skill in language acquisition because it influences how students comprehend, process, and communicate in a foreign language. Sartika (2017) states that listening must be learned by everyone, as it accounts for approximately 40–50% of daily communication and

serves as a fundamental skill for acquiring information in a new language. Despite its importance, students often experience various difficulties in learning listening skills. Common problems include the fast speed of spoken language, limited opportunities to hear repetitions, insufficient vocabulary, difficulty understanding the speaker's pronunciation and speech patterns, limited comprehension of the listening material, and the tendency to focus on understanding every single word. In addition, listening difficulties are frequently caused by short attention spans and low learner motivation (Sartika, 2017). However, traditional approaches to teaching listening skills have often emphasized formal contexts, such as lectures or audiobooks, which do not always engage students effectively. As a result, recent educational practices have increasingly adopted alternative methods, including the use of music, to improve listening comprehension. Music, particularly songs, offers an enjoyable and meaningful learning medium by combining rhythm, melody, and lyrics, thereby fostering both cognitive and emotional engagement in the listening process.

Songs have been widely recognized for their ability to improve various aspects of language learning, including vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of songs allows students to familiarize themselves with new vocabulary, sentence structures, and colloquial expressions in a natural, enjoyable manner. Furthermore, songs can expose learners to diverse accents, speech patterns, and cultural nuances, offering a broader context for language acquisition. Given the increasing integration of multimedia tools in education, this study explores the role of songs in improving students' listening abilities, focusing on how they can make language learning more engaging and effective.

Numerous studies have explored the use of music in language education, demonstrating its positive impact on various language skills. For instance, a study by Fayzullayeva (2023) highlighted the benefits of using songs in improving vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. Similarly, the work of Tasnim (2022) showed that music significantly enhances students' listening comprehension, as it provides repeated exposure to natural speech patterns and rhythms. Moreover, research by Asmaradhani et al. (2019) found that the integration of songs in listening activities increased students' motivation, engagement, and retention of spoken language. These studies support the idea that songs can play a vital role in developing listening skills by familiarizing students with real-world speech.

Furthermore, studies have indicated that different genres and types of songs can cater to various learning preferences, potentially making the learning process more personalized and effective. For example, upbeat and fast-paced songs may improve students' ability to comprehend casual or conversational language, while slower ballads may help with more precise pronunciation and intonation. Despite these promising results, the body of research focusing specifically on how songs can enhance listening comprehension—particularly in diverse educational settings—remains limited.

While previous studies have acknowledged the potential of songs in supporting language learning, few have directly addressed the specific impact of songs on listening comprehension across various student demographics. Most studies have focused on vocabulary and pronunciation rather than evaluating listening comprehension as a distinct skill. Additionally, there is a lack of research examining the role of song selection, such as genre, language complexity, and cultural relevance, in

enhancing listening abilities. This research aims to fill these gaps by examining how songs, as a form of auditory input, can specifically improve listening comprehension skills in students, considering various factors such as song choice, tempo, and lyric complexity. By bridging these gaps, this study will contribute valuable insights into how music can be effectively integrated into language education for improving listening skills.

Despite the growing interest in using music as an educational tool, there is limited research that specifically examines the impact of songs on listening skills. This research aims to bridge that gap by investigating the effects of using songs as a teaching method for enhancing students' listening comprehension. The findings of this study may offer insights into how songs can be utilized in classrooms to support language learners and enhance their listening abilities.

Listening plays a crucial role in the process of language acquisition, as it allows learners to process, understand, and interpret spoken language. Lokanita et al. (2020) emphasizes that listening comprehension is foundational to overall language proficiency, as it supports learners in developing their speaking, writing, and reading skills. Listening allows students to be exposed to authentic language input, providing opportunities for them to recognize language patterns, speech rhythms, and varied pronunciation. It is also a cognitive process where learners actively engage in filtering and processing auditory information to construct meaning. Gökmen (2021) further notes that effective listening not only involves decoding sounds but also comprehending context, making it one of the most complex skills in language acquisition. In second language learning, listening skills are often the most challenging to develop, especially when learners are exposed to fast-paced or informal speech.

The integration of songs in language learning has been widely advocated due to their ability to combine educational content with entertainment, making language learning more engaging and accessible. According to Binarkaheni and Dewangga (2024) songs offer authentic language input, providing learners with exposure to colloquial expressions, idiomatic phrases, and various accents, which might not be present in textbooks or traditional exercises. The repetitive nature of songs helps reinforce vocabulary and grammar, allowing students to absorb language patterns naturally. Additionally, songs offer a rich source of cultural context, exposing learners to the societal values, emotions, and traditions embedded in the lyrics. This cultural immersion is essential for developing a deeper understanding of the language and its practical use (Rmelah & Pornwiryakit, 2023). Thus, songs not only aid in vocabulary acquisition but also in fostering a more comprehensive understanding of language through emotional and cultural engagement.

Research has shown that songs have a profound impact on improving students' listening comprehension. The rhythmic structure and repetition of lyrics make songs an ideal medium for language learners to practice listening skills. Zhang et al. (2024) found that songs enhanced students' listening abilities by providing a predictable rhythm and allowing learners to recognize patterns in speech. This repetition and rhythm help students anticipate and decode words and phrases, improving word recognition and retention. Moreover, songs can challenge students by introducing them to different speech registers, from formal to informal, and exposing them to diverse accents and dialects. Merdianti et al. (2023) confirmed that students who were exposed to songs in their language curriculum performed better on listening comprehension tasks compared to those who only practiced

with traditional listening exercises. This suggests that songs create a dynamic listening environment that mirrors real-life communication, making them an effective tool for language learners.

The effectiveness of songs in enhancing listening comprehension is not only dependent on their presence in the classroom but also on the characteristics of the songs used. The genre, tempo, and complexity of the lyrics play a significant role in shaping the students' listening experience. Slow-paced songs with clear articulation tend to be easier for students to understand compared to fast-paced songs with more complex vocabulary or slanted pronunciations (Putri et al., 2022). For example, ballads or slow-tempo songs, which often feature clearer pronunciation, allow learners to process language at a comfortable pace, aiding in better understanding and retention. On the other hand, upbeat songs with faster rhythms and colloquial expressions may offer more challenges but can also provide exposure to everyday conversational language, which is essential for developing authentic listening skills. The selection of songs based on students' preferences and cultural backgrounds is also important, as it can foster motivation and greater engagement in the learning process (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021). Songs that resonate with students' interests or reflect their cultural experiences tend to have a greater impact, as they emotionally engage learners and help make language learning more meaningful.

Beyond cognitive benefits, songs have been shown to significantly impact students' motivation to engage with language learning. According to Afriyuninda and Oktaviani (2021), motivation is a key factor in the success of language learners, and incorporating enjoyable activities, such as listening to music, can greatly enhance motivation. Songs, especially when students have a personal connection to the music, can transform the often-monotonous task of listening practice into an enjoyable and immersive experience. Tasnim (2022) observed that when students enjoy the content they are listening to, they are more likely to pay attention, process the language more effectively, and retain the information. Furthermore, the emotional appeal of music can make learning more enjoyable and reduce anxiety, a common barrier to language learning (Fayzullayev, 2023). Therefore, using songs as a teaching tool not only facilitates cognitive learning but also motivates students to engage with the language actively.

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the impact of using songs on enhancing students' listening abilities. A mixed-methods approach combined quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of how songs affected students' listening comprehension. The quantitative component involved a pre-test and a post-test to measure improvements in students' listening skills. In contrast, the qualitative component included interviews and classroom observations to gain deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions of learning through songs. This design enabled data triangulation, thereby strengthening the reliability and validity of the findings.

The participants of this study consisted of 50 secondary school students aged 15 to 17 years who were enrolled in an English language class. The students were selected using purposive sampling

to ensure that they had a basic level of English proficiency and prior experience with listening activities. The selection process also considered diversity in terms of gender, cultural background, and exposure to English-language media, as these factors could influence students' engagement with songs. The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group and a control group, each comprising 25 students.

Quantitative data were collected using a listening comprehension test designed to assess students' ability to understand spoken English in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. The pre-test was administered before the intervention, and the post-test was administered after the intervention to measure any changes in listening comprehension. Both tests consisted of multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and short-answer questions that focused on identifying key information, understanding context, and interpreting meaning from audio recordings.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The interviews were conducted with selected students from the experimental group to explore their experiences of using songs in language learning. The interview questions focused on students' perceptions of the effectiveness of songs, their level of engagement, and the emotional and motivational impact of song-based listening activities. Classroom observations were carried out throughout the study to examine students' responses to the songs, their participation during listening tasks, and their overall engagement in the learning process.

The intervention involved the use of songs during regular English lessons over four weeks. The songs were selected based on their suitability for the students' language proficiency level, tempo, genre, and cultural relevance. Both slow-paced ballads and faster-paced pop songs were used to expose students to different types of language use, ranging from more formal expressions to casual, conversational speech. Each lesson focused on one song and included activities such as completing missing lyrics, identifying key vocabulary, and discussing the meaning of the lyrics in context. The experimental group listened to songs at the beginning of each lesson and completed guided listening activities, while the control group engaged in traditional listening exercises using recorded dialogues followed by comprehension questions. This comparison enabled a direct evaluation of the effect of songs on listening skills.

Quantitative data were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests to determine whether there was a statistically significant improvement in the listening comprehension scores of the experimental group compared to the control group. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were also calculated to summarize students' performance and identify trends before and after the intervention.

Qualitative data from interview transcripts and observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting recurring patterns or themes within the data. The analysis focused on themes such as student motivation, engagement, and perceived improvement in listening comprehension, allowing for a deeper understanding of how songs influenced the learning process.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents or guardians prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their right to withdraw at any

time without any negative consequences. All data were kept confidential and were used solely for research purposes. The study also ensured that students experienced no physical or emotional harm as a result of their participation.

Results and Discussion

The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed to examine the effect of using songs on students' listening comprehension skills. Comparisons between the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups were conducted to determine the extent of improvement in listening abilities. The results showed clear differences between the two groups, indicating the impact of song-based instruction on listening comprehension.

The experimental group, which engaged in listening activities using songs, demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in listening comprehension. The average pre-test score of this group was 55%, which increased to 75% in the post-test. A paired-sample t-test confirmed a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($t(24) = 7.32, p < 0.05$). In contrast, the control group, which participated in traditional listening exercises, showed only a modest improvement. The control group's average pre-test score was 53%, while the post-test score increased to 61%. However, this difference was not statistically significant ($t(24) = 1.84, p > 0.05$). These findings indicate that the use of songs had a stronger positive effect on students' listening comprehension than conventional listening methods.

Further analysis of specific listening skills revealed that students in the experimental group showed greater improvement in identifying key information, understanding context, and recognizing spoken words and phrases delivered in different accents and speech speeds. The post-test results indicated that these students were more successful in comprehending spoken texts and identifying specific details in audio recordings compared to students in the control group. This suggests that exposure to songs helped learners process spoken language more effectively and develop better overall listening competence.

Qualitative findings supported the quantitative results. Interviews with students from the experimental group revealed that they perceived listening to songs as an enjoyable and engaging way to practice listening skills. Many students reported that the repetitive nature of songs helped them remember vocabulary and improve pronunciation. Classroom observations also showed higher levels of participation and engagement among students in the experimental group. They were more actively involved in listening activities, such as discussing song meanings, completing missing lyrics, and translating parts of the songs, compared to students in the control group.

Overall, the findings provide strong evidence of the positive impact of using songs on improving students' listening abilities. Students exposed to song-based listening activities showed significantly greater improvement than those who followed traditional listening instruction. These results support the view that songs can serve as an effective instructional tool for enhancing listening comprehension, as they expose learners to authentic spoken language engagingly and memorably.

The improvement in the experimental group's listening skills can be attributed to several factors. First, songs expose learners to natural language use, including various accents, informal

expressions, and colloquial phrases. Such exposure is essential for understanding real-life communication (Dizon, 2020). In addition, the rhythmic and repetitive characteristics of songs facilitate word recognition and comprehension, as learners can predict words and phrases based on melody and rhythm (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021). This was reflected in the experimental group's stronger ability to identify details and understand context in audio recordings.

Moreover, emotional engagement played an important role in enhancing students' motivation and participation. As noted by Kumar et al. (2022), the emotional appeal of songs can reduce learning anxiety and increase enjoyment, leading to higher motivation. Students in the experimental group expressed positive attitudes toward learning through songs and reported greater enjoyment compared to traditional listening exercises. This emotional connection likely contributed to their improved listening comprehension outcomes.

The findings also emphasize the importance of appropriate song selection. The use of songs with different genres and tempos allowed students to practice listening to a range of speech styles, from clear and slow-paced pronunciation to faster, more casual speech. Slower songs helped students focus on individual words and pronunciation, while faster songs challenged them to understand natural conversational language. This variation likely supported the development of more flexible and effective listening skills. Although the control group showed some improvement, it was not as substantial as that of the experimental group, suggesting that traditional listening exercises may be less engaging and motivating. In line with Zuliyan (2021), the results indicate that incorporating songs into language instruction can be more effective than relying solely on conventional listening practices.

The findings of this study have important implications for language teaching, particularly in the development of listening comprehension. Teachers are encouraged to integrate songs into listening lessons to provide students with exposure to authentic language use and diverse accents. By selecting songs that match students' proficiency levels and interests, teachers can enhance motivation, engagement, and listening performance. Additionally, song-based activities create a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, which can reduce anxiety and foster a deeper connection to the target language.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and the research was conducted in a single school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples across different educational contexts. Moreover, this study focused on short-term improvements over four weeks. Further research is recommended to investigate the long-term effects of using songs on students' listening comprehension and overall language development.

Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of using songs on improving students' listening comprehension skills. The findings indicate that incorporating songs into language lessons can significantly enhance students' ability to understand spoken language, as evidenced by the improvement in the listening comprehension scores of the experimental group. The analysis revealed that students exposed to songs showed greater gains in identifying key information, understanding

context, and recognizing spoken words compared to those who participated in traditional listening exercises.

The use of songs in the classroom not only facilitated cognitive improvements in listening comprehension but also played a critical role in increasing students' engagement and motivation. The emotional connection that students formed with the songs, along with the repetitive and rhythmic nature of the music, made learning more enjoyable and less stressful, which likely contributed to the positive outcomes observed. Moreover, the variety in song genres and tempos provided students with exposure to both formal and informal language, further enhancing their listening abilities.

These results highlight the potential of songs as an effective and enjoyable tool for improving listening skills in language learners. Educators are encouraged to incorporate songs into their teaching practices to offer students more authentic language input, increase motivation, and create a more engaging learning environment. Future research could explore the long-term effects of song-based listening exercises and examine how different types of songs—based on factors such as genre, tempo, and complexity—affect various aspects of listening comprehension.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of research supporting the use of songs in language education and provides practical insights for language instructors seeking innovative ways to enhance their students' listening abilities.

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