

Melodies that Build Listening: Enhancing Undergraduate Students' Listening Comprehension through Popular English Songs

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Abstract

Listening is one of the most important language skills for successful communication. Yet it is difficult for undergraduate English students because they encounter unfamiliar pronunciation, vocabulary, and varying speech rates. Traditional learning exercises are based on textbooks and recorded audio. They don't maintain learners' listening skills. Popular English music provides an engaging alternative because songs combine language, rhythm, pitch and tone, pronunciation, repetition, and emotion. This article explains the teaching value of popular English songs in developing undergraduate students' listening skills. Popular English songs, such as Taylor Swift's Shake It Off, Adele's Someone Like You, and Ed Sheeran's Thinking Out Loud can be integrated into structured classroom activities involving lyric identification, vocabulary recognition, pronunciation awareness, listening for sequence, and shadow listening. This article presents a song-based listening method. It guides students from first listening to deep understanding and personal response. It also explains how technology helps provide flexible, repeated practice for every learner. Using popular English music with focused tasks helps undergraduate students improve their listening skills, hear sounds better, learn new words, speak more clearly, and understand spoken English.

Keywords: Listening Skills, Undergraduate Students, Popular English Songs, Technology, Classroom Activities.

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INTRODUCTION

To speak well, learners must first understand what they hear. To communicate well with native speakers, learners should learn to understand real-life language use and grasp the main point of what is being said. Listening is the first and foremost language skill. It is the essential skill for successful communication. Among the four basic skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing - listening skills are the most important for effective communication. Because they first start by listening; then they slowly improve their other skills. In the beginning, they listen to sounds and communicate with sounds (Berdaq 121-128). So, listening is more powerful than the other three skills (Altun 56-61). Listening is not only the physical act of hearing sounds. It is also an active process involving attention, repetition, memory, identification, and explanation. Yet it is difficult for undergraduate English students.

Traditional materials like classroom lectures, interviews, news reports, debates, telephone conversations, and two-person dialogues are useful, but they reduce concentration and motivation. (Thohir and Yundayani) So, technological materials like listening to popular English songs improve the students' motivation and concentration (Septaviani et al. 14-21). This study mainly focuses on using popular English songs as learning material to improve undergraduate students' listening skills. The popular songs included in this article, such as Taylor Swift's *Shake It Off*, Adele's *Someone Like You*, and Ed Sheeran's *Thinking Out Loud*, can be integrated into structured classroom activities involving lyric identification, vocabulary recognition, pronunciation awareness, listening with sequence, and shadow listening.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Khudarganova examines how songs help young learners learn English. Using songs in English language classrooms helps children improve vocabulary, memory retention, grammatical understanding, and emotional impact. This review suggests directions for future research and identifies gaps in current methodology . (Khudarganova 237-242).

Lee examines the importance of popular music and media literacy in the classroom, the merits and demerits of using popular music, and the connections and skills popular music can support as an educational tool (Lee 99-106). "Music is considered a socio-cultural artifact, which mediates the processes of collective identity construction, and whose function in such processes can be multiple" (Dordevic 899-915).

Salainti and Pratiwi found that digital music platforms and podcasts can support students' listening skills and also improve students' English. It strengthens students' connection to digital technology (Salainti). The participants are X Grade students of Makassar Adventists Senior High School, Indonesia. The writer found that students who are active with digital technology, especially on music platforms, have better listening skills than others.

Ahmadi examines how listening comprehension plays a vital role in the learning process (7-10). Many studies have explored listening in second-language learning,

research, and teaching. It shows that researchers can improve learners' listening comprehension through learning materials and activities.

Umam and Nafingul examine the use of podcasts to develop English listening and speaking skills. The writer used a qualitative literature review method and examined relevant studies from 2015-2025. The writer proved that podcasts improved listening comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking fluency (Umam 13-20). Therefore, podcasts are an effective and accessible tool to support listening and speaking skills in English Language Learning.

Sila and Gunawan investigate the use of YouTube as an alternative to conventional media such as CDs or audio cassettes. The writers use a case study approach with a qualitative design at a public university in Bandung, Indonesia. The twenty-eight participants are final-year English Education Students. The researchers used an open-ended questionnaire and analysed the data using NVivo. Therefore, the Extensive Listening (EL) of both students and teachers improved (Sila & Gunawan 182-200).

Schoepp investigates the reasons for using songs in the ESL/EFL Classroom. The writers clearly explain that songs have been part of the human experience for as long as we can remember. Songs have become an integral part of our language experience and if used in coordination with a language lesson they can be of great value. The writer demonstrated that the three theoretical reasons are all intertwined and help to demonstrate the value of using songs in the classrooms. (Schoepp 1-4).

Afriyuninda investigates that students' listening skills got improved using English songs. 100 students participated in this case study. The writer used qualitative method. The writer collected the data by giving link questionnaires to the students. Finally, the writer proved that English songs are effective in improving listening skills of students. (Afriyuninda 80-85).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Many undergraduate students have difficulty understanding spoken English. As a result, students struggle to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, maintain concentration, follow the overall meaning of the audio, and identify specific information. This study examines teachers' use of English songs in undergraduate classrooms to build students' listening skills.

The primary aim is to examine how English songs can be used as effective learning material for developing undergraduate students' listening skills. This study aims to develop undergraduate students' concentration, motivation, pronunciation, listening comprehension, active listening, identification, and vocabulary learning.

EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS

Research Methodology

This study uses a pre-test/post-test experimental design to investigate whether listening to popular songs can improve undergraduate students' listening skills. This method includes four steps to follow:

Step 1: Students complete their pre-test.

Step 2: Students participate in the classroom activities.

Step 3: Students complete their post-test, similar to the pre-test.

Step 4: Identify improvements in students' listening skills.

Research Group

The researcher selected 30 students from III BA English at Kalaignar Karunanidhi Government Arts College for Women (Autonomous), Pudukkottai, as a research group. The researcher spent one month teaching them the importance of listening skills and how to develop them. The researcher spent twenty hours on the experimental study. The first two hours were used to test the students' own listening skills through a pre-test. Then the researcher spent three hours on each of the five activities. Each of the five activities contained three exercises. The researcher clarified doubts about the activity. The next two hours were used to analyse the students' improvement in their listening skills through the post-test. The last hour was used to show the students their own improvement in listening skills.

Pre-test

The researcher conducted the pre-test with the students before moving to the activities and analysed the students' listening ability. This helps determine students' improvement at the end of the research.

Before participating in the classroom activities, students listened to an unfamiliar audio passage and answered multiple-choice questions based on it. The pre-test measures undergraduate students' ability to understand unfamiliar vocabulary, meaning, and information. The researcher analysed that the students' listening ability is too low.

S.No	Name	Total Marks
1	Abinaya A	12
2	Abirami S	13
3	Bhuvaneswari T	11
4	Dhivya M	09
5	Gajalakshmi K	07
6	Gayathri S	08
7	Hema M	10
8	Jakkirammal S	12
9	Kalaivani S	11

10	Kavitha A	10
11	Kesavarthini K	13
12	Lakshmi V	08
13	Lavanya C	10
14	Manisha R K	07
15	Marikkannu M	11
16	Nakshathra M	09
17	Poojaasri B	08
18	Priya Dharshini A M	13
19	Rajalakshmi M	11
20	Safrin S	12
21	Sakthi Priya P	10
22	Srimathi M	07
23	Susi C	06
24	Thenmozhi M	05
25	Thiraviga R	13
26	Vaishnavi S	10
27	Vijayalakshmi R	07
28	Vijila A	06
29	Yashwanthini J	08
30	Yuvashree B A	05

Selection of Songs

Select songs based on teaching fitness rather than popularity alone.

Song	Artist
<i>Shake it off</i>	Taylor Swift (Swift)
<i>Someone Like You</i>	Adele (Adele)

<i>Thinking Out Loud</i>	Ed Sheeran (Sheeran)
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These songs provide different linguistic and musical characteristics and can therefore expose students to varied listening experiences (Urbaite). The songs can help develop language, rhythm, pitch and tone, pronunciation, repetition, and emotion (Baills et al. 369-413).

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Missing Lyrics

The researcher played all the selected songs three times. The researcher prepared three lyric worksheets containing selected blanks. Students listened and filled in the missing words. Through this activity, the students developed their auditory discrimination, vocabulary recognition, and concentration.

Activity 2: Vocabulary through Context

The researcher played all the selected songs three times. The researcher selected unfamiliar words from the song. Students listened to the relevant section and inferred each word's meaning from context. In this activity, the students completed three exercises. This activity helped students learn new words by using context instead of translating every single term right away.

Activity 3: Pronunciation Detective

The Researcher played the song twice. Students listened carefully to the selected lines and identified pronunciation features.

“Sparked by the repeatability of musical stimuli afforded by the gramophone, psychologists ran various experiments to prove that music had generalisable emotional qualities. With culturally narrow music selections and subject pools, these experiments, viewed in a modern context, raise questions about biases and blind spots that may persist in modern metadata” (Krishnaswami 157-176).

The researchers replayed the selected lines and asked students to repeat them. They observed contractions, linking, stress, rhythm, reduced sounds, and repeated phrases. This activity helped students to recognise that spoken English might sound different from the individual words they saw in written form. (Chofifah et al. 18-31)

Activity 4: Listen and Sequence

The researcher played all the selected songs twice. Students listened carefully to the songs. The researcher gave the students three exercises. The selected lines from a selected song were presented in mixed order. After listening to the songs, the students arranged the lines in the correct sequence. This activity improved students' ability to identify relationships between ideas and understand sequence.

Activity 5: Shadow Listening

The researcher played all three songs in short sections for the students. Students listened and repeated them simultaneously after the singer. The Shadow Listening process is:

Listen → Pause → Repeat → Listen Again → Shadow

Students could perform this process in a group. This activity could help students improve their attention, pronunciation, and fluency.

Post-test

The researcher conducted the post-test to identify improvements in students' listening skills. After completing the tasks, students listened to an unfamiliar audio passage and answered multiple-choice questions of similar difficulty to the pre-test. The post-test evaluates improvements in listening comprehension, vocabulary, and recognition. The majority of students improved their listening skills. The results of the post-test indicate that the activities implemented during the intervention contributed to the development of students' listening abilities. The comparison between the pre-test and post-test performances further demonstrates progress in their overall listening comprehension.

S.No	Name	Total Marks
1	Abinaya A	17
2	Abirami S	18
3	Bhuvaneswari T	15
4	Dhivya M	14
5	Gajalakshmi K	14
6	Gayathri S	16
7	Hema M	17
8	Jakkirammal S	18
9	Kalaivani S	15
10	Kavitha A	16
11	Kesavarthini K	14
12	Lakshmi V	13
13	Lavanya C	16
14	Manisha R K	14
15	Marikkannu M	15
16	Nakshathra M	16

17	Poojaasri B	14
18	Priya Dharshini A M	19
19	Rajalakshmi M	15
20	Safrin S	19
21	Sakthi Priya P	15
22	Srimathi M	16
23	Susi C	18
24	Thenmozhi M	13
25	Thiraviga R	19
26	Vaishnavi S	16
27	Vijayalakshmi R	16
28	Vijila A	15
29	Yashwanthini J	14
30	Yuvashree B A	13

FINDINGS AND RESULT

The improvement can be calculated using the mean of both the pre-test and post-test.

SUM OF THE MARKS SCORED BY ALL THE STUDENTS

MEAN = -----
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS

Sum of the marks scored by all the students in the pre-test = 270

Total number of students = 30

Pre-test Mean = 270/30 = 9

Sum of the marks scored by all the students in the post-test = 470

Total number of students = 30

Post-test Mean = 470/30 = 15.6

PERCENTAGE OF IMPROVEMENT =
$$\frac{(\text{POST-TEST MEAN}) - (\text{PRE-TEST MEAN})}{\text{PRE-TEST MEAN}} \times 100$$

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Percentage of Improvement} &= \{15.6 - 9 / 9\} \times 100 \\ &= \{6.6/9\} \times 100 \\ &= 73.33\%\end{aligned}$$

Results indicate that **73.33%** of III BA English students showed advancement in their listening skills (Raj and Tomy)

CONCLUSION

Initially, the students showed little interest in developing their listening skills. After the researcher explained the importance of listening and introduced strategies to improve it, the students showed noticeable improvement in their performance. The findings indicate that the listening skills of the III B.A. English students improved significantly.

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