

Songs for EFL/ESL Class: How to Teach Listening Skill through Music¹

Zarin Tasnim², Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh

Abstract

The purpose of this pedagogical article is to suggest the effective use of songs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) classes, including the benefits, challenges, criteria, lesson planning, and guidelines, so that teachers can design tasks using songs to improve their learners' listening ability. After describing the current EFL/ESL context, a personal teaching experience is shared, specifically teaching listening to a group of thirty undergraduate students through songs. Then difficulties using songs and a list of various factors involved in selecting songs are discussed. Finally, some classroom activities accompanied by a sample lesson plan and some practical suggestions for developing the skill are included.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo pedagógico es sugerir el uso efectivo de canciones en clases de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) o inglés como segunda lengua (ESL), incluidos los beneficios, desafíos, criterios, planificación de lecciones y pautas, para que los profesores pueden diseñar tareas utilizando canciones para mejorar la capacidad auditiva de sus alumnos. Luego de describir el contexto actual de EFL/ESL, se comparte una experiencia de enseñanza personal, específicamente enseñar a escuchar a un grupo de treinta estudiantes de pregrado a través de canciones. Luego se discuten las dificultades para usar canciones y una lista de varios factores involucrados en la selección de canciones. Finalmente, se incluyen algunas actividades de clase acompañadas de una lección de muestra y algunas sugerencias prácticas para desarrollar la habilidad.

Introduction

Teaching English listening skills to students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) is not an easy task, especially for those who do not usually get much exposure to the English language. Listening is a primary receptive language skill that needs to be developed among ESL/EFL learners for successful verbal communication. Nevertheless, this skill is often ignored and devalued in the English classes of primary, secondary, or tertiary levels of education in many ESL or EFL contexts. However, second language (L2) learners often face many difficulties in grasping the sounds and meaning of the listening task. In addition, nervousness or reluctance can prevent them from acquiring listening skills. Due to the improvement of technology, various approaches and strategies have been promoted and applied in teaching language skills worldwide. Audio materials, such as recorded speech or conversation, songs, radio broadcasts, and audio versions of books, are often used as teaching tools for EFL/ESL instruction and at an upper-intermediate level, music or songs can also help develop listening skills.

Fonseca-Mora et al. (2011) define music as "rhythm, a reflection of our physiological life. Music is also melody, sequence of sounds, which is associated with our emotional life" (p. 102). Music reflects our inner feelings through tune and words. Almost everyone listens to music for pleasure or out of passion. Songs are related to our emotions and the perceptions of our lives. Hence, Bokiev et al. (2018) consider music as "not only a form of art meant for entertainment, but also a kind of healing art or a medicine for the soul and body, in a manner of speaking" (p. 316). This paper will show how English songs can be efficient in teaching and improving the listening of ESL/EFL learners. It aims to outline the benefits, challenges, some pedagogical factors, lesson planning, and important guidelines with respect to using songs in the listening class.

Benefits of Songs in the Listening Session

One of the most important benefits of using songs is that students find themselves in a relaxing and pleasant classroom atmosphere. Sevik (2012) considers songs as "vital tools to create a safe and natural classroom ethos and to overcome feelings of shyness and hesitation on the part of the learners" (p.11). Songs can remove boredom from the class and thus help learners feel comfortable and stress-free in the learning process.

¹ Received: 1 October, 2021. Accepted: 3 January, 2022. Published: 28 September, 2022.

² tasnim-eng@sust.edu, 0000-0001-8089-2923

Songs also create a diverse set of emotions in the listener and tied to one's own culture and real-life factors. According to Mobbs and Cuyul (2018), as music is universal and loved by people of all ages and cultural backgrounds, it is an excellent way to engage learners. They believe that music reinforces the aspects of rhythm in a language, an opportunity to examine culture and diversity through authentic songs and other materials, and a way for learners to explore human vocal expression and communication from speaking to singing. Kuśnierek (2016) thinks that popular songs affect students' lives and are related to their different interests and daily experiences. Hence, learners of different ages and tastes can easily get connected with the lyrics and music.

To improve listening skills, learners should be self-motivated and confident. Vernon (2010) suggests that songs strengthen the classroom atmosphere, as well as make students sustain their self-confidence. Songs can help learners to enhance their enthusiasm and confidence via emotions. Harmer (2007) considers music as "a powerful stimulus for student engagement precisely because it speaks directly to our emotions" (p. 319). Music thus functions as a motivating factor for the learners to engage in the learning. Şahin (2008) also feels that students can become actively involved in the learning process by using their musical knowledge.

Songs serve as a source of inspiration and academic interest as well. They help students express their ideas and encourage them to participate in class. Lieb (2008) believes that music has great potential in ESL classrooms as it is closely related to language. Songs are different expressions of a language that connect both brain and mind. Vethamani and Keong (2008) consider songs as "a form of useful resource in the language classroom for purposes of language development and to connect learners to issues that are of interest to young adults" (p. 95). According to them, young ESL or EFL learners respond positively to popular songs and participate more in class because songs give them the confidence to express themselves better in oral and written form.

Another advantage of songs is that they provide socio-cultural information, which makes the language learning contextualized. Shen (2009) says "language and music are interwoven in songs to communicate cultural reality in a very unique way" (p. 88). Āževik (2011) states that songs about typical traditions or cultural artifacts are helpful to develop pupils' cultural awareness and understanding. Students can gain insights into the cultural values of a foreign country through songs. Paquette and Rieg (2008) also suggest using songs as they promote awareness about multiculturalism among the learners. The understanding of cultural diversity teaches learners to show respect and tolerance to other cultures and people. Thus, in EFL or ESL contexts, language and cultural sensitivity can be developed through songs.

Furthermore, using songs in a listening lesson gives students opportunities to practice pronunciation, grammar, and learn new vocabulary. Chuang (2016) defines lyrics of the song as "optimal language input because the input chunks provided are manageable for beginning learners, blending rhythm, stress, rhymes, intonation, vocabulary, and sentence patterns" (p. 28). Songs contain these linguistic elements and help learners to enrich their knowledge of a foreign language.

Songs are a vital source for learning and improving pronunciation skills. Learners get exposed to a wide range of regional varieties in various types of English songs. They can be exposed to different accents, intonation patterns, and appropriate pronunciation of certain sounds and words. Based on empirical research, Arévalo (2010) concluded that "practicing listening with songs gives students experience and tools to understand more details during any speech. The ears become more acute, and comprehension becomes easier for them. Students also become familiarized with sounds and natural reductions of English that can be put into practice when speaking" (p. 129). Songs can improve listeners' ability to decode and absorb information in the English language.

Pratiwi (2018) claims that "songs can provide authentic language, are easily obtainable, provide vocabulary, grammar, cultural aspects, and are fun for the students. They can provide valuable speaking, listening, and language practice in and out of the classroom" (p. 371). Songs can introduce new vocabulary items and grammatical structures. In addition, students will know the correct usage of many words in context. Besides, songs offer variations in sentence patterns, introduce new vocabulary, and the use of different literary devices. Thus, they help students to develop fluency in the foreign language.

Moreover, songs facilitate building the student's memory. Both Jiang (2004) and Liao (2006) concur on the fact that English songs have beautiful melodies, and easy and repetitive lyrics to be imitated and memorized. Similarly, Jäncke (2008) discusses that songs manifest human feelings through exposing linguistic elements in situations, and thus improve memory. Songs evoke strong emotions and present the language items in

a meaningful context, which considerably facilitates their memorization both inside and outside the classroom, as emotions enhance memory processes. Therefore, learners can get opportunities to store more information in their memory.

Songs thus bring many positive effects by creating an entertaining class environment, connecting to real-life emotional factors, building learners' confidence, increasing motivation, developing grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and memory.

The next section will discuss a personal pedagogical experience of particular class in which a song was used to teach listening.

Personal Attempt to Teach Listening Through Song

Before sharing personal experience using a song for a listening lesson, it is pivotal to analyze the educational situation from a critical perspective.

In Bangladesh from the start of their education, most of the students focus on reading and writing activities in their English class in Bangla (the native and national language of Bangladesh). Only these two skills are given much emphasis in the process of learning English as a mandatory school or college subject. The students are not given proper motivation to do speaking and listening activities. Thus, they cannot develop the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) of the English language equally. The students who study English, generally are not exposed to many English listening materials.. Due to globalization and international competition, English speakers have the upper hand in every field. So, there is a dire need to improve English language skills among learners in ESL/EFL contexts.

Context and participants

As an ESL teacher, I got an opportunity to teach the course titled *English Language Skills* to a group of thirty students who studied English in their undergraduate program. When I started teaching the course, I asked their individual experience of listening and speaking English in their primary or secondary levels. I found that almost all the students in the class had little experience with listening and speaking English in their previous academic experiences. About eighteen students reported that they did not feel any urge to listen to English texts. A student told: "We did not have any sound box or computer in the class to listen to any English text. We never felt it that important skill [a skill] to learn." One of the students frankly expressed: "We did not bother about speaking in English, let alone listening. Even rarely found our English teacher talking English with us [sic]. He did not inspire us at all. We were taught only grammar and composition."

The students were not interested in listening to sources, such as English speeches, songs, and conversations. Even if very few students listened to English, they would just listen for pleasure and could not understand all the language they were hearing. Under these circumstances, they could not develop their listening abilities. It concerned me greatly as they did not seem motivated to listen to any English text material.

Steps taken for listening class

This shocking scenario proved to be very challenging to handle for an ESL teachers like me. However, it is important to teach the language skills by applying different strategies to make the students interested and proficient in purposeful communication in English. I felt that it was a very difficult task to accomplish, but to a large extent, I was successful in teaching listening skills to my students. At first, I tried to find out their problems in listening to English. Eventually, I observed that they were comfortable using their mother tongue, so I used both Bangla and English to teach different theoretical concepts regarding the listening skill. I realized that it was crucial to motivate them to learn English by listening in an interesting way. After the theoretical discussion, I tried to give practical tasks to my students, so that they could be exposed to spoken English.

Selection of the song

I took the risk of choosing an English song for some beginning classes because I believed that a musical element could create a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom, and this could help students to feel motivated to do the task at hand. The song I chose for the class was relevant and appropriate, and the music was soothing. It was a song titled "Don't cry Joni," which was released in 2008. It had been uploaded to *YouTube* by Rukshan (2008), and I used this version in the class [See Appendix]. The lyrics of the song and the singers' accents were clear. After selecting the song, I tried to use it through the stages of listening, which are described below.

Pre-listening Stage

Before having them listen to the song, I spent almost about ten minutes for the pre-listening session. I activated the 'schema' (background knowledge) of the students related to the subject matter of that particular song. As the theme of the song is love, I wanted to know some of their perceptions about love. I even asked them to sing a love song in the class, and two students seemed enthusiastic to do so. One sang a small part of a beautiful love song. Then, I proceeded to the main stage of the lesson.

While-listening stage

I played the song, and the students listened eagerly. Some of them confirmed that the song was familiar to them; they had heard it before. It did not bother me, as it was an initial attempt to introduce my students to listening tasks. The students had the opportunity to listen to the song four times with pauses and repetitions. The observation of the students' reactions showed that the lyrics seemed to have connected with their emotions.

Post-listening stage

After finishing the pre-listening and while-listening stages, I moved on to the post-listening phase during which I asked the students several questions in order to clarify specific details of the song (e.g., the name and age of the characters in the song, the name of the places or transport mentioned, and adjectives to describe an emotion). Most of them answered correctly while some could not answer since they had not been listening attentively. Finally, I showed the video with the lyrics of the song, so that they could check their comprehension. I also asked them specific thought-provoking questions or issues related to the song. Below I include some of the questions that I asked the students during the activity. These questions allowed them to develop their critical thinking, which, at the same time, fostered their speaking skills. For example:

1. *Do you think Jimmy did the right thing to refuse Joni's proposal? Why or why not?*
2. *Does Joni's decision at the end represent choice or revenge? Provide your rationale.*
3. *If you were in Joni/Jimmy's position, what would be your reaction?*
4. *Is childhood love something to cherish in the future? What is your view?*

I also included some writing activities, for instance, critically analyzing the protagonist's point of view and the significance of the plot twist in the song. Some grammar exercises were included, such as finding synonyms of some words, grammar exercises such as, voice, and transformation of sentences, and filling the gap with the correct word from the song. The aim of the critical writing and grammar activities was to test their accuracy and fluency in the language. The students completed the whole activity with enthusiasm and enjoyment. The outcome of the task was beyond my expectation. They got more motivated to practice other types of listening tasks with different topics.

From then on, I started to prepare listening materials based on their particular interests. Along with songs, I tried to adapt and improvise various tasks such as audio clips of English movie dialogues, BBC news, speeches, telephone conversation and job interviews to help them practice listening.

Difficulties in Using Songs

Choosing and utilizing a song for a language class is not an easy task. Teachers need to be aware of the difficulties that already prevail or might arise when using a song. These complications are related to the cultural characteristics, learners' motivation, technical issues, external environment, class size, duration, teachers' competence, and the theme of the song. If these factors misfit with the purpose, it can create obstacles in the way of teaching listening with a song.

Some challenges regarding the use of songs for listening class are presented below:

Cultural conflict: If the selected song conveys some elements, which are not culturally appropriate for a particular group of learners, it may cause a negative impression. Even some foreign culture-related topics can be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the learners.

Lack of students' motivation: Learners' lack of motivation and interest can lead to the failure to teach listening with songs. If the activities in class are not interesting or out of context, they can feel demotivated. Yang (2008) expressed that students may lose interest in listening due to some activities that seem dull and lack personal interests. Moreover, the use of songs while doing listening tasks may seem useless and

devoid of any academic value to many learners. Thus, it can lead them to confusion and disappointment about the learning process.

Large class size: A large number of students in any listening class could cause disorder and mismanagement. Teachers often find it difficult to conduct language activities with a large group of students. Moreover, learners might not pay proper attention to the song or tasks related to it. As a result, an overcrowded class could bring monotony and distraction.

Shortage and inefficiency of sound equipment and poor facilities: A lack of language laboratories, different audio equipment, and other logistics are among the biggest challenges in the listening sessions. If the institution does not have technological support, it is not possible to conduct a proper listening activity, let alone with songs.

Technical problems: Even if all types of sound equipment and logistics are available, technical complications can still occur, which can hamper the teaching with songs. This situation can be challenging if there is no expert technician or teacher to fix the problem at once.

Chaos and disturbance: During the listening phase, different sounds from both inside and outside the classroom can create chaotic and disturbing feelings to the students. The students cannot focus on the listening task and the teacher can lose control of the situation.

Short class duration: If the class is not long enough, it may not bring the expected learning outcomes. Learners may have difficulties completing listening activities due to the time constraints.

Teacher inefficiency: The success of a listening activity largely depends on teachers' level of dedication and efficiency. Therefore, if a teacher is not self-motivated to teach using songs, the class will not achieve the intended results. Moreover, the inability to make a well-designed lesson plan, to facilitate suitable activities, and the reluctance to provide useful suggestions are the signs of inefficiencies on the part of teachers.

Wrong choice of a song: The presence of offensive language or controversial issues often causes misunderstanding and discomfort for learners. In addition, if the chosen song does not match the interest and proficiency levels of the students, it will not be of any use. The selection of inappropriate or wrong songs for different groups of learners is detrimental to learning.

Lack of authenticity: Any song that is not authentic or realistic can hinder the success of the class. Listening materials including songs should be connected to students' real lives and not choosing such songs can lead to failure.

Criteria for selecting songs

Teachers should take several important factors into account while teaching listening with the help of songs. Proper utilization of songs is possible if the selection of songs is based on the following factors.

Age: Learners' age is a vital factor to be considered with respect to teaching language skills. For example, very young children, especially those under the age of twelve, can have difficulty if teachers use songs associated with more adult topics and provide activities that are not suitable for their age group. Pair or group tasks are even more difficult to be implemented with young children. If simple lyrics along with children-friendly topics are used in the songs, their minds will respond much better to the language or theme, which will help them learn better. On the other hand, adult or adolescent learners are open to various types of songs and various listening activities. Therefore, it is better to teach language skills to the same age groups of learners at a time.

Level of proficiency: Songs need to be selected according to learners' language proficiency levels. For beginner-level learners, songs should be simple and have clear, familiar language. Teachers need to choose songs on those topics which are easily understood and quite relatable to their lives. After acquiring proficiency in a language, they can include more complicated songs and more complicated design of activities. For intermediate or advanced students, teachers should organize the tasks related to the songs to stimulate deeper understanding and critical reflection of the learning process.

Interests: Students' specific needs and interests need to be considered in any learning process. If they have a genuine interest in songs, they become confident to develop listening skill. Teachers' musical preferences are also important because they can teach the students better if they like the music or song themselves. Griffiee (1992) emphasizes the point saying that "it is not wise to use music that you do not

like. It is also unwise to use music students do not like. The answer is to find common ground" (p. 6-7). Students should be given the freedom to make choices of preferred song types or themes.

The number of students: It is necessary to take the size of the class into consideration when teaching language skills through practical tasks. The optimum number should be around thirty students. If this number is exceeded, it may be very difficult to implement activities and monitor the students' performance. A smaller number of students ensures successful group management and completion of language tasks.

Socio-cultural background: Teachers should choose songs considering the learner's socio-cultural background. Any song that bears elements not accepted in their culture can affect the learners of different backgrounds. However, teachers should select songs that can explore topics of cultural diversity and do not conflict with cultural values and norms of learners.

Logistic support: Availability of proper logistic support is one of the major criteria in using songs in language class. Teachers and other personnel must ensure the availability of such classroom facilities as computers, loudspeakers, uninterrupted internet connections, headphones, projectors, sound systems, OHPs, printers, photocopiers and microphones for organizing the sessions for teaching listening and other skills. Moreover, it is necessary to be sure that both teacher and students can make the best use of the equipment for teaching and learning.

Class duration: Regarding classroom activities the duration of teaching time should be controlled. It should not be too long or too short. A class of 1.5 hours to 2 hours may be convenient, as there are three phases to complete various tasks. Multiple replays of songs in the while-listening stage, a number of speaking or writing tasks, and feedback sessions require a considerable amount of time.

Content of the song: The theme or content of the song must be meaningful, authentic, and culturally appropriate. It should not contain any violent, embarrassing, unethical, or controversial elements. Lynch (2008) points out that songs should have positive themes, such as love, friendship, dream, peace, and joy. Many educators prefer pop songs, for instance, Baoan (2008) considers pop songs to be highly motivating, as they contain linguistic information, cultural, and historical knowledge. Some researchers like Kao and Oxford (2014) suggest choosing hip-hop music for its worldwide appeal. Teachers need to choose songs that have appropriate and impactful themes to motivate the learners.

Clarity of language: Songs should have clear and comprehensive lyrics, tunes, and music. The diction and the voice of the singer(s) should capture learners' attention. Songs to be used to teach listening should have pleasant background music and beautiful melodies. There should not be any excessive use of musical instruments; too loud and harsh songs need to be avoided. Bokiev et al. (2018) consider that "songs can contain non-standard language, grammatically incorrect sentences, altered vocabulary, not well-pronounced words and abbreviations. It is therefore important to choose, as far as possible, the songs written in a standard language with lyrics identical in their written and recorded form and free from any confusing or inappropriate references" (p.324). Therefore, teachers must remain cautious about the lyrics of the song.

Speed and length of the song: The tempo or speed of the song should be moderate. Slow and simple songs are suitable for teaching beginner-level learners. If fast songs are used, many students may have difficulty keeping the pace and may not comprehend the theme. Yet, teachers can use these songs even with learners of a higher proficiency level. Moreover, the song should have a suitable length. Wang (2013) suggested that teachers need to control the length of songs. If the songs are lengthy, it can bore the students so the duration of the song to be used in listening should be three to five minutes.

Vocabulary and grammar: Songs should contain important grammatical patterns and a good variety of vocabulary, so that learners can practice grammar and enrich their knowledge of the lexicon. For instance, Bokiev et al. (2018) state "simple songs with recurring grammar features are suitable for grammar activities, while more sophisticated songs that contain idioms and metaphors are useful for practicing vocabulary" (p. 324). Therefore, teachers need to choose those songs, which expose the student to certain grammatical structures, and facilitate the use of informal or idiomatic language, and specific vocabulary items.

Teachers' expertise: Teachers need to have the relevant expertise to select and utilize the song properly. It is the teacher's responsibility to build curiosity and motivation. They need to be interested in music and should have the capacity to motivate students to listen to songs. Teachers have to be trained and technologically competent to handle the class through group management and useful tasks. They need to prepare backup lesson plans and organize activities tactfully.

These factors can lead to a wise and careful selection of English songs. It is important that teachers consider the above criteria when selecting and using songs in listening class.

Classroom Activities for Songs

There are various kinds of classroom activities and tasks that can be used when using songs in language classes. Based on three stages of listening tasks: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening phases, different activities can be designed and used accordingly.

Pre-listening activities

The purpose of the pre-listening stage is to prepare students for the particular topic of the song. This stage creates the base of the core session. Teachers have to ensure that students' 'schema' or prior knowledge gets activated. The theme or topic of the song along with necessary background information, vocabulary, or specific grammatical points needs to be introduced and briefly explained. Teachers can give hints about the song before they play its audio recording. According to Keskin (2011), students can be asked to guess the theme of the song, to brainstorm about it, to present it, to discuss the cultural information or to state the keywords and ideas relevant to the song. Teachers can provide basic information about the origin, features, and the singer of the song. Moreover, they can include some other activities, such as labeling or identifying pictures or reordering them to create a story related to the theme or plot of the song, reading a write-up relevant to the topic, going through the instructions for the upcoming activities, and sharing ideas or experiences.

While-listening activities

During the listening stage, students are assigned to go through some of the major tasks. The while-listening phase aims to encourage students to verify assumptions or predictions and check for comprehension. According to Peachey (2003), for students to get accustomed to the voice of the singer or the tempo of the song, they need to listen to that song at least three or four times. Teachers can provide an opportunity for students to listen to the song several times (as a whole or with pauses), based on the demand of the students or the complexity of the song. At the same time, learners can be instructed to complete different types of exercises prepared based on the song, as they repeatedly listen to it. These exercises may include filling in gaps, charts, or diagrams, choosing the right options, answering short questions, identifying true or false, listing unfamiliar concept or vocabulary, reordering lyrics, crossing out wrong information regarding the song, matching the right information, and understanding the gist for further tasks.

Post-listening activities

The last stage of listening provides some follow-up activities to evaluate overall comprehension or progress in the listening task. Teachers should incorporate various writing, reading, and speaking tasks after students finish listening to the song. Learners can be asked to share their feelings, opinions, or perspectives on the topic of the song, and thus can involve in critical discussion. In addition, they can be instructed to rewrite the lyrics, create imaginary dialogues for the song's characters, or write a summary of the song. The teacher might ask the students to articulate any word to check their pronunciation or teach the correct pronunciation of selected words. Moreover, students can practice particular grammatical items from the lyrics of the song. In this stage, teachers should provide feedback on improving other language skills: reading, writing, speaking, pronunciation, and grammar.

Teachers can design the activities as mentioned in the listening class not only for songs but also for other listening materials. Besides, they can come up with different alternative activities or ideas to execute in their ways. Above all, they will have to decide the types of tasks that should be interesting and motivating for learners.

Sample lesson plan for teaching listening with song

The following lesson framework can guide the language teacher to teach listening with songs.

Class Duration: 90 minutes

Number of Students: 25-30

Proficiency Level: Upper-intermediate

Logistics: Computer, soundbox, internet, tape recorder, multimedia projector, mobile phone, headphone, whiteboard, marker, pen, paper.

Song type: Pop song/ folk song/ classical song/ modern song

The focus of the lesson: Listening comprehension, accuracy, and fluency

Instructional materials: Audio and written version of the song, handouts on the vocabulary and grammar, worksheets on the tasks for while-listening and post-listening phases.

Aim of the lesson: The main goal of the lesson is to get the students introduced to listening activity using English songs. This class will create an opportunity to learn and develop listening skills and thus help to reboot learners' self-confidence.

Objectives:

- to gain information about the topic
- to share opinions and suggestions
- to reinforce vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing
- to make learners motivated to speak in the class

Learning outcomes:

At the end of the class, students will be able to:

- understand the topic of the song
- improve listening ability by completing tasks
- develop communicative competence through discussion and presentation
- know the particular accent and accurate pronunciation
- learn and improve vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation

The pre-listening stage: In this stage, teachers initiate warm-up activities for the students and activate their background knowledge before they proceed to the next stage.

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Directions:

- The teacher writes the name of the topic of the song on the board. Then they ask students to share their views or opinions about it.
- Then, the teacher briefly talks about the origin and the singer(s) of the song.
- The teacher distributes handouts on the vocabulary, informal language, and specific grammar points in the song, explaining them if necessary.
- The students are given a separate worksheet on various activities, such as guessing the title, filling in the gaps with the missing words from the lyrics, matching the correct information, answering short questions, and summarizing the main idea. The teacher gives instructions and explains the activity.
- Learners complete the worksheet during the listening stage as they listen to the song. So they go through all the worksheets, which will help them get ideas about the upcoming tasks.

The while-listening stage: In this stage, learners listen to the song multiple times and will complete different tasks simultaneously.

Duration: 20-25 minutes

Directions:

- The teacher plays the song for the first time and students listen to it.
- As they listen to the song, they identify the suitable title of the song in the worksheet.
- The teacher plays the song a second time. The students listen carefully and match the correct information.
- The students fill in the gaps with the right word or phrases from the lyrics after listening to the third time.
- The teacher can play the whole song a fourth time if necessary or simply just slow down the tempo, so that students can answer some basic questions regarding the theme, characters, or emotions of the song, or summarize the theme a very few sentences.
- Students can ask the teacher to rewind or forward the song to confirm their assumptions or answers.

The post-listening stage: In the last stage, the teacher incorporates reading and speaking activities and learners will have opportunities to practice vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar along with their writing skills.

Duration: 25-30 minutes

Directions:

- The teacher gives one more worksheet to the learners, including some reading, grammar, and pronunciation activities.
- Students are asked to form pairs or groups (not more than four members) and read a passage related to the song's topic to extract information for the exercises. They use reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning, and inference.
- Then, they proceed to grammar exercises. The teacher focuses on one or two major grammatical aspects in the activity. Students have to complete the exercise. They can ask for support from the teacher in case of any confusion.
- After finishing reading and grammar exercises, the teacher asks students randomly to pronounce words or specific portions from the song or even from the reading passage in order to check their pronunciation abilities.
- At the end of the post-listening stage, a few students volunteer to speak for one or two minutes about the lesson they have been taught. Thus, their speaking skills can be checked and evaluated.

Feedback Session:

- The teacher has to have at least twenty minutes to provide feedback to the learners. Feedback can take place in between the post-listening phase or at the end of the class. The teacher assesses the lesson through the response and success rate in the completion of tasks.
- The teacher gives the answer key of the exercises completed during the while-listening stage. Before this, the students have exchanged their worksheets for peer assessment and to build mutual understanding and better learning. After finishing post-listening activities, the teacher asks one student from each group to present the answers. The students have an opportunity to act as a group representative. The teacher suggests alternative answers and provides different viewpoints. Later on, the teacher can collect all of their worksheets for review. In addition, the teacher introduces the features of the accent and pronunciation of specific words in the song. If any student mispronounces any word, the teacher can demonstrate the correct pronunciation. Even at the time of speaking, the teacher monitors their fluency and accuracy. The teacher assigns some homework to the students on other types of songs, and give exercises for practice and suggest coming up with different ideas, including other varied activities in the listening class.

Anticipated difficulties and backup plans:

Some challenges can evolve out of the classroom context and teaching strategies. Teachers have to prepare other alternatives and solutions to these problems.

- One of the difficulties can be the possibility of prior listening to the particular song used in the language classroom. Many students might have listened to the song earlier because of its popularity or out of interest. To overcome the situation mentioned above, the teacher has to be careful when designing listening activities using the song to be applied equally to all the students. The tasks can provide extra benefits to any individual student but shouldn't bore them.
- Another difficulty may be the issue of time management. Time allocation for each activity may not work according to the plan; some activities can take more or less time than expected. Sometimes, the number and complexity of activities may seem difficult to the students and require extra time to finish. If there is a shortage of time, then one or two less important activities may be excluded. The teacher can conduct an experimental listening class with a song and decide the type of exercises with the assumed duration. After observation and analysis, he or she can set the activities by utilizing the assigned time. But the teacher also needs to make sure that such activities suit the language level and interest of the learners.
- Some students may complete the exercise before the deadline or, sometimes, they finish early. Again, some students may get bored doing tasks. If it happens, the teacher can occupy them with other informal tasks, such as assisting their weak or slow classmates, or requesting them to explain any idea or express feelings or perspectives regarding any aspect of the song or exercise.
- If there is a power failure or technical problem, the teacher can postpone the class for a certain period. The technicians in the institution should react immediately if such an incident occurs.
- Thus, teachers can prepare their lesson plans and design activities, considering the factors previously discussed, and can develop learners' listening skills with the help of English songs in a proper way.

General guidelines for teaching listening through songs

Some practical tips can be provided for teaching and learning listening skills through songs in the most effective ways.

Learner and context. The first and foremost suggestion of using song is the wise consideration of basic factors related to learner and learning process. ESL/EFL learners can feel motivated to learn the skill if teachers select songs by considering their age, socio-cultural background, needs, interests, and language proficiency level, class size, duration and logistic support.

Nature of the song. In the listening class, a teacher should choose songs with meaningful lyrics, well-tuned music, and a variety of useful vocabulary and important grammar items, and the absence of vulgar or offensive language. Teachers can select songs based on the level of difficulty after a few classes.

Variation in the songs. It is necessary to bring variation in the type of song to sustain students' motivation to learn the skill. Teachers can give different themes regarding a song or different types of songs based on a specific theme. Then, both the teacher and students will decide to choose particular songs to work on. Students also need to be self-motivated to listen to more songs of their own choices, so that they can enjoy listening.

Visualizing songs. Music videos or picturization (if available and culturally appropriate) can help learners to absorb the topic of the song well.

Improvising activities. As frequent use of songs can make the class monotonous, it is important to change the listening materials occasionally to sustain learners' motivation. Moreover, songs can be accompanied by

other listening texts, such as English news, talk shows, and advertisements, movies, so that teachers can incorporate various activities into the session.

Teaching note-taking skills. Teachers should instruct the learners to take keynotes from the songs during the while-listening phase. Thus, their note-taking strategy develops and can help them extract or gain information from any type of text.

Change in the pattern. At the initial listening classes with songs, teachers can provide the lyrics to the students when they finish listening to the full song to crosscheck their comprehension. Sometimes omitting the part of providing the lyrics can bring a noticeable change in the learning. Learners can be asked to write or verbalize the lyrics after they listen. Thus, they will be more attentive to the development of the listening skill.

Integrating skills. Teachers should integrate all language skills in the activities by using the song. Learners need to be exposed to more speaking and writing tasks. For example, they can be asked to write a summary of the song and discuss the topic in groups. In addition to this, students can create new lyrics and make their musical versions. In this way, they will be able to develop creativity and imaginative power. Moreover, this task will encourage and motivate the music-lover students in the class.

Reducing sound impact. When using a song for a class, the surrounding environment should be kept in mind. Both the teacher and the students must cooperate in this regard. They need to make sure that the sound of the song does not create any disturbance to other ongoing classes or any other person nearby. To handle this, teachers should take precautionary steps. For example, they can book a soundproof language lab for listening practice or demand it from the school authority. They can also get special permission from the particular classes that are likely to be affected by the song or noise of during the activities.

Classroom management. The best way to teach listening with the help of a song is to form pairs or small groups of students and give them tasks to complete. If the class size is large, this method works best. Teachers can assign different slots to particular groups of students for attending the class. In this way, it also becomes easier to monitor the students' progress in the class. A well-equipped language lab should accommodate the students and everyone has to get a headphone along with the recorder or computer. The song has to be played at the normal speed.

The guidelines mentioned above can be useful to reduce the existing difficulties in teaching listening skills with songs. Therefore, both teachers and learners should follow them in the most convenient ways.

Conclusion

Songs play a significant role in foreign language teaching. They help to build stronger listening skills and provide a new outlook to teaching language skills. Music and songs offer numerous benefits to learners for developing language skills. Many institutions all over the world have already recognized the importance of utilizing songs for teaching language skills to EFL/ESL learners.

Various research studies show the effectiveness of English songs in EFL/ESL listening classes. Both language teachers and learners can utilize songs in the classroom by bringing a major pedagogical dimension. A teacher should organize materials and activities based on different criteria mentioned in the paper. Though there are many complications in teaching the skill, thoughtful consideration of several factors can help to deal with those challenging issues. Teachers should choose suitable songs that comply with students' needs and learning objectives and design the activities to engage the learners in effective ways. Thus, the implementation of songs can provide fruitful outcomes in the class.

References

- Arévalo, E. A. R. (2010). The use of songs as a tool to work on listening and culture in EFL classes. *Cuadernos de Lingüística Hispánica*, 15, 121-138. https://revistas.uptc.edu.co/index.php/linguistica_hispanica/article/view/402/402
- Žvevik, M. (2011). Teacher views about using songs in teaching English to young learners. *Educational Research and Review*, 6(21), 1027-1035. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ERR11.25>
- Baoan, W.. (2008). Application of popular English songs in EFL classroom teaching. *Humanising Language Teaching*, 10(3). <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/jun08/less03.htm>
- Bokiev, D., Bokiev, U., Aralás, D., Ismail, L., & Othman, M. (2018). Utilizing music and songs to promote student engagement in ESL classrooms. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(12), 314-332. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i12/5015>
- Chuang, L.-L. (2016). *Accessing the workings of the mind: From input to intake*. Chartridge Books Oxford.
- Fonseca-Mora, M. C., Toscano-Fuentes, C., & Wermke, K. (2011). Melodies that help: The relation between language aptitude and musical intelligence. *Anglistik International Journal of English Studies*, 22(1), 101-118.
- Griffiee, D. T. (1992). *Songs in action*. Prentice-Hall.

- Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching*. Pearson.
- Jäncke, L. (2008). Music, memory, and emotion. *Journal of Biology*, 7(6), 21. <https://doi.org/10.1186/jbiol82>
- Jiang, N. (2004). English songs in teaching listening. *Journal of Xichang Teachers College*, 16(1), 39-41.
- Kao, T., & Oxford, R. L. (2014). Learning language through music: A strategy for building inspiration and motivation. *System*, 43, 114-120. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.01.003>
- Keskin, F. (2011). Using songs as audio materials in teaching Turkish as a foreign language. *TOJET: The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 10(4), 378-383. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ946647.pdf>
- Kuśnierek, A. (2016). The role of music and songs in teaching English vocabulary to students. *World Scientific News*, 43(1), 43-48. <http://www.worldscientificnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/WSN-431-2016-1-55-1.pdf>
- Liao, Y. (2006). English songs and teaching college English listening. *Journal of Yibin University*, 5, 95-97.
- Lieb, M.M. (2008). Music and listening: Learning gain without pain. In K. Bradford Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 518-534). Tokyo: JALT.
- Lynch, L. M. (2008, November 30). Using popular songs to improve language listening. *EzineArticles*. <http://ezinearticles.com/?Using-Popular-Songs-to-Improve-Language-Listening-Comprehension-Skills&id=104984>
- Mobbs, A., & Cuyul, M. (2018). "Listen to the music: Using songs in listening and speaking classes". *English Teaching Forum*, 56(1), 22-29. https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/etf_56_1_pg22-29.pdf
- Paquette, K. R., & Rieg, S. A. (2008). Using music to support the literacy development of young English language learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36(3), 227-232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-008-0277-9>
- Peachey, N., (2003). A framework for planning a listening skills lesson. *TeachingEnglish*. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/framework-planning-listening-skills-lesson>
- Pratiwi, E. (2018). Using song to enhance learning in English classroom. *Seminar Nasional Pendidikan Universitas Prgi Palembang*, 369-374.
- Rukshan, G. (2008, June 13). *Don't Cry Joni* [YouTube]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UI21wXE4hM>
- Şahin, D. (2008). *Teaching conditionals through songs in EFL preparatory classrooms* [Unpublished thesis]. *Selçuk Üniversitesi*. <http://acikerisimarsiv.selcuk.edu.tr:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/9063/235072.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Sevik, M. (2012). Teaching listening skills to young learners through "Listen and Do" songs. *English Teaching Forum*, 50(3), 10-17. https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/50_3_3_sevik.pdf
- Shen, C. (2009). Using English songs: An enjoyable and effective approach to ELT. *English Language Teaching*, 2(1), 88-94. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v2n1p88>
- Vethamani, M. E., & Keong, T. W. (2008). Connecting Linkin Park and Good Charlotte to ESL learners. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 14, 95-108. <http://ejournals.ukm.my/3l/article/view/1021/933>
- Vernon, S. A. (2010, August 14). How to use songs for teaching English. *EzineArticles*. <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-to-Use-Songs-For-Teaching-English&id=4860963>
- Wang, X. (2013). *The function of English songs to improve listening to college English as a Second Language (ESL) students* [Unpublished master's thesis], University of Wisconsin-Platteville. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/65620>
- Yang, L. (2008). Discussion on teaching method of college listening. *Journal of Shanxi Agricultural University*, 2(7), 202-204.

Appendix

Lyrics of the Song: *Don't Cry Joni*

Jimmy, please say you'll wait for me
I'll grow up someday you'll see
Savin' all my kisses just for you
Signed with love forever true

Joni was the girl who lived next door
I've known her I guess 10 years or more
Joni wrote me a note one day
And this is what she had to say

Jimmy, please say you'll wait for me
I'll grow up someday you'll see
Savin' all my kisses just for you
Signed with love forever true

Slowly I read her note once more
Then I went over to the house next door
Her teardrops fell like rain that day
When I told Joni what I had to say

Joni, Joni, please don't cry
You'll forget me by and by
You're just fifteen I'm twenty two
Joni, I just can't wait for you

Soon I left our little hometown
Got me a job and tried to settle down
But her words kept haunting my memory
The words that Joni said to me

Jimmy, please say you'll wait for me
I'll grow up someday you'll see
Savin' all my kisses just for you
Signed with love forever true

I packed my clothes and I caught a plane
I had to see Joni, I had to explain
How my heart was filled with her memory
And ask my Joni if she'd marry me

I ran all the way to the house next door
But things weren't like they were before
My teardrops fell like rain that day
When I heard what Joni had to say

Jimmy, Jimmy, please don't cry
You'll forget me by and by
It's been five years since you've been gone
Jimmy, I married your best friend John.