

Analyses of the Research on the Efficacy of Popular English Songs in Teaching English Language Pronunciation

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Abstract: *Implementing innovative methods and using authentic materials in teaching English language is highly demanded. This article aims at assessing the efficacy of using popular English songs in teaching English language. Research results showed that properly selected modern English songs can be a great tool to improve students' pronunciations skills.*

Keywords: pronunciation skills, authentic materials, students' preferences.

1. INTRODUCTION.

The government of Uzbekistan has been lately taking special reforms to improve educational process in Uzbekistan, specifically teaching English language. English is usually seen as the door to many opportunities since it is the language of science, media, businesses, economy, and simply everything. Previous years, Uzbekistan ranked 86 out of 88 countries in 2018, 95 out of 100 countries in 2019 in terms of English proficiency index. However, because of growing demand to learning and teaching the language, Uzbekistan ranked 88th out of 112 countries. (English Proficiency Index) Although according to English proficiency Index, this is very low proficiency, these figures mean many works done to improve the process. At the same time, to meet the demands of language learners, more creative and contemporary teaching methods, materials and approaches are highly demanded. Because, according to new educational reforms, all school and university graduates are required to have at least B2 language national CEFR certificate. It means the learners should be able to use and communicate (both orally and written) in English language fluently. Students are expected to be fluent communicators in English language. Because of some grammar structure and other different factors, language learners always struggle to increase their proficiency in English speaking and writing. Generally, students in my country, have a higher level of proficiency in terms of reading and listening. Receptive skills (reading and listening) are known to be easier to acquire whereas productive skills (speaking and writing) are harder to some learners. (core.uk) Recently, extensive researches have been conducted in the field of teaching English language, particularly speaking skills, although most of them are not appropriate particularly to Uzbek students' learning nature. Based on previous works done in the field, and my own personal observation, Uzbek students especially struggle to acquire English pronunciation in their learning process. In my previous works, it was identified that main challenge lies on non-existing sounds of English language in Uzbek language. Because of this, Uzbek students struggle to pronounce those sounds and it makes them feel insecure to communicate in English language. Another reason, in our native language we pronounce the words as the same as they are written. (Xadicha Tursunkulova) Only some dialects are exceptional. However, in English language, although students learn some pronunciation rules from textbooks and teachers, there are many exceptional cases available. Let alone, pronouncing the words directly as they are shown on the textbooks. This is just too much to embrace for some learners. These pronunciation problems might slow down the learning process since lack of pronunciation skills and learning motivation is closely connected to each other. According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, unless the learner is in an emotionally safe zone, acquiring the second language will be blocked and be less successful. In this article, the researcher mostly focuses on fostering the students' motivation through improving their pronunciation skills.

Definition of pronunciation

According to Oxford Languages Dictionary, pronunciation is the way in which a word is pronounced. Abbas and Narjes defined pronunciation as "the method of producing the sounds for constructing meaning. It consists of consonants and vowels of a language (segments), features of speech such as stress, timing, rhythm, intonation, phrasing (suprasegmental features), and voice quality. All of the mentioned elements can work together when speakers speak so that difficulties in one element may affect another and this may make an individual's pronunciation easy or difficult to understand".

Significance of pronunciation

Clear intelligible pronunciation makes the communication easier and more effective. Indeed, the aim of language learners should not be achieving the same accent as native speakers while the learners should be clearly understood.

The impact of lack of pronunciation skills on English language learning

This is the motivation which drives the learners to spend hours on achieving their desired outcomes and overcome barriers may arouse along the learning path.

- a) Teaching pronunciation;

Teaching the English language pronunciation is mostly neglected by English teachers. Firstly, the teachers themselves may have limited knowledge since they are also learners of this language. They also feel uncertain about their pronunciation skills. (Abbas) Secondly, when authority is making the curriculum, they tend to ignore including pronunciation lessons. At the end of the term students are tested in terms of their grammar, vocabulary skills so they do not have to have good pronunciation skills.

Research Questions

The present study addressed the research gap in light of the previous studies, and the study formulated the following research questions.

1. Can English songs help to reduce the affection filter and encourage language learners to use the target language since most Uzbek language learners feel insecure about their English pronunciation?
2. To what extent English songs helped Uzbek language learners to learn the target language, and particularly to improve their pronunciation skills?
3. To what level English songs are popular among language learners?

2. Research Methods

Qualitative

The researcher used qualitative method to analyze how songs can inspire students to overcome psychological barriers to use the target language. Popular song among Uzbek youngsters was used as a research material. Based on the centre's curriculum, special activities for this research purposes were tailored. The total of 10 worksheets was created and used in the focus group. (table 1)

Research was carried out in the following order:

1. The group of 20 students were divided into 2 groups;
2. The same topic (the pronunciation of /ʌ/ sound) was taught to both groups. However, 1st group learnt it with song and song based activities whereas the next group learnt this concept with their handbooks;
3. The participants' attendance and mood during the class were observed in both classes by the researcher.

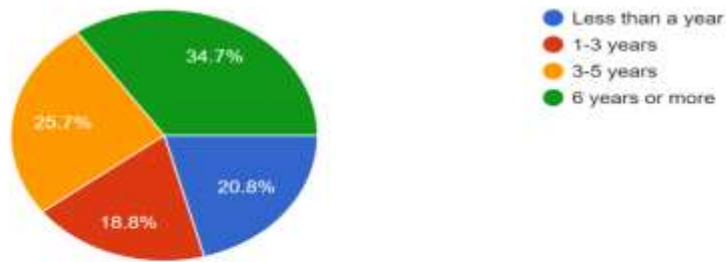
Quantitative

To obtain quantitative data, online questionnaire created using Google forms was used. This method was chosen because Google forms are convenient since it generates the summary fast. In addition, the target audience can be reached easily. The questionnaire helped to identify how songs are popular among language learners and to what level they contribute to language learning process. The researcher visited the target educational institutions and sent the online Google form's link to the participants' telegram groups. Google forms allowed respondents to take part in questionnaire.

Participants

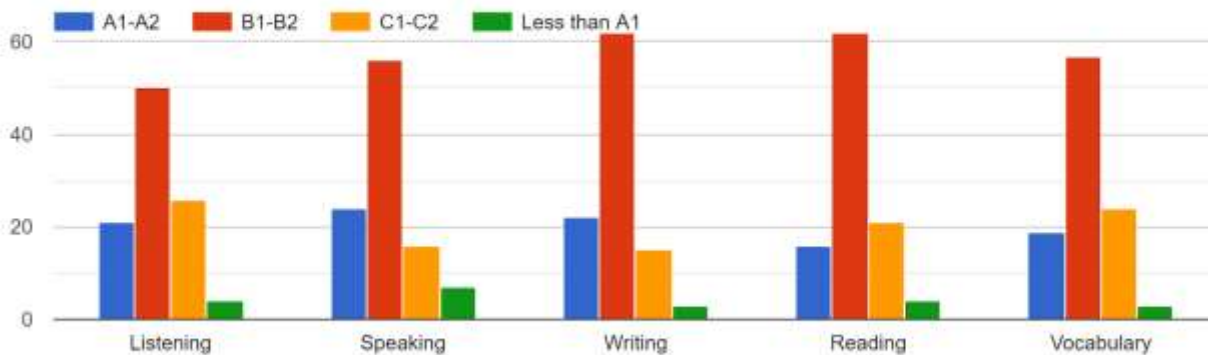
The total number of participants for the current study was 101 ESL learners from various educational backgrounds and all of them participated in online questionnaire. For qualitative research, 20 students who learn the English language at B1 level at Bilim Orzu private educational language centre at Samarkand city were selected. 41 students were from Bachelor of Art studying at the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign languages; study the English language as a major subject. 27 English language teachers from school№81 at Payarik region and specialized school №35 at Samarkand city took part in the current questionnaire. These diverse participant groups help the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of songs in language teaching from both perspectives. While teachers can give answers based on their professional knowledge, students can respond to questions relying on their own personal language learning experiences. Thus, the target respondents were both teachers and students of English language. The genders of the participants were left anonymous since it has no influence on research hypothesis. Considering their right to be protected, they were not under any obligation to participate. Their willingness to participate in the questionnaire was asked and consent was taken from the administration. To observe the lesson at educational centre, special consent was taken from administration (for qualitative method).

3. How long have you been learning English?
 101 responses



Acquiring the English language is an arduous and long process. As an evidence for this, nearly 35% of all respondents have been actively learning the English language for more than 6 years and 26% of them have been learning it during 3 and 5 years. Respondents who have been learning the language less than 3 years constituted only 19 % of respondents. Considering the majority of respondents have a valid experience with the English language learning, we can, hopefully, get appropriate results for our research work.

4. What is your proficiency level in the English language?



The proficiency levels of respondents were asked in terms of 5 major language skills as shown in the diagram. Strikingly, the great majority of respondents claimed that they have B1-B2 levels (CEFR criteria) from all skills, such as Listening -50%, Speaking - 56%, Writing -62%, Reading 62%, and Vocabulary – 57 %. However, less than 4% of respondents have A1-A2 level of English language skills even though they also study at the same group with some of the other high levelled respondents. Lastly, advanced C1-C2 language learners were between 26 and 24% of all respondents based on all 5 skills.

3. Results

Qualitative research

To teach the focus group, the below worksheets were used.

"A new day has come" song by Celine Dion. The pronunciation of the /s/ sound

Task 1. [audio]
 a) Read and listen to the pronunciation of the words
 b) Listen and repeat.

Word list	Transcription
Come	/kʌm/
touch	/tʌtʃ/
Sun	/sʌn/
hush	/hʌʃ/
Love	/lʌv/

Task 2. Listen to the song fill the blanks:
 sɔː long, darkness, love, everyone, tears, waiting, light, shatter.

A New Day Has Come
 Celine Dion
 I was waiting for _____
 For a miracle to come
 _____ told me to be strong
 Hold on and don't shed a tear
 Through _____ and good times
 I knew I'd make it through
 And the world thought I had it all
 But I was _____ for you
 Hush now
 I see a _____ in the sky
 Oh it's almost blinding me
 I can't believe I've been touched by an angel
 With _____
 Let the rain come down
 And wash away my _____
 Let it fill my soul
 And drown my fears

Let it _____ the walls
 For a new sun
 A new day has come

Task 3. Listen and put the lines in the correct order

Where there was weakness, I found my strength

All in the eyes of a boy

Where it was dark now there's is light

Where there was pain, now there's joy

I see a light in the sky

I can't believe I've been touched by an angel With love

Oh it's almost blinding me

Hush now

Let it fill my soul
 And drown my fears

Let the rain come down
 And wash away my tears

A new day has come

Let it shatter the walls
 For a new sun

Task 4. Sing the song (chorus)

In the focus group, teacher taught the class in the following order. First, the topic was introduced, and the activities were done in both groups. The concept was completely new to both groups.

Observations from the focus group

After introducing the concept, teacher handed out the worksheets. Teacher asked from students o look through all the tasks and identify if there are any new words. While they were doing this task, teacher put the song. Most students appeared not to care song. After they have completed the task, teacher explained unfamiliar words and phrases to the students as a whole group discussion. Then, they started doing the task in the given order. Since the popular song was selected, the student engagement in the classroom was really high. Participants were really motivated to do the tasks. Even the shy students at the last desk joined the activities. All tasks required to put the audio more than 2 times to comprehend completely. The melody of the song enabled the participants to repeat the certain pronunciation sounds after teacher and song over and over without getting bored. The class was a real fun as most students were familiar with the song in advance. Most importantly, students were not stressed and they were positive during the whole class. Because of positive atmosphere, all students acquired the concept very well, and when they were asked to read the songs' lyrics individually, nearly all students were confident and fluent. They were less insecure about possible mistakes they might make while pronouncing the words.

Observations from the second group

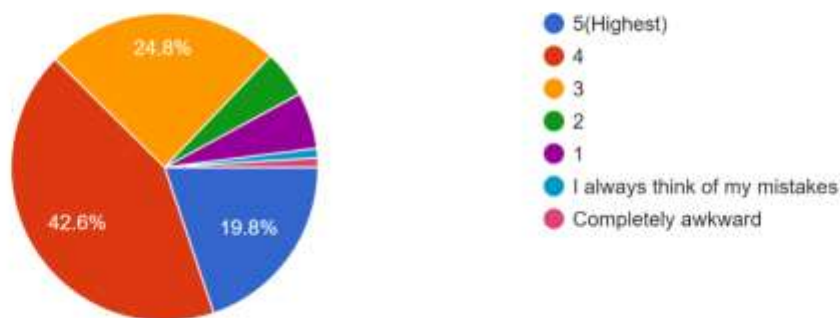
It was a typical lesson based on the traditional approach. The class was informative. Teacher explained the topic, and students were engaged in typical classroom activities.

Lesson was conducted in a typical lesson planning order. The researcher observed the students' engagement and motivation level to participate in the classroom. Students all did the tasks actively. However, when they were asked to read the list of given words individually, most of them were hesitating and making mistakes. Although they acquired the new concept really, they were not confident enough to produce the language they have learnt. They pronounced the learnt new pronunciation with relatively less confidence. This little observation of two groups show that songs are fun way of teaching the new concepts. It definitely increases the students' motivation and boosts their confidence to use the particular language skills. Students feel more comfortable when the concept is practiced with songs.

Quantitative research analysis and results

5. Rate your confidence level in terms of your English pronunciation

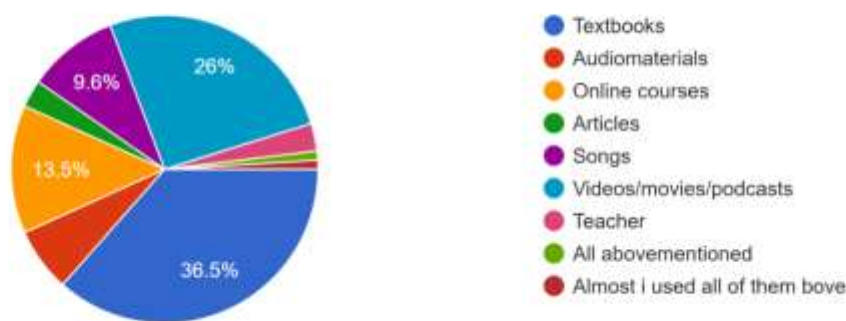
101 responses



The above diagram shows how they feel about their pronunciation when they speak in English. The research hypothesis was “Most students tend to feel insecure about their English pronunciation”. The respondents were asked to rate their confidence level in terms of their English pronunciation on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 means completely insecure and 5 means totally confident. Research results partly proved my hypothesis since only almost 20 % of respondents rated totally confidence level and only 2 % of respondents claimed that they feel either completely awkward or insecure since they always think of their pronunciation mistakes while speaking in English. The other respondents who rated their confidence with lower scores such as, 1, 2 and 3 marks were approximately 6%, 5% and 25% respectively. Most strikingly, the vast majority of English learners, which is 43 % of respondents, rated their confidence level at 4 scales. This shows that English pronunciation is a skill where most learners feel insecure when they produce the language. Considering from previous researches, pronunciation is extremely hard and complicated to teach because of several reasons. When it comes to the context of teaching English pronunciation to the Uzbek students, the pronunciation of certain sounds vastly differ from Uzbek sounds and some English phonics do not even exist in Uzbek language.

6. How do/did you basically learn English?

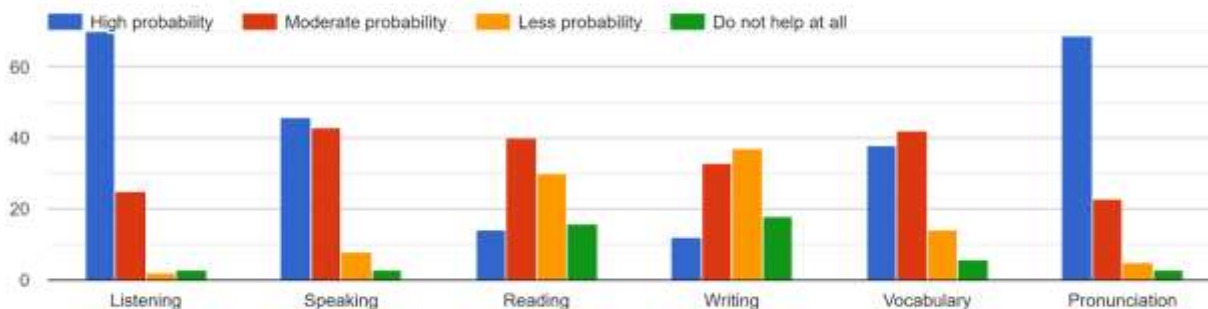
100 responses



The next section of the questionnaire is about the experience and preferences of respondents to learn English language. This question were asked to identify what type of project should be created to teach students. The research hypothesis was the creation of online course coupled with a textbook would be really helpful. Furthermore, textbook is expected to be built upon songs and their lyrics. Research shows that not all students are aware of online courses since only 13,5% of respondents chose online courses as a way to learn the language. It means either students are still stereotyped to trust online courses or online courses lack marketing strategies to manipulate language learners. When it comes textbooks, research hypothesis was again proven since approximately 36,5 % English language learners use textbooks to learn the language. Thus, creating a new textbook to teach the pronunciation to Uzbek students would be more appropriate. Research results also suggest that using authentic materials, such as videos/movies/podcasts (26%), songs (9,6%), and articles are also common among learners. Authentic materials are both effective and fun way of teaching the language. However, the research proved my hypothesis wrong since movies and other materials are more popular than songs in

learning the language. The most strikingly, merely 3 % o the respondents basically learn/learnt the language with their teachers. It shows how self-study is really popular among the language learners although the basic instructions are only got by their teachers.

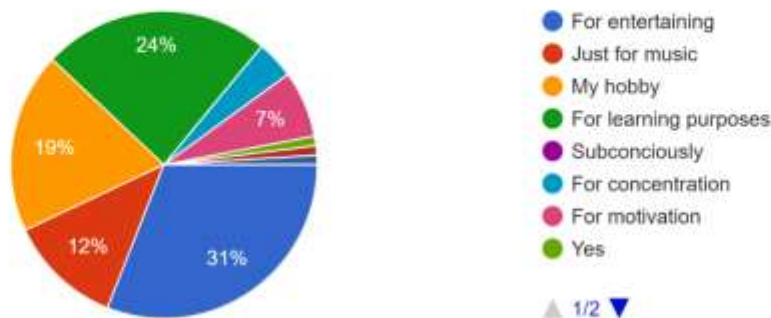
7. Which language skills can be improved through songs?



The research hypothesis was “Songs are common among language learners to boost their pronunciation” and it was proven correct since nearly 70% of respondents find songs have a high probability to improve pronunciation and listening skills. Speaking is at the second rank in terms of effect on improving English speaking skills. Indeed, since pronunciation can be improved through songs, songs must have a positive impact on all oral communication skills. Strangely around 30% of respondents find that songs can improve the reading skills. To some extent, it makes sense as songs have the ability to increase vocabulary (38% of respondents) that has strong connection with reading skills. While 18 % of respondents think that writing skills cannot be improved with songs at all, around 30 % of respondents’ ideas contradict their responses (moderate probability).

8. Why do you listen to English songs?

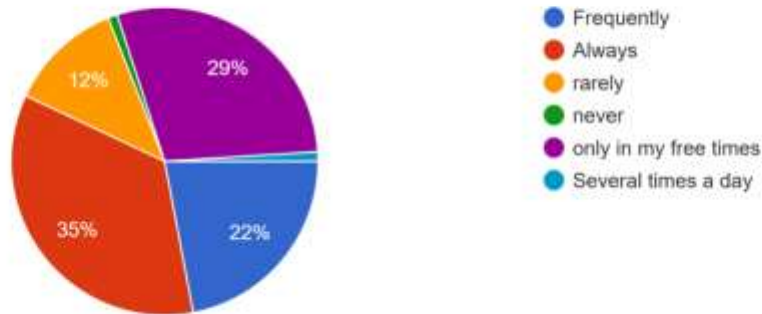
100 responses



When respondents were asked the reason why they listen to English songs, some respondents wrote in the other section for all reasons listed. 31% of respondents listen to English songs for entertaining purposes. Research proved that English can be used for educational purposes since majority (24%) of respondents listen to English songs exactly for this purpose. Basically, people listen to songs as a hobby or for its music; however, research shows that 19% of respondents listen to song for those purposes. Even less (7%) respondents listen to songs for motivation. Merely 4% of respondents use songs to boost their concentration. To conclude, songs are known for being both entertaining and educational.

9. How often do you listen to English songs?

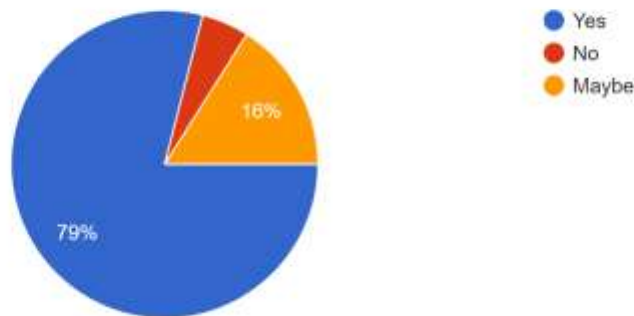
100 responses



It is obvious that songs are really popular among language learners. Research proved that above 50% respondents frequently/always listen to English songs. Hopefully, there is only 1 respondent who never listens to English songs. Furthermore, 29% respondents listen to English songs only in their free times. 12% of respondents listen to English songs rarely. Although songs are common among the majority, still some learners do not actively listen to English songs. The reason to justify this is that either some language or cultural barriers exist.

10. Do you enjoy singing English songs?

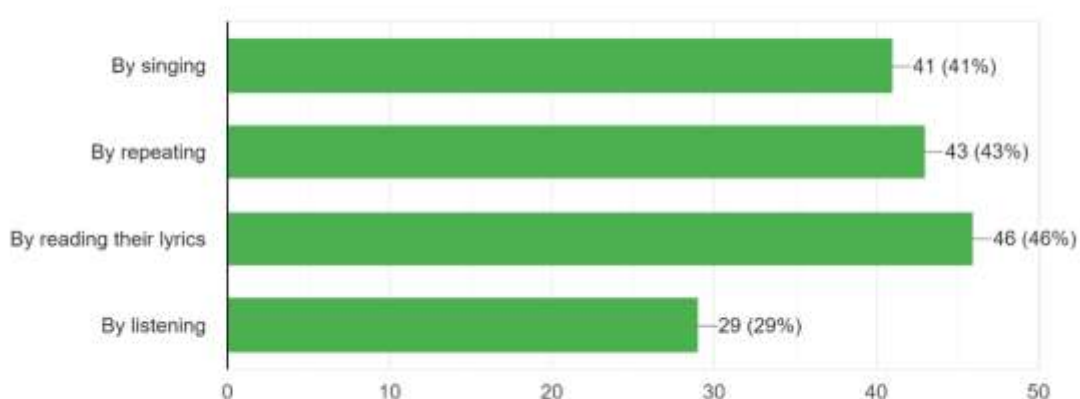
100 responses



Singing English songs almost everyone's favourite activity since 79% respondents claimed this while only 5% of them do not enjoy singing English songs. 16% of the respondents are not sure whether they enjoy singing English songs or not. This shows that it is easy to encourage learners to sing English song to improve their language skills, particularly pronunciation skills.

11. How songs help to learn how to pronounce English words?

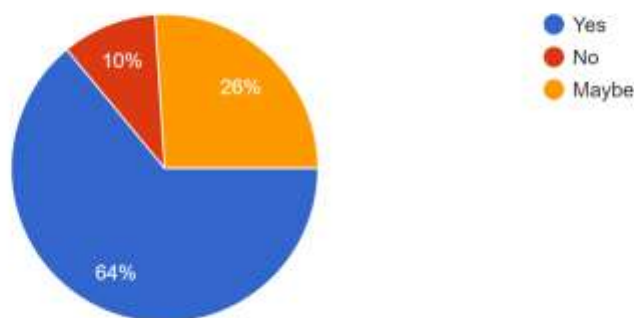
100 responses



For this question, respondents were asked to choose multiple answers from the checkboxes. All the possible ways (singing, repeating after the song, reading the songs' lyrics, and listening) which can help to improve language skills were listed. Only 29 % of the respondents think that just listening to the song itself can help to improve pronunciation skills. This is a reasonable and expected result. The most strikingly, the largest group of respondents think that reading the songs' lyrics is the most effective way of improving learners' pronunciation skills. Singing along with the song and repeating the song checkboxes have also been chosen by larger group of respondents, 41% and 43% respectively. The research does not suggest any clear result about how exactly songs might help to improve pronunciation skills due to almost even responses for this question. On the other hand, it makes a lot of sense as all the given options were effective ways of improving pronunciation skills through songs.

12. Do songs boost your confidence to use your English skills?

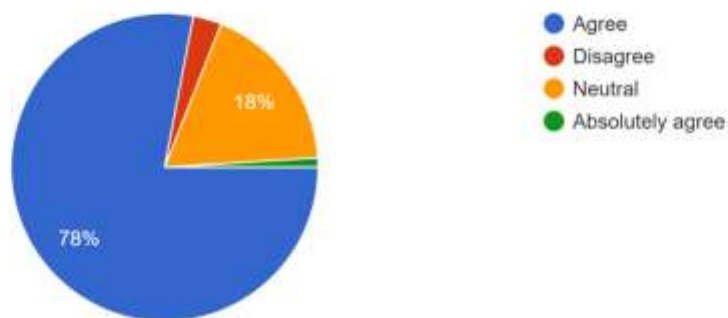
100 responses



The research hypothesis was that songs might help to reduce the affection filter and can encourage language learners to use the target language. The hypothesis was proved correct. 64 % of respondents claimed that songs boost their confidence level and inspire them sing. Furthermore, only 10% of respondents claimed that songs do not help them to boost their confidence while the other 26 of them are not sure whether songs increase their confidence or not.

13. Learning pronunciation through songs can help to upgrade the pronunciation.

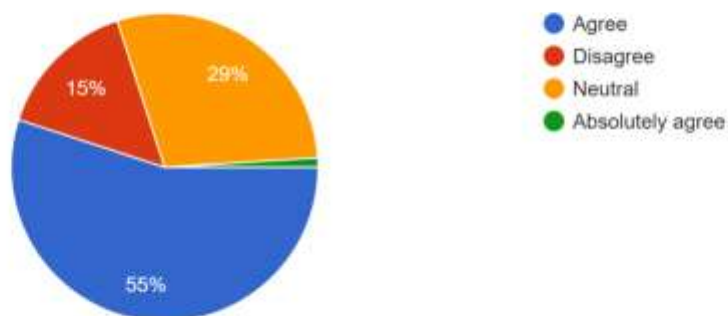
100 responses



The research also indicated that English songs are great tools to upgrade their pronunciation. Based on their personal experience, 76 % of respondents had positive view about songs' influence on their pronunciation skills. What is more, only 3% of them did not agree with this assertion. When it comes to the other 18% of respondents, they think songs might help or might not help. Thus, songs are one of the most effective ways to upgrade pronunciation promptly.

14. Is learning English through songs more interesting and easier than learning through textbooks?

100 responses



The research hypothesis was that learning English through songs more interesting and easier than learning through textbooks. The hypothesis was proved partially correct. More than half of the respondents agree that English songs are better than typical textbooks because songs are fun and easier. Nevertheless, 15% of the respondents completely disagreed with this assertion. Nearly one third of the respondents partially agreed and disagreed with this view. It might be reasoned when we consider the difficulty of the language lexis and syntax used in the songs.

4. Conclusion

The findings showed that the song lyrics can be used for several purposes based on teachers' creativity and students' needs. Teacher can tailor a song lyrics focusing on grammar point, vocabulary, listening, or speaking point. At some point, reading and writing can be improved as well with the means of song as English skills cannot be taught separately. Paper also included some proven techniques to use songs in teaching as well as potential problems teacher can face using songs are also discussed and relevant practical techniques are recommended. The findings of research can be used practically in real- teaching and learning process of English in language centres, schools as an extra material.

Basically, students and learners learn English language in order to communicate in this language. However, most Uzbek speakers struggle to pronounce English sounds as such sounds do not exist in Uzbek language. Good news is songs are precious sources to incorporate into English classroom and improve the students' pronunciation skills. Once any learner learns the songs by heart, that learn is never going to forget this thanks to the rhythmic structure of songs' lyrics. Furthermore, songs make sure the learners'

engagement in classroom activities. English songs tend to have a good background music which grabs the attention of students into activities. Students are less likely to be reluctant for doing the song related meaningful activities. English learners can benefit from the songs in many ways. Further research can be undertaken in using English songs to teach how to pronounce suprasegmental units of English language.

The study focused on using song lyrics in English classroom to improve English skills. The purpose of the study to find out whether songs can be a good source to integrate into English classroom based on set curriculum. Research findings showed that using songs in English classroom is effective in many ways. Songs can make the learning process more enjoyable, and students are more encouraged to take part in activities with higher level of motivation. Benefits of the song are improving pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking and listening skills in a faster pace engagingly. Regardless of almost the same improvement with the students of traditional method classroom, reading and writing skills are more or less enhanced. However, it is a little bit complicated process as there are some problems teacher can face. Students can lose their motivation to learn songs as a learning material. Use of songs in a long period makes them reluctant to use songs as the students feel songs no longer as a fun activity rather it feel more boring and less enthusiastic tool. Teachers are supposed to select the songs carefully according to students' interests and level. As long as the teacher is creative, songs are precious source for students to acquire language as once a word is learned by the song that will never be forgotten.

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