IMPROVE YOUR ENGLISH THROUGH SONGS

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Abstract: *The use of music as a pedagogical tool in language learning has gained considerable attention in applied linguistics and educational psychology. This paper explores how songs can improve English language acquisition, focusing on vocabulary development, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and cultural literacy. Through a review of empirical studies, this article demonstrates the effectiveness of music as a multimodal learning aid that stimulates cognitive and affective processes involved in second language acquisition (SLA).*

Key words: *Music and language learning, natural speech, intonation, stress, verbal and non-verbal systems, assimilation, contextual clues, integrating songs.*

Introduction

The integration of music into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms has long been viewed as a motivational strategy. However, beyond motivation, songs offer cognitive and linguistic benefits that contribute to second language learning (Medina, 1993)[1]. Language acquisition through music involves memory reinforcement, exposure to authentic language, and enhancement of phonological awareness, making it a valuable resource for educators and learners alike. From a cognitive perspective, the dual-coding theory (Paivio, 1986)[2] suggests that information processed through verbal and non-verbal systems—such as lyrics and melody—facilitates deeper learning and retention. Music engages both hemispheres of the brain (Patel, 2008)[3], thereby reinforcing linguistic input through

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[1]Medina, S. L. (1993). *The effect of music on second language vocabulary acquisition*. National Network for Early Language Learning Journal

[2] Paivio, A. (1986). *Mental representations: A dual coding approach*. Oxford University Press

[3] Patel, A. D. (2008). *Music, language, and the brain*. Oxford University Press.

rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Research has shown that songs significantly enhance vocabulary learning. Songs often feature high-frequency words, collocations, and idiomatic expressions. Murphey (1992) highlights how repetitive exposure to lyrics increases learners' lexical retrieval speed and long-term retention.

Pronunciation and Phonological Awareness

Songs contribute to improving learners' pronunciation by modeling intonation, stress, and rhythm. Ludke, Ferreira, and Overy (2014)[4] found that singing foreign phrases led to better pronunciation compared to speaking alone. This supports the idea that melody helps learners internalize phonological patterns more effectively.

Listening Comprehension

Exposure to songs provides practice with natural speech features such as connected speech, elision, and reduced forms (e.g., "gonna" instead of "going to"). Medina (1993) asserts that listening to songs enhances learners' ability to decode and process spoken language under real-time conditions. Listening comprehension is a critical skill in second language acquisition, as it underpins the ability to understand and respond appropriately in real-life communication. One of the challenges learners face is the gap between written and spoken language. Spoken English often differs from textbook examples due to natural speech phenomena such as:

Connected Speech: The way words link together in spoken language, e.g., "want to" becomes "wanna," "going to" becomes "gonna." Elision: The omission of certain sounds or syllables in rapid speech, e.g., "friendship" pronounced as "frenship." Assimilation: One sound changing to become more like a neighboring sound, e.g., "good boy" sounding like "gʊb bɔɪ."

Songs naturally exhibit these features, helping learners recognize and process authentic speech patterns. According to Medina (1993), repeated listening to songs trains the brain to decode spoken language in real-time, developing auditory discrimination skills and lexical segmentation (the ability to distinguish where one word ends and another begins).

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[4] Ludke, K. M., Ferreira, F., & Overy, K. (2014). Singing can facilitate foreign language learning. *Memory & Cognition*.

Moreover, Callan et al. (2003) found that musical training enhances auditory working memory, which supports listening comprehension and retention in language learning contexts.

Songs also offer contextual clues—such as melody, rhythm, and emotion—that aid in comprehension, especially for learners struggling to understand rapid or accented speech. Lyrics provide a predictable structure and often include choruses, enabling learners to anticipate and understand language more efficiently over time.

Affective Filter and Motivation

Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis[5] posits that learners acquire language more effectively when anxiety is low, and motivation is high. Songs create a relaxed learning environment, lowering learners' affective filters and increasing willingness to engage with the language. Songs naturally lower learners' affective filters due to their entertaining and emotionally engaging nature. Music can evoke positive emotions, reduce classroom anxiety, and create a supportive atmosphere (Murphey, 1992). Learners are more likely to take risks in using the target language when they feel emotionally safe, such as when singing along or discussing the meaning of a song. Additionally, music increases intrinsic motivation—learners often listen to music for enjoyment outside the classroom, making the learning process more autonomous and self-directed (Ushioda, 2011). By integrating songs that reflect learners' musical tastes or cultural interests, teachers can spark enthusiasm and foster a sustainable engagement with the language.

Songs also create a shared experience in the classroom, promoting social bonding and cooperation. Activities such as singing in groups or interpreting song lyrics in teams can improve both motivation and communicative confidence.

Cultural Understanding

Songs also serve as authentic cultural artifacts, providing learners with insights into the historical, social, and political contexts of English-speaking

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[5] Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon.

countries. For example, protest songs like **"We Shall Overcome"** or **"Imagine"** by John Lennon introduce learners to key social movements and values embedded in the English-speaking world.

Pedagogical Implications

Instructors should select songs that are level-appropriate and culturally relevant. Pre-listening tasks (e.g., predicting lyrics), while-listening tasks (e.g., gap-fills), and post-listening tasks (e.g., discussion or writing reflection) maximize the pedagogical potential of songs. Integrating songs into the curriculum supports a communicative approach, promoting both receptive and productive language skills.

Conclusion

Music is an effective, multimodal tool for developing English language proficiency. Through its ability to enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, and cultural knowledge, songs offer a holistic and enjoyable learning experience. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of music-based instruction on different learner populations.

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