

USING MUSIC: AN EFFECTIVE MEDIUM OF TEACHING VOCABULARY IN ESL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT: *Music can be used in ESL classroom to create a learning environment. It can be used in teaching second language acquisition as an effective vehicle for the rich literary content that lyrics hold. Music can be applied as a powerful instrument to help second language learners to acquire vocabulary. Learners of second language always perceive vocabulary acquisition as boring task. As listening to music and singing songs are enjoyable to students, it can be used effectively to acquire vocabulary in second language. This paper reports a study to find out how music accelerates vocabulary acquisition as the learners stay relaxed and thus learning becomes more enjoyable. To conduct the study, the researcher formed two groups namely Music and Non Music group. Data were collected through class observation, test, questionnaires and interview. The finding shows that music group performed well in acquiring and remembering vocabulary than non-music group. They also enjoyed vocabulary learning activities based on listening songs.*

KEYWORDS: Effective Instrument, ESL Classroom, Music, Relax Environment, Vocabulary Learning.

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum in English Language text books of Bangladesh has gone through number of different methods in teaching English to the learners. Though the existing method is based on CLT, still the learners go through the old tradition of grammar text books, cramming certain rules and writings and evaluating them based on the consecutive exams. At tertiary level, the EFL learners are often seen with great fear growing for English language and very often they try to escape what they fear rather than facing it. As a result they find learning English as boring and quite difficult task to accomplish and view the chance of being successful in learning English as very low. In fact, there should have been or could have been a positive disposition among the learners if they were taught the language in enjoyable and relaxed ways. Several methods can be implemented to teach English to the ESL learners . But it would be wise not to stick to “ one single method” because rather than applying one method it would be wise to incorporate more than one method to teach ESL learners . If we can implement and apply any method or methods in an interesting way, the possibility of acquiring language is higher. Hence in ELT classes English songs and lyrics can be applied to teach English in a natural and spontaneous way.

Music can be used by teachers to help second language learners to acquire second language. It can be used in the adult English in a second language (ESL) classroom to create a learning environment. Music can be used to build listening, speaking, reading and writing skills; to help acquiring vocabulary and to expand cultural knowledge.

ELT practitioners around think that music is helpful for the learners for several reasons. First singing songs and listening to music are most enjoyable experience to students. So if they are

engaged in pleasurable experience, learners stay more relaxed and their inhibition about acquiring second language is lessened. When they are more relaxed, they are also attentive than usual and more receptive to learning. Through songs students are exposed to more authentic examples of the second language.

Background of the study

Vocabulary learning is less focused area of the language learning and teaching. After examining all the NCTB English text books, it has been found that vocabulary acquisition is less focused and if there is any, that too is not enough interesting to engage the ESL learners. More research is needed in that issue as there is paucity of innovative and interactive method in teaching vocabulary. Learning vocabulary is a very complex system and different brains learn in different ways. According to Nation, ESL learners need to know large number of words as this may be useful for them in the long-term as learning vocabulary should not be a short term goal. (Nation2001)

Vocabulary teaching is not highly emphasized in our curriculum. In tertiary level, the majority of the learners face difficulty when they need to communicate both in verbal and written form. They fail to communicate in real life situation because of lack of adequate vocabulary in reservoir. Mere cramming and memorization of words do not sustain in the long run. Therefore, it is important to research deep inside of these difficulties and obstacle and introduce innovative and ideas for the learners to teach and learn English vocabulary.

Importance of Vocabulary

McCarthy states that: “[n]o matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meaning, communication in L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way”. So from this citation, it can be clearly drawn the only target of mastery of vocabulary should be to be able to communicate. The writer not only marks the importance of vocabulary over grammar and punctuation but also adds that it is the aspect that is least focused in learning language (McCarthy1990).

Komorowska voices the same as McCarthy. She reasons that in today’s world the very basic aim of any language learning is communication where she thinks vocabulary acts an important role in successful communication. She also adds that the only reason that the learners face the communication block is the unfamiliarity of vocabulary. She further states that no speaking, listening, reading or writing skill is possible without vocabulary exercise. (komorowska 2005)

Wilkins states “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary *nothing* can be conveyed” Communication at elementary level is possible with some useful expression and very little grammar but when people need to communicate abroad, they learn some basic vocabularies as it helps them to run the communication with the native speakers. (Williams 1972)

Szpotowicz and Szulc-Kurpaska state that students like to learn new vocabulary and they are not only always curious to what a new word look like and how it sounds, but also what it means. The authors also point out that learners love to experience new lexical items. Some young learners are fond of practicing vocabulary with pronunciation training. Though children tend to forget words, building and developing new words are the most important principles when we think about teaching a mother tongue. However, it is worth remembering that vocabulary plays the most essential role in learning language and also in real life conversation

while dealing with different situation. Next the authors suggest that the teachers should engage the learners and spend more time on practicing and developing new language items (Szpotowicz ,Szulckurpaska 2009)

It is needless to say that effective foreign language learning incorporates all four skills , grammar, vocabulary ,and pronunciation. Vocabulary is important to language teaching as without vocabulary students cannot communicate orally and in written form. Hence students need to acquire vocabulary mastery. Mastery of vocabulary learning is not only important to the English language learners but also crucial for successful communication in foreign language environment. Strong vocabulary will always help the learners to develop other skills in second language . Acquisition of vocabulary has a direct positive impact on building up language proficiency as a whole. Paul Nation, a leading linguist says “Vocabulary is not an end in itself . A rich vocabulary makes the skills of listening speaking ,reading, and writing easier to perform “ . In fact vocabulary learning can be considered as a strong and solid foundation where the whole language proficiency is much dependent .

Importance of music and ESL

Songs are combination of music and language which can be very effective for teaching vocabulary to. A good song always highlights the rhythm and important words and when students listen to those words with the rhythm ,it deeply influences the memory and the memorization as it is always heard with the melody infused . And when the words memorized along with the rhythm , they influence the way we talk , making it more natural and easier for conducting successful communication .

In his book “The Descent of Man and the Selection in Relation to sex” Charles Darwin suggested that music helped to get language started . Many scientists working with the origin of the language believe that language and music evolve together “We must suppose that the rhythm and the cadences of many oratory are derived from previously developed musical powers ...we may even go further than this , and ..believe that musical sounds afforded one of the bases for the development of language ... (Darwin 1871)

The relation between music and language learning is not an recent issue . It has it’s way back from the starting of the evolution of human being .Robbin Burling stated “...The evolution of music and even the relation of music to language , has recently attracted serious attention , and linguists and musicologists who care about evolution should be able to give one another some help. we should take , for a change , music seriously (Burling 2007)

Communicative language speaking deals with lexis , syntax and stress , intonation , rhythm in delivering our message Songs which engage both language and music can turn out to be very helpful in teaching students how to express emotion and feelings in the target language through words . A good song is always equipped with rhythm , melodic shape and strong words. When these words through music are memorized, they influence the brain more deeply and the language use with those words become more natural and easier . The benefits of the songs are long term as it slips into our memory effortlessly and influences the way we use it. Once the words are absorbed , it stays in long term memory which boosts up our speech with more natural vocabulary with dynamic color .

There can be number of reasons that songs, more specifically pop songs, might be helpful for second-language learners. According to Murphey’s (1992) analysis, language of pop songs are

more suitable for young learners . And the lyrics deal with comparatively easy and simple vocabulary which is appropriate for students learning English. Moreover lyrics are full of repetitive structure and song vocabulary most of the times contains short words . Lyrics are always conversational like real life speech and sung at slower rate with pauses . And finally the beat of the pop song that helps learners to grow a sense of inner timing and allows them to speak read in whole sentences rather than just one word at a time. All these factors make learners to relate to and understand song lyrics easily.

There has been much theoretical and psychological support for the inclusion of music in teaching ESL. According to Neurologists' findings, language processing and musical processing occur in the same area of brain . It happens to be parallel the way musical and linguistics syntax are processed.(Maess,Koelsch 2001) Researchers have examined that songs with lyrics and rhythm can enhance the possibility of learning vocabulary , grammar and pronunciation of ESL learners .

Hazel-Obarow (2004) in a study of young learners in English examined both the short-term and long-term effects of music on vocabulary acquisition using a pretest-posttest-delayed-posttest experimental design. The study involved music and no music instruction on vocabulary acquisition. Qualitative data , students motivation and engagement were also collected . He used two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), but no significant results were found regarding the impact of music on vocabulary acquisition . Nevertheless , the qualitative data , showed that treatments that involved music were more motivating and made helped to engage students deeper in learning vocabulary.

Theoretical Background

Using music in ESL class has it's support both from psychological and linguistics point of view and it has been supported strongly which are directly tied to music and second language learning . Krashen's Second language hypothesis and Gardener's Multiple Intelligence directly support why language acquisition can be more accelerated by using music in the class.

Krashen's Second language hypothesis

According to "Nativism" a biologically based theory humans are biologically pre-wired to process and therefore acquire language, be it first or second language. Noam Chomsky most widely known nativist, claims that a learners input from the environment is not enough to acquire language . He instead claims that humans are born with pre-programmed innate ability to acquire any language (Chomsky 1965).

Following in the nativist tradition is the work of Stephen Krashen's (1982) "Input " and "Affective filter hypothesis". According to Krashen's Input hypothesis , new unfamiliar vocabulary is acquired when its significance is made clear to the learner. Meaning is conveyed by providing extra linguistic support such as illustrations, actions, photos, and realia. And this is what Krashen refers to " comprehensible input" as the linguistic input is made comprehensible to ESL learners . (Krashen 1985),(ukessays.com)

Krashen(1989) states vocabularies are incidentally acquired through stories of the familiar words and syntax in the stories provide meaning to less familiar words . Another reason is picture illustration can be used to clarify the meaning of unfamiliar words also .

Music use in the second language classroom is consistent with both of Krashen's hypotheses.

When second language learners hear songs with lyrics, it is possible to similarly acquire vocabulary. As the music has positive effects on the learners of second language, songs may motivate and captivate the attention of second language learners in ways that only the lyrics without song or only the vocabulary can not.

Krashen's "Affective filter Hypothesis" is also tied to music use in ESL class room. According to this hypothesis receiving linguistic input from the environment largely depends on the learner's "affect" that is his inner feelings and attitude. Negative emotions, functioning much like a filter can prevent the learner from making total use of the linguistic input from his environment. Therefore if the learner is demotivated, anxious, or lacks confidence, language acquisition will be hampered and limited. So it is in the interest of the second language teacher to create an environment which evokes positive emotions and helps learners stay relaxed and motivated. Music precisely does that. When learners listen to instrumental music, vocals in the target language it is always pleasurable experience. Music thus evokes positive emotions and this can lower the "affective filter" which bring about language acquisition.

Gardener's Theory of Multiple intelligence

Using music in acquisition of second language is supported by another theorist, Howard Gardener (1993). According to this psychologist, there exist eight distinct intelligence; musical, spatial, logical, linguistic (verbal), logical mathematical, bodily-Kinesthetic (movement), interpersonal (understanding others) and intrapersonal (understanding self) and naturalist (observing and understanding natural and human made patterns and systems).

There are several suggestion for educators. Gardener (1983) believes that the educational institutions should take the responsibility of cultivating these intelligence. It is a fact to be reminded of that our schools have always focused on the development of only two intelligence: linguistics and mathematical /logical skills. Gardener thinks that such perspective is narrow as human beings have the potential of possessing multiple intelligence. Hence Gardener suggests that educational institutions should cultivate and foster a greater range of intelligence. Therefore teachers should play the key role and need to instruct such a way that can ignite a wide range of strategies which can be even more successful with the students than before. (Campbell, Campbell & Dickinson 1996), (ukessay.com)

Inclusion of music as a vehicle in ESL class is consistent with Gardener's multiple theory of intelligence. Music can be applied in various ways to teach the second language to ESL learners. While doing writing task, students can listen to instrumental background music.

In order to acquire vocabulary students may listen to songs along with lyrics. Teacher can provide the lyrics later and highlight the target words or can go for fill in the blank. Clearly there are many ways in which music can be used to instruct second language. In doing so students will cultivate the musical intelligence which Gardener speaks of.

Psychological Research on Music and Rote memorization

Using music in ESL classroom has been greatly supported by the research from psychology and much of it's focus is on music and rote memorization. Acquiring Language and rote memorization represent two different types of verbal learning. Although they are not synonymous, they are related. Language acquisition includes memorization. Music is said to enhance rote memorization. Infact some studies claim that there is a strong bond between

music and verbal learning (Deutsch 1972). Music and its sub component, have been proven to benefit rote memorization process. It was discovered that memorization was enhanced when various types of verbal information were presented simultaneously with music (Szpotowicz, Szulckurpaska 2009)

Research which focused only effectiveness of rhythm, a subcomponent of music, has been equally favorable (Staples 1968). The psychology literature also indicated that the retentive effects of rhythm can be maximized when the targeted verbal information carries meaning. In several studies rhythmic presentation helped to remember the target information and the items were both meaningful and meaningless (i.e. nonsense syllabus). But the effect of rhythm was greatest when the target verbal information was more meaningful. (Weener 1971)

The psychological literature provides evidence of the positive relationship between music and rote memorization, a related yet distinct type of verbal learning. It explains the interactive relationship between music and meaning. When more meaningful verbal information is learned with music, the retention is far greater than just memorizing any meaningful information. As it has been pointed out in the second language research, meaning also occupies a significant role in the acquisition of a second language. Krashen has demonstrated that language acquisition results when the target language item is heavily laden with meaning. This is made possible by providing extra linguistic support such as actions, etc, which make linguistic input comprehensible. Music particularly if accompanied by extra linguistic support may be a variable vehicle for language acquisition. Taking all these into consideration the researcher tried to investigate in the study (1) how music brings about change in language acquisition and (2) how using music accelerates acquiring more vocabulary.

METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the study was to examine how to what extent using songs in the English language teaching classroom can create an impact and initiate on better vocabulary memorization. The author also wanted to know the musical preference of the students to gain better idea on student's musical taste and to apply this to class room teaching; and finally to have an insight about their perception on song oriented Language class.

Description of the participant

Subjects participating in the study were 50 students from a private university located in the capital city of Dhaka. The study was carried out among two groups, each consisting of 25 students aged from 17-18. All of them are in their tertiary level from two classrooms. The students had two classes each week. They were having their Fundamental English course in their first semester. For the investigation two groups were formed: Music and Non music. Music group consisted of 25 students and Non music group consisted the same number of students from another section. Songs were selected carefully giving importance on the lyrics and theme. For running the test the teacher used multimedia and good sound system to create atmosphere. The songs used in the class are "Skyfall" by Adele and "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel, were based on vocabulary items such as fill in the gaps, search for synonyms, translation and making sentences with target words.

Procedure:

As stated before in this study vocabulary acquisition was investigated under two conditions: (1) Music and (2) No Music. Three kinds of data tools were used during the experiment .A preliminary questionnaire and an evaluation interview after the lesson with music group .The students were given a pre test and a post test . Finally, teacher’s observation was added too. The experiment started at the beginning of the year in Spring trimester. Before the experiment begins, the teacher conducted a preliminary questionnaire to know the taste and attitude of learners towards songs .Both the groups were given the same questionnaire containing questions about their musical preference and the frequency of their listening to music .The survey consisted of total 8 short questions. The aim of the questions was to find out if the learners are interested in listening to English music or not. After the preliminary survey was done, the teacher went through the result and carefully selected the songs close to their preference.

Next day both Music and Non Music group were given a pre test based on the vocabulary selected from the two songs. Total 15 words were selected from the two songs: One is “The Sound of silence” by Simon & Garfunkel and “Skyfall” by Adele. Both of the groups were asked to write the meaning of the words they know. They were allowed to use Bengali equivalent in case they fail to express in English.

Post-Test 1 was conducted music group one day after the Pre-test. The teacher played two songs : “Hello darkness , My old Friend by Simon & Garfunkel” and “Skyfall” by Adele . The students were handed with the lyrics with blanks to fill up while listening to the songs . The first lyrics contained fill in the blanks , writing the meaning and doing translation ., They listened to the song and filled up the blanks . And after finishing they all sang the songs when those were getting played again. On the same day , the Non music group was given the same songs but without the music. They were handed with the lyrics with blanks and the missing words were given in the table from where they had to guess.

Right after one week both groups were tested once again in post test II where they had the same 15 words . They had to write the meaning of 7 words and frame sentences with other 8 words .Both of the groups didn’t know there would be a test and they didn’t revise and work on the words at home either .

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULT**Survey analysis**

According to the preliminary survey in both groups (total 50 students) it was found out that 50% 24 students listen to music sometimes while % listens to music always when they were asked if they like to listen to music . The result shows that the students were not regular listeners of English songs .

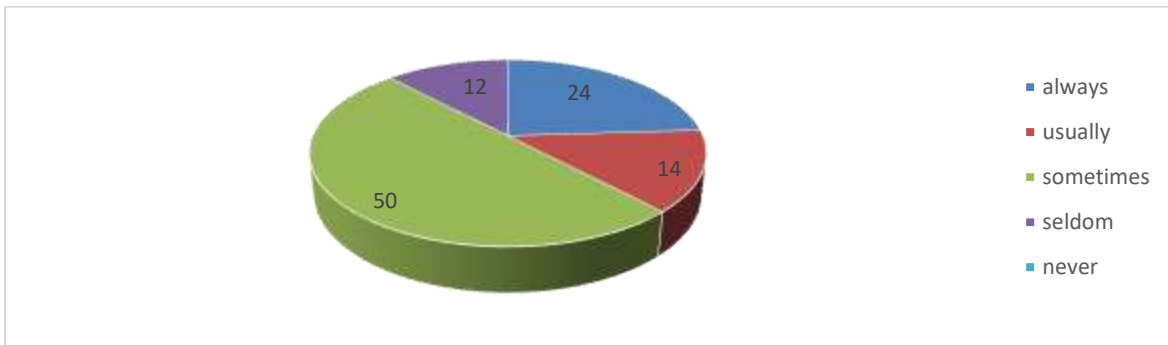


Figure 1 English Music Preference

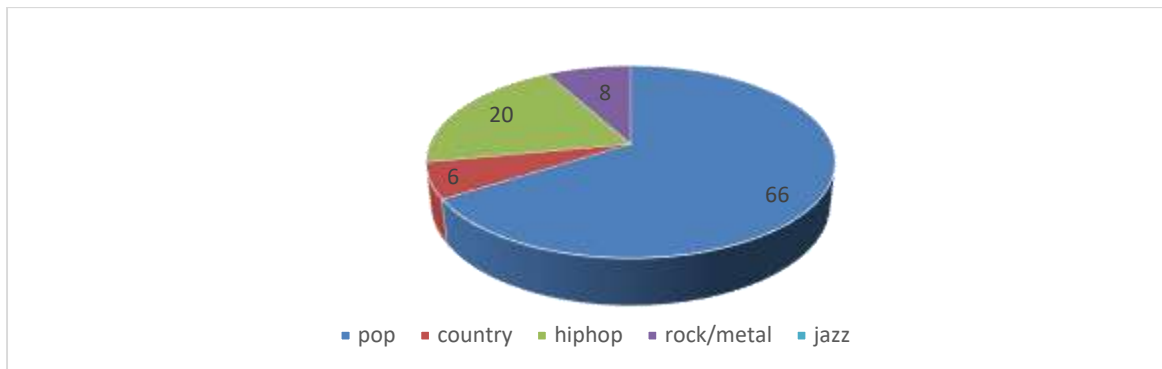


Figure 2 Genre Preference

2nd question was oriented to what kind of music they like and the result shows that 66% of them like pop music and 20% like hip hop . It reveals that pop if they listen , they choose to listen to pop music which is popular genre and the use of pop songs is much more regular than the other songs . So the listeners tend to listen to the kind of songs they get available or heard more or less everywhere.

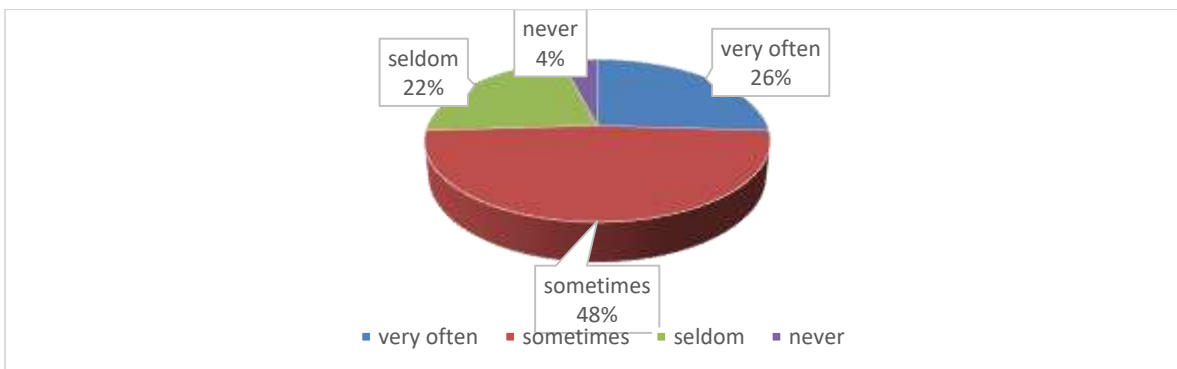


Figure 3 Frequency of listening to music

Query to how often they listen to music comes up with 48% sometimes which again shows they are not regular listener of music as 26% only listens very often .(see figure 3)

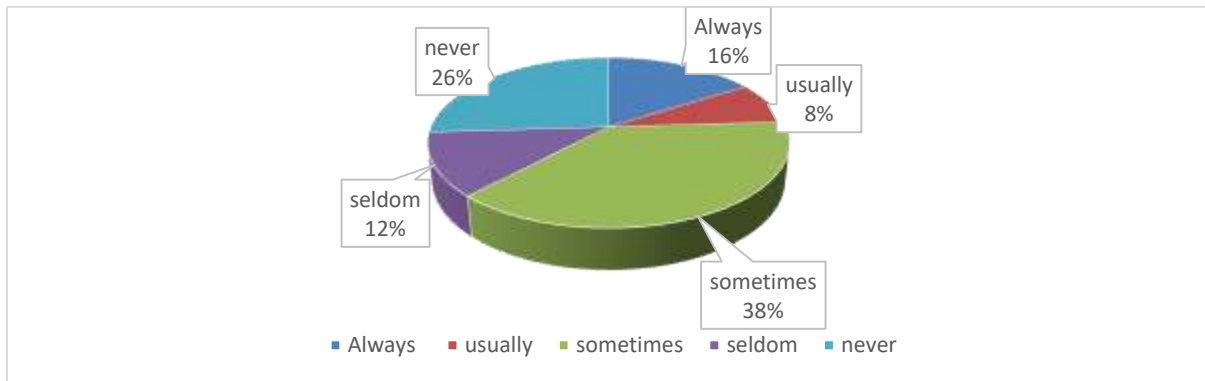


Figure 4 Preference to sing songs

Regarding singing it is seen that only 16% likes to do that where a large number that is 38% does it sometimes and a large buck doesn't like to sing song .(see figure4)

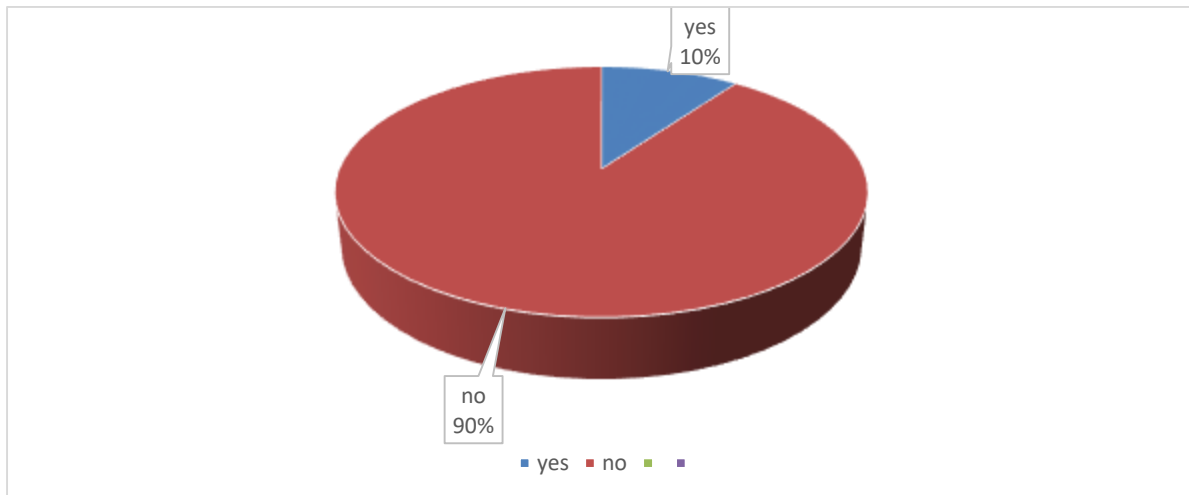


Figure 5 Past experience of having Music in ESL class

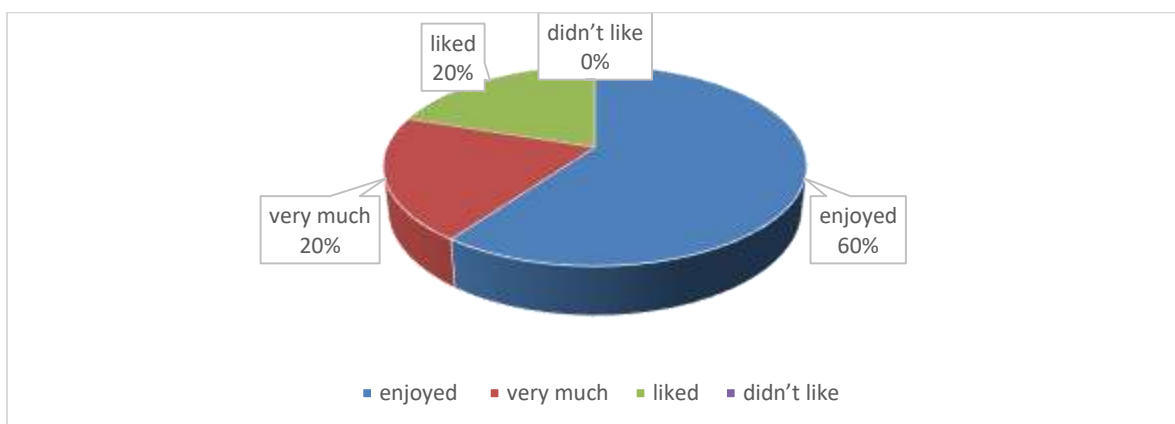


Figure 6 Feedback of the class using music

As shown in figure 5 & 6 only 10% students experienced music with lesson of which 10% liked it very much. It is obvious from this result that they are quite new to the idea that songs

can be infused to learning vocabulary. The last query was what device they use to listen to songs. Smart phone is the medium that they use for listening to songs (see figure 5 & 6)

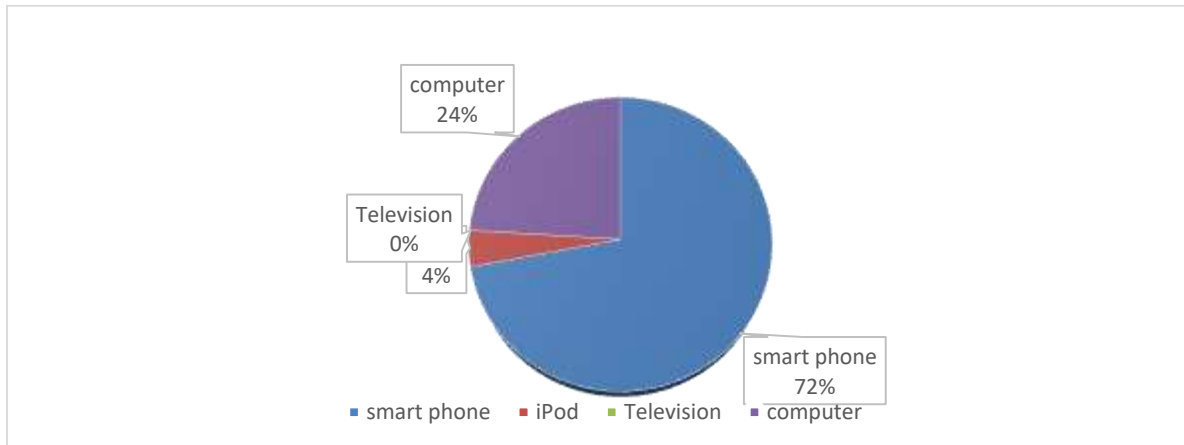


Figure 7 Device used for listening to Music

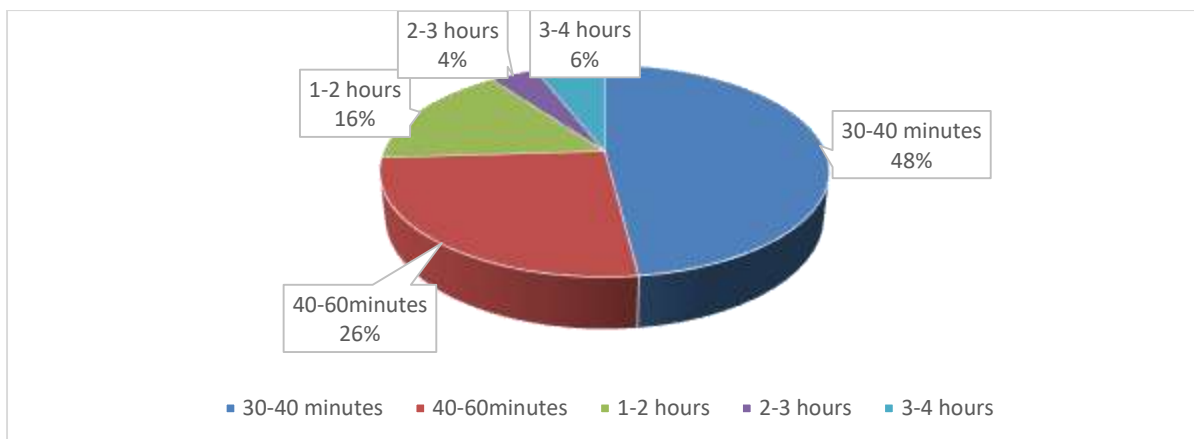


Figure 8 Total amount of time spent daily for listening to music daily

Figure 7 represents the query of the device they prefer to use. It's pretty clear that in terms of the availability and convenience, smart phone is the most popular device for listening to songs. (see figure 7). The last query was to know how much time they spend on listening to music daily and the result shows that large number of students that is 48% spends only 30-40 minutes on listening to music and less students on more time that is only 6% students listen to 3-4 hours. (see figure 8)

So from the preliminary survey it has become obvious that the majority of learners from both groups don't listen to music regularly, and they are not even introduced to vocabulary lesson infused with music in their previous academic institutions. Hence the idea of inclusion of songs in vocabulary lesson is very new to them. Nevertheless, after the music lesson in music group the learners admitted that they liked the idea of lesson with music very much and they enjoyed it.

Data analysis

Table 1: Mean value and percentage of all pre- test and post- test

Types of the test	Music Group		Non Music group	
	Mean value	Percentage	Mean value	Percentage
Pre test	2.88	19%	2.68	18%
Post test I	8.28	55%	7.12	47%
Post test II	8.72	58%	7.36	49%

Presenting the result from the Pre test of Music group, one might observe that the learners knew 2.88 words out of 15 words presented which is 19% . The Pre -test score from the Non Music is close to that . On an average the knew 2.68 words out of 15 words which is 18%. So it can be said that both of the groups had similar pre knowledge on the word list .

Post test I result displays that both groups did quite well than the pre test . However , it is observed that Music group performed better than Non Music group . On an average Music group could translate 8.28 words out of 15 which is 55% . Non music group could translate 7.12 words out of 15 which is 47%.

Post test II was the significant one to show the difference between two groups' result one week after the Post test I. The result demonstrates that Music group could recall and translate 8.72 words out of 15 that is 58% still after one week Post test I was held . On the other hand , Non Music group remembered 7.36 words that is 49% which is better than post test I. Nevertheless , The Music group performed better in all of the post tests.

DISCUSSION, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATION

However, this study is not without some disadvantages. The questionnaires used in this study may not be regarded as reliable .Some learners could ignore the questions and leave it empty. They could just make fun and deliberately give same answer. In all tests they could cheat or simply leave it blank. As the research was conducted for limited duration (one and half week) , it might not provide the long term effect of music on vocabulary acquisition. If researchers continue it for two semester or more , the impact of music on vocabulary acquisition will last longer and it could provide more empirical standpoint on the study

This study is an effort in small scale to examine the effectiveness of using songs in ESL class room applying experimental approach. ESL teachers all over the world endorse the use of songs in language classroom but few empirical studies are found on the effectiveness of the use of songs in ESL classroom. The result shows that learners in Music group performed better than Non music group . After taking their interview , the researcher came to know that they felt relaxed while they had lesson with songs . The researcher also figured out that the learners had more positive attitude while doing the vocabulary lesson with songs which brought confidence in them . Thus based on this study it can be said that an ESL classroom which is intensively based on activities with songs are proved to be highly effective both in terms of achievement and attitude than the regular one without songs .If used in ESL class properly and carefully , songs can emancipate mental and affective power in language acquisition and at the same time promote language awareness. Listening to music can drive the learners psychological barriers

and anxiety away and initiate self confidence and motivation to grasp the target language .

From pedagogical point of view effective and successful learning consists in active participation and engagement of the learners . English songs are wonderful source and rich in materials by which ESL learners can easily be moved and motivated initially .Music has unique appeal . If chosen and conducted carefully , the songs can play as effective materials as they are comprehensible , enjoyable and full of real life language that learners need to use in their lives. The intrinsic merits of songs undoubtedly cultivate interest and high motivation in ESL learners and develop linguistic intelligence .

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