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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING SONGS IN TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION AMONG YOUNG ADULT LEARNERS

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**A PROJECT PAPER SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION
UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS**

2010



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this project paper is my own except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Associate Professor Dr. Sali Zaliha Bt. Hj. Mustapha for the advice, guidance and encouragement given so generously throughout this study. Her encouragement and help are worthy of high acknowledgement.

I am also indebted to all those who have given me encouragement and guidance in the course of completing this study. I would like to dedicate my heartfelt thanks and sincere gratitude to all the students who took part in my research and to my fellow coursemates especially, Nadiah, Kalthom, Satwinder and Nalini for the moral support and encouragements they gave.

Last but not least, to my dear husband, my two lovely daughters and family members for their support and understanding in helping me to accomplish this study.





ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the effectiveness of using songs to teach listening comprehension. It focuses on the use of songs and recorded texts as an instrument to teach listening comprehension. This study tries to see whether using songs as an instrument can help to improve students' listening comprehension. The participants were 116 General English students selected based on their SPM English paper results. These students were divided into two groups. Students from both group were taught listening comprehension by using the two instruments respectively. Data collected revealed that the students had higher scores in the listening to song activity as compared to listening to recorded text activity. This indicated that students acquired more listening comprehension skill through exposure to songs. Thus it is recommended that various genre of songs be used during the English lesson to make it more interesting and to achieve better proficiency among the students.





ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji keberkesanan penggunaan lagu dalam pengajaran kefahaman mendengar. Fokus kajian ini adalah kepada penggunaan lagu dan teks rakaman sebagai instrumen untuk mengajar kefahaman mendengar. Kajian ini cuba melihat samada penggunaan lagu sebagai instrumen dapat menambahbaik kefahaman mendengar para pelajar. Sampel adalah terdiri 116 pelajar Bahasa Inggeris Am yang dipilih berdasarkan keputusan mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris peringkat SPM mereka. Para pelajar ini dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan. Para pelajar dari kedua-dua kumpulan ini diajar kefahaman mendengar dengan menggunakan kedua-dua instrumen satu persatu. Data yang dikumpul menunjukkan bahawa para pelajar memperoleh pencapaian lebih tinggi dalam kefahaman mendengar menggunakan lagu berbanding menggunakan teks rakaman. Ini menunjukkan para pelajar memperoleh lebih kefahaman mendengar melalui penggunaan lagu dalam pengajaran kefahaman mendengar. Dengan itu disyorkan pelbagai genre lagu digunakan sewaktu pengajaran mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggeris supaya menjadikannya lebih menarik dan para pelajar menjadi lebih fasih .



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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Learning English as a second language has been a major problem among L2 learners.

Looking back to the English syllabus in Malaysia, the prominent aim is to enable the students to develop their skills in language learning. Unfortunately, it is found that most students are unable to master the language due to many reasons. It cannot be denied that being second language learners, it is very difficult for the students' to grasp the English language because they did not use the language as a medium of communication. In addition even though English is a compulsory subject to learn, it is not compulsory for one to obtain a pass in that subject to enter tertiary education. This is further supported by results based on previous researchers which show that the use of conventional ways in language teaching such as "chalk and talk" and text book based activities are among the concrete factors that contribute to students' failure in mastering the language. The ability to master the language depends on how much we are exposed to the language and how





quick we can cope with it. In 1985, Krashen writes that affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, self esteem and empathy with the target culture play important roles in learners' success in mastering a second or foreign language.

Krashen's statement is well supported by Schuman (1976), who states that learning English as a second language is extremely difficult. He feels that the greater the social distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language and conversely, the smaller the social distance, the greater the social solidarity.

Nevertheless, in the last decade, we can see many improvements in the teaching of English as a second language in our country. It has resulted from the changes in language teaching methodology and the development of new educational technologies.

Furthermore, the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia YAB Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad has delivered the wake up call to all Malaysians to face the challenges of the present times:

"If we do not want to be left out and become victims of Information Technology, we must seriously strive to acquire this new knowledge. One condition for us to master this knowledge is by mastering the English Language."

(Dr Mahathir Mohamad, 2001: The UMNO General Assembly)

One major trend has been the swing towards the teaching of listening as a skill on its own right. Most teachers in school now recognize that it is possible to improve students' aural comprehension. They realize that it is only a worthwhile aim but one which can be realized even when the class is large and the conditions are generally unfavourable.





Moreover, it has been argued by many researchers that, listening skill is an important aspect of language learning. As Celce-Murcia, (2001) and Rost,(2002) advocated that foreign language listening comprehension is a complex process and crucial in the development of foreign language competence; yet, the importance of listening in language learning has only been recognized relatively recently .In fact, it has been proved by many researchers that by concentrating on the teaching of listening skill, it will help to improve on other language skills - as Orlova (2003) in her article had well elaborated on how listening to songs can be used in teaching speaking.

Among the four important skills that one need to acquire in acquiring English Language, listening is considered to be the most difficult skill in the mastery of the language. The ability to listen with understanding is a vital component of communication for all of us. Listening plays a major role in developing other skills in language learning. Students need to listen for central idea; for evidence, definition, recommendation, suggestion and for conclusion. This is due to the need of the ability to listen in everyday conversation, instruction and others. Moreover, with the development of high technology, we rely more and more on our ears to get information. There is no doubt that the speed of getting information is faster through listening than reading.(Luo, 2008:25) Thus, it is crucial to improve the level of listening comprehension of the students.

Listening can be divided into two; conversational and academic listening. Listening skills among students can be improved by providing the students the skills on how to listen and answer the question that is being asked. Likewise, Emmert (1994) claimed that listening is more than hearing words. Listening is an active process whereby students receive, construct meaning and respond to spoken and non-verbal messages. It





involves a process of understanding of students' accent or pronunciation, his grammar, his vocabulary and comprehending of meaning.

Through listening, students are able to predict what others are going to talk, guessing unknown words or phrases, identifying important ideas, rejecting unwanted information, recognizing discourse markers, cohesive devices and understanding different intonation, pattern and stress. Under the listening skills, listening comprehension complements reading comprehension. The ability of students to clarify the spoken message before, during, and after a presentation enhances listening comprehension.

Krashen (1983), in his "Input Hypothesis Theory", explained that :

"...listening comprehension is of primary importance in the language, and that the ability to speak fluently in a second language will come on its own withtime. Speaking fluently is thus not 'taught' directly; rather speaking ability 'emerges' after the acquirer has build up competence through comprehensive input."

(Krashen, 1983:32)

Krashen's theory clearly exposed that the importance of listening cannot be denied. In fact, one must acquire the listening skill before one is able to produce a sound or word of a language. As far as listening is concerned, one must understand the meaning of the particular word of a language, which involved the 'listening comprehension' skill before he or she is able to respond and articulate a sound or word as feedback, which is the 'speaking skill'. It is no doubt that listening in verbal communication cannot be isolated from speaking in normal patterns of vocal interchange. It is a matter of regular shifts of roles in the discourse between speaker and hearer, so to speak.

Listening is an essential part in effective communication which involves sending and receiving messages and negotiating meaning from those messages. It is a crucial skill for everyone to master because a large portion of education emerges from listening.





Students get information, sense of values, appreciation and understanding of the world through listening. Listening should be taught effectively and critically. To be a good listener, it is necessary for one to practice and acquire skills of attentive listening with comprehension. Listening regularly has helped the learning of language with ease, thus learning the language of mother tongue or native language is so much easier, more so at the early age. This is perhaps the order in which language learning skills are acquired by the native speakers. So, it is with the second language learners where listening is the first order and then comes speaking, then reading, later followed by writing, usually as part of formal educational program. Whatever the order of priority listening is accorded to; other skills would not be delayed for too long before they fall into the line-up.

In a second language learning situation, listening is different and has been regarded as intricate because speech in 'real time' consisting of sounds denoting the different usage of words in the language and the speed-rate varies with different speakers. Fulcher (2003) quoting Buck (2001) "Firstly, a second language learner must be a good listener if he or she wishes to be a good speaker." In order to acquire English language in totality, one must practice to listen thoughtfully to the spoken language of English first, followed by speaking by imitation, like so the skill acquired in reading. As Jones (2001) elaborated that a reader has the opportunity to refer back to a text to clarify understanding, but not to a listener in most listening contexts such as discussions, TV programs, meetings, lectures, and to a lesser extent, conversation.

Bazo as cited in Bramasto (2002) states that listening is the most difficult language skill which learners usually find. His statement is very much in line with the researcher's experienced with her students. Many students come into college and tertiary



education without successful in comprehending listening materials. They misapprehend the message contained in it. Students frequently misunderstand the listening process, thus they fail to adjust their listening strategies for different purposes. In addition, they have difficulty understanding the meaning of the words, listening to unfamiliar words, unable to grasp the speed of the speech, thus make them fail to respond effectively. In acquiring a second or foreign language, listening comprehension should be developed intensively.

This is strongly supported by Littlewood (1981:65) who stated that during listening, learners could not have power over the English language being used, but he or she must be prepared to extract meanings as best he can. More so, as Buck (2001:1), asserts that listening comprehension is a very complex process and if we want to measure it, we must first understand how the process works. To master any language, every learner has to practice and use the language regularly. One has to be in the language environment and the teacher of the language has to create the environment and motivation for each student to make use of the language frequently. Ur (1996) also affirmed that, through regular practice, this will lower the anxiety and raise the interest of the students to speak the language.

Teaching English Language as a Second Language to the low proficiency students is not an easy task. They often find English as a difficult subject to learn especially when given comprehension exercises either orally or in written form. This is because most of them have low confidence level in using that language so much so this makes them feel inferior and they refuse to talk either face to face with their teacher, course mates or even to speak in front of the whole class. To overcome the refusal of interacting in English amongst the students the teacher has to create activities that can give them the



opportunities, chances, and motivation to speak and interact in the language. Preferably the students should be put in a flexible and conducive situation when or during the lesson is carry out. One of the ways or approaches that I believe that can make an English lesson more effective and interesting in a classroom and that provides activities that can enhance students listening comprehension skills is through the use of songs in teaching the language (McCarthy,1985). Songs have been one of the ways or techniques that had helped teachers to lighten the mood and made the class more enjoyable and memorable.

Therefore, the researcher would like to conduct a study on the effectiveness of using songs to teach listening comprehension. The combination of songs and listening comprehension can be a powerful tool when used to teach English in class. Ur (1988) further added that, when students are interested in what they are doing, they will not only learn more efficiently but they are also likely to enjoy the learning process and wanting to continue learning the language. Horner (1993) agreed that songs are fun, motivating and can be used to teach structures. David (1993) also pointed the quietest students who tend to be the most sensitive become more vocal than usual in music-based lessons. Domoney and Harris (2003) asserted using songs is a good means to integrate fluency and accuracy.

In summary, the researcher believes that the use of song in teaching listening comprehension will promote English Language to the young adult learners. Hopefully, by using English songs in the language classroom it will create a relaxing learning environment for students to indulge in and to motivate their interests to learn the language. And most importantly, it will improve the students listening comprehension skill in their endeavour to learn English as a second language.



1.1 Statement of the Problem

“Listening ought to be naturally acquiredSadly, this apparently natural process doesn't seem to produce the desired results” (Brown and Yule, 1983:11)

One of the major problems among Malaysian students is their inability to listen attentively particularly among the low English proficiency level students in the present study. This is a hindrance to the teaching and learning process. Listening is important because it is through listening that one can understand what others are trying to say and to respond correctly. Throughout my experience as an English teacher, I find that most of the students in primary or secondary or higher learning institutions are weak in their listening ability when a listening activity is carried out. They do not have the interest in carrying out the listening task given to them.

Students are not motivated to listen and understand the listening text due to their inadequate level of English proficiency. Furthermore the students' attitude towards learning English is so disappointing. This maybe because they felt that they will never be able to use the language due to low self esteem. Many factors contribute to this attitude and almost all of them are related to the environment or surroundings of the students. To name some, the great influence of the mother tongue outside the English classroom. They communicate using mother tongue at home and with their friends, this habit is not easy to get rid off from their life. The exposure to English is limited with the use of Bahasa Melayu in schools as the medium of instruction is also a contributing factor. A typical classroom interaction also reflects the minimal use of English in the classroom and the teacher finds this truly disappointing because, when one learns a language, one need to be

able to speak it as well. Infrequent use and poor motivation at home and in school makes them feel that it is not necessary for them to master the skills of the language.

The need to have students to be proficient in the language is important for the student's development especially in today's 'Information Age'. Dr. Norrizan Ramli (2001) stated that students should be aware that one of the features that will make a graduate more employable is proficiency in English. As it is the language of most technologies and that the most comprehensive information in this world is found in English. Most importantly, as our country is moving towards globalization, many foreigners from all over the world are coming to Malaysia. Therefore, English, as a universal language is very important for students to be able to comprehend and use it when communicating with outsiders. In fact, according to a British Council estimate reported in the on-line magazine "i-osmosis", nearly half of the population in the world will be speaking English either as first or second language or as a tool for international communication by 2015.

Learning through songs is a great and effective way for students to master the language. Songs are memorable and we do not forget them easily particularly in cases where the lyrics of the song has some meaning which relates to our own lives. This statement is further supported by Moi (1994) who claimed that the meaning of song lyrics are fluid, and like poetry, allow for many different interpretations. Ebong & Sabbadini (2006), on the other hand, stressed on effectiveness of using songs to provide students with the very important of language learning since they are examples of authentic, memorable and rhythmic language. They elaborated on using songs to focus on sounds, words and on connected speech. Even though at the beginning it may start as listening for

fun, in the end students will realize that they are listening for some purpose. In this case they are listening in order to answer comprehension questions. Thus, this study is to determine the effectiveness of using songs to teach listening comprehension to one hundred and sixteen General English students in one of the Higher Learning Institution in Perak.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Learning should focus on students' interest, that is, by using activities that they enjoy. Students in general enjoy singing. Teacher could manipulate songs to teach vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, or phrases, to name a few. But, the use of songs as a tool in teaching listening comprehension is not widely used especially in most higher learning institutions. Furthermore empirical support for songs as a medium for teaching listening comprehension is scarce and there is concern that songs may be simply a supplementary activity with a little value. Besides that, many teachers believe that if something is fun, learning cannot take place. Teachers of English language are encouraged to be more creative in their teaching in order to upgrade the standard of English among Malaysian students. They should provide varieties in their teaching activities in order to enhance or improve their teaching.

Students, as far as possible should not be put in a rigid or tense situation during the teaching and learning process. The situation and environment of the classroom should be as conducive and lively as possible in order to enhance student's interest and provide them with some kind of motivation. One of the ways to make an English lesson

more interesting in a classroom is through the use of songs. In the long run, it is hoped that the students will become more interested in the learning English language, thus help not only the students as learners, but songs will also be a good material that education instructors can resort to for a new way of teaching (Hsu, 2007)

As has been mentioned above, the purpose of the present study is to determine the effectiveness of using songs in teaching listening comprehension. It is hope that it will provide insights that apart from being enjoyable, song is effective and meaningful in teaching English as a second language. By looking at the differences in students' performance via two different instruments, a popular song and a recorded text, the researcher hopes to show the benefit of using songs in teaching listening comprehension.

To sum up, the main purpose of this study is to find out whether the use of songs in teaching listening comprehension will help students to increase their ability in answering listening comprehension questions as compared to students who were taught using the recorded text.

1.3 Research Questions

In relation to the purpose of the study as mentioned above, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there a difference in the scores of students in the listening comprehension activity which utilises a song as compared to the listening comprehension activity which utilises a recorded text.

2. What are the students' perceptions pertaining to songs and recorded texts utilised in the listening comprehension activities?

1.4 Significance of the Study

English is a compulsory subject in the Malaysian school curriculum and Higher Education Institutions. Teachers are encouraged to be creative and innovative in their teaching activities. Nesamalar (1995) asserts that words are likely to be remembered when learnt through active use as compared to when it is only heard or read. Words that are repeated and used regularly will create better retention and thus students who are proficient in English will have greater chances to express themselves and to access vast amount of literature and information in all fields through printed and electronic medium.

These days students are closely identify with media since the majority of them watch television, listen to music and sing songs themselves. One of the teaching aids that teachers can utilized in teaching English Language, is the use of English songs . The combination of songs and listening comprehension can be a powerful tool when used to teach English in class. This is because the lyrics signify a list of words, old and new, which the students can learn and explore or it can be used as a way of practicing in pronouncing new words. Thus not only can they easily remember the words, but understand the meaning as well. So, whenever the students encounter the same words in future, they can recall the meanings of it. Besides they will also know how or when to use those words in writing or speaking.

The lyrics or songs too, can bring up certain emotive issues such as love, humanism, nature, war, death and others. This may captivate students' interest and attention which may direct them to learn and focus in class. Apart from that, the melody of the songs can also be considered as a form of relaxation, hence while learning the language, students can relax their mind and experience 'fun learning'.

Therefore, it is hoped that this study will change a teacher's perception in using songs as one of the ways to teach listening comprehension among the students. Songs can be manipulated as a useful and an enjoyable tool that will make listening comprehension effective. For this reason, it is important that this study be carried out as it provides insights on how songs can contribute towards education and language learning in Higher Learning Institutions.

For teachers, this study serves as a guide to carry out more interesting and effective method of teaching listening comprehension. As for the students, songs provide variety of entertainment, positive experiences and enjoyable environment in learning a language. Unfortunately, there are not many studies done to find out the effectiveness of using songs in teaching listening comprehension. The researcher hopes that this study will encourage more research to be done in this area because it not only benefits the learner but also the language teacher and language learning in general. If more studies were to have positive results, then recommendation can be made to have songs playing a more important role in teaching listening comprehension. By undertaking this research, the researcher will be able to give feedbacks to the relevant authorities about the result of the research and also share the methodology on how to teach listening comprehension more effectively by using songs.

1.5 Definition Of Terms

In view of this study, the researcher had defined some of the terms frequently used and should be made clear. The major terms are as follows:

1. Effectiveness : *The Webster's New World Dictionary* (1999) defines "effectiveness" as having an effect, producing a result, producing a desired result.
2. Song : *Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus* (2003:1449) defines "song" as a short poem or other set of words set to music or meant to be sung. According to Griffiee (1992) the word "song" refers to pieces of music that have words especially popular songs as those one hears on the radio.
3. Listening Comprehension : *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2002:313) defines "listening comprehension" as "the process of understanding speech in a first or second language. The study of listening processes in second language learning focuses on the role of individual linguistic units. Brown and Yule (1983) define Listening Comprehension as " a process of arriving at a reasonable interpretation of what the speaker

intended to communicate in the context in which the verbal message occurs”. Fischer and Farris (1995) regard listening comprehension as “a process whereby students actively form a mental representation of an aural text according to prior knowledge of the topic and information found within”.

4. **Limited English Proficiency (LEP)** : Students who have limited English proficiency. As for this study, it refers to students who obtained a P7, P8 or F9 in their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), English Paper result.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

In this study, one hundred and sixteen limited proficiency General English students are chosen. This study is limited to the comparison between two groups of General English students where the teaching and learning of listening comprehension in both group will be using a song and a recorded text. This sample is only a part of the Higher Learning Institution’s level population, therefore will not be taken as representing the whole Institution’s population, thus will not describe the country’s total undergraduate level populations. This study will also be using only a song and a recorded text as its instruments to see its effectiveness in teaching listening comprehension.

Besides that, the participants will be second language learners of English and their first language is Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese or Tamil. Most of them did not obtain good grades in their SPM English language paper. Therefore, the findings of the study will be focussing on second language learners who have limited English proficiency and cannot be applied to the high or medium proficiency group of learners. On the other hand, the participants of these two groups are of mixed races and gender. Hence, the findings of the study is not relevant to other classrooms, such as one race or one gender classes.

Despite the above mentioned limitations, the researcher believes that certain observations and recommendations pertaining to the use of songs in teaching listening comprehension might provide positive results in the effectiveness of using songs in teaching listening comprehension among young adult learners.

1.7 Summary

Chapter One provides a general overview of the study. The importance of listening comprehension to be taught attentively was highlighted. Teaching listening comprehension is a very important task in teaching English As A Second Language. For the language teacher, this study will hopefully serve as a guide to conduct more interesting and effective method of teaching listening comprehension.

This study also helps to give ideas for the teachers to vary their techniques in teaching listening comprehension to improve teaching and learning process in the future. The researcher too pointed out that the traditional method of teaching listening comprehension is not effective. The researcher believes that using songs in teaching

listening comprehension is an effective method. She also stated the rationale and significance of the study.