

Enhancing Learners' Listening Skill through Lyrics Training

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Abstract

One of the most common issues students faced in learning English in English non-speaking countries is their lack of listening time. This situation has become a major challenge for teachers since listening skill is required in mastering a foreign language. Another big challenge nowadays is the era of teaching and learning associated with the use of technology. Therefore, this article aims to deliver a new strategy to teach listening as well as to enable students to practice their listening skills through *Lyrics Training*. The use of music as a teaching resource is not new in classroom context. Gap-filling exercises have been a common practice since the late 1990s. With the advances of technology, this practice may seem outdated, but the benefits of music in ESL can be easily noted. With the lyrics, it is also possible to work on grammar, reading, vocabulary and pronunciation. In that sense, the use of the app and website *Lyrics Training* presents a modern version of the traditional exercise exploiting the possibility to develop all those skills. In addition to that, this app can improve the learners' learning motivation and provide opportunities for learners to be more autonomous in learning.

Keywords: *listening, gap-filling, app, website*

Introduction

When studying a foreign language, one of the skills that have to be mastered by students is listening. Through listening, students can also learn to speak as well as read and write. Although listening is considered as one of the most important skills, together with writing, reading and speaking, most classroom materials focus on reading as a passive activity and grammar out of context. It is quite obvious that listening is neglected in English language teaching (Garcia in Nation & Newton, 2009).

A major challenge faced by students is also the limited time to practice their listening skills. In Indonesia, English is taught for two hours (90 minutes) per week in senior high schools (Regular Program) added with other extra two hours (Cultural Studies). The students have abundant materials to be learnt each meeting, therefore, they have less listening practice time. The other unfortunate situation is English is not used in daily conversation. As a result, the students do not obtain maximal exposure to enhance their skills, particularly in listening. Some might have good efforts to practice their listening by watching English movies as well as listening to some English songs, but this also has limitations. It is also possible for some other students to travel abroad (English speaking countries) to practice their English, but there are also some drawbacks unless they stay or live there for a longer time.

In the curriculum of the State of São Paulo, Brazil (2008), for example, it is clear that the main objective of English classes in basic education is to make students able to understand written texts. The ENEM (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio), Brazilian national exam that high-schoolers take to be admitted to college, also focus on just reading skills, usually requiring just a general idea of the text or its context of production. While in Indonesia,

listening is one of the skills tested in the National Examination in Senior High School levels. The listening test has several parts attached in the written test and the format is similar to the TOEFL test. Furthermore, some big universities require students to take the TOEFL test as one of the admission requirements and as an obligatory document when their students graduate.

This approach causes a distance between students and the English language, since the study of English is limited to classroom context and books, while the contact with the language outside school walls happen through the internet, music, movies and other kinds of media. The limited time to practice listening has also become a major problem.

These conditions have become one of the greatest challenges for teachers to make classes interesting enough to keep students interested. In line with the importance of listening, teachers must be creative to make listening learning activity more fun and enjoyable and far from boring situation. Having that in mind, this paper proposes using Lyrics Training as a tool in English classes, not only for the listening skill, but also for vocabulary expansion and practicing grammar structures.

Theoretical Framework

Listening is one of the basic skills in learning a foreign or second language and students are involved in listening situation during the teaching and learning process both consciously and unconsciously. Wolvin (2012) points out that listening has been identified as one of the most important communication skills in personal, academic, and professional setting alike. But sometimes, teachers neglect this skill to be taught equally with the other three skills (speaking, reading, and writing) as stated by Azhari (2018). Teachers feel teaching listening is quite stressful as there are not sufficient teaching materials. However, listening still needs to be mastered by students as listening is essential not only for communicative goal of language teaching but also for language use outside the classroom (Hadian, 2015). However, listening is still needed by students and teachers need to think about how to create the fun and enjoyable learning situation in order to avoid the boredom from the both sides.

It is known that songs are very possible to be brought in the classroom as one of the teaching and learning media. As Brand & Li (2009) stated that songs are helpful for second language learners. According to Lopera (2003) there are some reasons why teachers use songs in the classroom; songs can boost students' mood, provide simulation, challenge, entertainment and pleasure. Based on these reasons, songs can be considered as a powerful tool to learn English.

Lyrics Training.com is an interactive self-study website providing authentic materials for the improvement of ESL/EFL listening skills (Azhari, 2018). The users or students can practice their listening with hundreds of videos (songs) and learn about the word, sentence pattern at the same time. Exercises like filling in the gap or selecting an option in the web or application might be helpful to increase students listening skill as well as their motivation in learning English.

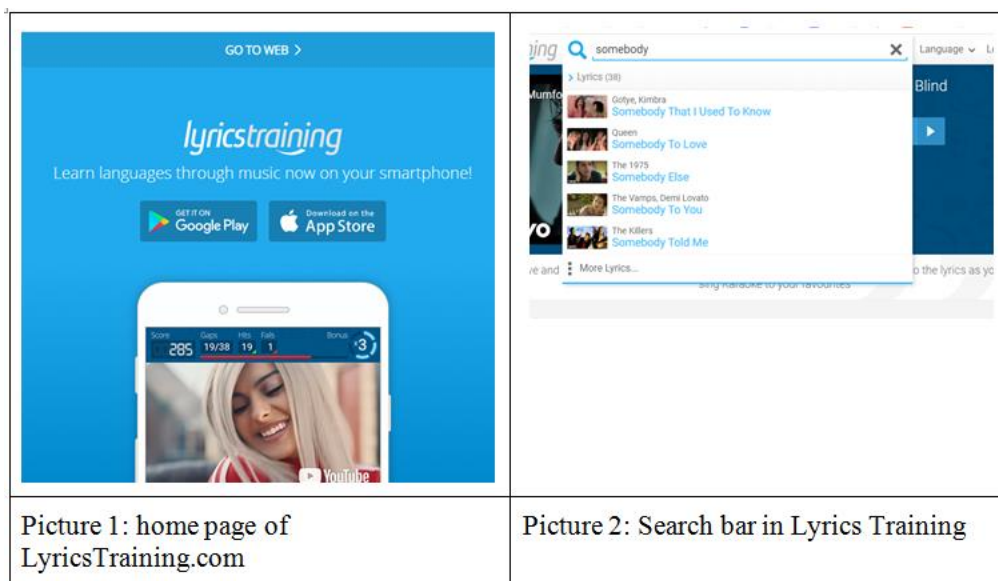
Discussion

One of the challenges of using songs as an evaluation tool is the prejudice school administrators may have concerning popular manifestations of culture. In order to achieve acceptance, one or more grammar contents are linked to the song so it fulfills the topics imposed by the curriculum.

After a traditional explanatory class about the grammar topics, students were asked about songs they knew using the structure. In the case we measured, the structure to be worked on was relative clauses with “that”, “who” and “which”. One of the songs most students mentioned was “Somebody that I used to know”, from the Belgian-born Australian singer

Gotye, a song which won three Grammy awards in 2013, what may be the reason of its popularity among the students even after six years.

The students were assigned to practice the song using the site Lyrics Training, knowing that in the test they would not be able to listen to it, due to the technical limitations in the classroom. In order to do that, they should access <https://lyricstraining.com/> and choose the option “Go to Web” (Picture 1) at the top of the page. There is the option to download the application in Google Play or Apple Store, but, like other education apps such as Duolingo, the exercise are made easier and less interactive in the mobile version.



By typing the first word of the song (Picture 2), the own site suggests a list of songs containing it, and then the player can choose the level of difficulty, from beginner to expert. This feature allows students to evaluate their own level, and since there are different levels of English in such a big classroom, it is useful to be challenging enough for advanced students at the same time it provides a starting point to basic learners.

The objective of the activity was not to make students memorize the lyrics, but through logic and grammar rules to infer what word was missing in the gap filling exercise. What was remarkable in that experience is that even a student who usually falls behind in the group was able to identify that a gap was missing in the beginning of the lyrics.

After taking this final test of the year, in a group of 38 sophomores, no student failed the grade nor had the final mark below 50%. The song not only supported acquiring the use of relative pronouns, but also helped students to improve their vocabulary, use of auxiliary and modal verbs, and, finally, the listening skill.

It was also found out that the students' motivation in learning English, particularly listening has increased significantly. The students were given some exit slips after using the Lyrics Training web (and also the application in their mobile phone) and most of them wrote that they are interested to practice listening using that application.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Beside the positive results of the use of applications, teachers must consider, before using them as evaluation tools, if all the students have access to it, since heterogeneous classrooms may present limitations not only about computer availability but also internet access and even lack of electricity. In that sense, teachers must use apps to create more participative environments, being careful in order to avoid highlighting social differences. Students might also be encouraged to keep using the application or web by themselves as a good effort to create their own autonomous learning environment.

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