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The effectiveness of music in grammar teaching on the motivation and success of the students at preparatory school at Uludağ University

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of music in grammar teaching to university students. The study was conducted with elementary level students at School of Foreign Languages at Uludağ University. Two participating groups each composed of 19 students were selected randomly. The control group was taught in traditional methods without any use of audio materials. The experimental group was taught the same grammatical structure with the help of selected songs and class activities including singing with musical instruments. The data were collected through a pre-test and a post-test which measured students' grammar competence. The test results of both groups were scored and compared. In order to evaluate motivation of the experimental group, a survey was conducted.

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Keywords: Grammar Teaching, Motivation, Music

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, many researchers in the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT) have emphasized the contribution of utilizing various educational tools to enhance foreign language learning. Brown (2001) states that a variety of techniques in language classes will ensure that a maximum number of students will be reached. Thus, he suggests using visual and auditory techniques and instruments to support interaction among learners. Music is one of the most efficient instruments serving this purpose. According to Speckman (2004), music is a common instructional

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tool in second language classrooms. Since music is a pedagogical resource for language learning, songs have become an integral part of our language experience (Cruz-Cruz, 2005).

Sağlam and Kayaoğlu (2010) emphasize the importance of music in ELT context since they regard music as a potential device in order to promote language abilities. On the importance of using music in language teaching, Edwards (1997) points out as following:

Music can be used in a second language setting to lessen anxiety and lower the affective filter, promote self-esteem, increase motivation to learn a new language, address multiple intelligences, aid in memory retention and increase cultural awareness and appreciation.

Mizener (2008) states that singing and other musical activities provide an enjoyable means of practicing language skills. Jolly (1975) states that there is a close relationship between language and music since both entities have significant common elements and similarities. In her study on the effects of songs in foreign language learning, Jolly used songs in Japanese conversation courses for two semesters. At the end of the term, she asked her students to rate the songs according to their usefulness. Based on the empirical observations, she concludes that the songs served both psychological and educational needs of the learners.

McCarthy (1985) makes a good case for using music in language development. He maintains that skills in word recognition, comprehension, reading study, and literary appreciation are reinforced by singing songs. He further states that performing songs and rhymes provides practice in rhythm, form, dynamics, and mood concepts and skills common to language and music.

Mashayekh and Hashemi (2011) point out that the role of music in learning can be described in terms of enhancement of social harmony, motivation force, and tool for learning. They suggest that language teachers should familiarize themselves with the pedagogical applications of music in language classes and the effects of music on thought and behavior of the learners. These features of songs facilitate not only academic success of learners but also the atmosphere of the learning environment and learners' motivation. With regards to the effects of music on learners' motivation, Ur (1999) states that entertainment produces enjoyment, which in return adds motivation. She also proposes that appropriate grammar focusing techniques should be as lively and intrinsically motivating as possible. Brown (2001) underlies the importance of motivating activities which appeal to learners' interests and goals. He regards singing songs as a way to lower learners' inhibitions and to encourage them to use their right-brain processing.

Music and songs may help learners reduce their anxiety and stress when learning a foreign language. On the effect of music and melody to reduce stress and anxiety, Keskin (2011) emphasizes that activities which make use of songs have positive effects on students' language learning process. These activities also help them to be encouraged toward foreign language learning. According to Çakır (2006), audio-visual materials are a great help in stimulating and facilitating the learning of a foreign language. He points out that all audio visual materials have positive contributions to language learning as long as they are used at the right time, in the right place (as cited by Keskin, 2011).

According to Sarıçoban (2000), utilizing songs in class environment not only amuses students but also helps them feel relaxed and get rid of their negative attitudes towards a foreign language learning. Sarıçoban (2000) underlies the effects of songs in language classrooms by regarding them as one of the most enchanting and culturally rich resources to be used in language classrooms. He states that songs offer a change from routine classroom activities. He also points that if selected properly and adopted carefully, a teacher should benefit from songs when teaching grammar. As for the teaching implications, he points out as following:

...the use of songs in language classrooms provides many advantages. They entertain and relax the learners while they are learning or practicing a structure, and they often eliminate the students' negative attitude towards learning. Through providing authenticity and context they make the grammar points more understandable and easy.

Abrate (1983) states that there are many benefits of utilizing popular songs such as holding attention and interest of students, introducing native and colloquial use of the language, presenting cultural phenomena and points of view, providing device and context for learning and creating an entertaining alternative to textbook study. Abrate also states that songs can be utilized to teach vocabulary and listening comprehension, grammar, and many other language skills. She suggests making use of various useful exercises serving this purpose.

Maria Luisa Cruz- Cruz (2005) conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of selected music and songs on teaching grammar and vocabulary. She concludes that music and songs can be an effective instructional supplement to teaching English grammar and vocabulary. She adds that the use of appropriate music can make learners feel energetic and motivated.

Smith (2003) states that music and language are closely related systems and beside the motivating effect or the change of pace they bring, serious issues affecting academic success can be addressed as well. Most of the research indicates that language processors in our brains also help us process harmony in musical relationships (Patel, 2008). According to Trollinger (2010), the study of language in relationship to music perception shows strong relationships between musical perception and processing with language. On the relation between music and language Trollinger points out as following:

Most imaging research about the brain and music involves studies of instrumentalists, instrumental training, and musical development that show a great amount of activity in Broca's area when processing musical melody, processing rhythm, and performing on an instrument. These findings have led many brain researches to conclude that instrumental musical training, musical perception and processing and language are strongly connected.

Moreover, Maess & Koelsch (2001) point that neurological research has shown that musical and lingual processes occur in the same section of brain, and there are significant similarities between musical and lingual syntax. Schön (2005) states that they found a strong overlap of the regions involved in language, music, and song processing. These findings support the hypothesis that the linguistic and melodic components of songs are processed in interaction. Cruz- Cruz (2005) states that utilizing songs in teaching helps enhance integration and create a link between the right brain's processing of music and rhythm and the left brain's processing of verbal information. Considering these integration, the importance of using songs in language teaching can be regarded as a crucial factor to enhance learning.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted with elementary level students at School of Foreign Languages, Uludag University in 2012-2013 academic year, spring term. Two groups each composed of nineteen students were selected randomly. One of the classes was selected as the experimental group while the other as the control group. All of the students are native speakers of Turkish.

At the beginning of the study, the grammar points to be studied were selected from the school curriculum. In order not to stay behind the pacing schedule, limited number of grammar subjects were selected. For the same reason again, the amount of time was restricted to ten days. The grammatical structures to be studied were *Present Simple*, *Present Continuous*, *Simple Past*, *Be: Future (will)* and *Past Tense (was, were)*.

As for the selection of the songs, three main criteria proposed by Abrate (1983) were applied. These criteria were the students' ability, the musical accompaniment, and the speed of the song. When determining the songs to be utilized for the study, the language and the speed of the songs, and students' level were all taken into consideration. In terms of grammar, the lyrics were easily comprehensible with the correct use of grammar in parallel with the grammar structures to be taught. The selected songs for the study were *Wonderful Tonight* by Eric Clapton, *The Way You Are* by Bruno Mars, *Lemon Tree* by Fool's Garden, *Killing me softly* by Fugees, *Bang Bang* by Nancy Sinatra, and *Oue Sera* by Jay Livingston, Ray Evans. With regards to musical aspect, songs with catchy and simple rhythm were selected. The songs had short utterances and motives with adequate repetitions. The definitions of the unknown verbs in the songs were given by the instructor.

In order to evaluate and compare the level of both groups, students were given a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test consisted of 15 questions measuring the students' existing knowledge of grammar structures. Students were to answer 5 questions by filling-in-the blanks, and 10 questions from multiple choice section.

In both groups, grammar points were introduced in the same way. After greetings, taking attendance and lead-in activities, the grammar points were explained explicitly by the instructors and the students were asked to do the exercises in the course book. Following the exercises, the students created their own exercises and worked on the structure of the sentences. These steps were the same in both groups but the next step was different. In the experimental group, the students listened to English songs twice and did exercises including fill-in the blanks, correcting the errors and choosing the correct verbs. Each song activity lasted ten minutes. These activities were done in eight lessons. In the last lesson, the songs were performed with the guitar played by two music teachers. The students participated to the lesson actively by singing.

On the last day of the study, both groups were given a post-test which included fifteen questions. The students were to answer five multiple-choice and ten fill-in-the blanks type of questions in the test. Following the post-test, the experimental group was also given a survey which evaluated their motivation. There were four questions in the survey which aimed to analyze the students' thoughts on the study.

2.1. STATISTICAL METHOD

The results of Box's M test that was applied to the data obtained from the study verified that variation covariance matrix was homogenous. The suitability of the data according to the normal distribution was controlled via Anderson Darling test. It was observed that the collected data met the pre-requisites of the parametric tests and repeated measurement ANOVA was applied.

In the study, repeated measurement ANOVA technique was applied to the values of the tests graded out of 100. In the trial, group factors have two levels namely teaching English with classical method and by means of music. Time factor has two levels namely as pre and post tests. Repeated measurements were realized at the levels of time factor.

3. RESULTS

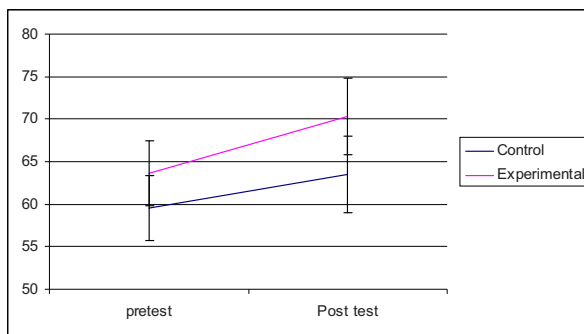
The results of the analysis of variance applied to the data have indicated that the group*time interaction and differences between the averages of group are not statistically significant. However, the differences between the averages of pre- and post-tests are statistically significant ($P < 0.05$).

Table 1. The level and sub-group averages of the factors applied in the study

	Pretest (mean±Std Error)	Post test (mean±Std Error)	Total (mean±Std Error)
Control (mean±Std Error)	59.58±3.84	63.47±4.51	61.53±3.82
Experimental (mean±Std Error)	63.63±3.84	70.37±4.51	67.00±3.82
TOTAL	61.61±2.72B	66.92±3.19A	

Analyzing Table 1, it is understood that the average value of the post test is 66.92, while the average value of the pre-test is 61.61, which points that the difference between these averages is not statistically significant. This difference is shown on the average values with Latin letters. It is also seen that the results of the post-tests are higher than that of the pre-tests. Although the average values are not regarded as statistically significant, the numeric size of the average values of the experimental group (67.00) is higher when compared to the average values of the control group (61.00).

Table 2. The level of success



The increase of the students' performance on the post-tests is shown in the graph in Table 2. The graph indicates that there has been an increase of four points in the control group, while seven points in the experimental group.

Table 3. Students' responses to the survey on the frequency of using songs in grammar lessons

	N	%
Some parts of every lesson	15	79
Once a week	4	21
Once a month	-	-
Never	-	-
Other	-	-

As shown in Table 3, the responses of the experimental group to the question of the survey on the frequency of using songs in grammar lessons have revealed that 79% of the students would like songs to be used in some parts of every lesson, while 21% of them would like them to be utilized only once a week. This means that 100% of the students would like their grammar lessons assisted with song activities at least once a week.

Table 4. Students' responses to the survey on the use of songs as teaching materials

	N	%
Using songs in lessons increases my interest and sympathy towards the lessons.	12	63
I think songs should be utilized more often in grammar lessons.	11	58
Utilizing from songs make grammar lessons more enjoyable.	11	58
I find it useful to learn and practise grammar with songs.	10	53
I can memorize grammatical structures more easily with songs.	9	47
I can memorize vocabulary more easily with songs.	9	47
I do not find it useful to use songs in grammar lessons.	-	-
I get distracted when songs are used in lessons.	-	-

Table 4 shows the students' responses to the question of the survey on the use of songs as teaching materials. For this question, the students have chosen more than one option. Accordingly, 63% of the students have stated that using songs in lessons have increased their interest and sympathy towards the lessons. 58% of the students have stated that utilizing from songs in grammar lessons has made the lessons more enjoyable. 53% of the students have stated that they have found it useful to learn and practise grammar with songs. 47% of them have stated that they can memorize the grammatical structure and vocabulary more easily with songs.

The students are also asked to evaluate their level in grammar lessons. The results indicate that 16% of the students (N=3) have regarded themselves as excellent while 37% of them (N=7) as good, 37% of them (N=7) as average, and 10% as poor (N=2). Among the students, those who consider themselves as weak in terms of grammar have stated that they have found it useful to learn grammatical structures with the help of English songs.

As for the last part of the survey, the students have stated their own comments on using songs in grammar lessons. Some of the quotations of the students are as following:

“Song activities help us learn better. Since grammar is repetitive and monotonous, songs can make it more enjoyable. I think they should be utilized more.”

“Grammar lessons require a lot of memorization, and thus, they are monotonous. Music and songs have made them more enjoyable. Moreover, it is useful to memorize grammatical points with the help of songs.”

“It is good to have diversities and variations in lessons. Memorizing lyrics makes it easier to learn grammar and new vocabulary.”

“I usually get bored in grammar lessons, but doing classroom activities with songs have made me enjoy the lesson. I think teachers should use songs in other lessons, too.”

This small-scale study was limited to ten days. If it had been extended, better results could have been gathered in terms of academic success of the students. As for the motivation of the students, expected results were obtained. The students' responses to the survey indicated that the songs and the activities related to them served both psychological and educational needs. Educationally, it is worth pointing out that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test although the difference between the averages of the two groups is

not statistically significant. In terms of motivation, most of the students stated that the songs created an enjoyable atmosphere and motivated them to learn a foreign language. This study needs more thorough research to analyze and evaluate the effects of songs on grammar teaching. More research could be carried out with songs to determine their effects on different aspects of language learning.

As language teachers, we should make use of audio-visual materials that will contribute to our students' success. Besides, we should seek ways to motivate our students as much as we can. Therefore, the benefits of songs should not be disregarded.

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