USING SONGS AS AUTHENTIC MATERIAL TO DEVELOP LISTENING IN EFL CLASSES

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Abstract (English): *This article explores the use of songs as authentic material to enhance listening skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. It examines the theoretical foundations, advantages, challenges, and practical methods for implementing songs in listening lessons. The article outlines a structured approach including pre-, while-, and post-listening activities, along with specific strategies for developing both bottom-up and top-down listening skills. It also highlights the motivational and cultural benefits of using music and provides recommendations for effective classroom integration.*

Annotatsiya (Uzbek): *Ushbu maqola ingliz tilini chet tili sifatida (EFL) o'rgatishda qo'shiqlardan autentik material sifatida foydalanish orqali tinglab tushunish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirishni o'rganadi. Maqolada nazariy asoslar, afzalliklar, yuzaga keladigan muammolar va tinglab tushunish darslarida qo'shiqlardan foydalanishning amaliy usullari tahlil qilinadi. Pre-, while- va post-listening bosqichlari asosida tuzilgan yondashuv, shuningdek, pastdan-yuqoriga va yuqoridan-pastga qarab tinglash strategiyalari bayon etiladi. Musiqa orqali motivatsiya va madaniy bilimlarning oshishini ko'rsatadi va samarali o'quv jarayonini tashkil qilish bo'yicha tavsiyalar beradi.*

Аннотация (Russian): *Данная статья рассматривает использование песен как аутентичного материала для развития навыков аудирования на уроках английского как иностранного (EFL). В статье представлены теоретические основы, преимущества, трудности и практические методы применения песен в обучении аудированию. Описывается структурированный подход с этапами до-, во время- и после прослушивания, а также стратегии для развития восприятия речи как на уровне отдельных слов (bottom-up), так и на уровне общего смысла (top-down). Также подчеркиваются мотивационные и культурные преимущества музыки и даются рекомендации по эффективному использованию песен на занятиях.*

Keywords (English): *Songs, Authentic materials, Listening comprehension, EFL (English as a Foreign Language), Language teaching, Motivation, Pronunciation, Top-down listening, Bottom-up listening, Cultural awareness*

Ключевые слова (Russian): *Песни, Аутентичные материалы, Аудирование, Английский как иностранный (EFL), Обучение языку, Мотивация, Произношение, Восприятие сверху вниз, Восприятие снизу вверх, Культурная осведомлённость*

Kalit so'zlar (Uzbek): *Qo'shiqlar, Autentik materiallar, Tinglab tushunish, Chet tili sifatida ingliz tili (EFL), Til o'qitish, Motivatsiya, Talaffuz, Yuqoridan-pastga qarab tinglash, Pastdan-yuqoriga qarab tinglash, Madaniy ong*

INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is one of the key challenges for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Authentic materials—those produced for native speakers for real communicative purposes—offer valuable exposure to natural speech, rhythm, intonation, cultural references, slang and informal usages. Songs are a special kind of authentic material, and when used well, they can be powerful tools for listening development: engaging, motivating, memorable, and rich in linguistic and cultural input. This article explores theoretical foundations, benefits, common challenges, and specific pedagogical methods for using songs to improve listening in EFL classes.

Theoretical Foundations and Benefits

Why Songs Work

1. **Natural Language Input**: Songs carry many features of native speech: connected speech, reductions, rhythmic patterns, stress, colloquial vocabulary. Learners exposed to such input develop listening skills that are more transferable to real-life situations.

2. **Affective and Motivational Factors**: Music tends to lower affective filter (i.e. reduce anxiety), increase learner motivation, and create a positive learning environment. Students often enjoy music and songs, so engagement tends to be higher than with dry textbook recordings. Online Library+2egarp.lt+2

3. **Repetition and Memory**: Songs are often repeated by learners (listening on their own, singing along), which helps reinforce vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar patterns, and phrase chunks. Repetition aids retention. Online Library+1

4. **Cultural and Contextual Learning**: Songs often carry cultural references, idiomatic expressions, register (formal/informal), tone, emotions. Exposure helps learners understand sociocultural contexts, pragmatics, and register variation. egarp.lt+1

5. **Multi-modal Learning**: When songs are accompanied by visuals (music videos, lyric videos), or by lyric sheets, gestures, etc., they engage multiple channels (listening + reading + viewing), which can help comprehension. Also helps learners with different learning styles. Online Library+1

Potential Challenges

- **Language Difficulty**: Songs may have fast speech, unusual phonetic realizations, slang, or poetic licence that make comprehension difficult for lower-level learners.

- **Cultural References / Unknown Contexts**: References to idioms, places, cultural allusions may not be understood.

- **Distracting Elements**: Music (rhythm, melody) may distract from understanding lyrics.

- **Overemphasis on Lyrics**: Focusing solely on lyrics may neglect listening for gist, inference, or broader comprehension skills.

• **Copyright / Licensing / Appropriateness**: Finding songs that are appropriate in terms of content, length, and rights may pose issues.

Studies have found that performance improves when songs are chosen carefully, when scaffolding is provided (pre-teaching vocabulary, cultural background), and when tasks are well designed. Frontiers+2Online Library+2

Methods of Using Songs in EFL Listening Lessons

Below are several methods or stages, with practical steps and sample activities, to use songs effectively for developing listening skills.

Stage	Purpose	Activities / Techniques
Pre-listening	To prepare learners: build background knowledge, activate relevant vocabulary, set expectations.	• Introduce the theme of the song (topic, mood, setting). • Pre-teach key vocabulary or expressions likely to be hard. • Show visuals (photos, video clips) to evoke context. • Predictive tasks: look at the title, album art, or a short excerpt of lyrics (with gaps) and predict what the song might be about. • Listen once for gist: what kind of song is it (happy/sad, genre), what does the singer seem to feel?
While-listening	To focus learners on detailed comprehension; develop listening for gist, detail, inference.	Play the song more than once: first for gist, then for specific information. • Fill-in-the-gaps activity with lyrics: omit target vocabulary or function words; learners listen and complete blanks. • True/False or multiple-choice statements about the content.

		• Listen for pronunciation features: stress, intonation, liaison, reductions. • Identify chunks or collocations, idioms. • Pair or group work to compare what they heard.
Post-listening	To consolidate learning, deepen understanding, extend skills.	• Lyric analysis: look at grammar forms, figurative language, metaphors. • Discussion: What do you think the song means? What feelings, images? How does the music reinforce the lyrics? • Shadowing / sing-along: learners try to sing/recite along to practice pronunciation, rhythm. • Creative tasks: write additional verses, rewrite lyrics in simpler language, adapt to a different context. • Compare versions (acoustic, cover, live version) to notice differences in speech, accent, clarity. • Reflection: what was hard? what did you learn? what strategies helped?

Specific Methods and Variations

1. **Bottom-UpFocus**

Emphasis on sounds, pronunciation, word recognition. For example: listening for minimal pairs (e.g. "beat" vs "bit"), reductions ("going to" → "gonna"), weak forms, consonant clusters. Use slowed-down versions or lyric sheets.

2. **Top-DownFocus**

Emphasis on context, predictions, inference, meaning beyond words. E.g., students listen to song multiple times, the first time for mood/theme, next for how the lyrics convey that, what emotions are expressed, cultural references etc.

3. **BlendedTasks**

Combine bottom-up and top-down. For example: before listening, learners predict; during listening, focus on specific words; after, discuss meaning, do shadowing. This helps learners both to get details and to grasp the big picture.

4. **ExtensiveListening   via   Songs**

Encourage learners to listen to songs outside class, as often as possible. They may choose songs they like, follow lyrics, use streaming services/z online lyrics with audio. This builds exposure. Learners might keep a listening journal: noting down new words, expressions, confusing bits.

5. **Task-Based   Learning   with   Songs**

Create meaningful tasks around songs: e.g., learners must prepare to perform the song in class, or create a podcast where they discuss songs; or use songs as a springboard to write stories or dialogues inspired by them.

6. **Use   of   Technology   and   Multimedia**

Lyric-video, karaoke versions, music videos on YouTube, apps for lyrics, streaming services with lyrics, slowing audio, looping segments. Visuals help comprehension. Technology enables learners to control speed, replay, see lyrics, translate etc.

Practical Guidelines for Teachers

• Select songs appropriate for learners' level: vocabulary, speed, clarity; possibly simpler songs at first, then more complex.

• Ensure content is appropriate culturally, age-wise, in theme. Be sensitive to slang, idiomatic expressions that might be confusing or offensive.

• Provide scaffolding: pre-teach difficult items, provide lyric sheets, transcripts.

• Vary tasks to avoid monotony; combine individual, pair, group work.

• Monitor comprehension difficulties; adjust the speed or provide slowed or simplified versions if learners struggle.

• Foster learner autonomy: encourage students to bring songs they like, share lyrics, and help each other.

• Evaluate and reflect: gather feedback from learners about what helps/didn't help; adjust your approach accordingly.

Examples of Lesson Sequences

Here are two sample lesson sequences illustrating how to integrate songs into regular listening lessons.

Example 1: Intermediate class – Focus on vocabulary & inference

1. **Pre-listening**

o Teacher introduces the song: plays a short clip (30 seconds) without lyrics; learners discuss what the mood is, guessing topic.

o Teacher shows a list of 8 words from the lyrics (some difficult, some easy) and elicits or explains meaning.

2. **First listening**

o Play the full song; learners listen for gist: what is the general message/theme; what emotion is expressed.

3. **Second listening**

o Fill-in activity: lyrics with blanks for the pre-taught words.

4. **Third listening**

o True/False statements, plus some inference questions (What does the singer mean by "..."?).

5. **Post-listening**

o Discuss the meaning; realising idioms; compare interpretations in pairs.

o Sing-along / karaoke version to reinforce pronunciation and rhythm.

6. **Extension**

o Task: write a short paragraph about a similar theme in their own lives, using vocabulary from the song.

Example 2: Lower intermediate / mixed proficiency – Focus on listening for detail + pronunciation

1. **Pre-listening**

o Teacher plays a small excerpt, asks learners to note any words they recognize.

o Show visuals or set scene.

2. **While listening**

o First listening for gist.

o Second, focus on specific features: e.g., linking, contractions; highlight examples in lyrics; learners listen for those features.

3. **Post-listening**

o Pronunciation drill: teacher models some lines; learners repeat line by line (shadowing).

o Work in pairs: compare their own versions with recording, note differences.

o Follow-up discussion: how music affects understanding, which features were hardest.

Research Evidence and Case Studies

Several empirical studies support the effectiveness of using songs in EFL listening instruction:

• **Use of Music and Songs as Pedagogical Tools** (Kumar et al., 2022): Describes multiple advantages of songs in teaching vocabulary, pronunciation and other skills, and notes how songs can be used as warm-ups, fillers, or main listening texts. Online Library

• **Melodies in the Classroom**: Study showing that vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, pronunciation, and cultural awareness improve when songs are integrated systematically. egarp.lt

• **Music in Elementary Students**: Evidence that using songs among younger learners promotes micro-listening skills, improves comprehension, increases motivation and reduces anxiety. polodelconocimiento.com

• **Role of Songs from Audio-Lingual Method perspective**: Study showing that songs help to internalize pronunciation and listening comprehension through repetition, mimicry, systematic listening and speaking practice. FTK UIN Banten

These and other studies suggest that while songs are not a panacea, when used appropriately they significantly help learners' listening skill, especially for comprehension of natural speech, prosodic features, and expanding lexicon in memorable ways.

Recommendations & Best Practices

To maximize the benefit of songs for listening, consider the following best practices:

1. **Gradual difficulty increase**: Start with slow, clear songs, then move toward faster, more colloquial, idiomatic songs.

2. **Cultural context support**: Pre-teach any necessary background (cultures, idioms, references) so that learners aren't completely lost.

3. **Effective task design**: Use a variety of tasks (gist, detail, inference, pronunciation) rather than always the same type.

4. **Maximize exposure**: Encourage students to listen outside class, possibly share songs, maintain playlists or journals.

5. **Feedback and reflection**: Allow learners to discuss what listening strategies helped, what was difficult, how they can improve.

6. **Teacher preparation**: Teachers should listen critically to song choices, prepare clipped or slowed versions if needed, anticipate possible misunderstandings.

CONCLUSION

Songs constitute a rich form of authentic listening material that can greatly support the development of listening comprehension in EFL classrooms. Their appeal, memorability, and richness in colloquial language, rhythm, stress, and cultural content make songs especially effective if carefully selected and well scaffolded. While there are challenges—such as learners' level, cultural unfamiliarity, and processing difficulty—these can be mitigated through well-designed pre-, while-, post-listening stages, scaffolding, and learner engagement. With thoughtful integration, songs do more than simply entertain: they help build real listening skills, boost confidence, and deepen learners' connection to the target language and its culture.

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