Investigation of the effect of Using Smart Musical devices on Listening Comprehension of EFL Learners

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Abstract: The present study explored the effectiveness of using music stimulated patterns for improving students' listening comprehension. To reach the purpose of this study, 60 male students of elementary and middle class, all at elementary level of proficiency participated in this study. They were divided into two groups of control and experimental on the basis of intact group sampling. Homogeneity of the groups was checked based on the scores they achieved in TOEFL junior standard test. After that, for testing the participants' initial listening ability, a pre-test based on the listening section of the Cambridge Young Learners English Test was administered. Then, the treatment started and both the groups were taught in accordance with Lindsay and Knight's (2006) three-stages for planning listening tasks including pre-listening, listening, and post listening activities except that the control group was taught using their own ordinary syllabus using the Connect series and the experimental group had their treatment employing music and songs. After ten sessions of the treatment, a post-test which was a version of the Cambridge Young Learners English Test was taken by the participants. Independent t-test was run to probe any difference between the groups. The result suggested that the experimental group that were taught using music outperformed the control group that were taught through traditional material in listening comprehension. Implications of the study for teaching and learning listening were also discussed.

Keywords: Music stimulated pattern, Listening comprehension, EFL learners.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that listening is the first and most important and crucial skill which should be developed for successful language learning (Demirel, 2004) explains the constant demand for methods and lesson plans which could successfully improve listening skills of learners. Listening tasks provide the input of the spoken language. In the classroom, the input of speaking language is provided by listening to the teacher, a CD, or other learners.

As Cameron (2001) claimed that the use of songs and rhymes is important for teaching young leaners in foreign language classroom and since many researchers in the field of EFL/ESL have found the pedagogical relationship between learning language and music in general and developing listening comprehension skill in particular (Stansell, 2005), the present study is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of music simulated patterns use for language listening learning among elementary and middle class school students.

Statement of the Problem

In learning a foreign language, following a natural order is common. It means that EFL learners first hear, then speak, and finally learn to read and write. Therefore, in teaching a foreign language, skills should be presented in the following order: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (Demirel, 2004). This highlights the importance of listening skill in relation to other language skill. On the basis of this assumption, Pinter (2006) argued that learning a foreign language should start with listening.

Listening is a skill and any attempt teachers make can help students to perform this skill and be better listeners. Teaching listening helps students to acquire language subconsciously even if teachers do not draw attention to its special features. Exposure to language is a fundamental requirement for anyone wanting to learn it. Listening to appropriate tapes provides such exposure and students get vital information not only about grammar and vocabulary but also about pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, pitch and stress (Harmer, 1991).

However, this emphasis on listening skill in language pedagogy is a recent phenomenon. Views about listening skill in language programs have undergone a great change in recent years. It was firs neglected and

was assumed as a minor strand within a speaking course. Nevertheless, it now appears as a core course in many language programs.

One way of teaching listening, especially when teaching younger learners, is using music. Music can be used as a powerful tool for teaching language in general and teaching listening skill in particular. One prominent feature of music and songs is their rhythmic and repetitive nature. The repetitive nature of music and songs, the joy they add to learning activity and the associative power between the melody and the content of the word reinforce language learning. When language input is in the form of music, the input is stored with other co-occurring elements including the melody of the song and the emotional elements. Therefore, several clues related to the stored input are available for later retrieval of information. Thus, the use of songs in listening activities will ease both internalization and retrieval processes of the learnt language (Demirel, 2004).

Significance of the Study
In EFL contexts, because learners are not in a real context of English, the listening skill is one of the four skills that must be targeted and be focused on. The reason is the degree of difficulty that it presents in terms of comprehension. In other words, EFL learners are not really exposed to a great amount of authentic input. Another factor that complicates the problem regarding mastering listening skill is that most of the foreign language teachers focus their attention on developing the students reading, writing or even the speaking skills but they pay less attention to developing students listening skill (Castro Villada, 2009).

Research Questions and Hypothesis
Based on the above-mentioned explanations, the research question was posed as follow:

Is there any statistically significant difference between the learners receiving music-based method of teaching listening and learners who are taught with traditional method and listening materials in terms of listening skill at elementary and high school?

This research question can be formulated as a research hypothesis:

H01: There is not any significant difference between the learners receiving music-based method of teaching listening and learners who are taught with traditional method and listening materials in terms of listening skill at elementary and middle class.

Previous Research
Arevalo (2010) explored the use of song as a tool for teaching listening in EFL context of Colombia. In this study, Arevalo designed and applied six lesson plans and considered Van Dozer's bottom-up and top-down processing when listening as well as Brown's procedure of any listening activity (pre-listening, while-listening, post-listening). Each lesson plan had a workshop based on a song.
In short, it was found that this set of lesson plans really helped students to accomplish a higher listening comprehension.

Keskin (2011) considered the use of music for teaching a foreign language. As he argued, there are positive and negative ideas regarding the use of music and songs in foreign language teaching. Music is used for many reasons by methods adopted in foreign language teaching. The facts that music relaxes students and melodies and rhymes in a song facilitate language learning cannot be denied. Music improves students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Furthermore, music and songs are authentic texts that act as significant sources for students to discover the culture of the target language and to improve their cultural awareness. In his study, music was integrated into activities. The result suggested that for foreign language teaching, if songs are carefully selected by considering the audience, objectives, language level of students and song content and if deliberate activities are carried out, songs can be used effectively for promoting teaching and learning a foreign language. Using songs as a pedagogic tool can provide an enjoyable experience not only for students but also for the teacher. Using songs along with such activities will have many advantages such as saving the lesson from being boring and improving student motivation.

Vera and Luna (2013) investigated the use of music and songs in the teaching of English to primary school children. As they mentioned, for the selection of songs students' age, their interests and needs, the difficulty of the lyrics, and the purpose of the activity were considered. The researchers used authentic songs, adapted songs, action songs, chants, nursery rhymes and anthems to cover all teaching phases in the classroom, as well as most learning styles and preferences. The results indicated that a notable change in academic results occurred after using songs and music with primary school students. The students' oral skills improved when they used songs to learn a language, and particularly when they relate these songs to physical, visual, or interpersonal purposes. Incorporating music into language learning led to a meaningful teaching practice which resulted in positive outcomes in the foreign language classroom.

Tse (2015) investigated Malaysian teachers' ideas regarding using music and song for English teaching. He concluded that teachers consider song as valuable teaching tool and rely on its advantages for

teaching young learners. However, they face difficulty in selecting song. It was recommended that interesting and suitable song material is provided for teachers who teach young learners and make such material part of class syllabus.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the effectiveness of music stimulate pattern use in developing listening comprehension of elementary and middle class EFL school students. Accordingly, this chapter provided information on the methodology of the study including participants, research design, material and instruments that were used for the treatment and data collection, procedures that shows the order in which research activities were conducted, and eventually data analysis that was done for answering the research question.

Participants

Participants of this study were 60 male elementary and middle class school EFL students who were taking part regularly in classes provided by a private language institute. Their ages were between 10 to 14 years and they were all at elementary level of proficiency. Because participants of this study were members of their own classes, it was not possible to randomly assign them into control and experimental groups. It seemed that grouping the students irrespective of their regular classes for the purpose of the research was not acceptable for both the institute and the learners. Therefore, two classes of the institute with members of elementary and middle class school students were chosen as the experimental and control groups of this study. Accordingly, the method of sampling was intact group sampling.

Research Design

This quasi-experimental study was conducted based on pre-test and post-test design. We call this study quasi-experimental because the process of random assignment was not conducted due to practical issues. (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). According to Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002), aside from the non-random assignment, the researcher still can have considerable control over selecting and scheduling measures, over the way non-random assignment is done, over the types of comparison groups, and over aspects of the treatment. Therefore, in spite of non-random assignment in our study, there was an attempt to control the research procedures and variables by careful planning of the research design. In addition, because the gathered data included the students' listening test scores, it can be said that the present study is of quantitative type.

Material

For teaching listening to control and experimental groups of the study, two different materials were used. For the control group, their course book that was Connect series, second edition, written by Richards, Barbican, and Sandy (2009) was used. Connect Series is a four-level, four-skill American English course for young learners. Each student's book is composed of eight units. Each unit includes a topic and different sections to practice grammar, vocabularies, a multi-skills, graded syllabus, and pronunciation. Richards (2006, p. 10) claimed that Connect series was produced based on the notion that motivation is essential for successful learning. The series also include resources such as workbook, CDs, and a teacher's manual (Khaghaninejad, Rahimi, & Vagheffard, 2014). In each lesson, this book contains listening activities, however, they are not based on music.

For the experimental group, a specific treatment was designed in a way that the participants received music stimulated patterns. For this purpose, British Council Kids English was chosen as a teaching material. This material includes games, songs, short stories, and listens and watches activities. Nevertheless, only the song part was appropriate for our purpose. The song part includes variety of songs with different topics. The ten songs' names that were used in this study were as follow:

People work, over the mountain, flying from the sun to the stars, one small world, time for another year, we are going to the zoo, ten shiny coins, record breakers, we are going to win, and the ballad of Lisa the lemur. The lyrics of the above-mentioned songs were provided in appendix of these papers.

Instruments

Three instruments were used in this study. The first one that was a TOEFL junior standard test was employed as a homogeneity test. This test measures reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and language form and meaning. In fact, before any procedure, the homogeneity of the control group and experimental group was tested. Students who were not homogeneous with others were not excluded from the treatment; however, their scores were not included as data for this study.

The second instrument was a listening pre-test to measure the participants' initial listening ability. This test is the listening section of the Cambridge Young Learners English Test available on the net. The third instrument is a listening post-test to measure any change in the participants' listening ability. This test was again conducted based on the Cambridge Young Learners English Test. It is worth mentioning that although the pre-test and post-test were both based on Cambridge Young Learners English Test, they were not the same. In other words, the pre-test and post-test were two different listening sections of Cambridge Young Learners English Test.

Procedures

For reaching the purpose of this study, first, two classes of a private language institute were chosen as the control group and experimental group. Then, all the participants took the homogeneity test. Based on the result of this test, participants who were not homogeneous with others were recognized. Because they were members of the classes, it was not possible to exclude them from the research physically. Therefore, the same as the other participants, they underwent all the procedures; however, their scores were not included in our data.

After the homogeneity test, both the experimental and control groups took the listening pre-test. This test indicated their initial listening ability before the treatment. At this stage, the treatment started. The experimental group received ten sessions of treatment. In each session, they listened to one of the British Council Kids English songs through three stages of pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities. During pre-listening activities, the teacher introduced the topic of the song to the participants. Then the teacher and participants discussed the topic and thought about the relevant vocabulary. For wile-listening activity, the participants attentively listened to the song and tried to understand it. Then the song was played again and paused time to time by the teacher and the participants were required to write the song while they received help from their teacher and other students. Finally, the song was played for the third time and the participants were required to sing with it. For the post-task activity, participants were required to write a short text with the topic of the song.

On the other hand, the control group underwent their ordinary syllabus. Their listening practice included the same pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening activities. However, no song was included in the schedule. For the pre-listening activity, the teacher introduced the topic of the listening test and the participants and their teacher tried to retrieve the relevant vocabulary. During the listening activity, the same as the experimental group, the control group listened to the text three times. First, the participants carefully listened to the text and tried to comprehend it. Then the listening material was played and paused and the participants were required to write the text. Simultaneously they received help from their teachers and other students. Eventually, the listening material was played for the third time and paused sentence by sentence. The participants were required to say each sentence after the pause. The post-test activity was done in the form of writing a short text with the topic of the listening material.

As can be seen, there was an attempt to carry out the same procedures for the control and experimental groups in terms of having the same activities except that the experimental group used songs, but the control group used listening texts.

After ten sessions of the treatment, as the last procedure of the study, participants took their post-tests. All the participants in the control and experimental group took part in the listening post-test.

Data Analysis

The obtained data including the homogeneity test scores and listening pre-test and post-test scores was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics of the data provided information such as group's means, standard deviations, normality, and frequency. Inferential statistics helped us to test the research hypothesis. For doing this, paired sample t-test and independent sample t-test was used. Paired sample t-test was run to probe any difference between the pre-test and post-test of each group. Independent sample t-test was employed to make comparison between the experimental and control group test scores.

Table.1. Data distribution based on the control group EFL students' ages

Measure (years old)	Frequency	Frequency percent (%)	Valid percent (%)	Mean
10	2	6.7	6.7	12.7
11	1	3.3	3.3	
12	9	30	30	
13	10	33.3	33.3	
14	8	26.7	26.7	
Total	30	100	100	

According to table 1, it can be concluded that, 6.7%, 3.3%, 30%, 33.3%, 26.7% of EFL students in control group are respectively ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen years old. Mean value of control group students' ages is equal to 12.7.

Descriptive Statistics

In this section, descriptive statistics and tables related to demographic characteristics will be presented. Identifying the characteristics of sample is useful, because with the help of it, general characteristics of the statistical population will become clear. First, data was collected from 60 EDL students of English institution, who were divided into two control and experimental groups. Then, data were analyzed.
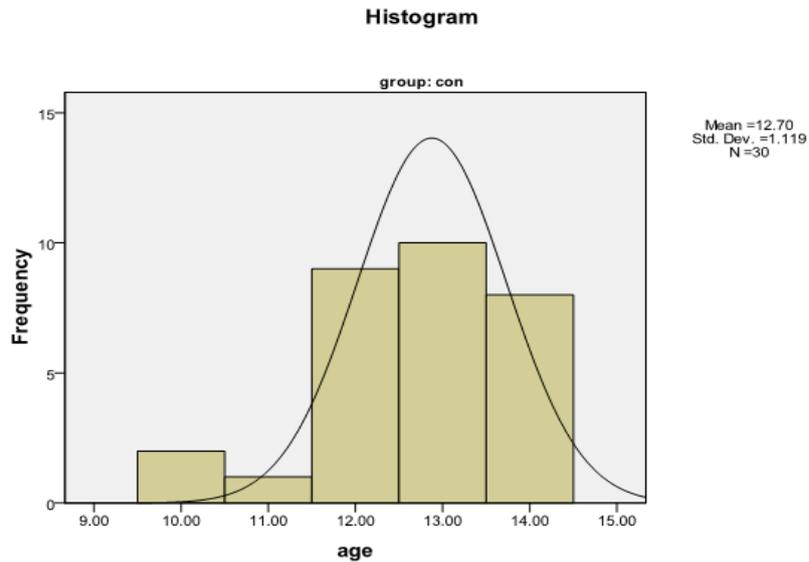

Figure 1. Data distribution based on the control group EFL students' ages

Table 2. Frequency distribution based on the experimental group EFL students' age

Measure	Frequency	Frequency percent (%)	Valid percent (%)	Mean
10	5	16.7	16.7	12.3
11	3	10	10	
12	5	16.7	16.7	
13	10	33.3	33.3	
14	7	23.3	23.3	
Total	30	100	100	

Based on table 2, it can be said that 61.7 %, 10%, 16.7%, 33.3%, and 23.3% of EFL students in experimental group respectively are ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and fourteen years old. The Middle value of experimental group students' ages is equal to 12.3.
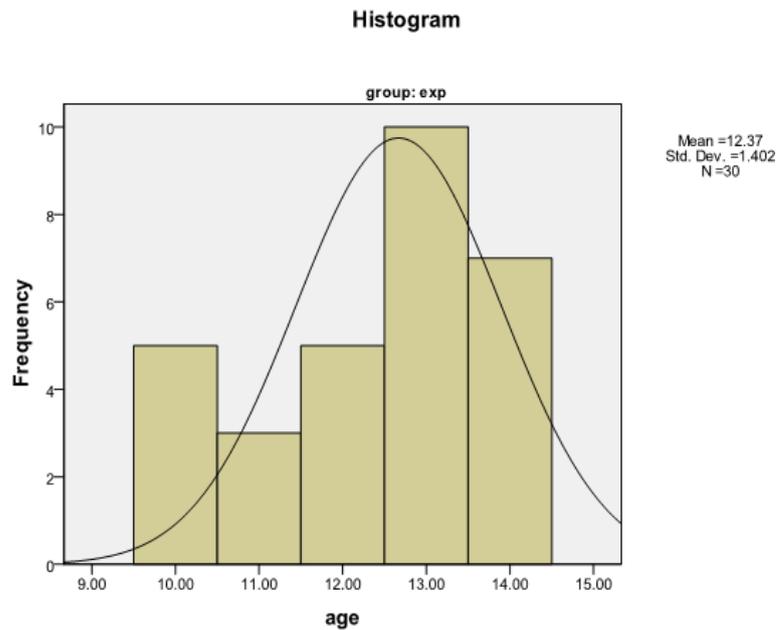

Figure 2. Frequency distribution based on the experimental group EFL students' age

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Table3.Frequency distribution based on the control group EFL students' listening pretest scores

Measure	Frequency	Frequency percent (%)	Valid percent (%)	Mean
12	1	3.3	3.3	14.7
13	5	16.7	16.7	
14	7	23.3	23.3	
15	9	30	30	
16	6	20	20	
17	1	3.3	3.3	
18	1	3.3	3.3	
Total	30	100	100	

According to table 3, it can be concluded that 3.3%, 16.7%, 23.3%, 30%, 20%, 3.3%, and 3.3% of students' listening pretest scores respectively are equal to 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. Mean value of control group students' pretest scores is equal to 14.7.
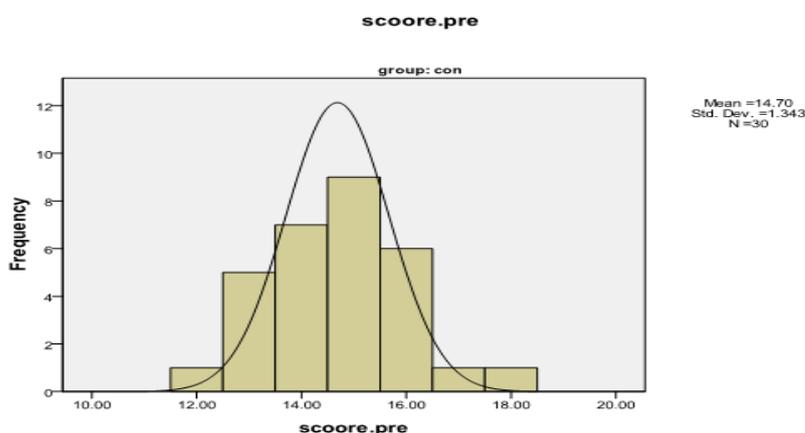

Figure 3. Frequency distribution based on the control group EFL students' listening pretest scores

Table4. Frequency distribution based on the control group students' listening posttest scores

Measure	Frequency	Frequency percent (%)	Valid percent (%)	Mean
11	1	3.3	3.3	14.8
12	2	6.7	6.7	
13	4	13.3	13.3	
14	8	26.7	26.7	
15	8	26.7	26.7	
16	3	10	10	
17	2	6.7	6.7	
18	1	3.3	3.3	
19	1	3.3	3.3	
Total	30	100	100	

Based on table 4, it can be concluded that 3.3%, 6.7%, 13.3%, 26.7%, 26.7%, 10%, 6.7%, 3.3%, and 3.3% of students' listening posttest scores respectively are equal to 11,12, 13, 14, 15 , 16, 17 , 18, and 19. Mean value of control students' posttest scores is 14.8.
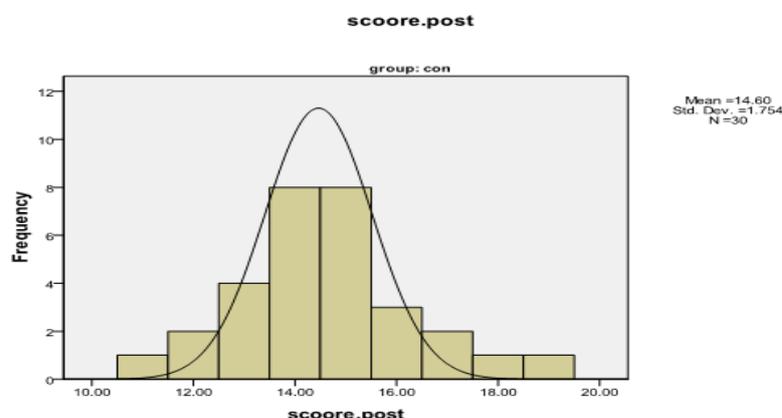

Figure 4. Frequency distribution based on the control group students' listening posttest scores

Table5.Frequency distribution based on the experimental students' listening pretest scores

Measure	Frequency	Frequency percent (%)	Valid percent (%)	Mean
13	8	26.7	26.7	14.5
14	8	26.7	26.7	
15	8	26.7	26.7	
16	4	13.3	13.3	
17	1	3.3	3.3	
18	1	3.3	3.3	
Total	30	100	100	

As it is shown in table 5, 26.7%, 26.7%, 26.7%, 13.3%, 3.3%, and 3.3% of students' listening pretest scores are respectively equal to 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. Mean value of experimental group students' listening pretest scores is 14.5.
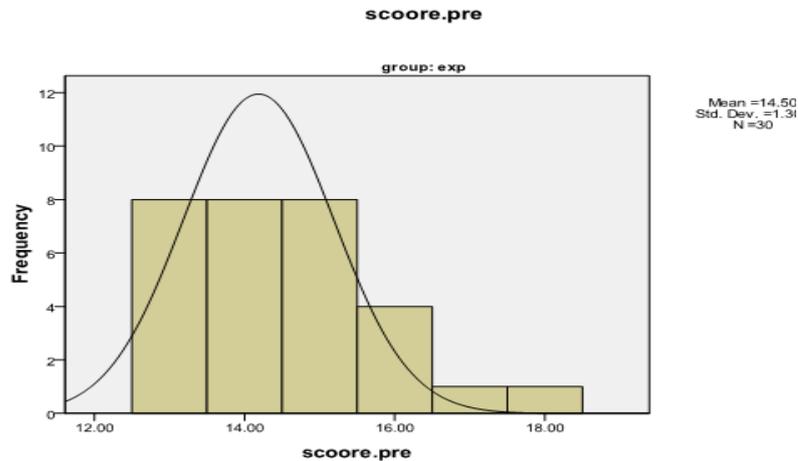

Figure 5. Frequency distribution based on the experimental students' listening pretest scores.

Table6.Frequency distribution based on the experimental group students' posttest listening scores

Measure	Frequency	Frequency percent (%)	Valid percent (%)	Mean
13	2	6.7	6.7	16.03
14	3	10	10	
15	6	20	20	
16	7	23.3	23.3	
17	7	23.3	23.3	
18	3	10	10	
19	2	6.7	6.7	
Total	30	100	100	

According to table 6, it can be concluded that 6.7%, 10%, 20%, 23.3%, 23.3%, 10%, and 6.7% of students' posttest listening scores are respectively equal to 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. Mean value of experimental group students' listening skill posttest scores is equal to 16.03.
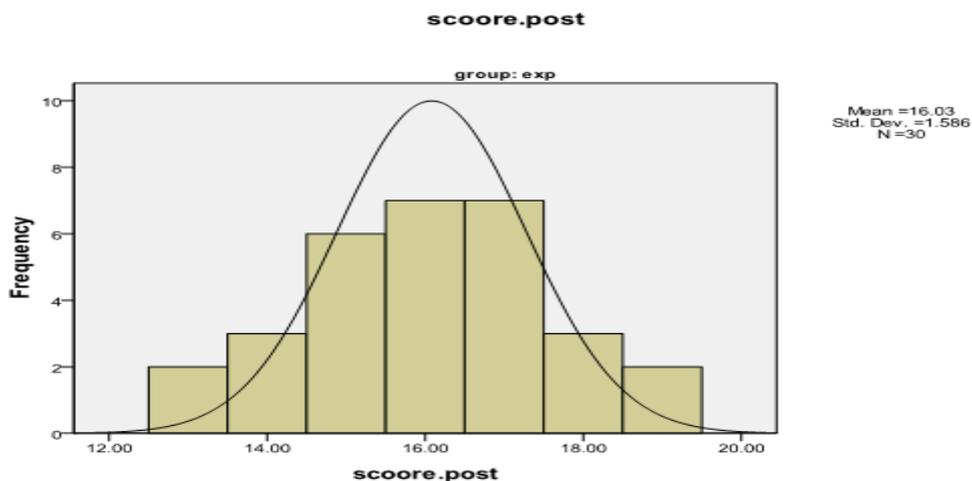

Figure 6. Frequency distribution based on the experimental group students' posttest listening scores

Inferential statistics
Assessing data distribution
Kolmogorov – Smirnov test is used to assess the normality of data distribution. The one-sample Kolmogorov – Smirnov test compares a variable observed cumulative distribution function with its expected cumulative distribution function at an ordinal assessment level. In other words, a characteristic distribution of a sample is compared with that of the related population using this test. In order to interpret the test results, if significance level is higher than p-value (a=0.05), the considered distribution will be normal, and if it is not so, the distribution will not be normal.

Table 7.Data distribution test

	K-S test scores	Sample size	Sig	p-value	Result
Control group students' pretest scores	0.849	30	0.466	0.05	Normal
Control group students' posttest scores	0.967	30	0.308	0.05	Normal
Experimental group students' pretest scores	0.999	30	0.271	0.05	Normal
Experimental group students' posttest scores	0.706	30	0.701	0.05	Normal

As it is presented in table 7, according to Kolmogorov – Smirnov test scores and sig-value, it can be concluded that there is not any significant difference between the expected distribution and the observed distribution. Therefore, this distribution is normal, and parametric statistics should be used to test the current study hypotheses.

Hypotheses testing
Hypothesis 1: there is a significant difference between students receiving music-based method of teaching listening and students receiving traditional method and materials at elementary and middle class.
H_0: There is not any significant difference between students receiving music-based method of teaching listening and students receiving traditional method and materials at elementary class.
H_1: there is a significant relationship between students receiving music-based method of teaching listening and students receiving traditional method and materials at elementary and middle class.
In this section, first, changes in control group students' posttest listening scores have been investigated in comparison to the same students' pretest listening scores using paired t-test statistics. Then, changes have been compared according to the existence or lack of difference over mean scores. One of the conditions for using paired t-test is that there should be a good correlation between pretest and posttest.

Table 8. Correlation between pretest and posttest

Measure	N	Correlation	p-value
Control group	30	0.855	0.000
Experimental group	30	0.724	0.000

As it can be observed in table 8, paired t-test can be used due to the observed significant correlation between control and experimental group.

Table 9. comparison between both control and experimental students' pretest and posttest scores

Measure	t	df	p-value
Control group	0.593	29	0.557
Experimental group	-7.594	29	0.000

According to table 9, the mean values of both experimental and control groups students' pretest and posttest scores are compared. As it can be observed in table 9, it can be concluded that there is not any significant relationship between experimental group students' posttest and pretest scores. To the contrary, there is a significant relationship between control group students' posttest and pretest scores.

Table 10.Descriptive statistics

Group		Mean	SD
Control group	Pretest	14.7000	1.34293
	Posttest	14.6000	1.75381
Experimental group	Pretest	14.5000	1.30648
	Posttest	16.0333	1.56822

According to the calculated mean values presented in table 10, it can be concluded that mean value of experimental group students' posttest scores has been increased. Also, independent t-test has been used to compare the difference between experimental group students, who received music-based method of teaching, and control group students, who received traditional method.

Table 11. Comparison between experimental and control group students' scores

Measure	Loon	P-value	t	DF	p-value
Pretest	0.001	0.973	0.585	58	0.561
posttest	0.121	0.729	-0.3.320	58	0.02

According to table 11, both experimental and control group students' scores mean values have been compared. As it is shown in table 11, it can be said that there is a significant difference between two methods which were used for increasing listening skill considering t-statitics and p-value (a>0.05). Also, it can be concluded based on the experimental group students' posttest scores that use of music-based method of teaching has had a significant effect on increasing listening skill. So, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the researcher's hypothesis is confirmed.

Since in experimental researches, pretest is considered to be an effective factor in results, ANCOVA test is used to neutralize this factor and estimate the net effect of receiving music-based method of teaching on increasing the listening skill as follows:

Posttest score: dependent variable

Experimental and control groups: factor or independent variable

Pretest score: ANCOVA or controlled variable

In fact, in this section, it is intended to control the effects of pretest scores to investigate the net effect of group on posttest score.

One basic assumption for using ANCOVA analysis is that there has not been any interaction between controlled variable and independent variable.

Table 12.Basic assumption of ANCOVA

Measure	f-statistics value	df	p-value
Pretest group students' scores	0.372	1	0.246

According to table 12, the basic assumption of ANCOVA is confirmed based on the significance level of interactions among experimental and control groups and pretest scores.

Table 13. The effects among variables

Change resources	Sum of squares	df	Mean Squared	f-statistics	p-value
Main model	132.817	2	66.408	62.913	.000
Group	39.792	1	39.792	37.698	.000
Pretest score	102.000	1	102.000	96.632	.000
Total	14269.000	60			

$$R^2=0.677$$

Based on table 13, difference and effects of variables are measured. As it can be observed in table 13 it can be concluded that methods can have a significant effect on students' posttest scores if the effect of pretest is controlled.

CONCLUSIONS

The first part of the conclusion included descriptive statistics of the study which contained information regarding the participants of the study. The second part involved inferential statistics that dealt with the research hypothesis.

First, based on the descriptive statistics, it is worth mentioning that the average age of participants in the control group was 12.7 with the majority of the students at the age of 13. The average age of participants in the experimental group was 12.3 and the same as the control group, the majority of students were 13 years old. Regarding the control group's test score, it can be said that the average of listening pre-test was 14.7 out of twenty and the average of post-test was 14.8 out of twenty. On the other hand, experimental group had the average of 14.3 and 16.3 for listening pre-test and post-test respectively.

Now, based on the test scores of the control and experimental groups and inferential statistics of the study, it was mentioned that not only the experimental group's post-test scores was significantly higher than the pre-test scores, but also the post-test scores of the experimental and control group were significantly different. It indicated that the following research hypothesis mentioned in the first chapter of this study was rejected:

"There is not any significant difference between the learners receiving music-based method of teaching listening and learners who are taught with traditional method and listening materials in terms of listening skill at elementary and middle class".

In other words, the result revealed that receiving music-based method of teaching listening led to the improvement of listening comprehension among elementary and middle class school students.

Implications

The findings can have implications for autonomous learners, English teachers, material developers, and policy makers. Autonomous learners may use music to empower themselves in listening skill. They may find suitable music for their level of proficiency and take advantages of the motivation and fun it adds to learning and simultaneously familiarize and adapt their ears to the rhythm and pronunciation of English. They may decide to base their language learning on music and use songs as the source of learning material.

English teachers can also look at using songs in English classrooms from a different angle. It seems that Iranian English teachers use music just to add more fun to their language classrooms. Gaining insight into the pedagogic value of music and song for improving language skills may lead them to reconsider the role of music in English classes. They may decide to use song and music systematically and as a part of lesson plan for teaching specific skills not just as a fun or relaxation between the activities in the classrooms. They can prepare themselves and learn how to use music more effectively in their classrooms.

Although many English teaching books include some sort of audio material, not all of them contain variety of songs for pedagogic purposes. Material developers can include relevant songs and music in each lesson especially those that contain more difficult vocabulary and structure to help the learners overcome the challenge of the tasks. Material developers may base teaching listening on music and change the shape and essence of listening in English course books.

It has been common among Iranian policy makers to stick to the traditional methods of teaching and learning English such as grammar translation and audiolingual approach. Nonetheless, by the advent of communicative language teaching (CLT), the value of using authentic material has been emphasized. Accordingly, it seems that the findings of this study can be considered by policy makers to change their mind regarding the use of song and music as the authentic material in English classrooms.

Suggestion for Further Research

Based on the limitations of the study, some suggestions can be made for carrying out further research in the related area:

Because the effectiveness of using songs and music was investigated based on their impact on listening comprehension, it is desirable to conduct studies to examone the impact of music on the improvement of other language skills and sub-skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

It may be a good idea to carry out a similar research with both male and female adult learners at different levels of proficiency to check the impact of music as a learning tool.

The type of music used for teaching can also be varied and their impact can be investigated based on the song and music type.

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