

EXPLORING THE EFFICACY OF UTILIZING SONG TEXTS AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL FOR TEACHING THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSES

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Abstract

Teaching grammar has always posed challenges for English teachers due to the tendency for it to be perceived as boring, resulting in disinterest and poor retention among learners. This study investigates the effectiveness of incorporating songs as an instructional tool for teaching the present perfect tenses in the context of English language learning. It explores whether songs can facilitate a deeper understanding of the tenses' usage, promote accurate application in authentic contexts, and enhance learners' overall interest in learning English as a second language. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative measurements of learners' performance on a grammar test with qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions. The results indicate that the group taught through the use of songs demonstrated significantly better test scores compared to the control group. Moreover, the qualitative analysis revealed students' positive perceptions of using songs, emphasizing the engaging and enjoyable nature of this approach. The findings align with previous research, highlighting the benefits of using songs in language learning, including increased motivation, engagement, and language proficiency. These results contribute to the growing body of research supporting the incorporation of music into language instruction and suggest its potential as an effective instructional tool for enhancing grammar proficiency. Further research is recommended to strengthen the generalizability of these findings and explore the underlying factors that contribute to the effectiveness of using songs in language learning contexts. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of embracing innovative and creative approaches to create meaningful language learning experiences for students.

Keywords

Songs, Instructional tool, Present perfect tenses, Language proficiency

Introduction

Second language learning has long been a complex endeavor, requiring educators to employ innovative and engaging methods to enhance learners' understanding and retention. In recent years, researchers and educators have turned to innovative approaches, such as incorporating music and songs into language instruction, recognizing their potential to engage learners and facilitate language acquisition. Using songs as a teaching tool for ESL (English as a Second Language) instruction can be justified for several reasons.

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Firstly, studies have found that songs have a unique ability to capture learners' attention and create an enjoyable and appealing learning environment. Indeed, the combination of melodies, rhythms, and lyrics appeals to learners' emotions and can enhance their motivation to actively participate in language learning activities. Also, since songs reflect the natural use of language in real-world contexts, they expose learners to authentic vocabulary, grammar structures, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances. Thus, by incorporating songs, ESL learners can develop their understanding of English as it is used by native speakers. One such advantage is that by listening to songs in the target language, learners are granted opportunities to practice pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm in meaningful and memorable ways. Added to this is the fact that listening to songs can improve vocabulary due to lyrics that use contextually relevant vocabulary. In addition, when learners encounter words in the context of a song, they are more likely to remember them due to a song's emotional and melodic associations instead of a written text. Hence, it has been convincingly argued that the melodic nature of songs can help improve learners' phonetic accuracy and promote fluency.

Studies have demonstrated how songs have been used for teaching ESL to reinforce grammar structures and usage patterns. By exposing learners to grammatical forms in a musical context, it can provide a memorable and repetitive way to internalize grammar rules and improve accuracy in language production. Given the potential of English songs for grammar reinforcement, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of utilizing songs as an instructional tool for teaching the present perfect tenses in the context of English language learning.

English educators would not contest the fact that the present perfect simple and the present perfect continuous tenses pose a significant challenge for ESL learners due to their nuanced usage and irregular structures. Teaching them using traditional teaching methods which often rely on grammar rules and repetitive exercises may lead to disengagement and lack of long-term retention. As such, the researcher decided to use several English songs, by leveraging the emotional and mnemonic power of music, to create an immersive and enjoyable learning environment that would enhance learners' understanding and usage of the present perfect tenses.

The integration of songs in language learning has been a subject of increasing interest and investigation in the field of applied linguistics. Previous studies have demonstrated the potential benefits of using songs to enhance vocabulary acquisition, improve pronunciation, and promote language fluency. However, limited research has focused specifically on the effectiveness of utilizing songs for teaching complex grammatical structures such as the present perfect tenses. This research attempted to address this gap in the literature by exploring the impact of incorporating songs as an instructional tool for the present perfect tenses. It investigated whether songs can facilitate a deeper understanding of the tenses' usage, promote accurate application in authentic contexts, and enhance learners' overall interest in learning English.

The findings of this research have the potential to contribute to language pedagogy by highlighting the benefits of incorporating songs as a viable instructional tool for teaching the present perfect tenses. By shedding light on the effectiveness of this innovative approach, ESL educators can further tailor their teaching methods to create more engaging and impactful language learning experiences for

their students. The primary aim of the research was to explore the efficacy of using songs as an instructional tool for teaching the present perfect tenses. By investigating the impact of songs on learners' understanding, application, and overall proficiency in the use of the present perfect tenses, this study expects to provide useful insights into the potential of incorporating music into language instruction.

The following research questions were posed prior to investigating the effectiveness of utilizing songs to teach the present perfect tenses:

1. Do learners show greater proficiency and fluency in the present perfect tenses when songs are incorporated into their language instruction compared to traditional teaching methods?
2. What are the learners' perceptions and attitudes towards using songs to teach the present perfect tenses?

Literature Review

The efficiency of using songs may vary depending on factors such as learner characteristics, instructional design, song selection, and teaching context. Nonetheless, based on the available literature, it has been found to have a positive impact on second-language learners in terms of their capacity to motivate and engage them in language learning activities, support their vocabulary, grammar, and syntax development, promote better L2 listening skills, become aware of the target language users' culture, and, most importantly, enhance memory and recollection of the target language uses and structures. This last point can be corroborated by the assertion that "Learning takes place not merely through good presentation but through meaningful, spaced repetition of the learning items" (Paquette and Rieg, 2008, p.161).

The studies that consider the integration of songs such as the ones conducted by Asselt (1970) and Mora (2000), exemplify the positive effect of such an initiation on language acquisition. Although several studies are available concerning the introduction of songs for teaching ESL, a majority of them have focused on their use for developing the listening skills of learners. The findings of these studies premise that using songs in the target language and exposing them to L2 learners develop their ability to listen and understand the spoken output of the second language (Hadi & Seriadi, 2019; Hidayat, 2013; Lestrays, 2019).

A study was conducted by Reski (2017) in order to find out if there was a notable impact in the acquisition of the simple past tense as a result of the integration of song. The findings proved that the intervention provided positive results. Moreover, a study conducted by Alinte (2013) explored the use of music as a tool for teaching grammar in language education. The study investigated the potential benefits and effectiveness of integrating music into grammar instruction, aiming to enhance students' understanding and retention of grammatical structures. The author discusses various theoretical perspectives and research studies that support the use of music in language learning, highlighting its ability to engage learners, facilitate language acquisition, and promote a positive learning experience. This research explores how music, with its melodic and rhythmic elements, can aid in language processing, memorization, and overall language proficiency. The study further presents a practical framework for integrating music into grammar instruction, including selecting appropriate songs,

designing activities, and implementing them in the classroom. Alinte (2013) also provides examples of activities and exercises that utilize songs to teach specific grammatical concepts. Overall, "Teaching Grammar Through Music" provides insights into the potential benefits and practical considerations of using music as a means of enhancing grammar instruction in language education. The study contributes to the broader discussion on innovative and engaging approaches to teaching grammar while offering guidance for educators interested in incorporating music into their instructional practices. Similarly, most researchers studying this area provide details as to how and why songs can be used for teaching a second language; specifically, in this case, during the acquisition of L2 grammar. For instance, Monson, in his thesis titled "Teaching grammar through music" notes: "I learned that music is one way to help language learners improve their grammar without explicitly teaching a concept" (2019). Cheng and Wang (2019) found that song-based instruction increased learners' motivation and engagement in English language learning, leading to improved performance across various language skills, including grammar proficiency. Kao and Liao (2015) also investigated the impact of English songs on motivation and language proficiency among Taiwanese college students. Their findings revealed that using songs in English instruction increased motivation, enhanced grammar comprehension, and improved language skills. Yet another study examined the effects of integrating songs into reading instruction on motivation and reading comprehension (Huang and Chang, 2014). The results indicated that the use of songs increased motivation and improved reading comprehension, suggesting a potentially positive impact on overall language development.

This literature review highlights the positive impact of using songs in second language learning, particularly in terms of motivation, engagement, and grammar and listening skills development. Overall, the literature supports the incorporation of songs in language learning as an engaging and effective approach as it provides valuable insights into the potential benefits and practical considerations of using music to enhance various aspects of second language acquisition. As language educators, understanding and leveraging the power of songs can create more meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences for L2 learners, thereby fostering their linguistic and cultural competence.

Methodology

To accomplish the aims of the study, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative measurements of learners' performance on a grammar test, along with qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions. The research participants consisted of a group of undergraduates who were following a beginner-level ESL course as first-year students. They were relatively of similar proficiency levels as per the placement test marks obtained by them at the beginning of the course.

The study used the quasi-experimental research design whereby a control and experimental group were used to investigate the effects of an intervention on the participants' outcomes. Unlike a true experimental design, a quasi-experimental design does not involve the random assignment of participants to groups; instead, pre-existing groups were used for purposes of sample selection.

The following briefly explains the study design and process of this quasi-experimental study:

Selection of Participants:

The participants were beginners-level ESL undergraduates who were already in a group that was assigned to them based on the marks they had obtained at the placement test prior to the course commencement. This group was further divided into the control and the experimental groups whereby two teachers were assigned to teach each group.

Intervention Implementation:

Both groups had to learn the simple present perfect and the present perfect continuous tenses. The teacher in the control group conducted the grammar lesson in the typical manner in which such lessons were being done sans songs. The experimental group, on the other hand, received the specific intervention in the form of three songs that were integrated into the grammar lesson.

Assessment:

After the intervention period, both the control and experimental groups were assessed using the same grammar test. It was a fill-in-the-blank exercise that tested their knowledge of the uses and structures of the present perfect tense. The comparison between the marks obtained by the two groups was done to measure any changes in the participants' ability to use the present perfect as a result of the intervention.

Focus group discussion:

The FGD was conducted with the participants in the experimental group to elicit their perspectives regarding the use of songs for teaching grammar.

Data Analysis:

The data collected from the test were analyzed to compare the outcomes between the control and experimental groups. The independent samples t-test was done using an online statistical calculator to determine whether there was any statistically significant difference between the marks obtained by the two groups.

The data collected during the FGD were manually coded and themes were noted and used for interpretation. The thematic analysis allowed the researcher to explore the depth and nuances of participants' perspectives regarding the integration of songs when learning grammar. The data helped uncover meaningful insights and contributed to the overall understanding of the research topic.

Results and Discussion

In accordance with the research questions posed, the analysis was conducted to provide insights and address the specific research inquiries.

Using the marks that were obtained after the completion of the grammar topic "Present Perfect Tenses", the mean scores obtained by the control and the experimental groups can be seen in Figure 1:

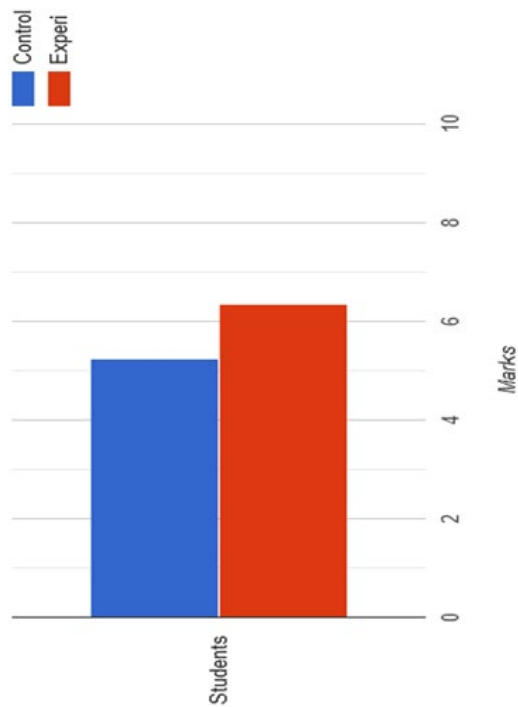


Figure 1: Comparison of the mean scores obtained for the test on the present perfect tenses.

As can be observed, there is a notable difference in terms of the mean whereby the control group received a mean of 5.24 while the experimental group obtained a mean score of 6.34.

To analyze the statistical difference between the control and experimental groups, an independent samples t-test was conducted as it is the most appropriate test when two separate groups are involved and there is a comparison of the means of their proficiency measurements in their use of the present perfect tense.

To conduct the independent samples t-test, the following null hypothesis (H0) and alternative hypothesis (H1) were used:

- Null hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference between the means of the control and experimental groups.
- Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference between the means of the control and experimental groups.

Subsequently, the mean and standard deviation of the marks for each group were calculated. This was followed by the conducting of the independent samples t-test using a statistical calculator. It should be noted that the assumptions, such as the normality of data distribution and the equality of variances between the groups were met prior to conducting this parametric test.

The 30 participants who were taught the present perfect tenses through the use of songs (M = 6.34, SD = 1.70) compared to the equal number of participants in the control group (M = 5.24, SD = 2.15) demonstrated significantly better test scores, $t(30) = 2.17$, $p = .017$. We can state that the result is significant at $p < .05$; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in place of the alternative hypothesis. This finding indicates that the experimental group taught through the use of songs, performed significantly better on the test compared to the control group.

The significance level of $p < .05$ suggests that the observed difference in test scores is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis, which assumes no difference

between the two groups, in favor of the alternative hypothesis, which suggests that there is a significant difference in test scores between the groups.

According to the above analysis, the findings of this study support the effectiveness of using songs as a teaching tool for improving understanding and application of the present perfect tenses. Three songs; namely, "Since I Met You Baby," (singer and songwriter Ivory Joe Hunter), "I've Been Everywhere" (songwriter - Geoff Mack, singer -Lucky Starr) and "Have You Ever Really Loved a Woman?" (songwriters: Bryan Adams, Michael Kamen, and Robert John "Mutt" Lange; singer: Bryan Adams).

The fact that these songs contain repetitive structures in the use of the present perfect tense appears to have supported more positively the retention of the structures and also their uses. This could be mainly due to the following rationalizing.

Firstly, repetitive structures such as "Since I met you baby, my whole life has changed", "I've been everywhere, boy", and "Have you ever really loved a woman?" makes the structures more memorable. In addition, the simplicity of the lyrics and the clear contexts in which the tenses are used; i.e., to connect past experiences to the present conditions makes it easier for students to grasp the uses of the present perfect tenses.

Since the lyrics of songs tend to use everyday language that has simple structures and expressions, using them in this type of grammar lesson makes it more straightforward for the students to understand. Moreover, the emotional connection that one can make with a song, makes it relatable to individuals no matter what their nationality, race, or religion is. This feature of songs to be universally applicable in terms of their themes such as love, heartbreak and loss would invariably interest and engage the learners in the lesson much more than when a passage or isolated examples are used to teach grammar topics.

Thus, it would be possible to premise that the use of songs in grammar instruction can more productively enhance the grammatical competence of L2 learners as opposed to when they are not being used. The findings are consistent with that of Cheng and Wang (2019), Kao and Liao (2015), and Huang and Chang (2014).

These studies provide additional support for the finding that using songs in grammar instruction can enhance language learning outcomes. They focus on the positive effects of songs on motivation, engagement, and language proficiency, aligning with the findings of the present study. Overall, the convergence of findings from these studies, along with the results of the current study, strengthens the argument for the effectiveness of using songs as a teaching tool to enhance grammar proficiency and overall language learning outcomes.

In line with the quantitative findings of the independent samples t-test, the qualitative data gathered during the focus group discussion (FGD) further support the notion that the incorporation of songs in language instruction has a positive impact on students' learning experiences and motivation.

During the FGD, the students in the experimental group expressed their appreciation for the use of songs in language learning, emphasizing the engaging and enjoyable nature of this approach. Students specifically highlighted that the traditional methods of studying English grammar often lead to boredom, whereas when those concepts are taught through songs, the practical and interactive nature of the activity helped them grasp the material more easily and prevented feelings of monotony.

As one student stated:

"When we go to study a very deep theory part in a traditional way, we feel bored. But if we do it with

a song, because it's a practical thing, we can grasp it more easily and learn without getting bored." (Student 8)

Moreover, these students appreciated the immersive and interactive environment created by integrating songs into grammar instruction. They believed that this approach enabled them to better understand and retain the grammar rules. The relaxation effect of songs was also mentioned by the majority of students who felt that incorporating songs into learning activities made lessons more enjoyable and prevented feelings of difficulty and boredom. One student explained:

"Songs can relax the mind. By using those songs in learning activities, you can learn lessons without difficulty and boredom." (Student 3)

These qualitative findings align with previous research that emphasizes the benefits of using songs in language learning. For example, in a study by Cheng and Wang (2019), students expressed positive attitudes toward using songs in English language instruction, affirming that it made learning more enjoyable and increased their motivation to participate actively in the learning process. Similarly, Kao and Liao (2015) found that songs helped students relax and enjoy the learning process, and improve their language skills.

Furthermore, the qualitative data from the FGD supports the quantitative results by providing insights into the students' perspectives on the effectiveness of using songs in language instruction. The students' direct quotations demonstrate their positive experiences and perceptions of the benefits of incorporating songs, resonating the quantitative findings that the experimental group, taught through songs, performed significantly better on the test compared to the control group. This argument is beautifully worded by a student as she points out:

"A song is remembered based on the beauty of its melody. If we have a beautiful melody, we will be able to remember the lyrics quickly and learn the grammar parts you expect." (Student 13)

Overall, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the understanding of the benefits of using songs in language instruction. The analysis reveals that students find songs engaging, enjoyable, and conducive to a more interactive learning environment. These findings align with previous research, emphasizing the positive impact of songs on student motivation, enjoyment, and language acquisition.

Conclusion

The results of this study contribute to the growing body of research that highlights the advantages of incorporating texts used for music into language instruction. Moreover, it suggests that utilizing texts as an instructional tool can have a positive impact on students' language learning outcomes, specifically in the context of improving proficiency related to the present perfect tenses. It is important to acknowledge that while this study demonstrates a significant difference in terms of the expression of proficiency during their use of the present perfect tenses between the two groups considered, further research and similar studies are needed to strengthen the generalizability of these findings. Additionally, future studies could explore the specific mechanisms and underlying factors that contribute to the effectiveness of using songs in language learning contexts, shedding light on the potential benefits for diverse learner populations and instructional settings. Ultimately, it is hoped

that this research will inspire educators to embrace innovative and creative approaches that foster meaningful language learning experiences for their students.

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