The Effect of Using English Songs on Speaking Ability of Iranian Pre-school Students in Kerman

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Abstract

This study assessed the effect of using English songs on Iranian pre-school students' speaking proficiency in Kerman. The study was conducted at Novin pre-school, in total, fifty pre-school students aged 5-6 participated in the study. At the beginning of the study, a pre-test of speaking was administered to the participants of the study. Then, they were assigned into two groups, 25 students were in the control group and 25 students were in the experimental group. English songs were used to expand the students' speaking proficiency in the experimental group and the participants of the control group utilized conventional methods of teaching speaking skills. After the treatment, a speaking post-test was administered to the participants of both groups to assess the effect of treatments on their speaking ability. The results were analyzed using the independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test. The results of the study indicated that English songs had a significant effect on the speaking ability of Iranian pre-school students in Kerman. Finally, the findings of the study assist the pre-school instructors to attract their students to learn a foreign language by using a song-based strategy.

Keywords: authentic materials, English songs, pre-school students, speaking skills

1. Introduction

The main aim of learning a foreign language is to learn four skills of that language: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Brown, 2001; Harmer, 2007). Speaking skill is one of the language skills which should be developed in the process of foreign language learning since foreign language learners have some difficulties in learning speaking skills. Due to the fact that people utilize speaking more than other skills, this skill is the fundamental task by which people interact together. According to Cameron (2001, p.40), "Speaking is an active use of language, but differ in the mental activity involved and demands that they make on learners of language in terms of finding and sharing meaning." Moreover, Richard and Renandya (2002, p. 201) declared that the main goal of language learners in the process of foreign language learning is to develop their speaking proficiency. It means that if the student's aim is to interact with people all around the world and get success in their life, they should learn to speak effectively.

Despite the importance of speaking in the process of foreign language learning, teaching and learning speaking skills have been neglected in Iranian schools and the language instructors try to teach this skill through the repetition of drills and dialogue memorization (Mikaili & Dolati, 2011; Sarani & Malmir, 2019). Brown (2007) stated that the factors such as redundancy, clustering, reduced words, performance variables, intonation and delivery speed are among the main factors which make the process of speaking so arduous for EFL learners. Various strategies and instruments have been proposed in order to assist the language learners to improve their speaking skills but, in fact, Iranian pre-school students encounter different problems in mastering their speaking skills. Badrawi (2012) stated that the difference between the spoken language spontaneous nature and the structural form of this skill causes problems for EFL learners and teachers. He added that the lack of utilizing authentic materials in Iranian educational settings is the other factor that makes the process of speaking skills so difficult for language learners.

Therefore, today's world requires that teachers utilize new strategies and authentic materials like music and songs in order to improve the speaking skills of students since the students can express their feelings and thoughts and learn how to use the cultural and social values in each communicative environment. Regarding the advantages of song-based strategy, Martin (1983, p.505) stated that "songs and rhymes represent powerful features of primary language programs. Having this in mind, teachers have to do anything to make their learners happy, cheerful, and satisfied." Due to the fact that songs are related to emotions and include lyrics that are authentic for language learners, they can stimulate the student's intrinsic motivation in the process of foreign language learning. Therefore, due to the above-mentioned difficulties of Iranian EFL learners in the process of speaking skills and lack of using suitable instruments and strategies for speaking skills in Iranian educational settings and advantages of using songs in learning a foreign language, the current study investigated the effect of English songs on Iranian pre-school students' speaking proficiency in Kerman. So, the main purpose of the study was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: "What is the effect of using English songs on Iranian pre-school students' speaking proficiency in Kerman?"

2. Review of Literature

Teaching speaking skills to EFL learners is not an easy task since the learners are not exposed to the foreign language before. To do this, language instructors should provide a situation in order to use appropriate methods, strategies and instruments in order to teach speaking skills. Furthermore, the teacher should use a model of teaching speaking skills which gives a real exposure to the target language in a real context through watching or listening to authentic materials. But, the process of foreign language learning is different from situation to situation, culture to culture and person to person because there are different factors that can influence learning. Therefore, the teachers should know the students' needs and their background capability. According to Burns and Joyce (1997, p.55) before teaching speaking, the teachers need to find the students' background knowledge and needs. Collecting students' personal data such as culture, age and background knowledge are among the other factors which need to be considered in the process of teaching speaking skills.

Based on analyzing the needs of learners and their level of spoken competence, language teachers need to design an appropriate speaking instrument and strategy in order to teach the oral language effectively. To teach speaking skills and select an appropriate strategy, some factors should be considered. Focusing on both accuracy and fluency based on the objectives of teaching, providing intrinsically motivation techniques, encouraging the employment of authentic language in a real context and giving an opportunity to the students to imitate oral communication are the main factors that play important roles in the process of teaching speaking skills (Brown, 2007, p. 331).

2.1. Main Principals of Teaching Speaking Skill

Teaching speaking skills include teaching how to use a language for communication and interaction. Indeed, the main goal of teaching speaking is to communicate meaning efficiently. According to Nunan (2015), there are five principles of teaching speaking skills that should be considered. The first principle is related to the second and foreign language learning context since in the second language context, the target language is the language of communication while in the foreign language context, the target language is not the language of communication and learning speaking skills is so problematic. The other principle is affiliated with providing students to expand their speaking fluency and accuracy. Fluency is one of the sub-skills of speaking skills in which the speaker uses the language fluently with few unnatural pauses. Accuracy is the other subskill of speaking skills in which the students use the language as same as the spoken language utilized by the native speakers of the target language.

Providing opportunities for learners to talk in small groups is the other principle of teaching speaking skills. These activities assist the students to decrease their information gaps and increasing their participation in-class activities. The other factor is related to negotiating to mean. This can be done through asking for repetition, clarification and explanation to get understanding. Deigning transactional and

interactional activities to teach the sub-skills of speaking skills is the last principle of teaching speaking skills. Interactional activities include activities that are used for specific purposes such as establishing social relationships while the main goal of transactional activities is to carry out a task. Furthermore, the language used in carrying out transactions is often predictable and contains many fixed expressions (Brown, 2007, Nunan, 2003).

2.2. The Problems in Teaching and Learning Speaking

Thornbury (2005) classified the students' speaking difficulties into two main areas:

- The first area is related to the knowledge factor. In this area, the learners do not have knowledge about the target language since there are no suitable interactive activities to acquire appropriate information.
- The second area is related to the skill factors. The learners' knowledge about the sub-skills of speaking is not enough. Furthermore, there are some affective factors such as lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy which hinder learning speaking skills.

It is supported by Keshavarz (2001) who stated declared some factors which impact the performance of students in the process of learning speaking skills. The first factor is related to the fact that the students regard learning a foreign language as a difficult task. The other difficulty of students is the lack of support to use the language outside of the classroom since there is no suitable instrument to practice speaking skills in other situations. Indeed, there is a lack of authentic exposure to the foreign language in a real context. Lack of adequate vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are the other reasons for learners' difficulties in learning speaking skills. He stated that lack of motivation is the last factor that impacts the performance of learners in mastering speaking skills. Fear of mistake, shyness and lack of confidence are among the other factors which increase the students' difficulties in learning speaking skills and sub-skills (Yarmohammadi, 2002). Referring to the abovementioned explanations, the main purpose of the study was to overcome the difficulties of students in the process of learning speaking skills through using English songs.

2.3. The Significance and Advantages of Using Authentic Material

Some scholars declared that using authentic materials is so effective in the process of language learning and teaching (Kim, 2015, Larsen-Freeman, 2000, Martinez, 2002). Exposing foreign language learners to the real world and providing a situation in order to learn and read different types of language styles are the main advantages of using authentic materials (Martinez, 2002). According to Brosnan et al. (1984), the benefits of authentic materials are related to their naturalness and meaningful effects. They added that authentic materials provided non-verbal clues such as pictures and symbols for the students to understand meaning effectively and construct a real context for foreign language learners.

In this respect, Brinton (1991) declared that applying authentic materials in the process of language learning helps the learners to detect the relationship between the language classroom and the real world. According to Nunan (2003), listening to authentic materials plays a crucial role in motivating the learners

in learning skills. Furthermore, he declared that reading newspapers, stories, and many written messages help the learners to deal with communication in a real context. One of the suitable authentic materials for learning a foreign language is English songs (Eken, 1996).

2.4. Reasons for Using Songs in the Classroom

There is some evidence regarding the relationship between music and language learning (Schön et al., 2008; Moreno et al., 2009; Vitale, 2011). Using a song-based strategy in educational settings, especially pre-and primary schools, provides a situation to liven up listening activities and learn the materials peripherally (Vitale, 2011). Thus, using a song-based strategy in the curriculum seems to be a great technique. There are effective and cognitive rationales for teaching a foreign through using a song-based strategy. The effective reasons have a close relationship with Krashen' Affective Filter Hypothesis.

This factor stated that the learners need to have a positive attitude and low stress to learn a foreign language through using songs. Regarding this point, Krashen (1982, p.45) stated that "for effective learning, the affective filter must be weak. A weak affective filter means that a positive attitude to learning is present." Therefore, the teacher's task is to provide a positive environment for learning. In this aspect, the song-based strategy may be one of the useful techniques for obtaining a low affective filter (Moreno et al., 2009). Eken (1996) claimed that there are some reasons to use songs in educational settings such as pre-schools. The first one is that it can be used in order to teach different topics and language points.

Then it can be considered authentic material to learn vocabulary items. Through using a song-based strategy, the learners can talk over with one another in small groups and share their opinions. Furthermore, this strategy can provide a relaxed situation and add variety to language learning. The last reason is that using songs may be used as an aid to enhance learners' imagination and creativity during the process of foreign language learning. Schoepp (2001) declared that songs provide an opportunity for autonomous learning which is the main cognitive reason for applying songs in learning a foreign language.

3. Methodology

A pre-and post-test design was used to assess the effect of song-based strategy on the speaking ability of pre-school students. The research design was employed to estimate the change in outcomes before and after an intervention. The participants of this study were a number of 50 (they were selected from 65 pre-school students) Iranian students, 25 boys and 25 girls with ages ranging from 5 to 6. All of the students were selected from Novin pre-school in Kerman and they were Persian native speakers. All of them were at the same level of language proficiency.

3.1. Instruments of the Study

A pre-test and a post-test of speaking were the main instruments of the study. Before the conduction

of the study, these tests were administered to 20 pre-school students in Kerman and the students of the pilot study belonged neither to the control nor experimental groups. Then, to examine the reliability of the tests, Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was run. The reliability of the pre-test and post-test was .78, .82, respectively. The results showed that the tests had acceptable reliability in order to be utilized in the current study. Different sections of the speaking tests which were in the form of interviews illustrated below:

The first section was related to the warm-up stage which concentrated on placing the students into the exam, constructing a friendly environment and eliciting greeting expressions from students. Indeed, the main focus of this stage was on "small talks". Furthermore, this section was continued by exchanging personal information between the examinee and the examiner. This stage included yes/no questions regarding the students' likes and dislikes, their families, their hobbies and so on. The second section required the students to "sing a song". The learner was asked to select a topic and then sing a song related to that topic. The third section was affiliated with the description of the pictures. In the first stage of this section, the students were asked to describe one of the pictures and sing a song related to the picture. Furthermore, they were asked to describe the materials of the picture as clearly as possible, including the description of the food, colours, clothes and so on. The last section of the test was related to "social English". It requires the students to play a role based on the selected topics and then they were asked to express their opinions regarding the experienced situation. The interview ended up encouraging the students to utilize expressions that have been learned through the songs.

3.2. Scoring the Tests

The students' speaking scores in the speaking pre-test and post-test were assessed by using the scoring rubric of Madsen (1984). To assess the speaking ability of students, the mean score of each speaking sub-skill was calculated (adding the scores of each sub-skill and then diving the result by the number of test sections). Each sub-skill of the speaking test was scored out of 20. The five sub-skills of the speaking skills were fluency, accuracy, comprehension, vocabulary and pronunciation. The maximum score was out of 100. Furthermore, three raters were involved in the scoring procedure of the tests.

3.3. Procedure

The data collection phase was conducted in the term of the 2019-2020 academic year. The term started on 2nd October and ended on 5th January (four months). Novin pre-school was selected because the students here were faced with a lot of difficulties when they came to speak in English as heard and observed by the researcher as they tried to communicate or convey information in English. One pre-school class was selected as the control group and another as the experimental group. The researcher took over the experimental group and one teacher was assigned to the control group (with the observation of the researcher). The two teachers selected had similar qualifications in the teaching of speaking skills since they both were graduate teachers of English. The lessons were completed in a period of 16 weeks (four months);

each session lasted 40 minutes and it was based on the rule of Novin pre-school. A speaking pre-test was administered to the groups' participants in order to assess the speaking proficiency of the students at the outset of the study. The first session of the study was an introductory one aiming at introducing the students to the program, its aim, and the activities they were going to do. Twenty lyric songs were used as an alternative instructional technique in the experimental group. The songs were "I can sing a rainbow", "Head and Shoulders," and "Ten little Teddy Bear" and "Hello, Feelings Song" and so on. Learning colours, food, animals, fruits, Numbers through the songs were among the main objectives of the study. The songs were selected from the book "Super Songs" which has been written by Ayliffe (2001). The researcher provided an attractive environment in the class in order to make the students feel at ease.

The sequence of the activities in the experimental group was the following:

First of all, they listened to the song. They had to fill the gaps in the lyrics (with the assistance of the teacher), so they listened to it twice. Then, as almost all the words were unfamiliar to them some time was devoted to explaining the meaning of the words. The teacher asked them about everything that they didn't understand. It was very important to the teacher that they understood perfectly all the words because, later on, they were going to demonstrate what they had retained. Following this, the students described the pictures related to the song. The teacher put the official video of the song in order to give them a final overview of the meaning of the song. Finally, the students played a role in the song and the ideas already said in the class. The teacher decided to do this final exercise for those students who were shy to talk in public so that it was very important to respect the feelings of everybody, so when someone didn't feel in the mood to talk in front of everybody it was better not to force him or her. Students could act out simulation as them or take on the role of completely different characters and express thoughts and feelings as they were doing in the real world. The teacher used more options to engage the learners in the communicative activities.

The teacher of the control group was asked to follow the regular teaching methods of teaching speaking adopted in the Novin pre-school curriculum. Finally, a speaking post-test was given to the participant of two groups to compare the performance of control and experimental groups before and after the treatment.

4. Results

The data for this study were analyzed using statistical software known as SPSS (version 24th). To assess the similarity or differences between the speaking performance of the participants of the experimental and control group, an independent sample t-test was employed. Indeed, based on the nature of the study design, the type of data collection and sampling technique, an independent sample t-test was found appropriate to draw a comprehensive conclusion.

Table1

Results of Speaking Pre-test

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Control Group	25	28.7600	3.83275	.76655
	Experimental Group	25	29.0800	4.94907	.98981

Table 1 (results of speaking pre-test) indicates the results of descriptive statics of both groups separately. As predicted, an examination of experimental and control groups' mean scores indicated that students in the experimental group (M=29.08, SD=4.94, N=25) scored not much higher (i.e., logically consistent) on the pre-test of speaking than the students in the control group (M=28.76, SD=3.82, N=25). Table 2 indicates the result of the independent sample t-test for speaking pre-test of the experimental and control groups.

Table 2

Independent Samples Test for the Speaking Pre-test of Control and Experimental Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% CI	
								Low	upper
	.691	.410	-.25	48	.799	-.32000	1.25193	-2.83	2.197

The results showed that the was not a significant difference between the speaking pre-test of the control and experimental groups since the p-value was less than 0.05 (p=.79> 0.05). In other words, the results showed there was no significant difference between the students' performance in the control group compared to the students in the experimental group. Furthermore, based on Table 2, the mean differences between the two groups were 1.25 and this indicates the same speaking proficiency of the participants of experimental and control groups before the experiment. The results gathered from the post-test are displayed in Table 3. To compare the post-tests of both groups, descriptive statistics and an independent-sample t-test were run to identify the effectiveness of English songs on the speaking ability of Iranian pre-school students.

Table 3

Results of the Post-test of Speaking

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest	Control Group	25	31.0800	5.56717	1.11343
	Experimental Group	25	50.2800	7.98707	1.59741

As shown in Table 3, the estimated mean and standard deviation of the experiment group amounted to 50.28 and 7.98 respectively while the mean and standard deviation of the participants of the control group

in the post-test was equalled M=31.08 SD=5.56. A precise look at Table 3 shows that the mean score of the experimental group was higher than the mean score of the control group in the post-test of speaking.

Table 4

Independent Samples Test for the Speaking Post-test of Control and Experimental Groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% CI	
Equal variances assumed	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Low	upper
	4.438	.040	-9.86	48	.000	-19.20000	1.94717	-23.11	-15.28

It can be reported (Table 4) that there is a significant difference between the performance of the participants of experimental and control groups in terms of speaking ability at the p<.05 level (p=.00<0.05, t(59)=986). As the p-value is less than .05 and the mean difference is 19.20, it can be consummated that there was a considerable difference between the experimental and control groups in the speaking post-test after the experiments. It means that the students of the experimental group significantly performed better than the students of the control group in the post-test due to the employment of a song-based strategy. Tables 5 and 6 illuminated the intra-analysis of the results pre-test and post-test of each group separately.

Table 5

Results of the Paired-samples t-test for the Speaking Pre-and Post-test of the Control Group

				Paired Differences					
				Std. Error	95% CI of the Difference				
		M	SD	Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-test/ Post-test	-2.320	6.13542	1.22708	-4.85258	.21258	-1.891	24	.071

Table 5 presents the result of the paired t-test which allows us to draw conclusions about the control group's subjects. The key outputs are the test statistic, the t-value, the mean differences, the degrees of freedom and the level of significance. SPSS calculated the P-value from the test statistic and the degrees of freedom and reported it to 3 decimal places. The actual value of p is .07 and it is more than .05 (t(30)=-1.89, p>.05), there is no statistically significant evidence of the development in the subjects' speaking ability.

Table 6

Results of the paired-samples T-test for the Speaking Pre- and Posttest of the Experimental group

				Paired Differences					
				Std. Error	95% CI of the Difference				
		M	SD	Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pre-test/ Post-test	-21.200	10.9582	2.19165	-25.7233	-16.6766	-9.673	24	.000

Based on Table 6, the experimental group got 29.08 and 50.28 average scores in the pretest and posttest, respectively. This group has increased its average score by 21.20. A look at the final column labelled Sig. (2-tailed) shows the level of significant differences. Due to the fact that the level of significance is smaller than 0.05 (p=00), it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the mean scores in the pre-test and post-test of speaking. Therefore, it can be concluded that using English songs significantly developed the speaking ability of Iranian pre-school students in the experimental group.

5. Discussion

The results of the study showed the significant effect of using a song-based language teaching strategy on developing Iranian pre-students' speaking ability in Kerman. This technique can increase their motivation for learning to speak. The findings of the study are in line with the studies which confirmed the effect of using authentic material in developing a speaking skill such as the studies of Samadi, Maghsoudib and Azizmohammadic (2014), Moreno et al. (2009) and Yükselir and Kömür (2017). They stated that using authentic material like CALL technology assists language learners to improve their speaking skills. This ensured that using the suitable strategy and instruments and learning the norms and principles of teaching speaking had a significant effect on developing the speaking ability of language learners. Besides, using a song-based strategy enhanced the students' confidence, fluency, accuracy and comprehension in the process of learning speaking skills. This strategy helped the students to use a discovery approach through construction and assessment of the hypotheses about the spoken language functions. In general, the discovery approach assists the students to use linguistic units and expressions in an appropriate context and increases their creativity in the process of speaking skills. Using authentic material like English songs provide effective opportunities for students to see how native speakers of a foreign language perform in their culture.

Another important factor, in teaching through using song-based language learning, was providing a situation for the pre-school students to perform publicly. This public performance increased the students' attention and motivation, assisted them to decrease their fear of public interaction and increased their proficiency in speaking tasks. Students enjoyed speaking in front of their peers and declaring their opinions. Before the treatment, the majority of the students were reluctant to participate in the communicative tasks but, after the employment of the song-based strategy in the classroom, they were so eager to give a presentation in front of their classmates. This technique provides an opportunity for students to build confidence in their learning process. At this stage, the students were provoked to be active by offering different tasks such as small group tasks, playing different roles based on the character of the songs and discovering rules by analyzing the spoken discourse. These tasks highlighted the main weakness of the students in the process of learning speaking skills and sub-skills and assisted the teacher to remedy them. Consequently, the speaking skills and sub-skills of students are enhanced. Furthermore, after the treatment, the students could use different expressions and vocabulary items which showed that they had a wide range

of vocabulary knowledge in their lexicon. In addition, the vocabulary items used by the students were more appropriate to the context. Bourke (2006) stated that by using a contextualized language learning process, the language input can be comprehensible and effective.

Vaughan (2002, p.36) claimed that "good multimedia can provide a real context for language learning, and it provides a situation for interaction and communication." In addition, the song-based strategy assisted the learners to learn different collocations and enhancing their intonation and fluency in order to communicate meaning effectively. The main reason for the promotion of the students in speaking skills can be attributed to different factors. The first reason was related to exposing the students to an authentic sample of spoken language including using all-natural factors of spoken language characterizing everyday language. The song played at the normal speed of language which was similar to a real context and it included real intonation and tone. During this process (consciousness-raising activities), the students detected the main characteristic of the speech stream and the sound system. Based on the genres of the songs, different tasks and activities were provided for the students that need a variety of social and cultural roles in the part of students' participation. Such tasks offered opportunities for pre-school students to participate in different pragmatic and socio-linguistic activities. After the treatment, by using a song-based strategy, the students of the experimental group can express themselves effectively with few pauses and hesitations. The song-based language learning strategy creates quick and simple interactions with people and authentic material; provides flexible materials that can be accessed in different contexts; and makes the learning tasks more attractive. Due to the communicative nature of language learning, these features contribute to more relaxed learning experiences and thus motivate language learners to pursue difficult and challenging tasks like learning communicative tasks.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, this study explored the effectiveness of English songs on Iranian pre-school students' speaking ability. The results of the independent samples t-test and paired samples t-test indicated that the participants of the experimental group outperformed the participants of the control group in the speaking post-test. As a result, English songs had a significant effect on the speaking ability of Iranian pre-school students. Based on the findings of the study, exposing pre-school students to authentic materials like songs can increase students' language consciousness and encourage them to learn lexical phrases and expressions in a real spoken context. Furthermore, using songs enables the teachers to teach speaking sub-skills in an entertaining and relaxing situation.

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