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# LISTEN, REFLECT, CONNECT: MUSIC - A RESPLENDENT TOOL FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

Dr. Latha Devi R<sup>1</sup>, Shakthi Vendhan P<sup>2</sup>, Priya K S<sup>3</sup>, Dr. Ragupathi Ramasamy<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor of English, University College of Engineering, Nagercoil, (Anna University Constituent College), Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Anna University Chennai, India

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Amrita School of Computing, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>4</sup>Associate Professor of English, M.Kumarasamy College of Engineering, Karur

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Corresponding Author: Latha Devi R  
(lathadevigiri@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the significance and thoughts on listening to the songs, Believer and Never Google your Symptoms in YouTube platform on the language learning process of students at tertiary level. It delves into their experiences, highlighting how music fosters engagement, comprehension, and an enjoyable approach to mastering a language. This study, further, evaluates the impact of YouTube songs – Believer and Never Google Your Symptoms – on the language proficiency of 50 first-year engineering students in Tamil Nadu. Using a single-sample t-test ( $M = 68.4$ ,  $SD = 10.2$ ,  $n = 50$ ), the results displayed a statistically significant improvement compared with the average baseline ( $t = 12.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The learners showed utmost interest in language acquisition and it resulted in active participation and simultaneously their level of vocabulary retention and pronunciation skill increased. The research findings validate the existing hypothesis and confirm that the musical exposure creates an engaging environment that modifies traditional ESL classrooms into spaces of confidence, interrogation and creativity. Findings support YouTube songs as an effective pedagogical tool that promotes language learning in a fun and engaging way.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Episodic memory. Language learning, Listening skills, Sound discrimination, Krashen theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

Earlier the educational philosophers insisted on rote learning and dismissed the idea of teaching through playful methods (Nutbrown, C., & Clough, P., 2014). The advent of post method theories turned down this notion and focused in the process of learning rather placing complete emphasis on achieving the desired result. Theorists like Cook (who proposed play-way method) addressed education in a joyous manner, aimed specially to fight the imposed rigid structures. In line with this concept, there were theorists who wished to incorporate music into education, to ensure education process as soothing as possible like listening to music (Dutta, G., Vimal, K., 2025; Gous-Kemp, C. 2013; Nakaya et al., 2024). Though there was strong support for the use of music in the language-learning classroom, it was occurring very little in most classrooms. Feng, Q., & Guo, Z. (2024) explores the impact of listening to music videos on learners' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement, which further adds to vocabulary and pronunciation gains. Teachers who intuitively felt music was beneficial in teaching the English language perceived it as a choice for better outcomes in learning (Griffie, 2010). Jean Piaget, however, considered that music plays as a vital tool for children's cognitive development and strongly supported its role in learning. Music incorporates the rhythm of life; it is intangible in nature and its uniqueness is often associated with riveting features that resemble hypnotic qualities. Music, right from the beginning of human evolution, remains a source of energy and the energy fills and feeds the souls of the human beings; turns them to be vibrant and no wonder, the vibrancy makes the human being energetic and enjoyable. Borchgrevink (1982) opined that our brain processes linguistic and musical elements differently and that language and music can be used concurrently in effective pedagogical methodologies to increase learning (McIntire, 2020). English language renders flexible learning styles to the readers depending upon the needs of the learners. The priceless contribution of music in the field of education is always a topic of interest. No doubt, music, the art form has been incorporated into the curriculum of English language teaching in the basic level teaching for years (Shuler. 2001). Rhymes like Jack and Jill, Mary Had a little Lamb, Humpty Dumpty and Ding Dong bell still give even the oldest a lingering memory and when they happen to listen the rhymes, they hum the tune and sometimes sing loudly. When music is used as an aid to learning strategies in the language classroom, both cognitive

and metacognitive strategies are enhanced in the process of imbibing a language (Wong & Lam 2007). Songs, a form of music also enhance the following among the students:

- Phonemic awareness
- Vocabulary building
- Inductive learning of grammar
- Developing auditory skills in language learner

By integrating songs, it enhances vocabulary retention, ties to listening skills and sound discrimination (LeBrun, 2019). Thus, music proves to be a tool to imbibe the language skill among children. Considering all these benefits into account, the researcher wishes to analyse whether the same music ambience could enhance the language potentialities of the students of higher education. The purpose is to identify the effects of music and the music genre that intrigues the Limited English Proficiency learners in language learning (Zhang, 2023).

Songs predominantly facilitate an individual with the language acquisition techniques and the required space. Kim et al. (2024) investigated the use of music as background input for language learning and found a significant correlation between music exposure and reduced foreign language anxiety. Like songs, rhymes attract the beginners to learn a new language in an efficacious manner. It helps in acquiring new words, as well as its meaning via actions. Rhymes, generally a repetitive action, acquired through imitation, allows the practitioners to feel language through music further assist them in internalizing the fundamental and necessary linguistic structures. Hence, they stay connected with the language and become one with that. This remains as the sole reason behind the prescription of rhymes as the primary syllabi amidst the kindergartens. Language is held to be integrated with music, bodily activity and interpersonal relationships. Rhymes benefit children by highlighting the unique and slender differences found between various phonetic sounds, which the children might utilize in the future. David Vale's teaching children English also stress on the importance of interaction and activity-based approaches. Nursery rhymes are found to be a true method of capturing and inspiring young minds and engaging them in learning. Rhymes are short and sweet. Therefore, they help children to learn language formation with ease. They contribute to a child's spatial development when used with music and movement. Ferreri et al. (2013) empirically proved that music enhances encoding of verbal material and it serves as a key for vocabulary acquisition in L2 learning. Singing nursery rhymes

can improve fine motor skills and co-ordination and a plain fun. Learning rhymes plays an unavoidable role in setting the tone of the classroom, developing skills, concepts and building a sense of community (one of the primordial sociology concepts). Reciting rhymes build vocabulary and develop sound discrimination. It strengthens the morality of those learners. They are induced without much effort. It is fun to learn rhymes. Children can learn noteworthy histories through rhymes, as rhymes indirectly carry those stories with its melodious rhythms.

**E.g.:**

- I. Little Miss muffet
- II. Ring around the Rosy: Describes the devastation of Black Death.

By spending most of their time listening and reciting rhymes, they unconsciously listen to sounds of the language as it connects them emotionally with the language. Moreover, Rhymes do serve as a bridge that helps them link to the past, thus preserving the cultural heritage remain plausible.

**E.g. Jack and Jill**

Alongside vocabulary acquisition, Grammar, being a life nerve is instilled into the young minds through the sentence patterns, tense and other such grammatical units that are found present abundantly in the rhyme. Despite the unawareness of the need for grammar and its functions at that stage, rhymes lay a strong foundation in unconsciously internalizing the essential learning patterns. Rhyme wires the brain and repetition strengthens the writing skill (the highest of all). Therefore, repetition will be at the heart. Knowing nursery rhymes could certainly build the most required social skills which results in the promotion of a sense of community and a sense of belonging.

Researchers have found that it is a fun reciting those rhymes. They have also found, with this technique real learning take place. Loving nursery rhymes opens the door to a love of all books and creativity. Research states that the vocabulary development in children will take place between 4 and 8 months and later between 8 months and 6 years. Dr. Schiller says that this impression starts with smart edition as a full curriculum for infants and toddlers. Another research states that children who struggle with rhymes later will struggle with reading. San Diego (Michael Sizer) advocates that reading of rhymes helps "to participate in a long tradition. It is a shared ritual, "there's almost a religious quality to it". The child's ability in sounds are strong predictors of how easily a child will learn to read when exposed to

formal instruction. Rhymes are not only good for reciting but also they help to learn how language works.

### THEORIES FAVOURING MUSIC

There are several theories that support rhyme learning in children they are:

James Asher's Total physical response (TPR) builds co-ordination of speech and action. TPR is a ground breaking theory as it shares commonalities with Krashen's natural approach. TPR, being one of the very few successful physical actions-based theories strongly support the core idea of this research article. This theory states that the right hemisphere of the brain indulges in most second language learning. Its main aim is to teach oral proficiency at the beginning level. An important take away from the theory has to be its focus on the hassle-free learning, which actually is the aim of rhyme teaching and recitation. TPR best defines this concept as music, rhymes, etc. makes language learning as such more meaningful and cheerful. TPR helps in understanding the contextual learning, as it favours the learners in providing sufficient context to words as well as phrases that learners are exposed to through rhymes. Those physical actions allow them to connect with the real-world actions which helps them to connect with the words naturally. A sign of organic learning. Music underscores this concept specifically.

**2.2 Krashen's Natural approach states that traditional** approaches are defined as "based on the use of language in communicative situations without resource to the native language. In response to this, his theory of language focuses on children's language acquisition. He favours a natural acquisition. In order to execute the concept efficaciously, he has proposed five different hypotheses that strengthens the language acquisition process:

- Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis
- The Monitor Hypothesis
- The Natural Order Hypothesis
- Input Hypothesis

One of his most important concepts the "i+1", a revolutionary gradational learning process takes place in this stage. This remains so, because of the fact that this was one of the fewest theories that takes the present status of the learners and tries developing upon that (moving from known to unknown in a way). Music and rhyme favours this as it allows the learners to learn new words by adding new on to their existing corpus. This way they escape the fear of being alienated. Therefore, the theory strongly

underscores one of the core principles of this article “being a part of the community”.

### 2.2.1 The Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Rhymes and Music are both learning and healing. This has the power to pain of those learners. Moreover, in general music is associated with calmness, soothing, etc. an exact opposite to being anxious, having troubles with motivation, etc. When learners are exposed to music, their affective filters generally fall down (at least gradually). As a result, their understanding ability widens and they become interested. Therefore, the theory focuses on constructing meaningful communication rather than on form. Music in general facilitates in lowering the affective filter.

**2.3 Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) focuses** on the psychic content of a program, which is essential in EFL. As discussed earlier in this same article music is associated with emotions, engagement and development. Music in general helps one in evoking strong emotions. Therefore, learning remains meaningful and noteworthy.

For instance, listening to a particular song, particular voice, music, etc. brings joy and positivity. Helping an individual become better with one’s own emotions will open doors for learners to learn and feel comfortable. In this regard, NLP is certainly a fabulous theory that advocates the focus of the research. These methods form together and provide the importance of teaching language through rhymes for children.

### 2.3.1 Learning by doing& Play-way-method:

Two other action-based theories specially emerged in the post-method era place their focus on practical experience of learning. These two offer a significant learning experience (experiential learning). This permits one to reflect upon one’s own learning practices. It is also important to take into consideration that these two theories are specially child/ learner-centred. Closely aligning with the ideas of Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, low-anxiety environments also contribute to the aspects of language learning (Ali, Z. A et al., 2024). Only in a learner-centred classroom a child could practice and let out one’s own emotions. This way music becomes an experience, an experience of oneself and one’s own self.

**2.3.2 Functional approach:** It begins with the words of immediate interest to them and come from the range of their experience. This variety of exercises

for the purpose to prepare them to read and write conveniently. This concept is much concerned about the practical aspects of the language, the usage. The function of music according to this article is to raise the linguistic standards of the learners. This fosters cultural understanding of the context they belong to as well as the music it represents (Boddie, 2023).

**2.3.3 Oral work:** Reading and writing are part and parcel of a language but speaking is the natural mode of expression and the modern trend is very much inclined towards oral practice.

**2.3.4 Controlled vocabulary:** It is in favour of teaching scientifically selected and suitably graded structures and vocabulary.

Thus, the songs and nursery rhymes, though different in terms of complexities, verse-chorus structure and thematically disoriented, they reflect the same journey, the journey of happiness and purposiveness. However, this research paper intends to analyse the effectiveness of ordinary songs towards language acquisition.

### 2.4 The following research questions guided the present paper:

1. Why does the music influence young language learners?
2. What kind of music enhances the overall ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom experience?

## METHODOLOGY

The target population was the first- year students at an engineering College in Kanyakumari, a district in Tamil Nadu. These students had been diagnosed with learning difficulties. The population consists of 25 female students and 27 male students. The students were allowed to watch the YouTube songs ‘Never Google Your Symptoms’ and ‘Believer’. A listening time of 20 minutes was allotted for each song. After the listening activity, the students were put into several groups and were directed to analyse and discuss the lyrics of the songs. There is indeed a strong relationship between music and language, substantiated by research in a language acquisition context, as it generates interest for language learners (Engl, 2013).

### 3.1 Learning outcome

The learners actively and interestingly participated in the sessions and showed seamless interest throughout the study. Since music is their all-time

favourite, all the students get involved in the process of active listening. It was observed that most of the students even attempted to sing and clap while watching. The active involvement of the participants echoed the fact that music teaches them not only English but also the rhythm and dynamics of life and language (Picciotti et al., 2018). ‘Never Google Your Symptoms’ and ‘Believer’ are energetic blends of rock and pop elements, and they boosted up the energy level of the participants. The use of song lyrics acts as ‘word clouds’ and engaging tools for language classroom interaction (Kryszewska, 2010). These songs created a stimulating learning space making it more vibrant and meaningful. Worksheets were distributed to consolidate their learning soon after watching the songs. Through structured music-based learning methods, improvements in academic outcomes, creative cognition, and self-concept can be effectively achieved (Chen, M. et al., 2024).

**FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

The primary data being collected from the target population addressing the subject matter was in the form of a questionnaire analysis (Appendix A& B). There were 12 questions (in the descriptive format) sought the responses from the stakeholders. This particular data facilitated the authors in arriving at the findings of the research. The research posed two vital research questions, around which the entire research process revolved. They were:

**4.1 Research Question 1:**Why does the music influence young language learners?

Music is an evergreen stress buster that heals wounds in a soothing way. It acts as a catalyst for many positive changes and enhances people’s listening skills. No wonder it evokes emotions and connects people on a common platform. Recent research shows that music develops the cognitive thinking of students. Music reduces stress, spreads positivity, and makes individuals more optimistic. Above all, music adds spice to the flavour of life and learning.

**4.2 Research Question 2 :**What kind of music enhances the overall ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom experience?

Music that radiates positivity are always at the beck and call of both learning and listening to language in an ESL classroom. In the research conducted, the participants were initially exposed to the songs whilst noting down important vocabulary. Then, they were encouraged to read the subtitles of the songs if they encountered unfamiliar words. Each

word in the selected songs acted as a power house of motivation to take their experience of understanding into a new dimension. Power-packed words remained in their memory without the need for deliberate memorization. The participants revealed the idea that music is always an add-on that transforms the classroom experience into seamless adoption with quick acceptance (Salcedo, C. S., 2010), and significantly aids memory for foreign-language vocabulary (Greenberg, T. 2015).It’s worth mentioning that pop music, folk music, catchy melodies ,Songs with repetitive lyrics, songs blend with personal reflections captivate the listeners with their unique notations. It is found that the youtube songs have the power of facilitating language acquisition.

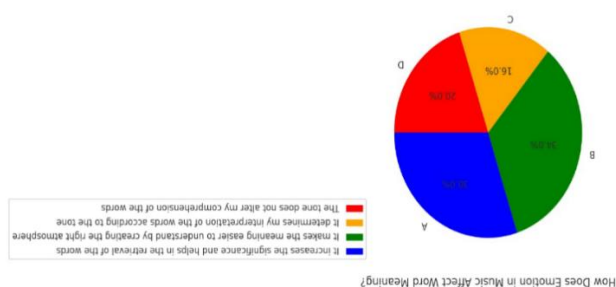


Figure 1. Illustration of the correlation between music and meaning of words

The first important question asked was related to the understanding of the correlation between music and understanding the meanings of the words and the emotional impact it creates on the learners. The outcome of the result was as expected that almost 30 % of the respondents felt yes and it leaves a noteworthy impact on retrieval of vocabularies. 34% (the major chunk) believes that music reduces the difficulty level and further it creates right atmosphere. 16% of them felt that music and song require their interpretation and the final 20% felt that it leaves no impact. A majority of the respondents have agreed to the usage of music.

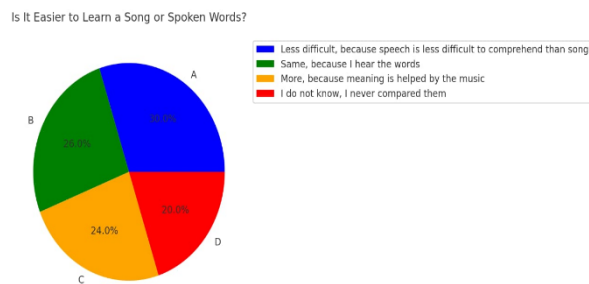


Figure 2. Learning percentage of song in terms of spoken words

Like the previous question, this question was asked to compare between the language in the form of words or the song and to identify which is easier to comprehend. 30% of the respondents have considered it as less difficult, whereas 26% sense it as same because they could hear those words. 24% believe music as aid that helps one in understand and make meanings. But 20% have said that they never tested this concept. Hence, they are unaware of the answer.

The below given chart was the analysis of the responses given to a particular question which tested the role of music in upbringing the pronunciation ability of the learners. Surprisingly 16 of them said that they strongly disagree with this concept, on the contrary 11 expressed strong likeliness towards it. 23 of them stayed in the middle where 12 of them just disagreed to the statement and 11 of them just agreed. They never felt the extremes.

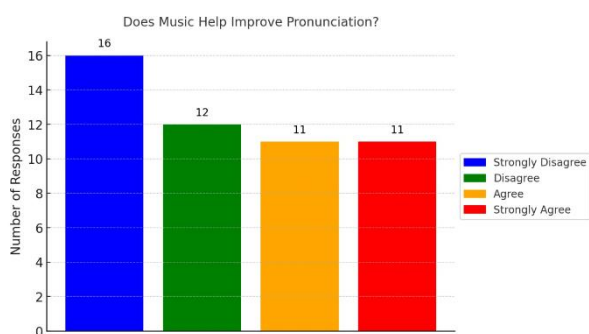


Figure 3. Role of music in enhancing pronunciation

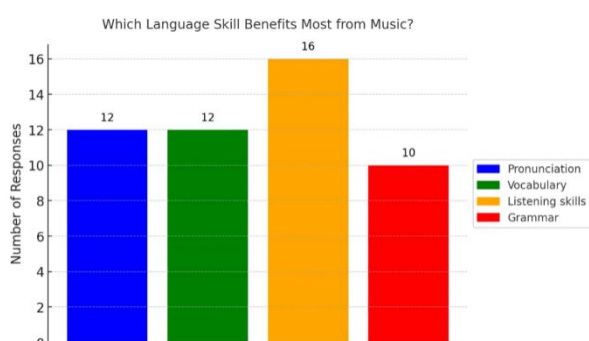


Figure 4. Impact of Music on Language Skills: Survey Results

This question was about the skill benefits of the learners gained from listening to music. As expected, the listening skill, the primary of all received the highest number of votes, followed by the pronunciation and vocabulary receiving 2nd highest shows the role of music in perfecting the language skills. Unfortunately, Grammar received least supporters as many of them felt that picking up

grammar is not on the higher side as music mainly focuses on the rhyme and meter.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Music triggers the participation level of the learners with its vibrancy and universal appeal. When they listen to music, their entire body mechanism lure into action and it fosters active involvement in the learning process. By its very nature, music propels individuals toward success, helping them connect with the learning process (Schmidt, 1990), and creates an enjoyable context for them to get conscious of their acquisition.

The song Believer is a popular song in youtube sung by the American rock band 'Imagine Dragons' which celebrates the victory of a person who previously faced many blows in his life. Through its inspiring narrative, it delivers the message that students should never give up when they are through the tough times of their life. The song includes the following lines:

- One evening, my father said: My son
- I'm dying and soon I'll be gone
- But before my final farewell:
- Hear me. And hear me well
- Do whatever you want to do
- Have a plan or roll the dice
- But one thing is strictly taboo
- Please, follow my advice
- Never google your symptoms
- That is my only prescription
- You get a hundred diagnoses
- And medieval prognoses
- Every sign is a serious condition
- If you google "cough" and "diagnosis"
- You have got tuberculosis
- And if you google "fever and red"
- You've got Ebola and soon will be dead
- And if you google "I've a runny nose"
- It's CSF. Your brain is leaking juice!
- And if you google itch and prognosis:
- Anaphylactic shock or psychosis
- So never google your symptoms
- Seldom it brings any wisdom
- You want to discover
- But you might uncover
- That you have an extra chromosome
- So this is what I heard my father say
- And then he closed his eyes and passed away
- The autopsy report was very clear
- Death from hypochondric fear

- Which is custom
- When you google
- Your symptoms
- Never google your symptoms
- The hit list is never awesome
- Pain in your left arm?
- Heart attack alarm!
- Do you feel a little weak? Yes,
- You've got ALS!
- If you have a slight anemia
- You've got leukemia!
- Are you a little crazy?
- You've got ADHD
- So never, ever google
- Your symptoms!
- (lyrics sourced from You TubeNever Google your Symptoms, 2020)

Most importantly, the song instils the art of endurance; it tries to focus on power of hard work, determination and resilience. The emotion in the vocalization is always an enticing aspect, particularly for teenagers. The language did not matter; the beat had turned the learning experience (Israel, 2013). The song with the wonderful beats resonates with their interests and gears up their mood for language acquisition further setting up a strong platform for the learning process (Goldstein, 2016).

Never Google your Symptoms is yet another song in youtube which is packed with a crucial message for the youngsters who often consider Google as their doctor. The song features the following lines:

#### First things first

- I'm say all the words inside my head
- I'm fired up and tired of the way that things have been, oh ooh
- The way that things have been, oh ooh

#### Second things second

- Don't you tell me what you think that I could be
- I'm the one at the sail, I'm the master of my sea, oh ooh
- The master of my sea, oh ooh
- I was broken from a young age
- Taking my sulking to the masses
- Writing my poems for the few
- That look at me, took to me, shook to me, feeling me
- Singing from heartache from the pain

- Taking my message from the veins
- Speaking my lesson from the brain
- Seeing the beauty through the...

#### Pain!

You made me a, you made me a believer, believer

#### Pain!

You break me down, you build me up, believer, believer

#### Pain!

Oh let the bullets fly, oh let them rain

My life, my love, my drive, it came from...

#### Pain!

You made me a, you made me a believer, believer

#### Third things third

- Send a prayer to the ones up above

All the hate that you've heard has turned your spirit to a dove, oh ooh

#### Your spirit up above, oh ooh

- I was choking in the crowd
- Building my rain up in the cloud
- Falling like ashes to the ground
- Hoping my feelings, they would drown
- But they never did, ever lived, ebbing and flowing
- Inhibited, limited
- Till it broke open and rained down
- It rained down, like...

#### Pain!

You made me a, you made me a believer, believer

#### Pain!

You break me down, you build me up, believer, believer

#### Pain!

Oh let the bullets fly, oh let them rain

My life, my love, my drive, it came from...

#### Pain!

You made me a, you made me a believer, believer

#### Last things last

- By the grace of the fire and the flames
- You're the face of the future, the blood in my veins, oh ooh
- The blood in my veins, oh ooh
- But they never did, ever lived, ebbing and flowing
- Inhibited, limited
- Till it broke open and rained down
- It rained down, like...

#### Pain!

You made me a, you made me a believer, believer

**Pain!**

You break me down, you build me up, believer, believer

**Pain!**

Oh let the bullets fly, oh let them rain

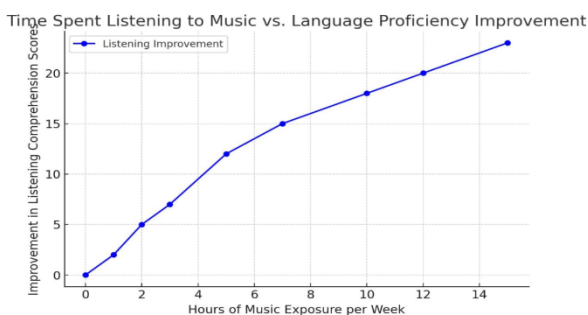
My life, my love, my drive, it came from...

**Pain!**

You made me a, you made me a believer, believer.

(lyrics adapted from You Tube Imagine Dragons, 2017)

It is quite paradoxical yet prevalent tendency among today's youngsters to trust the Google as 'go-to doctor'. It delivers a cautionary message to young individuals obsessed with the internet believing it to be all-knowing authority on earth. The provoking lyrics prompt students to think on their feet where they critically analyse their dependency on technology and replicate the same in their life. It keeps them informed about its limitations and take balanced decisions in their lives. Both songs are a combination of motivational messages and relatable themes with captivating rhythms, creating a compelling ambience for interactive and effective learning.



**Figure 5. Music's role in improving language proficiency**

The above graph is a visual documentation of the responses provided by the target population. It is evident that, the graph has revealed a significant, in fact strenuous cum continuous improvement amongst the students who have used youtube music and songs as tools to learn language. The process of language learning was never found to be a difficult,

instead they had become fun loving process, which yielded them the desired result despite facing several hardships such as lack of exposure, family circumstances, etc.(Khaghaninejad, 2016) spotlights neuro-parallels between music and language, highlighting how songs improve pronunciation, vocabulary, and memory. In countries like India, where more than 60 percent of the population rarely find chances to learn and exhibit their English proficiency. To such mob, this music offers them the linguistic cum emotional solace and makes them feel they belonging to the community.

## CONCLUSION

Music, a resplendent tool to imbibe the language skills among kids, can also be an excellent choice for the students of higher education too. Music has the capacity of transcending from a mere entertainer to a language trainer. With the music in English classroom, what was once a herculean task becomes a cake walk with the single focus i.e. focus on listening with a fabricated thread of enjoyment. For learners who possess challenges to concentrate, to remember vocabulary or to use phrases in appropriate situations, songs come to the rescue. Moreover, it teaches them good pronunciation as well. When listening to songs repeatedly, there is never a bit of boredom among students as the appealing music reinforces the context and meaning. Voluntary humming or loud singing renders a kind of incessant practice for the listeners and the constant repetition of this voluntary act makes them to store the words in the space meant for episodic memory (Derks-Dijkman, 2023). Music contributes to a learner's academic achievement, motivation, and creative development, helping them learn more effectively. It plays a vital role in all aspects of education (Eady and Wilson, 2004). When music is integrated into the process of language learning, the acquisition of language happens with no compulsion thus promoting ease and a deeper understanding of linguistic nuances with emotional overtones. Youtube songs which are played along with the subtitles and videos make language learning more engaging and interactive for the Gen z students.

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