



*La música como recurso para desarrollar las habilidades auditivas de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de la escuela primaria*

*Music as a resource to develop the listening skills of efl elementary school students*

*A música como recurso para desenvolver as habilidades auditivas de alunos do ensino fundamental EFL*

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## Resumen

Esta investigación explora el potencial de incorporar la música como herramienta de instrucción en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. Su objetivo es analizar los efectos del uso de la música para desarrollar habilidades auditivas con un grupo de 21 jóvenes estudiantes de nivel A1 en una escuela primaria pública en Cuenca-Ecuador utilizando el enfoque de método mixto con un diseño pre-postest. Además, examina las percepciones de los estudiantes sobre el uso de la música para desarrollar sus habilidades auditivas. En la etapa cuantitativa se aplicó un pretest y un postest considerando tres estrategias de escucha según el currículo establecido por el Ministerio de Educación: escuchar para predecir, escuchar para detalles y escuchar para comprender. En la etapa cualitativa, se pidió a los estudiantes que respondieran un cuestionario compuesto por cinco preguntas abiertas. Los resultados de este proyecto demostraron que la música es un recurso útil para desarrollar la escucha en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera. Enriquece la experiencia de aprendizaje, desencadenando percepciones positivas en los estudiantes para continuar practicando habilidades de escucha de acuerdo con sus niveles de competencia.

**Palabras clave:** Música; habilidades de escuchar; herramienta efectiva.

## Abstract

This research explores the potential of incorporating music as an instructional tool in the EFL classroom. It aims to analyze the effects of using music to develop listening skills with a group of 21 young A1 level learners in a public elementary school in Cuenca- Ecuador using the mixed-method approach with a pre-posttest design. In addition, it examines students' perceptions about using music to develop their listening skills. In the quantitative stage a pre-test and post-test were applied considering three listening strategies according to the curriculum established by the Ministry of Education: listening to predict, listening for details, and listening for comprehension. In the qualitative stage, students were asked to answer a questionnaire composed of five open-ended questions. The results of this project showed that music is a useful resource for developing listening in EFL students. It enriches the learning experience, triggering positive students' perceptions to continue practicing listening skills according to their proficiency levels.

**Keywords:** Music; listening skills; Music a tool for listening.

## Resumo

Esta pesquisa explora o potencial de incorporar a música como ferramenta de ensino na sala de aula de EFL. Tem como objetivo analisar os efeitos do uso da música para desenvolver habilidades auditivas com um grupo de 21 jovens alunos do nível A1 em uma escola pública de ensino fundamental em Cuenca-Ecuador, utilizando a abordagem de método misto com um desenho pré-pós-teste. Além disso, examina as percepções dos alunos sobre o uso da música para desenvolver suas habilidades auditivas. Na etapa quantitativa foram aplicados pré-teste e pós-teste considerando três estratégias de escuta de acordo com o currículo estabelecido pelo Ministério da Educação: ouvir para prever, ouvir para detalhes e ouvir para compreender. Na etapa qualitativa, os alunos foram solicitados a responder um questionário composto por cinco questões abertas. Os resultados deste projeto mostraram que a música é um recurso útil para desenvolver a audição em alunos de inglês como língua estrangeira. Enriquece a experiência de aprendizagem, despertando percepções positivas nos alunos para continuarem praticando habilidades auditivas de acordo com seus níveis de proficiência.

**Palavras-chave:** Música; habilidades auditivas; A música é uma ferramenta para ouvir.

## Introduction

Learning with songs and music could be an effective method because music plays an important role in the life of every person and people are surrounded by music (Warnke, 2006). In this sense, music and its rhymes and melodies can be an effective to learn actively making a difference in the learning process. According to Millington (2011) “most children enjoy singing songs, which can often be a welcome change from the routine of learning a foreign language” (p.134). Additionally, Millington (2011) mentioned that applying songs when teaching can serve as a withdrawal from adhering severely to a predefined curriculum. Songs are adjustable to varying class sizes and resources. Likewise, songs could be key in the development of a foreign language among young learners (Millington, 2011).

Not only does music help to teach ESL students new vocabulary, but it can also help improve listening and speaking skills (Verner, 2012). As the author argued, if teachers use music to teach English and develop different skills then students could feel motivated and interested, and get better scores while enjoying learning.

Spathis (2021) pointed out that songs are examples of authentic resources that can lead to a variety of different activities at all levels; homing in on specific songs and their lyrics could build students' listening comprehension skills. Likewise, when listening to a song, students are exposed to rich vocabulary enhancing their interest and attention. Music not only arouses students' interest but also aids in creating a new avenue in the classroom to develop listening skills (Spathis, 2021).

According to the Ecuadorian Curriculum for Teaching English (MINEDUC, 2019), the process of listening is complicated; linking various strategies that learners can practice and apply through listening tasks rooted in meaningful contexts. The curriculum also integrates Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as an instrument to expose learners to varied listening materials, ranging from songs, poetry, and brief dialogues to informational texts like announcements and messages. Furthermore, the MINEDUC (2019) stated that "listening strategies will aid learners in terms of pronunciation skills such as stress, rhythm, and intonation" (p.431 ). In this sense, the Ecuadorian Curriculum advised that teachers need to find sources to help students' practice and improve their listening skills.

The research study aims to examine the effects of using music to develop listening skills. Likewise, it examines students' perceptions about using music to develop their listening skills. The study is conducted following a mixed-method approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data.

## **Conceptual framework**

### **Music**

Music can have several meanings for different people. Music can be healing, comforting, educational, and it can even inspire ideas (Huges, 2023). Moreover, Huges (2023) argues that music plays a central role in the lives of many people, helping as a fundamental component that frequently offers a channel or a resource to articulate emotions that might otherwise remain unknown. In other words, the author sustained that music gives the opportunity to individuals to express the deepest feelings, demands, and inspirations that not all things produce.

Tanay (2021) argued that regardless the type of music, the field of reactions from the listeners can include a wide range of human emotions. In other words, humans in general feel identified through music because it stimulates them in a unique manner and involves communication.

## **Listening skill**

Listening stands as a fundamental receptive skill; it is the individual's capacity to receive and comprehend information within the statement procedure (Gilakjani, 2016). In other words, listening represents a person's capacity for receiving and interpreting information during conversation.

According to Raza (2016), “the first receptive skill a learner learns is listening. This skill, though very basic, is often thought to be a difficult skill to teach; therefore, teachers today are more interested in teaching listening interactively” (p. 1). The researcher mentioned that teachers are exploring methods that actively involve students in the listening process. In addition, this interactivity helps students improve their listening comprehension and also encourages active participation and the development of conversational skills.

According to Educator (2017) listening skills are directly linked to speaking and pronunciation abilities. A student who can accurately pronounce and naturally speak a language, may comprehend it effectively when encountered it in verbal form. Furthermore, active practice of pronunciation and speaking also contributes to the development of listening skills. Students who have perfected the pronunciation of certain words or phrases are more likely to recognize and understand them when they hear them in everyday conversations (Educator, 2017),

## **Music as a tool for listening**

As stated by Khaghaninejad and Fahandejsaadi (2016) primary language development is greatly helped by music, which can also fast-track language learning. Moreover, neuroscientists have shown that the brain region in control of processing language and music is similar in size, saying that similar processes motivate the understanding of language and music. In addition, music as an instrument for foreign language classes that can be used across all students' levels is only recently acknowledged (Khaghaninejad and Fahandejsaadi, 2016). In this sense, there is a growing recognition of music's potential as a source to enhance language learning, specially in initial language acquisition.

Parra and Calero (2020) believed that “the use of songs along with the use of technology can motivate learners to enhance the listening skills, confirming the benefits of music in the learning process” (p.1). Moreover, Parra and Calero (2020) suggested that “songs have served as useful tools for learning a language without putting pressure on the students” (p.1). According to these

authors, using songs as educational tools not only could have a positive impact on the learning process but also could be recognized as invaluable assets in language education, providing a bridge between enjoyment and academic achievement.

### **Literature review**

As reported by Kuśnierek (2016), music makes things memorable. That means it can help students focus and remember what the teachers are teaching them better by attaching lessons to catchy songs and rhythms, arguing that music enhances the memory of events. According to Kuśnierek (2016), it means that linking teaching to songs and rhythms helps pupils pay attention and retain information more effectively.

It is necessary to mention that researchers Toscano and Fonseca (2012) made contributions to musical pedagogy to understand the teaching of English through songs. Toscano and Fonseca (2012) reflected on the inclusion of songs and/or sound-musical elements in foreign language teaching. Using music, they showed how it brought benefits to the learning process at different linguistic, affective, and sociolinguistic levels. The study was conducted with Spanish sixth-grade students who used songs and/or sound-musical elements. The results showed that the program promoted musical intelligence, micro-listening skills linked to the use of the language, as well as the skills of oral production and comprehension. In addition, this study showed music is an effective tool in order to develop activities; it also demonstrated that music produces real benefits when students are learning English.

A study conducted by Kumar et al. (2022) demonstrated that music can help to learn a foreign language, and how it can be applied in the classroom by offering resources and providing various approaches. By examining research studies in the areas of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), the study described the pedagogical roles of music and songs in learning English. The study described multiple quantitative experiments conducted in different settings. According to the study's findings, songs and music are unquestionably helpful language learning aids that support the teaching of foreign languages without placing unnecessary academic load on students. Moreover, the authors contended that music and songs might be a beneficial listening activity with numerous advantages.

In the research study by Arevalo (2010), the author worked in a second-level EFL class at the University of Tunja. The study examined listening skills based on six workshops focused on songs.

A qualitative approach was used observing and recording events and behaviors method was used observing and recording events and behaviors. In addition, the activities were observed following a format and monitored with an interview to find out the extent the listening comprehension skill was developed through songs. Based on the data collected, “it is possible to say that songs are the most suitable type of authentic material to develop listening comprehension” (p.130). Moreover, they are effective when “learners’ ages and social contexts fit with the kind of music selected to work in class” (p.130). At the same time, the integration of music in the lessons increased attendance and active involvement of students. Arevalo (2010).

In the study conducted by Cuenca (2021), the author applied songs to strengthen the English pronunciation level of the participants. The researcher worked with a sample of 20 students from an educational institution in Santo Domingo, Ecuador. Students took a pre-test that allowed the researcher to check the pronunciation level. The example tests from the A1 Movers speaking test prepared by Cambridge was used. The study concluded that using music created a positive effect on the learning process, allowing the participants to improve their pronunciation.

The study developed by Lestari (2020) aimed to analyze the perceptions of students who practice listening skills in English by using rap music media specifically. The research was addressed to 36 elementary school students from Depok, West Java. The participants were exposed to music media for three months during English class. Data was collected data using questionnaires and interviews. The results indicated the students felt motivated to learn the pronunciation, students worked without feeling tense when they were learning and practicing listening skills with rap music.

## **Methodology**

This research study applied a mixed-method approach which according to Creswell and Clark (2017) “allows for more comprehensive and synergistic use of data than separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis” (p. 34).

The quantitative data was gathered via a pre-test and a post-test prepared considering specific parameters for listening. That is, listening to predict, listening for details and listening for comprehension. On the other hand, the qualitative data was gathered through an open-ended questionnaire.

The participants were 21 EFL students of a public school located in Cuenca. The students were between 13 to 14 years old in the tenth grade. There were 10 women and 11 men. Before data

collection started, the researcher contacted the school principal, parents, and students to provide information about the study and obtain consent. “To produce valid and beneficial results, researchers must uphold the ethical principles of informed consent and confidentiality” (Llego, 2014, p.7); therefore, in adherence to privacy protocols, all student names were anonymized. The researcher assigned numbers instead of names.

### **Pre-test and Post-test**

To measure the level of proficiency in students’ listening skills before and after using music as a pedagogical tool, a pre-test and a post-test were designed according to three aspects of listening mentioned in the Ecuadorian education curriculum (MINEDUC, 2016): listening to predict information, listening for details, and listening to comprehend vocabulary. Listening activities for the tests focused on Person Test of English General Level 1 (English, 2021). The test was divided in three parts and was scored over 40 points. In the first part, the students looked at a photograph where they predicted what they were going to listen. In the second part, an audio was presented where the students had to listen to obtain details of a conversation. In the third part, two songs were presented. For song number one, students had the lyrics in hand and while listening they tried to comprehend and fill in the blanks with the multiple options provided. With the second song, students had a vocabulary list and when listening to the song they highlighted the words from the list that they understood. The final results of each part were compared between the pre-test and post-test to analyze the effects of using music to develop listening skills with A1-level students.

### **Questionnaire**

An open-ended questionnaire with five questions was given to the participants to develop in a face-to-face session. The purpose of this questionnaire was to examine students’ perceptions about using music to develop their listening skills. The questionnaire was applied to half of the participants who were randomly selected. For a broader understanding and clear answers, the questionnaire was presented in Spanish. Later, the information collected to examine the students' perceptions was translated into English and qualitatively analyzed. Three themes emerged from the analysis: developing motivation when using music for listening skills, benefits of music to develop listening skills, and challenges while working with music for listening skills.



## **Procedure**

The research was developed over four weeks. Each week three pedagogical hours of forty-five minutes each were taught. During the intervention, short and simple listening activities were developed using songs. For the first song, the participants read the lyrics then listened to the song several times to fill in the blanks and later the answers were checked using a video. For the next song, the students reviewed some definitions, examples, and visual aids to help them understand the meaning of the words they found in the song. The students listened to the song and got a general sense of it. The last song was used to review the simple present tense. The participants reviewed vocabulary to better understand the song's content and reviewed the general explanation about simple present tense. When the learners listened to the song, they highlighted or underlined examples of the simple present tense in the lyrics. As homework and for practice, live worksheets' tasks were assigned.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative**

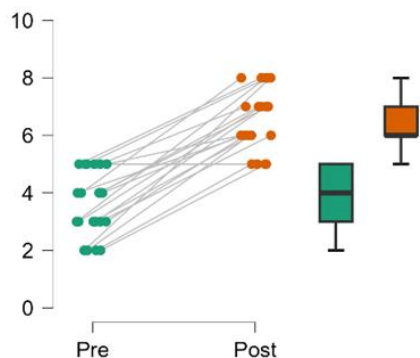
The quantitative analysis was treated as a pre-experimental pretest-posttest design (Cabrera-Tenecela, 2023). The analytical process of the four parameters and their summation was carried out using the statistical software JASP (Goss-Sampson, 2019; JASP, 2023). Data distribution was assessed employing the Shapiro-Wilk test to verify normality. The paired samples t-test was used to compare scores before and after the test (to obtain p values) while Cohen's d coefficient was calculated to evaluate the effect size, indicating the magnitude of the observed differences.

### **Listening to predict information**

The initial assessment reported an average score of 3.62 (SD = 1.12), while the subsequent evaluation displayed a noteworthy enhancement, registering an average of 6.52 (SD = 0.92). The 'Listening to Predict Information' task, scored on a scale of 1-8 points and showcased a normally distributed pattern as confirmed by the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > 0.05$ ). The paired samples t-test demonstrated a highly significant p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ), signifying substantial differences in performance before and after the intervention. Furthermore, the effect size, assessed through Cohen's d was notably large (Cohen's  $d = -2.01$ ), indicating a considerable impact of this task on

the development of listening skills. Detailed visual representations of these findings are depicted in Figure 1 through a raincloud plot.

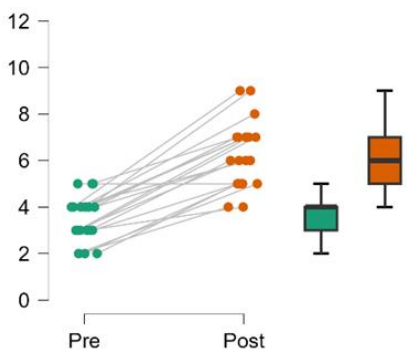
**Figure 1:** Pre and Posttest of Listening to Predict Information Parameter (1-8 Points)



### Listening to get specific details

The pre-test unveiled a mean score of 3.38 (SD = 0.98), demonstrating a significant leap to a mean of 6.43 (SD = 1.470) in the post-test. Moreover, initial scores indicated a mean of 3.48 (SD = 1.08) whereas post-test outcomes showed a mean of 6.19 (SD = 1.03). The Shapiro-Wilk test confirmed a normal distribution of scores for the 'Listening to Get Specific Details' task (rated on a scale of 1-9 points) in assessments ( $p > 0.05$ ). The paired samples t-test yielded a highly significant p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating substantial disparities between scores before and after the intervention. Additionally, an appreciable effect size of Cohen's  $d = -2.015$  was evident, emphasizing a notable impact of this activity on the enhancement of listening skills. Comprehensive visual representation of these findings is depicted in Figure 2 through a raincloud plot.

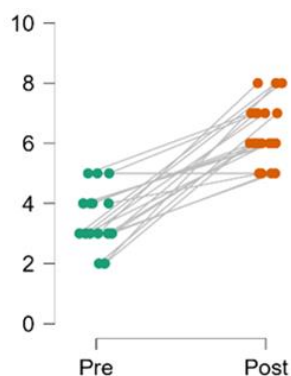
**Figure 2:** Pre and Posttest of Listening to Get Specific Details Parameter (1-9 Points)



### Listening to comprehend vocabulary

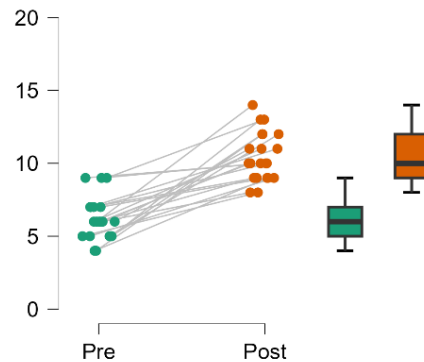
The initial assessment reported a mean score of 6.19 (SD = 1.44) whereas the subsequent evaluation demonstrated notable improvement, registering a mean of 10.48 (SD = 1.70). The distribution of scores before and after the test showcased normality according to the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > 0.05$ ). Notably, the paired samples t-test resulted in a highly significant p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating substantial differences between scores pre and post activity. Furthermore, a considerable effect size of Cohen's  $d = -1.95$  was observed, highlighting a substantial impact of this exercise on vocabulary development. These findings are visually presented in Figure 3 through a raincloud plot.

**Figure 3:** Pre and Posttest of Listening to Comprehend Vocabulary Parameter (1-8 Points)



### Listening to fill in the blanks

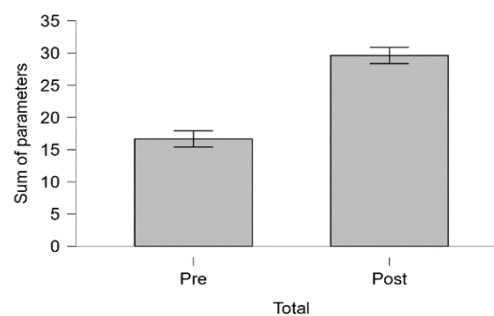
In the context of this activity, students achieved an average score of 6.19 in the pre-test which notably increased to 10.48 in the post-test while engaging in fill-in-the-blank exercises within song lyrics. The score distribution for the 'Listening to Fill in the Blanks' activity (rated on a scale of 1-15 points) was found to be normal based on the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p > 0.05$ ). The paired samples t-test produced a highly significant p-value ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating substantial differences between scores pre and post the evaluation. Moreover, a considerable effect size of Cohen's  $d = -1.914$  was observed, highlighting a significant impact of this activity on the refinement of specific listening skills. These outcomes are visually represented in Figure 4 through a raincloud plot.

**Figure 4:** *Pre and Posttest of Listening to Fill in the Blanks Parameter (1-15 Points)*

### Sum of parameters

The results from the sum of the four parameters indicate a significant change in scores before and after the listening evaluation. Prior to the test, the average score stood at 16.67 with a standard deviation of 2.58, while after the test, the average notably increased to 29.62 with a standard deviation of 2.99. The difference between these scores was assessed through a normality test (Shapiro-Wilk) which revealed that data follow a normal distribution ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting no significant deviation from normality.

The analysis of the paired samples t-test revealed highly significant differences between scores before and after the test ( $t = -15.151$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The effect size (Cohen's  $d$ ) was huge, measuring at  $-3.306$ , suggesting a substantial impact of the intervention (completion of the listening activity) on score improvement. These findings suggest that the applied activity had a highly positive effect on the evaluated listening skills, demonstrating a significant increase in student performance following the completion of the activity. In figure 5 a bar plot illustrates the differences between the pre and posttest.

**Figure 5:** *Pre – Posttest of Sum of Four Parameters*

## Qualitative

The qualitative findings correspond to the analysis of a questionnaire that collected data on how participants felt when working with music to develop their listening skills. The information obtained stands out from five open-ended questions in which motivation, interest, the usefulness of music, opinions on the continuity of use music, and challenges when listening were mentioned. The opinions collected were translated, transcribed, and analyzed. As already stated, the findings for this questionnaire were grouped into three themes: developing motivation using music for listening skills, music as a resource for listening skills, challenges while working with music for listening skills.

According to the first theme, the analysis revealed that participants highlighted the motivation and enthusiasm surrounding the use of music for enhancing listening skills. For instance, one student mentioned, *"It motivated me because it seemed more fun and easier to me. I feel that I understood English easier"* (Participant 2). Another student described that listening to music made learning a more enjoyable process. *"Yes, because it is a very entertaining way and it helps me a lot with English. I also developed knowledge of vocabulary and being able to speak in the process"* (Participant 4). Other perceptions reflected how the use of songs contributes to a positive outlook as manifested by participants, *"I'm happy because when I listened I realized that I can recognize words that I already studied and I feel I can learn more and that motivates me"* (Participant 3).

On the contrary, another student's perceptions expressed limited exposure to English songs and felt lack of motivation in that moment. *"I didn't feel very motivated because I don't listen to so many songs in English and I didn't understand and didn't catch it well"* (Participant 5)

Regarding the second theme, students reported feeling positive sentiments toward using music for listening skills, citing benefits such as improved pronunciation, enhanced listening skills, and increased interest; furthermore, they highlighted the usefulness of music in concentration and comprehension. *"Yes, because that would help me more in English when pronouncing new words"*(Participant 6). *"I am improving in the area of listening and I recognize words at the moment that I listening to music"* (Participant 10). *" It is more entertaining and interesting to hear the lyrics of each song and know more vocabulary. It is a different work as reading or writing "* (Participant 4).

On the last theme, some students revealed listening skill activities as challenging in spite of using music. *“A little because sometimes I don't grasp the information well and I don't understand the words in the music”* (Participant 5). Another student mentioned that there was a need for listening to the song several times to finally comprehend it. *“It was hard. it was complicated because I couldn't understand it at the first moment. I need listening a lot of time and practice”* (Participant 9). Another perception described was the presence of unfamiliar words and fast-paced speech which made the listening task hard. *“For me, the activities were challenging because there were some words that I didn't understand or that they spoke very quickly”* (Participant 8). *“They were difficult at first but little by little I got used to the activities I worked on and understood them better later”* (Participant 1).

As it can be seen through the analysis, students had different points of view concerning the use of music to develop listening skills. Generally, the students felt motivated and confident when working on the activities with music. Furthermore, the participants accepted that music is an effective resource that should be permanent during class hours as it awakens the senses and interest to understand the different tasks. On the other hand, some students mentioned that listening is a challenging skill at the first stages but that it can improve with time and practice.

## Discussion

The objectives aimed to analyze the effects of using music to develop listening skills among EFL students and to examine their perceptions regarding the use of music to improve their English listening skills.

The effects of using music on students' listening skills were analyzed across different activities, showcasing high improvements in the four aspects evaluated of the listening skill. Similar to this situation, Kumar et al. (2022) found that songs and music are effective auditory tools with numerous advantages linked with education. Likewise, the authors suggested that music can be used by teachers in different classroom situations to obtain different results.

The quantitative data showed that the 21 participants significantly improved after the intervention in the activities of completing, filling in the blanks, and comprehending vocabulary, which revealed a positive effect in developing listening skills using music. These results agree with Cuenca's (2022) conclusions which reported that using music to develop listening skills created a positive effect on the learning process.

The qualitative findings showed that the participants had positive perceptions about using music. Students' positive perceptions of this tool highlighted its potential to improve listening comprehension, making it more attractive and involving. This tool not only strengthens language skills but also encourages more enjoyable and memorable learning. As mentioned in Lestari's study (2020), the students felt motivated to learn the pronunciation using music. "The benefit obtained from teaching using music was that most of the students were relaxed without feeling tense when they were learning" (Lestari, 2020, p.632). Similarly, Toscano and Fonseca (2012) mentioned in their study that the use of music, connected to language usage, facilitated the development of listening skills. Likewise, with exposure to diverse musical genres, students honed their ability to discern subtle nuances in pronunciation, intonation, and contributing to comprehension of the English language.

## **Conclusion**

Results of the study have shown that music as a pedagogical tool could improve the listening skills of students. The intervention involving music-based listening activities showed statistically significant improvements in students' listening skills across different dimensions, affirming that music resources could contribute positively to the enhancement of listening skills among EFL students.

Findings also revealed that the integration of music as a pedagogical tool to enhance listening skills has yielded overwhelmingly positive perceptions among students. Thus, "music can certainly be considered one of the useful language learning tools that aid foreign language teaching without putting academic pressure on the learners" (Kumar et al,2022, p.1). This research underscores the instrumental role of music in education, affirming its potential as a resource for the development of listening skills.

The small sample of this study (n=21) is considered as a limitation of this research. Therefore, future research should increase the number of participants. Another limitation is that the researcher worked with an assigned group; other studies must include at least a control group when it is not possible to make a random selection of participants.

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