

The Effect of Background Music on Listening Comprehension among Intermediate Students

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Abstract

Listening is a fundamental and integral aspect of human communication and understanding. It involves actively receiving, interpreting, and making sense of the information conveyed through spoken words, tones, and other auditory cues. Effective listening is crucial in various contexts, including personal relationships, professional settings, education, and everyday interactions. Classical music, known for its intricate melodies and harmonies, can enhance focus and concentration. Classical music has the power to evoke emotions and moods. Depending on the composition, it can be uplifting, calming, or energizing. Present study attempts to find out the impact of listening soft music in the background during the listening comprehension tests. Intermediate level English language learners have adequate vocabulary power and it is important to find out how far the listening background help them to orient their cognitive faculties during the soft musical background, since most of the adults habitat with musical aesthetics. Present study takes up 50 post graduate students of arts disciplines studying at the University found that listening to the calm and pleasant Beethoven music enhances the listening comprehension. This study also notices that listening background music did not affect test takers' comprehension level and found that they feel better during the testing over those who were not given background music during the test.

Keywords: Background Music, Listening Comprehension, Psychology of Listening, Music and Comprehension

Listening

Listening is the process of receiving, interpreting, and understanding auditory stimuli or sound waves. It involves actively paying attention to what is being said or communicated through spoken words, music, or other sounds. It fosters better understanding, collaboration, and communication. It is an essential skill for building rapport and resolving conflicts in both personal and professional interactions. Studies have shown that listening background music improves the cognition of the listeners. Listening music also improves the ability to do mathematical tasks. Listening music can calm people who feel the pressure or stress during the tests. Listening to calm and classic music help develop dopamine, a neurotransmitter that controls the brain's aesthetic centres. Listening comprehension involves the ability to understand and interpret spoken language. It's a complex skill that requires various cognitive processes. It involves several components and they are charted in the following diagram



Figure 1

Music

Music is an art form, cultural expression and a powerful emotional tool (Frith, 2004) that involves organized sound elements such as melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre. Music is a universal and cross-cultural phenomenon, with diverse styles and genres existing around the world. Listening music in general has shown great impact on people’s life at various levels (Mark, 2005). Hu, X., Chen, J., & Wang (2021) opines that music is nowadays more popular than ever since it “is socially acceptable, healthy, inexpensive, and ubiquitously available”. Regardless the age, gender, language and nationality music have a unique character to appeal all. It is as an important instrument in learning activities of human beings (Bryant, Shimmins, 2003; Mishan, 2005; Sahebdel 2014).

Impact of Listening Background Music

The impact of instrumental background music on listening comprehension is a topic that has been explored in various studies. Calm and Classical music, particularly instrumental pieces with a slow tempo and low intensity, is often believed to enhance concentration and focus. Many people find that such music creates a calming atmosphere that can support sustained attention to tasks, including listening and comprehension. Classical music is sometimes associated with stress reduction and relaxation. Reduced stress levels can contribute to improved cognitive performance, including better listening comprehension. Classical music is known for its ability to evoke various emotions. If the mood of the music aligns with the content being listened to, it may positively influence the listener’s mood and, subsequently, their comprehension of the material. The nature of the listening task can influence the effectiveness of background music. Tasks that require sustained attention, such as listening to a lecture or studying, may benefit more from background music than tasks that demand active participation in a conversation or discussion.

Application of Background Music

instrumental music, especially pieces without lyrics, can serve as a form of “white noise” that mask potentially distracting background sounds. This can create a more controlled auditory environment, promoting better focus on the information being presented. The impact of instrumental music on listening comprehension can vary among individuals. Some people may find it highly beneficial, while others may prefer silence or minimal background noise. Personal preferences, familiarity with the music, and cultural background can all contribute to individual variability. The nature of the listening task can influence the effectiveness of background music. Tasks that require sustained attention, such as listening to a lecture or studying, may benefit more from background music than

tasks that demand active participation in a conversation or discussion. Some people prefer classical instrumental music so as to enhance their listening comprehension, while others prefer a quiet environment.

Classical and Soft Background Music in Classroom Activities

Playing classical music during moments of reflection or mindfulness activities can support relaxation and introspection. It can be a valuable tool in creating a classroom environment that promotes well-being. The application of classical background music in the classroom can have several potential benefits, but it's essential to consider individual preferences and the specific context. Studies on reading comprehension show background music helps develop better understanding of the content. College students who normally listened to music while studying did better on the comprehension test (Miller, Lenon K, Michael 1989). Classical music, particularly pieces with a slow tempo and gentle melodies, can create a calm and serene atmosphere in the classroom. This may contribute to a positive learning environment, fostering relaxation and reducing stress levels. Some students may find that classical music helps them concentrate on their tasks. Instrumental pieces, in particular, can provide a non-distracting background that supports focused attention during individual or group work. Certain types of classical music, especially those with intricate compositions and emotional depth, can stimulate creativity. Playing such music during creative activities, brainstorming sessions, or art projects may inspire students and enhance their imaginative thinking.

Background Music for Future Learning

The mood of classical music can contribute to setting a positive and uplifting tone in the classroom. Certain types of background music, particularly classical music, have been associated with improved memory performance. According to Havemeyer (1999) the University of California and Wisconsin found the classical music increases the concentration of students and eventually increases the comprehension levels.

This can have implications for the recall of information presented during a listening task. This may be particularly beneficial at the beginning of the day or during morning routines to create a welcoming atmosphere for learning. Introducing students to classical music from different periods and cultures can be an educational experience. Teachers can incorporate classical pieces into lessons about music history, cultural diversity, or specific historical eras. Offering students the option to use classical music while working independently can cater to individual learning preferences. Some students may find that the presence of background music enhances their ability to focus and engage with the material.

Psychology of Listening Background Music

The psychology of listening comprehension with music is a complex and multifaceted area of study. This field explores how music influences cognitive processes, emotions, and the overall listening experience. Music has the ability to modulate arousal levels, influencing the listener's attention. Slower, calming music may promote relaxation. The interplay between arousal and attention can impact listening comprehension. It can evoke a wide range of emotions, from joy and excitement to sadness or nostalgia. The emotional engagement induced by music can influence the listener's receptivity to and interpretation of information, affecting how well they comprehend spoken words or other auditory content. The addition of music may introduce an extra cognitive load, which could either facilitate or hinder listening comprehension. The complexity of the music, the familiarity of the listener with the music, and the nature of the listening task can all contribute to the cognitive load.

Impact of Background Music and Individual Listeners

Individual differences play a significant role in how people respond to music during listening comprehension tasks. Factors such as musical preferences, prior musical training, and cultural background can influence the psychological effects of music on cognition. The impact of music on listening comprehension can depend on the specific characteristics of the task. For example, music might have different effects during language learning activities, academic lectures, or casual conversations. Some individuals may find that music enhances their ability to concentrate and understand spoken information, while others may find it distracting. Listening comprehension with music is a dynamic and personalized aspect of human experience that warrants careful consideration in various settings, including education and the workplace.



Figure 2 Components of Listening Background Music

Selection of Test Material

Present study aimed at testing the listening comprehension abilities of the intermediate level students who have experience in listening music for aesthetics and adequate English language skills in tests. Considering the competent level and suitability, IELTS Listening tests material with 4 topics including 32 questions were selected. The test took 30 minutes to complete it. The content of the listening materials was related to lifestyle of the common people and regular events that takes place in day-to-day activities. To test the 25 group-I students with background music Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No.6 titled 'Pastoral' was selected and it was played during the testing period. The simple mp3 version of the symphony was played with gentle volume without disturbing the listening activity of the test takers. The 25 students of group II were tested using the same questionnaire without providing any background music during the testing period.

Selection of Participants and Testing Method

Two group of participants studying post-graduation in the University were selected for the present study. Each group consist of 25 students both boys and girls were given prior instruction on the testing procedure with suitable facilities. Both of the groups were given 30 minutes time to complete the listening test and listening input was given to all through headphones.

Present Research

The research design used in this study is an experimental model using Beethoven's music as background in listening comprehension using IELTS test material that consist of narratives, dialogues and conversation. Present research is an attempt to study the effect of background music in listening comprehension activities especially among the tertiary level students keeping with an eye on the results of the similar tests done in the intermediate levels. The adolescent learners get

more benefit from listening to music in comprehension activities (Tarrant, North, & Hargreaves, 2000). This study is concerned to the students who are having adequate fluency in English language and how the background music impact over their comprehension is the core aim apart from their emotional outburst during the serious test taking tasks. The assessment of the listening with background music group consisting of 25 students show several positive impacts including scores and emotional managements. Whereas group II non-background music students secured lower score in comprehension tests compared to group I and not had calm tempo during the testing as that of the group I students.

Testing Scheme

Table 1 Duration of the Test: 30 Minutes

	Group -I	Group-II
No. of Participants	25	25
No. of tests	4	4
No. of questions	32	32
Listening background music	Beethoven - Symphony No. 6 Pastoral	No

Listening with Background Music Achievement (Group-I)

Table 2 Total No. of Participants 25

Questions	Test 1-(%)	Test 2-(%)	Test 3-(%)	Test 4-(%)	Total (%)
0-2	5	7	15	3	7.5 (30)
3-4	40	33	35	40	37 (148)
5-6	35	45	40	45	41.25(165)
7-8	20	15	10	12	14.25(57)

Listening with Background Music Achievement (Group-II)

Table 3 Total No. of Participants 25

Questions	Test 1-(%)	Test 2-(%)	Test 3-(%)	Test 4-(%)	Total (%)
0-2	8	10	14	6	9.5(38)
3-4	40	37	37	42	39(156)
5-6	38	44	39	42	40.75(163)
7-8	14	9	10	10	10.75(43)

The test result show that the background classical music has increased the listening comprehension by nearly 2% over the group II who were not allowed to listen background music. There is a gradual increase witnessed from the low level to higher level of listening comprehension achievement in the above chart witness the impact of classical music during the test. During the testing period the group I students did not show any negative or reluctant signs and showed up any significant gestures. Few of the group II students expressed tend to look at the time and found stretching hands for relaxing. Three students of group- I were listening the music even after completing the test.

Conclusion

Listening activity is a crucial task in understanding things, where as it is highly influenced by the other sounds and noise in natural environment. Researches have proved that sequential extra

sounds in the form of music have reasonable impact over the listening comprehension especially with positive results. Showing interest to listening music depends on individual's interest but almost allof the higher education students agree that they like music in any of the form. Present study result shows a significant impact in listening comprehension with mild music among the tertiary level students. Apart from test achievements, it is found that the students who listened music along with the listening test felt comfortable to attend the listening comprehension test. The students while listening music did not face the tense or serious attitude and that help them increased concentration and cognition towards the listening matter. Present study is an initial attempt with limited participants and musical selection and the same can be extended with learners of various levels and music of different types so as to establish the strategy towards enhancing the listening comprehension of the learners at various level.

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