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## **A Motivational Environment to Improve Intermediate EFL Students' Pronunciation Through the Use of Classic Rock English Songs**

Un ambiente motivador para mejorar la pronunciación de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel intermedio a través del uso de canciones de rock clásico en inglés

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### **Abstract**

This research emerges from the necessity of finding an appropriate and encouraging methodology to teach pronunciation in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Thus, this investigation is aimed to determine a set of suitable techniques that use classic rock English songs to create a motivational environment to improve English pronunciation. The study was carried out with students and teachers of intermediate level of the Language Center (CIDEN) of the Politécnica Estatal del Carchi University (UPEC). This scientific work was developed using a mixed approach following an exploratory sequential design. In the first place an interview was applied to the teachers. Then, based on their answers a survey was elaborated for the students. Finally, to confirm and compare results it was made a direct classroom observation. After tabulating, analyzing and interpreting data, the more important results were that students feel motivated to learn pronunciation when working with classic rock English songs and improve segmental and supra segmental features of pronunciation significantly. The main conclusion is that the most proper techniques to create a motivational environment to improve pronunciation through classic rock English songs are as follows: karaoke, shadowing, songs and rhymes, and performance assessment. It is recommendable that the mentioned techniques are included as part of methodology in the curriculum. In accordance with this study, it was formulated the academic proposal that is an eight weeks workshop based on activities that use the established techniques in order to improve English pronunciation.


*Keywords:* classic rock english songs, techniques, motivational environment, english pronunciation, technology, education

### **Resumen**

La presente investigación nace de la necesidad de encontrar una metodología apropiada y motivadora para enseñar pronunciación en un aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. Así, esta investigación tiene

como objetivo determinar una lista de técnicas adecuadas que usen canciones de rock clásico en inglés para crear un ambiente motivacional para mejorar la pronunciación del inglés. El estudio se llevó a cabo con estudiantes y profesores de nivel intermedio del Centro de Idiomas (CIDEN) de la Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi (UPEC). Este trabajo científico se desarrolló usando un enfoque mixto bajo un diseño exploratorio secuencial. En primer lugar, se aplicó una entrevista a los maestros. Basado en sus respuestas se elaboró una encuesta a los estudiantes. Finalmente, se hizo una observación directa de clase para confirmar y comparar resultados. Después de tabular, analizar e interpretar la información, los resultados más importantes fueron que los estudiantes se sienten motivados a aprender pronunciación cuando se trabaja con canciones de rock clásico en inglés y mejoran significativamente los elementos segmentales y supra segmentales de la pronunciación. La principal conclusión es que las técnicas más oportunas para crear un ambiente motivacional que mejore la pronunciación a través de canciones clásicas de rock en inglés son: karaoke, sombra, canciones y rimas, y evaluación de desempeño. Se recomienda que las técnicas mencionadas sean incluidas como parte de la metodología en el currículo. De acuerdo a este estudio, se formuló la propuesta académica que es un taller de ocho semanas basado en actividades que usan las técnicas establecidas para mejorar la pronunciación en inglés.

*Palabras clave:* canciones de rock clásico en inglés, técnicas, ambiente motivacional, pronunciación del inglés

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## INTRODUCTION

Music is everywhere in life representing an integral part of human culture. The use of music and songs in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom represents an interesting tool as long as it is correctly applied. Howard Gardner's educational theory of multiple intelligences establishes that people having musical intelligence usually tend to use songs to memorize information (Yang, 2011).

Music provides students a fun and relaxing way to acquire, process, and produce English (Lake, 2002). Therefore, music may generate a motivational atmosphere in the EFL classroom. This fact can be quite relevant in teaching-learning process since as Shunk et al. (2008) mentioned in Jones (2009) state, encouraged learners are more likely to be focused during course assignments, use effective learning strategies, and pursue help from others when needed.

Dolman and Spring (2014) mention that language and music are connected in the human brain not only in the way how it behaves, but also in foreign language learning, principally in the learning of foreign language pronunciation. Harmer (2000) cited in Moradi and Shahrokhi (2014) establishes that in spoken English, pronunciation components offer enormous benefit to both production and understanding.

On the other hand, Lurhssen and Larson (2017), in their book *Encyclopedia of Classic rock*, advocate more than two hundred bands belonging to this musical genre which implies an extended number of songs that could be used to apply techniques that contribute to the creation of a motivational environment to improve pronunciation in EFL.

In terms of motivation, Auccahuallpa, Hidalgo, Ortega, and Tamayo (2019) found that Ecuadorian students get inspired in English classes depending on the nature of activity that is presented. For instance, only a minority assured that the use of textbooks is motivating when learning L2. Additionally, more than 50% of students expressed that their interest in learning English is among others to enjoy English music and understand its lyrics. Other study carried out by Cirocki, Honore, Rojas, and Soto (2019) indicates that Ecuadorian teachers generally hearten their pupils by forming a pleasant classroom environment as well as offering them exciting activities; because of that, the search of innovating techniques and methodology is imperative in EFL classroom to encourage students.

Politécnica Estatal del Carchi University (UPEC) and its center of languages Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros y Lenguas Nativas (CIDEN) offer four English level-classes: beginner, pre-intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate. In these four levels, several motivation problems of students have been identified when learning English. Such problems lie on different fields; for example, psychological such as nervousness, anxiety, fear to make mistakes when speaking in front of classmates, etc. Methodological e.g. completing books, master classes, repetitive activities, and so on. Being more specific, it is very frequent to notice the demotivation of students generated when they are not able to correctly pronounce a word or phrase and they are bullied by their partners. From this fact, it raises the idea to use a methodology that motivates learners to pronounce words and phrases regardless their classmates' reaction.

Students of intermediate level are supposed to have an acceptable pronunciation especially with common phonemes of words like the ending tion /ʃən/. However, the reality shows that in some cases this assumption is not true and various apprentices keep committing basic articulation mistakes. To illustrate, the letter u that can have different environments according to the word: /ʌ/ in but, /a/ in buy, /ʊ/ in bull, or /ɪ/ in busy. In this case like in others very similar, the problem is that the students read the word in the exact way as it is read in their own language L1, Spanish in Ecuadorian reality. This is maybe provoked by the interference of L1 when pronouncing L2. Over and above that, other difficulty that students present in pronunciation is that they say utterances in a very flat way which makes that the receptor has

complications to comprehend the real intention of the message. In this situation then, the supra segmental features of the pronunciation are being ignored.

Under these conditions, collecting data, comparing, and connecting all the elements aforementioned; it emerges the uncertainty about how groundbreaking techniques create a motivational environment that allows learners improving their pronunciation. Such techniques will be focused on classic rock English songs.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research work was aimed at achieving four objectives: to know the point of view that teachers have about their students at using classic rock English songs as didactic resource to create a motivational environment to improve pronunciation, find out the level of motivation that students have to pronounce at listening to classic rock English songs, compare these two first facts in the classroom through observation, and select a set of techniques to improve pronunciation based on that.

At having these research goals, the most appropriate approach to carry out this work was the mixed approach because as Chen (2006) in Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2014) mentions, a mixed approach can systematically integrate both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study in order to obtain a more complex panorama of the phenomenon, and it also indicates that these two approaches can be linked so that they conserve their original structure and procedure.

In conclusion, a mixed approach was the most suitable for this investigation since it allowed getting subjective perceptions collected from the qualitative approach from teachers, gathering numeric data from the quantitative approach from students, reinforcing that information with a direct observation in the classroom (quantitative), and based on that, selecting a set of techniques using classic rock English songs to create a motivational environment to improve English pronunciation.

This research was carried out with an Exploratory Sequential Design. According to Creswell et al (2008) in Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2014), this method belongs to the category of mixed approach and it is derivative because the collection and analysis of quantitative data are made based on the qualitative results. Besides, Morse (2010) in Hernández, Fernández, and Baptista (2014) points that this design method is used when the investigator needs to develop a standardized instrument because the existent tools are inadequate or it is not possible to have them. Under those conditions, it was convenient to use an exploratory sequential design of three stages:

- Gather qualitative data and analyze it, through an interview to the teachers in this study.
- Use those results to construct a quantitative instrument, designing a survey to students for this project.
- Administrate the instrument to a probabilistic sample of a population to analyze it, for this research teachers and students of intermediate level from a University in Tulcán were chosen.

Consequently, the method design previously explained fitted perfectly to this investigation since the final goal of this investigation was to suggest a set of techniques to create a motivational environment to improve pronunciation based on teachers' perceptions and students' information concerned in both cases to motivation and pronunciation through classic English songs.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Music and motivation**

Many significant findings were extracted from the research done by Lake (2002) who among other things mentions that repetition, pronunciation, and hand motions linked with an affable attitude can be a potent instrument in language learning. Besides, music connects pitch, rhythm, and syntactical phrasing with a fun and relaxing way in which learners acquire, process, and produces English.

The flexibility of music offers teachers a resource to adapt students' interests, without supposing music talent on the part of the professor or learner. It is not an expensive risk to think that every record can provide many cultural and communication activities that can be adjusted for different levels (Failoni, 1993).

### **Music and pronunciation**

Kang and Williamson (2013) established that the presence of music in any cognitive task can be presented in two different and opposite ways: on the one hand, music can meaningfully obstruct cognitive performance especially when that music is high in complexity and loudness; nonetheless, low complex music (non-verbal; stable tonality; minimal changes in tempo and amplitude) is directly connected with advances in task performance. Particularly, the use of music may help memory for new verbal materials.

## **RESULTS**

### **Teachers' interview**

The first instrument was a questionnaire of five open questions to three teachers of the CIDEN at UPEC. Based on their answers, it could be extracted the next patterns:

#### **Why do you choose classic rock English songs to teach pronunciation rather than other musical genre?**

Teachers use classic rock English songs to teach pronunciation because of its variety, versatility, and motivational power.

#### **How do you notice that your students feel motivated when you use classic rock English songs to teach pronunciation?**

Teachers notice that their pupils feel motivated to learn pronunciation through classic rock English songs because of the expressions in their faces that evidence joy and enthusiasm even in the most timid students.

#### **Which techniques do you use to teach pronunciation with classic rock English songs?**

Teachers indicated that they use some of the techniques mentioned in the literature review which demonstrate that they are much related with the main topic and they know how to apply it in their classes. The main techniques that they use are karaoke, songs and rhymes, performance assessment, and shadowing.

**How do you teach the elements of pronunciation: stress, rhythm, and intonation, by using classic rock English songs?**

Teachers manifested that they take advantage of the time when they are listening to the students' performance to teach supra segmental features of pronunciation. Although in the technique of shadowing, it is implicit.

**How do you assess pronunciation after teaching it using classic rock English songs?**

Teachers specified that all of them use a pronunciation rubric to assess students and include some indicators based on segmental and supra segmental features of it. In all the cases the final evaluation is individual.

**Students' survey**

The second technique applied to gather information was a survey of 8 closed questions to students. The results are shown below.

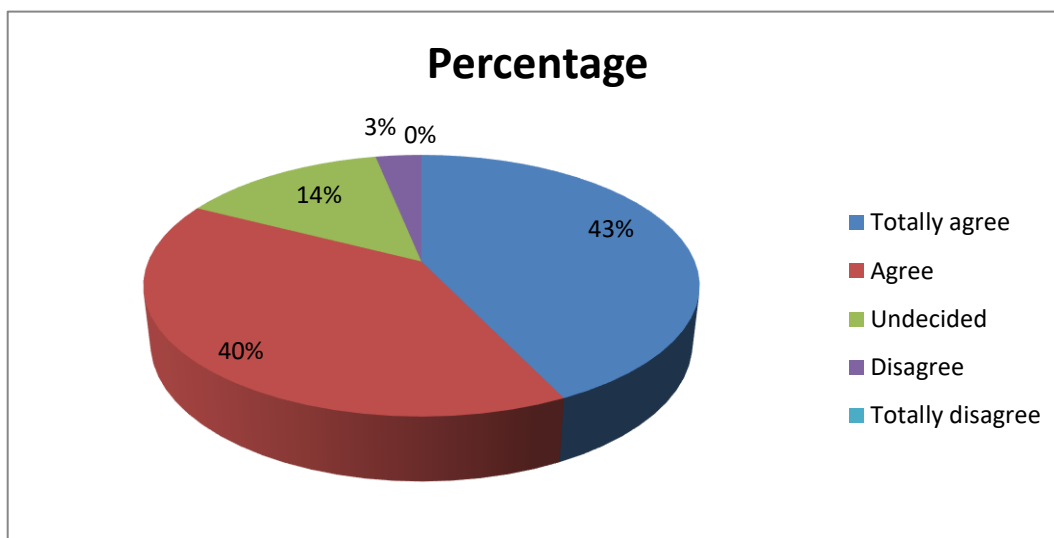
**Table 1**

*Classic English rock and pronunciation*

Question 1	Answer	Number	Percentage
Do you think that classic English rock is a good musical genre to learn pronunciation in the classroom?	Totally agree	27	42,9%
	Agree	25	39,7%
	Undecided	9	14,3%
	Disagree	2	3,2%
	Totally disagree	0	0,0%
	<b>Total</b>		63

**Graphic 1**

*Classic English rock and pronunciation*



Data obtained in the survey reveals that most of the students, 83%, think that classic English rock is a good musical genre to learn pronunciation in the classroom.

The reasons of this statistics could be varied: rock's versatility, rock raises psychological levels of the brain, provoke emotions to the heart, and encourage moving the body.

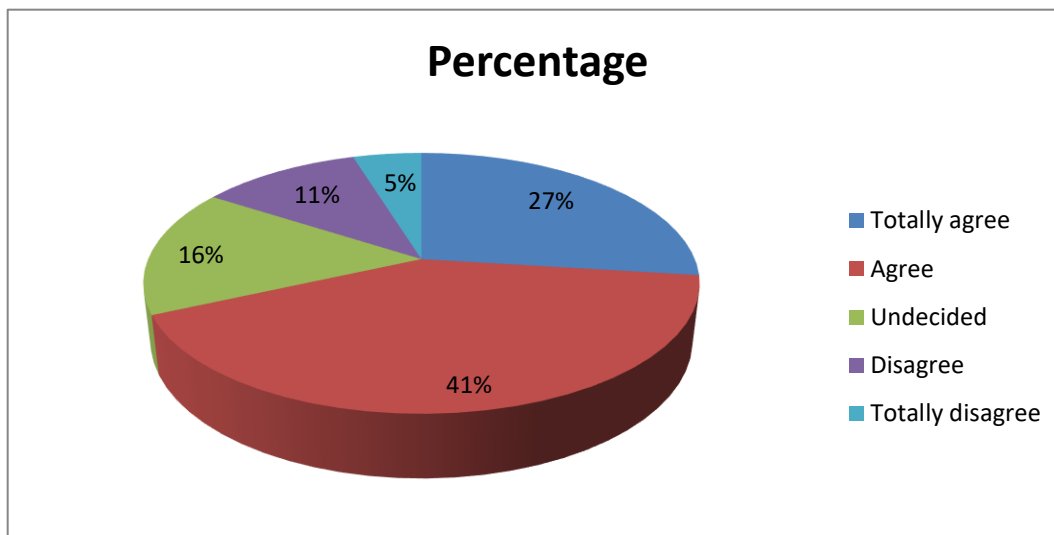
**Table 2**

*Another musical genre to learn pronunciation*

Question 2	Answer	Number	Percentage
Would you prefer another musical genre instead of Classic English Rock to learn pronunciation?	Totally agree	17	27,0%
	Agree	26	41,3%
	Undecided	10	15,9%
	Disagree	7	11,1%
	Totally disagree	3	4,8%
	<b>Total</b>		63

**Graphic 2**

*Another musical genre to learn pronunciation*



Based on the results acquired in the survey, it can be evidenced that 68% of learners would prefer another musical genre instead of classic English rock to learn pronunciation.

This can be due to students' preferences or interests. However, this can be solved considering the great variety of musical genres derived from rock such as blues rock, folk rock, hard rock, swamp rock, acid rock, psychedelic rock, and pop rock.

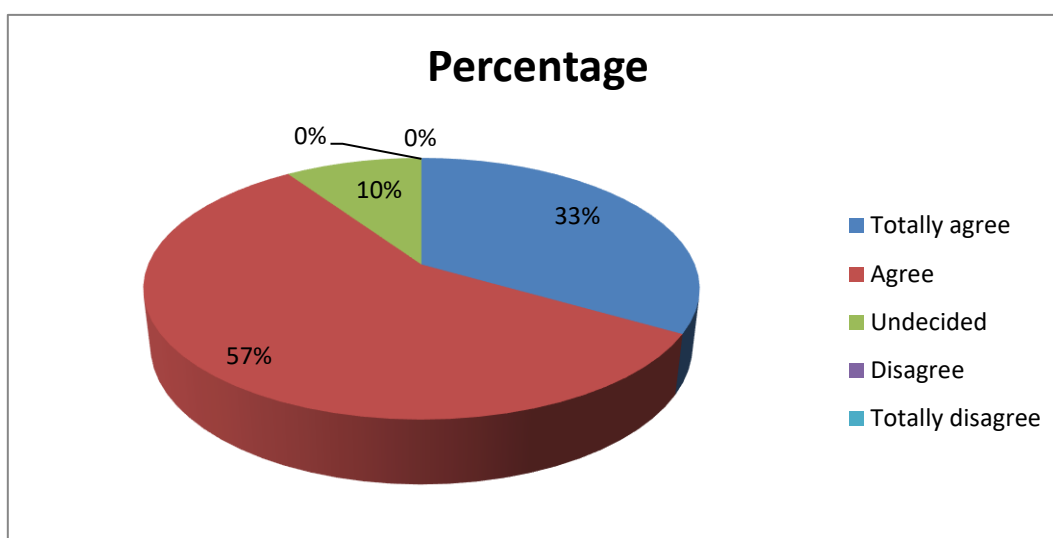
**Table 3**

*Motivation, pronunciation and classic rock English songs*

Question 3	Answer	Number	Percentage
Do you feel motivated at learning pronunciation through classic rock English songs?	Totally agree	21	33,3%
	Agree	36	57,1%
	Undecided	6	9,5%
	Disagree	0	0,0%
	Totally disagree	0	0,0%
	<b>Total</b>		63

**Graphic 3**

*Motivation, pronunciation and classic rock English songs*



According to the data collected in the survey, it can be concluded that the majority of scholars, 90%, feel motivated at learning pronunciation through classic rock English songs.

Therefore, this represents an advantage since music connects pitch, rhythm, and syntactical phrasing with a fun and relaxing way in which learners acquire, process, and produces English.

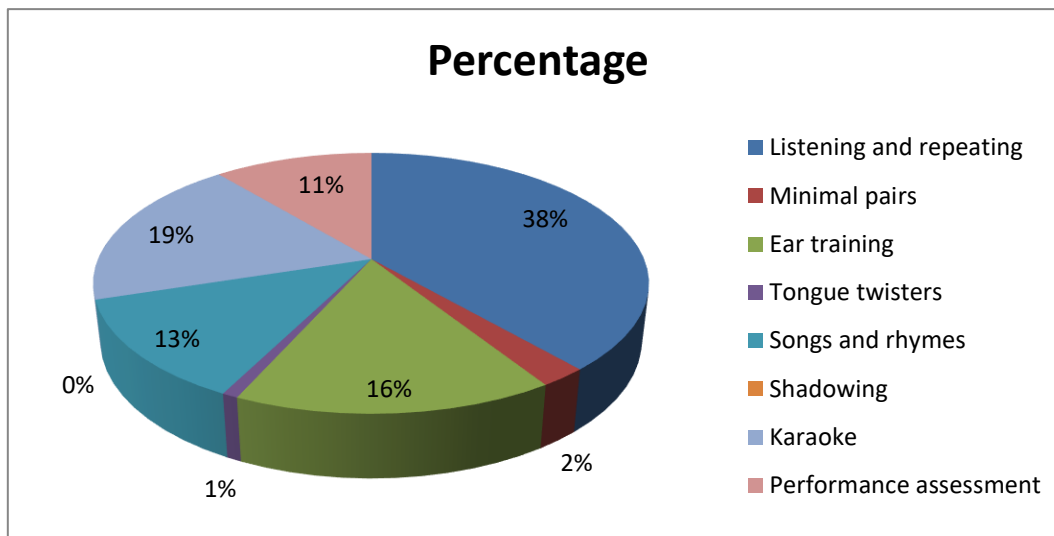
**Table 4**

*Techniques to teach pronunciation*

Question 4	Answer	Number	Percentage
Which of the next techniques does your teacher use to teach pronunciation through classic rock English songs?	Listening and repeating	49	38,6%
	Minimal pairs	3	2,4%
	Ear training	20	15,7%
	Tongue twisters	1	0,8%
	Songs and rhymes	16	12,6%
	Shadowing	0	0,0%
	Karaoke	24	18,9%
	Performance assessment	14	11,0%
	<b>Total</b>		127

**Graphic 4**

*Techniques to teach pronunciation*



Through the register of results of the survey, it is proved that the most applied technique by teachers to teach pronunciation through Classic Rock English songs is Listening and repeating with a 38%, followed by Karaoke (19%), and Ear training (16%). On the other hand, techniques such as Songs and rhymes and Performance assessment have the same percentage practically, 13% and 11% respectively. Finally, according to the students, techniques like Minimal pairs, Tongue twisters and Shadowing are null basically.

Despite Listening and repeating is seen as a traditional technique to teach pronunciation, it can be more interesting using songs, interactive boards, or internet activities. On the other hand, although Karaoke can be repetitive and boring to have fun, accompanied with activities and tasks, it could also be the primary point to carry more original activities into the classroom without abandoning communicative, intellectual and social factors. Songs and rhymes are more suitable for younger learners; however, they can be used for all age groups since they are very motivational. The main feature in Performance assessment is the fact that it provides teachers a more accuracy perspective of how much apprentices are learning (individually). Perhaps Shadowing could be integrated in this list of techniques since here students emulate a presented speech stimulus as closely and fast as possible.

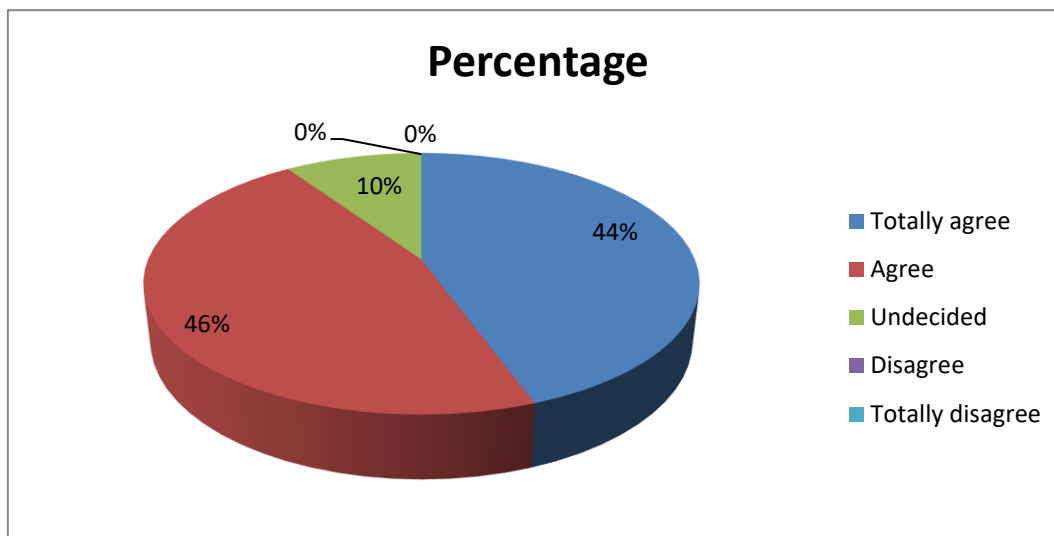
**Table 5**

*Language elements development*

Question 5	Answer	Number	Percentage
Do you believe that through the use of classic rock English songs in the classroom, you develop the language elements: stress, rhythm, and intonation?	Totally agree	28	44,4%
	Agree	29	46,0%
	Undecided	6	9,5%
	Disagree	0	0,0%
	Totally disagree	0	0,0%
	<b>Total</b>		63

**Graphic 5**

*Language elements development*



The information clearly shows that practically all the students, 90%, believe that through the use of classic rock English songs in the classroom, they develop the language elements: stress, rhythm, and intonation.

These statistics represent a wide positive point in terms of pronunciation because stress often determines the intention of the speaker when transmitting a message, rhythm deals with speed and cadence in utterances, and being the music of the language, intonation sometimes defines the purpose of the speaker's utterance.

**DISCUSSION**

Results showed that most of the students think that classic English rock is a good musical genre to learn pronunciation in the classroom and they are commonly related to the song that is going to be presented to teach pronunciation in the class. Teachers use classic rock English songs to teach pronunciation because of its variety, versatility, and motivational power. These findings are aligned with the studies of Campbell and Brody (2007) who assure that rock's versatility makes of this musical category a great tool to work in an EFL classroom.

The majority of scholars feel motivated at learning pronunciation through classic rock English songs at the beginning and at the end of the technique proposed by the teacher. Teachers realize that their pupils feel encouraged to learn pronunciation with this kind of songs because of the expressions in their faces that evidence joy and enthusiasm even in the shyest students. These results are comparable with Campbell and Brody's (2007) in which it is established that rock increases psychological levels of the brain, incite emotions to the heart, and motivate body movement like in TPR theory. Regarding TPR, when using music to learn pronunciation, learners associate what they listen to with physical actions performing the lyrics of the song and retelling the lyrics at the same time. Moreover, in other study Villalobos (2008) exposes that learning can be more pleasant and motivating in an EFL through the use of English songs and at the same time, students acquire the target language and feel relaxed in a comforting environment.

Pupils affirmed that the main techniques used by their professor to teach pronunciation with classic rock English songs are listening and repeating, karaoke, and ear training. Meanwhile, the techniques

that teachers used in the classes were songs and rhymes, shadowing, and performance assessment. This contradiction between learners and teachers might be because students ignore the name of the techniques or teachers never mentioned them. The similarities of these findings with previous studies are as follows: Reid (2016) suggests listening and repeating, ear training, songs and rhymes, and shadowing as techniques that can be used to teach pronunciation through music in the class. Besides, Rengifo (2009) recommends karaoke as tool to improve pronunciation in the students. Finally, beyond being a technique, Yulia (2018) indicates that performance assessment is an alternative to assess pronunciation as part of oral sub-skills.

In terms of stress, rhythm, and intonation, apprentices' pronunciation improves with the use of classic rock English songs. Furthermore, teachers guaranteed that they teach such supra segmental features of pronunciation when listening to the students' performance. They do it in a way to provide immediate feedback. These discoveries are analogous with Moradi and Shahrokhi's (2014) in which it found that music positively influences on pronunciation, and supra segmental articulation of learners who have been taught by songs improves considerably in front of those who have been taught without them.

Most of the teachers, 88%, use a rubric to evaluate students' pronunciation after teaching and pronouncing through classic rock English songs because they consider this as the most appropriate tool to do it. However, results demonstrate that students feel totally uncomfortable with this assessment tool. These outcomes are related to the studies developed by Isaacs (2005) who mentions that in pronunciation teaching and testing, the traditional emphasis on accuracy and goal of attaining native-like pronunciation has been considered as inappropriate and questionable for foreign language learners. This fact is supported by Yulia (2018) who affirms that it is not suitable if language learners are assessed using paper-and-pencil test. A direct testing will be more practical since learners are given a task to prove what they know and can do in terms of pronunciation skill. To measure whether students can put their comprehensive pronunciation mastery into practice, they are required to show some performances to display their understanding of what constitutes good pronunciation.

## **CONCLUSION**

By analyzing teachers and students' perceptions about the use of classic rock English songs to create a motivational environment to improve pronunciation and by observing some techniques applied in an EFL classroom, it can be concluded that:

Teachers choose classic rock English songs to teach pronunciation in the EFL classroom because of its diversity, flexibility and motivational influence. According to them, students feel highly encouraged when learning pronunciation through classic rock English songs. They declare that supra segmental features of pronunciation can be taught when assessing learners individually by using a rubric. The techniques commonly used by teachers with classic rock English songs to teach pronunciation are karaoke, songs and rhymes, performance assessment, and shadowing.

Students feel widely motivated at learning pronunciation through classic rock English songs at the beginning and at the end of the class. However, they would rather work with a different musical genre instead. Pupils confirmed that their teachers use a rubric to evaluate pronunciation and both segmental and supra segmental elements of pronunciation are improved by using this kind of songs. According to the apprentices, the most usual techniques employed by teachers to teach pronunciation with classic rock English songs are listening and repeating, karaoke, ear training, performance assessment and songs and rhymes.

Classroom observation demonstrated that students feel motivated at learning pronunciation with classic rock English songs. The techniques used with this musical genre were shadowing, songs and rhymes, and performance assessment. Although through these techniques proposed by the teachers,

undergraduates develop segmental and supra segmental features of pronunciation, they would prefer to work with others. Besides, learners do not show any comfort at being evaluating with a rubric.

The most suitable techniques to create a motivational environment to improve pronunciation in an EFL classroom with classic rock English songs are karaoke, shadowing, songs and rhymes, and performance assessment. Other techniques such as listening and repeating and ear training are very limited and could be incorporated as part of the techniques previously cited.

Based on the conclusions established in this research, it should consider the following suggestions to future studies and to include them in the methodological field of EFL teaching-learning process:

Teachers should take advantage of the characteristics of classic rock English songs to motivate students to practice pronunciation through appropriate techniques and implement assessment tools to evaluate them in a fair-minded and accurate way. Besides, they need to work tougher in creating activities to develop segmental features of pronunciation. Future investigators should collect information from a larger number of teachers (the totality of an English area of an educational institution) in order the study has more reliability.

Despite classic rock is a wide musical genre and it has numerous sub categories, it would be pertinent to carry out other studies regarding a different musical variety such as pop, ballads, rap, and so on depending on the main characteristics of the learners: age, level, background, and sex. In addition, the methodological field of an EFL class can be enriched by using the techniques proposed in this research condensed in a unique workshop. Thus, each technique would not work in isolation but it could be complemented by another technique according to the necessities of the class.

Teachers should look for other options to assess students since they do not feel comfortable at being evaluated with a rubric. Perhaps peer assessment or self-assessment could be appropriate alternatives to do it. As another option, teachers could indicate their pupils the rubric that is going to be used to evaluate them in detail at the beginning of the course in order to provide them a clear explanation of the elements considered in the rubric. Finally, it can be included practice performances of pronunciation to reduce the psychological impact that the student can have at being assessing with a rubric. Based on this study, new researchers can explore assessment tools of pronunciation to diminish psychological impact in EFL learners.

Karaoke, shadowing, songs and rhymes, and performance assessment are techniques that should be included as part of methodology in the curriculum to teach pronunciation through the use of classic rock English songs. Such techniques should be studied by teachers in order for them to acquire sufficient knowledge to apply them correctly in EFL classes. Future investigators can study these techniques to find out other uses in which they can be applied in EFL classes, for instance, grammar, vocabulary, or functions.

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