

Are We Listening? Student Reflections on the Use of Music in the English Language Classroom

「しっかり聴いているか？」英語授業における音楽使用に関する学生の反応

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アブストラクト

この定量的研究は、外国語としての英語（EFL）における音楽の効用を確かめる為に行われたものである。2クラスの1年生次女子大学生向けビジネスマネジメントクラス（およそ N=21 N=25の成員）及び2クラスの英語教育授業（1年生のグループ（N=19）、そして2年生のグループ（N=33））が調査に参加した。リッカート尺度を用いた10個の質問が、学生が英語を授業で学ぶ際に歌を使うことに対してどう感じるかを測る指標として用いられた。質問の例としては、学生が音楽を使ったことで楽しさを感じたか、音楽によるリスニング能力と発音能力の向上、音楽が授業に対するモチベーションを上げるか、授業で使われた音楽が、学生が授業外で歌を練習するきっかけになるか、音楽が外国文化を理解する助けになるか、授業中音楽を勉強するベストのタイミングはいつか、90分のEFL授業のうち何分学生は音楽を勉強したいかといったものだった。結果は、この調査に参加した殆どの日本の大学生が、授業に英語の歌を使用することに全面的に賛成を示すものとなった。彼らは、教師が音楽活動をおよそ19分程度授業で行うことを好ましいとするものであった。

Key Words : music EFL second language proficiency
 motivation pronunciation cultural understanding

Introduction

Using music as a teaching tool in the foreign language classroom remains a debatable topic in second language acquisition pedagogy. Some teachers remain hesitant about including music in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom since they tend to associate it with cloze activities which solely focus on listening comprehension. However, other language educators utilize music during class to develop vocabulary, make efforts to improve students' pronunciation, and create better strategies for listening comprehension. These teachers use both pre-listening and post-listening strategies to help usher students into the musical content. In this qualitative study, the primary purpose was to determine the efficacy of using music in the EFL classroom based on students' perspective and insight. In particular, the key

components this study attempted to ascertain were: 1) How do students feel about using music as a learning tool? In other words, did it motivate them to want to learn more English? 2) Does music improve students listening? 3) How much class time should teachers devote toward using music in an EFL class?

Also, this study looked at whether or not songs helped improve students' pronunciation. Additionally, the survey asked students if they were more apt to practice classroom songs outside of class. This is cogent because using songs in class that are somewhat known by students likely raises motivation to practice English beyond the walls of the classroom. Since this study was conducted in Japan—where karaoke is so prevalent—choosing songs that students can then find when they get together to sing songs with friends is also a major consideration.

Whether the reader uses music in class or not, EFL educators will benefit from the seeing the results of this study. It will help those using music in the classroom better pinpoint the ideal times to introduce songs and determine how long of a time students prefer to study songs in class. For those English language teachers that are reluctant about using songs in class, perhaps this paper will shed a more positive light on the subject. The results of the study undeniably support the notion that English language students have a very strong desire to learn from songs during class.

Background

What is it about music that makes us tap a toe or clap our hands? This could be predicated on an innate ability by human beings to simultaneously comprehend and produce language (Patel, 2010). We have a capacity to process music through rhythm or a beat and then do our best to recreate it. Murphey (1992) noted that one of the reasons music has such a profound effect on us is that it is highly memorable. Also, music can possess a strong emotional component for humans. This is likely a heightened phenomenon for young people who also happen to be pop music fans (Moi, 2003). Gugliemino's (1986) research mirrored Krashen's (1982) thesis which postulated that using music in class helped lower students' anxiety level, created more self-confidence, and increased students' motivation. This state of relaxed receptivity while listening to music is in tune with students' emotional state and helps put them in a better mood. For language teachers based in Japan, who are often confronted with students that are beaten down from years of grammar-translation, creating an environment that promotes a relaxed atmosphere where students are more receptive to learning is indeed music to our ears.

Music as a medium offers a means to both enhance and reinforce communication in the EFL classroom (Israel, 2013). Songs provide a sense of variety in class and are usually viewed

as an enjoyable activity. Singing songs together in class promotes a sense of harmony with classmates and also puts everyone on task aiming for a common goal. While listening to music, students strive to stay on key while keeping up with the rhythm of the song. For a group-oriented culture such as Japan, music presents itself as an ideal classroom activity.

More recent discoveries by Chobert and Besson (2013) found there is growing evidence that music and language share neural resources for processing prosody. Therefore, educators can surmise that using music to teach stress and intonation are symbiotic for brain activity and learning. By incorporating music into the foreign language classroom, students are placed in a more relaxed state of consciousness so pronunciation techniques can be learned more readily. Another positive aspect of music training is that it encourages sustained attention control and fosters use of memory to recall words and lyrics (Ludke, Ferreira, and Overy, 2014). This emphasis to increase verbal working memory is believed to correlate into students having higher concentration levels in the L2 classroom. In today's classroom where students surreptitiously check their smartphones during class, employing music in the language classroom appears to be an effective way to counteract this growing social phenomenon of multitasking.

On a macro level, Tani-Fukuchi (2005) revealed that Japanese students exhibited a positive overall learning experience when teachers used music in the foreign language classroom. Students walked away from the classroom with a more favorable attitude toward English. Zeromskaite (2014) concluded that both phonological and reading ability improved in research groups when examining the effects of subjects exposed to music in class. In this case, participants that used music in class simultaneously improved their reading levels. Based on these findings, we can see an obvious pattern here. Using songs in class places students in a better mental state which raises their ability to process and learn a foreign language.

Research Method

For this paper, a bilingual student questionnaire was used during the penultimate lesson of a 15-week semester occurring at the end of the academic school year. In the case of the Japanese university system, the research for this study was conducted in mid-January. As a result, students that participated were quite familiar with the teachers' preferred method of using music for the final 15 minutes of class time. Based on teacher log notes, music was used for approximately sixty-five percent of the classes throughout each semester. Some lessons music was not used at all while other times music was used for several weeks in a row at the end of English language class.

Subjects were comprised from two groups at two different universities located in central Japan. Lessons for all participants were for 90 minutes and each class met once a week. All of

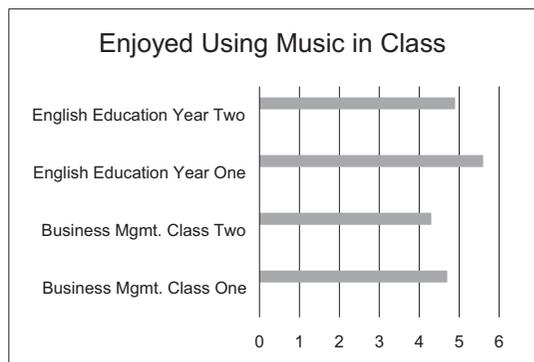
the classes were titled as communicative English courses. The first group consisted of two classes of first year university students studying business management at a women’s university. The second group also consisted of two classes, however, these students were first and second year university English education majors. Class sizes for the business management majors were numbered at approximately 21 and 25 students respectively while the first-year English education majors consisted of 19 students and the second-year students totaled 33 students. All together, the business English students at the women’s university equaled 46 students (N=46) and the English education majors were slightly higher with 52 students (N=52).

A series of 10 questions using a Likert scale were used for this research project to better gauge students’ feelings, motivation, and perceived efficacy of utilizing music in the EFL classroom. A complete list of the survey questions used for this study appears in appendix A at the end of this paper. Also, upon completion of the student survey, space was provided for students to write open-ended comments regarding using music in the EFL classroom. A class-by-class list for this open-ended question is labeled as groups A, B, C, and D and appears in Appendix B at the end of this paper.

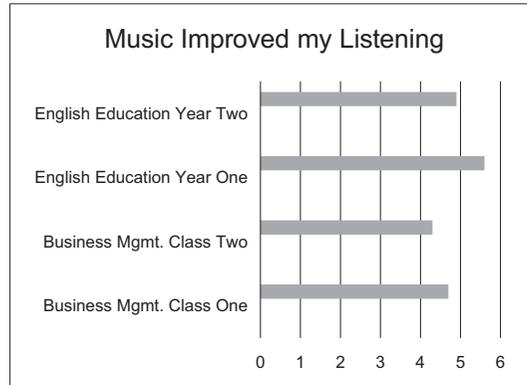
Results

For this section, a pair of graphs will show the results for the two female business management students along with the two coeducational English education majors. Question number one asked if students enjoyed using music and song lyrics to learn English in class.

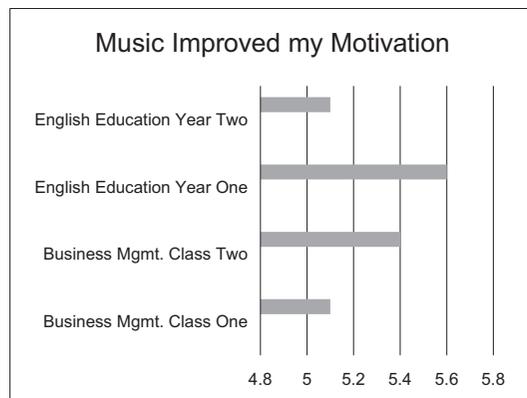
The two business management classes produced the exact same mean score of 5.2 for this question while the first-year English education majors reported a mean of 5.9 with the second-year students lower at 5.3. Clearly the first-year English education majors overwhelmingly enjoyed using music and song lyrics in class. Their scores were very close to 6.0 which correlated to the category of strongly agree in the questionnaire.



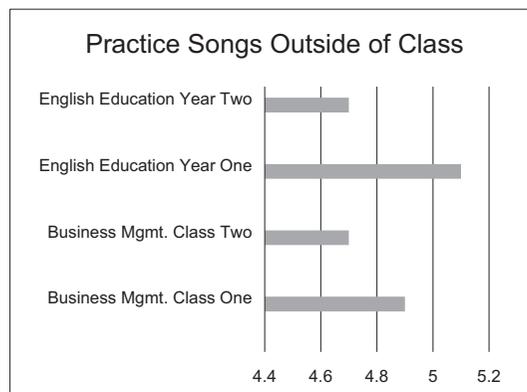
The second question asked if using songs in class improved students listening ability. Results for this question were as follows: The two business management classes had a mean score of 5.1 and 5.3 for this question while the first-year English education majors had a mean score of 5.4 with the second-year students producing a mean of 5.1. It was notable to see that second-year students did not feel as strongly as the freshmen class.



For the third question which asked if using music to study English in class improved students' motivation, the business management classes had a mean of 5.1 and 5.4. Meanwhile, the first-year English education majors ranked this question higher with a mean of 5.6 while the second-year students did not feel that music was quite so important regarding their motivation as the class mean hovered at 5.1.



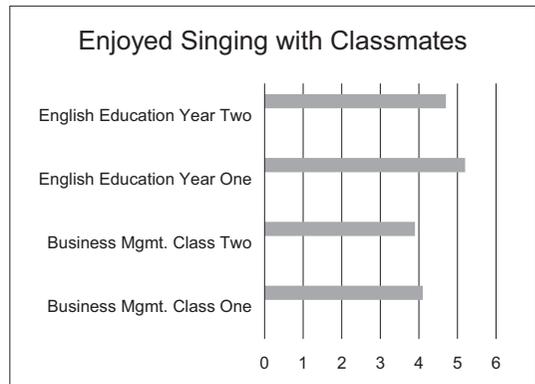
The fourth question inquired whether learning music in class caused students to practice songs outside of class. Here, the business management participants ranked this higher with mean scores of 4.9 and 4.7 respectively. The first-year English education majors ranked this higher with at a 5.1 mean with the second-year students paralleling the business management majors with a mean of 4.7.



After practicing listening and pronunciation activities using music in class, students sing the song together as part of the classroom activity. Therefore, question number five tried to

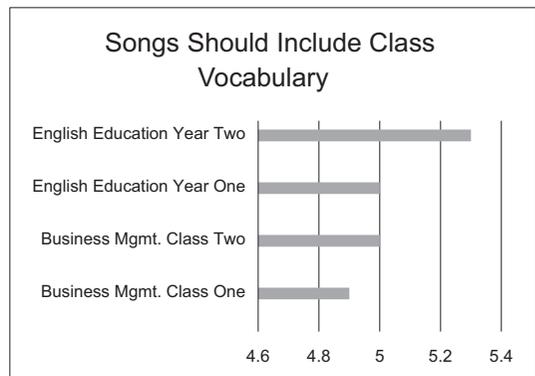
ascertain whether students actually enjoy singing songs together in class with their classmates.

Results for the women business management majors yielded mean scores of 4.7 and 4.3. The English education majors reported much different results. These participants produced means scores of 5.6 for the freshmen and 4.9 for the second-year students. Education majors appear to have less inhibitions singing along with classmates than the female non-English majors.



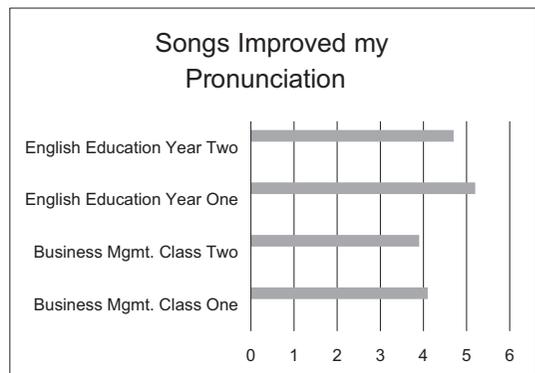
One complaint I have often fielded from teachers who are reluctant to include music into EFL lessons is that songs are unable to recycle classroom vocabulary and phrases. Although this seems to be a valid point, the next question addressed this issue. It queried students' opinions on this subject by asking if it is important that songs used in language classroom include vocabulary learned in class.

For question six, student results were rather high for all participants in the study. The business management majors displayed mean scores of 4.9 and 5.0 while the English education major averages were 5.0 and 5.3.

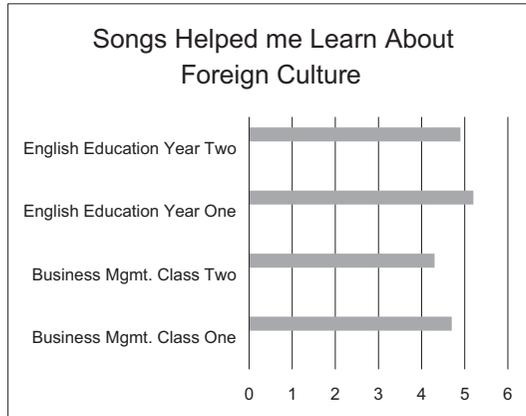


Question seven asked students if learning songs in class helped improve their pronunciation. Results for this question showed a wide degree of variance.

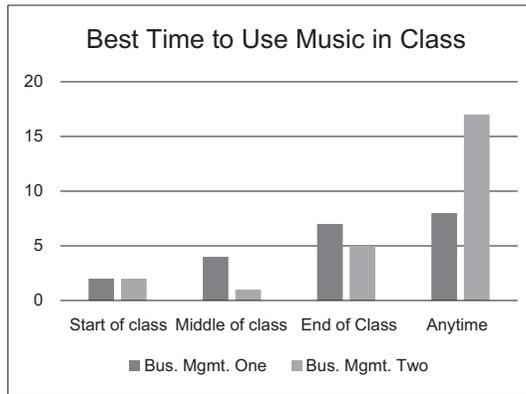
The business management students showed an average of 4.0 with one class mean at 4.1 and the other at 3.9. For the English education majors, these students felt more strongly that using songs in class improved their pronunciation with mean scores of 5.2 for the freshmen class and 4.7 for the sophomore class.



Question eight asked students if songs helped them better understand foreign culture. The business management participants showed a lower average for this question with scores of 4.7 and 4.3 compared to the English education majors that came in higher with averages of 5.2 and 4.9.

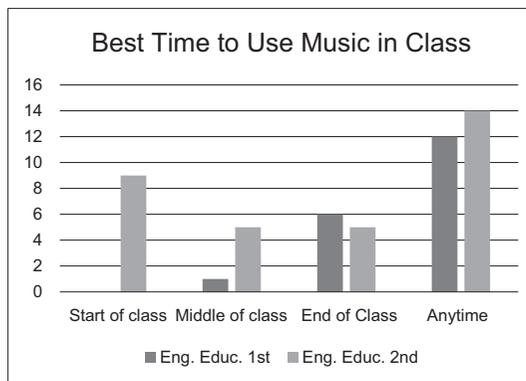


Question nine asked students which part of the 90-minute period is the best time to study music in class. This graph shows the results for the female business management students. For this set of data, the first class showed a more even distribution with four respondents choosing the middle of class for music. However, the second class had only one student choose that time slot.



time slot. More students overall chose the category of anytime with eight from the first class and 17 in the second class. This represented a total of 25 respondents or 53% of the business management students who felt that anytime is suitable for using music during class.

For the first-year English education majors, the averages were even higher with 63%—or 12 out of 19 respondents—reporting that anytime is fine to use music in class. The second-year students were even higher with 14 students choosing anytime. As a result, 26—or exactly half—of the English education majors reported that anytime is suitable for using music in

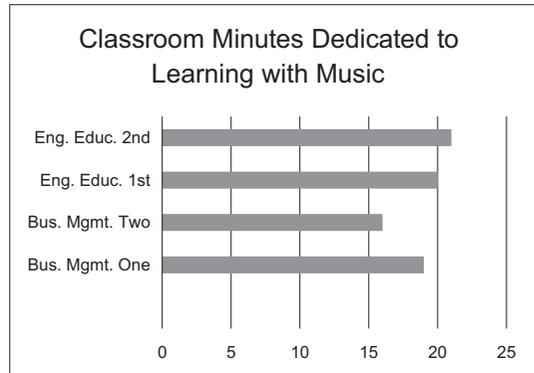


class. More than the other three groups in this study, these second-year students displayed a higher percentage of utilizing music at the beginning of class at 27%—9 out of 33 respon-

dents—which will be discussed in the next section of the paper.

The last question asked students how much time out of a 90-minute class should be dedicated to learning English with music. The female business management students chose a total of 19 minutes for one class with the other class slightly lower at 16 minutes.

As a group, the business management students produced an average of 17.5 minutes. With the English education majors, the results were higher as first-year students chose 20 minutes of classroom time and the second-year students selected 21 minutes of a 90-minute lesson. This data indicates



that the English education majors prefer that 22% of a 90-minute lesson utilize music as a learning tool in class. Some EFL teachers may be surprised with these results, but education majors for these two classes would like lessons to have at least 20 minutes of music activities.

The open-ended question produced many positive comments about using music and classroom feedback in general. Appendix B lists respondents’ comments under each of the classes in the study. Although comments were welcome in either English or Japanese, respondents only wrote in English and participation level was nil for the one of the business management classes.

Discussion

Readers can surmise that the first-year English education majors felt very positive about using music in class. This group chose the most responses for the strongly agree category used in the questionnaire. More specifically, the freshmen education majors believed that music improved both their listening and pronunciation and they also enjoyed singing songs with their classmates. The second-year English education students’ answers were more reserved about using music in class. While this group enjoyed using music, they did not harbor feelings that music motivated them to study more English. Although one could argue that these students are already motivated and this does not necessarily apply to them. Furthermore, this group did not show a high rate of practicing songs outside of class. Readers should note that many of these same students took the author’s class during their first year of university. Therefore, their answers to this question may have been quite honest. They enjoy using music in class, but usually do not practice songs outside of school. Yet, the second-year students echoed the answers provided by the freshmen English education majors indicating that music in class

helped them better understand foreign culture. A caveat should be mentioned pertaining to this question since the author often makes a point of explaining cultural understanding when using songs in class.

Another question where the second-year education students seemed more discerning than the rest of the participants was question six. Respondents to this question were more adamant that songs introduced in the classroom should include or recycle vocabulary from the textbook or class materials. Upon further reflection, the author wonders about the validity of this question. It is possible that it plants a seed in the minds of respondents. In simple terms, it represents somewhat of a lead-in question. In this case, education majors may have picked up on this nuance and chose a higher choice because they perceived it as a formidable teaching approach. This classroom of future educators was led to believe that choosing a song which recycled words and phrases learned in class is a sought after teaching approach.

One shortcoming of this study is that the questionnaire did not categorize the English education majors into male and female subjects. Doing so may have provided a glimpse into specific preferences regarding music used in class based on possible differences between men and women. However, the data obtained from this study does provide many significant findings which can provide teachers with the knowledge to plan EFL curriculum and create better syllabus design.

Conclusion

This qualitative study confirmed previous research whereby students believe that music should be an integral part of the foreign language classroom. As alluded to in the background section, this is likely because—from the students' perspective—music is considered to be fun and perhaps viewed as an escape from the rigors of academic life. For English language teachers, this study showed that students preference is to study music for nearly 20 minutes of class time. The actual time to introduce music activities during class—at the beginning of class, the middle portion, or at the end of class—did not seem to matter all that much according to the student participants. However, the author still subscribes to an anecdotal theory that using music at the end of class has numerous benefits. First and foremost is that students tend to view it as a reward for studying hard during class on that day.

Most importantly for EFL educators, teaching students to sing a song in class has the potential to be an empowering experience which puts students in a good frame of mind. It can provide the stimulus that makes students leave the classroom with a smile on their face. Using music as a language learning tool can lower some students' aversion toward studying English and may serve to motivate others to study outside of class. Additionally, using music in class can be fulfilling for teachers as well. Seeing students on task during listening activities and

then singing together is a gratifying experience for EFL educators. Based on the findings of this qualitative study, the author believes that music is a unifying experience that taps into student emotion and is well worth incorporating into even the lowest level of English classes.

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APPENDIX A

A Questionnaire About Using Music in Communicative English Class

Please circle only one answer for each question.

1. **I enjoy using music and song lyrics to learn English in class.**

英語の授業で英語の歌及び歌詞を使って学ぶのは楽しい。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
全く同意できない	同意できない	やや同意できない	やや同意できる	同意できる	非常に同意できる

2. **Using songs in class helps improve my listening ability.**

音楽を使った授業はリスニング能力向上に役立つ。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. **Using western pop music increases my motivation.**

西洋のポップミュージックを使った授業はモチベーションが上がる。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. **If I learn an English song in class, I try to practice it outside of class.**

英語の歌を習ったら、授業以外でも練習する気持ちがわく。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. **I enjoy singing the song together with my classmates in class.**

授業でクラスメートと一緒に英語の歌を歌うのは楽しい。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. **It is important that songs use vocabulary we learned in class (例: from our textbooks).**

歌の中に授業で習った語彙のあることは重要です。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. **The songs we used in class helped improve my pronunciation.**

授業で学んだ洋楽で発音がよくなった。

1	2	3	4	5	6
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. The songs we used in class helped me understand more about foreign culture.

授業で洋楽を学ぶと外国文化がより理解できる。

- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly | Slightly Agree | Agree | Strongly Agree |

9. When is the best time to study music in class?

授業の中で、音楽を取り入れるのはいつが一番いい時間帯ですか？

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| At the start of class
授業の最初 | In the middle of class
授業の真ん中 | Near the end of class
授業の最後 | Any time is OK
いつでも大丈夫 |

10. In a 90 minute English class, how many minutes would you like to study using music?

_____分 90分の授業時間のうち、何分くらい音楽を使うのが一番良いと思いますか？

Do you have any comments or suggestions about music in class? (日本語でも書いてください)

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

APPENDIX B

Open-Ended Question Results

<i>GROUP A</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>
Business Management – 1 st Class	I became interested in western music.
	Famous artists are best.
	I enjoyed the classes we used music.
	Very enjoyable.
	I enjoy your class.
	Very enjoyable.
	Thank you!!

<i>GROUP B</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>
Business Management – 2 nd Class	No comments.

<i>GROUP C</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>
English Education – 1 st Year	I like singing a song in class, because I can learn a lot of vocabulary and about foreign culture.
	This class is very fun. If I become a teacher, I try to sing a song, and learning something. Thank you.
	I suggest that you ask your students what song they want to know. And who is their favorite singer.
	I enjoyed listening to music and learning vocabulary.

<i>GROUP D</i>	<i>COMMENTS</i>
English Education – 2 nd Year	I think it is good to play music when student do English activity.
	enjoy fun music
	It is better to sing a English song rather than to fill in blanks of lyrics.
	Music is fun. So music should be used.
	It is very fun!
	This class is very fun! Thank you!

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