Using songs to Familiarize Adult students with pronunciation in ESL classroom.

Uso de canciones para familiarizar a los alumnos adultos con pronunciación en el aula de ESL.

Autores:

Minchala Campoverde, Luis Giovanny
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CUENCA
Maestrante de la Maestría en Enseñanza de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera
Cuenca – Ecuador

lgminchalac41@est.ucacue.edu.ec

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7065-5278

Argudo Garzón, Antonio Lenín
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CUENCA
Coordinador Académico del Centro de Idiomas
Cuenca – Ecuador

alargudog@ucacue.edu.ec

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4741-5935

Resumen

La lengua inglesa se ha enseñado habitualmente como una asignatura teórica porque la lengua es un ser vivo que cambia a diario a través de la muerte y acuñación de palabras y reglas gramaticales. Por lo tanto, debe enseñarse de forma pragmática como si se enseñara un arte, un oficio o tal vez un deporte de campo para que pueda aplicarse en la vida real. Por lo tanto, es necesario incorporar la enseñanza de la pronunciación para mejorar la productividad en la clase de enseñanza de inglés. El propósito de esta investigación es analizar el mejoramiento de la pronunciación teniendo como herramienta crítica el uso de canciones que contengan elementos pedagógicos y fonológicos en un grupo de estudiantes adultos. Este proyecto de investigación está dirigido a estudiantes de básica superior y del bachillerato intensivo del Colegio "Luis Cordero". Se diseñaron diferentes actividades orales y escritas para introducir y familiarizar a los estudiantes con los símbolos de pronunciación, seguidos de la mímica para la articulación y las reglas básicas para la producción de sonidos del idioma inglés. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes mejoraron sus habilidades de pronunciación y la motivación para aprender Inglés como segunda lengua.

Palabras claves: Educación, Inglés, Pronunciación, Canciones, Educación para adultos

Abstract

English language has usually been taught as a theoretical subject because language is a living thing that changes daily through the death and coinage of words and grammatical rules. Therefore, it should be taught pragmatically as if teaching an art, a craft or perhaps a field sport so that it can be applied in real life. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate the teaching of pronunciation to improve productivity in the English teaching classroom. The purpose of this research is to analyze the improvement of pronunciation having as a critical tool the use of songs containing pedagogical and phonological elements in a group of adult learners. This research project is aimed at high school and intensive high school students of the "Luis Cordero" School. Different oral and written activities were designed to introduce and familiarize students with pronunciation symbols, followed by mimicry for articulation and basic rules for the production of English language sounds. The results showed that the students improved their pronunciation skills and motivation to learn English as a second language.

Keywords: Education, English, Pronunciation, Songs, Adult education

Introduction

It has been a habit in adults' education to disregard the inclusion of pronunciation in the English Language classroom. In this sense, it is imperative to change the philosophy and the way of thinking of English teachers responsible for adult instruction. ESL adult learners in High School is a research context that is scarcely studied in the Ecuadorian educational system, despite having rich experiences and insights. Moreover, ESL high school adult learners find communication difficult since they are coming back to study, having almost no English background or rudimentary knowledge. In this particular study, pronunciation was selected as the main variable since the first approach to the case study group showed they feel frustrated when trying to pronounce English words. Besides using songs to improve pronunciation is a widely appreciated tool among ESL teachers, but it is usually applied to kids; its effect on ESL high school adults is something that has limited literature.

In consequence, this research addressed the effect of using songs on ESL adult students' ESL classrooms. The use of music, in general, and specifically of a selected group of songs for adults, offer this type of learner excellent lexicon, grammar, content, message, and form, enough to motivate and hold the attention in the classroom. In the same way, a teacher must consider the popularity rate of the songs, the gender, and even the rhythm. In so doing, adult learners raise their interest and self-confidence in trying to repeat the coral drill. This technique works willingly and unconsciously in the learners' minds and pushes them to do their best to chore the song played in the classroom. This is the road to disciplining the adult learners' articulation organs and getting used to and familiarized with pronouncing the sounds of the English language.

Teaching pronunciation studies

Although the amount of research on pronunciation teaching is steadily increasing, there is still much more to explore about the effects and effectiveness of different approaches. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2010) have regarded pronunciation as a relevant part of a language that allows for communication in a clear and intelligible way and has framed the point of view dealing with preferences of pronunciation teaching techniques by focusing on both trends: traditional and modern. This way, they have suggested combining or adapting techniques when describing how the changes and mixtures have taken place and how they have influenced the learners' attitudes. Other studies elaborate on an analysis of pronunciation, in which three distinct properties can be identified: (i) intelligibility, the level of clarity of an oral production observable by the number of elements that the listeners understand; (ii) comprehensibility, the degree of difficulty experienced by the listeners in understanding an utterance; (iii) accentedness, the extent to which the L2 speech differs from native one according to the listeners' perception (Derwing & Munro, 2015; O'Brien, 2014; Wei, 2021).

A long-standing gap in the need for pronunciation instruction vises the same syllabi designed to teach English at primary and secondary levels. It has commonly been associated with the

English teachers' philosophy and idiosyncrasy of thinking that pronunciation is a useless language component (Pourhosein & Banou, 2016). This way, they have ignored the lively part of a language that permits communication through the intelligibility of sounds. The teachers focused on teaching isolated words and unproductive patterns of sentences governed by grammar rules. The absence of pronunciation teaching has risen from a wide range of social, cultural, and even socioeconomic situations that face the different social contexts in Ecuador and where this research project is being executed.

Studies on teaching pronunciation to adult learners
Suddenly changing an education system is more than a challenging task, mainly due to the drawbacks mentioned above. In consequence, pronunciation must be something appearing spontaneously. Merriam (2018) contributes with a collection of principles and explanations that form ever-evolving knowledge, making the base of adult learning. Merriam suggests fundament adult education based on three foundational theories:
 -Andragogy and Heutagogy stand for methods and feasibilities for adult learning through self-learning and self-directive learning.
-Transformative learning is followed by the discussion of the shift from these theories to approaches related to the social and political context of adult learning.
-Thirdly, her theory is addressed in the most recent research on holistic approaches to adult learning, which include the role of emotion, body, and spirit in learning.

These changes demand constant and continuous motivation for adult learners to change their minds and direct their commitment toward an ongoing perspective and expectations in their future through the ability to speak English intelligibly, which might lead them to logical communication (Doloh & Chanyoo, 2022). Nuani and Rosyada (2015) claim that the relevant tool to improve communication skills is learning pronunciation through reading aloud, for misperception that emerges from mispronunciation can be avoided. The statement is that technology and science's fast development have become closely tied to cultural and social life. In this sense, communication competence is the primary factor in achieving the perfection of language comprehension. Also, they say that the critical aspect of increasing communication skills is pronunciation, which gives speakers the power to be confident when expressing their ideas to others. This tool helps adult learners introduce and practice reading out aloud. The writers highly recommend being practical in the matter of pronunciation. If adult learners improve their pronunciation, they can express their ideas transparently.
Teaching pronunciation to adult learners using state-of-the-art devices has proved to be efficient and motivating. Some adults can afford to buy computers, tablets, or mobiles by themselves and use them wherever or whenever they want to practice language pronunciation (Evers & Chen, 2021). Resorting to some traditional methods in the classroom or traditional training courses has turned out to be uninteresting because the current generations are accustomed to sophisticated devices that promote motivation and interest in learning English (Pennington, 2021).

Songs and pronunciation studies

The ability to speak clearly and confidently in English is one of the things learners value most, and it is something they feel most insecure about. Pronunciation is a psychological phenomenon affecting learners when talking to foreign people but strategies including songs have been shown to be effective as a pedagogical tool (Rezvani, Kumar, Akhter, Yunus, & Shamsy, 2022). These theories focus on the need to create better strategies and instruments to teach English pronunciation appropriately through songs.

Recreational linguistics is an approach used to give liveness to any class, either kid, adolescent, or adult. This approach soothes the hardness of the foreign language and lifts the learners' spirit, resulting in a change of atmosphere and a good rapport. Songs make one of the relevant resources used in recreational linguistics for their great acceptance into the learners' minds and predisposition to work (Merlino, 2014).

Pennington (2021) says that attention to pronunciation has been revived, relevant to supra-segmental phonology and other contextual aspects of pronunciation. Furthermore, a greater understanding and acceptance of the relevance of social and psychological factors to pronunciation have been achieved, and communicative effectiveness has also been regarded as a key goal rather than correctness or accuracy. On this, the author advises learners not to be concerned about fluency or accuracy but about communicative skills. Show them that enjoying songs' melody is an effective way of producing English sounds, and understanding the relevance of social and psychological factors to pronunciation is the bridge to icebreaking towards the fear of articulating English sounds.

Rais et. al. (2020) consider songs as a motivating medium that can be used to teach pronunciation. Using songs could be an instrument to achieve learners' confidence and break the feelings of nervousness and shyness when producing English sounds. The authors say English teachers and learners must be conscious that English is not a phonetic language but a bilateral one. In their criteria, using songs can be the foundation to start teaching pronunciation to adult learners; shyness has been an unsolvable barrier to pronouncing a foreign language, and songs are being framed as a suitable solution. Also, they say that English Pronunciation is unpredictable and pushes adult learners to take it seriously when pronouncing English sounds and practice it the most they can. Pronunciation through songs consists of reconnaissance, planning, enacting the plan, observing, and reflection; the study result showed that songs could improve students' pronunciation and confidence (Rais, Pranowo, & Intan, 2020).

Asmaradhani et al. (2018) claim that teaching pronunciation through songs requires selective material, sophisticated tools, teachers' knowledge, teacher time and devotion to work, new and entertainment activities, and a teacher's good mood. The authors suggest using motivating songs and games, affirm that songs increase the learners' expectations, and think using songs is what learners value the most.

Materials and Methods

During classes and before the application of the pre-test instrument based on CEFR, students were asked to create a list of songs in English they had listened and liked. Using this particular list, it was elaborated a program that included several lesson plans with andragogy fundamentals and activities that allowed students practice their pronunciation with songs. After the end of the class period, students took a posttest and answer a survey. The results were processed with the JASP program (2023) in which descriptive and inferential statistics were generated to compare the situation before (pre) and after (post) the intervention. For this purpose, the normality distribution properties of the data were evaluated and, after having verified that it is not normal, we proceeded to use Wilcoxon sign ranks as a hypothesis test to indicate whether the post-assessment is greater than the pre-assessment (Goss-Sampson, 2019). The results are presented using a point cloud in which the 21 students can be observed with a line to indicate the change of position they have had with the intervention process in their score. The significance level used to test that the post-assessment values are higher than the pre-assessment values is 0.05.

Results

The results are grouped into two groups. On the one hand, there are the values of the five-point rubric that evaluates Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Fluency, as well as Interaction. On the other hand, there are the results of the evaluation of the three variables on Intelligibility, Intonation, and Connected Speech. Both evaluation scales are scored with a minimum of 0 points and a maximum of 5 points.

Speaking rubric
The first sub-skill assesses students' ability to express themselves using grammar correctly. The initial score is 2.57 points (SD 0.75) as is the final score (SD 0.81). The changes that have occurred internally and are observed in Figure 1 are considered non-significant because although it is noted that in some respects the positions go up, in others they go down, but these variations do not produce significant changes within a related measure (Wilcoxon signed-rank test 27.50; p 0.523).

Figure 1

Students' positions in the point cloud illustrating the grammar dimension.
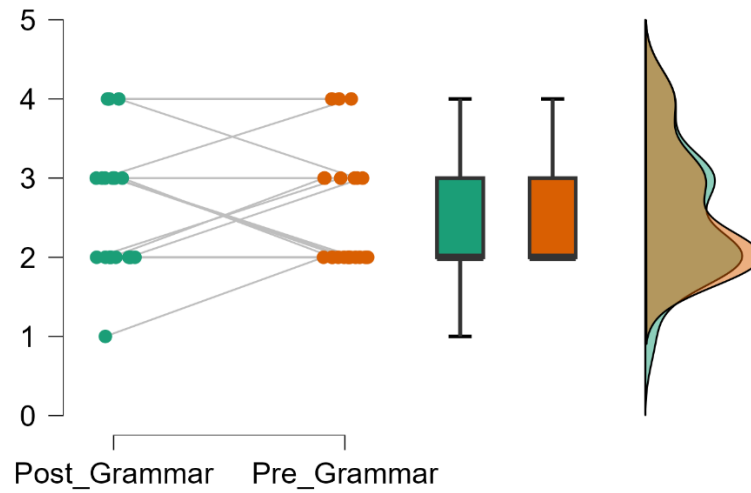
The second sub-skill measures the amount of vocabulary students must express themselves. The initial score was 2.67 points (SD 0.80) and the final score was 2.81 (SD 0.81). Although an increase of 0.14 points is noted, these changes are not significant enough to conclude (Z=-1.604; p 0.074). The point cloud shows three students who increase one position.

Figure 2

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the vocabulary dimension
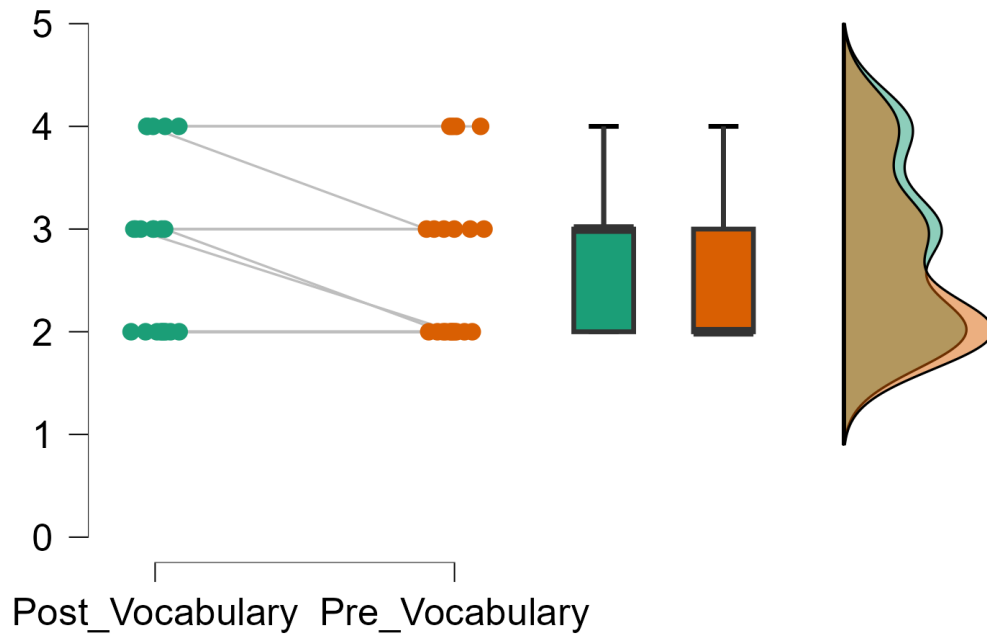
The third sub-skill considers students' pronunciation. The initial score was 1.86 points (SD 0.85) and the score assessed after the intervention was 2.62 (SD 0.87). In this case the increase in score was 0.762 points, this, according to the hypothesis test, is considered sufficient to conclude that it has significantly increased (Z=-3.30; $p < .001$). The effect size of the program, given by the matched rank biserial correlation, is 1 point, which is considered a high level. Figure 4 shows that the shifts are one and even two positions for several students.
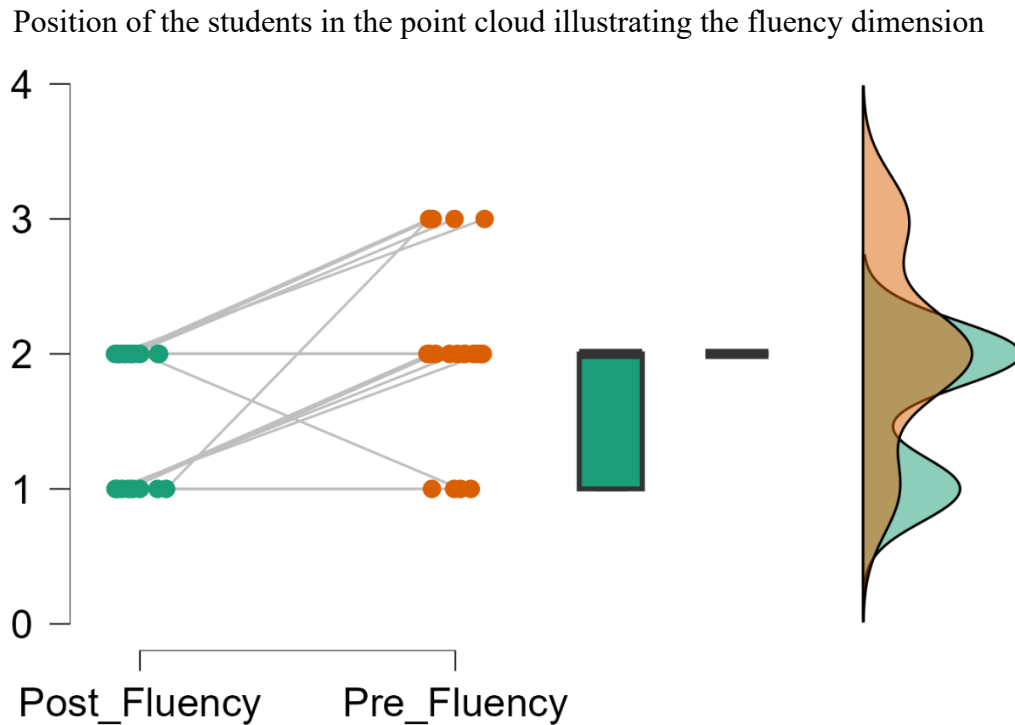
Figure 3

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the pronunciation dimension
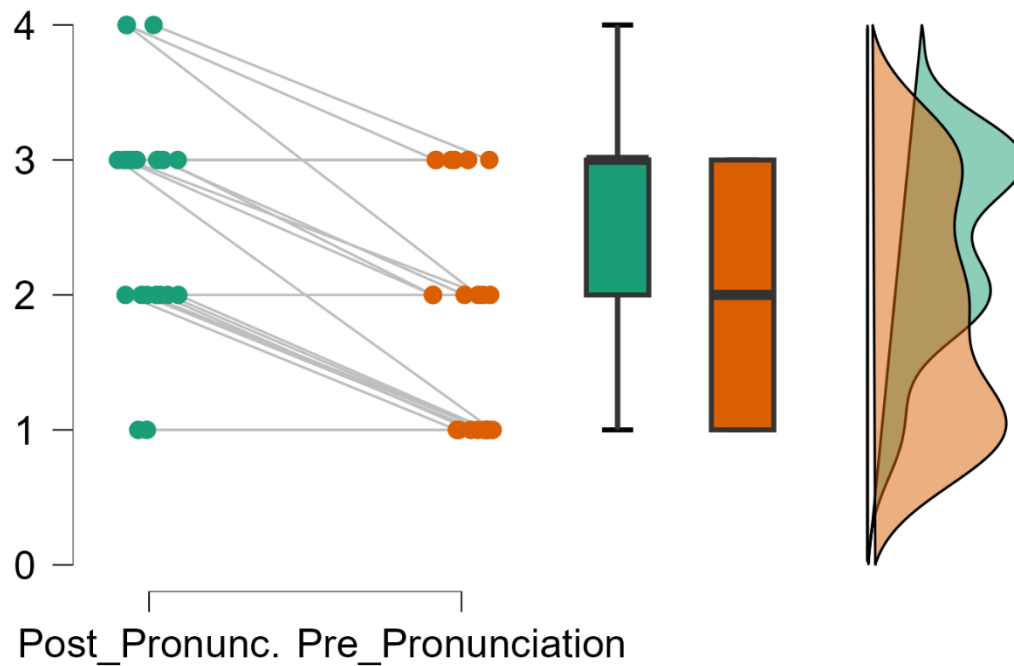
The fourth sub-skill measures students' level of fluency in speaking. The initial score was 2.048 points (SD 0.67) and the final score was 1.62 (SD 0.50). In this case, we note that there is a result contrary to what was expected, as there has been a decrease of 0.43 points on average (Z=-1.29; p 0.007). The point cloud shows that some students who had a score of 3 moved to a score of 2 points and others moved from 2 points to 1 point. The effect size, however, is not as high as in pronunciation, in this case it is 0.34 in the biserial correlation.

Figure 4.

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the fluency dimension

The fourth sub-skill measures interaction between students when speaking shows that the initial score was 2.38 points (SD 1.07) and the final score was 2.72 (SD 0.96). In this case, there is again an increase of 0.33 points, which is considered significant according to the hypothesis test (Z=-2.37; p=0.005). In the point cloud in several students a position is positively scaled. The effect size in this case is 0.40 in the biserial correlation, which is considered a medium-sized impact.

Figure 5

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the interaction dimension
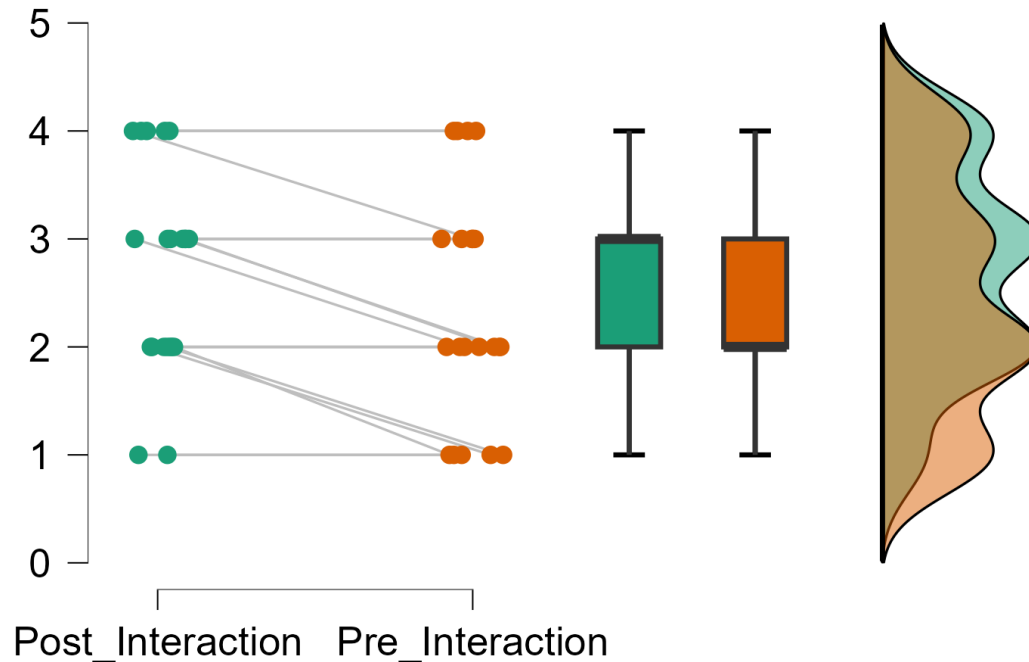

According to the results obtained in the grammar variable, despite some variation, it has not changed substantially, while the increase in vocabulary is positive, but not enough to conclude that there has been a significant improvement. In the case of the pronunciation dimension, it is observed that the increase is not only significant, but that the effect of the program, in this case, is considered large. Similarly, another significant improvement that occurred thanks to the process is in the interaction variable, in this case its effect shows a medium impact. However, in the fluency variable we found the unexpected, a significant decrease, although with a low effect, but which should be analyzed.

Connected Speech

In connected speech, the first dimension to be analyzed corresponds to intelligibility. In this case, the initial average of 1.48 points (SD 0.51) rose to 2.38 points (SD 0.67). There is an increase of 0.90 points that allows us to conclude that this is a significant increase ($Z=-3.62$; $p < .0015$). The point cloud shown in Figure 6 shows that all students who initially had one point increase to 2 points and those with 2 points increase to 3 or 4 points. The effect size in this case is very high (biserial rank correlation -1.00).
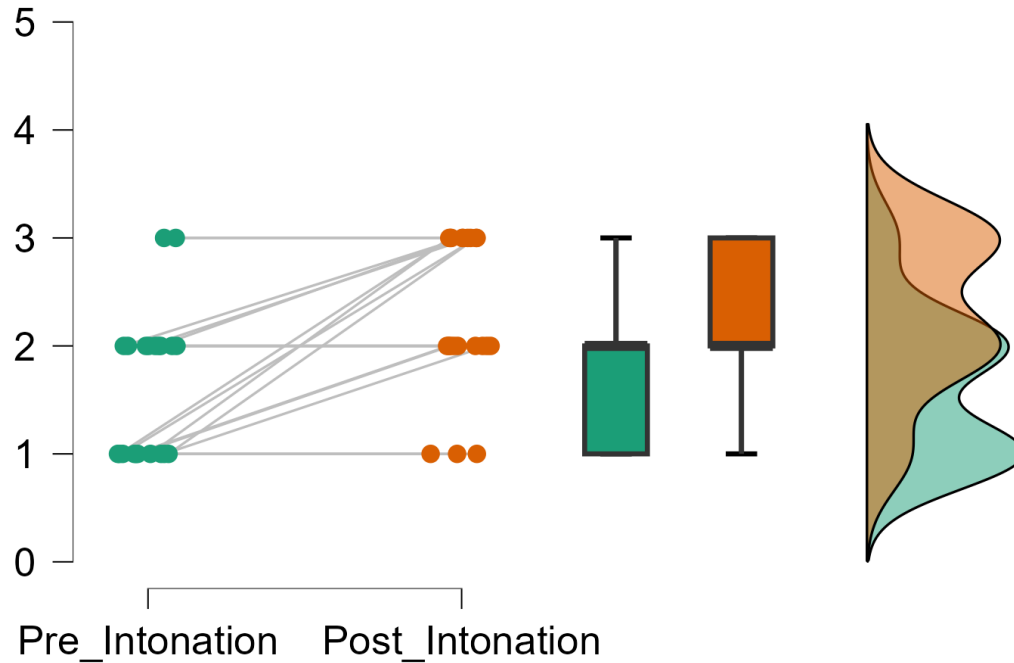
Figure 6

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the intelligibility dimension
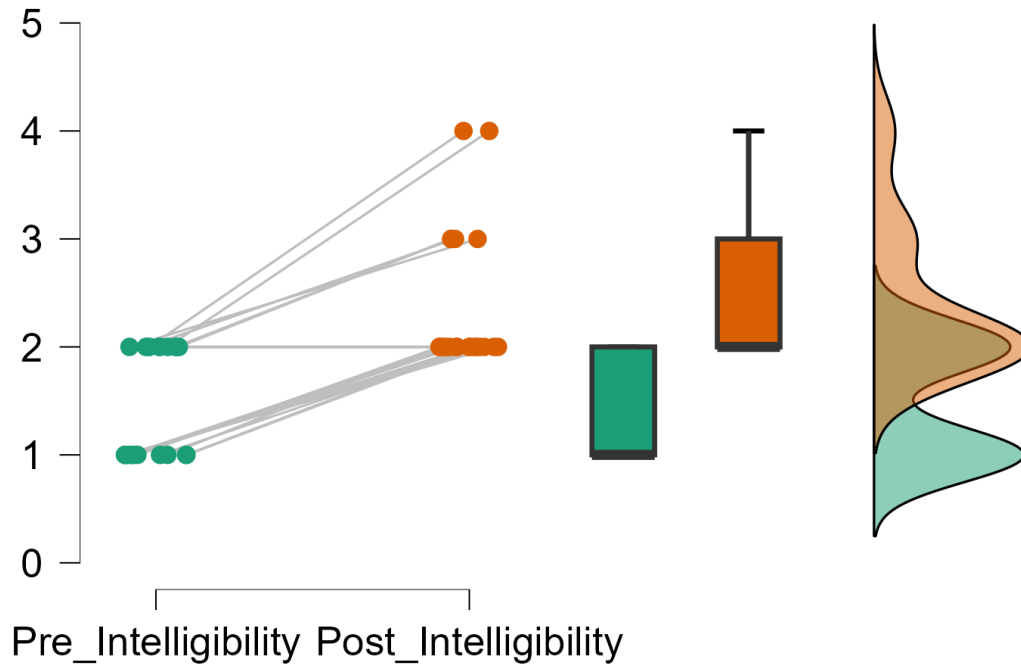
The second connected speech skill is intonation, which, before the intervention, had 1.62 points and, after the intervention, reached 2.23 points. This increase of 0.66 points is considered highly significant (Z=-2.80; p=0.002). Figure 7 shows that those who had 1 or 2 points increased respectively to 3 or 4 points. The effect size in this case is 0.40 in the biserial correlation, which is considered a low impact size (biserial correlation of 0.34).

Figure 7

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the intonation dimension

The third and last skill, called connected speech (the same name of the scale), showed an increase of 0.38 points from 2.43 (SD 0.51) to 2.81 points (SD 0.75). This is a significant difference according to the test statistic (Z=-2.52; p=0.003). Figure 8 shows that those who had 1 or 2 points increased respectively to 3 or 4 points, respectively. The effect size in this case is 0.40 in the biserial correlation, which is considered a low impact size (biserial correlation of 0.37).

Figure 8

Position of the students in the point cloud illustrating the Connected Speech dimension
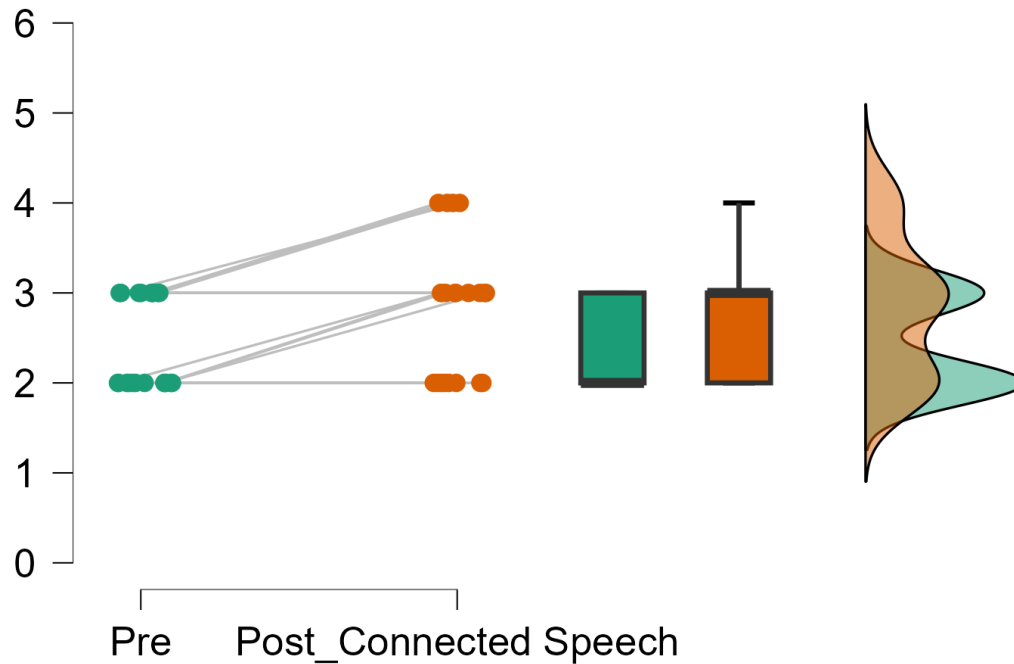
From the above, it can be observed that there was a general increase in connected speech. However, within this evaluation, it should be noted that intelligibility followed by intonation obtained the greatest increase in terms of scores.

Student's opinions on the learning method

A questionnaire was administered to identify how much they agreed with the method used during the program. Most of them agreed and strongly agreed with listening to songs in English for the purpose of learning the language. Similarly, it was found that they showed a high level of agreement in listening to songs in English because they do not bore them but excite them. However, the level of agreement is much higher in terms of increasing motivation and especially in creating a relaxed atmosphere for learning. Among these high scores, the lowest indicator has to do with focusing on learning the language itself.

Figure 9

Line diagram of the level of agreement in opinions on the method of learning with songs
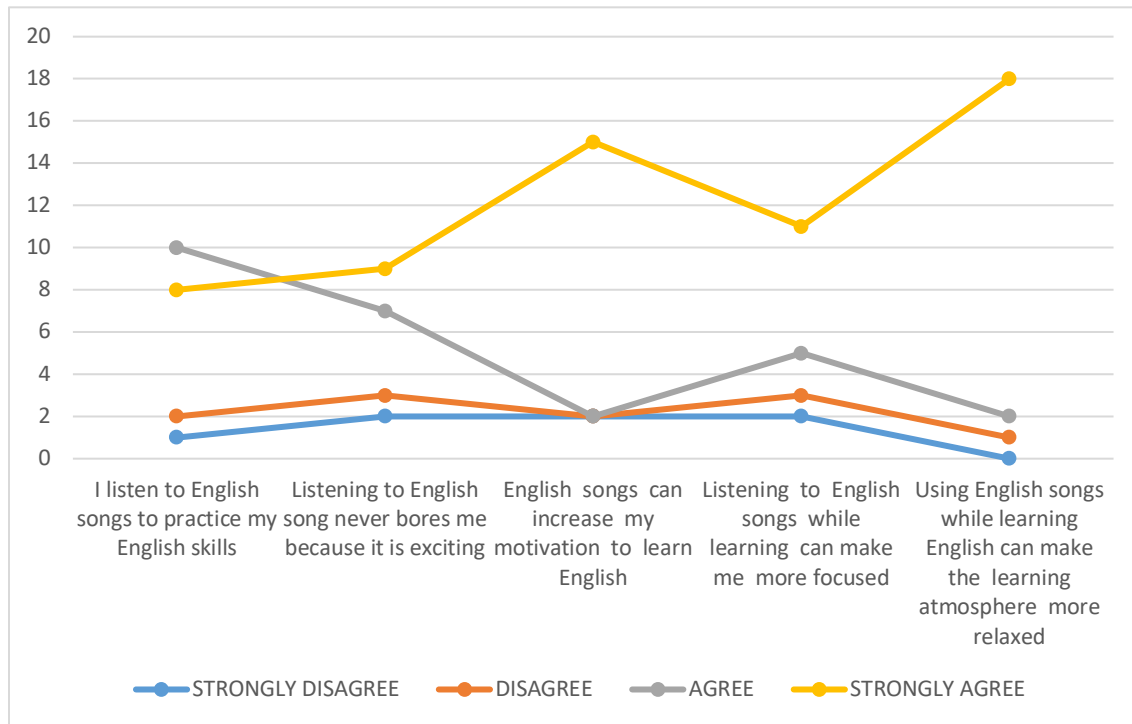
Discussion

The results showed a significant development of pronunciation skills, as revealed in other similar studies (Stanculea, 2015). It should be taken into account that the participants are adults who are resuming their high school studies, so motivation is an important element in any subject, but learning strategies must be specific for adults so that music has a positive effect on their learning, something that was also verified in this study (Rengifo, 2009).

Another important aspect is the influence that using songs for EFL has in creating a pleasant environment for learning English, which has proven to be effective since participants consider that they were motivated during the activities (Tavadze, Disamidze, & Katamadze, 2021).

However, the most significant result is that it was proven that it is possible to improve a sub-skill such as pronunciation in a short period of time with a simple but continuous change in methodology like introducing systematic pronunciation practice through the use songs, especially with a group of people reluctant to learn a new language (Panggabean & Batubara, 2022).

However, the work with songs did not show that students improved elements of grammar or vocabulary significantly; this is different from other studies that proved songs as a practical and efficient tool to improve the mastery of these elements among kids and adults' groups

(Andrade, 2017). Although in the absence of a control group, it was difficult to establish that the minimal improvement was significant in comparison to another study group.

In consequence, the findings are in line with studies linking the use of songs with motivation and improvement of pronunciation skills within the overall Speaking skill, although it remains to be explored whether the use of songs goes beyond a mere motivational situation.

Conclusions

From the above, it is observed that employing songs to familiarize adults with correct pronunciation has a very high significant effect. It is even good in interaction; this program can increase on average almost 1 point in the rubric from 0 to 5 points. Although the same cannot be said for grammar or vocabulary. Another effect that could be particularly observed has to do with intonation and intelligibility when students express themselves. Most students believe that the use of songs during EFL learning helps to create a more relaxed environment. The sample is small in the present case study, future studies should test on more groups controlling different times of using the songs as a method. A control group was also needed to avoid the Hathorne effect, as students struggled to improve their grades on the second assessment.

References

Andrade, C. (2017). The use of songs in the English Language Teaching-Learning Process of the 6th Level Basic Education Students at "Francés" Private Educational Institution in Esmeraldas. *International Congress on the Didactics of the English Language Journal, 2*(1). Obtenido de http://revistas.pucese.edu.ec/ICDEL/index

Asmaradhani, A., Evendi, R., Mursid, A., & Abdul, R. (2018). Fixing Students' Pronunciation Using Songs. *JOLLT, 6*(2), 77-85. doi: https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v6i2.1258

Derwing, T., & Munro, M. (2015). *Alice Henderson. Intelligibility and identity: From teaching pronunciation to training for spoken.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. doi:https://doi.org/10.1075/lllt.42

Doloh, S., & Chanyoo, N. (2022). Relationships Between Thai EFL Learners' Factors, Intelligibility, and Comprehensibility Towards Varieties of English. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 12*(1), 46-54. doi:https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1201.06

Evers, K., & Chen, S. (2021). Effects of Automatic Speech Recognition Software on Pronunciation for Adults With Different Learning Styles. *Journal of Educational*

Computing Research, 59(4), 669-685.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0735633120972011

Goss-Sampson, M. (2019). *Análisis estadístico con JASP.* Barcelona: JASP.

Hismanoglu, M., & Hismanoglu, S. (2010). Language teachers' preferences of
pronunciation teaching techniques: traditional or modern? *Procedia, 2*(2), 983-989.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.138

JASP. (2023). *A fresh way to do statistics*. Obtenido de JASP: https://jasp-stats.org/

Merlino, S. (2014). Singing in "another" language: how pronunciation matters in the
organisation of choral rehearsals. *Social Semiotics, 24*(4), 420-445.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2014.929390

Merriam, S. (2018). Adult learning theory. En I. Knud, *Contemporary Theories of Learning*
(págs. 21-37). Routledge. Obtenido de
https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315147277-6/adult-
learning-theory-sharan-merriam

Nurani, S., & Rosyada, A. (2015). Assessments, Improving English Pronunciation of Adult
ESL Learners through Reading Aloud. *Lingua Cultura, 9*, 18-113.
doi:10.21512/lc.v9i2.825

O'Brien, M. (2014). L2 Learners' assessments of accentedness, fluency, and
comprehensibility of native and non-native German speech. *Language Learning,
64*(4), 715-748. Obtenido de https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1044984

Panggabean, H., & Batubara, L. (2022). Utilizing a Karaoke App in Learning English
Pronunciation: A Case Study of EFL College Students. *International Journal of
English and Applied Linguistics (IJEAL), 2*(1), 103-111. doi:doi.org/ijeal.v2i1.1432

Pennington, M. (2021). Teaching Pronunciation: The State of the Art 2021. *RELC Journal,
52*(1), 3-21. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211002283

Pourhosein, A., & Banou, N. (2016). Why Is English Pronunciation Ignored by EFL
Teachers in Their Classes? *International Journal of English Linguistics, 6*(6), 195-
208. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v6n6p195

Rais, B., Pranowo, D., & Intan, R. (2020). The Use of Song in Teaching English
Pronunciation. *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Language,
Literature, and Arts Education*(461), 133-137. doi:10.2991/assehr.k.200804.025

Rengifo, A. (2009). Improving Pronunciation through the Use of Karaoke in an Adult
English Class. *Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development, 11*, 91-106.
Obtenido de http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1657-
07902009000100007&lng=en&tlng=en

Rezvani, E., Kumar, T., Akhter, S., Yunus, M. M., & Shamsy, A. (2022). Use of Music and
Songs as Pedagogical Tools in Teaching English as Foreign Language Contexts.
Education Research International. doi:https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3384067

Stanculea, A. (2015). Teaching pronunciation through songs. *Journal Plus Education,
12*(2), 177-184. Obtenido de https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-
detail?id=617435

Tavadze, L., Disamidze, I., & Katamadze, N. (2021). Using song to motivate students. *The Eurasia Proceedings of Educational & Social Sciences, 20*, 91-95. Obtenido de http://www.epess.net/en/download/article-file/2140655

Wei, M. (2021). Linguistic Dimensions of Accentedness, Comprehensibility and Intelligibility: Exploring Listener Effects in American, Moroccan, Turkmen and Chinese Varieties of English. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 44*(4), 520-542. doi:https://doi.org/10.1515/CJAL-2021-0033