

Using Lyrics Training¹ Website To Develop Efl Students' Listening Skills: A Dialogue Between Music And Technology

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Abstract:

Background: The present study uses a methodological approach based on bibliographic research whose theme is the use of music and technology allied to the teaching-learning process of the English language and the ability of listening through the website Lyrics Training. To do so, we will investigate the impact of the use of the Lyrics Training website on the development of listening skills in English language classes for EFL students. This term English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is often used in the field of education and language learning. It refers to the teaching and learning of the English language in a country where English is not the primary language. Listening skills are essential for English language proficiency, yet many EFL students face challenges when trying to understand and follow English language songs. The Lyrics Training website offers an interactive and engaging approach to improving listening comprehension by listening to and filling in gaps in song lyrics. In addition to this proposed general objective, we will analyze the effectiveness of the Lyrics Training website in developing listening skills, and learn about the benefits and limitations of Lyrics Training as a digital resource for English language learning, especially for listening skills. Understanding the effect of Lyrics Training on students' performance can provide valuable insights for the improvement of English language teaching and the use of this resource. The research is bibliographic and analytical in nature. Thus, this research discusses the importance of digital resources for the English language teaching-learning process.

Key Word: English; Teaching-learning Process; Lyrics Training.

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I. Introduction

The use of music in classrooms has been a pedagogical practice adopted due to the various benefits it offers in the teaching-learning process. According to Silva (2023, p. 53), "It helps perception, stimulates memory and intelligence. It favors the well-being of students' potential, because it speaks directly to the body, mind and emotions. Music trains the brain for relevant forms of reasoning."

Songs provide a playful and motivating approach to English language teaching, allowing EFL students to engage emotionally and personally with the content. This emotional connection stimulates students' attention and interest, resulting in greater engagement during learning activities. According to Schoepp (2001, p.3):

"[...] music is often the major source of English outside of the classroom. The exposure to authentic English is an important factor in promoting language learning. It relates directly to both the affective filter and automaticity. If students are exposed to songs which they enjoy, more learning is likely to occur since they may seek out the music outside of the classroom".

In addition, the songs offer a variety of linguistic elements, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and idiomatic expressions, which are presented in a contextualized and authentic way. This helps learners develop not only listening skills, but also listening comprehension, correct pronunciation and vocabulary enrichment, making learning more meaningful.

Nowadays, technologies such as cell phones, internet, computers and video games are becoming more and more an inseparable part of students' lives since the COVID-19 pandemic. They grow up surrounded by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which can be defined as a total set of technologies that

¹ Available at: <https://lyricstraining.com/> . Accessed on: June 09th,2023.

² This work had financial support from Proap/Capes.

enable the production, access and propagation of information, as well as technologies that enable communication between people, whether for studying or socializing with others.

For example, we have YouTube, a video sharing site sent by users, and WhatsApp, an application used to exchange messages, audios, texts and photos. We understand that ICTs are part of the daily life of this current generation.

Thus, many of the current devices are available to students and teachers as mediators of the English language teaching-learning process. Paiva (2006, p. 116) emphasizes that:

[...] technology that provides artifacts for teachers and learners to exercise their autonomy as persons, learners, communicators and users of technology; and finally, a just political, economic and social system that gives every learner good learning opportunities and every teacher good teaching conditions.²

Thus, we realize that music and technology significantly encompass the awakening of the student to English language learning. According to Boothe and West (2018) "Information communications technology (ICT) can be incorporated to enhance and strengthen learning while sparking inspiration and creativity".

In this context, using technology for the development of listening skills, such as the Lyrics Training website, can help in engaging the student, strengthening their creativity and learning. Also according to Boothe and West (2018):

"Using songs and humor in the classroom has both linguistic and cognitive value for strengthening English language acquisition. It helps to develop cross-cultural and interactive communication skills. Song lyrics will stimulate phonetics, vocabulary and improve grammar. Students are motivated and the affective filter is lowered through song-based activities combined with humorous lyrics. Listening skills become more intense and focused. During the digital age, an extraordinary collection of music can be downloaded at little or no cost and numerous websites from around the world are available for educators and students. Creativity and imagination are stimulated in a positive class atmosphere where music is incorporated to enable optimum learning".

II. Music in English Language Teaching

Teaching and learning a language is challenging because learning a language must involve the four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. In addition, as Almeida Filho states,

The foreign language class as a whole can enable the student not only the systematization of a new linguistic code that will help him to become aware of his own, but also the chance to occasionally transport himself into other places, other situations, and people. These cultural flashes can sometimes mark our perception and memory indelibly and forever (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1998, p. 28).³

Another factor to consider is that we often hear from English language teachers questions about what strategies they should use to make their classes motivating or engaging for the motivation of their students.

Thus, several teaching strategies and approaches emerge to make classes more attractive, such as: the use of visual aids, interactive activities, use of technologies, contextualization of learning, use of gamification, among others. It is worth remembering that each class is unique, and it is essential for each teacher to choose the appropriate resources, strategies and approaches to keep their students engaged and motivated during English language classes.

In this context, the use of music can play a significant role in the English language teaching-learning context for EFL students, making this environment more dynamic, interactive and conducive to learning. In this sense, music can be a considerable and valuable resource when worked in the school context in language learning. Cristovão (2007, p. 66) states that:

Songs are examples of authentic, memorable and rhythmic language. [...] a) songs are accessible examples of oral English; b) rhymes allow students to exercise in identifying similar sounds; c) the pleasant atmosphere that

² Our translation of: [...] tecnologia que fornece artefatos para professores e alunos exercerem sua autonomia como pessoas, aprendizes, comunicadores e usuários de tecnologia; e, finalmente, um sistema político, econômico e social justo que dê a cada aprendiz boas oportunidades de aprendizagem e a cada professor boas condições de ensino.

³ Our translation of: A aula de língua estrangeira como um todo pode possibilitar ao aluno não só a sistematização de um novo código linguístico que o ajudará a se conscientizar do seu próprio, mas também a chance de ocasionalmente se transportar para dentro de outros lugares, outras situações, e pessoas. Esses clarões culturais conseguem às vezes marcar nossa percepção e memória de maneira indelével e para sempre (ALMEIDA FILHO, 1998, p. 28)

musicality brings makes the student feel more comfortable with pronunciation work; d) the identification of strong and weak syllables helps in the pronunciation of the language.⁴

Thus, the use of music in English language classes for EFL students provides them the opportunity to work on the four skills of the English language. They are: listening, speaking, writing and reading. As for the listening skill, music is a great way to improve this skill, as an example we have the practice of identifying words, phrases and expressions in different musical contexts, in addition to regular exposure to different styles and genres, making students familiar with different accents and rhythms in English language.

Also, in relation to the listening skill, if the proposal is that students listen or perform a comprehension activity of a proposed song, their vocabulary can be enriched, since this practice leads to the memorization of vocabulary and their memory can be constantly stimulated by retaining as much information as possible about the song. In this way, authors such as Vicentti and Basso (2008, p. 7) argue that:

One of the most important points for the acquisition of a new language is memorization. Several studies show the connection of music with memory because, according to Gfeller (1983) music and its sub component, rhythm, has benefited the route of the memorization process.⁵

Furthermore, in an English language learning context where the learner is not exposed to the natural speech of native speakers, the use of songs as an authentic source, according to Peacock (1997), can have a positive effect on learners' motivation. Peacock (1997, p.152) recommends that:

“teachers of adult EFL try appropriate authentic materials in their classroom, as they may increase their learners' levels of on-task behavior, concentration, and involvement in the target activity more than artificial materials”.

Therefore, the use of authentic materials provides learners with the opportunity to engage with the language in real authentic situations. This helps to develop an understanding of nuances, slang, idioms, specific vocabulary and language culture. In addition, it is worth remembering how important it is to use authentic materials in conjunction with other teaching materials, while the combination of both offers a balanced and effective approach to English language teaching and learning.

In the next session we will get to know the website Lyrics Training - which is a website that uses music videos for the improvement of language skills in foreign languages. This digital resource will be analyzed in this paper, especially for the development of listening skills.

III. Getting to know the Lyrics Training Website

Lyrics Training is a free interactive website where users can practice language study while listening to their favorite songs. The main goal of the website is to help users improve their language skills through song lyrics and videos. The songs that are made available on the website are extracted from YouTube videos, which are already embedded in the tool, and, in turn, can be chosen by the learner to be used according to their level of proficiency (they are: beginner, intermediate, advanced and expert). There are a total of four levels of difficulty. Figure no 1 shows the image of the game mode:

Table no 1: Game Mode.



Source: <https://lyricstraining.com/en/play/maroon-5/memories/HNA9pBOc8N>

Thus, EFL students can train their skills by practicing them at four different levels. For example:

⁴ Our translation of: As músicas são exemplos de uma linguagem autêntica, memorável e rítmica. [...] a) as músicas são exemplos acessíveis de inglês oral; b) as rimas permitem aos alunos exercícios de identificação de sons similares; c) a atmosfera agradável que a musicalidade traz faz com que o aluno se sinta mais à vontade com o trabalho de pronúncia; d) a identificação das sílabas fortes e fracas ajuda na pronúncia da língua.

⁵ Our translation of: Um dos pontos mais importantes para a aquisição de uma nova língua é a memorização. Vários estudos mostram a ligação da música com a memória pois, segundo Gfeller (1983) a música e seu sub componente, o ritmo, tem beneficiado a rota do processo de memorização.

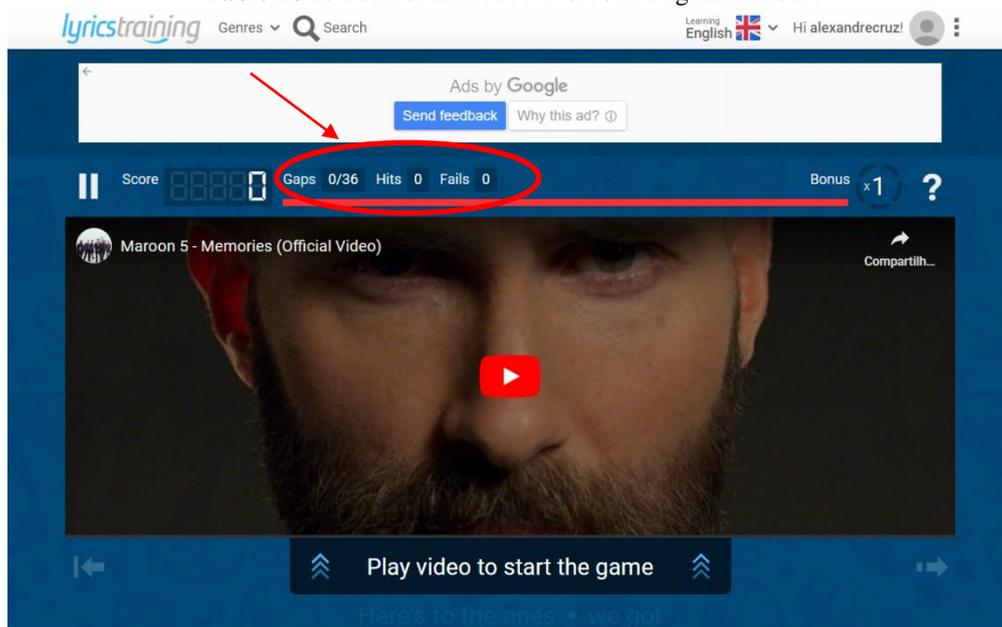
1. **Beginner:** All students who do not have a good level of vocabulary can choose the beginner level to complete 36 missing words out of the three hundred and fifty-eight words (10%) referring to the whole lyrics of any music video.
2. **Intermediate:** If students have a satisfactory vocabulary level, they can select the intermediate level to complete the 90 missing words out of the three hundred and fifty-eight words (25%) referring to the totality of the lyrics of any music video.
3. **Advanced:** All students who have sufficient vocabulary and listening and writing skills can choose the advanced level to complete 179 missing words out of the three hundred and fifty-eight words (50%) referring to the totality of the lyrics of any music video.
4. **Expert:** If students have an excellent command of foreign language visualization and superb listening skills, they can select the expert level to complete 358 missing words out of the three hundred and fifty-eight words (100%) referring to the totality of the lyrics of any music video.

The website offers a variety of language options, allowing students to practice other languages. There are 13 language options available: (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, German, Dutch, Japanese, Turkish, Polish, Swedish, Finnish and Catalan).

The functioning of the website is quite simple, since the student or the teacher chooses the song to be worked on and the desired level, and the website will remove some words from the song and the student will have the task of identifying the omitted words while listening to the music performance. The student will then complete the gaps with words taken from the lyrics while watching the selected video clip.

It is worth remembering that the student will have access to the audio and lyrics and, at the end of the activity, and he will receive a grade that will be listed in their overall rating of users of the tool. The number of words omitted will appear at the top. Below we will visualize this example. In this case, the beginner mode was selected and 36 words (Gaps) were excluded. The website also provides the number of words that the student will get right at the end (Hits) and the number of words that he will not get right (Fails). Figure no 2 shows the total number of words excluded in beginner mode.

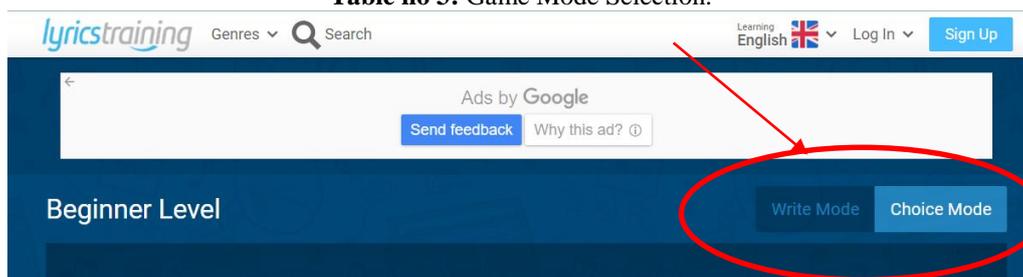
Table no 2: Total of Excluded Words in Beginner Mode.



Source: <https://lyricstraining.com/en/play/maroon-5/memories/HNA9pBOc8N#b7c>

Before starting the game, it is necessary, in addition to selecting the proficiency level (beginner, intermediate, advanced and expert), to choose the game mode, which are two: Write Mode and Choice Mode. Figure no 3 shows an image of the game modes.

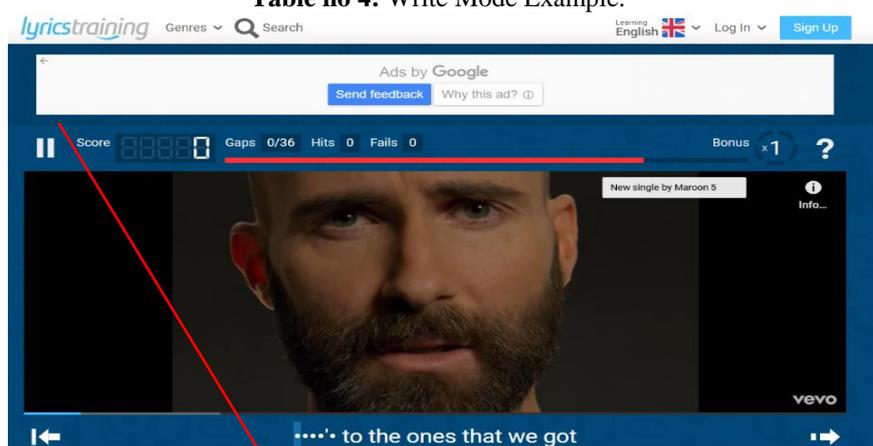
Table no 3: Game Mode Selection.



Source: <https://lyricstraining.com/en/play/maroon-5/memories/HNA9pBOc8N#b7c>

In Write Mode, the learner has to listen and write the missing sung word. If the student does not write anything in a passage, the music is paused so that he/she can write something. If they have difficulty understanding the requested sung word, they can ask to play the passage again or skip this word in the sentence. Figure no 4 shows a model of a word to be completed:

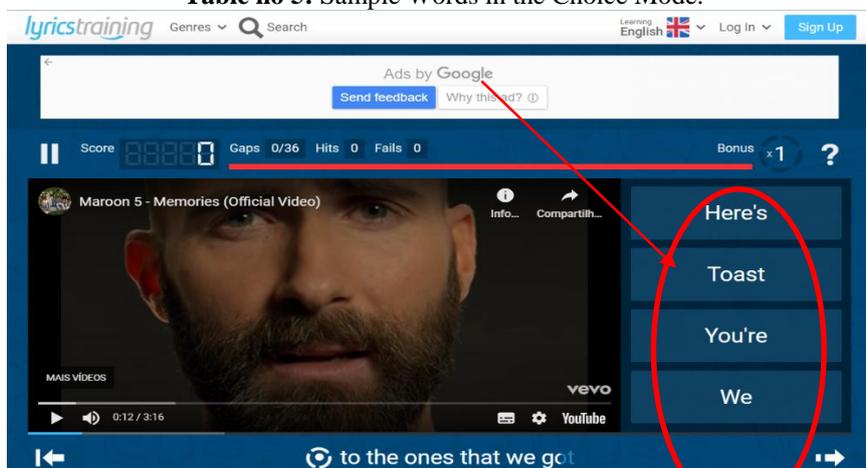
Table no 4: Write Mode Example.



Source: <https://lyricstraining.com/en/play/maroon-5/memories/HNA9pBOc8N#b7w>

In Choice Mode, the learner will need to listen and select the missing sung word to complete the sentence. If the student does not select the word in the excerpt, the music is paused so that he can select an option. If they have difficulty understanding the requested sung word, they can ask to play the excerpt again or skip this word in the sentence. Figure no 5 shows a model of the word to be chosen:

Table no 5: Sample Words in the Choice Mode.

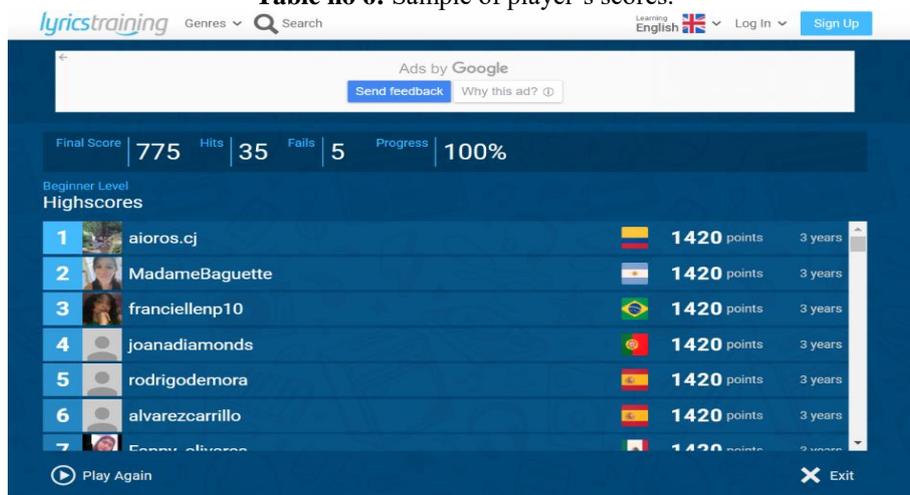


Source: <https://lyricstraining.com/en/play/maroon-5/memories/HNA9pBOc8N#b7c>

An interesting feature of Lyrics Training is that it allows the user to play with people from all over the world, from their country, or with friends. The user creates a game room and invites his friends to compete against

you, making the practice more fun and challenging. There is also the possibility to use additional features, such as the ability to save your scores and track your progress over time. This can be useful to monitor your development and identify where you need to improve. Figure no 6 shows a model of players' scores.

Table no 6: Sample of player's scores.



Source: <https://lyricstraining.com/en/play/maroon-5/memories/HNA9pBOc8N#b7c>

Another highlight of using the tool is providing teachers with the possibility of preparing their own exercises on the tool. It is clear that the emphasis of the website is to work on listening comprehension skills in the language studied through the use of memory strategies.

The Lyrics Training website is gamified, which is a practice that uses game mechanics to stimulate employees. Games are stimulating and present challenging situations, because game mechanics "work as a motivational engine of the individual, contributing to the engagement of this in the most varied aspects and environments" (Busarello; Ulbricht; Fadel, 2014, p. 13)⁶. In this perspective, while students listen to music they will have time to write or select the missing word, if they do not complete, the music stops at the end of each line. If they cannot complete the line, they will have to start again from the beginning of the song so that it does not pause. The use of music in this type of text reconstruction activity helps learners to listen several times without getting bored.

The game works in the web browser, but there is also a free app for Android and iOS. Another highlight is the possibility to access this website freely by creating an account, entering an email address and a username, as well as a password. Figure no 7 presents a model of how to fill in the fields for creating an account on the website:

Table no 7: Sample of Creating an Account on the Website.

Fields in the form include: Username, Password, Confirm Password, Email Address, Country (dropdown), Birthday (Month, Day, Year), and Security Code (Captcha image showing the word 'gaily').

Source: https://lyricstraining.com/en/sign_up

⁶ Our translation of: “funcionam como um motor motivacional do indivíduo, contribuindo para o engajamento deste nos mais variados aspectos e ambientes” (Busarello; Ulbricht; Fadel, 2014, p. 13)

IV. Impact of Using the Lyrics Training Website on the developing of Listening Skills in EFL classes

Lyrics Training, being an online tool that helps improve listening skills and offering interactive exercises, exposes learners to authentic language, and this practice can have a positive impact on listening skills for several reasons.

By being exposed to authentic language through listening to English songs, it makes EFL students familiar with native pronunciation, intonation, rhythm and vocabulary, just as they are used by native speakers. According to Harmer (2007b, p. 133):

Listening is good for our student's pronunciation (...) the more they hear and understand English being spoken, the more they absorb appropriate pitch and intonation, stress and the sounds of both individual words and those which blend together in connected speech.

Therefore, listening practice is essential to improve listening comprehension. It can be performed and improved with the use of the analyzed tool. But it is worth mentioning that other practices such as listening to podcasts, watching movies, series, TV shows, talking to native speakers and performing more challenging listening exercises are options to improve and achieve a more fluent listening comprehension in the language.

Another reason that is important to mention is vocabulary and grammar learning, since the tool can expand vocabulary and grammar understanding by the student having to identify the correct words to fill in the gaps. According to Wahyuni et al. (2009), teachers can let students listen to the main grammar points in the songs they like and analyze their meaning.

Thus, by improving listening skills for the grammar and vocabulary identification task, it can reflect on oral skills in a positive way. This is due to active listening, in which students need to pay attention to details and specific words to complete sentences. This encourages concentration and focused listening, improving their ability to understand the language in a hearing context.

V. Advantages of Lyrics Training

The use of games in English language learning is known to provide opportunities for interactive practice, allowing students to experience the language in a more active way. As they play games, they apply their reading, listening, speaking and writing skills. This reinforces understanding and proficiency in different aspects of the English language leading the subject to behavioral transformation. In this logic Schaaf et al, (2014, p.2) argues that:

The structural elements of games are also especially suited to serve this current generation of learners. Commonly known as gamification (or gameful design according to Jane McGonigal), this approach of adding game elements such as storytelling, problem-solving, aesthetics, rules, collaboration, competition, reward systems, feedback, and learning through trial and error into non-game situations has already experienced widespread implementation in such fields as marketing, training, and consumerism with rampant success.

According to Angelina (2020), the Lyrics Training website can bring two benefits to EFL students, including improving students' academic knowledge, especially some factors related to speaking, pronunciation and listening. This includes pronunciation, accent, and amount of vocabulary. In addition, the design of the game is also friendly to players. For example, the music will be paused when learners give a wrong answer. And, it will only resume when they get correct answer. Finally, the score will be saved on the leaderboard so that they can compete and improve their skills.

Therefore, Alves and Coutinho (2016, p. 222) understand that: gamified practices, unlike conventional lectures, do not place the student in a passive position in the acquisition of knowledge and in their learning processes. On the contrary, the gamification of the class values the active participation of the student.⁷

In this sense, games promote active learning, allowing students to make decisions and solve problems within an interactive context. This contrasts with the passive approach of just receiving information in a traditional class. Thus, educational games can be a good strategy for students to develop skills in an attractive discipline.

VI. Disadvantages of Lyrics Training

It is worth pointing out that, depending on the learner's perspective and their specific language learning needs, it is always useful to experiment with different tools and approaches to find the ones that best suit their needs and preferences.

⁷ Our translation of: as práticas gamificadas, ao contrário das aulas expositivas convencionais, não colocam o aluno em posição passiva na aquisição de conhecimentos e em seus processos de aprendizagem. Pelo contrário, a gamificação da aula preza pela participação ativa do aluno.

According to Dizon and Gayed (2021), although Lyrics Training has many advantages, there are still some disadvantages. Firstly, the grade that learners receive after finishing an activity sometimes does not adjust to their level (this disadvantage does not always occur, so it does not affect the trust level of the website). Secondly, some users who were at beginner and pre-intermediate level showed that some activities prevented them from understanding the lesson clearly. In addition, listening to the songs they do not like also disappointed them.

In this way Lyrics Training depends on the songs available in its library. So, if the specific song or artist you want to use is not present in the website library, the learner will not be able to use it. This can limit the learning options with specific songs.

VII. Conclusion

In this study, we analyzed Lyrics Training, which is an online platform for learning languages through songs. Although the website promotes a favorable environment for the development of listening skills, there are advantages and disadvantages. Among the disadvantages analyzed is the dependence on the songs available in the platform's library, which can lead to limitations in learning options with specific songs.

Another point is the limitation of exercises over time, which may lead to repetition or lack of more advanced exercises. It is also worth mentioning that although the website is useful for listening comprehension, it may not be effective in developing other language skills, such as oral production and writing.

In contrast, there are advantages to using the website as it provides an opportunity for EFL students to practice and develop listening skills, enriching their exposure to English language study in an authentic and culturally relevant context. We also emphasize that the teacher's role is crucial in selecting appropriate music, whether in contextualizing the activities or in providing clear guidance to learners.

Lastly, this theoretical and bibliographical research contributes to the knowledge of the use of the Lyrics Training website to improve and develop listening skills in English language classes for EFL students in a school context. However, further research is needed to better understand the impact of the website on listening skills and other skills, and to explore, in future research, strategies for its integration in English language classes, aiming at improving students' listening skills.

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