

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING SONGS TO ASSESS EFL LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

The current study seeks to explore the effectiveness of using songs in the classroom for the sake of assessing the students' communicative competence. Thus we hypothesized that through the implementation of the musicology approach in the classroom, the teacher will be able to assess his learner's communicative competence most efficiently and in an integrative way (integrative point test). To validate this hypothesis both descriptive and statistical study are used. The fundamental purpose of this research is to examine the efficiency of adopting the musicology approach in the classroom as to assess the students' communicative competence. The tool used to reach these objectives is a questionnaire that is administered to EFL teachers and learners at the University of Biskra in order to gather the needed data about the topic under study. The results indicate that the implementation of songs in the classroom improves the learner's communication skills and helps the teacher assess his students most effectively.

Keywords: Assessment, Communicative Competence, Integrative Point Test, Songs.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the most established instructional context in second and foreign language program is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which chief goal is to enhance learners' communicative competence because the knowledge of grammatical rules is not adequate for speaking a language and communicating with it. Classrooms today entail to be more productive through the use of multimodal assignment to communicate digitally, be it texting, blogging or through social media. This rise in computer-assisted communication has required classes to become multimodal in order to teach students the skills required in the 21st-century environment. Nonetheless, in the classroom setting, multimodality is more than just combining multiple technologies, but rather creating meaning through the integration of multiple modes. Students are learning through a combination of these modes, including sound, gestures, speech, images, and texts.

Moving from page to screen is the most noticeable shift in Education in the 21 century (Kress, 2010). Therefore Algerian schools and universities have to take up with this change in a way that suit its Learners' needs, styles, and teachers' strategies. No one can deny the fact that learning a foreign language currently is no more a matter of mastering the linguistic knowledge but rather being able to use this knowledge in real-life situations, what Hymes (1966-1968) dubbed as « Communicative Competence »; Communicative Competence according to Canale (1983), includes four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Those sub-competences need to be taken into account when assessing the learner's communicative competence.

The utility of the present research is to better understand the correlation between the two variables (Communicative competence and songs) as being related to assessment which is still a subject of debate especially when it comes to assessing students' communicative competence. This latter is a challenging mission for both teachers and learners for three reasons; assessment is not matter of an ordinary pencil and paper tests, competence is not only the case of mastering the linguistic, accurate structures, our classrooms should not be mono-modal anymore, putting the three challenging variables to an empirical test recapitulate the main aim of our investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is un-debatable that being an effective teacher requires more than knowing the subject matter; it requires other stuff. Likewise, assessment of learning. The latter is a crucial part of any educational system; Skinner (2005,41-42) goes to saying that "if you want to know the truth about an educational system you should look at its assessment procedures", he purports that assessment is "judging the worth, value or importance of something, it is judging what has been learned or what learners are able to do" (ibid: 42) Admittedly, assessment can be written or oral, this former is preferable to be used when assessing the students' communicative competence.

Racing back to the history of the concept of communicative competence and exactly in the 1960th, where a lot have been said about it by Dell Hymes who counter reacted to the linguistic competence that was advocated by Noam Chomsky (1965). Hymes (1960) presumes that being communicatively competent means being able to construct a grammatically correct sentence and to produce a socially appropriate utterance. To move into deep elucidation, competence for him is being accurate and appropriate with regard to both structural and social dimensions of language. To that end, how can communicative competence be assessed?

As a reply, Luoma (2009) stated several communication tasks in which communicative competence and oral performances can be assessed such as pair and group tasks, he propounds that peer interaction makes communication more realistic and authentic. Another task can be "rating checklist" which is considered as another interesting area to evaluation; peer evaluation for him is another promising. Behind it all, what is most important for the teacher is to use a variety of modes to assess his learner performances.

Then again, Assessment has assumed a primordial role in a recent effort to improve the quality of education. Assessing the learner's communicative competence, in particular, is of vital importance as well. To assess the learner's communicative competence the teacher has first to design multimodal communication environment; multimodality can be defined as the use of different modes (audio, visual, kinesthetic) through a range of media for the sake of communicating and conveying meaning. Kress (2010) puts forward the view that multimodality is a Social semiotic theory for creating meaning of communication using a variety of representation modes such as; layout, music, gestures, speech, moving image, 3d objects...

Multimodality has procreated a great portion of interest among designers, academics and educational practitioners working in the area of new technologies and technology-mediated learning such as Stein (2008) Kress (2010), and Smith (2012). In spite of that, few pieces of research have been conducted about multimodality, which is not an alien concept in the field

of foreign language teaching and learning because communication has always been multimodal.

Things become more complicated when trying to delineate the area of multimodality; terminologically speaking, it was described as a phenomenon by (Scollon & Levine, 2004 and O'Halloran, 2011), from another standpoint, Kress, 2009 believes that multimodality is a domain of inquiry or research field. While other researchers propound that it is rather an analytic approach such as Jewitt, 2008 and O'Halloran, 2007).

With respect to all the previously mentioned description of multimodality, we would like to refer to the definition provided by the chief learning officer and founding partner of multimodality "Ray Smith" (2012) in one of his interviews, his definition looks more elaborate, and it serves the aim of our study:

Multimodality is one of the models of learning that I developed during my careers; Multi means many, models means different approaches, applications, and technologies that can be leverage to really promote good learning.

In this way, we can refer to multimodality as anything that can be used by the teacher (videos, films, games...) when , learning is taking place. With regard to this definition, we assume that using all the previously mentioned modes from the part of the teacher will by no means enhance the learners' communicative competence and, going further, it will assist the teacher assessing his learners' performances innovatively and creatively.

It is worth mentioning at the end that the whole thesis will be grounded on this definition, and more precisely, the researcher will be confined to the implementation of the three approaches (Musicology, Game Theory, Film Theory), In addition to a variety of applications and technologies (language laboratories, Information, and Communication Technology and Computer-assisted language learning) that will be applied to put multimodality into practice.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE DEFINED

Gumperz and Hymes (1964) published their article entitled "ethnography of communication" (1972) in which they define communicative competence as "what the speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in a culturally significant setting" (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972:Vii). The typical language teacher, says Bratt (1992), tends to view communicative competence as the ability to perform linguistic interaction in the target language , yet a knowledge of social rules is highly required . That is to say, knowledge of when and how and to whom the linguistic form of language is appropriate simply because "the same linguistic form varies from one culture to another". (Bratt , 1992.p.49)

Very confident of his claim, Halliday purports that the notion of communicative competence is something which is un-necessary to speak about simply because communicative competence is what the speaker can do with language. The same definition can be given to competence. For him , nothing new has been established by Hymes ; knowing how to use language is the same as knowing what to do with it .But , in spite of their conflicts , Hymes and Halliday share the view that language is crucial in social life (Bern , 1991)

WHY ASSESSMENT IS IMPORTANT

“Answering the question about the purpose of education also requires us to confront the question about the purpose of assessment” (Cizek, 1997, p. 1)

While teaching, the reflective teacher has to stand for a while and ask himself a couple of questions about his assessment process, to see whether his planned objectives have been accomplished or not. The urgent question at this level is “why to assess?”. Hopkins (2000) states a list of assessment reasons that every teacher, be it novice or experienced, has to reflect upon; teachers need assessment to verify whether any progress is being marked by his students, so that he can plan for the next step in the development of his students. Students can be given the opportunity to reflect on their process by their own (self-evaluation). Also, the teacher can have a knowledge of his students' strengths and shortcomings by making use of continuous assessment. This diagnostic process can give the teacher an insight of sources of defects; is it the teacher himself, his methods and material used, or is it the learners or the learning environment! After a deep reflection, the teacher can find out the reason why by his own or with the help of another teacher. Hopkins (2000)

Additionally, assessment allows the teacher to decide about the effectiveness of the program in order to make modification and changes or omitting of some learning activities and resources also the way of presenting the lesson. In every classroom there is always that student who is in a constant need to help and additional information, assessment helps the teacher find those students and provide them with assistance and guidance. Far from school, there are those parents who are curious to know about their students' progress, Summative assessment and grading help parents on that matter. Furthermore, educational authorities as well are more involved in this process of assessment because they need to know the achievement level in school, all of which leads us to deduce that everybody is involved in the assessment process, not only the teacher, but also, students, parents, administration, government education authorities. (Westwood, 2008)

ENSURING VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF TEST

After conducting an oral test, teachers are often confused by whether or not their tests were reliable and valid. Grove and Brown (2001) were clear enough about the need to rate directly after the test finishes. Otherwise, teachers lose information about the quality of test performance, so it goes without saying that the rating process should be designed at the very beginning to ensure the validity of scores. Another important criterion is that teachers need to bear in mind while testing is that time and effort spent when rating should be equal. (Luoma, 2009)

Deciding whether to use scales or score points is up to the teacher, depending on the length of performance, teacher might rate the holistic performances and rate but a detailed report should be given to examinees as a feedback from the part of the teacher. Teachers are expected to design a “rating form” of the test which includes his/her main points of attention and start gathering information about students' performances based on his rating criterion. In this form the teacher may include a room for comments and feedback in case students are not convinced by their rating. Also, he may provide them with oral feedback about their strengths and weaknesses to get their level developed. (Luoma, 2009)

RELIABILITY ASSURANCE

Subjectivity is one of the great fears of classroom assessment. Brown & Hudson (2002) put forward the claim that rating students anonymously helps reducing subjectivity, but this does not work with oral assessment simply because anonymity can be removed right after the teacher listens to his students' voices even without seeing them (audio-tape). In this case, a double check of rating after the test is finished with his task and his learners' performances and he may change his mind concerning scoring after checking. (Luoma, 2009)

VALIDITY ASSURANCE

Luoma (2009) recognized a number of steps to guarantee validation of the test. First, identifying the intended purpose of the test, after that the test designers should clarify the type of speaking they intend to assess. Also test construction is of crucial importance which includes implementing test specification and exploring the relevance of the task to the main purpose of the test.

SPEAKING TASKS

To assess students' speaking skills, the teacher has to foster his learners to speak by providing them a range of tasks." task design is a very important element in developing assessment "(Luoma, 2004, p. 29). But setting up a task for learners is not the only requirement. Teachers need to create instruments to be followed by examinees without forgetting the task materials to be used such as pictures, role play cards. (Luoma, 2009).

OPEN ENDED SPEAKING TASKS: the teacher asks his students to use their skills using the language. A good example would be presentation, narrating a story, describing a picture. Role playing is also classified under the title of open-ended tasks.

SEMI-STRUCTURED SPEAKING TASKS: using language to react in specific situation, for instance, the teacher describes a socially multifaceted situation for his learners who are exposed to imagine themselves a part of a complex situation and describe what they would say if so. (E.g. learners might be asked to complain about the noisiness of their neighbors' party in order to prepare for exams)

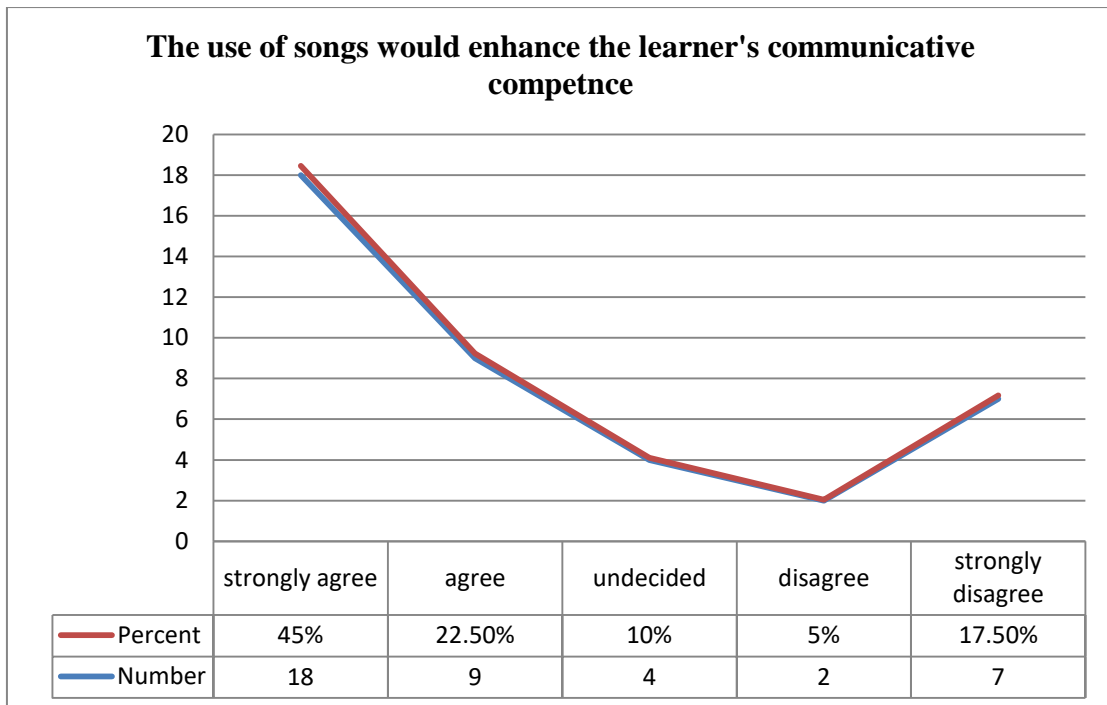
STRUCTURED SPEAKING TASKS: unlike the open-ended tasks, structured speaking tasks require short answers as a response to multiple choice tasks, they are not fair in terms of fostering creativity and getting astonished by learners' unpredictable answers, but they are fair in terms of scores. For instance, learners may be asked to read aloud so that to focus on their pronunciation skills. (Luoma, 2009)

METHODOLOGY

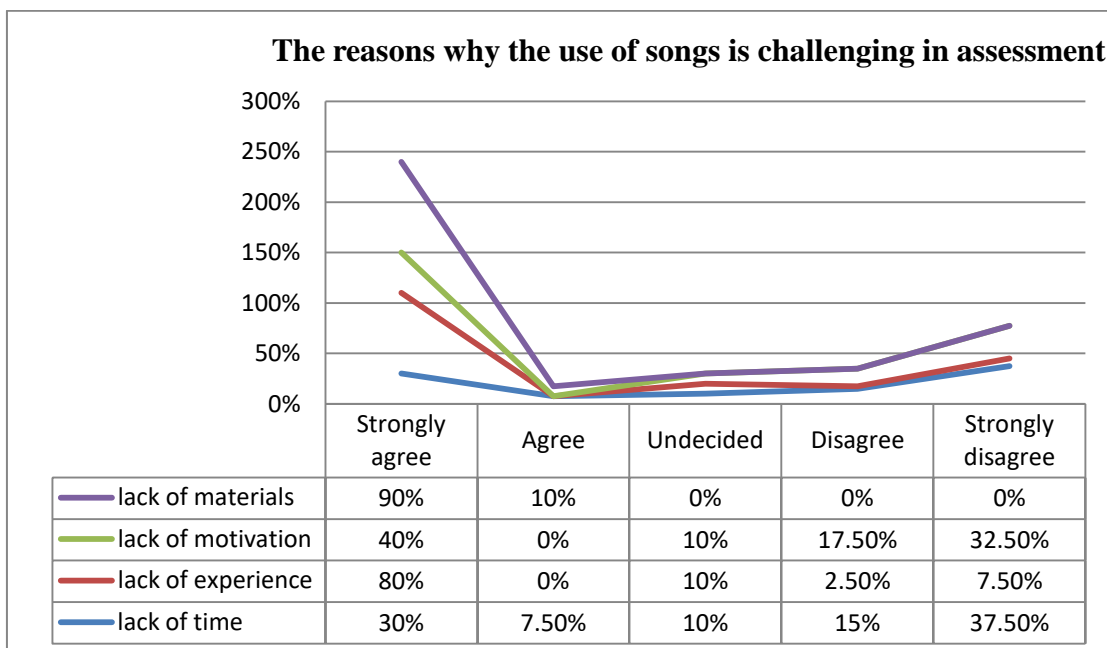
This study aims to investigate the efficiency of using songs to assess the students' communicative competence. The participants were 40 EFL teachers at the University of Biskra who were asked to fill in the questionnaire which was composed of five main questions that aim mainly on investigating their attitude towards the use of songs in the classroom and its efficiency when testing the students' performances.

RESULTS

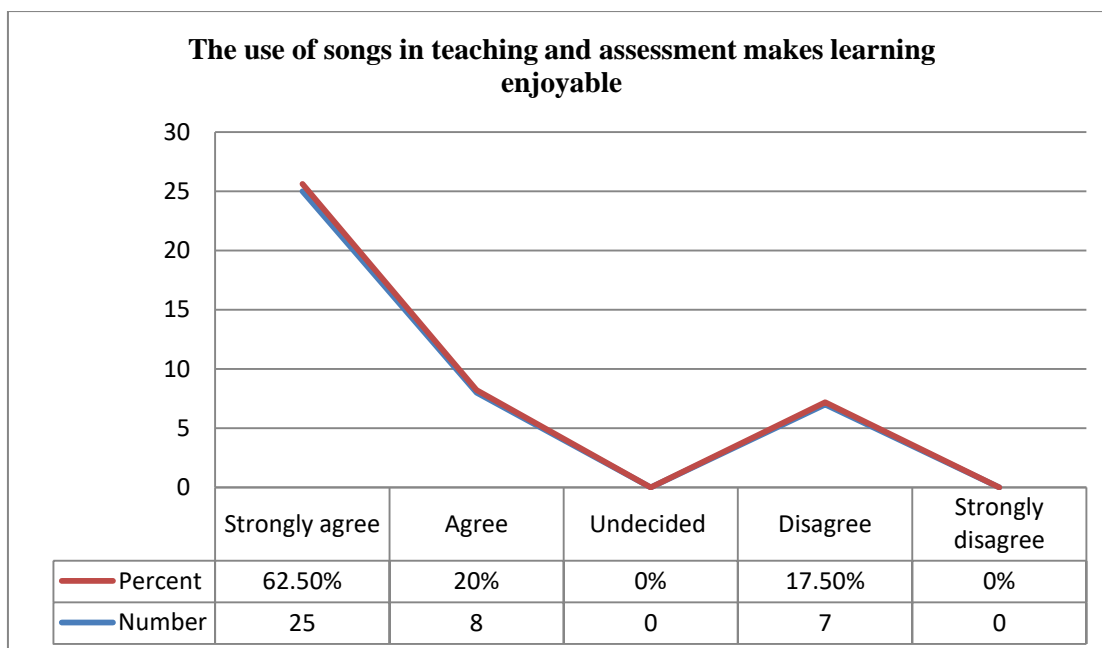
The following graphs recapitulate the main findings of the study;



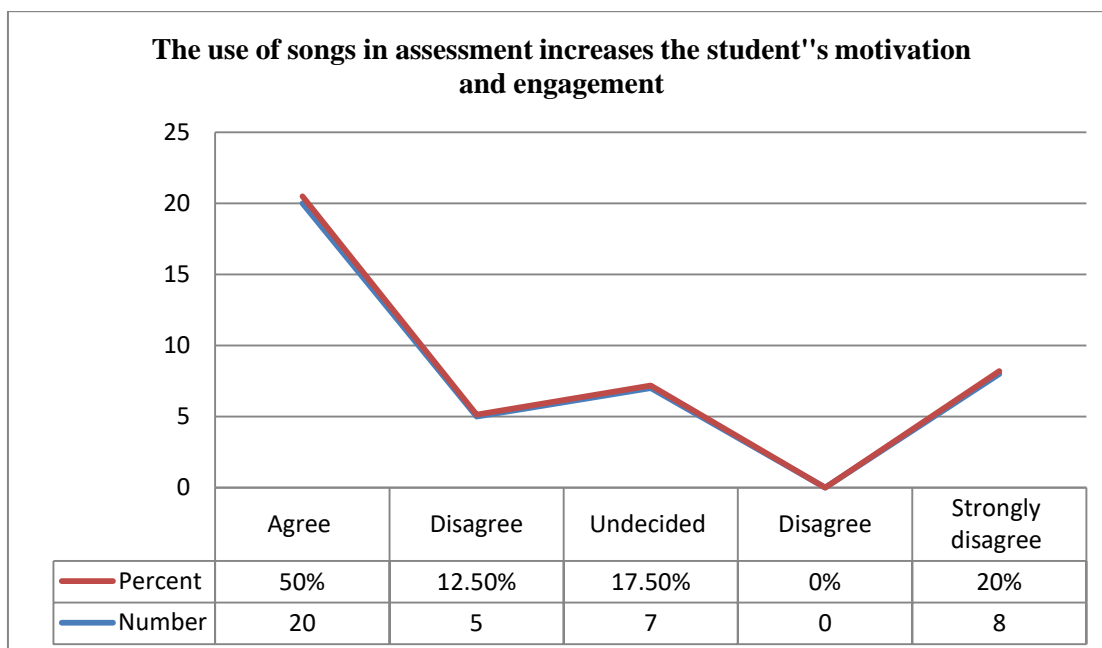
As it is shown above, the vast majority of teachers agree that there is ultimate relation between the use of songs and the development of the students' performances.



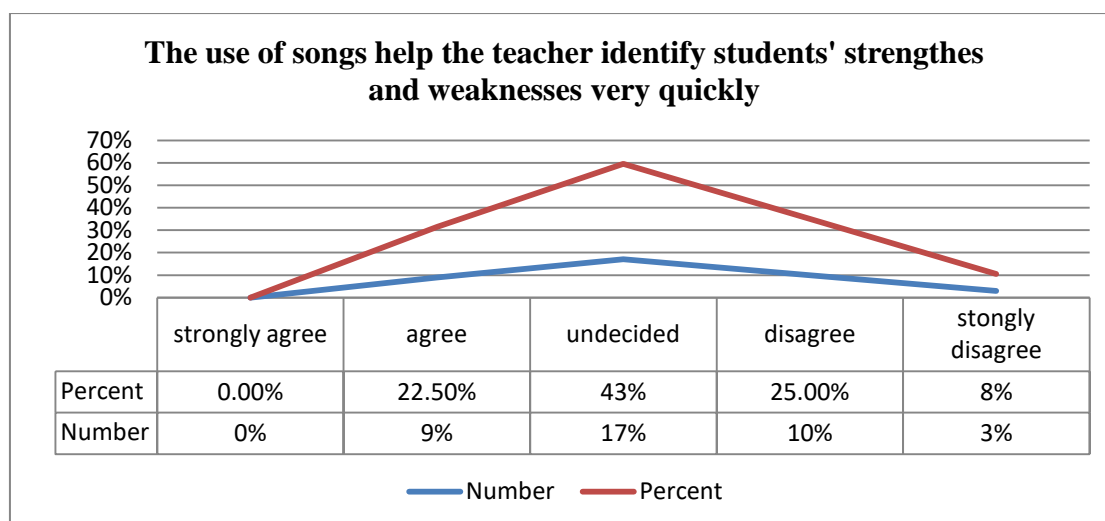
To be realistic, it is not easy to use songs in the classroom especially in undeveloped countries due to a number of reasons such as the lack of materials, low motivation, the lack of experience and the limitation of time. Most teachers (90%) agree on the fact that songs can't be easily implemented due to the lack of materials.



The results above shows that , most of the teachers (62.50) agree on the fact that using songs to teach foreign language and to assess students as part of their teaching is more suitable because it is one of the most enjoyable instruments for learners to master the language and for teachers to assess his learners’ performances



There are plenty of activities where the teachers can use songs to assess their students’ communicative competence. Such as; predicting, gap filling and spotting mistakes ..., all of which increases the students ‘motivation and engagement. 50% of the population agrees on this statement.



From the result above , we can see that 22.50% of teachers assume that the implantation of songs in the classroom helps the teacher to diagnose his student' strengths and weaknesses in an effective way.

DISCUSSION

In our study, we attempt to confirm the hypothesis that “the use of songs in the classroom might help the teacher to assess his student communicative competence most effectively” .To examine this theoretical belief, we opt for the use of a questionnaire to identify the teacher attitude towards the use of songs for assessment purposes. And we obtained the following results:

1. Teachers are highly motivated and enthusiastic towards the use of songs as a requirement in our digital age.
2. Using songs in the classroom increases the students 'motivation and engagement in a tremendous way.
3. Learners can improve their communicative competence through listening to songs in English.
4. By listening to English songs, learners boost their linguistic and communication skills and consequently they will be able to speak fluently .
5. Songs is one of the most enjoyable strategy used from the part of the teacher to assess their learners' performances.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude: the utility of our study is to put the musicology approach to an empirical test and to better understand the relation between communicative competence and songs since they are both based on communication, and to determine the effectiveness and importance of using a multimodality approach while assessing the students' performances and finally, to determine the feasibility and practicality of teaching and assessing the so-called 'communicative competence' by the implementation of diverse multimodal resources (linguistic, visual, gestural..) to enhance learners' communicative competence and to assess their performance.

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