

# ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNERS' COGNITIVE INTEREST BY POP-MUSIC IN ENGLISH

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**Abstract.** The article reviews the methodology of applying pop-songs in English for the purpose of developing cognitive interest of technical students in the process of L2 teaching. The pop-song as a multimedia teaching tool presents a number of advantages which must not be overlooked by university instructors. To these we refer a balanced combination of amusing, thought-provoking and discourse-motivating features which, when applied according to a certain methodology, can enhance students' motivation for expanding their knowledge in connection with newly-discovered data, which builds ground for the habit for life-long learning. The article highlights the idea that, due to the cognitive basis of speech, enhancement of cognitive aspects in the process of teaching L2 prompts the increase of learners' communicative competence in verbal interaction. The research was conducted among sophomores majoring in power engineering doing a General English course and involved the theoretical and the practical stages. Within the theoretical stage the notion of cognitive interest, its types and specific feature were addressed; the notion of pop-music was studied and pop-music samples were selected according to such criteria as harmoniousness of music and performance; informative and anthological value of the song; consistency of lyrics with the level of the learners' proficiency. Within the practical stage of the study, pop-music was applied in accordance with the developed methodology which was targeted at the enhancement of learners' background knowledge about pop-music in English, developing their cognitive interest and expressive skills by using popular pop-songs in the classroom. The classes conducted according to the suggested methodology proved to be effective in meeting the assigned objectives. As the result, 77.78% of the learners participating in the research displayed an enhancement of cognitive interest in a number of directions, such as studying the diversity of pop-music, increasing attention to song lyrics, and developing listening skills via songs. It is noteworthy that the methodology stimulated a 44.47% increase in the number of learners paying attention to song lyrics while listening, as well as a 33.32% increase in the number of learners displaying enhancement of expressive skills, thus validating the value of pop-songs for developing cognitive-communicative skills.

**Keywords:** cognitive interest; motivation; technical students; life-long learning; pop-music; cognitive-communicative skills.

### Background

The efficiency of using songs for language learning has been a commonly-recognized fact [1–5]. However there is a tendency to regard songs as

a means for entertaining students and taking a break from typical classroom activities.

Although English at universities is basically taught for future students' careers, the entertaining function of pop-song must not be overlooked. In terms of teaching English to technical students, instructors should also take into account one of the major incentives that students keep in minds in connection with language classes. The survey of 59 students of Tomsk polytechnic university (TPU) studying power engineering has revealed that one of the major expectations that many learners have in terms of English, as a humanitarian subject, is a change of activity and taking a break from the engineering subjects based on precise calculation and measurement. The survey highlighted the fact that, in addition to other learning objectives, English as an academic subject, is viewed as a subject for emotional relaxation: 41 students (69.29%) of the respondents stated that during English classes they expected to relieve some of the stress caused by the intellectual work they had to perform in the courses relating to the engineering major. As the desirable ways for doing that the students suggested talking, watching films and using songs for learning.

In this respect, using pop-music in the classroom provides a considerable potential in creating opportunities for emotional relaxation [6–8]. However pop-songs, when integrated into a proper methodology, can serve purposes of a more prominent nature rather than pure amusement, and contribute to meeting a number of teaching goals and objectives in terms of enhancing communicative competence of technical students.

### **Purpose of the study and sources of evidence**

The purpose of the research is to validate that pop-music can be an effective means for developing students' cognitive interest, therefore enhancing motivation for learning English and incentive for self-expression. The research was conducted at the Institute of the power engineering, TPU and involved 24 sophomores studying in two groups of 12 students each.

### **Methodology**

**Structure.** The methodology involved 2 stages: the theoretical and the practical one. The theoretical stage included such major steps as considering the notion of cognitive interest, specifying the notion of pop-music and selecting popular pop-songs according to certain criteria. The practical stage was targeted at the development and implementation of a methodology for developing learners' cognitive interest, with the posterior evaluation of its impact.

**The theoretical stage of the research.** Among a range of possible definitions of cognitive interest, we side with the one that specifies it as an ac-

tive cognitive focus on a certain object, phenomenon or activity associated with a favorable emotional attitude [9]. G.I. Shhukina, L.I. Bozhovich and other researchers have highlighted that cognitive interest can be situational and personal [10, 11]. Situational interest is typically grounded by curiosity or inquisitiveness evoked by external stimuli, while personal cognitive interest is characterized by the awareness and meaningfulness of the activity prompted by interest. Both types of interest produce a considerable impact on incentive for learning, e.g. situational interest often builds ground for personal cognitive interest.

According to B.I. Dodonov, V.B. Bondarevskij, A.A. Avdeeva, A.E. Krasilnikova, cognitive interest is characterized by such features as integrity, selectivity, willful determination, awareness [9, 12–14]. It is important that the isolated features of cognitive interest form ground for enhancing motivation for life-long learning, which is essential for the development of skills of operating information [15] and integrated development of language skills [16].

Motivation for learning is most easily enhanced by means which are associated with amusement, rather than those immediately related to learning. This accounts for considerable value of pop-music in English for developing cognitive interest.

Pop-music is defined as a genre of popular music derived from rock and roll in the 1950s and possesses such specific features as typical chorus-verse structure, repeated rhythmical tunes and hooks [17]. Although understood as a genre, pop-music is in fact a vast range of genres, many of which, at the present stage of music development, have become blended. The twelve major genres include rock and roll, rock, R&B, soul, country, disco, funk, synchpop, reggae, big beat, as well as gospel and spiritual; there are also «blended» genres, such as folk-rock, pop-rock and a number of others [17. P. 230; 18. P. 230]. The issue of the relevance of rock to pop-music is quite disputable in music studies [19. P. 301; 20], still it is not the purpose of this research.

Due to the diversity of pop-music the problem of careful selection of performers and songs for the methodology has to be addressed. We suggest that for developing learners' cognitive interest songs must be selected according to such principles as harmoniousness of music and performance; informative and anthological value of the song; consistency of lyrics with the level of the learners' proficiency.

***The practical stage of the research.*** Since the major purposes and objectives of teaching English throughout the academic year are regulated by the standardized curriculum, using pop-music in the classroom could be granted only a limited time – when it did not interfere with the major topics or was complimentary to them. The practical stage of the research included eight short series of classroom activities, with the posterior analysis of the

findings. Each of the series was conducted at a different lesson and lasted from 10 to 20 minutes. Four of the series were focused on the development of cognitive interest, and four series were targeted at developing learners' expressive skills.

The series targeted at developing cognitive interest included familiarizing the learners with the notion of pop-music and its major genres. Although many of the learners had believed themselves to be rather knowledgeable in terms of pop-music, it was surprising for them to discover that pop-music presented a much broader area for research, and this fact stimulated their interest to explore new aspects of its diversity.

At the beginning of the research all the 24 learners (100%) stated that listening to music was a natural part of their lives, with 21 learners (87.52%) claiming that they listened to pop-music and 3 learners (12.48%) siding with rock. However the learners turned out to have a rather simplified idea about pop-music. According to the survey for determining the students' background knowledge in terms of pop-music, which was conducted at the initial stage of the research, it was discovered that the learners in the first group were able to identify only six of the twelve major genres belonging to pop-music; and in the second group the students identified only four genres. To generalize, it was found out that the learners' knowledge of pop-music was basically limited to such genres as R&B, synchpop, funk and disco. The surprises for the learners were that: 1) there are more musical genres in pop-music than they had previously believed (also including country, reggae, gospel and spiritual and a number of others); 2) pop-music had originated from rock and roll (since many of them believed this style quite archaic and irrelevant to the present); 3) rock music is considered to be a part of pop-music.

Using pop-songs in the classroom proved to be an adequate tool to intensify motivation for cognition. The learners were willing to regard several of the major styles they had not been aware of, such as R&B, soul, big beat, reggae, gospel and spiritual. In the classroom the learners listened to sample songs fragments, read short texts about the genres, viewed lists of prominent performers referring to them.

Pop-music was also reviewed at the temporal perspective when the learners had a chance to, what they called, play «Guessing the melody». The learners had to identify the time when the song originated. However they even outperformed on the task: they also tried to specify the performer, often arguing with one another, in addition to just identifying the time to which the song belonged. This fact also testified to the growth of cognitive interest. It was observed that 19 learners (79.16%) were inspired by the game, taking an active part in the game and expressing regret when it was over.

As a number of the researchers have observed that the application of music in the classroom has been effective in reducing learners' reticence [2.

P. 60–61, 108; 21; 22], which was also confirmed by the research under review. Due to the fact that many individuals enjoy the situations when their opinions count and are eagerly heard, the series of classroom activities for eliciting learners' opinions about the songs they listened to raised considerable popularity among the learners.

It is noteworthy that the learners especially enjoyed discussing their opinion about song with the teacher, which proves the efficiency of such motivating techniques as «creating personal relationship with your students» [23. P. 138]. The learners were not only motivated to comment on the listening material provided by the teacher, but also shared the information about the songs and the bands they listened to. The learners were genuinely interested in the teacher's opinion and eagerly expressed their own. The possible explanation of this fact is that such discussions presented the situations when subordination did not matter, and verbal interaction was carried out on a person-to-person basis.

Another factor stimulating the enhancement of expressive skills was that making a judgment about the songs became a more habitual activity for the students. Previously they had just listened to pop-music for amusement – without analyzing and verbalizing the effect songs were making or thinking about a performers' voices and music. Thus we can suggest that taking the song as a complex multichannel message develops person's empathy, and, provided that there is proper vocabulary work done, it boosts motivation for verbal exchange.

At a more advanced stage of the research we considered the problem of perception and comprehension of song lyrics. The learners participating in the research were interviewed on the question how they felt about understanding lyrics. It was found out that the attitude varied considerably: 16.67% of the learners stated that lyrics did not make any sense in pop-songs; 25% commented that lyrics is too hard and, for this reason, demotivating for comprehension; 25% claimed that they did their best to understand the lyrics because it was an effective way to learn English, the rest of the learners – 33.33% – had a selective attitude to understanding lyrics, depending on the song. The finding have been visualized in Figure 1.

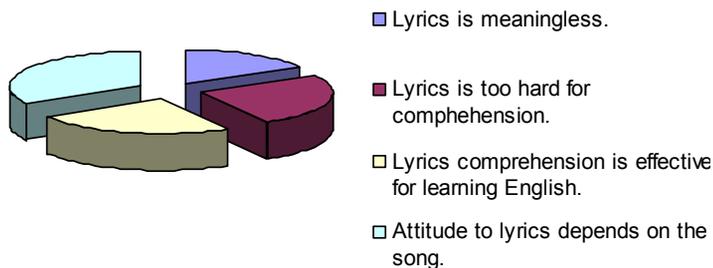


Figure 1

However, understanding lyrics proved to be a powerful tool of developing cognitive interest. In our research we take a pop-song as a multichannel message, since information is communicated by both non-verbal (such music, timbre and the quality of a voice, visual aids in case when listening is combined with watching a music video) and verbal means, i.e. lyrics, intonation, etc. It also develops listening skills essential for verbal discourse, which naturally involves decoding interlocutors' messages. For this reason learners should be taught to perceive, analyze and synthesize meanings from songs' lyrics.

In the methodology described the learners were encouraged to find that comprehension of lyrics is natural part of getting an integral impression of a song. Lyrics was applied as a stimulus for provoking and expressing judgment about its comprehensibility, complexity and the degree of its informative value. It was remarkable that it was the motivation for taking a pop-song as a multichannel message that prompted the evaluation of lyrics. The learners' judgments came like a spontaneous listeners' reaction and were not elicited by the teacher.

Language proficiency was measured by the enhancement of learners' cognitive-communicative skills. Cognitive-communicative skills are defined as skills of creating productive utterances based on the application of results of perception, extraction, comprehension and evaluation of information derived from verbal and non-verbal sources [24].

**Outcomes.** Using pop-music during English classes prompted the enhancement of learners' cognitive interest (the results are viewed in Figure 2). The growth of the learners' cognitive interest manifested itself in 2 directions: 1) studying pop-music genres and its anthology; 2) enhancing attention to song lyrics.

Directions of cognitive interest enhancement		Percentage of students stating the enhancement of cognitive interest, %
1	Diversity of pop-music	33.33
2	Deciphering song lyrics for meaning	16.7
	Development of listening comprehension skills via pop-songs	27.75
Total percentage of learners displaying growth o cognitive interest		77.78

Fig. 2. Enhancement of cognitive interest using pop-music

Thus 8 learners (33.33%) claimed that the lessons motivated them to research pop-music and discover new facts by taking a closer look at some other genres they had previously neglected and enlarge the list of the performers they habitually listened to. In terms of lyrics comprehension the classes boosted an increase of incentive for that: at the beginning of the research 18 students (75%) tended NOT to pay considerable attention to lyrics

for a number of reasons, the methodology had a 44.47% increase in the number of learners regarding lyrics, with 5 learners (27.75%) commented on the enhancement of listening comprehension skills when perceiving pop-songs, and 3 learners (16.7%) stating that they got the habit of listening and deciphering lyrics of the songs to their liking.

The experience in listening comprehension presented considerable value in terms of developing learners' expressive skills, since the demonstration of the pop-songs was accompanied by exchange of opinions about the samples and the suggested pop-music genres. In general the learners became more enthusiastic and competent in expressing their opinions in relevance to the pieces of pop-music introduced in the classroom. At the initial stage of the research only 4 learners (16.64%) were willing to express their opinion about the songs. At the final stage of the research, 7 out of the 24 learners (29.16%) learners took initiative in expressing their judgments about the song as a multichannel message, and 5 learners (20.8%) were able to express their judgments about the songs when questioned personally, though did not taking initiative in expressing themselves. The obtained data allow to conclude that 33.32% of the learners had an increase of expressive skills as the result of the methodology applied.

### **Conclusions**

Using songs in the classroom makes studying more relaxing and enjoyable, which comes up to the learners' expectations to find opportunities for emotional relaxation after classes relating to the engineering major, in spite of intense intellectual activity of memory, thinking and attention accompanying the application of pop-music in language learning. In the pop-song as a multi-media teaching tool an impressive fun-creating potential combines itself with a high didactic value for developing cognitive skills of analyzing, decoding and processing the information conveyed by songs as multichannel messages. Implementing the methodology enables learners to strengthen a connection between the form and meaning of the language means, which is a fundamental idea in language use. Cognition triggers the natural need of an individual for self-expression, and creates favorable conditions for verbal interaction on a person-to-person basis, provided that proper vocabulary for conducting discussions about impressions of a song has been taught.

The methodology has motivated learners to pursue their interests in furthering the research of pop-music, which is viewed as one of the ways of building ground for life-long learning. Forming a better comprehension of what pop-music is and how diverse it is contributes to enlarging learners' background knowledge about the modern world and building an image of a well-rounded individual.

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются потенциал и методика применения англоязычных песен с целью развития познавательного интереса у студентов технического вуза в процессе преподавания базового курса английского языка. Отмечается, что песни в жанре поп-музыка отличаются сбалансированным сочетанием развлекательных и мотивирующих характеристик, обеспечивающих активизацию процессов мышления и речевой деятельности. Применение поп-музыки в обучении развивает мотивацию студентов к дальнейшему расширению знаний, способствуя, таким образом, формированию у студентов заинтересованности обучаться в течение жизни. Подчеркивается идея о важной роли учета когнитивных аспектов речевой деятельности в развитии коммуникативной компетенции студентов в процессе речевого общения. Исследование проводилось среди студентов 2-го курса Энергетического института и состояло из двух этапов: теоретического и практического. Теоретический этап включал в себя рассмотрение понятия познавательного интереса, его основных видов и характерных черт, а также исследование понятия поп-музыки и отбор песен по выявленным принципам. Практический этап исследования осуществлялся в соответствии с разработанной методикой, направленной на определение и расширение фоновых знаний студентов об англоязычной поп-музыке, развитие их познавательного интереса и экспрессивных умений на основе применения англоязычных популярных песен на занятиях. В результате применения методики развитие познавательного интереса было выявлено у 77,78% студентов, принимавших участие в обучении, и проявилось в появлении мотивации к исследованию жанрового и исполнительского разнообразия в поп-музыке, усилении внимания студентов к содержанию песенных текстов и применении песен для развития уме-

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ний в аудировании. Важными результатами обучения стали рост числа студентов, повышение внимания обучающихся к смысловой составляющей песенного текста – на 44,47%, прирост в экспрессивных умениях у 33,32% студентов, что подтверждает высокий дидактический потенциал англоязычных песен в качестве средства развития познавательного интереса и когнитивно-коммуникативных умений.

**Ключевые слова:** технический вуз; познавательный интерес; мотивация; обучение в течение жизни; когнитивно-коммуникативные умения; поп-музыка.

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