

***IMPROVING EFL LISTENING SKILLS IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND
LANGUAGE THROUGH THE
APPLICATION OF MUSICAL METHODOLOGY***

***MEJORA DE LAS HABILIDADES DE ESCUCHA EN EL INGLÉS
COMO SEGUNDA LENGUA MEDIANTE LA APLICACIÓN DE
METODOLOGÍA MUSICAL***

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the research fields of how music may affect language learning; several techniques that involve different kinds of musical support have been used to develop student's skills in the use of language due to music influences the motivation in the classroom, diminishes anxiety (that distinct foreign language learners face) and it is an entertaining way to learn. The present study was to test the influence of a teaching short program with musical support that aimed at improving listening skills on foreign language on 24-35-year-old Spanish speakers who are learning English as a Foreign language with academic purposes and they both are rated at an A1 level in the foreign language (English). It was mainly focused on adults due to the minor interest that exists in teaching foreign languages to this demographic group, it was taken into consideration the motivational factor for learning this new tongue (reaching a master degree) and their tastes in music for them to have enjoyable encounters. Different musical sources such as karaoke and mainly an app called lyrics training were used to get a close relationship with the participants enhancing a better recognition of the phonemic register of the English language. Christiner and Reiterer (2013) consider singing as a 'good indicator of the ability to remember new and unintelligible utterances' and that the ability to sing improves auditory memory span (Fonseca et al., 2015). There were six sessions in which the participants moved from passive to active hearing and learnt to recognize and differentiate sounds from L1 to L2 in the words that were used in the songs; these recognitions were given by the pronunciation of the sounds while singing and after

hearing how the native speaker (the singer) makes those utterances. The songs chosen didn't count with advanced grammatical structures due to the level of the participants. The interest of this research project was to compare the results within the level of proficiency of the participants before and after the intervention with the proposed activities and what was expected was to improve the recognition of foreign sounds through the musical practice. Results point to the beneficial influence of a musical teaching approach for phonological training due to the improvement of the participants in this field after the practices, both participants didn't react in the same way and better results were shown on the participant that has more exposure to the English language through the music he often listens to.

Keywords: music, listening skills, adult learning, foreign language education.

Resumen

En los últimos años, con el rápido desarrollo de las neurociencias cognitivas, ha habido un interés creciente en los campos de investigación sobre cómo la música puede afectar el aprendizaje. En cuanto al aprendizaje de idiomas, se han utilizado varias técnicas que involucran diferentes tipos de apoyos musicales para mejorar las habilidades de los estudiantes en el uso del lenguaje gracias a que la música realmente puede influir en la motivación en el aula, disminuir la ansiedad (que enfrentan diferentes estudiantes de idiomas extranjeros) y es una forma entretenida de aprender. El presente estudio se realizó para probar la influencia de un programa corto de enseñanza con apoyo musical que tuvo como objetivo mejorar la comprensión auditiva en el idioma extranjero en hispanohablantes de 24 a 35 años que están aprendiendo inglés como segunda lengua con fines académicos y ambos están clasificados en un nivel A1 en la lengua extranjera (inglés). Se enfocó principalmente a adultos debido al menor interés que existe en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras a este grupo demográfico, se tomó en consideración el factor motivacional para aprender esta nueva lengua (cursar una maestría) y sus gustos musicales para que tengan encuentros agradables. Utilizamos diferentes recursos musicales como el karaoke y principalmente la aplicación *Lyrics Training* para conseguir que nuestros participantes tengan una relación más cercana y un mejor reconocimiento del registro fonémico de la lengua inglesa. Christiner y Reiterer (2013) consideran el canto como un "buen indicador de la capacidad de recordar expresiones nuevas e ininteligibles" y que la capacidad de cantar mejora la capacidad de memoria auditiva (Fonseca, et al, 2015). Fueron seis sesiones en las que los participantes pasaron de una escucha pasiva a una activa y

aprendieron a reconocer y diferenciar los sonidos de la primera y la segunda lengua en las palabras utilizadas en las canciones. Estos reconocimientos se dieron por la pronunciación de los sonidos al cantar y luego de escuchar la forma en que el hablante nativo (el cantante) los pronunciaba.

Las canciones elegidas no contaron con estructuras gramaticales avanzadas debido al nivel de los participantes. El interés de este proyecto de investigación fue comparar los resultados en el nivel de competencia de los participantes antes y después de la intervención con las actividades propuestas y lo que se esperaba era mejorar el reconocimiento de sonidos extranjeros a través de la práctica musical. Los resultados apuntan a la influencia beneficiosa del enfoque de enseñanza musical para la formación fonológica debido a la mejora de los participantes en este campo después de las prácticas, pero ambos participantes no reaccionaron de la misma manera y se mostraron mejores resultados en el participante que ha tenido un mayor contacto con la lengua inglesa a través de la música que escucha.

Palabras clave: música, habilidades auditivas, aprendizaje en adultos, educación en lengua extranjera.

Introduction

Music is something with which we interact daily since we are little kids and while we grow up, we develop music tastes and make them part of our daily lives; while we are working, studying or even when we're just not doing anything. Research shows that the influence of music on people is not only emotional; it has a positive effect on brain development and cognitive development (Zhang, S.Q., 2020). Bringing music into the classroom or including it in our learning processes can be a fruitifying practice since we would be including something very familiar to our students, it can be meaningful for the students and a great tool for cognitive development. Lapíldoraroja (2011, as cited in Carrillo, 2020), points out that teaching from understanding, the brain, to acquiring knowledge, must be enjoyable to ensure learning (Carrillo, 2020) so, education must be enjoyable for the students, if not, they might not learn or even they can create some kind of rejection towards learning (Ibid.). That is why music seems to be a very useful tool in classrooms.

This can diminish anxiety at the time of learning, furthermore, teachers can tune in to their students' interests and become sensitive to their tastes (Murphy, T, 1992). It is important how we learn something, those are experiences that will have a positive or a negative impact on our lives. When we learn something and then we use that knowledge we can go back to the moment when the learning took place; Richard Semon (1921) posited that memory would leave a physical trace in the brain; and the brain, when stimulated, would replay the memory (Zhang, S.Q. 2020). Music can provoke this effect by stimulating specific areas of the left and right hemispheres of the brain to evoke specific "music memories", causing corresponding physiological changes (Zhang, S.Q., 2020). Teachers can ensure their students' learning by giving them great experiences.

When teachers decide to include music as one of their teaching sources, making an appropriate choice of music is important. It has to be taken into account the level of the students, the content and lyrics structure, the objectives of the lesson and also the students' tastes. Mora (2014, as cited in Carrillo, 2020) states that the brain only learns if there are emotions, so choosing a song

that is appropriate to the students' context or tastes is fundamental. He points out that when knowledge is transmitted attractively, the brain releases chemicals, which can facilitate the learning process (Carrillo, 2020).

Music is also a tool for developing language skills in both, mother tongue and foreign language learning. According to Wallace (as cited in Abolfazl and Toshinari, 2019) “using songs with a repeated and simple pattern can facilitate precise text recall in the native language”. In foreign language learning, it is useful to acquire vocabulary, for giving examples of grammatical structures, tenses, colloquial expressions and to have an experience with authentic texts that, according to Jeremy Harmer, are “texts which are not written especially for language learners, but which are intended for any competent user of the language” (Harmer, J, 1997). Music training also improves phonological processing (Fonseca, Jara and Gómez, 2015) listening or singing different songs daily, helps us to get more in touch and to have a better recognition of the phonological register of the foreign language helping us to differentiate them from the sound that we use in our mother tongue.

For this study, the general objective was to determine the incidence of music and the improvement of the listening skill in the acquisition of English as a second language in two adults with similar exposure to ESL. This musical approach was chosen because of the great benefits that research has shown the music represents in the classes or encounters with educative endings. The participants are two people who have studied English at a university level and they both are rated on an A1 level in the English language. After the implementation of the proposed

sessions and activities, it is going to be analyzed how the musical method influences pronunciation and improves listening, also a contrast between the learning acquisition that each one of the students gets by applying the method proposed and an evaluation of the final output after the musical method of language acquisition is applied in both adult students will be done.

Lit Review

Education for adults started longer than it did for children, even though, in the last centuries, education and learning processes have been centralized in children and it has diminished the importance of education in adults and that includes teaching foreign languages as a second language. “This could be due to children have more flexible brains than adults, thus the children are superior to adults in learning a second language (Derakhshan, 2015), plus, various explanations that have been proposed for this limited learning, such as critical periods for language acquisition, socio-cultural differences, motivational differences, and restricted input (ibid.). McLaughlin (as cited in Derakhshan, 2015) suggests the best way for learning a second language is to learn two languages at the same time at birth since when people grow up they start having less free time and other many factors can interfere with the second language acquisition. Despite this, there have been some researchers focused on adult education or what is now known as andragogy and some of them have found music as an useful tool to develop communicative competencies and diminishing anxiety, which is one of the main factors that may interfere in adult education. Horwitz et al. (1986) “believed foreign language anxiety was responsible for students’ negative emotional reactions to language learning since they had to deal with a foreign language and culture” (Liu and Wenhong, 2010) and there have been several investigations that

point out music as an element to diminish anxiety; Suggestopedia is a teaching methodology developed by Dr Lozanov in Bulgaria which uses music as an indispensable tool and the idea behind using the music is apparently to relax students' defences and to open up their minds to the new language (Murphey, 1992).

English as a second language can be taught with a musical method that is based on establishing specific and didactic objectives to be met. The student will be relaxed and almost unconsciously will learn grammatical structures and speech acts because they learn the English language from such an everyday context as a simple song. Along with this, we have to highlight the motivating aspect that a song implies for a student in a second language learning process; tuning into the student's tastes, new or old, can be both enjoyable and useful, as it promotes natural interaction in the class (Murphey, 1992). Also, students will be improving their communicative competencies while reading, singing or listening to a song 'since we often exercise several of these skills at once' (Ibid.). According to several authors (Dornyei, 2001; Hiromori, 2006; MacIntyre, Gardner, 1989) motivation is an important factor for the acquisition of the target language but also and probably, in contrast, there are authors (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, Garner, 1989; 1991) that attribute more importance to the low levels of anxiety (Ahmetović, et al., 2020).

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2009) proposed "the Self determination theory (SDT) and it maintains that an understanding of human motivation requires a consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness" (Deci, Ryan, 2000). This theory proposes that it is

natural for humans to make an effort 'towards growth and self-organization' (Ahmetović, et al., 2020) but an important factor is how the social environment responds to those needs that we are trying to satisfy, making one feel free and fearless and with a sense of curiosity. While we are learning there has to be an answer to why we do it and for what we want it; in a learning process it is important to avoid amotivation that is the lack of desire and stimulus for getting engaged with a learning activity, in the same way, it has to be avoided extrinsic motivation which is given when students do something only to prevent punishments or gaining prizes but leaving behind a real interest for learning a topic (Ahmetović, et al., 2020). Motivation has to be intrinsic, that is 'activity performance for its own sake, for getting pleasure and satisfaction in doing it' (Ibid.). Additionally, Vallery et al. (1993, as cited on Ahmetović, 2020) established three subtypes of motivation; the one we have to learn and discover new things, then 'the motivation towards accomplishment giving one pleasure while testing the limits and achieving something not previously achieved' (Ibid.) and finally the motivation that exists by participating in activities that may evoke positive feelings. Based on Lems (2005), 'students enjoy music, they open up to it, and they feel more relaxed in its presence, this allows students to feel more motivated and less scared or anxious in the same way, music is one element that allows the students to feel more comfortable and free; it also awakens their curiosity.

Research has shown how there is a connection between music and learning a new language (Lems, 2001, 2002). According to Kristin Lems (2005), there is a consensus that using music in the classroom motivates and inspires learners; she points out that most of the students get involved in the activities when they include music. In addition, music can be used with several

purposes at the time of learning a new language; Murphey (1992, as cited in Lems, 2005), who worked a lot with music for teaching English as a foreign language in adults, mentions that using music besides offering lower rates of anxiety and higher rates of motivation in the classroom, also helps us to put language in a context and students can take from the song's lyrics examples of pronouns, time, gender and universal themes from the one's vocabulary can be learnt. The four skills (listening, writing, speaking and reading) can be reinforced by using music and in this study, there has been a focus on improving listening which is a 'tried-and-true method' in which learners can improve their listening comprehension in the foreign language and when is a guided activity the effects of listening to music get maximized (Lems, 2005).

Methodology

For the carrying out of this study, two people were selected based on the Purposeful sampling proposed by Creswell (2002) said participants had similar interests and also a similar academic level, they signed consent on the activities in which they were going to take part, later there was made a search of information mainly on the language acquisition forms, also on the use of music in andragogy and pedagogical methodologies applicable to the chosen population, Adults in this specific case, to carry out a methodology similar to the one exposed in Pedraza, S.(2015) a test composed of 5 multiple-choice questions was made, before the procedure that is exposed below.

The method designed for this proposal comprised three different stages where the participants were exposed to a passive hearing, an active hearing and a final hearing, where the results of the process were taken. Based on the method proposed by C. Jiménez (1997) researchers developed

a process in which the participants were exposed to selected songs which as mentioned in (G. Cristofaro, 2011) “Songs are a powerful tool for language learning” and they also “ help improve our listening skills, influence our behaviour and emotions.”, then the participants were left to interact with those songs in different activities that helped them develop better listening skills.

To start the process, four songs were selected for each participant; After that, passive hearing began by letting the participants listen to the songs a couple of times, then they got asked if they liked the music and how it made them feel, said questions are essential to maintain the motivation of the participants, know if they enjoyed the music, and also help us to have a recorded data about the emotions of the participants through all the process and its success.

The active hearing stage, and so the main stage, was composed of six sessions that improved the listening skills of the participants by implementing different activities using mainly the Lyrics Training app. In the first session, the participants had two tries to play the song in the easy or intermediate mode, leaving us in a passive role in which we revised how they did it. We developed the following two sessions with the karaoke mode of the app. In the first one, participants had the chance to sing with the background voice of the artist, and in the second session, they had to sing it just with the melody. Such activities helped them do a conscious process in which they discovered and identified the words they couldn't understand the first time they listened to the songs

The last two parts of the process of the six sessions were centred on the listening training and its check, with an activity of active hearing called Jumbled Lyrics, the participants were told to organize a song, which was cut into different parts at the beginning of the activity, just by

listening to it, using YouTube and Spotify as tools to reproduce the music, students were able to put together all the lyrics and receive little clarifications in terms of grammar and pronunciation if it was necessary for them to complete the process.

After this process, the same test of the beginning was applied and then different results were developed and the variables between each participant contrasted the results of each one of them, and their improvement.

For this project a qualitative form of data was used, in a changing observational role that according to Creswell (2002) is 'one where researchers adapt their role', due to in the sessions that were carried out there were two in which we were merely observing and in the other four we did interventions to correct pronunciation or to do clarifications for different sounds. One of the disadvantages of using observation in the qualitative model is that it will be limited to those places and situations where you can gain access, and you may have difficulty developing rapport with individuals.

Researchers didn't make recordings as shown in the project made by Pedraza, S. (2015) observations were written after each session, during observation it was analyzed the progress of the participants and compared the result between each one of them, a field diary wasn't used, because the study carried out was shorter than the one carried out by Pedraza, S. (2015) not only in time but also in the group in which it was applied.

Using Scopus and Mendeley, a search was made for the documents after establishing the type of study, the studies were selected based on their similarities with the study to be developed, words as Listening skills, language acquisition, motivation, methodologies with music as a tool, and andragogy were the ones that guide us to documents that exposed information from similar cases of methodological applications in adults were selected, as well as how documents were searched that would share information about the psychological aspects as motivation, stress and anxiety and how does this relate to the effectivity of a methodology.

Results

The incidence of music in the acquisition of English as a second language in two adults with similar ESL exposure was determined after the application of a methodology that was designed based on the books and articles found and guided us throughout the entire process. In both participants, results showed different advances for each of them; the participant who is usually more exposed to the English language and in his daily life and outside the educational context listens to music in that language, showed a better improvement than the other, since she is not exposed to the language for so long in her daily life, however, both participants showed improvement in their listening skills and expressed an understanding of a higher number of words compared to the results before the implementation of the methodology.

Before the application of the methodology both participants showed interest in developing better listening skills, because as Harmer, J. (2010) mentions, students often have the need to understand what others are saying to them, in media or classes for example, but mostly because

of their need to improve their level of English to apply to study for a master's degree. participants filled a first test in which they showed some abilities in the language. In comparison to the final result students seem to have a better handling and understanding of said skill, not a big one mainly because of the shortness of the study but a good one.

Even though it was expected karaoke to be the activity that would give the greatest improvement in the participants, the activity “jumbled lyrics” had the best results since the listening improvement is the principal purpose of this study, but that does not mean the other ones didn't work as well, Karaoke, however, proved to be more useful to develop improvement in pronunciation than in listening, according to Bozorgian and Feyten (1991) and Richard (2008) cited in Abu-Snoubar(2017) “enhancing the speaking skill is strongly related to the students' progress in the listening skill”. This activity “karaoke” showed that there is a correlation between both skills and that they often are studied together since one can be without the other. Researchers suggest studying and implementing a methodology that focuses on the improvement of both skills and not only in one of them if it's possible.

The songs as expected showed good results between the participants and the anxiety they usually have while studying English as a foreign language, it diminished since the selected songs were enjoyable for them and kept them motivated to still work on the activities proposed by the researchers. The effort they put into each activity was the direct result of their positive attitude and the positive incentive they received.

Discussion

The main objective of this research project was to determine the incidence of music and the improvement of the listening skills in the acquisition of English as a second language in two 24- 35 years old adult Spanish speakers with similar exposure to ESL. Because of the limited nature of the data, it is important to recognize that the results presented shouldn't be generalized, however, there are several authors and researchers (Murphey, 1992, Lems, 2005, Fonseca-Mora, M. C., Jara-Jiménez, P., & Gómez-Domínguez, M., 2015) that attribute great importance to music in the English as a foreign language classroom. During the training sessions, it was discovered that it was necessary to include a bigger reinforcement in speaking and reading to get a better response from the participants, also for them to better distinguish the phonological repertory. The speaking training was an important part of the process; it wasn't enough just listening to the songs. According to Harmer (2010), a difficulty that foreign learners can face at the time of learning English is the usual lack of similarity between the written words and the way they are pronounced, and if in the classroom or educational encounters activities like karaoke will be used, although it may improve listening competencies, the way in which the students read the words that the song contains will be an important factor to learn to memorize those utterances. Many goals can be reached teaching English as a foreign language to adults with a musical methodology with separated interest on improving one skill but there will be more meaningful learning if these activities are not separated into individual parts but with lesson sequences where vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening and language functions can be taught. On a posthumous and bigger research project, these lesson sequences that are a sort of

classes or educational encounters where we work on more than one skill¹ can be carried out. Another point in which there can be an emphasis on bigger research is that “what adults bring to the classroom is at least as important as what the classroom offers them” (Leems, 2005). Making a contrast between the cultural background of our adult students and part of the culture that we can discover through the English songs will be gratifying and a factor of motivation for these learners.

Conclusion

Music is an important tool that can take part in the teaching and learning process of English as a second language. It helps learners to diminish the common anxiety that appears while learning a new language and, equally it helps them to get more motivated in the learning process, even more, when it is about adult learners as it could be more difficult for them to get motivation. The musical approach that was used in this study helped the participants to have a better recognition of sounds, acquiring good phonological and decoding skills and along with the sessions they also had an improvement in their pronunciation (although less emphasis was placed on this) while having fun and meaningful learning. Finally, music is a resource we can use to improve different aspects of the learning of a new language. It can be used to focus not only on one skill but on all of them and even at the same time by proper guided activities.

¹ See Harmer, J. (2010). How to teach English (6th edition). In Pearson /Longman. Chapter 6.

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