TRANSCENDING RECREATIONAL FUNCTIONALITY: ADULT EFL LEARNERS' VIEWS ON SONG-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING FROM AN ANDRAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Complementary to its entertainment value, music is known for having educational relevance in foreign language learning, a topic which is often overlooked in andragogical studies. The present inquiry sought to explore the use of songs in language learning by focusing on the perceptions and experiences of adult EFL learners. The qualitative research data are drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 adult EFL learners of different occupational and cultural backgrounds. The study findings reveal that music is omnipresent in adult EFL learners' lives, both as a means of entertainment or 'alternative therapy' and as an opportunity for promoting language learning. The interviewees emphasized the way that songs enhance their learning experience by developing their reading comprehension and speaking skills. However, more emphatically, they reinforced the role of songs in facilitating vocabulary learning, namely the enrichment of their lexical repertoire. While the collected data suggest a consensus concerning the positive effects of songs, some participants argued that any learning gain is conditioned by several classroom-related factors. Future research can benefit from a discussion on the practical applications of songs in the adult EFL classroom.

Keywords: songs, adult EFL learners, language learning, vocabulary, classroom

1 Introduction

Beginning at infancy – although some even suggest that this occurs during the prenatal period – humans establish an almost subliminal bond with music[1]. This inherently complex phenomenon has been studied both by linguists (e.g., Jackendoff, 2009; Moreno et al., 2009 Schön et al., 2008) and neuroscientists (e.g., Arbib, 2013; Eschrich et al., 2008; Ferreri et al., 2013, Spiro, 2003;). The intimate relationship humans have with music has made it a debate-stirring topic worthy of further exploration, prompting research into the topic in various fields, including language education (Fonseca-Mora & Gant, 2016). Within the field of applied linguistics, the subject has received substantial interest in regard to the effects of songs on learners' foreign language experience (Cores-Bilbao et al., 2019; Degrave, 2019; Rose, 2016). This can be associated with the proliferation of different unconventional language learning trends (i.e., the use

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[1] Because lyrics are exclusive to vocal music, i.e., songs, which are a key factor to language learning and the main focus of this paper, the present research is not concerned with instrumental music and uses 'music' and 'vocal music' interchangeably throughout this paper.

of movies, YouTube, and other media for language learning purposes), which has stimulated critical discussions among foreign language researchers and teachers. So far, the main debate has revolved around the efficacy and appropriateness of using songs in language learning, which has been the focus of several studies (e.g., Dragnev, 2022; Griffiths, 2013; Mobbs & Cuyul, 2018) examining their educational applications.

Today, using songs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching is no longer considered a novelty. Seminal studies have substantiated the usefulness of music as a language learning tool (Kao & Oxford, 2014; Lorenzo et al., 2014). Whether they are implemented to incentivize students by creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere or to target their language skills, a considerable body of literature has corroborated the advantages of songs in teaching different aspects of language (e.g., Chandler, 2016; Grimm, 2020; Linh et al., 2020; Piri, 2018). Recent developments in the fields of neuroscience and psychology have led to a renewed interest in the role of songs in the classroom, with many studies carried out to examine their educational benefits (e.g., Brandt et al., 2012; Good et al., 2014; Ludke et al., 2013; Murad et al., 2018; Slevc & Miyake, 2006).

It has been claimed that immersive experiences with music can trigger cognitive processes required for language learning (Moreno et al., 2011). A survey report published by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (2021) suggests that people are listening to music now more than ever before. The study examined the listening habits of over 40,000 individuals representing different age groups and national backgrounds. Based on the findings, it was revealed that the average time spent listening to music is around 18.4 hours a week. Considering the restricted setting of the language classroom, it seems that students are more likely to gain exposure to authentic contextualized linguistic input extramurally through songs than within the confines of the simulated learning environment of the classroom.

The majority of the relevant inquiries into the educational potential of songs are almost exclusively based on a quantitative understanding of the phenomenon (Dolean, 2016; Setia et al., 2012), with a lack of qualitative studies examining the implicit facets of song-assisted learning from the insider's (i.e., the EFL student's) own vantage point. Moreover, the second main motivation for the present study was that research seemingly fails to acknowledge adult learners' experiences, as the literature primarily addresses the issue from the perspective of young language learners. Considering the paucity of research in this area, the current study aims to provide qualitative evidence supporting the use of song-mediated language learning based on the perceptions and personal insights of adult EFL learners. By reporting their views and song-related practices, the study explores how adult EFL learners leverage their musical interests to support their language learning.

2 Literature review

In order to gain a better grasp of the issue, key terms of direct conceptual relevance are defined in the first part of this section; then, empirical studies that report on song-supported language learning are discussed.

2.1 Theoretical background

2.1.1 Language learner perceptions

English language learners (ELLs), as insiders, can bring novel ideas and insights into applied linguistics research. However, Allwright (1984) argues that "very many teachers seem to find it difficult to accept their learners as people with a positive contribution to make to the instructional process" (p. 167). Following this line of thought, Pearson (2004) suggests that "much more is known about what … language learners and teachers do inside classrooms than what learners do outside the classroom to develop appreciation of the target culture and fluency in the target language" (p. 1). By acknowledging the voice of their students, EFL teachers can develop a better understanding of the specific strategies that learners rely on to promote their learning and the reasons why they may perceive these methods to be useful in developing their language abilities. As a result, adopting such an approach will ultimately benefit the teaching experience itself.

In this paper, the notion of perception is used to refer to students' views, experiences, and beliefs regarding using songs for language learning following the definition provided by Eggen and Kauchak (2010). They define perception as "the process people use to find meaning in stimuli" and, how, through our senses, we digest information and try to make sense of the world around us (p. 209). This implies that students' perceptions of learning are a crucial and decisive factor in the success of both the learning and teaching processes since the responsibility is shared by both teachers and learners. Understanding how students themselves view their own learning allows the teacher to adjust their educational preconceptions to be more student-centered and to contextualize their teaching ideologies to fit the reality of the classroom. Thus, by synchronizing their approaches and instructional practices with how students view and direct their own learning, teachers can better plan their lessons to target students' learning needs and meet their expectations.

2.1.2 Music, memory, and language: A multidimensional relationship

It is hard to deny that music has a strong influence on the human psyche (Trimble & Hesdorffer, 2017). In fact, the interplay between music, memory, and language is a multilayered phenomenon that has attracted considerable and varied research interest. This has resulted in different theories and teaching methods, such as the Suggestopedia approach developed by Lozanov in the seventies, which endorses the use of music as a useful tool for foreign language learning (Lozanov, 2004). Given its hedonic impact, music stimulates the brain and triggers feelings of engagement, positivity, and belonging, thus creating an atmosphere in which learners can "thrive emotionally, socially, and academically" (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 227).

Due to its mnemonic potential, music can facilitate the process of memorizing song lyrics (Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007), considering that the learner is offered repeated encounters with the same words. When listening to a song, two subliminal processes are likely to be triggered. On the one hand, the listener can experience "earworms", a term describing the process in which a piece of music repeatedly loops in their head, which adds to the possibility of ultimately retaining words

due to the song's recurrent mental presence. On the other hand, even though not consciously, the listener is emotionally involved in deciphering the meaning of the lyrics and making sense of the song. In the same vein, melodic input has the quality of lodging in one's brain, a phenomenon Murphey (1990) describes as the "Song Stuck in My Head" (SSIMH) theory. This hypothesis refers to the mostly subvocal mental rehearsal of songs where Murphey (1990) postulates that music "act[s] as a LAD[2] activator" (p. 53). To illustrate, SSIMH is the process of inwardly formulating words or thoughts without audibly expressing them, which can potentially facilitate long-term retention of new vocabulary and ultimately foster lexical acquisition. Murphey (1990) also describes the often-neglected educational benefits of music as "having a greater impact upon potential and actual language learners than teachers have thus far given it credit for" (p. 61). In fact, the science behind the stimulating effect of music on the functioning of the brain is that it "activate[s] both parts of the brain": the left hemisphere which is related to "the pronunciation of words, understanding, rhythm and musical execution" and the right hemisphere which is associated with "melodic expression, tone, emotions, and artistic expression" (Fonseca-Mora et al., 2011, p. 105). In this regard, Anton (1990) claims that using a learning activity that simultaneously involves both the left and right hemispheres creates an ideal learning situation and, as a result, "the most productive learning occurs" (p. 1170).

2.1.3 Song-assisted incidental language learning

Considering the lack of time in the classroom to cover all of the aspects of language learning, teachers may prioritize specific aspects over others (Webb & Nation, 2017); hence, students may find themselves unable to sufficiently develop their vocabulary knowledge by only relying on classroom input. However, while listening to music, learners experience repeated encounters with real language use and are introduced to new vocabulary. Thornbury (2002) comments that "while coursebooks, vocabulary books and … texts are useful for focusing on specific words for active study, … the learner needs plentiful opportunities for incidental learning to occur as well" (p. 58). He even goes further by suggesting that the fun factor should be present in language exposure rather than the educational purposes (p. 58). Hulstijn (2012), however, characterizes incidental learning as an unconscious process of "'picking up' an unknown word from listening to someone or from reading a text" (p. 1). Typically, vocal music involves the three aforementioned key features: enjoyment, listening, and reading. In fact, songs are not merely a source of language content for incidental learning, but they are also a means of internalizing vocabulary, providing more opportunities for repetition than reading a plain text while also allowing for increased engagement in learning.

2.2 Empirical background

A number of experimental studies have been carried out to investigate song-mediated language learning. Kuppens (2010) examined EFL learners' consumption of English-subtitled television programs and movies, computer games, and music outside the classroom. The findings revealed that music was the most common source of exposure to English, with more than 90% of

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[2] The Language Acquisition Device is a theoretical concept advanced by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s to explain how children can learn and understand language in a relatively short period of time (Chomsky, 1968).

the 374 students listening to English songs at least three times per week. Similarly, Sundqvist's (2009) study demonstrated that learners engage in many Extramural English (EE) activities outside the classroom and interestingly, listening to songs was "the number one EE activity in which participants spent most of their time doing"; she further revealed that for some informants, the amount of time spent listening to music is "the equivalent of a fulltime working week" (p. 118). Her study also demonstrated that some students were "productively" (p. 118) engaged in listening to songs, considering it more than a mere leisure activity. The participants also reported "that they [would] write down the lyrics of a song in English or translate the English lyrics into" their native language, while one of the informants "mentioned singing karaoke in English, which is another type of active/productive music activity" (p. 125).

Studies on learner-cognition have recently been receiving increased attention from language experts as there has been a marked shift of focus from teacher-centered instruction to embracing a learner-centered philosophy (Boyadzhieva, 2016). Adopting an action research approach, Palacios and Chapetón (2014) investigated the use of songs as a socially-situated literacy practice in the EFL classroom from a critical perspective. The authors consider songs as texts that the learner can individually interact with while making their own interpretations, "allowing students to bring to mind issues of their real life contexts, connecting those with the way in which social processes are being portrayed in the songs, and thus, encouraging an active role in the development of class activities" (p. 13). The study used a qualitative approach to explore the responses of 42 EFL students aged between 15 and 19 in a Colombian educational institution regarding the integration of songs in the language classroom as a social practice. The findings indicate that a positive change of attitude occurs when songs are used, with students feeling more interested, free, and motivated to participate in the EFL class. The study also demonstrated how songs benefit students not only in developing their language abilities but also at a social level, helping them make connections to their life experiences. This generates even more interest in learning English and can thus "shorten the felt distance with the L2" (Palacios & Chapetón, 2014, p. 27).

These findings were also corroborated by other studies conducted in the Indonesian context including Ma'rifat (2017) and Hendriani et al. (2020), who investigated Indonesian EFL learners' beliefs about the advantages of using songs for language learning. While Ma'rifat's (2017) case study sought to explore students' views regarding the use of songs in vocabulary learning, Hendriani et al.'s (2020) inquiry was more concerned with eliciting learners' beliefs about the advantages of using songs for language learning in general. Based on the feedback from the participants, the authors found that songs can help develop listening comprehension skills, improve pronunciation, produce a sense of relaxation and focus, and boost confidence. Producing similar findings to those of Ma'rifat (2017), Hendriani et al. (2020) revealed that EFL learners are aware of the importance of songs in exposing them to new vocabulary; in addition, they expressed that by "listen[ing] to English song[s], they are consciously and unconsciously accustomed to hearing English words" (p. 241), facilitating further familiarization with the language.

Celce-Murcia (2001) notes that teaching English to adult EFL learners can be a challenge for the L2 teacher (p. 386). Apart from the paucity of qualitative research on song-supported EFL learning, the reviewed literature reveals that studies have overlooked the emic perspective of adult EFL learners as a community of ELLs, despite the fact that they may face far more serious

challenges in their language learning experiences than young learners. Celce-Murcia (2001) expands on the idea that adult students are responsible and mature learners in the sense that they self-direct their own learning but she states that:

> […] if the learning environment does not […] match cultural expectations and perceived needs, the self-direction may take the form of challenging the teacher or syllabus in class, of filtering out what they perceive as nonessential, of simply leaving the class and seeking some other way of learning, or of abandoning the enterprise altogether. (p. 386)

3 Method

3.1 Research design

As the review above has shown, many aspects of song-assisted learning remain underexplored, namely adult EFL learners' attitudes and perceptions. Adopting a qualitative approach, the current study attempts to investigate adult EFL learners' experiences with using songs for language learning. With the purpose of obtaining a holistic outlook on song-supported learning, the aim of this research was to elicit students' thoughts and beliefs on how music can promote language development. This aim is reflected in the following overarching research question: What are adult EFL learners' views and experiences on the use of songs for language learning? The review of the related literature indicated several gaps which prompted the following sub-questions:

1. What is the role of music in adult EFL learners' everyday lives?
2. How do adult EFL learners view the value of songs in relation to their language learning?
3. What are adult EFL students' experiences with using songs for language learning purposes?

As far as the research design is concerned, the choice of the qualitative paradigm was to honor the principle of the "multiplicity of voices", which "involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 258). In the same vein, Levitt (2020) notes that qualitative data "can capture processes or experiences that are ambiguous, inchoate, and complexly interrelated" (p. 20), which reflects the main goal of the present study. Since this inquiry explores complex issues including differing views and attitudes, the qualitative approach was deemed congruous with the objective of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of these distinctive realities.

3.2 Data collection, instrument, and participants

After deciding on the methodological approach, the semi-structured interview was deemed to be the best tool for data collection given its flexible and fluid nature of "stimulat[ing] discussion rather than dictat[ing] it" (Tracy, 2020, p. 158). This not only allows for spontaneous pertinent questions to emerge, but also helps create a relaxed atmosphere for the informants to elaborately

dwell upon their answers. The interviews were conducted in English and/or Tunisian Arabic and took place between the spring and autumn of 2021 where most of them lasted for an average of 40 minutes. Apart from the icebreaker and wrap-up questions, the interview consisted of four main sections addressing 1.) The EFL learners' musical interest and profiles, 2.) the emotional impact of songs, 3.) the role of vocal music in language learning, and 4.) the implementation of songs in the EFL classroom (See Appendix for the interview guide).

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the study participants in terms of their gender, age, nationality, and occupation. The study sample consisted of 15 adult EFL students of different nationalities ranging in age from their early 20s to mid-40s and representing various educational backgrounds (e.g., computer-science, engineering, teaching, and international relations). The sample was selected using the purposive maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling technique, given that "any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon" (Patton, 2014, p. 428). Dörnyei (2007) further highlights that based on heterogeneous sampling "the researcher selects cases with markedly different forms of experience [which] will allow [them] … to explore the variation within the respondents and it will also underscore any commonalities" (p. 128).

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Occupation
Adam	Male	21	Tunisian	Computer science student
Adel	Male	30	Algerian	Transportation and logistics specialist
Alexander	Male	35	Russian	Dental practitioner
Amir	Male	24	Algerian	English language learner (preparatory course)
Aya	Female	29	Tunisian	PhD student in language acquisition and EFL instructor
Azita	Female	25	Iranian	Information technology graduate and English language learner (preparatory course)
Bariş	Male	40's	Turkish	Agricultural engineer and English language learner (preparatory course)
Baya	Female	23	Tunisian	Computer science postgraduate
Dora	Female	25	Tunisian	Business development master's student and content manager
Kenza	Female	21	Tunisian	International relations' undergraduate and human rights activist
Lina	Female	21	Tunisian	International relations' undergraduate
Malek	Male	23	Tunisian	Photographer, cinematographer, and engineer
Maya	Female	24	Tunisian	Political science MA student
Sami	Male	31	Algerian	PhD student in human resource management
Sofia	Female	24	Tunisian	MBA holder and a political science student

Table 1. Description of the interview participants

3.3 Data analysis

The verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The transcriptions were interpreted by first organizing the data into major descriptive categories, or so

called "dominant themes", which appeared as recurrent patterns in the interviews. Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework was adopted, which consists of the following stages: "getting familiarized with the data collected, generating initial codes, looking for themes based on initial coding, reviewing framed themes, identifying and labeling themes [and] producing the report" (p. 87). In the thematic analysis of qualitative material, the focus is on the themes that "describe in depth what is … found in the data", and the researcher is required to have "an intimate knowledge of their data" (Howitt, 2016, p. 162). While progressing through the above stages, data is iteratively examined, and raw ideas are delineated. Even though there is no general consensus on how data is supposed to be interpreted when following the thematic analysis method, the process of mapping the data was rigorous and thorough.

After the reflection stage, the initial codes were manually generated by pinpointing the most notable elements found in the interviews. These served as the basis for constructing and characterizing the emerging themes. The latter were then reviewed in relation to the dataset, and the transcripts were reexamined in search of additional pertinent codes, a recursive process that ultimately led to the refining and finalizing of the names for each theme. This meant looking at the semantic content from the initial coding and adopting a more latent process of analysis which "goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify… the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations / and ideologies / that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Brown & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This approach was purposefully adopted as it mirrors the main research objective of gaining a comprehensive understanding of EFL students' perceptions. The generalized themes were analyzed in relation to the study objectives to meet the scope and focus of the inquiry and then further developed by selecting quotes and reporting on relevant data that reflect the research questions.

4 Findings

4.1 The omnipresence of music as part of English learners' reality

Describing their personal attachment to songs, almost all the participants reported that music plays a crucial role in their lives. Reflecting on their individual experiences, they revealed that they devote a considerable amount of time to engaging with music. Bariş, an agricultural engineer, considered music to be "very important for [him]", stating that:

> I listen to music everywhere, in my car, at my home, while eating something … it's very important for me … my listening times I have to say one or two hours … but it's a special time … [it is] a daily routine. (Bariş, 10:45)

Kenza, another participant, is an international relations student and human rights activist who remarked that she always had her headphones on, and over time developed a habit of "… estimate[ing] how many songs [she] can listen to when planning to go from one place to another." Referring to the auspicious beginnings of her English learning journey, the participant revealed that it all started with cultivating an interest in the music of a famous English boy band. As a fan of the group, she repeatedly listened to and memorized their songs, which eventually helped her "expand [her] vocabulary knowledge significantly". Similarly, 23-year-old Malek, in divulging

his personal attachment to music, stated that "I spend a lot of time listening to music. I spent my whole life with headphones, literally … I spend 7 hours listening to songs, per day at a minimum, sometimes even more." These statements convey the notion of language exposure through authentic materials and illustrate how students learn by encountering language from their environment by means of repeated encounters. Referring to music's effect on the human psyche, the value of songs was explicitly emphasized by the interviewees, who described them as a haven providing emotional support. Describing the influence of music on her state of mind, Aya, an EFL instructor, described music as a means to:

> … express my own feelings so every mood I'm in there is a song I select … and [with time] I came to notice that that there are some patterns in songs that I never saw in books, weird combinations, or verbless sentences that I thought were ungrammatical, but they actually weren't. This actually helped me understand the language better and I even tried to follow that pattern when I produce my own language. (Aya, 23:45)

In this respect, using songs as a source of linguistic input is not merely about having a liberating learning experience that frees learners from the conventional formal learning routines of the classroom, but most importantly about providing new avenues for learning. Further articulating her thoughts, Aya thinks that "we depend on music to live. It is not something we can get rid of or live without. We need music no matter what mood we're in, even when you're busy you need music, when you want to focus you need music." Sharing a similar view, Sofia believes that:

> Music can have a positive effect on people. You can deliver an idea or a message through music that you can't do with words because it feels cringey when speaking it. For example, if someone tells you to "love yourself" or something like that or "the world is beautiful", it is cringey, but when you listen to this in a song with rhythm, etc., you can better grasp the meaning. (Sofia, 16:10)

Based on these views, it is implied that in learning a foreign language, the communication of meaning through musical material has a high degree of deliverability compared to other modes of input, considering the instrumental factor that makes songs easily absorbable.

4.2 The power of music in triggering curiosity and promoting language learning

In relation to learner attitudes and character traits, having a spirit of enquiry is foundational to learning. The interview participants highlighted the powerful influence of music as an emotional trigger for intellectual curiosity. A case in point is the narrative of Malek, who discussed his own approach to music recounting that "if I take a liking to a song and I find it interesting, I will look for the lyrics and follow it word by word and if I don't understand something, I would look for the translation." Thinking along the same lines, Sofia describes her experience with songs as very "sense-engaging", relaying that she would oftentimes note down new words from the song lyrics the meaning of which was not made explicitly clear, or she did not readily grasp. She explains that:

> Personally, when I listen to songs I would have the lyrics [in front of me] as well because I am the type of person who needs to know the meaning of the lyrics when listening to a

song. So when I want to understand the lyrics, I listen to the song at the same time. Something that makes me really like the song not only rhythm, is also the lyrics. (Sofia, 22:45)

With regard to real language learning gains, the majority of the participants commented on the potential of listening to songs to improve English vocabulary acquisition. Reflecting on his experience of using songs to independently learn English, Alexander, a dental practitioner, reveals that:

… listening to songs [is] an exercise … the main goal is for me to be able to clearly understand all phrases and words in the song and … in this case I would use Cambridge or Oxford dictionary to check for the correct translation. (Alexander, 09:49)

Participants also pointed out that songs can essentially be considered as natural language in use as they are based on authentic input, which makes them a convenient source for improving pronunciation and word articulation. Another key aspect they addressed was the role of the instruments or the melody of a song in enabling the retention and consequently the internalizing of new words, since songs are innately emotional and are capable of "touching [one's] inner feelings … because of the rhythm and instrument" as Alexander put it.

Similarly to Alexander, Dora, a business student working as a content manager, reports that music, especially singing karaoke, has always been one of her passions, as immersing herself in music has contributed to the development of her speaking skills. She further added that consuming music receptively (i.e., listening to songs) and productively (i.e., singing) both had a considerable impact on her productive vocabulary knowledge and helped her "build [her] own personalized glossary." From a vocabulary learning perspective, almost all of the participants addressed the effect of songs in "engraving" words in their memory, as described by Dora. Because of this direct interaction between the musical stimulus and the brain, that is, its immediate reaction to a piece of music, Bariş claimed that in comparison to poetry or other written materials, "memorizing words through songs requires less time" because it is an unpremeditated process that usually lacks the intention of learning.

Reflecting on the participants' statements, it appears that song-based language learning involves underlying cognitive processes that are either consciously activated or emotionally triggered, or both. Some students, like Alexander and Malek recalling their exposure to English through songs, find themselves conscious of their learning: when encountering a new word in a song they contemplate its meaning, uses, or forms. Others, including Dora, despite encountering a completely new word or cultural reference that is foreign to their established lexicon, somehow succeed in appropriately contextualizing through the given discourse. Stated differently, acquisition can take place without prior practice or production, at times only requiring exposure. All these cases, however, point to the fact that although the participants' learning took different forms, it was mainly incidental, as no concerted effort was invested in the learning process, at least in comparison to their school experiences.

4.3 Vocal music as an incentive in the foreign language classroom

The third theme displays the participants' predilection towards unconventional learning strategies in the language classroom, with songs viewed as an untraditional means of language learning. Aya, for instance, proposed that "the integration of traditional and non-traditional learning methods like songs in the language classroom is ideal because you would satisfy the formal needs learners require, and the fun needs … [which is what they] also want." Similarly, Maya, a political-science postgraduate, was of the opinion that music can be used as a tool to break from the "rigid routine" of formal teaching and the established methods of language instruction, claiming that this change "would certainly meet the desires and learning aspirations of the students". However, the participant also insisted that since "there are many music-based activities related to the different language abilities", it is the teacher's responsibility to be creative with adopting or adapting song-related materials and to "design language tasks that could contribute to students' language learning."

Viewing songs as a means of raising students' spirits, the participants also reported that the use of music can transform the classroom atmosphere from an adherence to the constraints of strict formal teaching to an enjoyable learning environment. Adam, a computer-science undergraduate, argued that the implementation of songs into the classroom might exert a favorable impact on students' psychological state, asserting that music:

> … can have a positive effect on the general mood of the classroom … you will even be impatiently waiting for the language class to start because you believe that this course gives you the opportunity to learn and construct new knowledge by producing an engaging ambience. (Adam, 32:33)

The interviewees also mentioned that they prefer learning in a setting where they do not feel "governed" by the formal conventions of language instruction. Touching on this issue, Adel, a logistics' specialist, described language learning through music as an experience in which "you don't to have to strictly memorize every grammar rule when listening to songs, because the musical input itself is interpretive and indirectly instructive". In the same vein, Baya, a computer science postgraduate, shared the reasons she supports incorporating songs into the English classroom. She pointed out that formal methods of language instruction essentially center around "teaching new vocabulary in isolation and teaching linguistic rules and grammatical structures that are challenging for the learner to fully grasp", suggesting that unfamiliar words need to be learnt in context, especially through songs, and that "these rules should be learnt inductively as we are exposed to the language." Highlighting another significant factor in song-mediated language learning, the interviewees mentioned how the use of songs encourages them to participate in the classroom, making them feel more involved in their own learning; as Baya asserted, it "is more interesting than a normal lesson where the teacher mainly uses the blackboard".

5 Discussion and implications

With the aim of gaining a better understanding of adult EFL students' experiences with out-of-class learning, specifically in connection with English exposure through songs, the present

article reports on a small-scale study which solicited participants' views on song-supported language learning. Different broad-based trends but three consistent interrelated themes emerged from the interviews. The first research question addressed the presence of songs in EFL learners' daily lives. The analysis of the interview data revealed that music plays an integral role in adult EFL learners' everyday lives as they spend a significant amount of time listening to songs and engaging in music-related activities, such as karaoke which confirms one of Sundqvist's (2009) findings. These subjective experiences are governed by idiosyncratic personality traits within which learners ground their beliefs and practices related to the use of songs as a learning resource, which aligns with Celce-Murcia's (2001) claim of adult EFL learners having a more autonomous approach to learning. The informants, each reflecting on their individual experiences in EFL learning, pointed out the importance of music in their daily lives and how being immersed in a song connects to a deeper sense of ipseity, that is, the quality or nature of self-experience. These patterns are consistent with the research evidence provided in psychological literature on the dynamic between music, human absorption, and identity formation (De Nora, 2000; Frith, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2002).

Secondly, this study also set out to illuminate adult EFL learners' beliefs and practices in relation to the tangible benefits of song-supported language learning. As the analysis results showed, there was consensus of opinion among participants emphasizing two key aspects that pertain to the value of songs in EFL learning, namely their effect on the psyche and their contribution to vocabulary knowledge. The interviewees reported that listening to music on a daily basis and this ubiquitous role of music in the EFL learners' lives helps to sustain their interest in the language by virtue of exposure. Interestingly, some participants revealed how their lexical repertoire has naturally expanded from listening to songs and how they managed to incidentally incorporate new words into their personal vocabulary and everyday language use, which resonates with other researchers' arguments about the incidental vocabulary gains through songs (Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007; Hulstijn, 2012). The time that adult EFL students dedicate to learning the language in the classroom can be far more effective if paired with out-of-class learning opportunities, such as music. The participants' reliance on music was evident in their descriptions of how it improves their foreign language ability and facilitates their overall experience of learning English. Almost all of the interviewees acknowledged the advantages of vocal music in learning English, corroborating the findings of previous studies on how using songs can be conducive to cultivating a greater interest in the target language (Bennett, 2019; Dolean, 2016; Setia et al., 2012; Werner, 2018). Revealing how music is intimately associated with intellectual processes, extrapolates the former's link with students' cognitive capacities and skills development, namely in regard to language acquisition. This has been propounded by Gardner (2011), who, in outlining his theory of Multiple Intelligences, highlights the direct interaction between music exposure and language competence.

Perhaps the most important inference to be drawn from the findings of the last question is that language learners' general predilection to informal avenues of learning is also true for adult EFL learners, who deem songs as a valuable contribution to their learning experience. What is crucial, however, is the way teachers approach music-assisted instruction and strategize the incorporation of songs in the language classroom. The participants unequivocally voiced how songs can facilitate their language learning experience expressing positive sentiments towards the usefulness of songs as a teaching tool. There was not a noticeable ambivalence across the range of respondents over the language learning potential afforded by songs; however, four interviewees

were divided in opinion on the practical reality of classroom instruction and how it may be a challenge to integrate such informal teaching materials, unlike using songs extramurally. As reported by the participants, the main challenge lies in teachers being goal-oriented and consciously innovative in designing relevant tasks and music-supported activities, where they should seek tangible educational advantages rather than merely following a pedagogical trend. In the same vein, shedding light on learner empowerment, students themselves also need to be involved in the selection process of musical material, not just teachers, since the latter "often use their intuitive sense in the classroom to develop activities that [they think] students [may] enjoy" (Adkins, 1997, p. 46) without considering learners' input or acknowledging their different learning cultures.

6 Conclusion

The role of songs in EFL education has been the subject of various studies aiming to optimize the quality of language instruction. Still, limited research has been carried out to provide an account of adult experiences in connection with music and EFL learning. Exploring the issue from an emic perspective, the present study is an endeavor to investigate how adult EFL learners perceive song-assisted language learning. Drawing on the interview data, the findings challenge the claim that songs do not appeal to adult students and reveal that songs can offer numerous opportunities for developing their language skills. The most important feature of song-mediated language input is that exposure to the target language is accomplished through the use of authentic speech. Hence, it seems that songs are more likely to offer better opportunities for learners to experiment with language than can be found in more conventional materials such as commercial coursebooks. There is no question that some of these textbooks do incorporate language activities that feature song materials, but the main concern remains that they refuse to recognize the learner's role in selecting the teaching instrument, especially if we are dealing with adult learners who favor a participatory approach to learning guided by their specific needs and preferences. This is unlike child learners, who are not as mature and are more reliant on prescribed textbooks as well as being heavily dependent on teacher input. Still, such an observation is not to suggest that an exclusively music-based teaching methodology be adopted; rather, using songs as supplementary materials (as was consistently advocated by some of the participants) can promote a blended teaching approach or "intra-formal" (Alm, 2021) kind of language instruction.

The major educational value of music for adult EFL learners is that prerequisites such as engagement and interest in the foreign language (and hence culture) are already met considering humans' general predilection towards music. What remains necessary for learning to occur in the instructional setting is the thoughtful integration of songs as a language learning resource into existing classroom activities. In this respect, the participants pointed out challenges that the teacher might encounter when using musical materials in class: to minimize the gap between how students approach songs outside the classroom and how as language learners they are introduced to songs in the classroom, the teacher needs to understand the countervailing processes at play. In other words, the task of planning a personalized language lesson and selecting the appropriate musical materials requires a certain level of creativity, imagination, and advocacy of learner-centered andragogy. Simply put, musical intervention in a real classroom setting can be a precarious undertaking if the teacher does not take certain factors into account related to the choice of songs

and how relevant they are to the lesson's objectives, students' preferences, and their learning needs.

As for expanding this inquiry to a wider context, adult non-native English speakers might recognize many similarities between their own experiences and the study findings, since the sample was selected purposely to represent a variety of adult EFL learner profiles. However, considering that this research is exploratory in nature, no sweeping conclusions are drawn. Due to time and resource restrictions, the outcome of this inquiry may have been shaped by factors such as level of participant cooperation and attention span limits. Another research limitation is the small sample size of participants which may not reflect every song-supported learning situation or be representative of all adult EFL learners' experiences. The main value of this study lies in the idea that if we seek to offer better learning avenues for adult EFL learners, it is incumbent upon foreign language literacy-conscious researchers to explore the different opportunities for learning to exist. Today, songs are recognized as a vehicle to facilitate access to the target culture and language; hence, addressing this substantive topic and assessing the scope of its educational potential should be encouraged. For the future, it might be worthwhile for researchers to address the practical applications of using songs in the adult EFL classroom. For instance, an issue that was raised by some of the participants is the absence of "culture teaching" in the language classroom; future research can examine how songs can be incorporated into the classroom to promote cultural awareness and foster cultural sensitivity towards the target community.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

I. Personal Background

1. Would you like to start by briefly introducing yourself?
      a. Which language(s) do you speak apart from your mother tongue?
      b. What has helped you learn this/these language(s)?

II. Musical interest

1. What are your music listening habits?
2. What is your favorite music genre?
3. What musical activities do you enjoy doing in your free time?
      a. What is your musical background?
      b. How does this interest/training in music contribute to your English language learning?

III. Emotions towards songs

1. How important is music in your life?
2. How would you feel if you could not have access to music?
3. In which situations do you find yourself listening to songs?
      a. Could you tell me about a time when a song helped you emotionally?
      b. What songs were you taught as a pupil, and can you still recall them?

IV. Language Learning

1. What would you do if you missed a word in a song or you did not understand it?
2. What is/are your current favorite song(s) in English ?
      a. What is it that you have learnt from this song?
      b. What are some of the words you learned from this/these song(s)?
3. Do you ever memorize songs?
      a. Can you give examples of when you can remember specific songs/words?
      b. Why do you think it was easy for you to recall these words?

V. Songs in the language classroom

1. What do you think about using songs in the language classroom?
2. How do your teachers use songs in the language classroom?
3. What could the benefits be of using songs in the classroom?
      a. What do you think about singing in relation to learning English?
      b. What do you think about listening to songs with lyrics and learning English?
4. What do you see as a disadvantage of using songs in the English language classroom?

5.   What type of language tasks make you feel engaged in the classroom?
6.   How do you think language activities with songs can affect the classroom environment?

VI. Closure

1.   Is there anything you would like to add about the topics we have covered?
2.   What pseudonyms or initials would you like me to use in place of your name?

Thank you for your contribution!