Music as an enhacer of EFL spelling skills in diverse secondary classrooms

La música como potenciadora de destrezas escritas en inglés L2 en clases de secundaria con diversidad

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Abstract:

This research has as a main aim to check the benefits of using music in the FL classrooms, specifically with diverse student populations who present lower proficiency levels in the target language. In order to carry out this project, the design of a pedagogical intervention has been necessary. In particular, two groups of the first year of secondary education took part. One group belonged to a bilingual program, the other one was a group formed by students with some difficulties in their learning process, due to diverse circumstances. The intervention focused on teaching the spelling of the sounds /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /iː/ and of regular and irregular verbs in the past simple tense having music an essential role during the sessions. The intervention lasted three sessions, data was collected through two dictation passages made at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. Classroom observation also offered qualitative data. Data gathered show interesting results which are highly positive. However, some students would need more time to acquire the knowledge expected. Finally, some pedagogical implications for future teaching interventions are provided.

Resumen:

El objetivo principal de este estudio es comprobar los beneficios del uso de la música en clases de lenguas extranjeras, particularmente con estudiantes con diversidad que presentan un menor nivel de competencia en la lengua meta. Para llevar a cabo este trabajo ha sido necesario diseñar y aplicar una intervención pedagógica. Concretamente, participaron dos grupos de 1º de ESO con diferentes niveles. Uno de los grupos pertenecía al programa bilingüe del centro, mientras que el otro grupo estaba formado por estudiantes que presentan algunas dificultades durante su proceso de aprendizaje, debido a diferentes circunstancias. La intervención se centró principalmente en enseñar la escritura de los sonidos /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /iː/ y del pasado simple de verbos regulares e irregulares en ambos grupos teniendo la música un rol esencial en las sesiones. La intervención duró tres sesiones; se recogieron datos cuantitativos a través de dos dictados realizados al principio y al final de la intervención. La observación durante las clases también permitió recoger datos cualitativos. Los datos recogidos muestran resultados importantes, muy positivos. No obstante, algunos aprendices necesitarían más tiempo para adquirir los conocimientos trabajados. Finalmente, se incluyen algunas implicaciones pedagógicas para el diseño de futuras propuestas didácticas.

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of teaching, the methodologies, and resources available to teachers have changed significantly. Previously, schools, and therefore teachers, did not have at their disposal the advanced technological material that exists today (Sánchez-Vizcaino & Fonseca-Mora, 2019). The invention of these materials has allowed teaching to be more easily extended and, in some cases, these developments have made the learning process easier for those students who have some difficulties. All students have their own personal and individual situation and sometimes they present some difficulties in their learning process that are not related to the lack of effort or study (Habib et al., 2016).

The last results in the PISA report for reading skills in Spain (2018, pp.13-14) with a sample of students of 15 years old (92%) show a significant decrease in reading comprehension skills (Table 1). Spain is below average, (477 points) in comparison to the rest of the total EU (489) and OCDE (487). Moreover, the results are much lower than in previous years (in 2105 Spain got 496 points). It reflects values similar to those of 2003 and 2009, but far from the maximum of 2015 (495.6) (educacionyfp.gob.es). Besides, on average for OECD countries, girls outperformed boys by almost 30 points, three points more than the difference observed in the EU (27 points) (2018, p.20).

Table 1. Evolution of comprehension skills

PISA REPORT	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
SPAIN	460.8	481	487.9	495.6	477
OCDE	488.7	493.2	496.2	492.5	487

Source: Extracted from Pisa Report for Spain (2018). Reading skills results in Spain (p.14)

So, it is very common to find students in their secondary education stage who show low proficiency and have a low literacy level and this fact is increasing considerably. Research has shown that reading difficulties in the mother tongue (L1) usually correlate with reading results in a foreign language (FL) (Fonseca-Mora & Fernández-Corbacho, 2017). In many cases they have problems with phonological awareness, which is the ability to identify and manipulate syllables or phonemes in words (Ferraz & Pocinho, 2013). A bidirectional relation between languages has also been shown. Thus, if students learn something in the FL language they will be able to apply this knowledge or skill in their mother tongue, and viceversa. If they have problems with their L1, they will also have difficulties in the process of language acquisition of a FL. These learners demonstrate to have problems above all in learning to read and write (Garrison-Fletcher, et al., n.d.).

On the other hand, research has demonstrated that there is a meaningful positive relation between the language aptitude of students and their musical aptitude (Fonseca-Mora, et al., 2011). Using music in the FL classrooms has been seen traditionally as a pastime. It has been mainly used to create a positive atmosphere and to foster motivation to the FL (Tegge, 2018). However, an increasing amount of research is proving that the use of music in the FL class is much more than that. Studies suggest that the inclusion of music in the FL classrooms can benefit considerably students' second language acquisition process (Foncubierta et al., 2020). The inclusion of music in primary classrooms offer students the possibility to improve their oral, written, listening, and reading skills (Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2018; Toscano-Fuentes & Fonseca-Mora, 2012). More specifically, studies have shown the lar-

ge benefits of music to teach children to develop foundational reading skills, basic for subsequent literacy development. This has been mainly demonstrated with native speakers and the duration of the intervention was not a significant variable (Standley, 2008). Besides, the emotional benefits of the introduction of music or songs in the classrooms are large. It makes students feel motivated. Music makes them feel closer to what they are learning because they are in contact with the music in all stages of their life (Fonseca-Mora, 2015). The positive emotions that the use of music in the classrooms provoke on students has been also the focus of the other scientific research (Tapiador & Fonseca-Mora, 2015). Fonseca-Mora (2015) found that -"[l]a música y el lenguaje comparten similitudes: ambas afectan a nuestras emociones y ambas son una forma de comunicación" (p. 2). At the same time, melodies and rhythms contribute to reduce their negative feelings that can occur when they have to deal with frustration or difficulties when learning a second, or in some cases, a third language. In other words, it should be pointed out that the introduction of music in FL classrooms also contributes to the reduction of the feeling of failure that many students with learning difficulties constantly feel (Fonseca-Mora, 2015).

2. Objectives

The general objective of the study is to check the benefits of the inclusion of music in the FL classroom, especially with learners that need special support because of several reasons, learning difficulties, low-literacy achievement or sociocultural background. To do so, a teaching intervention was designed and the results were measured to check whether music helps learners to acquire and improve their spelling skills in English as a FL.

3. Theoretical Framework

This section will provide theoretical scaffolding about the definition of literacy, reading skills and spelling, L1 influence and transfer to FL learning, learners with low literacy achievement and FL sessions with music support.

3.1. What is literacy

The term literacy was translated into Spanish as *alfabetización* (Marín, 2006). According to Venezky (2005) the term literacy is described as follows "Alfabetización es la habilidad mínima de leer y escribir una lengua específica, como así también una forma de entender o concebir el uso de la lectura y la escritura en la vida diaria" (p.62). It is necessary to highlight that there are different types of literacy. For example, the term academic literacy is one of the most broadly extended and it refers to the development of writing and reading skills (Marín, 2006). Besides, in the last years the concept of low level of literacy among students has increased significantly (Benítez & Borzone, 2012). For instance, students that are considered slow learners usually present a low level of literacy, usually those students are not at the level they are supposed to be according to their age, as Willingham states (2011, in Ruhela, 2014). To distinguish a slow learner within a class is a difficult task because on the surface they are not different from their classmates. However, there are some features that can describe slow learners as, for example, inability to express themselves through language, low self-esteem, or their difficulty to understand complex things, which have to do with their poor level of concentration (Ruhela, 2014).

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3. 2. Reading skills and cross-linguistic transfer

Being literate implies having the ability to read and write. So being able to understand what we read and express ourselves in written language is the focus of literacy teaching. However, it is essential to pinpoint that students need to develop low-order literacy skills in order to be able to comprehend what they read and write. But, sometimes much emphasis is placed on comprehension strategies in the FL classroom and we forget working on those skills. Lately, it has been stressed that instead of talking about the five components of reading skills (National Reading Panel, 2000), we should consider six: oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Konza, 2014). Articulating instruction around them is key for second language learners (Snyder et al., 2017).

There is a strong connection between phonological awareness, that is the capacity to listen, to perceive, and control sounds of language, and the skill of reading and writing (Benítez & Borzone, 2012), being the strongest predictor of word reading ability (Jongejan et al., 2007). It has been shown that in order to learn a foreign language, as English, it is necessary to have access to its lexicon, in order to do it learners need to activate their phonological awareness skills (op.cit.). Besides, the ability of decoding plays an essential role in reading. As Gough and Tummer (1986) claims "the ability to decode is at the core of reading ability" (p. 1). And this ability of decoding changes depending on the knowledge students have about the spelling of words.

In the same way, spelling and pronunciation are also related (Gough & Tammer, 1986), that is, the ability of establishing a connection between sounds and letters, an important ability to learn to read and write. Normally, students know that sounds are turned into letters, but they usually do not know how to accomplish it correctly in a FL. This task is very difficult for students with a transparent L1, such as Spanish, who are learning to read in English, due to the fact that English words are usually pronounced differently from their spelling, because of its opaque orthographic system. As the way of writing highly informs us about the level of literacy that a person has, this capacity indicates if students have a great level in the use of the language or not (Foncubierta et al., 2020). Besides, spelling skills give students the chance of noticing the differences between the phonetics and orthography in a language (Strattman & Hodson, 2005) In this way, it has been shown (Dussling, 2020) that working on phonological awareness and phonics, the mappings between written letters and spoken sounds, is effective to develop spelling ability growth with English language learners.

As it was mentioned in the introduction, there is a bidirectional relation between the L1 and the FL (Chuang et al, 2012). If students have difficulties in the L1, they will be reflected in the FL. And vice versa, if teachers help students in the acquisition of the FL, they will also help them with their L1. That is to say, if they learn something in the L1, they will be able to transfer that new knowledge to their FL, this is mainly true about phonological awareness and, to a lesser extent, some decoding skills (Fonseca-Mora & Fernández-Corbacho, 2017). For instance, the case of the two completely different languages, which are Spanish and English, especially in terms of spelling. Spanish has a very transparent correspondence between its spelling and its pronunciation, while English is more complex in that sense. That complicates the learning of English for those students who are Spanish and much more for those learners with some learning disorders or difficulties (Durgunoğlu, 2002; Lipka et al., 2005; Uccelli & Páez, 2007). However, the good readers in their L1 are also better readers in the FL (Fonseca-Mora & Fernández-Corbacho, 2017).

In school settings, and in general for life success, all learners have to achieve the most essential element, a basic level of literacy, no matter their individual circumstances or difficulties that they present during the process of learning, all students deserve and need to get it in order to succeed academically and personally.

3.3. Music in FL classroom and low-literacy learners

Toscano-Fuentes and Fonseca-Mora (2012) point out crucial results with music for the future of the primary education students. Fonseca-Mora and Ávila (2015) demonstrated the great benefits that music creates in the process of learning a second language in secondary education. These benefits are not just related to linguistic issues but also to emotional and sociolinguistic ones. In fact, the aforementioned studies have tried to demonstrate if auditory ability, essential to learn a foreign language, also uplifts with the inclusion of music in the FL classrooms (Fonseca-Mora, 2013). The use of songs and melodies in the FL classroom helps learners to improve literacy: pronunciation, phonological awareness, recognition and production of sounds of English, fluency, the memorization of vocabulary and writing skills (Good et al., 2015; Paquette & Rieg, Toscano-Fuentes & Fonseca-Mora, 2012). Music also benefits learners' phonological awareness (Gómez-Domínguez et al., 2019). This skill incorporates sentences, words, rhymes, syllables, onsets and rimes, and individual sounds or phonemes (Ferraz et al., 2013), all foundational elements of literacy. Besides, songs have rhythms and melodies which help our brain to memorize more words of vocabulary, to get engaged with the topic, etc. (Toscano-Fuentes & Fonseca-Mora, 2012).

The use of music also affects emotions. The fact of working using songs in the class highly increases motivation among students because they are in touch with the music in all the stages of their life (Fonseca-Mora, 2015). It is almost impossible to listen to music and not to feel anything. According to (Fonseca-Mora, et al., 2015), music serves to create positive emotions among students, helps them to feel relaxed and, in some cases, promotes speaking production because they tend to feel more self-confident when they are learning a language using music That happens because the rhythms and melodies cooperate to reduce the negative feelings among them, as the sense of failure or frustration. In fact, language and music are two communicative elements that have many aspects in common, as the rhythmical and melodic patterns (Fonseca-Mora, 2016). In short, music helps to create a positive environment inside the classroom and that is highly relevant, particularly to students who are not disposed to learn.

On the other hand, one of the biggest problems that students have when they are learning a FL is the scarcity of auditory input in the target language. However, thanks to the use of songs students are able to be closer to the pronunciation and vocabulary of the FL (Toscano-Fuentes & Fonseca-Mora, 2012), and get confidence at the time of speaking (Fonseca Mora, 2015). Learning a FL using songs, rhythms or melodies is a habit that can be easily adopted. Students can also use music for didactic purposes at home, listening to music in the FL, listening to news on the television or on the radio, etc. (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Indeed, students can listen to music anywhere and anytime. To put it another way, it is something that does not require a specific routine or time. That is one of the greatest advantages that the musical learning offers, pupils can learn inside and outside the classroom. On top of that, this kind of learning can be more multimodal than the traditional way of learning through books because, in music videos songs are accompanied by images, even subtitles can be activated. In fact, students can associate images with words or sounds and they can easily

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remember vocabulary words, expressions, what indicate that music helps students in their academic results and in etc (Calatrava, 2008).

Finally, it is essential to highlight that the inclusion of music in language classrooms helps particularly those students who have some difficulties in their learning process. In her meta-analysis Standley (2008) checked that music instruction was less effective in normally developing children than in children at-risk, special education learners and English as a second language students (p. 29). However, the studies reviewed have been mainly conducted with younger learners, where the benefits of music are larger. More studied with secondary school learners are needed.

Providing the required attention to those learners is also the responsibility of education authorities. Thus, the most recent Spanish and Andalusian education laws consider the situation of those students with some difficulties in their process of learning and highlight the obligation of considering motivational tasks and activities or distinct methodologies that support this diversity among students at school (Boletín Oficial del Estado del 30 de diciembre, Ley orgánica, 3/2020). In addition, due to the growth of immigrant population in Andalusian schools, another education law establishes the obligation of schools to support them, make them grow in their process of learning and promote interculturality, always preserving learners' culture and origin (Boletín Oficial de la Junta de Andalucía, Orden de 15 de Enero de 2007).

As previous stated, the large benefits of music and songs in the FL classroom have been mainly observed in kindergarten and primary schools. However, studies in secondary school levels are scarce. This work aims to contribute to close this gap.

4. Method

The pedagogical intervention and the teaching proposal of this dissertation are based on the use of music in order to develop literacy skills in English in the secondary education stage. The general objective is to check the benefits of the inclusion of music in the FL classroom to develop spelling skills. More specifically, the researchers want to find out whether diverse learners that may need extra support because of learning difficulties, low-literacy achievement or their sociocultural background, benefit more from music-based activities.

In order to do it, a pedagogical intervention based on Natural and Communicative Language Teaching methodologies has been carried out with two different groups of student in their first year of secondary education (in Spanish, ESO, Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria). Data was collected following a pre-post design. Finally, the results obtained were measured to check whether music helps learners to acquire and improve their spelling skills in English as a FL.

Those groups are different in terms of language proficiency and in average literacy skills' level. One of them presents a low level of literacy due to different circumstances and they are considered the group 2, while the group 2, is a bilingual class.

4.1. Participants

This intervention and research have been designed for a public secondary school located in an urban area of the Andalusian Community. This high school is placed in a big town, which has 28,000 inhabitants. Most students belong to middle social class and all of them have access to the material used during the lessons because everybody has internet connection at home. The high school has a bilingual section for each course since 2005 and students can choose if they want to study in a bilingual group. In the bilingual programme students have the opportunity to learn several subjects in English, such as Maths, Music, Science, etc. All students can start their studies in the bilingual section from the first year.

Two groups in their first year of secondary school, aged 12-13 years old and made up of boys and girls, participated in the study. Group 1, a bilingual group composed by 24 students, and group 2, a non-bilingual group, that consisted of 21 learners.

Group 1 is studying in the bilingual section of the school and, in general, they all have a high disposition to learn English. In general, they have a good level, the one expected for the course. However, most of them have problems with listening tasks, even more, most of them failed the listening exam. One of the students is from Brazil and another one from Morocco, but both have been living in Spain since they were babies.

In contrast, group 2, the non-bilingual group, is quite heterogeneous. Most of them are between the age of 12 and 13 years old, except for three students who are retaking the course and are one year older. All three failed English in the previous course. In this group, which is considered to have lower literacy skills, there are four students that are originally from Morocco. Although they have been living in our country since they were 8 years old, they still have problems when communicating in Spanish. There are also seven students from gypsy backgrounds. According to Fundación Secretario Gitano (2013), Roma learners tend to have problems with regular attendance, school dropout and post-obligatory education. In fact, 64,4% do not achieve a secondary education diploma in Spain. However, as people from gypsy culture have a strong relationship with music, this aspect was expected to have positive effects in the intervention. Besides, in group 2, one student is diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome and other with hyperactivity. There are also some learners who suffer from attention disorders and who are slow learners; these students tend to be distracted all the time and, normally, they need to move or, in other words, to be active. Finally, there are some students who do not like studying languages and they generally have low results in the English subject. It takes more effort to engage them because they need active and visual activities. Nevertheless, they have passed the subject every course till now. Just three students are fast finishers, probably because they just present the level that students are expected to have in the first year of ESO. In short, it is a diverse group with low literacy skills in average.

4.2. Method

The study has a pre-post design with a pedagogical intervention. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to measure the impact of the intervention in the groups involved.

4.2.1. Data collection

The instruments used to measure the impact of this pedagogical intervention were the evaluation of two dictation passages. They were used to gather quantitative data. Then, to gather qualitative data,

direct observation was included through teacher's notes during the intervention to study student´s progress.

The quantitative data presented offer a comparative result of the learning progress between two groups. On the other hand, qualitative data provide useful indicative results complementary to the quantitative one. However, the qualitative data of this sample provide deeper insights about two instrumental multiple case studies (Stake, 1995), providing minor conclusions about it.

4.2.2. Design procedure

In a first phase a pedagogical intervention to work on spelling skills was designed. The design of the three sessions can be consulted in Appendix I. In order to integrate students' syllabus, the vocabulary sections of the units in their textbook were analysed and potentially problematic sound-letter relationships (Helman, 2004) were selected: /aɪ/, /eɪ/ and /iː/. Besides, regular teachers from both groups asked the researchers to include the endings of regular and irregular verbs in simple past tense as students were just starting to learn them. So attention was not only paid to phonemic skills but to the acquisition of vocabulary. Then, the pedagogical intervention took place during three one-hour sessions. During the short intense intervention, one of the researchers was the teacher; she also observed and took notes, some questions were directed to informants. Exactly the same classes were carried out in both groups. Three dictation passages were read, one per session, but only the first and the third one were used to collect data. Finally, the researcher collected quantitative data with the first dictation activity comparing group 1 and group 2. The same procedure was followed with the third dictation activity in order to research the learning progress.

4.3. Intervention

The pedagogical intervention focused on the use of music (Bernal et al, 2010) in FL classrooms, considering the framework of competence learning model. Although all traditional language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) were integrated in the intervention, listening and spelling abilities were strengthened, as they tend to be more underestimated in textbooks. In order to do that, songs and dictation of texts were key. Music was highly present in the tasks and activities included in the lessons' design. Besides, there was a principal data collection tool, dictation. They are a good way to practice and reinforce both spelling and phonetics, and to measure students' skills. Two examples of dictation texts of one member of each group can be seen in Appendix II. Also, the phonemic chart (Underhill, 2005) was used in all the sessions. It is key to include this chart in all the sessions where students learn the sounds of English, as it is an effective tool to make learners familiar with the English sounds in a multisensory way.

Finally, an inductive approach was adopted during the pedagogical intervention. This approach encourages students to work without explicitly knowing the rules, thus, by analysing examples and, from these examples, reaching the understanding of the rule or items that students are learning. It needs the guidance of the teacher but it is highly intuitive (Thornbury, 2017). As inductive approaches, the pedagogical intervention has implemented the Natural method and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology as well.

Regarding the linguistic contents worked, the intervention focused on the spelling and pronunciation of some sounds in English, that is the phoneme-grapheme and grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Thus, at the end of the intervention, learners were expected to:

• get familiar with the English Alphabetic Code as a tool to learn the English sounds,
• learn how to move their mouth in order to produce certain sounds
• in English,
• learn how to pronounce regular and irregular verbs in the past tense,
• recognize the sounds of /aɪ/, /eɪ/ and /iː/,
• learn some spelling rules for the sounds worked.

5. Results

The results that are shown in the following graphics have been taken from the first and the third dictation, where more remarkable results can be observed.

The graphics below show the results obtained in the dictation. The vertical axis of the graphics corresponds to the percentage of students who managed to spell the words correctly from the dictation whereas the horizontal axis of the graphics corresponds to the number of correctly spelt words. To put it in another way, the bars represent the percentage of students who got right one word, two words, etc.

5.1. Dictation results of sound /aɪ/.

5.1.1. First dictation results

The first dictation passage contained five words with the sound /aɪ/. In this dictation activity (Figure 1), most of the students from the group 1 (bilingual class) were able to write most of the words pronounced with /aɪ/ or even all of them from the dictation passage, particularly, 75% of learners from this group. However, there were less students from the group 2 who were able to identify this sound during the dictation, more than a half of the students can only write a bit more than 50% of the words correctly.
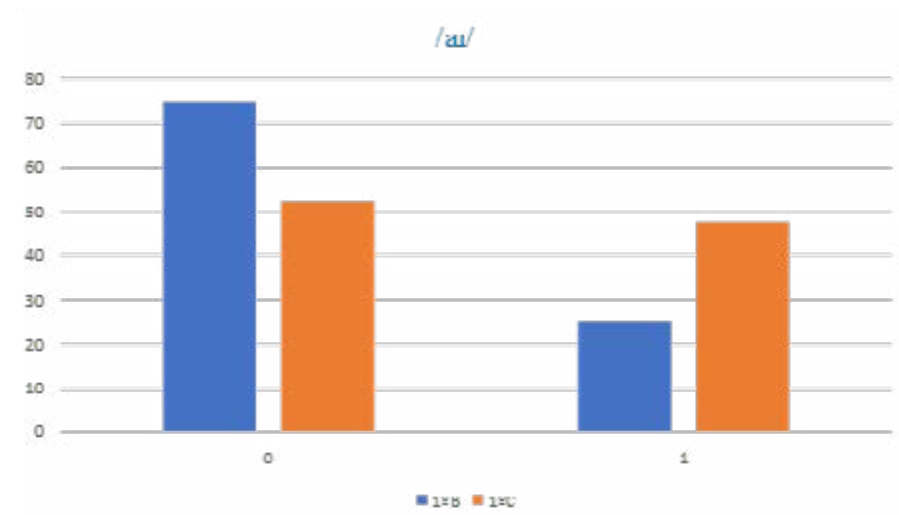
Figure 1. Sound /aɪ/. Results from the first dictation passage.
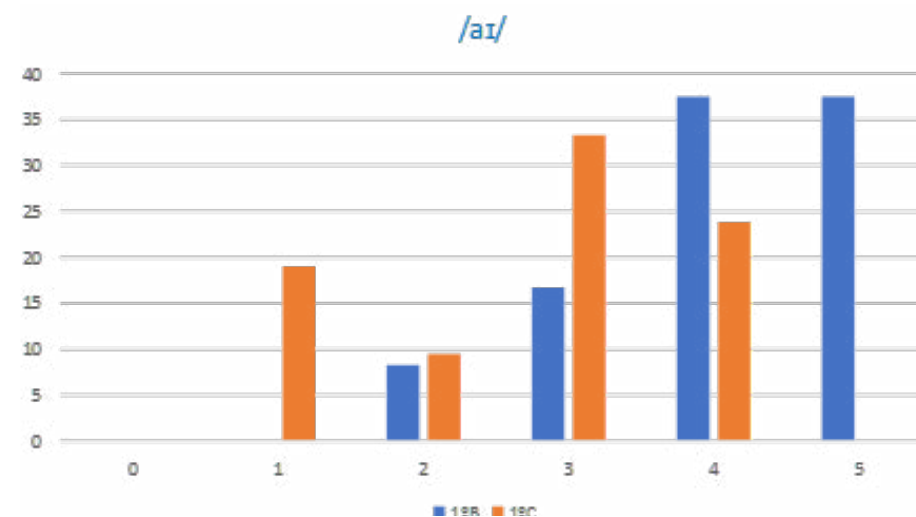
The third dictation passage contained just one word with the sound /aɪ/. Due to this fact, the results may not be very illustrative. In this dictation activity (Figure 2), most students present problems to spell this word. However, it is relevant to underline that the group 2 obtained better results, 10 out of 21, the 47,6%, identified it, in comparison to the other group, just 6 out of 24, the 25%, were able to spell this word correctly.
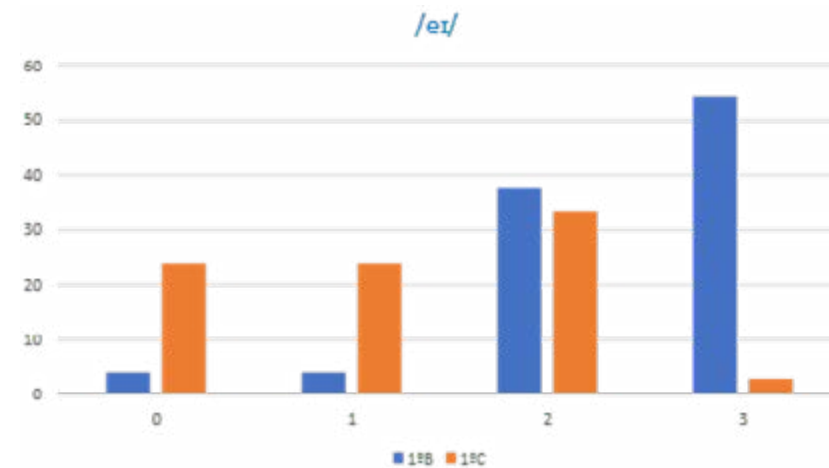
Figure 2. Sound /aɪ/. Results from the third session.

5.2. Dictation results of sound /eɪ/.
5.2.1. First dictation results

The first dictation also contained three words with the sound /eɪ/. In this dictation activity (Figure 3), most of the students from the group 1 (bilingual class) were able to recognise most of the words pronounced with /eɪ/ or even all of the dictation passage, particularly, 83,3% of learners from this group. However, there were less students from the group 2 who were able to identify this sound in all the words during dictation. Although, a great percentage of students were able to identify one or two words from the dictation passage, 52,4%.
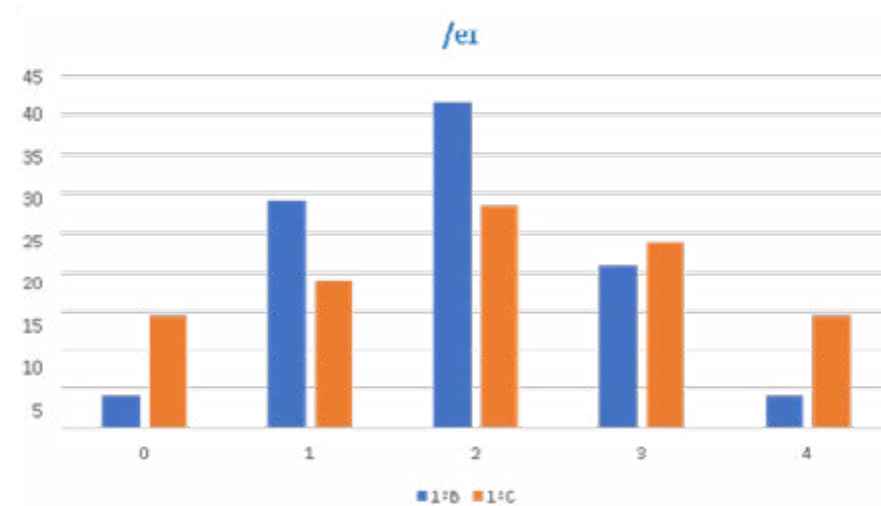
Figure 3. Sound /eɪ/. Results from the first dictation.

5.2.2. Third dictation results

The third dictation passage contained four words with the sound /eɪ/. In this dictation activity (Figure 4), 70% of the students from the group 1 (bilingual class) were able to recognise a half of words pronounced with /eɪ/ or even all of them from the dictation text. Also, the group 2 were able to identify this sound during dictation, the 67% of students. Therefore, there is a great improvement in the group 2 in comparison to the other dictation texts.

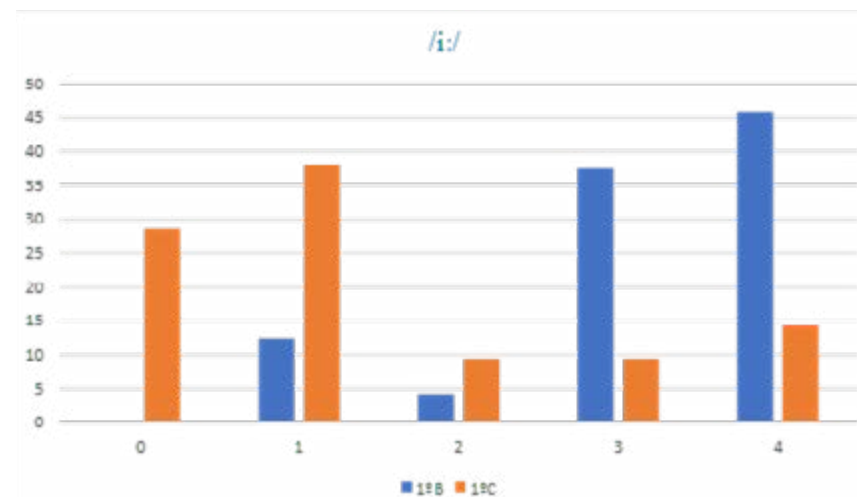Figure 4. Sound /eɪ/. Results from the third session.

5.3. Dictation results of sound /i:/

5.3.1. First dictation results

Besides, the first dictation passage contained four words with the sound /i:/. In this dictation activity (Figure 5), most of the students from the group 1 (bilingual class) were able to recognise most of the words pronounced with /i:/ or even all of them, particularly the 83,3% of learners from this group. However, there were less students from the group 2 who were able to identify this sound during dictation, 67% of learners from this group just identify one word or none of them.
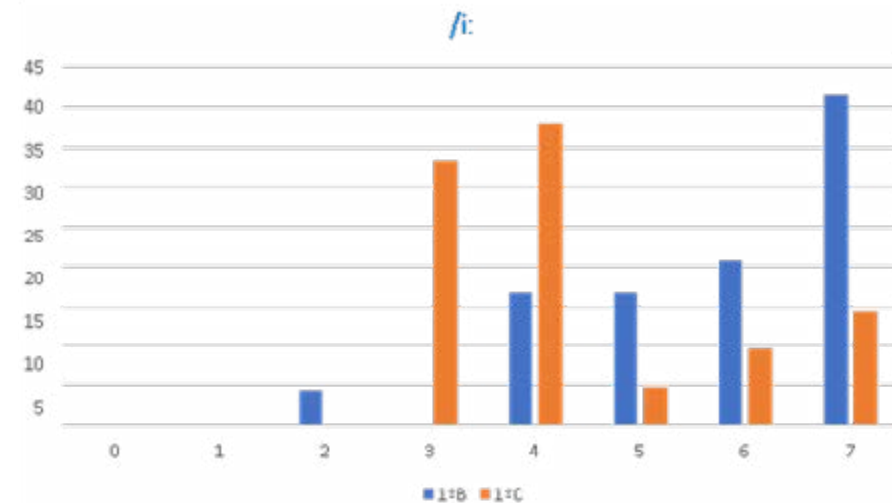
Figure 5. Sound /i:/. Results from first dictation.

5.3.2. Third dictation results

The third dictation passage contained seven words with the sound /i:/. In this dictation activity (Figure 6), there is a great improvement in students. Although group 1 (bilingual class) obtained better results, group 2 managed to identify three or more words with this sound during dictation. Hence, this figure shows a big improvement in group 2 who in the first session were incapable of writing more than one word with this sound. These results are highly positive.
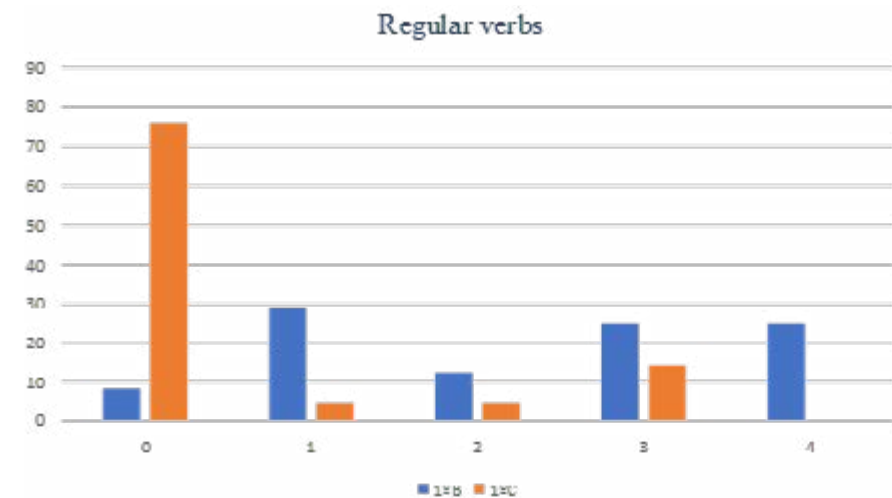
Figure 6. Sound /i:/. Results from the third session.

5.4. Dictation results of regular verbs
5.4.1. First dictation results

Regarding regular verbs in the past simple tense, the first dictation passage contained four forms. In this dictation activity (Figure 7), there is a balance in the group 1 (bilingual class), 50% of students managed to identify some of these verbs. However, there were less students from the group 2 who were able to identify some of the verbs during dictation, 76,2% of students were not able to identify none of them and no one could recognise all the regular verbs.
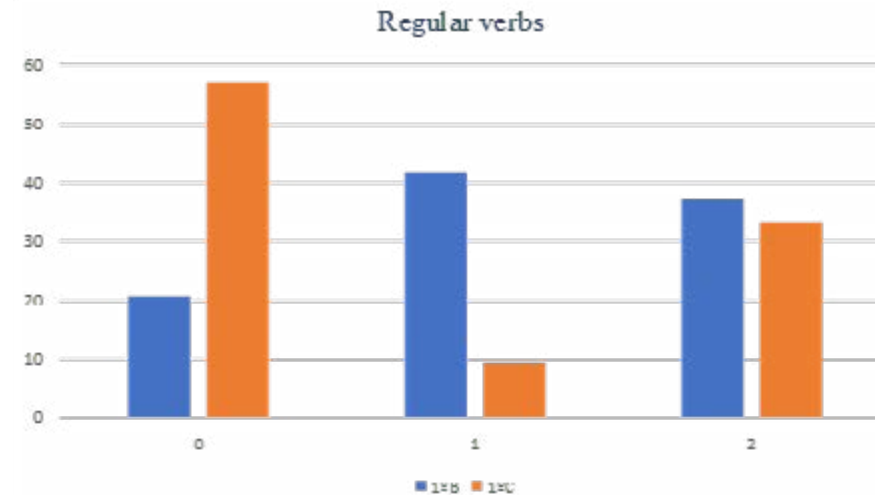
Figure 7. Regular verbs. Results from first dictation.

The third dictation passage also contained two regular verbs in the past simple tense. In this dictation activity (Figure 8), although group 2 (low literacy skills) obtained worse results than group 1 (bilingual class), they got to identify some of them, and even 33,3% of students spelled all the regular verbs correctly. However, in the first session, none of them was able to recognise all the regular verbs during dictation.

Figure 8. Regular verbs. Results from the third session.

5.5. Irregular verbs dictation results
5.5.1. First dictation results

Finally, the first dictation passage contained four irregular verbs in the past simple tense. In this dictation activity (Figure 9), there is a balance between both groups. In group 1 (bilingual class), 67% of students managed to identify 2 out of 4 verbs during dictation, as well as group 2.

Figure 9. Irregular verbs. Results from first dictation.
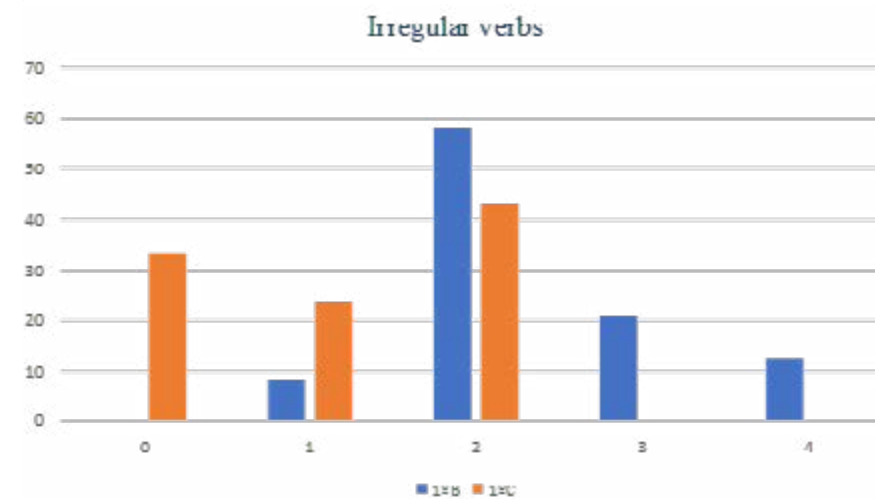
5.5.2. Third dictation results

Finally, regarding irregular verbs, as can be seen in Figure 10, the results are quite similar in both groups. Even though group 1 obtained better results, group 2has a great improvement in comparison to the results from the other session. Now, 76,2% of students from group 2 got to identify two or more irregular verbs.

Figure 10. Irregular verbs. Results from the third session.
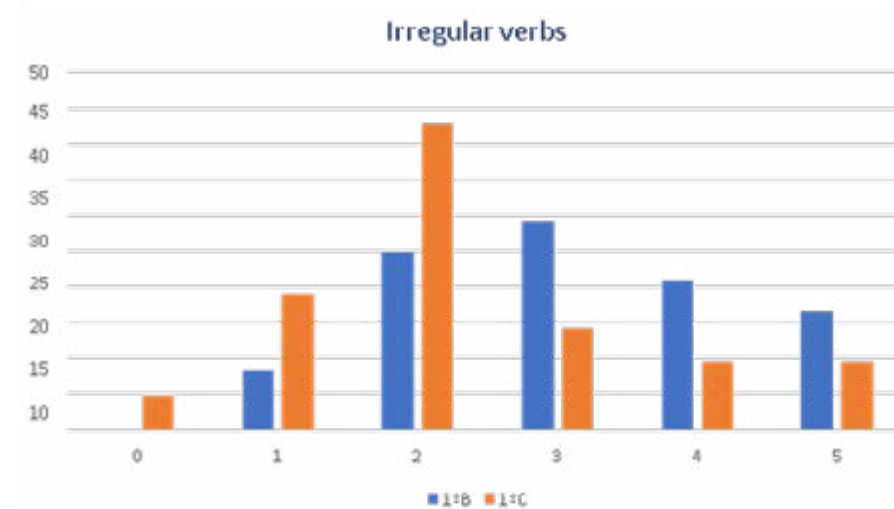
As a whole, the results show that the low level literacy group 2 seems to have more difficulties with their auditory perception and with spelling of the sounds and words worked. However, in general, group 2 has improved considerably throughout the sessions.

5.6 Results from teacher's observation

Regarding qualitative results, it is essential to highlight the disposition of students in the class when they are learning a language using songs. From the very beginning they were attentive and engaged to the lesson. Besides, the observer was able to verify that they were highly motivated due to this fact, even those students who are not interested in learning English.

5.6.1 Group 2 (low literacy skills)

In relation to the students who present some problems in their learning process, it is relevant to underline the following aspects.

As it was explained above, in group 2 there was a student with hyperactivity. According to the information given by his teacher, it was very difficult to get his attention because he needed to be active all the time and he lacked concentration. However, with the use of sounds, songs and music, he was able to pay attention to the activities and to do all of them with his classmates. Besides, the students with attention disorders were also able to be engaged with the sessions and they showed interest with their participation and questions.

Furthermore, gypsy learners from the same class also show interest in the process of doing the activities. In fact, during the intervention, the gypsy students even asked the teacher to repeat some issues in order to understand better all the information. This is something highly positive because normally they never asked questions in the English class. So, the researcher observed that they were more interested and attentive, and what is more, they wanted to participate and interact with their classmates, especially when it was played some songs.

In the same line, Mazariegos (2021) proposes a unit with gypsy music to promote participation, empathy and respect for other cultures. Spanish gypsy families typically show strong rhythmic abilities (Gil & Azcune, 2012). This sensitivity to musical rhythm is related to ability of decoding complex words (David et al., 2007) and phonological abilities (Moritz et al. 2012). Moreover, early phonetic processing may be organized differently in children with high musical aptitudes (Ott el al., 2011).

In reference to the students from Morocco, there were also positive improvements. They interacted with their classmates during the sessions and they tried to participate in the activities all the time.

All students from this class worked together, they helped each other to understand some issues and they got used to sing together the songs played.

5.6.2 Group 1 (bilingual class)

The researcher was able to obtain positive results in group 1, the bilingual class. Most of them also presented some difficulties in the listening activities. Instead, with these sessions they got to develop their auditory perception at the same time they learnt new issues of spelling and vocabulary. Moreover, they also use cooperative work several times, which is something extremely important within a class.

It is relevant to underline the improvement of some specific students. For example, in the group 1 there was a student with lack of motivation. This student never pay attention in class or never do the homework. As some research has shown, there are some students that assume the difficulty of learning English and that its learning will not contribute anything to their lives (Castellanos & Garzón, 2013). This is the case of this student from the group 1. However, in these sessions, this learner behaved completely different and it was shown in their dictation results. In the first session, this pupil got to spell correctly few words but in the last one he wrote many more than before. Apart from that, the interest shown by this student in the sessions was bigger than his interest during the course. This fact may be due to the use of music and the interactive activities.

5.6.3 General observations

In the first session it was observed that inductively, some of the learners were able to explain why there were similarities among some words. Some of them remembered many things. It is essential to underline that the majority of them remembered perfectly the meaning of "magic e", something the instructor explained from the first session, and this occurred because of the song the teacher played to them.

In the second session most of the students knew the songs and sang them together. Many of them, from both groups, were able to give reasons why they are different in their spelling and pronunciation.

In the third session, most of them knew the songs and sang them together. Many of them, from both groups, were able to give reasons why they are different in their spelling and pronunciation.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The main aim of this intervention was to check if the use of music in FL classrooms could help students in their process of language learners, more specifically in learning to spell problematic sounds in the English language. There was a special interest on the impact of the intervention with diverse students with learning difficulties that show lower literacy levels. The quantitative results show interesting findings.

Regarding quantitative data, the results obtained before and after the intervention were obtained with two different dictations passages which contained the sounds /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /i:/ and regular and irregular verbs in the past tense. The summary of the results from the first and the third dictation passages is as follows. In the first session, Group 1 (bilingual group) obtained better results regarding the recognition and spelling of sound /aɪ/ during the dictation, 75% of the students spelled most or all of the words with /aɪ/, while in Group 2 (non-bilingual group) 50% of students managed to write some words with this sound. With reference to sound /eɪ/, there was a big difference between both groups. Most of the students in Group 1, spelled all the words or the majority of them correctly. However, half of the students in Group 2 spelled just one word or none of them. Concerning the /i:/ sound, there is also a distinction between both groups. The majority of Group 1 members spelled most of the words with this sound, while in the group 2, 67% just identify and spelled one word or none of them. Regarding regular past tense verbs 50% of students in Group 1 managed to spell half or more verbs, 76,2% of students in Group 2 were not able to identify any of them. Finally, with reference to the irregular past tense verb forms, not so many differences were found. In fact, in both groups most of the students managed to spell at least half of the words correctly. This result seems interesting as in this case no spelling rule is to be applied as the verb forms do not follow a phoneme-grapheme pattern. Probably the access to the verb forms occurs via lexical route, as they try to remember the whole word. So, it is more related to vocabulary knowledge than spelling skills. Anyway, it can be observed that, in general, Group 2 presents more difficulties in the recognition and spelling of both vowels sounds and past tense verb forms, but there are greater differences with Group 1 in vowel sounds.

The post dictation activity, done after the intervention, offered stimulating results, mainly in Group 2. In general, Group 1 presented a similar distribution of results, with slight improvement, mainly in the spelling of sound /i:/. However, Group 2 showed higher results in all items measured, except for sound /aɪ/ where they did not get bad results in the first measure. Concerning the /aɪ/ sound, in the post dictation activity Group 1 got slightly worse results than in the first one, just 25% of the learners were able to spell the word correctly. Group 2 obtained better results and 47,6% of students wrote the word. However, the fact that only one word in the passage contained sound /aɪ/ limits the significance of the results. With reference to /eɪ/ sound, both groups obtained similar results. 70% of students from the bilingual group wrote half or more of the words with this sound and in Group 2, 67% of learners wrote the same amount of words. At this point is remarkable that Group 2 has improved their results in comparison with the first dictation and is getting closer to the results obtained

by Group 1. The results for the /i:/ sound show relevant improvement in both groups, but mainly in Group 2. In Group 1 almost half of the group could write all words correctly. All students in Group 2 were able to spell at least one word correctly. This is impressive because in the pre-dictation activity, 76,2% of them could not spell any of them. Besides, 14,3 could spell all of them, reaching again their counterparts in Group 1. Regarding regular verbs, Group 1 got very similar results to the pre-dictation text, being again better than Group 2. Nonetheless, although there is still a high percentage that cannot write any verb form, 33,3% of the group spelled correctly all the regular verbs in the past simple. Lastly, the results obtained with reference to the irregular verbs are again similar for Group A, but there is a higher percentage of students who are able to write more than half of the words correctly. As for Group 2, great improvement has been observed. While 1/3 of the group was not able to spell any verb form in the pre-dictation text, 1/3 of the learners is able to spell more than half of the words correctly in the post dictation passage. This also shows that all students are making use of both phonological and lexical strategies to correctly spell the words, depending on the regularity of the spelling, just as research predicts (Sheriston et al., 2016). Lower literacy level students seem to have improved both types of strategies.

The data collected with the observation complement the qualitative results and underline the socio-emotional benefits of the integration of music activities in the FL classroom. This intervention intended to make students conscious of the differences between the spelling and the pronunciation of words in English. This fact made students feel confused sometimes because of the shallow orthography of the L1, Spanish. Nonetheless, students in both groups showed interest, some even enthusiasm, during the intervention; collaboration among learners was also enhanced and a general feeling of success that increased their interest to the English subject was also observed. The most striking results were observed in the group with lower literacy levels and learning difficulties: students with attention disorder and hyperactivity were more engaged and attentive. The music-based intervention was beneficial for culturally and linguistically diverse learners as well. Moroccan students were more integrated and participative during the classes. And gypsy students were especially participative, showed more interest than usual and were enthusiastic when songs were played. More interestingly, some of the students that improved the most in the dictation texts were those from gypsy backgrounds. The difference of the impact of intervention in the two groups may point to the fact that with low literacy groups there is a larger room for improvement. The question is that even when a brief music-based programme is implemented results are soon visible for students in bilingual and non-bilingual programmes.

The results observed in the lower literacy level group are consistent with previous studies. The meta-analysis carried out by Standley (2008) confirms that interventions specifically for reading remediation are more effective with at-risk and FL learners. It was also observed that interventions are more advantageous with younger learners. But in this study the results with secondary school learners have been remarkable.

Regarding music, Standley (2008) states that music instruction was equally effective for different durations, although all of them are longer than the present study. In this case, even a three-session intervention has a significant impact on students' skills. Music activities seem to be more efficient when they respond to students' needs. In line with this, Mazariegos (2021) proposes a unit with

gypsy music to promote participation, empathy and respect for other cultures. This seems to be advantageous as Spanish gypsy families typically show strong rhythmic abilities (Gil and Azcune, 2012). This sensitivity to musical rhythm is related to the ability of decoding complex words (David et al, 2007) and to phonological abilities (Moritz et al. 2012). Moreover, early phonetic processing may be organized differently in children with high musical aptitudes (Ott el al, 2011). The relation between musical aptitude and literacy has been studied in previous research that shows similar findings to the present work. In Fonseca et al. (2015), the key element for success was the phonological component of the training programme, as it had significant effects on early reading skills with and without music support, and also with children who showed low musical aptitudes before training.

This research is also in line with previous studies that underscore the benefits of music for a more holistic FL learning process and socio-emotional aspects (Toscano-Fuentes & Fonseca-Mora, 2012; Fonseca-Mora & Ávila, 2015; Foncubierta et al., 2020). These benefits are not unknown. In fact, music is slowly spreading through educational practices connected with scientific research, as in some of the studies reviewed. Even a European project, called European Music Portolio (Ludke and Weinman, 2012), tried to follow the model of the well-known Language Portfolio to create a common framework across countries in order to support children's learning in music and language with an integrated approach. This study is also in line with the use of multimodal elements as a didactic resource to enhance literacy skills, for example, with the use of musical videos (Toscano and De Vega, 2018); and to promote learning in students with difficulties (Denizci ,2022) because they "constitute an essential component for the differentiating process aiming to resolve especially linguistic problems some pupils may face" (p.417). It should be also mentioned that the collaboration between teachers and researchers is crucial. Not only should research inform teaching practices, but experienced teachers could help researchers to identify the best ways to cater for learners' needs, which is indispensable when working with groups of students with low literacy achievement, learning difficulties and other special needs (Goig et al., 2020). Likewise, research findings should permeate teacher development courses.

The main limitation of this study is that it has been carried out only in a sample of few individuals, in two cases studies for a short period of time. However, it has opened a path for other studies in the same line of students with low literacy skills and diverse needs. Future studies could be carried out with a larger sample and with other research methods (quantitative, qualitative or mixed). In subsequent studies in a broader sense, it will be possible to deepen on how music can be a tool to attend to diversity with other cases. It could be also interesting to understand how it contributes to the personalization of learning a FL.

The contribution of this study as a minor conclusion consists in proving that learners who present low literacy skills improve their knowledge using this methodology. Because the use of music combined with dictations is a great way to enhance and measure the ability of students regarding phonological and spelling issues. In short, the inclusion of music and songs in the FL class resulted and excellent tool, specially promising with linguistically and socially diverse adolescents that show low literacy skills and needs.

Linguodidáctica.

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Annex I. Pedagogical intervention design

In this intervention the same dynamics have been used during the three sessions; as well as the same kind of activities were used in both groups.

As it was explained before, the content included in this intervention was particularly focused on the sounds /aɪ/, /eɪ/ and /i:/. For example, all the key words that appear in the dictations were taken from the vocabulary section of the units in the textbook. Besides, regular teachers from both groups asked to include in the intervention the regular and irregular verbs due to the fact that students were just starting to learn them. Because of that, the pronunciation of those verbs was also worked in this intervention. A story was created and divided into three parts, the three dictations.

Session 1

Opening activity: students have to pay attention to the pronunciation of different words without watching their spelling. While they listen to these words, they can see the Phonetic chart in order to familiarise with the English sounds. Then, it is checked whether they know any of these phonetic symbols and some of the sounds are pronounced.

Duration: 10 minutes

Main activities: First they listen to several audios, then, they do a dictation. The researcher reads aloud a text and the learners had to write down what they heard. Then, the researcher collects all the dictations. After that, music videos were used to work on the pronunciation and sounds of the target patterns and words. Students were asked to write some words, for example, "sweet" or "time", or some verbs in their regular and irregular form; and they are asked to find common patterns in the words. The objective is to make them conscious of the differences between the spelling and the pronunciation. Finally, some pronunciation and spelling are presented in order to check their initial guesses.

Duration: 30 minutes

Closing activity: activities to reinforce the sounds and spelling of the regular and irregular verbs were done in the digital board.

Duration: 20 minutes

Supporting materials/resources:

- A List! English Learning Videos for Kids (2018). Magic e / The Long Vowel Song | Best Phonics. [video] Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp1UmVSlLJ4
- A List! English Learning Videos for Kids (2018) Magic e/ Super phonics. Pinfong songs for children/ Pinfong song Baby Shark [video] .https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4BriUTH2w4
- EnglishCorner4U (2013). Learning English through songs. Past simple tense [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKaD2btS1A43
- Dictation

Session 2

Opening activity: students pay attention to the pronunciation of different words without watching their spelling. While they listen to these words, they can see the phonetic chart. Finally, they have to repeat the words after the audio in order to improve their pronunciation skills.

Duration: 10 minutes

Main activities: once they have listened to the audios, they have to do a second dictation. The teacher reads the text aloud, as in the previous session, and the learners have to write down what they hear. Then, all the dictations are collected, and the teacher plays some videos of songs. The same songs from the previous session are played except one of them, Mr. Morton's story. Instead, a riddle song was played. In this new video there are regular and irregular past tense verbs, so they can start to differentiate them. After that, some questions about the words from the text are asked, to see if they are able to form a hypothesis. Finally, the teacher reviews the phonetic rules explained in the first session.

Duration: 35 minutes

Closing activity: this time some visual and interactive activities are used. The videoclip of the song "Let It Go" from the film *Frozen* was shown in the digital board; students are asked to pay attention to the lyrics with the aim of recognising words that contain some of the sounds worked in the session. With this activity it can be checked whether learners are acquiring some knowledge.

Duration: 15 minutes

Supporting material/resources:

- activities
- Little Fox (2018) Kids songs and stories. The riddle song [video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8er3jjLIh_M
- -A List! English Learning Videos for Kids (2018). Magic e / The Long Vowel Song | Best Phonics [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp1UmVSlLJ4
- A List! English Learning Videos for Kids (2018) Magic e/ Super phonics. Pinfong songs for children [video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4BriUTH2w4
- Text for dictation

Session 3

Opening activity: as in the previous sessions, students first listen to different sounds. In this third session, words are selected from all the dictation passages, particularly those that may have caused problems to them. While they listen to these audios of words, they can see the phonemic chart as always. Finally, they repeat the words after the audio in order to improve their pronunciation skills.

Duration: 10 minutes

Main activities: students write the last dictation passage. The teacher reads the text aloud, as in the previous sessions, and the learners write what they hear. So, they are all the time working on sound-letter correspondences. Then, students' texts are collected, and some videos of songs are played. This time all the songs used during the three sessions are played. After that, the teacher asks learners some questions about the words from the text, to see if they already know the phonetic rules that have been worked in the other sessions. Finally, all phonetic rules are reviewed. This time, students help each other to understand and review these rules, working as a team.

Duration: 35 minutes

Closing activity: as a final activity, some online games, visual and interactive, are used for them to practise the regular and irregular verbs.

Duration: 15 minutes

Supporting material/resources:

- activities
- Little Fox (2018) Kids songs and stories. The riddle song [video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8er3jjLlh_M
- -A*List! English Learning Videos for Kids (2018). Magic e / The Long Vowel Song | Best Phonics [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp1UmVSlLJ4
- A List! English Learning Videos for Kids (2018) Magic e/ Super phonics. Pinfong songs for children [video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4BriUTH2w4
- EnglishCorner4U (2013). Learning English through songs. Past simple tense [video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKaD2btS1A4
- Dictation text
- Online games:
- World wall. (s.f.) Past simple regular and irregular verbs (by Lbarbero 1) [video]
- https://wordwall.net/es/resource/4001437/past-simple-regular- irregular-verbs
- World wall. (s.f.) Past simple regular and irregular verbs (by Bardipau) [video]
- https://wordwall.net/es/resource/5237484/english/simple- past-irregular-verbs

Appendix II. Samples of dictation texts written by students

Source: anonymous

Source: anonymous

Authors contribution

Research design SFG and AFC. Intervention, recollection and analysis of data SFG. Organization of data SFG and AFC. Writing of text SFG and AFG. Article layout AFC. Correspondence AFC.

Linguodidáctica.