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The Use of Songs: An Alternative for Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adolescents

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Abstract

Songs are widely used to teach language due to the large number of advantages they have for students, beyond the mere linguistic scope. This paper aims at presenting the main benefits the use of songs provides for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, in particular for teenage learners. For this purpose, firstly, the teenage brain modus operandi is described with the intention of clarifying students' behaviour within this age range and of applying those findings to their learning process. In particular, based on research, it is shown that the adolescent brain suffers a wide range of changes during this period, serving as an explanation for teenagers' behaviour inside and outside the classroom. It is argued that having this knowledge at hand, teachers can modify their methodology to achieve an improvement in their students' learning process. Secondly, a summary of the main ideas in the literature on the relation between music and language is provided. In particular, it is shown that music and language are closely related in the human brain, being the areas that process language closely connected to the ones that process music. Thirdly, the special benefits the use of songs have on language learners are discussed and divided into affective, cognitive and linguistic benefits. Within the affective category, songs are presented as an aid for increasing motivation and self-esteem in addition to lowering anxiety and stress. With regard to the cognitive benefits, it is argued that songs contribute to the use of memory and attention. Finally, songs also serve as a source of reference for vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In order to illustrate the didactic applications of the theoretical issues that have been discussed in the paper, four different activities for teenage students of English at a B1-B2 level are designed and provided in the last part of this paper. The activities integrate the four language skills.

Key words: Songs; English as a Foreign Language; teenagers

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1. Introduction

The use of songs in the English classroom is not new and teachers have been using this tool with their learners at all levels, from little children in their first years of instruction in the foreign language to adults in language schools or universities. A reasonable question could be, why songs? What is special about them that can serve as an aid to language learning? There is not one simple answer to this question because songs provide many and different benefits depending on the learner. What is interesting about songs is that teachers can adapt their use as they find it convenient and in a way that they consider would be more useful for their group of students. This paper explores the use of songs with a specific group of students, teenage students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In order to do so, in the first part of this paper I start by providing some insights into teenage behaviour and its inner causes, apart from the relationship between music and language, subsequently exposing the different benefits the use of songs can provide to this group of language learners. The second part of this paper aims at presenting an application of the theoretical ideas discussed by showing different alternatives in the use of songs in the teenage classroom. Finally, some conclusions are provided.

2. Adolescence and the adolescent brain

Adolescence, defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2019) as "the period of life when a child develops into an adult: the period from puberty to maturity terminating legally at the age of majority", is one of the periods teachers tend to fear the most, and this may be due to their belief that teenagers are a difficult group of learners to deal with. However, some teachers may not be aware of the fact that many of the behaviours they observe in their students have in fact a physiological basis, as during adolescence the human body suffers a multitude of changes both at the external and internal levels. In order to better understand teenagers' behaviour and to act in consequence, educators need to know how the adolescent brain works during this period of life.

According to Lauría de Gentile and Leiguarda de Orué (2012) the brain continues to develop after childhood until more or less the age of 25. During adolescence, the brain undergoes neural changes which consist in getting rid of the connections which are not used and maintaining and reinforcing the ones which are used. This process is known as

pruning and it is extremely important as it has a determinant role in the adult brain's performance. Hence, the activities in which teenagers spend their time are important because they have an influence on the neural connections their brain will preserve (Giedd, 2004, in Lauría de Gentile & Leiguarda de Orué, 2012).

This process of pruning has special relevance at the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain that is in charge of the synthesis of information, planification, memory, organization or changes in mood (Salyers & McKee, n.d.). It is also the part of the brain which allows humans to make decisions, interact with other people, to be empathic, to be conscious about one's self or to be able to stop inappropriate behaviour (Blakemore, 2012). The fact that the prefrontal cortex is still under maturation during adolescence serves as an explanation for teenagers' behaviour, specifically their difficulties when dealing with some of the functions this area oversees.

Apart from that, another area of the brain which has an impact on teenagers' behaviour is the limbic system, which processes emotions and rewards. In teenagers, this part is especially sensitive, and it is responsible for the feeling of reward when taking risks. The limbic system works together with the prefrontal cortex, the part which measures risks, however, since the latter is still developing at this stage, teenagers take more risks when compared to adults (Blakemore, 2012).

Teenagers also have problems controlling stress. McEwen (2009) explains that stress hormones, which in principle are not dangerous for our health, can become a serious problem if our body cannot control them (as commented on How Youth Learn, 2013). This is especially problematic for teenagers whose maturing prefrontal cortex struggles to control emotions and thoughts, making this task even more difficult than it already is (Romero & McEwen, 2006, in How Youth Learn, 2013). Moreover, Marder (2007, discussed in Lauría de Gentile & Leiguarda de Orué, 2012) explains that suffering from chronic stress during adolescence can be the cause of mental disorders in adulthood.

Knowing how the adolescent brain works is highly relevant for teachers. If they know how their students are going to react to certain situations in the classroom and the causes behind their reactions, they are more prone to know how to act in response, and how to adapt their lessons to this group of learners in a way that is more appropriate to their age. But not only that, teachers may influence the path the adolescent brain follows while maturing. As explained above, the activities students take part in are determinant for the neural connections they will maintain and the ones they will not. If teachers are able to see the strong points of their students, they can promote their brain development

in a certain direction. Furthermore, as Harmer (2015) suggests, teachers can help students be the ones who identify their own strengths, thus trying to adapt lessons to their needs. Adding to that, Blakemore (2012) defines this period as "an excellent opportunity for education and social development" (quote from her Ted talk: 13:54).

Consequently, the teachers' role is vital when it comes to deciding on the methodology they will use in the classroom, since it has an impact on students' learning. Oxford (2003) explains that "if there is harmony between (a) the student (in terms of style and strategy preferences) and (b) the combination of instructional methodology and materials, then the student is likely to perform well, feel confident, and experience low anxiety" (pp. 2-3). This is particularly relevant during adolescence, when, as explained before, students have difficulties at controlling their emotions or lowering the levels of stress. It would be convenient to avoid situations in which extra stress is added to the one they already experience, and to offer pleasant and encouraging lessons, something which is not always easy, since learning is usually considered as an obligation and not as an opportunity of self-growth. The difficult task for teachers is to know what methodology to apply in order to improve their students' learning process, and here is where music comes into play.

3. The language-music connection and the benefits of music in the language classroom

Music has been proved to be beneficial not only for teenage students but for students in general, particularly for language learners. The reason why music is beneficial in language learning seems to have its root in the connection between language and music. Techniques of brain imaging have shed light on the effects music has on the human brain and they have revealed that there are several areas of the brain involved in musical experiences (Lems, 2018). In fact, Tallal and Gaab (2006, in Jäncke, 2012) show that there are areas in the human brain where music and language are intermingled; they are not isolated in our brain, the neural networks involved in music functions are also used in speech. In addition, Maess et al. (2001, in Lems, 2018) demonstrated that the area in charge of language syntax processing, Broca's area, is also in charge of processing music. This area, which is located in the left frontal lobe of the dominant hemisphere of the human brain, reacts similarly to ungrammatical sentences and dissonant music (Lems, 2018). Hence, the connection between language and music is clear.

Teachers can take advantage of this connection in their lessons, the English Language lessons with teenage students, in this case. Schoepp (2001) argues that the use of songs has a number of benefits in the ESL/EFL classroom, which he groups into three categories: affective, cognitive and linguistic. Later on, I will comment on these categories also adding some other benefits.

3.1. Affective benefits

The affective benefits songs provide students with are closely related to the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen (1982). This hypothesis refers to the effects motivation, self-confidence and anxiety have on learners. According to this hypothesis, the language learning experience varies depending on the student's levels of these affective factors. If the levels of motivation and self-esteem are high and the level of anxiety is low, the affective filter is down, which could be translated into an increase in the acquisition of input. By contrast, if the levels of motivation and self-confidence are low and the level of anxiety is high, the filter is also high, which would complicate the student's learning process. Although the Affective filter is not determinant for successful second language acquisition, it plays an important role in the students' reception of input, facilitating or making it more difficult (Martínez, 2018).

Songs can be used with the purpose of keeping the affective filter down, thus promoting the reception of input. One way to introduce songs in the classroom is by using background music, especially instrumental music, as suggested by Lems (1996). This use of songs helps students to relax and fosters learning. Cunningham (2014) and Lowe (2007) also support the use of background music to make their students feel more comfortable about speaking in front of the class, and Fonseca Mora (2000) considers it helpful for creative writing (in Harmer, 2015). In addition, song lyrics, which tend to transmit emotions, can also help to lower the affective filter if students identify their feelings with those expressed in the song, or if they help students feel they are understood, that they are not the only ones who experience certain situations. This is especially important in adolescence since it is a period in which teenagers believe everyone is against them and have the feeling that they do not fit. They are confused and still discovering who they are and who they want to be.

Songs can also be very useful to increase the level of motivation. Harmer (2015) argues that there are many factors that can influence students' motivation and vision of the second language and which can affect their learning process. For instance, there is the

importance that the family assigns to the foreign language learning, the opinion other students have regarding the language they are learning, or the attitude society has about learning a foreign language. Additionally, Arnold (2013) highlights the importance of self-esteem in relation to motivation, since students who do not believe that they are capable of reaching some goals, will not be capable of doing so (in Harmer, 2015). Age is also an important factor since younger students usually have a higher level of motivation due to their natural curiosity (Hamer, 2015), although as they get older, students tend to lose this curiosity, in many cases because of their previous experience in learning. Related to that, research shows that "adolescents are very often unmotivated to learn, are disaffected and disengaged" (Wisniewska, 2013, as cited in Harmer, 2015, p. 91).

The use of songs in the classroom is not the definitive solution for unmotivated students, there are too many factors that are responsible for the students' demotivation, but it can be helpful. For instance, Posner et al. (2008, in Lems, 2018) explain the relationship between arts and intelligence, which could be applicable to the effects music has on motivation and the promotion of learning. In their view, when we are presented with a piece of art, we experience curiosity which provokes interest and motivation, and which makes us pay more attention. In the case of foreign language learning, an increase in attention would facilitate learning. That is to say, as I stated before, since teenage students tend to be less motivated because of their lack of curiosity, teachers can take advantage of the connection between music and motivation in order to lower their students' affective filter, foster their curiosity and thus improve their learning.

In short, the Affective Filter Hypothesis is relevant for teaching teenagers since this filter tends to be high in this group of students. Teenagers' struggle with their understanding of their emotions and their control of stress, as well as their problems with self-esteem or peer-pressure raise their affective filter making learning a foreign language more difficult for them. Therefore, any strategy used by the teacher which helps lower this affective filter will be beneficial for their learning process.

3.2. Cognitive benefits

Unless research is performed, it is complicated to look for the beneficial effects songs have in the learners' cognitive mechanisms such as attention, automaticity, restructuring, memory and fluency. However, songs have some properties which make

them suitable for the reinforcement of these cognitive mechanisms. I am going to focus on their effects on two of them: attention and memory.

When noticing the difference between their own production and other speakers' production (e.g. native speakers' or the teacher's production) learners make use of attention (Schmidt, 1998, as mentioned in Martínez, 2018). But in order to be able to grasp this difference, students need to be presented with enough instances, preferably with instances of genuine communication of the target language. Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988, in Schoepp, 2001) assert that songs present the listener with this type of communication. Since students pay attention to music, the instances of the target language that appear in the songs help students to differentiate between what they produce and what native or highly proficient English speakers produce. If students are not presented with authentic instances of the target language or if these instances are not sufficiently frequent, it will be more difficult for them to notice the gap between what they produce and what other more proficient speakers or native speakers produce. Another benefit of presenting students with authentic communicative situations is that they can appreciate different varieties of the language. Listening to different varieties can be interesting as well as enriching for students because it will prevent them from getting accustomed to one single source, such as the teacher. Moreover, as explained before, there will be an increased level of attention derived from the exposure to a piece of art, in this case music, more specifically, songs. Thus, the curiosity that listening to songs produces in learners raises their awareness and attention towards the differences between what they produce and the input they receive.

The second cognitive mechanism I am going to focus on is memory. Memory is divided into Short and Long Term Memory. Short Term Memory is related to controlled or explicit knowledge, whereas Long Term Memory deals with automatic or implicit knowledge (Martínez, 2018). Research has provided evidence that there is a relation between songs and long term memory. Concretely, in an experiment carried out by Wallace (1994, in Akbary, Shahriari & Fatemi, 2018), students were asked to memorize some song lyrics. The students were separated into two groups: one group listened to the lyrics in the song and the other group listened to them in spoken format, without music. The results showed that the students who listened to the lyrics in the song remembered the lyrics much better than the ones who listened to them without music. In another study conducted by Rainey and Larsen (2002, in Akbary et al., 2018) it was also shown that students performed better when they were asked to memorize some names accompanied

by music than when the names were presented visually or when they were uttered with no music. Lake (2002) also asserts that "adding rhythm and melody to chunks of language invites rehearsal and transfers words into long-term memory" (p. 103), relating this idea to the use of songs in advertisements in order to appeal for consumers emotions and making it easier for them to remember the advertisement.

3.3. Linguistic benefits

The use of songs in the English classroom offers benefits for the acquisition of various linguistic aspects. In this section I am going to show some of the main advantages that using songs has on students' pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

To begin with, pronunciation is a very important aspect in the acquisition of a language. However, it tends to be underestimated in the English classrooms. In fact, teachers generally prefer to concentrate on other linguistic aspects such as grammar or vocabulary perhaps because they do not know how to include pronunciation in their lessons. But denying the relevance of pronunciation in language acquisition can be detrimental for students. Villalobos (2008) defends the idea that pronunciation instruction is basic in teaching English because knowledge about the pronunciation plays a determinant role in successful communication and, without it, students may feel frustrated. Moreover, learning and knowing how to pronounce can raise students' motivation: if students feel comfortable when communicating orally, they will lower their affective filter and acquisition will occur more easily than if they do not know how to pronounce correctly in the target language. When students do not know how to pronounce in the foreign language or they feel insecure, they will avoid any opportunity to speak.

Songs can be used for teaching pronunciation. Villalobos (2008) asserts that using song lyrics in order to practice pronunciation is especially useful because "they are closely linked with rhythm. This makes them useful for teaching different pronunciation aspects naturally. All the aspects of connected speech, including reductions can be identified easily and practiced using songs" (p. 99). Lems (2018) also supports the importance of songs for the acquisition of pronunciation and states that "listening to songs and singing is a natural and enjoyable way to practice new sounds, words, and phrases" (p. 15). In fact, Villalobos (2008) proposes several examples of pronunciation activities in her study with the purpose of helping students identify English sounds or differentiate between those which can be problematic for certain students because they cannot be found in their native language. Stanculea and Bran (2015) also offer different alternatives for working

on pronunciation with songs, depending on the aspects the teacher wants to focus on (focus on sounds, words or connected speech). However, it is important to be careful when presenting songs as a model of pronunciation to students, since singers sometimes change patterns to make words fit in the song. Stanculea and Bran (2015), for example, advise not to use songs for teaching intonation and stress for that reason.

As for vocabulary learning is concerned, some authors argue that in order to master a language, students need to increase their exposure to it. One way of doing that is by resorting to language input outside the classroom, such as listening to music or watching the TV; by listening to music, students are more likely to learn vocabulary incidentally (Akbary, Shahriari & Hosseini Fatemi, 2018). Incidental learning is defined by Schmidt (1990) as "learning without the intent to learn or the learning of one thing (e.g. grammar) when the learner's primary objective is to do something else (e.g. communicate)" (from Akbary et al., 2018, p. 345). Incidental learning can be useful with unmotivated learners or with those who have difficulties with explicit learning. Thus, it is a good option for learning in or outside the classroom. Nevertheless, other authors such as Milton (2008) note the inconveniences or uselessness of incidental learning arguing that if students are not asked to pay special attention to their source of input, they are not likely to learn from it (Akbary et al., 2018). A good option for maintaining students motivated but also for contributing to their learning experience would be to combine both explicit and incidental teaching while using songs.

Another interesting aspect of vocabulary and songs is that songs frequently use colloquial language; they usually contain idiomatic expressions which are useful for advanced learners (Lems, 1996). Although, since most songs are a source of colloquial language, teachers need to pay special attention when choosing them and decide whether they want their students to take those specific songs as a model of pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar. They could be too colloquial or contain ungrammatical uses of the language and provide students with the wrong examples. In addition, songs contain language in context, that is, they present vocabulary items in a text so that students can learn them knowing where they are normally used and with which intention. All this is closely linked to the benefits songs have for our memory, since memory is directly implicated in learning vocabulary. All the benefits songs provide for learning vocabulary can be equally applicable for teaching grammar.

Finally, songs can also serve as a source of extra linguistic input to the one the students have access to in class. This is a good opportunity for EFL learners whose exposure to the language tends to be limited.

In the next section I am going to provide some activities based on the use of songs that could be introduced in an EFL classroom for teenagers.

4. Some class activities with songs for teenage students of English

In order to put into practice the information previously provided, I will be presenting a group of activities which integrate the needs of both teenagers and EFL learners. The activities are designed for students who are 14 to 17 years old and who have an intermediate level of English (B1 to B2). The activities here proposed are designed to be integrated in the class curriculum, that is to say, to be a complement of the class prepared by the teacher. They are intended to be essentially illustrative; they may be easily adaptable to the characteristics of the group of students and their respective needs, as well as the specific goals of their English course. The duration and nature of each activity, as well as the materials required and the specific outcomes are specified below.

4.1. Methodology

Four activities are discussed here. These activities can be used to revise content that has already been taught and to introduce new one. With regards to language skills, the four skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) have been integrated, although writing is not dealt with very much depth. The majority of the activities take place in groups. So, group work is the type of interaction between students that is employed the most. The intention is to make the tasks more dynamic and enjoyable for the students, as well as to provide the introverted ones the chance to work in a more relaxed environment. This is combined with some individual activities which promote a reflexive attitude and encourage autonomous learning.

As explained before, the four activities that I will be discussing next are meant to be included in the course program, whenever the teacher thinks it is appropriate. They are of a different kind and a different duration; some of them require the whole lesson while others just a short interval; the materials needed for each activity are different; and each activity has its own learning outcomes and benefits for teenage students.

4.2. Specific objectives of the activities

The activities that I will be proposing aim at applying the tenets and ideas I have discussed in the theoretical part of this paper in order to assist in the learning process of teenage students through songs. These are the main objectives of the activities:

- To give the students the chance to work with the four language skills.
- to learn new vocabulary and revise the one they already know.
- to practise pronunciation
- to learn and revise grammar items.
- to train memory, with activities explicitly designed for that.
- to increase attention by being presented with actual instances of the language, with songs sung by native speakers.
- to motivate the students, especially the unmotivated ones, and to reduce stress. This can be done through the use of songs that the students have chosen, by working in groups and with topics with which they are familiar, as we will see.
- to use the students' predisposition for risk-taking in a positive way, with a timed game.
- to help the students to identify their feelings.

The specific linguistic contents of the activities have been selected taking as a reference the books *Beyond B1* and *Beyond B2* currently used for teaching EFL in secondary education.

4.3. Teacher roles

The teacher can take different roles depending on the stage in the development of the activities. According to Harmer (2015), the roles that the teacher may adopt are as follows:

- Controller → the teacher gives explanations and transmits information to the whole class.
- Monitor and evidence gatherer → the teacher acts like an observer when students are working on their own, either individually or in groups, checking that they are doing what they should. She can also collect information about their doubts or mistakes in order to help them in future occasions.

- Prompter and editor → the teacher helps students with their work, advising them or directing them in a certain direction according to their needs.

- Resource and tutor → teachers adopt this role when students resort to them in case of doubt, basically trying to solve their problems.

- Organiser/task-setter → the teacher sets a task and tells the students what she expects from them. Besides, the teacher needs to decide what feedback she wants to provide to her students, the aspects she wants to put emphasis on and which ones she prefers to leave aside.

I will now provide a description of the four tasks, their benefits and their potential drawbacks, so that the teacher can prepare to solve them in case they appear.

TASK 1: Puzzle listening with four songs

Task 1 is based on the activity proposed by professor Joan-Tomàs Pujolà in the presentation he delivered at the University of the Basque Country about the use of mobile phones in learning a second language, in March 2019.

- **Previous requirements**: before the fulfilment of this activity the teacher asks her students to download any application which allows them to read QR codes onto their mobile phones.

- **Materials needed**: students need to bring their mobile phone and headphones to class. If a student does not have a mobile phone or a tablet, she or he can work with a classmate. The teacher needs to prepare some cards with QR codes of the songs that the students are going to listen to.

Table 1: Overview of the activity

Puzzle listening	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Steps	Explanation of the activity	Development of the task (first part)	Teacher's intervention	Development of the task (second part)	Discussion
Interaction	T → SS	Individual SS → SS	T → SS	SS → SS	T ↔ SS
Role of the teacher	Organiser or task setter	Monitor and evidence gatherer	Organiser or task setter	Monitor and evidence gatherer	Monitor and resource
Time	3'	20'	2'	10'	5'

SS= students; T= teacher

Description of the activity

Step 1: Explanation of the activity

The teacher tells her students that they are going to be divided into groups of 6 members each (the number of students per group may vary according to the number of students in the class) and that each group will be assigned a colour. The groups have to look for their colour in the cards that have been placed in the classroom. Then, they use their mobile phones to scan the QR code that appears on the cards. The codes will direct them to a YouTube video of a song. The lyrics are included. They need to listen to that song paying special attention to the lyrics. Once they have finished, they have to sit together and look for the meaning of words they do not understand, they can comment on interesting grammatical structures, the pronunciation of words, etc. They can also search a little bit of information about the singer or the year of release of the song, anything they would like to know about it. Finally, they have to discuss with their group the meaning that the song wants to transmit.

Step 2: Development of the task (I)

The students start working on the activity: first they listen to the songs, then they search interesting information, look up the vocabulary they do not know and discuss all of that with their group mates.

Step 3: Teacher's intervention

When the teacher considers they have had enough time (more or less 20'), she asks for the students' attention and she requests them to number themselves within their group, from one to six. Once they all have a number, they have to find the students with the same number in the other groups and get together with them. The teacher tells the students that their next task consists in briefly explaining what they have discovered about the song they have just listened to and that they need to find what the four songs have in common.

Step 4: Development of the task (II)

The students comment with the other members of their new group what they have discovered about the song they have just listened to and try to find the points that all their songs have in common.

Step 5: Discussion

The teacher asks the groups what they think the songs have in common and the whole class discusses it. Then the teacher provides them the answer.

Specific proposal (QR codes of the songs in Appendix 1):

The songs proposed for this task are the following:

"This Is Me" - Keala Settle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRyMoHJu-i8

"Perfect" - Pink

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12L8Tus290I

"Who You Are" - Jessie J

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCpr_10YzGg

"Who Says" - Selena Gómez

 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akaRg5C1VO8

Benefits of the activity:

- **Language skills are practised**. This task combines three language skills (listening, reading and speaking). At the same time, it reinforces different linguistic contents such as grammar and vocabulary. As a listening and reading activity, students not only have

to pay attention to the overall meaning of the lyrics but also to specific details, which leads to a deeper understanding of the song. As they have to listen to the song individually, they have the opportunity to pause it, rewind it or even listen to it as many times as they consider it convenient. Although the students are basically asked to focus on the new vocabulary items of the song as well as the grammar constructions they may be not familiar with, since they are exposed to a model of pronunciation, they will also learn how to pronounce words, they will learn about stress and intonation.

- **Linguistic issues are practiced.** As an example, I have provided an analysis of the specific linguistic issues that can be worked on in one of the songs that I have chosen, "Perfect".

"Perfect"

Grammar: in this song, as in the previous one, we can find examples of verbal tenses that the teacher could revise (e.g. present, present continuous, present perfect simple, past simple, future simple). Some more interesting contents considering the students' level would be: the use of 'should' (e.g. 'the only thing I should be drinking'), conditional (e.g. 'if you ever, ever feel'), use of the conjunction 'so' (e.g. 'the whole world's scared, so I swallow the fear'), use of 'so' as a degree adverb (e.g. 'so complicated'), use of 'too' as an adverb (e.g. 'we try too hard'), use of 'like' as a proposition (e.g. 'like you're nothing'), and the imperative (e.g. 'don't you ever, ever feel').

Vocabulary: in this song we have interesting adjectives, verbs and phrasal verbs. The adjectives here presented are all negative adjectives and some of them share the prefix 'mis-' (e.g. 'silly', 'mistreated', 'misplaced', 'misunderstood', 'underestimated', 'mean', 'scared'), phrasal verbs (e.g. 'slow [sb] down', 'chase down'), verbs (e.g. 'swallow', 'exchange').

Pronunciation: clusters, which tend to be more difficult to produce for students whose language does not present a syllable structure similar to that of English (e.g. 'decisio<u>ns</u>' - /ns/-, 'seco<u>nd</u>' - /nd/-); aspiration, absent in many languages (e.g. '<u>p</u>erfect'- /ˈpʰɜrˌfɪkt/-); vowel sounds: I would illustrate the contrast between /ɔː/ and /ɒ/ sounds (e.g. /ɔ/ and /ɑ/ in 't<u>a</u>lk' - /tɔk/- and 'wr<u>o</u>ng' - /rɑŋ/-); consonant sounds, in this case /t/ and /d/ which have the same place and manner of articulation but differ in voicing

(e.g. /t/ and /d/ in 'turn' - /tɜrn/- and 'dug'- /dʌg/-); and the pronunciation of '-ed' endings (e.g. /ɪd/ in 'mistreat<u>ed</u>' - /mɪsˈtritɪd/-, /t/ in 'misplac<u>ed</u>' - /mɪsˈpleɪst/-). The pronunciation the singer employs is American, however, if the students are used to a different pronunciation this would be a good opportunity for the teacher to show their differences

- **Anxiety and stress levels are reduced**. The fact that students are organized in groups during most of the activity allows them to reduce stress as they do not have to present their songs in front of the whole class but to their groups. Additionally, the fact that they share the information with the other groups should lower their anxiety level as the other members of their new group have not listened to the same song and therefore do not know if the information their mates are describing is correct or not. Finally, the fact that each student has had enough time to look for information about the song and to understand its overall meaning also helps to reduce the levels of anxiety.

- **Dynamism**. The cards are situated in different places in the class, what adds dynamism to the activity. This is especially relevant with teenage students due to their need for movement as it increases their attention and motivation (Lauría de Gentile & Leiguarda de Orué, 2012).

- **Positive use of technology**. The use of technology can also be motivating for them because they know how to use it and they tend to associate technology with enjoyable activities. If they use their phones with academic purposes, they may associate learning with having fun.

- **Increased self-esteem**. The songs that I propose for this task all have a message of accepting and loving oneself intended at being helpful for students at this age, who tend to suffer low self-esteem. The song "This Is Me", taken from the film *The Greatest Showman*, conveys the message that it does not matter how different you are or how others try to undermine you, you do not have to be afraid of showing the world who you are. On the other hand, in her song "Perfect" Pink says that we make mistakes and that people around us can be judgemental for that but that it does not have to make us feel inferior. "Who You Are" shows that the most important thing is being true to one's self, independently of what others say, and that there is no problem in not being

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fine sometimes, it is natural. Finally, "Who Says" expresses that there is beauty in everyone and that we know ourselves better than anybody else, so we should not let others define who we are and how far we can go.

Drawbacks of the activity:

- **Uncomfortable situation**. The students may not feel comfortable working with their groups. It is also possible for the teacher to let them create their own groups, or she can take into account her own knowledge of her students to form the groups being aware of which students are more compatible.

- **Lack of technical resources**. Some students may not have a mobile phone, in that case the ones that do have one can share it with the other students.

TASK 2: Musical Kahoot with "Story of My Life"

- **Previous requirements**: the students are asked to bring their mobile phones or Tablets to class.

- **Materials needed**: mobile phone or Tablet.

Table 2: Overview of the activity

Musical Kahoot	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Steps	Explanation of the activity	The song	The Kahoot	Re-playing
Interaction	T → SS	T → SS	T ↔ SS Individual	T → SS
Role of the teacher	Organiser or task setter	Organiser or task setter	Organiser or task setter Prompter and editor	Organiser or task setter
Time	3'	7'	10'	4'

SS= students; T= teacher

16

Description of the activity

Step 1: Explanation of the activity

The teacher tells the students that they are going to play Kahoot and explains to them what the application consists in.[1] Once they know how Kahoot works, she tells her students that they will have to answer specific questions on a song using Kahoot, so they will have to pay special attention to the song.

Step 2: The song

Students listen to the song twice, the first time without lyrics and the second one with the lyrics included.

Step 3: The Kahoot

Students start playing Kahoot. If necessary, the teacher uses a moment to explain why a specific answer was correct and why the others were not. She also solves any doubt the students may have.

Step 4: Re-playing

Once the students have finished with the Kahoot, the teacher asks them if they want her to play the song again and if they answer affirmatively, she does so.

Specific proposal (sample questions of the Kahoot in Appendix 2):

"Story of My Life" – One Direction

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-TE_Ys4iwM (without lyrics)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJcFoNIc4Fw (with lyrics)

Benefits of the activity:

- **Flexibility.** As this app allows teachers to design the activity as they consider it convenient, they can include a wide range of contents according to their students'

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[1] Kahoot is an application which allows the user to create quizzes, questionnaires or games where you need to put words in order, for instance. The participants who are using the application need to answer to some questions that are shown on their mobiles phones as quickly as possible. At the end of the game/quiz/questionnaire the student with the highest number of points is the winner.

needs. In this case I would include questions dealing with vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar, but it could be designed to address one of these elements exclusively. The language skills integrated in this activity are reading (students have to read the questions and the answers as well as the song's lyrics) and listening (they have to listen to the song). Speaking could also be applicable as long as they interact with the teacher or with the whole class, asking questions or making comments.

- Some of the **specific linguistic contents** this song provides are:
Grammar: the verbal tenses that appear in the song are: present simple, present perfect continuous, past simple, future simple. Besides that, the use of passive (e.g. 'these words will be written'), the participle (e.g. 'written', 'broken'), the use of 'too' as an adverb (e.g. 'too tight'), and some prepositions (e.g. 'between', 'beneath') are grammar constructions taught at this level that could help the teacher in introducing them or just presenting them as a review.

Vocabulary: the adjectives, nouns and phrasal verbs that will probably be new for students at this level are: adjectives (e.g. 'untamed', 'frozen', 'empty', 'warm', 'bright'), of which some could be introduced as antonyms (e.g. 'tight' and 'wide'); phrasal verbs (e.g. 'hold on', 'come around'); and nouns (e.g. 'stone', 'bones', 'cage').

Pronunciation: clusters (e.g. 'spe<u>nd</u>'-/nd/), vowel sounds, in this case the distinction between /iː/ and /ɪ/ sounds (e.g. /iː/ in 'l<u>ea</u>ve' - /liːv/- and /ɪ/ in 'g<u>i</u>ve' - /gɪv/) and the diphthong /əʊ/ (e.g. 'bones' - /bəʊnz/- and 'h<u>o</u>pe'- /həʊp/), consonant sounds (e.g. /ŋ/ in 'morni<u>ng</u>' - /ˈmɔːnɪŋ/ and 'burni<u>ng</u> - /ˈbɜːnɪŋ/-). The pronunciation used here is British.

- **Being attentive**. This application is engaging for the students, mainly because they are willing to compete, or, in the case of teenagers, to take risks. In this activity they will want to choose the right answer so they will pay more attention.

- **Quick-decision making**. This activity encourages students to make decisions in a short period of time, which would be helpful with teenage students as they have difficulties with decision making.

- **It is a game!** The students will probably see the activity as a game rather than a language activity, so they be more willing to participate. It lowers the anxiety level. The fact that the app allows the students to choose a nickname and that only the best results appear in the screen helps to lower stress and anxiety as students are not signalled if they choose the wrong answer.

- **Memorizing**. Since the students know they have to answer to specific questions about the song, they will try to memorize some words or sequences in order to answer the questions correctly, in that way the teacher encourages their use of memory and intends to increase their level of attention.

- **Technology**. It also entails the use of technology and provides the same benefits as in the previous task.

Drawbacks of the activity:

- **Kahoot is not a novelty any more.** Kahoot is an app commonly used with students nowadays and, if it is used assiduously, it may be tiresome for them. It would be a good option for the teacher to ask their students if they are familiar with the app and if they like it before they use it in the lesson.

TASK 3: Writing an informal e-mail

I have designed the following task following the idea of Cristina Urbizu, a teacher of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL), who presented a series of playful activities meant to be used in the SFL classroom. She delivered this talk at the University of the Basque Country in a course directed to future teachers of Spanish for foreign learners, in March 2019.

- **Previous requirements**: the teacher needs to show her students how to write an informal e-mail. She needs to explain that verbs have different registers, some are formal and some others informal, so that students know which verbs they should include in their message.

-   **Materials needed:** the lyrics of the song that the teacher will provide to the students.

Table 3: Overview of the activity

Writing an informal e-mail	Step 1	Step 2
Steps	Explanation of the activity	Development of the task
Interaction	T → SS	T → S Individual
Role of the teacher	Organiser or task setter	Monitor and evidence gatherer
Time	2'	20'

SS= students; T= teacher

Description of the activity

Step 1: Explanation of the activity

The teacher explains the activity to the students. First, they are going to listen to a song in which the singer has a message for them. In this case, the singer dedicates the song to a friend that she has not seen for a long time and whom she did not treat well. What they have to do next is to write an informal e-mail answering to the singer, pretending to be her friends. The students are asked to include in their writings some specific constructions typical of informal e-mails that have been previously explained by the teacher.

Step 2: Development of the task

First the students listen to the song. They have a copy of the lyrics that the teacher has previously handed out. Then, they start writing an email with their answer to the singer (the specific instructions for how to write this type of email have to be previously provided by the teacher). Once they have finished, they hand it in to the teacher who will correct their emails and give feedback to the students.

Specific proposal (lyrics of the song in Appendix 3):

"Hello" – Adele
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQHsXMglC9A

<u>Benefits of the activity:</u>

- **Two language skills** have been integrated in this activity: listening and writing. We ask the students to write an informal email, but since we provide them with a context, it is easier for them to get in the situation. They are presented with "a real situation" and they just have to imagine what their answer would be like. As they have to provide an answer to the singer, they must pay special attention to the content of the song, to the particular details that will help them to write their emails.

- **Specific linguistic benefits** that the song provides:
  Grammar: the constructions that would be relevant to teach at a B1/B2 level are the following: modal verb 'must' (e.g. 'I must have called a thousand times'), the use of 'used to' (e.g. 'I'm in California dreaming about who we used to be'), the use of 'such' as a determiner (e.g. 'there's such a difference between us'), and conditionals (e.g. 'if after all these years you'd like to meet'). As the previous songs, this one also exemplifies several verbal tenses (e.g. present simple, present continuous, present perfect simple, past simple and past continuous).

  Vocabulary: phrasal verbs, especially useful in informal language, such as (e.g. 'tear [sb] apart', 'make out', 'go over'), expressions, which help students to produce the language in a more natural manner (e.g. 'run out of time'), some new verbs (e.g. 'wonder', 'heal', 'matter', 'hope').

  Pronunciation: as in the previous cases, this song can be used to provide students with examples of clusters (e.g. 'fe<u>lt</u>' - /lt/-), to help them identify diphthongs (e.g. /əʊ/ as in 'h<u>o</u>me' - /həʊm/- or 'd<u>o</u>n't' - /dəʊnt/-), the teacher could also practise with them the pronunciation of contractions, common in everyday language (eg. 'I've' - /aɪv/-, 'I'm' - /aɪm/-, 'there's' - /ðeəz/-). Again, the pronunciation used by the singer is British.

<u>Drawbacks of the activity:</u>

- As the activity is carried out in class, **the timing** could not be appropriate for all the students: some may need more time and some less. The teacher can solve this problem

by bringing extra exercises for students who finish earlier and give a little more time to those who work slowly.

TASK 4: "Story of My Life"

This activity is based on the example proposed by Lapo (2016, in Lems, 2018) who proposes that students create playlists with songs which represent the most important moments in their lives. The playlists are shared with the rest of their classmates.

- **Previous requirements**: none.

- **Materials needed**: the students have to take to class the lyrics of the song chosen (obligatory), they can also take photos, videos…(optional).

Table 4: Overview of the activity

"Story of My Life"	Step 1	Step 2
Steps	Explanation of the activity	Development of the task
Interaction	T → SS	SS → T, SS
Role of the teacher	Organiser or task setter	Monitor and evidence gatherer
Time	3'	5'-8'

SS= students; T= teacher

Description of the activity

Step 1: Explanation of the activity

The teacher tells the students that they have to work on an individual project. Each student has to choose a song which reminds her/him of a particular moment in her/his life (it can be a happy, sad or funny moment). They will have to play the song to the rest of the class and prepare an oral presentation explaining the relation between the moment and the song they have chosen. In addition to the presentation, they can use the resources they think convenient, such as photos, personal objects, videos, etc. The students have to give the lyrics to the teacher. She will make copies for all the students in class. After each presentation, the whole class can discuss some aspects about the song, such as words they

do not know. In addition, students could be asked to add a little glossary with the words they think their classmates are not going to understand.

Step 2: Development of the task

First, each student provides the other students the lyrics of the song she or he has chosen for the presentation together with a glossary containing the words that could be difficult to understand for the other students. Second, the students play their song and after that they deliver their oral presentation. Once finished, the rest of the students can ask any question to the presenter and discuss interesting words, grammar constructions or even the meaning of the songs.

Benefits of the activity:

- **The four language** skills are required in the elaboration of this task. The presenters will work on their writing and reading skills in the preparation of the presentation. They will also work on their speaking skills because they will have to practise giving the talk. The rest of the students will be working on their listening as well as speaking skills. Apart from that, with regards to the linguistic objectives, students will acquire new vocabulary while they work with the lyrics of their song, they will pay special attention to grammar as they analyse the lyrics or prepare their presentation, and they may practise their pronunciation and fluency for their oral presentation.

- At a **more personal level**, another benefit of this activity is that it helps students identify and express their emotions, something that tends to be difficult for teenagers. Additionally, as Parker (2013) states, "Writing about ourselves, even in a foreign language, can also have the collateral effect of helping us understand more about ourselves and our lives and thus becomes a 'way of knowing'" (as expressed in Harmer, 2015, p. 366).

- **Motivation.** If this activity helps the students know more about themselves, it may also contribute to their motivation.

- **Lower anxiety levels**. Since the students themselves choose the song and the moment of their lives they want to share with their classmates, as well as the visual aids they want to include, this activity should decrease the level of anxiety that delivering an oral presentation could create on them.

Drawbacks of the activity:

- **Privacy issues.** Some students may not want to talk about their personal experiences. In this case, the students can choose a song, a singer or band they like and explain why.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I examine the beneficial uses of songs for EFL adolescent learners. In order to do so, I have first discussed the way the adolescent brain works in order to understand how it may affect their learning and after that I investigated the connection between language and music in addition to the different benefits songs had for language learners. In the last part of this paper, I proposed a number of activities applying the theory, with their potential benefits and drawbacks.

The information provided here shows that songs can contribute to an improvement in students' cognitive strategies as well as to an increase in their knowledge of the language, apart from the positive influence they exert on their emotions. With this information in mind and knowing that adolescence is a period in which the human brain suffers different physiological changes which make it flexible and adaptable, it would be reasonable for teachers to take advantage of that information and use it for the benefit of their students.

My intention with the selection of this topic and my decision to elaborate the activities that I have proposed here was to show that teachers have a great number of alternatives to implement in their classrooms at their disposal. These alternatives are very different from traditional methods and are highly adaptable to the characteristics of their teenage students. Although not much research has been carried out about the benefits that songs could exert on learning a foreign language, this paper has shown that they present features that make them suitable for that purpose

To finish with, I consider important that teachers pay special attention to their students' needs in general, but particularly the teenage students' needs. They should

analyse what works better with a particular group of students and what does not in order to obtain better results. They should not be afraid to experiment different alternatives and ask their students what they think would work better in the classroom. By doing so, the teachers would let them know that they are active subjects in their own learning, and this would help them to feel more engaged and therefore more motivated.

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Appendixes

APPENDIX 1

"This is me" – Keala Settle

"Perfect" - Pink

"Who You Are" – Jessie J

"Who Says" – Selena Gómez

APPENDIX 2

What does the word "stone" make reference to in this part of the song? Full Screen

▲ a jewel	◆ a gravestone
● a heavy rock	■ a stone brick

What does the word "stone" make reference to in this part of the song? Full Screen

▲ a jewel	◆ a gravestone ✔
● a heavy rock	■ a stone brick

The song says: "leave my heart open but it stays right here in its cage".
What lives in cages?

49

0
Answers

▲ Flowers

◆ Trees

● Snails

■ Birds

Which word contains the sound /i:/?

51

0
Answers

▲ It

◆ Leave

● Empty

■ Right

What does "hold on" mean here?

Skip

60

0
Answers

0:53 / 4:07

vevo

YouTube

▲ to resist, not giving up

◆ to wait

● to take something

■ to possess something

Podium

Full Screen

Get Results →

A

hoo

3,881 points

4 out of 6

C

Ka

2,883 points

3 out of 6

B

t!

766 points

1 out of 6

APPENDIX 3

"Hello" – Adele (www.azlyrics.com)

Hello, it's me
I was wondering if after all these
years you'd like to meet
To go over everything
They say that time's supposed to
heal ya
But I ain't done much healing
Hello, can you hear me?
I'm in California dreaming about
who we used to be
When we were younger and free
I've forgotten how it felt
Before the world fell at our feet

There's such a difference
between us
And a million miles

Hello from the other side
I must have called a thousand
times
To tell you I'm sorry for
everything that I've done
But when I call you never seem
to be home

Hello from the outside
At least I can say that I've tried
To tell you I'm sorry for
breaking your heart
But it don't matter, it clearly
doesn't tear you apart
Anymore

Hello, how are you?
It's so typical of me to talk about
myself, I'm sorry
I hope that you're well
Did you ever make it out of that
town
Where nothing ever happened?

It's no secret that the both of us
Are running out of time

[chorus]

Anymore
Anymore
Anymore

[chorus]