Introduction
Researchers have reported that music and songs can be used in foreign language teaching to efficiently increase learners’ language skills (Medina, 2003; 1990; Salcedo, 2002). However, few empirical studies exist to support these claims. Filling this gap in the literature will give teachers confidence in using music to support all aspects of second language learning.

Several studies have shown that music can be particularly effective in teaching early literacy skills (Register, 2001; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2000) and that songs can act as a memory aid when teaching content related to multiple domains. Researchers have reported that music and songs can be used in foreign language teaching to efficiently increase learners’ speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (Medina, 2003, 1990; Isenberg & Jalongo, 1983).

Study Design
Two groups were identified as good matches for proficiency in French, previous learning, and cultural/socioeconomic status. The two groups of 52-level pupils (mean age: 13.4) were located at a secondary school in Scotland through the generous support of Learning Tapes. The study ran for 8 weeks, including one week each for pre-test and post-test interviews.

One session per week (55 minutes each) was devoted entirely to the new method of instruction and taught by one of the researchers. Two other sessions (55 minutes) were taught using the methodology employed by the regular classroom teacher, but with a component (10-15 minutes) from the new method. The control group was given visual art and dramatic additions to the curriculum in order to counter-balance the impact of adding new material (independent of the content) to the curriculum of the other group.

Preliminary Results and Data Analysis
Each student was tested individually in a 20-minute session in a private room. The pre-test assessed pupils’ baseline level in French and the post-test measured any changes in 3 broad areas:

1. Vocabulary
2. Grammatical structures
3. Speaking and listening comprehension skills

Test results were obtained for 50 pupils total (27 in the music group and 23 in the art group). Preliminary data analysis, for the written tests only (Task 1 assesses vocabulary, while Tasks 2-4 assess grammatical knowledge), shows ANOVA results of p = 0.071, a trend which is not statistically significant. However, we will have a better sense of the overall results after scoring the six remaining French tests.

French vocabulary learning and grammatical knowledge will be assessed based on: accuracy of written and oral production, recognition/correction of errors, listening comprehension, and grammatical conversions. Pronunciation and conversation skills will be assessed by French teachers.

Musical Group Methodology
The methodology for the music/singing group added songs and activities that fall into the following categories:

1. Songs that review known material and repeat the target material in an enjoyable format.
2. Songs that present new material in a comprehensible context, additional was pairing with a familiar melody.
3. Songs with lyrics that teach learners how to employ the grammatical structure as they show numerous examples of the structure.
4. Songs that come directly from the target language, providing learners with background information about the target culture, proper pronunciation, and correct usage by a native speaker.
5. Songs that use learners’ input for composition of the tune and creation of lyrics.

Control (Visual Art and Drama) Group Methodology
The methodology for the control group added visual art and dramatic materials:

1. Videos and other visual aids to review known vocabulary and grammar and make the language accessible visually, along with appropriate spoken and listening activities in the target language.
2. Bright pictures and photographs that support the presentation of new material in a comprehensible context.
3. Visual aids using colour and memorable images to remind learners how to employ the grammatical structure as they show multiple examples of the target structure.
4. Creative, artistic games such as Pictionary and Vocabulary Bingo to review vocabulary while allowing for individuals’ imagination and interaction with the material.

Case Study
We are investigating the effectiveness of using songs and musical activities to teach French to 13-year-old (52 level) Scots English speakers, compared with a more traditional, visual art based language teaching methodology.

The working hypothesis is that the presentation of new material to the group of learners using added musical activities will have a significant effect, compared with the control (visual art and drama) group, on participants’ learning of:

- Targeted French grammatical structures through music’s potential to organise memorable structure in time
- Vocabulary items through music’s ability to generate memorable events in context, and
- Phonological skills because music requires detailed and accurate discrimination within the domain of sound.

Assessment consisted of pre-testing and post-testing in a fixed research design. Additional information was obtained through brief interviews at the beginning and at the end of the programme. The results of the interviews will provide a better sense of whether or not the strategies were successful in ways that may not perhaps be reflected in the quantitative data.

Improvements in Learning
The results of this study will begin to uncover whether or not a foreign language can be more efficiently learned using songs as a tool for presenting material, rather than being perceived as merely a ‘fun’ extra activity with little pedagogical value.

While music has been shown to improve vocabulary acquisition, beyond teachers’ reports, it is presently unclear whether or not this is true for learning grammatical structures and pronunciation.

REFERENCES

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