Music to their ears? Exploring Hungarian EFL teachers’ beliefs about the educational potentials of songs

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ABSTRACT

Despite the established value of music for language learning, in that, the bulk of empirical studies that corroborate its usefulness, teachers still eschew its incorporation in the classroom as song materials remain underutilized. The ideological basis of this discrepancy is poorly understood as little is known about English language teachers’ beliefs and practices regarding song-assisted instruction. To illuminate this uncharted area, the present exploratory interview study sought to elicit responses from five Hungarian EFL instructors at a well-recognized university in Budapest. Considering the importance of constantly revisiting and enhancing the quality of English instruction, this study will rebound to the benefit of EFL education namely the integration of arts and contributes to a better understanding of teachers’ attitudes towards the use of songs as instructional materials. While acknowledging songs’ relevance including their motivational and mnemonic properties for facilitating vocabulary retention, the findings reveal that teachers encounter various challenges related to their classroom applications, namely copyright infringement, student-related factors such as age as well as level of proficiency, and lyrical appropriateness. Implications of this inquiry involve the recognition of Hungarian teachers’ pedagogical concerns and the need for future research to seek practical strategies for implementing musical materials in the language classroom.

KEYWORDS

classroom, challenges, English language teachers’ beliefs, Hungarian EFL instructors, songs, underutilized

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INTRODUCTION

Central to the discipline of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is the research quest for a thorough understanding of the underlying facets of acquiring a second language (L2). Different L2 learning trends, over the past decades, have prompted empirical studies aimed at investigating the nature of these ‘unconventional’ language learning strategies. These mainly included audiovisual media such as movies, streaming platforms, etc., and among which music received considerable attention. In this regard, literature abounds with numerous studies testifying the special advantages of songs for language instruction. Several research studies also highlighted the crucial role songs play in facilitating learners’ out-of-school language experience.

In the Hungarian context, a number of studies have discussed the types of extramural English (EE) activities students engage in outside the classroom. For instance, a study by Józsa and Imre (2013, as cited in István, 2016), found that English exposure through songs is one of the main EE activities language learners experience. Another relevant study by Balázs (2022) investigated Hungarian EFL teachers’ perceptions of their students’ motivation for L2 learning focusing on EE activities. The findings revealed that teachers are aware of the usefulness and the educational potentials of EE activities acknowledging that they “make an effort to involve learners’ extramural English interests into EFL lessons” (p. 98). According to Nagy (2009), the Hungarian National Core Curriculum recommends the incorporation of songs as well as rhymes as useful resources in language instruction and encouraging students to memorize songs.

Along with the prominence music gained, however, questions have been raised about the effective implementation of songs. In this regard, Lems (2005) argues that “teachers know that music works, but no one is empowered to take the next step of putting it in the center of a curriculum; consequently there is no “proof” that music helps with English” (p. 20). Sharing similar views, Lieb (2008) postulates that “many are resistant to the idea of using music as a pedagogical tool in the EFL classroom, thereby forgoing a promising opportunity to positively influence student achievement” (p. 0.518). Additionally, there has not been a lot of attention given to the Hungarian pedagogical perspective on the use of unconventional materials such as songs in the EFL classroom.

Furthermore, the documented existing research from teacher cognition literature provides limited quantitative evidence (mostly survey-driven) on song-assisted EFL teaching. In this regard, Kagan (1990) and Woods (1996) gauge the appropriateness and the credibility of cognition-based studies that employ quantitative techniques being of a decontextualized nature, namely questionnaires, and point out that the obtained findings might be subjectively rooted in the researcher’s personal assumptions and beliefs rather than informants’ individual perceptions and real life experiences.

To identify the source of this paradox, the present interview study set out to investigate this underexplored aspect of teacher cognition research focusing on Hungarian language teachers’ beliefs and practices in relation to song-assisted L2 instruction. As a step towards filling in the research gap and adding fresh insights to what has been established in the related literature, this research sought to shine a spotlight on the educational value-laden reality of song-supported language instruction which resulted in the following foundational research questions:
1. How do Hungarian EFL teachers perceive the value of songs in promoting EFL learning?
2. What challenges do Hungarian EFL teachers face in incorporating songs the language classroom?
3. What characteristics make songs suitable teaching instruments according to Hungarian EFL teachers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because teaching and learning are two intertwined processes, acknowledging teachers’ beliefs and instructional philosophies is crucial to enhancing the quality of learners’ language experience. According to Borg (2003), beliefs refer to a set of “complex, practically oriented, personal, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge” (p. 81). In the context of language education, the concept of teacher beliefs is closely linked to teacher cognition and studies in this area are of important consequence to a better understanding of classroom dynamics.

In an attempt to move the debate about the full spectrum of human potentials forward, Gardner (2011) introduced his multiple intelligence theory (MIT) which is established on a comprehensive contemporary understanding of the human intelligence being intrinsically multidimensional. In other words, MIT lies in the idea that people have unique ways of learning based on the intelligences they developed throughout their lives and while these intellectual capacities are different from one another, the outcome of combining them is exponential. His theory proposes eight categories of intelligence including musical and linguistic. The former usually emerges earlier in humans than other intelligences and involves those with increased musical capacity who have a higher ability to hear, recognize, and remember patterns. The latter is the most studied category of human intelligence and addresses people who have strong linguistic talents and are able to understand others and skillfully communicate and express their thoughts. Addressing the link between the two types of intelligences, Kraus, Strait, and Parbery-Clark (2012) advance that “musical experience is a driving force in shaping biological responses to sound and, as we have seen, the benefits afforded by music transfer to other realms of auditory processing, including speech” (p. 105). In the same line, Christison and Kennedy (1999) suggest that “each learner can acquire language skills by employing individual strengths or preferences” (p. 3).

The universality and conspicuous consumption of music as a form of popular media instigated research to probe into the educational potentials of songs as pedagogical tools. The first major foray into music-based teaching took place in the late 1900s with the emergence of the Lozanovian theory of Suggestopedia. One of the key characteristics of suggestopedic learning is to create a relaxed atmosphere in the foreign language classroom because being in “this state is felt to be optimal for learning, in that anxieties and tension are relieved and power of concentration for new material is raised” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p 321). Lightbown and Spada (2013) further posit that “teachers can make a positive contribution to student’s motivation to learn if classrooms are places that students enjoy coming to because the content is interesting […] and the atmosphere is supportive” (p. 83).

An alternative modern method was advanced by Anton (1990) called the Contemporary Music Approach (CMA) which is a practical systematic plan developed to facilitate the teaching
of Spanish through songs. Anton’s (1990) main focus was to target learners’ grammatical skills so he combined singing and psychology with language learning claiming that “music is one of the most effective memory aids available to us, especially for recalling grammatical structures” (p. 1169). In her analysis, Ajenjo (2013) further observes that CMA is a multidimensional approach to L2 acquisition in the ways musical stimulus triggers different cognitive processes that facilitate the retention of linguistic input.

A similar theory referred to as the Melodic Approach was proposed by Fonseca-Mora (2000) who advocates for the integration of music in language teaching propounding that “musicality of speech has an effect not only on the pronunciation skills of EFL students but also on their entire language acquisition process” (p. 146). The author emphasizes the major role that melody plays in unlocking internal processes intended for language learning. Fonseca-Mora (2000) highlights the repetitive nature of song lyrics and how it can positively affect memory retention by “providing students with lexical patterns that are stored in their minds and that can be effortlessly retrieved during any oral interaction” (p. 151).

Centring on Spanish EFL teachers’ perspectives, Pérez-Aldeguer and Leganés-Lavall’s (2012) questionnaire study investigated the views and attitudes of 20 primary teachers and their approaches to song-assisted instruction. On the one hand, the study demonstrates Spanish EFL teachers’ awareness of the role of songs play in promoting learner motivation but the findings also reveal a lack of informed choice in implementing musical materials in the classroom and relating them to the lesson objectives.

Another survey study by Alisaari and Heikkola (2017) centres on the accounts of 94 Finnish language instructors concerning their beliefs on three language-teaching techniques namely singing, listening to songs, and reciting poems. The research findings indicate that teachers are aware of not only the educational and practical potentials of music but also recognize the psychological value songs harness. The authors also found that teachers deem listening to songs as the most used technique with different student age groups in contrast with singing which is believed to be mainly suitable for children. In their conclusion, Alisaari and Heikkola (2017) establish that there exists an incongruence between teachers’ beliefs and their practices, in that, while acknowledging the educational benefits songs can offer the learner, teachers still seem to seldom implement them in the real classroom setting.

Based on a global scale research approach, Tegge’s (2018) questionnaire study examined the beliefs of over 300 teachers regarding their teaching practices involving song materials. The findings showed that participants occasionally employ songs as instructional instruments in order to diversify their teaching practices and also given what cognitive-psychological research has demonstrated about the value of musical input. However, the study also revealed that there exists many challenges of song-assisted EFL instruction namely the lack of suitable materials and how “for some teachers, cultural or political reasons made the use of songs problematic” (p. 282).

A more recent survey conducted by Xi (2021) addressed Thai teachers’ perspectives on the use of songs for teaching English in secondary schools. On the one hand, the questionnaire findings from 55 participants showed a general positive attitude of songs-supported English teaching pointing out the flexibility of integrating musical materials in the classroom and the authenticity of the lyrical text. On the other hand, results from the open-ended questions of the survey revealed an equivocation in teachers’ responses of how they rarely incorporate musical materials in the classroom despite them acknowledging their usefulness. Interpreting these
findings, Xi (2021) gauges that teachers’ lack of relevant training and practical experience in using songs in the EFL classroom might be the reason why they fail to confidently approach songs as an unconventional teaching instrument, henceforth this reluctance.

The relationship between teachers’ reported advocacy for musical materials and their real classroom practices has not yet been qualitatively elucidated particularly in the Hungarian context. There seems to be a lack of understanding on how teachers view the value of musical input in terms of promoting foreign language learning and how they employ songs as teaching instruments despite the fact that previous research shows that many teachers seem to acknowledge their potentials for facilitating learners’ EFL experience. In this paper, the present interview study reports on how a sample of Hungarian EFL teachers approach song-assisted EFL instruction including the challenges they face in implementing song materials in their classroom.

METHODS

Participants

The interview study addressed the views and practices of five Hungarian EFL instructors, three females and two males who have years’ worth of teaching experience. During that time, they were teaching English Foundation Course (General English), i.e., a preparatory programme attended by international students (Russian, Persian, Algerian, Chinese, Turkish) at a well-known university in the Hungarian capital. The language program allows learners, after successful completion, to enter tertiary-level educational institutions and enroll in different programs in which English is the medium of instruction. The youngest teacher participant is in their late twenties and the oldest is in their fifties. The interview time varied from approximately 30 min to an hour.

As far as the criteria for selecting the participants are concerned, the sampling technique used was convenience sampling which is also referred to as opportunity sampling where members of the target population are chosen for the study due to “availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 99). Admittedly, such a sampling technique does not strive for transferable results as the main objective of the interview was to explore the phenomenon from teachers’ standpoint based on a small scale study. Therefore, by approaching the question of using informal instruments in EFL instruction from a pedagogical perspective, the study sought to generate fresh insights into the preconceived assumptions of song-mediated EFL teaching (Table 1).

Research instrument

Being a territory of the qualitative paradigm, in-depth interviews were selected as the research instrument “providing rich insights into deeply contextualized and lived accounts of people in

1The age and experience information were not explicitly stated by all participants so an approximate estimate was given (in their late twenties, fifties) which was shared by some respondents at the beginning of the interview before the recording started.
their life contexts—including their language teaching and learning life” (Mirhosseini, 2020, p. 86). Because of their flexible and fluid nature, the interviews were semi-structured maintaining a smooth flow of the conversation and allowing the informants to openly elaborate on their answers. Given the type of the research instrument being semi-structured, the guide was designed accordingly which included a summary related to the research moot issues (see appendix A).

**Data collection procedures**

The study was carried out between March and June of 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Under its crippling effects impacting human dynamics of face-to-face social interactions, the interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams. Since this inquiry was carried out under atypical research circumstances, a similar scenario was consequently predicted for the process of data gathering and the other successive research phases. The interview design was, thus, informed by Salmons’ (2015) E-Interview Research Framework which addresses a set of considerations to be taken into account when conducting online interviews.

The pre-stage of data collection was confirming the interview appointment and milieu with each informant and reminding them to sign the consent form prior to their participation with the exception of one interviewee who sent her form after concluding the interview. As a way of anonymizing their identity and adhering to the ethical code of conduct in scientific research, the informants were assigned pseudonyms, in order to guarantee their anonymity while being able to discern their individual input. After piloting the instrument and gaining expert feedback on the interview items, some changes at the level of question-structure were performed.

**Data analysis**

To gain insights into the phenomenon of song-mediated language instruction, the study uses a qualitative inductive approach for data analysis namely the thematic method by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify the most common themes. This form of analysis is performed through many phases of processing the collected textual data into digestible summaries. The initial stage involves a meticulous assessment of the transcription by adopting a critical view in interpreting informants’ statements and then recording patterns or open codes that are pertinent to the research questions. The coding processes involved the categorization of the generated codes that highlight emerging ideas into broad themes, creating established meaningful patterns and ultimately reevaluating each finalized theme concerning the dataset. Regarding Richards’ (2003)

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<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<td>Anna</td>
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coding framework, the process of thematic analysis consisted of openly exploring the data and iteratively searching recurrent themes in the utterances. A crucial step was marking evoked meanings and organizing them into codes which later emerged as themes that were named to reflect the phenomenon in question.

**FINDINGS**

**Recognition of the interplay between phonological awareness and musical intelligence**

When participants were asked about the relationship between having an ear for music and one’s language performance, four of the informants acknowledged that there is implicitly a close association between the two. Lilla, for example, pointed out that music can help with pronunciation “like what the rhythm is, where you stress” since “language has a certain style, a certain kind of melody” and songs can be useful for those with a “strong” L1 accent struggling with English intonation. The participants addressed the potential of songs in developing the ability to recognize sounds of spoken language and how they can be syllabized and blended.

The idea of songs facilitating sound matching in language learning was also voiced by Daniel who emphasized the relevance of vocal music in sentence segmentation and syllable stress which might be a learning obstacle for NNS with L1 phonological patterns different from those of the English language. The relevance of songs in language acquisition is established in relation to music perception and how it can enhance rhythm sequencing ability and pitch discrimination. Tomas, sharing similar views as Melinda, highlighted the value of vocal music in language recognition and how listening to English songs may target the recipient’s auditory skills particularly “pick[ing] up the rhythm of language […] which is very important [for language acquisition]” and “tun[ing] [one]self into the right sounds, […] of English [and] getting to know the rhythm […] the rhythm of English”. One of the aspects associating songs with language is based on the shared mechanisms between musical training and language learning where the latter can help facilitate sound processing and speech perception, and overall tonal sensitivity to the foreign language. Providing a concrete example, Melinda reflected on a case of a student she taught who had a musical background and was “in fact one of the best students in the group” propounding that “there is a link between music and, and the capability of learning the language, especially English. I think musicality is very important in language. I don’t know how the brain works, but if you are good at music, I suppose you are good at learning languages.” Offering a different take on the link between music and the language performance of non-native speakers, Anna observes that this interconnection might not be the case for certain language users. The interviewee used to believe that, in general, musicians have “very good ears” for language conveying the impression that when

I hear, for example, Hungarian musicians singing in English, I’m really surprised that they don’t hear the sounds. They don’t, they are not good, some of them, not everyone, of course. But some of them, cannot catch the phonetics and I’m wondering why, because I thought that this is connected, […] to be able to pronounce the sounds correctly. I thought this was connected, but actually not. (Anna, 11:54)
Further dwelling upon the tacit potentials of songs in phonological acquisition, Lilla sheds light on the idea of “having good ears or a sense of understanding or not just understanding, because I don’t think you actually have to [...] understand it, but you have to [...] sense it, like instinctively”. Such beliefs open the discussion for the multilayered nature of songs in promoting foreign language learning.

**Multiple challenges in the integration of songs in the language classroom**

While all five teachers pointed out the educational potential of songs in providing many opportunities for students to develop their language skills, they equally shared their concerns regarding the issues related to their classroom applications. The participants reported that the most common obstacle they face in implementing musical materials is the age group of students. They mentioned that there are different learner-profile-related factors to be considered before planning any song-inspired lesson or activity. Anna pointed out that it depends on the age group. For example, with children, you can do many, many songs [...] teaching vocabulary like, head shoulders, knees, and toes, and everyone knows this song. And then you can teach the different parts of the body. For adults, it is sometimes more difficult to choose a good song. (Anna, 03:12)

Based on their accounts, the participants seem to feel more comfortable using songs with young language learners because as Lilla relayed unlike choosing a “Barney song” for children or adolescents, it can be perceived differently with learners of advanced years in that “adults might be [...] sceptical about it. So [...] it’s not difficult, but it’s a slightly challenging [...] to find a song that is actually [...] made for adults or within the adult [...] audience in mind”. This view was also shared by another informant, Tomas, who suggested that children, for example, I think they are more likely to sing as well and to engage with songs much more. I think adults are a bit more passive when it comes to songs. They will listen to the songs, but I don’t think they will sing. Or if you ask them to clap the rhythm as well, [they] won’t do that necessarily, but [...] children, kind of interact more with music. (Tomas, 24:40)

Another challenge for Lilla, on the other hand, was selecting musical materials based on an informed choice and picking a proper song that is pedagogically suitable for the classroom context in that “finding appropriate music like [a song] that is clear [that] doesn’t contain any swearing. It’s not overly sexualized. Most of my students are devoted Muslims. They tell me that they pray regularly. So it’s something that I want to take into consideration when choosing a song.”

In a different context, a major concern for two interviewees was the copyright issue for instance, Lilla mentioned that this was the main reason for her reluctance to incorporate songs in the classroom as well as Tomas, who had to use the cover version of an original song on one occasion so there would be no copyright infringement. Pursuing this line, Daniel pointed out that certain English coursebooks would sometimes include particular songs, however, because of copyright “the recording of the song provided in the sound material of the publication is not the original song. It’s a cover. Those covers are very very mediocre ones, to say the least [...] Nevertheless, some of the lyrics can be used.” Interestingly, Melinda used to employ musical materials in her classroom years ago, considering that back then “it was different because [...] songs’ lyrics had meanings and I was quite young, I was listening to the same music as my
students” so having shared interests facilitate the process of incorporating them in the lesson but songs nowadays, according to the informant, are not lyrically appropriate to be considered for language teaching pointing out that

this modern music [...] doesn’t have lyrics, just maybe five words and all swearing. So I stopped that and then [...] I would bring into the classroom old songs, but it’s my interest. Students would not enjoy that because it’s like listening to their grandparents’ music or parents’ music so we wouldn’t match. (Melinda, 06:14)

Songs-enhanced language teaching contending the complexity of learner motivation

Emotions are a key aspect of educational research and a major focus of learner motivation studies (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014). For instance, Lilla suggests that songs “could bring a topic closer to [the students] because songs are very emotional [and] they impact us in a visceral level, so I would think [...] based on my experiences with, going to concerts or having favourite artists, there are songs that do talk to you”. Motivation is driven by the intent to be involved as well as an interest in the content and engaging with music can engender in listeners a positive emotional reaction to the input. Addressing the role of music in triggering learner curiosity, Lilla further argues that “it is good to have a positive impact on them or shine a light on an issue, or just motivate them [...] they like, that particular song, so they might, research the artist, start listening to that particular artist and by doing so acquiring more knowledge of, English vocabulary in general”. Songs are perceived as a motivating force for facilitating the foreign language experience because the classroom as an imposing environment presents many challenges for the language learner that are intrinsically psychological. In this respect, Melinda holds a similar position concerning using songs in the classroom supporting music’s implementation with the primary aim of making students relax as a way of liberalizing the classroom spirit from the monotony of traditional instruction. Flashing back to an instance where she incorporated songs in her classroom, the same informant segues into another anecdotal experience stating that

even though the group was a complex mix of nationalities, I remember that when I felt that the mood was done, the atmosphere that they were tired or something maybe to motivate myself for a selfish purpose or to motivate students. But, we had a big screen with a good volume and connected to the computer. So I would go on YouTube and play a song. It always created a very good, very good mood. (Melinda, 20:38)

There were some conflicting arguments, however, in terms of motivation being multilayered and hence the type of materials in that song, may not be the sole factor impacting learner engagement. The postulation was based on the fact that most EFL classrooms are heterogeneous in at least one aspect be it their cultural background, age, religion, gender, or any other relevant ‘variable’ that could even be related to the way of instruction itself including the type of language activity or teacher behaviour. In this regard, Anna believes that “there can be a link [between classroom motivation and songs]. But it depends on many aspects of their (students), how they are motivated and how many people are in the class. There is also the group energy, my energy as a teacher. And of course the exercises”.

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Highlighting this intricacy of designing a song-based language lesson, Tomas describes the planning process where teachers first need to consider musical materials that they know their students are generally interested in. He further expounds that for example, I guess if someone doesn’t like a particular genre, then they’re not going to enjoy the rest, even if I just bring in a song, so we’d probably have to think about that. But I think songs can be, of course, interesting, and important for the lesson because [students] are listening to songs […] all the time. So it’s something which brings lessons closer to real life. And that’s important […] it’s not just, we’re not in a bubble where you kind of learn grammar, vocabulary. So I think it can be [used], especially if it’s a kind of song which is popular or well known, and good for what I want to do in the lesson. (Tomas, 11:33)

Music’s mnemonic potential as a key attribute for promoting lexical acquisition

Considering that music is a popular cultural locomotive, participants shed light on how it can be of special usefulness in EFL instruction. They essentially emphasized the inseparability of the target language and culture being collateral systems and how songs can be suitable and genuine sociolinguistic sources for deepening learners’ cultural understanding of context-specific vocabulary and authentic language use. Reflecting on this premise, Melinda argued that songs can be advantageous for foreign language learning in terms of many aspects including:

vocabulary, listening skills, grammar, or even just showing the students how different vernaculars work, because […] [the] English class and English book would obviously very much emphasize or prefer to use […] RP [and] that sort of vocabulary. So I think it’s important to show them that in real life, this isn’t how people actually talk or this isn’t how they use grammar. (Lilla, 07:24)

Stretching the idea of strategizing musical materials in the language lesson, Tomas avers that the uses of songs are not strictly confined to being a resource of linguistic input but they can also be applied as a motivational topic in classroom discussions given that “it is more interesting to learn about the other culture to just listen to […] music from that […] country, and then talk about the culture […] I think it can make things more interesting”. All five participants had unanimous views with regard to using songs to advance learners’ vocabulary knowledge. Delving into the various applications of musical materials for language teaching, Anna asserts that songs’ lyrics can be exploited in different classroom-based activities proposing the following:

You can teach vocabulary by gap filling, doing multiple choice, or […] you put some mistakes in the lyrics [and then students] have to listen to the song and then […] change or […] give just the half of the song and the students have to finish the story or […] predict (Anna, 04:26).

In this respect, one of the reasons Daniel, for instance, would use song-based input in his classroom is because “vocabulary and speaking skills can be improved by memorizing real-life texts, not textbook, but real-life texts”. He also goes further to suggest that songs can be useful in learning and understanding “the way people speak” since “part of the vocabulary, is idioms, is, collocation so things that can be learned from these lyrics”. About the phenomenon of “earworms” which portrays a piece of music that crawls into one’s head and keeps looping, Tomas believes that

music has […] this tendency to stick in your mind […] you replay the song over and over and […] it might include words that […] you don’t know, you might look it up in the dictionary […] if you’re
really worried about not understanding the word, but then of course, if you understand it and if you keep replaying it in your mind, I guess it will stick the word as well not just the song itself. (Tomas, 17:57).

Appertaining to the question of music-language cerebral interaction, Lilla argues that “our brains are sponges that kind of work like that but [...] as an English learner, it definitely happened with me a lot. Like, I didn’t know, particular words and they weren’t part of my active vocabulary, but as time went by, they just became part of my active vocabulary. And I wasn’t intentional about it [...] I didn’t sit down and actually learn that particular phrase or verb. It just, you know… happened.” From a teacher’s perspective, the interviewee believed that “everyone can learn in such a way”, however, being “receptive enough” is a crucial determinant in whether or not one’s vocabulary knowledge can be developed. Deeming music as chiefly beneficial for lexical development while echoing their imperialistic linguistic dominance, Anna characterizes songs as being “memorable and enjoyable for students” and they can be useful “to memorize words much better than [...] learning words from a textbook” because not only “students [but] everybody listens to music actually [...] American songs [and] English songs are so popular. So everybody listens to them”.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this research was to reveal how EFL teachers in Hungary view and approach song-enhanced language instruction. The first question asks about the reported value of music in promoting language learning. The findings demonstrate teachers’ awareness of Gardner’s (2011) MI theory and the inbred correlation between musical and linguistic intelligence namely phonological awareness. The participants suggest that the aspect of tonality is a constitutive element of both systems of language and music and that having a musical background can wield a positive influence on language achievement. The type of discrete intelligence that some musically inclined learners cultivate can have a strong influence on their linguistic intelligence. The interviewees further predicate that learners’ personal interests and learning approaches can significantly contribute to their language and facilitate their foreign language experience echoing Christison and Kennedy’s (1999) statement that students have their unique EFL culture including their personal preferences and individual experiences.

Based on the analyzed data, the theme that emerged addressing the second question about teachers’ concerns shows that they have many reasons for eschewing the use of musical materials in the classroom. They pointed out the difficulty of finding appropriate songs that do not contain profane language considering the religious background and cultural beliefs of some of their students which as teachers they need to take into account when planning songs-based lessons. This interview outcome is in parallel with Tegge (2018) who revealed that one of the reasons that some EFL teachers “refrained from using songs […] despite a positive attitude towards music in the classroom [is that] they considered [them] to be inappropriate” (p. 282). Another challenge some participants discussed was admitting that they feel more confident using songs with young learners in comparison to adult students. The age factor was also addressed in Alisaari and Heikkola’s (2017) study which revealed that teachers find it easier to use songs in the classroom with young learners and adolescents than with adult students who are perceived to be too self-conscious to sing in the classroom.
Examining the educational contributions of songs, the last research question discusses participants’ views on the value of musical input where they emphasize two specific aspects facilitating foreign language learning namely vocabulary retention and classroom motivation. The first characteristic that the teachers highlighted is the mnemonic property of music in promoting vocabulary knowledge namely lexical retention. This finding is in line with Antón (1990), Fonseca-Mora (2000) and Ajenjo (2013) who argue that songs are considered as memory aids laying emphasis on their use as sources for language recall and vocabulary retention. The other main trait of musical input is the incentive it offers learners where teachers acknowledged the nonlinguistic benefits of songs in enhancing students’ foreign language experience namely learner psyche and classroom motivation which displays awareness of the Suggestopedic theory. Based on the present study, Hungarian EFL teachers recognize the psychological value of music which is in line with the statements of Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Lightbown and Spada (2013) who admit that learning can be facilitated by incorporating musical materials as they can help engage the senses and remove any psychological barriers that the learner might experience in formal teaching conditions. The present study findings also corroborate Pérez-Aldeguer and Leganés-Lavall (2012) who emphasized that the majority of EFL teachers in the Spanish context are aware of the motivational aspect of song input in facilitating the learning process and incentivizing students.

**IMPLICATIONS**

This study sought to gain better insights into the phenomenon of songs-supported language instruction based on the Hungarian EFL teacher perspective. On a general level, the interview data demonstrates teachers’ favourable stance regarding the value of songs for language learning but they also report having certain reservations when it comes to their classroom applications. This reflects Borg’s (2003) interpretation of beliefs being complex in nature. While discussing their personal experiences regarding the classroom applications of musical materials, one of the main obstacles EFL teachers face is selecting suitable musical materials. In this regard, they questioned the lyrical content and pedagogical appropriateness of songs that contain explicit vocabulary. This implies the lack of an established framework and specific instructional strategies for teachers to approach and effectively use songs as teaching instruments which is in parallel with Xi (2021) conclusions. However, in many cases where songs use lexically offensive lyrics, the artist releases two versions of the same song; an explicit and a clean version, or technically called radio edit where the lyrics do not feature vulgar references, sexual depictions or any explicit language. Hence, teachers can alternatively use the latter if the song material is found to be meaningful in terms of content and of direct relevance to the lesson objectives, for instance, to analyze lexical structures or to discuss colloquial expressions. These cultural nuances that are not necessarily prioritized in the EFL classroom might be encountered in real-world interactions where students have the opportunity to incidentally learn them through songs. Another implication of this research is reinforcing the educational contribution of musical materials which apart from their linguistic potentials can also be used as thematic tools in bringing a topic of discussion closer to the students. The Fig. 1 below summarizes the findings of the teacher interview study in a visual representation of the main themes that emerged in the dataset.
CONCLUSIONS

The popular appeal of songs among non-native speakers, particularly EFL students, is arguably one of the main factors of how learners are first introduced to or made contact with English and receive a spirited impression of the foreign culture. This type of exposure can instil positive assumptions in learners and emotionally facilitate their EFL experience. To clarify the patent failure of some teachers to view songs in a non-recreational light, the interview study about Hungarian EFL teachers’ beliefs and reported practices regarding the use (or non-use) of songs in language courses.

The findings revealed that this sample of EFL instructors support the use of songs in language instruction accentuating that music-based teaching can be advantageous in promoting students’ classroom engagement and cultural awareness as well as expanding their vocabulary knowledge. One of the postulations of this research, however, is that some teachers’ ’problematization’ of songs as a language teaching tool rests in several equally valid arguments. Apart from the prerequisite for language teachers to be creative in their approach to using songs and “diversifying [the] classroom activities and supplementing the textbook with material that […] is appropriate and interesting” (Arnold, 1999, p. 274), the specific classroom demography plays a decisive role in whether or not they can be a suitable choice of materials. This to a great extent can justify this ideological ambivalence between teachers’ personal views of deeming songs as an
effective EFL learning tool and their controversial pedagogical stance of underutilizing them in the language classroom.

As far as the research contributions are concerned, this study seeks to provide further insights into EFL teachers’ reported beliefs and practices in Hungary regarding song-assisted language instruction. It also aimed to shed light on the ambivalence between teachers’ personal views and pedagogical approaches. As their responsibility extends outside the classroom, this research also emphasizes the importance of raising teachers’ awareness of learners’ extramural exposure to English and incidental language learning which can benefit teachers’ future classroom practices. An informed understanding of these out-of-class experiences is crucial to students’ cooperation in the classroom and the overall success of the EFL teaching and learning processes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Given the limited scope of this study, future research can benefit from looking at how musical materials can be creatively approached as teaching materials and practically integrated into the EFL classroom. This calls for establishing a comprehensive framework designed for teachers who believe in the special contributions that songs can bring into the formal language classroom but lack proper training in strategizing their implementations.

LIMITATIONS

Some of the limitations of this research include data being originally obtained by analyzing what informants relayed about their views and experiences so the argument for the educational value of songs-enhanced language instruction remains relatively plausible. Being exploratory in nature, the present research primarily focuses on addressing Hungarian EFL teachers’ pre-conceived assumptions and experiences with song-mediated EFL education and does not strive to propose any lesson designs using song materials. Admittedly, the main shortcoming of this study was having a small sample size which may not reflect every songs-supported teaching situation or every Hungarian EFL instructor’s experience. However, the interviews are not meant to be a representative sample but to rather revisit and shed light on what teachers think about the use or non-use of musical materials in the language classroom, their educational potentials, pinpoint the reasons behind their reservations and open the door for future research to seek suitable ways for approaching song-assisted EFL instruction.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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REFERENCES


### Appendices

**Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Guide: EFL Teachers**

**I. Personal background (Icebreaker)**

1. Would you like to start by saying a few words about yourself?

**II. Implementing songs in the classroom**

1. What are the teaching materials you prefer using in the English classroom?
2. What do you think of integrating songs in the English language classroom?
   - How can songs be used in the English language coursebook?
   - For what purposes would you use songs as a language teaching method?
3. In case you have not used songs in the language classroom, what are the reasons behind that?

**III. Music training**

1. How much do you want to know about your students to be most helpful to them?
2. How do you see the relationship between being musically inclined or having musical training AND the skill of speaking?
3. How do you see the relationship between being musically inclined or having musical training AND the skill of reading?
4. What do you think of the link between being musically inclined or having musical training AND the skill of listening?
5. In what way do you see that being musically inclined or having musical training is related TO the skill of writing?
6. What are your thoughts on the connection between being musically inclined or having musical training AND vocabulary learning?
IV. Songs-assisted EFL learning

1. How do you usually teach new words?
2. How do you think using songs in the classroom can help students with lexical acquisition?
   a. How do you see the relationship between listening to songs with lyrics and the ability to acquire new vocabulary without having the intention to learn?
   b. What do you think links listening to songs with lyrics to internalizing/absorbing new words?
   c. How do you see the role of singing songs in terms of vocabulary practice?

V. Closure

- Is there anything you would like to add about the topics we have covered?
- What pseudonyms or initials would you like me to use?

Thank you for your contribution!