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**The impact of song lyrics in the promotion of listening comprehension, students' engagement, and mental health.**

**TRABAJO DE TITULACIÓN**

Para optar al título de Profesora de Inglés y  
el grado de Licenciada en Educación

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## **I. Introduction**

The aim of the following report is to present and justify the design of my pedagogical proposal, as well as to provide an account of my professional development throughout this process. In order to do this, I deem it essential to explore the context that determined the direction of this project.

This intervention is intended for a 7th Grade A class at an all-girl, lay institution under municipal management in Viña del Mar. This class is made up of 22 students, aged 12-14 years old, in which the majority is considered to be within the A1 level of proficiency. In general, the students tend to use mostly Spanish. Only a few of the students are able to produce English in written or oral form. Based on the account of my mentor teacher, in this class there are officially 5 SEN students. Specifically, there are 2 students who have Attention Deficit Disorder, one who has Social Anxiety Disorder, one with Down Syndrome, and one whose condition remains unidentified, since not all tests were conducted prior to the covid-19 outbreak. The latter 2 students require extensive support and guidance from the teachers, as well as special adaptations of the class materials to learn. For instance, the teachers have resorted to creating a different set of handouts and materials in order to cater to their particular needs and abilities.

In order to identify an existing gap within that class, it was necessary to administer several data collection instruments. In this case, I used my field notes, an interview to my mentor teacher, the textbook used by the school, and a report from a student who did her practicum in the same institution. The first instrument helped me to know better the students, their interests and attitudes toward the subject. Specifically, it allowed me to document how they are able to regulate their behavior when necessary, and how they tend not to communicate much in English. The second instrument was useful for understanding the current situation of the students, in which the economic and social aftermath of the virus threatened their ability to continue learning remotely. Additionally, it also brought to my attention the lack of listening practice, issue that was also prevalent in the results yielded by the third and four instruments. The third instrument, in turn, made me aware of the lack of listening practice in the 7th grade textbook, tendency that remained constant in all 4 units that were analyzed. Lastly, the fourth instrument confirmed that the consistent disregard for listening practice is a persistent issue in the Institution.

Listening comprehension is an interactive process in which the listener has to analyze and interpret the content based on their linguistic competence and topic knowledge (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). While the development of this skill is essential in learning a foreign language and could be useful in the development of other skills, listening seems to be much less practiced in comparison to reading, writing, and speaking. According to Field (2009), listening has been one of the most under-researched skills over time. That, in addition to its difficulty to teach it and to provide demonstrable results, contributes to the favoring of reading, writing, and speaking over listening.

The need to address this issue becomes much more challenging when considering the Covid-19 outbreak in our country, which partially hindered student response rates following the transition to remote instruction. According to my mentor teacher, this might be due to the fact that the learners are overwhelmed in the process of dealing with the quarantine and online-classes, both new processes that might be stress-inducing and detrimental to their mental health in various degrees. Thus far, the discussion surrounding the extent of the lockdown has centered on the negative effects it will have on people's mental health. Specifically, taking into account how stressors such as frustration and boredom, fears of infection, and financial loss are already affecting the overall wellbeing and regular functioning of people (Brooks, Webster, Smith, Woodland, Wessely, Greenberg, & Rubin, 2020).

For these reasons, the objective of this pedagogical proposal is three-fold: to promote listening comprehension skills, to foster students' engagement, and to improve students' mental health in connection to remote instruction.

In this sense, an approach I deemed appropriate to tackle these issues comes with the addition of song lyrics. The use of song lyrics for listening comprehension has been widely researched in the last decades. For instance, the introduction of music has been connected to the development of L2 sound awareness (Mora, 2000), the acquisition of grammar structures (Hurysz 1998; Przyjemaska 2000, cited in Siek-Piskozub, 2016), the exploration of accuracy and fluency in language (Mobbs & Cuyul, 2018), to increased motivation due to its authentic and emotional qualities (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Deci, 1995; Peacock, 1997, cited in Bokiev, Bokiev, Aralas, Ismail, & Othman, 2018), and with lower anxiety levels, while boosting relaxation and creativity (Metaxa, 2013; Mora, 2000, cited in Bokiev et al, 2018). However, it is still unknown whether the positive effects that come with its use still apply in a

remote instruction setting. In this respect, can song lyrics have the same positive impact that has been documented in the literature in the current context? Through this Action research I will attempt to answer this question.

## **II. Literature review**

As previously stated, song lyrics in the target language can be useful in developing awareness of the sounds, and in storing them into the long-term memory (Mora, 2000). This is particularly relevant to the context intended for this pedagogical proposal since the students have not had at this point many instances to practice their listening skills, so associating sounds and identifying words might be especially challenging to them.

For native speakers of Spanish, which only features 5 vowel sounds, it is particularly challenging to discriminate between the 20 vowel sounds existing in English. According to Flege and Wayland (2019), there seems to be a tendency in Spanish speakers to identify some of the English vowels to their Spanish equivalents, and thus disregarding the different nuances between them. For instance, sounds such as /i:/, /ɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɑ/, and /oʊ/ easily become /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɑ/ and /o/ to the Spanish speaking listeners. Considering the level of the students, as well as the time constraints to practice listening, the sounds I will mostly be focusing on will be: /i:/, /ɪ/, /ɑ/, /ʌ/, which were selected due to the fact that native speakers of Spanish find it challenging to discriminate each of these pairs as separate sounds (Flege & Wayland, 2019).

Evidently, the songs used in this intervention should feature prominently these sounds, while also being consistent with the overall purpose of this proposal. Bearing in mind that the purpose of this intervention is to enhance learners listening skills, mental health, and engagement, I deemed fitting to focus on 5 of the 10 song selection criteria provided by Mobbs and Cuyul (2018) due to their relevance to this project, as well as their ability to ensure that the songs to be utilized are appropriate for the context. Specifically, these criteria are clarity of speech, speed, vocabulary, grammar, and popularity. Regarding clarity of speech and speed, I believe that these are essential aspects to consider for listening practice, since they can directly affect the performance and achievement of the learners. For that reason, the songs used must count with a clear pronunciation of the words, and sung at a pace that favors understanding by beginner students. In connection to grammar and vocabulary, taking into account that it will be much more challenging for the students to identify words or

structures that they might not yet know or have not covered yet in class, the songs used must contain simple language. Additionally, there should not be too many complex structures, or at least, the focus should not be placed on them in case they are present in the lyrics. In regard to popularity, the songs should be fairly known and liked by the students so as to foster their interest, and thus motivating them to participate and learn. In light of these concepts, and taking into account the popularity of the singer and her songs, I intend to feature the songs “Be the One”, “One Kiss”, “New Rules”, “Physical”, and “Don’t Start Now” by British singer Dua Lipa, who was mentioned by the students as one of the artists they commonly listen to.

In order to further narrow down the scope of this intervention, it can be useful to explore the concept of learning strategy. Learning strategies are understood as the “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, cited in Graham & Santos, 2015, p. 22). According to Graham and Santos (2015) there are three main categories in which these strategies are organized: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. Firstly, meta-cognitive strategies are those concerned with “higher order executive skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity (O’Malley & Chamot 1990, cited in Graham & Santos, 2015, p. 28). On the other hand, cognitive strategies are those that directly make use of the information in order to boost the learning process (O’Malley & Chamot 1990, cited in Graham & Santos, 2015, p. 28). Lastly, socio-affective strategies are understood by Macaro (2006) as the strategies “used to manage affective or emotional responses to learning, or to draw on peer/teacher support to complete an activity” (Macaro, 2006, cited in Graham & Santos, 2015, p. 28).

For the purposes of this report, and considering the needs of the learners, I will mostly focus on metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. In this case, the former are expected to guide the instruction and goals for the different proficiency levels that exist within that classroom, while the latter are meant to concentrate on the particular needs of the students, enhancing their willingness to take part and focus on their learning under the current circumstances we are in. Considering the time constraints and the limited number of sessions, as well as the fact that this is a mixed ability class, I have decided to practice different metacognitive strategies depending on their levels of proficiency. For instance, for the lower level students it will be to

“match lexis heard to lexis in options”, for the intermediate level it will be “identification of word” and for the advanced level, “identification of chunk”.

In relation to socio-affective strategies, the one I intend to add to the intervention is that of taking emotional temperature, which consists in fostering “awareness of one's emotions when listening so as to avert negative emotions and to form the maximum positive emotions” (Vandergrift, 2011, cited in Zanjani, & Izadpanah, 2016, p. 1090). The way this strategy could be integrated into the lesson would be by prompting students to ask themselves questions such as “What am I feeling right now?”, “Why do I feel like this?”, or “What can I do to feel better right now?”, and giving them options, such as stop for a couple for a couple of minutes, or to allow them to do some breathing exercises to keep their feelings under control. The reason for including this particular strategy is that it can be easily implemented, and its effectiveness can be assessed by administering data collection instruments.

Another practice that could be useful in catering to the individual needs of the learners is the introduction of tiered tasks, in which gradually the students will be working “with the same essential ideas and use the same key skills, but at different levels of complexity and abstractness (Chen, 2007, p. 34). For that purpose, administering a pre-test and analyzing the results in order to design the class materials accordingly is essential, since that way individual students are given the opportunity for continued learning (Chen, 2007). The students can then be sorted into 3 levels according to their language proficiency and listening skills: the lower level students who have difficulties in understanding and using English, the intermediate level students who can partially understand and use the language in class with the guidance of the teacher, and the advanced level students, who are able to work independently, and require more complex tasks to fulfill their learning needs. It is worth noting that these levels are not fixed, and as the students grow familiar with this new mode of working, as well as with the tasks and skills of each session, they might feel comfortable enough to try a different activity slightly beyond their skill set (Chen, 2007).

### **III. Action Plan**

Based on the concepts, ideas, and issues discussed so far in this report, it can be concluded that the focus of the intervention is to introduce the learners to listening comprehension practice, placing special emphasis on English sounds. Specifically, by the end of this



intervention, students will be able to recognize several unknown words from a variety of oral texts (songs). For this learning objective to be possible, the following specific objectives will be the focus of the sessions:

1. Students will be able to identify English vowel sounds
2. Students will be able to associate the sounds with their written form
3. Students will be able to recognize written words/chunks that are part of the lyrics of a song.

For these purposes, this intervention will consist in 5 sessions expected to take place throughout one month, with one session per week (See **appendix A**). For a more detailed account of the lessons, see **appendix B** to explore the scope and sequence of this intervention.

In particular, the first session **is** intended for the administration of a pre-test, so as to detect the learners' distinct levels of proficiency, as well as the necessary amount and type of support for them. This test consists of 2 main sections, one for filling the gap exercises and another one for forced choice between two homophones (**Appendix C**). The song used for this session will be "One Kiss" by Dua Lipa.

The second session will concentrate on identifying and discriminating the sounds /i:/, /ɪ/, /ɑ/, and /ʌ/. In order to do this, the students will be exposed through the sounds in a repetition sequence that highlights the difference between the phonemes, for instance 'beat'–'beat', 'beat'–'bit', and 'bit'–'bit', taken from Barrios, Jiang, and Idsardi (2016). Afterwards, the students will be expected to document their ability to recognize and discriminate the vowel sounds /i:/, /ɪ/, /ɑ/, /ʌ/ by marking with an "X" the sounds the students hear in the song "Physical" by Dua Lipa (**Appendix D**).

The third session will be concerned with associating the sounds the learners hear with written words, reason for which meta-cognitive strategies for listening are introduced. For instance, the students who are not as proficient will match the words heard to possible options presented to them; the intermediate level students in turn will identify individual words, while the advanced learners will eventually be asked to identify a short phrase or chunk. For this lesson in particular, students will be given 2 options of similar sounding words taken from the song "Be the One"; they will have to choose based on what they hear and what they have learned in the previous class. The exit ticket intended for this session will consist of a 3-2-1

exit ticket in which the students are supposed to share 3 words they recognized, 2 of the sounds present in those words and the one strategy they focused on throughout the lesson to do identify these aspects (**See appendix E**).

As previously stated, this proposal is intended to follow a “tiered” approach to the tasks. Gradually, the students will be introduced to tasks that possess “the same essential ideas and use the same key skills, but at different levels of complexity and abstractness” (Chen, 2007, p. 34). In this sense, the fourth lesson aims at further practicing identifying words, although for the advanced learners the option to identify chunks will be available. In concrete terms, the students are expected to complete a gapped text that will be tiered. Lower level students have to select the correct word based on the options available; the middle level learners fill in the gaps of the song, while the advanced level will complete both words and some short phrases (**Appendix H**). After that, the students will complete another exit ticket focused on a single question pertaining to the perceived effectiveness of the strategy used up to that point (**See Appendix F**).

Lastly, to assess the success of the intervention, a post-test will be applied. Even though this instrument is relatively similar to the pre-test, the post-test counts with a questionnaire to elicit the students’ own views and opinions on their progress throughout the course of this intervention (**Appendix G**). It is worth noting that this instance of assessment will not be graded due to the negative impact it can have on the learners. According to Chen (2007), assessments in general tend to have “profound effects on students’ learning identities and self-esteem” (p. 91), explaining that marking may imply a lack of learning ability for the low achievers, and thus de-motivating them.

#### **IV. Reflection**

Working on this pedagogical proposal has been one of the most challenging experiences of my academic life thus far. Not only was I unable to make use of the learning strategies and resources I was familiar with, but I also had to face my own weaknesses as a teacher in adapting to the new way of teaching and learning. For instance, it never occurred to me that I was not aware of how to teach listening. While researching the area of listening, it was brought to my attention that it is rather common for teachers to devote less time for listening, and that when the skill is actually being practiced, the methods tend to be outdated and

repetitive (Field, 2009). If it were not for this research, I would have most likely be another one of them. In searching for methods to introduce listening in the context of remote instruction, I also discovered that through it I could tackle other issues that could affect language learning, such as student engagement and mental health, and how music could positively target both aspects at once. Because of this, I intend to further inquire into how to exploit music for the development of other skills, and what considerations to take with different learners, since it might be one of the most ideal media to grow closer to the students, and to foster a climate that favors their interest, and therefore learning. All in all, I am much more prepared to teach listening and to address the issues mentioned, regardless of the circumstances in which learning can be taking place.

As a prospective teacher, inclusion is probably one of the most necessary aspects to discuss and work on, even when it can be quite challenging to determine how to best address it in connection to the particular needs of the learners. In this sense, to differentiate accordingly to their needs and preferences is crucial so as to ensure a fair environment, in which everyone has the opportunity to grow. As a student diagnosed with ADD, I felt at times that teachers gave up on me when I did not provide them with the results they expected. As a consequence, certain subjects were a source of fear and disappointment, and I felt stuck. For years I had to fight the belief that I would never be able to accomplish anything, and that the word “mediocre” would follow me despite my best efforts. It was only after my first class at university, when my late Professor Pablo Villa discussed with us the concepts of “fixed” and “growth mindset” that I was able to give myself another chance at learning. According to Dweck (2016), a “growth mindset” is the belief that one’s talents can be further developed, and thus allowing for growth, while under the “fixed mindset” one’s capabilities are deemed and innate and therefore immutable.

That is why one of the beliefs I have as a teacher is that regardless of one’s limitations, all of us are capable of learning. This is why, I decided to include tiered tasks as part of this project, since they provide learners with an instance to both work at their own pace, but with the option to move forwards whenever they feel ready to do so. It is due to these elements that students are able to feel confident regarding their abilities, and motivated to explore what follows in their learning.

## **V. Conclusion**

As a prospective teacher of English, this intervention was an opportunity to further explore and test my capabilities to design lessons that promote meaningful learning, even under challenging circumstances, much different to what I have experienced in previous years. Because of the pandemic, as well as the sudden shift to remote instruction, many teachers and learners were put in a complex position in which maintaining the same methods and expectations is not possible. For this reason, to explore ways to make learning relevant to their lives and viable to their situations is crucial.

In the process of addressing the needs of the learners, I discovered the potential for songs to enhance not only listening comprehension skills, but also to foster students' engagement and mental health. The insights brought by this research will provide me with the necessary skills and strategies to make of my lessons an instance for growth and discovery, in which the students are able to take risks at their own pace, and regardless of their perceived limitations. All things considered, through this project I was able to grow professionally. It made me apply in various ways the contents and conclusions I have gained by completing this ELT program. Additionally, it allowed me to consider ways to keep growing on my own when working officially as a teacher.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Gantt chart

	July 1st	July 8 <sup>th</sup>	July 15 <sup>th</sup>	July 22 <sup>nd</sup>	July 29 <sup>th</sup>
Pre-test	■				
Vowel recognition		■	■		
Word identification			■	■	
Chunk identification				■	
Post-test					■



## Appendix B: Scope and sequence chart

Session	Content	Learning Objectives	Activities	Materials	Assessment	Contingency Plan
2 July 8th	Vowel sounds /i:/, /ɪ/, /a/, and /ʌ/	Students will be able to discriminate 4 English vowel sounds (phonemes 1, 5, 8, and 9)	Listen to the way a certain word is pronounced, to later bring attention to the nature of the vowel sounds.  Later, answer some questions related to the recognition and discrimination of these sounds.	1. Handout 2. “Physical” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLcSSUw0N2M">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLcSSUw0N2M</a>	Uptake sheet	The distinction between these sounds can be challenging for the learners, so it might be beneficial to facilitate them with a recording demonstrating the difference between them. That way, if needed, they can resort to it for support and clarification.
3 Wed. July 15th	Homophones	Students will be able to associate the sounds with their written form	Students will be given 2 options of similar sounding words, they have to choose based on what they hear and what they have learned in the previous class.	1. Handout 2. “Be the One” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnC0E2LMV-s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnC0E2LMV-s</a>	Exit ticket	Students might become too dependent on repetitions, so it might be useful to explain before the activities that there will be only a fixed amount of times to repeat the song or sections of it.  Additionally, if at

						some point the learners feel overwhelmed or anxious, I can give them a couple minutes to recognize their feelings and decide how to act on them, whether that is to pause and come back later or to work on some breathing exercises.
4 July 21st	Homophones and short phrases.	Students will be able to recognize written words/chunks that are part of the lyrics of a song.	Complete a gapped text that will be tiered. Lower level has to select the correct word based on the options available, the middle level will fill in the gap themselves, while the advanced level will complete both words and some short phrases.	1. Handout 2. “Don’t Start Now” <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CLkVWB_Lj8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CLkVWB_Lj8</a>	Uptake sheet	Students can sometimes take their time when working, so to make explicit the time limits for working on their activities is advisable.

### Appendix C: Pre-test

Song: "One Kiss" by Calvin Harris and Dua Lipa

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkeiKbqa02g>

#### I.- Listen and fill in the gap

"Let me take the night, I'll love real \_\_\_\_  
And I know that you'll still wanna see me  
On the Sunday \_\_\_\_, music real loud  
Let me love you while the moon is still out  
Something in you  
Lit \_\_\_\_ heaven in me  
The feeling won't let me sleep  
'Cause I'm lost in the way you move  
The way you feel  
One kiss is all it takes  
Falling in \_\_\_\_ with me  
Possibilities  
I look like all you need"

#### II.- Listen and choose the right word

1. "I just wanna feel your skin \_\_\_\_\_ mine"
  - a. on
  - b. in
  - c. en
2. "\_\_\_\_\_ your eyes do the exploring"
  - a. fill
  - b. feel
  - c. fall
3. "Might \_\_\_\_\_ your company tonight"
  - a. knit
  - b. need
  - c. ned

**Appendix D: Uptake sheet**

	<b>Sounds</b>			
<b>Words</b>	<i>/i:/</i>	<i>/ɪ/</i>	<i>/ɑ/</i>	<i>/ʌ/</i>
Common				
Agree				
Love				
Sleep				
Got				
<u>Something</u>				
Living				

**Appendix E: Exit ticket 1**

<b>3 Words you understood</b>			
<b>2 Sounds from those words</b>			
<b>1 The strategy you used</b>			



**Appendix F: Exit ticket 2**

Is it easier to understand what you are listening if you focus on...

1. matching it with the options?	2. a single word at a time?	3. short phrases?

## Appendix G: Post-test

Song: "New Rules" by Dua Lipa <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2qgadSvNyU>

**I.- Listen**  **and fill in**  **the gap**  
"Talkin' in my \_\_\_\_\_ at night, makin' myself \_\_\_\_\_  
Out of my mind, out my mind  
Wrote it down and read it out, hopin' it would save me  
Too many times, too many times  
My love, he makes me feel like nobody else, nobody else  
But my love, he \_\_\_\_\_ love me, so I tell myself, I tell myself  
One: Don't \_\_\_\_\_ up the phone  
You know he's only calling 'cause he's drunk and alone  
Two: Don't let him \_\_\_\_\_  
You'll have to kick him out again"

**II.- Listen**  **and choose**  **the right word**

1. I'm still tryna learn it by \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. hut
  - b. heart
  - c. had
2. Eat, \_\_\_\_\_, and breathe it
  - a. slip
  - b. sleep
  - c. slap
3. One, don't \_\_\_\_\_ the phone
  - a. peak up
  - b. pick up
  - c. peck up

### III.- Tu aprendizaje

★ ¿Sientes que te es más fácil escuchar en inglés?

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---

★ ¿Te has sentido cómodo con las actividades de estas últimas clases?

---

---

★ ¿Te gusta que las clases incluyan canciones?

---

---

★ ¿Te gustaría que otras clases de inglés fueran como estas?

---

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## Appendix H: Sample worksheet (session 4)

### I.- **Listen** and **choose** the right word

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_ a full 180, crazy
  - a) deed
  - b) did
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_ look at where I ended up
  - a) but
  - b) bath

### II.- **Listen** and **fill in** the gap (optional)

\_\_\_\_\_ you the guy who tried to  
Hurt me with the word goodbye?  
Though it took \_\_\_\_\_ time to survive you  
I'm better on the \_\_\_\_\_ side  
I'm all good already  
So moved on, \_\_\_\_\_ scary  
I'm not where you left me at all, so

### III.- **Listen** and **find** the missing words and phrases (optional)

Don't show \_\_\_\_\_, don't \_\_\_\_\_ out  
Don't start caring about me now  
Walk away, you know how  
Don't start caring about me now ('bout me now, 'bout me)  
If you don't wanna see me \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ that anything could stop me

## Appendix I: Word bank

### Word Bank

Here you will find some common words related to the unit (feelings).

1. Feelings
  - a. Happiness - Happy (+)
  - b. Sadness - Sad (-)
  - c. Fear - Frightened / Scared (-)
  - d. Anger - Angry / Mad (-)
  - e. Disgust - Disgusted (-)
  - f. Excitement - Excited (+)
  - g. Heartbreak - Heartbroken (-)
2. Preferences
  - a. Love (+)
  - b. Really like (+)
  - c. Like (+)
  - d. Don't mind (+/-)
  - e. Dislike (-)
  - f. Hate (-)
3. Activities
  - a. To run - Running (+ o -)
  - b. To dance - Dancing (+)
  - c. To sing - Singing (+)
  - d. To dream - Dreaming (+)
  - e. To think - Thinking (-)
  - f. To care - Caring (+)
  - g. To hurt - Hurting (-)
4. Expressions
  - a. Lights out (+ o -)
  - b. feeling diamond rich (+)
  - c. To have someone's back (+)
  - d. To work something out (+)
  - e. Let someone down (-)
  - f. Get to know someone (+ o -)
  - g. Do a 180° (+ o -)