

## **Implementing Art and Music in Maltese Courses for Non-Native Adults**

Jacqueline Żammit  
University of Malta  
Malta

### Abstract

Malta has currently attracted numerous non-natives who consider the island conducive for business, investment and work. To enhance their working and living experience in Malta, several foreigners are learning Maltese as a second language (ML2), which could be challenging to learn, especially its grammar, if second language (L2) learners do not know Arabic. Furthermore, ML2 is a new subject with a lack of research in its pedagogical approaches. Second language acquisition (SLA) can be quite challenging for adults. Various evidence-based interventions including the use of art and music have been used to enhance SLA. Art and music play an important role in SLA, such as stimulating communication in L2, memorising new words and enhancing comprehension skills. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of using music and art to enhance adults' success in ML2. A qualitative methodology with convenience sampling was used to select 37 adult learners of ML2 who took part in a one-on-one interview via Zoom. The interviews were analysed, and the study results revealed that the use of art and music could contribute significantly in enhancing an adult learner's academic achievement in ML2, whereas according to the participants, art and music are not currently used in ML2 courses. Therefore, the study recommends the use of art and music in both traditional and online classes to enhance adult learners' academic achievement in ML2.

*Keywords:* academic achievement, adult learners, art, Maltese as a second language, music, second language acquisition

Malta has increasingly experienced an influx of non-native workers, investors and residents. According to the Global Immigration Service Group (GIS, 2020), approximately 70% of foreigners who have settled in Malta consider it beneficial to trade, investment and jobs. Many non-natives study Maltese as a second language (ML2) to improve their working and living conditions.

Second language acquisition (SLA) is when a student learns a second language (L2) or subsequent languages after the original subconscious acquisition of an individual's first language (L1). Adult learners enjoy significant benefits when they learn an L2, including stronger motivation to succeed, cognitive benefits, improved communication skills, integration, enhanced direct connection to other cultures and competitive advantages as a bilingual or plurilingual. However, according to the critical period hypothesis, adult SLA neural mechanisms are slower and less successful than those of children who are younger than 18 (Muñoz, 2017). For example, even though SLA is important for adults since they urgently require L2 usage, they need to overcome some cultural barriers, have limited amounts of L2 to listen to and have restricted time to devote to L2 tasks due to adult commitments (Rose, 2016). Moreover, adults' SLA is influenced by various factors, such as personality, motivation, intelligence, commitment and age (Rose, 2016).

### **An Introduction to the Maltese Language**

Maltese is predominantly spoken in Malta. Malta's geographical position between the continents of Europe and Africa, 80 kilometres south of Italy, 284 kilometres east of Tunisia, and 333 kilometres north of Libya (Bonanno, 2008), therefore in the midst of two conflicting cultural and political powers, and Malta's history, have made Maltese an intriguing and peculiar language (Mifsud, 1995). Aside from being a variation of Arabic, Maltese is a mixed language that uses the Roman alphabet and is part of the South Arabic branch of Central Semitic, with components of Maghrebi/Siculo-Arabic, Romance (Sicilian, Italian), and English (Camilleri and Sadler, 2016).

Furthermore, 95% of Maltese grammar is Semitic, despite being influenced by both the Italian/Sicilian and English languages (Mifsud, 1995). While some participants in this research spoke Semitic languages as L1 or L2, the majority had no knowledge of any Semitic language. The Maltese grammar can be challenging for ML2 learners who lack such knowledge.

### **Problem and Purpose Statement**

Numerous factors, including extralinguistic and linguistic factors, have significant impacts on SLA and could be challenging for adult learners. The learners' linguistic background, such as the starting age of SLA and the phoneme inventory of the learner's L1, influences SLA performance. Similarly, L2 proficiency and phonology are influenced by extralinguistic factors, which include attention control, working memory, the learner's motivation, short-term memory, and lexical learning (Gorin & Majerus, 2019).

Various evidence-based interventions have been used to enhance SLA. Some interventions include the use of art and music in L2 classes. Art, music and language have similar neural resources for processing prosody, semantics and syntax (Calma-Roddin & Drury, 2020). Similarly, art and music have diverse effects on language learning (Chobert & Besson, 2013). For example, the features of L1 and L2 speech processing, which include the rhythmic structure of speech, supra-segmental vocalic discriminations, segmental vocalic discriminations, and prosodic modality, are significantly impacted by music, especially music expertise (Jekiel & Malarski, 2021). Besides enhancing enjoyable, engaging and productive lessons, art education

promotes discipline-neutral critical thinking and promotes thinking, reasoning, imagination, interaction and L2 achievement (Shulsky & Kirkwood, 2015). Consequently, this study focuses on exploring adult learners' perceptions of the use of art and music in ML2 courses. This is important as ML2 is a new subject in the Maltese curriculum due to the ongoing influx of foreigners, and a lack of literature on ML2 pedagogy (Camilleri Grima, 2015; Żammit 2020).

### **Research Question**

Is it beneficial to use art and music while learning Maltese as a second language?

## **Literature Review**

### **The Impact of Art in SLA**

Teachers have incorporated the use of manipulatives, such as photographs or visual images, posters, ceramics, modelling clay, pictorial game, painting, wordless books and drawing to improve student's SLA and enhance their holistic academic outcomes (Hartle et al., 2015). The integration of art in SLA has been shown to promote student engagement, stimulate L2 communication, encourage creativity, increase L2 comprehension, and reduce anxiety associated with learning, while fostering discipline-neutral critical thinking, self-expression, and accommodation of learning styles, thus leading to effective SLA (Ghandibari, 2015).

Furthermore, the use of art contributes significantly in creating long-lasting memories and strong impressions in students, while contributing to their success. Teachers have increasingly used pictures to explain specific concepts and language pedagogy approaches since visuals arouse students' interest, leading to increased student engagement and SLA (Shulsky & Kirkwood, 2015). Visual art can improve learners' understanding of L2 and enhance students' L2 by establishing positive student-teacher relationships, enhancing collaborative learning, providing autonomy support and creating a meaningful engagement (Lastra, 2017)). Specifically, the use of arts in learning focuses on inducing sensory perception and thoughtful experiences, which increase students' cognitive abilities in SLA.

### **The Impact of Music in SLA**

Music is exceedingly relevant in SLA. Specifically, musical factors have diverse effects on adults' success in the L2. These factors include extralinguistic effects, for example, connection to the L2 culture and regulation of mood, musical presentation during instruction, musical expertise and musical aptitude.

Musical presentation is defined as musical tasks/activities, such as songs, which tend to be utilised as a part of the L2 teaching process, and includes musical class exercises, rhythmic training, singing and listening to music (Rose, 2016). Incorporating music activities, for example, songs in L2 teaching, and in authentic texts to present L2 vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical aspects, has positive impacts on numerous SLA aspects (Bokiev, D., Bokiev, U., Aralas, Ismail & Othman, 2018). Therefore, songs do not only improve learners' musical aptitude but also the efficiency of SLA, resulting in improved academic success in the L2 (Degrave, 2019).

### **Effects of Musical Expertise and Training**

Musical expertise is defined as the productive and discerning or insightful musical capability that a person gains through all-embracing or comprehensive informal practice and formal musical studies and has significant effects on SLA (Chobert & Besson, 2013). For example, music improves auditory discrimination according to rhythmic cues and pitch, hence

facilitating the perception of suprasegmental and segmental dissimilarities/differences. As a result, improved auditory discrimination would lead to enhanced L2 attainment. Brain functions and brain organization are greatly influenced by musical expertise. Furthermore, neurophysiological, and behavioural levels show that musical expertise significantly influences numerous features of speech processing in SLA, which include the production of speech and auditory perception, leading to enhanced SLA (Chobert & Besson, 2013).

Music training and expertise improve perceived word stress or lexical stress cues and influence lexical stress processing in SLA, which develops the understanding of speech sound segmentation, leading to improved L2 speaking and listening skills (Garami et al., 2017). Jekiel and Malarski (2021) investigated the effects of musical listening abilities of 50 Polish learners of English as an L2 before and after a standardized accent training programme. They found that musical ability contributes to the production of more native-like L2 vowels and a potential relationship between rhythmic memory and L2 vowel acquisition before training, and years of musical experience after training, suggesting that specific musical skills and music practice can be an asset in learning an L2 accent.

Bokiev et al. (2018) found that musical training improved the L2 productive phonology, working memory, pitch perception and musical training/expertise of 45 native English students learning Spanish as an L2. Moreover, musical training and expertise enhanced phonological memory, which resulted in better grammar, improved word order and L2 speaking skills. Consequently, Bokiev et al. (2018) recommended the integration of musical training or musical expertise in L2 lessons, as it would significantly enhance L2 pronunciation and phonology, which collectively contributes to adult learners' SLA.

### **Impact of Musical Aptitude**

Musical aptitude, which is characterised as the ability to discern patterns in sound sets, is having a fine sense of rhythm and thus the ability to understand or appreciate music intuitively and, particularly, to differentiate off-key and off-pitch music (Borland, 2015). Irrespective of music training and experiences, musical aptitude is unique to every individual. Musical aptitude can play a vital role in facilitating L2 skills. Therefore, persons who have higher performances on musical aptitude tests tend to have higher cognitive abilities and better L2 learning skills (Borland, 2015).

Borland (2015) found that L2 aptitude, which is independent of general intelligence, is significantly related to musical aptitude. Adults' musical aptitude is also attributed to improved L2 pronunciation and speaking skills and the retrieval of novel word sequences (Borland, 2015). Therefore, the use of musical aptitude is strongly assumed to improve SLA in adults.

## **Methodology**

### **Qualitative Research Method**

This study used a qualitative research method to understand the possible effect of the implementation of art and music in ML2 courses for adults. According to Umeshkumar, Kothari, and Awari (2016), a qualitative research method offers a deeper understanding of the study phenomena. Although qualitative research methods do not generate numerical data, they provide a clear understanding of participants' relations, behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and beliefs (Hennink et al., 2020).

The main rationale for choosing a qualitative research method was that it could provide insights into the research problem and an understanding of the underlying motivations, reasons and

views of the participants concerning the use of art and music to enhance adults' ML2. In addition, qualitative research methods uncover trends in opinions on the current study problem, which is the use of music and art to enhance adults' SLA (Rahman, 2017).

### **The Participants**

The researcher used convenience sampling to select samples from the target population (Umeshkumar, et al., 2016). The sampling criterion required that participants were above 18 years old and were learning ML2 at an intermediate level (Level B2).

In this sampling method, all individuals who met the sampling criterion were invited to participate in the study (Umeshkumar, et al., 2016). To accomplish the objective of the present research, the participants had to be easily accessible and available, and they agreed to be interviewed online due to COVID-19 pandemic for the benefit of reaching their and future adult learners' potential in learning ML2.

Determining the study population and calculating the sample size are important issues to research success (Garg, 2018). In this research, the sample size included 37 adults who were learning ML2 at lifelong learning centres and in private lessons taking place in Malta. The participants consisted of different professionals from diverse countries, who were working in Malta and interested in learning ML2. The participants' professions included doctors, nurses, construction workers, students, managers, salespersons, chefs, beauticians, masseurs, surgeons, nuns, iGaming managers, receptionists and teachers. Some teachers who were colleagues of the author recommended the participants who were then recruited on a voluntary basis via email. All study participants could withdraw from the study without prejudice (Garg, 2018). The interviews were conducted at the participants' discretion and at their preferred time, in compliance with the guidance established by McGrath et al., (2018). With the participants' consent, the online interviews were recorded.

### **Data Collection Process**

**Research instrument.** One-on-one interviews consisting of 6 unstructured questions were conducted via Zoom to collect data from 37 participants. The aim of the interviews was to develop a holistic understanding of the use of art and music to enhance adults' SLA, to achieve the study objectives (Umeshkumar, et al., 2016) and to answer the research question.

**Development of the interview.** Before the study took place, the researcher obtained ethical consent from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) of the University of Malta. The researcher then designed an interview guide and held interviews. The participants were aware that their identities would remain anonymous in the research. The interview questions were confidential and the respondents' names were not required (Surmiak, 2018).

The main interview questions were:

1. Does your Maltese teacher use art and music in class to enhance your Maltese learning?
2. How would you feel if your Maltese teacher used art or music in class?
3. Did the teacher in your home country use music and art in class while teaching you a second language?
4. What are the benefits and challenges of using art while learning a second language?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using music while learning a second language?
6. Do you think that you learn more when art and music are used in the language class?

### **Validity and Reliability**

After interviewing the respondents, the researcher used member-checking to assess construct validity by distributing the transcripts to the participants for approval. Hence, the researcher sought to reduce potential cases of personal bias. According to Thomas (2017), member checks are critical in obtaining respondents' permission to use quotes, particularly where the respondent's identity is at stake.

To achieve a valid sample size, the researcher used convenience sampling of the population. When using member-checking, the researcher also maintained procedural accuracy and used self-correcting techniques (Candela, 2019).

### **Data Analysis**

The 37 online interviews took roughly 37 hours since each recorded online interview lasted approximately one hour. These interviews were recorded between February 11 and February 26, 2021 and were later transcribed. The interview results were categorised into themes and then thematically analysed and interpreted. The themes emerged from what the participants said. During analysis, two main themes were developed. The first theme was using art to enhance adults' ML2, and the second theme was using music to enhance adults' ML2. The information collected was evaluated using content evaluation and the results were summarised into reports. The NVivo 10 software confirmed the established trends, enabling the researcher to analyse more of the qualitative findings, uncover additional insights and draw explicit, plausible hypotheses backed by empirical data while saving time and working more efficiently (Zamawe, 2015). The possible hypotheses were that using art and music is essential in ML2 classes, and that participants would report more benefits than challenges in using music and art in L2 classes.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This section will report the participants' perspectives regarding benefits and drawbacks of using art and music in ML2 classes. Their responses will attend to the research question: Is it beneficial to use art and music while learning Maltese as a second language? It is hoped that the results will serve to inform the effective practice of future teachers of ML2.

### **Using Art to Enhance Adults' SLA**

In this study, it was interesting to find that since ML2 is a new subject, most Maltese teachers were trained on how to teach Maltese as a first language and thus, not how to teach ML2. This was due, in part, because the postgraduate course in ML2 pedagogy started in 2018 (Żammit, 2020). Consequently, all participants agreed that art and music were not used in ML2 classes. These participants were accustomed to the use of music and art in L2 classes when they learned an L2 in their home country or learned English as an L2 (ESL), even in Malta.

Maltese teachers who teach ESL/EFL or any other L2 have coursebooks on how to teach L2 and follow internationally recognised courses such as TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and the Trinity DipTESOL or Cambridge DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) without the requirement of a degree. These courses provide teachers with an internationally recognized certification to teach English worldwide in a range of contexts, and address concepts such as how to use art and music to teach students in a fun and creative way that motivates them to want to learn (Degrave, 2019).

Art has many benefits for ML2 learning. All 37 participants agreed with Rose (2016) who claimed that using art could improve learners' understanding of the cultural aspects and the contemporary issues of L2 society. For example, one participant said:

*If the teacher can show us artistic pictures or if we can attend an art exhibition, I can understand more the cultural aspects and political issues of Maltese society. (Indian nurse, Interview: 11/02/2021)*

Likewise, another participant asserted:

*Since we, third-party nationals are learning both the Maltese language and its culture to obtain our permanent residence permit, artistic pictures could be used so that Maltese teachers can teach us Maltese literature, history, culture and geography and we can learn and experience Maltese like native speakers. (Burkinabè builder, Interview: 24/02/2021)*

Correspondingly, another participant stated:

*I can better understand the contemporary issues of Malta through its contemporary art. (Serbian doctor, Interview: 18/02/2021)*

All participants supported Martello (2017), who asserted that using art in class enables learners to learn new vocabulary. Additionally, 34 participants discussed how art could be used in ML2 online classes. For instance, one participant claimed:

*It is fun to learn new vocabulary by playing pictionary and guessing our colleague's drawing. This game could also be played online due to COVID-19 restrictions. I would definitely learn the vocabulary better than when the teacher translates Maltese words for us or when she gives us a lot of drilling exercises. (Syrian builder, Interview: 26/02/2021)*

Similarly, another participant explained:

*I wish that the teacher could show us an artwork online or in class and ask us to describe the emotions that the artwork brings out. I would surely learn a lot of vocabulary in this way. I remember that our English teacher used this kind of technique to teach us adjectives, and I still remember the English adjectives through this teaching method. (Palestinian plumber, Interview: 15/02/2021)*

Besides learning new vocabulary and motivating the learners to write or discuss the visuals, this study continues to build on Martello (2017), since according to 32 participants, using art during ML2 classes could improve their grammatical concepts, especially if it reflects the learners' cultural context and motivations, as the following participants asserted:

*It is important that if our Maltese teacher selects some artistic pictures, the teacher should first consider our cultural background and interests so that we will be more interested in learning the new vocabulary or grammar. (Somali builder, Interview: 11/02/2021)*



*Besides learning the vocabulary, my Arabic teacher used to teach us verb conjugations and prepositions by describing what we were seeing in the pictures. (German iGaming manager, Interview: 26/02/2021)*

Building on Rose (2016) concerning music in L2 classes and motivation, 30 participants revealed that besides music, art can also help them develop a positive attitude towards ML2, as for example, one participant claimed:

*I love art, especially abstract and surrealist art. It would be great if the teacher could project some artwork, as I would surely be motivated and have a positive attitude towards the Maltese language. I will remember the new words more by describing artwork. In Sweden, I learned English in this way. (Swedish iGaming consultant, Interview: 22/02/2021)*

Thirty-five participants asserted that through visuals, teachers can encourage them to discuss images with their peers using ML2. As a result, continuous practice of ML2 through this technique would enhance the student's ML2, as the following participants explained:

*The teacher can also ask us to show her some pictures on our iPhones, and we can describe these images or talk in Maltese about our personal stories that our iPhone pictures depict. (Pakistani nurse, Interview: 16/02/2021)*

*We can bring our photo albums to our class or share our photos online, and we can talk about them with our peers. Our peers can ask us questions about our photos, and we can answer them. In this way, we can practise the Maltese language through our personal photos. (Czech student, Interview: 17/02/2021)*

Thirty-two participants contended that using famous artworks of their home country might encourage them to describe them in Maltese, besides learning more about different cultures through an intercultural teaching approach, thus confirming Griffith et al., (2016). According to one participant:

*It would be nice if our teacher could ask us to present a picture of any famous painting or monument of our country, and describe it in Maltese. The teacher could obviously help us when we do not know how to express certain words, and we could show the objects on the pictures rather than translating from English to Maltese. (Ukrainian doctor, Interview: 15/02/2021)*

Additionally, 33 participants supported Lastra (2017), who asserted that using art in L2 classes can develop L2 listening, writing, comprehension, speaking and reading skills, as the following participants said:

*In my home country, my English teacher used both our personal photos and fine art paintings to develop our listening, writing, comprehension, speaking, and reading skills. She used to motivate me a lot to learn English. That's what the Maltese teacher should do. I am sure that in this*

*way, I will remember the words and the verb conjugations better in Maltese. (Italian chef, Interview: 25/02/2021)*

*It would be awesome if our Maltese teacher would use pictures or make us play pictionary to teach us Maltese vocabulary because that would make me feel more comfortable to practise Maltese whilst describing the pictures or what another student is drawing during pictionary. In this way, I wouldn't be afraid of making mistakes, and I guess that more attention would be given to the picture description rather than to the kind of verbs that we'd be using. (Pakistani housewife, Interview: 12/02/2021)*

According to a participant who was also a teacher, teachers use pictures, wordless books and film clips to improve learners' writing skills:

*It would be great if our Maltese teacher would show us artistic pictures and wordless books; like I do during a writing activity to teach German as a foreign language. I show a painting to my students and they write their answers to specific questions about the painting, such as the emotional expression of the girl in the painting or the reason for embracing the moon. (German teacher, Interview: 11/02/2021)*

Comparably, a participant asserted:

*The teacher could provide a written text for us to read and understand. In this text, there could be background information, such as the historical context of the artwork that the teacher could show us or insert it in the reading text. (Serbian surgeon, Interview: 23/02/2021)*

Similarly, another participant claimed that L2 teachers had used pictures to improve her speaking skills in L2:

*I remember that the German teacher used to show us artworks to get familiar with the German culture and also as an opportunity for us to speak in German by describing what we were seeing in the picture and why the painter might have painted in that way or drawn a particular person or used such colours or texture. (Polish receptionist, Interview: 19/02/2021)*

Apart from music, as claimed by Bokiev et al. (2018), 35 participants stated that visuals can improve their concentration in ML2. For instance, one participant claimed:

*An artistic picture can make me concentrate more, reflect and help me think, besides relating it to my personal experiences. In this way, I can definitely learn and remember more. (Moroccan student, Interview: 11/02/2021)*

### **The Disadvantages of Using Art in ML2 Class**

Although many scholars have mentioned the benefits of using art in an L2 class (Lastra, 2017), 13 participants mentioned some disadvantages of using images during ML2 class. For example, the following participants explained that a picture can distract them from the lesson:

*Sometimes, when a teacher used to show me a painting to learn English, I used to miss the point of the lesson as I thought of something personal or cultural. (Palestinian builder, Interview: 22/02/2021)*

*Complicated pictures, such as abstract paintings, are very distracting, and I end up not learning anything related to the new language. (Somali tile layer, Interview: 16/02/2021)*

Although Martello (2017) claimed that art can enhance L2 learners' vocabulary, 13 participants expressed their concern that they might not learn all vocabulary associated with a specific image. For example, one participant claimed:

*The picture can be so appealing to me that I keep on focusing on two or three important objects in the picture and learn only those two or three new words....no more! (Venezuelan maid, Interview: 24/02/2021)*

### **Using Music to Enhance Adults' SLA**

Based on the interview results, the study found that music has significant benefits for enhancing adults' ML2 learning. The study supports Rose's view (2016) and reveals that all participants would be very motivated to learn ML2 through Maltese music. For instance, a Sicilian doctor stated:

*I will be very enthusiastic to attend Maltese classes if the teacher will teach us through Maltese songs. (Sicilian doctor, Interview: 17/02/2021)*

Another participant added:

*As a shy person, I would participate more if the Maltese language class was combined with music. (Kenyan nun, Interview: 12/02/2021)*

Similarly, a participant claimed:

*I really wish that our Maltese teacher would play some Maltese music for us. Besides learning more about the Maltese culture, I would surely participate more in the lesson. (Pakistani nurse, Interview: 16/02/2021)*

The comments of thirty-six participants confirmed Shulsky and Kirkwood (2015) and Bokiev, et al. (2018), who revealed that using music makes learning enjoyable, improves the learners' concentration and enhances participation, which results in improved SLA. It is also worth noting that all participants discussed how their ML2 teacher could incorporate music into their online lessons. For instance, one participant stated:

*Besides enjoying myself more while learning the vocabulary of new words, I will concentrate more if the teacher makes us listen to a song and then gives us the task to fill in the blanks of the song lyrics. Due to the pandemic, this could also be achieved by downloading a song from YouTube to be shared during our online Maltese classes. (Indian housewife, Interview: 25/02/2021)*

Furthermore, the same 32 participants who claimed that they would be pleased to show their home country's art during ML2 class shared the same passion for their home country's music. For example, the following participant claimed:

*How happy I will be if the teacher asks us to present a song or music from our home country and then to describe how it makes us feel. I will surely feel happy to speak in Maltese about the music of my home country. (Serbian builder, Interview: 26/02/2021)*

Similarly, 34 participants stated that music makes them feel relaxed, and they enjoy learning new vocabulary while it enhances their concentration. These findings are consistent with Shulsky and Kirkwood (2015) and Bokiev et al. (2018). For instance, the following participants stated:

*I would feel more relaxed and concentrate more if the teacher plays some background music while we are working on a task in Maltese. (Indian nurse, Interview: 23/02/2021)*

*I would feel more comfortable, relaxed, and happy if music is played in class while learning Maltese vocabulary and grammar. (Albanian beautician, Interview: 22/02/2021)*

A participant claimed that she can guess the meaning of Maltese words by using cognates due to a positive transfer (crosslinguistic influence) (Shatz, 2017) from her Modern Standard Arabic L1:

*How much I enjoy guessing the meaning of words that our Maltese teacher would present to us through Maltese songs! I am sure that I can guess most meanings correctly as I can relate most Maltese words to Arabic (Libyan housewife, Interview: 19/02/2021)*

Additionally, all participants revealed that they wished that their teachers would use music in ML2 lessons because this would improve their ML2 acquisition. These results support Bokiev et al. (2018) in the argument that songs could be used to improve SLA, as reported by the following participants:

*Most songs make me dance. They make me truly happy, and I know that if the teacher presents Maltese songs in class, the new words will stick in my mind forever. (Italian salesgirl, Interview: 22/02/2021)*

*The repetition of songs would definitely make me remember the new Maltese words. (Turkish chef, Interview: 18/02/2021)*

*Listening to Maltese songs is very important because it would make me learn Maltese better through the songs' melodies and rhythms. (Danish iGaming manager, Interview: 25/02/2021)*

*It would be wonderful if the teacher played a song and we practise the Maltese language by sharing the feelings and memories that the song makes us feel. (Italian hairdresser, Interview: 15/02/2021)*

Since all participants revealed that ML2 is not taught through music, they recalled the importance of music when studying an L2 because it transported them back in time. This finding concurs with Chobert and Besson (2013), who asserted that an old song could evoke vivid memories that take individuals back in space and time due to the deep neural connection

that music generates with romance, heartbreak or other pleasant and painful memories. Consequently, one participant said:

*When songs used to be played in our English-as-a-foreign-language class in Malta, we used to enjoy the lesson more, laugh more, talk about our experiences and nostalgic memories and make friends. (Spanish child-minder, Interview: 23/02/2021)*

All participants explained how music helps them to learn numerous words, and according to a teacher:

*You can't imagine how many words my students learn when I play a German song and allow them to sing it. I am always impressed by the number of words from the song my students used that they magically must have learned them through songs. (German teacher, Interview: 11/02/2021)*

All participants agreed with Bokiev et al. (2018) by stating that songs played during ML2 lessons could improve their grammar. For example, the following participants asserted:

*I would like the teacher to play some songs in our lesson because I tend to forget all grammar rules, but songs make me remember the new words and the new grammar rules more. (Libyan manager, Interview: 18/02/2021)*

*As you know, as you grow older, you lose the ability to memorise new words and grammar concepts. Thanks to music, I can relate a particular lesson to a song. So, I would be very grateful if the teacher played a song while we are learning a grammatical concept or new words in Maltese. I will surely remember them more. (Serbian surgeon, Interview: 23/02/2021)*

*In Sweden, I learned foreign languages through songs. Music creates such a relaxing and positive environment in class that will make me feel more confident, relaxed and very interested in learning the vocabulary, grammar, proverbs, idioms and whatever the song provides. (Swedish iGaming consultant, Interview: 17/02/2021)*

*Who knows how many new words, sentence patterns, pronunciation, adverbs, prepositions, and adjectives I learned when I was learning Spanish through songs! (Filipino carer, Interview: 24/02/2021)*

According to Džanić and Pejić (2016), songs are vital language learning materials that could be utilised to develop every language aspect, besides enhancing motivation and helping learners develop a love for language learning. Correspondingly, all respondents stated that music could improve their ML2 memory, vocabulary, sentence structure, and pronunciation skills. A Chinese participant claimed:

*When I was learning English, I used to listen to music to help me remember the words, idioms, sentence structure, word pronunciation, and grammar.* (Chinese masseur, Interview: 16/02/2021)

Similar to Rose's (2016) findings, 35 participants mentioned that music's melody and rhythm could contribute significantly in their memorization of verb conjugation patterns. The following participants stated:

*I could link the melody and rhythm of music to the Maltese verb conjugation patterns.* (Thai chef, Interview: 19/02/2021)

*Music could definitely help me to memorise verb lists while it is being played in the background.* (German iGaming consultant, Interview: 26/02/2021)

Whilst Lastra (2017) found that visuals help L2 learners in comprehension skills, 31 participants argued that music could also improve their comprehension skills, such as the following participant:

*I used to love the background music in a listening comprehension task when I was learning French. It used to help me understand the text and its meaning more, and also concentrate more.* (Palestinian plumber, Interview: 15/02/2021)

### **Disadvantages of Using Music in ML2 Classes**

Twenty-four participants reported some disadvantages of using music in ML2 classes. This supports Chobert and Besson's (2013) observation that music can evoke unpleasant and painful memories, potentially undermining the SLA process. A Polish receptionist asserted:

*If a song reminds me of a sad or nostalgic experience, I tend to switch off, remember the memory, and certainly follow the music without understanding or learning any new words or anything else related to language learning.* (Polish receptionist, Interview: 19/02/2021)

Contrary to the findings of Shulsky and Kirkwood (2015) and Bokiev et al. (2018), 24 participants stated that music could reduce their concentration levels during ML2 lessons, as the following respondents expressed:

*Music in class can definitely distract me. To concentrate and focus, I need total silence.* (Italian chef, Interview: 25/02/2021)

*Sometimes the singer is singing too fast and uses so many words that I don't know. This makes it difficult for me to follow.* (Turkish chef, Interview: 18/02/2021)

According to 17 participants, music can make the ML2 lesson boring if the teacher plays a song without considering the adult learners' preferences. A Czech student explained:

*Just imagine if our old-fashioned Maltese teacher plays a song that we do not like, then the lesson will be so boring. It is important that the teacher*

*plays the songs we like, but then again, it is very difficult and perhaps impossible to please everyone's subjective taste. (Czech student, Interview: 17/02/2021)*

Contrary to Bokiev et al. (2018), who related music to good L2 pronunciation, 22 participants reported that wrong pronunciation or particular words from songs could mislead learners and thus could negatively affect the ML2 learning process, as identified by the following participant:

*Sometimes I get the wrong pronunciation or words from songs. Then it is difficult for me to erase the word I learned from songs because it really sticks in my mind. (Syrian builder, Interview: 26/02/2021)*

Consequently, twenty-six participants reported on their L2 performance improvements concerning vocabulary and grammar acquisition, and noted that they performed better on L2 tests because of the use of art and music in class. Although the participants commented on the gains in student achievement in L2 concerning vocabulary and grammar acquisition, they did not mention any scores. Nonetheless, this supports Piri's (2018) finding that participants who were subjected to music obtained higher scores in L2 than the no-music group. Therefore, from the results of this study and others, the use of art and music in L2 classrooms appears to motivate students and leads to higher grades.

### **Limitations**

There were some limitations to this study. First, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher was unable to use a larger sample because some ML2 students did not have access to the internet or computers. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic also posed significant limitations in terms of conducting the research, especially during data collection. Sometimes the participants and the researcher had technical problems and a lack of internet connection, making an interview over Zoom impossible. It was time-consuming to find another time slot to meet online to continue the interview. Acknowledging these limitations, the research was nonetheless completed successfully.

### **Recommendations**

According to the participants in this study, art and music were not used in adult ML2 classes, despite the fact that they were used when learning another L2, such as English, in the United States, the United Kingdom, Malta, or some other country. Therefore, suitable research should be conducted to determine why teachers are not using art and music in adult ML2 classes. It is also recommended a new study to investigate the impact of using music and art when teaching an L2.

Other research could focus on how art and music are used in children's ML2 classes, and how art and music help learners improve their academic performance in ML2. Another study could establish a strategy to help in the process of incorporating art and music into ML2 lessons and in the training of ML2 teachers. Another recommendation could be that teachers collaborate with students to choose appropriate songs or pictures that would not interfere with their learning.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of using music and art to enhance adults' academic achievement in ML2. According to 37 adult learners, using art and music in teaching ML2 could make ML2 learning enjoyable and enhance participation and memory while improving grammar, vocabulary, comprehension skills and sentence structure, contributing to adults' success in ML2. The art and music that could be used in ML2 could be depicted from the Maltese culture and thus, the songs would be in Maltese to help in the learner's ML2 acquisition. Moreover, the participants mentioned some disadvantages to using art and music during ML2 classes, such as being distracted, incorrect pronunciation of L2, thinking of sad memories and a reduction in concentration levels. Nevertheless, the additional insights in this research suggest that since the benefits of using art and music in L2 courses seem to outweigh the drawbacks of using them, it is evident that incorporating the fine arts through art and music would contribute greatly to ML2 and any L2 academic achievement. Thus, the study's results can also help L2 teachers adjust their teaching practices to improve the performance and success of L2 students' learning. With the implementation of more art and music into L2 classes, L2 students, L2 teacher trainers, L2 course book authors, and curriculum designers could become more conscious of the importance of music and art in improving the quality of their work in classes, course materials, and curriculum decisions. Consequently, the study recommends the use of art and music to enhance adult learners' academic achievement in ML2 since the study participants indicated that neither art nor music were used previously in ML2 traditional and online classes.



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**Corresponding author:** Jacqueline Żammit

**Email:** [jacqueline.zammit@um.edu.mt](mailto:jacqueline.zammit@um.edu.mt)