

ABLE (ART-BASED LANGUAGE EDUCATION): A SINGING-BASED METHOD FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Sommario

Questo articolo nasce con l'intento di colmare l'attuale lacuna di ricerca sui potenziali vantaggi dell'uso sistematico della musica come strumento didattico nell'ambito dell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere. Partendo dall'idea che il piacere derivante dal canto possa fungere da catalizzatore per l'acquisizione di una lingua straniera, ABLE (Art-based Language Education) viene qui proposto quale metodo innovativo per l'insegnamento delle lingue attraverso l'educazione al canto corale. La tipica sessione didattica dell'ABLE, la rehearsal (choir rehearsal + language lesson), è descritta nelle sue quattro fasi al fine di fornire agli insegnanti di lingua un supporto dettagliato per la realizzazione pratica in classe. Con la proposta di ABLE, questo articolo mira a sensibilizzare gli insegnanti-ricercatori all'uso consapevole e sistematico del canto nella classe di lingua, offrendo elementi di ricerca per ulteriori studi sui benefici dell'educazione al canto corale nell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere.

Keywords: Foreign Language acquisition – enabling pleasure – music – singing-based teaching – ABLE (Art-based Language Education) – “rehearsal”

Introduction

As a result of globalisation, cultural and linguistic boundaries among different countries are becoming more and more blurred, while the human cultural landscape seems to be leaning towards a growingly unified and standardised cross-national model. And it is no wonder, since we all get to experience it nearly every day. English terms such as *laptop*, *Wi-Fi*, or *news* are now common nouns in a variety of non-English-speaking cultures; I first tried *naan*, the Indian bread, in

Canada; most of my Italian friends call themselves *sushi* addicts despite having never travelled to Japan, etc. In other words, multiculturalism and multilingualism permeate our every-day lives, and define them more than we are probably aware of. Yet, ironically, when it comes to language instruction, foreign languages are often portrayed as stand-alone bodies belonging to far-away worlds which are only – and partially – accessible through decontextualised textbooks via teachers' explanations. Especially when teaching wide-spread languages such as English and Spanish, it is curious how language instructors are able to close off the endless input availability around them while exclusively relying on their textbooks as the only language sources. It is almost the same as trying to explain to a child what grass is by googling it on an iPad rather than opening the house door and having them pick a blade of grass with their own hands. Surprising as it may seem, be it in public schools or in private language academies, a standardised, decontextualised and textbook driven teaching approach tends to win over a more student-tailored approach that seeks to interrelate the language classroom with students' real-world experiences and interests related to the target language.

This article explores how pleasure, and especially music-derived pleasure can potentially work as a binding factor between students' personal interests and the foreign language classroom. Eventually, ABLE (Art-based Language Education), i.e., an innovative language teaching method based on choral singing education, will be proposed as a new pedagogical framework for the Foreign Language (FL) classroom.

Filling the classroom-real life gap through *pleasure*

Filling the classroom-real life gap: this should be the very core of Foreign Language Teaching research. While in single language teaching settings, the learners' immediate linguistic need to carry out basic daily tasks using the target language can potentially work as a natural link between the language lesson and real life, finding nearly as much as a credible, consistent and motivating link in FL teaching contexts is not easy task. FL students do not need the target language to survive. They do not need it to hang out with friends or to go to the movies.

If it is not *need* that binds FL students to the language classroom, let it be *pleasure*. Arguably, mono-directional, textbook-oriented and grammar-based traditional language curricula are perceived by students as rather scarce sources of pleasure. In trying to come up with a way to make language lessons more pleasurable, one should not forget that pleasure here is not understood as mere passive amusement, but rather as an *enabling factor* capable of making students perceive the lesson contents as relevant, thus motivating them to actively engage in the learning process.

ABLE indicates pleasure as a learning catalyst, as a gateway to the contents of the language course. In other words, as a link between the language classroom and students' real-life interests. Keeping in mind this understanding of pleasure, FL teachers are, therefore, encouraged to actively integrate in the language curriculum what their students perceive as relevant and interesting, thus meaningfully 'exploiting' the deriving pleasure as enabling factor for FL acquisition.

Jones (2020:5) describes motivation as "the extent to which one intends to engage an activity". In Jones' view, therefore, motivation precedes and *enables* engagement. From this perspective, the goal of the teacher is finding pleasurable and motivating teaching strategies that allow for students' engagement. As pointed out by Jones, "through positive engagement in class over time, students are more likely to learn and perform at higher levels and to develop more productive cognition and affect related to the L2" (2).

It goes without saying that finding pleasurable and yet curriculum-relevant activities can be tricky for language teachers and there are several reasons for this.

First of all, it often seems to be common belief among language teachers that playful activities are 'not really useful'. As a consequence, the risk is that teachers propose pleasurable activities (e.g., listening to a song, watching a movie, etc.) as mere break-time entertainment in an otherwise traditionally taught lesson – or, even worse, as a filler to wait for the end-of-class bell to go. On the contrary, ABLE seeks to 'institutionalise', fully acknowledge, and systematically exploit pleasure deriving from fun as acquisition booster.

Secondly, the concept of pleasure is somehow vague and strictly related to one's previous experiences, natural inclinations and sociocultural background. And certainly, the teacher-student

generational gap does not make it easier. While a middle-aged teacher might appreciate certain authentic material, the students could possibly perceive this as outdated, boring, and distant from their daily experience. What we are looking for here is a win-win solution, a formula to create fun and pleasurable activities for all the actors within the FL classroom despite obvious generational, cultural, and social differences. However, such a formula simply does not exist.

Nevertheless, it is convenient to acknowledge that some practices are more involving than others, that certain pedagogical choices are more likely to produce more positive results in terms of learners' motivation and willingness to actively participate in the learning process. Hence, more realistically, teachers should forget about the Edenic dream of homogeneous learning communities sharing the exact same interests and learning modes. On the contrary, foreign language teachers are encouraged to acknowledge and embrace diversity within their classrooms, providing polyhedric curricula that are accessible through numerous gateways depending on students' personal interests, skillset, intelligences (cf. Gardner's MI theory, 2006) and learning modes (cf. Fleming's VARK model, 1995). In this complex mechanism, pleasure – as described above – can work as a lubricant to smoothen and empower all the single sub-mechanisms building up the foreign language classroom.

Among the numerous existing sources of pleasure, the arts – and, in particular, music – seem to have the potential to aggregate people while at the same time preserving and valuing each participant's unique expressive potential. According to Lems (2018:14), “music is universally pleasurable” and “young adults in particular listen to music almost nonstop, and their playlists form an important part of their identities”. Indeed,

[...] perhaps the greatest benefit to using songs in the classroom is that they can be fun. Pleasure for its own sake is an important part of learning a language, something which is often overlooked by teachers, and songs can add interest to the classroom routine and potentially improve student motivation. (Nadera, 2015:370)

Besides supporting students' motivation through enjoyable and playful activities, Nadera suggests that music can contribute to create a non-threatening and informal learning environment with reduced anxiety, stating that songs and

[...] in particular, choral singing can help to create a relaxed and informal atmosphere that makes the classroom a nonthreatening environment. By reducing anxiety, songs can help increase students' interest and motivate them to learn the target language. Students often think of songs as entertainment rather than study and therefore find learning English through songs fun and enjoyable. (Nadera, 2015:370)

The role of singing and choral singing in reducing classroom anxiety is confirmed by Owain Lewes. In the article describing his karaoke-based English Second Language (ESL) lessons using songs by The Beatles, Lewes reports on his field notes taken after one teaching lesson:

Because of the fun nature of the activity, my students realize that making mistakes, such as singing off key and skipping or mispronouncing a word or two, is not such a bad thing. After a few individual performances or a choral singing session involving the entire class, my students seem energised, less reserved, and more self-confident. Therefore, the simple act of singing a few songs at the beginning of my classes lowers the affective filter, thus reducing the stress of interacting in a foreign language. (Dalton & Lewes, 2015:33)

Besides its potential to lower down anxiety, song can also be a teaching tool to create informal and student-centred learning environments in that it promotes and encourages social learning through group work and shared learning experiences. Schulkin and Raglan (2014:2) argue that "music is social in nature" and that "we inherently feel the social value of reaching others in music or by moving others in song across the broad social milieu". It can be therefore hypothesised that music can be a useful tool to promote meaningful and emotionally-loaded

interconnections among pupils, thus engaging them in informal, enjoyable and community-based language learning experiences.

Pleasure as an *enabling factor* for Foreign Language acquisition

To sum up, music seems to sustain learners' motivation in that: it may meet students' needs and interests, it creates relaxed and student-centred learning environments, and it promotes social learning. These are all desirable, and yet insufficient elements to come up with the conclusion that music and songs can be pedagogically relevant tools for the foreign language classroom. As pointed out at the beginning of this article, pleasure *per se* is not necessarily an acquisition booster. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that pleasure acts as an *enabling factor* to allow for deep and high-quality acquisition in FL learning contexts.

In light of its intrinsic nature and structure, Tavadze *et al.* propose that pop song can be an effective pedagogical tool to enhance FL acquisition. According to the authors, songs can help by

[...] introducing the new topic, practicing grammar structures or revising tenses, teaching and mastering new vocabulary together with rhythm, stress and pronunciation practice. (Tavadze *et al.*, 2021:92).

Moreover, the use of topic-related authentic materials (and, among them, songs) can provide students with repeated exposition to semantically-related terms, thus allowing for incidental learning of new vocabulary. Thanks to rhythmic patterning and rhyme scheming, musical material can empower incidental learning and favour long-term recalling. In addition, well-selected authentic materials can support inductive learning of grammar and pronunciation.

Among its learner-friendly features, song was shown to be particularly effective in FL teaching because of its potential to provide meaningful repetition. As emphasised by advocates of the pattern drilling methods, good levels of language acquisition often come with great amount of repetition.

According to Kelly (2000:16), "one of the primary manners by which pronunciation is practiced in the classroom is through drilling".

Basuki (2018:45) states that “teaching [...] pronunciation is simple [...] in that such teaching involves merely the drilling of students on the various sounds”.

While good arguments can be found to support the hypothesis that pronunciation is acquired through repetition, it should also be considered that drilling methods normally presented by teachers or in textbooks tend to be fairly monotonous and potentially boring. Calling upon Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), it should be taken into consideration that boredom inhibits acquisition by activating the affective filter, and should, therefore, be avoided in teaching settings.

Tavadze *et al.* propose song as a pedagogical tool that provides repetition of language structures while sustaining learners' interest and motivation. They observe that “songs can be interesting and enjoyable at the same time” and that, by learning through song, “students will find themselves full of stamina, less worried and [more] involved in the learning process” (2021:92). In line with this view, Kumar *et al.* (2022:2) assert that “songs do not only offer language practice opportunities through repetition”, but they also provide a pleasurable and “easy-going learning atmosphere”.

Music as *enabling pleasure*: the song-language link

As indicated above, Lems (2018:14) defines music as “universally pleasurable”, also arguing that it is “part of our lives in ways both big and small.” Similarly, Gray (2001:53) states that “there is a deep human need to create, perform, and listen to music”. However, taking into consideration the literature previously mentioned, it seems that songs' beneficial effects go far beyond their entertaining potential. Indeed, it has been proposed that songs can work as effective tools to pleasurably learn grammar, new vocabulary, and pronunciation. In this sense, it seems that, if strategically exploited, music-derived pleasure can work as an enabling factor for foreign language acquisition.

This hypothesis gains relevance if analysed in light of the fact that learning a song “is analogous in many ways to learning a language” (Lems, 2018:15). As he observes

we are required to produce and employ a repertoire of specific sounds, learn new patterns and rules, and master

the 'syntax' of songs and compositions. As musicians become more proficient, they — like language learners — make ever-closer approximations of the target sounds until they reach a level of ease and enjoyment, or 'fluency'.

This song-language parallel is in line with Jolly (1975:11), who states that

[...] the close relationship between language and music is an easily recognizable one. Both entities have significant common elements and similarities. Songs might be looked upon as occupying the middle ground between the disciplines of linguistics and musicology, possessing both the communicative aspect of language and the entertainment aspect of music.

Jolly further supports the existence of a closely knit speech-song bond by proposing that songs can be considered as “‘distortions’ of the normal speech patterns of a language” (11), concluding that they can represent “valid material for study within the broad framework of language learning” (11-12).

Referring specifically to ESL teaching, Dalton and Lewes (2015:32) seem to confirm Jolly's view 40 years later by stating that “reading and singing song lyrics utilising karaoke-style performances provides ESL teachers with an effective English language acquisition teaching tool”. They add that

[...] singing the lyrics of popular songs provides ESL students with multiple exposures to essential foundational oral and written English vocabulary and grammatical structures. This practice develops students' familiarity with the pronunciation and spelling of high frequency sight words, thereby developing reading skills and oral language proficiency. (32)

Moreover, as indicated by Dalton and Lewis, singing English song lyrics provides students with “a new genre of English language material for lifelong learning and enjoyment” (32).

Crucially, neurological studies have shown that 'music syntax' is processed in the same area involved in language syntax processing. According to Maess *et al.* (2001:540), "it seems plausible that music, like language, has a syntax: both have a structure based on complex rules". In their study, Maess *et al.* aimed to "localize the neural substrates that process music syntactic incongruities" (540). They found that music incongruities processing occurs in Broca's area, which is noteworthy considering that "Broca's area and its right homologue [...] are involved in the processing of syntactic aspects during language comprehension" (543). In other words, Maess *et al.* found that music processing activates the same neural networks involved in language syntax processing. Such results might have significant consequences in the FL classroom. Taking advantage of the strong music-language relationship at the neural level, teachers could design music-based activities to enhance foreign language acquisition.

The melody-prosody relation and the benefits of music on Foreign Language oral production

While a lot of attention is paid by foreign language teachers to grammar accuracy, coherence, and cohesiveness, pronunciation instruction tends to play a marginal role in FL curricula. Contextually to the rise of the communicative method, while written correctness has kept a central role in FL teaching, communicative effectiveness and overall 'understandability' has been emphasised at the expense of pronunciation and prosodic accuracy in oral production. In particular, the linguistic dimension of prosody is barely represented and the many FL students wanting to improve their prosodic skills are ultimately left to self-directed learning.

Interestingly, several studies have revealed a strong melody-prosody relationship, suggesting that including music in FL instruction might raise awareness on and favour the learning of prosodic features such as pitch and intonation in spoken language. That many FL curricula based on the communicative approach do not provide sufficient prosody instruction seems to be contradictory, especially when considering that "pitch contour of [a] word can change the meaning of [that] word – not only the nuance, but also the core meaning" (Yip, 2002:1).

The relevance of pitch variations in effective communication is also emphasised by Mang (2001:5), who notes that

[...] speakers of non-tonal languages use 'variations in the shape of the pitch contour over a sentence to convey intentions and expressions'.

Put simply, in order to get full understanding of one's communicative intention, literal comprehension has to happen along with accurate prosodic interpretation.

McCormack and Kloppe (2016:420) explain that

[...] through the examination of pitch contours within [...] non-tonal languages, it is evident that contours within both music and speech are more interconnected than one assumes.

Consistently, Stevens *et al.* (2013:59) assert that "music and speech are auditory forms of communication that draw on common process[es]", explaining that "the shape of the melodic line or pattern in the rise and fall of pitch" are "aspects of speech that are analogous to melodic contour in music".

It is proposed that, provided "music and oral language unmistakably converge" (McCormack & Kloppe, 2016:419), including music training in FL curricula could be a way to refine students' skills to perceive and effectively reproduce rhythmic, tonal and melodic elements characterising native speakers' oral productions, so as to achieve oral fluency in the target language.

Another reason to promote the use of music in FL teaching may be found in the fact that the tonal characteristics within a culture's music are "related to the prosodic characteristics of its speech" (Han *et al.*, 2011:1). Thus, studying the melodic patterns of a song in the target language could be a way to study its prosodic functioning.

From this perspective, it can be concluded that extensive music training programs (e.g., language-oriented choral singing) should be integrated in FL curricula to support students' discovery, analysis and conscious reproduction of the prosodic features of the oral language.

Through singing, it is possible to engage students in enjoyable activities that allow for an in-depth analysis of language sounds, thus improving students' receptive and productive phonetic skills. Indeed, Leith (1979:540) posits that "there probably isn't a better or quicker way to teach phonetics than through songs".

In light of what has been discussed so far, it can be concluded that using music in FL learning settings can be an effective tool to enhance foreign language learners' prosodic and pronunciation skills.

ABLE (Art-based Language Education): A singing-based teaching paradigm for Foreign Language teachers

A school without a choir is like a body without a soul.
(John Rutter, *The Importance of Choir*, 2018)

Songs not only represent material for study, but represent a 'method' of language study within themselves. (Jolly, 1975:11-12)

Despite the revealing findings briefly presented in the sections above, a consistent body of literature aimed to design a music pedagogy for the FL classroom seems to be missing. As a consequence, this article can be seen as a practical attempt to fill this research gap by providing teacher-researchers with a music-based method, i.e., the ABLE method, for FL classroom practice. Here below, I propose a detailed description of ABLE by briefly reviewing each of the terms building up the acronym.

Art-based

Although this article focuses on singing training, a broader term – i.e., 'art' – has been chosen since more performing arts can be used at the same time as meaningful sources of *enabling pleasure* to enhance FL acquisition. For example, a consistent body of literature suggests that drama pedagogy can produce excellent results in terms of foreign language acquisition (cf. O'Neill, 1995; Kao & O'Neill, 1998; Winston, 2012; Baldwin & Galazka, 2022).

Regardless of the performing art(s) selected, what should be noted here is that the proposed pedagogical method is understood to be *systematically based* on art training. This is a disclaimer to clarify that infrequent use of songs and isolated role-play activities as usually occurs in traditional FL teaching settings is profoundly different to the systematic art-based language teaching method proposed in the present article. Borrowing Jolly's words, ABLE is based on the concept that songs "represent a 'method' of language study within themselves" (Jolly, 1975:11-12).

The idea is that students receive semi-professional choral singing training in laboratorial activities within which singing coaches and FL teachers proactively cooperate in designing language curricula aimed at achieving artistic excellence *through* foreign language mastery.

When considering the improvement of students' speaking skills, for example, specific training techniques used by professional singers to achieve impeccable diction will be systematically implemented in the FL classroom to enhance students' pronunciation. Similarly, specific score-reading techniques and melody and rhythm patterning strategies will be 'borrowed' from the world of music performance to analyse prosodic and rhythmic features of spoken language. In other words, thanks to ABLE, student-performers can become familiar with their vocal instrument and learn how to regulate it and adjust it accordingly to their communicative needs and intentions when it comes to real-life conversations.

Language

Of course, ABLE's ultimate goal is language acquisition. Nevertheless, this method is centred around the idea that language should be perceived by learners as a means to, rather than the only goal of, the learning process. According to Krashen's *forgetting principle* (Krashen, 1982:168) language learners better acquire a language when they 'forget' they are studying it.

Thus, ABLE's laboratorial choir lessons are meant to focus students' attention on their singing rather than on their language performance while actually being exposed to a highly stimulating activity in terms of linguistic input. In more practical terms, students will put great effort in pronouncing the sung words correctly not because they perceive it as

the explicit learning goal for the class, but mainly because they want their singing to 'sound nice' compared to the rest of the choir. In this way, language accuracy will be perceived and acknowledged by students as a meaningful goal because it is directly functional for the success of an activity which they perceive as fun, relevant, and socially rewarding.

Moreover, choir rehearsal – and those who sang in a choir will remember this well – is built mainly upon repetition. The score is broken into sections and the song is studied measure by measure, repeating in particular the sections that present any kind of criticalities in melody or pronunciation.

This is the perfect example of meaningful drilling: the passage is not repeated over and over 'just' to learn the language. The choir master insists on those measures because the choir must sound as one voice, because the singers must respect the dynamic indications, because the students must place word-final consonants at the exact same *tempo*, etc.

During such drilling, relevant acquisition processes are being activated at a more subconscious level due to meaningful repetition of specific sounds, vocabulary, and/or grammar structures.

The choir singers' 'waking nightmare' seems to prove the effectiveness of this learning method: after rehearsal, the lyrics of the song they have been working on for hours will 'haunt' them and they will sing it over and over on the subway, in the shower, while trying to study, until the next rehearsal.

This suggests that, if wisely selected and meaningfully exploited (cf. the definitions of *utility* and *usability* in Santipolo's BLT theory, 2017), songs can be viewed as valid work material for the FL classroom.

Education

This term has been selected as a reminder that FL learning is an extremely multi-layered and complex process which should never be 'banalised'. Regardless of the teaching style(s) adopted, FL teaching remains a discipline and, as such, it requires academic rigor and pedagogical awareness on behalf of the teacher.

Hence, while ABLE brings forward a prominently laboratorial approach, it also encourages holistic education which encompasses a variety of teaching methods, including the more traditional ones. As a

direct result, ABLE's typical lesson is a blend of a *choir rehearsal* and a *language lesson*, which can be referred to as *language rehearson*. Each *rehearson* typically articulates in four phases.

Phase 1

Taking inductive learning as an overall framework, Phase 1 starts with first-hand practical experience, i.e., with vocal warm-up (diaphragmatic breathing exercises, humming, vocal scales with vowel sounds, musical exercises on consonant sounds to improve articulation, etc.), score analysis (analysing the song's overall structures and phrases), and singing.

While studying the song from a more musical perspective, students have the chance to 'discover' at intuitive level the authentic language in the lyrics via the mechanisms described in the previous section. At this stage, the song is broken down into sections which should be studied separately focusing on specific passages and details as indicated by the teacher-conductor.

During song analysis, the choir can also be divided by parts (sopranos, altos, tenors, basses) so that each group of students can learn their melodic lines. In this phase, it is the teaching staff's responsibility to effectively balance artistic directions and musical training with some degree of language instruction, making sure learners are given numerous chances to observe the target language set for that specific session (e.g., a grammar topic such as the structure and use of present perfect).

Nevertheless, since the primary goal of Phase 1 is learning the song to be later performed, students should be let free to experiment with the target language without worrying too much about linguistic mistakes.

Phase 2

This phase is more similar to a traditional language lesson, in that students are invited to carry out some language activities on the target structures. For example, the teacher could integrate the song lyrics with other types of authentic materials (a relevant literary text, a topic-related article, a movie clip, another song, etc.) and ask the students to work in groups and to recognise language patterns with the outcome of

identifying a grammar or phonological rule that explains the observed examples.

Phase 2 could conclude with a wrap-up activity in which the teachers gather their students' hypotheses, correct and integrate them to eventually present the theory in the 'talk-and-chalk' style.

Phase 3

Here the class reunites as a choir, and the song is performed again, but this time with an enhanced linguistic and musical awareness. Phase 3 is the refinement phase, during which students apply the rules they have intuitively discovered, inductively analysed, and systematised during phases 1 and 2.

The goals for this phase are both musical and language accuracy. Hence, the teaching staff can intervene to refine learners-singers' performance, insisting on more critical passages to make sure everyone is on the same page. It goes without saying that, whenever needed, teachers can intervene in Phase 3 with additional pills of explicit language or music instruction, so as to improve learners' singing and overall performance.

Phase 4

This is typically an individual take-home assignment and can be defined as the productive phase. At this stage, the student is asked to produce original content basing on the knowledge acquired during phases 1-3.

As observed by Gardner (2006:255), an education that does not reflect natural diversity among members of the target group "is actually the most unfair education". Novello (2022:vii) argues that "talking of inclusion is talking of respect. Each member of the class group has the right to see their characteristics accepted and supported".

In line with this view, homework assignments in Phase 4 should be assigned as open tasks, or teachers should at least provide a meaningful list of different tasks students can choose from, making sure all intelligences and learning modes are represented. For example, while logical-mathematical students might want to reinforce the just-learnt rule through mnemonical book-based exercises, more creative students with predominant linguistic intelligence might prefer to write poems or

prose texts basing on the language and literary-cultural themes covered during the *rehearson*. Similarly, musical students may decide to write and record a new song as a way to creatively expand on the musical, linguistic, and cultural or literary elements contained in the song performed in class. It goes without saying that such original productions could represent valid material for future lessons.

Considering the collective nature of ABLE's *rehearson*, Phase 4 consists mainly of individual work, that also acknowledges intrapersonal students who enjoy working in their own company.

Nevertheless, the teacher can decide to include group-work open tasks among the options to give interpersonal students the chance to share their talents and realise more complex content which requires teamwork (editing a video, putting up a small show, recording a song, etc.).

Figure 1 (below) graphically represents the dual nature of the *rehearson*, showing elements from both the choir rehearsal and the language lesson. Based on this general framework, Figure 2 (next pages) summarises the 4 phases of a *rehearson*, indicating that Phases 1 and 3 mostly include activities typically found in a choir rehearsal, whereas Phases 2 and 4 lean towards a more traditional language lesson.

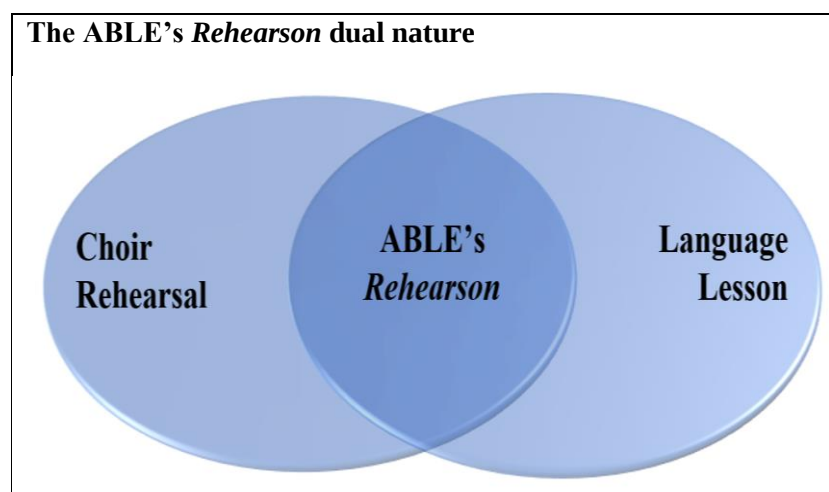


Figure 1. The ABLE's *Rehearson* Dual Nature: A visual representation of the *rehearson* as a unified approach that blends musical and linguistic learning.

The Rehearson’s 4 Phases

Choir rehearsal	Phase 1: Studying the song Vocal Warm-up: breathing, humming, vocal scales, musical exercise on consonant sounds articulation, etc. Introduction to the song: author, context, meaning, overall musical structure, etc. Detailed song study: the song is sung and thoroughly studied in all its sections, with a focus on particularly challenging and/or relevant passages. Musical instruction: the focus in this phase is mainly musical accuracy. The choir might break out into vocal sections (sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses) to study the melodic lines separately. Introduction to the language topic: at this stage, students are only introduced the session’s language topic at an intuitive level. They observe and use the language in the lyrics without necessarily analysing or fully understanding it.
Language lesson	Phase 2: Studying the language Inductive analysis of the language topic: students work in group to reflect upon the target language contained in the song lyrics (e.g., use and structure of the present perfect). Critical linguistic comparison: students compare the target language in the song with different related authentic materials to find patterns. Linguistic Hypothesis: eventually, each group comes up with a tentative hypothesis on the functioning of the language target observed so far (e.g., the students hypothesise how the present perfect is used and formed). Teacher’s wrap-up activity: the teacher discusses, integrates, and corrects the group hypotheses and provides explicit and contextualized language instruction (e.g., they explain how the present perfect is used and formed drawing on the texts previously analysed by the students).

Choir rehearsal	Phase 3: Performing the song Linguistically and musically aware choral performance: while singing, the students put in practice what they acquired in Phases 1 and 2. Musical and linguistic refinement: the song is performed several times while the teacher-conductor refines musical and linguistic content. (e.g. focusing on accurate pronunciation of past participle endings in the present perfect occurrences). Performative language reinforcement: singing the lyrics over and over, the students repeat and ‘interiorise’ the target language just acquired.
Language lesson	Phase 4: Producing with the language Take-home assignment: students are asked to produce original material (a poem, a video, an essay, etc.) based on the acquired knowledge and according to their tastes, interests and needs. This can be an individual or a group task depending on the specific context and on the student’s prevailing learning mode(s).

Figure 2. A concise summary of the four phases of the ABL’s *Rehearsal*, which integrates choral rehearsal techniques and more traditional language teaching strategies.

Obviously, this example is not the only possible way to plan a *rehearsal* within the ABL framework. Each learning context is characterised by unique features and participants are faced with specific context-related challenges. Therefore, to apply a standardised teaching paradigm indistinctively in any or all learning environments is not only unthinkable and impractical, but also inconvenient in terms of providing high-quality and acquisition-bound education.

On the contrary, teachers are encouraged to tailor the *rehearsal* structure to the specific learning contexts considering in particular three elements which mutually affect each other, as graphically represented here in Figure 3:

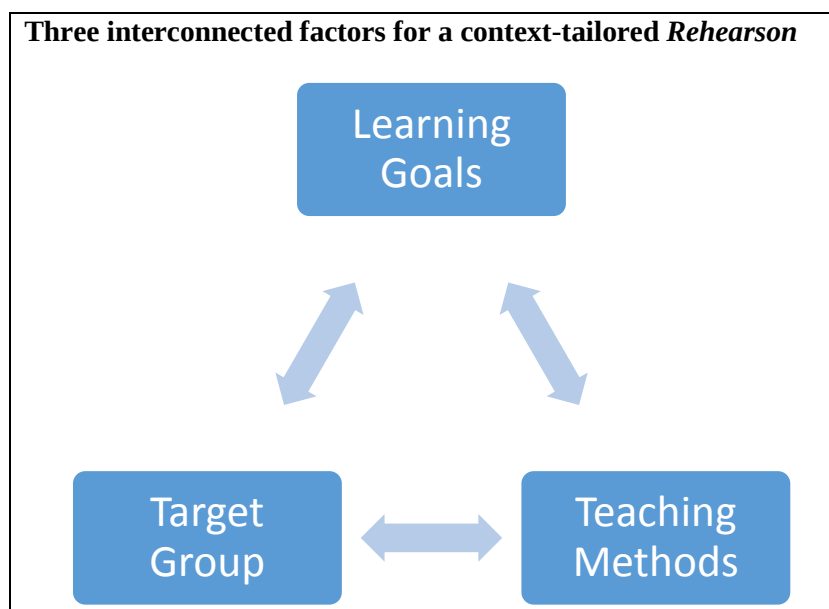


Figure 3. The three interconnected factors of a context-tailored rehearson: Learning Goals, Target Group, and Teaching Methods mutually influence each other to shape an effective and adaptive learning process.

As showed in the diagram above, although the learning goals might be set by the teacher(s), they should at the same time be selected considering the target group's features (e.g. language proficiency level, students' interests, students' needs, sociocultural background, etc.). Likewise, the teaching methods should be chosen based on the learning goals, but also considering the target students' predominant intelligences and learning modes, so as to make sure the ways the content is taught is cognitively consistent with the way those specific students receive and process new linguistic input. By consciously combining these three elements, foreign language teachers should be able to adjust the *rehearson* to their and their students' needs. Guided by the same principles of flexibility and feasibility, teachers can refer to the following info chart as an overall framework for the practical realisation of a *rehearson*:

The Language *Rehearsal*: a practical framework

Teaching staff	A foreign language teacher and a choir conductor/vocal coach (or a foreign language teacher with musical and singing competences and/or conducting experience); An accompanying pianist is strongly recommended, although not strictly needed (instrumentals can be used instead; <i>a cappella</i> singing is also an option).
Students	Any age is fine. Just note that working with adult singers and white voices at the same time can be technically challenging and sometimes inhibiting. Moreover, interests and needs of foreign language students belonging to different generations may significantly vary. Number of students: 12-25. Ideally, the target group consists of at least three basses, three tenors, three altos, and three sopranos. At the same time, involving more than 25 students may decrease each student's talk-time and may make teamwork in Phase 2 more difficult to manage and potentially less effective. Teachers might want to opt for 1-, 2-, and/or 4-voice songs depending on students' vocal features, male-female ratio and overall student number.
Timing	Each <i>rehearsal</i> should last at least three hours with a 15-minute break in between. Depending on the specific lesson's goals, the teaching staff can decide to include Phase 4 within the three hours rather than assigning it as homework.

	If needed, the teaching staff can consciously choose to skip some of the phases and dedicate more time to some specific activity (e.g., score analysis or language-related analytical and/or productive activities).
Classroom type	A clean, tidied and welcoming room with good acoustics (a gym with high ceilings is very bad, a regular classroom works well, a carpet-floored room with wooden ceiling is ideal); To easily and quickly shift from phase to phase (e.g., from choir position to a group-work setting) students should sit on mobile desk chairs for both left-handed and right-handed students. Heavy desks or any kind of physical barrier inhibiting easy movement should be avoided.
Specific equipment	A whiteboard; A digital board with Internet connection; A stereo system with good-quality loudspeakers; At least 4-5 fully functioning laptops for group activities; A wheeled piano or keyboard (or more instruments depending on the context); Music score stands for both students and the conductor.

Figure 4. Table summarising the key practical components of the language *rehearsal*, including teaching staff roles, student considerations, timing, classroom setup, and required equipment for an effective and easily adaptable learning experience.

Conclusion

The present article has proposed ABLE as an innovative method to teach foreign languages through choral singing education. Drawing on the idea that pleasure can work as an enabling factor for foreign language acquisition, different works from the existing literature have been critically interrelated to show how music-derived pleasure can

enable and enhance FL acquisition processes. As a result, music has been showed to support active engagement and students' motivation throughout the learning process. Moreover, songs have been proposed as valid work material to teach and learn FL pronunciation and prosody, but also grammar, vocabulary and song-related cultural or literary topics.

In light of these promising results, this article has proposed ABLE as a practical tool for teacher-researchers who are willing to design their FL curricula within the broader framework of music pedagogy. At practical level, ABLE's typical teaching session, i.e. the *rehearsal* (choir rehearsal + language lesson) has been thoroughly described in its four phases to provide teacher-researchers with step-by-step support for practical realisation.

In this article, ABLE is not conceived as the ultimate version of a new teaching method, but rather as a practical attempt to fill the research gap on systematic music pedagogy for the foreign language classroom. Hence, it will be my pleasure to further elaborate on ABLE through insightful collaboration with foreign language teachers and researchers so as to refine, integrate, and improve the proposed art-based language teaching method based on further research findings and practice-based teaching experience.

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