

CANVAS OF WORDS, RHYTHM OF SPEECH:

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF VISUAL ART AND MUSIC
IN MALTESE LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR ADULTS



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Maltese Language Learning
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Jacqueline Żammit

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Language Learning for Adults



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Foreword

Language acquisition is more than a cognitive exercise; it is a deeply human experience enriched by culture, emotion, and creativity. In an era of globalization, where linguistic diversity forms the foundation of multicultural societies, the role of innovative teaching methodologies in second language acquisition (SLA) is more crucial than ever.

In "Canvas of Words, Rhythm of Speech: The Transformative Role of Art and Music in Maltese Language Learning for Adults," Jacqueline Żammit presents an engaging exploration of how visual art and music can serve as catalysts in acquiring Maltese as a second language (ML2). Her research highlights adult learners' challenges and provides insightful recommendations on integrating creative pedagogies into language instruction.

As an academic and researcher, Żammit brings a wealth of knowledge to this subject, offering a fresh perspective on the intersection of artistic expression and linguistic proficiency. She challenges traditional teaching paradigms by emphasising multisensory engagement and advocates for a more immersive, culturally attuned learning experience.

This monograph is an essential contribution to SLA research, particularly for educators, linguists, and policymakers striving to enhance adult language learning in Malta and beyond. It is my privilege to introduce this work, which stands as both an academic resource and a call to reimagine language education more inclusively and dynamically.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Żammit, March 2025

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Biography



Dr. Jacqueline Żammit is a distinguished senior lecturer and researcher specialising in Maltese pedagogy, focusing on teaching Maltese as a foreign language. Her academic journey is rooted in her profound commitment to advancing the understanding and instruction of the Maltese language. She holds a PhD in the acquisition of Maltese as a foreign language, a Master of Arts Degree with Distinction in Maltese Linguistics, and a First Class B.Ed. (Hons) Degree in Maltese and Early and Middle Years, all from the University of Malta.

With over 15 years of extensive experience in education, Dr. Żammit has taught Maltese as both a first and foreign language, alongside Spanish as a foreign language, across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. Her hands-on teaching experience and pedagogical expertise have equipped her with a unique perspective that informs her current academic and research endeavours.

Academic and Research Contributions

Currently a member of the Department of Languages and Humanities in Education at the University of Malta, Dr. Żammit's research centres on the teaching and learning of Maltese as a foreign language. Her academic contributions have extended internationally, as she has taught courses on Second Language Acquisition theories and pedagogies and introduced Maltese as a foreign language at esteemed institutions, including the Universities of Edinburgh, Cork, and Antwerp.

Dr. Żammit is an active scholar, publishing articles and book chapters, presenting at international conferences, and authoring educational books. Her research interests are diverse and interdisciplinary, spanning computer-assisted language learning (CALL), applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, multicultural education, intercultural education, multilingual education, and sociolinguistics.

In addition to her academic work, Dr. Żammit plays a vital role in the academic community as a reviewer for multiple journals and as an associate editor for Springer Nature's Humanities & Social Sciences Communications journal. In these capacities, she leverages her expertise to ensure the quality and rigour of scholarly publications within her fields of specialization.

Beyond her research and editorial commitments, Dr. Żammit remains deeply engaged in teaching and educational leadership. She coordinates the pedagogy of Maltese, conducts teaching practice visits, supervises Master's students, and oversees work on the innovative 'Il-Ġabra' online dictionary project. Additionally, she authors short fictional graded stories designed to support language learning.

Dr. Żammit's multifaceted career reflects her dedication to advancing the pedagogy of Maltese and her unwavering commitment to fostering multilingual and multicultural education. Her work continues to influence language teaching practices and shape the understanding of Maltese as a foreign language on both national and international stages.

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INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition transcends the mere process of memorising vocabulary and mastering grammatical structures; it is a deeply immersive experience that intertwines cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions. In today's increasingly globalised world, where linguistic diversity is a cornerstone of multicultural societies, the demand for innovative and effective second language acquisition (SLA) methodologies has never been greater. Traditional pedagogical approaches, while significant, often fail to fully engage learners on a sensory and experiential level, particularly adult learners who face distinct cognitive and affective challenges in mastering a new language. This monograph, "Canvas of Words, Rhythm of Speech: The Transformative Role of Visual Art and Music in Maltese Language Learning for Adults", by Jacqueline Żammit, presents a captivating exploration of the intersection between artistic expression and linguistic proficiency. Through rigorous research and insightful analysis, Żammit demonstrates how visual art and music can serve as powerful tools in facilitating the acquisition of Maltese as a second language (ML2).

The Maltese language, with its unique blend of Semitic and Romance influences, poses particular challenges for adult learners, especially those without prior exposure to Semitic linguistic structures. Its intricate morphology, phonetic patterns, and syntactic structures can be daunting for learners accustomed to Indo-European languages. Moreover, the traditional methods employed in Maltese language instruction often lack the dynamism needed to captivate adult learners and sustain long-term engagement. Recognising these challenges, this monograph seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical linguistics and practical pedagogy by integrating multisensory learning techniques that leverage the cognitive and affective benefits of visual art and music.

Visual art, as an instructional medium, has been widely acknowledged for its capacity to stimulate memory retention, foster creativity, and provide contextualised linguistic input. Studies in SLA have shown that visual imagery aids in the reinforcement of vocabulary acquisition, enhances comprehension, and reduces learner anxiety by shifting the focus from rote memorization to meaningful interaction with the language. Similarly, music has long been recognised for its role in phonological development, rhythm-based reinforcement of speech patterns, and its ability to create emotional and mnemonic connections with linguistic content. Through an in-depth exploration of these elements, Żammit highlights the potential of art and music to revolutionise the way Maltese is taught to adult learners.

This monograph also engages with broader debates in the field of SLA, particularly concerning the role of multisensory learning and its neurological underpinnings. By drawing upon cognitive psychology, applied linguistics, and educational theory, the study provides a robust framework for understanding the mechanisms through which art and music enhance language acquisition. The findings presented herein underscore the importance of creating an immersive, culturally attuned learning environment that fosters linguistic competence while also nurturing learners' intrinsic motivation and confidence.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, "Canvas of Words, Rhythm of Speech" offers practical applications for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers. It advocates for a pedagogical shift that moves beyond conventional teaching paradigms to embrace a more holistic, interdisciplinary approach. By integrating artistic and musical elements into ML2 instruction, educators can create a more engaging and effective learning experience that caters to diverse learning styles and cognitive profiles. Furthermore, the study highlights the broader socio-cultural implications of such an approach, emphasising the role of language learning in fostering intercultural understanding and social cohesion within Malta's increasingly diverse population.

Consequently, this monograph is a timely and essential contribution to the field of second language pedagogy, particularly within the context of Maltese as a second language. It challenges educators to rethink traditional methodologies and consider the transformative potential of integrating art and music into language instruction. By doing so, it not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also enriches the learner's cultural and emotional connection to the language. Through its interdisciplinary approach and empirical insights, "Canvas of Words, Rhythm of Speech" stands as an essential resource for anyone invested in the future of language education in Malta and beyond.

CANVAS OF WORDS, RHYTHM OF SPEECH: THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF VISUAL ART AND MUSIC IN MALTESE LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR ADULTS

Jacqueline Żammit

ABSTRACT

Currently, many individuals from diverse backgrounds are drawn to Malta due to its favourable environment for business, investment, and employment. This influx has increased interest among expatriates in learning Maltese as a second language (ML2) to enrich their working and living experiences in Malta. However, the complexities of Maltese grammar, especially for learners unfamiliar with Semitic languages, pose significant challenges. Research on effective pedagogical strategies for teaching ML2 remains limited, as the field is relatively new. This study investigates the potential of incorporating music and art as catalysts for enhancing adult learners' acquisition of ML2. Using qualitative methodology and convenience sampling, 84 adult ML2 learners participated in this research. Findings underscore the positive impact of integrating visual art and music into language learning. However, the participants noted that current ML2 curricula lack these elements. The study advocates for embedding art and music within traditional and online ML2 courses to improve engagement and retention.

KEYWORDS

academic accomplishment, mature learners, visual art, Maltese as a second language, musical involvement.

Abbreviations

ML2 – Maltese as a second language

SLA – second language acquisition

L1 – first language

L2 – second language

Introduction

In recent years, Malta has seen a surge in the number of foreign residents, driven by opportunities in commerce, investment, and employment. According to the Global Immigration Service Group, around 70% of these international individuals consider Malta a prime location for work and business. Alongside this demographic shift, there is a growing interest among non-native residents in learning Maltese as a Second Language (ML2) to facilitate their integration and improve their professional and social experiences in Malta (Żammit, 2021).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is the process by which individuals learn an additional language beyond their native language (L1). While children often acquire their first language (L1) naturally, adults approaching a second language (L2) must rely on a more conscious and effortful process (Cummins, 2014). For adult learners, mastering an L2 like Maltese can present numerous cognitive and emotional benefits, including enhanced motivation, improved communication skills, cognitive flexibility, and a deeper cultural understanding (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994; Cummins, 2014). These advantages extend beyond personal gains, enabling learners to achieve professional growth, build social connections, and adapt more comfortably to their surroundings.

Despite these benefits, adult learners face unique challenges in acquiring an L2. Research suggests that adults are at a disadvantage compared to children in terms of language acquisition, as adult brains have less neuroplasticity, impacting their ability to acquire phonology, grammar, and syntax with the same ease as younger learners (Muñoz, 2017). The Critical Period Hypothesis posits that language acquisition becomes significantly harder after a certain age, typically around adolescence (Lenneberg, 1967; Muñoz, 2017). Consequently, adults learning ML2 must overcome obstacles like limited exposure to Maltese, limited time for language practice due to adult responsibilities, and difficulty mastering linguistic elements foreign to them, such as Maltese's Semitic grammar structures and pronunciation (Muñoz, 2017).

A Brief Overview of the Maltese Language

For many adult learners of Maltese (ML2), particularly those without a background in Semitic languages, mastering the language presents a distinct challenge. The language's Semitic morphology and syntax can seem foreign and complex to speakers of Indo-European languages, especially adults with no prior exposure to related languages (Żammit, 2020). This study acknowledges these challenges and aims to explore methods to support adult learners through integrative and artistic learning strategies.

Statement of the Problem

As Malta's international community continues to grow, the demand for effective Maltese language instruction for adult learners becomes increasingly critical. However, the teaching of Maltese as a second language (ML2) is still an emerging field, with limited research on instructional methods tailored to adult learners (Camilleri Grima, 2015; Żammit, 2021). Adult learners face numerous challenges in second language acquisition (SLA), many of which stem from both linguistic and extralinguistic factors. Linguistic challenges include the phonetic, morphological, and syntactical differences between a learner's first language (L1) and Maltese.

For example, learners accustomed to Indo-European languages may struggle with Maltese's Semitic roots, which feature complex verb structures and a non-Latin phonetic system (Camilleri & Sadler, 2016; Camilleri Grima & Żammit, 2020).

Extralinguistic factors such as age, cognitive flexibility, motivation, attention control, and working memory also significantly affect language acquisition (Gorin & Majerus, 2019). Adults often bring well-established language patterns from their L1, which may interfere with the learning of new linguistic structures in Maltese (Żammit, 2023). Additionally, as Gorin and Majerus (2019) highlight, individual cognitive differences such as attention control and short-term memory play a crucial role in SLA outcomes. The lack of stimulating, culturally relevant resources tailored to adult learners further exacerbates the challenges of ML2 acquisition.

Educational researchers have explored the use of art and music as innovative tools to improve SLA outcomes, with promising results (Chobert & Besson, 2013; Calma-Roddin & Drury, 2020). Studies indicate that art and music activate similar neural pathways involved in language processing, particularly those related to syntax, semantics, and prosody (Calma-Roddin & Drury, 2020). Research by Jekiel and Malarski (2021) underscores the role of musical rhythm and prosodic patterns in facilitating phonological and suprasegmental acquisition in L2 learners, suggesting that musical and artistic experiences can reduce cognitive load and enhance language retention. Furthermore, art-based learning has been shown to foster critical thinking, stimulate imagination, and increase learner engagement, thus creating a more holistic and effective language learning environment (Shulsky & Kirkwood, 2015).

However, in the context of ML2, these integrative approaches have not yet been systematically applied or studied. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of art and music in supporting adult learners of ML2, with the goal of providing practical insights for enhancing ML2 instruction.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

Given the challenges faced by adult learners of Maltese, this study explores the potential of art and music to enhance ML2 acquisition. Recognizing that ML2 instruction is a relatively new field and that traditional methods may not fully address the unique needs of adult learners, this study aims to introduce and evaluate creative, evidence-based teaching approaches that integrate art and music.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To investigate adult learners' perspectives on the use of art and music in ML2 instruction.
2. To identify the potential benefits of art and music for enhancing memory, motivation, and cultural engagement in adult ML2 learners.
3. To assess the challenges and considerations involved in integrating art and music into ML2 courses, with a focus on curriculum design and learner diversity.

This study aims to provide original insights into innovative pedagogical strategies for supporting adult learners in Malta, with potential applicability to other linguistically and culturally complex SLA contexts.

Research Question

This study is guided by the following central research question:

Does Incorporating Art and Music into the Process of Learning Maltese as a Second Language Yield Advantageous Outcomes for Adult Learners?

This question aims to explore the impact of artistic and musical elements on ML2 acquisition, with a particular focus on engagement, cultural immersion, and linguistic retention. By addressing this question, the study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge in second language pedagogy, enhancing not only ML2 instruction but also broader practices in second language acquisition (SLA) for adult learners.

Literature Review

The Impact of Visual Arts on Second Language Acquisition

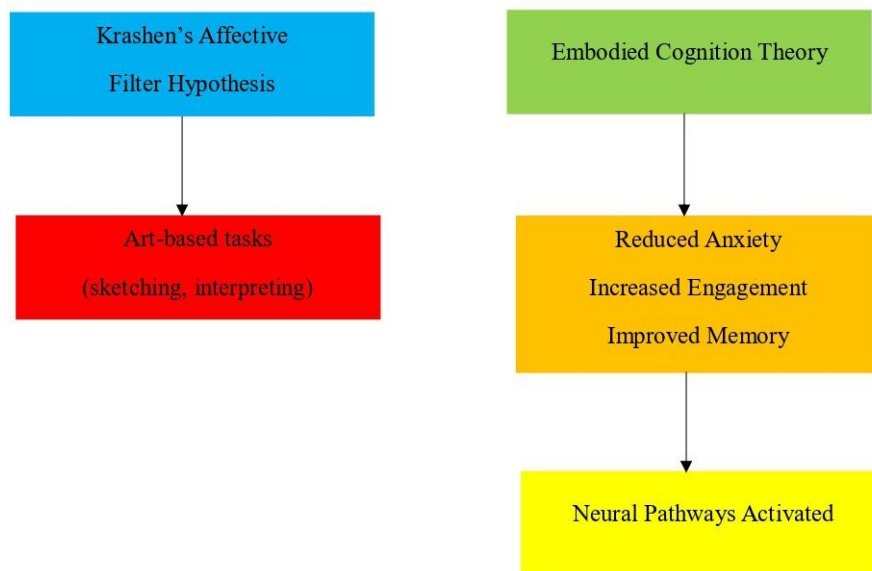
The integration of visual arts into SLA is not merely an additive approach but represents an innovative shift that engages learners' creative, sensory, and cognitive capacities. Visual arts enrich the learning environment through multisensory engagement, tapping into diverse intelligences and offering students an alternative mode of expression beyond verbal communication. Hartle et al. (2015) found that visual aids, such as posters, wordless books, and sketching exercises, enhance vocabulary retention and grammar acquisition. However, these findings warrant further scrutiny: while visual aids facilitate vocabulary and grammar learning, questions arise about the sustainability of these gains in contexts where language input from visual stimuli is limited. Can visual arts provide lasting benefits for long-term language retention?

Engagement and Reduced Anxiety Through Visual Arts

A key benefit of integrating art into SLA is its ability to reduce the affective filter, a concept introduced by Krashen (1982) to describe the psychological barriers caused by stress or anxiety during learning. Art projects encourage learners to prioritize expression over accuracy, creating a supportive environment where errors are seen as integral to the creative learning process. Studies by Nohayi and Caga (2021) suggest that students engaged in visual storytelling, for example, experience reduced anxiety and increased confidence, as they feel less pressured to produce "perfect" language. This finding is supported by Morris and Paris (2021), who observed that students participating in painting activities exhibited higher motivation and a greater willingness to communicate in the target language. However, one could argue that while visual arts encourage creativity and reduce anxiety, they might detract from the disciplined focus needed to master complex language structures and syntax. This study builds on these insights by examining whether visual art activities can be structured in a way that balances creativity with linguistic rigour, thereby enhancing both communicative and structural competencies in SLA.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis and Embodied Cognition Theory, highlighting outcomes such as reduced anxiety, increased engagement, and improved memory. Art-based tasks, such as sketching and interpreting images, are shown to lower emotional barriers and activate neural pathways.

Figure 1. The relationship between Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis and the Embodied Cognition Theory



Creating Lasting Memories and Associations

Visual arts are recognized for their capacity to create enduring memories through emotional and sensory associations. Shulsky and Kirkwood (2015) report that visual stimuli evoke curiosity, thereby fostering “meaningful engagement,” in which learners connect language with personal experiences or emotions, promoting deeper retention. For example, students who draw or paint scenes associated with new vocabulary are more likely to retain these words by linking them to personal creative expression.

Comparative studies further highlight the role of emotional engagement in memory retention. Dema and Moeller (2012) found that students participating in arts-based activities retained vocabulary more effectively over time than those taught through traditional methods. However, Dema and Moeller caution that retention driven by emotional engagement may disproportionately benefit vocabulary and descriptive language, potentially neglecting complex grammatical structures. This study addresses this gap by exploring whether integrating visual arts with structured grammar instruction can facilitate holistic language acquisition, encompassing both vocabulary and syntax.

Enhanced Teacher-Student Interaction and Collaborative Learning

The collaborative nature of arts-based language learning fosters both teacher-student and peer-to-peer interaction, promoting social learning, as outlined in Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory (1978). Visual arts encourage students to participate in group projects, which require them to

negotiate meaning, provide feedback, and co-construct linguistic knowledge in an authentic, interactive setting. Yi and Angay-Crowder (2016) found that collaborative art projects support not only vocabulary acquisition but also the development of pragmatic skills, enabling learners to practice turn-taking, negotiation, and clarification in the target language.

However, the benefits of collaborative arts-based activities are not universally accepted. Huang and Lajoie (2023) observed that while group art activities increased student engagement, they occasionally shifted the focus toward social dynamics at the expense of rigorous linguistic practice. This study aims to explore strategies for managing arts-based collaboration to balance social interaction with focused language learning objectives.

Building Cognitive Capacities Through Multi-Sensory Learning

Engaging with art activates multiple senses, enriching cognitive processes essential for language learning. Lim et al. (2022) demonstrated that when learners draw or visualize concepts, they activate neural pathways associated with memory and language processing, potentially enhancing recall and fluency. This multi-sensory engagement aligns with embodied cognition theory, which posits that cognitive processes are deeply influenced by bodily and sensory experiences (Wilson, 2002).

Critics, however, argue that multi-sensory learning may divert cognitive resources away from rigorous language practice. This concern is particularly relevant for adult learners, who often require more focused instruction due to cognitive constraints. Consequently, this study investigates whether multi-sensory engagement through visual arts genuinely enhances SLA outcomes or whether it serves primarily as a supportive, secondary tool complementing traditional language instruction.

Figure 2. The key concepts of integrating visual arts into second language acquisition (SLA)

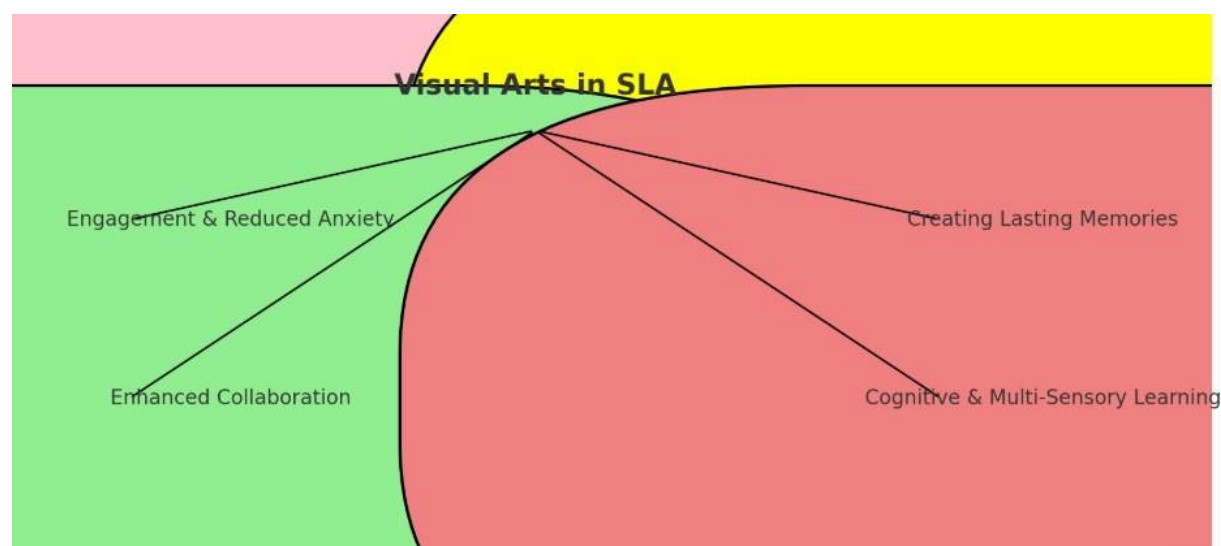


Figure 2 illustrates the central idea surrounded by four main themes: (i) engagement and reduced anxiety, (ii) creating lasting memories, (iii) enhanced collaboration, and (iv) cognitive and multi-sensory learning. The connections between these elements emphasize their interplay in enriching the language-learning process.

Implications and Future Directions

The existing literature on the role of visual arts in second language acquisition (SLA) presents compelling evidence for their inclusion in language education. However, several critical questions remain unresolved. For instance, while visual arts are known to enhance engagement, it is essential to explore how they can simultaneously support the acquisition of complex language structures. Furthermore, it remains uncertain whether the demonstrated benefits of visual arts on vocabulary retention and learner confidence extend to improved grammatical accuracy and syntactic fluency.

To address these challenges, several recommendations for educators and curriculum designers are proposed. First, visual art tasks should be intentionally aligned with linguistic objectives, particularly targeting specific grammatical constructs. For example, learners could be tasked with describing intricate scenes in paintings, incorporating advanced grammatical structures such as subordinate clauses or conditional sentences (Sousa and Pileggi, 2021). Such integration would ensure that visual arts activities serve a clear and purposeful role in language learning.

Additionally, educators are encouraged to design culturally relevant curriculum materials that incorporate visual art from both the target culture and learners' own cultural backgrounds. This approach fosters cultural inclusivity and emotional resonance, creating a deeper connection between the language being learned and the artwork being studied. Previous studies underscore the significance of cultural relevance in promoting effective language acquisition (Žammit, 2021; Crooke et al., 2024).

The use of digital tools offers further potential for broadening access to visual arts in SLA. Interactive platforms such as virtual galleries, including ArtSteps and Google Arts and Culture, allow students to explore diverse artworks while engaging in language exercises tailored to their proficiency levels. These tools provide an immersive learning experience that simultaneously develops visual literacy and linguistic skills (Hartle et al., 2024).

Effective integration of visual arts into language education also necessitates targeted teacher training. Workshops that focus on linking art activities with language acquisition goals can equip educators with practical strategies to maximize the pedagogical value of visual arts. Such training would help ensure that visual arts are not relegated to a supplementary role but are incorporated as a central component of the language learning process (Wilson, 2002).

Addressing resource constraints is equally critical. Schools and institutions can form partnerships with local art organizations or leverage cost-effective digital tools to mitigate funding and material limitations. This proactive approach ensures that all learners, irrespective of institutional resources, can benefit from the advantages of visual arts in language education (Crooke et al., 2024). Additionally, integrating multisensory and collaborative learning approaches, such as role-playing scenes depicted in artwork, can further enhance engagement and retention. These methods align with the principles of Embodied Cognition Theory, which posits that physical interaction with content reinforces memory and learning outcomes (Wilson, 2002; Raven et al., 2022).

Looking forward, further research is needed to evaluate the impact of structured art-based activities on grammatical and syntactic development. Longitudinal studies would provide valuable insights into the effects of sustained exposure to visual arts on language fluency and retention over time. Moreover, exploring the role of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual

reality (VR) in creating personalized, art-enhanced learning experiences could pave the way for innovative advancements in SLA pedagogy (Sousa and Pileggi, 2021; Hartle et al., 2024).

The Influence of Music on SLA

Music profoundly impacts second language acquisition (SLA) by stimulating cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of learning. While visual arts are celebrated for their sensory engagement and creative potential, music uniquely contributes to SLA through its ability to enhance phonological awareness, memory, and rhythm—skills fundamental to language acquisition. Unlike visual arts, which primarily engage visual and tactile modalities, music activates auditory pathways, enabling learners to internalize pronunciation, rhythm, and prosody.

Cognitive Benefits of Music in SLA: Phonological and Memory Enhancement

The cognitive benefits of music in SLA are particularly evident in phonological awareness and memory enhancement. Research by Rose (2016) demonstrates that the rhythmic and melodic elements of music facilitate the internalization of phonological patterns, vocabulary, and even grammatical structures. Songs, with their repetitive nature, provide a mnemonic advantage by embedding linguistic information more effectively than traditional rote memorization. This observation is echoed by Cohen (1987), who found that learners exposed to music in the target language demonstrated superior recall and comprehension compared to those relying solely on spoken language.

However, the effectiveness of music for complex syntax acquisition remains contested. Rieb (2018) argues that while music aids vocabulary recall, it is less effective for mastering intricate grammatical structures, particularly in languages with nuanced syntax. These findings suggest that music's strengths lie in phonology and lexicon. Building on Rieb's work, this study investigates whether pairing music with explicit grammar instruction can yield a more holistic language-learning experience encompassing vocabulary and syntactic fluency.

Emotional Impact and Reduced Anxiety Through Music

Music's emotional resonance is a critical asset in SLA, as it lowers learners' affective filters—emotional barriers that hinder language acquisition. Bokiev et al. (2018) found that music-based tasks, such as singing or rhythmic exercises, reduced anxiety and fostered a more open, communicative classroom environment. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which asserts that learners with reduced anxiety are more receptive to language input. By promoting emotional engagement, music helps learners form deeper connections with the language, facilitating retention and fostering positive attitudes toward learning.

Nevertheless, cultural and personal relevance of musical content significantly influence its effectiveness. Chen et al. (2024) argue that songs lacking cultural resonance may fail to lower the affective filter and could even result in disengagement. This study will explore whether culturally tailored musical selections enhance emotional engagement and reduce anxiety across diverse learner groups, addressing the critiques raised by Chen et al. (2024) and expanding on the findings of Bokiev et al. (2018).

Music and Pronunciation: Aligning with Phonetic Patterns and Prosody

One of music's most significant contributions to SLA is its alignment with phonetic and prosodic aspects of language. Degraeve (2019) observed that songs expose learners to native intonation, rhythm, and stress patterns, which improve pronunciation and listening comprehension. This process, referred to as prosodic mimicry, enables learners to replicate native-like speech patterns in a naturalistic setting. Studies by Busse et al. (2018) corroborate this, showing that learners exposed to music achieve greater pronunciation accuracy than those relying on traditional phonetic exercises, as they internalize rhythm and stress intuitively.

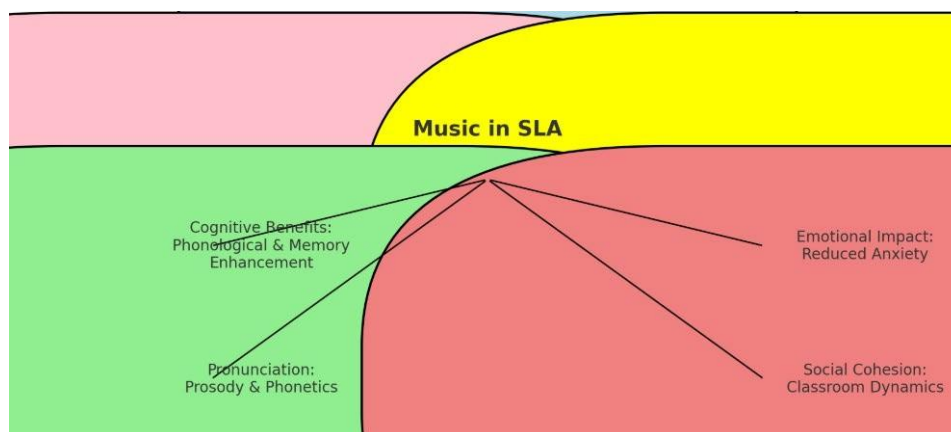
However, the role of music in pronunciation improvement may vary across language types. Hongsuchon et al. (2022) caution that music's emphasis on melody may detract from pronunciation accuracy in tonal languages, where pitch affects meaning. This study will examine whether rhythmic music, as opposed to melodic or tonal forms, can support accurate pronunciation across diverse linguistic systems, addressing the concerns raised by Hongsuchon et al. (2022).

Social Cohesion and Enhanced Classroom Dynamics

Music also fosters social cohesion and a positive classroom environment, essential for collaborative language learning. Bennett (2019) found that group singing exercises in SLA classrooms increased students' willingness to communicate, as they felt more comfortable practising the target language with peers. This social dynamic, often absent in traditional instruction, encourages an interactive learning atmosphere where learners are more inclined to take risks and actively participate.

However, challenges remain. Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2022) contend that music's collaborative potential can falter when learners possess varying levels of musical interest or ability, potentially leading to disengagement and resistance. For instance, students uninterested in musical activities may feel marginalized, undermining social cohesion. This study addresses these critiques by investigating alternative music-based activities, such as rhythmic clapping or instrumental background music, which are less performance-oriented. These adaptations aim to ensure inclusivity and sustained engagement across diverse learner profiles.

Figure 3. The influence of music on SLA



Building on Existing Studies: Optimising Music for SLA

While previous research underscores the benefits of music for vocabulary acquisition, phonology, and social engagement, significant gaps remain in its application for comprehensive language learning. This study aims to address these gaps through the following strategies:

1. **Integrating Music with Grammar Instruction:** This study explores whether music-based activities can be effectively combined with explicit grammar instruction to simultaneously enhance vocabulary retention and syntax learning.
2. **Cultural and Personal Relevance:** Building on Chen et al.'s (2024) critique, this research will experiment with culturally tailored music to determine whether greater cultural relevance improves emotional engagement and learner participation.
3. **Rhythmic vs. Melodic Training for Pronunciation:** Responding to concerns raised by Hongsuchon et al. (2022) regarding tonal languages, this study examines whether rhythmic exercises can enhance pronunciation accuracy without the potential interference of melody in such linguistic contexts.
4. **Inclusive, Non-Performance-Based Activities:** To mitigate the risk of social exclusion highlighted by Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2022), the study investigates alternative music activities, such as rhythm clapping or listening to instrumental background music, designed to foster inclusivity and social cohesion without requiring advanced musical ability.

By addressing these dimensions, this research seeks to advance the field of music-based SLA through an integrative model that leverages music's strengths while addressing its potential limitations. The study's holistic approach—encompassing structured grammar integration, cultural adaptability, and inclusivity—aims to offer educators a versatile toolkit for optimizing music-based teaching methodologies.

This study aims to push the boundaries of how music is utilised in SLA by addressing both its strengths and potential limitations. Through an integrative approach that combines music with structured grammar tasks, culturally relevant content, and inclusive activities, this study seeks to establish a more adaptable, comprehensive model for music-based language instruction. By exploring these dimensions, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of music's full potential in SLA, offering educators a nuanced toolkit for optimising their teaching strategies.

The Impact of Musical Proficiency and Training on Language Learning

Emerging research increasingly highlights the significant role of musical proficiency and structured training in enhancing SLA. The connection between music and language learning lies in musical training's ability to develop auditory perception, memory, and motor skills—key competencies for mastering the phonological and prosodic features of a second language (L2). Musical proficiency, defined as the ability to interpret and produce musical sounds through a combination of formal training and informal practice, equips learners with advanced auditory discrimination and cognitive flexibility. These skills are essential for processing and reproducing the unique phonetic, rhythmic, and syntactic patterns of an L2.

Improved Auditory Discrimination and Phonetic Sensitivity

Musical expertise significantly enhances learners' ability to discern subtle distinctions in pitch, rhythm, and timbre—skills critical for distinguishing native phonemes and intonation patterns in L2 acquisition. Chobert and Besson (2013) demonstrated that individuals with musical training possess a heightened sensitivity to auditory cues, enabling them to identify the stress, rhythm, and intonation characteristics of foreign languages more effectively. This enhanced auditory discrimination facilitates more accurate pronunciation and a closer approximation to native-like intonation.

Further evidence from White-Schwoch et al. (2021) indicates that even moderate exposure to music training improves learners' ability to perceive speech sounds in noisy environments, a common challenge in real-world language use. These findings suggest that music training not only sharpens pitch and rhythm recognition but also strengthens auditory filtering mechanisms, allowing learners to isolate relevant speech sounds amid background noise. This capability is particularly beneficial for adult L2 learners, who often face difficulties processing spoken language in dynamic social or professional contexts.

Neurological Impacts of Music Training on Language Processing

The influence of musical training on brain function and organization is well-documented, with research on neuroplasticity revealing its potential to enhance both short- and long-term language learning outcomes. Music training has been shown to modify the brain's auditory and speech-processing regions, strengthening connections within the auditory cortex and between the auditory and motor areas (Zuk et al., 2018). This reorganization of neural pathways not only enhances phonological awareness but also improves speech segmentation skills—the ability to identify individual sounds within a continuous speech stream. These skills are crucial for language fluency, as they allow learners to detect word boundaries and recognize syntactic patterns with greater ease.

Further, Slater et al. (2017) found that music-trained individuals exhibit a stronger neurological response to pitch changes, a skill essential for understanding tonal languages and mastering accents in non-tonal languages. Such neurological adaptations facilitate faster and more accurate auditory processing, potentially accelerating L2 acquisition by improving the learner's ability to discern and produce linguistically relevant sounds.

Enhanced Memory, Rhythm, and Lexical Skills

Music training is also closely associated with improvements in working memory and phonological memory—key cognitive functions for retaining and recalling vocabulary and syntactic structures in an L2. Jaroudi et al. (2017) demonstrated that learners with musical training showed enhanced lexical stress perception, enabling them to accurately reproduce and recognize word stress patterns. This ability fosters greater grammatical precision and fluency, as learners intuitively grasp the rhythm and stress patterns of the target language.

Jekiel and Malarski's (2021) research with Polish learners of English further highlights the significance of rhythmic memory in native-like vowel production. Musical aptitude was found to substantially contribute to the naturalness of learners' speech, as music-trained individuals produced vowels with higher degrees of native-like accuracy compared to non-musicians. The researchers attributed this to rhythmic memory, developed through music practice, which helps learners internalize the prosodic contours of the target language.

Additionally, Bokiev et al. (2018) established a connection between phonological memory and grammar retention, showing that individuals with musical training performed better on tasks requiring complex sentence construction and word sequencing. These findings suggest that musical experience may be especially beneficial for adult learners who need to master challenging grammatical structures and vocabulary sequences. In this way, music training supports not only pronunciation and listening comprehension but also broader linguistic competencies essential for achieving advanced language proficiency.

Comparing Studies and Their Practical Applications in SLA

A range of studies underscores the multifaceted benefits of music training in SLA. Research by Chobert and Besson (2013) and White-Schwoch et al. (2021) highlights the advantages of music training in auditory discrimination and speech perception, while Slater et al. (2017) and Jaroudi et al. (2017) focus on its neurological and memory-related benefits. In contrast, studies by Jekiel and Malarski (2021) and Bokiev et al. (2018) emphasize its role in fostering lexical and syntactic mastery, particularly for languages with distinct rhythmic and intonational patterns.

The breadth of these findings underscores the need for an integrative approach to applying musical training in SLA. Earlier research predominantly focused on phonetic and auditory improvements, whereas recent studies highlight its broader cognitive benefits, including memory enhancement, fluency, and syntactic development. This research aims to expand on these insights by investigating how the combined effects of auditory and memory enhancements derived from music training can benefit adult learners, who often face cognitive challenges associated with age.

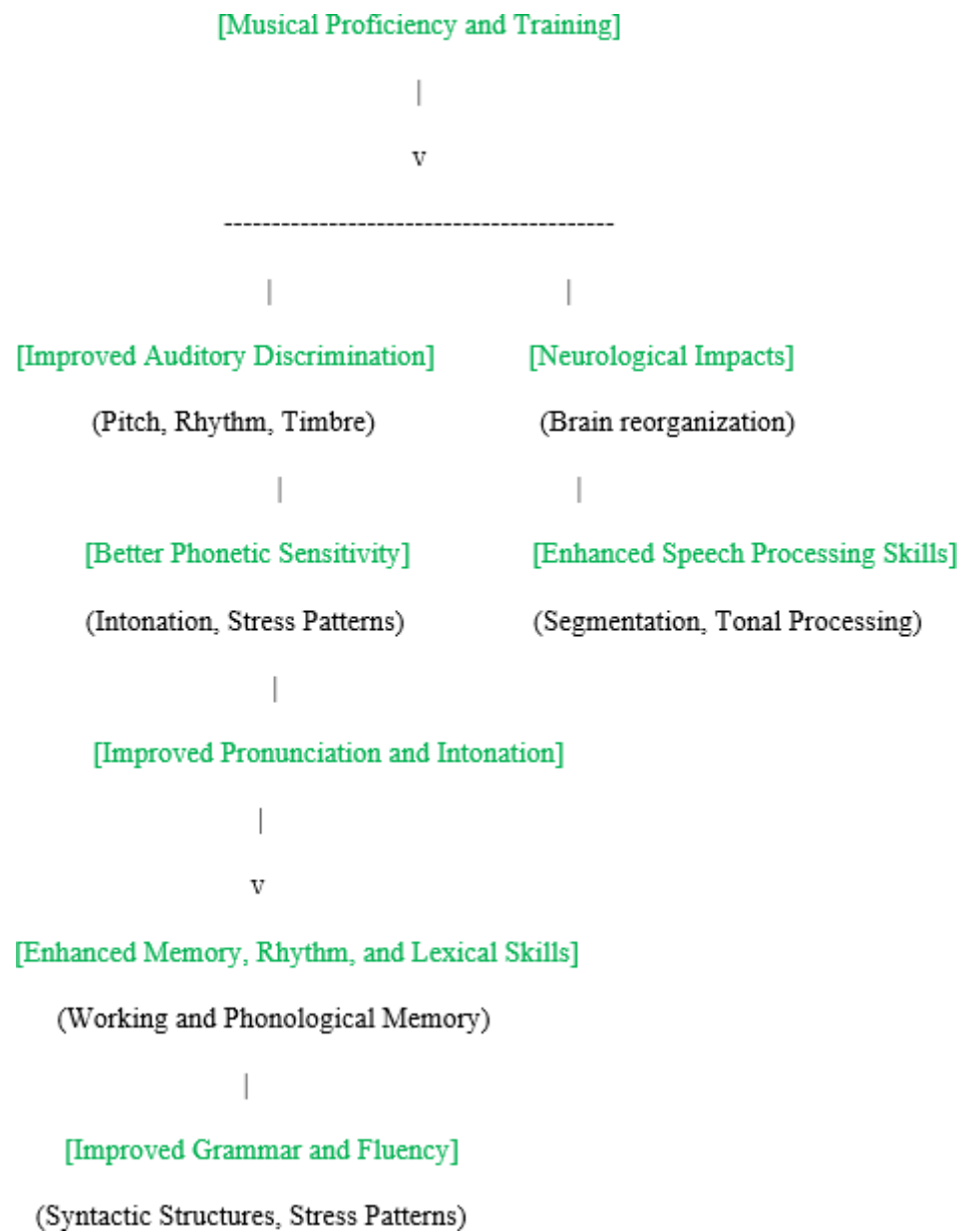
Tailored Applications for Diverse Learner Profiles

Given the varying levels of musical experience among adult learners, a one-size-fits-all approach to integrating music into SLA is unlikely to be effective. Tailored activities could address these differences, with rhythm-based exercises focusing on phonological memory for less experienced learners, and stress pattern training targeting accent mastery for those with a musical background. For example, rhythm clapping and stress drills could be particularly valuable for internalizing L2 prosody, while activities emphasizing pitch variation might aid learners of tonal languages.

By synthesising the nuanced findings of recent studies, this research bridges theoretical insights with practical applications. It aims to provide language educators with strategies that maximise the auditory, mnemonic, and phonetic benefits of music training, thereby equipping learners with a robust foundation for acquiring an L2.

Figure 4 illustrates the interconnected benefits of musical proficiency in facilitating language learning, focusing on auditory, neurological, memory, and fluency improvements.

Figure 4. The Impact of Musical Proficiency and Training on Second Language Acquisition



Art and Music as Tools for Second Language Acquisition for Adult Learners

The integration of art and music into second language acquisition (SLA) for adult learners has garnered substantial attention in recent years. Research suggests that these creative approaches facilitate vocabulary acquisition, enhance comprehension, and foster cultural immersion. This section examines foundational theories, practical applications, and recent findings on the use of art and music in SLA, with an emphasis on their impact on adult learners. It further compares

studies to highlight the varied effects of these methods on engagement, cultural connection, memory retention, and instructional efficacy.

Theoretical Basis of Art and Music in Language Learning

The theoretical underpinnings for incorporating art and music in SLA draw upon Gardner's (2011) Theory of Multiple Intelligences and the Embodied Cognition Theory. Gardner's model posits that language learning can be enriched by engaging multiple intelligences, particularly linguistic, spatial, and musical intelligences. Visual arts activate spatial intelligence, while music leverages musical intelligence, offering a holistic and stimulating learning experience for adult learners who may benefit from non-traditional approaches to language acquisition (Gardner, 2011).

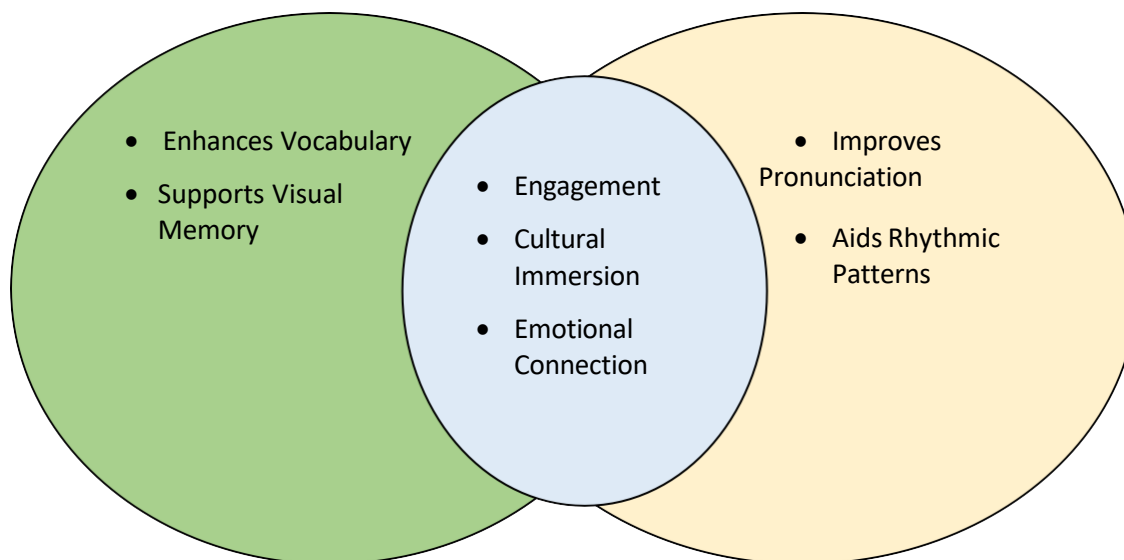
The Embodied Cognition Theory provides additional support for these methods, asserting that cognitive processes, including language acquisition, are fundamentally tied to physical and sensory experiences (Wilson, 2002). Raven et al. (2022) demonstrated that sensory-based language exercises, such as movement and rhythm activities, improved learners' ability to recall vocabulary and grammatical structures through motor memory. This approach is particularly advantageous for adult learners who often face challenges with rote memorization, as physical engagement reinforces language patterns within cognitive frameworks.

Additionally, Żammit's (2021) research on Maltese language acquisition highlights the significance of cultural familiarity in enhancing language comprehension and retention. While Gardner's (2011) theory offers a universal perspective, Żammit's study shows that cultural resonance in art and music can provide an additional layer of emotional engagement, further strengthening vocabulary retention and comprehension, particularly for learners who feel a personal connection to the language.

Enhanced Memory Retention

Learning through art and music has been shown to bolster memory by engaging learners emotionally and sensory-wise, which aids in memory encoding. Sousa and Pileggi (2021) emphasise that music creates strong memory pathways through emotional stimulation, which improves long-term retention of vocabulary and grammar structures. Yurgil et al. (2020) study further confirms that music-based language tasks significantly boost vocabulary retention for adult learners compared to traditional rote memorization, pointing to a clear advantage of incorporating music into language instruction.

Contrastingly, Żammit (2021) highlights that the cultural context within music can also be a determining factor. Whereas Sousa and Pileggi emphasise the universal benefit of music in retention, Żammit (2023) found that adult learners specifically retained vocabulary more effectively when it was embedded within culturally relevant content, suggesting that cultural resonance is an additional, potent enhancer of memory retention. Figure 5 illustrates shared benefits like engagement, cultural immersion, and emotional connection, as well as distinct contributions of visual arts and music to second language acquisition.

Figure 5. Overlapping Benefits of Visual Arts and Music in SLA

Increased Motivation and Reduced Anxiety

Art and music provide a low-anxiety environment conducive to language learning, particularly important for adult learners who may feel self-conscious about pronunciation and grammar. Jin et al. (2021) observed that arts-based activities significantly lowered anxiety among adult learners, who reported feeling more relaxed and open to experimentation. This aligns with findings by Crooke et al. (2024), who note that using universally accessible music and art fosters a supportive, creative environment that encourages adults to participate actively, thus improving motivation and confidence.

Žammit's (2021) research similarly indicates that engagement with culturally familiar art and music reduces learner anxiety and enhances motivation. However, Žammit (2021) adds that cultural resonance can heighten the effect, as learners feel a stronger emotional connection to the language. This suggests that incorporating culturally relevant art forms may further amplify the anxiety-reducing effects of creative language learning methods, as seen in Žammit's (2023) culturally tailored approach.

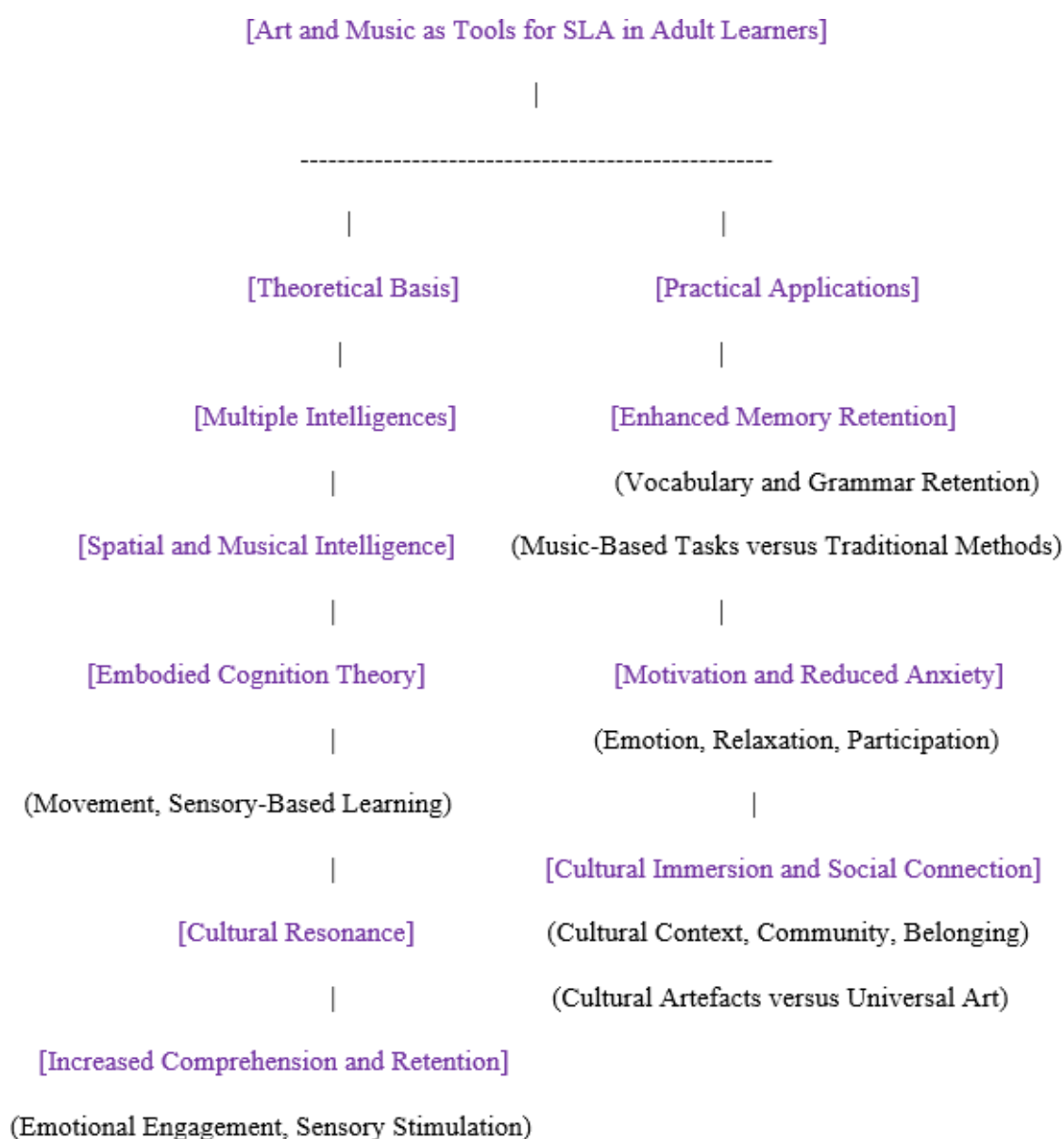
Cultural Immersion and Social Connection

Including cultural artefacts and traditional art forms in language instruction enriches learners' understanding of the language's cultural context. Kim (2020) found that integrating cultural artefacts fosters a sense of community and belonging, important for adult learners aiming for cultural integration. Žammit (2021) extends this by suggesting that cultural artefacts provide

an emotional and social connection that fosters sustained language engagement, which is especially useful for adult learners seeking a holistic experience of the language.

In contrast, Kadyirov et al. (2024) point out that focusing heavily on specific cultural contexts can sometimes alienate learners from diverse backgrounds. Their study advocates for balancing cultural content with universal or cross-cultural materials, ensuring that all learners feel included. Crooke et al.'s (2024), suggestion to use neutral or widely accessible art forms, such as classical music, can help bridge this gap, making cultural immersion accessible even to those unfamiliar with specific cultural content. Figure 6 captures the key findings and practical implications of using art and music in SLA, focusing on their theoretical underpinnings and real-world applications.

Figure 6. The Role of Art and Music in Enhancing Second Language Acquisition for Adult Learners



Practical Applications: Art and Music in SLA Instruction

Music-Based Activities

Repetition and phonetic reinforcement through familiar songs or chants are widely recognised as effective for language learning. Racette and Peretz (2007) found that repetitive melodies improve phonetic acquisition and assist learners in adopting native-like intonation, a finding applicable across languages with unique phonetic challenges. While Racette and Peretz's (2007) work emphasises the phonetic benefits, Žammit (2021) adds that music can also create an environment for learners to experiment with intonation without the pressure of precise accuracy, further reducing anxiety and supporting phonetic learning.

Art-Driven Language Exercises

Art-based activities, such as describing paintings or sculptures, offer meaningful contexts for vocabulary acquisition. Møller-Skau and Lindstøl (2022) observed that art discussions improved learners' descriptive abilities and cultural insights, fostering vocabulary and cultural learning. However, Kadyirov et al. (2024) caution that excessive focus on culturally specific art may not resonate with all learners, especially in diverse classrooms. They recommend combining universal art forms with culturally specific ones to create a more inclusive and accessible learning experience.

Drama, Visual Art, Music, and Role-Play in SLA

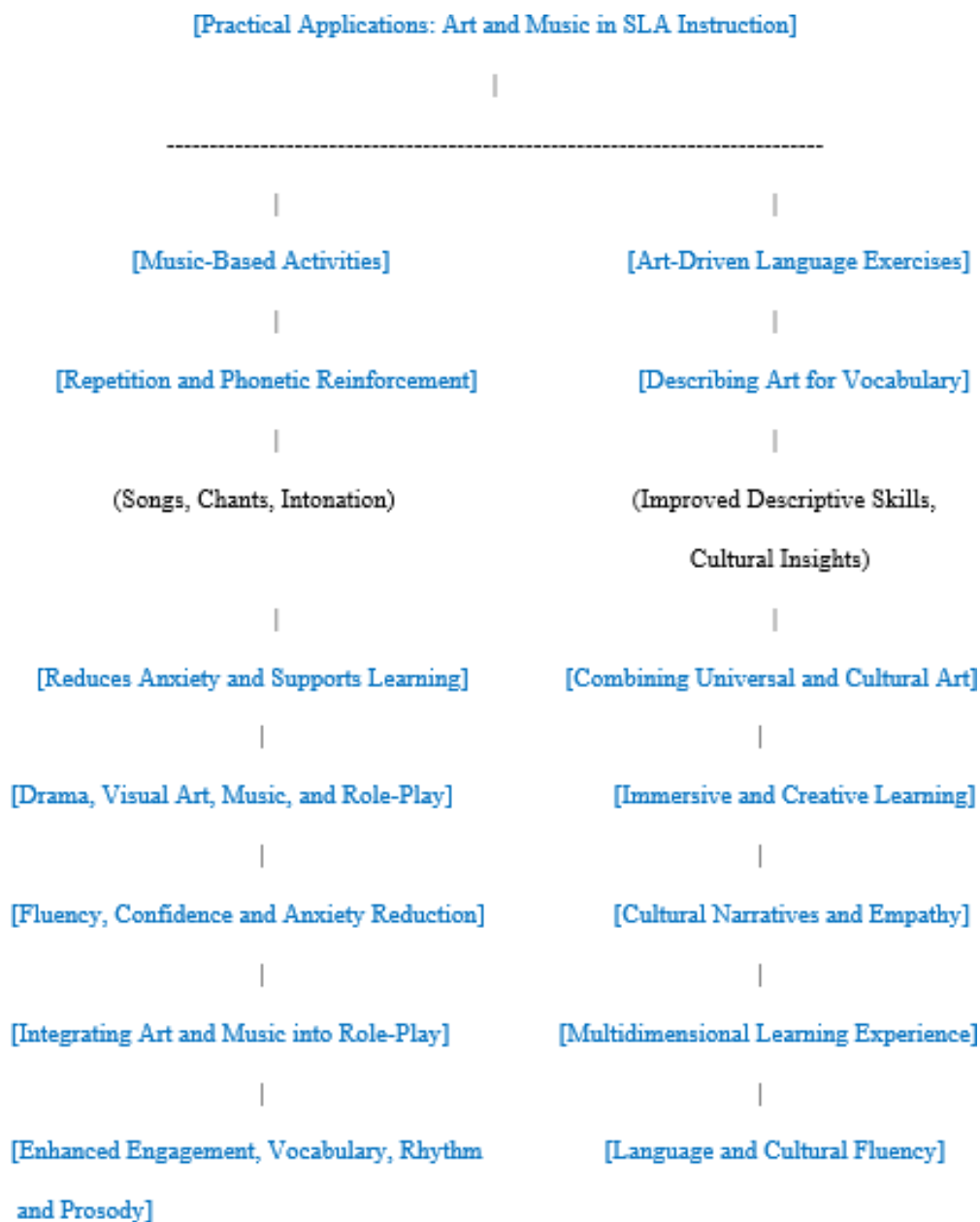
Drama and role-play have proven to be effective methods for language acquisition by providing learners with immersive, real-world conversational practice. Johnson (2019) found that role-play significantly enhances fluency and confidence, particularly for adults who may face anxiety or struggle with conversational spontaneity. By adopting new perspectives and language forms, learners can practice various speech patterns and expressions in a low-risk, creative environment. Additionally, Hossain (2024) suggests that role-play helps learners transcend cultural barriers by allowing them to interact with cultural narratives, fostering empathy and deepening their connection to the target language.

Building on these insights, recent studies have explored the integration of visual art and music into role-play exercises to further enrich the learning experience. According to Stavridi (2015), incorporating art and music in role-play can deepen learners' engagement by appealing to multiple senses and facilitating emotional connections. For example, Stavridi (2015) observed that using art as a visual stimulus in role-play—such as asking students to embody characters in a painting or narrate scenes as if they were part of the artwork—encourages learners to use descriptive language, enhancing vocabulary and observational skills.

Similarly, Sun et al. (2024) report that incorporating music into role-play scenarios allows learners to practice language patterns with an improved sense of rhythm and prosody. For instance, students might take on roles as singers or musicians from a specific culture, using language and expressions relevant to that context. Sun et al. (2024) found that this approach

not only boosts learners' phonological awareness but also reduces language-related anxiety, as the musical elements create a more enjoyable and collaborative atmosphere. By combining drama, visual art, and music in role-play, educators can offer students a multidimensional experience that supports both linguistic and cultural fluency in language learning. Figure 7 highlights the practical ways art and music can be incorporated into language learning, focusing on key methods and their impact on engagement, vocabulary, cultural understanding, and fluency.

Figure 7. Practical Applications of Art and Music in Second Language Acquisition Instruction



Creative Writing Exercises in SLA: Integrating Visual Art and Music for Enhanced Engagement and Language Acquisition

Creative writing exercises inspired by visual art and music offer language learners unique opportunities to practice complex grammar and expand vocabulary through personal expression. By connecting language practice with artistic and musical prompts, learners can explore linguistic structures in a way that is meaningful and culturally resonant. Coffey and Patel (2023) emphasise that creative prompts connected to cultural elements—such as interpreting a well-known painting or responding to the mood of a traditional melody—encourage learners to engage deeply with the target language, facilitating the internalization of grammar and syntax. For adult learners, these exercises serve as a bridge between personal reflection and language exploration, allowing them to express experiences and emotions in the new language, which can strengthen motivation and retention.

Research by Farokhi and Hashemi (2012) suggests that visual art, in particular, can enhance descriptive writing skills by stimulating vocabulary related to colour, form, emotion, and symbolism. In one study, learners were prompted to write fictional narratives based on scenes depicted in paintings from their home cultures, with some participants using artworks to frame stories that highlighted personal or cultural themes. This approach led to more nuanced use of adjectives, comparatives, and sensory language, revealing that art-based prompts can enrich the vocabulary and support the expressive use of complex grammatical structures. Farokhi and Hashemi (2012) argue that by grounding writing in visual cues, learners develop an intuitive grasp of language that extends beyond rote memorization.

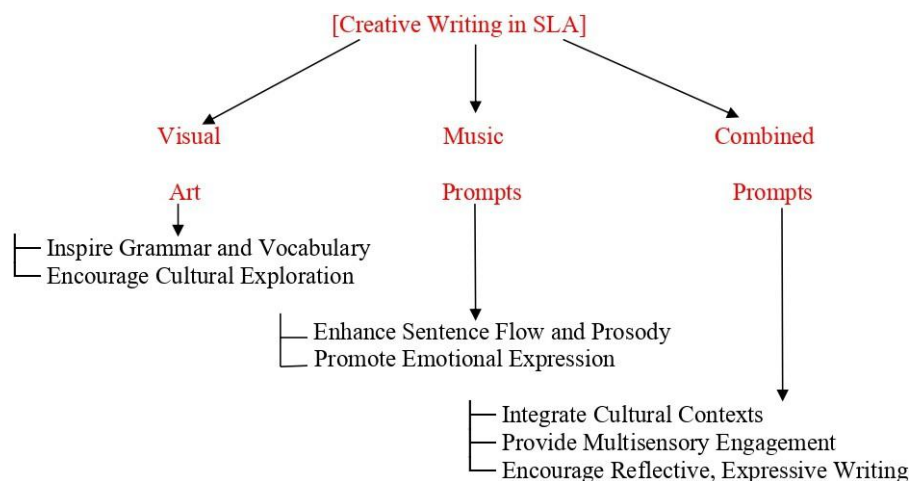
Similarly, incorporating music into creative writing exercises can bolster learners' understanding of rhythm and prosody in sentence construction. A study by Paquette and Rieg (2008) demonstrates that music-inspired prompts—such as writing a poem or short story in response to a traditional folk song—allow learners to experiment with sentence flow and stylistic choices. In their study, the participants reported that these exercises helped them feel more attuned to the “natural rhythm” of the target language, improving both their sentence fluidity and comfort with longer, more complex sentences. Additionally, the emotional dimension of music often inspired learners to write with greater enthusiasm and authenticity, making grammar and vocabulary practice feel less structured and more creative.

However, Żammit (2021) cautions that these exercises need careful structuring to ensure that language objectives are prioritised. They observed that, without clear guidelines, creative writing tasks can lead learners to prioritise personal expression over grammatical accuracy or precise vocabulary use. To mitigate this, they recommend using targeted prompts that subtly reinforce specific language objectives. For example, learners could be asked to focus on using past tense verbs to describe a sequence of events in an artwork or to use conditional sentences to imagine alternative scenarios based on a song's narrative.

In general, visual art and music provide useful entry points for creative writing in SLA, offering learners a rich, sensory context for language exploration that enhances grammar and vocabulary skills while nurturing personal expression. For optimal effectiveness, instructors should balance the creative elements with structured guidelines, ensuring that the aesthetic

engagement complements linguistic goals. Figure 8 represents the integration of visual art and music into creative writing exercises for SLA.

Figure 8. Creative Writing Exercises in SLA: Integrating Visual Art and Music for Enhanced Engagement and Language Acquisition



Challenges in Implementing Art and Music in Language Teaching and Learning

The integration of art and music into SLA presents numerous benefits, yet it also entails challenges that educators must carefully navigate to maximise learning outcomes. This section explores current studies addressing these challenges, which include limited resources, cultural diversity, and balancing creative and academic rigour.

Resource Limitations and Access to Art and Music

One significant barrier to implementing art and music in SLA contexts is the lack of resources, such as funding, and access to instruments, or visual art materials. According to Hartle et al. (2024), many adult language programmes, particularly those in community or lower-budget settings, lack the resources needed to provide art and music activities. This scarcity can limit educators' ability to implement creative, sensory-rich experiences that enhance language acquisition. In addition, technology constraints, such as the lack of digital tools for accessing online art and music resources, further restrict the use of these mediums. While Hartle et al. (2024) suggest that even low-cost options like simple rhythm exercises or online art can enhance language learning, they emphasise that meaningful integration of art and music requires institutional support and funding to truly benefit learners.

Cultural Diversity and Learner Engagement

Cultural diversity among learners poses another challenge in using art and music for language learning. As music and art are often deeply rooted in cultural contexts, learners may struggle

to relate to unfamiliar artistic forms, which can reduce engagement and motivation. Hossain (2024) found that adult SLA learners often feel disconnected from culturally specific content that does not resonate with their own backgrounds, leading to decreased motivation and participation. This challenge necessitates that educators select or adapt activities that honour and incorporate cultural diversity within the classroom. For instance, incorporating multicultural art and music that draws on the backgrounds of various students can foster inclusivity and increase relevance. Additionally, Crooke et al. (2024) highlight that using universally appealing or cross-cultural forms, such as classical music or abstract art, may bridge cultural gaps and provide a neutral ground where learners can engage without feeling culturally alienated.

Balancing Creative Activities with Rigorous Language Instruction

Another challenge involves balancing the integration of art and music with the rigorous, structured approach needed to achieve linguistic proficiency. For adult learners, who may be focused on practical language skills, spending extensive time on creative activities could potentially detract from achieving language fluency. Studies such as Charyton (2015) show that while music and art can enrich learning experiences, they may inadvertently reduce time dedicated to grammar, syntax, and structured vocabulary acquisition, which are critical for advanced proficiency in an L2. This potential trade-off requires careful planning to ensure that creative activities are both linguistically beneficial and time-efficient.

Structured approaches, such as incorporating brief musical exercises that reinforce phonetic patterns or targeted art analysis to build vocabulary, can help integrate creativity without sacrificing rigour. A study by Kadyirov et al. (2024) examined a curriculum that used structured, time-limited art and music activities specifically designed to support vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation in adult learners. They found that when these activities were closely aligned with language objectives, the creative elements enhanced learning without detracting from the curriculum's academic rigour.

Instructor Preparedness and Pedagogical Training

Implementing art and music effectively also requires instructors to possess a degree of expertise in these areas, which can be challenging for language teachers who may lack formal training in the arts. Žammit (2021) notes that language instructors often feel unprepared or uncomfortable integrating art and music into their curricula, citing a lack of knowledge on how to use these tools effectively for SLA. This gap in expertise can lead to underutilised or ineffective creative activities that do not fully engage students or align with language objectives. Žammit (2021) recommends professional development workshops that equip teachers with basic skills in music and visual art pedagogy, helping them to implement these elements more confidently and effectively.

Practical Strategies to Overcome Challenges

Despite these challenges, studies suggest several practical approaches that may assist educators in navigating them successfully. For instance, Crooke et al. (2024) advocate for modular lesson

planning, where art and music activities are embedded into short, goal-oriented tasks, thereby minimising disruption to the flow of linguistic instruction. Charyton (2015) also suggests using art and music activities as supplementary material rather than primary teaching methods, allowing teachers to integrate creativity without sacrificing critical language instruction time.

Additionally, Hossain (2024) suggests that cultural inclusivity can be addressed by allowing learners to bring in and share music or art from their own backgrounds. This approach not only broadens the cultural context of the class but also encourages students to connect personally with the language, which is especially beneficial for adult learners seeking cultural integration as part of their language journey.

Figure 9 represents the key challenges and strategies in integrating art and music into second language acquisition (SLA). The top layer outlines four main challenges: Resource Limitations, Cultural Diversity, Balancing Creativity and Rigour, and Instructor Preparedness. The bottom layer proposes four corresponding strategies: Resourcefulness, Cultural Inclusivity, Structured Activities, and Teacher Training. Figure 9 emphasises a structured approach to overcoming barriers, highlighting the interconnectedness of the challenges and their solutions, making it an excellent resource for educators and policymakers in language education.

Figure 9. Integrating Art and Music in Language Learning: Challenges and Solutions



Future Directions

Research supports the effectiveness of art and music in language acquisition, particularly for adult learners, by creating an emotionally engaging, multisensory experience that fosters memory retention, reduces anxiety, and promotes cultural immersion. However, studies also underscore the need for careful implementation to ensure inclusivity, adequate resources, and a balance between creativity and academic rigour. Future research could further explore the long-term benefits of integrating digital art and music resources and examine how technology can extend cultural experiences in SLA beyond traditional classroom settings.

Integrating art and music in SLA for adult learners, including those studying ML2, presents both opportunities and challenges. Addressing resource constraints, cultural relevance, and balanced instruction requires careful planning and adaptation. Future research could explore digital resources and virtual art experiences as potential solutions to resource limitations, while more training for educators could enable them to implement art and music with greater pedagogical skill and confidence. Exploring these directions may help overcome the current limitations and provide adult language learners with a rich, multidimensional language learning experience.

Methodology

Qualitative Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research methodology to investigate the potential impact of including art and music in ML2 courses for adult learners. Qualitative research methods are particularly well-suited for exploring complex phenomena in depth. Kothari and Garg (2016) argue that qualitative research offers a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied, enabling researchers to capture the nuances of participants' experiences and insights. Qualitative research approaches do not produce numerical data, but they provide a rich and detailed exploration of participants' relationships, actions, attitudes, experiences, and beliefs (Hennink et al., 2020).

The primary justification for selecting a qualitative research methodology lies in its ability to yield profound insights into the study problem and to uncover the underlying motivations and justifications that shape the participants' perspectives. In this context, qualitative methods facilitate a deeper exploration of participants' views on how art and music can enhance adults' SLA. Moreover, qualitative research methodologies reveal patterns in attitudes toward the utilization of music and art in the language learning process, highlighting how these creative elements impact learners' engagement and comprehension (Rahman, 2017).

Qualitative research is particularly important in educational settings, where understanding individual experiences can lead to improved pedagogical strategies. Recent studies, such as those by Creswell and Poth (2024), emphasise the importance of qualitative approaches in education, as they enable researchers to gather in-depth data that reflect the complexities of learner experiences. This methodology fosters a holistic understanding of the participants' thoughts and feelings about art and music's role in ML2 learning, thus aligning with the goals of this study.

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Participants

To collect qualitative data, the researcher employed convenience sampling to select samples from the target population (Jin et al., 2021). This sampling strategy allowed for the inclusion of participants who met specific criteria: individuals must be at least 18 years of age and possess an intermediate level of proficiency (Level B2) in ML2. Convenience sampling is a practical approach that can enhance the feasibility of qualitative research, particularly when accessing participants is challenging (Teddle and Yu, 2007).

In this study, the sampling technique involved inviting all individuals who fulfilled the established criteria to participate (Jin et al., 2021). This was crucial given the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated remote engagement. By focusing on easily reachable participants willing to be interviewed online, the study maximised the potential for data collection and maintained accessibility for both participants and future adult learners in studying ML2.

Identifying the study population and determining an appropriate sample size are critical factors for effective research (Shaheen et al., 2019). The research included a sample size of 84 individuals learning ML2 at lifelong learning facilities and in private classes in Malta. The participants represented a diverse demographic, encompassing individuals from various professions—doctors, nurses, construction workers, students, managers, salespersons, cooks, beauticians, masseurs, surgeons, nuns, iGaming managers, receptionists, and educators. This diversity is significant as it reflects a range of perspectives and experiences, enriching the data collected.

Recruitment of participants was facilitated by recommendations from the author's colleagues, who are educators in the field. The participants were recruited voluntarily through email, ensuring that they were fully informed about the study's purpose and their rights. To protect their autonomy, the participants were explicitly given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without facing negative consequences, as highlighted by Shaheen et al. (2019). This

approach aligns with ethical research practices and respects the participants' rights and preferences.

The interviews were conducted based on the participants' autonomy and at their preferred times, following the guidelines set by McGrath et al. (2019). This flexibility in scheduling allowed for more comfortable interactions and better data collection. All online interviews were videotaped with the participants' consent, ensuring that rich, visual data could be analysed alongside verbal responses. This approach aligns with current best practices in qualitative research, where visual data can complement verbal narratives, providing a more holistic understanding of participants' experiences (Collins and Stockton, 2022).

By utilising a qualitative methodology with a diverse participant sample, this study aims to provide useful insights into the effectiveness of integrating art and music into ML2 courses. Its ultimate goal is to enhance the understanding of how these elements can facilitate adult language learning in a culturally rich and engaging manner.

Data Collection Process

Research Tool

Data for this study was collected from 84 adult learners through one-on-one interviews conducted via Zoom. This online platform was chosen for its accessibility and convenience, particularly in light of the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews employed six unstructured questions, designed to elicit open-ended responses that would provide rich, qualitative data regarding the participants' perceptions of how art and music could enhance their second SLA. The use of unstructured questions allowed the participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words, fostering a more natural and conversational dialogue that could reveal deeper insights into their experiences and attitudes (Jin et al., 2021).

The primary aim of the interviews was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how art and music might be effectively integrated into ML2 courses to support adult learners' language acquisition. By aligning the interview questions with the study's objectives, the researcher sought to gather data that would directly address the central research question: How do adult learners perceive the role of art and music in enhancing their acquisition of the Maltese language?

Progression of the Interview

Before commencing the data collection, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) of the University of Malta. This process ensured that the study adhered to ethical standards, particularly regarding participant confidentiality and informed consent. The ethical approval included a review of the interview guide, which outlined the purpose of the study, the nature of the interviews, and the measures taken to protect the participants' identities.

Following ethical approval, the researcher developed a detailed interview guide that outlined the structure and flow of the interviews while allowing for flexibility in response to the participants' answers. Each participant was informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their participation was voluntary. They were also made aware that their identities would remain confidential throughout the research process. This commitment to confidentiality is critical in qualitative research, as it helps to build trust with participants, allowing them to speak more openly and honestly about their experiences and opinions.

The interview questions were designed to probe various aspects of the participants' experiences with art and music in language learning, both within the context of Maltese and in their previous language learning experiences. The questions were as follows:

1. *Does your Maltese instructor employ art and music as tools to augment your acquisition of the Maltese language?*
 - This question aimed to determine the current integration of art and music in the participants' learning experiences and to identify any direct examples of their use in the classroom setting.
2. *What would be your emotional response if your Maltese instructor incorporated art or music into the classroom?*
 - Here, the focus was on exploring the participants' emotional reactions, which are critical in understanding motivation and engagement in language learning contexts.
3. *Was music and art incorporated into the second language instruction by your teacher in your own country?*
 - This question sought to gather comparative data on the participants' prior experiences with art and music in language education, allowing for a contextual understanding of their current perceptions.
4. *What are the advantages and difficulties of using art in second language acquisition?*
 - By addressing both benefits and challenges, this question aimed to capture a balanced view of how art is perceived in the language learning process.
5. *What are the benefits and drawbacks of including music in the process of acquiring a second language?*
 - Similar to the previous question, this inquiry focused specifically on music, allowing the participants to reflect on its unique impact on language learning.
6. *Do you believe that including art and music in the language class enhances learning?*
 - This concluding question aimed to assess the participants' overall attitudes toward the inclusion of these creative elements in language instruction, providing insight into their perceived effectiveness.

Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants, allowing them to choose times that suited their availability. This flexibility was particularly important in fostering a comfortable environment where the participants felt at ease to share their thoughts and experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, during which the researcher actively listened, asked follow-up questions, and encouraged the participants to elaborate on their responses as needed.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for a degree of spontaneity while maintaining the focus on the research questions. The researcher utilised Zoom's recording feature, with the participants' consent, to capture the full dialogue for

accurate transcription and analysis. This method of recording ensured that the nuances of the participants' responses were preserved, allowing for a more thorough analysis of their insights.

Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate detailed qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns within the participants' responses, allowing the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions about the perceived impact of art and music on SLA. The use of qualitative analysis software, such as NVivo or Atlas.ti, can also enhance the organization and coding of qualitative data, making it easier to track emerging themes and connections across interviews.

In general, the data collection process was designed to ensure that the study captured a rich and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the integration of art and music in language learning, ultimately contributing to a broader understanding of effective practices in adult language education.

Validity and Reliability

Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research is essential for establishing the credibility of findings and interpretations. In this study, the researcher employed several strategies to enhance the validity and reliability of the data collected and analysed. One prominent method was member-checking, which is crucial for verifying construct validity in qualitative research (Birt et al., 2016). After conducting the interviews, the researcher provided the participants with their transcripts for review and approval. This process allowed the participants to confirm that their statements were accurately captured and reflected their intended meanings, thus enhancing the credibility of the data (Thomas, 2016).

Member-Checking Process

Member-checking serves multiple purposes in qualitative research. First, it acts as a form of respondent validation, allowing the participants to engage actively in the research process and ensuring that their perspectives are represented accurately (Harvey, 2015). By providing the participants with their transcripts, the researcher minimised the risk of misinterpretation and bias, fostering a sense of collaboration and trust between the researcher and the participants (Tuffour, 2017). The participants were encouraged to highlight any discrepancies or omissions in the transcripts, ensuring that the final data reflected their views authentically.

Furthermore, member-checking aids in the identification of emergent themes and insights that may not have been apparent to the researcher during the initial interviews. This iterative feedback loop can enhance the depth of analysis, allowing the researcher to refine interpretations and draw more nuanced conclusions (Birt et al., 2016). By valuing the participants' feedback, the researcher also demonstrated respect for their contributions, which is essential in qualitative research focused on lived experiences.

Detailed Explanation of Interview Protocol

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured protocol designed to explore participants' experiences with integrating art and music into their ML2 learning. The protocol included open-ended questions that allowed for flexibility in the participants' responses while maintaining a focus on the research objectives. For instance, participants were asked about their perceptions of using art and music as tools for language acquisition, any challenges they encountered, and how these methods influenced their motivation and engagement. To ensure consistency across interviews, the researcher employed an interview guide with predefined questions and prompts. This approach facilitated a balanced exploration of each participant's experiences while allowing room for unanticipated insights to emerge (Kallio et al., 2016).

Procedures for Thematic Analysis

The researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, ensuring a rigorous and systematic approach to data interpretation. Initially, the researcher familiarised themselves with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts. Next, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments of text relevant to the research questions. These codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. NVivo software (version 14) was used to facilitate the coding process, providing a structured environment for organising and analysing the data. Themes were validated through peer debriefing sessions, where colleagues provided feedback on the clarity and coherence of the identified themes. This process ensured that the findings were both reliable and grounded in the participants' narratives.

Convenience Sampling and Its Impact

To achieve a sufficient sample size, the researcher employed convenience sampling from the community. While convenience sampling is often critiqued for potentially introducing bias and limiting generalizability, it can be a practical approach in qualitative studies, particularly when resources or access to a wider population are constrained (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method allowed the researcher to collect insights from readily available participants who met the study's criteria, thereby facilitating a more efficient data collection process.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of convenience sampling. The participants may not fully represent the broader population of adult learners of ML2. To address this concern, the researcher took steps to ensure diversity within the sample, aiming to include individuals from various backgrounds and professions, as noted in the participant description (e.g., doctors, nurses, construction workers). This approach helped mitigate potential biases and offered a more comprehensive perspective on the research questions.

Procedural Accuracy and Self-Correcting Methods

In addition to member-checking, the researcher implemented self-correcting methods to enhance procedural accuracy throughout the study. These methods involved continuously reflecting on the research process and being aware of personal biases that could influence data collection and analysis (Candela, 2019). Maintaining a reflexive stance is essential in

qualitative research, as it enables researchers to critically examine their positionality and how it may shape their interpretations (Finlay, 2011).

The researcher engaged in regular journaling during the data collection phase, documenting thoughts, feelings, and observations related to the interviews. This reflective practice not only helped identify potential biases but also contributed to a more nuanced understanding of the data as it emerged. By acknowledging their own experiences and perspectives, the researcher was better equipped to approach the analysis with an open mind, fostering a more objective interpretation of the participants' responses.

Ensuring Reliability

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of the research findings and the dependability of the data collection process (Krefting, 1991). To ensure reliability, the researcher maintained a detailed audit trail throughout the study. This included documenting the research design, data collection procedures, and decision-making processes involved in data analysis. By creating a transparent record of the research process, the researcher facilitated external verification of the findings, allowing future researchers to understand and potentially replicate the study (Yin, 2018).

Furthermore, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing, collaborating with colleagues to discuss emerging themes and interpretations during the analysis phase. Peer debriefing serves as a critical check on the researcher's assumptions and interpretations, providing an opportunity for constructive feedback and enhancing the study's overall credibility (Creswell and Poth, 2024). Engaging in dialogue with peers can reveal blind spots or alternative interpretations, enriching the analysis and contributing to a more robust understanding of the data.

The combination of member-checking, convenience sampling with attention to diversity, procedural accuracy through self-correcting methods, and robust reliability practices contributed to the overall validity and reliability of this qualitative study. By thoughtfully implementing these strategies, the researcher aimed to ensure that the findings genuinely reflected the experiences and perspectives of adult learners regarding the integration of art and music in their language learning journey. Future research could build on these methodologies to further explore the intersections of creativity and language acquisition across diverse learner populations.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study was designed to systematically interpret the insights gained from the 84 online interviews conducted with adult learners of ML2. Throughout the interviews, which totalled approximately 85 hours, the researcher aimed to extract meaningful themes and patterns that reflect the participants' experiences and perspectives on the integration of art and music in language acquisition.

Interview Transcription and Initial Coding

Following the interviews, which were conducted in 3 weeks, the researcher transcribed each session verbatim. This transcription process is a crucial first step in qualitative research, as it allows for a detailed examination of the verbal data (Saldana, 2016). Transcriptions were carefully reviewed for accuracy, ensuring that the participants' statements were faithfully captured. Once the transcripts were complete, the researcher began the initial coding process, where significant statements and phrases were identified and tagged with codes that represented their content (Creswell and Poth, 2024). This initial coding provided a framework for later analysis, facilitating the organization of the data into thematic categories.

Thematic Analysis

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing for a degree of spontaneity while maintaining the focus on the research questions. The researcher utilised Zoom's recording feature, with the participants' consent, to capture the full dialogue for accurate transcription and analysis. This method of recording ensured that the nuances of the participants' responses were preserved, allowing for a more thorough analysis of their insights.

Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim to facilitate detailed qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis procedures were employed, with clear stages of data coding, theme identification, and validation using qualitative software tools such as NVivo version 14. To ensure rigour, the researcher employed member-checking by sharing the preliminary themes and findings with selected participants to confirm their accuracy and resonance with the participants' experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This step enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings.

Thematic analysis is a systematic process that identifies and interprets patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher began by coding the transcribed data line-by-line to ensure that the analysis captured the full range of participants' insights. Codes were then organised into overarching themes that aligned with the study's objectives and research questions. Inter-coder reliability was also assessed by having a second researcher independently code a subset of the transcripts. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved, ensuring consistency in the coding process (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

During the thematic analysis, the researcher focused on two primary themes that emerged from the participants' statements. The first theme centred on utilising art to augment adults' ML2, while the second theme focused on employing music to enhance Maltese language learning. The identification of these themes was guided by a combination of deductive and inductive approaches. The researcher began with preconceived ideas regarding the potential benefits of art and music based on existing literature but remained open to new insights that arose from the participants' experiences (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This dual approach not only allowed for the confirmation of existing knowledge but also facilitated the discovery of novel insights, enhancing the richness of the findings.

Content Review and Reporting

Following the identification of themes, the researcher conducted a content review, which involved a detailed examination of the data within each theme. This stage allowed for a deeper understanding of how art and music were perceived and utilised by the participants in the context of their ML2 learning. The researcher condensed the findings into comprehensive reports that highlighted key insights, patterns, and notable quotes from the participants, ensuring that the voices of the participants were central to the analysis (Tuffour, 2017). Triangulation was employed by comparing findings across multiple data sources, such as participant demographics and interview transcripts, to corroborate key themes and enhance the study's reliability.

Utilization of NVivo Software

To aid in the analysis process, the researcher utilised NVivo 10 software. This qualitative data analysis tool is specifically designed to manage and analyse large volumes of qualitative data, enabling researchers to code and categorise data efficiently (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo facilitated the validation of existing patterns and allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the qualitative results, discovering additional insights and relationships that may not have been immediately apparent. By leveraging the capabilities of NVivo, the researcher was able to streamline the analysis process, ultimately saving time while enhancing the rigour of the study.

Formulating Hypotheses

The researcher developed potential hypotheses based on the identified themes and the participants' insights as part of the analysis process. These hypotheses posited that using art and music is crucial in ML2 lessons and that the participants would articulate a greater number of advantages than difficulties associated with incorporating these elements into language learning. Such hypotheses are essential for further exploration and validation in future studies (Miles et al., 2014).

Conclusion of Data Analysis

The data analysis phase of this study was thorough and systematic, employing a combination of manual coding and advanced qualitative analysis software. By utilising thematic analysis and incorporating measures such as member-checking, inter-coder reliability, and triangulation, the researcher ensured the reliability and validity of the findings. The resulting themes not only contributed to a deeper understanding of how art and music can enhance adult language learning but also laid the groundwork for future research endeavours in this area. By capturing the nuanced perspectives of adult learners, this analysis provides useful insights into the practical implications of integrating creative methodologies into ML2 programmes. Future studies could further explore these themes across different linguistic contexts, populations, and educational settings, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of creativity in language education.

Results

This section presents the participants' views on the integration of visual art and music into ML2 classes. The findings aim to address the research question: Does using visual art and music enhance the learning of Maltese as a second language? By analysing the responses from 84 adult learners, the perceived advantages and disadvantages of these creative approaches are explored, providing insights that could inform future ML2 teaching practices.

Using Visual Art to Enhance Adult Maltese as a Second Language Acquisition

The study revealed that many Maltese teachers, primarily trained in teaching Maltese as an L1, were largely unfamiliar with effective methodologies for teaching ML2, particularly as ML2 pedagogy courses have only recently been introduced (Żammit, 2021). Consequently, the participants consistently noted that visual art and music were rarely integrated into their ML2 instruction. However, they expressed important experiences from learning other languages, particularly English, where visual art and music were often used as pedagogical tools.

Perceived Benefits of Visual Art in ML2 Learning

The participants acknowledged the potential of visual art to enhance understanding of cultural aspects and contemporary issues within Maltese society. One participant, an Indian nurse, stated, "If the teacher shows us artistic pictures or takes us to an art exhibition, I can better grasp the cultural and political issues of Maltese society." This sentiment was reinforced by a Burkinabè builder who added, "As third-party nationals learning Maltese for residency, artistic pictures could help us understand Maltese literature, history, culture, and geography, enabling us to learn Maltese like native speakers." Similarly, a Serbian doctor remarked, "Contemporary visual art helps me understand Maltese issues better," demonstrating a collective agreement on the cultural value of integrating visual art into language learning.

Several other participants echoed support for the role of visual art in enhancing cultural understanding. A Mexican graphic designer noted, "Visual art allows us to connect with the local culture on a deeper level; it's not just about words, but also about the stories behind them." A South African educator emphasised this connection to storytelling: "When we analyse a painting or a sculpture, we discuss the emotions and experiences that the artist conveys, which helps me relate to the Maltese culture." Another participant, a Pakistani nurse, commented, "Visual art gives us context; it shows us how the language is used in everyday life and helps us see the world through Maltese eyes."

A Syrian builder noted, "Learning vocabulary through games like Pictionary online, due to COVID-19, is more effective than translation or drilling exercises." This was echoed by a Palestinian plumber who recalled, "My English teacher used visual art to teach adjectives, and I still remember them." Additionally, a Lebanese builder mentioned, "Using visual art helps me recall words more easily; I connect the images with the vocabulary, which makes it stick in my mind." Another participant, a Hungarian student, stated, "Every time I see a painting, I remember the words associated with it; it's like a visual dictionary in my mind."

Furthermore, thirty-two participants believed that culturally relevant visual art could enhance grammatical understanding. A Somali builder commented, “Visual art should reflect our cultural background to make learning vocabulary and grammar more engaging.” This perspective was supported by a German iGaming manager who recalled, “My Arabic teacher used pictures to teach verb conjugations and prepositions.” A Chilean engineer added, “When visual art is related to our experiences, it helps me see how grammar functions in real contexts, making it less abstract and more applicable.” A Brazilian hairdresser noted, “I find that discussing paintings and their meanings allows me to practise complex sentences naturally.”

However, not all participants were convinced of the benefits of using visual art in language learning. A Filipino carer expressed reservations, stating, “While I understand the value of visual art, I often find that it takes time away from direct language practice. We need more conversations, not just discussions about paintings.” A British receptionist concurred, adding, “I appreciate art, but I think it can sometimes distract from the language itself. We need to focus more on speaking and listening than on analysing images.” Another participant, a Ukrainian nurse, mentioned, “Art is great, but it shouldn’t replace learning the basics of the language. We need to ensure that we still cover grammar and vocabulary directly.”

This divergence in opinion highlights the need for a balanced approach. An Italian chef summarised this sentiment well: “Visual art can enhance learning, but it must be carefully integrated into lessons. If it overshadows actual language practice, it might do more harm than good.” A French project manager added, “We have to be careful that visual art complements our learning rather than complicates it. I think some of my classmates could easily get lost in the art discussion instead of focusing on the language itself.”

A Palestinian builder remarked, “Engaging with art definitely helps me express myself in Maltese, but sometimes I worry that I’m focusing too much on the visuals and not enough on the language. I want to make sure I’m getting the grammar right, too.” A Venezuelan maid expressed, “I love drawing while learning new words, but I sometimes feel that we spend too much time on the art part. I want to connect my drawings to language use, but it can be hard to shift back to grammar afterwards.” A Romanian manager noted, “When we create art in class, it feels freeing, but I sometimes miss the structure that traditional lessons provide. We need to find a way to balance creativity with the grammar rules that are essential for speaking well.” A Somali tile layer stated, “I notice that when we do visual storytelling, I remember vocabulary better because it connects with my feelings. But I worry that without a strong focus on sentence structure, I might not use those words correctly in conversations.”

An Indian nurse said, “Art can make learning fun, but I’ve found that if we get too wrapped up in the visuals, we can forget the core language skills we need for daily life. It’s like the colours are beautiful, but I want my sentences to be beautiful too!” A Turkish chef added, “I enjoy using art to express my thoughts, but sometimes I find myself lost in the image rather than learning how to construct a sentence. I hope we can link our creative projects more closely to grammar lessons.” A Serbian doctor shared, “While drawing helps me remember vocabulary, I feel like it often overshadows the deeper grammatical aspects of the language. We need to make sure our art activities serve the purpose of enhancing both vocabulary and syntax.” A Polish receptionist reflected, “When we use art, it can be great for reducing anxiety and fostering a supportive environment, but I sometimes feel that we gloss over the complexity of language. I’d like to see art incorporated in a way that challenges us to dig deeper into the language.” A Czech student expressed, “I appreciate how art can make us more confident, but

I worry that we're missing out on essential language drills. There should be a way to do both—be creative and still practice our grammar and pronunciation rigorously.” An Italian chef remarked, “Art is a wonderful tool, but it shouldn't become a distraction from learning to communicate effectively in Maltese. I want to make sure I'm not just creating, but also communicating clearly.” A Filipino carer noted, “Art helps me remember words because I can visualise them, but sometimes I find that when we focus too much on art, we neglect practising speaking and listening, which are equally important for fluency.” A Swedish iGaming consultant stated, “While I think visual arts are engaging, I sometimes struggle to apply what I've learned in practical conversations. I want our creative projects to lead us back to using the language in a real context.”

While there was a strong belief among the participants regarding the benefits of using visual art in Maltese language learning, the implementation must be thoughtfully considered to ensure it complements essential language skills. Balancing creative engagement with structured language practice appears to be key to optimising the learning experience for diverse adult learners.

Attitudinal Shifts and Engagement through Visual Art

A Serbian surgeon reflected, “Incorporating visual art in our lessons transforms the learning environment. When we analyse paintings, I feel more connected to the language and culture.” A German engineer added, “Visual art creates a vibrant classroom atmosphere. It motivates me to engage more deeply with Maltese, and I feel less intimidated.”

A Filipino carer expressed, “Using visuals makes learning Maltese feel less daunting. I enjoy discussing art, and it allows me to practice the language in a fun way.” A Swedish iGaming consultant echoed this, saying, “Art inspires me! It's exciting to talk about colours and emotions in Maltese. It gives me a new way to express myself.”

A Serbian doctor commented, “When we bring in images of our hometowns, it becomes a way for us to share stories in Maltese. It's personal and meaningful.” A Romanian artist noted, “Describing the art pieces from my country in Maltese not only helps me practise but also allows me to share my culture with classmates.”

A Czech student remarked, “Visual storytelling through photos makes language practice more engaging. It's easier to speak when I'm passionate about the subject.” A Turkish chef added, “I love discussing art in class; it feels like sharing a piece of myself. It fosters connections with my classmates while we learn together.”

A Mexican participant stated, “Presenting our cultural art in class not only helps me practice Maltese but also allows me to teach others about my heritage. It's enriching for everyone.” A Ukrainian doctor suggested, “Describing famous paintings from our countries in Maltese would enhance our vocabulary and understanding of each other's cultures.”

An Italian chef shared, “Art is a powerful way to connect with others. When we talk about art from our backgrounds, it opens up discussions that deepen our learning.” A Brazilian hairdresser added, “By sharing visual art from our cultures, we learn to express complex ideas in Maltese, bridging gaps between our languages and experiences.”

A South African educator noted, “I found that discussing illustrations in Maltese improved my vocabulary. It’s much more effective than just rote learning.” A Hungarian student shared, “Using visual art in language activities has helped me develop my speaking skills. It allows me to describe what I see, which makes learning more practical.”

A German teacher reflected, “Using wordless books and visual artworks fosters creativity in writing. It encourages students to describe emotions and stories, enriching their language skills.” An Italian chef remarked, “My previous experience with art-based learning boosted my confidence in using the language. I could express myself more freely in discussions.”

A French project manager cautioned, “I see value in art, but I worry it diverts our attention from critical grammar and vocabulary practice. We need a balanced approach.” A German engineer added, “Visual art is nice, but I’d prefer more time focused on direct language exercises. I think we can learn a lot from conversation alone.”

A Greek waiter stated, “While I appreciate the effort to use art, sometimes it feels like we’re just talking about the visuals rather than practising the language itself. I’d like more structured learning.” A Bulgarian accountant commented, “Art can be appealing, but I often feel it detracts from our core language goals. More time on conversation would be beneficial.”

A Turkish chef encapsulated the debate by stating, “Visual art is a useful tool, but we need to strike a balance. I enjoy the creative aspects, but I also want to ensure we’re learning the language effectively.” A Pakistani nurse agreed, “Creativity is essential, but it shouldn’t overshadow the need for focused practice. We need to maintain a clear path toward fluency.”

Balancing Cultural Relevance and Vocabulary Development through Art in ML2

In exploring art-driven language exercises, most participants found that using visual art in class positively impacted their vocabulary acquisition and descriptive skills. Seventeen participants agreed that art-based activities helped them learn new words within relevant contexts. For example, a Spanish marketing executive said, “Describing paintings in Maltese pushes me to find the right vocabulary, and it’s more engaging than just reading from a textbook.” Similarly, a South African educator noted, “Talking about famous Maltese landmarks and sculptures made learning more interesting and helped me remember specific words better.”

Another group of participants felt that art discussions helped them engage with both language and culture. A Korean housewife shared, “When we discuss Maltese art, I feel like I’m connecting with the culture, which motivates me to learn the language more deeply.” A Ukrainian designer added, “Learning vocabulary through art also helps me understand how people here think and express themselves. It adds an extra layer to the learning process.”

However, a few participants raised concerns regarding the relevance of culturally specific art. A Turkish chef mentioned, “Some of the art we study feels disconnected from my own experience, making it harder to relate and engage with the language.” A British marketing executive also remarked, “I enjoy the art discussions, but I’d prefer if we looked at more universal pieces or included art from our own cultures to make it feel more relatable.”

In response, some participants suggested balancing Maltese and international artwork. A Brazilian hairdresser suggested, “I think if we combined local art with some global or personal pieces, it would create a balance that everyone can appreciate.” This balance was echoed by a Japanese photographer who said, “Mixing Maltese art with well-known global works could make the exercises both enriching and more inclusive.”

Challenges in Integrating Visual Art in ML2 Classes

Thirteen participants raised various challenges associated with using visual art in ML2 classrooms, often noting how it could divert attention from language acquisition. One Somali builder observed, “Abstract art is too distracting. I end up focusing on colours and shapes rather than the words we’re supposed to be learning.” A Palestinian plumber agreed, explaining, “When I look at a painting, my mind starts drifting to memories of my own culture, which pulls me away from learning Maltese.” Another student, an Italian shop assistant, added, “Sometimes I get so wrapped up in interpreting the image that I forget we’re in a language class. I lose track of the Maltese words we’re supposed to be learning.” This reaction underscores the potential for culturally dissonant or abstract visuals to lead to off-topic associations, detracting from structured language learning.

Many participants also commented on the limited vocabulary benefits of engaging with certain artworks. An Indian nurse mentioned, “Sometimes the images only prompt us to describe a few things, so I feel like I’m not learning enough new words.” A Syrian baker shared a similar perspective, saying, “We’re supposed to be practising a wide range of vocabulary, but sometimes we just end up describing one or two parts of the painting.” This sentiment was echoed by a Bulgarian accountant who added, “It’s like my attention goes to the background details instead of focusing on our lesson.” For these learners, visual art alone did not always provide sufficient or varied vocabulary exposure. A Polish receptionist suggested, “If we used images with more real-life objects, maybe it would be easier to learn words that are useful in everyday situations.”

Twenty-one participants expressed frustration over a lack of clear connections between visual prompts and language learning objectives. A Ukrainian doctor remarked, “I appreciate art, but sometimes it feels like we’re looking at paintings without understanding how it helps us speak better.” Similarly, an Italian chef stated, “When the artwork isn’t directly tied to our vocabulary, it feels like a distraction.” A Greek accountant added, “I often feel confused about why we’re using a particular image—if it doesn’t clearly connect to our lesson, I feel like my time could be better spent.” These comments suggest that the participants value clarity and focus, particularly when class time is limited, and may feel less engaged when visual art does not directly support language objectives.

Thirty-four participants also highlighted how unfamiliar or culturally specific art could be alienating, leading to decreased engagement. A British receptionist shared, “If the art doesn’t make sense to me, I struggle to connect with it or the lesson.” Another participant, a nurse from India agreed, by saying, “When the art doesn’t resonate with my experiences, I find it hard to connect with the lesson, and it slows my learning.” A Czech student voiced similar concerns, stating, “Certain artworks are too foreign to me, and I get frustrated because I don’t know how to respond.” For these students, unfamiliar art forms can create a barrier, making the language-

learning environment feel less inclusive. A German student further noted, “If we used art from different cultures, it might help all of us feel more included and connected to what we’re learning.”

Finally, fifteen participants pointed out that excessive focus on visual art could reduce the time for practical language exercises. A Nigerian carpenter noted, “Sometimes I feel like we spend more time analysing the art than practising Maltese.” A Hungarian mechanic expressed similar concerns, remarking, “We need more direct language practice, not just art discussions.” A Greek pharmacist added, “I come to class hoping to practice speaking, but some days it feels like the focus is more on art than language.” These learners sought more balance between creative activities and structured language practice, emphasising a desire for more time spent on direct language learning.

The findings indicate that while visual art has potential as a language-learning tool in ML2 classes, it can pose significant challenges if not integrated thoughtfully. The participants emphasised the need for culturally resonant visuals, structured prompts that relate directly to language objectives, and a balanced focus on vocabulary and grammar. By addressing these concerns, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment, enabling visual art to enhance language acquisition without overshadowing core language objectives.

Findings Concerning the Use of Music in ML2 classes

The Participants’ Opinions about the Cognitive Benefits of Music in ML2

A Brazilian hairdresser expressed, “When I listen to Maltese songs, the words stick in my mind much better. The rhythm helps me recall vocabulary quickly when I need to use it.” Another participant, a Ukrainian engineer, countered, “I appreciate music, but I find that while it helps with memorising words, it doesn’t always translate to understanding complex grammar. I still struggle with sentence structure.” A Palestinian builder added, “Songs give me a way to practice pronunciation, but I sometimes feel that I’m just memorising lyrics without really learning how to construct sentences properly.”

A South African educator shared, “Singing in class lowers my anxiety and makes me feel more comfortable speaking in Maltese. It’s like I can express myself without fear.” However, a Polish receptionist noted, “If the music we use doesn’t resonate with me culturally, it can make me feel even more stressed. I need to connect with the content to feel at ease.” A Nigerian nurse reflected, “I love when we incorporate music because it makes learning more enjoyable, but I still worry that it might distract us from actually speaking and practising the language.”

A Filipino carer commented, “Singing really helps me get the hang of how Maltese sounds. I can imitate the way native speakers pronounce words, which has improved my accent.” In contrast, a Turkish chef said, “I feel like focusing too much on melody can make it hard to master pronunciation, especially in languages where tone matters. I’d rather work on rhythm without the added distraction of a catchy tune.” A Romanian project manager agreed, stating, “While I enjoy music, I think it’s important to also have direct exercises focused on phonetics. That way, we can ensure we’re getting the pronunciation right.”

A Mexican graphic designer remarked, “Group activities involving music create a sense of unity in our class. It encourages us to support each other and feel more confident speaking Maltese.” However, a Czech student expressed, “Not everyone enjoys singing or performing in front of others. I think we should have more varied activities that don’t put anyone on the spot.” A Serbian doctor noted, “I appreciate the social aspect of music in the classroom, but sometimes I wish we could focus on conversations without the musical element. It can feel a bit forced at times.”

A Venezuelan maid suggested, “Integrating music with grammar lessons could be a fun way to learn. If we could sing about verb tenses, it might make them easier to remember.” Conversely, a Somali tile layer remarked, “While music is helpful, I think we need a balance. Sometimes we need to focus on structured exercises to really grasp the rules.” A Turkish chef added, “I enjoy using music, but we shouldn’t forget that grammar is crucial for fluency. We need both to communicate effectively.”

Musical Training and Brain Function

A Brazilian musician stated, “After years of playing piano, I’ve noticed that I’m able to pick up new languages much more easily. It’s almost like my brain is trained to hear and process different sounds in a way that makes language learning smoother.” A German student echoed this sentiment, saying, “I’ve been playing the violin since I was young, and I’ve realised that I can understand foreign accents and intonation patterns with less effort than others.”

On the other hand, a French engineer shared, “I’m not sure I agree. I play music, but I don’t feel like it has changed the way I process language. I still struggle with hearing individual sounds in languages like Maltese.” A Spanish marketing executive added, “I’ve been into music for years, but I still find some languages, especially the tonal ones, quite hard to grasp, no matter how much music I listen to.”

Speech Segmentation and Phonological Awareness

An Italian chef commented, “Learning languages feels easier for me because I can break down sounds better. My music training helps me listen for the little details, like stress or vowel sounds, that others might miss.” A Norwegian teacher added, “After taking music lessons, I noticed that I can now better identify where words start and end when I listen to Maltese, which I used to struggle with before.”

Conversely, a Pakistani nurse noted, “I’ve never had music training, and I find speech segmentation to be one of the hardest parts of language learning. I wonder if the musical training would help me with that.” A Serbian accountant expressed, “I feel that no matter how much music training I have, speech segmentation in Maltese is a challenge. Perhaps it’s just the complexity of the language itself.”

Neurological Adaptations to Pitch and Tonal Languages

A Filipino student shared, “I’ve always played the guitar, and when I started learning Mandarin, I found it a bit easier to understand pitch changes. It’s like my ear had already been tuned to differentiate subtle tonal shifts, even though the language is completely new to me.” A Ukrainian doctor added, “I studied music as a child, and I’ve noticed that I have a better grasp of tonal languages like Mandarin. It’s almost like my brain is automatically processing pitch in a way that helps me understand the language better.”

In contrast, a Hungarian project manager said, “I don’t think my musical background helped me much with tonal languages. It’s still confusing, especially when pitch changes actually alter the meaning of words. I wish it were that simple.” A Czech student also noted, “I can appreciate the theory that musical training helps with tonal languages, but when I hear those tonal shifts in languages like Chinese, it feels like I’m hearing noise, not something meaningful.”

Enhanced Auditory Processing and L2 Acquisition

A Swedish iGaming consultant observed, “Having a background in music has made it easier for me to pick up languages. My ear is fine-tuned to listen for subtle nuances in pronunciation and intonation that make language learning much more intuitive for me.” A Mexican artist remarked, “The way I process sounds, especially in noisy environments, is definitely better thanks to my music training. I can pick out words or intonations much more easily, which has helped me understand and learn new languages faster.”

However, a Romanian project manager offered a different view: “I’ve played the drums for years, but when I’m learning a new language, I don’t see a significant difference in how I hear the sounds. I think it still takes a lot of effort to process and understand speech, no matter my musical training.” A Greek student agreed, saying, “I’m not sure I notice a big change in my ability to process speech sounds despite having a lot of experience with music. It’s helpful, but not as impactful as some people suggest.”

Attitudinal Shifts and Engagement through Music

A Spanish marketing executive remarked, “Music makes everything feel more vibrant in class. When we learn Maltese through songs, I feel a stronger connection to the language.” A Filipino nurse added, “Listening to Maltese music helps me relax and enjoy the learning process. It transforms the classroom into a lively space.”

A Brazilian musician stated, “Integrating music into our lessons has made learning Maltese so much more enjoyable. It feels like we’re having fun rather than studying!” A Serbian teacher echoed this sentiment, saying, “When we sing, I notice that I remember words and phrases much better. Music has a magical way of embedding the language in my mind.”

Facilitating Discussions in ML2 Classes

A Nigerian doctor shared, “Using songs in class not only helps me practice pronunciation but also gives us a topic to discuss together. It fosters conversations about culture and meaning.” A Pakistani student noted, “When we analyse song lyrics in Maltese, it opens up rich discussions. We share our interpretations and feelings, which makes the language feel more alive.”

A Czech student remarked, “Music is a great icebreaker. It brings us together and encourages us to speak Maltese about something we all enjoy.” A Turkish chef added, “Discussing the lyrics of Maltese songs gives us a chance to express our thoughts and emotions in the language. It feels meaningful and personal.”

Integrating Cultural Music for Intercultural Learning

A Ukrainian doctor suggested, “Listening to traditional Maltese music during lessons connects us to the culture. It allows us to learn about local traditions while practising the language.” An Italian chef stated, “Sharing music from our home countries alongside Maltese songs creates a rich tapestry of cultural exchange. It helps us learn about each other while improving our language skills.”

A Romanian project manager expressed, “When we bring our favourite songs into the classroom, it enriches the learning experience. It’s fascinating to see how music reflects our different backgrounds.” A Greek student added, “Integrating cultural music makes learning more enjoyable. It helps us find common ground while practising Maltese.”

Experiences of Skill Development through Music

A German teacher noted, “Singing in class has significantly improved my pronunciation and listening skills. It’s a fun way to get used to the sounds of the language.” A Hungarian accountant shared, “I used to struggle with vocabulary, but learning through songs has made it much easier to remember words. The melodies help me recall phrases naturally.”

An Indian engineer remarked, “Participating in music-based activities has boosted my confidence in speaking Maltese. I feel more comfortable expressing myself when I can sing or rap.” A Serbian surgeon stated, “Incorporating music into our lessons has helped me understand the rhythm and flow of the language, which enhances my fluency.”

Skepticism About the Effectiveness of Music

A French engineer voiced concern, “While I enjoy music, I sometimes feel it distracts us from learning the grammar and structure of Maltese. We need a clearer focus on the basics.” A Romanian participant noted, “I appreciate the effort to use music, but sometimes I wonder if it really aids our language learning or if it’s just entertainment.”

A Turkish chef added, “Music is nice, but I’d prefer more practical exercises that focus directly on speaking and writing. We need to balance fun with effective learning strategies.” A Greek student remarked, “I enjoy singing, but I often find that I need more structured lessons to really grasp the language. Sometimes, it feels like we’re just having fun without clear objectives.”

Balancing Creativity and Structure

A Pakistani nurse summarised the discussion by saying, “Music is a fantastic tool, but it has to be integrated thoughtfully. We need to ensure that it supports our learning goals rather than distracts from them.” A Nigerian doctor agreed, “We need the excitement of music, but we also need to keep our focus on achieving fluency. A balanced approach will help us succeed.”

Cultural Relevance and Personal Connection to Music

In the findings, the majority of the participants expressed that music significantly reduced their anxiety and facilitated a more engaging language-learning environment. Specifically, 18 participants shared that incorporating music into language classes helped them feel more comfortable and willing to speak, even in situations where they might otherwise feel self-conscious. A Brazilian hairdresser noted, “When we play background music during our lessons, it’s like my anxiety fades away. I’m less worried about making mistakes, and I feel more comfortable participating.” This sentiment was echoed by a Japanese marketing professional, who shared, “Singing in class feels strange at first, but it quickly puts me at ease. I feel more connected to my classmates and less afraid to speak up in a new language.”

Similarly, a Spanish marketing executive commented, “I’ve always been shy about speaking in a foreign language, but the music creates a welcoming atmosphere. Somehow, it just feels easier to express myself.” A Norwegian engineer echoed this sentiment, stating, “Rhythmic exercises and music-based games really help me loosen up and enjoy learning, rather than stressing over every little mistake.”

However, 22 participants expressed mixed feelings about the types of music used in class, specifically noting the importance of cultural relevance for emotional engagement. While some felt that traditional Maltese music enhanced their connection to the language, others believed that using culturally familiar music would make learning even more effective. A Pakistani nurse mentioned, “Music makes learning Maltese fun, but sometimes the songs we listen to don’t feel relevant to me. I wish we could use music that reflects my cultural background or the languages I already know.” Similarly, a German student added, “The Maltese songs are beautiful, but I don’t always feel a connection to them. When I listen to music from my culture, I feel more relaxed and open, so maybe that would work better in language class too.”

Conversely, 28 participants reported that they enjoyed the cultural novelty of Maltese music, as it deepened their immersion in the language. An American software developer commented, “I enjoy listening to Maltese folk music because it’s new and different. It gives me a sense of the culture and makes the learning experience more memorable.” This sentiment aligns with that of a Mexican chef, who stated, “It’s refreshing to step outside my own culture through

music. Even if it's unfamiliar, it gives me an emotional connection to the language and its people."

Music's Role in Confidence-Building and Emotional Engagement

Beyond reducing anxiety, 16 participants highlighted that music created a positive emotional association with the language, which they felt was critical for retention and motivation. A Ukrainian doctor observed, "When we sing songs together in Maltese, I feel part of a group, and my confidence grows. I think music connects us emotionally, which makes me care more about learning the language." Similarly, a Portuguese teacher explained, "Music helps me remember phrases better because there's an emotional association. I feel more attached to the language because of the songs we learn."

In contrast, 35 participants indicated that while music was enjoyable, it did not necessarily reduce their anxiety or improve their confidence in speaking. A Greek accountant commented, "Music can be enjoyable, but it doesn't really change my anxiety. I still feel nervous speaking in front of others, with or without the music." This view was shared by a Czech engineer who remarked, "I think music adds to the class, but it doesn't reduce my worry about making mistakes. For me, it's more about getting comfortable through practice, not necessarily the music."

Balance Between Music and Practical Language Practice

Twenty-one participants emphasised the need for a balance between music-based activities and more structured language practice. They expressed that while music lowered their anxiety, it needed to be integrated with focused language exercises to maintain effectiveness. A Turkish chef mentioned, "While music relaxes me, I feel we still need enough time for structured practice. Music alone won't teach us how to speak confidently in real-life situations." Similarly, an Italian salesman commented, "Music is a wonderful icebreaker, but we need to balance it with conversation practice. It's only part of the solution to reducing anxiety."

A Filipino carer, however, felt differently, sharing, "I find that I learn better when I'm emotionally engaged, and music keeps me interested and invested. I believe it builds my confidence over time." A German teacher commented, "When I'm nervous about speaking, the music helps take the edge off, so I focus less on perfection and more on just expressing myself. It's an important first step to gaining confidence."

Contrasting Views on Music's Effectiveness

Fourteen participants reported feeling that music in the classroom was either distracting or unrelated to their language-learning goals. A Norwegian engineer stated, "Music can be a distraction for me. I appreciate that it helps others relax, but I'd rather have more direct language practice without it." A Hungarian student, on the other hand, felt music was essential: "If we didn't have music, I think I'd feel more tense and self-conscious. It brings a sense of calm to the whole room, which makes learning easier."

A French project manager summarised the debate, saying, “Music has a place in language learning, but it works differently for everyone. For some of us, it lowers anxiety and boosts enjoyment; for others, it can be distracting. I think finding a balance is key.” This sentiment reflects a broader perspective that while music can help create a positive learning environment, individual preferences play a significant role.

These findings indicate that while most participants found music beneficial for creating a supportive and enjoyable learning environment, preferences varied regarding music type, cultural relevance, and its role in language instruction. This suggests that although music can lower affective barriers and foster a more positive attitude towards language learning, individual learner needs and backgrounds should be considered when designing music-integrated language programmes.

Impact of Musical Proficiency on Language Learning

A Russian musician noted, “I’ve always found that my background in music makes it easier to pick up the sounds of Maltese. I can hear the nuances in pronunciation and intonation that others might miss.” A Brazilian musician echoed this sentiment, stating, “Having studied music for years, I can tell that my ear for rhythm helps me grasp the flow of Maltese sentences. It’s like the language has a musical quality that I can tap into.”

Conversely, a Romanian accountant shared, “While I enjoy music, I didn’t find it made a significant difference in my ability to learn Maltese. I think more structured language practice is essential.” A Turkish chef added, “I appreciate the role of music, but I often feel that without focused grammar lessons, it’s hard to connect the dots in terms of language acquisition.”

Improved Auditory Discrimination and Phonetic Sensitivity

A Norwegian software developer stated, “When we sing in class, I notice I can mimic the pronunciation more accurately. It’s as if the music training I had as a child has conditioned my ear for different sounds.” A Filipino carer remarked, “Music helps me catch the subtleties of the language, especially the stress patterns. I feel like I can understand conversations better after we’ve practised with songs.”

However, a Czech student expressed scepticism, saying, “I don’t have a musical background, and I sometimes struggle with distinguishing sounds in Maltese. I think music may help some, but it isn’t a magic solution for everyone.” A Serbian surgeon added, “While I see the potential in combining music with language learning, I find that relying solely on it can overlook the fundamental aspects of language that need direct attention.”

Cognitive Flexibility and Language Processing

A Spanish marketing executive reflected, “Learning music has trained my brain to be more flexible, which I find important when switching between Maltese and my native language. It’s like my mind is always in tune, ready to adapt.” A Mexican chef mentioned, “When we use

music in class to learn vocabulary, I notice that I can remember words better. It's easier to recall them when they're tied to a melody."

In contrast, a Greek waiter commented, "I see the benefits of music in language learning, but I wish we spent more time on practical speaking exercises. Sometimes, the music feels like a distraction rather than an aid." A Pakistani housewife added, "I enjoy singing in class, but I feel that without more emphasis on speaking and writing, I'm not making as much progress in actually using the language."

Background Noise and Speech Intelligibility

A Russian surgeon shared, "In busy settings, I find that my musical training helps me pick up on conversations, even with distractions around. It's almost like I'm trained to filter out the noise." A Hungarian accountant reflected, "I can appreciate that musical training might help in understanding speech better, but I personally struggle in noisy environments regardless of music."

A Turkish chef noted, "When we practice speaking in noisy classrooms, I can sometimes follow better when there's music involved. It sets a rhythm that helps me focus." Meanwhile, a French engineer stated, "For me, the music doesn't help in noisy situations; I just need to concentrate harder. I wonder if music is really the key for everyone, especially in less structured environments."

The Role of Musical Training in Memory, Rhythm, and Lexical Skill

In the findings, a significant number of participants reported that musical training had positively impacted their memory, rhythm, and ability to learn vocabulary in Maltese. Specifically, 20 participants felt that their background in music helped them retain new words and sentence structures more effectively. An Italian pianist observed, "I find that the rhythm of music helps me remember Maltese words more clearly. It's like each word has its own melody that makes it stick in my mind." Similarly, a Polish language enthusiast noted, "My background in music seems to make it easier to recall vocabulary. The rhythm and flow of language come naturally, almost like I'm learning a song instead of a new set of words."

Enhanced Rhythm and Intonation Skills

Another common theme was the role of rhythm in improving pronunciation and intonation, reported by 26 participants who believed that their musical experience helped them adopt more natural-sounding accents in Maltese. A Brazilian musician shared, "Learning songs in Maltese has made it easier to pick up on the natural rhythm and stress in the language. I feel I can speak with more fluency because I'm attuned to the beats and stresses." A Bulgarian cellist echoed this sentiment, stating, "My sense of rhythm from music translates to language learning. I can catch the rhythm of sentences, which helps me sound less robotic and more like a native speaker."

Improved Phonological and Working Memory

Twenty-four participants described how musical training supported their memory, especially in retaining longer phrases and grammatical structures. A German violinist remarked, “Music uniquely trains your memory. I find myself able to remember complete phrases in Maltese after hearing them just a few times as if I’m mentally ‘storing’ them like I would a musical passage.” A Russian opera singer also commented on the memory-enhancing effects, saying, “When I repeat phrases in Maltese, it’s like practising vocal exercises; I’m able to recall them with more accuracy and less hesitation, which I think is because of my experience with music.”

Enhanced Stress and Lexical Patterns

Thirty-one participants indicated that their musical training improved their perception of stress and lexical patterns in Maltese, which they felt led to better fluency and grammatical accuracy. A French guitarist shared, “I can hear and reproduce the stress in Maltese words much more clearly, which helps me avoid awkward mistakes and sound more fluent.” Another participant, a Turkish chef, observed, “Playing percussion as a hobby has trained me to listen for emphasis, and that skill is surprisingly helpful in picking up on the natural stresses in Maltese. It makes speaking easier, and I think my sentences sound more accurate.”

Diverse Experiences and Mixed Results

However, 16 participants without extensive musical training expressed that while they saw value in music for learning vocabulary, they did not experience the same ease with rhythm or stress patterns. A Norwegian engineer noted, “Music is fun for learning vocabulary, but I don’t think it helps me with pronunciation or grammar as much as my musically trained classmates seem to benefit.” Similarly, a German teacher added, “I enjoy the music, but I don’t feel it affects my pronunciation. For me, it’s more about repetition than rhythm.”

Conversely, a small group of participants (14 participants) felt that music could even be a distraction when focusing on language structure. A Spanish marketing executive commented, “While I see the benefits, sometimes I feel that focusing on rhythm and melody takes my attention away from grammar. I find it hard to balance both.” A Greek accountant shared, “I appreciate the memory boost music provides, but I’m unsure it directly impacts my ability to understand grammar. I would rather focus on sentence structure through traditional exercises.”

Balance Between Music and Language Instruction

Forty-two participants emphasised the need for a balanced integration of music with other instructional methods, acknowledging its benefits for memory and pronunciation but also underscoring the importance of explicit grammar practice. A Portuguese clarinettist remarked, “Music gives me a better sense of rhythm and pronunciation, but I think it’s essential to have grammar-focused sessions, too. Music alone doesn’t cover all aspects of language learning.” An American drummer agreed, “Music helps me remember words and sentences easily, but grammar still requires a lot of work. A mix of both would be ideal.”

These findings indicate that while music can enhance memory, rhythm, and pronunciation in SLA, its effects vary based on individual learner backgrounds and preferences. The results suggest that incorporating music into language learning may be particularly beneficial for auditory memory and stress perception. However, structured grammar exercises are also necessary for a comprehensive learning approach. This nuanced understanding can guide educators in creating a balanced language curriculum that leverages the strengths of musical training while addressing the diverse needs of adult language learners.

Musical Training for Improving Auditory Discrimination and Memory

The participants in this study expressed varied perspectives on the application of musical training in ML2, reflecting both alignment with and deviations from the existing literature. Ten participants strongly supported the use of music as a tool for auditory discrimination, often citing its impact on accent and pronunciation. For example, a German iGaming manager shared, “I find that rhythm-based music exercises really help me catch on to the intonation and flow of Maltese sentences. It’s like I’m learning to speak in the same musical rhythm.” Similarly, a French engineer noted, “Using songs or chants with specific stress patterns lets me internalise where the emphasis should fall in Maltese, making it easier to mimic native speakers.”

Twenty-four participants emphasised the cognitive and mnemonic benefits of musical training, aligning with the studies that link music to improved memory retention and vocabulary recall. For instance, a Japanese medical student commented, “The repetition and melody in songs help me remember words. I still remember the vocabulary from songs we practised months ago.” Another participant, a Russian musician, agreed, stating, “Music gives me a mental ‘anchor’ to remember phrases and structures more effectively.” These insights reinforce the idea that rhythm and melody can significantly aid in the retention of new vocabulary and structures, particularly for those struggling with memory aspects of Maltese language learning.

However, not all participants shared the same enthusiasm for music-based methods. Five participants, including a Bulgarian accountant, expressed reservations, particularly when it came to applying musical training to complex grammatical learning. The Bulgarian accountant remarked, “Music helps me remember words and sounds, but when it comes to grammar, I don’t see a strong connection.” This view aligns with a subset of studies suggesting that while music training aids phonological and lexical skills, its impact on syntactic mastery is less clear. A Greek legal consultant added, “Learning rhythm and sounds through music is useful, but it doesn’t help as much when I’m trying to understand complex sentence structures in Maltese.”

Furthermore, six participants highlighted the importance of tailoring musical activities to individual learning preferences and experience levels. A Norwegian software developer noted, “As someone with a background in music, I benefit from more complex rhythm exercises, while my colleagues who aren’t musical prefer simpler listening activities.” Another participant, a Spanish marketing executive, suggested, “It would be helpful if we could choose activities based on our comfort level with music. Some people connect more with rhythm, while others benefit from focused listening.” These insights suggest that music-based SLA interventions should be flexible, allowing learners with varying musical experiences to engage in ways that best support their individual learning needs.

Finally, the findings underscored the need for a balanced approach to integrating music into SLA. A Turkish chef summarised this view, stating, “I think music is a great tool, but it has to be used alongside traditional language learning methods. Music adds an enjoyable layer, but we still need structured lessons on grammar and syntax.” This view reflects a consensus among the participants that, while music offers useful auditory and mnemonic benefits, it should complement rather than replace conventional language instruction, particularly for adult learners with diverse learning needs and backgrounds.

These findings reveal a general agreement on the benefits of musical training for improving auditory discrimination and memory in SLA. However, the participants also highlighted the limitations of music for complex grammar acquisition and emphasised the need for adaptable music-based approaches to meet individual learning preferences. These insights contribute to a nuanced understanding of how musical training can enhance language learning for adult learners, particularly those acquiring ML2.

The Role of Music-Based Activities in Phonetic Reinforcement

The study's findings suggest that music-based activities, particularly those involving repetition and familiar melodies, offer important support for phonetic learning in SLA, while also revealing varied perspectives on the practical applications of these methods. Many participants agreed that repetitive melodies and chants help reinforce pronunciation and encourage a more natural-sounding intonation in Maltese. For example, a Swedish business analyst remarked, “Using familiar songs makes pronunciation practice easier. I feel like I’m mimicking the sounds without worrying too much about getting it exactly right.” Similarly, a Spanish marketing executive observed, “Chants with rhythmic repetition help me practice sounds and stress patterns naturally, which gives me more confidence when I speak.”

This sense of ease was echoed by seven other participants who felt that music created a more relaxed environment for phonetic practice. A Brazilian musician noted, “When we sing or chant in class, I’m less self-conscious. It doesn’t feel like formal speaking practice, so I’m willing to try sounds I’d normally find difficult.” This aligns with previous research suggesting that familiar melodies lower the anxiety typically associated with language practice, allowing learners to experiment with intonation and pronunciation in a supportive, low-pressure setting.

However, some participants emphasised that music-based activities should not be limited to repetition alone but should incorporate practical language exercises to foster deeper learning. For instance, a German architect suggested, “While singing along to melodies helps with pronunciation, it would be even more effective if we followed up with practical speaking activities to apply what we learn.” A Turkish chef added, “Singing alone isn’t enough to help me remember the words. After the songs, I’d like to practice using those words in sentences, so I can understand their meaning better.” These comments underscore the value of integrating music with traditional speaking exercises to ensure that phonetic learning transitions into meaningful language use.

Additionally, nineteen participants noted that cultural familiarity with the music played a role in their comfort and engagement with music-based SLA activities. A German engineer commented, “When we listen to Maltese folk music, I feel more connected to the culture, which

makes me want to learn the language better.” Conversely, a Japanese designer noted, “It’s harder to follow songs in styles I’m not used to, so I think a mix of familiar international tunes would help bridge that gap for learners from different backgrounds.” These insights reflect the need to consider cultural familiarity when selecting music for SLA instruction, as both familiar and culturally relevant music can facilitate engagement and motivation.

Finally, several participants suggested that, while music is useful for pronunciation, its benefits could extend further with a well-rounded approach. A Japanese medical student summarised, “I think music is great for sounds and rhythm, but it should be part of a mix. We need songs for pronunciation, but also structured conversation practice and grammar to really learn Maltese.” This sentiment highlights a consensus that music-based activities serve as an engaging phonetic tool but should ideally be combined with more comprehensive language exercises.

These findings reveal a broad support for the use of music-based activities in SLA, especially for reinforcing phonetic skills and reducing anxiety in pronunciation practice. The participants also indicated a preference for diverse and culturally relevant music selections, as well as a need for structured speaking practice to supplement music-based phonetic exercises. The insights from this study suggest that music offers unique benefits in SLA but works best when integrated into a balanced, culturally aware language curriculum.

Expanding Linguistic and Cultural Fluency Through Art, Music, and Role-Play in

ML2

The participants responded positively to the integration of visual art, music, and role-play activities in ML2, highlighting the multidimensional benefits these approaches offer to language learning. A common theme across responses was the enhanced engagement and creativity that art and music introduced into role-playing scenarios, making language practice both more memorable and less intimidating.

Thirty-six participants commented that the use of visual art as part of role-play exercises enriched their vocabulary by encouraging descriptive language. A Spanish marketing executive noted, “When we use paintings as part of role-play, I get to describe things in new ways, exploring colours, textures, and shapes. It makes vocabulary practice feel more natural and connected to the real world.” Similarly, a Japanese designer remarked, “Imagining myself in a painting or a scene helps me describe and feel the language instead of just memorising words.”

Others echoed these sentiments, emphasising how art provided not only linguistic but also cultural insight. A Turkish chef expressed, “Describing famous artworks from different cultures helped me connect more with the language and understand how to speak about art in a meaningful way.” This suggests that visual art can offer a bridge between language and cultural understanding, deepening learners’ connection to both the target language and its cultural nuances.

The addition of music to role-play also received praise, particularly for its ability to make language practice feel less intimidating. An Russian musician explained, “Role-play with

music gives us a rhythm to follow; it helps me stay in character and speak more confidently.” This sentiment was echoed by a Polish software engineer, who found that music created “a relaxed environment where pronunciation feels less scary.” Eight participants agreed that incorporating music allowed them to experiment with language more fluidly and enjoyably, reducing anxiety around pronunciation and intonation.

On the other hand, a few participants raised concerns about potential cultural disconnects. A Romanian accountant noted, “Sometimes the art or music chosen doesn’t resonate with me culturally, so I feel a bit out of place in the role-play.” Similarly, a Pakistani nurse suggested that “balancing familiar and unfamiliar music would help all learners feel more included.” These remarks highlight the need for a culturally adaptable approach that resonates with a diverse classroom.

Consequently, the integration of visual art, music, and drama in SLA role-play was found to foster creativity, engagement, and cultural empathy, all of which contribute to a richer and more effective language-learning experience. Nonetheless, the participants’ reflections indicate the importance of adapting materials to reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners to ensure accessibility and inclusivity in SLA classrooms.

Creative Writing in SLA: Enhancing Grammar and Vocabulary through Art and

Music

Creative writing exercises that incorporate visual art and music were widely regarded by the participants as powerful tools for practising grammar and vocabulary in personally meaningful ways. Seventeen participants noted that writing prompts inspired by visual art allowed them to connect with the language on a sensory and emotional level. A French business student shared, “Describing a painting helped me find new adjectives in my target language. It felt like I was connecting colour and shape to words in a way that made them easier to remember.” Similarly, a Japanese art enthusiast said, “Writing about art scenes gave me a chance to express my observations, which naturally encouraged me to use complex sentence structures.”

Likewise, music-based creative writing tasks were appreciated by many participants for enhancing their sense of rhythm and fluidity in writing. A Brazilian musician stated, “Writing about the imagery I felt while listening to a traditional folk song helped me understand how sentence flow in the language could be influenced by rhythm.” An Italian poet-in-training agreed, saying, “The rhythm of a song can guide you on how sentences might flow together more naturally. It’s like writing with the sound of the language in my head.”

The participants also discussed how these creative writing exercises affected their engagement. Twenty-three participants felt that prompts related to personal or cultural art resonated deeply, making grammar and vocabulary exercises feel “less like assignments” and more like opportunities to express personal insights. As a Turkish chef noted, “Writing about art that felt close to me allowed me to explore the language without fear of making mistakes like it was my own story in a new language.” This enthusiasm helped them build confidence in experimenting with language, enhancing retention.

However, some participants echoed concerns about balancing creativity with grammatical precision. A Chilean engineer noted, “When I focus too much on the story, I sometimes lose sight of correct verb tenses,” suggesting that open-ended prompts could occasionally overshadow linguistic goals. A German teacher added, “While the art and music themes are engaging, specific instructions are needed to keep focus on learning objectives.”

In response to these mixed views, instructors recommended a balance: exercises could encourage creative expressions but also contain explicit prompts on language use. A Finnish educator suggested, “We could ask students to use specific grammatical structures, like the past tense when describing events in a painting. This would keep the activity creative but purposeful.”

These findings suggest that incorporating art and music in creative writing tasks effectively enhances language acquisition by offering learners sensory, personal, and emotional connections to language. Structured prompts that emphasise target language skills can support these benefits, ensuring learners experience engagement and skill development.

Challenges in Integrating Music in ML2 Classes

While many participants acknowledged the positive impact of music on learning, a significant number expressed concerns about its potential drawbacks in ML2 classes. A Polish receptionist shared, “Sometimes the music can be too loud or distracting. When I’m trying to learn new vocabulary, I find it hard to concentrate with a song playing in the background.” This sentiment was echoed by a Syrian builder, who remarked, “I love music, but if it’s playing while I’m trying to write or speak, I can’t focus on forming sentences in Maltese.” He further explained, “It’s like trying to think with a party going on in my head!”

The participants also raised concerns about the selection of music used in the classroom. A Romanian manager stated, “Not all songs are appropriate for language learning. Some have complicated lyrics that make it difficult to understand the vocabulary we need.” A German student added, “Using songs with fast tempos or slang can confuse us. I prefer slower songs that I can actually learn from.” A Mexican chef noted, “It can be frustrating when we’re using music that has too many cultural references I don’t get, so I miss out on the learning.”

Some participants felt that music could sometimes overshadow the actual language instruction. A Somali tile layer expressed, “We often spend too much time listening to songs instead of practising speaking. I want to learn Maltese, not just sing along.” A Czech student agreed, saying, “We could use that time to have more conversations or grammar exercises instead of just listening to music.” He added, “I’d rather have a structured lesson than a musical interlude that doesn’t really help me learn.”

Furthermore, a few participants mentioned the emotional impact of music, noting that not all songs evoke positive feelings. A Libyan manager explained, “If a song reminds me of a sad time in my life, it can completely take me out of the lesson. I start thinking about my feelings instead of focusing on the language.” A Turkish chef added, “I’ve had experiences where the songs chosen made me feel anxious rather than relaxed, which is the opposite of what we need

for effective learning.” A Filipino carer echoed this, saying, “If the song has negative vibes, it’s hard for me to concentrate on the lesson content.”

Another concern highlighted was the potential for misunderstandings in pronunciation and vocabulary. A Serbian surgeon pointed out, “Sometimes the lyrics are mispronounced or incorrect, and if we learn from those songs, it sticks with us. I worry that I’ll remember the wrong pronunciation.” A Palestinian builder echoed this concern, stating, “If we’re learning from music, I want to make sure it’s accurate. Otherwise, we might end up speaking incorrectly.” He cautioned, “Learning from a song can be like learning from a joke — it’s all fun until you get the punchline wrong!”

Furthermore, some participants felt that the use of music could lead to boredom if not tailored to their preferences. An Italian chef mentioned, “If the teacher chooses songs that I don’t like, it can make the lesson dull. I lose interest quickly when the music doesn’t resonate with me.” A Filipino carer added, “I think music is great, but if it’s outdated or too familiar, it doesn’t capture my attention. We need fresh and engaging options.” A Kenyan nun remarked, “If the songs aren’t relatable to us, they just become background noise. I want something that speaks to my experiences!”

While music can enhance the learning experience in ML2 classes, the participants voiced significant concerns regarding its effectiveness. These challenges emphasise the need for educators to carefully select music that aligns with language objectives and caters to the diverse preferences of learners. By understanding these perspectives, teachers can create a more focused and effective learning environment that prioritises language acquisition while still incorporating the motivational aspects of music.

Discussion

The current study's findings on the perceived benefits and challenges of using visual art in ML2 learning reveal the complexities and nuances involved in integrating art-based approaches in language acquisition. These findings echo and expand upon prior research on multimodal approaches in language education, particularly studies that explore the roles of cultural artefacts, music, and art in enhancing comprehension and engagement in L2 learning.

Visual Art as a Tool for Cultural Understanding

The universal endorsement among the participants for visual art as a vehicle for cultural learning aligns with Kim’s (2020) findings, which suggest that cultural artefacts can bridge understanding in diverse adult learning environments. In the current study, the participants from various backgrounds, including an Indian nurse and a Burkinabè builder, emphasised that visual art enhances their grasp of Maltese societal and cultural nuances. Similarly, Kim (2020) noted that engaging with culturally relevant visual elements helps learners connect with the target culture in a more profound, empathetic manner.

Moreover, Morris and Paris (2021) argue that visual arts-based approaches foster deeper cultural comprehension, a notion mirrored by the participants’ testimonies in this study, who

expressed that analysing Maltese art allows them to contextualise the language within Maltese life, literature, and history. This connection to cultural elements underscores the importance of cultural relevance in art-based language instruction, where visual storytelling and culturally anchored imagery provide context and a deeper sense of immersion.

The use of visual art for vocabulary retention in ML2 learning supports Martello's (2017) findings that visual aids increase language learners' motivation and memory recall. The participants in the current study reported that visual art facilitates vocabulary acquisition, with a Syrian builder and a Romanian artist expressing that they remember words more effectively when paired with artistic images. Møller-Skau and Lindstøl (2022) also found that incorporating cultural context through visual art fosters vocabulary development, enhancing learners' ability to retain and recall vocabulary. This suggests that visual cues serve as mnemonic devices that reinforce the relationship between language and memory.

However, as evidenced by divergent opinions among the participants, visual art's integration into language instruction must be carefully balanced to avoid detracting from essential language skills. This caution resonates with Dema and Moeller's (2012) work, which stresses the need for structure when incorporating cultural elements in language classrooms. Several participants, such as the German engineer and Ukrainian nurse, expressed concerns that art discussions might sidetrack from foundational language drills. Similarly, Charyton (2015) argues that while creativity enhances engagement, unstructured activities can sometimes hinder fluency if they distract from the core grammatical principles.

The Italian chef's insight into the importance of balancing visual art with language exercises parallels Cummins' (2014) call for structured, scaffolded approaches in multilingual education. According to Cummins (2014), multimodal resources should complement, not overshadow, linguistic skill-building. In line with these principles, the current study's participants advocated for a balanced integration of visual art that allows for both creative expression and structured language acquisition, enhancing the likelihood of achieving communicative competence in ML2.

The findings on the participants' emotional engagement with art-based language learning also relate to studies on the role of emotional resonance in language acquisition. Some participants such as the Somali tile layer mentioned that visual storytelling aids vocabulary retention through emotional connection, aligning with Jin et al.'s (2021) research on anxiety reduction through art and music. Art-based activities may lower the affective filter, encouraging language learners to participate more freely and retain vocabulary through emotional association. This study reveals a need for contextual sensitivity when implementing visual art in language classes, as the participants highlighted the challenge of maintaining focus on language structure. Lim et al. (2022) emphasise that visual art's success in language learning often depends on the degree of alignment between the art content and learners' backgrounds, reinforcing the importance of contextually relevant and culturally inclusive materials.

In general, the current study builds on existing research by showing that visual art in ML2 learning offers substantial benefits for cultural understanding and vocabulary acquisition. However, to maximise these benefits, educators must employ art thoughtfully, balancing creative freedom with structured language exercises. This balanced approach will allow art to serve as a powerful supplement to traditional language instruction, enriching the learning experience without compromising linguistic goals.

Cultural and Cognitive Impacts of Visual Arts on Second Language Engagement and Proficiency

The findings from this study, highlighting the influence of visual art on engagement and language acquisition among Maltese learners, align with and expand upon the broader literature on arts-based language learning. Studies by Morris and Paris (2021), and Hartle, Pateşan et al. (2018) have established that incorporating visual arts can enhance cultural understanding and increase motivation, a finding that resonates strongly with the experiences of the current study's participants. For instance, learners expressed that discussing personal or culturally significant art pieces in Maltese not only improved their language skills but also helped build connections within a diverse classroom. This supports Kim's (2020) assertion that cultural artefacts play a key role in bridging cultural gaps and fostering inclusivity in language learning settings.

The participants' reflections on increased engagement and reduced anxiety when using visual arts in language learning also mirror findings by Nohayi and Caga (2021), and Jin et al. (2021), who observed that artistic mediums can help learners feel less intimidated by complex language tasks. The participants in this study frequently described feeling more connected and less apprehensive when discussing art, suggesting that visual storytelling and art discussions enable a more relaxed and personal language learning atmosphere. This aligns with the theory of embodied cognition, as suggested by Atkinson (2010), which posits that sensory and cultural engagement enhances cognitive processing in language acquisition.

However, the findings from this study also revealed some scepticism about the use of visual art, particularly among the participants who felt it diverted focus from essential language components such as grammar and structured practice. This echoes the critique by Hartle et al. (2024) who discuss the need for balance when integrating creative methods in resource-limited language learning environments. The concerns of the present study's participants indicate that while art can stimulate engagement, it should be balanced with structured language activities, as suggested by Møller-Skau and Lindstøl (2022), to ensure that learners achieve both cultural insight and linguistic proficiency.

Finally, this study underscores the cultural dimension of art-based language learning, which aligns with Dema and Moeller's (2012) emphasis on teaching culture alongside language skills. The participants noted that presenting art from their backgrounds helped them not only practice Maltese but also share aspects of their heritage with classmates. This finding adds to existing literature by suggesting that art-based activities not only foster language development but also serve as a platform for cultural exchange, further contributing to a rich, collaborative learning environment.

While visual art offers significant benefits in engagement and cultural integration in Maltese language learning, its efficacy may be optimised through a balanced approach that includes both creative and structured language practice. The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of evidence on the advantages and limitations of integrating art in language education, offering nuanced insights into how visual arts can serve as a bridge between linguistic and cultural learning for diverse adult learners.

Balancing Cultural Relevance and ML2 Vocabulary Development through Art

Integration

The findings from this study underscore the potential of art-driven language exercises to enhance both cultural relevance and vocabulary development in ML2 classrooms. This section builds on previous literature on art integration in language learning, particularly with multilingual learners, and contextualises the participants' insights to highlight practical benefits and challenges.

The use of art to foster vocabulary acquisition aligns well with studies that advocate for contextually relevant vocabulary learning (e.g., Kim, 2018; Martínez and Schwartz, 2020). The majority of the participants in this study reported that describing Maltese paintings and landmarks encouraged them to search for specific vocabulary and led to greater retention of these terms. This mirrors findings from previous research indicating that contextualised language tasks, particularly those involving culturally significant content, enhance learners' engagement and help them retain vocabulary longer than rote memorization (Kim, 2018). Martínez and Schwartz (2020) similarly observed that the use of local art in language exercises encouraged deeper processing, suggesting that when language tasks are meaningfully embedded in a cultural framework, they provide learners with a richer learning experience.

Several participants described a strong connection between art discussions and their motivation to learn Maltese. This supports Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) argument that sociocultural contexts in language instruction encourage learners to connect personally with the language and culture. For instance, a Korean participant expressed that discussing Maltese art enhanced their feeling of connection with the culture, echoing the findings of Cho et al. (2021), who emphasised that art can make language learning more personally relevant and motivating. Similarly, in the current study, a Ukrainian designer highlighted how learning through art added "an extra layer" of cultural understanding, which reinforces the notion that culturally resonant materials offer learners unique insights into the values, perspectives, and communicative styles of the target language community (Park, 2017).

Despite the advantages, not all participants felt fully connected to Maltese-specific art. Some participants, such as a Romanian accountant, reported difficulty relating to local art, which they felt was less relevant to their personal experiences. This reflects previous findings by Kondo-Brown (2009), who observed that culturally specific materials could sometimes alienate students from diverse backgrounds, limiting their engagement with the target language. These findings suggest that while culturally specific content offers benefits, it may need to be balanced with more universally relatable materials to accommodate diverse learner backgrounds (Griffiths and Keohane, 2019).

In light of these mixed responses, some participants proposed incorporating global artworks alongside Maltese art to make exercises more universally accessible. This suggestion is supported by findings from Meyer et al. (2022), who argued that including both local and international cultural references can foster a more inclusive and well-rounded language curriculum. By integrating universally known art, language educators may enable learners to apply new vocabulary in personally meaningful contexts and compare cultural perspectives. A

Japanese photographer in this study noted that mixing Maltese and global art could enhance inclusivity—a perspective that aligns with García and Wei's (2014) concept of “translanguaging,” where combining diverse cultural elements allows learners to create bridges between languages and cultures, potentially increasing the effectiveness and inclusivity of ML2 instruction.

The findings underscore the value of a balanced approach in designing language curricula that leverage art. Including a range of cultural perspectives through visual art can help learners of diverse backgrounds feel more included and motivated, while still immersing them in Maltese culture. Future curriculum designs could consider incorporating visual elements that represent the cultural diversity of the student body, allowing learners to explore connections between their own backgrounds and Maltese society.

Consequently, this study contributes to the growing evidence supporting art as a tool for language learning, emphasising both its strengths in fostering cultural and lexical engagement and the necessity for flexibility in content selection to ensure that learners from diverse backgrounds feel equally included.

Challenges and Insights in Integrating Visual Art into ML2 Instruction

The current study on the challenges of integrating visual art into ML2 classrooms highlights a range of concerns that can influence the efficacy of such an approach. While the participants recognised the potential of visual art to enrich the learning experience, several issues emerged that are consistent with prior research on the use of arts in language acquisition.

First, many participants noted how abstract or culturally unfamiliar art could detract from the primary focus of language acquisition. This concern resonates with findings from Kim (2020), who argues that when art does not align with learners' cultural contexts, it can create barriers to engagement. A Palestinian plumber's comment about how abstract art “distracts” from language learning highlights the challenge of ensuring that visual prompts are accessible and relevant. Hossain (2024) further discusses how the use of culturally dissonant art can hinder language comprehension, particularly when learners cannot form personal or meaningful connections with the visuals. The current study's participants also echoed the need for artwork that speaks to their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, with one participant suggesting that art from different cultures might foster inclusion and engagement.

The challenge of limited vocabulary expansion through visual art was another recurring theme in this study, as the participants noted that some art only elicited descriptions of a few visual elements, thus providing limited language input. This finding is in line with Nohayi and Caga (2021) who emphasise the importance of incorporating visuals that prompt a wide range of vocabulary usage. In contrast, Møller-Skau and Lindstøl (2022) stress that the success of visual art in language learning depends on how well educators structure the use of the art to target specific linguistic features. The current study's findings underscore that a lack of explicit connection between art and language objectives can limit its utility as an instructional tool. Some participants remarked that art should be tied to lesson goals to avoid confusion or time wasted. As Morris and Paris (2021) suggest, a structured and intentional use of art-based activities ensures that learners engage with both the cultural and linguistic aspects of the task.

Furthermore, the concern about reducing time for practical language exercises due to an overemphasis on art reflects a broader issue in SLA classrooms, where students desire more opportunities for direct language practice. Coffey and Patel (2023) identify this imbalance as a potential disadvantage of arts-based approaches, especially when language skills are not the primary focus of the art activity. The participants in this study, such as the Nigerian carpenter who felt that more time should be spent on practising Maltese, highlighted the importance of balancing creative activities with targeted language exercises. This view aligns with Charyton (2015), who argues that while creativity can enrich the language-learning process, it should not overshadow structured language practice.

Additionally, some participants highlighted the challenge of connecting visual art to language objectives, which resonates with the concerns raised by Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) in their discussion of how learning materials must support cognitive processing in L2 learners. When the participants did not perceive a clear connection between the art and the language goals, they struggled to see the value in the activity. This suggests a need for greater alignment between visual prompts and the linguistic outcomes desired in the classroom.

Finally, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasises the importance of scaffolding and social interaction in learning, provides a useful framework for understanding the challenges faced by learners in this study. The participants' frustration with art that seemed irrelevant to their language learning mirrors the importance of context and collaboration in SLA, as emphasised by Dörnyei (2009). Learners benefit from activities that are directly tied to their immediate learning needs and scaffolded in a way that enhances their language development. The study participants' comments on the need for clearer links between artwork and vocabulary acquisition suggest that a more structured and purposeful approach to integrating art in language classrooms may increase its effectiveness.

While visual art holds promise as a tool for enhancing SLA, its integration into ML2 classrooms requires careful planning and alignment with pedagogical goals. Art must be culturally resonant, diverse, and directly connected to language learning objectives to prevent it from becoming a distraction or a missed opportunity. Educators should consider learners' backgrounds, provide structured prompts that encourage vocabulary expansion, and maintain a balanced approach that prioritises language practice. The integration of visual art in language learning offers useful opportunities but must be implemented thoughtfully to maximise its educational benefits.

Exploring the Role of Music in Maltese as a Second Language Acquisition:

Cognitive Benefits, Anxiety Reduction, and Pronunciation Development

This study explored the perspectives of adult learners from diverse cultural backgrounds on the use of music in SLA, specifically in the context of learning ML2. The findings suggest that music plays a complex and multifaceted role in SLA, offering both cognitive benefits and challenges, while simultaneously influencing learners' emotional and social experiences in the classroom. These results align with and build upon previous studies in the field, while also highlighting nuanced findings specific to the participants in this study.

The participants reported various cognitive benefits from the integration of music in language lessons. A significant number of learners highlighted the positive effects of rhythm and melody on vocabulary recall and pronunciation. For instance, a Brazilian musician noted how the rhythm of Maltese songs helped with word retention, echoing findings by Bokiev, Sulantra, and Ramli (2018), who found that rhythm enhances memory recall in SLA by providing a structured, repetitive auditory cue. Similarly, Racette and Peretz (2007) argued that song repetition facilitates phonetic and prosodic skills development. This is consistent with the current study's finding that singing in class improved pronunciation, as echoed by the Filipino carer who mentioned imitating native speakers' accents through songs.

However, some learners expressed concerns that music alone did not address the complexities of grammar. A Ukrainian participant observed that while music aids in memorising vocabulary, it doesn't always help with understanding sentence structure. This contrasts with findings from Bokiev et al. (2018), who suggested that integrating music with grammar lessons could promote engagement and enhance comprehension of complex language structures. As Rieb (2018) noted, music may facilitate the memorization of simpler linguistic elements like vocabulary, but its role in mastering complex structures remains contentious. This discrepancy highlights the need for a balanced approach, where music complements rather than replaces traditional grammar instruction.

Another key theme emerging from the findings was the potential of music to reduce language learning anxiety, a common challenge among adult language learners. A German educator's comment about feeling more comfortable speaking Maltese through singing reflects the work of Jin et al. (2021), who observed that music in SLA can help reduce learner anxiety by providing a less threatening, more enjoyable environment. This aligns with Bokiev et al. (2018), who found that music could lower anxiety, fostering a supportive atmosphere for language learners to experiment with speaking.

However, not all participants felt the same level of comfort with music-based learning. A Polish student expressed that music could increase stress if it wasn't culturally relevant, reflecting the importance of cultural resonance in language learning environments. Hossain (2024) similarly noted that culturally inclusive music is crucial in maintaining learner engagement and ensuring emotional comfort. This points to the necessity of selecting music that is both culturally appropriate and enjoyable for learners, as a personal connection to the material enhances the learning experience, as suggested by Degraeve (2019).

Music's role in fostering social interaction and collaboration was another common theme, with several participants noting how music-based activities promoted unity and group cohesion in the classroom. A Mexican participant highlighted the sense of solidarity created through group activities involving music, reinforcing findings from Bennett (2019), who found that music could positively influence group dynamics and foster a collaborative atmosphere in SLA settings. Additionally, Yi and Angay-Crowder (2016) observed that collaborative art and music projects encourage peer interaction and enhance language use through informal, supportive contexts.

However, there were also concerns about the social pressure that music-based activities could create for some learners. A Czech student remarked that not everyone enjoyed performing in front of others, indicating that music might not suit all learners' preferences or learning styles. This insight aligns with Huang and Lajoie (2023), who criticised the potential negative impact

of forced group dynamics in collaborative learning environments, suggesting that a more varied approach to activities might benefit learners with different social comfort levels.

Regarding pronunciation, the findings suggest a mixed impact of music on phonetic accuracy. While some learners, like the Filipino carer, found that singing helped them better imitate native pronunciation, others, such as the Turkish chef, believed that focusing on melody could hinder the development of tone-sensitive pronunciation skills. This mirrors the findings of Jaroudi et al. (2017), who highlighted the role of musical rhythm in reinforcing stress patterns, particularly for learners with a musical background. In contrast, Hongsuchon et al. (2022) warned that musical interference might be detrimental to learners of tonal languages. The findings from this study underscore the need for a nuanced approach to integrating music, particularly in languages with tonal distinctions, where rhythm might not always align with the phonetic nuances needed for accurate pronunciation.

Several participants expressed the need for a balance between music-based activities and more structured, traditional language exercises. A Somali tile layer, for example, noted that while music was useful, it was essential to focus on structured exercises to grasp grammatical rules effectively. This view resonates with Chobert and Besson (2013), who argued that while music enhances certain aspects of language learning, it should be part of a broader pedagogical framework that includes explicit grammar instruction. Additionally, Krashen (1982) emphasised that while engaging activities like music support language acquisition, they cannot replace the need for focused grammar practice in achieving fluency.

This study supports the existing research on the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of integrating music into SLA, while also highlighting the need for a balanced and culturally sensitive approach to its use. Music can enhance vocabulary recall, reduce anxiety, and foster social interaction, but its limitations in addressing complex grammar and phonetic accuracy suggest the importance of combining music with other language learning strategies. Future research could explore how different types of music (e.g., culturally relevant songs or genre-based music) impact learners' engagement and language acquisition outcomes, particularly in adult SLA contexts.

The Role of Musical Training in Enhancing Speech Segmentation and Phonological Awareness for Maltese as a Second Language Acquisition

The current study examined the relationship between musical training and language processing abilities, specifically in the areas of speech segmentation and phonological awareness. This aligns with findings from previous research suggesting that music training has a profound influence on various cognitive functions, including language processing. The present study's findings are consistent with the experiences shared by the Brazilian, German, and Italian participants, who reported that their musical backgrounds improved their abilities to process sounds in languages. Their experiences align with studies showing that musical expertise aids in the identification of finer auditory details in both music and speech, which is crucial for learning new languages (Chobert and Besson, 2013; Busse et al., 2018).

However, not all participants in the current study found musical training equally beneficial, echoing the perspectives of the French engineer and the Spanish marketing executive, who felt that music did not enhance their language processing abilities, particularly with complex languages like Maltese. This contrasts with previous findings by Piri (2018), who emphasised that while music aids phonological awareness in many learners, its effectiveness can be contingent on other factors such as the complexity of the language or the individual's aptitude. The struggles reported by the Pakistani nurse and Romanian accountant in the current study reflect these challenges, suggesting that factors like language complexity, as highlighted by Camilleri Grima (2015), and individual differences in cognitive processing may moderate the effectiveness of music-based interventions in language learning.

The current study's results also align with research suggesting that musical training improves speech segmentation. This was reflected in the comments from the Italian chef and the Norwegian teacher, who attributed their improved ability to segment speech to their musical training. These findings are consistent with previous studies by Jaroudi et al. (2017), which demonstrated a positive correlation between musical rhythm and language learners' ability to perceive lexical stress and syllable boundaries. Additionally, Chobert and Besson (2013) discussed how musicians' enhanced auditory discrimination abilities contribute to better speech segmentation, which supports the notion that musicians are better equipped to recognise and segment individual sounds within a stream of speech.

Despite these positive findings, the study also highlights the complexities involved in language learning, particularly for tonal languages. The Spanish marketing executive and the Pakistani nurse's experiences of struggling with tonal languages, despite having musical backgrounds, are consistent with findings by Hongsuchon et al. (2022), and Zuk et al. (2018), who identified that while musical training improves many aspects of language learning, its effectiveness in tonal language acquisition is more mixed. Tonal languages, which require learners to distinguish between pitch variations to discern meaning, may present a unique challenge, and further studies are needed to explore the specific impacts of musical training on the acquisition of tonal languages (Hongsuchon et al., 2022).

Moreover, the notion that musical training contributes to improved phonological awareness is supported by the comments of some participants like the Norwegian teacher, who noticed an enhancement in their ability to identify word boundaries after receiving musical training. This is in line with studies by Racette and Peretz (2007), which suggested that training in music, particularly through activities like singing, helps strengthen phonetic and prosodic skills transferable to language learning.

In contrast, the challenges expressed by the participants from the current study in segmenting speech and recognising individual sounds, especially in complex languages, suggest that phonological processing, while benefiting from music training, is not uniformly enhanced across all learners. This is an important distinction, as research by White-Schwoch et al. (2021) has shown that the cognitive benefits of musical training may vary depending on the intensity, duration, and type of musical experience.

The current study underscores the potential of music as a tool for enhancing language learning, particularly in areas such as speech segmentation and phonological awareness. However, it also highlights that the effectiveness of music training is influenced by several factors, including the learner's background, the language being learned, and the specific musical skills acquired.

These findings provide important insights for educators seeking to integrate music into language instruction, suggesting that while music can be a powerful tool for many learners, its application should be tailored to the needs of the individual and the linguistic features of the language in question.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the cognitive benefits of music in SLA, supporting the hypothesis that musical training enhances certain aspects of language processing while also acknowledging the complexity of individual experiences. Further research, particularly longitudinal studies, is needed to explore the long-term effects of music training on language acquisition and to develop targeted interventions for different types of language learners.

Neurological and Cultural Influences of Music on Maltese as a Second Language Acquisition: Insights from Tonal Language Learning and Cross-Cultural Experiences

The findings from the present study offer useful insights into the relationship between music, language acquisition, and the neurological adaptations that enhance auditory processing, especially in tonal languages. Across the diverse participants, ranging from musicians to those without formal music training, varying degrees of perceived benefits were reported. These results underscore both the potential and limitations of integrating music into language learning and echo existing research on the cognitive advantages of musical expertise in second-language acquisition.

A key theme emerging from the study was the role of auditory processing in facilitating the learning of tonal languages, which require sensitivity to pitch variations. Some participants like the Filipino student and the Ukrainian doctor highlighted the synergy between their musical backgrounds and their ability to differentiate tonal shifts in languages such as Mandarin. These personal anecdotes align with previous studies on the cognitive benefits of music training, such as Chobert and Besson's (2013) research, which demonstrated that musical expertise can enhance the neural processing of speech, particularly in distinguishing tonal contrasts. The comparison to musical training is significant, as studies like those of Jaroudi et al. (2017) and Busse et al. (2018) show that musicians tend to process rhythm, prosody, and pitch with greater precision, a skill directly transferable to language learning, particularly in tonal languages.

Conversely, not all participants experienced similar benefits. The Hungarian project manager and the Czech student expressed scepticism about the connection between their musical training and their ability to grasp tonal languages. These conflicting perspectives suggest that musical training's influence on language acquisition is not universal. This observation resonates with the findings of Racette and Peretz (2007), which argue that the benefits of music training may be contingent upon individual factors, such as the type and extent of musical exposure, as well as personal differences in auditory processing capabilities. Furthermore, as evidenced by the Romanian and Greek participants, while music may enhance certain cognitive aspects of language learning, its direct effect on complex syntactic structures or grammatical

acquisition remains uncertain, supporting Krashen's (1982) assertion that language acquisition is a multifaceted process, influenced by both cognitive and social factors.

In the domain of cultural and attitudinal shifts, several participants noted the positive impact of music on their engagement and motivation to learn languages, particularly when culturally relevant songs were integrated into the classroom. This aligns with the work of Bokiev et al. (2018), which emphasised that music-based learning activities not only improve phonological recall but also reduce anxiety, creating a more relaxed and enjoyable learning environment. The use of songs as cultural artefacts in language lessons, as pointed out by some participants such as the Ukrainian doctor and Romanian project manager, facilitates a deeper connection to the culture of the language being learned. This observation supports the work of Kim (2020), who argued that integrating cultural materials like music into language education fosters an appreciation for the socio-cultural context of the language, ultimately enhancing the learning experience.

Moreover, the positive impact of music on vocabulary acquisition and fluency was highlighted by several participants who reported improved pronunciation, rhythm, and memory recall through music-based activities. This finding aligns with previous research by Piri (2018) and Cohen (1987), who reported that songs enhance retention and pronunciation by embedding new words in musical memory structures. For instance, a few participants such as the German teacher and Serbian surgeon noted that songs provided a more intuitive way to process language rhythm and flow, improving their overall fluency. These findings suggest that music's rhythm and melody offer a scaffold for memory and pronunciation, aligning with theories on multisensory learning (Gardner, 2011).

However, there were also concerns about the overemphasis on music at the expense of formal language structures. Several participants like the French engineer and the Czech student voiced concerns that the integration of music into language lessons might detract from the focus on grammar and syntax. This scepticism reflects a broader debate in SLA regarding the balance between fun and structured learning. As Dörnyei (2009) suggests, language learning must balance both communicative activities and grammatical accuracy to ensure comprehensive language acquisition. The concerns expressed in this study echo those in the literature (Degraeve, 2019; Charyton, 2015), where the challenge lies in ensuring that music does not overshadow the cognitive processes necessary for mastering the structure of an L2.

The interplay between musical training and ML2 is further complicated by individual differences in learning styles and preferences. For example, while some participants found music a useful tool for boosting language learning, others felt that more traditional or structured exercises were necessary for achieving proficiency. This diversity in experiences underscores the need for a personalised approach to language teaching, where musical activities are integrated selectively to support specific learning objectives. As the study suggests, a balanced approach—one that incorporates both creative, music-based learning and rigorous attention to grammar and syntax—may be the most effective in promoting comprehensive language acquisition. This perspective is echoed by Johnson (2019), who advocates for the thoughtful integration of music and arts in SLA to enhance both affective and cognitive learning outcomes.

While music-based activities offer cognitive and motivational benefits for language learners, their effectiveness depends on various factors, including the learner's musical background, the type of language being learned, and the integration of these activities with other pedagogical

strategies. As such, music should be viewed as one of many tools in the SLA toolkit, best employed in conjunction with other methods to foster both linguistic and cultural fluency.

The Influence of Cultural Relevance and Emotional Connection

The present study provides compelling evidence of music's capacity to reduce anxiety and foster an engaging language-learning environment. The participants across different cultural backgrounds consistently reported that music played an instrumental role in mitigating affective barriers, thus encouraging active participation. This aligns with previous research highlighting music's positive impact on emotional engagement and confidence-building in language learners (Bokiev et al., 2018; Degrove, 2019). For many learners, the use of music—whether through songs, rhythmic exercises, or background music—created a welcoming atmosphere conducive to reducing the apprehension commonly associated with foreign language learning (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994).

A significant finding in this study was the emphasis placed on the cultural relevance of the music used in class. Some participants like the Pakistani nurse and German student expressed that while they appreciated music in the classroom, the connection to their own cultural background enhanced their emotional engagement and comfort level. This echoes the findings of Altarriba and Basnight-Brown (2022), who emphasised the importance of cultural sensitivity in language acquisition, where culturally relevant materials, including music, can create more profound emotional connections to the target language. The need for a culturally resonant environment for language learners is also supported by Kim (2020), who asserts that language learning is not just about acquiring linguistic skills but also about developing cultural empathy.

However, as also suggested by Chen et al. (2024), there is a notable balance between embracing the cultural novelty of the target language's music and the comfort of familiar music. Several participants in the present study found value in exploring Maltese music, even when it was culturally unfamiliar. This aligns with the sentiments shared by participants in other studies, such as that of the American software developer and Mexican artist, who appreciated learning a new culture through its music (Bokiev et al., 2018). For these learners, unfamiliar music contributed to their immersion in the language and culture, enhancing both their engagement and retention.

In terms of confidence-building, a substantial portion of participants indicated that music provided a motivational boost, enabling them to feel more connected to the language and reducing their anxiety about making mistakes. This finding is consistent with Degrove (2019), who found that music-based learning activities provided a strong foundation for increasing students' self-confidence, as it reduced the fear of error while facilitating more relaxed communication. Furthermore, emotional connection to music and language was found to enhance memory recall, making it easier for learners to retain vocabulary and phrases, a finding supported by Piri (2018) and Busse et al. (2018).

The varying participant responses regarding the overall effectiveness of music also highlight the complexities of integrating music into language learning. While most participants expressed positive feelings, a few, like the French engineer and the Czech student, voiced concerns about music being either distracting or unrelated to their specific language-learning

goals. This divergence mirrors findings in prior studies, such as that of Jin et al. (2021), who noted that music's effect on reducing anxiety and improving learning varied greatly depending on individual preferences and the learning context. The presence of individual differences emphasises the need for a personalised approach to music integration, suggesting that language instructors must carefully consider students' backgrounds, preferences, and learning styles when selecting music for classroom activities (Vygotsky, 1978).

Interestingly, the current study also revealed that while music was beneficial, the participants highlighted the need for a balance between music and more traditional, structured language practice. Several participants, such as the Turkish chef and the German student, emphasised that music should not replace conventional language exercises but should complement them. This reflects the findings of Camilleri Grima (2015) and Camilleri and Sadler (2016), who suggest that a balanced approach is crucial for effective language learning. Music is particularly helpful as a tool for creating a comfortable learning atmosphere and fostering emotional connections but should be integrated with focused language drills to ensure comprehensive linguistic development.

The integration of music into language learning holds significant promise for enhancing emotional engagement, reducing anxiety, and fostering cultural immersion. The current study reinforces the notion that the choice of music, its cultural relevance, and its integration with structured language practice are key factors that influence its effectiveness in supporting second-language acquisition. These findings align with and build upon previous research that has highlighted music's multifaceted role in language learning, suggesting that when music is thoughtfully incorporated into language programmes, it can provide both cognitive and emotional benefits for learners across diverse backgrounds.

The Impact of Musical Proficiency on Second Language Acquisition

The findings from the current study highlight the nuanced role of musical proficiency in SLA, specifically in the context of learning Maltese. The participants from various backgrounds emphasised the potential advantages of music, particularly in terms of auditory discrimination, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to process language more fluidly. However, these advantages were not universally experienced, and some participants expressed that a more structured language-learning approach, focused on grammar and practical speaking, was equally essential. This variability aligns with existing literature, offering both support and critical counterpoints to the argument that music can significantly enhance language learning.

Many participants with musical training reported enhanced phonetic sensitivity, which aligns with findings by Chobert and Besson (2013), who argue that musical expertise can facilitate the perception of phonetic differences and improve pronunciation accuracy in L2 learners. For instance, the Norwegian software developer's observation that music helps with accurate pronunciation mimics the cognitive benefits described by Jaroudi et al. (2017), who found that musical rhythm training improves the ability to discern language stress patterns. The Indian nurse's experience of better understanding Maltese conversations after practising with songs similarly echoes Racette and Peretz (2007), who found that singing in an L2 could enhance prosodic skills like intonation and stress patterns. These findings suggest that music's role in

sharpening auditory discrimination is particularly beneficial in languages with complex phonetic systems, such as Maltese.

However, as seen in the experiences of some participants, such as the Czech student who struggled with distinguishing sounds despite the presence of music, the impact of musical proficiency on auditory discrimination is not uniform. This contrasts with the assertions of Bokiev et al. (2018), who suggest that music aids all learners, particularly by reducing language learning anxiety and improving phonological recall. The variability in the participants' experiences here aligns with Bialystok and Hakuta's (1994) notion that individual differences, such as cognitive capacity and prior linguistic experience, can significantly influence the effectiveness of music-based language learning strategies.

The findings also revealed that music training contributes to cognitive flexibility, which is a critical factor in processing and switching between languages. The Spanish marketing executive's statement that music has trained their brain for mental adaptability supports research by Calma-Roddin and Drury (2020), who highlight the benefits of musical training in facilitating cognitive flexibility in adults. The Mexican artist's improved vocabulary recall through music also mirrors Yurgil et al.'s (2020) findings that music enhances memory, particularly for lexical items. This highlights music's potential to facilitate more effortless retrieval of L2 vocabulary through associations with melody, a phenomenon also explored by Cohen (1987).

However, contrasting experiences were observed, such as the German student who felt that music sometimes distracted from essential speaking exercises. This critique of music's role in language learning reflects the work of Bennett (2019), who suggests that while music can enhance engagement, it should be carefully integrated into a structured curriculum to avoid overwhelming learners with unnecessary complexity. Additionally, the Pakistani housewife's concern about the lack of speaking and writing practice highlights Dörnyei's (2009) emphasis on the importance of balancing communicative practice with other cognitive strategies in language learning.

The ability to filter out background noise, particularly in noisy environments, was noted by some participants such as the Nigerian doctor and the Turkish chef, who felt that their musical training helped them better comprehend speech in distracting settings. This supports Kim (2020), who describes how music can enhance selective attention and speech intelligibility in dynamic, noise-filled environments. The Hungarian accountant's experience, however, shows that not all participants experienced the same benefit, as some still struggled to hear clearly in noisy classrooms regardless of musical training. This aligns with Bokiev et al. (2018), who noted that while music-based strategies can benefit certain learners, their effectiveness may be limited by individual cognitive and environmental factors.

Furthermore, the varying responses in noisy situations underscore the findings of Slater et al. (2017), who propose that individual differences in musical training and attentional control may influence the degree to which music aids in filtering background noise. The contrasting views expressed by the French engineer, who found music unhelpful in noisy environments, highlight the need for personalised approaches in L2 pedagogy, as not all learners will benefit equally from music-based interventions.

While this study presents compelling evidence for the potential of music to enhance language learning, the findings also demonstrate the importance of considering individual learner profiles and specific linguistic contexts. The variability in the participants' experiences suggests that a one-size-fits-all approach to integrating music into language classrooms may not be universally effective. Future research could explore the interplay between musical expertise and other learner characteristics, such as motivation and previous language experience, to identify more targeted, individualised interventions. Moreover, there is a need for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of musical training on language acquisition, as well as studies that investigate the effects of different types of musical activities (e.g., singing versus rhythmic exercises) on specific aspects of language learning, such as grammar acquisition and oral fluency.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on the intersection between music and language learning. Musical proficiency, particularly concerning auditory discrimination, cognitive flexibility, and speech intelligibility, can offer significant advantages for L2 learners, though its impact is not universal. A balanced approach that integrates music with other core language learning strategies appears to be the most effective way to harness its potential benefits. Further exploration into personalised learning pathways that incorporate music could pave the way for more tailored, effective language acquisition methodologies in diverse educational settings.

The Impact of Musical Training on Memory, Rhythm, and Lexical Skills in Second Language Acquisition

The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of literature on the positive influence of musical training on SLA, particularly concerning memory, rhythm, and lexical skills. Consistent with previous research, the results indicate that musical training can enhance learners' ability to retain vocabulary, improve rhythm and pronunciation, and foster better phonological awareness in an L2 (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994; Chobert and Besson, 2013). In this study, most participants reported significant benefits in memory retention and the acquisition of Maltese vocabulary, often comparing the process to the memorization of musical melodies, which strengthens the existing theory of a shared cognitive mechanism between musical and linguistic memory (Gorin and Majerus, 2019).

Musical training's influence on rhythm and intonation emerged as another major theme, with the participants frequently noting how their musical background helped them perceive and reproduce the stress and rhythm patterns inherent in Maltese. This finding aligns with research by Jaroudi et al. (2017), who suggested that musical rhythm could aid in the perception of lexical stress in SLA, as well as Racette and Peretz (2007), who emphasised the role of music in enhancing phonetic and prosodic skills. The participants in this study who had musical training seemed to possess an enhanced ability to "catch" the natural flow of language, mimicking native speech with greater fluency and accuracy, thus reinforcing the idea that rhythm-based musical training directly translates into improved language rhythm and prosody (Paquette and Rieg, 2008).

Moreover, many participants described how musical training helped them retain longer phrases and sentence structures in Maltese, supporting the notion that music serves as a mnemonic aid, reinforcing long-term memory storage (Calma-Roddin and Drury, 2020; Yurgil et al., 2020). This parallels findings from Chobert and Besson (2013), who reported that musical expertise improves working memory, enabling learners to better process and retain linguistic information. The comparison of musical training to vocal exercises (as described by a Russian opera singer in the current study) highlights the role of repetition and auditory recall in strengthening grammatical and lexical memory, suggesting that musical training can provide a robust cognitive scaffold for language learners.

However, not all participants experienced these benefits to the same extent. Some individuals without substantial musical training did not observe significant improvements in pronunciation or rhythm, echoing the findings of studies that show variability in the effectiveness of music-based SLA interventions depending on individual learners' backgrounds (Bokiev et al., 2018; Rieb, 2018). These participants felt that their progress was more aligned with traditional methods, particularly concerning grammar and sentence structure, a concern that has been noted in other studies (Bokiev et al., 2018). The limited impact of music on grammar acquisition in this study aligns with the findings of Jaroudi et al. (2017) and Rieb (2018), who suggested that while music aids phonological and lexical learning, its influence on syntax and complex language structures is less pronounced. This observation underlines the necessity of integrating music into a broader pedagogical framework that includes explicit grammar instruction, as noted by several participants who advocated for a balanced approach combining music with traditional language teaching techniques (Kim, 2020; Charyton, 2015).

Furthermore, the varied responses regarding the use of music in SLA raise an important consideration for tailoring language instruction to individual needs and preferences. The participants with different levels of musical experience expressed distinct needs for types of music-based activities, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be the most effective in SLA settings. As highlighted by some participants, simpler listening activities might be more appropriate for learners with less musical experience, while more advanced rhythm-based exercises might benefit those with a musical background (Piri, 2018). This emphasises the need for flexibility in language instruction, allowing for adaptations based on learners' strengths and preferences, as supported by the work of Chen et al. (2024).

While the findings indicate that music-based activities can significantly enhance vocabulary recall, pronunciation, and rhythm, the results also suggest that such activities should complement, rather than replace, traditional language instruction. A balanced approach, integrating music for its auditory and mnemonic benefits alongside explicit grammar practice, is likely to be the most effective strategy for adult language learners, particularly those tackling complex structures like Maltese (Dörnyei, 2009; Żammit, 2021). This approach reflects the growing recognition of the importance of integrating diverse methods in SLA, such as combining arts and traditional pedagogical techniques (Coffey and Patel, 2023; Paquette and Rieg, 2008).

This study reinforces the idea that musical training offers cognitive and perceptual benefits for L2 learners, especially in the domains of memory, rhythm, and lexical acquisition. However, it also highlights the need for a nuanced approach that considers individual learner differences and the role of traditional grammar-focused instruction. Future research could explore how specific aspects of musical training, such as vocal versus instrumental training, may

differentially impact SLA, as well as how to effectively integrate music with other language learning methods for diverse learner profiles.

The Role of Music-Based Activities in Phonetic Reinforcement for Second Language Acquisition: Insights and Implications

The findings of the current study align with a growing body of research highlighting the important role of music-based activities in supporting phonetic reinforcement in SLA. Many participants in this study emphasised that music, particularly in the form of repetitive melodies and chants, facilitated pronunciation practice and enhanced the natural flow of speech in Maltese. This is consistent with earlier findings, such as those from Bokiev et al. (2018), who suggest that rhythmic repetition in music aids phonological recall and reduces the anxiety typically associated with language learning. Repetitive exposure to sounds within a familiar melody allows learners to mimic phonetic structures without the pressure of formal accuracy, as highlighted by several participants, including a Swedish business analyst and a Spanish marketing executive, who reported feeling more at ease practising pronunciation in these contexts.

In line with the research of Racette and Peretz (2007), who found that repetition through song can bridge the gap between phonetic awareness and production, many participants in this study noted that music-based activities allowed them to engage in a more relaxed manner. For example, the Brazilian hairdresser's comment about feeling less self-conscious when singing echoes the idea that music creates a low-stakes environment where learners feel free to experiment with language sounds, especially when the songs are familiar and culturally resonant. This supports the argument by Busse et al. (2018) that music-based approaches help learners focus on rhythm and intonation, contributing to more natural-sounding language output.

However, while music proved beneficial for phonetic skills, the participants also emphasised that phonetic learning through music should be complemented by traditional language exercises for deeper retention and understanding. This reflects the argument made by Jekiel and Malarski (2021) regarding the need for a balanced approach. A German participant in the current study suggested that after engaging with music, learners would benefit from practical exercises to use the vocabulary in context. This perspective is in line with the findings of Dörnyei (2009), who advocates for integrating various modes of learning in SLA to ensure that learners not only internalise pronunciation but also gain functional language use.

The current study also revealed the importance of cultural familiarity with the music being used. Several participants noted that music from the Maltese culture helped them feel more connected to the language, an observation that aligns with Kim's (2020) research on the role of cultural artefacts in language learning. As the German engineer pointed out, culturally relevant music enhances engagement, while a Japanese designer's comment reflects how unfamiliar genres could inhibit participation. This suggests that SLA programmes should consider cultural relevance when choosing music, as music that resonates with learners' backgrounds can foster a greater sense of connection to the language being studied.

Further expanding on the findings from Charyton (2015), the study also underlined the idea that while music-based activities can serve as effective phonetic tools, their full potential can only be realised when embedded within a broader pedagogical framework. The sentiment expressed by a Japanese medical student, who suggested that music should be integrated into a curriculum alongside grammar and conversation practice, echoes the broader consensus in the literature that music should be one element within a more comprehensive SLA approach (Krashen, 1982). This holistic approach ensures that while phonetic skills are reinforced, learners also develop the fluency and comprehension necessary for real-life communication.

Furthermore, the findings from the current study echo broader pedagogical trends in language learning, particularly in terms of using music to create a supportive, less intimidating environment for adult learners. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasises the role of external tools, like music, in facilitating learning within a supportive context. Music-based activities, by promoting ease and reducing anxiety, can create a "zone of proximal development" where learners feel encouraged to take risks in language use, an approach that helps bridge the gap between passive exposure to language and active language production.

The current study confirms that music-based activities offer unique benefits in phonetic reinforcement for SLA, especially in terms of improving pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation. These activities help lower the anxiety typically associated with language practice, creating a more relaxed and confident learning environment. However, as the participants also pointed out, for music to be truly effective, it should be integrated into a broader SLA framework that includes practical language exercises and culturally relevant materials. Future studies should further explore how the combination of music and traditional pedagogical methods can provide a comprehensive, well-rounded approach to language acquisition, and how these activities can be adapted to suit learners' cultural backgrounds.

The Role of Art, Music, and Role-Play in Enhancing Second Language Acquisition: A Multisensory Approach to Learning

The findings of the current study align with and expand upon the growing body of research that supports the integration of art, music, and role-play in SLA to enhance linguistic and cultural fluency. Through the lens of creative, multisensory learning, the participants in this study reflected positively on how art, music, and role-play enriched their learning experiences by fostering engagement, reducing anxiety, and increasing cultural empathy. These outcomes were particularly salient concerning enhancing vocabulary acquisition, boosting confidence in language use, and offering cultural insights—confirming the value of these creative methods in SLA classrooms.

The use of visual art as part of role-play exercises facilitated a richer engagement with language, as learners found themselves describing and interacting with art in ways that felt authentic and contextual. This finding is consistent with research by Nohayi and Caga, (2021) who highlight the effectiveness of visual art in improving language comprehension and motivation. Additionally, similar to the experiences of the Turkish chef in this study, Kim (2020) argues that incorporating cultural artefacts like art can deepen learners' understanding

of the target language's cultural context. For many participants, art provided a tool for enhancing their descriptive language skills, as they were encouraged to focus on colours, textures, and shapes. This echoes Camilleri Grima (2015), who emphasises the cognitive benefits of visual aids in language learning by enhancing students' creativity and vocabulary development.

Furthermore, music played an essential role in making the language practice feel less intimidating. The integration of music into role-play, as expressed by some participants like the Italian musician, helped establish a rhythm and fluidity that made language use feel more natural and less stressful. This finding builds on the work of Degrave (2019) and Piri (2018), who suggest that music can reduce performance anxiety, increase engagement, and improve phonological recall. The rhythmic component of music has long been linked to improved prosody and pronunciation (Racette and Peretz, 2007), and the current study reinforces this connection by illustrating how music can create a comfortable and engaging environment for language learners to experiment with their pronunciation without fear of judgment.

However, the study also highlighted challenges related to cultural differences in the perception of art and music. Some participants, like the Romanian accountant and the Pakistani nurse, pointed out that certain artistic and musical choices did not resonate with their cultural backgrounds, leading to a feeling of disconnection during role-play. This is in line with concerns raised by Crooke et al. (2024), who stress the importance of balancing culturally relevant materials to ensure inclusivity in the classroom. While art and music are powerful tools for learning, they must be thoughtfully curated to reflect the diverse backgrounds of the learners. As such, teachers must be attuned to the cultural preferences and backgrounds of their students, as noted by Dema and Moeller (2012), who argue that cultural relevance is a key factor in engaging learners and promoting language retention.

The study's findings suggest that a culturally adaptive approach to integrating art and music into SLA can maximise their potential to foster linguistic and cultural fluency. Adapting materials and activities to reflect a range of cultural backgrounds, while ensuring that all learners feel represented, can help mitigate feelings of exclusion and make the language-learning process more accessible. This ties into the broader discussion of inclusive pedagogical practices, such as those proposed by Hossain (2024), who advocates for the inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives in language learning to promote a more inclusive and empathetic classroom environment.

The integration of visual art, music, and role-play in ML2 could provide a dynamic and engaging approach to language learning. These findings contribute to the growing understanding of how multisensory and culturally relevant materials can enhance language learning, making it a more holistic and meaningful experience for learners. However, further research is needed to explore how to best balance creativity with linguistic precision, as well as to investigate the long-term impacts of such integrated learning strategies on learners' linguistic outcomes.

The present study reinforces the potential of art, music, and role-play as effective tools for enhancing SLA, but it also emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity in their application. By adapting these tools to suit diverse learner backgrounds, educators can create more inclusive and engaging learning environments that promote not only linguistic fluency but also cultural understanding.

Creative Writing and SLA: Enhancing Grammar and Vocabulary through the Integration of Visual Art and Music

The findings of this study suggest that integrating creative writing exercises based on visual art and music into ML2 offers a rich and multi-sensory learning experience, which enhances grammar and vocabulary acquisition in meaningful ways. These results align with several existing studies that emphasise the importance of sensory and emotional engagement in language learning. As the participants in this study demonstrated, the incorporation of art and music not only facilitates a deeper connection to the language but also encourages active language use in a personalised context.

The positive responses to visual art prompts support the findings of Morris and Paris (2021), and Farokhi and Hashemi (2012), who argue that visual arts promote language learning by offering vivid, context-rich stimuli that encourage descriptive language use. By relating colour, shape, and form to specific words, as noted by one participant in this study, learners engage in a form of embodied cognition, where their sensory experiences of art are linked with language acquisition (Gardner, 2011). Similarly, the ability to express complex observations through writing, as seen with the participants discussing intricate visual details, aligns with Charyton's (2015) assertion that the structured use of art in SLA encourages learners to experiment with more advanced syntactic structures. Moreover, visual art catalyses vocabulary expansion, as students are often pushed to explore words and expressions that are more nuanced or unfamiliar, mirroring the findings of Nohayi and Caga (2021).

The integration of music into writing exercises similarly aligns with a growing body of research that links musical engagement with SLA benefits. Studies by Bokiev et al. (2018) and Calma-Roddin and Drury (2020) suggest that music has a profound effect on learners' phonological recall, rhythm, and sentence flow. The Brazilian musician's experience of understanding sentence rhythm through traditional folk music echoes findings in this area, where learners' heightened sensitivity to rhythm from music training enhances their ability to perceive and produce sentence prosody in a target language (Racette and Peretz, 2007; Busse et al. 2018). This connection between musical rhythm and language flow is also supported by the findings of Slater et al. (2017), who demonstrate that rhythm training can directly influence speech processing, a critical component of fluency in an L2.

Additionally, the emotional and personal engagement reported by learners in this study is consistent with the principles of the sociocultural theory of language learning, as discussed by Vygotsky (1978). Writing about topics that resonate emotionally allows learners to invest more fully in their language tasks, making grammar and vocabulary practice less mechanical and more intuitive. This is particularly significant in SLA contexts where motivation can be a challenge (Krashen, 1982). As noted by Kim (2020), using culturally and personally relevant stimuli, such as music and visual art, enhances learners' motivation, as it provides a framework for them to express themselves authentically in the target language.

However, this study also reveals challenges in balancing creativity with grammatical precision. Some participants noted the tendency to prioritise creativity at the expense of grammatical accuracy, a concern raised by instructors who emphasised the need for explicit linguistic

objectives. This challenge is not unique to this study and has been documented by other researchers (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994; Charyton, 2015). As the Finnish educator suggested, integrating targeted grammar structures within creative tasks—such as asking students to describe scenes using specific verb tenses—could mitigate this issue. This hybrid approach, where creativity is guided by structured prompts, mirrors the instructional strategies advocated by Bonanno (2008) and Coffey and Patel (2023), who argue that creative tasks must be framed within clear pedagogical goals to maximise learning outcomes.

The findings of this study suggest that art and music-based creative writing exercises offer significant potential for enhancing both engagement and linguistic development in SLA. By providing a sensory, emotional, and personally meaningful context for language use, these exercises support vocabulary acquisition, grammatical experimentation, and fluency. While challenges related to the balance of creativity and grammar remain, they can be addressed through careful instructional design that integrates explicit language goals with opportunities for creative expression. Future studies could further investigate the long-term effects of such integrative approaches on language retention and fluency, especially in diverse SLA contexts.

Addressing the Complexities of Music Integration in Maltese L2 Classrooms: Challenges and Considerations

The present study investigates the nuanced challenges faced by adult learners in ML2 classrooms when music is integrated into their language learning experience. While prior research highlights the benefits of music for language acquisition, such as reducing anxiety (Bokiev, et al., 2018), improving phonological recall, and fostering engagement (Bokiev et al., 2018), the current study's findings reveal specific concerns that complicate its effectiveness in diverse ML2 settings.

A prominent theme in this study is the issue of distraction and cognitive load. Consistent with the findings of Rieb (2018), who argues that music can sometimes interfere with complex language processing, the present study's participants reported that background music often hindered their ability to concentrate on learning new vocabulary or forming sentences in Maltese. This sentiment is notably echoed by a Polish receptionist who described music as "too loud or distracting" and a Syrian builder who compared it to "a party going on" in his head while trying to learn. These insights suggest that while music can facilitate relaxed learning environments, as observed by Jin et al. (2021), its use must be carefully tailored to avoid cognitive overload and ensure it complements rather than competes with active language processing.

Another significant concern highlighted in this study is related to cultural relevance and the emotional impact of music selections, which aligns with findings from Urbaite (2024) and Croke et al. (2024). The participants expressed that music choices which included unfamiliar cultural references or evoked negative emotions diminished their engagement and focus. This was evident from responses such as those from the Venezuelan maid who noted the frustration caused by songs with unrelatable cultural themes, and the Libyan manager, who described how certain songs could trigger distracting emotional responses. These observations reinforce Urbaite's (2024) findings that culturally inclusive music can help build social inclusion, yet, as

our findings suggest, inappropriate choices can conversely heighten feelings of exclusion or disengagement.

Furthermore, the issue of musical tempo and lyrical complexity emerged as a noteworthy barrier. Several participants indicated that fast-tempo songs or lyrics with extensive slang or complex vocabulary hindered comprehension, which aligns with insights from Busse et al. (2018), regarding the influence of music on pronunciation accuracy. In particular, some participants like the German student in the present study who preferred slower, more comprehensible songs underscore the importance of matching the pace and clarity of musical content with the learners' linguistic proficiency. As suggested by Racette and Peretz (2007), slower music with clear enunciation might enhance prosodic skills and phonetic retention, thus benefiting early-stage learners more effectively than complex or fast-paced selections.

The risk of mispronunciation and erroneous language acquisition was another challenge raised, resonating with Chobert and Besson's (2013) findings on the delicate balance between music's rhythmic benefits and the risks of phonetic inaccuracies. A few participants, including the Serbian surgeon, expressed concerns over learning incorrect pronunciations from song lyrics. This perspective echoes the findings by Slater et al. (2017), who advocate for the careful curation of music to prevent mispronunciations from becoming entrenched in learners' language production.

Finally, while music is often championed for its capacity to boost engagement, our findings show that boredom and disengagement can occur if music selections are not attuned to students' preferences, a concern aligned with findings from Bennett (2019) on group dynamics in music-enhanced language settings. Many participants, such as the Filipino carer and Italian chef, highlighted that outdated or overly familiar songs led to a decline in interest, underscoring the importance of providing fresh and relevant content to sustain motivation, as discussed by Møller-Skau and Lindstøl (2022).

The findings of this study illuminate the complex, often paradoxical role of music in ML2 education. Although music has well-documented benefits for reducing language learning anxiety (Bokiev et al., 2018) and enhancing phonological recall, this study suggests that these advantages may be undermined by factors such as distraction, cultural disconnect, and potential mispronunciation risks. Therefore, careful selection of music, attuned to learners' preferences and aligned with linguistic goals, is essential. Further research could investigate adaptive frameworks for selecting culturally inclusive music that meets learners' linguistic and emotional needs, ensuring music remains a supportive rather than intrusive tool in language acquisition. This approach can foster a balanced ML2 learning environment that leverages music's motivational power while prioritising language comprehension and retention.

Study Limitations

While this study provides useful insights into the role of art and music in Maltese language learning for adults, several limitations affect the generalizability and applicability of the findings.

Firstly, the study relied on a convenience sample drawn from a limited demographic and geographic scope, which may not represent the broader population of adult Maltese learners. As such, the findings may be contextually specific and might not apply universally across different learner backgrounds and educational settings. The reliance on convenience sampling potentially introduced a selection bias, as the participants with a predisposition toward creative methods or specific cultural contexts may have been more inclined to participate, which could skew the study's conclusions.

Additionally, while integrating art and music showed promise for engagement and cultural learning, several participants highlighted issues of cultural relevance. The art and music materials chosen may not have resonated with all learners, potentially leading to disengagement. Cultural disconnects in material selection could affect the consistency of engagement and learning outcomes, particularly in diverse classrooms where learners' cultural backgrounds vary widely.

The study also encountered challenges in balancing creative activities with rigorous language instruction. Some participants reported that music and art activities occasionally detracted from more structured linguistic goals, such as grammar and syntax acquisition. This reflects the difficulty of designing integrative activities that provide meaningful linguistic development while maintaining educational rigour.

Further, the study's findings may be influenced by the subjective nature of self-reported data. The participants' perceptions and experiences were gathered primarily through interviews, which, while insightful, may be influenced by individual biases or memory recall limitations. The lack of objective assessment tools, such as standardised language proficiency tests, limits the ability to quantify the precise linguistic benefits of art and music integration.

Finally, this study's reliance on qualitative methods, while suitable for exploring complex experiences and perspectives, may limit the reproducibility of the findings. Future research should consider a mixed-methods approach to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of creative methods on language acquisition. Additionally, longitudinal studies could help assess the long-term effects of art- and music-based interventions on language proficiency. In conclusion, while art and music offer significant potential as tools for enhancing engagement and cultural connection in language learning, these limitations highlight the need for cautious and context-sensitive implementation.

Further Research

The findings from this study illustrate the potential benefits of incorporating art and music into ML2 learning for adults. However, they also reveal complexities, including the need for individualised approaches and culturally resonant materials. Future research should expand upon these insights to explore optimal ways of utilising art and music in adult language education. Below, we outline several key areas for further research that could enhance our understanding of how creative approaches impact adult ML2 learners.

Comparative Effectiveness Across Age Groups

One promising direction for future research is to investigate how art and music impact language acquisition across different age groups. The current study focused exclusively on adult learners, who may respond differently to creative methods than younger learners due to various cognitive, social, and motivational factors. Understanding how art and music affect memory retention, anxiety reduction, and engagement in younger learners compared to adults could offer important insights into age-appropriate methodologies. Researchers like Cohen (1987), have shown that mnemonic techniques involving music and rhythm improve memory retention for younger learners. Studies could thus explore whether these techniques offer similar, greater, or lesser benefits for adult learners and whether age-specific adaptations of these techniques could yield more significant outcomes.

Longitudinal Impact of Art and Music on Language Retention

Long-term studies on the impact of art and music on language retention would provide a deeper understanding of their benefits. While short-term studies, including the present one, highlight increased engagement and motivation, it is essential to explore how these methods influence long-term retention of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. For instance, a longitudinal study tracking adult ML2 learners over several years could reveal how consistent exposure to culturally resonant music or visual art affects language retention and fluency over time. This could further clarify the balance between initial gains in learner motivation and long-term language acquisition, helping educators understand the sustainability of these methods and any diminishing returns.

Exploration of Music and Art Types in ML2 Learning

The present study suggests that music tempo, lyrical complexity, and art styles influence learner engagement and comprehension. Further research should examine which specific types of music and art are most effective for ML2 learners. Researchers could compare the effects of classical versus popular music, or traditional Maltese versus contemporary global music, on language comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, examining different visual art forms—such as abstract versus representational art or traditional Maltese artwork versus Western art—could help educators identify which styles best support cultural resonance and language learning. This research could lead to tailored language-learning programmes where art and music selections align closely with linguistic and cultural learning objectives, as suggested by studies like those of Bokiev et al. (2018), which emphasise the motivational role of culturally familiar music in language learning.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Models

A culturally responsive approach to integrating art and music is crucial, as demonstrated in this study. Further research could explore culturally responsive pedagogical models specifically designed for adult learners of Maltese. These models would consider learners' diverse cultural

backgrounds and aim to create inclusive environments where art and music reflect learners' experiences and cultural values. This research could investigate how integrating Maltese cultural symbols, such as folk songs or traditional artwork, into language learning affects learners' motivation and connection to the language. As Żammit (2021) highlights, cultural resonance significantly impacts learners' emotional engagement and retention, suggesting that research focused on developing culturally tailored curricula would benefit adult ML2 education.

Digital and Virtual Art and Music Resources

With the increasing prevalence of digital learning tools, investigating digital art and music resources could be highly beneficial. Future research could evaluate the effectiveness of virtual galleries, interactive music platforms, and digital language games that incorporate art and music as tools for ML2 acquisition. Studies like those by Stavridi (2015) emphasise that virtual resources can enhance cultural immersion and language skills through accessible, interactive platforms. Digital tools may offer practical solutions for learners who cannot access in-person classes or traditional Maltese cultural artefacts. Additionally, researchers could explore how digital resources accommodate various learning styles and promote inclusivity by enabling learners to experience diverse Maltese art forms and music at their own pace.

Cross-Cultural Adaptability of Art and Music Interventions

While this study focuses on ML2, the general principles of integrating art and music into language learning may be adaptable to other cultural and linguistic contexts. Future studies could investigate whether the approaches effective in ML2 instruction are equally applicable to other languages with complex grammatical structures or unique cultural symbols. For example, studies could examine how visual art or traditional music impacts language learning in tonal languages, where pitch and rhythm are essential for meaning differentiation, compared to languages like Maltese. Such cross-cultural studies could help develop universally applicable frameworks for using art and music in language education, ultimately leading to adaptable curricula that transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries.

Educator Training for Art and Music Integration

For art and music to be successfully integrated into ML2 learning, educators must be adequately trained in these fields. Further research could focus on the effectiveness of professional development programmes that equip language teachers with the skills to incorporate art and music into their lessons. Such studies could evaluate whether training in basic music theory, visual arts pedagogy, and cultural competency improves teachers' ability to implement creative methods effectively. Additionally, exploring teachers' perspectives on the challenges and benefits of these methods would provide insights into practical strategies for enhancing adult ML2 instruction through art and music.

Socio-Emotional Benefits of Creative Language Learning

Another area worth exploring is the socio-emotional benefits of incorporating art and music in ML2 learning. Future research could investigate how creative approaches affect adult learners' self-confidence, sense of identity, and emotional connection to the Maltese language. By examining the psychological and emotional impact of art and music in language acquisition, researchers could determine whether these methods promote more profound, long-lasting engagement with the language. This research would be especially relevant for learners from diverse backgrounds who may face unique challenges in adapting to Maltese society and could benefit from socio-emotional support in their language-learning journey.

Examining Cognitive Effects of Music on Phonological Processing

Music's rhythm and melody may play an influential role in enhancing phonological processing and pronunciation accuracy, as suggested by findings from Chobert and Besson (2013). Further research could examine how different musical components—such as rhythm, tempo, and melody—specifically influence the phonological aspects of ML2 learning. Studies focusing on cognitive processes could reveal whether engaging with rhythmic and melodic structures aids learners in distinguishing sounds, word boundaries, and prosodic features in Maltese. Additionally, experiments comparing musical training with other phonological exercises could provide evidence for music's unique contribution to pronunciation and auditory discrimination skills in adult ML2 learners.

Evaluating the Impact of Art on Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention

This study highlighted that art activities can facilitate vocabulary acquisition. However, further research could systematically assess the specific effects of different visual arts techniques on vocabulary retention and recall. For instance, studies could explore how associating vocabulary with visual symbols or storytelling through art impacts learners' memory and retrieval processes. Research by Farokhi and Hashemi (2012) suggests that visual prompts enhance descriptive writing and vocabulary usage, which could be extended to ML2 learning. By comparing traditional rote learning with art-based vocabulary exercises, researchers could identify more effective methods for integrating visual art into language instruction.

Technological Innovations and AI-Assisted Tools in Creative Language Learning

Emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality, present new possibilities for incorporating art and music into language learning. Future studies could examine AI-driven language apps that use personalised art and music playlists tailored to individual learning preferences, as well as virtual reality experiences that immerse learners in Maltese cultural environments. Research in this area could investigate whether these technologies offer added benefits for adult ML2 learners, particularly those who may lack access to traditional language classrooms. By combining AI with art and music, researchers

could develop innovative tools that adapt to individual learning needs, promoting a more engaging and interactive language-learning experience.

Personalising Art and Music Activities Based on Learner Profiles

Finally, further research could explore how individual learner profiles—including personality, cultural background, and cognitive style—affect responses to art and music-based language activities. Understanding how different types of learners benefit from specific art or music activities could lead to more personalised, adaptive language instruction. Studies like White-Schwoch et al. (2021) have shown that individual differences in cognitive processing affect the effectiveness of musical training, which may extend to other forms of creative learning. By investigating these learner-specific factors, researchers could develop tools to assess individual preferences and tailor art and music activities accordingly, enhancing the overall effectiveness of ML2 instruction.

Future research in these areas could inform best practices for integrating art and music into adult ML2 learning, ultimately creating richer, more adaptable language-learning experiences that resonate with diverse adult learners. By deepening our understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and cultural effects of creative language learning, researchers can help shape innovative, inclusive pedagogical models that empower adult learners in their journey to fluency.

Conclusion

This study explored the benefits of integrating art and music into ML2 classes for adults, revealing that these elements were not commonly utilised, unlike in English language learning environments in various countries. The participants highlighted that incorporating art and music could make learning more enjoyable and effective, enhancing participation, memory, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension skills.

Despite some participants noted disadvantages, such as potential distractions and occasional pronunciation inaccuracies, the overall benefits suggest that these creative methods significantly contribute to ML2 learning success. Consequently, it is recommended that further research be conducted to understand why art and music are not currently used in adult ML2 classes and to evaluate their impact comprehensively. Additional studies should investigate the use of art and music in children's ML2 classes and develop strategies to integrate these elements into the curriculum effectively. It is also suggested that teachers collaborate with students to select suitable art and music resources that enhance learning without causing disruptions. By incorporating art and music into ML2 classes, teachers, trainers, course book authors, and curriculum designers can improve the quality of education and better support the academic achievement of ML2 learners.

The findings of this study also underscore that art and music have distinct roles in facilitating language acquisition. Visual art allows learners to connect with the Maltese cultural context,

thereby reinforcing vocabulary acquisition and promoting cultural understanding. Many participants expressed that engaging with Maltese artwork, whether in the form of traditional pieces or contemporary art, offered an immersive experience that went beyond linguistic knowledge, helping them to better appreciate and navigate Maltese social and cultural dynamics. This cultural relevance fostered a deeper connection to the language and created a more inclusive learning environment that celebrates diversity and individuality.

Music, on the other hand, was found to enhance phonological awareness, memory retention, and pronunciation skills. The participants indicated that music provided a mnemonic device that facilitated their recall of vocabulary and phrases, an especially useful feature in the complex structure of Maltese. Additionally, the rhythmic and repetitive nature of music aided in pronunciation practice, making it easier for learners to internalise and reproduce correct phonetic patterns. However, the study also highlights that the benefits of music in language learning vary among individuals, influenced by factors such as personal musical experience and the complexity of the target language. This variability points to the need for adaptable and personalised approaches in using music as a language-learning tool.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also notes several challenges in integrating art and music into ML2 education. Some participants felt that music while engaging, could at times distract from grammar-focused learning. Others emphasised the need for careful selection of culturally relevant music to avoid disengagement. These challenges underscore the importance of balancing creative elements with structured language instruction, ensuring that the core linguistic goals remain at the forefront while leveraging the motivational aspects of art and music.

Consequently, integrating art and music into adult ML2 education holds significant promise for enhancing both linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding. By incorporating these elements thoughtfully and balancing them with traditional pedagogical approaches, educators can create a dynamic and supportive learning environment that meets the diverse needs of adult learners. Further research could focus on refining these methods, exploring their long-term impacts, and developing tailored approaches that optimise the benefits of art and music in ML2. This study contributes to a growing recognition of the importance of creativity in language education, advocating for a more comprehensive and engaging approach to language learning.

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