


Chapter 4


Songs for Socio– Critical EFL Teaching: What Secondary School Students Think

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ABSTRACT

The present chapter explores the views of secondary school students on the use of songs for EFL before and after the administration of a song-based lesson plan dealing with the topic of racism. The data were obtained through a 21-item questionnaire and five open-ended questions. The results reveal that students' rates of agreement with the use of songs for EFL, which were already positive in the pre-test, increased significantly in the post-test for the three dimensions under analysis, namely linguistic, intercultural, and motivational. Besides, in the post-test, rates of agreement for the three dimensions evened out, in contrast to pre-test results where linguistic advantages received higher scores. Students also valued the anti-racist component of the lesson plan highly and were in favour of understanding EFL not only as a linguistic endeavour but as a discipline which also encompasses critical thinking and reflection on issues of social justice. Finally, some pedagogical implications and avenues for further research are defined.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing interest in integrating socially relevant themes and multimodal resources into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms to enhance both linguistic competence and critical awareness (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015; Méndez & Pavón, 2012). Among these resources, songs have been recognized for their potential to foster language acquisition while simultaneously engaging learners emotionally and cognitively (Fonseca-Mora et al., 2011). Furthermore, songs offer authentic input, promote motivation, and can serve as powerful tools for intercultural and ideological reflection (Murphey, 1992).

Among the wide array of social justice issues available, the present study focuses on racism, more specifically the movement Black Lives Matter as presented in a song of the same name by Dax. Our decision to address this topic stems from the increase in racist attitudes in Spain, the country where the present study was conducted. Following trends worldwide, recent reports and research in Spain (Cáceres-Zapatero et al., 2023; Lozano Martín et al., 2023; SOS Racismo, 2024) have shown a remarkable increase in hate crimes related to racism and xenophobia. Such racist attitudes have been identified to come not only from society in general but also from institutions.

Against this background, incorporating anti-racist education promotes critical consciousness among students, more specifically by providing them with the tools to identify, analyze, and challenge prejudice, stereotypes, and structural discrimination (Freire, 1970; Dei, 1996). This critical engagement is particularly important in language education, where cultural content can either reinforce dominant ideologies or serve as a platform for transformative learning (Kubota, 2004). Moreover, anti-racist pedagogy fosters empathy, intercultural competence, and democratic values, which are essential in today's multicultural societies (Gay, 2018). Ultimately, addressing racism in education contributes to the development of more just and equitable societies by empowering learners to become agents of change both within and beyond the classroom (Nieto & Bode, 2018).

Conducting empirical research on secondary school students' perspectives regarding the use of songs in EFL instruction—particularly from an anti-racist, socio-critical orientation—is relevant. Existing studies have largely relied on one-shot designs, focused on university-level learners or teachers' perspectives, and explored only a limited range of the potential benefits that songs can bring to the EFL classroom. Furthermore, research in song-based EFL instruction has rarely addressed the issue of racism.

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