



Using Folk Music To Facilitate Second Language Learning: A Pilot Study

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Background

While mnemonics have long been researched in their relationship with memory and cognition (Bower, 1970; Cohen, 1987; Taylor, 2016; Wang, Thomas, 2000), the specific use of music in second language (L2) learning and consolidation has only received limited empirical discussion. Beyond the practicality of common mnemonics, folk music places vocabulary within its cultural context (Greenway, 1960), strengthening the assimilation of the L2 learner into the culture of the language, beyond their basic vocabulary (Martin 1981). If folk songs in the classroom are shown to improve L2 learning, they will provide a fun, culturally relevant, and effective way to learn a new language.

Hypothesis: language learners who use folk music during their studies will experience significant improvement in both the short- and long-term variables.

Methods

This study utilized a single-case design, only using one participant for the sake of the pilot trial. The experiment was conducted in two separate trials

Tōryanse



In each trial, the participant was given 30 minutes to study the data set using either written repetition or a folk song. The participant was then tested immediately, one day, and one week afterward using a simple vocabulary test.

Folk Music

- とおりやんせ - Go through
- いく - To go
- じんじゃ - Shrine
- まいる - To visit
- おいわい - Celebration
- もつ - To hold
- ゆるす - To permit
- せまい - Narrow
- あぶない - Dangerous
- みち - Road

Written Repetition

- もどる - To return
- おそく - Slowly / Late
- あるく - To walk
- でる - To exit
- わたる - To cross
- まえ - Front / Before
- あと - After
- ふかい - Deep
- くらい - Dark
- ひびく - To echo

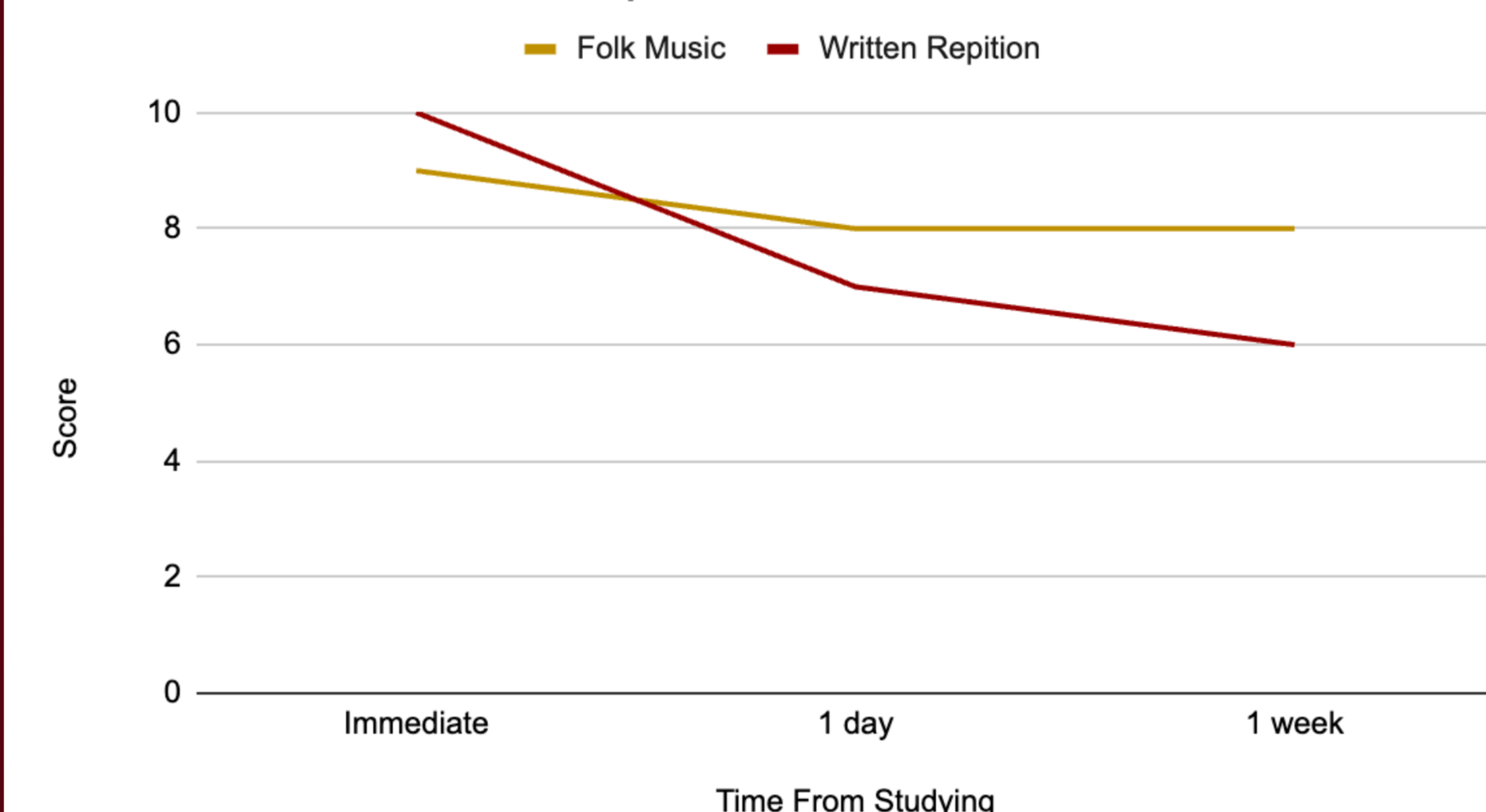
Results

Participants' vocabulary test scores were analyzed across three-time points: immediately after learning, one day later, and one week later.

- Immediate Recall: Written Repetition resulted in higher scores (M = 10) compared to Folk Music (M = 9).
- One-Day Retention: Folk Music (M = 8) led to slightly higher scores than Written Repetition (M = 7).
- One-Week Retention: Folk Music (M = 8) maintained higher scores compared to Written Repetition (M = 6).

If replicated on a larger scale (N=~100), these results would indicate that while Written Repetition produced higher scores for immediate recall, Folk Music led to better retention over time.

Folk Music vs Written Repetition



Conclusions

The results of this pilot study suggest that while written repetition may be more effective for immediate recall, incorporating folk music into language learning enhances long-term retention. This would hold significant value for language instructors seeking to promote student growth more cumulatively. This pattern of long-term recall could be explained by the “spacing effect” which states that learning is promoted when spaced out over time. A concept potentially replicated by having a song stuck in your head. Future research should address the major limitation of this study by incorporating a larger sample size.