

Songs and singing songs in early childhood education: A review of Spanish curriculum policy

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore Spanish curriculum policy related to song in early childhood education. By means of a document analysis, the different state governments' guidelines were reviewed. Song and singing songs are included in the official documents as curriculum content, as a pedagogical tool to approach curriculum content, and as an activity that helps promote personal and social development. In the first case, song is associated with the interpretative, aesthetic or artistic values to be enhanced in the early childhood; in the second case, singing songs is identified as a means to approach foreign language learning and as a way to gain a better understanding of culture; and lastly, as an activity that can help strengthen group cohesion, interpersonal relationships and the sense of belonging to a community. The present study findings suggest that song is taken into account as a valuable educational means in early childhood curriculum. Further study is needed to analyse how singing is approached in teacher education and how it is integrated into teachers' daily practices.

KEYWORDS

curriculum, early childhood education, policy, singing, songs

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INTRODUCTION

Singing is one of the most common musical activities in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Songs are taught to provide children with a repertoire to perform (Campbell, 2010; Gul & Bozkaya, 2015; Young, 2006), to increase vocabulary and enhance the ability to speak (Kristyana & Suharto, 2014), to reinforce foreign language learning (Ludke et al., 2014; Millington, 2011), to boost long-term memory and retention (Wolfe, 2010), to ease transitions, routines, and as a clean-up strategy in the classroom (Addressi, 2009; Register & Humpal, 2007), and to create positive learning environments (Angel-Alvarado, 2017; de la Vega Sestelo, 2015; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Songs are inherent to culture and can help children gain a better understanding of the identity of their community, their culture and the culture of others (Ilari et al., 2013).

According to the New Harvard Dictionary of Music, a song is

A form of musical expression in which the human voice has the principal role and is the carrier of a text; as a generic term, any music that is sung; more specifically, a short, simple vocal composition consisting of melody and verse text. (Randel, 1995, p. 768)

The act of singing is a physical and emotional experience (Moore, 2002) and a form of communication (Welch, 2005). To sing is “to make musical sound with the voice” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). It can elicit emotional response (Dario et al., 2006), with a great power to reconnect us with ourselves and others and to provide significant and amazing moments (Fundación Gemán Sánchez Ruipérez, 2009, p. 7). Choir singing, for example, can have a positive impact on participants' emotional state (Kreutz et al., 2003). Children, especially in early childhood, respond positively and show a strong emotional response to music and singing (Arriaga-Sanz et al., 2017; Ortis, 2008).

Singing offers numerous possibilities for personal and creative expression interconnecting song or improvised singing with play. As stated by Young (2006), children spontaneously sing songs during their play, particularly during their free-play where self-initiated or improvised singing takes place. Invented songs, common in young children aged 18 months to 7 years, can be considered “an early instance of creativity” (Barrett, 2006, p. 218). As playing has a crucial role in children's education preschools should stimulate children to take part in musical activities from the angle of enjoyment. Through them, and especially through songs, skills that contribute to children's holistic education and development are enhanced (Niland, 2009). For this reason, songs should be considered crosscutting and powerful elements of the educational process.

For a large number of teachers whose specialization is music, singing in schools is one of the most important activities of the music curriculum, although the interest of children in singing activities drops by the age of ten (Cámara, 2004; Mizener, 1993). Cuadrado and Rusinek (2016), also observed in the case studies they carried out that most of the students of the fifth and sixth grades of Spanish primary education (10–12 years old) seemed not to be motivated to sing. For this reason, many music specialists try to organize concerts or music shows (Cámara, 2008), or seek the collaboration of experts in singing and in music to develop specific activities (Lamont et al., 2012) as a way to motivate their students and to inspire singing practice. But we cannot forget that for many class teachers integrating singing and introducing singing opportunities into the school curriculum can be a real challenge (Hennessy, 2000). ECE teachers can feel anxiety when singing, showing a lack of confidence when having to initiate or lead a song (Abril, 2007; Swain & Bodkin-Allen, 2014).

In an attempt to answer the question *In what way is song taken into account in the different state or regional governments' frameworks for ECE?*, the aim of this paper was to

explore Spanish curriculum policy related to song in ECE and to provide a snapshot of how song is included in the official regulations. Research related to curriculum policy can help understand the educational intentions, in this case, referred to song in ECE. This way, comparisons between countries can help improve future curriculum development, in line with the most recent research and best practices studied.

METHODOLOGY

According to Bowen (2009), "Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material" (p. 27). The official records analysed in this article were located on the online Encyclopedia of the Spanish Educational System (Eurydice Spain-Spanish network of educational information, 2019). Each one of the official journals or bulletins of the state governments was accessed and analysed. Once the documents were downloaded, a search was made for the terms "song/songs" and "singing" to identify the passages of text where they were named. In Appendix, the frequency and context of the use of song/songs and singing in the different official documents are outlined. Following Braun and Clarke (2006) and Nowell et al. (2017) guidelines, a thematic analysis was later undertaken. Accordingly, these passages were classified into codes that were not previously defined and an open codification system was created in an inductive approach (Gibbs, 2012). Initial categories such as "curriculum content," "connecting element to culture," "activity that can support group cohesion," "source of enjoyment," "channel of expression," "teaching-learning resource," amongst others, were regrouped through a process of revision into three final categories: song as a curriculum content, song as a pedagogical tool to approach curriculum content, and singing songs as an activity that promotes personal and social development.

The research was conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation about best practices in singing education. To attain the aim and to respond to the aforementioned question, the frameworks and guidelines for ECE curriculums of the seventeen different Spanish regions or states plus the cities of Ceuta and Melilla were analysed, as this is the political structure that currently organises the Spanish territory. Thus, in this way, an analysis of the complete Spanish curriculum legislation for ECE was undertaken.

SPANISH CURRICULUM POLICY FOR ECE

In the Spanish context we can find a range of educational settings that offer provision for children: from birth to age three, that is, the first cycle of ECE, day care centres and nursery schools; and from age three to age six, that is, the second cycle of ECE, kindergartens, nursery schools, and preschools. These centres are run both by private and public institutions, licensed and regulated by the different states. In general, public centres are the responsibility of the regional or local administrations, which provide free schooling or require a fee according to the families' income tax. As ECE is non-compulsory it is up to the families to decide whether their children attend or not an ECE centre. These centres are not required to have an educational plan, in fact, what differentiates a school from a general ECE centre is that ECE schools (commonly named 'preschools' when referred to the second cycle) have an educational project, which frequently follows the official curriculum guidelines. It is only when children are five or six years old that it is compulsory to enrol them in a primary school (the entry age varies from 5 to 6 years depending on the month of the year of the child's birth).

Curriculum policies for ECE in Spain are mandated by the different state or regional governments, in accordance with the Education Act of 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2006).¹ Education falls under regional administration as a consequence of the 1981 State Pact. Thus, each state government provides a statutory framework and guidelines for ECE that must take into account the current national Education Act. These curriculum documents represent the fundamentals and the global outcomes state governments establish to be achieved, and the expected steps to reach them. They are related to the dimensions or spheres that are considered important and necessary in ECE. Both the targets and the learning areas, jointly with the reasons or arguments that justify the options adopted, are part of these regulations (Zabalza, 2008).

Each ECE centre can develop the curriculum and design its own teaching plans, normally based on the official documents. The existence of a curriculum for ECE implies the existence of a concrete educational project (Requena & Sáinz de Vicuña, 2009). In this sense, the aim of an ECE centre is not only to take care of children adequately but to offer them different and well-planned activities as well, according to their stage of development. The teaching plan should be intentional, in harmony with the principles of the educational project of each school, where the main key and defining educational goals should be outlined (Zabalza, 2009).

The curriculum frameworks of the regional governments follow an internal structure including, at least, an introduction, methodological guidelines and general principles, aims, contents and criteria assessment. Other aspects are also specified, such as timetable, requirements of facilities, number of professionals, attention to diversity, etc. This structure and these aspects are generally followed by the ECE centres when designing their teaching plans.

In general, the curriculum is built around three learning areas: *Self-knowledge and personal autonomy*; *Knowledge of the environment*; and *Languages: Communication and representation*. Nevertheless, there are some slight changes in the denomination of the learning areas in some regions (e.g., *Self-identity building and knowledge of the physical and social environment* or *Self-knowledge, personal autonomy, affections and the first social relationships* instead of *Self-Knowledge and personal autonomy*, etc.).

The frameworks and guidelines of the Spanish regions analysed are detailed in Table 1. As can be seen, a total of twenty-seven documents (or 100% of the documents) were reviewed.

RESULTS

References to songs are found in the second and third learning areas of the different Spanish ECE curriculums: *Knowledge of the environment* and *Languages: Communication and representation*. Only the central curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008) includes songs in the first learning area (*Self-knowledge and personal autonomy*) as a means to help identify oneself, one's name and objects.

The analysis undertaken shows that nine of the regions do not include the word "song" (in singular) in their state documents, whilst the word "songs" (in plural) can be found in all, although the regions of Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid and Murcia do not mention it in the first cycle of education. In relation to singing, we can find references in all the state documents analysed except in the Valencian Community. It is interesting to note that not always the verb "to sing" is used. Instead, verbs such as "to perform," "to interpret," "to reproduce" and "to recite" are used as equivalent to the act of singing in this stage of learning.

We can identify three main categories in which song and singing songs are mentioned in the official documents:

TABLE 1 Regions and documents reviewed

Spanish regions	Documents
Andalusia	Order 5 th August 2008, by which the childhood education curriculum is developed. <i>Official Bulletin of the Government of Andalusia</i> , 169, 17–53
Aragon	Order 10 th March 2008, of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, by which the curriculum of childhood education is passed and its implementation in the teaching centres of the Autonomous Community of Aragon is authorized. <i>Official Bulletin of Aragon</i> , 43, 4943–4974
Autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla	Order ECI/3960/2007, 19 th December, by which the curriculum is established and the organization of childhood education is regulated. <i>State Official Bulletin</i> , 5, 1016–1036
Balearic Islands	Decree 71/2008, 27 th June, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of the Balearic Islands is established. <i>Official Bulletin of the Balearic Islands</i> , 92, 177–191
Basque Country	Decree 237/2015, 22 nd December, by which the curriculum of childhood education is established and it is implemented in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country. <i>Official Bulletin of the Basque Country</i> , 142, 1–50
Canary Islands	Decree 183/2008, 29 th July, by which the organization and the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Autonomous Community of Canary are established. <i>Official Bulletin of Canary</i> , 163, 15977–16008 Decree 201/2008, 30 th September, by which the educational contents and the requirements that the centres that offer the first cycle of childhood education of the Autonomous Community of Canary are established. <i>Official Bulletin of Canary</i> , 203, 19393–19407
Cantabria	Decree 143/2007, 31 st October, by which the educational contents of the first cycle of childhood education of the Autonomous Community of Cantabria are established. <i>Official Bulletin of Cantabria</i> , 222, 14968–14977 Decree 79/2008, 14 th August, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Autonomous Community of Cantabria is established. <i>Official Bulletin of Cantabria</i> , 164, 11543–11559
Castile and Leon	Decree 122/2007, 27 th December, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Community of Castile and Leon is established. <i>Official Bulletin of Castile and Leon</i> , 1, 6–16 Decree 12/2008, 14 th February, by which the educational contents of the first cycle of childhood education of the Community of Castile and Leon are defined and the requirements that the centres that offer this cycle must meet are established. <i>Official Bulletin of Castile and Leon</i> , 35, 3022–3025
Castilla-La Mancha	Decree 67/2007, 29 th May 2007, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha is established and organized. <i>Official Journal of Castilla-La Mancha</i> , 116, 14743–14759 Decree 88/2009, 7th July 2009, by which the educational contents of the first cycle of childhood education are defined and the basic requirements that the centres that offer it in the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha must meet are established. <i>Official Journl of Castilla-La Mancha</i> , 133, 30037–30062
Catalonia	Decree 181/2009, 9 th September, by which the organization of the teaching of the second cycle of childhood education is established. <i>Official Journal of the Government of Catalonia</i> , 5216, 68256–68272 Decree 101/2010, 3 rd August, of organization of the teaching of the first cycle of childhood education. <i>Official Journal of the Government of Catalonia</i> , 5686, 61472–61484

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Spanish regions	Documents
Community of Madrid	Decree 17/2008, 6 th March, of the Government Council, by which the teaching of childhood education for the Community of Madrid is detailed. <i>Official Bulletin of the Community of Madrid</i> , 61, 6–15
Extremadura	Decree 4/2008, 11 th January, by which the curriculum of childhood education for the Autonomous Community of Extremadura is passed. <i>Official Journal of Extremadura</i> , 12, 1226–1272
Galicia	Decree 330/2009, 4 th June, by which the childhood education curriculum in the Autonomous Community of Galicia is established. <i>Official Journal of Galicia</i> , 121, 10773–10799
La Rioja	Decree 25/2007, 4 th May, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Community of La Rioja is established. <i>Official Bulletin of La Rioja</i> , 62, 3287–3292 Decree 49/2009, 3 rd July, by which the organization of the first cycle of childhood education is established, the educational contents are detailed and the requirements that the centres who offer this cycle in the Autonomous Community of La Rioja must meet are established. <i>Official Bulletin of La Rioja</i> , 85, 9400–9416
Navarre	Foral Decree 23/2007, 19 th March, by which the curriculum of the teachings of the second cycle of childhood education of the Foral Community of Navarre are established. <i>Official Bulletin of Navarre</i> , 51, 4506–4513 Foral Decree 28/2007, 26 th March, by which the first cycle of childhood education of the Foral Community of Navarre is regulated and the requirements that the centres must meet is established. <i>Official Bulletin of Navarre</i> , 56, 4985–4993
Principality of Asturias	Decree 85/2008, 3 rd September, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education is established. <i>Official Bulletin of the Principality of Asturias</i> , 212, 20440–20456 Decree 113/2014, 3 rd December, by which the organization of the educational contents of the first cycle of childhood education is regulated. <i>Official Bulletin of the Principality of Asturias</i> , 286, 1–15
Region of Murcia	Decree number 254/2008, 1 st August, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Autonomous Community of the Region of Murcia is established. <i>Official Bulletin of the Region of Murcia</i> , 182, 24960–24973
Valencian Community	Decree 37/2008, 28 th March, of the Council, by which the educational contents of the first cycle of childhood education of the Valencian Community is established. <i>Official Journal of the Valencian Community</i> , 5734, 55003–550017 Decree 38/2008, 28 th March, by which the curriculum of the second cycle of childhood education of the Valencian Community is established. <i>Official Journal of the Valencian Community</i> , 5734, 55018–55048

1. As curriculum content.
2. As a pedagogical tool to approach curriculum content.
3. As an activity that helps promote personal and social development.

In the first case, song is associated with the interpretative, aesthetic or artistic values to be enhanced in early childhood; in the second case, songs are identified as a means to approach foreign language learning and as a way to gain a better understanding of culture; and in the third case, singing songs is considered an activity that can help strengthen group cohesion, interpersonal relationships and the sense of belonging to a community.

Song as curriculum content

Song is included in the curriculum as a specific content in the third learning area *Languages: Communication and representation*, block III, *Artistic languages*. The documents refer to songs from the cultural and/or oral tradition (eleven regions), contemporary (one region), dancing and children's songs. As well, references are also made to simple songs (ten regions), songs for playing in circles or songs in a foreign language, being Madrid the only region that specifies choral music (see Table 2). For example, the regulation of the Department for Education, Culture and Sports of Aragon (2008) includes "To recognize and to perform some simple songs" (p. 4956) without specifying types of songs, whilst the Andalusian document (2008) includes "Round songs, games, old tunes, ditty songs, and others not specifically children songs but heard and sometimes learnt at home, will make up the first repertoire of boys and girls" (p. 43).

As well, an emphasis is made to listening or to enjoy listening to and singing songs, except for three regions (Andalusia, the Basque Country and the Canary Islands). For instance, "To

TABLE 2 Types of songs mentioned in the state documents analysed

	Type of song
Andalusia	Animal songs, repetitive songs, songs for playing in circle, games, popular songs and other songs learnt at home, parts of songs in a foreign language
Aragon	Songs, simple songs, songs from the cultural tradition, traditional children songs characteristic of the community
Autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla	Songs, parts of songs in a foreign language, simple songs
Balearic Islands	Short songs, lullabies, songs
Basque Country	Songs, parts of songs in a foreign language
Canary Islands	Songs, simple songs, songs of the cultural tradition, contemporary songs, simple songs in a foreign language, traditional children songs, songs for playing in a circle, songs for counting, nursery rhymes, chants
Cantabria	Songs, traditional songs and lullabies, simple songs present in the community, songs in a foreign language
Castile and Leon	Simple songs, songs, songs in a foreign language, popular traditional songs, songs from other cultures
Castilla-La Mancha	Songs, songs from the oral and cultural tradition, short and simple songs
Catalonia	Songs, traditional and contemporary songs, Catalan traditional songs and songs from around the world
Community of Madrid	Songs, traditional and contemporary songs, simple songs, songs from home and from around the world
Extremadura	Simple songs from the oral tradition, children songs, simple songs, songs, traditional songs from Extremadura, traditional songs, songs for playing in a circle, songs for jumping, songs to count, contemporary songs
Galicia	Songs
La Rioja	Songs
Navarre	Songs, simple songs
Principality of Asturias	Songs, songs from the cultural tradition of Asturias
Region of Murcia	Simple songs, traditional songs from Murcia, traditional songs from other cultures
Valencian Community	Traditional songs, songs, interesting songs (both psychologically and musically speaking), traditional songs, folklore and contemporary songs

take an active part and to enjoy singing songs, music games and dances” (Aragon, 2008, p. 4970) or “To take an active part and to enjoy music listening, music games and to perform songs and dances” (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 1029).

Song as a pedagogical tool to approach curriculum content

References to song can be found in the second and third learning areas, i.e., *Knowledge of the environment* and *Languages: Communication and representation*, as a pedagogical tool to approach curriculum content. This refers to the use of songs related to the impact on other fields of knowledge. For example, Andalusia (2008) includes songs in the second learning area *Knowledge of the environment*, Block I, *Physical environment: elements, relationships and measures* related to mathematics representations: “The learning of repetitive songs, rhythm chants, cumulative stories or short poems brings together intuitively children to the models based on repetitive and increasing patterns” (p. 32); and in Block II, *Approach to nature*, with the aim of getting to know nature and increasing children’s vocabulary:

We will use, as well, storytelling of short stories, the use of formulas from popular folklore such as couplets, songs, poems, circle games, etc. to contribute to the knowledge of nature of children at the same time that they increase their vocabulary. (p. 34)

In relation to the references of song in the third learning area *Languages: Communication and representation* not associated with the interpretative, aesthetic or artistic values, we find that song is mentioned in some documents under the heading Block I, *Verbal language*:

- Related to understanding and repeating simple texts: “To understand and to repeat some simple texts (stories, poems, songs ...)” (Extremadura, 2008, p. 1250).
- As an approach to literature: “To understand and to repeat correctly some texts from cultural tradition in general and specifically from our own community (tongue twisters, riddles, proverbs, game songs, songs to sort out ...) individually and in group” (Extremadura, 2008, p. 1269).
- As an approach to written language: “To choose the most adequate title of a song according to the text (in tales, news, recipes, songs, poems, etc.)” (La Rioja, 2007², p. 3291) and “To invent other titles for songs, poems, etc.” (p. 3291).

Other uses of song as a pedagogical tool include songs linked to the first learning area *Self-knowledge and personal autonomy*, as a means for the “Identification of oneself, one’s name and personal objects through signs, photographs, hiding games, mirror games or songs” (Ministry of Education, 2008, pp. 1020–1021).

Explicit attention is shown to singing songs to approach a foreign language. Song is recognized in foreign language training as a valuable teaching-learning resource to improve listening and speaking skills and to promote motivation and attention (Millington, 2011). Song is acknowledged in foreign language training as a teaching-learning resource that can help students respond to teachers and embrace the knowledge in a more practical manner, especially when linked to the use of the body (e.g., using body language like gestures, mimics, pointing, kinaesthetic approaches, etc.). This activates the so-called Total Physical Response (TPR), which implies using the whole body to express and to act. This approach receives distinctive attention in some regions, such as in Galicia (Xunta de Galicia, 2009a). Similar to the model used to learn the mother tongue, TPR is based on oral skills development and on listening comprehension.

Six regions specifically mention songs in a foreign language: the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, Andalusia, the Basque Country, the Canary Islands, Cantabria and Castile and Leon. The curriculum documents refer to songs and rhymes in general and do not specify types of songs. There is one exception in the Canary Islands' document (2008), which includes in the assessment criteria the English words *nursery rhymes*, *poems*, and *chants*: "To repeat simple songs (nursery rhymes, poems, chants ...)" (p. 16006). But it is usually taken for granted that songs in ECE include finger-plays, action songs, alphabet, counting songs, nursery rhymes, chants, etc.

Song related to foreign language learning is mentioned in the third learning area *Languages: Communication and representation*, Block I, *Verbal language*. For example, in Cantabria's document, it states "Interest in taking part in oral interactions in a foreign language in routines and daily situations and functional communication ones (games, greetings, classroom routines, songs, stories, etc.)" (Cantabria, 2008, p. 11554). The Basque Country's framework specifies "To listen, to understand, to memorize and to recite some parts of songs, stories, poems or rhymes in a foreign language" (The Basque Country, 2016, p. 44).

Regarding one of the eight basic skills to be developed in ECE, the cultural and artistic skill, song is also considered as a connecting element to culture. It is included in the curriculum in the second and/or third learning areas *Knowledge of the environment* and *Languages: Communication and representation* as an element that can help us connect with our culture and the identity of our community as well as that of others. For example, Asturias (2008) specifically mentions the regional hymn as a means to help recognize cultural identity:

Recognition of Asturias identity traits (Asturias' hymn, songs, the flag, festivities, traditions, myths, etcetera) and an interest to take part in social and cultural activities. To take an active part in Asturias' cultural traditions through songs, dances and traditional festivities. (p. 20450)

Andalusia (2008) lists some of the songs to sing identified with the Andalusian popular tradition, relating them to the enjoyment of singing and to helping group cohesion:

Andalusian popular music – La Tarara, Gatatumba, Arroyo Claro ... – due to the enjoyment and fun it produces, to the great number of chorus, melodies, and tag lines, to the easiness to be accompanied rhythmically with gestures and movements of all the body or to be danced individually or in group, etc., is an exceptional tool in these circumstances. (p. 44)

Other state or regional documents do not specify the regional songs to be learnt, and just refer to traditional or popular songs of the region (or other cultures) in general. This is the case of Castile and León (2008) that includes "Curiosity for songs and dances from our own popular tradition and that of other cultures" (p. 16).

Song and singing songs as an element and an activity that helps promote personal and social development

The different guidelines include singing songs as an activity that can help strengthen group cohesion, interpersonal relationships, and the sense of belonging to a community. Andalusia's curriculum regulations (2008) specifically mention singing songs as a means to help children take into account other participants in the activities been undertaken:

Participation in collective situations where it is necessary to undergo the performance and memorization of songs, in musical stories dramatization and songs, as well as in other musical activities such as games, dances and simple instrumentations, will allow them, too, to adjust and coordinate with other members of the group. (p. 44)

The other state documents refer to children's integration and participation in group activities but do not clearly mention singing as a means to enhance social cohesion. For example, in the methodological guidelines section for the second level of ECE, Galicia's document mentions:

The organization of agreed, negotiated projects carried out collectively by the group, or the realization of assemblies to comment events or discuss and decide specific aspects of daily activity are valuable strategies for the teacher to use because they are very motivating and promote the development of interpersonal relationships, the establishment of emotional ties, as well as that the child can feel to be a member of the group and can take an active part in it. (Galicia, 2009a, p. 10796)

DISCUSSION

Song is included in Spanish curriculum policy as curriculum content *per se* and as a pedagogical tool to approach curriculum content, in particular related to foreign language learning. Singing songs is seen as a way to gain a better understanding of culture, as an activity to enjoy, and as an activity that can support group cohesion. As can be seen, song is not only viewed in terms of impact on other fields of knowledge (although a considerable weight is given to song as a means to approach the learning of a foreign language) but, as well, the interpretative, aesthetic or artistic value is taken into account, at least in writing. This is an important issue since nowadays education neoliberal policies advocate for a scientific training approach that prevails at a great cost for the Arts (Aróstegui & Kyakuwa, 2020). In the same line, North and Hargreaves (2013) point out that at present there is a great emphasize on the non-musical outcomes of music education. An example of Arts integration can be found in the STEAM approach, where Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics are intertwined and not narrowly conceived, with the aim of promoting a deeper understanding of the disciplines, a holistic education and key skills, such as creativity, problem-solving and collaboration (Belbase et al., 2021; Khine & Areepattamannil, 2019).

As stated by Lamont et al. (2012), singing can be integrated into daily practices or can only be part of the music lesson. In Spain, not all preschools count with music specialist teachers as this is non-compulsory in ECE: the 1990 Spanish Educational Act specifies for primary education that music, physical education and foreign languages, should be delivered by specialists; on the other hand, for the second cycle of ECE curriculums, the regions of Galicia and Murcia (Galicia, 2009b; Murcia, 2008) stipulate that only foreign languages and religion should be taught by specialists in these fields. For this reason, although singing songs are mentioned in the different states' guidelines, in practice it really depends on the willingness (or the competencies) teachers or child-minders have to integrate musical activities in their classrooms, and therefore, in the daily curriculum. Teacher training for ECE should place a special focus on song and singing. Confident class teachers can be vocal leaders and examples of best practice introducing songs successfully in their daily practice (Saunders et al., 2011), without having to be experts in singing education. Further research would be worth pursuing related to vocal practices in ECE, in particular regarding how is singing addressed in teacher training in ECE or how is singing integrated into teachers' or child minders' classroom practices. As songs are important in children's education,

non-specialist teachers should be trained to use them in an effective way in their pedagogical practices. As well, specialist teachers must be provided with the tools and strategies to integrate songs and music in a holistic way, building bridges between disciplines. This training should not only be focused on instrumental techniques but, as well, related to the implications that teaching singing and vocal education entails. According to Lamont et al. (2012, p. 263) “an understanding of teaching singing is also required for class teachers”. This is a key idea in teacher education. Vocal training and the implications that working with young voices has should not be missing in initial teacher education. It is important not to forget that in vocal and singing education the physical, emotional, and psychological human dimensions play a central role.

The act of singing emphasizes the role of the children and their active participation in the lesson, as for singing they must produce sounds with their own voices, involving their whole self in the activity. In relation to the inclusion of singing in the official regulations, the findings are not as promising as expected since singing songs (performing, interpreting or reproducing) is not included in all the learning areas and when included it is mentioned, in the majority of cases, only once. Taking into account that singing is one of the most important and democratic musical activities that can be integrated into the classroom, in our view, it ought to be included in the current Spanish curriculum legislation.

It should not be forgotten that singing (performing, interpreting or reproducing) songs frequently requires bodywork, movement, sense of rhythm, vocal education, memory and emotional regulation at the same time, and, implying health education in a cross-cutting way. On the other hand, references to song/songs are more frequent, being Andalusia the region that mentions the noun the most, twelve times throughout the document. As can be seen, the official state documents do not take into account the benefits of songs/singing songs as much as would have been desired.

Songs, rhymes, and chants can help children remember the meaning of words as well as enhance motivation and positive attitudes towards language learning (Brewster & Ellis, 2011). Abdul Razak and Md Yunus (2016) argue that for younger ESL (English as a Second Language) learners, combining singing with movement through action songs is another powerful option to teach vocabulary. The official documents analysed recognize the importance of song as a valuable pedagogical tool. Usually, ECE practitioners use traditional songbooks. These include songs with few and repetitive sounds and rhymes that catch children's attention. Maffioletti (2015) states that traditional songs are enjoyable to children and can help introduce music theory and grammar structures in a context of play. As well, traditional nursery rhymes can provide useful information related to context and culture of a different country and the development of different key competences (Couto Cantero, 2018). According to Pound and Harrison (2003), song can become a way to gain a better understanding of culture. A nurturing musical environment in preschool offering a rich and varied repertoire can promote global awareness as well as personal and social identities.

We have seen that the different regional or state government curriculums include the enjoyment of songs. Temmerman (2000) points out that the enjoyment of music is essential to achieve quality musical programmes that involve children successfully. Teaching practices should be sustained taking into account the use of songs for the pleasure of enjoying music and as a personal, cathartic and living revelation (de Fonzo, 2010). Positive engagement in music activities, especially singing together, can increase cooperative behaviour, creating a sense of community and social inclusion (Welch et al., 2014). As well, song helps strengthen interpersonal relationships and the sense of belonging to a group. Marsh (2008) points out that taking part in games can promote group solidarity and acceptance.

To summarise we can say that the different state or regional governments' frameworks for ECE in Spain include song as curriculum content (which suggests that ECE teachers should deliver music and cultural training to their children), as a pedagogical tool to approach

curriculum content (which implies the use of songs in the teaching-learning process of other curriculum content blocks, such as foreign languages), and singing songs as an activity that helps promote personal and social development (which means children should be involved in active singing practices, with the benefits this entails, such as the promotion of social participation or the increase of self-confidence).

Although this study has a limited scope as it focuses only on Spanish curriculum, the analysis undertaken may be useful as a model to follow to conduct future studies in other countries, whilst the findings could be compared with those of other countries with the aims of suggesting ways of promoting curriculum revisions and improving day-to-day educational practices. The study provides useful insight of how songs and singing songs are integrated into the curriculum of the different Spanish state governments official ECE regulations, showing ways of introducing them in daily practice that can be of great help to practitioners, especially novel teachers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data associated with a paper is available on the Reference list.

ETHICS STATEMENT

All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards to do research in education, such as those of the BERA.

PATIENT CONSENT STATEMENT

This is not applicable for this research.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE MATERIAL FROM OTHER SOURCES

All the in-text citations strictly follow APA style, 7th edition.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The current national Education Act of 2013 (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Spain, 2013), which partially modifies the previous Act, did not introduce changes in ECE.

² This document was updated in 2018, but the content we are citing does not change.

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APPENDIX

Frequency and context of the use of song/singing in the state documents analysed

	SONG/SONGS		SINGING (to sing/to perform/to reproduce song(s) ^k)	
	Frequency	Context	Frequency	Context
Andalusia ^b	0/2 ^l	1&2 ^a : description ALCR ^e	1	1&2: to sing (methodological guidelines)
	0/8	1 ^f : contents		
	0/2	2 ^g : contents	2	2: to perform (contents)
Aragon ^b	0/1	1: description of block III (ALCR ^e)	3	1: to perform (contents; assessment criteria)
	0/1	2: contents	2	to reproduce (contents; assessment criteria)
			1	2: to perform (contents)
Autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla ^b	0/1	1&2: description ALCR ^e	3	1&2: to reproduce (assessment criteria)
	0/1	1: contents	1	to sing (assessment criteria)
			3	2: to perform (contents)
			1	to recite (contents)
Balearic Islands ^b	0/1	1&2: description ALCR ^e	0	
	0/4	1: contents	1	2: to perform (contents)
Basque Country ^b	0/1	1: contents	1	1&2: to perform (key competencies)
	0/1	2: contents	1	2: to recite (contents)
Canary Islands ^c	0/1	1: description ALCR ^e	1	1: to perform (description ALCR ^a)
	3/5	2: description ALCR ^e ; contents; assessment criteria	2	to reproduce (contents)
			4	2: to perform (description ALCR ^a ; contents; assessment criteria)
			3	to reproduce (contents; assessment criteria)
			2	to sing (assessment criteria)
			1	to recite (assessment criteria)
Cantabria	0/4	1: description ALCR ^e ; contents	1	1: to perform (contents)
	0/1	2: contents	2	2: to perform (contents; assessment criteria)
Castile and Leon ^c	0/0	2: description ALCR ^e ; contents	1	1: to perform (contents)
	0/4		2	2: to reproduce (assessment criteria)
Castilla-La Mancha ^c	0/2	1: contents; assessment criteria.	2	1: to reproduce (contents)
	0/2	2: description basic skills; contents	1	2: to perform (contents)

	SONG/SONGS		SINGING (to sing/to perform/to reproduce song(s) ^k)	
	Frequency	Context	Frequency	Context
Catalonia ^c	0/1	1: contents	0	
	1/1	2: contents	1	2: to perform (contents)
Community of Madrid ^b	0/0		0	
	1/9	2: description ALCR ^e ; contents; aims; assessment criteria	1	2: to reproduce (contents)
			1	to perform (contents)
1	to sing (aims)			
Extremadura ^b	0/3	1: contents	2	1: to reproduce (aims; contents)
	1/4	2: contents	1	to perform (contents)
			2	2: to reproduce (contents)
			1	to perform (contents)
Galicia ^b	0/0		1	1: to perform (contents)
	0/0		3	2: to perform (contents; assessment criteria)
La Rioja ^c	0/0		2	1: to reproduce (aims; contents)
	0/2	2: contents	1	2: to recite (contents)
			1	to perform (contents)
Navarre ^c	0/2	1: contents; description BMPE ⁱ	2	1: to reproduce songs (contents)
	1/3	2: contents; assessment criteria	1	2: to recite (contents) to perform (contents)
			1	
Principality of Asturias ^c	0/3	1: description ALCR ^e ; contents	1	1: to perform (contents)
	0/3	2: contents; assessment criteria.	1	2: to perform (contents)
Region of Murcia ^d	0/0		0	
	0/2	2: contents	1	2: to perform (contents)
Valencian Community ^c	1/5	1: description AKE ^h ; description ALCR ^e ; contents	0	
	0/5	2: description ALCR ^e ; contents	0	

^a "1&2" means the following information refers to both cycles; the 1st and the 2nd cycle. ^bSeven regions include in the same document the regulations for the whole childhood range age. These are identified with the superscript letter^b. ^cNine regions provide two different documents, one covering from birth to three years of age and the second, from three to six years. These cases are identified with the superscript letter^c. ^dThe Region of Murcia only details the curriculum for the second cycle of preschool (ages three to six). ^eALCR: Area 'Languages: communication and representation'. ^f"4" means the following information refers to the 1st cycle. ^g"2" means the following information refers to the 2nd cycle. ^hAKE: Area 'Knowledge of the physical, natural, social, and cultural Environment'. ⁱBMPE: Area 'Body, Music and Art Expression'. ^j0/2 means that the word "song" (0) is missing, and that the word "songs" (2) appears twice. ^kTo perform/to interpret/to reproduce are understood as equivalent to "singing" in this stage of learning.