



Castledown

 OPEN ACCESS

Technology in Language Teaching & Learning

ISSN 2652-1687

<https://www.castledown.com/journals/tltl/>

Technology in Language Teaching & Learning, 6(2), 1–8 (2024)

<https://doi.org/10.29140/tltl.v6n2.1500>

Language Learning Through Music: A Critical Review of Lirica



IBRAHIM HALIL TOPAL 

Gazi University, Türkiye
ibrahimtopal@gazi.edu.tr

Abstract

The past decade has been the heyday of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), with increased use of mobile applications (apps) as learning platforms. Despite the central focus of mobile apps on language skills such as vocabulary (e.g., Duolingo) and pronunciation (e.g., BoldVoice), few have factored in both learners and teachers. Lirica is an engaging mobile app that fosters language learning through songs in five languages. Given the pedagogical and psychological affordances of songs and the personalized learning environment offered by mobile apps, this tech review seeks to present an overview of the Lirica app and its potential for language learning while tackling its limitations, following Kohnke and Moorhouse's (2022) framework. The main findings are teacher-friendliness (i.e., level and objective-appropriate assignments), integrated skills practice (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, listening, and pronunciation), and information cards to raise learner's cultural awareness. However, full content access is available only to premium users. Users might also experience technical hiccups, such as glitches and connection instability. Furthermore, the app prioritizes Spanish among the other languages of practice (i.e., English, French, German, and Welsh). Since this review introduces the app and outlines its potential advantages and disadvantages for language learning, classroom-based and experimental studies are needed to corroborate the findings.

Keywords: Lirica, mobile-assisted language learning, mobile apps, music, songs

Introduction

Many scholars argue that much learning occurs outside classrooms (Foster et al., 2023). Given the diversity of language learners and contextual challenges (Turgut & Aslan, 2021), many learners and

Copyright: © 2024 Ibrahim Halil Topal. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. **Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within this paper.

teachers turn to out-of-class alternatives such as MALL products (Huang et al., 2024). Mobile apps might improve language skills, with MALL providing manifold benefits (Hsu & Liu, 2023). However, most apps are commercialized, with a specific language focus. Additionally, many fail to incorporate teacher support for classroom use (Wai et al., 2018). However, the positive impact of music on human psychology (Dolean, 2016) and language learning (Baills et al., 2021) features mobile apps utilizing music. Lirica (Appendix 1), a mobile app that promotes multilingual practice through songs, emerges as a convenient model for the very reason. Hence, this tech review evaluates Lirica by presenting an overview and handling its affordances and limitations of use.

Overview

Lirica is a mobile app that shows great potential for language learners. It allows practice in five languages: English, French, German, Spanish and Welsh. It has been tested with Spanish students in several institutions and has demonstrated impressive results. Due to numerous levels of lesson content, the app primarily focuses on Spanish learners.

Lirica is downloadable for Android (5 and up) and iOS (11 or later). Users can access more information at <https://www.lirica.io/>. Once downloaded, users are asked to register. Free (restricted content) and premium (\$4.99–\$24.99 per item) versions are available. It is user-friendly and has a straightforward interface with four tabs at the bottom page (Figure 1).

The *Learn* tab displays the course content according to level. Users can quickly check their progress by completion percentage. Independent users might go to the *Play* section to practice language through diverse genres. The *Awards* section shows the user's achievements and the number of words learned. The fourth tab (*Settings*) enables users to customize settings or access information on privacy and help.

Opportunities for Language Learning

One of Lirica's robust features is the teacher's module (Figure 2), allowing teachers to manage their classes by assigning songs across levels (A1–C1) and learning objectives (e.g., tenses and themes). This way, teachers can review students' progress and guide them accordingly. Given the scarcity of language apps that incorporate teachers' use (Wai et al., 2018), this feature may give teachers a distinct advantage over other apps (e.g., LingoClip and Sounter).

Another distinct feature is diverse activities for language skills, considering the challenges these skills pose for different language learners (Brandt et al., 2024). For instance, users can revise grammar through episodic instructions (Figure 3) that guide them to relevant parts of the lyrics. They can also practice vocabulary by choosing the correct translation as the song proceeds. Listening is another skill that can be improved through manifold activities (e.g., ordering words, gap fill, multiple choice, and arranging the lyrics). In addition, all skills practice comes with various competitive activities. In an earlier study, Huang and Chen (2024) found that the Lyrics Training app effectively improved learners' listening and vocabulary and reported that learners held positive perceptions. In another study, Busse et al. (2021) revealed the positive impact of songs on vocabulary, speaking, and grammar. In addition, Baills et al. (2021) reported pronunciation improvement in learners who practiced through songs. As the literature indicates, learning through songs might foster language skills; thus, Lirica could facilitate this.

Information cards (Figure 4) that expose users to the target culture are also beneficial. Users can learn about artists and their local culture by reading these cards. Given the interconnectedness of culture and language learning (York, 2023), this feature might assist in raising users' cultural awareness. Previous

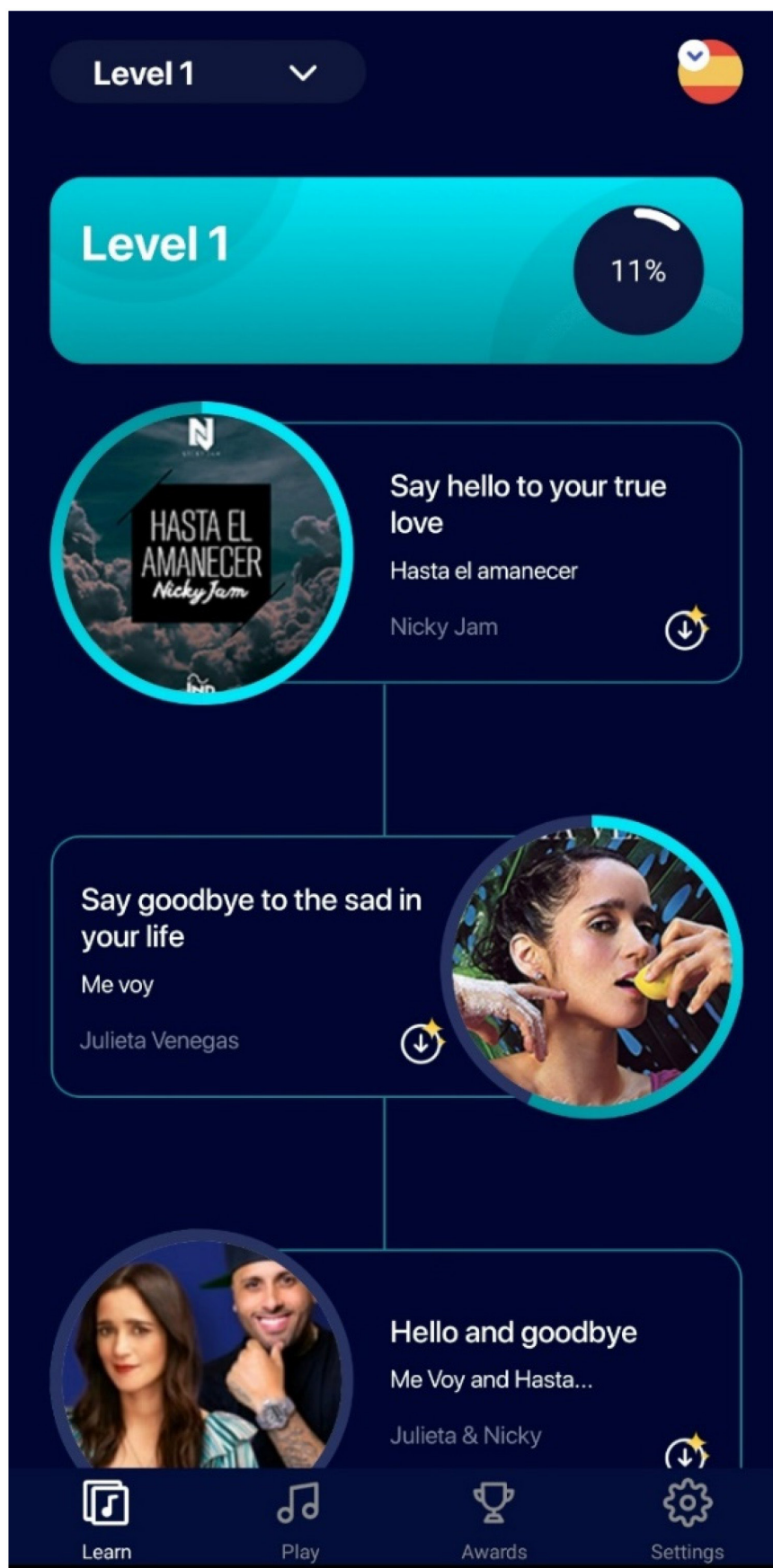


Figure 1 *The Main Screen.*

Class Details Class Code: **S5628ER3** [Copy Code](#)

Class Name: Class Language:

Students 10 [Invite Students](#)

Student	Progress	Action
AN Arlan Novasky Joined via Code	12/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
EM Ellen Morgan Invited	15/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
MS Manuel Spencer Invited	8/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
LH Lawrence Hunter Joined via Code	12/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
EA Edna Armstrong Joined via Code	2/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
AD Amy Duncan Invited	14/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
LE Lois Elliott Invited	12/15 Lessons Completed	Invite
AA Amy Andrews Invited	12/15 Lessons Completed	Invite

Lessons 15 [Add Lessons](#)

Lesson	Details	Action
To the cake shop!	Song: Aber bitte mit sahn Artist: Udo Jurgens Level: A1 Language: German Learning Objectives: Present tense Agreement, noun + adjective Noun +2	Add
What's the time Mark?	Song: Übermorgen Artist: Mark Forster Level: A2 Language: German Learning Objectives: Present tense Agreement, noun + adjective Noun +2	Add
Whatever the weather	Song: Bleib noch'n Tag Artist: LOTTE Level: A1 Language: German Learning Objectives: Present tense Agreement, noun + adjective Noun +2	Add
Let's go to the beach		Add

Figure 2 Teacher's Module.

Ordinal numbers define the order of something in a sequence e.g. first, second or third, etc. Camilo repeatedly uses an ordinal number in his song

[Next](#)

Figure 3 Episodic Instructions.

studies also showed that singing songs from diverse cultures could significantly impact how we form our identities, perceive and comprehend others, and ultimately develop a better understanding of ourselves (Ilari et al., 2013; Kelly, 2018). It was also demonstrated that language learners preferred learning through entertainment (e.g., learning about music bands) (Ma, 2017). Furthermore, cultural information is one of the criteria for evaluating language learning apps (Rosell-Aguilar, 2017). All things considered, Lirica has these characteristics and might be helpful to language learners in this regard.

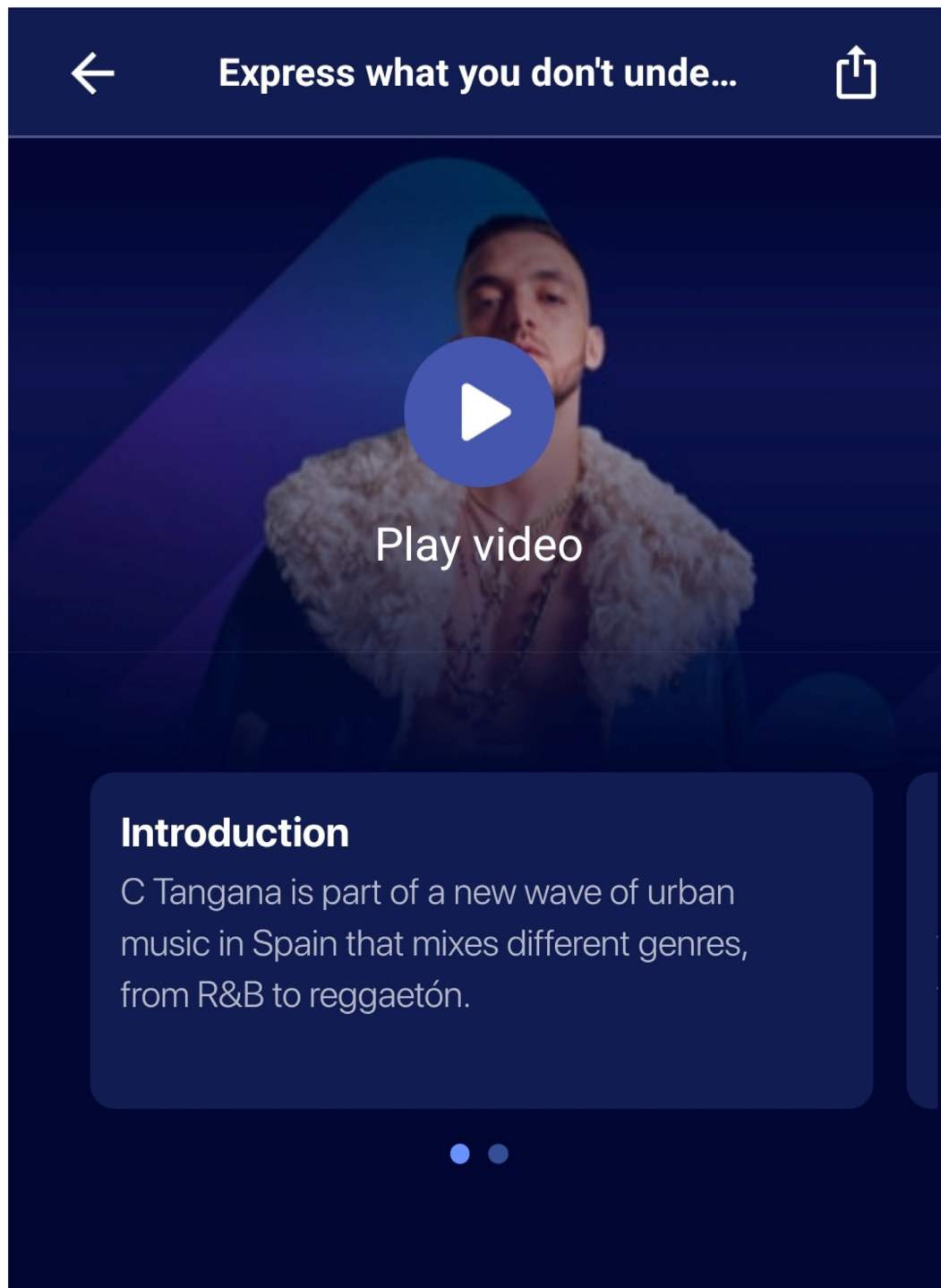


Figure 4 *Information Cards.*

Users can further benefit from the gamified learning environment. Previous research revealed the positive impacts of gamification on learner experiences and learning outcomes (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021). In addition to earning gold and diamond discs, stars, and characters based on their achievements, users can also check their progress after completing the activities. Further, the app's digital assistant displays instructions in episodes, scaffolding users through their learning experience. Given gamification's pedagogical affordances, this feature might increase learners' motivation (Hong et al., 2022). A meta-analysis of gamification studies between 2011 and 2019 indicated its positive effects on learner motivation and engagement (Boudadi & Gutiérrez-Colón, 2020). Accordingly, the relevant literature supports our claim that Lirica might foster learner motivation.

Conclusion and Limitations

Notwithstanding its primary focus on Spanish, Lirica can be an advantageous tool for language learning and practice via songs in multiple languages. The app stands out, particularly for its teacher-friendly feature, along with integrated skills practice and cultural awareness-raising features for learners. Teachers can leverage this app in classrooms to review learners' vocabulary, grammar, listening, and pronunciation progress. On the other hand, learners might customize their learning preferences (e.g., selecting musical genres to practice songs with) and have a motivating and engaging learning experience.

However, the app suffers from a few limitations. First, it allows full access to premium users only. Also, it is only accessible to users with a stable internet connection. Additionally, glitches might occur during practice and thus slow learners' pace, which can be discouraging. Furthermore, the app emphasizes Spanish more among other languages for practice (e.g., English, French, German, and Welsh). Since this review aimed to introduce Lirica and present its affordances and limitations for language learning, more studies are needed to verify the results. In this regard, prospective researchers might examine the effectiveness of Lirica in improving language skills, particularly vocabulary, grammar, listening, and pronunciation. Researchers might also explore learners' perceptions of the app across diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, future studies might compare Lirica with similar apps, such as LingoClip and Sounter.

References

- Baills, F., Zhang, Y., Cheng, Y., Bu, Y., & Prieto, P. (2021). Listening to songs and singing benefitted initial stages of second language pronunciation but not recall of word meaning. *Language Learning*, 71(2), 369–413. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12442>
- Boudadi, N. A., & Gutiérrez-Colón, M. (2020). Effect of gamification on students' motivation and learning achievement in second language acquisition within higher education: A literature review 2011–2019. *The EuroCALL Review*, 28(1), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.4995/eurocall.2020.12974>
- Brandt, H., Ehmke, T., Kuhl, P., & Leutner, D. (2024). Pre-service teachers' ability to identify academic language features: The role of language-related opportunities to learn, and professional beliefs about linguistically responsive teaching. *Language Awareness*, 33(1), 70–93. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2023.2193409>
- Busse, V., Hennies, C., Kreutz, G., & Roden, I. (2021). Learning grammar through singing? An intervention with EFL primary school learners. *Learning and Instruction*, 71, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2020.101372>
- Dehghanzadeh, H., Fardanesh, H., Hatami, J., Talaei, E., & Noroozi, O. (2021). Using gamification to support learning English as a second language: A systematic review. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 34(7), 934–957. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1648298>
- Dolean, D. D. (2016). The effects of teaching songs during foreign language classes on students' foreign language anxiety. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(5), 638–653. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815606151>

- Foster, N. L., Mueller, M. L., Dunlosky, J., & Finkenthal, L. (2023). What is the impact of interleaving practice and delaying judgments on the accuracy of category-learning judgments? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 29(2), 374–385. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/xap0000444>
- Hong, J. C., Hwang, M. Y., Liu, Y. H., & Tai, K. H. (2022). Effects of gamifying questions on English grammar learning mediated by epistemic curiosity and language anxiety. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 35(7), 1458–1482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1803361>
- Hsu, K. C., & Liu, G. Z. (2023). A systematic review of mobile-assisted oral communication development from selected papers published between 2010 and 2019. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 31(6), 3851–3867. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2021.1943690>
- Huang, Y. C., & Chen, K. T. C. (2024). Supporting EFL listening ability and vocabulary acquisition with lyrics training app. *International Journal of Instruction*, 17(2), 539–560. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2024.17230a>
- Huang, C., Wang, T., & Li, Y. (2024). Mobile-assisted English learning beyond the classroom: Understanding the effects of language proficiency on Chinese undergraduate students' behavioral engagement. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29(1), 737–762. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-12301-7>
- Ilari, B., Chen-Hafteck, L., & Crawford, L. (2013). Singing and cultural understanding: A music education perspective. *International Journal of Music Education*, 31(2), 202–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761413487281>
- Kelly, S. N. (2018). *Teaching music in American society: A social and cultural understanding of teaching music*. Routledge.
- Kohnke, L., & Moorhouse, B. L. (2022). 'There's an app for that!' Writing technology reviews for academic journals. *RELC Journal*, 53(1), 261–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220945419>
- Ma, Q. (2017). A multi-case study of university students' language-learning experience mediated by mobile technologies: A socio-cultural perspective. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 30(3–4), 183–203. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1301957>
- Rosell-Aguilar, F. (2017). State of the app: A taxonomy and framework for evaluating language learning mobile applications. *CALICO Journal*, 34(2), 243–258. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1558/cj.27623>
- Turgut, Y. E., & Aslan, A. (2021). Factors affecting ICT integration in Turkish education: A systematic review. *Education and Information Technologies*, 26(4), 4069–4092. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-021-10441-2>
- Wai, I. S. H., Ng, S. S. Y., Chiu, D. K., Ho, K. K., & Lo, P. (2018). Exploring undergraduate students' usage pattern of mobile apps for education. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 50(1), 34–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000616662699>
- York, J. (2023). Engaging with the world: Applying connected learning in a university language learning context. *Foreign Language Annals*, 56(2), 334–361. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12691>

Appendix 1: Product at a Glance

Title	Lirica
Developer	Taplyrica Ltd
Website	https://www.lirica.io/
Product Type	Online/mobile language practice (in English, French, German, Spanish, and Welsh)
Operating Systems	iOS 11.0 or later, iPadOS 11.0 or later, macOS 11.0 or later and a Mac with Apple M1 chip or later, visionOS 1.0 or later, Android (5.0 and up)
Registration	Required
Hardware Requirements	An internet-accessible device
Price	Free A seven-day trial account Subscription at \$4.99 – \$24.99 per item