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# Harnessing The Power of English Songs in ELT Classrooms: A Review of **Pedagogical Impacts Across Educational Levels**

# Memanfaatkan Kekuatan Lagu-Lagu Bahasa Inggris di Kelas ELT: Tinjauan Dampak Pedagogis Di Seluruh Tingkat Pendidikan

# Marisa Linia<sup>1\*</sup>, Yuni Putri Utami<sup>2</sup>, Awati Fane<sup>3</sup>, Achmad Faqih<sup>4</sup>, Moh. Taufik<sup>5</sup>

1-5 Universitas K.H Bahaudin Mudhary Madura

Email: marisalinia@unibamadura.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, yuniputriutami@unibamadura.ac.id<sup>2</sup>, awatifane@unibamadura.ac.id<sup>3</sup>, achmadfaqih@unibamadura.ac.id<sup>4</sup>, moh.taufik@unibamadura.ac.id<sup>5</sup>

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Integrasi lagu ke dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris (ELT) semakin mendapat perhatian sebagai pendekatan pengajaran yang menarik dan efektif. Tinjauan pustaka ini mengeksplorasi peran lagu bahasa Inggris sebagai media pengajaran dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa siswa di berbagai jenjang pendidikan. Berdasarkan studi yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2011 dan 2021 dari basis data seperti Google Scholar dan Publish or Perish, tinjauan ini berfokus pada bagaimana lagu berkontribusi pada pengembangan kemampuan mendengarkan, berbicara, kosakata, pelafalan, dan motivasi belajar. Analisis ini disusun berdasarkan tiga konteks pendidikan: sekolah menengah pertama, sekolah menengah atas, dan pendidikan tinggi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan lagu bahasa Inggris dapat menumbuhkan suasana belajar yang positif, mengurangi kecemasan siswa, dan meningkatkan keterlibatan serta penguasaan keterampilan. Tinjauan ini menyoroti nilai pedagogis lagu dalam ELT dan memberikan wawasan praktis bagi para pendidik yang ingin menerapkan strategi berbasis lagu di kelas mereka.

Kata kunci: Lagu bahasa Inggris, media pengajaran, keterampilan berbahasa

#### **Abstract**

The integration of songs into English Language Teaching (ELT) has gained increasing attention as an engaging and effective instructional approach. This literature review explores the role of English songs as instructional media in enhancing students' language skills across various educational levels. Drawing on studies published between 2011 and 2021 from databases such as Google Scholar and Publish or Perish, the review focuses on how songs contribute to the development of listening, speaking, vocabulary, pronunciation, and learner motivation. The analysis is organized according to three educational contexts: junior high school, senior high school, and higher education. Findings suggest that the use of English songs can foster a positive learning atmosphere, reduce learners' anxiety, and improve engagement and skill acquisition. The review highlights the pedagogical value of songs in ELT and provides practical insights for educators seeking to implement song-based strategies in their classrooms

Keywords: English songs, instructional media, language skills

#### INTRODUCTION

In contemporary English language education, the integration of multimedia resources has become increasingly essential to foster learner engagement and facilitate effective instruction. Among various instructional media, English songs have emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool within English Language Teaching (ELT), offering both cognitive and affective benefits to learners. Their accessibility through digital platforms and familiarity in daily life make songs a versatile and

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appealing medium for language learning. The rhythmic, repetitive, and melodic qualities of songs not only support language retention but also present authentic linguistic input, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse patterns (Millington, 2011; Bokiev et al., 2018).

Recent research underscores the potential of songs to promote motivation, reduce anxiety, and enhance student participation in language classrooms. Learners often experience apprehension when engaging with foreign languages, especially in contexts dominated by traditional, teacher-centered methodologies. In this regard, songs serve as a motivational scaffold, fostering a more relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Rohmah and Indah (2021) emphasize that the incorporation of music in the classroom can reduce distractions, alleviate boredom, and increase students' attention span. These affective advantages align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively in environments where anxiety is minimized and motivation is high (Arif et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the use of English songs in ELT aligns with theories of input-based instruction, particularly those advocating for comprehensible input. Songs naturally provide learners with repetitive exposure to language structures in meaningful contexts, allowing them to internalize patterns and develop listening comprehension skills over time. According to Bokiev et al. (2018), music-based instruction engages both cognitive and emotional domains, resulting in deeper processing of linguistic material. This is particularly beneficial in developing listening and speaking competencies, as learners mimic the pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns modelled by native speakers in songs (Putri et al., 2021; Melati et al., 2021).

From a linguistic standpoint, songs are valuable resources for vocabulary acquisition, grammatical awareness, and oral fluency. The lyrical content often features high-frequency vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and colloquial language, providing learners with practical and contextually rich language input. Empirical studies have demonstrated that learners exposed to vocabulary through songs exhibit higher retention rates than those using rote memorization strategies (Rohmah & Indah, 2021; Rais et al., 2020). Moreover, songs can be intentionally selected to reinforce specific grammatical structures, thereby transforming abstract linguistic concepts into engaging learning experiences.

The application of songs is particularly advantageous across different educational levels. In primary and secondary schools, songs facilitate phonological awareness and auditory discrimination, critical skills for developing pronunciation and oral fluency. Melati et al. (2021) assert that music increases learners' sensitivity to phonetic distinctions, which is essential for second language development in younger learners. In tertiary education, songs continue to play a meaningful role in enhancing listening comprehension and promoting learner autonomy. Studies by Anggraini and Fauzi (2019) and Andriani et al. (2018) reveal that digital music applications such as Joox and Spotify significantly improve vocabulary and listening proficiency while encouraging independent language practice outside the classroom.

Nevertheless, despite their pedagogical potential, the implementation of songs in ELT is not without challenges. Teachers must exercise critical judgment in selecting songs that are age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and linguistically suitable. Lyrics containing complex idiomatic expressions, regional slang, or culturally specific references may hinder comprehension if not

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properly scaffolded. Hidayat (2013) recommends designing pre-listening and post-listening activities to contextualize song content and facilitate deeper learning outcomes.

This literature review seeks to synthesize empirical findings from 2011 to 2021 on the use of English songs as instructional media in ELT settings. The analysis categorizes research outcomes based on three educational contexts: junior high school, senior high school, and higher education. By organizing the findings in this manner, the review aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the pedagogical value of English songs across varying learner profiles and institutional levels. In doing so, this paper provides English language educators with evidence-based insights and practical recommendations for effectively integrating songs into their instructional practices. Ultimately, the review affirms that English songs are not merely supplementary materials but constitute dynamic, multimodal resources capable of enriching language teaching and learning processes.

Unlike previous studies that often examine the use of English songs in isolated educational levels or focus on specific language skills, this review offers a comprehensive synthesis of empirical research across junior high school, senior high school, and higher education settings. By categorizing findings based on educational stages and identifying both cognitive and affective outcomes, this paper provides a multilayered perspective on the pedagogical integration of English songs. Furthermore, a distinctive feature of this study lies in its selection of literature from 2011 to 2021, a critical period marked by the rapid rise and widespread adoption of digital music platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and Joox in language learning environments. These platforms have increasingly shaped how English songs are accessed and utilized in English Language Teaching (ELT), making this temporal focus both timely and pedagogically relevant. Previous literature reviews have largely overlooked this technological shift. Thus, this paper fills a gap by capturing the intersection of music-based pedagogy and digital media integration in ELT, offering insights into differentiated instruction and learner engagement across educational levels.

### Literature Review

The incorporation of English songs in English Language Teaching (ELT) has increasingly been studied in recent years, especially as educators seek creative and student-centered strategies to foster language learning. Songs offer rich input in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, and cultural context. When implemented thoughtfully, they can be powerful tools to enhance linguistic competence and learner motivation in both traditional and digital learning environments.

Recent studies have shown that songs facilitate vocabulary acquisition and retention, particularly among young and adolescent learners. According to Rokhayati and Rahmawati (2020), students exposed to English vocabulary through songs demonstrated higher retention rates and better contextual understanding than those using textbook materials alone. This is attributed to the repetitive and melodic nature of songs, which enhances memory through rhythm and rhyme. The presence of emotional content in music further reinforces cognitive retention, making vocabulary recall more accessible during communication tasks.

Songs also serve as an effective medium for improving listening comprehension and pronunciation. A study by Nugroho and Mutiaraningrum (2021) highlights how Indonesian EFL students benefited from listening to English pop songs in developing phonological awareness and intonation patterns. When learners sing along or complete gap-fill lyric exercises, they are exposed

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to the natural rhythm, stress, and connected speech used in authentic communication. This immersive exposure helps them develop a more intuitive sense of pronunciation, which can be difficult to achieve through isolated phonetic drills.

In addition to cognitive benefits, songs offer affective advantages by enhancing motivation, reducing anxiety, and creating a supportive learning environment. Lailiyah and Cahyono (2022) found that incorporating music into ELT lessons resulted in increased student participation and enjoyment, especially among learners with lower confidence levels. Songs are naturally appealing and can shift the emotional tone of a class from passive to active, allowing learners to engage with the language in a more relaxed and enjoyable way. This aligns with the principle that a positive emotional state facilitates second language acquisition, especially in oral performance and listening comprehension.

Furthermore, English songs act as a gateway to cultural learning and intercultural competence. Modern songs often contain references to social issues, identity, and contemporary values that reflect the culture of the language being learned. In a study by Yuliana and Indriani (2023), learners reported that analysing English song lyrics helped them understand aspects of Western culture while building empathy and perspective-taking skills. This kind of engagement contributes not only to linguistic competence but also to critical thinking and cultural awareness, which are important outcomes in globalized education.

Despite these clear advantages, there are also pedagogical challenges. Teachers often struggle with selecting appropriate materials due to concerns over language level, song content, or curriculum alignment. Some educators may also lack training in how to structure lessons that incorporate music meaningfully. To address these issues, Putri and Ningsih (2021) suggest developing guided song-based learning frameworks, which include pre-listening activities, vocabulary preparation, and post-listening reflection. Such frameworks ensure that musical content is not only entertaining but also pedagogically sound.

Moreover, in the current post-pandemic educational landscape, the use of songs has adapted to digital formats. Teachers now utilize platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Lyrics Training to engage students in remote or blended learning environments. These platforms offer interactive tools, lyric videos, and real-time listening tasks that support autonomous learning. The shift toward technology-enhanced language learning has made it even more practical to integrate music into ELT.

In conclusion, current research over the past five years consistently supports the use of English songs as an effective and multidimensional tool in English language teaching. They promote vocabulary development, improve listening and pronunciation skills, support emotional engagement, and provide meaningful cultural exposure. However, their effectiveness depends heavily on careful selection, instructional planning, and alignment with learning objectives. This literature review provides a foundation for the current paper's focus on how English songs are applied across educational levels in Indonesia, aiming to identify both effective practices and areas for further development.

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### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative integrative literature review to examine the pedagogical use of English songs in English Language Teaching (ELT). The integrative review approach allows for the synthesis of diverse research findings and methodological perspectives in order to construct a comprehensive understanding of a given topic (Snyder, 2019). In the context of ELT, this method is appropriate for identifying instructional trends, evaluating pedagogical outcomes, and generating implications for both classroom practice and future research.

To ensure academic rigor and relevancy, a systematic search was conducted across three major academic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2018 and 2023 to capture recent developments in music-assisted language instruction. A range of search terms was used, including "English songs", "language learning", "songs in ESL classrooms", "songs in EFL teaching", "music and vocabulary", "pronunciation", "listening", and "songs as instructional media in ELT". Boolean operators (AND/OR) were applied to enhance search accuracy, and filters were used to limit results to English-language publications.

The selection of studies was guided by clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. To be included, studies had to (1) explicitly examine the use of English songs in formal ELT or EFL classroom settings; (2) investigate one or more key language skills—such as listening, speaking, vocabulary, or pronunciation; (3) involve participants from structured educational contexts, including junior high schools, senior high schools, or higher education institutions; and (4) be peer-reviewed and available in full-text English versions.

Studies were excluded if they focused on music therapy or informal learning environments outside the classroom. Also excluded were editorials, theoretical papers lacking empirical evidence, conference abstracts without peer review, and research not involving the pedagogical use of English songs. Following this screening process, an initial pool of 89 articles was identified. After title and abstract screening to eliminate irrelevant or duplicate entries, 61 articles remained. These were further assessed through full-text review, resulting in a final selection of 22 articles that met all inclusion criteria. This process is summarized in Table 1.

The selected studies were subjected to thematic content analysis, where findings were coded and categorized based on the educational level of participants: junior high school, senior high school, and higher education. Each study was analyzed according to its research design, instructional approach, participant demographics, targeted language skills, and reported outcomes. An integrative synthesis approach, as outlined by Xiao and Watson (2019), was employed to allow for the inclusion of diverse study designs (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods), thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness of the review.

This methodological approach enabled the researcher to identify patterns, pedagogical benefits, and contextual challenges related to the use of English songs in ELT classrooms. The findings not only highlight effective practices but also inform areas requiring further investigation, particularly in relation to technology integration and differentiated instruction.

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Table 1. Summary of Study Selection and Screening Process

Stage	Description	Number of Articles
Initial database search	Articles retrieved from Google Scholar, ERIC, and DOAJ	89
Title and abstract screening	Duplicates removed; relevance assessed based on keywords and scope	61
Full-text eligibility review	Articles evaluated using inclusion and exclusion criteria	32
Final articles included in review	Studies that met all criteria and were thematically analyzed	22

#### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Use of English Songs in Elementary and Junior High School

Research has consistently shown that introducing language learning at a young age yields positive outcomes. According to Rohmah and Indah (2021), several factors support the preference for early language acquisition. First, the brain exhibits greater neuroplasticity before puberty, allowing children to absorb language more rapidly than adults. Second, language mastery in childhood tends to occur unconsciously, providing children with more natural opportunities for acquisition. Lastly, children engage in constant learning, often without realizing it, which supports incidental vocabulary development. Music, when introduced during these formative years, contributes to cognitive development and enhances language skills by promoting appreciation for language, vocabulary, and poetic expression through singing activities (Rohmah & Indah, 2021).

Given the playful and inquisitive nature of young learners, English teachers are encouraged to integrate songs into classroom instruction. In elementary and junior high school contexts, English songs have been utilized as effective pedagogical tools to teach pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure (Rohmah & Indah, 2021; Rais, Pranowo, & Sari, 2019; Fadhli, 2017; Hadi, 2019). For example, a study by Rohmah and Indah (2021), which explored the use of modified English songs to teach vocabulary, revealed that students exposed to such materials demonstrated significantly higher vocabulary scores compared to those taught through conventional methods. Their findings align with Millington's (2011) assertion that songs are effective for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in English language learners.

Similarly, Fadhli (2017) examined the use of song-based worksheets to enhance vocabulary mastery among elementary-level EFL students. The results indicated that such worksheets were not only pedagogically effective but also well-received by students. The study emphasized that engaging and age-appropriate worksheets based on songs could make vocabulary learning more enjoyable and memorable. However, it also highlighted the importance of carefully selecting classroom activities to maintain student interest, as young learners may lose focus easily.

In another study, Rais, Pranowo, and Sari (2019) investigated the use of songs in teaching English pronunciation. Their research demonstrated a marked improvement in

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students' pronunciation abilities and speaking confidence. The findings showed that most students were able to sing the lyrics accurately and with correct pronunciation, suggesting that the musical context reduced language anxiety and encouraged active participation. Students expressed a clear preference for learning pronunciation through songs over traditional drills, as it provided a more engaging and motivating experience.

Hadi (2019) further supported these conclusions in his study on teaching English through songs in junior high school. He reported that students became more interactive and communicative when music was integrated into the learning process. The findings indicated a significant improvement in overall language proficiency, particularly in listening and speaking skills. Hadi concluded that English songs serve as effective instructional tools that not only enhance linguistic competence but also foster enthusiasm and participation.

In light of the above studies, it is evident that the use of English songs in elementary and junior high school classrooms has a positive impact on various aspects of language learning. As an instructional medium, songs offer an enjoyable and effective approach to increasing student motivation and reinforcing language skills (Hadi, 2019). However, the success of song-based instruction largely depends on the careful selection of appropriate materials. Teachers must consider the linguistic complexity and thematic relevance of the songs relative to the learners' proficiency level. Songs that are too simple may fail to provide meaningful input, while those that are overly complex may hinder comprehension and demotivate learners. Thus, aligning song selection with students' linguistic capabilities is essential for achieving optimal learning outcomes.

### 2. The Use of English Songs in Senior High School

At the senior high school level, students possess a higher degree of cognitive and linguistic maturity, which enables them to engage with more complex forms of language input. English songs at this stage serve not only as engaging instructional tools but also as effective media for improving vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and language comprehension. The use of music in the classroom offers contextualized exposure to authentic language, making abstract grammar and vocabulary concepts more accessible to learners.

Several studies have affirmed the effectiveness of using songs in English instruction for senior high school students. For instance, Pratiwi (2020) noted that songs could enhance students' vocabulary acquisition by introducing new words within meaningful, memorable contexts. This contextual learning is reinforced through melody and repetition, which are known to aid retention. Moreover, the lyrical content of songs often includes idiomatic expressions and colloquial structures, providing learners with exposure to real-life language use beyond what is typically found in textbooks.

Rais, Pranowo, and Sari (2019) emphasized that learning pronunciation through songs leads to more accurate articulation and greater confidence in speaking. Their findings revealed that students taught using English songs demonstrated improved phonological awareness and intonation. The integration of melody and rhythm enabled learners to internalize correct stress patterns, which can be challenging to master through conventional methods. Moreover, learners

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reported feeling more motivated and comfortable practicing pronunciation when music was part of the learning process.

Hadi (2019) also highlighted the impact of songs on student participation and classroom interaction. In his study on the use of music in teaching English at the junior and senior high school levels, students exhibited increased enthusiasm and engagement. The findings suggested that music reduces language anxiety and promotes a more relaxed and student-centered environment. When students are emotionally connected to the learning materials, they are more likely to engage in communicative tasks and participate actively in class discussions.

In addition to linguistic benefits, songs at the senior high school level can be leveraged for the development of critical thinking and cultural awareness. Song lyrics often touch upon themes such as identity, love, social issues, and emotional experience—all of which can be explored through group discussions, writing assignments, or interpretive activities. As Putri and Ningsih (2021) assert, incorporating music-based tasks such as lyric analysis, reflective journaling, and creative expression not only improves language skills but also fosters learner autonomy and personal connection to the material.

To ensure the effectiveness of song-based instruction at this level, careful attention must be paid to song selection. The chosen songs should align with students' interests, language proficiency, and curricular objectives. Educators should also scaffold instruction with prelistening, while-listening, and post-listening activities to ensure that language input is processed deeply. Utilizing online tools such as Lyrics Training or YouTube with subtitles can further enhance learners' listening comprehension and allow for differentiated instruction tailored to individual student needs.

In conclusion, the use of English songs in senior high school classrooms offers a multidimensional approach to language teaching. Songs provide authentic input, promote phonological development, and enhance learner motivation. When incorporated strategically into lesson planning, songs can also support critical literacy and cultural understanding. With appropriate instructional design and careful song selection, educators can optimize the pedagogical value of music in fostering language competence among senior high school students.

### 3. The Use of English Songs in Higher Education

In higher education contexts, the use of English songs extends beyond basic language acquisition to encompass more advanced linguistic, cultural, and critical engagement. University students are generally more autonomous learners, capable of analyzing language not only for comprehension but also for rhetorical and sociolinguistic depth. English songs thus serve as a rich and authentic resource for exploring discourse features, cultural values, and thematic complexity in the target language.

Research supports the integration of songs as a means of promoting active learning in tertiary education. Nugroho and Mutiaraningrum (2021) found that English pop songs could enhance students' pronunciation, listening comprehension, and awareness of stress and intonation patterns. These auditory and phonological skills are especially important at the university level, where learners are expected to participate in presentations, debates, and

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academic discussions. Moreover, the familiarity and emotional appeal of music contribute to a reduction in language anxiety and increase learner engagement, key factors in successful language acquisition at the adult level.

Beyond listening and pronunciation, songs can be used to stimulate higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Lestari, Suwartono, and Yuliasri (2022) demonstrated that integrating English songs into a critical literacy framework enabled university students to explore complex social themes embedded in lyrics. Topics such as gender, identity, inequality, and mental health were discussed in connection with both language use and broader social context, thus supporting both linguistic and civic competencies.

English songs also provide opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. In literature, education, or communication studies, students may analyze how language is used creatively to construct meaning, express emotion, or persuade an audience. Tasks may include lyric interpretation, reflective essays, multimedia presentations, or podcast production, all of which encourage both analytical and creative skills. According to Yuliana and Indriani (2023), these types of activities support intercultural competence, as students are exposed to cultural narratives and values embedded in the lyrics of English songs from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, the integration of technology into higher education enhances the accessibility and interactivity of song-based learning. Online tools such as Lyrics Training, Spotify, and YouTube allow students to engage with authentic English materials beyond the classroom. These platforms also support learner autonomy, enabling students to select songs based on their interests and proficiency level, and to practice language skills at their own pace. This aligns with modern pedagogical approaches that emphasize personalized learning and the development of independent study habits.

To ensure that song-based activities are pedagogically effective, instructors must align their use with clearly defined learning outcomes. Song selection should be based on linguistic complexity, thematic relevance, and student preferences. Educators should also employ scaffolding strategies, such as pre-listening questions, vocabulary previews, and post-listening discussions, to guide students toward deeper understanding. When implemented thoughtfully, English songs can serve as a dynamic medium for enhancing not only language skills but also students' critical awareness and intercultural understanding.

In summary, English songs in higher education function as valuable instructional tools for developing advanced language proficiency, fostering learner autonomy, and promoting interdisciplinary inquiry. Their integration supports a more holistic approach to language learning that goes beyond grammar and vocabulary to include emotional, cultural, and analytical dimensions. With the appropriate pedagogical framework, English songs can enrich the university language classroom and prepare students for more nuanced and critical engagement with the English language.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This integrative literature review has explored the pedagogical use of English songs as instructional media in English Language Teaching (ELT) across junior high, senior high, and higher education contexts. The synthesis of 22 empirical studies published between 2018 and 2023 reveals

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that the use of English songs supports both the cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning. English songs were found to enhance vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation accuracy, listening comprehension, and speaking fluency. Additionally, their capacity to foster learner motivation, increase classroom engagement, and reduce language anxiety reinforces their pedagogical relevance.

At the junior and senior high school levels, the incorporation of songs into English lessons helped young learners internalize language structures in meaningful, memorable ways (Rohmah & Indah, 2021; Rais et al., 2020). Songs provided a low-pressure environment where students could experiment with pronunciation and vocabulary through repetition and rhythm. In tertiary education, the use of music—especially when integrated with mobile applications such as Spotify or Joox—supported autonomous learning and increased learner investment by enabling repeated exposure to target language input (Anggraini & Fauzi, 2019; Andriani et al., 2018).

These findings align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which asserts that learners acquire language more effectively when their anxiety is lowered, and motivation is high. As songs naturally promote emotional engagement, they create favorable learning conditions that contribute to sustained language acquisition (Bokiev et al., 2018). When implemented strategically, music serves as a multimodal learning tool that addresses both the linguistic and psychological needs of learners.

Nevertheless, the review also highlights key considerations for successful classroom implementation. Teachers must ensure that selected songs are age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and linguistically aligned with learners' proficiency levels. Moreover, instructional design should include structured pre-listening and post-listening tasks to facilitate vocabulary reinforcement, comprehension, and critical reflection. Without pedagogical scaffolding, the effectiveness of songbased learning may be limited.

This review has certain limitations. It only included peer-reviewed journal articles published in English and accessible in open academic databases. As such, relevant studies published in other languages or non-indexed sources—such as theses, dissertations, or reports—were excluded. Future research could address these gaps by incorporating a broader range of sources and exploring longitudinal impacts of song-based instruction across proficiency levels and sociolinguistic contexts.

In conclusion, English songs offer more than just an engaging supplement to language learning—they represent a pedagogically sound and affectively rich medium that bridges linguistic development and learner-centered instruction. Positioned at the intersection of language, culture, and emotion, English songs constitute a powerful, yet underutilized, resource for transforming traditional ELT into a more dynamic, inclusive, and motivating experience.

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