



The Effectiveness of Songs as a Phonology-Based English Pronunciation Teaching Tool

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of English songs as a phonology-based tool for teaching pronunciation to EFL learners. The research employed an experimental approach involving intermediate-level students in real classroom settings. Songs were integrated into pronunciation lessons to observe their impact on learners' phonological development, including segmental features (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental features (intonation, stress, and rhythm). The results showed that students who were taught using English pop songs demonstrated notable improvements in their pronunciation accuracy, listening comprehension, and motivation to learn. The melodic and repetitive nature of songs helped reinforce sound patterns, making pronunciation practice more enjoyable and memorable. These findings support the use of music as an innovative pedagogical strategy in English language classrooms, promoting not only phonological competence but also a more engaging and confidence-building learning environment

Keywords: *English Song; Teaching Pronunciation; Phonology*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji efektivitas lagu berbahasa Inggris sebagai alat pengajaran pelafalan berbasis fonologi bagi pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan eksperimental yang melibatkan siswa tingkat menengah dalam konteks kelas nyata. Lagu-lagu diintegrasikan dalam pembelajaran pelafalan untuk mengamati dampaknya terhadap pengembangan fonologis siswa, termasuk aspek segmental (vokal dan konsonan) maupun suprasegmental (intonasi, tekanan, dan ritme). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa yang diajar menggunakan lagu-lagu pop berbahasa Inggris mengalami peningkatan yang signifikan dalam ketepatan pelafalan, kemampuan menyimak, dan motivasi belajar. Sifat lagu yang melodis dan repetitif membantu penguatan pola bunyi, sehingga latihan pelafalan menjadi lebih menyenangkan dan mudah diingat. Temuan ini mendukung penggunaan musik sebagai strategi pedagogis inovatif dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, yang tidak hanya meningkatkan kompetensi fonologis, tetapi juga menciptakan suasana belajar yang lebih positif dan membangun rasa percaya diri siswa.

Kata Kunci: *Lagu Bahasa Inggris; Pengajaran Pelafalan; Fonologi*

INTRODUCTION

Mastering spoken English requires more than just vocabulary and grammar; accurate pronunciation plays a crucial role in effective communication. Good pronunciation helps convey meaning clearly and boosts learners' confidence when speaking. However, in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, pronunciation is often overlooked. Instruction tends to focus heavily on reading and writing skills, leaving students with limited exposure to the sounds, stress patterns, and intonation of natural English speech. As a result, many learners struggle with articulating specific English sounds, stressing syllables correctly, and applying appropriate rhythm and intonation in spoken communication (Rahmawati & Yunus, 2020).

These pronunciation difficulties can hinder students' ability to engage in fluent conversations and reduce their self-assurance during oral interactions. To address this issue, educators must adopt engaging and effective methods for teaching pronunciation. One promising approach is the use of songs in language instruction. Songs are rich in phonological features—such as rhythm, stress, tone, and connected speech that reflect authentic language use by native speakers. When incorporated into classroom activities, songs provide learners with meaningful and memorable exposure to real-world pronunciation patterns (Yulyanti et al., 2019).

Several previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of using songs in language learning. Murphey (1992) emphasized that songs promote phonological awareness and aid memory retention due to their repetitive and melodic nature. Similarly, Fonseca-Mora et al. (2011) found that songs improve learners' intonation and general pronunciation in EFL contexts. In addition to enhancing listening and speaking skills, songs make the learning environment more enjoyable and reduce students' anxiety. Tasks such as listening to lyrics, identifying pronunciation features, and singing along help students internalize sound patterns in a natural and interactive way.

Given these advantages, it is essential to further explore how songs can be effectively integrated into pronunciation instruction through a phonological approach. This is especially relevant in EFL settings where learners benefit from multisensory and context-rich materials. Moreover, the combination of phonology and music remains an underexplored area in language pedagogy, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels. A deeper understanding of this intersection can contribute both to the improvement of classroom practice and the enrichment of academic discourse in applied linguistics and language education.

This study aims to investigate the use of songs as a pedagogical tool for enhancing English pronunciation through a phonological framework. It will examine a variety of classroom strategies from basic listening tasks to more complex lyric analysis and performance-based activities and evaluate

their impact on learners' phonological competence. Additionally, the study will draw on theoretical foundations from phonology, cognitive psychology, and educational theory to support the integration of music in pronunciation teaching and to offer informed recommendations for EFL practitioners.

METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research approach using a quasi-experimental design, specifically employing a pre-test and post-test control group arrangement. The primary objective is to determine the effectiveness of teaching English pronunciation through the use of songs, with a specific emphasis on phonological components such as word and sentence stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech. The experimental group receives treatment through song-based pronunciation activities, while the control group undergoes conventional pronunciation drills. Both groups are given pre-tests and post-tests to measure improvements in their pronunciation performance and to assess the comparative effectiveness of the intervention.

The research is conducted over a period of four to six weeks at a selected educational institution, with two instructional sessions per week, each lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The study involves two intact EFL classes, each consisting of around 20 to 30 students. These classes are selected using purposive sampling, considering factors such as learners' language proficiency and accessibility of the classes. The experimental group engages with song-based materials focusing on phonological patterns, while the control group continues with traditional classroom practices. Data are collected through oral pronunciation tests administered before and after the intervention. Students are asked to read prepared sentences or short texts aloud, which are audio recorded for further analysis. An optional questionnaire is also administered to the experimental group to gather perceptions on the use of songs in pronunciation learning.

To analyze the collected data, the study utilizes statistical methods including paired sample t-tests to examine within-group progress and independent sample t-tests to compare outcomes between groups. Additionally, effect size calculations are conducted to determine the practical significance of the teaching method. The primary research instruments include a pronunciation scoring rubric that evaluates aspects such as word stress, sentence stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech, as well as curated speaking tasks that incorporate both structured texts and selected song lyrics designed to elicit target phonological features. Through this design, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how songs can support phonological development in EFL pronunciation instruction (Wusqo et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Songs and Phonological Awareness in English Pronunciation

In the context of English language acquisition, pronunciation plays a critical role in developing both speaking and listening proficiency, particularly for learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. Pronunciation is not limited to producing individual sounds (segmental features such as consonants and vowels), but also involves suprasegmental features, including rhythm, stress, intonation, and connected speech. Many learners face challenges in mastering these prosodic elements. Difficulties often include incorrect syllable stress, improper intonation patterns, and lack of fluency due to mismanagement of connected speech. Unfortunately, traditional language instruction tends to emphasize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition while paying insufficient attention to phonological development. This imbalance results in learners who may have strong written skills but struggle to speak clearly and naturally in real-world conversations (Rahmawati & Yunus, 2020).

One effective and engaging strategy to address these pronunciation challenges is the integration of songs into language instruction. Songs inherently contain rich phonological content—rhythmic patterns, stressed syllables, natural intonation contours, and examples of how words are linked or reduced in everyday speech. Listening to songs exposes learners to authentic spoken English and allows them to internalize natural pronunciation patterns through repeated and enjoyable listening experiences. Activities such as reading song lyrics, identifying phonological features, and singing along encourage students to actively imitate and practice pronunciation in a context that is both meaningful and memorable. Songs also highlight aspects of pronunciation that are often absent in textbooks, such as contractions, elision, and assimilation, which are common in native speech but frequently overlooked in formal instruction (Melisa et al., 2022).

The classroom application of songs for phonological instruction can take various interactive forms. Learners may be asked to listen and identify specific sounds, mark stressed syllables or intonation patterns, or complete gap-fill exercises that sharpen their auditory discrimination and pronunciation accuracy. Clapping to syllable patterns and singing lyrics aloud allow students to engage kinesthetically and aurally, reinforcing rhythmic and prosodic awareness. Additionally, using songs from different English-speaking regions introduces learners to a variety of accents and speech styles, thus improving their adaptability and comprehension in diverse communicative contexts. From a theoretical perspective, the use of music in language education is supported by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of a low-anxiety learning environment, and Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, which identifies musical-

rhythmic intelligence as a valuable modality for language learning. These perspectives suggest that songs not only enhance pronunciation but also promote learner motivation and emotional engagement (Rais et al., 2020).

In summary, the use of songs in EFL pronunciation instruction represents a pedagogically sound and research-supported approach to phonological development. By focusing on key prosodic elements such as rhythm, stress, intonation, and connected speech, songs provide a multisensory and enjoyable medium through which learners can improve their pronunciation in meaningful contexts. This method supports both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, making it a valuable tool for fostering clear, fluent, and confident spoken English

Integrating Phonological Instruction into English Language Learning through Songs

Pronunciation is a fundamental component of successful spoken communication in English. It enables learners not only to articulate sounds correctly but also to speak more naturally, fluently, and intelligibly. Effective pronunciation goes beyond the accurate production of segmental sounds such as vowels and consonants; it includes suprasegmental or prosodic features such as rhythm, stress, and connected speech. These features are central to speech fluency and comprehensibility, yet they are frequently underemphasized in many language classrooms, where instruction often prioritizes grammar and vocabulary. For EFL learners, particularly those from syllable-timed language backgrounds such as Indonesian, mastering the stress-timed rhythm of English poses a considerable challenge (Situmeang & Panjaitan, 2024).

English is characterized by its stress-timed rhythm, in which stressed syllables occur at regular intervals regardless of the number of unstressed syllables in between. In contrast, many learners' native languages are syllable-timed, where each syllable is given equal time. This contrast can make English rhythm feel unnatural to EFL learners. Similarly, stress plays a crucial role in English pronunciation, both at the word and sentence level. Word stress affects meaning, as seen in pairs such as 'PREsent' (noun) and 'preSENT' (verb), while sentence stress highlights important content words and reduces the prominence of function words. Additionally, connected speech phenomena—including linking, assimilation, elision, and intrusion—further contribute to the fluidity of spoken English. These phonological processes are rarely presented explicitly in textbooks, yet they are essential for authentic and intelligible speech (Tsang, 2020).

To address these complexities in pronunciation, language instruction can benefit from incorporating music and song-based activities, which naturally embed the prosodic features of English. Songs provide authentic models of stress, rhythm, and connected speech in a context that is both

enjoyable and memorable. Integrating phonology into song-based learning can be done through several strategic stages. The selection of songs should consider their phonological richness, such as clear stress patterns, rhythmic consistency, and examples of connected speech. Prior to listening, teachers can direct students' attention to specific features in the song—such as syllable stress or problematic sound contrasts—using phonemic charts and guided prediction. During listening, students can engage in tasks such as filling in missing words from lyric sheets or identifying features of connected speech, which promote focused auditory processing (Abdul Karim et al., 2023).

Imitation-based techniques also enhance phonological awareness. Methods such as shadowing, choral repetition, and echo singing enable learners to mimic the prosody of native speech in real time. These techniques help internalize patterns of stress and rhythm through repetitive and active engagement. Songs designed around minimal pairs or phoneme contrasts can be particularly useful for refining the articulation of challenging sounds. To deepen learners' understanding, teachers may incorporate visual aids such as spectrograms or waveforms, which visually represent stress and intonation patterns. Slowed or isolated song segments allow students to analyze subtle features of pronunciation in greater detail. Together, these strategies not only improve learners' phonological competence but also contribute to greater fluency, listening comprehension, and confidence in spoken English. By combining cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, the integration of songs into phonological instruction provides a holistic and effective approach to pronunciation development in EFL contexts (Anggraini & Bhuana, 2022).

Lyrics Line	Rhythm	Word Stress	Connected Speech
The snow glows white on the mountain tonight	Even rhythm	snow, white, mountain, tonight	glows_ white, on_ the
Not a footprint to be seen	Quick pace	not, footprint, seen	not_ a, to_ be
A kingdom of isolation	Smooth, slow rise	kingdom, isolation	of_ isolation
And it looks like I'm the queen	Natural flow	looks, queen	like_ I'm, I'm_ the
The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside	Building intensity	wind, howling, storm, inside	like_ this, storm_ inside
Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I've tried	Dramatic drop	couldn't, keep, heaven, tried	keep_ it, knows_ I've

Don't let them in, don't let them see	Balanced, repetitive	don't, let, see	let_them, don't_let
Be the good girl you always have to be	Rolling rhythm	good, girl, always, be	you_always, have_to
Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know	Choppy, emotional	conceal, feel, know	don't_feel, let_them
Well, now they know	Strong end stress	now, know	they_know
Let it go, let it go	Strong beat, chant-like	let, go	let_it
Can't hold it back anymore	Even, strong beat	can't, hold, back, more	hold_it, back_anymore
Turn away and slam the door	Clear, heavy beat	turn, slam, door	slam_the
I don't care what they're going to say	Dramatic rhythm	care, what, say	don't_care, they're_going_to
Let the storm rage on	Powerful, slow	storm, rage, on	storm_rage
The cold never bothered me anyway	Drawn-out ending	cold, never, bothered, anyway	bothered_me, never_bothered
It's funny how some distance makes everything seem small	Gentle flow	funny, distance, everything, small	how_some, makes_everything
And the fears that once controlled me can't get to me at all	Gradual rise	fears, controlled, can't, get	that_once, get_to_me
It's time to see what I can do	Rising anticipation	time, see, can, do	what_I, I_can
To test the limits and break through	Even beat	test, limits, break, through	and_break
No right, no wrong, no rules for me	Strong, steady rhythm	right, wrong, rules, me	rules_for

I'm free	Final stress	free	I'm_free
I am one with	Even flow	one, wind, sky	with_the,
the wind and sky			wind_and
You'll never see	Emotional,	never, see, cry	see_me
me cry	strong end		
Here I stand and	Balanced rhythm	stand, stay	here_I, and_here
here I stay			
My power	Flowing and	power, flurries,	through_the,
flurries through	intense	air, ground	into_the
the air into the			
ground			
My soul is	Smooth spiral	soul, spiraling,	frozen_fractals
spiraling in	feel	fractals, around	
frozen fractals			
all around			
And one thought	Sharp and	thought,	like_an, icy_blast
crystallizes like	building	crystallizes, icy,	
an icy blast		blast	
I'm never going	Declaring tone	never, going,	going_back, is_in
back, the past is		past	
in the past			
And I'll rise like	Triumphant rise	rise, break, dawn	rise_like,
the break of			break_of
dawn			
That perfect girl	Strong and final	perfect, girl,	girl_is
is gone		gone	
Here I stand in	Bold, strong	stand, light, day	in_the, light_of
the light of day	close		
Let the storm	Final chant	storm, rage, on	storm_rage
rage on			
The cold never	Calm, resolute	cold, never,	never_bothered,
bothered me	ending	bothered,	bothered_me
anyway		anyway	

The detailed phonological analysis of the song "*Let It Go*" demonstrates its strong pedagogical potential as a tool for teaching English pronunciation to EFL learners. This song, popularized by Disney's *Frozen*, contains a rich array of prosodic features that mirror authentic spoken English, making it an ideal material for phonological instruction. Its structured rhythm and predictable meter help learners internalize the stress-timed nature of English, which contrasts with the syllable-timed rhythm of many learners' native languages. The regular beat and phrasing provide a scaffold for understanding how stressed and unstressed syllables are organized in natural discourse.

In terms of word stress, "*Let It Go*" consistently highlights key content words that carry the semantic weight of the lyrics. These stressed words—

often nouns, verbs, and adjectives—are pronounced with greater clarity and duration, enabling learners to grasp the communicative function of emphasis in English prosody. Conversely, function words such as prepositions, articles, and auxiliary verbs are frequently reduced or linked to adjacent words, illustrating phenomena of connected speech such as linking (/let_ɪt_gəʊ/), elision (e.g., “holding it back” → /'həʊldɪn_ɪt_bæk/), and assimilation. By listening to and mimicking these features, students can develop a more nuanced understanding of how native speakers naturally produce fluid, expressive speech.

Moreover, the repetitive structure and melodic contour of the song enhance both retention and pronunciation practice. The chorus, which is repeated several times with slight variations in intonation and dynamics, allows learners to engage in repeated, scaffolded practice of target phonological patterns. This repetition not only reinforces phonological memory but also fosters fluency by encouraging learners to produce longer utterances rhythmically and confidently. From an affective perspective, the emotive delivery of the lyrics helps learners connect sound patterns with emotional expression, an important component of spoken interaction. The cultural familiarity and emotional appeal of “*Let It Go*” further increase learner motivation and classroom engagement, aligning with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional investment facilitates language acquisition.

In sum, “*Let It Go*” offers an authentic and aesthetically engaging model of spoken English that integrates rhythm, stress, and connected speech in a context that is meaningful and memorable. Its use in the EFL classroom can significantly enhance learners’ awareness of English prosody while also improving their pronunciation fluency and confidence. As such, it serves not only as a culturally iconic musical piece but also as an effective and pedagogically valuable resource for developing communicative competence through phonological instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

Employing songs as a method for teaching pronunciation in language education offers an innovative and effective approach to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. Songs naturally incorporate key prosodic features such as rhythm, stress, intonation, and connected speech, providing authentic models of spoken English. Through interactive activities like listening, singing, and analyzing lyrics, students are exposed to accurate pronunciation patterns in an enjoyable and memorable way. This multimodal exposure not only improves their phonological awareness—covering both segmental and suprasegmental features—but also fosters greater confidence and motivation, in alignment with theories like the Affective Filter Hypothesis and Multiple Intelligences Theory.

Given these pedagogical benefits, the integration of songs into

pronunciation instruction, particularly in EFL contexts, should be seriously considered. Carefully selected songs with clear articulation and appropriate rhythm can reinforce specific pronunciation targets while catering to diverse learner preferences. Activities may include shadowing, lyric gap-fills, and group discussions to promote collaborative learning. Adapting to different learning styles—whether musical, analytical, or kinesthetic—can further optimize engagement. Allowing students to contribute song choices also increases autonomy and relevance. In conclusion, songs are not merely supplementary materials but can serve as core tools in developing natural, fluent, and confident English speakers.

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