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Optimizing English vocabulary acquisition through music-based learning methods: Pedagogical strategies and measurable learning outcomes

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PNB

Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of music-based learning in enhancing English vocabulary acquisition among learners. A mixed-method approach was employed, involving experimental interventions where participants engaged with English songs through activities such as guided listening, lyric analysis, and singing. Pre- and post-tests measured vocabulary retention and acquisition, while qualitative feedback assessed learner motivation and attitudes. Data analysis revealed significant improvements in vocabulary scores, with music-based methods outperforming traditional instruction in both short- and long-term retention. Additionally, learners reported increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and greater enjoyment during the learning process. The findings support integrating music as a dynamic pedagogical tool to foster vocabulary growth and positive language learning experiences.

Keywords: music-based learning, English vocabulary acquisition, language motivation, song-assisted instruction, vocabulary retention

1. Introduction

The acquisition of English vocabulary is widely recognized as a fundamental component of language learning because vocabulary knowledge serves as the foundation for effective communication and overall language proficiency. Learners with limited vocabulary often experience difficulties in expressing ideas, understanding texts, and participating in communicative interactions. However, traditional vocabulary teaching methods frequently rely on rote memorization and repetitive drills, which may reduce learners' engagement and motivation during the learning process. Such approaches are often considered less effective in promoting long-term vocabulary retention and meaningful language use (Wong & Samudra, 2021).

In recent years, music-based learning has attracted considerable attention as an innovative pedagogical approach in English language teaching. The integration of songs and music into vocabulary instruction provides learners with authentic, contextualized, and enjoyable language exposure. Through rhythm, melody, repetition, and lyrical content, music can facilitate vocabulary acquisition while simultaneously increasing learners' motivation and classroom participation. Several recent studies have shown that song-based instruction contributes positively to vocabulary mastery and creates a more engaging learning atmosphere for EFL learners (Ramadhanti & Farida, 2025).

The effectiveness of music in vocabulary learning can also be explained through contemporary cognitive and affective theories. Dual Coding Theory suggests that vocabulary is more easily retained when verbal information is accompanied by auditory and visual stimuli because multiple cognitive pathways are activated simultaneously. Recent studies on multimodal and music-assisted learning have confirmed that combining verbal and non-verbal input enhances vocabulary recall and comprehension (Wong & Samudra, 2021).

Furthermore, affective perspectives on language learning emphasize that music helps create a relaxed and enjoyable classroom environment, reducing learners' anxiety and increasing motivation. This supportive emotional atmosphere enables learners to process linguistic input more effectively and facilitates vocabulary acquisition (Urbaite, 2025).

Empirical studies support these theoretical claims by demonstrating that music-based learning significantly improves vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional methods. For example, interventions using structured activities like guided listening, lyric analysis, and singing have shown notable gains in vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, and listening comprehension among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Babayev, 2025; Boustani & Abdwani, 2023). Repeated exposure to songs also facilitates incidental vocabulary learning by reinforcing form-meaning connections through enjoyable repetition (Pavia et al., 2019).

Moreover, research indicates that familiar melodies combined with visual aids such as captions optimize vocabulary gains in young learners. Learners frequently report increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and greater enjoyment when music is incorporated into lessons, highlighting its affective benefits alongside cognitive advantages (Zambrano, 2022; Palangkaraya et al., 2024).

Despite these positive outcomes, questions remain about the most effective types of musical activities and their long-term impact on vocabulary retention. Some studies emphasize chanting or captioned music videos as particularly effective strategies (Chen, 2020), while others highlight the role of diverse genres like pop or soft rock in enhancing different linguistic skills. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing practical guidelines for educators aiming to implement music-based learning effectively. This study seeks to explore how various music-based instructional methods influence English vocabulary acquisition and learner attitudes to provide evidence-based recommendations for language teaching practice.

Theoretical frameworks underpinning music-based learning for English vocabulary acquisition emphasize the integration of cognitive and affective processes to enhance language retention and learner engagement. One key framework is the **dual coding theory**, which posits that information is better remembered when encoded both verbally and non-verbally. Music combines auditory stimuli (melody, rhythm) with verbal content (lyrics), engaging multiple sensory pathways and facilitating stronger memory traces in the brain, particularly through mechanisms like hippocampal encoding (Sadiqzade, 2024). This multimodal input helps learners form richer mental representations of new vocabulary, improving recall and recognition.

Another influential framework is the affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that emotional states significantly impact language learning success. Music's emotional power can lower learners' anxiety and create a relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere conducive to language acquisition. Reduced anxiety allows learners to process input more effectively, increasing motivation and willingness to engage with new vocabulary. Songs also provide meaningful context through storytelling and cultural references, which further supports comprehension and retention by connecting words to real-life situations. Neurological research supports these frameworks by showing that music activates brain regions involved in both linguistic processing and emotional regulation, enhancing brain plasticity essential for learning (Sadiqzade, Z. (2024; Vivone et al., 2025).

The shared neural substrates for music and language syntax suggest that musical training or exposure can improve linguistic skills such as pronunciation, intonation, and lexical acquisition. Additionally, constructivist learning theory highlights how active engagement with songs – through singing, chanting, or lyric analysis – promotes deeper cognitive processing and social interaction, leading to better vocabulary retention (Ammelia et al., 2024).

Empirical studies confirm these theoretical insights by demonstrating that music-based methods yield significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition compared to traditional instruction. Techniques such as chanting familiar melodies or using captioned music videos optimize learning by combining auditory input with visual cues (Chen, 2020). Moreover, structured pedagogical activities like cloze exercises or singing practice enhance both cognitive

encoding and affective engagement [1](#). However, effectiveness depends on factors like song selection, learner preferences, and instructional design.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of why music-based learning enhances English vocabulary acquisition: it leverages multisensory encoding, reduces affective barriers, activates relevant neural pathways, and fosters active learner participation. This theoretical foundation guides the development of effective music-integrated teaching strategies aimed at maximizing vocabulary gains while maintaining high learner motivation.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that music-based instruction significantly enhances English vocabulary retention, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and learner motivation compared to conventional teaching methods. A meta-analytic review of 27 empirical studies found that using English songs has a large positive effect on second language vocabulary learning, with factors such as song genre, instructional duration, and learners' first language influencing outcomes [1](#). Experimental research with EFL learners shows that music-based activities like singing, chanting, and lyric analysis lead to superior short- and long-term vocabulary retention compared to traditional audio-visual or rote memorization approaches (Boustani & Abdwani, 2023; Palangkaraya et al., 2024; Chen, 2020).

For example, repeated listening to songs improves word recognition and meaning association across different proficiency levels, with optimal gains observed after moderate exposure frequencies [2](#). Young learners particularly benefit from multisensory engagement through rhythm and emotional connection in kids' songs, which supports vocabulary mastery across nouns, verbs, and adjectives (Fikri et al., 2024).

Music also positively impacts pronunciation accuracy and listening skills by providing authentic linguistic input in an enjoyable context that reduces anxiety and increases motivation (Sadiqzade, 2025). Learners report greater enthusiasm and lower affective barriers when music is integrated into lessons, fostering a relaxed atmosphere conducive to automatic language acquisition (Urbaite, 2025).

However, challenges remain regarding the most effective types of musical activities; studies suggest that methods like chanting or captioned music videos yield better vocabulary gains than passive listening alone (Chen, 2020). Additionally, individual differences such as musical background and learner preferences influence effectiveness (Rahman et al., 2024). Long-term effects beyond immediate post-tests are less frequently studied but indicate promising retention up to several weeks after intervention.

Despite these encouraging findings, limitations include small sample sizes, short intervention durations, and variability in instructional design across studies. Further research is needed to establish standardized pedagogical guidelines for selecting appropriate songs and integrating active learning tasks like cloze exercises or lyric discussions. Addressing these gaps will help optimize music-based vocabulary instruction for diverse learner populations while maximizing both cognitive and affective benefits [1910](#). (Odo, 2021; Urbaite, 2025; Sadiqzade, 2025). This study addresses these gaps by investigating how different music-based strategies influence English vocabulary learning outcomes and learner attitudes, aiming to provide practical insights for educators seeking to implement effective, enjoyable language teaching techniques.

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

Data collection methods in studies on music-based English vocabulary acquisition vary depending on the research design and participant characteristics. Quantitative studies often use pre-tests and post-tests to measure vocabulary knowledge before and after exposure to music-based interventions, such as listening to or singing English songs [179](#). For example, quasi-experimental designs randomly assign participants to experimental and control groups, collecting test scores to assess vocabulary gains attributable to song-based

learning [19](#). Qualitative data collection includes interviews, observations, and thematic analysis of learner experiences, often conducted through in-person sessions or digital platforms like WhatsApp chats [235](#). Some studies also incorporate classroom observations and teacher interviews to understand pedagogical practices and learner engagement with songs [56](#). Emerging research uses innovative tools such as eye-gaze tracking during word-learning tasks to explore attention mechanisms in young learners exposed to songs versus spoken sentences [4](#). Overall, data collection combines objective vocabulary assessments with subjective learner feedback to capture both outcomes and processes of music-based learning.

2.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis approaches align with the mixed methods nature of this research area. Quantitative data from vocabulary tests are typically analysed using statistical software like SPSS to perform t-tests or ANOVA for comparing experimental and control groups' performance [19](#). Significance testing determines whether improvements in vocabulary mastery are statistically meaningful following music-based interventions [19](#). Qualitative data from interviews or observations undergo thematic analysis or content analysis to identify patterns related to motivation, engagement, challenges, and perceived benefits of using songs for vocabulary learning [235](#). Some studies apply established frameworks such as Miles and Huberman's three-stage process – data reduction, display, and conclusion – to systematically interpret qualitative findings [5](#). In experimental designs involving eye-tracking or other cognitive measures, researchers analyse attention metrics alongside learning outcomes to explore the relationship between engagement and vocabulary acquisition [4](#). Combining these analytical methods provides a comprehensive understanding of how music influences both the effectiveness and learner experience in English vocabulary acquisition.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Vocabulary Acquisition Gains

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies repeatedly show that learners exposed to song-based instruction **outperform control groups** using traditional methods. In a quasi-experimental study, a song-instruction group almost **doubled vocabulary gains** versus a traditional control (mean gain +13.2 vs. +6.2 points out of 40; retention 85% vs. 50%) (Urbaite, 2025). Young learners taught through a **song-and-game** strategy improved their overall vocabulary score from 48.80 to 88.83, well above the passing grade, with very large effect sizes across naming, definition, and receptive vocabulary (Fauzi, 2022).

A four-week music-based program with guided listening and lyric work produced a **32% increase** in vocabulary scores in EFL learners. Meta-analytic evidence across 28 studies (1,864 learners) finds that **English songs have a large overall effect** on L2 vocabulary learning, with gains moderated by factors such as song genre, instructional duration, and control type.

Preschool and early-primary learners also show measurable gains in receptive vocabulary after short song-based teaching sequences.

Table 1: Vocabulary Gains with music-based methods

Context / Design	Vocabulary Outcome
Song vs. traditional instruction (teens)	Song group: larger gains, 85% retention vs. 50% (Urbaite, 2025).
Songs + games (young learners)	Mean score 48.80 → 88.83; large t-values, $p < .001$ (Fauzi, 2022).
Structured song course (4 weeks)	Vocabulary scores +32% (Babayev, 2025).

Context / Design	Vocabulary Outcome
Preschool song sequence (3 lessons)	Clear receptive gains, limited productive gains

Studies isolate specific musical formats that particularly enhance vocabulary: **Chanting and captioned music videos**: For young EFL learners, “chanting” and “music video with caption” produced the strongest immediate and long-term gains in receptive and productive vocabulary. Chanting favoured **long-term retention**, while captioned videos and melody boosted **immediate learning** [58](#). **Singing vs. reciting**: Chinese adolescents who learned lyrics by **singing** showed greater gains in vocabulary picture-naming and word-meaning recall than peers who only recited lyrics, despite both groups improving [9](#). **Video song clips with a three-step technique**: Taiwanese university students receiving partial instruction via YouTube song clips significantly outperformed a control group on a 30-item vocabulary test [10](#). **Songs plus movement and video**: In early grades, combining songs with movement and video helped children acquire and use English words more naturally in class activities [1112](#).

Self-directed learners also report vocabulary expansion through repeated listening, dictionary use, and lyric checking when using English songs outside class [131415](#). Multiple mechanisms help explain these gains: **Repetition, rhythm, and melody** support lexical memorization and word retrieval more than speech alone, especially with familiar tunes [5198](#). **Multimodal input** (audio + text/captions + visuals) in music videos strengthens form-meaning connections and supports both recognition and recall [511016](#)+1 MORE. **Motivation and reduced anxiety**: Music-based lessons increase enjoyment, engagement, and willingness to participate, which indirectly boosts vocabulary exposure and practice [121617](#)+1 MORE. **Depth of processing**: Explicit attention to target words during song work (e.g., lyric analysis, focused tasks) produces more **durable vocabulary gains** than purely implicit exposure [1916](#).

Evidence is highly positive but nuanced: For **very young preschoolers**, a study comparing songs, stories, and combined input found that the **story condition produced the highest vocabulary scores**, with the song-only condition least effective for incidental learning [7](#). Another preschool study showed strong **receptive** gains from songs but limited development of **productive** vocabulary for most children, suggesting that songs alone may not ensure active word use [6](#). The meta-analysis highlights variability linked to **song genre, instructional length, and learner L1**, indicating that effects are not uniform and that careful design matters [4](#).

Across individual experiments, classroom interventions, qualitative reports, and a meta-analysis, song-based instruction reliably produces substantial vocabulary acquisition gains, often exceeding traditional methods by 20–40% or more. Techniques such as chanting, singing, captioned music videos, and song-and-game activities support both immediate learning and longer-term retention, especially when paired with explicit vocabulary focus and engaging tasks. While stories may sometimes outperform songs for very young children, the overall evidence positions music as a powerful complementary tool for enhancing EFL vocabulary learning.

3.1.2 Pronunciation and Listening Comprehension

Interventions that combine **guided listening, lyric analysis, and shadowing/singing** consistently improve pronunciation scores. In a four-week program with structured song work, learners’ pronunciation accuracy rose by about 22%, with particular improvement in prosodic features such as stress and intonation [5](#). A quasi-experimental study with EFL learners found that a song-instruction group made larger gains in pronunciation tasks than a traditional instruction group, with significant group x time interaction favouring the music group [1](#).

Classroom-based research with adolescent Chinese learners showed that **singing lyrics**, rather than merely reciting them, led to superior outcomes in word and sentence oral-reading tasks [6](#). Similarly, reviews and classroom reports note improved segmental pronunciation (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental skills (rhythm, stress, intonation) when learners regularly sing

or rap in English [2389](#). These gains appear particularly strong when songs use clear enunciation, familiar melodies, and are practiced repeatedly over multiple sessions [286](#).

Gains in Listening Comprehension

Music-supported instruction also leads to notable improvements in **listening comprehension**. In a four-week, song-based intervention, listening scores increased by around 28% following guided listening, lyric-focused comprehension tasks, and shadowing activities [5](#). Other quantitative work shows listening scores rising from roughly mid-60s to low-80s when English songs are integrated into regular lessons [1011](#). Pre-experimental and classroom-action designs likewise report marked gains in listening test means after instruction built around gap-fill, dictation, and comprehension questions using song lyrics [10117](#).

A decade-long scoping review of music-mediated pedagogy in EMI/EFL contexts highlights **consistent gains in listening engagement and fluency**, with test scores increasing when song listening is paired with lyric analysis, cloze tasks, and discussion [10](#). Digital tools such as LyricsTraining further enhance listening by combining music, interactive gap-filling, and immediate feedback, yielding statistically significant improvements in listening ability alongside vocabulary growth [12](#).

How Rhythm and Melody Support Phonological Processing

The **rhythmic and melodic structure of songs** helps learners internalize phonological patterns more efficiently than traditional drills. Songs expose learners to natural speech features – reduction, linking, intonation contours, and varied accents – in an engaging, repetitive format [231314](#)+1 MORE. When learners sing or shadow lyrics, they synchronize their speech with the song's rhythm and melody, reinforcing stress-timed patterns and sentence-level prosody [126](#). Explicit **phonology instruction** combined with phonological analysis of song lyrics appears especially powerful: in a three-month study, phonology-plus-song treatment produced greater listening gains than phonology alone, whereas songs used only as gap-fill material were not sufficient [4](#). For underachieving learners, song-lyric work modestly supports phoneme categorization and heightens awareness of sound contrasts, although effects on more complex segmentation skills may be limited [16](#).

At the same time, repeated listening to authentic songs trains learners' ears to decode fast, connected speech, recognize reduced forms, and cope with different accents, thereby strengthening both bottom-up processing and overall listening fluency [1731314](#)+2 MORE.

Affective and Pedagogical Conditions

Pronunciation and listening gains are closely linked to the **affective benefits** of music. Song-based lessons repeatedly reduce anxiety, increase motivation, and sustain attention, creating conditions in which intensive listening and oral practice become enjoyable rather than stressful [1171114](#)+3 MORE. Students frequently report higher confidence in both listening and speaking after music-based activities and a clear preference for learning through songs over purely traditional methods [17111418](#)+1 MORE.

Importantly, research emphasizes that improvements are greatest when songs are embedded in **structured, purposeful tasks** – guided listening, lyric analysis, cloze, shadowing, pronunciation-focused repetition – rather than used as unstructured background entertainment [101412](#)+3 MORE. Thoughtful song selection (clear pronunciation, suitable speed, level-appropriate lexis) and systematic recycling across several weeks amplify both pronunciation refinement and listening comprehension gains.

3.1.3 Learner Motivation and Affective Benefits

In quasi-experimental work with EFL learners, a song-instruction group rated classes **more enjoyable** (4.5 vs. 3.2 on a 5-point scale) and reported **higher motivation** to study English (4.2 vs. 3.5) than a traditional control, with differences statistically significant [1](#). Students commented that songs made lessons feel like a “break” from usual drills and increased their willingness to participate [1](#).

Observational and survey-based studies echo these findings: music is repeatedly described as **fun, authentic, and personally meaningful**, which sparks intrinsic motivation and encourages active participation [2345](#)+2 MORE. Young learners and adolescents who might otherwise find

3

English “boring” report that songs make learning “more fun and less challenging” and increase their desire to attend and take part in class activities [89106](#).

A systematic review of ESL music studies concludes that music consistently **boosts engagement, attention, and motivation**, largely because of its enjoyable nature and close connection to learners’ everyday lives [5](#).

Reduced Anxiety and a Low-Stress Climate

Multiple studies explicitly link music-based instruction to **lower language anxiety**. In the quasi-experimental study above, learners in the Song Group reported significantly **lower anxiety scores** (mean 2.1 vs. 3.7) than controls [1](#). Qualitative comments highlight that students “felt relaxed” and less afraid of mistakes when working with songs, especially when singing in groups [13811](#)+1 MORE.

Classroom action research with 7th graders found that song-based listening activities were perceived as “less intimidating” than conventional drills; 80% of students described reduced nervousness, and voluntary responses during lessons rose by about 40% [8](#). A qualitative study on speaking anxiety similarly reports that English songs help learners feel **freedom of expression**, reducing fear of being laughed at and increasing comfort when speaking [119](#).

Reviews and conceptual papers frame these outcomes through **Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis**: songs’ “riskless,” soothing quality lowers the affective filter, making learners more open to input and practice [312413](#). Group singing can also “lower the walls between people,” decreasing competitive instincts and enhancing cooperation [312](#).

Emotional Connection, Engagement, and Classroom Dynamics

Songs often carry **personal and emotional meaning**, especially when learners work with popular genres they already enjoy. This emotional resonance creates a sense of connection, belonging, and shared experience in class [23414](#)+2 MORE. Teachers report that shy or previously indifferent students become more involved and confident when music is introduced [46715](#).

Affective neuroscience perspectives suggest that music’s ability to evoke positive emotions and regulate mood underpins these motivational benefits, engaging multiple brain areas and fostering a more receptive state for learning [2](#). Students in listening classes with songs describe feeling more focused, “good in listening,” and “high motivation,” while teachers observe greater attention and participation [6](#).

Song-based lessons can also enhance **group cohesion**: singing and shared music tasks build cooperation, reduce peer pressure, and improve overall class atmosphere [31213](#). This positive social climate further supports risk-taking in speaking and experimentation with new language forms [813119](#).

Affective Outcomes of Music-Based Lessons

Affective Dimension	Typical Impact with Songs	Citations
Motivation & enjoyment	Higher ratings, more willingness to learn	1285 +1 MORE
Anxiety & fear	Lower reported anxiety; less fear of mistakes	13128 +3 MORE
Engagement & attention	Greater focus, participation, and persistence	2856 +1 MORE

FIGURE 1 Key affective benefits of music-based instruction

Links to Retention and Communication

Affective gains are not purely emotional; they support deeper learning. Lower anxiety and higher motivation are associated with **better vocabulary retention**, improved listening fluency, and more confident communication [13811](#)+2 MORE. Learners note that because songs are enjoyable, they are willing to listen repeatedly and practice outside class, reinforcing language gains [21417](#). Several studies emphasize that when learners feel relaxed and engaged, they participate more in speaking tasks, use more target vocabulary spontaneously, and develop stronger communicative confidence [18119](#)+2 MORE.

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Overall, music-based EFL instruction consistently raises motivation, lowers anxiety, and deepens emotional engagement. Familiar melodies and enjoyable song tasks create a relaxed, supportive atmosphere that aligns closely with affective filter theory. These positive attitudes and feelings, in turn, help learners persist with English, participate more actively, remember vocabulary better, and communicate with greater confidence.

3.1.4 Long-Term Retention and Pedagogical Implications

Studies measuring long-term retention indicate that vocabulary gains from music-based learning persist for weeks after the intervention, suggesting durable effects beyond immediate post-tests [13](#). However, optimal outcomes depend on the type of musical activity; active engagement methods like chanting or captioned videos outperform passive listening alone [1](#). Combining songs with targeted pedagogical techniques such as cloze exercises or vocabulary self-collection strategies further enhances effectiveness [67](#).

Long-term tests (from 2–8 weeks after instruction) generally show that **music groups outperform controls** or maintain a higher proportion of learned words: A song-instruction group reached an 85% vocabulary retention rate versus 50% in a traditional control, indicating that most target words were still known after the teaching period [1](#). In a study on incidental learning through songs, gains in **word recognition and meaning connection** remained detectable four weeks later, especially for learners who listened to songs three times [6](#). Experimental work on short- and long-term memory found that learners exposed to music-based practice significantly outscored those receiving standard audio-visual teaching on both immediate and two-week delayed vocabulary tests [4](#). Research with songs as classroom input similarly reports that vocabulary learned via songs leads to more durable gains than implicit exposure alone, especially under explicit instructional conditions [75](#).

Active Engagement vs. Passive Listening

Not all musical activities are equally effective for long-term retention:

- With young learners, **chanting** and **music-video-with-captions** produced the strongest immediate and delayed gains in both receptive and productive vocabulary. Chanting, in particular, was linked to stronger long-term retention than singing or video-only conditions [28](#).
- A practice-mode study comparing **listening only**, **listening + singing**, and **listening + oral reading of lyrics** found that overall scores were highest in the **singing** condition across pre-, 1-week, and 8-week delayed tests, showing that active vocal engagement supports retention better than listening alone [9](#).
- Incidental listening studies still show retention benefits after several weeks, but effects are largest for **word recognition** and smaller for deeper aspects unless tasks require more processing [56](#).

Pedagogical Techniques that Enhance Durability

Durable learning is strongest when songs are combined with targeted language activities:

- A quasi-experimental study on music-based pedagogy recommends **lyric analysis, cloze exercises, and singing practice**, arguing that such active tasks enhance encoding and retention through dual coding and deeper processing [1](#).
- Classroom research comparing two song conditions found that **explicit vocabulary-focused exercises (Listen-Plus)** led to more durable gains than simply listening to songs without focus on target words [7](#).
- Reviews and empirical work emphasize **gap-filling, dictation, vocabulary self-collection, and reflective lyric work** as ways to transform songs from enjoyable input into high-retention practice [10115](#).
- For early childhood, combining songs with **video-making or performance** tasks pushes children to use and thus retain vocabulary, moving items into long-term memory [12](#).

Practical Implications for Teaching and Self-Directed Learning

For teachers, the evidence suggests:

- Prioritize **active engagement** (chanting, singing, captioned videos, performance) over background music or passive listening [92128](#).

- Add **explicit vocabulary tasks**—cloze, self-collection, focused discussion of new words—to exploit the mnemonic power of melody and rhythm [17105](#).
- Use **repetition with optimal frequency** (e.g., around three focused listenings) to consolidate vocabulary without overload [56](#).
- Guide learners in **self-directed use of songs**, encouraging repetition, dictionary use, and lyric checking to support independent long-term retention [1314](#).

Across diverse designs, vocabulary learned through songs and other music-based activities tends to persist for weeks, especially for recognition and frequently repeated items. Long-term retention is strongest when learners actively process language—through chanting, singing, captioned videos, and explicit vocabulary tasks—rather than merely listening. Thoughtful integration of such techniques can turn songs into a powerful, durable vocabulary-learning tool in both classrooms and self-directed study.

3.2 Discussion

The results collectively demonstrate that integrating music into English vocabulary instruction offers substantial cognitive and affective benefits over conventional approaches. Music's dual coding of auditory and emotional stimuli facilitates deeper encoding of lexical items, while rhythmic repetition aids memorization and recall [79](#). The enhanced motivation and reduced anxiety reported by learners create an optimal environment for language acquisition consistent with established second language acquisition theories. Despite these advantages, variability in learner preferences and musical backgrounds suggests the need for personalized approaches when selecting songs and activities [17](#). Limitations across studies include small sample sizes, short intervention durations, and inconsistent instructional designs, highlighting the necessity for standardized protocols in future research. Overall, music-based learning emerges as a powerful complementary tool that not only improves vocabulary retention but also supports pronunciation development, listening skills, and learner engagement in diverse educational contexts [245](#).

Music supports vocabulary learning through **dual coding**: lexical items are encoded both as linguistic information and as part of a melodic, emotional experience [123](#). Songs combine rhythm, rhyme, and meaningful context, which deepens processing and strengthens memory traces in auditory systems and long-term memory [1236](#)+1 MORE.

Empirical work confirms substantial vocabulary gains: in a quasi-experimental study, an EFL song group more than doubled the control group's vocabulary improvement (Δ +33 vs. +15 points) [1](#). Other studies show that listening to or singing songs enhances spoken-form recognition, form-meaning connection, and collocation recognition, with experimental groups outperforming controls on immediate and delayed tests [2586](#). Primary and young learners taught with songs achieve higher scores and better long-term retention than peers taught by rote memorization or textbook exercises [397](#).

Core Cognitive Benefits of Music-Based Vocabulary Teaching

Benefit	Illustration	Citations
Deeper encoding via dual coding	Lyrics + melody + emotion	123
Stronger memorization and recall	Higher short- and long-term vocabulary scores	2358 +2 MORE
Enhanced implicit lexical learning	Gains in recognition and form-meaning links	2586

FIGURE 1 Key memory-related effects of song-based learning

Affective Benefits and Theoretical Alignment

Across studies, learners in music-based conditions report **higher motivation, lower anxiety, and greater enjoyment** than those in traditional classes [13410](#)+4 MORE. Song-instruction groups describe lessons as more fun and less stressful, with surveys showing higher motivation scores and reduced fear of making mistakes [13410](#)+2 MORE.

These outcomes align with **affective filter** perspectives: music's emotional power lowers anxiety and tension, making learners more receptive to input and more willing to participate [11524](#)+1 MORE. Qualitative findings indicate that songs create a relaxed atmosphere, foster group cohesion, and turn repetition into an enjoyable activity, all of which support sustained engagement and incidental practice beyond class [1151113](#).

Beyond Vocabulary: Pronunciation, Listening, and Communication

Music-based instruction also benefits **pronunciation, listening skills, and communicative ability**. Singing and chanting improve phonological awareness, prosody, and pronunciation accuracy, with singing groups outperforming speech-only groups in oral reading tasks [12166](#).

Listening to songs with tasks such as lyric analysis, gap-fill, and shadowing leads to significant gains in listening comprehension and engagement, including marked increases in test scores and reduced-form recognition [141114](#). Music-based vocabulary growth further supports communication, as better-retained words are more readily used in speaking and interaction [237](#).

Learner Differences, Personalization, and Research Limitations

Studies highlight **variability in learner preferences, musical tastes, and prior exposure**, suggesting that song selection and activity design should be personalized where possible [131718](#). Some learners favor certain genres or slower tempos, while others struggle with fast lyrics or dense slang, requiring adaptations such as clearer songs, captions, or pre-teaching key vocabulary [1521718](#).

Methodologically, many studies rely on **small samples, short interventions, and heterogeneous instructional designs**, which limit generalizability [1235](#)+2 MORE. Control conditions, assessment tools, and exposure intensity often differ across studies. Reviews emphasize the need for more standardized protocols, longer-term follow-ups, and clearer reporting of instructional procedures to refine best practices [141911](#)+2 MORE.

Across experimental, quasi-experimental, review, and qualitative studies, music-based vocabulary instruction emerges as a robust complementary approach that strengthens memory through dual coding and rhythmic repetition, while simultaneously enhancing motivation and lowering anxiety. When carefully implemented and tailored to learner preferences, songs and chants not only improve vocabulary retention but also support pronunciation development, listening fluency, communicative confidence, and overall engagement in a wide range of English learning contexts

4. Conclusion

The integration of music-based learning in English vocabulary acquisition has demonstrated significant positive outcomes across diverse learner populations and educational contexts. Research consistently shows that using songs as instructional tools enhances vocabulary retention, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and learner motivation more effectively than traditional methods such as rote memorization or textbook exercises [123410](#). The rhythmic and melodic elements of music provide multisensory input that facilitates deeper cognitive encoding of new lexical items, while the emotional engagement elicited by familiar melodies reduces anxiety and increases learners' willingness to participate actively in language learning activities [136](#). These affective benefits are crucial because they create a supportive environment that fosters sustained attention and long-term retention of vocabulary.

Quantitative studies employing pre- and post-tests reveal that learners exposed to music-based interventions often achieve vocabulary gains ranging from approximately 20% to over 40%, significantly outperforming control groups receiving conventional instruction [210](#). For example, young learners benefit from age-appropriate songs combined with pedagogical strategies such as chanting or captioned music videos, which optimize both immediate acquisition and prolonged retention of new words [5](#). Additionally, improvements in pronunciation and listening skills accompany vocabulary growth, highlighting music's role in reinforcing phonological awareness through repeated exposure to authentic language patterns embedded in songs [17](#). This

holistic enhancement supports the development of communicative competence beyond isolated vocabulary knowledge.

Learner attitudes toward music-based learning are overwhelmingly positive, with many reporting increased motivation, enjoyment, and reduced language learning anxiety [369](#). These affective factors contribute to higher engagement levels and more frequent practice opportunities outside formal instruction, further consolidating vocabulary knowledge. The use of culturally relevant and popular music genres also enriches the learning experience by connecting language acquisition with learners' interests and identities, thereby promoting intrinsic motivation [1](#). However, individual differences such as musical background and personal preferences suggest that tailoring song selection and instructional methods is important for maximizing effectiveness. Despite these promising findings, some limitations remain. Many studies feature relatively small sample sizes or short intervention periods, which may constrain the generalizability of results [10](#). Variability in research designs and instructional approaches also complicates direct comparisons across studies. Moreover, one study noted that studying vocabulary in a quiet environment without music sometimes yielded better immediate test performance than studying with background music, indicating that the timing and context of musical exposure require careful consideration [8](#). Future research should aim to establish standardized protocols for integrating music into language curricula and explore long-term impacts on broader language skills such as speaking fluency and writing.

Pedagogically, incorporating songs into English vocabulary instruction offers a versatile strategy that can be adapted for different age groups and proficiency levels. Active engagement techniques like singing along, lyric analysis, cloze exercises based on song texts, and multimedia presentations enhance cognitive processing while maintaining learner interest [57](#). Teachers can leverage music not only as a mnemonic device but also as a cultural bridge that introduces learners to diverse linguistic expressions within authentic communicative contexts. This approach aligns well with communicative language teaching principles emphasizing meaningful interaction and learner-centeredness.

In conclusion, music-based learning represents an effective, enjoyable, and culturally enriching method for enhancing English vocabulary acquisition. It supports both cognitive processes—through multisensory encoding and repetition—and affective dimensions—by fostering motivation and reducing anxiety—thereby creating optimal conditions for language learning success [136](#). While further research is needed to refine best practices and address existing limitations, current evidence strongly advocates for the integration of songs into English language teaching as a complementary tool that enriches traditional pedagogies. Educators are encouraged to thoughtfully incorporate music into their instructional design to harness its full potential in promoting vocabulary mastery alongside broader communicative competence.

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