

Song Utilization in English Language Teaching: Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract. Songs are widely used in English language teaching (ELT) to enhance linguistic skills, learner engagement, and cultural understanding. However, a comprehensive synthesis of qualitative research on this instructional strategy is lacking. This study focused on how the utilization of songs in English language teaching contributes to addressing English language acquisition challenges through a meta-synthesis, following the PRISMA framework, CASP checklist, and Rayyan Interface. Research articles included were published between 2015 and 2024 within Asian countries. Descriptive Analysis and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020) were employed to identify common themes and findings, as well as to examine different pedagogical approaches across various English skills. Additionally, this approach facilitated the identification of challenges in integrating songs into English language instruction and explored the pedagogical implications from existing studies. Three common themes emerged from the findings, namely Cognitive and Linguistic Aspect Benefit, Motivational Benefit, and Pedagogical Aspect Benefit. Pedagogical approaches varied due to different target skills, but included everyday activities such as listening to and singing songs in class. Results showed the interconnectedness of English skills. Challenges in incorporating songs include the cognitive and linguistic aspects of the learners, as well as the pedagogical aspect, which primarily concerns the teacher. Careful planning and thoughtful implementation by the teacher are essential in utilizing songs in class. The meta-synthesis revealed that songs in the English language teaching are potent tools for enhancing language learning skills and boosting student motivation. Songs are authentic materials in English Language Teaching, and while they offer many benefits, their selection and use must be strategic to be effective in a classroom setting. Future research in song-based language teaching should focus on expanding sample sizes and diversifying the groups of teachers and students involved in the study.

Keywords: English language teaching; Meta-synthesis; Pedagogical approaches; Songs.

1.0 Introduction

The key tool for global communication and cultural exchange is language. As people around the world become increasingly interconnected, there is a growing need for English language proficiency among ESL learners. The English language is widely regarded as a global language. The role of English as a worldwide language promotes cross-cultural understanding and cooperation, making it a vital part of education worldwide. It serves as a bridge between different cultures, industries, and countries. By emphasizing English, schools equip students with the tools to engage in international dialogue, contribute to global discussions, and become competitive in their respective industries. Although the Philippines' gradual deterioration in English language proficiency was

observed among Filipinos, as indicated by the EF English Proficiency Index, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), and the average score of Filipino IELTS takers (Santos et al., 2022).

Responding to this need has led to extensive research on English language acquisition challenges, strategies (Aparanti & Jazadi, 2021), and pedagogical methods in English language teaching, as well as their outcomes. However, in recent years, studies about the use of songs in English language teaching as an innovative teaching method have become a trend as this aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, to provide quality education, by highlighting inclusive and equitable education among diverse ESL learners (United Nations Statistics Division, n.d.).

Songs have always been popular, regardless of genre, which appeals to different types of listeners in various circumstances. Songs provide exposure to a variety of vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical structures in a natural, context-rich way. Several studies claim its positive effect on learning and developing English skills (Suryanto, 2025; Megawati et. al.,2024; Rahmania, 2024; Razimona et. al.,2024; Febrina, 2023; Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Huong, 2022; Taula'bi, 2022; Anis et. al, 2021; Harahap, 2021; Hadi, 2019; Rais et. al., 2019; Pratiwi,2018). However, there is limited research on the potential usefulness of songs, considering their appropriateness and diversity for ESL learners. This study aims to contribute to the knowledge base in English Language Education by synthesizing existing research on the use of songs in this context, with a focus on appropriateness and diversity. This study aims to assist language teachers by providing an overview of a pedagogical approach that they can apply in their respective classrooms.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design, meta-synthesis. The synthesis of the studies included in the research reveals potential research topics for the researchers (Uysal et al., 2018). Meta-synthesis studies aim to understand and explain a particular phenomenon through synthesizing individual studies in a specific subject. The design enabled in-depth and process-based studies on the use of English songs in English Language Teaching in Asia over the past decade.

2.2 Data Gathering Procedure

A systematic search was conducted using Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and Scopus, with the aid of Publish or Perish software. Keywords included English Language Teaching, Meta-synthesis, Pedagogical Approaches, and Song. Screening was managed using Rayyan, where two independent reviewers assessed studies in two phases: abstract/title and full-text. The process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines.

Harzings' Publish or Perish was utilized to conduct the PRISMA flow in 2020, as illustrated in Figure 1. Initially, 1,799 studies were identified using Harzing's Publish or Perish software. These studies were sourced from various databases, including Google Scholar (1,000), Scopus (116), and Semantic Scholar (683). Before screening, 127 duplicate studies were removed, and 1,672 reports were excluded based on a set of inclusion criteria. Rayyan AI was used for data management. Consequently, only 96 reports underwent further screening after including "qualitative" as a criterion, resulting in 30 reports for retrieval. The researchers were guided by the CASP Checklist for qualitative research. With 18 reports remaining, the researchers sought three external evaluators to validate the research articles for the meta-synthesis. Considering the results of the evaluators, only nine (9) articles were included.

2.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The extracted data (context, design, participants, and themes) were organized in a matrix. Codes and themes were developed inductively and refined through iterative comparison and analysis. Three validators used CASP to appraise study quality. Trustworthiness was ensured through peer debriefing and audit trails.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained a certificate of exemption from the Ethics and Review Committee, as no human participants were involved in the study.

Identification of Studies via databases

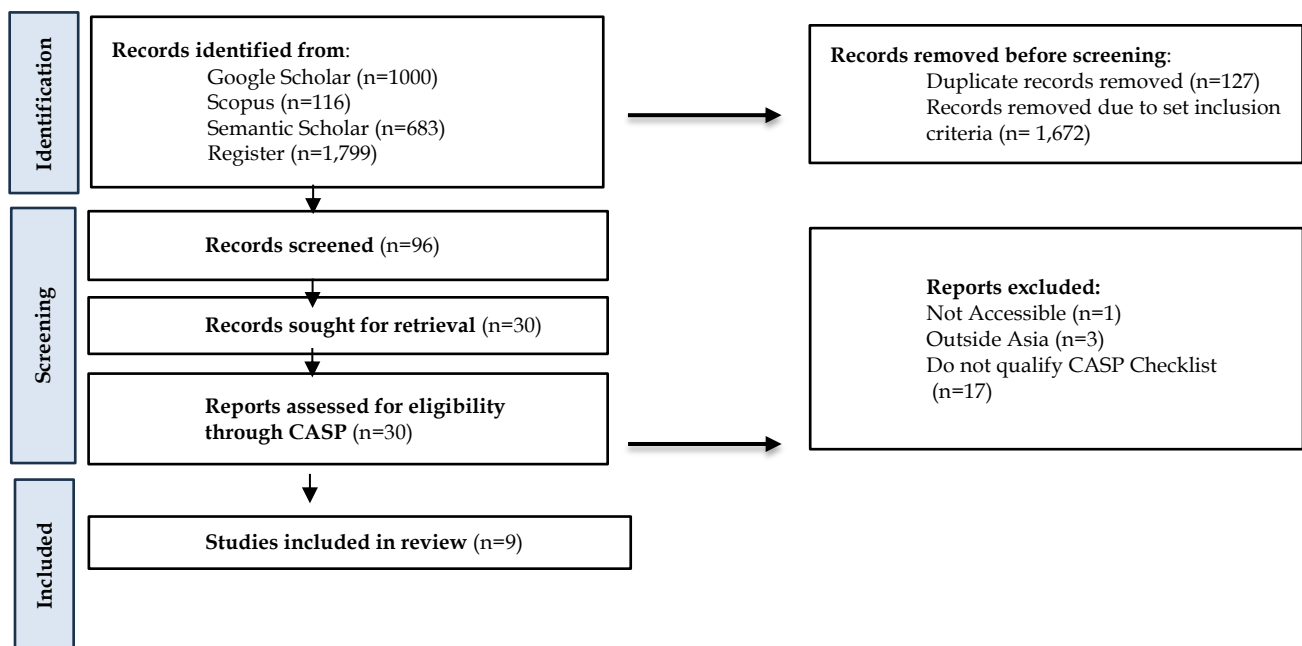


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram on Data Selection

3.0 Results and Discussion

The study aimed to collect and synthesize data on the utilization of songs in English language teaching in Asian countries. Table 1 presents a summary of studies by author(s), year, research design, participants, target English skills, Theme presence, and Challenges in the utilization of songs in English Language Teaching.

Table 1. Descriptive data of the 9 included Studies on Song Utilization in English Language Teaching in Asian Countries

	Authors	Year	Research Design	Participants	Target English skills	Present Theme	Challenges
1	Hammad Mushtaq, Taskeen Zehra	2016	Qualitative	3 EFL teachers and 60 HS students	Listening	1,2	CL,P
2	Nilma Taula'bi'	2022	Qualitative	2 English teachers and young learners	Vocabulary and Grammar	1,2,3	-
3	Abdullah Al Anis, Siti Rosyidah, S. Wulandari	2021	Qualitative (case study)	2 Teachers and 20 students	Vocabulary	1,2,3	CL,P
4	Irma Fitriana Harahap, Farida Repelita Waty Kembaren	2023	Qualitative (descriptive)	20 4 th -Grade students	Vocabulary	1,2,3	P
5	Rizka Razimona, Sary Silvhiany, M. Vianty	2024	Qualitative (descriptive)	5 classes of 1 st Grade students	English Literacy	1,2,3	CL,P
6	Jati Suryanto	2025	Qualitative (descriptive)	3 teachers	English Literacy	1,2,3	CL
7	V. Pratiwi	2018	Descriptive	Fifth-grade students	Speaking	1,2,3	P
8	Fayza Rahmania	2024	Qualitative (descriptive)	34 students from grade 2,	Vocabulary	1,2,3	CL
9	Nguyen Thi Mai Huong	2022	Qualitative	Teachers	Pronunciation	1,2,3	CL, P

Legend: 1 - Cognitive and Linguistic Aspect Benefit, 2 - Motivational Benefit, 3- Pedagogical Aspect Benefit. CL- Cognitive and Linguistics Challenge, P- Pedagogical Challenge.

Using Braun & Clarke's (2020) reflexive thematic analysis, the included studies examined the utilization of songs in English language teaching, particularly in institutions of Asian countries. They generated three (3) common themes based on findings from eight (8) initial codes. The three themes identified are, namely: (1) Cognitive and Linguistic Aspect Benefit, (2) Motivational Benefit, and (3) Pedagogical Aspect Benefit.

3.1 Cognitive and Linguistic Aspect Benefit

Cognitive and Linguistic Aspect Benefit pertains to the effect of songs, which may enhance or increase the English learning experience. This theme includes two (2) themes from the initial codes, namely: (1) Improvement of Target Skill which pertains to having songs' positive effect on the target skill of the study, (2) Integration of various

English skills pertains to songs having positive effects on other English skills apart from the target skill of the study. Several studies have claimed its positive effects in English Language learning regardless of target skill (Suryanto, 2025; Megawati et al,2024; Rahmania, 2024; Razimona et. al,2024; Febrina, 2023; Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Huong, 2022; Taula'bi, 2022; Anis et. al, 2021; Harahap, 2021; Hadi, 2019; Rais et. al, 2019; Pratiwi,2018).

Regardless of the target skills and learning activities employed in the included articles, songs expose learners to the language (Güler & Bozkurt, 2021) through listening and singing, which may have had positive effects on language learning and improved students' skills. Language exposure improves students' language skills (Awatin & Escandallo, 2024). Articles may focus on different English skills, but all target skills improved after incorporating songs into the teaching-learning process. It also highlighted the interconnectedness of English skills (Rahmania, 2024; Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Taula'bi, 2022; Güler & Bozkurt, 2021; Anis et al., 2021). Songs serve as a valuable language learning resource by providing authentic exposure to how words are naturally pronounced and used in context. As students listen and sing along, they develop better pronunciation skills and become familiar with new vocabulary. Repetition through music helps reinforce these elements, making it easier for learners to remember and use them accurately in conversation. These positive effects are not limited to cognitive and linguistic benefits only, but also include motivational and pedagogical benefits.

3.2 Motivational Benefit

Motivational benefits pertain to making learners more motivated and excited in class through the use of songs. Motivation is a key factor in successful learning. It drives students to engage actively in the learning process and contributes significantly to creating a participative and dynamic classroom environment. It may be intrinsic or external, but studies report that using songs boosts learners' learning motivation (Suryanto, 2025; Megawati et al,2024; Rahmania, 2024; Razimona et. al,2024; Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Huong, 2022; Taula'bi, 2022; Anis et. al, 2021; Harahap, 2021; Pratiwi,2018). As songs increase learners' motivation, it leads to increased participation in class, resulting in the improvement or development of skills.

3.3 Pedagogical Aspect Benefit

The pedagogical approach benefits include the positive effects of songs on classroom management and environment during the study, which encompass learner engagement and participation. This theme contains two (2) themes from the initial codes, namely: Psychological Aspect Benefit, which pertains to the effect of songs on the attitude, self-efficacy, anxiety, and awareness of the learners in class, and Social Aspect Benefit, which relates to learners' interpersonal skills and collaborative skills. Incorporating songs into classroom activities can create a fun and engaging atmosphere (Taula'bi, 2022). Music helps reduce student anxiety and fosters a more relaxed learning environment, making learners more open and interested. This emotional comfort enhances participation, focus, and ultimately leads to more effective and successful learning (Ani et. al, 2021). Similarly, Hadi (2019) concluded that songs can help students improve their English language skills due to increased participation levels. Songs grant students enjoyable learning experiences that significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and listening comprehension (Ronritulus & Wuntu, 2023). Similarly, Pratiwi (2018) recommended that teachers enhance English language learning to lighten the learning atmosphere. Songs' ability to set a more conducive setting for learning positively influences classroom instruction and development of interconnected skills (Suryanto, 2025; Megawati et al,2024; Rahmania, 2024; Razimona et. al, 2024; Febrina, 2023; Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Huong, 2022; Taula'bi, 2022; Anis et. al, 2021; Harahap, 2021; Hadi, 2019; Rais et. al, 2019; Pratiwi,2018).

3.4 Pedagogical Approaches

In this study, pedagogical approaches refer to classroom activities that utilize songs. Articles have many different target English skills, but the incorporation of song has positively affected all. Songs are indeed versatile tools that can enhance multiple English language skills at once. Songs offer a more integrated learning experience. Their use in the classroom has been shown to improve various areas of language learning simultaneously, including listening comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, and even reading and writing through lyric analysis and activities.

The most common activity in the articles was listening and singing along with the song, exposing learners to the language and catering to their listening and oral skills—language exposure fosters language learning (Awatin & Escandallo, 2024). Additionally, combining songs with other multimedia materials, such as videos, caters to the learner's visual skills and helps them acquire more vocabulary words.

3.5 Challenges in Integrating Songs into English Language Teaching

The existence of cognitive and linguistic barriers is one of the most pressing challenges in using songs for English language learning. Students often vary in their English proficiency across different language skills, which can pose challenges in implementing a uniform pedagogy effectively. Students demonstrate varying levels of proficiency in different English language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This multi-level nature affects the implementation of pedagogical strategies, as teachers must adapt their methods to meet diverse learning needs and ensure that all students are engaged and supported (Suryanto, 2025; Rahmania, 2024; Razimona et. al, 2024; Febrina, 2023; Huong, 2022; Anis et. al, 2021; Harahap, 2021; Hadi, 2019; Rais et. al, 2019; Pratiwi, 2018).

Another challenge in using songs for English language teaching is the pedagogical approach and its implementation. Teachers in the planning stage must consider songs that are age-appropriate for the learners and fit the lesson (Harahap & Kembaren, 2023; Anis et al., 2021). There is also a mismatch between students' musical interests and the songs chosen by teachers, which can lead to unfamiliarity and decreased participation (Güler & Bozkurt, 2021). Additionally, when planning classroom activities, teachers must consider the timing and duration of implementation. Rushing through tasks or fitting them into inappropriate time slots can reduce their effectiveness and learning value. Allocating sufficient time ensures that students can fully engage with the content, meet learning objectives, and benefit from well-designed instructional tasks (Huong, 2022). Lastly, establishing clear classroom rules and routines is essential for maintaining a smooth, orderly, and productive learning environment (Razimona et al., 2024).

3.6. Pedagogical Implications Drawn from Existing Studies on the Use of Songs in English Language Teaching

When introducing a new pedagogical approach, the planning phase is equally important as the implementation phase. Thoughtful planning allows educators to align objectives, materials, timing, and assessment methods. It ensures that the approach is well-structured, realistic, and adaptable to the students' needs, which ultimately leads to more effective and meaningful learning experiences.

Teacher training and support are critical for the effective use of songs in language teaching. Schools and educational institutions are urged to equip teachers with the necessary training to select and implement songs in their curricula. This training ensures that teachers can effectively integrate songs to enhance language skills and maintain student engagement (Güler & Bozkurt, 2021; Huong, 2022). In resource-limited contexts, creative and interactive teaching methods using songs have proven beneficial. Teachers are encouraged to use available resources creatively, and policymakers are urged to improve access to teaching materials and teacher training (Suryanto, 2025). Integrating songs into lessons has been shown to increase student motivation, language development, and retention, particularly among young learners (Taula'bi, 2022; Harahap & Kembaren, 2023). By incorporating song lyrics into lessons, teachers can create more engaging and interactive environments that foster active participation, helping students develop multiple language skills simultaneously (Anis et. al, 2021; Pratiwi, 2018). Integrating culturally relevant songs, such as Islamic songs, into the curriculum can enhance motivation and character development, offering students a more meaningful learning experience (Megawati et al, 2024). Furthermore, student involvement in the song selection process is emphasized to boost engagement and foster a sense of ownership over learning (Huong, 2022).

For early childhood education, integrating songs with movement and multimedia offers a dynamic, multisensory learning experience. This approach helps reinforce vocabulary and supports language acquisition in an enjoyable, interactive way (Harahap & Kembaren, 2023). Students are encouraged to participate actively in the learning process, which strengthens both speaking and listening skills. Additionally, flexibility and creativity in teaching methods are essential. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate a variety of materials and activities, including songs, to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Collaboration with parents is also emphasized to extend learning beyond the classroom (Razimona et. al, 2024).

Songs not only enhance vocabulary but also support the development of speaking and listening abilities. The use of songs is especially effective for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and motivating students, particularly in classrooms where student engagement is challenging. Song-based learning has also been shown to aid in the development of speaking skills, making it a valuable tool for enhancing language proficiency (Pratiwi, 2018;

Rahmania, 2024). Lastly, pronunciation plays a significant role in language learning, and studies recommend a stronger focus on this aspect within the curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to allocate more time for pronunciation-focused lessons, using songs as a tool to improve students' pronunciation, especially when integrated into structured learning activities (Huong, 2022).

4.0 Conclusion

This qualitative research utilized a meta-synthesis on the utilization of songs in English language teaching in Asian countries. The findings highlight that integrating songs into English language teaching (ELT) offers a multifaceted approach to language development, contributing not only to linguistic gains but also to emotional, motivational, and cultural engagement. Songs serve as powerful tools for enhancing student engagement, alleviating anxiety, and cultivating a positive classroom environment. Learners who participated in song-based activities often reported feeling more confident and connected to the language, showing marked improvements in vocabulary retention, pronunciation, and listening comprehension.

However, the success of song-based instruction depends heavily on the intentional pedagogical design of the teacher and the students' state and response to the implementation. Teachers may utilize a variety of creative approaches, such as gap-fill exercises, lyric analysis, and role-playing, to make song-based lessons more interactive and practical.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that teacher education programs prioritize equipping teachers with the necessary skills to integrate songs into language lessons effectively. Schools should also provide institutional support, including training resources and adequate technological infrastructure, to ensure the effective use of songs in the classroom. Moreover, a more intentional curricular integration of song-based learning, alongside support for teachers in selecting culturally relevant and pedagogically sound songs, could address many of the current limitations. Future researchers may focus more on integrating song learning with other strategies, such as task-based learning, collaborative learning, gamification, and virtual and augmented reality.

5.0 Contribution of Authors

The authors divided the task reasonably to produce this research. Authors 1 and 2 were responsible for conceptualization, proposal writing, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing. Lastly, Author 3 oversaw the entire research process, editing and providing constructive feedback, and ensuring the rigor of the study.

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7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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