Effects of English Songs on EFL Learners' Speaking Production and Their Perceptions

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Abstract *- Although English songs are recognized as beneficial in EFL instruction, research on their impact on learners' speaking performance and perceptions remains limited. This study investigated the effects of integrating English songs into speaking lessons for 28 first-year EFL students at a private university in Thailand and explored students' perceptions of using songs to improve speaking. Over fifteen weeks, participants received two weekly sessions incorporating contemporary songs. A one-group pretest-posttest design was used, with speaking tests (pretest, posttest, delayed posttest) analyzed via paired-sample t-tests and descriptive statistics. Results showed significant improvements in overall speaking performance from pretest to posttest ($p < .001$, $d = 1.84$) and sustained gains in the delayed posttest ($p < .001$, $d = 1.98$). Lexical density improved only in the delayed posttest ($p < .05$, $d = 0.43$), while accuracy and fluency increased significantly (errors per 100 words, $p < .05$, $d = 0.49$; error-free clauses, $p < .05$, $d = –0.59$; words per minute, $p < .001$, $d = 1.09$). Survey results indicated that students viewed song integration positively for enhancing speaking skills. These findings suggest that English songs are an effective pedagogical tool for developing EFL learners' speaking performance. Limitations include the small sample size and lack of a control group, but the study offers practical implications for engaging speaking instruction in EFL contexts.*

Keywords: Complexity, English as a foreign language learners, English song-based learning, fluency, lexical density, speaking production

I. INTRODUCTION

English In this era of globalization, English is used worldwide, including Thailand. Thailand is a member country of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where English is the official language. Therefore, English is essential for international communication in contexts such as ASEAN, and being proficient in English opens doors to better job opportunities and higher education around the world (Suoc et al., 2025).

Despite being a compulsory subject from primary to university level, English in Thailand is mainly taught through Thai, resulting in limited communicative ability among students (Yaorm, 2019). Overreliance on Thai hinders English-speaking development (Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021), while consistent exposure to English through media and speaking practice enhances fluency (Phisutthangkoon, 2024).

Speaking, a productive skill, requires frequent exposure and practice. Research indicates that EFL learners improve when regularly immersed in English-speaking environments (Keomany et al., 2020). However, instructors often struggle to create such environments. Integrating English songs offers one solution, as music motivates learners, builds confidence, and supports language acquisition in line with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985).

Previous studies have explored songs in language learning (Khongsat, 2018; Mobbs & Cuyul, 2018; Vishnevskaia & Zhou, 2019; Zamin et al., 2020) and learners' perceptions (Al-Efeshat & Baniabdelrahman, 2020; Güzel & Altay, 2023), but little is known about their impact on speaking production. The present study therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of integrating English songs on EFL undergraduate students' speaking production in terms of lexical complexity, accuracy, and fluency?

2. What are the perceptions of EFL undergraduate students regarding the use of English songs to improve their speaking performance and increase their confidence?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is grounded in the Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency (CAF) triad (Housen et al., 2012), which offers a structured lens for analyzing learners' spoken performance and evaluating pedagogical interventions, such as the use of songs in EFL classrooms. It also incorporates Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis to explain how music can reduce anxiety and facilitate more effective language input and speaking development in EFL contexts.

Speaking Challenges Among EFL Learners

English is widely regarded as the world's lingua franca due to its cultural, economic, and political influence, making it essential for global communication and opportunities (Crystal, 2003). For EFL learners, English proficiency is linked to career prospects, academic success, and international engagement, which drives their motivation to master speaking skills. However, many face challenges such as limited vocabulary, weak grammar mastery, low confidence, nervousness, fear of mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, inadequate exposure, and reliance on the mother tongue (Normawati et al., 2023; Winnie et al., 2023).

Vocabulary plays a central role, as students with limited word knowledge struggle to express ideas clearly and often avoid speaking (Keomany et al., 2020; Winnie et al., 2023). Grammar is equally important, yet learners frequently struggle to use patterns actively despite knowing the rules, which causes hesitation and reduces confidence (Keomany et al., 2020; Scrivener, 2011).

Lack of confidence further hinders oral proficiency. Insufficient practice and exposure lead to nervousness and fear of mistakes or mispronunciation, discouraging participation (Keomany

et al., 2020). Overuse of the mother tongue also limits opportunities to practice English, while frequent exposure enhances speaking skills and builds confidence (Keomany et al., 2020).

The Pedagogical Value of Songs in Speaking Instruction

Songs have long been used in language teaching to support speaking development. While Scrivener (2011) acknowledged that songs are frequently used as a filler activity to shift the mood or tempo of a lesson, which is fine. However, it is important to recognize that they can also be effectively incorporated into the overall structure of your course. Vocabulary is essential for effective communication, and limited vocabulary often hinders learners' speaking skills and confidence (Keomany et al., 2020; Winnie et al., 2023). Research has shown that using songs in language teaching enhances vocabulary acquisition, development, retention, and mastery among ESL and EFL learners (Zamin et al., 2020).

Grammar is essential for spoken English as it provides the foundation for clear and fluent communication. However, many EFL learners struggle with it, with nearly half identifying grammar as their main difficulty (Normawati et al., 2023). Studies show that songs help learners internalize grammatical patterns and structures (Khongsat, 2018), and experimental evidence confirms that students learning grammar through singing outperform those taught with traditional methods (Busse et al., 2021).

Songs serve as an effective tool for improving EFL and ESL learners' pronunciation. Research confirms their benefits: learners taught with songs achieved higher pronunciation scores (Saldiraner & Cinkara, 2021), ESL learners improved significantly compared to non-song learners (Khan, 2024), and EFL learners acknowledged gains in vocabulary and pronunciation through songs (Kimprasit, 2021). Similarly, students who learned vocabulary through singing demonstrated better pronunciation and retention than those using traditional methods (Zhang et al., 2023).

Listening plays a crucial role in developing speaking proficiency, as it enables learners to comprehend input. As Bolitho et al. (2003) emphasize, "Acquisition of automatic language skills depends on rich, meaningful, repeated exposure to comprehensible input without awareness" (p.253). Songs serve as an effective medium for improving listening comprehension by exposing learners to authentic language with natural rhythm, intonation, and connected speech (Mobbs & Cuyul, 2018).

Practical Considerations for Effective Song Integration

While songs offer clear pedagogical benefits, effective integration into EFL instruction requires careful planning. Teachers may face challenges such as selecting songs suitable for learners' proficiency levels, working within time constraints, and lacking training in song-based methods (Bokiev & Ismail, 2021). Learners, too, may struggle with fast-paced lyrics or idiomatic language (Muhamad & Rahmat, 2020). Therefore, songs should be chosen based on learners' age, proficiency, vocabulary demands, and cultural relevance (Mobbs & Cuyul, 2018).

As previously discussed, songs support the development of speaking-related skills that contribute to improvements in complexity, accuracy, and fluency. Lexical complexity, often assessed through lexical density, improves through repeated exposure to varied vocabulary in context. Research on complexity, accuracy, and fluency provides a valuable framework for understanding these gains (Housen et al., 2012). Songs also reinforce grammatical accuracy through consistent, patterned input (Busse et al., 2021; Lan et al., 2020) and enhance fluency by promoting automaticity and familiar language chunks (Jain et al., 2024; Lume et al., 2023).

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design. Data were collected via speaking tests to assess the impact of English songs on EFL learners' speaking performance. In addition, a survey of students' perceptions on the use of English songs in helping them to improve their speaking was administered and analyzed. Quantitative methods were used to analyze three key dimensions of speaking ability: lexical complexity, accuracy, and fluency.

Participants: The study population consisted of approximately 180 undergraduate EFL students with A1–A2 English proficiency, enrolled in a speaking-focused course, ENGL2210: Dialogue and Conversation Skills in English. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to reflect beginner-level students with limited speaking ability. The final sample included 28 students: 14 English for Professional Communication majors, 4 Accounting majors, and 10 ESL students from Thailand, China, Malaysia, and India. All participants were aged 18–19 and placed in the course based on an English Placement Test assessing listening, reading, grammar, and writing.

Instruments: This study employed three types of instruments to obtain research data: (1) a series of speaking tests (pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test), (2) speaking lessons incorporating English songs as an instructional intervention, and (3) a survey questionnaire.

Speaking Tests

The study used pre-speaking, post-speaking, and delayed post-speaking tests to assess participants' speaking skills. Each test involved four colored sequence pictures depicting a familiar scenario of a woman and a boy traveling by bus. Participants had three minutes to observe the pictures and two minutes to describe them; their speech was recorded and transcribed. The test content, adapted from Easylearn (2015), was reviewed by three language teaching experts to ensure validity.

Survey Questionnaire

The second instrument was a researcher-developed survey questionnaire designed to assess participants' opinions on using English songs to improve speaking skills. It included 20 validated items across three sections: demographics, satisfaction with the teaching method, and perceived improvement in speaking.

Speaking Lessons with English Songs

The third instrument was speaking lessons incorporating English songs. Ten topics related to everyday life were taught. Lessons progressed from simple to more complex songs and followed a three-stage framework adapted from Lorenzutti (2014): pre-listening (discussion, vocabulary introduction, prediction), while-listening (listening and completing tasks), and post-listening (speaking or writing activities). Each lesson consisted of four 50-minute periods over two days.

Procedures: The study employed a one-group pretest–posttest design over 15 weeks during the first semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Participants completed a pre-speaking test in the first week, followed by ten English-speaking lessons incorporating songs over weeks 2–11. Post-speaking tests and a satisfaction questionnaire were administered in weeks 12–13, and a delayed post-speaking test was conducted approximately three weeks later to assess retention. Quantitative data from the speaking tests and questionnaire responses were used to evaluate the effects of songs on speaking performance and confidence.

Analysis Techniques:

Speaking Test Analysis

Learners' pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest speaking performances were evaluated by three experts using IELTS speaking band descriptors. Mean scores were compared using paired samples t-tests to examine improvements and retention, with effect sizes calculated following Cohen (1988). Inter-rater reliability was high, with Cronbach's Alpha correlations ranging from .88 to .99 across tests, indicating consistent and reliable scoring.

Lexical Density Analysis

Participants' utterances from pre-, post-, and delayed posttests were transcribed using VEED.IO. Lexical density, measuring the proportion of lexical words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) in the speech, was analyzed using Analyze My Writing, which provides overall and sentence-by-sentence lexical density scores. The total lexical density percentage for each test was calculated, and paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare pretest vs. posttest scores and posttest vs. delayed posttest scores to assess improvement and retention. Below is the lexical density formula:

Measure	**Calculation**
Lexical Density	(Number of lexical words ÷ Total number of words) × 100

Speaking Accuracy Analysis

Speaking accuracy was measured following Khan (2010) using two metrics: the number of errors per 100 words and the percentage of error-free clauses. Using clauses as the unit of measurement is suitable for beginner EFL learners. Accuracy measures were calculated for pre-, post-, and delayed posttests and analyzed using paired samples t-tests to determine significant improvements and retention. Below is the accuracy formula:

Accuracy Measures	Calculation
Number of errors per 100 words	(Total number of errors ÷ Total number of words) × 100
% Error-free clauses	(Number of error-free clauses ÷ Total number of clauses) × 100

Speaking Fluency Analysis

Fluency was measured as the number of meaningful words spoken per minute, using Pruned Speech Rate (PSR) adapted from Bui and Huang (2018). PSR excludes disfluency features such as pauses longer than 3 seconds, vocal fillers, incomplete words, and repetitions. Utterances were transcribed, disfluencies marked, and PSR calculated for pre-, post-, and delayed posttests. Paired samples t-tests compared scores to assess improvement and retention. Below is the fluency formula:

$$\text{PSR} = \frac{\text{total words} - \text{vocal fillers} - \text{incomplete words} - \text{repeated words}}{\text{Total time of speech (in seconds)}} \times 60$$

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Objective one examined the effects of English songs on EFL students' speaking performance in terms of lexical complexity (lexical density), accuracy, and fluency. Participants completed pre-, post-, and delayed post-speaking tests.

Lexical density showed no immediate improvement from pretest ($M = 49.47$, $SD = 4.64$) to posttest ($M = 49.52$, $SD = 4.08$), $t(27) = -0.03$, $p = .971$, $d = 0.01$. However, a delayed gain was observed between posttest and delayed posttest ($M = 51.23$, $SD = 3.90$), $t(27) = -2.27$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.43$, suggesting that improvements in lexical complexity emerged over time.

Accuracy improved significantly: errors per 100 words decreased from 11.52 to 9.74, $t(27) = 2.58$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.49$, and the percentage of error-free clauses increased from 8.67 to 24.25, $t(27) = -3.14$, $p < .05$, $d = -0.59$, indicating enhanced grammatical control.

Fluency also improved markedly, with words per minute increasing from 62.50 ($SD = 34.80$) to 100.64 ($SD = 39.33$), $d = 1.09$, and pruned speech rate rising from 27.52 ($SD = 14.40$) to 44.39 ($SD = 17.45$), $d = 1.07$, reflecting longer and smoother speech production.

Research Objective 2 examined participants' opinions on using songs to improve speaking performance and confidence. Results showed high student satisfaction, with most mean scores above 4.0. The highest-rated aspects were enjoyment of learning through songs ($M = 4.75$), vocabulary development ($M = 4.50$), motivation ($M = 4.46$), and improvement in speaking through listening ($M = 4.46$). Students reported gains in fluency, pronunciation, naturalness, accuracy, and conversational English, with vocabulary acquisition receiving the highest rating. While students felt comfortable in casual conversations, classroom speaking confidence was slightly lower.

Thematic analysis of students' written reflections (Braun & Clarke, 2006) revealed four main themes ranked by frequency: engagement and enjoyment [46], speaking skills and confidence [42], language development [38], and teaching effectiveness and support [22]. These findings indicate that integrating songs positively impacted both speaking performance and learner motivation.

Discussion

Lexical Complexity

The results indicated that the use of English songs led to a delayed but significant improvement in lexical complexity, as measured by lexical density. While there was no notable difference between the pretest and posttest, a significant increase was observed in the delayed posttest, suggesting that the benefits of songs on lexical development may take time to manifest. This delayed effect aligns with Housen et al. (2012), who argued that learners' initial vocabulary use is limited but gradually expands with increased competence. Similarly, Lume et al. (2023) found that singing with interactive activities enhances vocabulary retention, reinforcing the idea that vocabulary growth is a gradual process. These findings also resonate with previous research showing that songs support vocabulary acquisition and long-term retention (Zamin et al., 2020). Thus, songs appear to provide a strong foundation for learners to internalize new vocabulary, which later reflects in higher lexical density in their speech.

Accuracy

The study revealed significant gains in accuracy, as students produced more error-free clauses and reduced the number of errors per 100 words from pretest to posttest. Importantly, these improvements were sustained in the delayed posttest, suggesting that the use of songs had both immediate and lasting effects on grammatical accuracy. These results are consistent with Khongsat (2018), who reported that songs support grammatical development, and with Vishnevskaia and Zhou (2019), who highlighted that songs help learners internalize sentence patterns and structures. Similarly, Busse et al. (2021) showed that learners taught through singing outperformed those receiving regular instruction in grammar learning. The repetitive, structured nature of lyrics provides learners with repeated exposure to correct grammatical forms in meaningful contexts, making it easier to internalize accurate structures (Lan et al., 2020). Collectively, these studies support the present findings, confirming that songs are an effective pedagogical tool for improving learners' grammatical accuracy in spoken English.

Fluency

Fluency showed the most immediate and substantial improvement, with students producing significantly more words per minute and reducing the duration of pauses after the intervention. The large effect size indicates that songs played a key role in fostering smoother and more confident speech. These findings align with Jain et al. (2024), who found that songs enhanced speaking fluency, and Lume et al. (2023), who reported fluency gains when vocabulary was taught through singing combined with interactive activities. Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2023) demonstrated that singing familiar melodies improved multiple aspects of pronunciation, including fluency, more effectively than traditional repetition methods. The improvement may be explained by content familiarity (Bui & Huang, 2018), as repeated exposure to lyrics made

learners more confident in speech production. Thus, songs not only encouraged more fluid speech but also helped create the conditions for sustained confidence in oral communication.

Students' Perception on The Use of Songs

Students expressed high satisfaction with using English songs to improve speaking, with all eleven survey items scoring above 4.0, most in the "very high" range (above 4.20). Key aspects included enjoyment, perceived improvement in speaking, vocabulary retention, and increased confidence, motivation, and engagement. The highest-rated item, "The use of English songs made learning enjoyable" (M = 4.75, SD = 0.58), was supported by qualitative feedback, consistent with previous studies (Güzel & Altay, 2023; Al-Efeshat & Baniabdelrahman, 2020).

Songs also enhanced engagement in speaking activities (M = 4.36, SD = 0.67), comfort in speaking (M = 4.36, SD = 0.62), and motivation (M = 4.46, SD = 0.69), with thematic analysis highlighting enjoyment and participation, aligning with prior findings on music's positive impact (Güzel & Altay, 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Al-Efeshat & Baniabdelrahman, 2020).

Students reported that song lyrics aided vocabulary improvement (M = 4.50, SD = 0.63) and memorization (M = 4.36, SD = 0.73), supporting previous research on vocabulary retention and enrichment (Güzel & Altay, 2023; Zamin et al., 2020).

Finally, students agreed that songs matched their English level and improved speaking skills (M = 4.43, SD = 0.74), highlighting the importance of appropriate song selection. Listening to songs also contributed to speaking development (M = 4.46, SD = 0.69), consistent with prior studies on vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking gains (Kimprasit, 2021), though selecting suitable songs remains a known challenge (Bokiev & Ismail, 2021).

V. CONCLUSION

This study shows that English songs significantly enhance EFL students' speaking skills, particularly grammatical accuracy and fluency, with delayed improvements in lexical density. Statistically significant gains across pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest highlight immediate and lasting benefits, supporting Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis and prior research on music's value in language learning (Keomany et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2024; Zamin et al., 2020). Survey results indicate that students view songs as helpful for improving speaking and confidence. Moreover, songs effectively aid vocabulary retention, grammar learning, and fluency practice in a low-anxiety environment (Busse et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2024). Limitations include a lack of control group and small sample size, suggesting future research should use larger randomized samples and diverse methodologies to explore effects on pronunciation, discourse competence, and motivation.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Tantip Kitjaroonchai was responsible for conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and writing the original draft of the manuscript. Krittat Sukman provided

supervision, critical feedback, and guidance during the research and revision process. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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