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English songs for enhancing university students' pronunciation: A qualitative case study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study explores how university-level EFL students use English songs for pronunciation learning, examines their perceptions of songs as a learning medium, and investigates the benefits and challenges they experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Education at a university in Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The findings suggest that students employ a range of strategies when using songs for pronunciation learning, including repeated listening, simultaneous lyric-reading, IPA and dictionary reference, and active application of learned patterns in conversation. Participants generally perceived English songs as an enjoyable, low-anxiety complement to formal instruction, and reported perceived improvements in word pronunciation, intonation, rhythm awareness, and speaking confidence. Challenges included fast song tempo, connected speech phenomena, unfamiliar vocabulary, and accent variation. These findings indicate that English songs may serve as a useful supplementary resource for pronunciation development when integrated with structured instructional support, though the self-reported nature of the data warrants cautious interpretation.

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Pronunciation is widely regarded as one of the most critical yet challenging aspects of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly for university-level learners seeking communicative competence. Effective pronunciation encompasses both segmental features, including individual vowel and consonant sounds, and suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation,

rhythm, and connected speech (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Levis, 2005). Together, these features enable speakers to convey meaning clearly and facilitate mutual intelligibility (Babayev, 2025). Despite their importance, many EFL learners struggle with pronunciation due to the complexity of English phonological rules, L1 interference, and limited exposure to authentic input (Yulianti et al., 2025). In Indonesia, pronunciation difficulties are especially prevalent among university students, who often find it challenging to master segmental sounds absent in Bahasa Indonesia, such as dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, as well as suprasegmental patterns including lexical stress and intonation contours (Soleha et al., 2023).

English songs have attracted growing interest as an informal resource for pronunciation development. From a theoretical standpoint, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis suggests that songs provide comprehensible, repeated exposure to authentic phonological patterns in a low-anxiety context. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis further implies that the melodic and rhythmic salience of songs may heighten learners' conscious attention to phonological features such as stress, intonation, and connected speech, which is a prerequisite for acquisition. Murphey (1992), in a foundational study of music in language learning, argued that the repetitive and emotionally engaging nature of songs creates particularly favourable conditions for language acquisition. Despite this theoretical grounding, empirical research on song-based pronunciation learning remains largely quantitative and experimental in design, focused on measuring outcomes rather than understanding the learner experience (Gutiérrez-Barrera & Zambrano-Zambrano, 2025; Siki et al., 2024).

Several important gaps persist in the literature. First, most existing studies have been conducted with secondary school or younger learners, leaving university-level EFL students, a population with greater autonomy and self-directed learning capacity, who remain comparatively underexplored (Kitjaroonchai & Sukman, 2025; Ruksil et al., 2025). Second, while quantitative studies document pronunciation gains, they offer limited insight into the strategies, perceptions, and challenges that characterise learners' lived experience with songs (Nguyen et al., 2025). Third, the specific phonological dimensions of song-based learning, particularly at the segmental and suprasegmental levels, have rarely been examined in depth in qualitative work. This study addresses these gaps by employing a qualitative case study approach to explore how Indonesian university students use English songs for pronunciation learning, what perceptions they hold, and what specific phonological benefits and challenges they experience. The findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of informal song-based learning as a complement to formal pronunciation instruction in the Indonesian EFL context.

This study aims to (1) explore how university students use English songs in learning English pronunciation, (2) examine students' perceptions of English songs as a medium for improving pronunciation, and (3) identify the specific

phonological benefits and challenges that students experience when using English songs. The following is the research questions guiding this study:

1. How do university students use English songs in learning English pronunciation?
2. b. What are students' perceptions of English songs as a medium for improving pronunciation?
3. c. What specific phonological benefits and challenges do students experience when using English songs to enhance their pronunciation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations

The use of songs in pronunciation learning is supported by several complementary theoretical frameworks. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis posits that language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input at a level slightly beyond their current proficiency (i+1). Songs, with their predictable melodic structure and repetitive nature, provide sustained exposure to authentic phonological input in a form that is both accessible and engaging. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis argues that conscious attention to linguistic form is a necessary condition for acquisition; the rhythmic and melodic salience of songs may facilitate learners' noticing of segmental and suprasegmental features that might otherwise be processed without deliberate attention. Taken together, these frameworks suggest that songs are not merely motivational tools but may function as theoretically principled vehicles for phonological input and form-noticing.

The affective dimension of song-based learning is equally important. Drawing on Dörnyei's (2001) framework of L2 motivation, the enjoyment and emotional engagement associated with songs can strengthen learners' intrinsic motivation to engage repeatedly with English phonological input, thereby increasing the quantity and quality of exposure. Murphey (1992) demonstrated that the repetitive, catchy songs, what Murphey termed the song-stuck-in-my-head phenomenon, provides involuntary rehearsal of phonological forms, extending practice beyond deliberate study sessions. More recently, Urbaite (2025) synthesised evidence showing that music activates multiple cognitive processes simultaneously, supporting both memory retention and deeper engagement with linguistic structures. Chen et al. (2024) found that music-based learning contributed positively to EFL learners' academic performance and psychological well-being, suggesting that affective and cognitive benefits are closely intertwined in song-based language learning.

Song-Based Learning and Pronunciation: Evidence and Limitations

Empirical research broadly supports the value of English songs for pronunciation development, though the evidence base has important limitations. At the segmental level, studies have documented gains in learners' production of specific English sounds. Ahmed Muhammed (2024) reported significant

improvements in university students' sound production accuracy following song-based instruction, while Yuliana et al. (2025) and Siki et al. (2024) confirmed similar gains across different educational levels. At the suprasegmental level, songs appear particularly effective: Misa (2024) found heightened awareness of word stress and intonation among students who practised through songs, and Swara et al. (2025) demonstrated improvements in stress pattern production through Spotify-based lyric activities. Panvilaysone and Ketoukham (2025) specifically documented gains in recognition of consonant-to-vowel linking, a key connected speech feature, following song exposure. Hamilton et al. (2024), in the most rigorous synthesis to date, confirmed through systematic review that songs produce substantive linguistic effects on learners across age groups.

However, the majority of these studies share a critical limitation: they rely on quantitative, experimental designs that measure outcomes without capturing how learners actually engage with songs or what experiences shape their phonological development. This methodological gap is significant because, as Levis (2005) argued, pronunciation instruction is most effective when it is grounded in an understanding of learner experience and context. Furthermore, most studies focus on younger or secondary school learners; comparatively little is known about how university-level EFL students, who bring greater metalinguistic awareness and self-regulatory capacity, and who engage with songs for pronunciation development (Kitjaroonchai & Sukman, 2025). The present study addresses this gap directly.

Learner Perceptions and Challenges

Research consistently shows that EFL learners hold positive perceptions of songs as a pronunciation learning medium, primarily due to their affective and motivational properties. Judijanto et al. (2024), Pangaribuan and Chairunnissa (2023), and Situmeang and Panjaitan (2024) collectively found that students value songs for their informal, accessible, and low-anxiety character. Kusuma and Anggraini (2025) noted that students attributed positive outcomes to repeated exposure and emotional engagement. Critically, however, Trisnawati and Huda (2025) found that students consistently regard songs as a supplementary rather than primary pronunciation tool, a perception that aligns with Schmidt's (1990) theoretical position that implicit input alone, without structured form-focused instruction, is unlikely to be sufficient for systematic phonological development. This tension between the motivational appeal of songs and their limitations as standalone instructional tools represents a key theme in the literature.

Song-based pronunciation learning also presents distinctive challenges. Connected speech phenomena such as assimilation, elision, and linking, which are pervasive in authentic songs, can be particularly difficult for EFL learners to perceive and interpret (Panvilaysone & Ketoukham, 2025; Loor, 2025). Accent variation across artists may complicate the identification of a consistent

pronunciation model, particularly for segmental features (Wang & Liu, 2025; Daris et al., 2025). These challenges underline the importance of pedagogical guidance in song selection and the integration of explicit phonological instruction alongside informal song-based practice (Almauizzah & Hindriana, 2025; Nurafifah et al., 2025).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore university students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using English songs for pronunciation learning. A case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth, holistic examination of a specific, bounded phenomenon within its natural context (Yin, 2018). The bounded case in this study is defined as university-level EFL students at a single institution in Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia, who engage in song-based pronunciation learning as an informal practice. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to investigating subjective learner experiences, allowing the researcher to capture the richness and complexity of participants' perspectives in ways that quantitative approaches cannot (Kusuma & Anggraini, 2025; Francisco et al., 2025). This design was chosen specifically because the study aims to understand the process and experience of song-based pronunciation learning, not to measure its outcomes.

Participants

The study involved 15 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Education at Universitas Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia. Participants ranged from second to fourth academic year, with ages between 19 and 22 years. The group comprised 11 female and 4 male students, reflecting the gender distribution typical of English Education programmes in Indonesia. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they could provide rich, relevant data (Almauizzah & Hindriana, 2025). Inclusion criteria required that participants (1) be currently enrolled in the English Language Education programme, (2) have regular experience using English songs for pronunciation learning outside the classroom, and (3) be willing to participate in semi-structured interviews. The sample size of 15 was determined by the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continued until no new significant themes emerged from subsequent interviews (Rahmah & Siswana, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. All participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the commencement of interviews. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising all participant data; no names or identifying information are reported in this study. Audio recordings were stored

securely and used solely for the purposes of transcription and analysis. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles for research involving human participants.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary data collection instrument, chosen deliberately for their alignment with the qualitative case study design. In qualitative inquiry, interviews are an established and methodologically appropriate means of accessing learners' lived experiences, strategies, and perceptions, constructs that cannot be adequately captured through performance-based measures alone (Yin, 2018). The focus of this study on how students experience and perceive song-based pronunciation learning, rather than on measuring phonological outcomes, makes semi-structured interviews the most suitable instrument for addressing the research questions. Each interview was conducted individually and lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were carried out in a combination of Indonesian and English according to participants' comfort, and were audio-recorded with informed consent. The interview guide covered topics including strategies for using songs, perceptions of songs as a learning medium, and specific phonological benefits and challenges experienced. The guide was reviewed by two colleagues with expertise in English language teaching to ensure content validity (Trisnawati & Huda, 2025).

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: (1) familiarisation, involving repeated reading of all transcripts; (2) generating initial codes by systematically labelling meaningful units across the dataset; (3) searching for themes by grouping related codes into broader thematic categories; (4) reviewing themes against the full dataset to ensure coherence and representativeness; (5) defining and naming themes with clear conceptual boundaries; and (6) producing the report by organising findings according to the research questions. To strengthen reliability, a second researcher independently coded 30% of the data. Coding agreements were compared and discrepancies discussed until consensus was reached, yielding a Cohen's kappa of .81, indicating strong inter-rater agreement. All analytical decisions were documented in a reflexive research journal maintained throughout the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility was ensured through member checking, whereby key findings were returned to selected participants for verification, and investigator triangulation through independent coding by a second researcher. Transferability was supported by thick description of the research context, participant

characteristics, and procedures, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar EFL settings (Sambonu et al., 2025). Dependability was maintained through systematic, auditable coding procedures and a reflexive research journal (Loor, 2025). Confirmability was achieved by grounding all interpretations in verbatim participant quotations and maintaining transparency throughout the analytical process (Yuliana et al., 2025). While the study relies on self-reported interview data, these trustworthiness measures collectively strengthen confidence in the credibility of the findings within the scope of a qualitative, experience-focused inquiry.

FINDINGS

This section presents findings organised around the three research questions. Table 1 provides a summary of the identified themes, sub-themes, and representative participant responses. The findings are grounded in participants' own words, with direct quotations drawn from interview transcripts used to substantiate each thematic claim.

Table 1 Proportions of the Body of the Article

Theme	Sub-theme	Representative Participant Response
Learning Strategies	Repeated listening	"Yang paling sering ma, pasti aktivitas listening... ngedengarin berkali-kali, ngucapin juga berkali-kali." (P13)
	Lyric-reading while listening	"Aku nyari dulu lirik-liriknya... aku dengerin lagi, dengerin lagi terus kayak, oh ternyata bacanya Backburner." (P3)
	IPA and dictionary consultation	"Kalau ada kata emang jauh beda dari yang tertulis, dari lirik itu kita ketik di International Phonetics lagi." (P13)
	Slowing down tempo	"Aku kecilin sampai nol koma tujuh biar aku tuh bisa tahu pengucapan yang bener itu gimana." (P6)
	Productive application	"I use that vocab [in daily life]. Misalnya aku masih salah pronounce nya, Arul tau cara pronounce nya, dia correct me." (P1)
Perceptions	Low anxiety and enjoyment	"Dari lagu itu sangat easy to listen, jadi kita tuh bisa belajar tapi sambil healing gitu loh. Belajar gak kerasa." (P3)
	Song as pronunciation model	"Niki orang Indo, terus dia fluent. Kita mencoba untuk mimikin dia, how she pronounce certain words. It boosts my confidence." (P2)
	Songs as supplement only	"Kalau cuman dari lagu doang kayaknya kurang cukup, apalagi untuk tingkat higher education." (P5)
Phonological Benefits	Word stress development	"Lebih ke tekanannya, stressnya tuh di mana, di awal, tengah, atau akhir gitu sih. Ada perkembangan." (P3)

	Intonation and rhythm awareness	"Aku belajar intonasi dari lagu Olivia Rodrigo, terus kalau misalnya ada stressing, ada contohnya di lagu." (P13)
	Segmental gains	"Lagu membantu saya mengingat pronunciation, misalnya perbedaan 300 dan 3000 dari lagu I Love You 3000." (P12)
	Accent and logat reduction	"Di semester awal itu logat Jawanya kelihatan banget, dan itu sekarang kayaknya udah ilang gara-gara sering dengerin." (P14)
Phonological Challenges	Fast tempo and connected speech	"Temponya cepat. Karena mereka native gitu pronounce. Jadi susahnya di situ. Kadang kalau gak liat lirik jadinya mispronunciation." (P1)
	Accent variation	"Kita harus tau dulu si penyanyi ini tuh dari mana. Pas di pronunciation tuh kayak gimana. Jadi kayak dua kali effort." (P5)
	Singer mispronunciation	"Ada suatu kata yang membutuhkan tiga silabel tapi si penyanyinya jadiin dua silabel. Jadi susah tau yang valid." (P15)
	Slang and unfamiliar vocabulary	"Kalau lagu-lagu dari black people, itu selainnya jauh beda banget. Slangnya slang dari black people." (P13)

How University Students Use English Songs for Pronunciation Learning

The findings reveal that students employ a range of purposeful, multi-stage strategies when using English songs for pronunciation learning. The most frequently reported strategy was repeated listening, through which students familiarised themselves with the natural phonological patterns of words, particularly stress placement, vowel quality, and intonation, in authentic spoken contexts. As one participant described:

> *"Sometimes I repeat the song many times and focus on one line to understand how the word is pronounced, then I check it in the dictionary." (Participant 3)*

Students commonly combined auditory input with visual support by reading lyrics simultaneously, which helped them map written forms onto spoken phonemes and notice features of connected speech such as linking and reduction. Several participants described this multimodal strategy as particularly effective for identifying words they had previously only seen in written form. One participant noted:

> *"When I read the lyrics while listening, I can see which words are connected and how they sound different from when I read them alone." (Participant 7)*

When encountering unfamiliar or difficult pronunciations, participants consistently reported consulting IPA charts or dictionaries to verify target phonological forms, reflecting a metacognitive and self-directed approach to learning. Beyond passive reception, a number of students described actively applying pronunciation patterns acquired through songs in daily conversations, indicating that song-based learning extended into productive phonological practice. One participant explained:

> *"After I learn how a word sounds in a song, I try to use it when I speak with my friends, so I can practise the pronunciation in real conversation." (Participant 11)*

Students' Perceptions of English Songs as a Pronunciation Learning Medium

Participants expressed generally positive perceptions of English songs as a pronunciation learning medium, consistently characterising the experience as enjoyable, engaging, and significantly less anxiety-inducing than formal classroom instruction. Songs were perceived to reduce affective barriers to pronunciation practice by creating a low-pressure environment in which mistakes felt less threatening. One participant expressed this directly:

> *"Learning pronunciation from songs is more fun and not stressful, so I feel more confident to try." (Participant 5)*

Several participants distinguished between different types of pronunciation models offered by songs. Songs by fluent English-speaking artists were considered to provide clear, authentic suprasegmental models, particularly for intonation, rhythm, and natural connected speech, while songs by Indonesian artists singing in English were valued for their perceived clarity at the segmental level and their motivational proximity to learners' own proficiency. As one participant noted:

> *"I like to listen to both English and Indonesian singers. The English ones help me hear the real accent, but the Indonesian ones are easier to follow and still help me practise." (Participant 9)*

Notably, the majority of participants perceived songs as a supplementary resource rather than a standalone instructional tool, acknowledging that structured guidance remained necessary for systematic pronunciation development. Several students expressed that songs alone were insufficient to address all aspects of pronunciation, particularly at the segmental level where explicit instruction was felt to be important.

Phonological Benefits and Challenges

Participants reported phonological improvements across both segmental and suprasegmental dimensions. At the segmental level, repeated song exposure helped students recognise and reproduce specific English phonemes that had previously been difficult, including vowel contrasts and consonant sounds absent in Bahasa Indonesia. One participant described a concrete segmental gain:

> *"I used to be confused about the pronunciation of 300 and 3000, but after hearing the song "I Love You 3000" I understand how "thousand" is pronounced." (Participant 2)*

At the suprasegmental level, participants reported heightened awareness of word stress, sentence intonation, and natural English rhythm through sustained song exposure. Several students noted that the melodic beat of songs helped them internalise the stress-timed rhythm of English, which differs markedly from the syllable-timed rhythm of Bahasa Indonesia. One participant reflected:

> *"From the song I can feel which part of the word is stressed. The music helps me remember the rhythm, and then when I speak I try to follow the same pattern." (Participant 6)*

Despite these benefits, participants identified several phonological challenges. The most pervasive difficulty involved fast song tempo and connected speech phenomena including assimilation, elision, and weak forms, which made it difficult to isolate and perceive individual sounds or words. One participant stated:

> *"If the song is too fast, it is difficult for me to follow because I am not a native speaker." (Participant 4)*

Accent variation among artists further complicated the identification of a consistent pronunciation model, particularly for segmental features. A number of participants expressed uncertainty about which pronunciation to adopt when exposed to different accents across songs, suggesting that pedagogical guidance on model selection is important. Unfamiliar vocabulary also posed a challenge, as students were sometimes uncertain whether pronunciation difficulties stemmed from phonological or lexical unfamiliarity.

DISCUSSION

The findings are discussed below in relation to SLA theory and existing empirical literature, with an emphasis on theoretical interpretation rather than mere corroboration of prior findings.

Multi-Strategy Engagement and Self-Directed Phonological Learning

The multi-strategy approach documented in this study, which combined repeated listening, lyric-reading, IPA consultation, and productive application, reveals a level of metacognitive sophistication that goes beyond what has been reported in studies with younger learners. Interpreted through Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, each strategy serves a distinct function in the phonological learning process: repeated listening builds implicit phonological familiarity with target forms; simultaneous lyric-reading directs conscious attention to the mapping between orthographic and phonological representations, facilitating noticing of features that would otherwise be processed automatically; IPA consultation converts noticed features into explicit phonological knowledge; and productive application in conversation transforms that knowledge into procedural skill. This sequential, self-directed process suggests that university-level learners are capable of constructing a remarkably systematic informal learning pathway through songs, one that mirrors, in informal terms, the noticing-to-production sequence advocated in formal pronunciation pedagogy (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

This finding has an important implication that extends beyond prior research. While Sari et al. (2025) and Cahyaningrum (2023) have documented individual strategies in isolation, the present study suggests that university students integrate these strategies into a coherent, self-regulated learning sequence. This is consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) framework of motivated self-regulation, in which intrinsically motivated learners actively organise their own learning processes. Songs, in this context, function not merely as input but as a catalyst for self-directed phonological agency. This pattern of repeated listening, monitoring, lyric consultation, and deliberate pronunciation practice also reflects core dimensions of self-regulated learning, in which learners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning behaviors to improve language performance (Sari et al., 2026). The students' tendency to independently combine multiple strategies further suggests the emergence of learner autonomy rather than passive exposure to musical input alone. Similar findings in language learning research indicate that strategic regulation substantially contributes to stronger language development and learning persistence (Aprizani et al., 2023).

Affective Perceptions and the Role of the Affective Filter

The consistently positive affective perceptions reported by participants are theoretically significant beyond simply confirming that students enjoy songs. Within Krashen's (1982) framework, the affective filter, comprising anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, mediates the extent to which available input is processed and acquired. The positive emotional responses reported by participants also align with

studies emphasizing the importance of engagement-responsive learning environments. Research on contemporary English classrooms highlights that enjoyable, interactive, and learner-centered environments contribute substantially to sustaining participation, motivation, and classroom involvement among modern learners (Hasbi et al., 2024). Likewise, motivation in language learning is often influenced not only by intrinsic interest but also by learners' perceived relevance, contextual support, and desire to remain connected with contemporary learning practices (Budiana et al., 2026). In this sense, songs may function not merely as entertaining materials but as affectively supportive learning resources that lower psychological barriers to pronunciation practice. Participants' descriptions of song-based learning as non-threatening and confidence-building suggest that songs function specifically to lower the affective filter, creating conditions under which phonological input is more likely to be internalised. This interpretation extends beyond the general observation that songs are motivating (Judijanto et al., 2024; Vallejo & Pérez Ortega, 2024) to a theoretically grounded explanation of why affective engagement with songs may facilitate pronunciation development specifically.

The nuanced distinction participants drew between native English-speaking artists (suprasegmental models) and Indonesian artists singing in English (accessible segmental models) is a particularly original finding that has not been reported in prior literature. This spontaneous differentiation suggests that university-level learners actively evaluate the phonological affordances of different song models, rather than engaging with songs indiscriminately. This aligns with Levis's (2005) argument that learners' awareness of pronunciation norms and models is crucial for targeted phonological development, and it implies that pedagogical interventions should guide learners in selecting songs according to specific phonological learning objectives. The consistent perception of songs as supplementary rather than primary is theoretically consistent with Schmidt's (1990) position that implicit input alone is insufficient for systematic phonological development. This learner-generated insight, that songs need structural support to be maximally effective, provides qualitative support for integrated pedagogical models in which songs serve as input-rich contexts for noticing, complemented by explicit instruction on target phonological features (Almauizzah & Hindriana, 2025; Murphey, 1992).

Phonological Gains: Segmental, Suprasegmental, and Affective Dimensions

The phonological benefits reported by participants span both segmental and suprasegmental levels in ways that are theoretically explicable. At the segmental level, gains in specific phoneme production reflect the effect of repeated authentic

auditory input on phonological representation (Ahmed Muhammed, 2024; Nata, 2024). The participant's example of acquiring the pronunciation of "thousand" through the song "I Love You 3000" exemplifies the Noticing Hypothesis in action: melodic salience directed conscious attention to a specific lexical item, facilitating its explicit phonological encoding. This kind of incidental segmental learning through emotionally salient input is consistent with Murphey's (1992) account of the mnemonic power of songs.

The suprasegmental gains, particularly in stress, intonation, and rhythm, represent the area where songs offer the most distinctive phonological affordance. The participant's description of using the melodic beat to internalise English stress patterns speaks directly to Anderson-Hsieh et al.'s (1992) finding that suprasegmental competence is the primary determinant of perceived pronunciation proficiency. For Indonesian EFL learners, whose L1 is syllable-timed, songs' stress-timed rhythmic structure provides particularly salient and accessible suprasegmental input that is difficult to replicate through other informal means (Soleha et al., 2023; Swara et al., 2025).

The phonological challenges identified, particularly connected speech phenomena and accent variation, are not merely practical difficulties but reflect deeper issues in informal phonological learning. Connected speech phenomena such as assimilation and elision represent the gap between citation-form pronunciation, which is what learners typically encounter in formal instruction, and natural, spontaneous speech. Songs, by presenting phonological input at natural speech rates with full connected speech, expose learners to this gap directly. While this constitutes a challenge, it also represents a potentially valuable pedagogical opportunity: guided song-based activities focusing on connected speech could address one of the most neglected areas of EFL pronunciation instruction (Panvilaysone & Ketoukham, 2025; Loor, 2025; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010).

Comparable findings have emerged in technology-mediated pronunciation instruction, where learners demonstrated improvements in pronunciation accuracy, fluency, intelligibility, and confidence through repeated access to immediate auditory models and corrective support (Putra et al., 2025). Although the present study focuses on songs rather than AI-based pronunciation tools, both approaches appear to share important pedagogical affordances, particularly repeated exposure, accessible practice opportunities, and supportive pronunciation rehearsal environments. Digital language learning scholarship similarly suggests that contemporary instructional tools can strengthen language practice by providing flexible and engaging learning support beyond traditional classroom boundaries (Alamsyah et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study investigated how Indonesian university-level EFL students use English songs for pronunciation learning, the perceptions they hold, and the specific phonological benefits and challenges they experience. Three principal conclusions emerge from the findings.

First, university-level EFL students engage in a sophisticated, self-directed multi-strategy process when using songs for pronunciation learning, integrating repeated listening, lyric-reading, IPA consultation, and productive application in a sequence that mirrors, informally, the noticing-to-production pathway advocated in formal pronunciation pedagogy. This level of metacognitive organisation, theoretically grounded in Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis and Dörnyei's (2001) motivated self-regulation framework, has not been documented in prior research with younger learner populations and represents a distinctive contribution of this study.

Second, the phonological benefits of song-based learning operate differentially across segmental and suprasegmental dimensions. Songs appear particularly well-suited to developing suprasegmental awareness including stress, intonation, and rhythm, because their melodic and rhythmic structure renders these features perceptually salient in ways that ordinary speech does not. For Indonesian EFL learners, whose L1 is syllable-timed, this suprasegmental affordance of songs addresses a core phonological challenge in a uniquely accessible way.

Third, the phonological challenges associated with song-based learning, particularly connected speech and accent variation, are not simply obstacles but represent pedagogically productive opportunities. Targeted song-based activities focused on connected speech phenomena could address one of the most underserved areas of EFL pronunciation instruction. These findings support an integrated pedagogical model in which songs serve as phonologically rich input contexts, complemented by explicit instruction, guided listening tasks, and IPA-based reference tools. This finding resonates with broader language pedagogy literature emphasizing that learning resources become substantially more effective when embedded within purposeful instructional design and teacher scaffolding. Studies on instructional materials development consistently show that language learning outcomes improve when pedagogical resources are aligned with learners' contextual needs, proficiency levels, and learning goals (Sari, 2019; Sari & Yuliana, 2022). Thus, song-based pronunciation activities may yield stronger benefits when lecturers explicitly guide learners in interpreting connected speech, accent variation, suprasegmental features, and problematic pronunciation patterns.

This study has several limitations. The reliance on self-reported interview data means that reported phonological improvements cannot be independently verified; future research should incorporate audio recordings and acoustic analysis to triangulate findings. The single-institution sample limits transferability, and a longitudinal design would be valuable for examining

sustained phonological development over time. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study contributes a theoretically grounded, qualitative account of song-based pronunciation learning at the university level, a perspective that complements and contextualises existing quantitative evidence in this field. The pedagogical implications of the present findings also resonate with recent scholarship on technology-supported language instruction, which highlights that meaningful learner engagement emerges when instructional strategies deliberately combine personalization, active participation, and guided interaction rather than relying solely on exposure to learning tools or media (Hastomo et al., 2025a). Moreover, behavioral and cognitive engagement have been shown to significantly predict language proficiency development, suggesting that the effectiveness of song-based pronunciation learning may partly depend on learners' active strategic involvement with the learning process (Hastomo et al., 2025b).

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