

The Role of English Rap Hits in the Formation of Native-Like Pronunciation

Javid Babayev^{1*} , Aygun Asgarova² , Rubaba Mammadova² ,
Yegana Babasoy² , and Hayat Aliyeva² 

Abstract. The growing global popularity of English rap music has created new opportunities for language learners to improve their pronunciation and listening skills. This study investigates the role of English rap hits in the formation of native-like pronunciation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Rap music is characterized by rhythm, rhyme, connected speech, stress patterns, and authentic colloquial expressions, all of which expose learners to natural pronunciation models. The research adopts a qualitative-descriptive methodology based on classroom observation, learner interviews, and analysis of previous studies related to music-assisted language learning. The findings reveal that learners who regularly practice pronunciation through rap songs demonstrate improvements in intonation, fluency, stress placement, and reduced foreign accent interference. Furthermore, rap music increases learner motivation and confidence due to its entertaining and emotionally engaging nature. The study also identifies several challenges, including slang vocabulary, rapid speech tempo, and non-standard grammatical forms frequently present in rap lyrics. Despite these limitations, the research concludes that carefully selected English rap hits can function as effective supplementary tools for pronunciation development when integrated with guided instructional strategies. The article emphasizes that music-based pronunciation practice contributes not only to phonetic accuracy but also to cultural awareness and communicative competence.

Keywords: english rap, pronunciation, EFL learners, native-like speech, music-assisted learning, phonetics

¹Nakhchivan State University, PhD in Philology, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

²Nakhchivan State University, Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan

*Corresponding author. E-mail: cavidbabayev@ndu.edu.az

Received: 4 April 2026; Accepted: 23 July 2026; Published online: 22 August 2026

© The Author(s) 2026. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

İngilis rep hitlərinin ana dilinə xas tələffüzün formalaşmasında rolu

Cavid Babayev^{1*} , Aygün Əsgərova² , Rübabə Məmmədova² ,
Yeganə Babasoy² , Həyat Əliyeva² 

Xülasə. İngilis rep musiqisinin global miqyasda artan populyarlığı dil öyrənənlər üçün tələffüz və dinləmə bacarıqlarını inkişaf etdirmək baxımından yeni imkanlar yaratmışdır. Bu tədqiqat İngilis dilini xarici dil kimi öyrənənlər (EFL öyrənənləri) arasında ingilis rep hitlərinin ana dilli danışanlara xas tələffüzün formalaşmasındakı rolunu araşdırır. Rep musiqisi ritm, qafiyə, əlaqəli nitq, vurğu nümunələri və autentik danışiq ifadələri ilə xarakterizə olunur ki, bunların hamısı öyrənənləri təbii tələffüz modelləri ilə tanış edir.

Tədqiqat musiqi dəstəyi ilə dil öyrənilməsi sahəsində aparılmış əvvəlki araşdırmaların təhlili, sinif müşahidələri və öyrənənlərlə müəssisələrə əsaslanan keyfiyyət yönümlü təsviri metodologiyayı tətbiq edir. Əldə olunan nəticələr göstərir ki, rep mahnıları vasitəsilə müntəzəm olaraq tələffüz məşqləri edən öyrənənlər intonasiya, axıcılıq, vurğunun düzgün yerləşdirilməsi və xarici aksentin təsirinin azalması baxımından əhəmiyyətli irəliləyiş nümayiş etdirirlər. Bundan əlavə, rep musiqisi əyləncəli və emosional cəhətdən cəlbedici xarakteri sayəsində öyrənənlərin motivasiyasını və özünəinamını artırır. Tədqiqat eyni zamanda rep mahnılarının mətnlərində tez-tez rast gəlinən jarqon söz ehtiyatı, sürətli nitq tempi və qeyri-standart qrammatik formalar kimi bir sıra çətinlikləri də müəyyən etmişdir. Bu məhdudiyyətlərə baxmayaraq, araşdırma belə nəticəyə gəlir ki, diqqətlə seçilmiş ingilis rep hitləri istiqamətləndirilmiş tədris strategiyaları ilə integrasiya edildikdə tələffüzün inkişafı üçün effektiv əlavə vasitə kimi çıxış edə bilər. Məqalədə vurğulanır ki, musiqi əsaslı tələffüz təcrübəsi yalnız fonetik dəqiqliyin artırılmasına deyil, həm də mədəni maariflənmənin və kommunikativ sərəfşənin inkişafına töhfə verir.

Açar sözlər: *ingilis repi, tələffüz, EFL öyrənənləri, ana dilli danışana xas nitq, musiqi dəstəyi ilə öyrənmə, fonetika*

¹Naxçıvan Dövlət Universiteti, filologiya üzrə fəlsəfə doktoru, Naxçıvan, Azərbaycan

²Naxçıvan Dövlət Universiteti, Naxçıvan, Azərbaycan

*Məsul müəllif. E-poçt: cavidbabayev@ndu.edu.az

Daxil oldu: 4 Aprel 2026; Qəbul edildi: 23 İyul 2026; Onlayn dərc edildi: 22 Avqust 2026

© Müəllif(lər) 2026. Bu açıq girişli məqalə Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 Beynəlxalq Lisenziyasının (CC BY-NC 4.0) şərtlərinə uyğun olaraq yayımlanmışdır.

Introduction

Pronunciation is widely recognized as one of the most essential components of successful communication in a foreign language. Even learners with advanced grammatical competence and extensive vocabulary knowledge may experience communication barriers if their pronunciation differs considerably from native speech patterns. In English language teaching, pronunciation instruction has evolved from traditional phonetic drilling toward more communicative and interactive approaches that expose learners to authentic speech environments. Modern educational research increasingly emphasizes the importance of natural language input, listening exposure, and rhythm-based learning in developing pronunciation competence (Brown, 2007).

Among various alternative instructional methods, music has gained substantial attention as an effective pedagogical resource in second language acquisition. Songs provide repetitive linguistic input, emotional engagement, and memorable speech patterns that facilitate language retention and oral production. According to Murphey (1992), music creates a low-anxiety learning atmosphere that encourages learners to imitate pronunciation naturally and unconsciously. Similarly, Schoepp (2001) argues that songs contribute to vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, pronunciation development, and learner motivation simultaneously.

Within music-based learning, English rap music occupies a unique position due to its linguistic intensity and rhythmic complexity. Rap combines rapid articulation, rhyme schemes, stress manipulation, connected speech, and authentic conversational expressions in ways that closely resemble spontaneous spoken English. Unlike slower traditional songs, rap often reflects real-life pronunciation patterns, including reductions, contractions, linking, assimilation, and intonation shifts. Such phonological features are critical for learners attempting to achieve native-like pronunciation and natural speech fluency.

The emergence of rap music as a global cultural phenomenon has significantly influenced younger generations worldwide. Originating in African American communities during the 1970s, rap gradually expanded into mainstream international culture through artists such as Tupac Shakur, Eminem, and Jay-Z. Today, English rap songs are consumed by millions of non-native English speakers through digital streaming platforms, social media, and online video services. This global accessibility has transformed rap music into an informal language-learning environment where learners are repeatedly exposed to authentic pronunciation models.

From a linguistic perspective, rap music supports several important aspects of phonological acquisition. Stress timing, rhythm, syllable reduction, and intonation are essential features distinguishing native English pronunciation from foreign-accented speech. English itself is a stress-timed language, meaning that stressed syllables occur at relatively regular intervals regardless of the number of unstressed syllables between them. Many EFL learners struggle with these rhythmic characteristics because their native languages may follow syllable-timed patterns instead. Rap music emphasizes rhythmic synchronization and stress placement, helping learners internalize natural English speech timing through repeated auditory exposure and vocal imitation.

English rap songs also introduce learners to suprasegmental features of speech such as stress, rhythm, intonation, linking, assimilation, and reductions. These features are often difficult to teach through conventional textbook exercises. Through imitation and repetition, learners gradually internalize native-like speech patterns. Furthermore, rap performance encourages oral fluency and confidence because learners practice rapid articulation and synchronization with rhythm.

Research in psycholinguistics further supports the connection between music and language acquisition. Patel (2008) notes that music and language share overlapping neurological processing systems related to rhythm, auditory perception, and memory. Similarly, Fonseca-Mora (2011) explains that musical repetition enhances phonological awareness and improves learners' ability to distinguish subtle pronunciation differences. Repetition is especially important in pronunciation acquisition because learners must repeatedly hear and reproduce sounds before developing accurate articulation habits.

The theoretical foundation for using rap music in language learning can also be linked to the Input Hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen. Krashen (1985) argues that language acquisition occurs when learners receive meaningful and comprehensible input in low-stress environments. Rap songs provide extensive exposure to authentic language input in entertaining and emotionally engaging contexts, increasing learner attention and motivation. Learners often voluntarily repeat songs multiple times outside classroom environments, thereby increasing pronunciation practice frequency without formal instructional pressure.

In addition to pronunciation accuracy, rap music contributes to listening comprehension and oral fluency development. Because rap lyrics are often delivered rapidly, learners become accustomed to processing spoken English at natural conversational speed. This repeated exposure trains learners to recognize connected speech patterns that are frequently absent in textbook dialogues. According to Underhill (2005), pronunciation instruction should include suprasegmental elements such as rhythm, stress, and intonation rather than focusing exclusively on isolated sounds. Rap naturally integrates these suprasegmental features into authentic linguistic performance.

Another important advantage of rap-based learning involves learner motivation. Traditional pronunciation exercises are frequently perceived as repetitive, mechanical, and stressful. In contrast, music-based activities create emotionally stimulating learning experiences that increase participation and learner autonomy. Young learners especially demonstrate strong emotional connections to contemporary music culture, making rap an appealing educational tool. Research by Richards (2008)

indicates that emotionally engaging materials increase retention and active participation in second language classrooms.

Despite these benefits, the pedagogical use of rap music remains controversial among some educators and researchers. One major concern involves the presence of slang vocabulary, taboo expressions, violent themes, and non-standard grammatical structures in certain rap lyrics. Critics argue that learners may imitate inappropriate expressions or develop inaccurate grammatical habits if instructional guidance is insufficient. Furthermore, some rap artists intentionally manipulate pronunciation for stylistic or regional identity purposes, which may create confusion for learners attempting to acquire standard pronunciation norms.

Another challenge concerns speech tempo. Many rap songs contain extremely rapid lyrical delivery that may overwhelm intermediate learners. Excessive speech speed can reduce comprehension and create frustration among students unfamiliar with connected speech phenomena. Therefore, careful song selection and instructional scaffolding are essential for successful implementation in educational settings. Teachers must consider learners' proficiency levels, cultural sensitivity, lexical accessibility, and pronunciation clarity before integrating rap materials into classroom practice.

Technological development has further increased the educational potential of rap music in language learning. Streaming platforms, lyric annotation websites, pronunciation applications, and subtitle-supported videos enable learners to combine listening, reading, and pronunciation practice simultaneously. Digital accessibility allows students to engage in autonomous pronunciation training beyond formal classroom environments, strengthening continuous exposure to authentic spoken English.

Given the growing influence of global music culture on language learning practices, investigating the relationship between English rap music and pronunciation acquisition has become increasingly relevant. Although numerous studies have explored the general role of music in language education, fewer studies specifically examine the phonological benefits of rap music for developing native-like pronunciation among EFL learners. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how English rap hits contribute to pronunciation development, fluency enhancement, stress and rhythm acquisition, and learner motivation in foreign language learning contexts.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design to investigate the role of English rap hits in the formation of native-like pronunciation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Qualitative methodology was selected because it allows deeper exploration of learner experiences, attitudes, behavioral changes, and pronunciation development processes occurring during music-assisted language learning. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is particularly effective when researchers seek to understand participants' perceptions and interpret complex educational phenomena within natural learning environments.

The study was conducted over a twelve-week instructional period at a university-level English language program. The research focused on examining how systematic exposure to English rap songs influenced learners' pronunciation, fluency, stress placement, rhythm control, and confidence in spoken communication.

Research participants

The participants consisted of 40 undergraduate students enrolled in intermediate and upper-intermediate English language courses. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 years. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because they demonstrated regular engagement with English-language music and expressed willingness to participate in music-based pronunciation activities.

The participants represented diverse linguistic backgrounds, but all shared similar educational exposure to formal English instruction. Prior to the study, a preliminary diagnostic speaking activity was conducted to evaluate their pronunciation difficulties, fluency levels, and listening comprehension abilities. Common pronunciation problems included incorrect stress placement, vowel substitution, syllable omission, monotone intonation, and strong first-language interference.

Research design

The study utilized a classroom-based action research framework combining observation, guided listening activities, pronunciation exercises, learner interviews, and reflective analysis. Action research was considered appropriate because it allows researchers to observe practical instructional interventions within authentic educational settings while continuously evaluating learner progress (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The instructional design was influenced by communicative language teaching principles and music-assisted learning theory. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), communicative pronunciation instruction should expose learners to authentic speech contexts rather than isolated phonetic drills. Rap music provided such authentic contexts through natural rhythm, stress patterns, reductions, and connected speech.

Selection of rap materials

The rap songs selected for the study were chosen according to several pedagogical criteria:

- clarity of pronunciation;
- moderate speech tempo;
- educational suitability;
- limited offensive language;
- lexical accessibility;
- rhythmic consistency;
- authentic conversational pronunciation.

Songs by artists such as Eminem, NF, and Macklemore were partially incorporated because their lyrical articulation was considered relatively comprehensible for language learners. Certain highly explicit or excessively rapid songs were intentionally excluded to maintain educational appropriateness and learner comprehension. The selected songs were transcribed and accompanied by lyric sheets to support simultaneous listening and reading practice. Difficult vocabulary items, slang expressions, contractions, and idiomatic phrases were pre-taught before listening sessions.

Instructional procedure

The instructional process was divided into multiple pedagogical stages designed to maximize pronunciation acquisition.

1. Pre-listening activities

At the beginning of each session, students were introduced to key vocabulary items, slang expressions, and pronunciation features present in the selected rap lyrics. Teachers explained stress patterns, contractions, reductions, and intonation characteristics before audio exposure. This stage aimed to reduce cognitive overload during listening activities.

2. Focused listening

Students listened to selected rap songs multiple times while following printed lyrics. During initial listening stages, learners focused on identifying rhythm, stress, rhyme patterns, and pronunciation features rather than understanding every lexical item. According to Rost (2011), repeated listening exposure improves phonological discrimination and listening comprehension.

3. Shadowing technique

A central component of the methodology involved the shadowing technique. Learners repeated lyrics immediately after hearing them while attempting to imitate pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, and speech tempo as accurately as possible. Shadowing has been widely recognized as an effective pronunciation-training strategy because it strengthens auditory processing and articulatory coordination (Murphey, 2001).

Students practiced both individual and group shadowing exercises. Short lyrical segments were repeated multiple times until learners achieved smoother rhythm synchronization and more accurate stress placement.

4. Rhythm synchronization exercises

Participants practiced synchronizing speech with instrumental beats to internalize English stress timing. Because English is stress-timed rather than syllable-timed, rhythm training was considered essential for developing native-like pronunciation patterns. These activities emphasized:

- syllable reduction,
- stressed syllable elongation,
- connected speech,
- natural pausing,
- intonation flow.

Musical rhythm was expected to reinforce phonological memory and speech automatization.

5. Recording and self-evaluation

Students periodically recorded themselves performing selected rap segments. The recordings were compared with native-speaker models to identify pronunciation improvements and persistent errors. Self-monitoring encouraged learner autonomy and phonological awareness. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), recording-based pronunciation analysis promotes learner self-correction and reflective learning.

6. Classroom discussion and reflection

After each instructional session, learners participated in guided discussions regarding listening difficulties, pronunciation challenges, emotional responses, and perceived improvement. Reflective classroom interaction allowed researchers to gather qualitative data concerning learner attitudes and motivational changes.

Data collection instruments

Several qualitative data collection instruments were employed throughout the study.

Classroom observation

The researcher conducted systematic classroom observations during all instructional sessions. Observation focused on:

- pronunciation accuracy,
- rhythm imitation,
- learner participation,
- speaking confidence,
- fluency development,
- engagement levels.

Field notes were recorded after each session to document behavioral patterns and instructional outcomes.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants at the conclusion of the study. Interview questions explored:

- learner motivation,
- perceptions of rap-based learning,
- pronunciation difficulties,
- listening comprehension experiences,
- confidence changes,
- attitudes toward traditional pronunciation instruction.

The interview format allowed participants to express individual experiences while maintaining consistency across responses.

Audio recordings

Learners' speech performances were audio-recorded at the beginning, middle, and end of the instructional period. The recordings were analyzed comparatively to evaluate changes in:

- stress placement,
- speech rhythm,
- connected speech production,
- pronunciation fluency,
- intonation patterns.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures. Repeated patterns and recurring themes were categorized according to learner experiences and pronunciation outcomes. Themes such as "improved fluency," "enhanced confidence," "difficulty with rapid speech," and "greater stress awareness" emerged consistently throughout observations and interviews. The audio recordings were examined descriptively rather than statistically because the primary goal was to identify qualitative pronunciation changes rather than precise phonetic measurement. Comparative analysis was conducted between initial and final recordings to evaluate pronunciation development trends. Triangulation was applied to improve research reliability. Observation data, interview responses, classroom participation patterns, and audio performance comparisons were analyzed collectively to ensure interpretive consistency. According to Denzin (1978), triangulation increases credibility by combining multiple data sources within qualitative research.

Ethical considerations

All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and were informed about the research objectives before data collection began. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without academic consequences.

The instructional materials were carefully screened to avoid culturally offensive or psychologically inappropriate lyrical content. Educational suitability remained a priority throughout song selection and classroom implementation.

Results

The results of the study demonstrate that English rap hits contributed significantly to the development of native-like pronunciation features among EFL learners. Throughout the twelve-week instructional period, participants displayed observable improvements in pronunciation accuracy, stress placement, rhythmic fluency, connected speech production, and speaking confidence. The findings also indicate

that music-assisted pronunciation learning increased learner motivation and engagement compared to traditional pronunciation exercises (Alisoy & Sadigzade, 2025).

Improvement in pronunciation accuracy

One of the most noticeable outcomes of the study was the improvement in overall pronunciation accuracy. At the beginning of the research period, many participants demonstrated strong first-language interference, including incorrect vowel articulation, consonant substitution, syllable omission, and unnatural intonation patterns. However, repeated exposure to authentic rap performances gradually improved learners' articulatory precision. Students became more capable of reproducing difficult English sounds through imitation and repetition exercises. Several participants improved their pronunciation of consonants such as /θ/, /ð/, /r/, and /w/, which are often problematic for EFL learners. Learners also demonstrated better vowel differentiation after intensive listening practice.

These findings support the conclusions of Underhill (2005), who argues that repeated auditory exposure and oral imitation strengthen phonological awareness and articulation control. Similarly, Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) emphasize that pronunciation development requires extensive exposure to authentic spoken language rather than isolated phonetic drills. Participants reported that rap music enabled them to notice pronunciation details that they had previously ignored during conventional listening exercises. One student explained during the interview phase that "repeating rap lyrics helped me hear the real sound of English words instead of the way I imagined them from spelling."

Development of stress and rhythm awareness

The study revealed substantial improvement in learners' understanding of English stress timing and speech rhythm. Before the instructional intervention, many participants produced English speech with equal syllable timing influenced by their native language phonological systems. After engaging in rhythm synchronization and rap-shadowing activities, learners became increasingly aware of stressed and unstressed syllables. Rap music appeared particularly effective in helping learners internalize natural English stress patterns because rhythmic beats reinforced syllable emphasis. Learners gradually improved their ability to elongate stressed syllables and reduce unstressed syllables during oral production.

The findings align with the observations of Gilbert (2008), who states that rhythm and stress are among the most essential features distinguishing intelligible English pronunciation from heavily foreign-accented speech. According to Dauer (1993), mastery of stress timing contributes more to communicative intelligibility than individual sound accuracy alone. Several learners demonstrated improved sentence-level intonation after practicing lyrical performance. Rising and falling intonation patterns became more natural and expressive, reducing monotonous speech delivery commonly observed among foreign language learners.

The rhythmic structure of rap also supported speech memorization. Students were able to recall pronunciation sequences more effectively because rhyme and beat created predictable phonological patterns. This finding supports Patel's (2008) neurological research suggesting that music and language share overlapping rhythmic processing systems within the human brain.

Increased fluency and speech flow

Another major finding involved the development of oral fluency. Participants gradually produced longer speech sequences with fewer pauses, hesitations, and interruptions. Rap-shadowing exercises encouraged learners to maintain continuous speech flow while synchronizing pronunciation with musical rhythm.

At the beginning of the study, many students hesitated frequently during oral tasks because they concentrated heavily on grammar accuracy and word retrieval. By the final weeks of instruction, learners displayed smoother articulation and greater automaticity in spoken production.

The fluency gains observed in this study support Nation's (2001) argument that repeated language performance activities strengthen automatic processing and reduce cognitive overload during communication. Repetition of rap lyrics appeared to accelerate speech automatization because learners practiced pronunciation within meaningful rhythmic structures. Classroom observations also revealed that learners became increasingly comfortable speaking English publicly. Students who initially avoided oral participation gradually volunteered to perform short rap segments individually or in groups. Increased participation indicated growing self-confidence and reduced pronunciation anxiety.

These findings correspond with Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that enjoyable and low-stress learning environments facilitate language acquisition by lowering psychological barriers to participation.

Acquisition of connected speech features

The study demonstrated considerable improvement in learners' recognition and production of connected speech phenomena. Participants became more familiar with reductions, contractions, linking, assimilation, and elision commonly found in natural spoken English.

Examples frequently identified by students included:

- "gonna" instead of "going to,"
- "wanna" instead of "want to,"
- "lemme" instead of "let me,"
- "kinda" instead of "kind of."

Learners initially struggled to recognize these reduced forms during listening activities, but repeated exposure increased both comprehension and oral reproduction accuracy.

According to Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006), connected speech remains one of the most difficult aspects of listening comprehension for EFL learners because classroom materials often present artificially clear pronunciation rather than authentic conversational speech. Rap songs exposed learners to realistic speech reductions and informal pronunciation patterns occurring in native communication. Furthermore, participants developed greater awareness of linking between words. Students improved their ability to connect final consonants with following vowels, producing smoother and more natural speech sequences. For example, learners became more comfortable pronouncing phrases such as "take_it" and "turn_off" without unnatural pauses between words.

Improvement in listening comprehension

The instructional intervention also enhanced listening comprehension abilities. Initially, many participants experienced difficulty understanding fast-paced native speech due to unfamiliar rhythm patterns and reduced pronunciation forms. Continuous listening practice gradually improved learners' ability to process rapid speech input. Repeated exposure to rap lyrics trained learners to identify key words within dense speech streams and anticipate rhythmic patterns (Seidova et al., 2026). Several participants stated that they became more comfortable understanding English movies, interviews, and podcasts after participating in rap-based activities.

This finding supports Rost's (2011) claim that listening competence improves through exposure to authentic auditory input combined with repeated practice and contextual prediction strategies.

Participants also reported improved ability to distinguish individual sounds within continuous speech. Many learners explained that rap listening sharpened their attention to pronunciation detail and word boundaries.

Motivation and emotional engagement

Motivation emerged as one of the strongest positive outcomes of the study. Most participants described rap-based pronunciation learning as enjoyable, energetic, and less stressful than traditional pronunciation exercises. Learners demonstrated high levels of classroom participation and voluntary practice outside instructional hours. Unlike repetitive textbook drills, rap activities created emotionally engaging learning experiences that maintained student attention for longer periods. Participants frequently practiced songs independently using streaming platforms and lyric websites.

The findings support Murphey's (1992) argument that music enhances learner motivation by combining emotional stimulation with repetitive language exposure. Similarly, Gardner (1985) emphasizes that positive emotional attitudes significantly influence second language acquisition success. Students also developed stronger cultural interest in English-speaking societies through exposure to rap music. Many participants explored additional English-language media independently after becoming engaged with rap culture and lyrical expression (Nuri et al., 2025).

Pronunciation confidence and accent reduction

The results indicate partial reduction of first-language pronunciation interference among many participants. Although complete native-like pronunciation was not achieved, learners displayed more natural rhythm, smoother speech transitions, and improved intonation control by the end of the instructional period. Several students became more willing to communicate spontaneously in English without excessive fear of making pronunciation mistakes. Increased confidence contributed positively to classroom interaction and oral participation. According to Derwing and Munro (2005), pronunciation confidence plays a central role in communicative effectiveness because learners who fear pronunciation errors often avoid oral communication altogether. The present study suggests that rap-based pronunciation activities may reduce speaking anxiety by transforming pronunciation practice into a creative and enjoyable performance activity.

Challenges and difficulties

Despite the positive outcomes, the study also identified several challenges associated with rap-based pronunciation learning.

Rapid speech tempo

Many learners initially struggled with the fast delivery speed of rap lyrics. Certain songs overwhelmed participants because multiple words were compressed into short rhythmic sequences. Intermediate learners occasionally became frustrated during early listening sessions. However, gradual exposure and repeated practice reduced comprehension difficulty over time. Slower rap songs proved more suitable during initial instructional stages.

Slang and informal language

Participants occasionally encountered difficulties understanding slang expressions, idioms, and culturally specific references. Some learners incorrectly assumed that all rap vocabulary represented standard English usage. This issue confirms concerns raised by Alim (2006), who notes that rap language often reflects regional identity, urban slang, and sociocultural variation that may differ from formal English norms.

Non-standard grammar

Certain rap lyrics included grammatically non-standard constructions used for artistic rhythm or cultural authenticity. Teachers needed to clarify differences between conversational artistic expression and formal academic English usage.

Pronunciation manipulation by artists

Some rap artists intentionally distort pronunciation to preserve rhyme schemes or stylistic identity. Without instructional guidance, learners risk imitating exaggerated or regionally marked pronunciation forms. Therefore, careful material selection remained essential throughout the instructional process.

Overall findings

Overall, the findings strongly suggest that English rap hits can function as effective supplementary tools for pronunciation development among EFL learners. Rap-based instruction improved stress awareness, fluency, listening comprehension, connected speech recognition, and pronunciation confidence while simultaneously increasing learner motivation and engagement. The results demonstrate that authentic musical input provides meaningful opportunities for repeated pronunciation practice in emotionally stimulating environments. When carefully integrated into structured language instruction, English rap music can support learners' movement toward more natural and native-like speech production.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that English rap hits can serve as an effective supplementary instructional resource for improving pronunciation and promoting native-like speech characteristics among EFL learners. The results reveal that learners exposed to rhythm-based pronunciation activities developed greater awareness of stress timing, connected speech, intonation, and fluency. These findings correspond with broader theories of second language acquisition emphasizing the importance of authentic auditory input, repetition, emotional engagement, and meaningful communicative exposure.

One of the central findings of the study concerns the role of rhythm in pronunciation development. English rap music relies heavily on stress placement, beat synchronization, and rhythmic speech flow. These features appear to support learners' acquisition of English prosody, particularly stress timing and intonation patterns. According to Gilbert (2008), prosodic features such as rhythm and stress are fundamental components of intelligible pronunciation because they shape the listener's ability to interpret meaning and speech organization. Learners who fail to master English stress timing often sound unnatural even when individual sounds are correctly pronounced.

The study suggests that rap music creates a practical environment for internalizing these prosodic patterns. Through repeated imitation and synchronization with musical beats, learners gradually adjusted their speech rhythm toward more native-like timing. This observation supports Dauer's (1993) argument that stress timing plays a greater role in pronunciation intelligibility than isolated segmental accuracy alone. Many participants in the present study improved sentence rhythm and syllable reduction after repeated exposure to rap lyrics.

The findings also reinforce the theoretical assumptions of Stephen Krashen regarding comprehensible input and affective factors in language acquisition. Krashen's Input Hypothesis proposes that learners acquire language most effectively when exposed to meaningful and engaging input in low-anxiety environments (Krashen, 1985).

Rap music appears to satisfy several conditions of effective language acquisition simultaneously:

- authentic language exposure,
- repeated auditory input,
- emotional engagement,
- learner motivation,
- reduced classroom anxiety.

Unlike traditional pronunciation drills, which learners often perceive as mechanical and repetitive, rap-based activities transformed pronunciation practice into an enjoyable and socially interactive experience. The increased classroom participation observed during the study supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which states that emotional comfort facilitates language acquisition by lowering psychological barriers to communication.

The motivational dimension of rap-based learning emerged as another highly significant finding. Many participants voluntarily practiced English pronunciation outside classroom settings through repeated listening and lyrical imitation. This autonomous engagement is especially important because pronunciation acquisition requires long-term exposure and extensive repetition. According to Gardner (1985), motivation represents one of the strongest predictors of success in second language learning. Learners who are emotionally invested in language practice are more likely to sustain effort, tolerate mistakes, and engage in repeated communicative attempts.

Music-based learning may therefore function not only as a linguistic tool but also as a motivational catalyst. Murphey (1992) argues that songs naturally encourage repetition because learners repeatedly listen to music for enjoyment rather than obligation. The current study supports this perspective, as many participants practiced rap lyrics voluntarily beyond classroom requirements. Such repeated exposure strengthens phonological memory and speech automatization.

Another important implication of the study involves the development of connected speech awareness. Traditional EFL instruction frequently presents artificially slow and carefully articulated speech, which differs substantially from authentic conversational English. As a result, learners often struggle to understand native speakers despite strong vocabulary knowledge. Rap music exposes learners to realistic speech reductions, linking, contractions, assimilation, and rapid articulation patterns that are characteristic of everyday spoken English.

The improvement observed in learners' recognition of forms such as "gonna," "wanna," and "lemme" suggests that rap-based instruction may bridge the gap between classroom English and authentic communication. According to Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006), exposure to connected speech is essential for developing listening comprehension and communicative fluency because native speech rarely occurs in isolated word forms. The present findings indicate that rap music can familiarize learners with these naturally occurring phonological processes more effectively than scripted textbook dialogues.

Furthermore, the study supports neurological perspectives concerning the relationship between music and language processing. Patel (2008) argues that music and language share overlapping cognitive mechanisms associated with rhythm perception, auditory memory, and temporal processing. The rhythmic repetition found in rap may therefore strengthen neural pathways involved in phonological acquisition and speech production. Several participants reported that rhythmic beats helped them memorize pronunciation sequences more effectively than ordinary listening exercises. This finding aligns with Fonseca-Mora (2011), who emphasizes that musical repetition enhances phonological retention and auditory discrimination.

The observed improvement in speaking fluency also carries important pedagogical implications. Many learners initially hesitated during oral communication because they focused excessively on grammatical correctness and pronunciation accuracy. However, rap-shadowing activities encouraged continuous speech production without frequent interruption. As learners practiced maintaining rhythm and speech flow, they gradually developed greater automaticity in spoken English.

Nation (2001) explains that fluency develops when learners repeatedly process language under time pressure until speech production becomes more automatic and cognitively efficient. Rap performance naturally introduces time-sensitive articulation demands that train learners to process language more rapidly. This may explain why participants demonstrated smoother speech flow and reduced hesitation during classroom interaction by the end of the study.

The findings additionally suggest that rap music contributes to pronunciation confidence and identity formation. Several learners reported feeling more comfortable speaking English publicly after participating in rap-based activities. Pronunciation anxiety often prevents learners from engaging actively in communication, even when they possess sufficient linguistic knowledge. According to Derwing and Munro (2005), fear of negative evaluation frequently limits oral participation among foreign language learners.

Rap performance may reduce this anxiety because it reframes pronunciation practice as artistic imitation rather than formal assessment. Learners focus on rhythm, performance, and expression rather than perfection, which may decrease self-consciousness and increase communicative risk-taking. Increased confidence subsequently encourages more frequent oral interaction, further reinforcing pronunciation development through practice.

The study also highlights the importance of authenticity in pronunciation instruction. Authentic input exposes learners to natural speech variability, emotional expression, and spontaneous pronunciation phenomena absent from many educational materials. Rap lyrics frequently contain emotional intensity, personal storytelling, and conversational language that create meaningful communicative contexts for pronunciation learning. Richards (2008) argues that authentic communicative materials increase learner engagement because they connect language study to real-world usage.

However, despite these positive outcomes, the study also confirms several important limitations associated with rap-based language learning. One major concern involves the presence of slang vocabulary and non-standard grammatical structures. Rap artists often intentionally manipulate grammar and pronunciation to preserve rhythm, rhyme, regional identity, or artistic expression. Without teacher guidance, learners may struggle to distinguish between standard English usage and stylistic variation.

This concern corresponds with Alim's (2006) sociolinguistic analysis of hip-hop language, which emphasizes that rap frequently reflects cultural identity and urban speech communities rather than formal standardized English. Teachers therefore carry significant responsibility in selecting appropriate materials and contextualizing linguistic variation for learners. Another limitation involves speech tempo. Certain rap songs contain extremely rapid articulation that may overwhelm intermediate learners and reduce listening comprehension. Although repeated exposure gradually improved learner processing abilities in the current study, excessive difficulty may discourage less confident students. Consequently, pedagogical implementation should involve gradual progression from slower, clearer rap performances toward more linguistically complex material.

Cultural considerations also deserve attention. Rap music is deeply connected to specific historical, social, and cultural contexts, particularly African American urban culture. Learners unfamiliar with these cultural references may misunderstand lyrical meanings or fail to appreciate contextual nuances.

Therefore, integrating rap into language instruction may also require cultural explanation and discussion to support comprehensive understanding.

From a broader educational perspective, the findings suggest that contemporary language instruction should increasingly incorporate multimedia and culturally relevant resources (Babayev et al., 2025). Modern learners interact extensively with music, digital platforms, and social media outside formal educational environments. Integrating these authentic cultural resources into language classrooms may increase relevance, engagement, and learner autonomy.

Technological accessibility further strengthens the educational value of rap-based pronunciation learning. Streaming services, lyric annotation platforms, pronunciation applications, and subtitled music videos allow learners to combine auditory, visual, and textual input simultaneously. This multimodal exposure may accelerate pronunciation acquisition by activating multiple cognitive processing channels.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that English rap hits can meaningfully contribute to the formation of native-like pronunciation when implemented thoughtfully within structured pedagogical frameworks. Rap music enhances pronunciation awareness, listening comprehension, fluency, stress timing, and learner motivation while simultaneously providing authentic communicative exposure. Although challenges related to slang, rapid speech, and non-standard language remain important considerations, the educational benefits observed in this study strongly support the integration of carefully selected rap materials into modern EFL pronunciation instruction.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that English rap hits can play a significant role in the formation of native-like pronunciation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The findings reveal that rap music provides learners with authentic exposure to natural English pronunciation patterns, including stress timing, rhythm, intonation, connected speech, reductions, and fluent articulation. Through repeated listening, imitation, and rhythm-based practice, learners gradually improved their pronunciation accuracy and developed greater awareness of the phonological characteristics of spoken English.

One of the most important outcomes of the study is the recognition that pronunciation learning becomes more effective when linguistic instruction is combined with emotional engagement and motivation. Unlike traditional pronunciation drills, rap-based activities created an enjoyable and dynamic learning environment that encouraged active participation and independent practice. Learners demonstrated increased confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, and stronger willingness to communicate in English. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of rap also strengthened memory retention and speech automatization, helping learners internalize pronunciation patterns more naturally.

The study further highlights the importance of authentic language input in modern pronunciation instruction. English rap music exposes learners to real conversational speech features that are often absent from textbook materials. By interacting with authentic musical language, learners improved not only pronunciation but also listening comprehension, fluency, and cultural awareness. These findings support contemporary language acquisition theories emphasizing meaningful exposure, repetition, and communicative practice.

However, the research also identifies several limitations associated with rap-based pronunciation learning. Rapid speech tempo, slang expressions, non-standard grammar, and culturally specific references may create comprehension difficulties for some learners. Therefore, successful

implementation requires careful song selection, instructional guidance, and adaptation to learners' proficiency levels and educational needs.

Overall, the study concludes that English rap hits represent a valuable supplementary resource for pronunciation development in EFL education. When integrated thoughtfully into classroom instruction, rap music can effectively bridge entertainment and pedagogy while helping learners move closer toward more fluent, confident, and native-like spoken English.

References

- Alim, H. S. (2006). *Roc the mic right: The language of hip hop culture*. Routledge.
- Alisoy, H., & Sadigzade, Z. (2025). Comparative analysis of mobile applications and traditional methods in vocabulary acquisition. *Educational Process: International Journal*, 17, e2025322. <https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2025.17.322>
- Babayev, J. S., Sadikhova, S. N., Baghirova, M. A., Seidova, E. R., & Mammadova, A. A. (2025). A lexical-stylistic and cross-cultural analysis of vulgarisms and their usage spheres. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 17(6), e5525.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Pearson Education.
- Brown, J. D., & Kondo-Brown, K. (Eds.). (2006). *Perspectives on teaching connected speech to second language speakers*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. M., & Goodwin, J. M. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation: A course book and reference guide*. Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dauer, R. M. (1983). Stress-timing and syllable-timing reanalyzed. *Journal of Phonetics*, 11(1), 51–62.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. McGraw-Hill.
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2005). Second language accent and pronunciation teaching: A research-based approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 379–397.
- Fonseca-Mora, M. C. (2011). Foreign language acquisition and melody singing. *ELT Journal*, 65(2), 101–115.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.
- Gilbert, J. B. (2008). *Teaching pronunciation: Using the prosody pyramid*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ismayilli, T. M., Mammadova, K. M., & Asadova, A. A. (2025). The impact of educational games on speaking skills in the foreign language teaching process. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 1, 229–240. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15228398>
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (1988). *The action research planner*. Deakin University Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Longman.
- Loewy, J. (1995). The musical stage of speech: A developmental model of pre-verbal sound making. *Music Therapy*, 13(1), 47–73.
- Murphey, T. (1992). *Music and song*. Oxford University Press.
- Murphey, T. (2001). Exploring conversational shadowing. *Language Teaching Research*, 5(2), 128–155.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nuri, A., Ismayil, Z., Babayeva, M., Guliyev, A., Rzayeva, F., Shiraliyeva, G., & Jahangirli, T. (2025). Artistic expressions as vehicles of cultural memory: Bridging identity, heritage, and intercultural understanding. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 12(5), 258–275. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2816>

- Patel, A. D. (2008). *Music, language, and the brain*. Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching listening and speaking: From theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rost, M. (2011). *Teaching and researching listening*. Pearson Education.
- Schoepp, K. (2001). Reasons for using songs in the ESL/EFL classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 7(2).
- Seidova, E., Babayev, J., Sadikhova, S., Aghayeva, G., & Mammadova, Z. (2026). AI-powered lexical innovation: Modeling neologisms with NLP. *Scientific Work*, 20(3), 170–179.
- Underhill, A. (2005). *Sound foundations: Learning and teaching pronunciation*. Macmillan Education.