The influence of listening to music on the development of pronunciation among EFL High School students: a systematic review.

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Abstract

Current information in the field of education recognizes the need to rethink teaching methodologies in order to enhance the development of pronunciation in high school students of English as a foreign language (EFL). In this context, the purpose of this systematic review was to investigate the influence of listening to music on the development of pronunciation among EFL high school students. To this end, a process of searching, selecting, and analyzing scientific documents indexed in academic databases was carried out using Boolean operators. Multiple documents met the inclusion criteria and were examined according to their theoretical approaches, didactic dimensions, and conclusions. The results indicate that active, music-based pronunciation interventions are more effective than passive listening practices in improving students' pronunciation, fluency, intonation, and stress patterns. However, the findings also highlight significant gaps in teachers' methodological training and a lack of research conducted in Latin American contexts, underscoring the need for context-specific studies and pedagogical strategies that support effective pronunciation instruction in public high schools.

Keywords: Music, pronunciation, high school, English as a foreign language, PRISMA methodology.

Introduction

In modern society, characterized by various technological advances and multiple forms of communication, interpersonal interactions in the English language require linguistic skills such as effective pronunciation to ensure successful communication. In the institutional setting of high school English instruction, there remains a tendency toward a more technical approach focused on explaining grammatical rules and the isolated memorization of vocabulary, rather than on strengthening oral production and phonetic intelligibility (Huensch, 2019; Nhat & Hien, 2024). This significantly limits students' ability to develop the skills needed for assertive communication and to adapt to changing global environments. In this regard, it is essential that curricula incorporate active and innovative methodologies that strengthen high school students' pronunciation skills, enabling them to prepare for the communicative challenges of today's world based on their own experiences, as part of a renewed pedagogical approach.

To address this issue, the development of language skills using songs is presented as a pedagogical strategy that helps enhance the quality of the educational process, facilitating successful language acquisition in foreign language learning. Acoustic-musical resources, also known as musical mediation strategies or songs in the classroom, play a crucial role in secondary education, especially for foreign language learners, as they allow for the training of suprasegmental elements such as tone, rhythm, intonation, and accent, which enable more effective oral interactions and better performance in collaborative settings such as classrooms (Fraga González et al., 2025; Vivone et al., 2025).

Thus, the incorporation of music into English instruction at the high school level becomes a requirement rather than an option; it not only promotes communicative performance and social adaptation but also reduces the fear of public speaking. Educational institutions should evaluate their teaching-learning processes to integrate the development of these skills, thereby ensuring the quality of their graduates (Robles Ortega & Mendoza Chavarria, 2025). Similarly, promoting active listening enhances classroom practice, as songs are useful for planning and interacting assertively, while incorporating emotional regulation by reducing the affective filter (Alimoradi & Adib, 2022; Sotomayor Cantos et al., 2024; Yousif, 2025). As part of a comprehensive English language education, learners are provided with the essential skills and knowledge needed to succeed both academically and professionally. By developing these competencies, students are better prepared to communicate effectively in classroom settings, future careers, and a variety of real-world contexts. This raises the following question:

How does listening to music influence the development of pronunciation among EFL high school students?

Given the significance of this specific topic, this systematic review aims to analyze research from the past 10 years on the impact of listening to music in English on the development of pronunciation among EFL high school students, focusing primarily on the main theories, teaching approaches, findings, and variables. The rationale for this study is based on the need to provide a comprehensive, structured, and up-to-date synthesis of knowledge that serves as a foundation for implementing pedagogical strategies to address effective pronunciation in high school students.

Method

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach, based on an analytical-

interpretive paradigm, with the aim of understanding, analyzing, and reflecting on whether or not music influences students' pronunciation development. A systematic review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA statement, utilizing scientific databases of high academic relevance (Scopus, Dialnet, Scielo). To this end, keywords and analytical indicators were established, and combined searches were performed using the Boolean operators AND and OR, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Search strategy and combined observation levels.

Search terms	Code
"Music" AND "pronunciation" AND "EFL" AND "high school"	1
"Music" OR "songs" AND "pronunciation" AND "EFL" AND "secondary education"	2
"Music" OR "songs" AND "pronunciation" OR "phonetics" AND "EFL" AND "high school" AND "digital platforms"	3

As shown in Table 1, the search terms initially used focused on the core concepts of music, pronunciation, the foreign language environment, and high school; consequently, all bibliographic sources retrieved included these core descriptors, which were assigned Code 1. To filter and refine the results obtained, the second stage incorporated regional delimitation variants such as "secondary education" and synonyms such as "songs" (Code 2), ensuring a homogeneous selection free of geographical bias. Finally, in the third filtering stage, a third equation was created incorporating descriptors associated with digital environments and specific variables such as "phonetics" and "digital platforms" (Code 3). The quantitative results derived from these searches and their corresponding selection filters according to the indexed repositories are presented in a structured format in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of documents retrieved by database and search terms.

Database	Code	N° of Docs
Scopus	1	157
	2	103
	3	10
Dialnet	1	8
	2	5
	3	4
Scielo	1	4
	2	2
	3	1

The search results mentioned in the previous paragraph initially yielded the total volume of raw literature listed in Table 2. These documents included original articles, reviews, empirical reports, and conference proceedings. From this initial pool, only original scientific articles were selected for further analysis. The selection process involved applying language restrictions and exclusion criteria based on methodological considerations, as detailed in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Number of selected citable articles classified by language.

Database	Code	N° of Docs	Spanish	English
Scopus	1	157	2	155
	2	103	0	103
	3	10	0	10
Dialnet	1	8	0	8
	2	5	0	5
	3	4	0	4
	1	4	1	3

Scielo	2	2	0	2
	3	1	0	1

Table 4. Number of citable articles classified by publication time window.

Base de datos	Código	N° de Docs	Antes de 2016	Desde 2016 a 2026
Scopus	1	157	15	142
	2	103	4	99
	3	10	0	10
Dialnet	1	8	0	8
	2	5	0	5
	3	4	0	4
Scielo	1	4	0	4
	2	2	0	2
	2	1	0	1

Table 4 shows the final eligible documents, which consist of citable articles in Spanish and English published over the past 10 years (2016–2026). Through rigorous screening and detailed full-text reading, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied with strict rigor. Grey literature, short opinion pieces, or theoretical manuals lacking verifiable experimental data were discarded, and all studies that dealt generically with the acquisition of isolated vocabulary or grammar without direct phonetic measurements were excluded. In this way, the final corpus was

established to analyze exclusively those studies that advocate for and demonstrate the benefits of musical stimulation on students' oral proficiency.

Development and Discussion

Based on the specific objectives of this review, it was proceeded to compile and critically analyze the selected studies that address the use of music to develop pronunciation in EFL high school students. This process allowed the identification of the main teaching approaches and the conclusions reached by various authors over the past decade.

The selected articles were subsequently subjected to a structured comparative analysis, allowing their findings to be contrasted with current theoretical literature. Table 5 summarizes the principal studies included in this review and the characteristics of the dimensions analyzed, highlighting the diversity of methodological approaches as well as the general consensus regarding the positive impact of music on students' pronunciation development and affective factors.

Table 5. Major studies on musical stimulation and pronunciation development in EFL (2016–2026).

Author(s) & year	Theoretical backgroung	Variable Definition	Conclusions
(Feng & Guo, 2025; Jaramillo & Solano, 2019)	Models of technological mediation and interactive lyrical visualization on video platforms (YouTube).	Instructional approach using music and digital mediation.	The educational use of guided music and interactive videos significantly improves phonetic discrimination in high school students.

(Ebadi et al., 2023; Kusuma et al., 2025)	Theories of Informal Learning and the Digital Extramural Linguistic Environment (DILE)	Time, frequency, and informal autonomous exposure.	The transition from formal music-based activities to autonomous digital learning environments at home significantly promotes learners' autonomy in oral language production.
(Akindele & Fabunmi, 2023; Sugiura & Hori, 2025)	Principles of syllabic isochrony, stress-timed rhythm, and prosodic transfer.	Direct impact on the phonetic components of speech.	Melodic training corrects interference from the native language, improving rhythm, intonation, and proper word linking.
(Alimoradi & Adib, 2022; Sotomayor Cantos et al., 2024; Yousif, 2025)	The Concept of the Affective Filter (Krashen), fear of public speaking, and phonetic anxiety in adolescents.	Communicative performance and socio-emotional regulation.	Music-based recreational activities significantly reduce stress and shyness, while improving public speaking skills.
(Chust-Pérez et al., 2026)	Teaching approaches based on gamification and interactive acoustic visualization platforms.	Speech production and the gamification of music.	Gamified interactive platforms foster highly competitive, positive, and effective learning environments for the production of difficult phonemes.
(Zhang et al., 2026)	Neuroeducational theories of active lyrical processing versus passive background exposure.	Active structured music listening.	Passive or background listening is ineffective; progress necessarily requires active processing (imitation and shadowing).

(Judijanto et al., 2024; Robles Ortega & Mendoza Chavarria, 2025)	Criteria of acoustic simplicity, moderate speed, and prosodic isochrony.	Selection and classification of musical genres in EFL.	Genres such as modern pop, ballads, and classic rock are ideal because of their perfect tempo and vocal clarity.
(Altakhaineh et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025)	Longitudinal studies on speech motor articulation and the production of complex consonant clusters.	Segmental features and flexibility of the vocal tract.	Regular singing makes the articulatory apparatus more flexible, facilitating the accurate pronunciation of phonemes that do not exist in one's native language.
(Avdıu, 2021; Huensch, 2019)	Traditional curricular approaches and initial training in applied phonetics.	Educational constraints and teacher training.	The lack of specific methodological training among teachers means that music is used only in an improvised manner.

An analysis of the accumulated evidence indicates that the use of songs in the English classroom functions as a comprehensive auditory stimulus that enhances the way high school students acquire the correct pronunciation of the language. When learners actively engage with music by paying attention to and analyzing song lyrics, rather than listening passively, a natural process of linguistic imitation is stimulated.

For this approach to be effective, the careful selection of musical material is essential. For instance, songs characterized by clear rhythms and an appropriate tempo appear to produce the most favorable outcomes, particularly within the pop and classic rock genres. Such songs enable students to internalize authentic language patterns, exposing them to the natural rhythm,

pronunciation, and structure of English in ways that traditional instructional texts often cannot replicate.

From a practical perspective, the frequency and context in which students engage with music play a crucial role in determining learning outcomes. The combination of teacher-guided classroom activities and autonomous exposure to music at home through music videos and digital platforms fosters a habit of continuous practice. This sustained contact with the language beyond the classroom extends learners' opportunities for exposure, allowing them to become more familiar with authentic, everyday English. As a result, students are able to internalize sound patterns more efficiently, facilitating language acquisition in a manner that feels natural and engaging rather than imposed.

Regarding communicative competence, the most notable improvements are found in the suprasegmental features that contribute to the natural rhythm of speech, such as rhythm, intonation, and word stress. By singing or following the rhythm of songs, high school students learn to connect words more naturally and develop greater ease in producing complex sounds that do not exist in Spanish. These gains translate directly into improved perceived fluency, enabling learners to speak more naturally and move beyond the rigid or overly segmented pronunciation patterns that typically characterize beginning levels of language proficiency.

Finally, one of the most significant findings of this review is the positive affective impact associated with the use of music as a learning resource. Music serves as an effective tool for regulating mood and reducing anxiety and fear of making mistakes, which are common psychological barriers among high school students learning a foreign language. As emotional tension decreases, learners tend to develop greater self-confidence and a stronger willingness to participate actively in classroom activities. Consequently, the use of songs not only enhances

students' listening and pronunciation skills but also fosters a supportive and highly motivating learning environment that promotes the development of oral communication skills.

Discussion

The findings of the present systematic review reveal a broad consensus regarding the importance of music as an integral component in the development of pronunciation skills among EFL high school students. This finding is strongly consistent with the conclusions of contemporary research, which suggests that foreign language learners benefit from engaging and stimulating instructional approaches that move beyond the limitations and monotony often associated with traditional formal phonetic instruction (Nhat & Hien, 2024).

Similarly, the theoretical convergence observed across the studies reviewed strongly supports the notion that pronunciation development requires an active and guided learning approach, as engaging with the various components involved in the process of auditory and phonological acquisition, helps learners overcome speech-related barriers and facilitates progress through the use and sharing of resources such as interactive YouTube videos and gamified digital platforms. These tools provide meaningful opportunities for practice, feedback, and engagement, thereby supporting the gradual development of pronunciation skills in foreign language learners (Chust-Pérez et al., 2026; Feng & Guo, 2025).

Along the same lines, the evidence suggests that songs play a pivotal role in both overall academic performance and the development of verbal fluency. Significant improvements are observed when music is incorporated through structured instructional practices, such as lyric-based activities and repetitive imitation techniques, including shadowing. These strategies encourage learners to attend closely to pronunciation patterns, rhythm, and intonation, thereby

facilitating more accurate and fluent oral production while reinforcing language acquisition in an engaging and meaningful manner (Zhang et al., 2026).

This perspective is consistent with contemporary language teaching approaches, which propose that pronunciation is enhanced through the simultaneous training of auditory perception and speech production mechanisms. By continuously developing listening skills while exercising the articulatory muscles involved in speech, learners are better able to perceive, reproduce, and internalize the phonological patterns of the target language (Altakhaineh et al., 2024). It is at this stage that musical structures become a fundamental tool for reducing the prosodic interference of the learner's first language; the rhythmic patterns found in music naturally encourage Spanish-speaking learners to adopt the stress-timed rhythm characteristic of English. As a result, students become more capable of producing reduced vowels in unstressed syllables and applying appropriate word linking, thereby developing more natural and intelligible speech patterns (Akindele & Fabunmi, 2023; Sugiura & Hori, 2025). On the other hand, the evidence clearly indicates that these resources contribute to the creation of a low-stress learning environment, fostering positive and meaningful interaction between teachers and students. The development of these auditory and pronunciation-related skills supports learners' overall growth by significantly reducing the fear and anxiety often associated with speaking in public. Moreover, music-based activities help replace traditional punitive forms of assessment with collaborative, enjoyable, and engaging learning experiences, encouraging greater participation and confidence in oral communication. (Alimoradi & Adib, 2022).

A highly relevant issue identified in this review is the persistence of methodological limitations resulting from insufficient pedagogical knowledge regarding the effective use of music-based resources. This concern was also reflected in the literature, which indicates that

many teachers employ songs primarily as background entertainment or as improvised activities to fill classroom time. Such practices often promote passive listening rather than purposeful engagement, thereby limiting their potential impact on students' pronunciation development and reducing the likelihood of meaningful changes in their phonetic and speech production habits (Avdıu, 2021; Lizaldes, 2021). Several authors strongly argue that the use of music and technology in the language classroom should not be regarded as a supplementary or decorative element, but rather as a central component of pedagogical and curricular design. This perspective aligns with contemporary educational approaches, which emphasize the need for secondary education to move beyond traditional grammar-based instruction and incorporate innovative, technology-enhanced practices. Such approaches are considered essential for fostering more meaningful language learning experiences and supporting the holistic development of students.

Finally, this review highlights the need for a transition toward a more dynamic and communicative model of language education, one that embraces theoretically grounded frameworks, such as neuroeducational approaches to prosodic processing, to guide the methodological development of pronunciation instruction in Latin American classrooms. At the same time, the contextual realities of public educational institutions in the region must be taken into account. High student-teacher ratios and limited access to digital connectivity require these music-based strategies to be adapted flexibly to both formal classroom settings and autonomous extramural learning environments. Such adaptations are essential to ensure the effective and equitable implementation of pronunciation-focused instruction across diverse educational contexts (Alvarez et al., 2024; Cedeño Macías & Cantos Vélez, 2025).

Conclusions

A detailed and comprehensive search of the study variables was conducted, providing access to reliable, up-to-date, and highly indexed scientific sources. The systematic review, structured according to the PRISMA guidelines, enabled the identification, comparison, and critical analysis of the principal theoretical and empirical trends concerning the transformative role of music in the development of EFL high school students' pronunciation. As a result, the following key conclusions were drawn in relation to the specific objectives established at the outset of the study:

1. The comprehensive literature search conducted in this review revealed that the most effective intervention models for enhancing pronunciation among high school students are those that require active learner engagement. Approaches such as interactive lyric processing, phonetic imitation techniques (shadowing), and the guided use of digital tools, including gamified video platforms and autonomous mobile learning environments, have been shown to be substantially more effective than traditional passive listening practices. These strategies exert a direct positive influence on both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of speech, contributing to improvements in pronunciation accuracy, intonation, fluency, and stress patterns.

2. Despite the well-documented benefits reported in the international scientific literature, a significant gap remains in teachers' methodological training regarding pronunciation instruction and the structured integration of music into language learning. As a result, these resources are often used in an improvised manner, limiting their pedagogical potential. Furthermore, the review reveals that the vast majority of empirical evidence originates from contexts outside Latin America. Consequently, there is a pressing need to expand locally grounded research that addresses the structural constraints faced by public educational

institutions in the region and develops context-sensitive strategies for promoting comprehensive, fluent, and confident language learning.

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