

## **The Effect of Using Taylor Swift's Songs on the Improvement of Students' Listening Skills at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan**

**Indah Cahyani**

[2211102421017@umkt.ac.id](mailto:2211102421017@umkt.ac.id)

**Ade Ismail Ramadhan Hamid**

[air550@umkt.ac.id](mailto:air550@umkt.ac.id)

**Abdul Halim**

[ah918@umkt.ac.id](mailto:ah918@umkt.ac.id)

**Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the effect of using Taylor Swift's songs on improving students' selective listening skills at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan. Selective listening refers to learners' ability to identify specific information, keywords, and main ideas from spoken texts. Songs were chosen as learning media because they provide authentic pronunciation, natural rhythm, and meaningful repetition that support focused listening practice. The study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design involving 32 tenth-grade students. Data were collected using a listening test consisting of ten fill-in-the-blank questions based on selected Taylor Swift songs. The test measured students' ability to recognize keywords and accurately complete missing words and phrases from the song lyrics. The instrument was reviewed by English teachers to ensure content relevance and clarity. The treatment was conducted over four instructional sessions using structured listening activities, including lyric prediction, gap-filling, and comprehension checks. The results showed a significant improvement in students' selective listening performance after the treatment. The mean posttest score was higher than the pretest score, and statistical analysis using a paired-sample t-test indicated a significant difference at the 0.05 level. These findings suggest that integrating English songs into listening instruction can effectively support students' ability to focus on specific auditory information and improve listening accuracy. This study offers practical implications for English teachers to use music-based activities as supplementary listening materials to enhance learner engagement and selective listening development in secondary school contexts.

**Key words:** Selective Listening; English Songs; Listening Skills; EFL Students

### **INTRODUCTION**

In learning English, listening is one of the fundamental skills, especially for senior high school students. Listening allows learners to recognize sounds, understand

meaning, and respond appropriately in communication. However, many senior high school students still find it difficult to comprehend listening materials due to several factors, such as limited vocabulary, different accents, fast speech rate of native speakers, and inadequate exposure to authentic English in daily life (Rifai et al., 2024). These difficulties often cause students to misunderstand learning content, lose concentration, and gradually become less motivated to participate in listening activities. When listening instruction relies heavily on textbook-based audio materials or repetitive drills, students may perceive learning as monotonous and disconnected from real-life language use. Therefore, a new and creative approach is needed to help students better perceive, process, and comprehend spoken English while maintaining their motivation (Hanifah, 2020).

One instructional strategy that has gained attention is the use of English songs as a learning aid (Supriyani & Fatin, 2025). Songs are among the most effective teaching materials because they naturally combine rhythm, melody, and repetition, which help learners internalize language patterns and improve auditory discrimination (Amelia & Fatyra, 2024). Through repeated exposure to lyrics, students become more familiar with pronunciation, stress patterns, and intonation. Songs also provide contextualized vocabulary and authentic expressions that reflect everyday language use. In addition, learning through songs creates a more relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, which encourages students to engage actively and reduces anxiety during listening practice (Nainggolan & Maharini, 2025). When learners feel emotionally connected to the material, their attention span and willingness to practice tend to increase.

Taylor Swift is one of the most admired artists among teenagers, making her songs a relevant and familiar resource for classroom use (Ghonivita et al., 2021). Her lyrics generally employ simple sentence structures, clear diction, and understandable pronunciation, which support comprehension and listening accuracy (Nanda, 2023). Many of her songs also address universal themes such as friendship, self-identity, and personal growth, allowing learners to connect meaning with their own experiences (Yuanjai & Gampper, 2025). These characteristics make her songs suitable for structured listening activities that require students to focus on specific information rather than merely enjoying the music.

From the perspective of language assessment, listening consists of multiple sub-skills rather than a single general ability. Brown (2004) categorizes listening into four types: extensive, selective, responsive, and intensive. Each category reflects different listening purposes and requires distinct instructional approaches and assessment techniques. Selective listening focuses on identifying particular details or specific information from spoken input, such as keywords, numbers, names, or main ideas. This type of listening is especially relevant in academic contexts, where students must filter relevant information from large amounts of spoken data. Therefore, listening instruction should not only develop general comprehension but also target specific listening competencies aligned with instructional goals.

Selective listening is the listening sub-skill emphasized in this study. Clawson (2020) defines selective listening as the ability to concentrate on particular elements within a broader stream of spoken language. When learners listen selectively, they actively focus on extracting relevant information while ignoring less important input. Songs provide an appropriate medium for practicing this skill because learners can be guided to identify missing words, key phrases, rhyme patterns, or specific messages embedded in lyrics. This structured listening process trains learners to sharpen attention and listening accuracy.

Several studies have reported positive impacts of using songs in English language learning. Linia et al. (2025) found that songs increase student participation and support understanding of sentence structures, while Mijo (2022) reported that English songs enhance grammar acquisition and listening skills through natural exposure to language patterns. Faiza et al. (2021) also suggested that songs with clear vocabulary facilitate comprehension among high school learners. Although these findings confirm the effectiveness of song-based instruction, most previous studies emphasize general listening improvement rather than examining specific listening sub-skills such as selective listening. In addition, limited research clearly explains how particular song selections contribute to targeted listening development. As a result, there remains insufficient empirical evidence on how carefully selected songs can be systematically aligned with specific listening objectives in classroom practice.

Another concern is that many studies apply various songs without considering learners' familiarity, lyrical clarity, or relevance to instructional goals. Without explicit alignment between song characteristics and learning objectives, the pedagogical value of music-based instruction may not be fully optimized. Investigating a specific artist with consistent linguistic characteristics allows researchers and teachers to better evaluate how song features influence listening performance. Therefore, focusing on Taylor Swift's songs provides an opportunity to examine how familiar and linguistically accessible materials support selective listening development in senior high school students.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates whether the use of Taylor Swift's songs as instructional material improves students' listening skills at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan by comparing listening performance before and after the intervention. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for English teachers in selecting appropriate learning media, designing focused listening activities, and integrating music into classroom instruction more effectively. By narrowing the focus to selective listening and specific song selection, this study contributes to a more precise understanding of how song-based learning can enhance listening competence in secondary education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Listening**

Listening is a basic language skill that combines the sense of hearing with cognitive processing to allow students to decipher and create significance from spoken language (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Effective listening in EFL contexts extends beyond just hearing words it also entails identifying phrases, intonation, sentence structures, and contextual cues (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023). Accurately processing spoken messages requires active participation, prediction, and meaning verification. Among the various sub-skills of listening, selective listening is one of the most important listening skills for language learning because it teaches students to concentrate on specific details within a broader auditory stream, such as important verbs, clauses, or phrases in a song (Clawson, 2020). This ability improves students' capacity to recognize linguistic elements in natural conversational situations and filter out relevant details (Suwartono & Rahadiyanti, 2020). In furtherance of offering constant, meaningful input that promotes natural language acquisition, song-based activities help students practice both top-down (using context and prior knowledge) and bottom-up (decoding sounds and words) strategies (Qizi, 2023). Listening is a sophisticated, integrative ability that incorporates context, perception, and cognition. In particular, selective listening enables students to concentrate on significant linguistic components, which is crucial for precise comprehension.

### **The Importance of Listening in Language Learning**

According to Uktamovna & Sakina (2025), listening is the first language skill that is naturally acquired and forms the foundation for speaking, reading, and writing. In order to communicate effectively in English, learners must be able to identify pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and sentence patterns. Learners may find it difficult to comprehend and accurately communicate meaning if they lack listening skills (Anggreni et al., 2023). The development of focus, recall, and contextual understanding requires exposure to real materials, like music (Hanifah, 2020). Songs encourage both receptive and productive skills, offer rich linguistic input, and acquaint students with everyday vocabulary and natural speech patterns (Misa, 2024). In practical communication, selective listening helps students anticipate words, identify patterns, and modify their comprehension techniques (Clawson, 2020). Students gain cognitive engagement and the capacity to react appropriately to spoken English by concentrating on pertinent information while blocking out distractions (Meiske et al., 2024). Listening is essential when learning a language. It improves comprehension, cognitive processing, and learner motivation in addition to serving as the basis for other abilities, particularly when combined with practical material like songs.

## **Teaching Listening Skills**

Effective listening instruction combines bottom-up processing, which focuses on understanding sounds and words, and top-down processing, which interprets meaning based on context and prior knowledge (Qizi, 2023). Lessons should help students concentrate, anticipate meaning, and recognize important linguistic components in spoken input (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Students can practice listening in a meaningful way by incorporating real materials, like songs (Yuliarini, 2022). Activities that reinforce grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation while encouraging active engagement involve putting in missing lyrics, analyzing passages, and identifying main ideas (Amelia & Fatyra, 2024). Additionally, these exercises foster student independence in applying techniques to actual listening scenarios. Internalizing linguistic patterns, developing grammatical knowledge, and improving comprehension in real time are all facilitated by repeated repetition of listening tasks (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Repetitive structures and clear pronunciation make it easier to gradually pick up language features (Kaswari et al., 2023). Integrating strategy instruction with real-world practice is essential to teaching listening effectively. Activities that are organized, interesting, and inspiring help students gain self-assurance, independence, and listening proficiency.

## **The Use of Songs in Teaching Listening**

The combination of rhythm, repetition, and semantic richness in songs makes language input memorable and captivating, making them useful teaching tools (Ludke, 2020). They give students a natural setting in which to practice selective listening by making them concentrate on important words, phrases, and grammatical structures while disregarding unimportant details (Clawson, 2020). Taylor Swift's song *Lover* serves as a treatment experiment in this study. It is appropriate for teaching verbs, tenses, and basic conditional clauses due to its slow tempo, clear pronunciation, and structured, repetitive lyrics (Mijo, 2022). Students can apply grammatical knowledge, identify proper verb forms, and enhance comprehension in a relevant context by completing tasks such as fill-in-the-blank lyrics (Amelia & Fatyra, 2024). In addition, songs like *Lover* provide an inspiring and useful approach to practice listening. They strengthen vocabulary and grammar, foster selective listening skills, and offer real world exposure to English in a memorable and interesting setting.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to examine the effect of using Taylor Swift's songs on students' listening skills. This design was selected to measure changes in students' listening performance before and after the instructional treatment within the same group. The pretest provided

baseline data on students' listening ability, while the posttest measured learning gains following the implementation of song-based listening activities. Although this design does not involve a control group, it allows for practical classroom-based evaluation of instructional interventions and is suitable for exploratory educational research in school settings. The treatment was implemented through structured listening activities using selected Taylor Swift songs. Learning tasks included listening for specific information, completing missing lyrics, and identifying key details to support the development of selective listening skills. The consistency of instructional procedures across sessions helped ensure that observed changes were attributable to the treatment rather than instructional variation.

The participants of this study were tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan. One intact class consisting of 32 students was selected as the research sample. The sampling technique applied was purposive sampling, based on several pedagogical and practical considerations. First, the selected class had similar English proficiency levels according to the teacher's academic records. Second, the students had not previously received systematic listening instruction using English songs, which minimized prior treatment exposure. Third, the class schedule allowed sufficient time for the implementation of the intervention. The participants represented typical senior high school learners with heterogeneous listening abilities and learning backgrounds. All students participated in both the pretest and posttest, ensuring complete data collection. The sample size was considered adequate for preliminary statistical analysis within a classroom-based experimental framework. Although the sample was limited to one class, the study aimed to generate contextual evidence regarding the effectiveness of song-based instruction rather than broad generalization. The findings are therefore interpreted within the instructional context of SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan and may inform similar classroom settings.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

The instrument used in this study is a listening test administered in the form of a pretest and a posttest. The pretest is conducted to measure students' listening ability before the treatment, while the posttest is used to measure students' listening improvement after the treatment. The test consists of ten fill-in-the-blanks questions based on Taylor Swift's song *Back to December*. This song is selected to differentiate the test items from the treatment material, which uses the song *Lover*. The listening test is designed to assess students' vocabulary recognition, pronunciation, and comprehension of song lyrics.

In this research project, information was gathered across a four day span using a pretest, four treatment phases, and a posttest, where each phase ran for nearly 60 minutes, to test if Taylor Swift's songs could sharpen learners' listening skills. On the inaugural day, the pretest featured the track *Back to December* to measure participants' word familiarity, speech clarity, and overall grasp through the completion of ten fill in blanks lyric. The initial intervention explained the value of

hearing proficiency, showcased the song *Lover*, spotlighted essential terms, and included auditory drills. The next phase is finishing *Lover* lyrics, delivering corrections and advice from the investigator. The third phase delved into interpreting the song's purpose, central motifs, and emotional depth, with group chats and classmate reviews. The last phase recapped the content, bolstered word knowledge and articulation, and assessed total insight prior to the posttest, which used the identical method as the pretest. The gap in results from the start to the end highlighted how effective Taylor Swift's tunes were at boosting students' listening skills.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained from the pretest and posttest are analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test with the assistance of SPSS version 22. This non-parametric statistical test is employed because the data do not meet the assumption of normal distribution and involve paired scores from the same group of students (Hasonni & Al Azzawi, 2024). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test is used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between students' listening scores before and after the treatment. The level of significance used in this study is 0.05. If the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is less than 0.05, it indicates that the use of Taylor Swift's songs has a significant effect on improving students' listening skills.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part outlines the findings from a research project designed to assess how employing Taylor Swift's music influences the advancement of students' listening abilities in the context of English language acquisition. The information was gathered from 32 tenth-grade pupils at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan via listening assessments conducted prior to and following the intervention.

*Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores*

|          | N  | Mean  | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum |
|----------|----|-------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Pretest  | 32 | 25.00 | 9.837          | 10      | 50      |
| Posttest | 32 | 92.81 | 8.126          | 80      | 100     |

The table presents the descriptive statistics of students' pretest and posttest scores. The results reveal that the mean pretest score was 25.00 with a standard deviation of 9.837, indicating that students' initial reading comprehension ability was relatively low and varied considerably. The pretest scores ranged from a minimum of 10 to a maximum of 52, suggesting that most students experienced difficulties before the treatment was implemented.

After the application of the instructional strategy, students' performance showed a substantial improvement. The posttest results demonstrated a markedly higher mean score of 92.81, with a lower standard deviation of 8.126, indicating more

consistent achievement among students. The post-test scores ranged from 80 to 100. These findings indicate a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension ability after the treatment was applied.

*Table 2. Ranks of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test*

|                                   | N               | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| Posttest - Pretest Negative Ranks | 0 <sup>a</sup>  | .00       | .00          |
| Positive Ranks                    | 32 <sup>b</sup> | 16.50     | 528.00       |
| Ties                              | 0 <sup>c</sup>  |           |              |
| Total                             | 32              |           |              |

a. Posttest < Pretest

b. Posttest > Pretest

c. Posttest = Pretest

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test show that all 32 students obtained higher posttest scores than their pretest scores. As presented in Table 4.1.5, there were 32 positive ranks, no negative ranks, and no ties, indicating that none of the students experienced a decrease or unchanged scores after the treatment. The mean rank of the positive differences was 16.50, with a total sum of ranks of 528.00. The absence of negative ranks indicates that the use of Taylor Swift's songs consistently improved students' listening skills. These findings demonstrate that the treatment had a positive effect on all participants.

*Table 3. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>*

|                        | Posttest - Pretest  |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Z                      | -4.982 <sup>b</sup> |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | .000                |

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

The Test Statistics table presents the results of the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' pretest and posttest listening scores after the implementation of listening instruction using Taylor Swift's songs. The analysis revealed a Z value of -4.949, indicating a substantial difference between the paired scores.

Furthermore, the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value was .000, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This result indicates that the difference between the pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which states that the use of Taylor Swift's songs does not have a significant effect on students' listening skills, was rejected, while the alternative

hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) was accepted. These findings confirm that the use of Taylor Swift's songs had a significant effect on improving students' listening skills at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan.

The findings indicate that the use of Taylor Swift's songs as instructional material significantly improved students' listening performance at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan. The pretest results showed that students initially demonstrated limited listening ability, with a low mean score, whereas the posttest results revealed substantial improvement after the intervention. All participants showed score increases, indicating that song-based instruction effectively supported students' listening development, particularly in identifying specific information and recognizing language patterns.

Several factors may explain this improvement. First, the linguistic characteristics of the selected songs, including clear pronunciation, steady rhythm, and repetitive lexical patterns, supported students in recognizing vocabulary and sentence structures more accurately. These features facilitated learners' ability to focus on specific linguistic elements, which is essential in selective listening practice. Second, the implementation of structured listening activities, such as lyric gap-filling, keyword identification, and brief interpretation of song meaning, encouraged students to apply both bottom-up processing (recognizing sounds, words, and phrases) and top-down processing (using contextual understanding and background knowledge), consistent with Qizi (2023). This dual processing strengthened learners' listening accuracy and comprehension.

In addition, students' familiarity with and interest in Taylor Swift's songs increased their motivation and attention during learning activities. Familiar content reduced cognitive load and anxiety, allowing students to concentrate more effectively on listening tasks. Increased engagement also contributed to sustained participation throughout the treatment sessions, which positively influenced learning outcomes. The results of this study are consistent with previous research on the pedagogical value of music in language learning. Linia et al. (2025) reported that the integration of songs increased student participation and improved understanding of English sentence structures. Similarly, students in this study demonstrated higher engagement and improved listening performance during song-based activities. Mijo (2022) found that repeated exposure to English songs supports grammar development and listening skills through natural language pattern acquisition. Correspondingly, learners in the present study showed improved recognition of vocabulary and sentence patterns after repeated exposure to song lyrics.

Faiza et al. (2021) also emphasized that songs with clear pronunciation and simple vocabulary enhance high school students' listening comprehension. Taylor Swift's songs share these characteristics, which likely contributed to learners' ability to identify keywords and extract specific information accurately. The statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores further confirms the instructional effectiveness of song-based listening activities. These findings suggest

that integrating English songs into listening instruction not only enhances listening performance but also promotes learner motivation and active participation. When song selection aligns with learners' proficiency levels and instructional objectives, song-based learning becomes an effective strategy for developing selective listening skills in EFL classrooms. However, the results should be interpreted cautiously due to the limited sample size and absence of a control group. Future studies may employ experimental designs with comparison groups and longer intervention periods to strengthen generalizability and examine long-term learning effects.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of using Taylor Swift's songs as instructional material on students' listening skills at SMA Negeri 1 Loa Janan. The findings demonstrate a significant improvement in students' listening performance after the implementation of song-based instruction. The results indicate that structured listening activities supported by clear pronunciation, repetitive language patterns, and engaging content can effectively enhance students' ability to identify specific information, which is central to selective listening. The improvement observed suggests that integrating familiar and meaningful songs into listening lessons can increase learners' motivation, concentration, and active participation. Students were able to engage more confidently with listening tasks when learning materials were enjoyable and relevant to their interests. The use of guided activities such as lyric gap-filling and keyword identification also encouraged learners to apply both bottom-up and top-down listening strategies. Despite the positive outcomes, this study was limited to one class and employed a pre-experimental design without a control group. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the specific instructional context. Future research is recommended to involve larger samples, comparison groups, and longer treatment duration to strengthen generalizability and explore long-term effects of song-based listening instruction. The study provides practical evidence that English songs, particularly those with clear linguistic features, can be effectively integrated into classroom instruction to support selective listening development and enhance students' learning engagement in EFL contexts.

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