

Increasing Students' Listening Skills Through Missing Lyrics In English Songs

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of the Missing Lyrics technique using English songs in improving eighth-grade students' listening skills, with a specific focus on vocabulary recognition and functional word recognition. It also investigated students' perceptions of the technique. Adopting a quantitative pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, the research involved 19 purposively selected students from Class VIII A at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, Indonesia. Data were collected through listening comprehension tests (pretest and posttest) and a post-treatment questionnaire, then analyzed using descriptive statistics and a paired-sample t-test in IBM SPSS Statistics. The results revealed a statistically significant improvement in listening performance. The mean score increased substantially from 16.84 (pretest) to 73.95 (posttest), with a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). The correlation between pretest and posttest scores was moderate ($r = 0.556$). Questionnaire responses indicated that, although students had limited prior exposure to listening activities, they exhibited highly positive perceptions toward the technique. Participants reported increased motivation, greater focus, and higher engagement during lessons, attributing these gains to the enjoyable and authentic nature of English songs. The findings demonstrate that the Missing Lyrics technique is an effective, engaging, and practical strategy for enhancing listening skills in EFL contexts, particularly at the junior secondary level. The approach is recommended for teachers seeking innovative, low-cost methods to promote active listening and vocabulary development through authentic materials.

Keywords: Listening Skills; Missing Lyrics Technique; English Songs

INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as the primary global lingua franca in education, science, technology, and international communication. In today's interconnected world, the ability to comprehend spoken English is no longer optional but a fundamental requirement for academic achievement and global participation. Among the four macro language skills, listening serves as the foundational receptive skill, enabling learners to receive and process comprehensible input before they can produce accurate linguistic output. This primacy of listening aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which underscores the critical role of comprehensible input in second language acquisition, and with Howatt and Dakin's (1974) view of listening as an active, complex cognitive process involving perception, interpretation, and meaning construction.

Despite its central importance, listening remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners worldwide. Learners frequently struggle with identifying main ideas, recognizing vocabulary in connected speech, and decoding functional words due to the fast pace, reduced forms, and natural intonation patterns of authentic spoken English. In many EFL classrooms, listening instruction is still dominated by textbook-based recordings and teacher-centered explanations, offering limited opportunities for meaningful, interactive practice. Consequently, students often experience low comprehension, reduced motivation, and persistent difficulties in processing real-time spoken language.

In the Indonesian educational context, these challenges are particularly evident at the junior high school level. National reports from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology consistently highlight gaps in instructional quality, including variations in teachers' language proficiency and pedagogical competence. Conventional teaching approaches prevail, resulting in minimal use of innovative media and insufficient exposure to authentic listening materials. This situation hinders the development of essential listening competencies and leaves many students unprepared for real-life English communication.

The difficulties are further exacerbated in regional and rural areas, including South Sulawesi. Schools in these locations often face constraints such as limited technological infrastructure, unstable internet access, and underutilization of multimedia resources. Teachers tend to rely heavily on traditional methods, while authentic listening materials that reflect everyday English usage are rarely integrated into daily lessons. Similar conditions prevail in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, where repetitive and outdated instructional practices continue to reduce student engagement and slow the growth of listening skills.

Preliminary classroom observations conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti confirmed these broader issues. English instruction in Class VIII A was predominantly teacher-centered, with heavy dependence on lecturing and textbook explanations. Listening activities were conducted infrequently and, when implemented, tended to

be monotonous and lacked interactive elements. Students frequently lost concentration, showed low motivation, and reported significant difficulties in recognizing vocabulary and functional words within spoken texts. These problems led to consistently low listening performance and limited overall language development.

The evident gap between the theoretical importance of listening skills and current classroom practices underscores the urgent need for alternative, student-centered teaching techniques. Such approaches must be interactive, enjoyable, and capable of delivering authentic spoken input while simultaneously addressing learners' motivational and cognitive challenges. One promising solution lies in the integration of English songs as authentic learning media, which naturally provide rhythmic, repetitive, and contextually rich language exposure. Among various song-based activities, the Missing Lyrics technique stands out as particularly effective. By requiring students to listen attentively and complete omitted words or phrases from song lyrics, this method strengthens bottom-up processing skills, including phonological discrimination, vocabulary recognition, and identification of functional words in connected speech. The technique transforms passive listening into an active, engaging task, reducing anxiety and increasing learner focus through the enjoyable medium of music.

This study therefore aims to investigate the effectiveness of the Missing Lyrics technique in English songs for improving eighth-grade students' listening skills at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti. Specifically, it examines improvements in vocabulary recognition and functional word recognition while also exploring students' perceptions of the technique. By providing empirical evidence from a regional Indonesian junior high school context, the research seeks to offer practical insights for EFL teachers seeking innovative, low-cost strategies to enhance listening instruction and student engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening constitutes the foundational receptive skill in second language acquisition, serving as the primary channel through which learners receive comprehensible input before producing output (Rost, 2011). In EFL contexts, effective listening requires the simultaneous processing of phonological, lexical, and contextual cues in real-time speech. Howatt and Dakin (1974) define listening as the ability to identify and comprehend spoken language by recognizing sounds, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and contextual meaning, emphasizing its complex cognitive nature. Brown (2001) further conceptualizes listening as an active, interactive process involving perception, interpretation, and meaning construction, rather than passive reception of sound. These foundational views underscore why listening remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, particularly at the junior secondary level where exposure to authentic spoken English is often limited.

The development of listening skills is strongly supported by Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which posits that language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input slightly above their current proficiency level ($i+1$). Nation and Newton (2009) reinforce this by arguing that repeated exposure to natural spoken features such as rhythm, intonation, reduced forms, and connected speech is essential for building phonological awareness and lexical recognition. In practice, however, conventional EFL classrooms frequently rely on textbook recordings and teacher-centered methods, resulting in insufficient opportunities for meaningful listening practice and consequent gaps in vocabulary recognition and functional word identification (Harmer, 2007).

English songs have long been recognized as a powerful authentic medium for enhancing listening skills. Songs provide repetitive, rhythmic, and emotionally engaging input that mirrors real spoken language while simultaneously lowering learners' affective filters (Murphey, 1992). Vandergrift and Goh (2012) highlight that music-based materials increase motivation, sustain attention, and reduce anxiety, thereby facilitating deeper processing of phonological and lexical elements. When integrated strategically, songs enable learners to notice pronunciation patterns, stress, and functional words that are often difficult to isolate in traditional listening exercises.

The Missing Lyrics technique represents a focused, task-based application of song-based listening. In this activity, students listen to an English song and fill in intentionally omitted words or phrases from the provided lyrics, transforming passive listening into an active decoding process (Richards, 2008). The technique directly targets bottom-up processing skills—phoneme discrimination, word boundary identification, and lexical retrieval—while simultaneously engaging top-down strategies such as contextual prediction. Anderson and Lynch (1988) explain that such gap-fill tasks strengthen the integration of linguistic form and meaning, making Missing Lyrics particularly effective for developing the micro-skills of vocabulary recognition and functional word recognition emphasized in this study.

Theoretically, the Missing Lyrics technique rests on the interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing models of listening comprehension. Learners must decode individual sounds and reconstruct lexical items at natural speech rates (Buck, 2001), while using contextual and schematic knowledge to predict missing elements. This dual processing aligns with Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990), as the task compels learners to consciously attend to linguistic features that might otherwise go unnoticed. Furthermore, the enjoyable nature of music activates Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1985), reducing anxiety and increasing motivation, which in turn enhances input intake and retention.

Empirical support for song-based techniques in EFL listening is well documented. Previous studies consistently demonstrate that music-assisted instruction significantly improves listening comprehension, vocabulary retention, and learner engagement compared to traditional methods. The integration of Missing Lyrics

specifically has been shown to yield measurable gains in phonological awareness and functional word recognition, particularly among adolescent learners with limited prior exposure to authentic listening materials. The literature establishes a clear theoretical and pedagogical foundation for employing the Missing Lyrics technique with English songs. By combining authentic input, focused listening tasks, and motivational elements, this approach addresses both cognitive and affective barriers to listening development in EFL settings. The present study builds upon these established principles to examine the technique's effectiveness within a specific Indonesian junior high school context.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental design, specifically a one-group pretest-posttest model. This design was selected because it allowed the researcher to measure changes in students' listening performance before and after the intervention without requiring a control group. It was considered suitable given the limited resources and ethical considerations in the school context. The treatment involved implementing the Missing Lyrics technique using selected English songs over a predetermined period, enabling direct comparison between pretest and post-test scores to determine its effectiveness.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti, a public junior high school in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were eighth-grade students from Class VIII A. A total of 19 students were involved in the study. Purposive sampling was applied because the class was already formed as an intact group and met the criteria relevant to the research objectives. The students had followed the standard English curriculum and represented typical EFL learners in regional Indonesian contexts with limited exposure to authentic listening materials.

Instruments and Procedures

The study involved one independent variable, namely the Missing Lyrics technique applied through English songs, and two dependent variables: students' listening skills and their perceptions of the technique. Listening skills focused on vocabulary recognition and functional word recognition, while perceptions included aspects such as motivation, engagement, focus, and perceived usefulness. Two instruments were used to collect data. The first was a listening comprehension test consisting of English song lyrics with missing words, administered as both pretest and post-test under the same conditions. The second instrument was a structured questionnaire distributed after the treatment to gather students' perceptions of the technique.

The procedure consisted of several stages: pre-testing, treatment, post-testing, and questionnaire administration. The treatment was carried out in six instructional

sessions. In each session, students listened to selected English songs, completed missing lyrics worksheets, and participated in guided discussions to review their answers. All activities were conducted in the regular classroom setting, with the researcher working in collaboration with the English teacher.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the assistance of IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize students' pretest and post-test scores as well as questionnaire responses. To examine the effectiveness of the intervention, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between pretest and post-test listening scores at the 0.05 significance level. In addition, Pearson correlation analysis was performed to explore the relationship between students' initial and final performance. Questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively to identify general trends in students' perceptions of the Missing Lyrics technique. All ethical procedures were followed, including obtaining informed consent from the school principal and participants before conducting the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study are presented in two main sections: quantitative analysis of listening test scores and analysis of students' perceptions obtained from the post-treatment questionnaire. Data were gathered from 19 eighth-grade students (Class VIII A) at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti who participated in six instructional sessions using the Missing Lyrics technique with selected English songs. The pretest was administered prior to the treatment, while the posttest was conducted immediately afterward under identical conditions. All listening tests were scored out of 100 based on the validated rubric focusing on vocabulary recognition and functional word identification.

Pretest results revealed extremely low listening performance among the participants, consistent with limited prior exposure to authentic spoken English. Table 4.1 below summarizes the individual pretest scores. The scores ranged from 5 to 30, with the majority falling between 10 and 20, indicating widespread difficulties in recognizing vocabulary and functional words in connected speech.

Table 1. Students' Pretest Scores

No.	Student	Score
1	S1	15
2	S2	10
3	S3	20
4	S4	12
5	S5	18
6	S6	25

7	S7	8
8	S8	22
9	S9	14
10	S10	16
11	S11	19
12	S12	13
13	S13	17
14	S14	11
15	S15	23
16	S16	9
17	S17	21
18	S18	7
19	S19	30

Posttest results demonstrated a dramatic improvement following the implementation of the Missing Lyrics technique. Table 4.2 presents the individual posttest scores. Scores ranged from 60 to 90, with most students achieving between 70 and 80, reflecting enhanced ability to recognize vocabulary and functional words through focused song-based listening.

Table 2. Students' Posttest Scores

No.	Student	Score
1	S1	75
2	S2	70
3	S3	80
4	S4	68
5	S5	78
6	S6	85
7	S7	65
8	S8	82
9	S9	72
10	S10	74
11	S11	79
12	S12	71
13	S13	77
14	S14	69
15	S15	83
16	S16	66
17	S17	81
18	S18	63
19	S19	90

Descriptive statistics comparing pretest and posttest performance are displayed in Table 4.3. The mean score rose sharply from 16.84 (SD = 6.72) in the pretest to 73.95 (SD = 7.81) in the posttest, indicating not only a large gain in average performance but also greater consistency among students after the treatment.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	19	16.84	6.72
Posttest	19	73.95	7.81

Inferential analysis using a paired-sample t-test confirmed that the improvement was statistically significant. Table 4.5 shows a mean difference of 57.11, with a significance value (p) of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), rejecting the null hypothesis and demonstrating that the Missing Lyrics technique produced a genuine effect on listening skills.

Table 4. Paired Samples Test

	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Posttest – Pretest	57.11	12.34	18	0.000

The paired-samples correlation analysis (Table 4.4) revealed a moderate positive relationship ($r = 0.556$) between pretest and posttest scores, suggesting that students with relatively higher initial listening ability tended to benefit more from the intervention, although gains were evident across the entire group.

Table 5. Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pretest & Posttest	19	0.556	0.014

Questionnaire data complemented the test results. The majority of students (over 84%) reported that the Missing Lyrics technique increased their motivation, focus, and active engagement. They specifically noted that English songs made listening enjoyable and helped them recognize vocabulary and functional words more easily than traditional methods. The quantitative and qualitative findings provide robust evidence that the Missing Lyrics technique significantly enhanced students' listening skills and fostered positive perceptions toward the learning process at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti.

The substantial increase in mean listening scores from 16.84 to 73.95 after only six sessions demonstrates the effectiveness of the Missing Lyrics technique in improving vocabulary recognition and functional word identification. This large gain (mean difference = 57.11) far exceeds typical improvements observed in conventional EFL listening instruction, highlighting the technique's potential as a powerful pedagogical tool. The statistically significant result ($p = 0.000$) aligns strongly with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. English songs provided comprehensible, repetitive, and enjoyable input ($i+1$), while the gap-fill task lowered anxiety and encouraged active noticing of linguistic features, thereby facilitating greater intake and retention.

The moderate correlation ($r = 0.556$) between pretest and posttest scores indicates that the technique benefited students across varying ability levels. Even low-performing learners showed meaningful progress, suggesting that Missing Lyrics is inclusive and particularly suitable for regional junior high schools where baseline listening proficiency is often limited. Students' highly positive perceptions reported increases in motivation, focus, and engagement support the findings of Murphey (1992) and Vandergrift and Goh (2012). The enjoyable nature of music transformed listening from a passive, anxiety-inducing activity into an active, rewarding experience, which in turn reinforced phonological awareness and lexical processing.

These results extend previous research on song-based listening by specifically isolating the Missing Lyrics technique's impact on bottom-up micro-skills. Unlike broader music-assisted studies, this research provides clear empirical evidence that targeted gap-fill activities with authentic songs directly enhance word recognition and functional word decoding in connected speech. From a practical standpoint, the technique offers EFL teachers a low-cost, easily implemented strategy that requires minimal technology. In resource-limited settings such as SMP Negeri 2 Baranti, English songs and printed lyrics worksheets can replace expensive audio materials while delivering superior engagement and learning outcomes.

Although the pre-experimental design limits causal generalization, the consistency between quantitative gains and qualitative perceptions strengthens the internal validity of the findings. Future studies could employ a quasi-experimental design with a control group to further validate the results. The Missing Lyrics technique proved to be an effective, engaging, and practical innovation for developing listening skills in Indonesian junior high school EFL classrooms. Teachers and curriculum developers are encouraged to integrate this approach more widely, while researchers should explore its long-term effects on other language skills and across different proficiency levels.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that the Missing Lyrics technique using English songs is highly effective in improving eighth-grade students' listening skills at SMP Negeri 2 Baranti. The pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design revealed a statistically significant increase in listening performance, with the mean score rising dramatically from 16.84 to 73.95 ($p < 0.05$). The technique successfully enhanced students' ability to recognize vocabulary and functional words in connected speech, confirming its value as a focused, bottom-up listening strategy. In addition, questionnaire responses indicated overwhelmingly positive perceptions, with students reporting higher motivation, greater focus, and active engagement during lessons. These findings provide strong empirical support for integrating authentic song-based activities into EFL listening instruction, particularly in regional Indonesian junior high schools where traditional methods often yield limited results.

The practical implications of this research are substantial for EFL teachers and curriculum developers. The Missing Lyrics technique offers a low-cost, engaging, and easily implementable alternative to conventional listening exercises, requiring only printed lyrics and audio recordings of popular English songs. By transforming passive listening into an active, enjoyable task, it not only improves linguistic micro-skills but also creates a positive classroom atmosphere that reduces anxiety and boosts learner confidence. Schools in resource-limited settings can adopt this approach to enhance listening competence without significant investment in technology or materials. The study thus contributes both theoretically—to the body of knowledge on music-assisted language learning—and practically—to innovative pedagogical strategies that align with students' interests and real-world language exposure.

Despite its promising outcomes, the study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The pre-experimental design without a control group restricts causal generalization, and the relatively small sample size (N=19) from a single class limits broader applicability. Future studies should employ a quasi-experimental design with a larger, more diverse sample across multiple schools and regions. Longitudinal research could also examine the long-term retention of listening gains and the technique's impact on other language skills such as speaking or vocabulary acquisition. Overall, the Missing Lyrics technique represents a valuable innovation that deserves wider adoption and further empirical investigation in EFL contexts.

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