



Digital Music Streaming as a Pedagogical Tool: Exploring the Role of Spotify in Enhancing EFL Students' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

Listening comprehension is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it supports learners' ability to understand spoken communication and develop overall language proficiency. The use of digital platforms has provided new opportunities for language learning, including Spotify. Previous research by Epril L. et al., involving 97 EFL students, found that learners generally had positive perceptions of using English songs on Spotify for vocabulary learning and motivation. In addition, Sari et al. reported that Spotify-based listening activities positively influenced EFL learners' listening comprehension and motivation. This study aims to examine the role of Spotify as a digital learning tool in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension. A literature review method was employed by analyzing scholarly articles, books, and previous studies related to music-assisted language learning, English songs, and digital learning platforms. The findings indicate that Spotify can support listening comprehension by increasing motivation, expanding vocabulary, improving pronunciation awareness, and providing authentic English input through songs and podcasts. Its lyrics feature also helps learners connect spoken and written language. However, slang, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and rapid speech may hinder comprehension. Therefore, appropriate material selection and instructional guidance are essential to maximize Spotify's benefits in EFL learning.

Keywords: Spotify; Listening Comprehension; EFL Learners; Digital Learning; English Songs

Received: 16 Jul 2026; Revised: 14 Agu 2026; Accepted: 18 Agu 2026; Available Online: 20 Agu 2026

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INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is a central component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because learners need to process spoken input to understand meaning, recognize vocabulary and pronunciation, and participate effectively in communication. However, listening remains challenging for many EFL learners because spoken English contains features such as reduced forms, unfamiliar vocabulary, different accents, and rapid speech. Recent research continues to identify listening as a difficult language skill, particularly when learners have limited exposure to authentic spoken English and opportunities for independent listening practice (Alzamil, 2021). Therefore, accessible learning resources that provide regular exposure to authentic English input are needed to support listening comprehension development.

The growth of digital learning has expanded opportunities for learners to access English input beyond the classroom. Audio-based platforms can provide flexible and repeated exposure to spoken English through songs, podcasts, and other authentic materials. Spotify is particularly relevant because it provides access to extensive English-language audio content and, for supported content, synchronized lyrics that allow learners to connect spoken language with its written form. Recent empirical studies have reported positive outcomes associated with Spotify-based learning (Ni'mah & Putri, 2024). For example, investigated the use of English songs on Spotify among eighth-grade students and found that the experimental group achieved higher listening scores after treatment. Their statistical analysis also showed significant differences between the groups, with Mann-Whitney significance values of 0.000 and 0.001. These findings provide empirical evidence that English songs delivered through Spotify can

support listening skill development. Similarly, Yanti (2024) involving 37 university students, found positive student responses toward Spotify for improving English listening skills, particularly because of its accessibility and learning features.

The potential of Spotify can be understood more broadly through research on music and multimodal language input. Songs provide repeated exposure to vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, and authentic expressions, while audio-visual or multimodal input can provide richer linguistic and contextual information that supports listening comprehension (Shaojie et al., 2022). Evidence from second-language research also indicates that listening to songs can contribute to pronunciation development, although its effects may differ across language-learning outcomes (Baills et al., 2021). In addition, research on multimodal input suggests that combining verbal and visual information can influence how learners process and retain linguistic information (Li et al., 2022). In Spotify-based learning, synchronized lyrics can therefore function as complementary written input while learners process spoken English.

Despite these findings, the existing evidence remains fragmented. Recent studies have primarily examined specific populations, particular types of Spotify content, or learners' perceptions and experiences rather than synthesizing the broader pedagogical role of Spotify in EFL listening comprehension. For example, recent research has examined Spotify through English songs, classroom activities, and listening experiences, but the findings are distributed across different educational contexts and learning outcomes. This indicates a need to consolidate the available evidence to clarify not only the potential benefits of Spotify but also the challenges that may affect its effectiveness. Such challenges may include unfamiliar vocabulary, slang and idiomatic expressions, cultural references, pronunciation differences, and rapid speech.

Accordingly, this literature review aims to synthesize recent research on the use of Spotify in EFL listening instruction, with particular attention to its contribution to listening comprehension, learner engagement, vocabulary and pronunciation awareness, and exposure to authentic English input. The review also examines the challenges and instructional considerations associated with Spotify-based learning. By synthesizing recent empirical findings, this study seeks to provide a clearer understanding of Spotify's pedagogical value and its potential as a supplementary digital resource for EFL listening comprehension.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative thematic synthesis approach to examine the role of Spotify in enhancing listening comprehension among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. An SLR was selected because it provides a structured and transparent procedure for identifying, screening, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant evidence from previous studies. Unlike a traditional or narrative literature review, an SLR applies predetermined search strategies and eligibility criteria to reduce selection bias and provide a more systematic synthesis of existing evidence. The review was conducted and reported following the general principles of the PRISMA 2020 framework to ensure transparency in the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of studies.

The review focused on empirical and scholarly evidence concerning Spotify, English songs, digital audio platforms, and listening comprehension in EFL contexts. The review process consisted of five main stages: (1) formulation of the search strategy; (2) identification of relevant literature; (3) screening and eligibility assessment; (4) quality assessment of the selected studies; and (5) thematic synthesis of the findings.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

A systematic literature search was conducted using Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, ERIC, and Semantic Scholar. The search was conducted using combinations of keywords and Boolean operators related to the research focus. The main search strings included: (1) "Spotify" and "EFL" and "listening comprehension"; (2) "Spotify" and "English language learning"; (3) "Spotify" and "EFL listening"; (4) "English songs" and "listening comprehension" and "EFL"; (5) "music-assisted language learning" and "listening skills"; and (6) "digital music platform" and "English learning".

The search focused primarily on studies published between 2021 and 2026 in order to emphasize recent evidence, while earlier studies were considered only when they provided essential theoretical or methodological

foundations. The search was limited to studies published in English and available as full-text academic publications.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure consistency in the selection process, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria were established before the screening stage. Studies were included when they met the following criteria: (1) The study focused on EFL or English language learning contexts; (2) The study examined Spotify, English songs, music-based learning, or digital audio resources relevant to listening instruction; (3) The study discussed listening comprehension, listening skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, motivation, or other learning outcomes related to listening development; (4) The publication was a peer-reviewed journal article, academic research article, or scholarly publication; (5) The full text was available in English; and (6) The study was published primarily within the 2021–2026 publication period.

Studies were excluded if they (1) were unrelated to EFL or English language learning, (2) did not address listening or relevant language-learning outcomes, (3) were duplicate publications, (4) were not available in full text, or (5) consisted of non-scholarly materials such as advertisements, informal websites, or unrelated media content.

Screening and Study Selection

The study selection process was conducted in several stages. First, all records identified through the database searches were collected and organized. Duplicate records were removed before the screening process. Second, the titles and abstracts of the remaining studies were screened according to the predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies that were clearly irrelevant to the research objectives were excluded at this stage. Third, the full texts of potentially relevant studies were examined to determine their eligibility. Studies that met all inclusion criteria were retained for the final synthesis.

The search process initially identified [N] records. After removing [N] duplicate records, [N] studies remained for title and abstract screening. Following this stage, [N] studies were excluded because they did not meet the eligibility criteria. The full texts of [N] studies were subsequently assessed, and [N] studies were excluded for specific reasons. Finally, [N] studies were included in the qualitative synthesis.

The complete study-selection process was documented using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram to show the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and included in the review.

Quality Assessment

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed before the synthesis stage to determine the trustworthiness and relevance of the evidence. Because the selected literature may consist of different research designs, an appropriate critical appraisal checklist was applied according to the methodological design of each study. The assessment considered aspects such as clarity of the research objectives, appropriateness of the research design, description of participants or data sources, suitability of data collection procedures, appropriateness of data analysis, and clarity of the reported findings.

Studies that demonstrated substantial methodological weaknesses or insufficient relevance to the research questions were excluded from the final synthesis. The quality assessment results were also considered when interpreting the strength and consistency of findings across studies. The use of structured critical appraisal is important because quality assessment helps reviewers evaluate the trustworthiness, relevance, and potential limitations of evidence included in a systematic review.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Relevant information from each included study was systematically extracted and organized in a data-extraction table. The extracted information included the author and publication year, research context, participants or sample, research design, type of Spotify or music-based intervention, data collection method, main findings, and limitations.

The extracted findings were then analyzed using thematic analysis based on the six-phase approach described by Braun & Clarke (2021). The analysis involved (1) familiarizing the researcher with the selected studies, (2) generating initial codes from relevant findings, (3) identifying potential themes, (4) reviewing and

comparing the themes across studies, (5) defining and naming the final themes, and (6) synthesizing and reporting the findings. Thematic synthesis was used to identify recurring patterns and differences across the selected literature.

The final themes were organized around the main research focus, including (1) listening comprehension development, (2) vocabulary and pronunciation awareness, (3) learner motivation and engagement, (4) exposure to authentic English input, (5) the role of synchronized lyrics and multimodal learning, and (6) challenges and instructional considerations in using Spotify for EFL learning. The findings from the included studies were compared and synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical potential and limitations of Spotify as a supplementary resource for EFL listening comprehension.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The review of the selected literature identified several recurring findings concerning the use of Spotify as a supplementary digital resource in EFL learning. Overall, the literature indicates that Spotify has potential to support listening comprehension through increased learner motivation, exposure to authentic English input, vocabulary development, pronunciation awareness, multimodal learning through synchronized lyrics, and opportunities for autonomous learning. However, the effectiveness of Spotify is influenced by learners' proficiency levels, the characteristics of the materials, and the way the platform is integrated into instructional activities.

One of the most consistent findings concerns the role of Spotify in increasing learners' motivation and engagement. Music is generally considered an accessible and enjoyable form of language input because learners can interact with English content that is connected to their personal interests. Recent research on music-assisted language learning indicates that songs can create positive learning experiences and encourage learners to engage with language more actively. This motivational effect can be understood through the affective dimension of second-language learning, in which learners' emotions, attitudes, and willingness to participate may influence their engagement with learning activities. Spotify can strengthen this effect because learners are able to select songs, artists, podcasts, and other audio materials based on their preferences. This degree of choice can encourage voluntary and repeated listening outside the classroom. Therefore, Spotify does not merely function as a source of listening materials but can also provide a more learner-centered learning environment in which students have greater control over their learning activities.

The literature also indicates that Spotify provides opportunities for learners to encounter authentic English language input. Unlike conventional listening exercises that are often designed specifically for instructional purposes, songs and podcasts available on Spotify can expose learners to naturally occurring pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, vocabulary, accents, and different patterns of spoken English. This is particularly relevant in EFL contexts where learners may have limited opportunities to interact with English speakers in real-life situations. Research on authentic input suggests that exposure to diverse and meaningful language materials can help learners become more familiar with how English is actually used outside the classroom. From the perspective of second-language acquisition, repeated exposure to comprehensible input is important because learners need opportunities to process language before they can gradually develop greater understanding and fluency. Spotify can therefore extend listening practice beyond classroom materials by providing flexible access to authentic English audio.

Another important finding is the contribution of Spotify-based learning to vocabulary development. English songs frequently contain everyday vocabulary, collocations, informal expressions, and contextualized language that learners may not encounter in conventional textbooks. The repeated occurrence of words and phrases in songs can provide learners with multiple opportunities to notice and process new lexical items. This finding is consistent with research on incidental vocabulary learning, which suggests that repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts can contribute to vocabulary learning and retention. The combination of auditory repetition and contextual information may help learners recognize the meaning and pronunciation of unfamiliar words. In addition, Spotify allows learners to pause, replay, and listen to the same material repeatedly, giving them greater control over the amount and frequency of exposure. This flexibility can support independent vocabulary learning, particularly when learners actively identify unfamiliar words and seek their meanings while listening.

The reviewed studies further suggest that Spotify and English songs can contribute to pronunciation awareness. Through repeated listening, learners are exposed to pronunciation features such as word stress, sentence stress, rhythm, connected speech, and intonation. Such exposure is important because learners may have difficulty recognizing spoken words when they are produced in connected or reduced forms. Songs can provide memorable auditory models that learners can listen to repeatedly and imitate. Research on music and second-language pronunciation has also indicated that musical activities may support learners' awareness of prosodic features because rhythm and melody draw attention to patterns of stress and intonation. However, the pronunciation benefits of songs should be interpreted carefully because singing does not always represent natural conversational pronunciation. Consequently, songs are better considered a supplementary source for developing pronunciation awareness rather than a complete substitute for authentic conversational listening materials.

A particularly relevant finding concerns Spotify's synchronized lyrics feature. The combination of auditory input and written lyrics provides learners with two complementary forms of linguistic information. When listening to a song, learners can hear the pronunciation while simultaneously observing the corresponding written words. This may help learners identify word boundaries, connect pronunciation with spelling, and recognize unfamiliar vocabulary that may otherwise be difficult to distinguish from continuous speech. The finding can be interpreted through the broader concept of multimodal learning, which suggests that learners may benefit when information is presented through complementary modes. Recent research on multimodal input in EFL learning indicates that combining verbal and visual information can support learners' processing of linguistic information when the two modes are appropriately coordinated. Therefore, synchronized lyrics may function as scaffolding that helps learners move from dependence on written support toward more independent listening comprehension. However, excessive reliance on lyrics may also reduce the need to process auditory information independently. For this reason, teachers may gradually reduce lyric support as learners' listening proficiency develops.

The literature also demonstrates that Spotify can contribute to learner autonomy. Because the platform provides continuous access to a wide range of audio materials, learners can determine what they listen to, when they practice, and how frequently they repeat particular materials. This flexibility is consistent with the concept of learner autonomy, in which learners take greater responsibility for decisions related to their learning process. In an EFL environment, where classroom exposure to English may be relatively limited, opportunities for self-directed listening can provide additional language practice. Learners can use Spotify to develop personal listening routines, select content appropriate to their interests, and monitor their progress through repeated exposure. Thus, Spotify can potentially extend language learning from a teacher-directed classroom activity into a more continuous form of independent learning.

Despite these benefits, the reviewed literature also reveals several challenges that may limit the effectiveness of Spotify for EFL listening instruction. Songs may contain slang, idiomatic expressions, figurative language, cultural references, contractions, and reduced forms that are difficult for learners to interpret. In addition, some songs use poetic structures or pronunciation patterns that differ from ordinary conversational English. Fast speech, unfamiliar accents, background music, and unclear articulation may further increase the cognitive demands placed on lower-proficiency learners. These challenges demonstrate that authentic input is not automatically equivalent to comprehensible input. Learners need sufficient linguistic knowledge and appropriate instructional support to process authentic materials effectively. Therefore, the selection of Spotify materials should consider learners' proficiency levels, vocabulary knowledge, learning objectives, and the linguistic characteristics of the selected content (Rahmawanti & Inggar, n.d.).

Overall, the findings suggest that Spotify has educational potential as a supplementary resource for EFL listening comprehension rather than as a replacement for structured classroom instruction. Its main advantages lie in its accessibility, variety of authentic audio materials, learner choice, repeated listening opportunities, and synchronized lyrics. These features can support motivation, vocabulary development, pronunciation awareness, listening comprehension, and learner autonomy. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of Spotify depends strongly on pedagogical implementation. Teachers should select appropriate materials, provide pre-listening and while-listening activities, explain unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural expressions when necessary, and gradually reduce visual support from lyrics as learners become more proficient. The findings therefore indicate that Spotify is most effective when it is integrated into purposeful instructional activities rather than used merely as a source of entertainment.

The synthesis also highlights an important research implication. Although existing studies generally report positive outcomes associated with music and Spotify-based language learning, the evidence remains varied in terms of participants, research designs, learning objectives, and types of audio materials. Some studies focus primarily on motivation or learner perceptions, whereas others examine vocabulary, pronunciation, or listening performance. Consequently, the positive potential of Spotify should not be interpreted as evidence that the platform alone directly improves all aspects of listening proficiency. More empirical research with controlled designs, larger samples, and clearly defined listening measures is needed to determine which Spotify-based activities are most effective for different proficiency levels and learning contexts.

CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that Spotify has potential as a supplementary digital resource for enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension by providing accessible exposure to authentic English audio, supporting vocabulary and pronunciation awareness, increasing learner motivation, and facilitating comprehension through synchronized lyrics. However, its effectiveness is not automatic, as slang, idiomatic expressions, cultural references, unfamiliar accents, and rapid speech may create difficulties, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. Therefore, Spotify should be integrated into EFL instruction through appropriate material selection and purposeful pedagogical guidance rather than being used as a replacement for conventional teaching. Future research should employ empirical, experimental, or mixed-method approaches with diverse learners to provide stronger evidence of the effectiveness of Spotify-based learning across different proficiency levels and educational contexts.

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