International Journal of
Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences

e-ISSN : 3026-0892
p-ISSN : 3026-1422

Index: Harvard, Boston, Sydney, Dimensions, Lens, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/IJHESS.v3i3.7030

Horns Up! The Integration of Heavy Metal Music as a Motivational Technique for Teaching English as a Foreign Language: A Systematic Literature Review

Jesús Romero-Argueta
Universidad de Oriente, El Salvador
jose.romero@univo.edu.sv

Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Jul 23, 2025	Aug 18, 2025	Aug 30, 2025	Sep 4, 2025

Abstract

This systematic literature review explores the integration of Heavy Metal music as a motivational tool in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), addressing an innovative yet underexplored area within pedagogical research. Drawing on three peer-reviewed studies published between 2020 and 2025 and selected through the PRISMA framework, the review examines pedagogical strategies, educational benefits, and implementation challenges associated with using Heavy Metal music in EFL classrooms. The analysis reveals that Heavy Metal's rich lexical content, rhythmic complexity, and cultural resonance significantly enhance learner engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and phonological awareness—particularly among advanced learners at B2 to C2 levels of the CEFR. Additionally, its emotionally expressive lyrics and dynamic musical structure contribute to a low-anxiety, inclusive classroom environment, supporting principles of culturally responsive teaching. Despite these advantages, barriers such as limited empirical research, the lyrical complexity of the genre, and the lack of structured pedagogical models impede broader adoption. The review highlights the need for longitudinal studies, genre-specific frameworks, and investigations into learner diversity to better

IJHESS Journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

understand the long-term effects and practical applications of this approach. Overall, the findings offer evidence-based insights for educators aiming to implement innovative, student-centered strategies that leverage the motivational potential of Heavy Metal music to enrich EFL instruction.

Keywords: Heavy Metal Music; Rock Music; English as a Foreign Language; EFL Classroom; Language Motivation

INTRODUCTION

The integration of music into language education has long been recognized as an effective strategy to enhance engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes (Chen et al., 2024). Among various musical genres, Heavy Metal music, characterized by its intense rhythms, emotive lyrics, and cultural significance, has emerged as a unique yet underexplored tool for educational purposes. While music-based pedagogies have been widely studied, the specific application of Heavy Metal music in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) remains a novel area of inquiry. This systematic literature review seeks to address this gap by exploring how this musical genre can serve as a motivational technique in EFL classrooms, leveraging its emotional and cultural resonance to foster language learning.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to diversify and innovate EFL teaching methodologies. "In the traditional classroom, the students and teachers only follow the pre-decided curriculum…" (Frost, 2000, cited by Khan et al., 2023, p. 2360), which may not resonate with all learners, particularly those with diverse cultural or musical preferences. Heavy metal music, with its global fanbase and rich lyrical content, offers an alternative setting to engage learners, especially younger or non-traditional students who may feel disconnected from standard and traditional curricula. By examining the motivational impact of heavy metal music, this study contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive and culturally relevant pedagogies, addressing the need for dynamic, student-centered approaches in EFL education.

This research is justified by the growing recognition of the role of affective factors, such as motivation and emotional engagement, in language learning success. Studies have shown that positive emotional experiences can enhance memory retention, linguistic comprehension, and learner confidence (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Heavy metal

music, with its powerful emotional appeal and narrative depth, may provide a unique medium to stimulate these affective factors, thereby improving students' engagement with English language learning (Fonseca-Mora et al., 2011). Furthermore, the global popularity of heavy metal music, spanning diverse cultural contexts, makes it a potentially universal tool for EFL instruction, warranting a systematic exploration of its efficacy.

The aim of this systematic literature review is to synthesize existing research on the use of Heavy Metal music as a motivational technique in EFL teaching. By analyzing recent and relevant studies, this review seeks to identify the lexical complexity, motivational impact, and cultural relevance associated with integrating Heavy Metal music into EFL classrooms, as well as to highlight gaps in the literature that warrant further investigation. Moreover, it seeks to display the data concerning the features of the scientific papers analyzed after being selected through the PRISMA model. Ultimately, this study aims to provide evidence-based insights for educators seeking innovative, culturally responsive methods to enhance motivation and EFL language learning through Heavy Metal music.

Literature Review

The integration of music into language learning has gained traction in recent years, with Heavy Metal music emerging as a potential resource for enhancing English language acquisition. This literature review synthesizes various research findings that explore the implications of using Heavy Metal music in teaching English, focusing on the unique characteristics of this genre that may facilitate language learning.

Heavy Metal music encloses implicit elements related to EFL language learning. Rohrmeier and Rebuschat (2012) emphasize the concept of implicit learning, which is crucial in both music acquisition and language learning. Heavy Metal music, characterized by its complex structures and rhythms, provides a rich context for implicit learning. Repeated exposure to Heavy Metal may enable learners to internalize linguistic patterns and vocabulary, akin to the way individuals naturally acquire musical features (Rohrmeier & Rebuschat, 2012). This suggests that this music genre could be particularly effective in enhancing language skills, especially regarding rhythm and phonological awareness, which are vital components of language development (Akbary et al., 2018). Moreover, the relationship between rhythm in music and phonological development is further supported by Flaugnacco et al. (2014), who found that rhythm processing can significantly influence reading abilities in children with dyslexia. Given that Heavy Metal music often features

intricate rhythmic patterns, its incorporation into English language teaching could engage learners and improve their phonological skills. By leveraging the rhythmic qualities of Heavy Metal, educators may help students enhance their reading and phonological awareness, particularly for those facing challenges in language acquisition.

Besides, the motivational aspects of using songs in ESL classrooms are highlighted by Albiladi et al. (2018), who note that music can significantly enhance student participation and engagement. Heavy Metal music, with its energetic and dynamic nature, can serve as a powerful motivator, making the learning experience enjoyable, building confidence, promoting social interaction, and encouraging active participation (Pitts, 2016). This aligns with the notion that music, including Heavy Metal, can facilitate language acquisition, particularly in terms of vocabulary retention and pronunciation. Likewise, Aguirre et al. (2016) discuss how music training can improve auditory skills and neural processing, which are critical for language acquisition. The intricate structures and fast tempos typical of Heavy Metal music present unique auditory challenges that may enhance learners' listening skills and phonological processing (Schön & Tillmann, 2015). By engaging with Heavy Metal, students can develop better auditory discrimination and processing abilities, which are important for mastering a new language (Kraus et al., 2014).

Another important element has to do with addressing anxiety and creating a fun learning environment. For instance, Bokiev et al. (2018) emphasize the potential of music to alleviate anxiety in language learning. Heavy Metal music, with its distinct style and cultural significance, can provide an engaging medium for instruction. This genre's incorporation into lessons can facilitate vocabulary and grammar acquisition in a less pressured environment, thus enhancing the overall learning experience. Also, following the same narrative, Kumar et al. (2022) discuss the need for a theoretical grounding in the use of music in language teaching. Educators may require a structured framework to effectively integrate Heavy Metal music into their curricula. By examining methodologies and research on music's benefits for language acquisition, teachers can better understand how to utilize Heavy Metal music to enhance linguistic skills and cultural understanding. This could involve developing activities that leverage the unique characteristics of Heavy Metal to improve students' engagement and comprehension (Pitts, 2016).

Despite the promising findings regarding the use of Heavy Metal music in English language teaching, several knowledge gaps remain. Most studies focus on general music

integration without specifically isolating the effects of Heavy Metal music. Future research could explore the distinct characteristics of Heavy Metal that contribute to language learning, such as its lyrical content, cultural references, and emotional impact. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess the long-term effects of Heavy Metal music on language acquisition and retention. Furthermore, researchers could investigate the potential differences in effectiveness based on learners' backgrounds, musical preferences, and proficiency levels. Understanding these factors could lead to more tailored and effective instructional strategies that utilize Heavy Metal music as a tool for language teaching.

In conclusion, the integration of Heavy Metal music into English language instruction presents a unique opportunity to enhance language acquisition through implicit learning, rhythmic engagement, and motivational benefits. While existing research highlights the potential advantages of this approach, further investigation is necessary to fully understand its implications and optimize its application in educational settings. By addressing current knowledge gaps and exploring new qualitative avenues for research, educators can better harness the power of Heavy Metal music to facilitate English language learning.

METHODS

This study adopted the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The SLR technique serves to analyze and synthesize findings from previous investigations relevant to a specific subject. The data and relevant insights were derived from scholarly journal publications spanning the years 2020 to 2025. Subsequently, all journal-based sources were gathered and filtered following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, which guided the identification, selection, and exclusion of articles in alignment with the study's thematic focus. Moreover, the PRISMA protocol was employed to identify suitable indicators, document the article retrieval process, and present comprehensive details regarding the selected studies and their outcomes.

Data collection process and technique

A meticulous search procedure was carried out, specifically targeting sources indexed in Google Scholar. This search was guided by carefully chosen terms such as “Heavy Metal music”, “English learning”, “English as a foreign language (EFL)”, and

"student learning strategies". The review concentrated on peer-reviewed publications released between 2020 and 2025, prioritizing all the studies situated within all the levels of education. Throughout the screening phase, the initial query retrieved a total of 15 relevant studies. After assessing the titles and abstracts, 6 were retained for thorough full-text evaluation. By applying the predefined inclusion and exclusion parameters, the final pool was narrowed down to 3 qualifying studies (See Table 1). Hence, the reason why only a few manuscripts were analyzed is due to the limited publications regarding the research topic. In conclusion, the 12 discarded studies were related to other music genres rather than Heavy Metal music.

Table 1. *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Language	English	Non-English
Paper reviews	Peer-revied papers	Non-peer-revied papers
Research setting	EFL learning and Heavy Metal music	Non-EFL learning and Heavy Metal music
Cited manuscripts	Journal papers	Non-journal papers
Access	Open-access journal	Paid access
Year of publication	2020-2025	Before 2015
Papers quality	Indexed journal	Non-Indexed journal

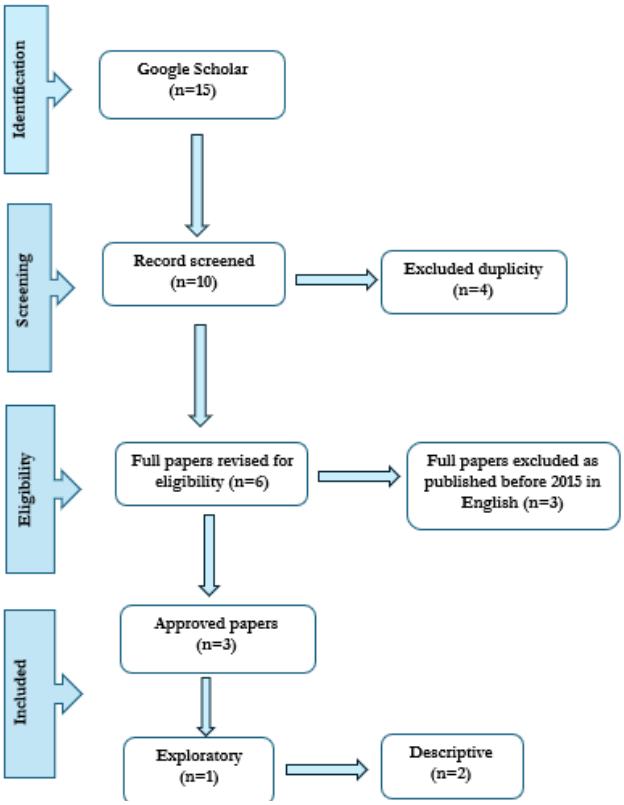

Figure 1. PRISMA flow chart for research selection

RESULTS

To comprehensively explore the potential of Heavy Metal music as a motivational technique in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), this systematic literature review synthesizes findings from three peer-reviewed studies identified through the PRISMA framework. Specifically, these studies, spanning 2020 to 2025, provide insights into the pedagogical strategies, benefits, and challenges associated with integrating Heavy Metal music into EFL classrooms. The results, therefore, highlight the genre's lexical complexity, motivational impact, and cultural relevance, while also identifying limitations and gaps that inform future research directions.

Table 2. *Article tittle: A Small-Scale Corpus Study of Metal Songs: Metallica's 'The Black Album'*

Author (s) & year	Research design	Results	Gaps	Future research
Shahrokhi and Önen (2025)	The study is a small-scale corpus analysis focusing on the educational value of metal song lyrics in English Language Teaching (ELT). It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses to examine the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) levels of words and idioms, as well as prevalent lexico-grammatical structures in a corpus of approximately 3,000 words from Metallica's The Black Album (1991). The corpus includes lyrics from twelve songs, selected for their popularity and relatively minimal use of derogatory language, making them suitable for classroom use.	**1. CEFR Levels of words and idioms** • Approximately 80% of the words in the corpus fall within CEFR levels A1, A2, and B1, with a significant portion of A1 words being function words (e.g., articles, prepositions, conjunctions), which are less significant for advanced vocabulary development. • Idiomatic expressions are predominantly at the C2 level (25%), followed by C1 and B2 levels (20% each), with 15% at B1, 5% at A2, and 15% unclassified. • Some words and idioms, such as archaic forms (e.g., "lest," "thou," "thee," "thyself") and neologisms (e.g., "unforgiven"), were not classified within the CEFR framework, with Songs 1, 3, and 4 containing the majority of these terms. • Compared to Pop song lyrics, Metal song lyrics are lexically more demanding, requiring knowledge up to the C1 level to comprehend 95% of the lyrics, versus B1 for pop songs.	1. The study is limited by the small size of the corpus (3,000 words from a single album), which restricts the generalizability of the findings. 2. There is a lack of prior corpus studies specifically examining the CEFR levels of idiomatic expressions in song lyrics, particularly in the Metal genre, making this an underexplored area. 3. The study notes that metal music has been largely overlooked in corpus analyses compared to genres like Pop, Rock, and Hip-Hop, despite its	1. To expand the corpus size by including a broader range of Metal songs from various artists, subgenres (e.g., Heavy Metal, Thrash Metal, Hard Rock), and time periods to enhance the reliability and generalizability of findings. 2. To investigate the practical effectiveness of using metal song-based activities in ELT classrooms, focusing on their impact on vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and learner motivation. 3. To conduct comparative studies across different music genres to further

	2. Lexico-grammatical structures • Five predominant lexico-grammatical structures were identified: personal pronouns (45.35%, ~386 occurrences), determiners (33.84%, 288 occurrences), imperatives (8.34%, 71 occurrences), modal verbs (7.28%, 62 occurrences), and metaphors/similes (5.17%, 44 occurrences). • Personal pronouns (e.g., "I," "you") create a conversational tone, fostering a dialogic connection between the singer and listener, which enhances learner engagement. • Imperatives and modal verbs contribute to the dialogic nature of the lyrics, offering practical examples for teaching commands, obligations, and possibilities. • Metaphors and similes, though less frequent than in other genres (e.g., 38% in 2023 hit songs vs. 5.17% in this corpus), provide opportunities for creative language use and critical thinking. • The frequent use of function words (over 40% of the corpus) aligns with findings from other song lyric analyses, indicating their role in grammatical cohesion but limited contribution to advanced vocabulary learning. **3. Educational implications** • Metal song lyrics are particularly suitable for advanced learners (B2–C2) due to their complex lexical items and idiomatic expressions. • The conversational tone, driven by personal pronouns and imperatives, makes the lyrics relatable and engaging, supporting vocabulary acquisition and conversational skills. • Metaphors and modal verbs offer opportunities for teaching nuanced meanings, cultural themes, and creative language use, enhancing critical thinking and cultural awareness.	potential to introduce more demanding lexical items. 4. The analysis did not explore the effectiveness of song-based activities derived from the findings, limiting insights into practical classroom applications.	elucidate the unique pedagogical contributions of Metal music in language learning. 4. To explore the long-term effects of incorporating Metal song lyrics on learners' linguistic skills, cultural awareness, and critical thinking abilities. 5. To analyze a larger dataset to identify additional lexico-grammatical structures and refine the categorization of words and idioms by CEFR levels.

Table 3. *Article title: Students Perspective on the Use of Rock Song in Learning to Improve Students Vocabulary*

Author (s) & year	Research design	Results	Gaps	Future research
Alghifari et al. (2022)	This is a descriptive study utilizing a mixed-methods approach to explore students' perspectives on using rock songs as a medium to enhance English vocabulary learning. The study was conducted at SMP Sabiluddin Masjid, involving 70 eighth-grade students. Data were collected through a questionnaire with 10 questions using a 4-point Likert scale and semi-structured group interviews with randomly selected students. The analysis combined quantitative questionnaire results with qualitative interview findings to describe students' perceptions.	**1. Students' challenges with vocabulary** **Questionnaire findings** • 66.2% of students (20.3% strongly agree, 45.9% agree) reported difficulty understanding English sentences due to limited vocabulary. • 50% of students (5.4% strongly agree, 44.6% agree) found it hard to concentrate when using books as a learning medium. • 45.9% of students (13.5% strongly agree, 32.4% agree) felt bored with book-based learning materials. • 75.7% of students (12.2% strongly agree, 63.5% agree) struggled to acquire new English vocabulary due to limited exposure. **Interview findings** • Students (S1, S2, S3, S4) emphasized that mastering English vocabulary facilitates communication, reading, writing, speaking, and completing assignments. For example, S1 noted that vocabulary mastery makes speaking English easier, while S3 highlighted its role in supporting ambitions to study or travel abroad. **2. Motivation and engagement** • Students found Rock songs to be a fun and engaging learning medium, increasing motivation to learn English vocabulary. S1 stated, "Learning [with] song is fun, besides being able to learn English vocabulary, I can	**1.** The study is limited to a single school (SMP Sabiluddin Masjid) and a specific group of 70 eighth-grade students, which may limit generalizability. **2.** The specific rock songs used were not detailed, making it unclear which songs or lyrical features were most effective. **3.** The study did not quantify the extent of vocabulary improvement (e.g., number of words learned or retained) or assess long-term retention. **4.** The analysis did not explore the impact of different teaching strategies or classroom activities paired with rock songs.	1. To conduct studies with larger and more diverse participant groups across multiple schools to improve generalizability. 2. To specify and analyze the types of rock songs used (e.g., subgenres, lyrical complexity) to identify which are most effective for vocabulary learning. 3. To investigate the long-term impact of rock song-based learning on vocabulary retention and overall English proficiency. 4. To explore the effectiveness of specific classroom activities (e.g., lyric analysis, gap-fill exercises) when using Rock songs to enhance vocabulary acquisition. 5. To compare the effectiveness of Rock songs with other music genres or learning media to determine their relative pedagogical value.

		also enjoy listening to songs given by the teacher." • The use of Rock songs created a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere, reducing stress and enhancing participation (Shehadeh & Farrah, 2016). **3. Effectiveness of Rock songs for vocabulary acquisition** • Students reported that Rock songs helped them acquire new vocabulary through exposure to diverse words in the lyrics (S1, S3). • The repetitive nature of playing songs in class made it easier for students to remember new vocabulary, particularly verbs and adjectives (S2, S4). S4 noted, "It is easier to remember the new vocabulary because when learning the song is repetitive several times and activities in class that can support to get new vocabulary." • Song lyrics provided a different and effective learning experience compared to traditional methods, supporting vocabulary retention (Dilago et al., 2022).		

Table 4. *Article title: What Makes Heavy Metal 'Heavy'?*

Author (s) & year	Research design	Results	Gaps	Future research
Miller (2021)	This is a theoretical and philosophical study exploring the aesthetic concept of "heaviness" in heavy metal music, a subgenre of rock. The study draws on musicological,	**1. Challenges in defining heaviness** • The concept of "heaviness" is difficult to articulate due to the radical stylistic diversity within Heavy Metal, making it challenging to establish a unified genre concept (Gracyk, 2016).	1. The study does not provide empirical data or quantitative analysis to support claims about heaviness, relying instead	1. To conduct empirical studies to quantify how specific musical features (e.g., distortion levels, tempo) contribute to perceived heaviness across

sociological, and philosophical perspectives to analyze what constitutes "heaviness." It uses qualitative analysis, referencing music theorists, aesthetic philosophers, and examples from heavy metal bands to argue that defining "heaviness" is complex due to the genre's stylistic diversity and perceptually distinct features.	• No single feature logically defines heaviness, as it involves a combination of musical properties that are sometimes contradictory (e.g., fast vs. slow tempos, complex vs. minimalist compositions). **2. The gestalt of Heavy Metal:** • Heavy Metal's "Gestalt" is often understood as the expression of power, characterized by loud guitars, distortion, and intensity (Keil, 1995). This captures diverse subgenres like Glam Metal, Thrash Metal (e.g., Slayer, Metallica), and Black Metal. • However, this definition struggles to account for variations, such as the slow, monotonic style of stoner Metal (e.g., Sleep's *Dopesmoker*), which evokes inertia rather than dynamic energy. **3. Musical features of heaviness** • **Loudness and distortion:** Heavy Metal is defined by "loudnessness" and heavily distorted guitars, which produce complex harmonic overtones, contributing to textural richness (Berger, 1999). Distorted guitar timbre is the primary feature associated with heaviness. • **Power chords:** The power chord (root and fifth) is a core harmonic element, amplified and distorted to create sonic potency and resonance, distinguishing Heavy Metal from other genres (Berger & Fales, 2005). • **Tempo extremes:** Heaviness can stem from both extremely fast tempos (e.g., Thrash Metal's frenetic energy) and extremely slow tempos (e.g., Moom Metal's deliberate pacing), creating contrasting perceptions of heaviness (Berger, 1999). • **Pitch variations:** Heaviness is achieved through sharp pitch contrasts (e.g., Slayer's *Raining Blood*) or low-frequency, monophonic textures via down-tuned guitars and quad-tracking.	on theoretical and anecdotal evidence. 2. It lacks detailed analysis of specific songs or subgenres beyond broad examples, limiting its depth in exploring variations within Heavy Metal. 3. The role of listener perception and subjective experience is underexplored, despite acknowledgment of diverse perceptions of heaviness. 4. Non-guitar-based Heavy Metal subgenres (e.g., Synth Metal) are mentioned but not analyzed, leaving gaps in understanding their contribution to heaviness.	subgenres. 2. To analyze specific songs or albums to compare heaviness within and across Heavy Metal subgenres, addressing variations like Synth Metal or minimalist compositions. 3. To investigate listener perceptions of heaviness through psychological or sociological studies to account for subjective and cultural influences. 4. To explore how production techniques (e.g., quad-tracking, mixing) impact the perception of heaviness beyond raw musical elements. 5. To compare heaviness in Heavy Metal to other genres (e.g., Punk, Hardcore) to refine its aesthetic boundaries.

- **Structural complexity vs. simplicity:** Heaviness manifests in both technically complex compositions and minimalist, repetitive guitar riffs, which shape the listening experience through precision and depth.

4. **Lyrical content:**

- Heavier subgenres (e.g., Death Metal, Black Metal, Doom Metal) often feature dark, transgressive themes like war, apocalypse, death, and despair, which enhance the perception of heaviness (e.g., Black Sabbath's early recordings).
- However, lyrical content alone does not define heaviness, as seen in stoner Metal's lighter themes (e.g., marijuana in Sleep's *Dopesmoker*), suggesting the musical treatment of lyrics matters more than their subject matter.

5. **Aesthetic of noise:**

- Heavy Metal is often viewed as an exaggerated form of rock's "surplus noise" (loudness, distortion, power chords), distinguishing it from other Rock styles (Keil, 1995).
- This "surplus noise" view provides a basic framework for identifying heaviness but struggles with fine-grained judgments (e.g., comparing heaviness between two Heavy Metal songs like Sleep's *Jerusalem* vs. *Rage in Band*).

6. **Cultural and historical context:**

- The music industry's push for commercialization sometimes dilutes heaviness, transforming it into cliché melodies or saccharine ballads, which complicates its definition as a genre concept.
- Heavy Metal's noisiness has been used controversially, e.g., as a psychological tool in interrogation settings, highlighting its visceral impact.

DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review underscores the potential of Heavy Metal music as a novel and effective motivational technique in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Specifically, the findings from the three analyzed studies (Shahrokhi & Önen, 2025; Alghifari et al., 2022; Miller, 2021) provide a multifaceted perspective on how Heavy Metal music can be integrated into EFL classrooms, emphasizing its lexical complexity, motivational impact, and unique aesthetic qualities. Consequently, this discussion synthesizes these findings, addresses their implications for EFL pedagogy, and identifies avenues for future research to strengthen the application of Heavy Metal music in language education.

Pedagogical potential of Heavy Metal music in EFL

The integration of Heavy Metal music into EFL teaching offers several pedagogical advantages, particularly in enhancing learner engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and phonological development. For instance, Shahrokhi and Önen's (2025) corpus analysis of Metallica's The Black Album reveals that Heavy Metal lyrics contain a significant proportion of advanced lexical items (B2–C2 CEFR levels) and complex lexico-grammatical structures, such as metaphors, imperatives, and modal verbs. As a result, these features make Heavy Metal music particularly suitable for advanced learners, as they provide opportunities to engage with nuanced language, cultural themes, and creative expressions. Moreover, the conversational tone created by personal pronouns and imperatives fosters a dialogic connection, which can enhance learner motivation and facilitate conversational skill development. This aligns with Albiladi et al. (2018) and Bokiev et al. (2018), who emphasize that music creates an engaging and low-anxiety learning environment, thereby promoting active participation and reducing affective barriers to language learning.

Furthermore, Alghifari et al.'s (2022) study on rock music, a genre closely related to Heavy Metal, underscores the motivational benefits of using songs in EFL classrooms. In this context, students reported that rock songs made learning vocabulary more enjoyable and memorable due to their repetitive nature and engaging melodies. Although the study focused on rock rather than Heavy Metal specifically, its findings suggest that Heavy Metal's energetic rhythms and emotive lyrics could similarly enhance vocabulary retention and learner motivation, particularly for younger learners who may find traditional methods

monotonous. Additionally, the rhythmic complexity of Heavy Metal, as noted by Flaugnacco et al. (2014), could further support phonological awareness and reading skills, especially for learners with language acquisition challenges, such as those with dyslexia.

Similarly, Miller's (2021) exploration of "heaviness" in Heavy Metal music provides a theoretical foundation for understanding its cultural and aesthetic appeal, which can be leveraged in EFL settings. In particular, the genre's intense musical features (eg., loudness, distortion, power chords, and tempo extremes) create a visceral and immersive experience that can captivate learners' attention and foster emotional engagement. Moreover, the dark, transgressive themes in heavier subgenres (e.g., death metal, black metal) may resonate with learners who connect with countercultural or expressive narratives, thereby making Heavy Metal a culturally relevant tool for diverse student populations. This aligns with Khan et al.'s (2023) critique of traditional curricula, which often fail to engage learners with diverse cultural or musical preferences.

Challenges and limitations

Despite its potential, the integration of Heavy Metal music into EFL teaching faces several challenges. First and foremost, the limited scope of existing research, as evidenced by the small number of studies (n=3) meeting the inclusion criteria, indicates that Heavy Metal music remains underexplored compared to other genres like Pop or Rock. For example, Shahrokhi and Önen (2025) note the small corpus size (3,000 words from one album), which restricts the generalizability of their findings. Likewise, Alghifari et al.'s (2022) study is confined to a single school and does not specify the songs used, making it difficult to assess the applicability of their findings to Heavy Metal specifically. In addition, Miller's (2021) theoretical analysis, while insightful, lacks empirical data to validate its claims about heaviness, thus limiting its direct applicability to classroom settings.

Another challenge is the potential mismatch between Heavy Metal's complex lyrical content and the proficiency levels of beginner or intermediate learners. In this regard, Shahrokhi and Önen (2025) found that while 80% of words in their corpus align with A1–B1 CEFR levels, idiomatic expressions and metaphors often require C1–C2 proficiency, which may pose difficulties for lower-level learners. Furthermore, the cultural and thematic content of Heavy Metal, particularly in heavier subgenres, may not appeal to all students or may be deemed inappropriate in certain educational contexts due to its dark or controversial themes (Miller, 2021). Therefore, educators must carefully select songs with

minimal derogatory language, as Shahrokhi and Önen (2025) did, to ensure suitability for classroom use.

Finally, the lack of structured pedagogical frameworks for integrating Heavy Metal music, as noted by Kumar et al. (2022), poses a practical challenge. Without clear guidelines on how to design activities (e.g., lyric analysis, gap-fill exercises, or discussions of cultural themes), teachers may struggle to effectively incorporate Heavy Metal into their curricula. Consequently, this highlights the need for professional development and resources to support educators in leveraging this genre effectively.

Implications for EFL pedagogy

The findings suggest several practical implications for EFL educators. Firstly, Heavy Metal music can be used to design engaging, student-centered activities that cater to diverse learner profiles. For example, teachers could use songs with conversational lyrics to teach functional language (e.g., imperatives for giving instructions) or metaphors to foster critical thinking and cultural discussions. In addition, the repetitive nature of Heavy Metal songs can be harnessed for vocabulary drills or pronunciation practice, capitalizing on the genre's rhythmic qualities to enhance phonological awareness (Flaugnacco et al., 2014). For advanced learners, analyzing lyrical themes (e.g., war, despair, or rebellion) can provide opportunities to explore cultural contexts and develop higher-order thinking skills.

Secondly, Heavy Metal music can create a low-anxiety, inclusive classroom environment, particularly for non-traditional or disengaged learners. By aligning teaching materials with students' musical preferences, educators can foster a sense of ownership and motivation, as supported by Alghifari et al. (2022). As a result, this approach aligns with the broader discourse on culturally responsive pedagogies, which emphasize the importance of connecting learning materials to students' interests and identities (Khan et al., 2023).

Thirdly, the integration of Heavy Metal music requires careful planning to address its challenges. In particular, educators should select songs with accessible vocabulary and appropriate themes, scaffold activities to match learners' proficiency levels, and integrate multimedia resources (e.g., music videos, interviews with bands) to contextualize the lyrics. Moreover, collaborative activities, such as group discussions or creative writing inspired by song themes, can further enhance engagement and social interaction (Pitts, 2016).

Future research

The review identifies several gaps that warrant further investigation. First, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of Heavy Metal music on language acquisition, retention, and learner motivation. Such studies could quantify improvements in vocabulary, pronunciation, or reading skills and explore whether these gains are sustained over time. Second, comparative studies across music genres (e.g., Heavy Metal vs. pop or classical) could elucidate the unique pedagogical contributions of Heavy Metal, as suggested by Shahrokhi and Önen (2025). Third, research should examine the effectiveness of specific classroom activities (e.g., lyric gap-fills, pronunciation exercises) when using Heavy Metal songs, addressing the gap noted by Alghifari et al. (2022).

Additionally, studies should explore how learner characteristics (eg., age, cultural background, musical preferences, and proficiency levels) influence the effectiveness of Heavy Metal music in EFL learning. For instance, Heavy Metal may resonate more with adolescent or young adult learners who identify with its rebellious or emotive qualities, but its appeal to other demographics remains underexplored. Finally, the development of evidence-based pedagogical frameworks for integrating Heavy Metal music, including teacher training modules and activity guides, would support its practical implementation in diverse educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the integration of Heavy Metal music into EFL teaching represents a promising, yet underexplored, approach to enhancing learner motivation and language acquisition. Its complex lexical content, rhythmic qualities, and cultural resonance offer unique opportunities to engage learners, foster phonological and vocabulary development, and create inclusive learning environments. However, challenges such as limited research, lyrical complexity, and the need for structured frameworks must be addressed to maximize its potential. By building on the insights from this review and addressing its identified gaps, educators and researchers can harness the power of Heavy Metal music to innovate EFL pedagogy, thereby making language learning a more dynamic and culturally relevant experience. Future research should prioritize empirical studies, diverse learner populations, and practical applications to ensure that Heavy Metal music becomes a viable and effective tool in the EFL classroom.

Dedication

Horns up! This work is dedicated to the bands whose powerful music, uncompromising messages, and masterful lyrics have deeply influenced my teaching philosophy and inspired the very foundation of this research. To Saxon, Elvenking, Forefather, Týr, Blind Guardian, Iron Fire, Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath, Ensiferum, Falconer, Helloween, Dreamlore, Testament, Sabaton, Kalidia, Madhouse, Asylum Pyre, and many others, your music has been more than sound; it has been a classroom, a conversation, and a catalyst for critical thought.

To my Metalhead friends across the globe, those who headbang with passion and think deeply about the world, thank you for reminding me that learning does not have to be conventional to be powerful. May this work be a testament to the idea that Heavy Metal is not just noise, but a force of creativity, connection, and education.

REFERENCES

Aguirre, D.., Bustinza, D., & Garvich, M. (2016). Influence of Songs in Primary School Students' Motivation for Learning English in Lima, Peru. *English Language Teaching*, 9, 178-191. http://doi.org/10.5539/ELT.V9N2P178

Akbary, M., Shahriari, H., & Hosseini Fatemi, A. (2016). The value of song lyrics for teaching and learning English phrasal verbs: a corpus investigation of four music genres. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 12(4), 344–356. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2016.1216121

Albiladi, Waheeb S., Abdeen, H., & Lincoln, F. (2018). Learning English through Movies: Adult English Language Learners' Perceptions. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*. http://doi.org/10.17507/TPLS.0812.01

Alghifari, H., Adi, S. & Caterine, W. (2022). Students Perspective on the Use of Rock Song in Learning to Improve Students Vocabulary. *Edu-Ling: Journal of English Education and Linguistics*. 6. 18-25. https://doi.org/10.32663/edu-ling.v6i1.3192

Berger, H. M. (1999). *Metal, rock, and jazz: Perception and the phenomenology of musical experience*. Wesleyan University Press.

Berger, H. M., & Fales, C. (2005). "Heaviness" in the perception of heavy metal guitar timbres: The match of perceptual and acoustic features over time. In P. D. Greene & T. Porcello (Eds.), *Wired for sound: Engineering and technologies in sonic cultures* (pp. 181–197). Wesleyan University Press.

Bokiev, D., Aralas, D., Ismail, Liliati., & Othman, M. (2018). Utilizing Music and Songs to Promote Student Engagement in ESL Classrooms. International *Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. http://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/V8-I12/5015

Chen, M., Mohammadi, M., & Izadpanah, S. (2024). Language learning through music on the academic achievement, creative thinking, and self-esteem of the English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. *Acta Psychologica*, 247, 104318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104318

Dilago, S. P., Liando, N. V. F., & Kukus, F. (2022). Student's Perceptions of Using Song Lyrics as a Media to Improve Vocabulary Mastery. *Journal of Teaching English, Linguistics, and Literature*, Volume 1(No. 5), 643. https://ejurnal.unima.ac.id/index.php/jotell/article/view/4081

Flaugnacco, E., Lopez, L., Terribili, C., Zoia, S., Buda, S., Tilli, S., Monasta, L., Montico, M., Sila, A., Ronfani, L., & Schön, D. (2014). Rhythm perception and production predict reading abilities in developmental dyslexia. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8. https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00392

Fonseca-Mora, C., Toscano-Fuentes, C., & Wermke, K. (2011). Melodies that help: The relation between language aptitude and musical intelligence. *International Journal of English Studies*, 22(1), 101–118. https://ssrn.com/abstract=1815339

Gracyk, T. (2016). Heavy metal: Genre? Style? Subculture? *Philosophy Compass*, 12(12), 775–785. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12368

Keil, C. (1995). Running with the Devil: Power, Gender and Madness in Heavy Metal Music. By Robert Walser. Hanover & London:Wesleyan University Press, 1993, 222 + 12 pages of photographs, bibliographical references, discography and index. *Popular Music*, 14(1), 131–135. https://doi:10.1017/S0261143000007704

Khan, N. W., Rizvi, Z., Iqbal, H., & Asghar, Z. (2023). A Comparative Study of Task-Based Approach and Traditional Approach in English Language Teaching. *Elementary Education Online*, 20(4), 2357–2370. https://ilkogretim-online.org/index.php/pub/article/view/4440

Kraus, N.., Slater, J.., Thompson, Elaine C.., Hornickel, Jane., Strait, Dana L.., Nicol, T.., & White-Schwoch, Travis. (2014). Auditory learning through active engagement with sound: biological impact of community music lessons in at-risk children. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 8. http://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2014.00351

Kumar, T., Akhter, S., Yunus, M. M., & Shamsy, A. (2022). Use of music and songs as pedagogical tools in teaching English as foreign language contexts. *Education Research International*, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3384067

MacIntyre, P., & Gregersen, T. (2012). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 2(2), 193–213. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.2.4

Miller, J. (2021) What Makes Heavy Metal 'Heavy'? *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 80, 70-82. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaac/kpab065

Pitts, S. E. (2016). Music, language, and learning: Investigating the impact of a music workshop project in four English early years settings. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 17(20). http://www.ijea.org/v17n20/

Rohrmeier, M.., & Rebuschat, P. (2012). Implicit Learning and Acquisition of Music. *Topics in cognitive science*, 4 4, 525-53. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-8765.2012.01223.x

Schön, D.., & Tillmann, B.. (2015). Short- and long-term rhythmic interventions: perspectives for language rehabilitation. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1337. http://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12635

Shahrokhi, F., & Önen, S. (2025). A Small-Scale Corpus Study of Metal Songs: Metallica's 'The Black Album'. *Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 22(1), 34-54. https://doi.org/10.33711/yyuefd.1544982