



Paper Type: Original Article



The Role of English Songs in Enhancing the Speaking Skill, Vocabulary, and Cultural Awareness of Iranian Undergraduate TEFL Students

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Received: 12 September, 2024

Revised: 15 November, 2024

Accepted: 08 January, 2025

Abstract

Urban contemporary music has gained remarkable popularity among individuals all over the world. This genre has significant effects on educational fields like English language learning. By incorporating cultural awareness, it enriches the learning experience. Bearing this fact in mind, the present study attempted to explore the relationship between the speaking skill and cultural awareness of Iranian undergraduate students through this genre of music. For this purpose, 124 TEFL students were selected to join the study. By adopting exploratory sequential mixed methods design in the qualitative phase, five students were invited to participate in the sessions of semi-structured or unstructured interviews for a thematic data analysis procedure. Although the results revealed a positive connection among English urban music, participants' speaking skill, and vocabulary mastery, the participants were found tending to avoid using them in public, workplaces, and educational/professional contexts, except among close friends. In other words, listening to these songs led students to the ambivalent use of their terms. Furthermore, the cultural findings suggested that students' favorite urban music stars' background profiles were important to their knowledge of target language culture. The analysis in this part provided critical data for developing a well-formed questionnaire to measure the effect of English urban music on students' speaking skill and cultural awareness in practice. Therefore, in the quantitative phase, the researchers tried to develop a 99-item questionnaire.

Keywords: English urban music, Cultural awareness, Iranian undergraduate TEFL students, Speaking skill.

I | INTRODUCTION



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When it comes to learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the most attention is paid to the ability to speak English fluently and clearly. In this regard, urban contemporary music which is globally one of the most popular and desirable instruments (Pennycook, 2007) among people especially the younger generation, may help EFL learners perform better in their language use as they hold a suitable resource of mnemonic strategies to help learners retain the information adeptly (Fiore, 2018). This can also happen while they are enjoying its rhythm and attempting to sing along with the lyrics. Thereby, it can play a role in fostering their proficiency in English through authentic language contexts. As explained by Vadivel (2021), "by comprehending and examining the lyrics and context



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10.22034/jsllt.2025.22125.1054



of a song, learners can attain a better grasp of foreign language and culture”. Surprisingly, a large number of people and of course English language learners show their interests in this trending industry.

Kelley (2006) mentioned that English urban music can be considered as an educational tool which leaves positive impact on EFL students. One thoughtful issue is that not only may this music lead to a higher level of English language development, but it may also provide greater insights and conceptions of cultural elements existing within it. Another noteworthy point is the concept of vocabulary proficiency through music, which serves as one of the major basics and sub-skills of the English language speaking in the EFL curriculum. It relevantly involves significant influences on EFL learners’ fluency and accuracy. In the same way, there is a reflective concern that if individuals intend to enhance their speaking skill by listening to their favorite fast-beat English songs, they may have the opportunity to promote a wider range of vocabulary used in them.

As Hidayati (2020) suggested, everything needs to begin with its fundamentals, and so does the speaking skill. Accordingly, inadequate knowledge of English vocabulary may lead to EFL learners’ incapability of producing influential utterances in English. In this respect, delivering an eloquent speech needs accurate knowledge of a wide range of words, and fast-beat English songs can be considered as a substantial source of new English words, idioms, and phrases. To confirm it, Chesley (2011) revealed the positive influence of hip-hop music on vocabulary utilization by non-African American adolescents considering the related cultural perception and other musical factors. In the same context, Rossen (2019) argued that urban music offers “an extensive corpus of low-frequency words” but agreed that learners who enjoyed the process of listening to music rather than reading a book get the most out of their vocabulary expansion. Therefore, on the threshold of English urban music industry, this novel music genre is to be a concern for language instructors. For this reason, Lestari (2020) acknowledged teachers’ attempts to adapt to new teaching methods, applying fast-beat English songs in the classroom, due to the lack of exposure to English contexts. Jones (2022) found that “incorporating hip-hop pedagogy into English curricula provides an opportunity for educators to integrate youth culture effectively into teaching and learning in a culturally relevant way” (p. 94). This finding aligns with Lestari’s study, which indicated that students experience happiness in learning English when exposed to fast-beat songs. Savitri & Rahman (2016) also mentioned significant improvements in students’ vocabulary mastery through urban music. However, the potential applicability of this music within the cultural context of the Islamic-Iranian agenda remains debatable. By virtue of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s constitution, studies on the effectiveness of fast-beat English songs in educational settings are poorly welcome. To fill this gap, finding the relationship between Iranian undergraduate TEFL students’ speaking skill, knowledge of the new vocabulary, and understanding of the relevant cultural context of urban music became the main concerns of the researchers in this study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally, the relationship between music and language has been critically navigated throughout various research papers. In this regard, Brandt (1986) emphasized music as an educational curriculum that made a crucial contribution to the process of language learning so that children would “find an opportunity to consolidate physical, emotional, and intellectual responses to structured stimuli in a non-threatening educational setting” (p. 1). Under this phenomenon, many EFL learners cogitate about listening to music with the condition to prompt their language proficiency and develop their vocabulary development as an absolutely demanding task. Looking upon the well-regarded music genre, urban music, Hicks (1987) featured fast-beat English songs as an effective instruction for preschool children, including verbal and physical aspects throughout the communication. The positive footprint of urban music in the relevant curriculum was also emphasized. Gaijandren (2021) came up with the conclusion that fast-beat English songs could serve as supplementary materials for teachers who seek additional content in ESL classrooms. Hicks also finalized that these songs could not stand alone in providing all



the components of teaching process and was meant to be part of the ESL pedagogy. Meanwhile, [Lestari \(2020\)](#) reported that the applicability of fast-beat songs within educational settings is dependent on students' tastes toward music genres as if it would be rather practical for them to engage more in language learning while enjoying them.

Back to the main concern in this study, urban music has endured many restrictions in some societies for decades; however, English urban music is also rising in popularity and increasingly flourishing among the Iranian youth. Even though there were no relevant studies in this specific area or further research based on the connection between this music and the Iranian youth's language skills, this paper aims to fill this gap and investigate the relationship between fast-beat English songs, language proficiency, vocabulary skills, and cultural awareness among Iranian TEFL undergraduates.

III. AIM OF THE STUDY

The new Iranian generation is increasingly drawn to urban music. To put it another way, this genre of music is played by the Iranian youth in their cars, stores, and even in their privacy. Also, Iranian BA TEFL students spend a remarkable amount of their time listening to fast-beat English songs even for fun in their leisure time, which has a critical impact on their awareness of the linguistic and cultural elements. So, as it appears, students' speaking skill may be influenced by linguistic inputs like the vocabulary items they are exposed to. What matters most here is the importance of the speaking proficiency of Iranian BA TEFL students. To this end, the researchers in this study tried to explore and explain the relationship between students' speaking skill, the knowledge of new vocabulary, and understanding of the relevant cultural context of this genre. In other words, the current investigation sought to find suitable answers to the following questions:

RQ1. How is Iranian BA TEFL students' vocabulary mastery in speaking related to urban music?

RQ2. How is urban music related to Iranian BA TEFL students' understanding of target language culture?

RQ3. Is there any valid instrument to measure the effect of target language urban music on BA TEFL students' speaking proficiency?

IV. METHODOLOGY

1. Study Design

To compensate for the weaknesses and take advantage of the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study used an exploratory sequential mixed method to gain initial deep insights on participants' perceptions about English urban music. The study aimed to explore its particular relationship with their speaking proficiency, focusing on the underlying vocabularies and cultural awareness. To do so, the researchers employed a qualitative approach in the first stage to delve deeply into the relationship between Iranian BA TEFL students' speaking skill, vocabulary mastery, and cultural awareness. The analysis provided critical data for developing a well-formed questionnaire to explain the correlation among the variables and to measure the effect of urban music on students' speaking skill and cultural awareness in practice at the same time. For this purpose, a quantitative design was implemented sequentially. Given the underlying rationale, an exploratory sequential mixed method was determined for this study. As a result, by analyzing data from the recorded transcripts, and through designing a questionnaire by statistical evaluation, we were able to derive meaningful outcomes that support the objectives of this research paper.



2. Participants

To follow the purpose of this study, Iranian BA students (aged 18-25) whose major was Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) were targeted as the research population. As many as 124 participants, whose language proficiency level and linguistic knowledge were of high and appropriate level with regard to their fluent speaking, were selected through the convenient sampling of the students at Islamic Azad University, West Tehran Branch.

3. Instrumentation

Throughout the qualitative phase of this mixed methods research, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight into five participants' perceptions of their speaking skill and cultural awareness via fast-beat English songs. The questions featured in the interview consisted of 30 main questions, 20 questions for exploring vocabulary mastery, and 10 questions on decoding the cultural awareness that happened through listening to a song of this music genre. Soon after, two PhD holders reviewed and revised the first-hand interview question file and deleted 18 questions to purposefully reduce the number of the questions to 12 (7 for vocabulary and 5 for cultural awareness) (See Appendix A).

Moreover, in the quantitative part, the researchers created a questionnaire that represented different aspects involved in students' progress in speaking proficiency through urban music. To be more specific, the researchers adopted a multistep development method. The questionnaire consisted of 99 multiple-choice items, categorized into four sections of fast-beat English song, speaking skill, vocabulary mastery, and cultural awareness.

4. Data Collection Procedure

To get deep insights from the participants' concise perceptions, a qualitative phase was carried out for the first and second research questions of the study. To do so, among those 124 students, the researchers invited five participants to participate in the interview sessions to take an emic or insider perspective and try to make sense of the phenomena from the value the students assigned to the urban music and English learning. In addition, the interviews were all conducted during the summer holidays of 2024 via phone calls at the participants' preferably arranged time. The semi-structured interviews preceded the unstructured interviews in the procedure. All the five participants were contacted and interviewed for 20 minutes, and the interviews were recorded upon the consent of the individual interviewees.

For the transferability of the interview questions, two other BA students with the same characteristics as the main participants were selected and the initial codes and emerging themes along with the raw data were compared in terms of degree of agreements.

For the interview, the participants were exposed to a piece of fast-beat English song played. The selected song was Mockingbird by Eminem as it strongly fulfilled the aims of the first part of the interview. This song was primarily well-known, easy to understand, and had a fluent flow and a most-liked melody. After the sessions, all the five interviews were transcribed and validated for accuracy with the original recorded audio files. Their participants' identity remains confidential for privacy.

Sequentially, for the purpose of developing an instrument (a questionnaire) to answer the third research question, a quantitative phase was carried out. In essence, a functional and robust questionnaire can elicit versatile information. On the authority of what Dornyei (2007, p. 112) designated for the procedures in questionnaire development, some crucial steps were taken by the fieldworkers including (a) drawing up an item pool, (b) initial piloting of the item pool, (c) final piloting, and (d) item analysis.



4.1. Initial Stages in Item Development

For this stage, the researchers developed a questionnaire of 160 items, categorizing them into four scales (fast-beat English song, speaking skill, vocabulary mastery, and cultural awareness). Based on the purpose of the study, 40 items were dedicated to each of the scales. Overall, within the process of creating the item pool, all the factors concerning the layout, the type of questions, the wording, and the type of responses to the questions were taken into consideration. Moreover, the items were answered on a three-choice basis including no, neutral, and yes, which were coded through the data analysis procedure later.

4.2. Evaluating The Content Validity of The Questionnaire

The next stage of developing a questionnaire is to reduce the drafted to the intended final number, providing a more flexible list of questions, the point to which the researchers began the initial piloting of the item pool.

Following this stage, three PhD holders who were university lecturers in TEFL were involved. One of them has a position in Tehran Farhangian University, and the other two are working at Islamic Azad University, West Tehran Branch. They were asked to review the questions and check if any editing, revising, removing, or adding the items was needed. They were also asked to give their feedback and opinions on the accuracy and the relevancy of the questions according to the main target of the study. Thus, the content and face validity of the scales were evaluated. The questions in the primary version of the questionnaire were 160, and each of the four scales included 40 items. Based on the experts' judgments and feedbacks, 61 items were deleted from the scales. So, the number of the final list of questions dropped to 99 (28 items were deleted from the fast- beat English song scale, 15 items from the speaking skill scale, 8 items from the vocabulary mastery, and 10 items from the cultural awareness scale).

4.3. Final Piloting

For the third step, the researchers assembled the new version of the questions, making sure that there were no more puzzles. Afterwards, an online version of the questionnaire via Google Forms was designed. For the convenience and accessibility of the process of the questionnaire distribution, a link to the online Google form was created and sent to the target group through social media networks. Hence, all the participants' responses were automatically recorded on the database of the server which could have been then downloaded in Microsoft Excel sheet format. Ultimately, 124 respondents submitted their records through the online questionnaire.

4.4. Item Analysis

The final step of conducting a potent questionnaire deals with the process of item analysis. By subjecting the answers of the pilot group (BA TEFL students) to the statistical analysis (factor analysis through SPSS), the researchers checked for the possibility of whether the items were understood incorrectly or the items within a scale function homogeneously among the range of the elicited responses from each item. Based on the results of the factor analysis and the reliability validation, the researchers selected the most functional items and omitted those that failed to meet the requirements and the demands of the current study.



V. RESULTS

1. The Qualitative Phase

The following indicates a brief explanation of the transcribed conversations and the coded information. The interviews assembled 10 major themes concerning the two aspects of vocabulary and culture. Also, the assembled data were analyzed through thematic analysis with respect to Braun & Clarke's model (2006). Therefore, the participants' viewpoints were expressed inclusively under each theme's description.

1.1. Answer To Research Question 1

This section involves six themes answering research question 1: *How is Iranian BA TEFL students' vocabulary mastery in speaking related to target language urban music?* The themes include:

- a. Increased vocabulary size,
- b. Exploring new fast-beat song phrases and slang terms,
- c. Vocabulary acquisition and use,
- d. Social connections and communities,
- e. Aging sequence,
- f. Understanding contextual fast-beat song phrases (Lit, Feeling like a bum).

a. Increased vocabulary size

Listening to fast-beat English songs had added many words to the participants' vocabulary, such as "to blade" and provided them with some adjectives with opposite meanings. Participant 2 had been extracted lexical chunks since his childhood, and participant 3 had learned slang words and phrases like "ain't" and "grind". It also helped a little in fluency. For participant 4, he focused on colloquial/vernacular language and slang like "cap", and participant 5 learned many kinds of words and believed that it would be better if he could use some slang that native speakers use.

b. Exploring new fast-beat song phrases and slang terms

Concerning the meaning behind fast-beat English song lyrics, participant 1 tended to search for the meanings. Also, reaching out to people who liked urban music and asking them to teach him the new slang was another way of knowing the meanings of words if no certain denotation could be found. Unknown words and phrases in target language urban music raised the awareness of the gaps for participant 2 as an English teacher. Participant 3 joined some channels on Telegram and followed Instagram pages to explore the meanings. A website called Genius, was introduced by participant 4 as a resource which included bold chunks and the definitions of urban music lyrics. Participant 5 would also search for the vocabulary and follow famous people on YouTube explaining the lyrics in simple words.

c. Vocabulary acquisition and use

Listening to fast-beat, highly emotional English songs and using the new urban slangs, such as those in meaningful, relatable lines of some urban music and African American terms, have helped participant 1 stay motivated. Listening to these songs helped him sound more like an African American native speaker, which led him to be hired in an English institute. Participant 2 also used these words to be close to others. Participant 3 intended to keep up with the rhythm and make some gestures. For participant 4, learning the lyrics would happen subconsciously. He used these songs as a source and a model for speaking. Therefore, moving his hands, nodding his head, and memorizing the lyrics was not by any means far-fetched. Participant 5 was only able to remember some parts of the lyrics. However, he mentioned that structures and vocabulary in these songs could be beneficial.



d. Social connections and communities

Regarding the appropriateness of using urban words, participant 1 avoided using them in workplaces, such as English institutes, as they might not be considered formal or polite. Participant 2 discussed the teaching profession, advocating for the adaptation of urban words to facilitate learners' understanding. This approach emphasizes the importance of adjusting speech to the learners' level for effective communication. Participant 3 addressed the use of slang in the context of high and low social classes, noting that the higher the occupational status, the less slang is typically used in speech. Participant 4 believed that there are not many jobs related to this field in Iran yet as Iran had advanced its more extensively traditional music styles, however; the choice to listen to fast-beat songs depends solely on personal characteristics and tastes. Participant 5 also asserted that using some of these words would strictly depend on only specific casual contexts among adults.

e. Aging sequence

As participant 1 stated, some slang words are intended for adults, and their use by children can be problematic. It is evident that an adult listening to some songs would recognize the other meanings hidden the context, which are definitely not suitable for children. Regarding the teaching profession, participant 2 decided to no longer listen to urban music. Participant 3 noted that when interacting with peers, many slang words are easily understood, whereas older individuals, such as parents, may not grasp the intended meaning, for example, the phrase "*having beef with somebody*." To illustrate this point, participant 4 mentioned that he tried to avoid using slang words to appear more mature and opted for more polite language in educational settings; however, he would still use slang when speaking with friends of the same age. Furthermore, participant 5 emphasized the need to be older and mature enough to comprehend not to use certain words in contexts other than casual with peers.

f. Understanding contextual fast-beat song phrases (Lit, Feeling like a bum)

Moving to the phase of listening to "Mockingbird" by Eminem, participant 1 remarked on the song's significance as a heartfelt apology from Eminem to his daughters. For participant 2, the emotion conveyed in Eminem's voice was particularly appealing. Participant 3 discussed the true story of Eminem's life and the hardships he faced. Participant 4 appreciated the song for its narrative and believed that urban music is not solely an aggressive genre. The storytelling in Eminem's work captured the attention of participant 5, making it one of the most memorable songs.

1.2. Results and Interpretations for RQ. 1

In response to the first research question, the researchers discovered that listening to fast-beat English songs had a positive impact on the vocabulary acquisition of undergraduate TEFL students. The enhanced proficiency in colloquial language and informal expressions was notably evident. Moreover, students showed a tendency to delve into the meanings of unfamiliar urban words through a range of strategies, including online searches, consulting with native speakers and enthusiasts of such songs, engaging in social media communities like Instagram, Telegram, and YouTube, and exploring various websites.

Due to the fact that urban music is not as recognized as other classic music genres, the acquisition and use of English urban words among people of different social statuses and communities can be somewhat strange. In fact, some slangs appear to be definitely inappropriate to be used in formal contexts in Iranian society, as people view the use of such urban slang words as disgraceful, unacceptable, and disrespectful in our first language culture. This is why EFL teachers and learners tend to avoid using them in public, workplaces, and educational or professional contexts, except among close friends and peers of similar age. Consequently, the use of urban words by Iranian EFL learners can be described as occurring in an active but passive mode. The acquisition process of these words is active, but their usage is restricted. Another suitable word for this situation could be "*ambivalence*," which reflects a state in which the connotation of a



word raises questions about its appropriate use. For instance, listening to many fast-beat songs may lead one to sound more like an African American native speaker, but being compared to “*drug dealers*”, as one of the participants mentioned, cannot provoke positive reaction among members of Iranian community whose age-old Eastern culture has always valued politeness and respect. Nevertheless, by listening to the songs multiple times and exploring new contexts, Iranian EFL learners and teachers strive to make sense of the informal vocabulary and phrases within these songs, hence enhancing their awareness of target language culture.

1.3. Answer to Research Question 2

The second part presents the answer to the second research question: *How is English urban music related to Iranian BA TEFL students’ understanding of target language culture?* It involves four themes including:

- a. Cultural reconciliation through English urban music,
- b. Understanding intentions in urban music,
- c. Life and background of the urban music performers,
- d. Cultural influence on Iranian lifestyle.

a. Cultural reconciliation through English urban music

Listening to English/American urban music helped participant 1 understand African American culture. For instance, Iranian people thought that their culture was about blood and crime, yet it was not. “*Some of the American singers also became Muslims*”. However, participant 2 only figured out the crime and cruelty in American culture as “*they had guns and horrible stuff*”. Participant 3 believed that their songs were just “*a breeze to their culture*”. Not only urban music but also movies and series were a door to their culture for participant 4. As most urban music performers are from America, their lives and backgrounds allowed participant 5 to understand what they said better.

b. Understanding intentions in urban contemporary music

Accordingly, participant 1 did not understand all the messages in the music, so he thought that searching for their meanings would help. Participant 2 believed that urban music did not possess significant cultural value or content. However, participant 3 was able to understand the music because of the genuine words behind it and the straightforward lyrics. By Googling and referring to specific communities, such as fandoms on Instagram, participant 3 could grasp the meanings of certain phrases. “*Music is a tool and an art form for conveying a message*”, stated participant 4. He preferred to review the song and understand its main purpose by searching on YouTube. Depending on the level of difficulty, participant 5 could discern the meaning in the music. *Yet, some cultural factors cannot be translated, and those terms may only be understood in English or explained by native speakers*”.

c. Life and background of the native English urban music performers

Notably, while participant 1 has been following the personal lives of urban music stars, he has not felt empathy or a strong connection to them. Participant 2, on the other hand, has expressed a lack of interest in such matters, stating, “*I’m not the type to concern myself with these things*”. In contrast, participant 3 focused solely on following and admiring urban music performers he is interested in, extensively researching their careers and backgrounds. Similarly, participant 4 delved into his favorite artists’ interviews and biographies. Finally, participant 5, akin to participant 1, does not place importance on the private lives or backgrounds of urban music stars, yet keeps up with news related to them.

d. Gaining awareness of target culture lifestyle



Listening to fast-beat English songs had an impact on participant 1's life, leading to involvement in basketball. Despite being an English teacher, participant 2 was cautious not to be influenced by the culture surrounding these songs. Participant 3 drew inspiration from the gathering style of UK urban music and attempted to emulate it by using trendy phrases like, "*mandem*" (i.e. anybody that you chill with), and "*wagwan*" (i.e. What's up? In casual greetings). The perception of this music influenced participant 4 by empowering him to be resilient and self-assured. Participant 5 recognized the motivating qualities of fast-beat songs and believed it could influence how they interact with friends.

1.4. Results and Interpretations for RQ. 2

Reflecting on the answer to the second research question, Iranian EFL learners consider their perceptions of native English urban music in distinct ways. Two critical perspectives in this regard were captured from two opposite ends of a continuum: a) urban music is nothing but a matter of some taboo antisocial topics; b) urban music is not only conceptual but also demonstrates moral values for life. These two contradictory views show how urban music can reveal two different sides of a coin in context. On the one hand, urban music can represent the negative aspects of society due to some inappropriate content and the sharp verses of the performers conveying their messages. On the other hand, it can also serve as a powerful symbol of trust, perseverance, strength, and dignity in some other singers' songs.

To some, urban music is a lifestyle that encompasses pivotal aspects of life, from dressing like its stars to playing basketball and using those special expressions and street language, such as the casual greeting words "*mandem*" or "*wagwan*" However, to others, it reflects a lack of cultural values within specific professions or discourse communities, such as teaching.

Inevitably, the background of the urban music performers can influence the connection between the learner/listener's cognition about the singers' characters and their willingness to follow more works from them, as well as their desire to uncover the intentions and meanings hidden behind the lyrics. Those who are interested will naturally raise their awareness and spark curiosity about their favorite performers' profiles, backgrounds, and activities, such as releasing new albums or making announcements. In this case, learners will be more eager to listen to the songs and learn new vocabulary through the music.

2. The Quantitative Phase

Following the exploratory sequential mixed methods research design, the second phase of this study focused on establishing and developing an instrument (questionnaire) to measure the effect of urban music on students' speaking skill and cultural awareness. Indeed, measurement is an essential key that systematically connects the collected data to statistical expressions. By explaining the correlation among urban music, speaking skill, and cultural awareness, the researchers aimed to corroborate the qualitative outcomes of the research study. The questionnaire was intensively analyzed and evaluated for its construct validity.

2.1. Answer to Research Question 3

The construct validity primarily focuses on validating the main target of investigation of a questionnaire. This involves operationalizing the planned constructs of the potential items and their related dimensions into measurable and precise features. A questionnaire is deemed constructively valid only if it effectively assesses what it intends to measure. To address research question 3: "Is there a valid instrument to measure the impact of English urban music on BA TEFL students' speaking proficiency?" and to thoroughly evaluate the construct validity of the questionnaire, factor analysis was performed using IBM SPSS. By utilizing factor analysis, correlations and interrelationships among the variables were revealed, indicating the degree to which the variables are linked. This analysis helped in identifying and assessing the representativeness of the underlying factors.



The extracted factors must incorporate and document the coefficient of correlation. Accordingly, in the correlation matrix, a coefficient of correlation greater than 0.3 indicates a suitable relationship among the variables, while a coefficient less than 0.3 suggests a weak or negligible relationship. At this point, the factors and related items that were insufficiently analyzed were effectively excluded and erased. Following this systematic process, 55 items that had the coefficient of the correlation less than 0.3 were subsequently removed. The remaining items represented a strong correlation within the factor analysis, as they were all above 0.3. Furthermore, the variables were primarily categorized into 4 sections, reflecting the structure of the main questionnaire. Hence, the first section focused on listening to urban music, the second examined speaking skill proficiency related to this genre of music, the third section addressed vocabulary mastery, and the final section concerned cultural awareness. Consequently, the correlational factors determined the construct validity of all four sections. The first section of the questionnaire, containing 32 items, is illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Main items related to Section 1 (fast-beat songs).

Item	Question	Load factor
1	I listen to English rap music at least once a day.	.525
2	Listening to English rap music is full of good vibes for me.	.534
3	I enjoy the beat and rhythm of English rap music.	.627
4	English rap music gives me more energy	.662
5	I listen to English rap music in my free time	.782
6	English rap music helps me overcome my negative feelings.	.800
7	Listening to English rap music boosts my energy and mood.	.456
8	I usually listen to English rap music on my way home or university.	.510
9	I have relevant information about different English rap styles.	.710
10	I share my favorite English rap tracks with my friends.	.903
11	I follow my favorite American/English rappers on social media.	.654
12	I care about the released tracks and albums from my favorite rap stars.	.921
13	I try to support my favorite American/English rapper on social media.	.923
14	I am obsessed with my favorite English rap songs.	.931
15	I follow the latest news about the upcoming English rap tracks and albums.	.934
16	I like to share my opinions and feelings about the English rap song I have already listened to.	.943
17	I am a big fan of English rap music.	.942
18	I know about English rap music and its styles.	.490
19	I know the most famous English rap stars.	.950
20	I admire my favorite English rap singers.	.945
21	I can make connections with my current mood and the English rap track I choose to listen to.	.950
22	English rap music makes me feel relaxed and energetic.	.530
23	English rap music can be annoying to me.	.955
24	I cannot stay focused when I listen to English rap music.	.651
25	I lose my control over listening to English rap music.	.562
26	I cannot manage my mood when I listen to English rap music.	.834
27	I get distracted by listening to English rap music.	.876
28	I do not care about new or old English rap tracks. I listen to whatever I enjoy.	.907



29	I do not care who the rap star is. I listen to whatever English rap track that makes me feel good.	.916
30	To me, English rap music is very cool and fun.	.412
31	I listen to both old and new English rap tracks.	.940
32	I create my English rap playlists.	.943

In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents' opinions regarding the correlation between listening to fast-beat English songs and their speaking skill were examined. The table below presents this section, which comprises 25 items.

Table 2. Main items related to Section 2 (speaking skill).

Item	Question	Load factor
1	English rap music motivates me to speak English confidently.	.750
2	There has been good progress in my English-speaking skill since I listened to English rap music.	.644
3	I feel confident in my speaking skill when I learn new expressions from English rap music.	.800
4	I feel positive changes in my speaking skill when I listen to English rap songs.	.879
5	I feel encouraged to talk about my favorite English rap track with my friends in English.	.412
6	There has been no progress in my speaking skill since I listened to English rap music.	.769
7	I try to stay on the beat and mumble with the rapper when I listen to English rap music.	.824
8	I care to notice how the rap star sings the lyrics.	.879
9	I try to sing with the rapper when I listen to English rap music.	.951
10	I do not mind if I can repeat the English rap verse or not.	.651
11	I enjoy memorizing the English rap verses so that I can sing with the lyrics later.	.562
12	I sing my favorite verses in my free time randomly.	.834
13	I feel that my speaking skill is affected by English rap music.	.867
14	I don't see any improvements in my English-speaking skill by listening to English rap music.	.876
15	I do not try to sing with the English rap verses at all.	.907
16	I feel motivated when I can repeat the English rap verses alongside the rap star.	.908
17	I feel motivated when I can repeat the English rap verses alongside the rap star.	.916
18	I am not passive when I listen to English rap music. I try to sing and feel the vibes.	.919
19	I feel that my speaking skill has sounded more like native English speakers since I listened to English rap music.	.940
20	I do not care whether I can repeat the English rap verses or not.	.951
21	Listening to English rap music encourages me to spend more time improving my English-speaking skill.	.955
22	My speaking skill has had no specific changes since I listened to English rap music.	.561
23	I do not mind if I mumble the lyrics or not. I only enjoy the beats.	.731
24	I cannot stop singing with the lyrics when I listen to my favorite English rap music.	.868
25	My English-speaking skill has sounded more natural since I listened to English rap music.	.916



The third part of the questionnaire focuses on the influence of listening to English urban music on respondents' vocabulary acquisition. It includes 30 items, presented in the following table.

Table 3. Main items related to Section 3 (vocabulary mastery).

Item	Question	Load factor
1	Listening to English rap music helps me improve my vocabulary range.	.940
2	I can understand more native-like English words when I listen to English rap music.	.769
3	I like to understand what the rapper is singing about.	.824
4	Knowing the meaning of the new words in English rap music is important to me.	.879
5	English rap music helps me learn more informal words and phrases.	.951
6	My vocabulary knowledge has increased since I listened to my favorite English rap songs.	.651
7	Listening to English rap music had no effect on my knowledge of vocabularies.	.562
8	I enjoy it when I can use a new slang/phrase while I am speaking English.	.834
9	I like to search for the meaning of the words to know what the rapper is singing about.	.867
10	I do not care about the meaning of the new vocabularies. I only enjoy the beats.	.662
11	My English vocabulary ranges have not changed since I listened to music.	.782
12	I learn at least a new word or phrase while I am listening to English rap music.	.800
13	Listening to English rap music helps me widen my English vocabulary ranges.	.456
14	I use English rap slangs and informal words and phrases while chatting with my friends.	.510
15	Knowing the meanings behind the slangs satisfies me.	.710
16	I like to listen to English rap music because I can learn many words.	.903
17	Informal words used in English rap music lyrics are very helpful for my English language.	.654
18	Listening to English rap songs helps me keep new words in my mind.	.921
19	Searching for the meaning behind English rap verses helps me understand the intentions of the rapper better.	.923
20	Learning new words through listening to English rap music makes me more confident in the English language.	.931
21	I do not mind checking for the meaning of new words when I listen to English rap music.	.934
22	Listening to English rap songs doesn't affect my vocabulary knowledge.	.356
23	I feel good when I can understand similar words in another English rap song.	.943
24	I try to use the new words I learned by listening to English rap music in my speaking skill.	.942
25	The new words and phrases in English rap songs are not helpful at all.	.490
26	I feel discouraged when I do not understand what the rapper is singing.	.412
27	When I listen to English rap music, I try to follow the written lyrics to see what the artist sings.	.940
28	I try to learn the new words' deep meanings so that I can use them in real contexts appropriately.	.943
29	I care to update my vocabulary knowledge with the latest English rap tracks.	.750
30	I like it when I read native English speakers' comments using slangs and informal phrases.	.644

The final part of the questionnaire assesses the respondents' cultural awareness regarding listening to English urban music. This section includes 13 items, presented in the table below.

**Table 4.** Main items related to Section 4 (cultural awareness).

Item	Question	Load factor
1	I can widen my insights about English culture when I listen to English rap music.	.543
2	English rap music is full of cultural slangs and related informal phrases.	.750
3	I do not mind whether I understand the cultural aspects through English rap music or not.	.644
4	I believe that English rap music has affected the lifestyle of young generation.	.423
5	I do not understand the deep meanings behind English rap verses at all.	.542
6	I do not search for the intention behind English rap lyrics on the internet.	.436
7	I can get better understanding of cultural aspects of American/English life when I search the meanings of English rap slangs.	.834
8	Singing with the English rap music makes me feel like I can understand local expressions easily.	.867
9	There are some American/English aspects of culture that appear to be weird when I listen to English rap music.	.662
10	If I do not understand the verses because of cultural factors, I check it on the Internet.	.782
11	I can see the positive impacts of English rap music on my cultural mindset of American/English lifestyle.	.800
12	English rap music reveals all aspects of American/English real-life.	.456
13	I am not influenced by American/English culture at all when I listen to English rap music.	.452

2.1.1. Reliability Analysis

The next stage, after confirming the construct validity through factor analysis and removing unmatched items, involves examining the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which measures the level of homogenous reliability among the questionnaire items. A Cronbach's alpha value of ≥ 0.8 signifies internal consistency, whereas a score of < 0.7 raises concerns about reliability. The table below displays the results of the detailed assessment of internal consistency, highlighting the questionnaire's high reliability.

Table 5. Cronbach's alpha reliability estimation.

	Reliability coefficient (α)
Part 1: Effects of listening to English/ American rap music	0.900
Part 2: Effects of Listening to English/ American rap music on the speaking skill	0.930
Part 3: Effects of listening to English/ American rap music on vocabulary mastery	0.960
Part 4: Cultural awareness within listening to English/ American rap music	0.950
Total	0.980

VI. DISCUSSION

As it was mentioned before, the first phase of this study aimed to explore the overall relationships related to urban music's in-depth role in vocabulary mastery and cultural awareness of Iranian undergraduate TEFL students regarding the English communities. To confirm the results, the second phase involved designing a well-developed questionnaire. This questionnaire sought to examine and explain the correlation



between TEFL students' speaking skill and their exposure to English urban music. Additionally, the study aimed to provide a reliable instrument for measuring the effect of this genre of music on students' speaking proficiency. Highlighting the issues of formality and strong values of politeness and respect in Iranian culture, the results in qualitative phase indicated that listening to fast-beat English songs can lead students to *ambivalent* use of slang words. Moreover, a positive relationship was found between urban music and students' cultural awareness regarding learners' target language communities, concerning their social status and discourse communities. Furthermore, by developing the questionnaire, the study demonstrated a correlation between students' speaking skill and their cultural understanding of English/American urban music.

The current study highlights both achievements and challenges. It has contributed significantly to developing a well-organized instrument for investigating the effects of fast-beat English songs on individuals' speaking proficiency. The structured questionnaire measured the correlation of various factors through a valid data analysis procedure and served as a specific criterion for examining the related hypotheses. Looking at the drawbacks, this study was hindered by a lack of opportunities for practical application of the designed questionnaire in real classroom contexts. But it aims to be effectively utilized in educational and academic environments.

The results of this research study complement previous research on the fundamental relationships and challenges of applying urban music in the EFL curriculum. Prior studies have investigated the essential role of music in learners' acquisition processes, autonomy, and engagement during the exposure to music. As concluded by [Kim et al. \(2024\)](#), music plays a significant role in foreign language learning since the participants showed positive attitudes toward including music to enhance their pronunciation and listening skill. Urban music, recognized as a major industry, holds a noteworthy place in pedagogical contexts. [Sam \(2018\)](#) claimed that urban music can provide "active manipulation of learning material," such as practicing songs, reading words, and performing them (p.19). Therefore, with strong evidence, the current study supports the effective role of music in the educational process as a tool to facilitate learning and enhance wisdom. As [Segal \(2014\)](#) concludes, urban music helps students reinforce their memories and connect with a second culture through the musical language. This study supports the positive connection between English urban music and EFL learning and teaching. In line with this study, [Guzel \(2024\)](#) demonstrates that fast-paced English songs improve students' listening, speaking, and pronunciation skills. Additionally, [Medina \(2002\)](#) agreed that incorporating rhythm and melody (music) into language learning can significantly enhance memory and vocabulary, as it facilitates the rhythmic repetition of words, leading to longer-lasting memory traces. [Segal \(2014\)](#) stated clearly that integrating music into the English curriculum, particularly urban music, does not require any expertise from teachers. Additionally, [Failoni \(1993\)](#) recognizes music as a unique medium for enhancing cultural awareness of other communities, reflecting their history and literature. However, [Andrzejewski \(2023\)](#) acknowledged both the challenges and effectiveness of incorporating urban music into the ELT curriculum. In his overall conclusion, Andrzejewski emphasizes that the inclusion of urban music in the ELT curriculum requires instructors to consider the accuracy and standardization of the language used, as well as the cultural values within the transcultural flow of this music genre. Therefore, teachers need to be astute and conscientious when incorporating this genre of music into their teaching process. Not all materials that integrate urban music contain appropriate language and messages that align with cultural values for language learners.

In summary, considering the constructive outcomes of this research paper and previous studies, urban music is postulated to have significant effects on listeners' cognition and emotions. To put it another way, urban music can influence a learner's language learning style in acquiring new vocabulary. However, care should be taken to exclude those songs which might include taboo themes for our young generations. Consequently, the potential influences of listening to English songs in any educational fields can be thoughtfully examined from different linguistic and sociocultural angles.



VII. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

To examine the correlation between EFL students' speaking skill, vocabulary mastery, and cultural awareness through listening to fast-beat English songs, this research study utilized an exploratory sequential mixed method. The aim was to explore participants' perspectives on how native English urban music influences their linguistic and cultural perceptions. The results enabled the researchers to develop a meticulously designed questionnaire that quantitatively measures the effectiveness of these influences and facilitates a rigorous analysis of the primary findings.

In the qualitative phase of the study, a positive relationship regarding vocabulary mastery was found. The target Iranian undergraduate TEFL students showed more enthusiasm for acquiring new English and American urban slang words from their favorite fast-beat songs. Regardless of their occupations, the participants expressed positive perceptions of the efficiency of urban music, having gradually learned new slang and colloquial words from their selected performers. Despite this, they struggled to apply them in broader contexts such as educational, social, and occupational settings. This ambivalence reflects Iranian cultural values and strong beliefs concerning morality, dignity, and appropriate speech in various situations. In terms of cultural awareness, Iranian students engaged with the background profiles of their preferred artists, leading them to a deeper connection with the lifestyles represented in the target language culture, which, in turn, helped them comprehend song lyrics more accurately. However, the fundamental principles of cultural literacy in different contexts will likely remain unchanged. Within the Iranian community, using urban slang words may be regarded as inappropriate and thoughtless. Meanwhile, in the quantitative stage, an instrument was developed to validate initial findings through a practical questionnaire.

Considering the implications of this research study, incorporating English urban music could create a more engaging and effective environment for EFL teaching and learning. Therefore, TEFL students, university professors, and heads of English departments can benefit from integrating English urban music, appropriately selected for language levels, into the curriculum and pre-planned teaching syllabi while considering appropriate themes for EFL learners' different age groups. This approach can enrich students' vocabulary and expressions, helping bridge lexical gaps related to the authentic language of the urban music genre. However, it is crucial to reflect on how the exposure to urban music influences learners' subconscious understanding for educational purposes.

Lastly, it is recommended that further studies implement the designed questionnaire in the natural settings of EFL classrooms. Additionally, it is suggested that this research be conducted with larger sample sizes, across different age ranges, and in various educational contexts, such as English language institutes, schools, and foreign language departments.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions.

Part 1: Vocabulary Mastery

- 1) Has English rap music helped you improve your range of vocabulary? If so, explain by giving an example.
 - 2) When listening to your favorite rap music many times, do you try to sing with the rapper or keep the lyrics in your mind? If so, do you use the slang terms in your everyday speaking or when you are with your friends?
 - 3) Do you think that your speaking skill has sounded more like English native speakers since you listened to English rap songs? If so, could you describe its influence on your speaking skill?
 - 4) If you don't understand some parts of the English rap song because of the new slang terms and phrases, are you interested enough to go and search for what the rapper is singing about and what the new vocabulary is?
 - 5) According to the song you listened to (Mockingbird by Eminem), what makes it lit in your opinion?
 - 6) Could you describe why Eminem mentioned that he felt like a bum?
 - 7) Are there any words or phrases that attracted your attention in The Mockingbird by Eminem?
- *Does the age factor contribute to your use of rap slang terms? How?
- *Does your occupational status affect the use of rap slang terms? How?

Part 2: Cultural Awareness

- 1) Since you have listened to English rap songs, do you think it affects your understanding of the speakers' culture?
- 2) When following the lyrics, does the vernacular/informal language make you wonder what the real intentions of the rapper are? What message does he want to send?
- 3) Have you noticed any changes in your lifestyle even in your first language since you listened to English rap songs? If so, what are they?
- 4) If you do not understand the meaning behind a phrase or an expression because of cultural factors, will you search for it to get the right understanding?
- 5) Do you care for the rap star's background profile? Do you read about their private lifestyle or their career? If so, describe it by giving an example.