

Hip-Hop Music in Enhancing Communication among Young Adults: A Literature Review

Mohamad Adib Mohamed Yusoff¹, *Noor Mayudia Mohd Mothar², David Robert Osborne³
**Corresponding Author*

^{1,2} Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UITM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

³ Graphia International Limited, Hong Kong, China

Email of All Authors: adiby203@gmail.com, nmayudia@uitm.edu.my, dro@graphiabrand.com
Tel: +60142438240

Abstract

This paper offers a literature review of the study to investigate and identify how hip-hop lyrics can function as an informal learning resource to strengthen verbal confidence, communication, and expressive ability among young adults, while examining gender as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach is one of the research tools used in this paper's methodology, which focuses on gender disparities, media influence, and communication development. Results indicate that poetic involvement enhances self-expression and communication behaviours, yet most studies focus on Western populations. According to the reviewed literature, more thorough studies of gender mediation, different demographics, and Malaysian educational environments should be conducted in the future.

Keywords: Hip-Hop Music Lyrics, Oral Communication Skills, Youth Communication, Gender Mediation

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1.0 Introduction

Hip-hop music has become one of the most influential music genres among young adults worldwide because of its unique storytelling, emotional honesty, and creative use of language (Evans, 2021; Anyiwo et al., 2021). Beyond being a form of entertainment, many researchers believe that hip-hop can also play an important role in improving oral communication skills. Previous research revealed that hip-hop-based educational activities inspired youth to engage more fully in conversations, freely express their opinions, and form closer bonds with others (Evans, 2021; Anyiwo et al., 2021). Nevertheless, several gaps remain in the current study. Most previous studies have focused on topics such as cultural identity, activism, social resistance, and digital media trends rather than exploring how hip-hop could improve communication skills in educational settings (Chang, 2021; Jitreengam, 2021). However, previous studies (Evans, 2021; Anyiwo et al., 2021) had small sample sizes and did not examine how hip-hop may function as an informal learning tool, strengthening communication confidence and expressive ability among young adults (Adjapong, 2021; Emdin, 2021). For this reason, the present study aims to explore whether hip-hop lyrics can contribute to the development of oral communication skills while also considering gender as a mediating factor (Anyiwo et al., 2021). Therefore, the goal of this research is to ascertain how hip-hop lyrics affect communication, investigate how exposure to lyrical material develops communication abilities, and ascertain how gender shapes this relationship (Steinbrecher & Pichler, 2021; Wan et al., 2021).

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2.0 Literature Review

There are many music genres, such as R&B, ballad, and pop, that feature lyrics, expressive emotions, and good pronunciation of written vocabulary (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2022). Hip-hop, however, has been selected in this study as a more effective method for developing communication skills among young adults because it emphasises lyrical storytelling, verbal expression, rhythm-based articulation, and social interaction (Wang, 2024; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). Hip-hop promotes active language use, improvisation, critical thinking, and conversational interaction through rap, freestyle, and spoken-word elements, in contrast to other music genres that often focus primarily on melody and emotion delivery (Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Wang, 2024). Nevertheless, even though hip-hop has gained popularity and been recognized, as many contemporary studies acknowledged the educational and social value of hip-hop (Levy et al., 2023; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024), there are still limited studies that specifically examine how it improves oral communication among young adults (Levy et al., 2023; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024) and oral communication development through gender mediation (Qian, 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025) with a relation to the significance of this current research, which is by emphasizing of how hip-hop music can function as an informal learning resource capable of strengthening verbal confidence, communication, and expressive ability among young adults. Recent educational research showed that hip-hop-based learning environments encouraged participation, confidence, classroom discussion, and cultural engagement among students, but these studies mainly focused on identity formation and inclusivity rather than measurable communication outcomes (Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Levy et al., 2023). Existing research primarily focuses on cultural identity, racial resistance, activism, and self-expression rather than on the development of communication in educational contexts (Anyiwo et al., 2021; Chang, 2021; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024). Previous studies also primarily explored hip-hop as a form of youth empowerment and emotional expression, leaving a gap in understanding how lyrical engagement can strengthen speaking confidence, listening skills, interpersonal interaction, and verbal communication among university students (Levy et al., 2024; Emdin, 2021; Adjapong, 2021). Furthermore, past studies did not focus on gender as a mediating factor in communication development through hip-hop exposure (Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Levy et al., 2023). While several studies discussed communication styles and gender differences separately, they rarely connected these variables with hip-hop engagement and communication outcomes (Steinbrecher & Pichler, 2021; Hadiani & Ariyani, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2021). After reviewing the literature from past research, the current research will focus more on how hip-hop music can help enhance communication skills by adopting a quantitative methodological orientation to systematically examine how engagement with hip-hop music, particularly its lyrical content, relates to the development of oral communication skills among young adults, rather than focusing on racial resistance, activism, and others that do not relate at all to hip-hop music being an effective learning tool to enhance communication skills.

Henceforth, this research aims to examine whether hip-hop lyrics can contribute to the development of oral communication skills among young adults, while gender serves as a mediating variable. Moreover, it is supported by recent studies suggesting that engagement with hip-hop influences self-expression, social interaction, and communicative confidence among youth audiences (Adeyola & Allen, 2025; Jefferson & Ohrt, 2023). Previous studies found that hip-hop-based educational approaches encouraged participation, emotional openness, and creative self-expression among students, yet these studies rarely directly measured communication performance and oral fluency (Levy et al., 2023; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024). However, other studies reported that hip-hop discussions supported emotional articulation and social confidence among young adults, although the development of verbal communication was not statistically examined within their research frameworks (Adeyola & Allen, 2025; Jefferson & Ohrt, 2023). Furthermore, past studies on hip-hop communities further highlighted critical consciousness, self-efficacy, and cultural awareness among listeners, but oral communication outcomes and gender mediation remained underexplored areas of research (Stamps & Johnson, 2025; Wang, 2024). In addition, research on rap music and self-image often focused more on identity, gender ideals, and psychological interpretations than on communication enhancement among young adults (Dankoor et al., 2025; Qian, 2025). Therefore, this current research is going to pursue these gaps and pay much more attention by measuring communication performance directly and by investigating whether continuous engagement with how hip-hop lyrics can strengthen communication skills among young adults through gender mediation, using a quantitative approach as one of the research methodologies to systematically examine the measurable relationship between hip-hop music lyrics and the enhancement of oral communication skills among young adults unlike past existing studies, that did not collect enough data because of not pursuing even further to get more evidence to support their studies.

Proceeding to the objectives of this current research, which are to identify how hip-hop lyrics influence communication, examine the development of communication skills through exposure to lyrical content, and determine the role of gender in shaping this relationship between Hip-hop music and communication skills. Recent studies highlighted that participation in hip-hop activities encouraged collaborative interaction, cultural discussion, and expressive engagement among students (Adjapong, 2021; Emdin, 2021), but many of these studies did not directly measure communication competence or speaking development (Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Livingston, 2024). Other researchers explored freestyle rap communication and nonverbal interaction within hip-hop performance spaces, although their work focused mainly on-stage performance rather than everyday oral communication among young adults (Yao & Jia, 2025; Wang, 2024). Subsequently, existing studies frequently discussed gender representation, feminism, and identity within hip-hop culture, but they rarely explored gender mediation in relation to communication development (Qian, 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025). Other contemporary studies analysed masculinity, emotional processing, and social identity in rap music, yet communication development among male and female listeners was not examined comparatively (Dankoor et al., 2023; Wang, 2024; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). Research also suggests that gender may influence interpretation, emotional engagement, and participation in hip-hop spaces, although the mediating role of gender in communication outcomes remains largely unexplored (Ling et al., 2025; Wang, 2024). Studies discussing communication styles among Malaysian young adults similarly lacked investigation into how music engagement shapes verbal interaction differently across genders (Azmi et al., 2023; Livingston, 2024). Moreover, much of the previous literature focused heavily on activism, identity politics, and socio-cultural resistance rather than communication enhancement in educational environments (Levy et al., 2023; Stamps

& Johnson, 2025). Therefore, this current research contributes new insight by directly measuring communication competence. Moreover, examine hip-hop more as an effective tool for developing oral communication skills among young adults, rather than just an on-stage performance, and specifically analyse communication confidence, articulation, and conversational fluency as key outcomes. Furthermore, this current research will identify whether male and female young adults by bigger sample size ranging from 250 to 350, or possibly even more that will help the data that will be collected to be sufficient enough that will internalize hip-hop lyrics differently and to determine whether that does these differences influence communication confidence, ability to express, and oral interaction skills within non-urban area of Malaysian university, with the use of statistical analysis that provides the ability to identify patterns, strengths of association, and potential mediating effects, which are central to this research's objectives, as research should be done precisely, efficiently without leaving any stone unturned.

Table 1

Author (Year)	Hip Hop	R&B	Ballad	Background	Significance	Aim	Objectives	Methodology	Findings	Limitations	Recommendations
Evans (2021)	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Small sample size	Broader educational settings
Anyiwo et al. (2021)	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Focused more on identity and culture	Examine communication outcomes statistically.
Adjapong (2021)	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Limited focus on gender mediation	Include gender-based communication analysis.
Erdin (2021)	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Communication fluency is not directly measured.	Explore oral communication variables.
Chang (2021)	✓			✓	✓			✓		Focused mainly on activism and resistance	Investigate educational communication impacts.
Jitrengam (2021)	✓			✓	✓			✓		Limited educational application	Study university communication development
Singh & Mehr (2023)	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	General music focuses only.	Compare genres in communication learning.
Kim (2023)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	Did not focus on hip-hop specifically	Analyse lyrical storytelling and articulation
Ma'rof et al. (2023)	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	Limited focus on communication confidence	Examine expressive communication skills.
Laforge-Bullido et al. (2024)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Focused more on inclusivity than communication measurement	Use statistical analysis for oral communication
Livingston (2024)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Limited mediation analysis	Explore gender as a mediating variable.
Wang (2024)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Focused more on lyrical creativity	Measure conversational fluency directly.
Adeyola & Allen (2025)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Emotional expression is emphasised more than communication competence	Examine verbal interaction outcomes
Dankoor et al. (2025)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Gender is discussed without communication mediation.	Conduct a mediation analysis statistically.
Ling et al. (2025)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Limited Malaysian educational context	Expand research in non-urban universities.
Qian (2025)	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Focused mainly on gender identity	Explore communication enhancement variables.
Yao & Jia (2025)	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	Focused mainly on the on-stage performance	Study everyday oral communication development.

3.0 Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology to be used in this research and reviews prior literature that will support the methods. This current research will employ a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between hip-hop music lyrics and oral communication skills among young adults while investigating gender as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was chosen because many recent studies on hip-hop mainly focused on identity, emotional expression, cultural resistance, and social engagement without directly measuring communication development among university students through statistical analysis (Laforge-Bullido et al., 2024; Wang, 2024; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). To collect measurable and structured data, this current research specifically adopts a cross-sectional survey method to gather measurable data regarding communication confidence, verbal interaction, articulation and lyrical engagement (Livingston, 2024) among young adults within a non-urban area of a Malaysian university (Azmi et al., 2024; Ling et al., 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025). This design is considered appropriate because recent educational studies highlighted the importance of measuring communication-related variables more systematically when examining hip-hop-based learning environments and youth interaction patterns (Levy et al., 2024; Livingston, 2024; Ling et al., 2025). Moreover, using a quantitative design allows the researcher to statistically examine whether gender influences the relationship between exposure to hip-hop lyrics and oral communication development by comparing male and female participants (Dankoor et al., 2025; Qian, 2025; Jefferson & Ohrt, 2024).

After data collection for this research, the data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and mediation analysis techniques to examine the relationship between hip-hop lyrical exposure and oral communication skills among young adults. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, mean scores, and standard deviations, will first be used to summarise respondents' demographic backgrounds, listening habits, and communication perceptions (Ling et al., 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025; Yao & Jia, 2025). A Pearson correlation analysis will then be conducted to determine the strength of the relationship between hip-hop engagement and communication development variables, as recent studies have emphasised the need for clearer empirical evidence on communication outcomes in hip-hop-related educational research (Levy et al., 2024; Livingston, 2024; Wang, 2024). Moreover, multiple regression and mediation analyses will be conducted to determine whether gender significantly mediates the relationship between hip-hop lyrical exposure and oral communication development among university students (Dankoor et al., 2025; Qian, 2025; Ling et al., 2025). The methods used for this research will also prioritise ethical considerations throughout the research process by ensuring voluntary participation, respondent anonymity, and the confidentiality of all collected information. To sum it up, these methodological procedures are expected to provide more comprehensive and measurable findings that address the limitations of previous studies, particularly the lack of statistical investigation into communication enhancement and gender mediation within hip-hop-based learning and communication research among young adults (Anyiwo et al., 2021; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Dankoor et al., 2025).

4.0 Findings

Therefore, the findings of this current research are expected to strengthen existing literature by providing measurable statistical evidence that hip-hop lyrical engagement may positively influence oral communication development among university students (Dankoor et al., 2025; Wang, 2024; Livingston, 2024). The findings are also expected to reveal a moderate to strong correlation between hip-hop lyrical engagement and communication-related variables such as conversational fluency, expressive confidence, and interpersonal communication skills among young adults (Ling et al., 2025; Yao & Jia, 2025; Bansal et al., 2025). Pearson correlation and regression analyses are likely to indicate that students who frequently engage with lyrical interpretation, rap storytelling, and expressive hip-hop content demonstrate stronger communication perceptions and greater confidence in verbal interaction (Jefferson & Ohrt, 2024; Livingston, 2024; Wang, 2024). These expected outcomes align with contemporary studies that found hip-hop participation encourages emotional openness, collaborative interaction, social confidence, and expressive participation among youth communities (Jefferson & Ohrt, 2024; Yao & Jia, 2025; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). Other recent studies also suggested that hip-hop discussions and lyrical analysis may strengthen expressive articulation and critical communication awareness through language-focused engagement and socio-cultural reflection (Dankoor et al., 2025; Livingston, 2024; Ling et al., 2025).

Furthermore, research on linguistic diversity and verbal creativity in hip-hop music highlighted that exposure to complex lyrical structures and rhythm-based articulation may contribute toward improved communication fluency and expressive communication among young listeners (Bansal et al., 2025; Wang, 2024; Yao & Jia, 2025). As a result, the findings of this study are expected to provide clearer empirical evidence supporting the role of hip-hop music as an informal learning medium that may enhance communication skills among young adults in educational contexts (Levy et al., 2024; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). In addition, this study's findings are expected to show that gender mediates the relationship between hip-hop lyrical exposure and oral communication development among university students (Qian, 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025; Ling et al., 2025). Statistical mediation analysis may indicate that male and female students experience and internalise hip-hop lyrics differently, which may influence their communication confidence, expressive behaviour, interpersonal interactions, and verbal communication patterns (Adeyola & Allen, 2025; Wang, 2024; Livingston, 2024). These anticipated findings are supported by recent studies suggesting that gender affects emotional interpretation, identity engagement, communication behaviour, and participation within hip-hop spaces and music-related communication environments (Qian, 2025; Ling et al., 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025). Contemporary research also reported that male and female listeners often respond differently to lyrical themes, emotional expression, and socio-cultural narratives presented in rap and hip-hop music (Adeyola & Allen, 2025; Wang, 2024; Livingston, 2024). At the same time, previous studies acknowledged that gender mediation within communication development through hip-hop exposure remains underexplored and lacks sufficient statistical investigation within educational contexts (Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Dankoor et al., 2025; Qian, 2025). Therefore, the findings of this research are expected to provide new insights into how gender influences communication enhancement through hip-hop engagement, particularly within Malaysian university settings, where studies on music-based communication development remain limited (Azmi et al., 2024; Ling et al., 2025; Livingston, 2024).

5.0 Discussion

The discussion of this study suggests that hip-hop lyrical engagement may positively influence the development of oral communication among university students, including conversational fluency, articulation, expressive confidence, and interpersonal interaction (Dankoor et al., 2025; Ling et al., 2025). The findings support earlier studies, which found that hip-hop encourages emotional openness, participation, discussion, and self-expression among young adults through storytelling, rhythm, and language use (Jefferson & Ohrt, 2024; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). However, many previous studies focused more on identity politics, activism, and emotional expression rather than measuring communication development through statistical analysis (Levy et al., 2024; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024). Therefore, this study addresses a research gap by demonstrating that hip-hop can serve not only as entertainment but also as an informal learning tool that strengthens communication skills among young adults in educational settings (Livingston, 2024; Wang, 2024).

Another finding is the relationship between lyrical engagement and communication behaviour among university students. The results indicate that students who frequently engage with rap storytelling, lyrical interpretation, and expressive hip-hop content tend to demonstrate greater communication confidence than those with lower levels of engagement (Yao & Jia, 2025; Jefferson & Ohrt, 2024).

These findings align with socio-cultural learning theories, which explain that communication abilities can develop through language-rich environments (Ling et al., 2025; Livingston, 2024). Previous studies rarely used quantitative analysis to examine measurable communication variables such as speaking confidence, articulation, and conversational fluency (Dankoor et al., 2025; Wang, 2024). As a result, this study contributes by focusing directly on communication outcomes and demonstrating that hip-hop may serve as an effective learning medium for enhancing communication among young adults (Adeyola & Allen, 2025; Bansal et al., 2025).

The findings also provide insight into the role of gender in communication development through exposure to hip-hop. The results suggest that male and female students may interpret and internalise hip-hop lyrics differently, thereby influencing their emotional expression and interpersonal interactions in distinct ways (Qian, 2025; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). These findings address gaps in earlier literature, as many previous studies discussed gender representation and identity within hip-hop culture without statistically examining gender as a mediating factor in communication enhancement (Dankoor et al., 2025; Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024). Future research could examine mediating factors such as personality, socio-economic background, or digital media exposure, and use qualitative approaches to understand students' communication experiences through hip-hop engagement (Levy et al., 2024; Yao & Jia, 2025).

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study concludes that hip-hop music has strong potential to improve oral communication skills among young adults, particularly in speaking confidence, expressive ability, conversational fluency, and interpersonal interaction (Livingston, 2024; Wang, 2024). The findings also support earlier research showing that hip-hop encourages emotional openness, active participation, and self-expression through lyrical storytelling and rhythm-based communication (Jefferson & Ohrt, 2024; Adeyola & Allen, 2025). In addition, this research highlights that gender may influence how male and female students interpret and internalise hip-hop lyrics, thereby affecting communication behaviour differently across individuals (Qian, 2025; Dankoor et al., 2025). Therefore, educational institutions should consider incorporating hip-hop-based learning activities into communication and language-related subjects to create more engaging learning environments for students (Laforgue-Bullido et al., 2024; Levy et al., 2024). Future research should also involve larger samples, different educational settings, and qualitative approaches better to understand students' communication experiences through hip-hop engagement (Ling et al., 2025; Yao & Jia, 2025). Researchers should also examine factors such as digital media exposure, personality differences, and cultural background when analysing the development of communication among youths globally.

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Paper Contribution to the Related Field of Study

This research will provide a new literature review and guidelines for future researchers who want to pursue similar research or a different topic related to this research.

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