



Using Songs to Boost Vocabulary Mastery in English Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of English songs in enhancing vocabulary mastery among university-level EFL students and explores their perceptions of song-based learning. Employing a mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected through pre-test and post-test vocabulary assessments, while qualitative data were obtained via semi-structured interviews. Participants were 23 English Education students at Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative analysis using a paired-sample t-test revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the intervention ($p < .001$), indicating a strong instructional effect. Beyond score improvement, the findings revealed that students demonstrated increased ability to infer word meanings from context and greater retention of newly learned vocabulary. Qualitative findings further supported the quantitative results, showing that English songs enhanced students' motivation, engagement, and confidence in using new vocabulary, as well as improving their pronunciation awareness and listening comprehension. Nevertheless, students reported challenges related to fast song tempo and unfamiliar accents, which occasionally hindered comprehension. Overall, the findings suggest that English songs function not only as an effective tool for improving vocabulary mastery but also as a meaningful pedagogical medium that promotes contextual learning, learner engagement, and positive learning experiences in higher education EFL contexts.

Keywords: EFL learners, English songs, Mixed-method, Vocabulary mastery

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1. Introduction

English has become an international language widely used across the world, making English proficiency an essential skill in today's globalized era (Arbain & Nur, 2017; Irawan et al., 2018; Eltigani & Ahmed, n.d.). In contemporary education, vocabulary mastery plays a central role in supporting English comprehension and communication and should be developed through appropriate instructional strategies and learning media (Arbain & Rohman, 2023; Keristiana et al., 2019; Kitila & Ali, 2023; Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020). Previous studies have indicated that the use of learning media contributes to students' engagement and understanding



in English learning, particularly when interactive and enjoyable media are employed (Brutman & Matsegora, 2024; Budianto et al., 2025; Merilia et al., 2019). Among various instructional media, music has been frequently used as a supportive tool to facilitate vocabulary retention, learner motivation, and classroom engagement (Arbain et al., 2017; Gracella & Rahman Nur, 2020; Sari & Ayu, 2021; Kumar et al., 2022; Wahyuningrum, 2019).

English songs have attracted particular attention because they integrate vocabulary, pronunciation, listening skills, rhythm, and repetition within a meaningful linguistic context (Karim et al., 2023; Sadiqzade, 2025). Empirical evidence suggests that song-based instruction is associated with improvements in vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and learner motivation (Triwardani, 2022; Oktaviani 2023; Alya Audria et al., 2023; Nur, 2020, 2021; Praditha & Nur, 2019). However, most existing studies emphasize learning outcomes through quantitative measures, such as pre-test and post-test score comparisons, without sufficiently exploring learners' perceptions and experiences during the learning process (Oktaviani & Indonesia, 2023; Maulidina Tri Amanda et al., 2024). Conversely, several qualitative studies have focused on students' attitudes toward learning English through songs but have not systematically linked these perceptions to measurable vocabulary gains (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020; Farhansyah et al., 2023).

In addition to these methodological limitations, previous research has predominantly been conducted at the primary and secondary school levels (Triwardani, 2022; Hanipudin, 2021), while empirical studies involving university-level EFL learners, particularly in Indonesian contexts, remain limited. Furthermore, although some studies have utilized popular English songs in instruction, the pedagogical rationale for song selection is often insufficiently explained, which may reduce the clarity and replicability of the findings (Oktaviani 2023; Triwardani, 2022).

To address these gaps, the present study narrows its focus to university level EFL students and employs a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation. The study involved 23 undergraduate students at Muhammadiyah



University of East Kalimantan. Quantitative data were collected through vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests and analyzed using a paired-sample t-test to examine changes in students' vocabulary mastery. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews to explore students' perceptions and learning experiences related to song-based instruction. The selection of English songs—specifically songs by Charlie Puth such as *One Call Away*, *See You Again*, and *Dangerously*—was based on pedagogical considerations, including lexical simplicity, frequent use of everyday vocabulary, thematic relevance to students' lives, and repetitive melodic structures that support memory retention (Oktaviani 2023; Maulidina Tri Amanda et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2023).

By integrating statistical evidence of vocabulary learning outcomes with qualitative insights into students' perceptions, this study contributes to existing literature by providing a more comprehensive understanding of song-based vocabulary learning in higher education EFL contexts. Rather than merely reporting score improvements, the study links quantitative results with learners' experiences, thereby offering methodological and contextual contributions beyond previous song-based vocabulary studies.

2. Method

This study uses a mixed-method design with an explanatory sequential model to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effect of English song-based learning on students' vocabulary mastery and their perceptions of the learning process. The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows numerical data on learning outcomes to be supported by qualitative descriptive data, thereby providing a more in-depth interpretation of the research findings (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020; Farhansyah et al., 2023). The research participants consisted of 23 students from the English Education Study Program at Muhammadiyah University of East Kalimantan, who were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, including basic English proficiency and limited vocabulary mastery. Data collection was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Quantitative data were obtained through vocabulary tests administered in the form of pre-tests and post-tests, consisting of 20 multiple choice and fill in the blank items covering general and



contextual vocabulary derived from the lyrics of selected English songs, with a maximum score of 20. Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package Social Sciences (SPSS).

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected participants after the post-test to explore students' perceptions, learning experiences, motivation, vocabulary improvement, pronunciation awareness, and challenges in learning vocabulary through songs. The interview protocol began with an introduction and explanation of the interview purpose, followed by a series of open ended questions organized into four main aspects: students' perceptions and attitudes toward song-based learning, vocabulary improvement and learning processes, motivation and engagement, and challenges encountered during learning. The interview concluded by allowing participants to provide additional comments and thanking them for their participation. The interview questions and procedures were adapted from previous studies (Pavia, 2023; Iqbal Firdaus et al., 2023; Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020; Farhansyah et al., 2023).

The research procedure began with a pre-test, followed by vocabulary learning using English songs by Charlie Puth, namely One Call Away, See You Again, and Dangerously, which were selected based on pedagogical considerations such as lexical simplicity, frequent use of everyday vocabulary, relevance of themes to students' lives, and repetitive lyric structures that support vocabulary retention. The procedure ended with a post-test and interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using a paired-sample t-test to examine differences between pre-test and post-test scores, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to complement the understanding of students' learning experiences and motivation.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative findings describe changes in students' vocabulary mastery before and after the song-based intervention, while qualitative findings elaborate students' learning experiences and perceptions.



3.1. The Result of Normality

Before conducting the hypothesis testing, a normality test was performed to examine whether the data met the assumption of normal distribution. The Shapiro–Wilk test results indicated that both pre-test and post-test scores were normally distributed, with significance values greater than 0.05, allowing further parametric analysis.

Table 1 Test of Normality

Table 1. Test of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
before	.221	23	.005	.934	23	.133
after	.170	23	.084	.920	23	.066

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

3.2 Paired Samples Correlation

Correlation
to measure
between two

Table 2 Paired Sample Correlations Result

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	before & after	23	.664	.001

tests are conducted
the relationship
paired variables.

The paired-sample correlation test revealed a strong positive relationship between pre-test and post-test scores ($r = 0.664$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that students who performed relatively higher before the intervention also tended to show higher performance afterward.

3.4 Paired Sample T-Test Results

The main results of the hypothesis testing are presented in the following table.



		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	before - after	-6.522	2.520	.526	-7.612	-5.432	-12.410	22	.000

The paired-sample t-test results demonstrated a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores ($t(22) = -12.410$, $p < 0.001$). The mean score increased from 11.43 in the pre-test to 17.96 in the post-test, with a mean difference of -6.522 . This result indicates that students achieved higher vocabulary scores after learning through English songs. The statistical significance reflects measurable improvement in test performance following the intervention. However, this finding is interpreted strictly as evidence of score improvement within the scope of the instructional treatment rather than as a comprehensive indicator of overall language proficiency.

3.5 Qualitative Research Results (Interviews)

Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with five participants to explore their experiences in learning vocabulary through English songs. Data analysis produced several interrelated main themes, as described below.

1. Enjoyable, Interesting, and Relaxed Learning

Learning vocabulary through songs creates a fun, engaging, and relaxed learning environment. This positive learning environment helps reduce anxiety about learning languages, making it easier for students to absorb language input and increase their involvement in the learning process. student stated: "Easier for beginners, easy to remember (R1). Learning is more interesting and very enjoyable, not boring, and it makes students interested in learning (R2). Learning is fun and not boring, making it more relaxed (R3)". Students consistently described song-based learning as enjoyable, engaging, and less stressful. Songs created a relaxed learning environment that reduced boredom and anxiety, allowing students to participate more actively. Rather than viewing vocabulary learning as a task-



oriented activity, students perceived it as a more natural and enjoyable process. This positive atmosphere appeared to support sustained attention during learning sessions. (Zen Fadli, 2023; Helmi, 2024).

2. Contextual Vocabulary Understanding and Retention

Song lyrics present vocabulary in a meaningful context so that students not only memorize the meaning of words, but understand their natural usage. This contextual understanding helps deepen meaning and improve long-term memory of vocabulary. student stated: ‘‘To understand the vocabulary, there are some idioms, so if we understand the lyrics, we become curious and search for the meaning and definition (R1). Because the words appear in the context of the story, you can understand the meaning of all the lyrics, not just because you memorize the word meanings (R2)’’.

Participants emphasized that song lyrics helped them understand vocabulary in context rather than through memorization alone. Words embedded in meaningful lyrics encouraged students to infer meaning, explore idiomatic expressions, and remember vocabulary more effectively. Repetition of lyrics and melodies further supported retention, as frequently repeated words became easier to recall. This suggests that vocabulary learning occurred through repeated exposure and contextual reinforcement rather than isolated drilling. (Zhang et al., 2023; Maghfiroh et al., 2025).

3. Pronunciation Awareness and Listening Development

Exposure to English songs helps improve listening skills and pronunciation awareness. The variety of accents, intonations, and tempos in songs trains students to recognize language sounds more accurately. student stated: ‘‘Every singer and every song has a different accent and tone, so it becomes trained and the pronunciation is different (R1). To improve listening skills, you have to listen repeatedly and treat it like you have to learn how to pronounce it specifically; that helps with that (R2). From that song, it makes the listener's hearing become more accustomed to listening to English pronunciation, so when they want to try, they can (R3)’’.



Students reported increased awareness of pronunciation and listening skills through exposure to different accents, intonation patterns, and tempos in songs. Although variations in pronunciation initially posed challenges, repeated listening helped students adapt and become more familiar with spoken English sounds. This process contributed to improved phonological awareness rather than immediate mastery. (Misa, 2024; Solanon et al., 2020).

4. Lyrics as a Source of Vocabulary Learning and Meaning Understanding

Song lyrics are an effective source of vocabulary learning because they present authentic and meaningful language. Songs that are relevant to students' personal experiences can increase their understanding of meaning and interest in learning. student stated: "lyrics, for away from the Charlie Puth song that always sticks in my mind (R1). lyrics because there are many words we can see and learn (R2). Melody because everyone likes tunes that don't make people feel bored (R3). In terms of lyrics and the meaning of each line (R4). It's more about the lyrics and the meaning of the song. If the lyrics align with my experiences, I'm more interested and understand better (R5)".

Participant said that they are more interested in and understand the meaning of a song better when the words are about things that happen to them. Research consistently shows that learning vocabulary through songs creates an engaging, enjoyable, and motivating environment that enhances vocabulary acquisition. Studies also indicate that when song lyrics relate to learners' personal experiences or familiar topics, students show greater interest and better comprehension of the vocabulary (Hasaniyah & Suryanto, 2025). Experimental research confirms that using songs as a teaching medium leads to significantly higher vocabulary gains compared to traditional methods (Kittiya Phisutthangkoon, 2016). Overall, the results show that song lyrics can help students learn new words and understand what they mean better, especially if the lyrics are personal and have something to do with them.

5. Confidence, Relevance, and Learning Challenges

The main challenges in using songs include fast tempo, singer accents, and unclear pronunciation. However, through repeated listening practice, these challenges can be overcome



and actually contribute to improving language skills. student stated: ‘‘There are parts of the song that are difficult and fast to pronounce, so it's a bit challenging. That's why I keep searching and repeating those parts over and over (R1). Pronunciation because every singer has a different accent (R2). I didn't understand what it meant when I made it (R3). The tempo is too fast, so the way to overcome this is to keep listening, memorizing, and learning (R4). It's more about the tempo of the song and the pronunciation, which is usually not clear to the ear. So, to overcome this, I usually listen to it repeatedly(R5)’’.

Song-based learning was perceived as relevant to students' daily lives and aligned with contemporary learning preferences. Several students noted increased confidence in using English vocabulary and pronunciation. However, challenges such as fast tempo and unclear pronunciation were also identified. These difficulties did not prevent learning but required students to engage in repeated listening and independent meaning-seeking strategies. (Pratiwi, 2025; Safitri, 2024; Selvia et al., 2025).

3.6 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that English song-based instruction contributed to a statistically significant improvement in students' vocabulary test scores. The quantitative results demonstrate a clear difference between pre-test and post-test performance, suggesting that the instructional intervention supported vocabulary learning within the measured scope. However, this improvement should be interpreted as an increase in test-based vocabulary mastery rather than as evidence of broad language proficiency development (Brutman & Matsegora, 2024).

Qualitative findings provide insight into how this improvement occurred. Students' descriptions of increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and contextual understanding suggest that songs functioned as a supportive learning medium rather than a standalone instructional method. The learning process was facilitated by repetition, melody, and meaningful context, which helped students notice, remember, and reuse vocabulary encountered in lyrics. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the role of affective factors and contextual exposure in vocabulary learning (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020; Farhansyah et al., 2023). yet the present



findings indicate that these benefits emerged specifically through structured classroom integration of songs rather than casual listening alone.

Unlike some prior studies that primarily highlight motivation as the main outcome of song-based learning, this study demonstrates a connection between motivational factors and measurable learning outcomes. Students' increased motivation and engagement did not function independently but appeared to support repeated exposure and deeper processing of vocabulary. Nevertheless, the qualitative data also reveal limitations. Difficulties related to fast tempo and unfamiliar accents suggest that songs may not uniformly support all learners without guided instructional support. These challenges indicate that song selection and pedagogical scaffolding remain critical factors in maximizing learning effectiveness.

Rather than merely confirming existing literature, the findings refine current understanding by showing that song-based instruction is effective when songs are selected based on pedagogical considerations and integrated into a structured learning process. The results suggest that songs are most effective as a complementary medium that supports contextual learning, motivation, and learner autonomy, rather than as a replacement for conventional vocabulary instruction.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that learning English vocabulary through songs can support improvements in student performance on vocabulary tests and create a more contextual and affectively engaging learning experience. Songs serve as a supporting medium that helps students be exposed to vocabulary in meaningful contexts, encourages active engagement, and facilitates the repetition process that contributes to vocabulary comprehension and retention. However, these findings need to be understood proportionally within the limitations of the research design and scope.

This study has several methodological limitations that need to be explicitly acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 23 students from one study program and one institution, so generalizing the findings to a broader EFL learning



context needs to be done with caution. Second, the short duration of the intervention limited the study's ability to assess the long-term impact of song use on productive vocabulary development and other language skills. Third, the quantitative instruments used focused on multiple-choice vocabulary tests, so the results reflect improvements in receptive test performance rather than overall vocabulary competence in real-world communication contexts.

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