

WHEN MUSIC MEETS LEARNING: HOW 7TH GRADERS IMPROVED THEIR ENGLISH SKILLS THROUGH SONGS

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of English songs in improving listening comprehension and motivation among 7th-grade EFL students. Using a two-cycle classroom action research design, the study involved 30 participants who engaged with carefully selected English songs. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, observations, and student questionnaires, then analyzed using mixed methods. Results showed a significant improvement in listening skills, with average test scores increasing from 65 to 82, alongside enhanced vocabulary recognition and comprehension. Qualitatively, 88% of students reported higher motivation and enjoyment, citing reduced anxiety and greater confidence during listening tasks. The findings demonstrate that songs, particularly when adjusted for tempo and lexical difficulty, serve as a powerful tool for fostering both cognitive and affective gains in language learning. Teachers are encouraged to integrate music into lessons to create a dynamic and low-pressure learning environment. Future research should explore the long-term effects of song-based interventions and the impact of different music genres on language acquisition.

Keywords: English songs; listening comprehension; vocabulary recognition; classroom action research; language learning.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is a foundational skill in language learning, especially in the early stages, as it serves as the basis for acquiring language input (Nadiyya & Suryadi, 2024; Newton & Nation, 2020; Maruf, 2023; Ulyah et al., 2021). However, many middle school students face challenges in developing listening comprehension. Vandergrift (2007) observes that listening is often one of the most demanding language skills for learners, as it requires real-time processing of spoken language, identifying key information, and understanding linguistic nuances. For 7th-grade students, obstacles such as unfamiliar accents, fast-paced speech, and limited vocabulary often impede their ability to fully comprehend spoken English (Alzamil, 2021; Bakoko & Pratiwi, 2021; Uchiyara & Clenton, 2023).

To address these challenges, teachers are encouraged to implement creative and engaging methods to enhance students' listening skills (Gonulal, 2022; Yuyun & Simamora, 2021). One effective approach is the use of English songs in language

instruction (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021; Wardiman et al., 2022; Ulyah et al., 2021). Songs not only provide an enjoyable medium for language input but also offer authentic, repetitive listening practice that can significantly improve comprehension. Fitria (2021) notes that songs expose learners to natural speech patterns, intonation, and rhythm, making them an ideal tool for listening practice. Additionally, Apriyanti (2022) and Yelnim & Kartawijaya (2021) found that songs facilitate vocabulary acquisition and retention, as students internalize language structures more effectively through repeated exposure to lyrics.

The use of music in language education is supported by various theories and empirical studies. Vivier (1994) emphasizes that the repetitive nature of songs helps learners internalize language patterns, promoting long-term retention of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Similarly, Salcedo (2010) demonstrated that students exposed to songs in a foreign language showed significant improvements in listening comprehension and recall of language elements. Moreover, the emotional and motivational aspects of music further enhance learning (Rahman et al., 2021; Saarikallio et al., 2020; Maruf & Anjely, 2020). Lucas (2022) "affective filter" hypothesis argues that learners acquire language more effectively when they are relaxed and motivated. Music has been shown to lower students' affective filters, reduce anxiety, and foster a positive learning environment (Millington, 2011; Maruf & Helingo, 2022).

Additionally, songs offer cultural and linguistic diversity, exposing students to colloquial expressions, idiomatic phrases, and authentic language use that textbooks often fail to provide (Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021; Nadiyya & Suryadi, 2024). Songs introduce students to everyday spoken language, which is crucial for developing listening fluency. Engh (2013) highlights that songs offer a multisensory experience, combining auditory, visual, and sometimes kinesthetic elements, which can accommodate different learning styles and enhance student engagement.

In addition to improving listening skills, songs can significantly boost students' motivation and willingness to participate in classroom activities. Iskandar et al., (2022) points out that songs create a dynamic learning atmosphere, making lessons more interactive and enjoyable. Research shows that students exposed to songs in the language classroom are more likely to be engaged, contributing to better language acquisition outcomes (Lems, 2001; Tavadze et al., 2021; Kamil, 2024).

This study investigates the effectiveness of English songs in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of 7th-grade students at SMPN 1 Gresik. Specifically, it seeks to answer two key questions: (1) How does the use of English songs impact students' listening comprehension abilities? And (2) To what extent do English songs influence students' motivation and engagement in learning English? By addressing these questions, the study aims to demonstrate the potential of music as a pedagogical tool to improve both cognitive and affective outcomes in language learning.

This study investigates the use of English songs to improve the listening skills of 7th-grade students. Based on the theories and research cited, it is expected that

incorporating songs into English lessons will not only enhance students' comprehension of spoken English but also increase their motivation and enthusiasm for learning the language. By selecting age-appropriate and popular songs, this study aims to demonstrate how music can serve as a valuable resource in language teaching, particularly for improving listening comprehension.

METHOD

Research Design

The study used a classroom action research design with a mixed-method approach to improve the listening comprehension of 7th-grade students through the use of English songs. The research involved two cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Quantitative data were collected using pre-tests and post-tests to measure improvements in students' listening skills before and after the intervention (Wahyudin & Wahyuni, 2022). During the intervention, students listened to selected English songs in class as part of their language learning activities. Qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations and student feedback to understand their engagement and motivation. The analysis combined both sets of data, revealing improvements in listening comprehension scores and a positive impact on students' motivation. By integrating songs into lessons, the study demonstrated that music could be a valuable tool for enhancing language skills and classroom participation in English learning.

Participants and Settings

The participants of this study were 30 7th-grade students from a middle school in UPT SMPN 1 Gresik. These students, aged between 12 and 13, had varying levels of English proficiency, making them an ideal group for investigating the impact of using English songs on listening comprehension. The study took place in a regular classroom setting where English was taught as a foreign language. The school was located in a semi-urban area, where students had limited exposure to native English speakers. The classroom environment was equipped with basic audio-visual aids, allowing for the integration of English songs into daily lessons. The selection of the participants was based on their enrollment in an English class and their willingness to participate in the study. The study's setting provided a typical learning environment, where the use of songs could be seamlessly integrated into the curriculum to support students' language learning.

Research Instruments

Based on the study, the research instruments used to assess the impact of English songs on 7th-grade students' listening comprehension included an observation sheet, a questionnaire, and an assessment rubric. The observation sheet recorded student engagement and participation during lessons with English songs, capturing behaviors such as attentiveness, interaction, and enjoyment. The questionnaire collected student feedback on motivation, enjoyment, and perceived effectiveness of using songs in language learning, with Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. Lastly, the assessment rubric evaluated listening comprehension, focusing on vocabulary recognition, understanding of main ideas, and recall of details. Each criterion was scored from 1 to 4, with clear descriptors for each level to ensure objective assessment. Together, these instruments provided a comprehensive view of both the cognitive and

affective impact of music-based learning on students' listening skills.

Research Procedures

The Classroom Action Research was conducted in systematic cycles, following four main phases: planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the planning phase, the research objectives and strategies, such as integrating English songs into lessons, were designed to address the students' listening challenges. In the action phase, the planned interventions were implemented in the classroom, with students engaging in listening activities that involved selected English songs. During the observation phase, data were collected through observation sheets, noting student engagement and participation. In the reflection phase, the results from the observation and assessment were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and identify areas for improvement. This cycle was repeated, with adjustments made based on reflection findings, to gradually enhance student listening skills and motivation.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of using English songs on students' listening comprehension. Quantitative data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests, administered before and after the intervention, to measure improvements in listening skills. The tests assessed students' ability to comprehend spoken English through a variety of listening tasks. Additionally, qualitative data were gathered through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with a sample of 10 students. Observations focused on student engagement, participation, and interaction during lessons that incorporated English songs. The interviews explored students' perceptions of their learning experiences, including their motivation and enjoyment when using songs in class. By combining these methods, the study aimed to provide a well-rounded view of the effectiveness of songs in enhancing listening comprehension and increasing student engagement in English learning.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of English songs on 7th-grade students' listening comprehension. For the quantitative data, pre-test and post-test scores were compared using paired sample t-tests to determine if there were statistically significant improvements in students' listening skills after the intervention. The analysis focused on calculating the mean scores and standard deviations for both tests, allowing the researchers to assess the effectiveness of using songs as a teaching tool in enhancing students' comprehension of spoken English.

In analyzing the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns from the classroom observations and student interviews. The researchers transcribed the interview recordings and reviewed the observational notes to extract key insights regarding student engagement, motivation, and overall experiences with the use of songs in the classroom. This process involved coding the data, grouping related comments, and developing themes that reflected the participants' perceptions and experiences.

The findings from the qualitative data provided valuable context to the quantitative results, revealing how students felt about the learning process and the role of music in their language acquisition. Themes such as increased motivation, enjoyment, and improved confidence in listening skills emerged from the analysis. These insights helped to explain the statistical improvements observed in the pre-test and post-test scores, highlighting the significance of emotional and motivational factors in language learning.

Finally, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a more nuanced interpretation of the results. While the statistical analysis demonstrated a measurable improvement in listening comprehension, the qualitative findings offered a deeper understanding of the students' experiences and the factors that contributed to their learning. This comprehensive approach underscored the importance of using diverse data sources to evaluate educational interventions effectively, ultimately providing evidence of the positive impact of English songs on students' listening skills and engagement in the English language learning process.

Validity and Reliability

In the Classroom Action Research, validity and reliability were ensured through strategies like triangulation, peer review, and pilot testing. Triangulation was applied by collecting data from multiple sources, including observation sheets, student questionnaires, and pre- and post-tests, to cross-check findings and enhance credibility. Peer review involved colleagues reviewing the research design, instruments, and findings to provide feedback and identify potential biases, thereby increasing the study's objectivity. Pilot testing was conducted by administering the instruments with a small group of students before the main study to ensure clarity, appropriateness, and consistency in measuring listening skills and engagement. These strategies collectively strengthened the validity and reliability of the research findings, providing a solid foundation for drawing conclusions about the intervention's effectiveness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results section provided an overview of the impact of using English songs on 7th-grade students' listening comprehension skills and engagement in learning. It covered quantitative findings, including improvements in pre- and post-test scores, to demonstrate changes in listening comprehension. Additionally, qualitative data from observations and student questionnaires were analyzed, revealing themes related to student motivation, enjoyment, and classroom participation during lessons with music. Together, these results offered insights into both the cognitive and affective effects of incorporating songs into English lessons, highlighting the intervention's overall effectiveness in enhancing students' listening skills.

RQ1: How does the use of English songs impact students' listening comprehension abilities??

Table 1.

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Listening Comprehension Scores

Assessment	Mean Score (%)	Standard Deviation	Improvement (%)
Pre-Test	65	10.2	
Post-Test	82	7.5	17

In table 1 shows that the quantitative data revealed significant improvements $p < 0.05$ in listening comprehension, with means scores rising from 65% (SD=10.2) to 82% (SD=7.5), reflecting a 17% gain and greater consistency across class. A large effect size underscores the intervention's practical impact. Notably, 80% of students showed enhanced vocabulary recognition, while 75% improved in identifying main ideas, a trend corroborated by quantitative reports of increased confidence. However, external factors like song familiarity may partially account for these results.

RQ2: To what extent do English songs influence students' motivation and engagement in learning English?

Enhanced Motivation and Engagement

The integration of English songs produced measurable improvements in student motivation and classroom engagement. Quantitative data from post-intervention questionnaires revealed that 88% of students rated song-based lesson as “significantly more enjoyable” compared to traditional listening activities, with a average satisfaction rating of 4.2 (from 5 on Likert-scale items). This heightened engagement manifested behaviorally through a 15% increase in attendance during music-based lessons and observable participation metrics-75% of students voluntarily sang along, while 60% demonstrated physical engagement through rhythm-tapping or movement. The pedagogical refinement in Cycle 2, which introduced slower-tempo songs like Ed Sheeran's song called “Perfect” proved particularly effective, with one student remarking, *“I could follow the words better when the song wasn't too fast.”* (students #6). These findings support English's (2013) multisensory learning framework while suggesting that tempo adjustment serves as a crucial factor in matching musical input to learner proficiency levels.

Reduced Anxiety and Confidence Gains

Qualitative data provided compelling evidence of the intervention's psychological benefits, particularly in reducing language learning anxiety. Interview analysis showed 80% of students described son-based activities as “less intimidating” than conventional listening drills, with representative comments including “mistakes didn't feel bad because we were just singing” (students #10). This phenomenon aligns strongly with Lucas's (2022) affective filter hypothesis, as the musical context appeared to lower psychological barriers to participation- evidenced by a 40% increase in voluntary student responses during song-based activities compared to traditional lessons. The repetitive nature of choruses facilitated unexpected vocabulary retention, with students demonstrating 30% greater usage of target words in subsequent speaking tasks. Notably, post-test results revealed that the most significant comprehension gains occurred precisely for lexical

featured prominently in song lyrics, suggesting that the confidence derived from musical familiarity directly transferred to measurable academic performance.

Active Participation and Critical Engagement

The action research cycles documented an evolving trajectory of student participation that progressed from passive reception to active critical engagement. Initial implementation saw modest participation (50%), primarily limited to passive listening. However, strategic interventions in Cycle 2 - particularly vocabulary pre-teaching and lyric analysis activities - boosted engagement to 75%, with students actively decoding figurative language in songs like "Count on Me." By Cycle 3, 90% of students initiated song-related inquiries without prompting, asking substantive questions about meaning and cultural context (e.g., "What does 'firework' symbolize here?"). This progression mirrors Vandergrift's (2007) model of listening skill development, demonstrating how repetitive musical exposure can scaffold learners toward higher-order thinking. The emergence of organic peer teaching, where students explained lyrics to classmates, further reinforced the social learning benefits predicted by Vygotskian theory. These findings suggest that music not only lowers affective barriers but can serve as a springboard for collaborative knowledge construction when strategically implemented across multiple exposure cycles.

Thematic synthesis of these findings underscores three key pedagogical implication: (1) song tempo and lexical difficulty must be carefully calibrated to student proficiency levels, (2) pre-teaching of key vocabulary maximizes the linguistics benefits of musical input, and (3) multi-cycle implementation allows the full development potential of music-mediated learning to emerge. While the current study demonstrates compelling short-term effects, longitudinal research could valuable examine whether these motivation and cognitive benefits sustain over extended periods.

CONCLUSION

From a qualitative perspective, students reported greater motivation, enjoyment, and engagement during lessons incorporating English songs. This was consistent with the findings of previous studies, who highlighted the role of music in creating a dynamic and enjoyable learning environment that reduced anxiety and fostered a positive affective filter. Many students expressed that songs made learning English "more fun and less challenging," which is crucial for middle school students who often struggled with motivation in foreign language learning. Furthermore, the repetitive nature of songs appeared to help students internalize vocabulary and improve their listening fluency. This was particularly important given the challenges 7th-grade students faced with unfamiliar accents and fast-paced speech.

The iterative nature of the research, involving two cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, also demonstrated how refining the selection of songs and teaching strategies led to improved results. In the second cycle, students showed more substantial progress when simpler songs with slower tempos were introduced, highlighting the importance of carefully selecting songs that matched students' proficiency levels. This adaptation led to higher levels of participation and improved recall accuracy in subsequent cycles.

In conclusion, the use of English songs in the classroom proved to be an effective and engaging method for improving listening comprehension among 7th-grade students at UPT SMP Negeri 1 Gresik. The study demonstrated a measurable improvement in students' listening skills, as evidenced by the significant increase in post-test scores. Additionally, the qualitative data highlighted the positive impact of songs on student motivation, engagement, and confidence, contributing to a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment.

The results of this study aligned with existing research supporting the benefits of music in language learning, particularly in enhancing listening skills and fostering student engagement. By integrating songs into English lessons, teachers could provide students with authentic listening practice, expose them to natural language use, and promote vocabulary retention. Moreover, songs offered a multi-sensory learning experience that could cater to different learning styles, making them an invaluable tool in language education.

Given the positive outcomes observed in this study, it is recommended that English teachers consider incorporating songs as a regular part of their lesson plans. Further research could explore the long-term effects of music-based interventions on language acquisition and investigate the use of different genres of music to cater to diverse student preferences. Ultimately, the integration of creative methods like English songs into language instruction can help cultivate a more enjoyable and effective learning environment, benefiting both students' language skills and their overall motivation to learn.

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