

EFL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING ENGLISH SONGS FOR STUDENTS' VOCABULARY LEARNING AT DEHASSEN UNIVERSITY BENGKULU

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ABSTRACT

Vocabulary knowledge plays a crucial role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, enabling learners to communicate effectively and comprehend spoken and written texts. In many Indonesian higher education settings, traditional vocabulary teaching methods such as rote memorization and written exercises tend to reduce students' motivation and hinder long-term retention. This study explored the perceptions of Physical Education students at Dehasen University regarding the use of English songs for vocabulary learning, with attention to enjoyment, perceived effectiveness, and challenges. A qualitative design was employed, involving 50 participants. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that 90% of students (45 out of 50) reported high enjoyment, and the same proportion perceived English songs as effective for vocabulary acquisition, mainly due to their motivational value and repeated exposure to meaningful language input. Challenges were also noted: 30% (15 students) struggled with unfamiliar slang, 26% (13 students) found it difficult to maintain focus, 24% (12 students) reported pronunciation issues, and 20% (10 students) were affected by fast tempo. Overall, the results suggest that English songs can serve as an engaging and effective medium for vocabulary development when appropriate materials are selected to minimize comprehension barriers. Integrating songs into EFL instruction may enhance vocabulary retention and listening skills while fostering a positive learning atmosphere. Future research could complement perception-based findings with quantitative measures of vocabulary gains to strengthen the evidence for music-based language learning.

Keywords: *Vocabulary Learning, English Songs, EFL Students, Learner Perceptions, Physical Education*

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it enables learners to interpret both spoken and written messages effectively. Students with limited vocabulary often find it difficult to convey ideas and understand English input, which may lead to reduced engagement in learning activities (Nation, 2010; Uspa, 2020; Putra & Pradana, 2023). Supporting this, Pradana (2023) reports that many learners struggle in English communication due to insufficient vocabulary, low confidence, and limited opportunities to participate in meaningful interactions. Such circumstances illustrate how vocabulary deficiency not only affects comprehension but also restricts learners' oral communication and overall performance.

In many Indonesian EFL contexts, however, vocabulary teaching continues to rely on traditional techniques such as rote memorization and repetitive writing exercises. These methods are often perceived as monotonous and may not foster long-term retention or meaningful vocabulary use. As highlighted by Pradana (2023), non-interactive classroom practices can heighten students' anxiety, cause hesitation, and reduce their willingness to participate. Drawing on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), high anxiety and low motivation can inhibit language acquisition by preventing input from being processed effectively. This highlights the need for vocabulary-learning approaches that create supportive, engaging, and motivating conditions.

While traditional approaches may not fully address learners' communicative needs, recent research emphasizes the contribution of digital learning tools in vocabulary development. Mariska et al. (2024) found that applications like Duolingo enhance learners' vocabulary knowledge and engagement by providing interactive and adaptive learning environments. This aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which stresses that vocabulary acquisition occurs through exposure to meaningful and comprehensible input. Nevertheless, technology-based tools may not fully meet learners' needs for authentic, multimodal, and socially oriented experiences.

English songs provide an alternative medium that combines linguistic input with enjoyable, real-world contexts. From the viewpoint of Comprehensible Input, songs offer repeated exposure to vocabulary within meaningful linguistic patterns, enabling learners to acquire new words naturally. Millington (2011) notes that songs can support vocabulary learning because their repetitive and understandable lyrics help learners absorb language more effectively. Similarly, Shen (2009) emphasizes that songs contribute to an enjoyable learning environment where melody, rhythm, and emotion support vocabulary retention. In addition, songs can lower anxiety and enhance enjoyment—conditions that lower the affective filter and promote vocabulary uptake. These affective advantages are also consistent with the motivational perspectives of Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2001), who underline the role of motivation in language learning success.

From a cognitive perspective, Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986) explains how the combination of verbal input (lyrics) and auditory stimuli (melody) enhances memory through dual mental representations. Empirical evidence supports this theoretical claim: Hardian et al. (2021) showed that English songs significantly improve learners' vocabulary mastery because rhythm and contextual repetition reinforce memorability. Songs likewise facilitate incidental vocabulary learning, an important process discussed by Nation (2010) and Schmitt (2008), where learners acquire new words unintentionally through repeated exposure during listening. In this regard, songs integrate cognitive, affective, and linguistic dimensions in vocabulary development.

Vocabulary mastery is essential not only for communicative competence but also for improving learners' ability to process language input and produce output efficiently (Putra et al., 2024). As such, teaching techniques that enhance vocabulary learning while simultaneously reducing anxiety and fostering motivation are highly needed.

This urgency becomes even more evident in non-English departments, such as the Physical Education program at Dehasen University. These learners must understand English terminology related to anatomy, physiology, sports science, movement, and

sports regulations. They also require English proficiency to access global academic resources. Since much scholarly discourse in sports is published in English, adequate vocabulary knowledge is crucial for academic progress and professional development. Therefore, identifying appropriate vocabulary-learning techniques that match the characteristics of Physical Education students—who often prefer active and dynamic learning—is an important pedagogical consideration.

Among various learning media, English songs have gained attention due to their linguistic and affective benefits. Songs provide exposure to authentic pronunciation, rhythm, and everyday expressions (Putra et al., 2018). They also create a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere that reduces anxiety and encourages repeated engagement, which in turn strengthens vocabulary retention (Lengkoan, 2017). These features are consistent with theories of affect, input, dual coding, incidental learning, and motivation. Given the active and kinesthetic learning preferences often observed among Physical Education students, English songs may offer a particularly suitable medium for vocabulary reinforcement and listening improvement.

Previous research supports the effectiveness of songs in EFL classrooms. Studies by Millington (2011) and Shen (2009) highlight that songs increase student engagement and facilitate vocabulary learning through meaningful repetition and emotional involvement. Similarly, Lekian (2016) and Bawawa (2020) found that vocabulary instruction through songs leads to better vocabulary retention compared to traditional approaches. However, researchers such as Ma'rifat (2017) caution that learners' attitudes influence the effectiveness of song-based learning. If students perceive songs merely as entertainment, the pedagogical benefits may be limited. This observation is closely related to Dörnyei's (2001) emphasis on the importance of learner perceptions and motivation in shaping learning outcomes.

Despite these promising findings, research specifically investigating university students from non-English departments—particularly those in Physical Education programs—remains scarce. Existing studies mainly examine general EFL learners and do not fully explore how discipline-specific students perceive song-based vocabulary

learning. To address this gap, the present study examines Physical Education students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary learning, focusing on their enjoyment, perceived effectiveness, and potential challenges. The findings are expected to inform the design of music-based activities in EFL instruction and enrich vocabulary-learning practices in non-English academic programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EFL Students' Perceptions in Language Learning

Perception can be understood as the process through which individuals interpret, evaluate, and assign meaning to sensory input or experiences they encounter in their surroundings (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). In an educational setting, the term refers to how learners make sense of and form beliefs about their learning experiences, classroom activities, and instructional approaches, which in turn shapes their responses, involvement, and participation in the learning process (Altman et al., 2013). Given the central role that perception plays in shaping learners' interpretations of their learning environment, understanding how these perceptions influence language learning becomes particularly important.

Learners' perceptions strongly influence engagement, motivation, and participation in EFL contexts (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985). Positive perceptions support sustained learning, while negative ones—arising from anxiety, low confidence, or unsupportive environments—can hinder comprehension and participation (Krashen, 1982; Pradana, 2023). For non-English majors, such as Physical Education students, attitudes toward English media, including songs, are crucial for the effectiveness of vocabulary-learning activities. Understanding these perceptions is essential for designing instruction that aligns with students' emotional and cognitive needs.

Vocabulary Learning in EFL Context

Vocabulary is central to language proficiency and communication (Nation, 2010; Schmitt, 2008). Limited vocabulary can reduce comprehension and participation,

especially in EFL settings with low English exposure (Uspa, 2020; Putra & Pradana, 2023). Traditional methods like rote memorization are often monotonous and less effective for long-term retention (Pradana, 2023). Contemporary approaches emphasize meaningful, repeated, and multimodal input. For instance, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) highlights that comprehensible input in authentic contexts promotes vocabulary acquisition, while digital tools can provide interactive, adaptive practice (Febrianti et al., 2024). For Physical Education students, active and dynamic learning preferences suggest that enjoyable, context-rich, and repetitive vocabulary activities are most effective.

English Songs as a Vocabulary-Learning Tool

English songs combine linguistic, cognitive, and affective benefits, making them a promising EFL resource (Millington, 2011; Shen, 2009). Linguistically, repeated lyrics expose learners to vocabulary in authentic contexts; cognitively, dual coding (Paivio, 1986) strengthens memory through verbal and non-verbal channels; affectively, songs reduce anxiety and enhance enjoyment, lowering the affective filter (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001; Lengkoan, 2017). Research shows song-based instruction improves vocabulary retention, engagement, and motivation (Lekian, 2016; Bawawa, 2020). However, learners' perceptions mediate effectiveness, as songs perceived merely as entertainment may limit pedagogical benefits (Ma'rifat, 2017). For Physical Education students, songs cater to kinesthetic and active learning preferences, supporting vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, and overall engagement.

Previous Research on Songs in EFL Classrooms

Songs have been widely recognized as effective tools in EFL learning due to their linguistic, cognitive, and affective benefits. They enhance vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, pronunciation, and learner engagement (Millington, 2011; Shen, 2009). Repetitive and meaningful lyrics support natural vocabulary internalization, while enjoyable melodies foster motivation and retention. Empirical studies show that song-

based instruction improves vocabulary retention and classroom engagement compared to traditional methods (Lekian, 2016; Bawawa, 2020).

However, learners' perceptions play a crucial role: if songs are seen merely as entertainment, their pedagogical impact may be limited (Ma'rifat, 2017; Dörnyei, 2001). Moreover, most research focuses on general EFL learners or English majors, with limited attention to non-English majors like Physical Education students, whose active learning preferences may influence effectiveness. Investigating song-based learning in such discipline-specific contexts is therefore important to optimize instructional practices and address learners' unique needs.

Research Gap

Despite these advantages, most studies focus on general EFL learners or English majors, with little attention to non-English majors like Physical Education students (Putra et al., 2018, 2024). Moreover, learners' perceptions as a mediating factor and discipline-specific vocabulary needs remain underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by investigating Physical Education students' perceptions of English songs for vocabulary learning, including enjoyment, perceived effectiveness, and challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to explore Physical Education students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary learning. Since the focus was on understanding students' experiences, enjoyment, perceived effectiveness, and challenges rather than measuring learning outcomes, this approach allowed for rich, detailed, and contextually grounded insights.

Participants (Population and Sample)

The study population comprised all students in the Physical Education Study Program at Dehasen University, Bengkulu, who require English vocabulary for sports-related terminology, anatomy, physiology, and global sports science. Purposive

sampling, defined by Sugiyono (2017) as a sampling technique in which participants are selected based on specific considerations or criteria relevant to the research objectives, was applied to determine the participants. A purposive sampling technique selected 50 students who were active in the program, had taken an English course, and had experience learning vocabulary through English songs. This sampling ensured participants had direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected using two methods. First, a questionnaire captured participants' perceptions of enjoyment, effectiveness, and challenges in learning vocabulary through English songs, providing broad information from all students. Second, semi-structured interviews with selected participants offered deeper insights into their experiences, motivation, and vocabulary retention, complementing the questionnaire data with richer, detailed explanations.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data on students' perceptions of using English songs to learn vocabulary. First, a questionnaire with Likert-scale and open-ended items assessed enjoyment, effectiveness, and challenges, while allowing students to provide additional insights. Second, a semi-structured interview guide captured detailed narratives about students' experiences, focusing on how songs supported vocabulary retention, enjoyment, and obstacles encountered. Both instruments were aligned with the research objectives.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The process involved familiarization with the data, coding statements related to enjoyment, effectiveness, and challenges, grouping codes into themes, and interpreting these themes to explain students' perceptions of using English songs. Thematic analysis was

chosen for its suitability in interpreting subjective perceptions, aligning with the study's objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to previous literature and the research objectives. The analysis focuses on three main aspects as stated in the research questions: enjoyment, effectiveness, and challenges of using English songs for vocabulary learning among Physical Education students at Dehasen University. The study involved 50 participants.

Students' Enjoyment of Learning Vocabulary Through English Songs

The questionnaire and interview data revealed that the majority of Physical Education students experienced high levels of enjoyment while learning vocabulary through English songs. Table 1 presents the distribution of responses regarding students' enjoyment.

Table 1. Students' Perception of Enjoyment in Learning Vocabulary through English Songs

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Enjoyable	20	40
Enjoyable	25	50
Neutral	5	10
Less Enjoyable	0	0
Not Enjoyable	0	0

Interview data reinforced these findings. One participant noted, "listening to songs made learning feel less like a task and more like a hobby" (Participant 5). Another participant added, "I can remember new words more easily when they are in songs because the rhythm and melody stick in my mind" (Participant 12). These reflections highlight that enjoyment not only makes learning more engaging but also supports memory retention through the dual coding of verbal and musical stimuli, as suggested by Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986).

The high levels of enjoyment reported in this study align with previous research indicating that songs can lower anxiety, increase motivation, and facilitate repeated

exposure to language input (Lengkoan, 2017; Shen, 2009; Millington, 2011). For Physical Education students, who often face challenges with technical English vocabulary in sports science, anatomy, and physiology, songs offer a psychologically comfortable and affectively engaging medium. This is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which posits that a lower affective filter enhances learners' intake of comprehensible input.

Overall, the findings suggest that enjoyment is a critical factor in promoting vocabulary learning through English songs, particularly for learners who benefit from active, engaging, and less traditional forms of instruction. Integrating songs into vocabulary learning not only makes the process enjoyable but also strategically supports cognitive and affective mechanisms that facilitate language acquisition.

Perceived Effectiveness of English Songs for Vocabulary Learning

The majority of Physical Education students perceived English songs as effective tools for learning vocabulary. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of responses regarding perceived effectiveness

Table 2. Students' Perception of Effectiveness of English Songs in Vocabulary Acquisition

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	15	30
Effective	30	60
Neutral	5	10
Less Effective	0	0
Not Effective	0	0

Interview data further supported this finding. One participant explained, "I often remember new words from the chorus because it repeats several times. It's easier than memorizing from a list" (Participant 3). Another participant added, "I find it easier to recall technical terms in sports science when they are in songs because the rhythm helps me remember them" (Participant 9). These observations indicate that repetition, meaningful context, and rhythmic patterns in songs facilitate vocabulary retention, aligning with Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986) and the concept of incidental learning (Nation, 2010; Schmitt, 2008).

These results are consistent with previous studies showing that songs improve both retention and motivation in language learning (Lekian, 2016; Bawawa, 2020; Millington, 2011). For Physical Education students, English songs provide a particularly effective medium because they combine auditory, rhythmic, and contextual cues, which are compatible with their kinesthetic and active learning preferences (Putra et al., 2018). Moreover, the positive affective experience associated with song-based learning helps lower the affective filter, as suggested by Krashen (1982), thereby enhancing the intake and retention of new vocabulary.

In summary, the findings indicate that English songs are perceived as effective for vocabulary acquisition, especially when they provide repetition, meaningful context, and an engaging, enjoyable learning experience. This suggests that integrating songs into vocabulary instruction can support both cognitive and affective aspects of language learning, making it particularly suitable for non-English majors with specific disciplinary vocabulary needs.

Challenges Encountered in Learning Vocabulary Through Songs

Despite the overall positive perceptions, students reported several challenges in learning vocabulary through English songs. Table 3 presents the main difficulties identified.

Table 3. Challenges Faced by Students in Learning Vocabulary through English Songs

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Difficult Pronunciation	12	24
Fast tempo of songs	10	20
Unfamiliar slang or idioms	15	30
Lack of focus during listening	13	26

Interview data further elaborated these difficulties. One participant mentioned, “Sometimes I like the song, but I cannot understand some words because they are sung too quickly” (Participant 7). Another participant added, “I enjoy learning with songs, but the slang or idioms in some lyrics confuse me, and I have to check the meanings afterward” (Participant 12). These responses suggest that song tempo, pronunciation

clarity, and unfamiliar expressions can hinder comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

These challenges are consistent with Ma'rifat (2017), who highlighted that learners' language proficiency, attention, and attitudes influence the effectiveness of song-based learning. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) also provides a relevant perspective: when learners encounter stressors such as fast lyrics or difficult vocabulary, the affective filter may rise, reducing input intake.

For Physical Education students, although enjoyment and perceived effectiveness of songs are high, careful selection of songs—considering tempo, clarity, and lexical content—is essential to optimize vocabulary learning outcomes. Moreover, scaffolding strategies, such as pre-teaching key vocabulary or providing lyric annotations, can mitigate these challenges and support both comprehension and retention (Nation, 2010; Schmitt, 2008).

In summary, while English songs offer an enjoyable and effective medium for vocabulary learning, attention to linguistic and cognitive challenges is necessary to maximize their pedagogical potential, particularly for learners with discipline-specific vocabulary needs.

Integration of Findings with Literature

The results of this study demonstrate that English songs are a highly effective medium for vocabulary learning among Physical Education students. Students reported high levels of enjoyment, describing songs as engaging and less formal, which aligns with Lengkoan (2017) and Dörnyei (2001) who highlight that positive perceptions enhance motivation and sustained participation. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), these enjoyable experiences lower the affective filter, allowing learners to absorb more language input (Putra et al., 2018).

Students also perceived songs as effective for vocabulary acquisition. The repetitive and meaningful nature of song lyrics enabled repeated exposure to target words, facilitating long-term retention. This supports Nation's (2010) assertion that

repeated meaningful input is crucial for vocabulary learning and is reinforced by Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986), which emphasizes that combining verbal and auditory stimuli strengthens memory. For Physical Education students, the auditory-rhythmic elements of songs are particularly helpful for mastering technical sports-related terminology.

Despite these benefits, some challenges were identified. Students reported difficulties with fast tempos, unclear pronunciation, unfamiliar slang, and occasional lack of focus, indicating that learner proficiency and song complexity can affect outcomes (Ma'rifat, 2017). These findings suggest that careful song selection, pre-teaching difficult vocabulary, and guided listening are important to maximize pedagogical effectiveness.

Overall, the study confirms that English songs provide a balanced integration of affective, cognitive, and linguistic benefits. They enhance enjoyment, support vocabulary retention, and improve listening skills while accommodating learners' active and kinesthetic preferences. Addressing the identified challenges ensures that songs function not only as a motivating tool but also as a highly effective medium for discipline-specific language learning.

Implication

The findings indicate that English songs effectively enhance vocabulary learning in Physical Education programs by increasing engagement, motivation, and enjoyment, consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) view on positive perceptions sustaining language learning. Repeated and meaningful exposure to lyrics supports input-based learning and long-term retention, aligning with Nation's (2010) principles of comprehensible input. Educators should select songs carefully, considering tempo, pronunciation, and vocabulary complexity, as learner attitudes and proficiency affect outcomes (Ma'rifat, 2017). Future research could combine perceptual data with quantitative measures of vocabulary acquisition to further validate the cognitive and affective benefits of song-based instruction, guided by Krashen's (1982) affective filter theory and Paivio's

(1986) dual coding framework. Thoughtful integration of songs into EFL curricula can create enjoyable, contextually meaningful, and pedagogically effective learning experiences, particularly for learners in discipline-specific contexts like Physical Education.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical support for the pedagogical value of English songs in facilitating vocabulary learning among Physical Education students. The findings indicate that students experience high levels of enjoyment and engagement, aligning with Dörnyei's (2001) and Gardner's (1985) frameworks emphasizing the influence of motivation and learner attitudes on language acquisition. The repetitive and meaningful nature of song lyrics supports long-term vocabulary retention, consistent with Nation's (2010) input-based approach and Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, which highlights the role of positive emotional experiences in optimizing learning.

Despite challenges such as fast tempo, unfamiliar slang, and pronunciation variations (Ma'rifat, 2017), English songs were particularly effective for reinforcing technical sports-related vocabulary and enhancing listening skills. These results underscore the potential of integrating music-based instruction into EFL curricula to create a contextually meaningful and enjoyable learning environment. Future research is encouraged to combine perceptual data with quantitative assessments of vocabulary acquisition and to examine the application of songs across other language skills, thereby further elucidating their pedagogical potential in specialized EFL contexts.

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