



Between Enjoyment and Comprehension: Students' Perceptions of English Songs in Developing Listening Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how English Education students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta perceive and experience the use of English songs as a medium to improve their listening skills. Conducted in July 2025, this qualitative descriptive study involved a population of 20 final-year English Education students, from which five participants were selected through purposive sampling. Adopting a qualitative descriptive design, the study involved five final-year students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, validated by an expert in listening pedagogy, and analyzed thematically using Miles and Huberman's (2014) framework. The analysis yielded five major themes: (1) enjoyment and motivation, (2) vocabulary and pronunciation development, (3) listening comprehension challenges, (4) learning strategies, and (5) autonomy and habit formation. The findings reveal that while English songs enhance enjoyment, reduce anxiety, and provide authentic linguistic exposure, students also face difficulties related to speed, slang, and cultural references. Nevertheless, they develop personal strategies—such as repeated listening and lyric translation—that foster autonomy and sustained engagement. Overall, the study concludes that English songs serve a dual pedagogical function: they act as affective catalysts and as authentic input for listening development. Pedagogically, teachers are encouraged to integrate songs purposefully, balancing enjoyment with structured linguistic and reflective activities to maximize their instructional potential.

Keywords: enjoyment, comprehension, student's perception, English song, listening skills

Antara Kesenangan dan Pemahaman: Persepsi Siswa terhadap Lagu Bahasa Inggris dalam Mengembangkan Keterampilan Menyimak

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta memandang dan mengalami penggunaan lagu berbahasa Inggris sebagai media untuk meningkatkan keterampilan menyimak mereka. Penelitian yang dilakukan pada Juli 2025 ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dan melibatkan populasi sebanyak 20 mahasiswa tingkat akhir, dengan lima peserta yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, divalidasi oleh ahli pedagogi listening, dan dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan kerangka Miles dan Huberman (2014). Analisis menghasilkan lima tema utama, yaitu: (1) kesenangan dan motivasi, (2) pengembangan kosakata dan pelafalan, (3) tantangan pemahaman mendengarkan, (4) strategi pembelajaran, dan (5) kemandirian serta pembentukan kebiasaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa lagu berbahasa Inggris dapat meningkatkan kesenangan belajar, mengurangi kecemasan, dan memberikan paparan linguistik yang autentik. Namun, mahasiswa juga menghadapi kesulitan terkait kecepatan lagu, penggunaan bahasa slang, dan referensi budaya. Meski demikian, mereka mengembangkan strategi pribadi—seperti mendengarkan berulang kali dan menerjemahkan lirik—yang mendorong kemandirian dan keterlibatan belajar berkelanjutan. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa lagu berbahasa Inggris memiliki dua fungsi pedagogis, yaitu sebagai katalis afektif dan sebagai sumber input autentik dalam pengembangan kemampuan menyimak. Dari sisi pedagogis, para pengajar dianjurkan untuk mengintegrasikan lagu secara terencana dengan menyeimbangkan unsur kesenangan dan kegiatan linguistik serta reflektif yang terstruktur guna memaksimalkan potensi instruksional.

Kata kunci: kesenangan, pemahaman, persepsi siswa, lagu berbahasa Inggris, keterampilan menyimak

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of music into English language teaching has long attracted attention among educators and researchers (Lê, 2011). English songs, in particular, are widely regarded as a creative and motivating medium that can enrich listening instruction by combining language input with enjoyment (Graciano Neto et al., 2019; Lems, 2005; Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020). However, despite this optimistic view, there remains an enduring debate regarding their pedagogical value. While some scholars emphasise their potential to enhance listening comprehension, vocabulary recall, and pronunciation (Baills et al., 2021; Davis, 2017; Graciano Neto et al., 2019; Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020; Nie et al., 2022; Tomczak & Lew, 2019; Zhang et al., 2023), others question whether songs merely entertain students without producing substantial linguistic gains (Busse et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2024). This contradiction—between enjoyment and effectiveness—makes it crucial to re-examine how students perceive and experience learning through songs in authentic academic contexts.

Listening comprehension is one of the most challenging yet essential components of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. In Indonesia, many students still struggle to understand spoken English, especially when encountering natural accents, idiomatic expressions, and rapid speech (Putri, 2022; Wulandari et al., 2021). Preliminary classroom observations and informal conversations with UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta students revealed that even final-year English Education students who have completed all listening courses often express frustration over their limited listening fluency. They frequently mention that classroom audio materials are too artificial and repetitive, leading them to seek alternative exposure outside class, most commonly through English songs and digital media. These spontaneous listening habits suggest that English songs already occupy a meaningful space in their daily linguistic environment, yet their actual contribution to learning remains underexplored. This makes UIN Jakarta a particularly relevant setting for investi-

gating how students experience and interpret the pedagogical use of songs.

Previous research on using English songs in EFL contexts has provided valuable insights but remains primarily quantitative and surface-level. Studies such as Afriyuninda and Oktaviani (2021) and Putri (2022) reported positive attitudes toward songs as a tool to enhance listening skills. Still, they relied mainly on survey responses without delving into learners' reflections or learning processes. In contrast, Yuliarini (2022) and Güler and Bozkurt (2021) explored instructional strategies from teachers' perspectives, overlooking how students emotionally and cognitively engage with the medium. Furthermore, while most Research emphasises motivation and enjoyment, fewer studies address the cognitive challenges students face—such as understanding fast lyrics, slang, and cultural references—and the strategies they develop to overcome them. This limited attention to learners' lived experiences leaves a significant gap in understanding how songs function as authentic yet complex listening material.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by employing a qualitative descriptive approach to explore students' perceptions and experiences of using English songs to improve their listening skills. The participants, final-year students of the English Education Department at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, were chosen because they represent advanced EFL learners who have completed formal listening instruction yet continue to engage informally with English songs. This study investigates how they perceive the benefits, difficulties, and personal strategies associated with song-based listening through semi-structured interviews. By focusing on this specific group, the study aims to capture a more authentic picture of how language exposure through music operates within the real learning lives of EFL students in Indonesia. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on music-assisted language learning and to offer practical insights for EFL teachers seeking to balance en-



joyment, authenticity, and linguistic effectiveness in listening pedagogy.

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design to explore how English Education students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta perceive and experience the use of English songs in developing their listening skills. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, feelings, and reflections rather than statistical measurement (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted in the English Education Department, where informal classroom observations showed that even final-year students—who had completed all listening courses—still faced difficulties understanding authentic spoken English. Many reported that they often relied on English songs for additional practice, making this context ideal for exploring song-based learning experiences.

The participants consisted of five final-year students selected through purposive sampling from a population of 20 English Education students, based on three criteria: (1) completion of all listening courses, (2) regular engagement with English songs, and (3) willingness to share personal experiences.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in a flexible format, either in English or Bahasa Indonesia. The interview guide was constructed around five thematic dimensions derived from previous research:

- 1) Enjoyment and motivation (Lems, 2005; Krashen, 1982)

- 2) Vocabulary and pronunciation development (Medina, 1993; Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021), 3) Listening comprehension challenges (Field, 2009; Lems, 2005), 4) Learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; Rost, 2015), 5) Autonomy and habit formation (Little, 1991; Güler & Bozkurt, 2021).

The interview instrument underwent expert validation by a senior lecturer specializing in listening pedagogy to ensure content relevance, clarity, and theoretical alignment.

All interviews were conducted individually through voice calls on WhatsApp, each lasting approximately 20–30 minutes, and recorded with participants' consent. The conversations were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using Miles and Huberman's (2014) framework, consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Codes were developed inductively, then grouped into the five major themes that structured the findings section of this study. This analytical process ensured that interpretations remained grounded in the participants' own voices and experiences.

RESULT

Data from the interviews were analyzed thematically, resulting in five central themes that describe students' experiences with English songs as listening materials. These themes highlight emotional engagement, linguistic development, and learning autonomy, as summarized in Table-1.

Table-1
Key Themes on Using English Songs for Listening Practice

No.	Main Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency (n=5)	Illustrative Quotes
1	Enjoyment and Motivation	Learning feels more enjoyable	5/5	"Listening to English songs makes me excited to learn; it doesn't feel like studying."
		Songs reduce boredom and anxiety		
		Positive emotional connection with English		
2	Vocabulary and Pronunciation Development	Songs introduce new words	4/5	"I can remember new words faster through songs because of repetition in the lyrics."
		Improve pronunciation and accent recognition		
		Increase memory retention		
3	Listening Comprehension Challenges	Fast tempo and unclear pronunciation	5/5	"Sometimes I can't understand the lyrics because native singers speak too fast or use unfamiliar slang."
		Use of slang and idioms		
		Limited understanding of cultural context		
4	Learning Strategies	Repeated listening for comprehension	4/5	"I usually replay the song several times while reading the lyrics to understand the meaning."
		Checking lyrics and translations		
		Selecting slower or clearer songs		
5	Autonomy and Habit Formation	Self-directed learning using songs	5/5	"I often learn English by myself through songs; it's part of my daily routine now."
		Daily exposure outside classroom		
		Integration into leisure activities		

DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of students' interviews revealed five interconnected themes describing their experiences with using English songs to enhance listening skills: (1) enjoyment and motivation, (2) vocabulary and pronunciation development, (3) listening comprehension challenges, (4) learning strategies, and (5) autonomy and habit formation. These themes reflect not only how students emotionally respond to English songs but also how they cognitively and strategically engage with them in their learning process.

All participants reported that listening to English songs made the learning process more enjoyable, less stressful, and emotionally engaging. They described songs as a medium that transforms formal learning into a relaxing and motivating activity. One student said, "Listening to English songs makes me excited to learn; it doesn't feel like studying."

This finding aligns with Krashen's (1984) Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that low-anxiety environments facilitate language acquisition.



Similarly, Lems (2005) emphasized that music can stimulate emotional involvement and maintain attention in listening tasks. The present study confirms that enjoyment functions as an entry point to sustained listening practice—students listen voluntarily, which increases their exposure to authentic English input.

Four out of five participants noted that songs helped them acquire new vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and recognize natural speech patterns. Through repetition and melody, learners could internalize lexical and phonological features unconsciously. One participant explained, “I can remember new words faster through songs because of repetition in the lyrics.” This supports Medina's (1993) claim that music aids vocabulary retention by engaging both linguistic and emotional memory. It also echoes findings by Afriyuningda and Oktaviani (2021) and Putri (2022), who found that English songs improve learners' pronunciation awareness. Unlike previous quantitative studies, however, this research shows that these improvements arise not from structured classroom instruction but from spontaneous, self-directed engagement with songs in everyday contexts.

Despite these benefits, all participants acknowledged facing severe comprehension difficulties—particularly when dealing with fast lyrics, idiomatic expressions, and culturally loaded references. As one participant shared, “Sometimes I can't understand the lyrics because native singers speak too fast or use unfamiliar slang.” This reflects Field's (2009) observation that authentic listening materials increase cognitive load due to speed and unpredictability. Lems (2005) similarly warned that informal language in songs can hinder comprehension for non-native listeners. These challenges indicate that, while songs provide authentic exposure, they also demand scaffolding—teachers may need to pre-teach key vocabulary or cultural context to help learners make sense of song lyrics.

In response to these challenges, four participants described employing specific learning strat-

egies to enhance comprehension. Standard methods included replaying songs, reading and translating lyrics, and selecting slower or more precise songs. One participant explained, “I usually replay the song several times while reading the lyrics to understand the meaning.” Such practices demonstrate the use of metacognitive strategies (Oxford, 1990) and support Rost's (2015) view that listening involves active regulation of attention and comprehension. Interestingly, these strategies developed organically outside the classroom, suggesting that students are capable of autonomous learning when motivated by personal interest. This finding bridges the gap between affective enjoyment and cognitive engagement, showing that motivation transforms into self-regulated effort.

All participants reported that their engagement with English songs had evolved into a daily learning habit and a form of autonomous language exposure. As one stated, “I often learn English by myself through songs; it's part of my daily routine now.” This aligns with Little's (1999) concept of learner autonomy, where students take personal responsibility for their learning. Güler and Bozkurt (2021) also found that songs encourage independent practice beyond classroom boundaries. The present study reinforces these perspectives by showing that repeated voluntary listening cultivates long-term exposure and self-directed learning behaviors—key factors in second language acquisition.

Taken together, these findings reveal that English songs play a dual role in EFL listening development: they serve as affective enhancers that increase motivation and engagement, and as linguistic tools that provide authentic listening input. However, their effectiveness depends on learners' ability to manage comprehension difficulties through appropriate strategies. Compared to previous studies that mainly quantified student attitudes, this research provides a more nuanced understanding of the processes behind those attitudes—how learners negotiate between enjoyment

and difficulty, and how they transform informal listening into meaningful learning.

Pedagogically, these insights suggest that teachers should integrate songs not merely as entertainment but as structured materials accompanied by guided reflection, lyric analysis, and discussion of cultural content. Encouraging students to develop listening strategies and independent habits can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world exposure, ultimately fostering more holistic and sustainable listening proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how English Education students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta perceive and experience the use of English songs to improve their listening skills. The qualitative analysis revealed five interrelated themes: enjoyment and motivation, vocabulary and pronunciation development, listening comprehension challenges, learning strategies, and autonomy and habit formation. Collectively, these findings show that English songs play a dual pedagogical role—they serve as both an affective tool that enhances motivation and reduces learning anxiety, and as a linguistic medium that provides authentic input for developing listening comprehension. “The results highlight that while students are highly motivated and emotionally engaged when learning through songs, they still encounter substantial comprehension difficulties caused by fast lyrics, slang, and cultural references. However, these challenges stimulate students to develop personalized learning strategies—such as repeated listening, reading lyrics, and translation—which transform music from entertainment into meaningful language exposure. This process reflects a gradual shift toward autonomous learning, where students take initiative and integrate English listening practice into their daily routines. Thus, English songs do not merely supplement classroom instruction but extend learning into students' everyday lives.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that English songs can be an effective me-

dium in listening instruction if integrated purposefully. Teachers should not treat songs solely as motivational warm-ups but design structured activities that balance enjoyment with linguistic focus—for instance, pre-teaching complex vocabulary, analyzing lyric meaning, or discussing cultural context. Incorporating reflective listening tasks and encouraging independent song-based practice can also help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use. This aligns with communicative and learner-centered approaches that emphasize meaningful, authentic, and student-driven learning experiences.

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