



University Students' Perception of Integrating English Songs into Online English Language Teaching

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Abstract. The use of English songs has been widely discussed as an alternative medium in English language teaching. Songs are believed to create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere and increase students' motivation, especially in online learning contexts. This study aimed to explore university students' perceptions of integrating English songs into online English language teaching. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The study was conducted at Universitas Negeri Makassar with first semester students from the Management Study Program who attended an online English language course. The course was delivered fully online using Zoom over one academic semester. English songs were integrated as supporting instructional media during online classes, such as for warm-up activities, listening exposure, and background media. Data were collected through semi-structured written interviews and non-participant observation. The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes related to students' perceptions. The findings revealed that students generally had positive perceptions toward the use of English songs in online English classes. English songs were perceived to increase students' motivation and create a more relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Students also reported higher engagement and attention during online classes when songs were used. In addition, English songs were perceived to support language learning, particularly in improving listening comprehension and vocabulary awareness. However, some challenges were also identified, such as difficulty understanding fast song lyrics, differences in music preferences, and technical issues during online learning. In conclusion, this study suggests that integrating English songs into online English language teaching can provide motivational and pedagogical benefits when used appropriately. English songs can be considered as a supportive instructional medium to enhance students' engagement and learning experience in online higher education contexts.

Keywords: EFL Learning; English Songs; English Teaching; Motivation; Students' Perceptions.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching has always tried to find interesting and effective ways to help students learn better. One method that has gained attention is the use of songs in the classroom. Songs can make learning more enjoyable and help students feel more motivated. They provide real examples of language use, repetition of words, and cultural information. Many studies have shown that integrating songs into English language teaching can make learning more enjoyable and effective for students (Millington, 2011).

Songs provide authentic language input because they use real and natural expressions commonly found in daily communication. In addition, the repetition of lyrics and melodies helps students remember new words and expressions more easily. Listening to songs also allows learners to improve their listening comprehension, pronunciation, and understanding of sentence patterns. Furthermore, songs often reflect cultural aspects of the language, which can help students gain cultural awareness while learning English.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) environments, learners often struggle with motivation and language exposure, especially when English is not used outside the classroom. Krashen (1985) explained that affective factors such as anxiety and motivation play an important role in language acquisition, as a high affective filter can block learners from processing input effectively. According to Rahmalisa and Solusia (2025), using music in English classes can increase EFL students' motivation by reducing emotional barriers and making learning activities more enjoyable. Traditional approaches that rely on textbook drills and grammar instruction have shown limitations in stimulating learners' affective filters and daily language use.

In addition to motivational challenges, EFL and ESL learners often experience limited opportunities to engage with authentic English input, particularly in contexts where English is not used in daily communication. Songs can serve as an accessible source of authentic language exposure because they present natural pronunciation, stress patterns, and intonation in meaningful contexts (Murphrey, 1992). Through repeated listening, learners are exposed to common vocabulary, grammatical structures, and discourse patterns in a way that is less intimidating than formal instructional materials. As a result, songs may help reduce learners' anxiety and support a more relaxed learning atmosphere, which is essential for language acquisition (Krashen, 1985).

Previous studies have suggested that the pedagogical use of songs contributes positively to various aspects of language learning. Paquette and Rieg (2008) argue that songs can enhance vocabulary development and listening skills while also increasing learners' engagement. Similarly, Baoan (2008) found that songs are effective in improving listening comprehension because they combine linguistic input with rhythm and melody, which facilitate memory retention. These findings indicate that songs are not merely entertainment tools but meaningful instructional media when integrated purposefully into language teaching.

In higher education contexts, particularly at the university level, learners' perceptions play a crucial role in determining the success of instructional practices. University students are generally more autonomous and reflective, and their attitudes toward teaching strategies can influence their level of participation and engagement in learning activities (Dörnyei, 2001). Understanding students' perceptions allows educators to evaluate whether a particular instructional approach supports learners' needs, preferences, and learning experiences. Therefore, examining how university students perceive the integration of English songs into language instruction is essential for informing pedagogical decisions.

The importance of students' perceptions becomes even more significant in online English language teaching. Online learning environments differ substantially from face to face classrooms in terms of interaction patterns, learner engagement, and instructional delivery. Hodges et al. (2020) note that online learning often requires instructors to adopt innovative strategies to maintain students' attention and motivation due to physical distance and limited real-time interaction. Without engaging instructional media, online classes may feel monotonous, leading to reduced learner participation and motivation.

Research on online language learning emphasizes the need for interactive and engaging materials to support student engagement. Martin and Bolliger (2018) highlight that students in online courses value instructional strategies that promote interaction, interest, and emotional connection. Integrating English songs into online English language teaching may address these needs by creating a more dynamic learning environment. Songs can be used as background media, warm-up activities, or listening materials during synchronous or asynchronous sessions, offering flexibility that aligns well with online instructional formats.

However, despite the growing use of digital platforms in higher education, research focusing on the integration of English songs in online English language teaching remains limited, particularly from the perspective of university students. Many previous studies have examined the use of songs in traditional classrooms or have focused primarily on specific language skills such as vocabulary or listening comprehension. There is still a need for studies that explore students' perceptions of using songs as a regular instructional component in online English courses over an extended period.

Investigating university students' perceptions can provide valuable insights into the perceived benefits and challenges of integrating English songs into online language teaching. Students' views may reveal how songs influence their motivation, learning atmosphere, engagement, and overall learning experience in online settings. Such insights are important for instructors seeking to design effective and learner-centered online English courses that go beyond conventional teaching methods.

Based on these considerations, the present study aims to explore university students' perceptions of integrating English songs into online English language teaching. By focusing on students' experiences and viewpoints, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on innovative media use in online EFL instruction and to offer pedagogical implications for English language educators in higher education contexts.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore university students' perceptions of integrating English songs into online English language teaching. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to present participants' views and experiences in a clear and comprehensive manner using their own words (Sandelowski, 2000; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The focus of this study was not to measure the effectiveness of English songs quantitatively, but rather to describe how students perceived their use as part of regular instructional practice in an online English language course conducted over one semester.

Reserach Context

The study was conducted at Universitas Negeri Makassar, a public university in Indonesia, within an online English language class offered to students of the Management Study Program. The class was delivered fully online using Zoom as the primary platform for synchronous instruction.

English songs were integrated consistently throughout one academic semester as supporting instructional media during online classes. The songs were not used as the main teaching material but were incorporated into various stages of instruction, such as warm-up activities, listening exposure, and background media during learning tasks. This integration aimed to create a more engaging and relaxed online learning atmosphere while supporting students' exposure to authentic English input.

Participant

The participants of this study were the first semester students enrolled in the online English language course in the Management Study Program at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as they had direct and continuous experience with the integration of English songs throughout the semester. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to obtain rich and relevant data from participants who are familiar with the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

In this study, a semi-structured written interview was used to collect data. Participants were provided with a set of key questions via Zoom, and they wrote their perceptions regarding the online English class. The use of written responses was considered appropriate due to the online learning context and allowed participants to reflect on their experiences without time constraints. This approach allows for both flexibility in responses and coverage of key topics,

providing rich descriptive data in the participants' own words (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015).

In addition to written interviews, non-participant observation was conducted during online English classes delivered via Zoom. The observation focused on students' engagement, participation, and responses when English songs were integrated into learning activities. Field notes were taken to document observable behaviors and classroom dynamics, such as students' attentiveness and interaction during song-related activities. Observation was used to provide contextual support and triangulate the interview data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data by identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data, allowing for rich interpretation of participants' perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Written interview responses were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Relevant segments of data were coded based on emerging meanings related to students' perceptions. The codes were then grouped into broader themes that represented recurring patterns across participants' responses, such as perceived benefits, motivational aspects, and challenges. The analysis focused on providing a clear and descriptive account of students' perceptions rather than generating abstract theoretical interpretations. This analytical approach is consistent with qualitative descriptive research, which emphasizes accurate representation of participants' experiences

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on students' written semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations conducted during the online English language course. The results are organized into several major themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, namely: (1) increased motivation and positive learning atmosphere, (2) improved engagement and attention in online classes, (3) perceived support for language learning, and (4) challenges in using English songs in online instruction.

Increased Motivation and Positive Learning Atmosphere

One of the most dominant themes emerging from the data was students' perception that the use of English songs increased their motivation to learn English. Many participants expressed that listening to songs during online classes made them feel more relaxed and comfortable. Students reported that songs helped reduce feelings of boredom and tension, which are commonly experienced in online learning environments.

Students A stated that "*English songs made the class atmosphere more enjoyable and less stressful, especially during long online sessions*". This positive emotional response encouraged them to stay focused and participate more actively in learning activities. The integration of songs as warm-up activities or background media was perceived as helpful in creating a friendly and supportive learning environment.

Observational data supported these findings. During song-related activities, students appeared more attentive and responsive compared to sessions that relied solely on textbook-based instruction. Students were more willing to turn on their microphones, respond to questions, or engage in brief discussions after listening to songs.

Improved Engagement and Attention in Online Classes

Another important finding was related to student engagement. Many participants reported that English songs helped maintain their attention during online classes conducted via Zoom. Online learning was often described as monotonous, particularly when instruction consisted mainly of explanations and exercises. Songs were perceived as a refreshing variation that broke the routine of online lessons.

Students indicated that songs helped them refocus when they felt tired or distracted. The melody and rhythm of songs were described as effective in capturing their attention, making it easier for them to stay engaged throughout the lesson. Some students mentioned that they looked forward to song-related activities, which increased their interest in attending online classes.

Student B said that "*At first, I thought that the English class would be boring, especially because it was conducted online. However, after attending the class, I realized that it was enjoyable and interesting. The learning activities were not monotonous, especially because the lecturer often played songs during the online class. I felt more comfortable and motivated to join the class and focus on completing the quizzes and assignments given*".

Classroom observations showed that students were generally more responsive during lessons that included songs. For example, students tended to respond more quickly to questions related to song lyrics or themes, and they appeared more enthusiastic when the instructor introduced a song-based activity.

Perceived Support for Language Learning

In addition to motivational benefits, students perceived that English songs supported their language learning, particularly in vocabulary development and listening skills. Many participants stated that repeated exposure to song lyrics helped them learn new words and

expressions. Songs were seen as a useful way to encounter everyday English that is not always found in textbooks.

Students C also reported that “*listening to songs improved their listening comprehension, as they became more familiar with natural pronunciation, stress, and intonation patterns. Some students mentioned that they began to recognize words and phrases more easily after hearing them repeatedly in songs*”.

Although the study did not aim to measure learning outcomes quantitatively, students’ perceptions indicated that songs contributed positively to their overall learning experience. Songs were viewed as supportive learning media rather than the main instructional content, complementing other learning materials used in the course.

Challenges in Using English Songs

Despite the generally positive perceptions, students also identified some challenges related to the use of English songs in online learning. One commonly mentioned issue was difficulty understanding fast lyrics or unfamiliar accents. Some students felt that certain songs were hard to follow without written lyrics or additional explanation from the instructor.

A few students also noted that personal music preferences influenced their level of interest. When the song genre did not match their taste, they felt less engaged. Additionally, technical issues such as unstable internet connections occasionally disrupted listening activities, reducing their effectiveness.

Some students from class A and B explained that “*Personally, I like this English class because I feel more relaxed with the background music and songs. However, some classmates sometimes feel disturbed and find it difficult to focus while listening to songs. They feel less concentrated when working on quizzes and answering the questions during the class*”.

These challenges suggest that while English songs offer many benefits, careful selection and instructional support are necessary to maximize their effectiveness in online language teaching.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that university students generally perceived the integration of English songs into online English language teaching as positive and beneficial. These results are consistent with previous research highlighting the motivational and affective benefits of using songs in language learning contexts (Millington, 2011; Murphey, 1992).

The increased motivation and positive learning atmosphere reported by students align with Krashen’s (1981) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of reducing anxiety and increasing motivation to facilitate language acquisition. By creating a

relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, songs may help lower students' affective filters, allowing them to process language input more effectively. This is particularly important in online learning environments, where students may experience isolation and reduced emotional connection.

The findings related to student engagement support previous studies that emphasize the need for interactive and engaging instructional strategies in online learning. Hodies et al. (2020) argue that maintaining student engagement in online courses requires intentional use of varied and meaningful learning activities. Similarly, Martin and Bolliger (2018) highlight that students value instructional approaches that promote interest and emotional involvement. In this study, English songs appeared to serve this function by providing variety and emotional appeal in online classes.

Students' perceptions of improved vocabulary and listening skills are also supported by earlier studies. Paquette and Rieg (2008) found that songs can enhance vocabulary learning by providing repeated exposure to language in meaningful contexts. Baoan (2008) similarly reported that songs support listening comprehension by combining linguistic input with rhythm and melody, which aids memory retention. Although this study did not measure language gains, students' perceptions suggest that songs contributed to their awareness and understanding of spoken English.

The challenges identified by students, such as difficulty understanding fast lyrics and differences in musical preferences, reflect issues noted in previous literature. Murphey (1992) emphasizes that song selection plays a crucial role in ensuring comprehensibility and learner engagement. These findings suggest that instructors should carefully choose songs that match students' proficiency levels and provide supporting materials, such as lyrics or guided listening tasks.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of considering students' perceptions when integrating instructional media into online language teaching. As Dörnyei (2001) notes that learners' attitudes toward instructional practices significantly influence their motivation and engagement. By understanding how students perceive the use of English songs, instructors can make informed pedagogical decisions that support learner-centered online English instruction.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore university students' perceptions of integrating English songs into online English language teaching. Based on the findings from written semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, it can be concluded that the use of English songs was generally perceived positively by students. Most participants viewed English songs as an effective supporting medium that helped create a more enjoyable, relaxed, and engaging online learning environment. The results showed that English songs played an important role in increasing students' motivation and improving the overall learning atmosphere. Many students felt less stressed and more comfortable when songs were used during online classes. This positive emotional condition encouraged students to pay more attention, stay focused, and participate more actively in learning activities. In online learning contexts, where students often experience boredom and lack of interaction, songs helped reduce monotony and made learning sessions more interesting. In addition to motivational benefits, students perceived that English songs supported their language learning, particularly in listening comprehension and vocabulary development. Through repeated exposure to song lyrics, students became more familiar with everyday English expressions, pronunciation, and intonation patterns. Although the study did not measure language improvement quantitatively, students' responses indicated that songs helped them feel more confident and comfortable when listening to spoken English. However, this study also found several challenges in using English songs in online English classes. Some students experienced difficulty understanding fast lyrics or unfamiliar accents, while others felt distracted depending on their personal music preferences. Technical problems, such as unstable internet connections also affected the effectiveness of song-based activities. These challenges suggest that the use of English songs needs careful planning, appropriate song selection, and clear instructional guidance to ensure that songs support, rather than distract from, learning objectives. Overall, this study highlights the importance of considering students' perceptions when integrating instructional media into online English language teaching. English songs can be a valuable and flexible instructional tool when used appropriately, especially in online learning settings. The findings suggest that lecturers should thoughtfully select songs that match students' language levels and learning goals, and provide supporting materials such as lyrics or guided activities. By doing so, English songs can contribute to a more learner-centered and engaging online English learning experience in higher education contexts.

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