



THE ROLE OF ENGLISH SONGS IN SHAPING STUDENT MOTIVATION AND MOOD: A THEMATIC STUDY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE 2021-2022 ACADEMIC YEAR AT AL-QOLAM UNIVERSITY

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Abstract :

In today's digital age, music, especially English songs, has become an integral part of students' lives. This study was conducted to address the lack of research that highlights the role of songs not only as a linguistic tool but also as a motivator and mood regulator in English language learning. Most previous studies have emphasized cognitive aspects; this research seeks to fill the gap by focusing on the affective dimension. The purpose of this study is to explore how English songs influence the motivation and mood of students in the English Education Program, class of 2021-2022 at Al-Qolam University, and to examine the conscious and unconscious use of songs as learning strategies. The study employed a qualitative method with thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke. Data collection was conducted through open-ended questionnaires and interviews. The findings indicate that English songs significantly enhance students' motivation, improve mood, enrich vocabulary and pronunciation, and support autonomous and flexible learning. These findings suggest that songs can serve as an effective, enjoyable, and emotionally engaging learning tool for today's learners.

Keywords: English songs, student motivation, mood regulation, thematic analysis, language learning strategy

Abstrak :

Di era digital saat ini, musik, terutama lagu berbahasa Inggris, telah menjadi bagian penting dalam kehidupan mahasiswa. Penelitian ini dilakukan untuk mengatasi kurangnya kajian yang menyoroti peran lagu tidak hanya sebagai alat linguistik tetapi juga sebagai pemicu motivasi dan pengatur suasana hati dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Sebagian besar penelitian sebelumnya lebih menitikberatkan pada aspek kognitif; oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menekankan dimensi afektif. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana lagu berbahasa Inggris memengaruhi motivasi dan suasana hati mahasiswa Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris angkatan 2021-2022 di Universitas Al-Qolam, serta menelusuri penggunaan lagu secara sadar maupun tidak sadar sebagai strategi belajar. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis tematik oleh Braun & Clarke. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui angket terbuka dan wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa lagu berbahasa Inggris dapat meningkatkan motivasi belajar, memperbaiki suasana hati, memperkaya kosakata dan pelafalan, serta mendukung pembelajaran yang fleksibel dan mandiri. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa lagu dapat menjadi alat belajar yang efektif, menyenangkan, dan melibatkan secara emosional bagi pelajar masa kini.

Kata Kunci: lagu berbahasa Inggris, motivasi belajar, regulasi suasana hati, analisis tematik, strategi pembelajaran Bahasa

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital era, music is not merely a form of entertainment but has become an inseparable part of students' daily routines, especially among



Generation Z who are known for their close interaction with technology and digital media. One of the most consumed forms of music is English songs, which are easily accessible through platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok. For students majoring in English, these songs unconsciously contribute to their language acquisition through pronunciation imitation, vocabulary enrichment, and the understanding of expressions embedded in the lyrics.

Despite the potential, most prior research has focused primarily on the cognitive aspects of song usage in language learning, such as vocabulary improvement and listening comprehension (Amien et al., 2022; Astuti et al., 2023). However, there remains a significant research gap in exploring the *affective dimensions* – specifically how English songs affect students' motivation and mood in the learning process. Emotions and motivation are crucial in language acquisition; positive emotional states are proven to increase learning efficiency, memory retention, and classroom engagement (Putri et al., 2022; Vigl et al., 2023). Several studies have highlighted the motivational and emotional potential of music. For instance, Al-Smadi (2020) found that songs could significantly increase students' learning motivation in Jordanian classrooms. Similarly, research by Elviany et al. (2024) and Fatonah (2024) in Indonesian junior high schools confirmed that integrating English songs into teaching created a more enjoyable and engaging learning environment. However, very few of these studies focus specifically on tertiary-level English education students and how they consciously or unconsciously utilize songs in their daily academic routines.

This study, therefore, aims to fill this research gap by focusing on English Education students at Al-Qolam University, class of 2021–2022. It investigates how English songs influence their internal motivation and mood, and how these songs are used as informal learning strategies. The study also explores students' emotional attachment to specific songs and their perception of songs as an effective and flexible learning tool. By taking a more holistic and affective-centered perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of how English songs function not only as linguistic input but also as emotional and motivational stimuli that support language learning in modern educational contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a thematic analysis method, as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach was selected because the research aimed to explore students' in-depth experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses related to the use of English songs in the English learning process – particularly in relation to motivation and mood. The focus was not on statistical generalization but on meaning-making and affective insights drawn from individual lived experiences.

The research was conducted at Al-Qolam University, Malang, with participants drawn from the English Language Education Study Program, class of 2021–2022. A total of 20 students were selected using purposive sampling. The selection was based on specific criteria: active status in the English education program and self-reported habits of listening to English songs as part of their

learning routine. These students were considered appropriate informants due to their active language development phase and regular engagement with digital music media.

Data were collected through two instruments: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The open-ended questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms, allowing students to describe their experiences freely. The interviews were conducted to clarify and explore deeper meaning from the students' written responses. These instruments aimed to uncover both the conscious and unconscious dimensions of students' interaction with English songs in their learning process.

For data analysis, this study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading, (2) generating initial codes by highlighting significant segments in the responses, (3) searching for themes among codes, (4) reviewing and refining themes to ensure coherence and clarity, (5) defining and naming the themes, and (6) producing the final thematic report. This analytic framework enabled the researcher to systematically interpret complex qualitative data while preserving the authenticity of student voices.

To enhance the validity of the findings, member-checking was employed by asking several participants to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. The researcher also maintained reflexivity throughout the process to minimize bias and maintain the trustworthiness of the analysis. The overall goal of the methodology was to uncover rich, meaningful insights into how English songs influence the affective and linguistic dimensions of students' language learning experiences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings, derived from open-ended questionnaires and in-depth interviews, followed by a thematic discussion of their implications in the context of English language education. The themes were grouped into several internal aspects, including emotional (affective), motivation, cognitive (vocabulary and pronunciation), and learning strategies.

Aspect	Indicator	Sub-Indicator	Number of Selected Sub-Indicators
Internal	Emotional/Affective	Songs make learning more fun and less boring.	20
	Motivation to Learn	Songs increase enthusiasm/motivation to learn English.	20
	Interest in Lyrics	Interest in learning English due to curiosity about the lyrics.	20

Memorable Song	Mention specific songs that are emotionally/motivational.	20
Cognitive Vocabulary	- Music helps expand vocabulary	20
Cognitive Pronunciation	- Music helps understand pronunciation	20
Learning Strategies	Listening to music while studying (following lyrics, memorizing, etc.)	20

1. Emotional/Affective

One of the dominant findings revealed that students perceived English songs as a significant emotional regulator during the learning process. From the questionnaires, five students reported feeling more relaxed, calm, and emotionally uplifted after listening to songs. Similarly, 21 out of 22 interviewees stated that songs made the learning experience more enjoyable and reduced boredom. This aligns with affective filter theory (Krashen, 1982), which posits that positive emotions lower the affective filter, thereby enhancing language acquisition. Students confirmed that songs helped them regain focus and emotional balance, particularly when they experienced mental fatigue.

2. Learning Motivation

Motivation was another central theme that emerged strongly. All questionnaire respondents (5) and nearly all interviewees (20) expressed that English songs significantly increased their motivation to study. Students mentioned that certain lyrics were inspirational and made them more enthusiastic about completing assignments or learning grammar. One student noted that listening to a song like “*Fight Song*” helped them push through academic stress. These findings reinforce previous studies (Al-Smadi, 2020; Elviany et al., 2024), which show that integrating music into education enhances intrinsic motivation.

3. Interest in Lyrics and Language Curiosity

Another finding that stood out was students’ curiosity about lyrics, which sparked their interest in understanding English better. A total of 20 students admitted that trying to understand lyrics became their initial motivation to improve vocabulary and sentence comprehension. This supports the notion that songs can bridge the gap between entertainment and learning, promoting incidental vocabulary acquisition (Amien et al., 2022). Students frequently used dictionaries or translation tools to understand unfamiliar words from the songs they liked.

4. Cognitive Gains: Vocabulary and Pronunciation

The data also showed that English songs had a significant impact on students’ language development. From interviews, 22 students stated that they learned new vocabulary through repeated listening, while 20 confirmed improvements in pronunciation and intonation. These results align with studies

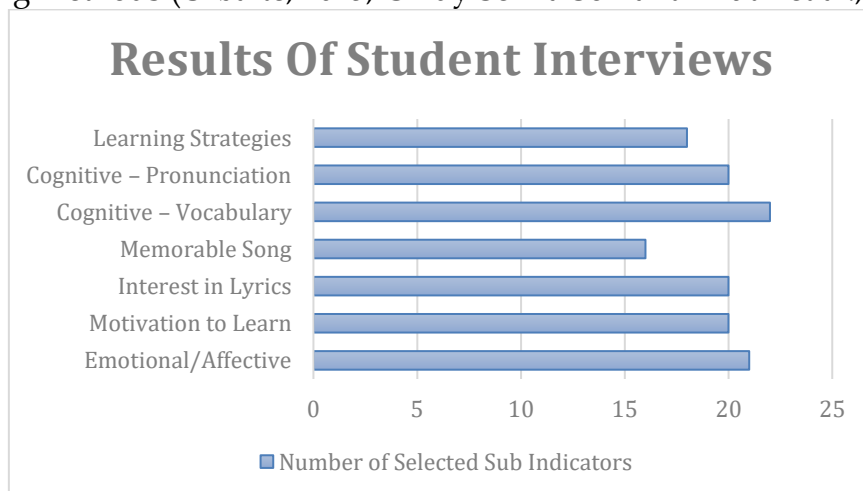
by Astuti et al. (2023) and Sadiqzade (2025), which emphasized that songs are effective for authentic exposure to native-like speech, helping learners internalize pronunciation patterns in a stress-free environment.

5. Specific Songs and Emotional Connection

Many students mentioned particular songs that had deep personal meaning or emotional value. Songs such as *“Love Story,” “Perfect,” “Fix You,”* and *“The Rest of My Life”* were cited as sources of comfort and motivation. These emotionally resonant songs helped them cope with academic pressure and maintain a positive mindset during stressful periods. This supports the concept of emotional scaffolding in learning, where emotionally meaningful content enhances engagement and retention.

6. Learning Strategies Involving Songs

Students described how they actively used songs in their learning routines. Eighteen interviewees reported using strategies such as listening while reading lyrics, memorizing songs, or imitating pronunciation. These practices indicate a high level of autonomy and personalization in learning. These results align with the principles of learner-centered and differentiated instruction, as well as post-pandemic recommendations for more emotionally supportive learning methods (Urbaite, 2025; Cindy Selvia Somantri Putri et al., 2025).



DISCUSSION

The results suggest that English songs play a multifaceted role in students’ English learning experience – functioning not only as linguistic input but also as affective and motivational tools. Songs reduce stress, build positive learning environments, and reinforce intrinsic motivation. In addition, they help improve cognitive outcomes by offering authentic exposure to vocabulary and pronunciation in meaningful contexts.

These findings support the movement toward emotionally responsive and student-centered pedagogies. Especially in the post-COVID-19 educational climate, where students face emotional fatigue and low motivation, music offers a light, flexible, and relatable medium. Incorporating English songs into formal

learning can enhance students' affective engagement, improve learning outcomes, and create a dynamic learning atmosphere.

However, it is important to note that while most students benefit from songs, individual differences must be considered. Not all students enjoy or respond positively to music, and educators must remain sensitive to varying preferences. Therefore, English songs should be used as complementary tools rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English songs significantly contribute to enhancing students' motivation, mood, and language proficiency within the context of English language learning. Students consistently reported that songs helped create a positive and relaxed learning atmosphere, which in turn supported their emotional well-being and reduced academic stress. This emotional comfort was closely linked to an increase in learning motivation, with many students stating that inspirational lyrics and engaging rhythms reignited their enthusiasm for attending classes, completing assignments, and persisting in learning challenges.

Beyond the affective benefits, English songs were found to support cognitive development, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation improvement. Through repeated exposure to lyrics, students gained a deeper understanding of word meaning, sentence structure, and native like pronunciation. Furthermore, many students developed independent learning strategies involving songs such as memorization, imitation, and translation that reflect a high level of learner autonomy.

These findings affirm that English songs are not merely a supplementary form of entertainment but can function as a powerful and flexible pedagogical tool. Their integration into English instruction, particularly for Generation Z students, can create a more emotionally engaging, relevant, and student-centered learning experience. For educators, this presents an opportunity to design innovative and humanistic learning models that incorporate music as an emotional and linguistic resource.

Future research is encouraged to expand the sample across different academic disciplines and cultural contexts, as well as to adopt mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative analysis. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how songs influence academic performance, emotional resilience, and long-term motivation in language education.

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