

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF USING SONGS TO BOOST MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of classroom-based research focusing on how songs influence student motivation in junior high school EFL contexts in Indonesia. This study aims to explore students' perceptions of using English songs as a medium to motivate them in learning English at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan. A descriptive qualitative method was employed using questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations as instruments. The findings revealed that most students showed high motivation when songs were used, with 64% categorized as highly motivated and the class average reaching 3.54. Students also reported feeling more relaxed, interested, and willing to participate when English songs were integrated into the learning process. The data triangulation from observations and interviews further confirmed that songs created a low-anxiety and engaging classroom atmosphere. These results align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Keller's ARCS Model of Motivation. This study suggests that English songs can be a valuable tool for fostering motivation and engagement in junior high school English language teaching.

Key Words: Student Perception, Motivation, English Songs, Language Learning, EFL

ABSTRAK

Masih kurangnya penelitian di kelas yang membahas bagaimana lagu berbahasa Inggris memengaruhi motivasi belajar siswa dalam konteks EFL di tingkat SMP di Indonesia menjadi celah dalam kajian pendidikan bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa terhadap penggunaan lagu bahasa Inggris sebagai media untuk meningkatkan motivasi belajar di SMP Negeri 1 Pekalongan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan instrumen berupa angket, wawancara, dan observasi kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa menunjukkan motivasi tinggi saat lagu digunakan, dengan 64% siswa berada dalam kategori sangat termotivasi dan rata-rata kelas mencapai skor 3,54. Siswa juga melaporkan bahwa mereka merasa lebih santai, tertarik, dan termotivasi untuk berpartisipasi ketika lagu digunakan dalam pembelajaran. Hasil triangulasi dari observasi dan wawancara memperkuat temuan bahwa lagu menciptakan suasana kelas yang menyenangkan dan rendah kecemasan. Temuan ini selaras dengan Teori Affective Filter dari Krashen dan Model Motivasi ARCS dari Keller. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa lagu dapat menjadi alat yang efektif dalam meningkatkan motivasi dan keterlibatan siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di tingkat SMP.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi Siswa, Motivasi, Lagu Bahasa Inggris, Pembelajaran Bahasa, EFL

INTRODUCTION

In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, there is a growing interest in the integration of music, particularly songs, as a medium to enhance student engagement and motivation. Despite this interest, the use of songs in formal instructional settings remains underexplored, especially in junior high school contexts where students may struggle with language exposure and motivation. This is especially evident in Indonesia, where traditional teaching methods still dominate English language classrooms, limiting opportunities for students to experience English through dynamic and relatable contexts (Serrano-Espinoza & Argudo-Serrano, 2022; Zaharani, 2023). At Junior High School 1 Pekalongan, teachers have begun incorporating songs as part of English instruction, but a systematic investigation into how students respond to this practice is still lacking.

Ideally, EFL classrooms should provide learners with authentic, engaging input that is both comprehensible and relevant to their experiences, as emphasized in Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen by Nattinger, 2014). Songs meet this criterion by presenting real-life language in melodic,

repetitive, and emotionally engaging formats that can reduce affective barriers to learning (Khan, 2023). However, a gap exists between this ideal and current classroom practices, which often fail to fully utilize music as a language learning tool. This study aims to address that gap by exploring how students perceive the motivational impact of learning English through songs in their actual classroom environment.

Several theoretical perspectives support the potential of songs to foster effective language learning. Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasizes that language is best acquired through exposure to input slightly above the learner's current level ($i+1$), and songs provide this kind of rich, comprehensible input in an enjoyable format. Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences identifies musical intelligence as a powerful learning channel, especially for students who are more responsive to auditory stimuli Keller J, (2008) ARCS Model of Motivation underscores the role of attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction—components that songs can naturally trigger through engaging rhythms, emotional content, and relatable themes. Additionally, the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposes that learners acquire language more effectively in low-stress, enjoyable environments—conditions that song-based instruction readily facilitates (Deci et al., 1991; Khan, 2023).

Empirical research has demonstrated that songs positively impact vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and student motivation. Zaharani (2023) outlines a structured pedagogical framework for implementing songs effectively in the classroom, from pre-teaching vocabulary to post-listening discussions. Similarly, Nadiyya & Suryadi (2024) found that English songs reduced students' anxiety and encouraged sustained engagement with language materials. These findings align with observations by B (2023), who established that the rhythmic and emotional qualities of songs support long-term retention and increase learners' willingness to participate in language tasks. Nevertheless, few studies have explored how students themselves perceive this method within specific school settings, particularly in Indonesia.

Given this context, this study investigates students' perceptions of using songs as a medium to motivate them in learning English at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan. The research addresses two primary questions: (1) What is the condition of students' motivation in learning English at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan? and (2) How do students perceive the use of songs to motivate students in learning English? By examining these issues, the research seeks to provide both empirical insights and practical recommendations that can inform teaching strategies in EFL classrooms, making language learning more engaging and effective.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of using songs as a medium to increase motivation in learning English. The study was conducted at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan, a public junior high school located in Central Java, Indonesia, during the period of March to May 2025. This school was selected due to its active use of music as part of English instruction and the accessibility of research participants.

The participants were seven-grade students who were currently enrolled in English classes where song-based activities were used. A total of 25 students participated in the research. The researcher did not

apply probability sampling techniques; instead, purposive sampling was used to select students who had experienced learning English through songs during regular classroom activities.

Data were collected through three instruments: (1) a closed-ended questionnaire measuring students' motivation and perception toward English song use, (2) semi-structured interviews with selected students, and (3) classroom observations using a structured observation sheet. The questionnaire consisted of 16 items using a Likert scale format and was divided into two sections: students' motivation and their perception of songs as a learning medium. Interviews were conducted with ten students who represented a variety of academic performance levels to ensure diverse insights. Observations were conducted during two classroom sessions in which English songs were integrated into the lesson.

The data analysis process involved three steps. First, the questionnaire responses were analyzed descriptively using percentage distribution to determine general trends. Second, interview transcripts were examined using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns in students' responses. Third, observation notes were reviewed and categorized according to indicators of motivation and engagement such as attention, participation, and emotional response.

By triangulating the data from these three sources, the researcher was able to cross-validate findings and ensure the credibility of interpretations. This method provided a comprehensive picture of how students at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan perceive and are influenced by the use of songs in their English learning experience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are presented in two main parts: (1) descriptive statistical analysis of questionnaire data on students' motivation and perceptions, and (2) a discussion that integrates these findings with relevant theoretical and empirical literature.

1. Descriptive Analysis of Questionnaire Results

To capture students' views, the questionnaire was divided into two categories: motivation and perception. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of student responses across the perception-related statements.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions Toward Songs in English Learning

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Songs are an effective tool for learning English	0%	0%	60%	32%	8%
I find it easier to remember vocabulary when I learn through songs	0%	4%	52%	24%	20%
Songs make learning English more enjoyable	0%	0%	40%	48%	12%
I understand English words better when learning through songs	0%	12%	44%	40%	4%
English songs help me improve pronunciation	0%	8%	56%	24%	12%

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel more relaxed when learning English through songs	0%	0%	40%	48%	12%
I like it when English teachers use songs in lessons	0%	0%	48%	44%	8%
I would like more English lessons to use songs	0%	8%	48%	36%	8%

In addition to motivation, the questionnaire also explored students' perceptions of songs as a medium for learning English. The responses suggest that students generally view songs as an effective and enjoyable learning tool.

For the first statement, "Songs are an effective tool for learning English," 40% of students agreed or strongly agreed, while 60% remained neutral. No students disagreed. This reflects a general acknowledgment of the usefulness of songs, although some students may not have strong opinions yet, possibly due to varying levels of exposure or effectiveness of the implementation.

In the item "I find it easier to remember vocabulary when I learn through songs," 44% of students agreed or strongly agreed, while 52% were neutral and 4% disagreed. This aligns with Zaharani (2023) findings that songs aid in vocabulary retention. The repetitive and contextual nature of lyrics likely helps embed vocabulary in students' memory.

The third item, "Songs make learning English more enjoyable," received strong positive responses, with 60% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing and 40% remaining neutral. No one disagreed. This supports theories from Nadiyya & Suryadi (2024), showing that enjoyment significantly contributes to student engagement and positive attitudes toward learning.

For "I understand English words better when learning through songs," 44% of students agreed or strongly agreed, while 44% remained neutral and 12% disagreed. This reflects varied experiences, suggesting that while many benefit from songs, others may require additional instructional support to grasp word meanings fully.

In the statement "English songs help me improve pronunciation," 36% agreed or strongly agreed, 56% were neutral, and 8% disagreed. The neutral majority suggests that although songs can model pronunciation, not all students may recognize or focus on these aspects without explicit instruction.

The sixth statement, "I feel more relaxed when learning English through songs," received 60% agreement and 40% neutrality. This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, where low anxiety enhances language acquisition.

When asked whether "I like it when English teachers use songs in lessons," 52% agreed or strongly agreed, and 48% remained neutral. The lack of disagreement indicates general approval of songs in the classroom, although it also suggests the importance of effective song selection and integration by the teacher.

Lastly, the item “I would like more English lessons to use songs,” garnered 44% agreement, 48% neutrality, and 8% disagreement. This reflects openness among students to song-based instruction but may also point to a need for variety in teaching methods or concerns about overuse.

In conclusion, these findings highlight that students hold generally favorable perceptions of using songs for learning English. While not all are strongly convinced of their effectiveness in areas like vocabulary retention or pronunciation, a significant number recognize the emotional and engagement benefits. The positive perceptions confirm the value of songs as a relevant, enjoyable, and flexible medium for supporting language acquisition in EFL classrooms.

Table 2. Students' Motivation Toward Learning English Through Songs

Respondent	Class	School	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Result	Average
R 1	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	32	4
R 2	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	3	27	3,375
R 3	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	5	4	3	4	3	3	4	30	3,75
R 4	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	3	3	5	3	3	4	29	3,625
R 5	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	31	3,875
R 6	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	5	33	4,125
R 7	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	3	4	5	3	4	3	3	28	3,5
R 8	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	4	3	4	3	2	4	28	3,5
R 9	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	5	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	28	3,5
R 10	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	27	3,375
R 11	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	4	3	3	5	4	3	3	28	3,5
R 12	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	29	3,625
R 13	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	4	3	4	5	3	5	4	31	3,875
R 14	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	3	3	3	4	3	4	3	26	3,25
R 15	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	2	3	4	4	2	3	26	3,25
R 16	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	4	3	3	3	2	4	5	28	3,5
R 17	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	5	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	30	3,75

R 18	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	28	3,5
R 19	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	4	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	26	3,25
R 20	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	25	3,125
R 21	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	26	3,25
R 22	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	4	3	3	4	3	4	4	28	3,5
R 23	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	24	3
R 24	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	2	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	21	2,625
R 25	7 C	SMPN 1 PEKALONGAN	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	40	5
TOTAL												3,54

Explanation :

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 1 : Strongly Disagree | 1. 0 - 2 | : Low Motivation |
| 2 : Disagree | 2. 2,1 – 3 | : Medium Motivation |
| 3 : Neutral | 3. 3,1 – 5 | : High Motivation |
| 4 : Agree | | |
| 5 : Strongly Agree | | |

Interpretation of Table 2: Statistical Overview of Student Motivation

Table 2 presents the responses of 25 students from Class 7 at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan regarding their motivation toward learning English through songs. Each respondent answered eight motivational statements, scored from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The "Result" column indicates the total score across the eight items, while the "Average" column shows each student's mean score. The motivational levels are categorized as follows:

Low Motivation: 0–2

Medium Motivation: 2.1–3.0

High Motivation: 3.1–5.0

The overall class average score is 3.54, which places the class in the “High Motivation” category. This indicates that, collectively, students in Class 7 exhibit strong motivation when songs are used in English learning. The distribution of individual motivation levels is as follows:

16 students (64%) showed high motivation (average score between 3.1 and 5.0).

8 students (32%) demonstrated medium motivation (average between 2.1 and 3.0).

1 student (4%) fell into the low motivation category (average below 2.0).

The majority of students expressed positive responses, particularly in items that reflect increased engagement, reduced anxiety, and enhanced enjoyment—factors that align with Keller’s ARCS Model of Motivation (2008), especially the components of Attention and Satisfaction. For example, students generally agreed that songs help them stay focused, make learning more enjoyable, and encourage them to participate actively in class.

The use of songs also supports Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis (Khan, 2023), which posits that emotional factors such as anxiety and comfort affect language acquisition. The musical setting in the classroom appears to create a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, making students more receptive to learning English.

Furthermore, the results can be interpreted through the lens of Deci & Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (1991), where motivation is enhanced when students feel a sense of autonomy and interest. Since music is generally relatable to students’ lives, it increases intrinsic motivation by making learning feel more relevant and personal.

In conclusion, the overall average of 3.54 for Class 7 reflects a strongly positive motivational trend. These findings reinforce that the integration of songs into English learning not only increases student engagement but also cultivates a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. It demonstrates that song-based instruction can be a powerful tool for enhancing students’ motivation in EFL contexts, particularly at the junior high school level.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel more motivated to learn English when songs are used in the classroom	0%	4%	36%	44%	16%
Songs make me more interested in participating during English lessons	0%	0%	44%	44%	12%
I am more willing to complete English assignments after learning through songs	4%	0%	60%	28%	4%
Songs make me feel less anxious about speaking English	0%	0%	68%	24%	8%
Listening to songs helps me stay focused during English lessons	0%	0%	36%	48%	16%
I feel more confident to use English after practicing through songs	0%	4%	64%	28%	4%
Songs encourage me to practice English outside of school (e.g., singing, listening)	0%	8%	44%	44%	8%
Learning English through songs makes me enjoy studying English more	0%	0%	44%	44%	12%

The questionnaire results in Table 1 reveal a generally positive response regarding the motivational influence of songs in learning English. Each item will now be discussed individually to present a clearer picture of student motivation, supported by theoretical frameworks such as Keller's ARCS Model (2008), Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1991), and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (as cited in Khan, 2023).

The first statement, "I feel more motivated to learn English when songs are used in the classroom," received 60% agreement (44% agree and 16% strongly agree), with only 4% disagreeing. This shows that a majority of students respond positively to song-based learning. According to Keller J (2008), attention is a key factor in motivation, and the rhythmic, engaging nature of songs naturally captures learners' attention, encouraging active involvement.

For the statement "Songs make me more interested in participating during English lessons," 56% of students agreed or strongly agreed, while 44% were neutral. No student expressed disagreement. This reflects how songs support the "relevance" and "satisfaction" aspects of the ARCS model. By connecting language learning to familiar and enjoyable media, students perceive the lessons as meaningful, which increases their desire to participate (Nadiyya & Suryadi, 2024).

The third item, "I am more willing to complete English assignments after learning through songs," showed a more reserved response, with 60% remaining neutral and 32% agreeing or strongly agreeing. A small minority (4%) strongly disagreed. While this shows that songs may not directly influence students' assignment completion, it does suggest that the emotional and cognitive benefits of songs could indirectly promote academic responsibility over time (Deci et al., 1991).

In response to "Songs make me feel less anxious about speaking English," 32% agreed or strongly agreed, with the majority (68%) remaining neutral. This indicates that although not all students experience reduced anxiety, a significant number feel more comfortable speaking English when music is involved. This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which asserts that lowering anxiety facilitates language acquisition.

On the statement "Listening to songs helps me stay focused during English lessons," 64% of students agreed or strongly agreed, while 36% remained neutral. This high level of agreement suggests that songs can maintain learners' attention, consistent with Keller's attention dimension. Music provides auditory stimulation that can reduce distractions and maintain engagement (B, 2023).

The sixth item, "I feel more confident to use English after practicing through songs," received mixed responses: 32% agreed or strongly agreed, while 64% were neutral and 4% disagreed. These results indicate that while some students gain confidence, others may still require more practice or scaffolding to benefit from song-based activities. Nonetheless, the trend supports the confidence aspect of the ARCS model (Keller J, 2008).

The statement "Songs encourage me to practice English outside of school (e.g., singing, listening)," showed that 52% of students agreed or strongly agreed, while 44% were neutral. This reflects that songs, being easily accessible outside the classroom, may serve as an extension of formal learning, reinforcing the autonomy aspect of intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1991).

Finally, for the statement “Learning English through songs makes me enjoy studying English more,” 56% of students agreed or strongly agreed, and 44% remained neutral. No students disagreed, indicating strong overall acceptance of songs as a motivating tool. Enjoyment, a critical factor in sustaining motivation, is emphasized in both the Affective Filter Hypothesis and Self-Determination Theory.

In summary, these item-by-item responses confirm that songs function as a meaningful motivational tool, particularly by increasing attention, reducing anxiety, enhancing enjoyment, and promoting engagement in and beyond the classroom. Although some students remain neutral on certain aspects—such as assignment completion or speaking confidence—the overall trend underscores the potential of songs to cultivate a positive learning atmosphere and increase students’ willingness to participate in English learning.

2. Discussion

The results of this study are consistent with findings from previous research. Aguirre et al (2016) demonstrated that song-based activities enhance intrinsic motivation in EFL learners. Likewise, Serrano-Espinoza & Argudo-Serrano (2022) reported that music improved engagement and retention in English classrooms. In this study, both student interviews and observation sheets supported these conclusions, indicating improved participation, confidence, and emotional comfort during lessons that used songs.

Theoretically, these findings align with Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis and Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences Theory by Ayfer Kayhan Saka (2008). Songs lower learners’ affective barriers, making it easier for them to absorb new input, while also catering to musical intelligence. Furthermore, the results reflect the Ideal L2 Self concept from Dörnyei’s motivational framework, where songs help students imagine themselves as proficient English users — increasing long-term motivation (Csizér, 2020).

One practical implication of this research is the importance of song selection. Teachers should choose songs that are appropriate for students’ proficiency levels and interests to maximize motivation and reduce cognitive overload. As some students reported difficulty understanding lyrics due to speed or unfamiliar vocabulary, careful preparation and scaffolding are essential.

This study also suggests that song-based learning should be systematically integrated into the English curriculum, not merely used as supplementary entertainment. When aligned with learning objectives and applied using structured methods — such as Zaharani (2023) five-step model — songs become an effective medium for vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, and student engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of English songs as a learning medium significantly contributes to increasing students’ motivation in learning English at Junior High School 1 Pekalongan. The results of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of students responded positively to the use of songs in the classroom, reporting increased interest, reduced anxiety, and greater participation during English lessons. Students also perceived songs as effective tools for enhancing vocabulary, pronunciation, and overall enjoyment in the learning process. These findings were supported by interviews and classroom observations, which highlighted students’ emotional engagement and enthusiasm when songs were incorporated into instructional activities. Aligned with Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis and Keller’s

ARCS Model of Motivation, this study reinforces the idea that enjoyable, meaningful input through music can foster a low-anxiety, student-centered learning environment. Thus, the findings underscore the potential of songs as a practical and motivating medium for English language instruction in junior high school EFL contexts.

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