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Exploring Student's Perceptions of the Use of English Song in Their Speaking Performance

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of English songs, particularly within the R&B soul pop genre, in improving their speaking ability. The research focuses on five key aspects of speaking: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension of meaning, and psychological readiness to speak. A qualitative approach with a case study method was employed, involving 59 sixth-semester students of the English Language Education Study Program at Sriwijaya University who had experience learning through songs. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and song-based assessments, including lyric completion, reading aloud, and question-and-answer activities related to the song's content. The findings revealed that most students held positive perceptions toward the use of English songs as a medium for speaking practice. Many reported improvements in pronunciation, vocabulary mastery, and fluency, while also highlighting reduced anxiety and increased motivation. However, some challenges were identified, such as difficulty in understanding fast-paced lyrics, unfamiliar accents, and cultural expressions. Overall, English songs proved to be an effective, interactive, and enjoyable learning tool for enhancing students' speaking performance, provided they are supported by appropriate teaching strategies and sufficient instructional guidance.

Keywords: Students' Perceptions, English Songs, Speaking Ability, Audiolingual Method, Language Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication skills, particularly verbal communication, are indispensable in second language acquisition. These skills empower learners to engage effectively in interactions, boost their confidence, and refine their proficiency in the target language. Among the four primary skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—speaking is often considered the most difficult to master because it requires real-time processing, fluency, and confidence. Learners must not only produce grammatically accurate sentences but also speak with proper pronunciation, sufficient vocabulary, and natural intonation. This is further complicated by affective factors such as fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which often discourage students from actively participating in oral communication. Despite the presence of various pedagogical methods to enhance speaking skills, traditional approaches—such as rote memorization, drilling, and textbook-based instruction—tend to be less engaging and fail to simulate authentic communicative contexts.

To overcome these limitations, educators and researchers have explored the integration of alternative and multimodal teaching strategies, one of which is the use of English songs. Music is known to offer a rich linguistic and emotional experience, blending pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and cultural content into a memorable format. One traditional yet adaptable method that aligns well with music-based learning is the Audiolingual Method, which emphasizes imitation, repetition, and pattern practice. According to Bagheri et al. (2019), this method enhances

learners' accuracy and fluency by reinforcing sentence structures and pronunciation through repetition. When applied to songs, it encourages learners to imitate native-like pronunciation and internalize language structures naturally. The rhythmic and melodic nature of music makes repetition enjoyable rather than mechanical, while the lyrics offer meaningful linguistic input.

Furthermore, English songs expose learners to authentic expressions, idioms, and communicative phrases that are often missing from conventional classroom materials. As Isnaini and Aminatun (2021) argue, songs serve as powerful tools for introducing new vocabulary and familiarizing students with real-life usage. Different genres of music offer diverse linguistic styles—pop songs often present colloquial expressions, while R&B and soul tend to offer clearer articulation and emotional depth. This genre-specific characteristic may influence how students absorb language, especially in speaking. Additionally, songs provide a relaxed and non-threatening environment for learning, helping students lower their affective filter and feel more confident using the target language. This aligns with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis and is supported by psycholinguistic theories, which emphasize the role of emotion and cognition in language learning. As noted by Susanty et al. (2024), music activates various cognitive domains— attention, memory, and emotional processing—facilitating more efficient language retention and recall.

Empirical research supports the integration of songs into English classrooms. Studies have found that songs can enhance vocabulary retention, improve pronunciation and intonation, and promote fluency (Nuraini & Rusmiyati, 2022; Rahmania & Mandasari, 2021). The use of music apps, combined with lyric tools, has also been shown to improve students' pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition (Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021). Moreover, song-based activities have been found to increase student engagement, reduce boredom, and create a more student-centered classroom atmosphere. According to Jain et al. (2024), students exposed to song-based instruction demonstrated significant gains in speaking fluency and confidence compared to those in conventional settings. However, despite these promising results, many of the existing studies focus primarily on listening comprehension, vocabulary development, or general motivation, with limited attention to students' subjective perceptions of using songs to improve speaking skills. Additionally, the specific use of genres such as R&B soul pop remains underexplored, despite being favored by learners for their clarity, rhythm, and emotional appeal.

These gaps highlight the need for more nuanced studies that focus on how students perceive and experience the use of songs in speaking-oriented activities. Students may enjoy listening to music, but it is not always clear how this enjoyment translates into speaking improvement. Furthermore, challenges such as fast-paced lyrics, unfamiliar accents, and cultural references may hinder comprehension and usage. Thus, investigating students' views and difficulties can help teachers refine instructional strategies and tailor them to learners' needs.

Therefore, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of English songs— particularly from the R&B soul pop genre—in improving their speaking performance. It focuses on key speaking components such as pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and psychological readiness. The study also seeks to identify the challenges that students encounter when engaging with songs as a learning medium, and how these challenges affect their overall speaking development.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore students' perceptions of the use of English songs, especially the R&B soul pop genre, in improving their speaking ability. The main focus is to explore students' real experiences in an authentic language learning context.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore students' perceptions of using English songs to improve speaking performance. A case study was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences and reflections in a specific instructional context, particularly the integration of R&B soul pop songs into speaking activities.

Operational Definitions

Speaking performance in this study refers to students' oral communication abilities, specifically in terms of pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and clarity. English songs refer to English-language tracks in the R&B soul pop genre, used as a medium for learning in classroom contexts. Students' perceptions include their responses, attitudes, and reflections toward the use of songs as a learning tool. The Audiolingual Method serves as the pedagogical foundation for this study, emphasizing oral repetition, imitation, and listening-based practice through music.

Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program, Sriwijaya University. A total of 59 sixth-semester students from the 2022 academic year participated in the study. The participants were selected purposively, as they had prior experience using English songs in classroom learning. These students also represent Generation Z, a demographic familiar with digital music platforms, making them relevant to the study's focus on music-based learning.

Method of Collecting the Data

Data were gathered through three techniques: (1) open-ended questionnaires adapted and modified from previous studies focusing on five core speaking aspects—pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, meaning comprehension, and psychological readiness; (2) song-based assessments, which involved three tasks: completing missing lyrics (lyric cloze), reading song lyrics aloud, and participating in Q&A discussions regarding the song's content and meaning.

Validity and Reliability

The open-ended questionnaire was validated by expert lecturers and statistically tested using Pearson correlation. All items were found to be valid. The reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha resulted in a score of 0.951, indicating high internal consistency. The song-based assessment instrument was validated through expert judgment and tested for inter-rater reliability to ensure consistency in evaluating students' speaking performance.

Method of Analyzing the Data

The questionnaire data were analyzed qualitatively using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The song-based assessment was evaluated using a rubric that covered five speaking aspects: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. Each aspect was scored on a 1–4 scale and then converted into a final score based on the university's academic evaluation standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aimed to explore students' perceptions of the use of English songs, especially within the R&B soul pop genre in enhancing their speaking performance and to identify the challenges they faced in the process. The findings are derived from open-ended questionnaires and song-based assessments, including a lyrics completion activity and a speaking task consisting of reading aloud and Q&A discussions. The results are presented thematically, covering five key aspects of speaking pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and psycholinguistic factors followed by a discussion of the challenges encountered.

Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs to Improve Their Speaking Performance

The questionnaire consisted of 20 items designed to explore students' perceptions of the use of English songs in enhancing their speaking performance. The items were grouped into five aspects: Pronunciation, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension (Meaning), and Psycholinguistic Factors. A total of 59 students from the sixth semester participated in this study. Each statement

was answered on a Likert scale and analyzed based on the percentage of students who selected Agree or Strongly Agree.

The overall results of the questionnaire show a consistently high level of agreement across all five aspects, with percentages ranging between 78% and 92%, indicating a generally positive perception.

Table 1. Percentage of Students' Agreement on Each Statement

No	Statement	Percentage
Pronunciation		
1.	English songs help me pronounce English words more clearly.	87%
2.	I often repeat English song lyrics to improve my pronunciation.	85%
1.	Songs help me recognize correct English intonation and rhythm.	85%
Fluency		
2.	Singing along with English songs helps me speak more naturally and smoothly.	86%
5.	Listening to songs regularly helps me speak more confidently.	80%
6.	I feel more fluent in speaking after practicing with English songs.	82%
7.	I feel that listening to songs has made me speak English more fluently in daily conversations.	81%
Vocabulary		
8.	I learn new vocabulary from English songs.	92%
9.	I can remember vocabulary better through songs.	84%
10.	Songs have increased the variety of words I use in speaking English.	84%
Meaning		
11.	I learn how words are used in context through songs.	85%
12.	English songs help me understand how to use expressions in the right context when speaking.	81%
13.	Lyrics from songs help me learn how native speakers express their ideas in real-life situations.	82%
14.	Songs help me connect new expressions to real-life meanings.	83%
Psycholinguistics		
15.	Singing English songs increases my confidence by reinforcing the storage and retrieval of language structures in my brain.	78%
16.	English songs help me associate emotions with language use, enhancing my ability to express myself orally.	84%
17.	Practicing songs makes it easier for me to organize my thoughts when speaking English.	80%
18	The rhythm and melody of songs make it easier for me to remember the correct order of words when speaking English.	80%
19	Learning the lyrics of English songs strengthens my memory for new vocabulary and expressions.	84%
20	Songs enhance my speaking skills by engaging multiple cognitive processes such as listening, pronunciation, memory, and emotional connection.	85%

Pronunciation

Students expressed strong agreement that English songs helped improve their pronunciation. According to the questionnaire, 87% of students agreed that songs made English words easier to pronounce, while 85% reported repeating song lyrics to improve their pronunciation. An equal percentage (85%) stated that songs helped them recognize appropriate intonation and rhythm in speech.

Students noted that they found it easier to imitate native pronunciation when listening to songs repeatedly. This is consistent with the principles of the Audiolingual Method, which emphasizes repetition and mimicry for accurate sound production. By repeatedly listening and singing along to songs, students became more confident in articulating words and intonation patterns in a natural and stress-free context.

Fluency

In terms of fluency, students believed that songs played a significant role in improving the natural flow of their speech. The questionnaire showed that 86% of students felt more natural and

smoother when speaking after singing along to English songs. Additionally, 80% reported increased confidence, and 82% agreed that they became more fluent after practicing with songs. Meanwhile, 81% claimed they felt more comfortable using English in daily conversations as a result of regularly listening to music.

The rhythm, pacing, and structure of songs helped students internalize sentence flow, which contributed to their ability to speak without frequent pauses. This reflects the notion that fluency can be developed through rhythmic and consistent language exposure, especially when embedded in emotionally engaging and repetitive input like music.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary was the highest-rated aspect in the students' perceptions. A striking 92% of students agreed that they learned new vocabulary through English songs. In addition, 84% reported that songs helped them remember vocabulary better, and another 84% indicated that their word usage in speaking increased due to the influence of songs.

Students found that English songs introduced a wide range of words and expressions, including idioms and colloquial phrases not usually taught in textbooks. These words were easier to recall because of the context in which they appeared—embedded in emotionally charged, repetitive lyrics. This confirms findings from previous research (e.g., Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021) that contextualized and musical content supports better vocabulary retention.

The results from the lyrics completion task further supported these perceptions. A majority of students (67%) scored in the Excellent or Good categories, demonstrating their ability to recognize and remember vocabulary from song lyrics.

Comprehension of Meaning

Students also reported that English songs helped them understand how language works in context. Specifically, 85% said songs helped them learn how words are used in context, 81% learned how to use expressions appropriately, 82% understood how native speakers' express ideas, and 83% reported that songs helped them connect language to real-life meanings.

Lyrics provided learners with exposure to emotionally driven language and common communication patterns. Through songs, students developed an understanding of how phrases carry different meanings based on tone, mood, or situation. This contributed to a deeper and more practical understanding of how English is used in real-life conversation, aiding their ability to express ideas in spoken form.

Psycholinguistic Factors: Motivation, Memory, and Confidence

The psycholinguistic dimension of speaking—such as confidence, memory, and emotional connection—was another area where students saw substantial benefits, as reflected in the questionnaire results: 78% reported that practicing songs reinforced the storage and retrieval of language structures, 84% stated that songs helped them associate emotions with language to improve oral self-expression, 80% agreed that songs made it easier to organize their thoughts when speaking, and 85% indicated that songs supported multiple cognitive processes, including pronunciation, memory, and emotional connection, all of which contributed to better speaking performance.

These findings align with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and research in psycholinguistics suggesting that language acquisition improves when learners are emotionally engaged and relaxed. Music, particularly in the expressive R&B soul pop genre, appears to lower affective barriers and enhance speaking readiness.

Students' Challenges When Using Songs as Learning Tools

Lyrics Completion

In this task, students listened to an English song and were asked to complete a 50-item gap-fill activity, where selected words or phrases were removed from the lyrics. This activity was designed to assess both listening comprehension and vocabulary recognition, as students had to identify missing words based on the audio input.

A total of 59 students participated in this assessment. Their scores were classified into five categories based on the number of correct blanks filled:

Table 2. Percentage of Students' Scores in the Lyrics Completion Task

Category	Score Grade	Number of Students	Percentage
Excellent	100 - 86	28	47%
Good	85.99 - 71	12	20%
Fair	70.99 - 56	12	20%
Poor	55.99 - 40	5	8%
Fail	Below 40	2	3%

Nearly half of the students (47%) achieved scores in the **Excellent** category, correctly completing at least 43 out of 50 blanks. These students demonstrated high levels of listening accuracy, strong vocabulary retention, and the ability to identify words even at a natural singing pace. The **Good** category (20%) also showed satisfactory performance, with students completing between 36 and 42 blanks, although they experienced occasional difficulties with less predictable or fast-paced sections of the song.

Students in the **Fair** category (20%) performed moderately well, successfully filling in more common or repetitive lyrics but showing more frequent errors in complex or reduced speech segments. In contrast, those in the **Poor** (8%) and **Fail** (3%) categories struggled significantly. They encountered major challenges in processing the audio input, recognizing spoken words, and identifying the correct vocabulary.

These findings suggest that while the majority of students were able to complete the activity successfully, a subset of learners had difficulty with fast lyrics, unclear articulation, and less familiar vocabulary. For these students, the rhythm and speed of the song may have been overwhelming, especially when combined with the natural variation in pronunciation, tone, and accent.

Therefore, additional support—such as pre-teaching vocabulary, providing slower audio versions, or allowing repeated listenings—may help these learners better engage with song-based tasks. Nonetheless, the overall results support the effectiveness of English songs in improving vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension for most students.

Speaking Practice: Reading Aloud and Q&A Discussion

In this assessment, students completed a speaking task consisting of two components: reading aloud selected song lyrics and participating in a Q&A session about the song's meaning. These activities aimed to evaluate both the technical aspects of speaking—such as pronunciation and fluency—as well as students' comprehension and ability to express ideas verbally. The reading task assessed accuracy in pronunciation and rhythm, while the Q&A allowed students to interpret lyrics and relate them to personal experiences.

To ensure objective evaluation, each student was assessed by a rater using five criteria: fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and grammar. This rubric provided a comprehensive view of their speaking performance, highlighting how music-based tasks can foster language development and speaking confidence.

A total of 59 students participated, with their scores categorized based on overall performance across the five criteria. The following is a breakdown of the results:

Table 3. Percentage of Students' Scores in the Speaking Practice (Reading Aloud and Q&A Discussion)

Category	Score Grade	Number of Students	Percentage
Excellent	100 - 86	9	15%
Good	85.99 - 71	22	37%
Fair	70.99 - 56	20	34%
Poor	55.99 - 40	8	14%
Fail	Below 40	0	0%

The data shows that 9 students (15%) demonstrated Excellent performance, showing strong fluency, accurate grammar, appropriate vocabulary use, and confident responses in

expressing the meaning of the song. Meanwhile, 22 students (37%) performed in the good category, with only minor issues in pronunciation or sentence structure.

However, 34% of students were categorized as Fair, and 14% as Poor, indicating several challenges. These students had difficulty expressing their thoughts clearly, hesitated frequently, and showed weakness in vocabulary recall and pronunciation accuracy. Their responses tended to be short, less structured, and lacked the confidence observed in higher-scoring groups. Despite this, no students were placed in the Fail category, meaning all participants were able to engage in the speaking tasks at a functional level.

The results of this assessment reveal that while many students were able to use songs as a productive tool for speaking practice, a significant portion struggled with transferring receptive listening skills into active spoken language. This suggests a gap in students' ability to internalize and reproduce language learned through songs without additional scaffolding.

Discussion

This section presents an interpretation of the findings, linking students' experiences with relevant theoretical perspectives and pedagogical implications. It focuses on how students perceived and responded to the use of English R&B soul pop songs to develop their speaking performance, as well as the challenges they encountered during implementation. Drawing from the questionnaire and song-based assessments, this discussion explores the connection between students' subjective perceptions and their actual performance, while also addressing linguistic, cognitive, and instructional factors influencing their learning outcomes.

Students' Perceptions of English Songs in Improving Speaking Performance

The findings revealed that most students held positive perceptions regarding the use of English songs to improve their speaking abilities. Students consistently recognized the benefits of using songs across five main aspects: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and psychological readiness. They described how songs helped them articulate words more clearly, speak more smoothly, learn and recall vocabulary more effectively, understand how expressions are used in context, and feel more confident when speaking English.

This positive view aligns with the theoretical framework that supports the use of contextualized language input in enhancing second language acquisition. Song lyrics expose students to authentic and expressive language, enabling them to internalize real-world expressions. Many students reported imitating native speakers through singing, which resonates with the principles of the Audiolingual Method (Daley & Rusiewicz, 2021) that emphasize repetition and mimicry for reinforcing accurate pronunciation and intonation.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, students expressed that songs reduced their anxiety, increased motivation, and enhanced emotional connection to the language. These responses are consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that emotional comfort facilitates language acquisition. Music, especially from emotionally resonant genres like R&B, creates a learning environment that supports memory retention and deeper engagement (Nineuil et al., 2020).

Student performance in both the lyrics completion and speaking practice tasks further confirmed these perceptions. Many students successfully demonstrated their ability to understand song content, recall vocabulary, pronounce words clearly, and express ideas during speaking activities. These outcomes highlight the influence of auditory repetition and musical rhythm in supporting language development, both in receptive and productive skills.

Challenges Faced by Students When Using Songs as Learning Tools

Although the majority of students benefited from song-based learning, the study also identified a number of challenges, particularly among those with lower speaking and listening proficiency.

In the lyric's completion activity, some students struggled to identify words due to the fast tempo of the song, unclear pronunciation, or unfamiliar vocabulary. The poetic and idiomatic

nature of lyrics, along with slang and contractions, made it difficult for these learners to decode meaning through listening alone. Compared to standard textbook dialogues, song lyrics often present informal and culturally specific language that can hinder comprehension.

Likewise, the speaking practice revealed that several students had difficulty expressing ideas fluently, pronouncing words correctly, or using appropriate grammar and vocabulary. Their responses were often hesitant and brief, indicating a gap between listening comprehension and spoken output. These difficulties suggest that for some learners, listening to songs alone is not enough to develop speaking confidence or accuracy without additional support.

Cognitively, this may be due to the mental demands of processing complex auditory input. Psycholinguistic theory indicates that when learners are exposed to rapid or emotionally expressive content, their working memory may be overloaded, limiting their ability to plan and produce speech effectively. In addition, unfamiliar song content or abstract lyrical messages may cause delays in comprehension and response.

Instructionally, some students expressed that they could not always relate the song's content to real-life situations or classroom topics. This issue may stem from a mismatch between the song's level of difficulty and the students' current language ability. According to Hamilton & Murphy (2024), music becomes an effective learning tool only when its content is accessible, relevant, and well-integrated into the curriculum. Without scaffolding—such as vocabulary previews, guided lyric interpretation, and structured speaking practice—students may fail to fully benefit from the learning experience.

CONSCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of English songs, particularly those in the R&B soul pop genre, provides meaningful pedagogical value in enhancing students' speaking performance. Through a qualitative case study involving open-ended questionnaires and song-based assessments, students demonstrated positive responses across five key dimensions of speaking: pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension of meaning, and psychological readiness. The findings suggest that songs serve not only as a source of authentic linguistic input, but also as a medium that supports oral practice, reinforces language retention, and reduces speaking anxiety reflecting the principles of the Audiolingual Method and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. However, several challenges emerged, including difficulty in processing rapid lyrics, interpreting idiomatic expressions, and understanding culturally embedded language. These issues highlight the necessity of pedagogical scaffolding, including appropriate song selection, pre-listening support, and guided language activities. Ultimately, the study underscores that the effective use of music in language learning is not inherent in the medium itself but depends on its thoughtful implementation. When integrated with pedagogical intent, English songs can function not merely as supplementary material, but as a dynamic and engaging tool that fosters both linguistic development and learner confidence in speaking.

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