

Investigating Students' Perception on the Impact of Song Lyrics in Improving Reading Comprehension at Sman 5 Palu

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to investigate the perceptions of students at SMAN 5 Palu regarding the impact of using song lyrics to improve English reading comprehension. This study focuses on the role of song lyrics in increasing reading motivation and the challenges faced by students in their use. Although reading comprehension is an essential skill, international assessment results such as PISA show that Indonesian students' reading literacy is still below the global average, causing students to often feel bored and have difficulty understanding conventional texts. This study used a descriptive qualitative design with 25 students from class X Merdeka 1 of SMAN 5 Palu selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through open questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The results showed that students had positive perceptions of the use of song lyrics. Song lyrics increase learning motivation through a fun and relaxed atmosphere, and help improve vocabulary, contextual meaning comprehension, and grasping main ideas. Challenges found include the use of slang, figurative meanings, fast pronunciation, and distractions for some students. This study concludes that song lyrics are effective authentic material in EFL reading learning.

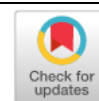
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INTRODUCTION

Reading skill is one of the most essential abilities in learning English. It includes higher-level functions like deducing meaning, making inferences, evaluating, and synthesizing information from a passage, in addition to letter and word recognition. People who read well can easily find many different sources of information, most of which are in English. These include textbooks, scholarly articles, online news, and other information in the digital age (Mirizon & Rosmalina, 2021). On the other hand, students who have trouble reading often have trouble understanding instructions, learning the material, and developing critical thinking skills, all of which are important for doing well in school and at work.

One of the main goals of the English curriculum merdeka is to help students understand what they read better. According to Wang (2023), this emphasis is because reading comprehension is a complicated mental process that is important for school success and depends on using metacognitive techniques, reading fluency, and what you already know. In this complicated process, readers actively create meaning by drawing on their cultural and experiential backgrounds, the context, and their reading goals. Many English as a Foreign Language learners find it very challenging to achieve excellent reading comprehension, even though it is crucial. This issue is often due to insufficient instructional media and the inherent challenges associated with acquiring a second language (Yuan, 2025).

To overcome these challenges, song lyrics can be a helpful tool in the classroom. Song lyrics, as a form of authentic media, have outstanding potential to attract students' attention while helping them understand the context of the text. Besides being rich in vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural nuances, song lyrics are also equipped with rhythms and melodies that make the learning process more enjoyable and effective than

conventional reading texts (Wardiman et al., 2022). The connection between reading lyrics and listening to music makes it simple for students to combine their interests with their language learning goals. This method can transform a passive hobby into an active and beneficial strategy (Sulis, 2023).

Besides the effectiveness of learning media, students' perceptions of using song lyrics also play an important role in the success of the reading learning process. Perception determines how students interpret, respond to, and interact with the provided material. When students have a positive perception of an instructional medium, they tend to be more motivated, focused, and open to learning (Fatonah, 2024). On the other hand, if the media is seen as uninteresting or difficult to understand, students tend to be passive and less enthusiastic. Therefore, understanding how students view the use of song lyrics in reading learning can provide valuable insights for teachers to adjust teaching strategies to better suit their needs, interests, and learning styles. Thus, studying students' perceptions not only describes their responses to learning media but also helps improve the effectiveness of English teaching in the classroom

At SMAN 5 Palu, students still have difficulty understanding English texts, often translating word by word and lacking motivation because reading is considered difficult and boring, as revealed from classroom observations and informal conversations with English teachers. The teachers also mentioned that students are often unmotivated to interact with English-language texts because they find reading difficult and tedious. In response, some teachers have started to integrate song lyrics as an alternative learning material, especially for reading activities, by selecting songs that are appropriate and interesting so that students are more motivated to read English texts. Students are invited to listen to the songs and then analyze the lyrics to grasp the meaning and main ideas. This process helps reduce the habit of translating word by word. However, the use of song lyrics has not yet been systematically integrated into the school's English curriculum in a structured manner. This situation highlights the urgent need for more contextual and engaging learning materials. Although previous studies have explored the use of song lyrics to support vocabulary acquisition and listening skills, little attention has been paid to Indonesian senior high school students' perceptions of using song lyrics to improve their reading comprehension. This gap emphasizes the relevance and necessity of the current study.

Based on the background, the researcher formulates the following research questions: How do song lyrics increase students' motivation to read English texts?, What challenges do students face when using song lyrics as a medium to improve their reading comprehension? This study focuses on investigating students' perception on the impact of song lyrics in improving their reading comprehension, specifically on their motivation and challenges. Rather than focusing on measuring students' reading scores, the study aims to explore their experiences, viewpoints, and attitudes toward the integration of song lyrics into English reading activities.

Reading Comprehension

Reading with comprehension means understanding what has been read. According to Efriza et al., (2023), understanding the meaning of words, sentences, and the relationships between ideas in paragraphs is another component of comprehension, which goes beyond reading aloud. Therefore, if students read a text without understanding its content, they have not succeeded in reading comprehension. Most students struggle to understand the deeper meanings of texts and can only grasp information to a limited extent. One of the main causes of low reading comprehension is students' disinterest in and lack of motivation for traditional reading texts, which are usually thought of as tiresome and difficult to understand (Nanda, 2020).

Building on the challenges mentioned, it is important to know that reading comprehension is more than just recognizing words; it requires careful thinking to understand, analyze, and judge the meaning of the text. Good reading comprehension skills help students find the main ideas, make guesses, understand the author's intent, and link what they already know with new information. These skills are key to success in school because

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they help students learn difficult concepts and think critically about the material. Teaching methods that improve comprehension often include interactive reading, vocabulary building, and asking questions to encourage critical thinking and deeper understanding. Interactive reading involves engaging students actively with the text through discussions, summarizing, and predicting content. Vocabulary building helps students recognize and understand new words, which is essential for grasping the meaning of the text.

Song Lyrics as Learning Media

Song lyrics can be considered a unique language learning medium, as they bring together elements of music, language, and emotion. Song lyrics can be considered a unique language learning medium, as they bring together elements of music, language, and emotion. Songs offer language in a more engaging, real, and relatable way to students' everyday experiences than standard reading texts. According to multimedia learning theory, the combination of textual lyrics and auditory melodies activates several cognitive processes, improving comprehension and memory (Zhang, 2025). Teachers can leverage this technique by using carefully selected song lyrics during reading lessons, having students read and analyze the text alongside the music, which promotes active engagement with vocabulary, sentence patterns, and contextual meaning.

However, this section explicitly underlines the function of song lyrics as reading texts to avoid redundancy with prior discussions on their role in language learning. Unlike conventional reading materials, lyrics offer real-life language usage with repetitive structures that aid retention. To reduce the challenges presented by slang or intricate metaphors, educators must carefully select songs with simple, age-appropriate language (Kumar et al., 2022).

This theoretical framework combines theories of language acquisition, multimedia learning, and learner perception to explain how song lyrics can improve reading comprehension skills in Indonesian high school students. It illustrates how vocabulary, grammar, and critical thinking are improved by fusing the auditory cues of music with authentic, meaningful input (song lyrics). Multimedia learning theory supports the idea that integrating text and music improves memory and comprehension by presenting song lyrics as useful reading materials rather than merely listening aids.

Furthermore, the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning supports simultaneous use of information via multiple channels, including audio and visual, which increases learning effectiveness (Mayer, 2024). This study demonstrates the application of this theory by using song lyrics, allowing us to read the text and also listen to it. Through intonation, rhythm, and emotional expression in the song, the intonation, rhythm, and emotional expression are conveyed in the song, so comprehension is not limited to written words alone.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions at SMAN 5 Palu about the role of song lyrics in improving their reading comprehension. Qualitative research was chosen because it allowed an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, attitudes, and views regarding how song lyrics affect their reading skills. Based on Creswell & Poth (2021), this descriptive qualitative approach aims to describe the phenomenon based on participants' perspectives without manipulating variables. Specifically, this study explored how students viewed the use of song lyrics, how the content affected their motivation and understanding, and how the emotional and cognitive components of the lyrics contributed to their learning.

Subject and Research Setting

The subjects of this study were tenth-grade students at SMAN 5 Palu, selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria included students who were accustomed to listening to English songs, those who enjoyed reading English lyrics or texts, and students who were interested in international music or songs, making them suitable to assessing the role of lyrics as a learning medium. The criteria

also included students who were willing to participate in interviews and questionnaires by openly and honestly sharing their perceptions and experiences to ensure ethical and voluntary data collection. A total of 25 students participated in filling out the questionnaire, while 5 students were selected for in-depth interviews. This study was conducted within the school environment among tenth-grade students at SMAN 5 Palu. This setting is considered ideal because the students were at the early stage of senior high school, making their adaptation to new methods, such as using song lyrics, still fresh and relevant for investigation. The classroom environment also provided a real-life context to observe how multimedia and song lyrics influenced students' reading comprehension and perceptions.

Instruments

To obtain deep insights into students' perceptions of the impact of song lyrics on improving reading comprehension, this study used two qualitative instruments: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. These tools complemented each other in capturing students' experiences, opinions, and attitudes toward using song lyrics in reading classes.

The open-ended questionnaire consists of carefully designed questions that encouraged students to freely express their thoughts and experiences. The questions focused on how song lyrics helped students understand vocabulary, sentence structure, motivation, and overall reading comprehension. This instrument allowed the researcher to reach a broader range of participants and collect diverse perspectives. The responses gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which involved three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Through this model, the researcher systematically identified recurring ideas and patterns that reflected students' perceptions of using song lyrics in reading comprehension.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five selected students to explore more nuanced aspects of their experiences. These interviews provided participants with the opportunity to elaborate on what they found effective or challenging when learning through song lyrics. This approach offered a deeper contextual understanding that went beyond the data collected from the questionnaires. The interviews were also analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, ensuring a consistent method in interpreting the qualitative findings. By employing exclusively qualitative data collection methods complemented by the interactive model of analysis, this study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meaningful impact of song lyrics on students' reading comprehension from their own perspectives.

Technique of Data Collection

In this study, the data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Based on Sugiyono (2018), an open-ended questionnaire was a data collection method that involved providing a series of written questions for respondents to answer freely in their own words, allowing the researcher to obtain richer and more meaningful information about their views and experiences. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were used to explore information in depth. As explained by Abubakar (2021), a semi-structured interview was conducted using a guided set of questions while still offering flexibility for the interviewer to further explore participants' answers, helping to gain a deeper understanding and a clearer context.

The process of data collection in this study involved several interconnected stages. The researcher began by distributing open-ended questionnaires to students to obtain initial data regarding their perceptions of using song lyrics in reading activities. The data collection process for the open-ended questionnaire started with the researcher preparing a list of open-ended written questions, giving respondents the freedom to answer using their own sentences or narratives. These questionnaires were distributed online using the Google Forms digital platform. After the respondents completed the questionnaires, the researcher collected the descriptive and in-depth responses. The answers were then read carefully, organized, and analyzed to identify common themes and patterns, which formed the basis for conducting semi-structured interviews.

The researcher also conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews at the school to obtain in-depth information from the students. The interview aimed to explore students' perceptions of how song lyrics helped them understand reading texts, which reading aspects were most supported, such as vocabulary, main ideas, inference, and reading details, as well as the challenges they faced during the learning process. Each interview lasted approximately 10 to 20 minutes and was recorded using a voice recorder (with the students' consent). Additionally, the researcher took important notes to ensure that the data collected were complete and accurate. The interviews were conducted in bahasa Indonesian to allow students to express their opinions and experiences more freely, enabling smooth communication and ensuring that the data truly reflected the participants' understanding and perceptions.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data gathered from this study were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman. As stated by Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis in qualitative research was conducted interactively through three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These three components were interconnected and occurred continuously throughout the research process, starting from data collection to the final conclusion.

In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused on, and simplified the raw data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This process aimed to highlight information relevant to the research focus, which was students' perceptions of using song lyrics to improve reading comprehension. Irrelevant data were discarded, while important data were categorized based on similar meanings to facilitate analysis. Next, the data display stage involved organizing the reduced data into narrative and descriptive forms. This presentation included systematic and logical explanations of the information, accompanied by direct quotes from respondents that were considered representative. The purpose of data display was to help the researcher better understand the findings and interpret the relationships between concepts and meanings emerging from the participants' answers.

The last stage was conclusion drawing/verification, in which the researcher thoroughly examined the results of the open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings related to students' perceptions of using song lyrics to improve reading comprehension skills. The conclusion-drawing process was conducted descriptively by considering similarities and differences in respondents' views, resulting in an accurate general overview of the phenomenon studied. Through this stage, the researcher sought to produce a clear and in-depth depiction of students' perspectives on the impact of using song lyrics in enhancing English reading comprehension, ensuring the conclusions were scientifically accountable and truly reflected the students' perceptions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study investigated students' perceptions of the use of English song lyrics in improving reading comprehension among tenth-grade students at SMAN 5 Palu. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires administered to 25 students and in-depth interviews with five selected participants. The data were analyzed using the Interactive Model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

The results indicate that most students frequently or occasionally listen to English songs and intentionally use song lyrics as a learning medium. Students reported strong motivation driven by personal interest, enjoyment, and emotional engagement with music. Learning through song lyrics was perceived as fun, relaxing, and less stressful compared to conventional reading texts. Musical elements such as melody, rhythm, repetition, and emotional expression were found to enhance students' interest and sustained engagement during reading activities. In terms of reading comprehension, students reported several

benefits. Song lyrics contributed to vocabulary acquisition, improved pronunciation, and enhanced understanding of word and sentence meanings. Students were able to infer meaning through contextual clues such as the song's theme, repeated lines, and emotional tone, rather than relying solely on word-by-word translation. Repetition in song lyrics also supported memory retention, as students often reread lyrics or listened to songs multiple times to reinforce comprehension.

Despite these advantages, students encountered challenges, including unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, slang expressions, fast pronunciation, and different accents. Some students also noted that music could occasionally become distracting. To address these difficulties, students employed various strategies such as using online dictionaries and translation tools, repeatedly listening to songs, selecting songs according to their proficiency level, and seeking assistance from teachers or peers.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that English song lyrics play a significant role in improving students' reading comprehension by providing meaningful context, repeated exposure to language, and multimodal input. Students' ability to infer meaning from context supports reading comprehension theory, which emphasizes the integration of vocabulary knowledge and contextual understanding in constructing meaning. Repetition through listening and reading lyrics also reinforces word recognition and sentence processing, contributing to deeper comprehension.

Furthermore, song lyrics function as authentic learning materials that present language in real-life contexts. The emotional and thematic relevance of songs made reading activities more engaging and relatable for students, which encouraged repeated interaction with texts. This supports the view that authentic materials enhance learners' engagement and facilitate more natural language processing.

From an affective perspective, song lyrics increased students' motivation and reduced reading anxiety. The presence of music created a relaxed learning atmosphere, lowering students' affective filters and encouraging active participation in reading tasks. Positive emotional responses such as enjoyment and interest played a crucial role in sustaining students' focus and willingness to read English texts.

Although linguistic challenges were present, they did not hinder learning. Instead, these challenges prompted students to adopt various cognitive and metacognitive strategies, fostering independent and strategic reading behavior. This finding aligns with learning strategy theory, which highlights that effective language learners actively manage comprehension difficulties through appropriate strategies.

Overall, the results suggest that English song lyrics are effective instructional media for enhancing reading comprehension and motivation. By integrating authentic language, emotional engagement, and strategic learning opportunities, song lyrics support students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral development in reading English texts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the use of English song lyrics is perceived positively by students as an alternative medium for improving English reading skills. The results of the study show that students not only consider song lyrics as entertainment, but also as a learning resource that helps them understand vocabulary, sentence meaning, and pronunciation through repetition and meaningful context. In addition, learning to read through song lyrics creates a fun, relaxed, and stress-free learning atmosphere, thereby increasing students' motivation, interest, and involvement in the process of reading English texts.

Although students face several obstacles, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, idioms, slang, and fast pronunciation, they can apply various learning strategies, such as using dictionaries or online translators, repeating song lyrics, understanding context, and asking teachers for help. Thus, this study confirms that song lyrics have significant potential as an effective and

meaningful learning medium, both in supporting reading comprehension and in building students' positive attitudes towards English language learning.

Based on the research findings, English song lyrics are recommended as supplementary media in teaching and learning reading comprehension. Teachers are encouraged to select appropriate songs and design structured reading activities to ensure effective learning. Students are advised to use song lyrics as independent learning resources to improve reading skills, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Future researchers are suggested to broaden the scope of research by involving more participants, different educational levels, other language skills, and varied research designs to obtain more comprehensive results.

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