THE ROLE OF SONGS IN PROMOTING VOCABULARY LEARNING AMONG YOUNG EFL STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of songs in promoting vocabulary learning among young EFL students in elementary school. Using a quasi-experimental design, this research involved two classes: an experimental class that learned using songs and a control class that learned using conventional methods. Data were collected through pretests and posttests using vocabulary bingo cards, as well as documentation analysis through classroom observations and visual records to support the learning outcomes. The results showed that students in the experimental class achieved significantly higher vocabulary scores compared to the control class. The use of songs not only helped students remember vocabulary more effectively but also increased their learning enthusiasm, active participation, and confidence in using English. Documentation analysis confirmed that students in the experimental class were more engaged, active, and responsive during the learning process. These findings suggest that integrating songs into English learning can be an effective strategy to enhance vocabulary acquisition and student engagement in EFL classrooms.

Keywords*: EFL classrooms; elementary students; songs; vocabulary learning; vocabulary mastery.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English is widely recognized as an international language that holds a critical role in education, technology, economy, and global communication. In Indonesia, English is introduced from the elementary school level to prepare students for future global participation. One of the essential components of language learning is vocabulary mastery. Without sufficient vocabulary, students will encounter significant difficulties in understanding and using English effectively, both in spoken and written forms. Nation (2020) emphasized that vocabulary is a fundamental aspect that supports all language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Vocabulary learning in elementary school requires appropriate teaching strategies that align with children's natural learning styles. Traditional methods that rely heavily on rote memorization and drilling often make the learning process monotonous and less meaningful for young learners. As a result, students become passive and tend to experience boredom in the classroom. To address this issue, researchers and educators have sought more engaging and interactive approaches to teaching English vocabulary.

One of the widely recommended strategies is the use of songs in language learning. Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2002) stated that songs can effectively support memory retention through rhythm, melody, and repetition, which naturally appeal to children's cognitive development. Songs can also improve pronunciation, promote student participation, and create a dynamic learning environment (Pardede, 2019; Martínez et al., 2020). Additionally, Kumar et al. (2022) found that songs can reduce student anxiety and provide a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. However, Bsharat et al. (2021) argued that the use of songs in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is still underutilized in many regions, including in Indonesia. This indicates a gap between the potential of song-based learning and its practical application in schools.

During the Kampus Mengajar program at SDN Beuah, the researcher observed that English lessons were commonly delivered by general classroom teachers with limited English teaching expertise. The instructional methods employed were still largely conventional and lacked variation, which contributed to students' low interest and limited vocabulary acquisition. Although previous studies have highlighted the benefits of using songs in English classrooms, their practical implementation in elementary schools, particularly in Pidie, remains minimal. This situation presents a significant research opportunity to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The use of songs in language learning not only supports cognitive development but also addresses the affective domain of learning. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, students learn more effectively when they are in a low-anxiety, enjoyable environment. Songs can lower the affective filter, making it easier for students to absorb and retain new vocabulary. Moreover, the interactive nature of songs fosters cooperative learning and encourages students to be more involved in classroom activities. The rhythmic and repetitive elements in songs provide natural reinforcement that helps solidify vocabulary retention over time.

Several studies have emphasized the unique advantages of using songs in EFL classrooms. Brown and Williams (2020) noted that songs can significantly enhance children's memory by offering multiple exposures to vocabulary in an enjoyable context. Trinh, Nguyen, and Duong (2022) confirmed that songs contribute to long-term vocabulary retention among young learners. Furthermore, Kumar et al. (2022) found that songs not only support vocabulary development but also improve students' phonological awareness and listening skills. These studies collectively support the growing recognition of songs as a powerful educational tool for young language learners.

Despite the recognized benefits, some challenges must also be addressed when implementing songs in the classroom. Teachers need to carefully select songs that are age-appropriate, linguistically relevant, and culturally suitable for their students. Managing classroom behavior during song-based activities can also be challenging, as overly excited students may lose focus. Džanić and Pejić (2016) highlighted the importance of structured and well-managed activities to maintain student engagement without causing classroom disruptions. Moreover,

students may sometimes focus too much on the melody and physical movements and not pay sufficient attention to the meaning of the vocabulary presented in the songs. Based on these considerations, this study is essential to provide empirical evidence on the impact of songs in improving vocabulary learning among young EFL students. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the field of language education by offering practical strategies that can enhance vocabulary instruction in elementary schools.

This article is structured as follows: the introduction explains the background, purpose, and significance of the research; the method section describes the research design, participants, instruments, and data analysis; the results and discussion section presents the research findings along with their interpretation based on previous studies; and the conclusion and suggestions section summarizes the key findings and offers practical recommendations.

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the role of songs in improving vocabulary learning among young EFL students in elementary schools. The researcher aims to demonstrate that songs can create a more engaging, enjoyable, and effective learning environment that enhances vocabulary mastery. This study is expected to contribute to the advancement of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of songs as a teaching strategy and to offer practical solutions for teachers seeking to improve vocabulary acquisition in their English classrooms.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design involving two classes: an experimental class taught using songs and a control class taught using conventional methods. The research was conducted at SDN with fifth-grade elementary school students as the population. Two classes were selected based on convenience sampling, using the available classes at the school.

The data collection techniques used in this study included: (1) Pretests and posttests using vocabulary bingo cards to measure students' vocabulary mastery before and after the intervention; and (2) Documentation analysis, which involved recording classroom activities through video during the learning process. The video documentation served to provide qualitative support for the statistical results and to capture the dynamics of student behavior during the intervention.The instruments used in this study were vocabulary bingo cards tailored to the English vocabulary relevant to the elementary school curriculum.

Descriptive statistics were applied to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the pretest and posttest scores, while inferential statistics, including paired sample t-tests and Mann-Whitney tests, were used to determine the significance of vocabulary mastery improvement between the two classes. The teaching intervention in the experimental class involved the use of two selected English songs, accompanied by physical movements to reinforce vocabulary retention and enhance student engagement.

The research took place over a period of several weeks, during which the researcher was actively present in the classroom to observe and facilitate the learning process. The researcher ensured the validity of the data through data triangulation, comparing the results from tests and documentation analysis to verify the accuracy and consistency of the findings.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION
3.1 Finding
1. Vocabulary Test Results

This section presented the results of the vocabulary tests conducted before (pretest) and after (posttest) the learning intervention. The pretest was administered to measure the students' initial vocabulary mastery in both the experimental and control classes. After the learning process, the posttest was conducted to evaluate the improvement in the students' vocabulary.

Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Results. The descriptive statistics in this study provide an overview of the pretest and posttest scores in both the experimental and control classes. This summary helps to illustrate the improvement in students' vocabulary mastery after the learning intervention.

Presented the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest results in both the experimental and control classes. In the experimental class, the pretest scores ranged from a minimum of 45.00 to a maximum of 75.00, with a mean score of 60.17 and a standard deviation of 9.11. This indicated that the students' vocabulary mastery in the experimental class was relatively low before the learning intervention.

After the learning process using songs, the posttest results in the experimental class showed a significant improvement. The scores ranged from 95.00 to 100.00, with a high mean score of 99.48 and a small standard deviation of 1.55, which suggested that most students achieved similar and high scores after the intervention.

In the control class, the pretest scores ranged from 45.00 to 80.00, with a mean score of 62.93 and a standard deviation of 9.11, indicating a slightly higher starting point compared to the experimental class. The posttest scores in the control class ranged from 65.00 to 100.00, with a mean score of 92.07 and a standard deviation of 11.06. Although the control class also showed improvement, the mean posttest score was lower than that of the experimental class, and the score distribution was wider.

These results suggested that the experimental class, which received the song-based learning intervention, achieved greater vocabulary improvement with more consistent results among students compared to the control class that learned through conventional methods.

2. Paired Sample Test Results (Within-Group)

This section presents the results of the paired sample tests conducted to examine whether there are significant differences between the pretest and posttest scores within each group. The

paired sample test is appropriate because it compares two related sets of scores from the same participants before and after the intervention or treatment. Prior to conducting the t-tests, normality tests were performed on the difference scores to ensure that the assumptions for parametric testing were met. The results of these tests are detailed in the following sub-sections for each class, along with the interpretation of the statistical significance of the score differences.

3. Normality Test of the Difference Scores between Pretest and Posttest

The normality test results for the difference scores between pretest and posttest in two groups: the experimental class and the control class. For the experimental class, both the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (p = 0.200) and the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = 0.205) show p-values greater than 0.05, indicating the difference scores are normally distributed. For the control class, the Shapiro-Wilk test (p = 0.070) also shows normality, while the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows a p-value below 0.05 (p = 0.015). Because Shapiro-Wilk is more reliable for small samples, the data is considered normally distributed. Therefore, both groups meet the normality assumption, and a paired sample t-test can be used for further analysis.

4. Paired Sample t-Test: Experimental Class

The results of the paired samples test in the experimental class showed a between the pretest and posttest scores. The mean difference of -39.31 indicated that students in the experimental class experienced a much greater improvement in vocabulary mastery after learning through songs. The significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) confirmed that this result was statistically significant. Learning through songs proved to be much more effective in improving students' vocabulary mastery compared to conventional teaching methods.

5. Paired Sample t-Test: Control Class

The results of the paired samples test in the control class showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. The mean difference of -29.14 indicated that students in the control class experienced an improvement in vocabulary mastery after learning through conventional methods. The significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant. The conventional method was able to improve students' vocabulary mastery, but the improvement was not as substantial as that achieved by the experimental class.

6. Mann-Whitney Test Results (Between-Group)

The Mann-Whitney test results indicated that the experimental class had a higher mean rank (36.97) compared to the control class (22.03). This finding showed that students in the experimental class achieved significantly better vocabulary mastery than those in the control class.

Therefore, it can be concluded that learning through songs provided a more effective improvement in students' vocabulary acquisition compared to conventional teaching methods.

The significant improvement in the experimental class could be explained by the use of songs as a learning medium, which had been proven to increase students' motivation, participation, and memory retention of English vocabulary. Meanwhile, the significant improvement in the control class could also be understood based on the situation that occurred during the treatment process. Initially, the control class was planned to receive learning without the use of songs. However, based on field observations, students in the control class (Class V-A) expressed their interest in the learning process used in the experimental class (Class V-B), which incorporated media such as songs and laptops.

To maintain the students' learning motivation in the control class, the researcher decided to provide learning using technology-based media such as pictures and videos, but without using songs. This treatment became one of the reasons why the control class still showed a significant improvement in learning outcomes, although it was not as high as the improvement observed in the experimental class. The use of visual media such as pictures and videos still provided additional stimulation that helped students to improve their vocabulary mastery, but it lacked the engaging and interactive elements that songs provided.

Although the normality test results within each class indicated that the data were normally distributed, when a comparison was made between the posttest results of the experimental class and the control class, the combined data between the groups showed a non-normal distribution. This could have been caused by differences in the learning outcomes' characteristics in each class due to the different learning media used. In addition, variations in student responses to the different learning methods also affected the distribution pattern of the data between the groups, resulting in a non-normal distribution when directly compared.

The difference in media types used in both classes greatly influenced the students' learning experiences and outcomes. While songs provided a multi-sensory experience that combined auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements, the learning activities in the control class primarily focused on visual input and limited auditory engagement. This limited the opportunities for students in the control class to actively engage with the learning material in a way that songs naturally facilitated. As a result, the experimental class demonstrated not only higher learning outcomes but also a more consistent improvement among students across different vocabulary categories.

Furthermore, the students' enthusiasm and curiosity in the control class about the experimental class's learning process indicated that students are naturally drawn to learning methods that are enjoyable, interactive, and diverse. This interest can serve as valuable feedback for teachers in selecting learning media that can sustain students' motivation and engagement throughout the learning process. By providing enjoyable and varied learning experiences, teachers

can reduce the risk of student boredom, maintain consistent focus, and enhance long-term vocabulary retention that benefits students in future language learning contexts.

In future research, it would be beneficial to explore more combinations of interactive media and to conduct long-term studies to examine vocabulary retention over extended periods. Additionally, further investigation into students' individual learning preferences and cognitive responses could provide valuable insights into how to personalize learning media to maximize vocabulary acquisition outcomes and support student learning success across different educational environments.

3.2 Disscusion

Based on the research conducted on fifth-grade elementary school students, the use of songs in English language learning provided significant benefits for students. The students in the experimental class became highly motivated, actively engaged, and demonstrated better vocabulary mastery through song-based learning. Statistical analysis confirmed these findings, with the experimental class achieving a higher posttest mean score (99.48) compared to the control class (92.07). The Mann-Whitney test also supported this difference with a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05). The mean rank of the experimental class (36.97) was higher than that of the control class (22.03), indicating that students taught using songs achieved better learning outcomes.

The use of songs created an enjoyable learning environment that motivated students to participate actively. Students enthusiastically sang songs, followed movements, and confidently answered vocabulary-related questions. They easily remembered the vocabulary presented in the songs and were eager to repeat them even outside the classroom. These findings aligned with Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2002), Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, and Martínez et al. (2020), who emphasized the positive effects of songs on memory, student motivation, and participation in language learning.

Despite these benefits, the researcher faced several challenges during the learning process. Some students became overly excited and lost focus during singing activities, while others tended to memorize the lyrics without fully understanding their meanings. Managing student discipline, selecting appropriate songs, and maintaining student attention became essential aspects of successful song-based learning. Careful planning and classroom management were required to balance enjoyable activities with effective learning outcomes.

4   CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
4.1 Conclusion

Based on the results of the research that had been conducted, it could be concluded that the use of songs in English language learning had a significant influence on improving students' vocabulary mastery in young EFL classrooms. Students who learned by using songs achieved higher learning outcomes compared to those who learned without using songs. Songs proved to

have increased students' learning motivation, created an enjoyable learning atmosphere, and made students more active and confident in participating in learning activities. In addition, songs helped students to more easily remember and understand vocabulary through rhythm, movements, and engaging repetition. Therefore, the use of songs in English language learning was effective in improving vocabulary mastery and was highly recommended to be implemented in young EFL classrooms.

4.2 Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed:

1. For Teachers:

Teachers are encouraged to incorporate songs into English learning activities to enhance student motivation and vocabulary retention. However, teachers must also pay attention to classroom management, especially in handling students who become overly active or lose focus during song activities. Teachers should ensure that all students understand the meaning of the vocabulary and not just memorize the lyrics.

2. For Schools:

Schools should support the use of creative and interactive learning media, such as songs, by providing the necessary facilities and time allocation to maximize the learning process. Additional training for teachers on how to integrate songs effectively into lessons may also be beneficial.

2. For Future Researchers:

Future studies can explore the long-term effects of using songs in language learning, as well as compare the effectiveness of different types of songs (e.g., slow vs. fast tempo, traditional vs. modern songs) on vocabulary acquisition. Researchers are also advised to allocate more time to conduct further instrument trials and to develop a broader range of vocabulary assessments.

3. For Students:

Students are encouraged to continue practicing vocabulary through songs outside the classroom to strengthen memory retention and increase exposure to English in an enjoyable way.

insights that enriched the research findings. The researcher is also deeply grateful to the Kampus Mengajar program, which provided the opportunity to engage directly in classroom teaching and allowed the researcher to explore innovative learning strategies, including the use of songs to improve vocabulary mastery. The hands-on experience gained during the Kampus Mengajar program was invaluable and significantly supported the completion of this study.

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