

Incidental Vocabulary Learning through English Songs: A Correlational Investigation

Tasya Priscilla Muaja¹, Ate Gueen Simanungkalit^{*2}

^{1,2} FKIP, Universitas Klabat, Minahasa Utara, Indonesia

e-mail: ¹s21810503@student.unklab.ac.id, ^{*2}agsimanungkalit@unklab.ac.id

* Corresponding Author

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between students' level of listening to English songs and their vocabulary mastery. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 82 middle school students. Data were collected through a questionnaire measuring students' listening habits and a vocabulary test consisting of 18 items. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson product-moment correlation. The results indicated that both the level of listening to English songs and vocabulary mastery were at a moderate level. However, the correlation analysis showed a very weak negative relationship between the two variables, which was not statistically significant. These findings suggest that listening to English songs alone does not significantly contribute to students' vocabulary mastery. Therefore, structured instructional strategies and active vocabulary practice are recommended to enhance students' vocabulary development.

Keywords— listening to English songs, vocabulary mastery, EFL students, correlational study

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji hubungan antara tingkat kebiasaan siswa dalam mendengarkan lagu berbahasa Inggris dan penguasaan kosakata mereka. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif korelasional dengan melibatkan 82 siswa sekolah menengah sebagai responden. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner untuk mengukur kebiasaan mendengarkan lagu berbahasa Inggris serta tes kosakata yang terdiri dari 18 butir soal. Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan korelasi Pearson product-moment. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa tingkat mendengarkan lagu berbahasa Inggris dan penguasaan kosakata berada pada kategori sedang. Namun, analisis korelasi menunjukkan adanya hubungan negatif yang sangat lemah antara kedua variabel dan tidak signifikan secara statistik. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa mendengarkan lagu berbahasa Inggris saja tidak memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan terhadap penguasaan kosakata siswa. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan strategi pembelajaran yang terstruktur dan latihan kosakata yang aktif untuk meningkatkan perkembangan kosakata siswa.

Kata Kunci— mendengarkan lagu berbahasa Inggris, penguasaan kosakata, siswa EFL, studi korelasional

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English songs have gained remarkable popularity, particularly among young people and students. Music has become an inseparable part of everyday life, and songs are widely consumed for entertainment, emotional expression, and social connection. As Chaidir (2021) notes, songs are part of everyone's life. This widespread interest in English-language songs indicates not only a cultural trend but also a potential educational opportunity. Frequent exposure to English songs may subconsciously train learners' ears to recognize sounds, rhythms, and patterns of the language. Listiyaningsih (2017) argues that songs can be used as an effective method to enhance listening skills. Regular listening to English songs familiarizes learners with pronunciation, intonation, and vocabulary, which may help them comprehend spoken texts more easily in formal listening activities.

Music is often processed more quickly and memorably than traditional instructional materials. Vadivel (2021) suggests that mastering a song can occur more easily than mastering conventional coursework because music is enjoyable and engaging for the human mind. Even simple activities such as humming or singing along may reinforce language elements and support memory retention. As a result, students who frequently listen to English songs may find it easier to understand spoken English in classroom contexts. This repeated exposure can contribute not only to listening comprehension but also to improved memory and language awareness.

Vocabulary mastery is widely recognized as a fundamental component of language proficiency. Ambarwati and Mandasarin (2020) emphasize that vocabulary is a significant element in foreign language acquisition. Learners need repeated exposure to words in various contexts before fully understanding and using them effectively (McCarten, 2007). Vocabulary knowledge supports all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—and is essential for achieving fluency (Viera, 2017). Without sufficient vocabulary, students may struggle to comprehend both written and spoken texts (Sumardi, Surjowati, et al., 2023). Therefore, developing vocabulary mastery is crucial for effective communication and overall English proficiency.

Despite the popularity of English songs, some students still experience difficulties in learning through listening activities. Listening is often considered one of the most challenging language skills to master (Setiawan, 2019; Kobilova, 2021). Students may struggle with recognizing sounds, understanding fast speech, interpreting metaphorical or abstract lyrics, and following unfamiliar vocabulary. Many songs contain slang, idiomatic expressions, and culturally embedded meanings, which can complicate comprehension. Moreover, students sometimes focus more on the emotional appeal of music than on understanding the lyrics. The digital era has also encouraged passive and superficial listening habits, limiting deeper engagement with language content.

Nevertheless, research indicates that songs can enhance listening ability and vocabulary acquisition when used effectively (Afriyuninda & Oktaviani, 2021; Permana, 2020). Songs provide authentic language input and expose learners to natural pronunciation and intonation. They also increase motivation and engagement in learning activities. Nurkolip and Hanafi (2019) highlight that songs contain valuable linguistic elements, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. As Wilkins (1972) famously stated, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed." This underscores the central role of vocabulary in language learning.

Several previous studies have examined the relationship between listening to English songs and vocabulary mastery, but their findings are inconsistent. Some research reports a significant positive correlation between students' listening habits and vocabulary development. For example, Nurkolip and Hanafi (2019), Barnabas (2019), and Nurvadillah (2021) found that students who frequently listen to English songs or show strong interest in English pop music tend to have better vocabulary mastery. These studies indicate that

songs can contribute to vocabulary acquisition by providing repeated exposure to authentic language. Similarly, Pradita (2011) reported a significant but moderate correlation, suggesting that listening to English songs supports vocabulary development although other factors also influence learning outcomes.

However, other studies show different results. Sari (2013) found no significant correlation between students' ability to listen to English songs and their vocabulary mastery, although a positive relationship was observed. Likewise, Motoh, Palenkahu, et al. (2023) reported a negative correlation between English listening habits and vocabulary mastery among their participants. These conflicting findings suggest that the effectiveness of listening to English songs may depend on factors such as listening strategies, learning context, motivation, and the level of students' engagement with lyrics.

Given the strong interest in English songs among students and the mixed results of previous research, it is important to investigate this issue further. Although many students frequently listen to English songs, it remains unclear whether this habit significantly correlates with their vocabulary mastery in different learning contexts. Therefore, the rationale for conducting this study is to examine the correlation between students' habit of listening to English songs and their vocabulary mastery. The findings are expected to provide empirical evidence that can guide teachers in integrating English songs into vocabulary instruction and improving students' language proficiency.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive correlational design. Quantitative research aims to measure variables and examine the relationship between them using statistical procedures. According to Sugiyono (2017), quantitative research is based on post-positivist principles and focuses on testing hypotheses through objective measurement and empirical data. Similarly, Mehrad and Zangeneh (2019) state that the main objective of quantitative research is to investigate and quantify the relationship between independent and dependent variables within a particular population.

In this study, a descriptive approach was used to identify and describe the level of students' habits in listening to English songs and their vocabulary mastery. In addition, a correlational technique was applied to determine whether there was a significant relationship between students' listening habits to English songs (independent variable) and their vocabulary mastery (dependent variable). This design was considered appropriate because the study did not involve treatment or manipulation of variables but focused on examining the existing relationship between the two variables.

Respondents

The participants of this study were Grade X students enrolled in the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic year at a selected private senior high school in Airmadidi. The total population consisted of 120 students distributed in four classes: XA, XB, XC, and XD, with 30 students in each class.

Before conducting the main study, a pilot study was carried out to examine the validity and reliability of the research instruments. The pilot study involved 30 students from class XA. After the instruments were revised and confirmed to be appropriate, they were administered to the remaining three classes (XB, XC, and XD), which served as the research sample. The pilot study was conducted to ensure that the questionnaire and the test provided reliable and accurate data before being used in the main research.

Research Instruments

To collect the data, the researcher used two instruments: a questionnaire and a vocabulary test. The questionnaire was used to measure students' listening habits to English songs, while the vocabulary test was used to assess students' vocabulary mastery.

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended items in which respondents selected one answer that best represented their habits. The instrument was adapted from Apriani (2020) and modified to suit the context of this study. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure students' listening habits, namely: always, usually, sometimes, seldom, and never. Likert scales are commonly used to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behavioral tendencies (Siregar, 2013).

The indicators included in the questionnaire were derived from Apriani (2020) and were designed to capture essential aspects of students' habits in listening to English songs. These indicators included the frequency of listening, attention to lyrics, understanding of song meaning, and engagement with English-language music. The detailed indicators are presented in the table below.

The vocabulary test consisted of objective items that measured students' knowledge and understanding of English vocabulary. The test items were constructed based on the curriculum and learning materials appropriate for Grade X students. The test was intended to measure students' ability to recognize word meanings, use vocabulary in context, and identify synonyms and antonyms. The validity and reliability of the test were examined through the pilot study before being used in the main data collection.

This methodological approach ensured that the data collected were systematic, reliable, and appropriate for analyzing the correlation between students' listening habits to English songs and their vocabulary mastery. The Table 1 displays the specific indicators used by the writer in the questionnaire.

Table 1. Students Listening English Songs Questionnaire

No.	Indicators	Statements
1.	Active	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
2.	Passive	4, 5, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

(Apriani, 2020)

A test is a set of questions or exercises used to assess an individual's or group's skills, knowledge, intelligence, abilities, or aptitudes. Riduwan (2007) claimed that there are various types of test instruments used in data collection, such as personality tests, aptitude tests, achievement tests, and aptitude tests. In this research, the researcher utilized a vocabulary test to evaluate students' vocabulary mastery. This test comprises multiple-choice questions with alternative answers. The indicators for the vocabulary test are drawn from the researcher's theory and are described below:

Table 2. Vocabulary Mastery Test Indicators

No.	Indicators	Number of Items	Total Items
1.	Synonyms	1, 5, 7, 9, 11, 16	6
2.	Antonyms	2, 4, 8, 12, 15, 18	6
3.	Meaning/Translation	3, 6, 10, 13, 14, 17	6

(Nurvadilla, 2021)

Pilot Study

A pilot study is a small-scale investigation conducted prior to the main research to evaluate the feasibility, validity, and reliability of the research instruments, as well as to identify potential problems in the research design. According to In (2017), a pilot study serves as a preliminary investigation that helps researchers refine procedures, improve instruments, and ensure the accuracy of the study before conducting the full-scale research. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted at a selected private senior high school located in Airmadidi, North Minahasa. The participants of the pilot study were 30 students from Grade X-A in the 2023/2024 academic year.

Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher consulted three English education lecturers and the research advisor to ensure the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the instrument. After the questionnaire was distributed and completed by the participants, the collected data were analyzed with the assistance of a statistician. The results of the pilot study were used to revise and improve the research instruments before they were employed in the main study.

Validity and Reliability

In this study, content validity was established by seeking expert judgment from three English lecturers from the Faculty of Education at Universitas Klabat. This process was intended to evaluate the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of each questionnaire item in measuring students' listening habits to English songs. According to Yusup (2018), the validity of an instrument can be demonstrated through several types of evidence, including content validity, construct validity, and criterion-related validity. Content validity, in particular, ensures that the instrument adequately represents the domain of the construct being measured.

Furthermore, item validity was examined statistically by analyzing the correlation between each item score and the total score. According to Arosyadi and Suyantiningasih (2020), an item is considered valid if the correlation value is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Based on the results of the validity test, all questionnaire items were found to be valid and appropriate for use in the main study.

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of an instrument in producing similar results under similar conditions (Yusup, 2018). In this study, the questionnaire was tested for reliability to ensure that it consistently measured students' listening habits to English songs. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. According to Sahir (2021), a reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher indicates that the instrument has acceptable internal consistency (see Table 3). The results of the reliability analysis showed that the questionnaire met the required standard and was therefore considered reliable for data collection.

Table 3. Level of Reliability

Reliability	Level of Reliability
> 0.90	Very high
0.80 - 0.90	High
0.70 - 0.79	Reliable
0.60 - 0.69	Minimally
< 0.60	Unacceptable

(Cohen. 2007, p.506)

Overall, the pilot study and the validity and reliability procedures ensured that the research instruments were accurate, consistent, and appropriate for investigating the relationship between students' listening habits to English songs and their vocabulary mastery.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed and interpreted using appropriate statistical procedures. Statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant correlation between students' listening habits to English songs and their vocabulary mastery. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present the data, including the mean, frequency, and percentage.

To determine the direction and significance of the relationship between the two variables, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was applied. This statistical technique was selected because the study aimed to examine the relationship between two quantitative variables. The analysis was conducted to answer research question number three, which seeks to determine whether there is a significant correlation between listening to English songs and vocabulary mastery.

According to Brown (as cited in Tanujaya et al., 2022), a Likert scale consists of a set of items designed to measure attitudes, perceptions, or behaviors. In this study, a five-point Likert scale was used as the basis for analyzing and interpreting the data obtained from the questionnaire. The results were interpreted to answer research question number one regarding students' listening habits to English songs. The mean scores, which ranged from 1.00 to 5.00, were interpreted based on the following scales (Brown, as cited in Tanujaya et al., 2022): 4.50-5.00 (Very High); 3.50-4.49 (High); 2.50-3.49 (Moderate); 1.50-2.49 (Low); 1.00-1.49 (Very Low).

Furthermore, the results of the vocabulary test were interpreted using a classification scale adapted from the students' score classification proposed by Arikunto (2013). This classification was used to answer research question number two regarding students' vocabulary mastery, as shown as follows: 81-100 (Very High); 61-80 (High); 41-60 (Average); 21-40 (Low); 1-20 (Very Low). These interpretation criteria provided a clear framework for describing students' listening habits and vocabulary mastery and for identifying the relationship between the two variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Level of Listening to English Songs

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics of students' level of listening to English songs. The results show that the number of respondents (N) was 82. The minimum score obtained was 1.59, while the maximum score reached 5.00, indicating a relatively wide range of responses. The mean score was 3.34, with a standard deviation of 0.82.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Level of Listening English Song

		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Listening	English	82	1,59	5,00	3.34	0.82
Valid N		82				

Statistically, the mean score of 3.34 suggests that the overall level of listening to English songs among the respondents falls within the moderate category. The standard deviation of 0.82 indicates a moderate level of variability in the data. This means that most of the respondents' scores were distributed within one standard deviation from the mean,

specifically between 2.52 and 4.16. Therefore, the majority of respondents reported similar levels of engagement in listening to English songs.

Furthermore, the distribution of scores demonstrates that although some respondents showed low engagement and others reported high engagement, the overall tendency was centered around the moderate level. This pattern suggests that listening to English songs is a relatively common activity among the participants. The moderate variability also indicates that the respondents had comparable exposure and frequency in listening to English songs.

In summary, the descriptive statistical results reveal that the respondents generally exhibited a moderate level of listening to English songs, with a relatively consistent pattern of responses. These findings provide an empirical basis for further analysis of the relationship between listening to English songs and English language proficiency, particularly vocabulary mastery.

Level of Vocabulary Mastery

To answer the second research question, a vocabulary test consisting of 18 items was administered to 82 students to measure their level of vocabulary mastery. The descriptive statistics of the test scores are presented in Table 5.

The results indicate that the minimum score obtained by the respondents was 11.11, while the maximum score reached 100.00. The mean score was 70.60, with a standard deviation of 19.10. These findings suggest that the overall level of vocabulary mastery among the students can be categorized as moderate to high.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Level of Vocabulary Mastery

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Vocabulary Mastery	82	11.11	100	70.60	19.10
Valid N	82				

From a statistical perspective, the relatively large range between the minimum and maximum scores reflects substantial variability in students' vocabulary knowledge. The standard deviation of 19.10 indicates a moderate to high dispersion of scores around the mean. Assuming a normal distribution, most students' scores were distributed within one standard deviation from the mean, ranging approximately from 51.50 to 89.70. This implies that while a considerable number of students demonstrated adequate vocabulary mastery, some students showed lower levels of vocabulary proficiency.

Furthermore, the mean score of 70.60 suggests that, on average, students were able to correctly answer a significant proportion of the test items. However, the relatively high variability indicates differences in vocabulary acquisition and exposure among the respondents. This variation may be influenced by factors such as learning strategies, frequency of exposure to English, and engagement in activities such as listening to English songs.

In summary, the descriptive statistical analysis reveals that the students generally exhibited a moderate level of vocabulary mastery, with a noticeable variation in performance. These results provide a basis for further inferential statistical analysis, particularly in examining the relationship between listening to English songs and vocabulary mastery.

Correlation between Listening to English Songs and Vocabulary Mastery

Table 6 presents the results of the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationship between listening to English songs and students' vocabulary mastery. The analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of -0.127 with a p-value of 0.255.

Table 6. Correlation between Listening English Song and Vocabulary Mastery

				Vocabulary Test Score
Listening Songs	English	Pearson Coefficient r	Correlation1	-.107
		Significance. (1-tailed)	p-value	.170
		N	82	82

Statistically, the Pearson correlation coefficient indicates both the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables. The obtained coefficient of -0.127 reflects a very weak negative correlation, suggesting that an increase in the level of listening to English songs was associated with a slight decrease in vocabulary mastery. However, the magnitude of this correlation is close to zero, indicating that the relationship between the variables is practically negligible.

Furthermore, the p-value of 0.255 is greater than the commonly accepted significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$). This result indicates that the observed correlation is not statistically significant, meaning that there is insufficient empirical evidence to conclude that a meaningful relationship exists between listening to English songs and vocabulary mastery among the respondents. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between the two variables, is accepted.

In addition, the coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.016$) shows that only approximately 1.6% of the variance in vocabulary mastery can be explained by the level of listening to English songs. This very small effect size further supports the conclusion that listening to English songs did not have a substantial contribution to students' vocabulary mastery in this study.

Overall, these findings suggest that although listening to English songs may provide exposure to vocabulary, it alone may not be sufficient to significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery. Other factors, such as learning strategies, reading habits, instructional methods, and direct vocabulary practice, may play a more important role in vocabulary development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between students' level of listening to English songs and their vocabulary mastery. The descriptive statistical analysis revealed that the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of engagement in listening to English songs, as indicated by a mean score of 3.34 with relatively moderate variability. In addition, the students' vocabulary mastery was also categorized at a moderate level, with a mean score of 70.60, although the results showed considerable variation among respondents.

The Pearson product-moment correlation analysis showed a correlation coefficient of -0.127 with a p-value of 0.255. This indicates that there was a very weak negative relationship between listening to English songs and vocabulary mastery. Furthermore, the relationship was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, and it can be concluded that listening to English songs did not significantly contribute to students' vocabulary mastery in this study.

Overall, although listening to English songs may provide exposure to English vocabulary, the findings suggest that it alone is not a strong predictor of vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary development appears to be influenced by multiple factors, including learning strategies, reading habits, classroom instruction, and active vocabulary practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed. First, teachers are encouraged to integrate listening to English songs as a supplementary activity rather than the main strategy for vocabulary learning. Songs should be accompanied by structured learning activities such as vocabulary exercises, discussions, and contextual practice to enhance students' vocabulary acquisition. Second, students are recommended to combine listening to English songs with other effective learning strategies, such as reading English texts, practicing speaking, and using new vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Active engagement in language learning is likely to produce better outcomes than passive listening alone. Third, schools may consider designing language programs that incorporate multimedia learning, including songs, videos, and interactive activities, but with clear instructional objectives and guided learning processes. Finally, future studies are suggested to examine other factors influencing vocabulary mastery, such as motivation, learning styles, frequency of reading, and exposure to English in different contexts. Researchers may also use larger samples, experimental designs, or longitudinal approaches to obtain more comprehensive and generalizable findings. Future research may explore different types of songs, teaching methods, and instructional interventions to determine how songs can be used more effectively to support vocabulary learning.

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