AN ANALYSIS OF SONG IN ENGLISH LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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Article Information	Abstract
	The main objective of this research is to explore the experiences of children in learning English through songs at SDN 2 Sukarame. The study used narrative inquiry approach, because it can collect deep information about students' real stories and feelings. The participants were 15 elementary students who already joined English lessons with songs. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, then analyzed by thematic narrative analysis. The findings show that learning English with songs gave many benefits for the children. They enjoyed and felt more motivated in the lesson, they could remember new vocabulary easily, and their pronunciation also improved. Songs also created social interaction, emotional connection, and cultural awareness among the learners. However, some challenges appeared, such as difficulty in understanding some lyrics. The implication of this study is that English teachers should use songs more actively in classroom because they support not only language development but also social and emotional growth. Schools and curriculum designers are suggested to integrate music in teaching English as an effective and enjoyable method for young learners. Keywords: English learning; songs; young learners

Introduction

The significance of developing English language skills among elementary school students in Indonesia cannot be overstated, since English today plays a dominant role as a global lingua franca that connects people from different linguistic backgrounds. In almost every aspect of life, such as technology, higher education, international business, tourism, and global communication, English occupies a central position. Therefore, proficiency in the language is not only a matter of academic excellence but also a vital asset for future employability and mobility in a highly competitive world. In the Indonesian context, English is introduced at an early stage in many schools, even though the status of English in the national curriculum has fluctuated over time due to policy shifts. Despite this introduction, however, many students still face substantial challenges in acquiring the core skills of listening, speaking, and vocabulary development. Recent reports

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indicate that a considerable percentage of students remain at a basic level of proficiency, especially in rural areas where educational resources are often limited. For example, a study has shown that students in rural Indonesian schools continue to lag behind their urban counterparts, experiencing more serious difficulties in language acquisition processes (Azizah et al., 2023). This reality highlights the urgent need for new approaches that can address the gap and support students more effectively.

The challenges faced by learners in Indonesia's EFL context are multifaceted and cannot be attributed to a single factor. Among the most significant impediments is the dominance of traditional teaching methodologies, which often rely heavily on grammar-translation methods, memorization, and teacher-centered instruction. These methods fail to actively engage young learners, who typically learn better through interaction, creativity, and play-based experiences. As a result, students may develop a lack of motivation and interest in learning English, perceiving it as a difficult and monotonous subject rather than an enjoyable exploration of communication. This lack of engagement, in turn, hinders the development of crucial skills such as listening comprehension, oral communication, and vocabulary acquisition (Husain et al., 2021). In order to address these educational challenges, researchers and practitioners have begun to turn their attention toward more innovative teaching methodologies that align with children's cognitive and emotional development. One particularly promising approach is learning through songs, which harnesses children's natural love for music and rhythm. Songs not only capture their attention but also promote active participation, creating a dynamic and interactive learning environment (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020).

In English classrooms worldwide, the use of songs has garnered increasing appreciation due to their multidimensional educational value. Language researchers and practitioners have observed that songs are not merely entertaining tools, but rather pedagogical resources with strong linguistic and psychological benefits. Scholars such as Millington emphasize that songs offer practical contributions, including enhanced retention of vocabulary, improvement in pronunciation, and even the transmission of cultural nuances embedded in the lyrics (Millington, 2011). The repetitive and rhythmic structure of songs supports vocabulary memorization and strengthens listening comprehension skills, as learners are repeatedly exposed to authentic patterns of the target language. Furthermore, the melodic component of songs plays a psychological role in lowering learners' affective filters, thereby reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to engage with the foreign language (Isnaini & Aminatun, 2021). By making learning less intimidating and more enjoyable, songs serve as a creative tool that aligns with the developmental needs of young learners who benefit from multi-sensory learning experiences.

The integration of songs into the curriculum is not without complexities. Teachers must carefully consider several pedagogical aspects, such as the relevance of selected songs to curricular objectives, the linguistic elements embedded in the lyrics, and the strategies for connecting musical activities to broader language-learning goals. For instance, educators often struggle to identify songs that are simultaneously enjoyable for students and linguistically beneficial for teaching specific competencies such as vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, or pronunciation practice. While pop songs may be attractive to learners, their content and linguistic complexity may not always align with classroom objectives. Similarly, nursery rhymes and traditional children's songs may contain outdated or culturally irrelevant references that do not resonate with modern learners. These dilemmas highlight the need for teachers to receive additional support in terms of professional development and access to effective teaching resources. By equipping teachers with appropriate strategies for integrating songs into their lesson plans, schools can ensure that music becomes a meaningful part of language instruction rather than a superficial activity (Assalamah, 2024).

A review of existing literature on the use of songs in EFL contexts reveals both methodological strengths and weaknesses in previous research. For example, studies conducted by Džanić and Pejić confirm the motivational benefits of using songs in language learning, demonstrating that students generally respond positively to musical activities and show higher levels of engagement (Džanić & Pejić, 2016). However, these studies also acknowledge certain limitations, such as the relatively small sample sizes and the lack of specific focus on the unique

challenges faced by younger learners in different cultural contexts. Moreover, much of the previous research tends to emphasize cognitive or affective outcomes without providing detailed accounts of the lived experiences of learners themselves. This gap in the literature underscores the importance of narrative inquiries that focus on children's perspectives and voices. By exploring how learners personally experience English through songs, researchers can gain a more nuanced understanding of both the strengths and the limitations of this pedagogical approach.

The current study is therefore designed to fill this research gap by employing narrative inquiry methodologies that capture the authentic voices and perspectives of elementary students. Narrative inquiry is particularly suitable for this context because it allows for the collection of rich qualitative data that reflects not only outcomes but also processes and personal stories. Unlike purely quantitative approaches, which often reduce learning to numerical measurements, narrative inquiry embraces the complexity of human experiences and highlights the meaning learners attach to their educational journeys. Through storytelling, students can express their excitement, difficulties, and emotional responses to learning English through songs. This method ensures that the research findings are deeply rooted in the realities of the participants' lived experiences, providing valuable insights that might otherwise remain hidden (Latifaturrizqia et al., 2023).

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in its potential to advance the field of music-based language learning by illustrating how songs can foster deeper emotional connections with language materials. As Avdıu argues, the incorporation of music in educational contexts does not only enhance linguistic competence but also stimulates motivation and emotional engagement (Avdıu, 2021). Songs can transform language learning from a mechanical process into a meaningful experience where students feel personally connected to the material. This emotional connection is especially important for younger learners, whose affective responses often influence their overall attitude toward a subject. Practically, the findings of this study aim to support teachers in developing strategies for effectively integrating songs into their English language curricula. By providing evidence-based insights, the research hopes to guide educators in leveraging music as a tool to increase engagement and improve learning outcomes for elementary students.

The main objective of the present study is to explore the experiences of elementary students as they engage with English through songs, thereby uncovering both the positive impacts and the challenges they encounter. Narrative inquiry is expected to reveal the richness of these experiences, highlighting not only the linguistic benefits but also the affective and motivational dimensions. The research intends to illuminate the ways in which students perceive and respond to song-based learning, providing a more comprehensive picture of its effectiveness. These insights will be crucial for improving teaching practices and creating learning environments that are more responsive to children's needs and preferences (Tanbusai & Nasution, 2023). By examining both successes and difficulties, the study aims to contribute to a balanced understanding of the pedagogical potential of songs in EFL instruction.

The implications of this study extend beyond the individual level of students and teachers, reaching into the broader institutional and policy domains. Schools that adopt innovative, child-centered approaches such as song-based learning may cultivate more engaging and supportive learning environments, which can ultimately enhance the overall quality of English education. At the institutional level, administrators may consider investing in teacher training programs that emphasize creative methodologies, as well as providing resources such as curated song collections, lesson plans, and multimedia tools. From a policy perspective, the research findings may encourage curriculum developers to integrate music more systematically into English language syllabi, recognizing its value as more than just an optional activity but as a central component of effective language teaching.

Another important dimension to consider is the cultural relevance of songs used in EFL classrooms. While many English songs are imported from Western contexts, their cultural references may not always align with Indonesian students' backgrounds or experiences. Therefore, teachers must carefully select or adapt songs that not only teach language skills but also resonate with learners culturally and emotionally. For instance, the adaptation of popular

local melodies into English-language lyrics may serve as a bridge between students' existing cultural identities and the target language, creating a more meaningful learning experience. Such culturally responsive practices can enhance students' sense of belonging and motivation, reinforcing the idea that English learning does not require abandoning one's cultural identity but rather expanding it.

Equally significant are the technological opportunities for integrating songs into English teaching. With the rise of digital platforms and mobile applications, teachers now have access to a wide range of resources, including karaoke apps, interactive videos, and online lyric-based games. These tools can make song-based learning even more interactive and personalized. However, technological integration also brings challenges, such as the need for digital literacy among teachers and equitable access to devices among students. In rural areas of Indonesia, where infrastructure remains underdeveloped, teachers may struggle to utilize such resources effectively. Therefore, the success of technology-enhanced song-based learning will depend on careful planning and support to ensure inclusivity.

It is also essential to recognize the role of teacher attitudes in determining the effectiveness of song-based learning. Teachers who embrace creativity and innovation are more likely to implement songs in ways that genuinely benefit students. Conversely, teachers who are reluctant to move beyond traditional methods may treat songs as a superficial distraction rather than a serious pedagogical tool. Professional development workshops and peer-sharing sessions can help shift teacher mindsets, providing them with the confidence and skills necessary to integrate music into their practice meaningfully. Moreover, teachers who themselves enjoy music are often better able to transmit enthusiasm and energy to their students, creating a more positive classroom atmosphere.

From the perspective of students, learning English through songs may foster not only language proficiency but also broader socio-emotional skills. Singing together can build a sense of community within the classroom, enhancing collaboration and empathy among peers. Furthermore, engaging with the lyrics of songs may expose students to new perspectives, values, and cultural narratives, contributing to their holistic development. For young learners in particular, songs can help reduce feelings of isolation or anxiety, as music creates a joyful and inclusive environment. In this sense, the benefits of song-based learning extend beyond purely linguistic outcomes, encompassing emotional, social, and even cultural dimensions of education.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the urgent need to address the real-world challenges of English language teaching at the elementary school level in Indonesia. Despite the early introduction of English in schools, many students, especially in rural areas, continue to struggle with basic proficiency, largely due to traditional teaching methods and limited engagement opportunities. By investigating and sharing the narratives of children's experiences with learning English through songs, the research hopes to make a meaningful contribution to the field of EFL education. The findings advocate for teaching practices that are reflective, engaging, and tailored to the evolving landscape of language learning. Ultimately, songs offer not only a tool for linguistic development but also a pathway to greater motivation, emotional connection, and cultural relevance in the language classroom. By acknowledging both the potential and the challenges of song-based methodologies, educators, researchers, and policymakers can work together to create learning environments that empower students and prepare them for the demands of the globalized world.

Methods

This research use narrative inquiry approach to study children's experiences of learning English by songs at SDN 2 Sukarame. Narrative inquiry is good for this study because it focus on understanding people's real experiences and stories (Creswell, 2013). By this approach, the participants can tell their own experiences, and it can give deep data about language learning process in classroom.

This research will take place at SDN 2 Sukarame, which is an elementary school in Indonesia. The school has students from different cultural and social backgrounds, so it is a good place to

study children's experiences. The participants are 15 students from several grades who already join in English lessons that use songs. The focus on elementary students is important because it gives special insight about young learners learning English in non-native context.

The research will use purposive sampling to choose the participants. The participants must be willing to share their stories and have experience of learning English with songs. This technique is good for qualitative research because it can select cases that give rich information about the problem.

Data will be collected by semi-structured interviews and participatory observations. Interviews will give chance for children to tell their stories and feelings about English learning with songs . Observation will be done in English class to see how songs are used, how teacher and students interact, and how students enjoy the songs. Using both interview and observation will make the data stronger and more trustworthy.

The data will be analyzed by thematic narrative analysis. This means the researcher will find important themes from the children's stories, but still keep the context of the experience. The process will include coding the stories and looking for patterns about their feelings and experiences of learning English with songs.

Findings and Discussion

The study "A Narrative Study of Children's Experiences of Learning English through Songs at SDN 2 Sukarame" revealed a number of important themes about how children experience learning English through songs. These themes show how students felt, what they learned, and how they interacted with others in the classroom. The results are based on narratives from interviews and classroom observation, supported by direct words from the children.

Enjoyment and Engagement

Many children expressed that they enjoyed English lessons more because of the songs. They often said that singing made them feel excited and motivated to join the class. One child shared that "I love singing English songs; they make me happy and help me remember the words." This reflects the findings of Harahap and Kembaren, who explained that music can increase students' engagement and motivation (Harahap & Kembaren, 2023).

Vocabulary Growth

The use of songs also helped children to learn new vocabulary easily. Several participants mentioned that lyrics helped them to remember words and use them in real life. As one student explained, "When we sing, I learn new words that I can use outside of class too!" This is consistent with Bimo and Dartani, who found that songs are effective in supporting vocabulary acquisition (Bimo & Dartani, 2021).

Social Interaction

Another strong theme was the social interaction created by group singing. Children felt closer to their classmates when they sang together, and some even said that singing made them feel like part of one big family. A child explained, "We sing together, and it feels like we are all friends." This finding supports Váradi, who stated that collaborative activities with music encourage socio-emotional development (Váradi, 2022).

Motivation and Enthusiasm

Songs also made students more enthusiastic to participate during lessons. The children reported that they wanted to sing more songs because it helped them learn better. One participant said, "I want to sing more songs so I can learn better!" This enthusiasm confirms Wu et al., who showed that music in language education fosters motivation and reduces learning anxiety (Wu et al., 2023).

Overcoming Challenges

Although most experiences were positive, some children described difficulties, especially in understanding the meaning of certain lyrics. For example, one child said, "Sometimes, I don't understand what the song means, and it makes me feel confused." This shows that comprehension of songs depends on the learner's language level, which is also discussed by Sudo (Sudo et al., 2022).

Emotional Connection

Several students expressed strong emotional connections with the songs. They explained that music helped them feel emotions and sometimes connect with the stories in the lyrics. A participant mentioned, "When I hear a sad song, it makes me feel something inside." This supports Schellenberg and Mankarious, who emphasized that music creates deeper emotional engagement in language learning (Schellenberg & Mankarious, 2012).

Connection to Culture

Children also reported that songs gave them new knowledge about culture from English-speaking countries. They were excited to learn about how other children live through the music. One child explained, "Learning new songs shows me how other kids live, and it makes me want to learn English more." This finding is aligned with Váradi, who noted that music helps promote cultural awareness (Váradi, 2022).

Improvement in Pronunciation

Many children observed that their pronunciation improved because they practiced singing repeatedly. They said that mimicking the sounds and rhythms in the songs made them speak more clearly. For instance, a student said, "I sing along and it helps me say English words better." This is supported by Tanbusai and Nasution, who found that singing contributes to clearer pronunciation (Tanbusai & Nasution, 2023).

Long-term Retention

Another key theme was that songs helped children remember words for a longer time compared to regular lessons. The lyrics served as memory aids. One student mentioned, "I remember the song, and then I can remember the words." This supports Zhang et al., who showed that music has a positive effect on long-term memory recall (Zhang et al., 2022).

Diverse Learning Styles

Finally, songs catered to different learning styles, especially for students who learned better with movement. Some children said they could learn more effectively when singing was combined with actions or dancing. As one participant shared, "When we dance and sing, I can learn better because I feel it in my body." This observation agrees with Kumar et al., who explained that music activities can reach different types of learners (Kumar et al., 2022).

Discussion

The findings from this narrative study contribute valuable insights into the experiences of children learning English through songs, and they also connect with many ideas already discussed in previous studies and pedagogical theories. The enjoyment that children experience when they learn by music shows again that music can play an important role in motivation. When children feel happy and excited during lessons, they can engage more actively and learn better. The results of this study show children's enthusiasm, which is similar to other studies that explain how music helps learners to enjoy the process of learning and creates a more positive classroom atmosphere.

The emotional and social aspects in children's narratives are very important. They support the opinion that music can develop feelings of belonging and unity inside the classroom. When children sing together, they are not only practicing English but also sharing joy and creating friendship. This is in line with studies that show music can build social cohesion and collaboration, especially in diverse classrooms with students from different backgrounds. For many young learners, learning language is not only about grammar or vocabulary, but also about

learning how to communicate and live together. Collaborative singing activities help children to learn respect, cooperation, and trust with their peers, which are very important social skills.

The evidence of vocabulary improvement from children's experiences confirms that music can be an effective tool for language development. Songs repeat words and phrases many times, so children can remember them more easily. This matches the results of earlier research which showed that listening and singing songs helps young learners to retain new vocabulary and understand word meanings more deeply. This finding emphasizes that teachers and curriculum designers should not only focus on traditional vocabulary drills, but also make space for music-based strategies in the English classroom. If songs are used regularly, they can become a natural and enjoyable way for children to expand their vocabulary and overall language skills.

Although the findings show many benefits, they also highlight some challenges. Some children reported difficulty in understanding the lyrics, especially when songs used fast rhythm or complex vocabulary. This shows that not every child has the same language ability or background knowledge. The differences in comprehension among learners reflect the need for teachers to adjust their methods and apply differentiated strategies. For example, teachers can give explanations about difficult words before singing, use gestures, or provide visual aids to support meaning. In this way, all children, even those with lower proficiency, can still enjoy and benefit from learning with songs.

Another important point from this study is the cultural awareness that children can gain through songs. Many English songs introduce cultural values, stories, and perspectives that are different from local ones. When children learn them, they are not only learning language but also developing cultural competence. This agrees with previous studies that highlight how music can be used as a tool for building cultural understanding and inclusivity. In today's global world, schools are expected to prepare students to be open-minded and respectful toward other cultures. Therefore, including songs from different countries and traditions can help children see the diversity of the world and feel more connected to it.

The overall implication of these findings is that English language education should give more attention to music and songs as part of teaching practice. Teachers can use different song genres—traditional, popular, or even multicultural songs—and connect them with interactive activities. For example, movements, games, and group performances can make the learning process more active and fun. The curriculum should not only target cognitive learning, like vocabulary and grammar, but also integrate the emotional and social dimensions of learning, because these dimensions can make the experience more meaningful for children.

Based on this study, there are several areas that need more research. First, it would be valuable to investigate what types of songs are most effective for different age groups and proficiency levels. Younger children may prefer simple and repetitive songs, while older learners might engage more with meaningful lyrics. Second, longitudinal studies would be useful to examine how long the vocabulary and skills gained from songs can be remembered over time. Finally, more qualitative studies should be conducted to explore children's feelings and emotional reactions to learning with music in detail. This kind of research will give deeper insights into how songs influence motivation and classroom dynamics.

In conclusion, this study shows clearly that music is a powerful tool for language learning in young learners. It helps to increase motivation, build social and emotional connections, improve vocabulary, and even develop cultural awareness. At the same time, it also shows some challenges that teachers must address through flexible and inclusive teaching methods. By combining the emotional, academic, and cultural benefits of music, educators can create a richer and more engaging English learning environment for children. The findings also open opportunities for further studies to explore more deeply how music can be integrated in different educational contexts to maximize its benefits.

Conclusion

This research concludes that songs are very useful for supporting young learners in learning English. The children's experiences show that songs make the lesson more

interesting, help them to remember words better, improve pronunciation, and give them motivation. Songs also encourage cooperation, joy, and cultural awareness in the classroom. At the same time, teachers should be aware of some problems like difficult lyrics and different levels of students' comprehension.

Based on these results, some recommendations are given. Teachers are recommended to carefully choose songs that are suitable for children's age and language level. Teachers also need to give explanation or visual support for difficult words before singing. Schools should provide training and resources for teachers to use songs more effectively in English lessons. Finally, future researchers are suggested to study more about the long-term effects of songs in language learning and to explore what types of songs are best for different groups of learners.

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