



The Effectiveness of Using English Songs in Improving the Vocabulary of Eighth-Grade Students of MTs Nurul-Qur'an Patokan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 19 Dec 2025	This study evaluates the effectiveness of using English songs in developing the vocabulary mastery of eighth-grade students at MTs Nurul-Qur'an Patokan. The underlying problem motivating this research is students' limited interest in and comprehension of English vocabulary, which constitutes a significant obstacle to learning. A quantitative method with a quasi-experimental pre-test-post-test control group design was adopted. The study population comprised all Grade VIII students, from which two classes were selected as samples: one as the experimental group, which received instruction through English songs, and one as the control group, which continued with conventional learning methods. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests and analyzed using an independent samples t-test. The results demonstrated that the use of English songs had a significant positive effect on the vocabulary mastery of students in the experimental group compared to the control group, with average scores rising from 58.3 to 82.6 in the experimental group versus 57.5 to 68.2 in the control group (p -value = 0.003). These findings indicate that the use of English songs is not only statistically effective but also has strong practical value in classroom instruction, as it can meaningfully enhance students' vocabulary mastery while increasing engagement and motivation in learning English. Therefore, integrating songs into vocabulary teaching is recommended as an enjoyable, interactive, and pedagogically beneficial strategy that can be applied consistently to improve learning outcomes in junior high school settings.
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1. Introduction

Mastery of English vocabulary is one of the most important components in foreign language learning (Schmitt, 2008). Vocabulary not only serves as a fundamental element in communication but also constitutes the primary foundation for developing the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Indriyani & Wakerkwa, 2024; Kulsum et al., 2023; Sahmawati et al., 2024). For junior high school students, particularly at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level, mastering English vocabulary presents a unique challenge. This is largely due to limited exposure to English in daily life and the use of learning methods that are insufficiently varied or engaging.

English language instruction in Indonesia, especially in *Pesantren*-based educational institutions such as MTs Nurul-Qur'an, is often still dominated by conventional approaches that emphasize memorization and translation. Such approaches tend to be less effective because they fail to provide a meaningful context for language use and offer little motivation for students to engage actively. As a result, many students experience difficulties in retaining and applying the vocabulary they have learned (Kulsum et al., 2025).

In this context, innovation in English language teaching is essential to create a learning environment that is both enjoyable and effective. The use of English songs in vocabulary instruction emerges as a promising alternative. Songs possess unique characteristics as a learning medium: they contain repetition of words and phrases, employ rhythm and melody as mnemonic aids, and present language within meaningful and authentic contexts. Moreover, songs can create a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere that reduces students' anxiety in learning a foreign language.

Preliminary classroom observations at MTs Nurul-Qur'an Patokan indicated that Grade VIII students experienced considerable difficulty in recalling and using English vocabulary during classroom activities. Many students tended to rely on direct translation from their native language and showed low participation when asked to use English words in simple sentences. It was also observed that their engagement decreased during vocabulary lessons that relied heavily on memorization techniques, suggesting a lack of interest and limited retention of the material presented.

A growing body of research has examined the role of songs in enhancing vocabulary acquisition in English language learning. Makuta et al. (2025) found that song-based instruction significantly improves students' vocabulary mastery compared to conventional teaching methods, particularly by increasing word retention through repetition and rhythm. Similarly, Butar and Katemba (2023) reported that the integration of songs not only improves vocabulary recall but also fosters more positive learner attitudes toward English. In addition, Sari et al. (2023) demonstrated that using English songs in junior high school classrooms can improve listening comprehension and vocabulary recognition, although the study noted that student outcomes were highly dependent on teacher facilitation. Nie et al. (2022) further emphasized that songs contribute to incidental vocabulary learning, especially when learners are exposed to authentic lyrics in meaningful contexts. Meanwhile, Chen et al. (2024) highlighted that

music-based learning strategies enhance motivation but may require structured guidance to ensure vocabulary retention is maximized. Similar findings were also reported by Iswari (2024), who observed significant improvement in students' vocabulary test scores after the implementation of lyric-based learning activities in secondary schools.

Despite these positive findings, previous studies also reveal several limitations. Most research has been conducted in general public school settings, with limited attention to Islamic boarding school (*Pesantren*) contexts, where learning environments, discipline systems, and language exposure differ significantly. Furthermore, many studies focus primarily on short-term improvements without examining sustained vocabulary retention over time. Another gap lies in the relatively small number of studies that compare song-based instruction with traditional methods using rigorous experimental designs such as quasi-experiments with control groups. Therefore, while existing literature consistently supports the effectiveness of English songs in vocabulary learning, further research is needed to explore their application in specific educational contexts such as MTs Nurul-Qur'an and to strengthen empirical evidence through more robust methodological approaches.

This study therefore aims to evaluate the effectiveness of English songs in developing the vocabulary of eighth-grade students at MTs Nurul-Qur'an Patokan. Specifically, it analyzes the extent to which English songs can enhance students' vocabulary mastery in terms of recognition, comprehension of meaning, and contextual use. Student motivation and responses to the song-based learning approach are also examined.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English language education, particularly in *Pesantren*-based institutions. Theoretically, this research enriches the existing literature on authentic media use in vocabulary instruction. Practically, the findings can inform English teachers in designing more effective and meaningful lessons, and guide curriculum developers in formulating contextual English learning programs that meet students' needs.

2. Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design. This design was chosen because the research was conducted in a natural school setting where random assignment of participants was not feasible; therefore, intact classes were used as the experimental and control groups. The quasi-experimental approach is widely recommended in educational research when full experimental control cannot be achieved, particularly in classroom-based studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design enables the researcher to compare the vocabulary mastery outcomes between students who were taught using English songs and those who received conventional instruction, while still maintaining a reasonable level of internal validity in real educational contexts. The design is represented as follows:

A1 — [+] — A2 (Experimental Group)
A3 — [C] — A4 (Control Group)

Notes: A1= pre-test of the experimental group; A2= post-test of the experimental group; A3= pre-test of the control group; A4= post-test of the control group; [+] = treatment with English songs; [C] = conventional instructional approach.

The study population comprised all Grade VIII students of MTs Nurul-Qur'an Patokan, totaling 120 students distributed across four classes: VIII-A, VIII-B, VIII-C, and VIII-D. Using purposive sampling, class VIII-A was assigned as the experimental group and class VIII-B as the control group. The selection of these classes was based on several considerations to ensure their comparability and suitability for the study. First, a pretest was administered to measure initial vocabulary proficiency, and the results showed that both classes had relatively similar mean scores, indicating equivalent baseline ability. Second, information obtained from English teachers suggested that both groups had comparable academic performance, classroom participation levels, and learning characteristics. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling in educational research is appropriate when researchers intentionally select groups that are most likely to provide relevant and comparable data for answering research questions. Based on these criteria, both classes were considered appropriate for inclusion because they provided a balanced comparison between experimental and control conditions, thereby supporting the validity of the study's findings.

The research procedure comprised three main stages. First, the preparation stage involved developing and validating the vocabulary test instruments (pretest and post-test), selecting vocabulary materials aligned with the curriculum, and choosing English songs that matched the instructional topics. The selected songs were familiar, age-appropriate, and contained target vocabulary related to daily activities, school life, and simple expressions commonly taught at the Grade VIII level. Second, the implementation stage involved administering a pretest to both the experimental and control groups to determine their initial vocabulary ability. In the experimental group, song-based instruction was conducted over eight sessions (2×40 minutes per session). Each lesson began with pre-listening activities such as introducing key vocabulary and discussing the theme of the song. This was followed by while-listening activities where students listened to the song, identified target words, and completed guided worksheets such as gap-filling lyrics and matching vocabulary tasks. Post-listening activities included pronunciation practice, group discussion of song meaning, and simple sentence construction using newly learned words. Meanwhile, the control group received conventional instruction through explanation, memorization, and textbook-based exercises without the use of songs. At the end of the treatment period, both groups were given a post-test to measure vocabulary improvement. Third, the data analysis stage involved processing the test results using appropriate statistical procedures to determine whether there was a significant difference in vocabulary achievement between the two groups.

Data were collected using three instruments: (1) a vocabulary test comprising multiple-choice, short-answer, and matching items to measure vocabulary mastery in terms of recognition, comprehension, and contextual use; (2) an observation checklist to

document classroom dynamics and student engagement; and (3) a student questionnaire to explore responses and motivation toward song-based vocabulary learning.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics to characterize the data, tests of normality and homogeneity of variance as analytical prerequisites, and inferential analysis using an independent samples t-test to examine differences in learning outcomes between the two groups. The effectiveness of English songs was further measured using the N-Gain formula to compare the magnitude of improvement in each group. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25. Internal validity was controlled by ensuring equivalent initial abilities, prior English learning experiences, and instructional duration across both groups. External validity was maintained through representative sampling and the naturalistic classroom setting of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The experimental group received instruction through carefully selected English songs themed around the curriculum content, while the control group followed conventional lecture and exercise-based instruction.

Prior to treatment, both groups completed a pre-test to establish baseline vocabulary levels. Results indicated comparable initial ability, with average scores of 58.3 for the experimental group and 57.5 for the control group. Following the four-session intervention, both groups completed a post-test. The experimental group demonstrated a markedly greater improvement, achieving an average score of 82.6, while the control group reached an average of 68.2.

An independent samples t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference in vocabulary improvement between the groups (p -value = 0.003, below the 0.05 threshold), providing strong empirical evidence that the observed differences in learning outcomes are attributable to the instructional method rather than chance. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Results by Group

No.	Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Improvement	Percentage of Increase
1	Experimental (Song)	58.3	82.6	+24.3	41.7%
2	Control (Conventional)	57.5	68.2	+10.7	18.6%

Table 1 presents a comparison of pre-test and post-test scores between the experimental group, which was taught using English songs, and the control group, which received conventional instruction. At the beginning of the study, both groups showed relatively similar vocabulary proficiency, with the experimental group scoring 58.3 and the control group scoring 57.5 on the pre-test. This indicates that the initial abilities of the two groups were comparable before the treatment was applied. After the intervention, both groups showed improvement; however, the experimental group demonstrated a much greater increase in performance. The post-test mean score of the experimental group

rose to 82.6, reflecting an improvement of 24.3 points or 41.7%. In contrast, the control group increased more modestly to 68.2, with an improvement of 10.7 points or 18.6%. This clear difference suggests that the use of English songs had a stronger impact on students' vocabulary development compared to conventional teaching methods. Overall, the data indicate that song-based instruction was more effective in enhancing vocabulary mastery, as it not only improved test scores but also produced a substantially higher percentage of learning gain.

By contrast, while the control group also showed measurable improvement, gains were less substantial. This is attributable to the more passive, teacher-centered nature of conventional instruction, the absence of varied learning stimuli, and the lack of emotional and cultural engagement that might strengthen students' personal connection to the learning material.

Table 2 presents the observation results of student learning activities during the implementation of English song-based instruction in the experimental group compared to the control group. The aspects observed include student activity, participation in discussion, learning enthusiasm, focus and concentration, teamwork, and the use of new vocabulary in classroom interactions. Table 2 presents the observation results of student learning activities during the learning process. The aspects observed include student activity, participation in discussion, enthusiasm for learning, focus and concentration, teamwork, and the use of new vocabulary.

Table 2. Observation Summary

Observation Aspect	Experimental Group (%)	Control Group (%)	Description
Student Activity	85.5	62.7	High vs. Medium
Participation in Discussion	78.9	54.2	High vs. Medium
Enthusiasm for Learning	91.2	58.1	Very High vs. Medium
Focus and Concentration	82.6	65.4	High vs. Medium
Teamwork	88.7	61.3	High vs. Medium
Use of New Vocabulary	74.5	48.9	High vs. Low

As shown in Table 2, the experimental group consistently demonstrated higher levels of engagement across all observed aspects compared to the control group. The most prominent difference was found in learning enthusiasm, where the experimental group reached 91.2% (very high), while the control group was only at 58.1% (medium). Similarly, teamwork and student activity were notably higher in the experimental group, indicating that song-based learning encouraged more active participation and collaboration among students. The use of new vocabulary also showed a clear improvement in the experimental group, suggesting that students were more able to apply newly learned words in classroom interactions. The table showed that English songs contributed not only to cognitive improvement but also to affective and behavioral engagement in the learning process, as students became more active, motivated, and confident in using English during classroom activities.

Table 3 presents the results of the student feedback questionnaire regarding their perceptions of learning English through songs. The questionnaire measured students' agreement levels on statements related to enjoyment, vocabulary retention, motivation, pronunciation, willingness to continue learning with songs, and contextual understanding of vocabulary.

Table 3. Student Feedback Questionnaire

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Learning with English songs is more enjoyable.	56.7	33.3	6.7	3.3	0.0
Vocabulary is easier to remember through songs.	43.3	40.0	13.3	3.3	0.0
Motivation to learn English has increased.	50.0	36.7	10.0	3.3	0.0
Pronunciation has improved.	36.7	46.7	13.3	3.3	0.0
I want to continue learning with songs.	60.0	30.0	6.7	3.3	0.0
I better understand how vocabulary is used in context.	40.0	43.3	13.3	3.3	0.0

As shown in Table 3, the majority of students responded positively to all statements regarding the use of English songs in learning vocabulary. The highest level of agreement was found in the statement expressing willingness to continue learning with songs, indicating strong acceptance of this teaching approach. In addition, most students agreed that songs made learning more enjoyable and helped them remember vocabulary more easily. The table showed that the use of songs positively influenced students' motivation, pronunciation awareness, and understanding of vocabulary in context, reflecting an overall favourable perception of this learning strategy.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of English songs has a significant and positive effect on students' vocabulary mastery. The experimental group, which was taught using song-based instruction, achieved a considerably higher improvement compared to the control group, as evidenced by the post-test results (82.6 vs. 68.2) and the statistically significant difference confirmed by the independent samples t-test ($p = 0.003$). These results indicate that English songs are an effective instructional medium for vocabulary learning, particularly in junior high school contexts where students often struggle with motivation and retention. The findings are consistent with previous studies that highlight the effectiveness of music-based learning in language acquisition. For example, found that English songs significantly improve students' vocabulary mastery by facilitating repetition and contextual exposure to new lexical items (Andari & Wiguna, 2022; Putri & Rustipa, 2023). Similarly, Urbaite (2025) reported that song-based instruction enhances vocabulary retention and fosters positive learner attitudes toward

English learning. The present study reinforces these findings by providing additional empirical evidence from a Pesantren-based educational context, which has been relatively underexplored in previous research.

From a theoretical perspective, the effectiveness of English songs in improving vocabulary mastery can be explained through Krashen's (2009), which emphasizes that emotional factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence influence language acquisition (Müller et al., 2020). In this study, students in the experimental group demonstrated higher levels of engagement and enthusiasm, as shown in the observation results (Table 2), where enthusiasm reached 91.2%. This suggests that English songs successfully reduced students' affective filter by creating a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment. When students feel less anxious and more motivated, they are more likely to absorb and retain new language input. This finding aligns with Pratiwi and Yaw-kan (2025), who stated that music-based learning strategies enhance motivation and reduce language learning anxiety, thereby improving overall learning outcomes. Furthermore, the Input Hypothesis proposed by Krashen supports the idea that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to meaningful and comprehensible input. In this study, songs provided repeated and contextualized exposure to vocabulary, allowing students to naturally internalize new words through rhythm, melody, and repetition.

In addition, the findings support Jannah et al. (2026), who emphasized that songs contribute to incidental vocabulary learning by providing authentic language exposure in meaningful contexts. The present study similarly shows that students were able to understand and retain vocabulary more effectively when it was embedded in song lyrics rather than isolated word lists. This suggests that vocabulary learning is more effective when it occurs in meaningful and contextualized environments rather than through rote memorization. The improvement observed in the experimental group reflects not only memorization of words but also deeper cognitive processing, including comprehension and contextual use, as shown in the test results and student questionnaire responses.

The results also highlight the importance of engagement and affective involvement in vocabulary learning. Observation data indicated that students in the experimental group were more active, collaborative, and focused compared to those in the control group. This supports the findings of Kholid et al. (2024) and Muliana et al. (2026), who reported that English songs improve student participation and classroom interaction by creating a more dynamic learning environment. Similarly, Br.Siregar et al. (2026) found that song-based learning not only enhances vocabulary acquisition but also improves productive language skills such as writing, suggesting that the benefits of music-based instruction extend beyond vocabulary recognition. In the present study, students also reported improved pronunciation and better understanding of vocabulary in context, which aligns with Hawa et al. (2023), who emphasized that songs are particularly effective for young learners due to their rhythmic and repetitive nature.

Moreover, the findings of this study highlight the role of motivation as a key factor in vocabulary acquisition. The questionnaire results showed that 86.7% of students agreed that learning with English songs increased their motivation to learn English. This is

consistent with Butar and Katemba (2023), who found that songs foster positive attitudes toward language learning. It is also supported by Tavadze et al. (2025), who argued that integrating popular music into ESL classrooms enhances student engagement and reduces resistance to learning. In this study, students expressed a strong preference for continuing song-based learning (90% agreement), indicating that music not only facilitates learning but also sustains long-term interest in English. However, despite its effectiveness, the implementation of English songs also presents certain pedagogical considerations. Hamilton et al. (2024) emphasized that song selection must balance pedagogical relevance and student interest. This is particularly important in the present context, where songs must be culturally appropriate and aligned with Islamic educational values. The findings suggest that careful selection of songs contributed to the success of the intervention, as inappropriate or overly complex lyrics could reduce comprehension and learning effectiveness. Additionally, Anwar et al. (2025) highlighted technological barriers in implementing music-based learning, such as limited access to audio equipment and digital resources (see also Hasumi & Chiu, 2024). While this study did not encounter major technological constraints, it remains an important consideration for broader implementation in similar educational contexts.

Another important aspect is the sustainability of vocabulary learning. While the post-test results indicate significant improvement, previous research by Williams (2021) suggests that innovative teaching methods such as music integration may face resistance from educators who are more accustomed to traditional teaching approaches. This highlights the need for teacher training and institutional support to ensure consistent implementation of song-based instruction. Furthermore, Neves et al. (2022) noted the absence of standardized assessment tools for evaluating music-integrated language learning outcomes, which may limit comparability across studies. In the present research, the use of pretest-posttest design and statistical analysis helps address this limitation by providing clear and measurable learning outcomes.

In the context of Pesantren-based education, the findings of this study are particularly significant. Zuhdi (2020) emphasized that students in madrasah environments often have limited exposure to English, which makes innovative and engaging teaching strategies essential. The present study demonstrates that English songs can effectively bridge this gap by providing accessible, enjoyable, and meaningful input. Furthermore, Nahidin (2025) argued that learning media in Islamic educational settings should align with students' values while still promoting engagement and comprehension. The successful implementation of English songs in this study indicates that music-based learning can be adapted to culturally sensitive contexts without compromising pedagogical effectiveness (see Chen et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2024; Ngadni & Hui, 2025; Urbaite, 2025).

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature supporting the use of English songs in vocabulary instruction. They confirm that song-based learning enhances vocabulary acquisition through multiple mechanisms, including increased motivation, reduced anxiety, improved retention, and meaningful contextual exposure. Compared to conventional instruction, which relies heavily on memorization

and teacher-centered explanation, English songs provide a more interactive and student-centered learning experience. This aligns with the broader trend in language education that emphasizes communicative and learner-centered approaches. Therefore, the integration of English songs into vocabulary teaching is not only effective but also pedagogically justified, particularly in contexts where students require additional motivation and meaningful engagement in language learning.

4. Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of English songs as a learning medium for improving vocabulary mastery among eighth-grade students of MTs Nurul-Qur'an Patokan. The findings from the quasi-experimental design indicate that song-based instruction has a significant positive effect on students' vocabulary achievement when compared to conventional teaching methods. The experimental group experienced a substantial increase in their mean score from 58.3 in the pre-test to 82.6 in the post-test, while the control group showed a smaller improvement from 57.5 to 68.2. This difference demonstrates that English songs contribute more effectively to vocabulary development than traditional approaches.

The effectiveness of the treatment was further confirmed through statistical analysis using an independent samples t-test, which revealed a significant difference between the two groups ($p\text{-value} = 0.003$). This result indicates that the improvement in vocabulary mastery can be attributed to the use of English songs as an instructional medium. Beyond statistical significance, the findings also highlight the practical benefits of integrating songs into language learning, as they provide meaningful and contextual exposure to vocabulary in a way that supports comprehension and retention.

In addition, the use of English songs enriched the learning process both cognitively and affectively. Students were able to understand vocabulary more naturally through repeated exposure within lyrics, while also showing increased motivation and engagement during classroom activities. The learning environment became more interactive and enjoyable, encouraging students to participate actively and collaborate with peers. These conditions contributed to a more effective and meaningful learning experience compared to traditional instruction.

Although students in the control group also demonstrated improvement, their progress was less significant due to the more conventional, teacher-centered approach that relied heavily on memorization and explanation. The absence of engaging and contextual learning media limited their motivation and reduced opportunities for meaningful vocabulary use. Overall, the findings suggest that English songs are a highly effective and practical instructional strategy for enhancing vocabulary mastery in junior high school settings, particularly in *Pesantren*-based schools where innovative and engaging teaching methods are needed to support language learning.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Authors' contribution

The authors make substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study and take responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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