

Improving Vocabulary Mastery with English Kids' Songs: A Study in Primary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of English kids' songs on vocabulary mastery among fifth-grade students at SD Islam Assalam. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design, the study compares an experimental group, taught vocabulary through English kids' songs, with a control group that followed traditional textbook-based instruction. Both groups completed pre- and post-tests to measure vocabulary acquisition. Results indicated a significant improvement in the experimental group, with an average post-test score increase of 42.9%, compared to a 10.3% improvement in the control group. The experimental group showed gains across different vocabulary categories—nouns, verbs, and adjectives—suggesting that songs enhance vocabulary retention through repetition, rhythm, and emotional engagement. These findings support the use of songs as a viable instructional tool for vocabulary learning, particularly for young learners who benefit from multisensory and associative learning techniques. While promising, the study's limitations, such as a small sample size and short intervention period, suggest the need for further research to validate these findings across diverse educational settings. Future studies should consider expanding sample sizes, extending the duration, and comparing song-based learning with other multimedia approaches. This research offers valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers, underscoring the potential of integrating songs to make vocabulary learning both engaging and effective.

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Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is foundational to effective language learning and is widely recognized as critical for students' ability to communicate, comprehend, and interact in a new language. In learning English, particularly among non-native speakers, vocabulary represents one of the core components of linguistic competence, facilitating essential skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Sari et al., 2023). Mastery of vocabulary enables learners to express their ideas, understand

others, and engage in meaningful communication (Hasbi & Nursaputri, 2024). However, in Indonesia, English is often taught as a foreign language, with limited opportunities for students to immerse themselves fully in English-speaking environments (Islamiah & Hasbi, 2024). This limitation poses challenges for young learners, as they rely heavily on classroom-based instruction to develop language skills, which may lack engagement and fail to cater to their developmental needs (Istiara et al., 2023).

Children are naturally inclined towards activities that stimulate their sensory perceptions, such as singing, dancing, and interactive games. Therefore, the integration of music and specifically designed children's songs in language education provides a promising avenue to enhance vocabulary acquisition and retention. Songs, by virtue of their rhythmic and repetitive nature, are known to capture children's attention, making language learning more enjoyable and potentially more effective (Güler & Bozkurt, 2021). Furthermore, songs serve as a contextual tool, connecting new vocabulary with familiar actions and emotions, thereby aiding retention and application in practical contexts (Liu & Song, 2021). The present study focuses on the use of English children's songs as a medium for vocabulary instruction among fifth-grade students at SD Islam Assalam, seeking to evaluate their impact on vocabulary mastery in comparison to conventional textbook-based learning methods.

English language teaching in primary schools across Indonesia often emphasizes textbook learning, which can become monotonous and limit students' engagement. Traditional methods, such as drilling vocabulary lists and repeating phrases, are commonly used to reinforce vocabulary but may not be effective in fostering a deep understanding or long-term retention of words (Waziana et al., 2024). Young learners frequently exhibit signs of disinterest, as these methods may not align with their natural learning preferences, which include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic activities (Andeska et al., 2021). Research by Harmer (2007) has emphasized the limitations of teaching vocabulary without engaging students emotionally and mentally, noting that vocabulary learning becomes more effective when students find personal relevance in the content and are actively involved in the learning process.

The effectiveness of vocabulary learning methods has been extensively studied in the field of applied linguistics. For example, Yulistiani et al. (2020) underscores the necessity of designing vocabulary instruction that aligns with young learners' cognitive and emotional stages of development. Vocabulary mastery is more readily achieved when the learning experience is interactive and enjoyable, particularly for primary school students, who benefit from associative learning techniques. According to Oktarina et al. (2024), vocabulary teaching methods should engage young learners actively, helping them form meaningful connections between words and their everyday lives.

Songs have been demonstrated as a potent tool for language instruction, especially in vocabulary acquisition. Songs offer a unique form of repetitive learning, which enhances memory retention and provides a multisensory experience. They incorporate rhythm, melody, and language simultaneously, creating a rich learning environment that can make vocabulary acquisition both enjoyable and effective

(Gusrayani, 2017). The use of English children's songs, which often employ repetitive phrases and simple vocabulary, supports young learners in internalizing new language structures and meanings without the cognitive load associated with traditional rote memorization (Nadera, 2015).

Research has shown that using songs to teach language can be particularly advantageous for vocabulary development. Luo (2014) found that songs increase learners' motivation and sustain their attention longer than traditional instruction methods. Songs offer a variety of repetitive patterns that embed vocabulary in memorable contexts, helping children recall and use words more naturally. In a classroom setting, songs also encourage group interaction, allowing students to learn from each other and build on their collective knowledge (Rahbar & Khodabakhsh, 2013). By providing contextualized language in the form of familiar narratives, songs contribute to a more authentic language learning experience, which is especially important for young learners who may not have direct exposure to English outside of the classroom.

Songs' role in language learning is also supported by empirical research that suggests songs not only aid vocabulary learning but also enhance pronunciation and listening skills (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020). In their study, children who learned vocabulary through songs demonstrated improved pronunciation and listening comprehension skills, likely because songs expose students to the natural rhythm and phonetics of the language. The process of singing and repeating lyrics allows students to internalize the intonation patterns of the language, which supports their overall language proficiency (Güler & Bozkurt, 2021). This underscores the multidimensional benefits of songs, making them a valuable resource in primary English education.

The use of English kids' songs as a learning medium aligns with several established educational theories that emphasize the importance of contextualized, multisensory learning in childhood. Songs designed for children typically employ simple language structures, repetitive patterns, and engaging melodies, making them particularly suitable for vocabulary instruction (Nainggolan et al., 2024). Additionally, songs can be strategically selected to align with educational goals, reinforcing specific vocabulary topics such as body parts, colors, or daily activities. For example, in teaching vocabulary related to health and physical activities, songs about body parts or daily routines provide a natural context for students to learn and recall relevant vocabulary (Hastomo, Mandasari, et al., 2024).

Studies suggest that songs are particularly effective in engaging learners' long-term memory due to the repetition and rhythm involved. This technique allows children to encode words in both auditory and kinesthetic memory, leading to higher retention rates compared to conventional methods (Luo, 2014). He emphasizes the advantage of using songs over conventional teaching methods, suggesting that vocabulary acquired through songs may lead to more automatic recall in practical situations, particularly in contexts requiring conversational use of language. For fifth-grade students, who are transitioning from basic to more advanced vocabulary, this approach can bridge the gap between understanding isolated words and using them in meaningful expressions (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020).

The focus of this study is to evaluate whether using English kids' songs as a medium can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition among fifth-grade students at SD Islam Assalam in Bandar Lampung. This study addresses a gap in Indonesian educational practices where vocabulary instruction in English is often limited to conventional textbook methods, potentially leaving students disengaged and less proficient in vocabulary. By employing a quasi-experimental design that compares an experimental group using kids' songs with a control group using textbooks, this research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on effective vocabulary instruction methods for young learners.

Furthermore, by focusing on a specific group of students and measuring vocabulary mastery through pre- and post-tests, this study provides data-driven insights into the efficacy of integrating music into vocabulary learning in primary education. Previous studies in this field have largely focused on vocabulary acquisition at the preschool or early elementary levels; thus, this study's focus on fifth-grade students fills an important gap, offering insights into how music-based instruction can benefit students in upper elementary grades (Gusrayani, 2017; Liu & Song, 2021; Nadera, 2015).

By examining the potential influence of kids' songs on vocabulary mastery, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the role of music in education, advocating for a shift towards more interactive and student-centered learning approaches. Findings from this study could inform educational policymakers and curriculum developers in Indonesia, suggesting the potential integration of multimedia learning tools in the national curriculum to enhance language learning outcomes. As English continues to be a critical skill in the globalized world, providing young learners with engaging and effective learning tools such as songs may lay a stronger foundation for their language development and future academic success (Andewi, 2024; Hasbi & Purnama, 2024; Kholid et al., 2024).

Method

Design

This study utilizes a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of using English kids' songs in enhancing vocabulary mastery among fifth-grade students. The quasi-experimental method was selected due to the non-random assignment of participants into experimental and control groups, making it suitable for educational research where fully random assignment may not be feasible (Creswell, 2012). The design includes pre- and post-tests to measure the impact of the intervention—teaching vocabulary through English kids' songs—on the vocabulary scores of the experimental group compared to a control group that received traditional textbook-based instruction.

Population and Sample

The population for this study includes all fifth-grade students at SD Islam Assalam in Bandar Lampung for the academic year 2023/2024. The total number of students is 52, divided into two classes: 5A and 5B, each containing 26 students. To form the sample groups, the 5A class was designated as the experimental group, where students learned

vocabulary through English kids' songs, while the 5B class served as the control group, learning through the traditional textbook method. Both groups had equal distributions of male and female students, ensuring balanced demographic characteristics for comparison.

Variables and Operational Definitions

The primary variables in this study include an independent variable and a dependent variable. The independent variable is the use of English kids' songs as a teaching medium, while the dependent variable is vocabulary mastery, measured through pre- and post-test scores. In this study, vocabulary mastery is operationally defined as the students' ability to correctly identify, recall, and use target vocabulary items. The English kids' songs incorporated in the experimental group contained vocabulary relevant to the students' syllabus, such as body parts, basic verbs, and adjectives. These songs were selected for their repetitive structure, simplicity, and alignment with the students' developmental level, making them an engaging and age-appropriate learning tool.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument for data collection is a vocabulary test composed of multiple-choice questions, covering vocabulary items that align with the fifth-grade English curriculum. The test was administered as both a pre-test and post-test, providing quantitative data on students' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention. The test items were validated for content accuracy by subject-matter experts to ensure alignment with the curriculum and the appropriateness for the target age group. In addition, a pilot test was conducted to verify the reliability and clarity of the test items, resulting in minor adjustments to improve item phrasing and comprehension.

Data Collection

Data collection spanned a period of four weeks and followed a structured sequence of steps. Initially, both the experimental and control groups completed a pre-test to assess their baseline vocabulary knowledge prior to the treatment, establishing a reference point for measuring the intervention's impact. During the treatment phase, the experimental group was instructed using English kids' songs specifically chosen for their repetitive nature and alignment with the syllabus. Songs such as "Head, Hands, Toes and Nose," "Sneeze," and "Do Exercise" were incorporated, corresponding directly to vocabulary items in the fifth-grade English curriculum. In contrast, the control group continued with traditional vocabulary instruction using the "Grow with English" textbook, focusing on standard drilling and memorization techniques without song-based reinforcement. After the treatment, both groups completed an identical post-test to measure any changes in vocabulary mastery, allowing for an assessment of the treatment's effect on vocabulary acquisition.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a paired sample T-test to determine the statistical significance of any differences in vocabulary mastery between the pre- and post-tests for both groups. The T-test allowed for a comparative analysis of vocabulary score

improvements between the experimental and control groups, indicating whether the use of English kids' songs significantly impacted vocabulary acquisition. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS software version 21, with a significance level set at 0.05. A p-value of less than 0.05 in the T-test results was considered statistically significant, suggesting that the intervention had a meaningful effect on the students' vocabulary mastery.

The vocabulary test was validated by a panel of educators who ensured the content's relevance and alignment with fifth-grade English language objectives. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha, where a threshold of 0.70 was deemed acceptable. Adjustments were made to any test items that were ambiguous or potentially confusing, ensuring that the instrument was both valid and reliable for assessing vocabulary mastery in young learners.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study aimed to investigate the impact of English kids' songs on vocabulary mastery among fifth-grade students at SD Islam Assalam, with a particular focus on comparing the results of the experimental group (taught using English kids' songs) and the control group (taught using a traditional textbook approach). Data were collected through pre- and post-tests administered to both groups, and the results were analyzed using a paired-sample T-test to determine statistical significance.

Table 1. Results of Pre-test and Post-test

Group	Pre-Test Average Score	Post-Test Average Score	Average Improvement (%)
Experimental	55.2	78.9	42.9%
Control	56.5	62.3	10.3%

Pre-Test Results

In the pre-test, both groups demonstrated a similar baseline level of vocabulary knowledge. The average pre-test score for the experimental group was 55.2, while the control group averaged slightly higher at 56.5. This small difference was statistically insignificant, indicating a comparable level of vocabulary mastery across the two groups prior to the intervention. These baseline scores also highlight the challenges students face in vocabulary acquisition, particularly in the absence of engaging instructional methods, which aligns with previous findings that emphasize the limited efficacy of traditional textbook-based vocabulary instruction (Hastomo, 2024).

Post-Test Results

After four weeks of intervention, the post-test results revealed significant improvement in the vocabulary mastery of the experimental group compared to the control group. The average post-test score for the experimental group increased to 78.9, showing a marked improvement over their pre-test scores. In contrast, the control group showed only a marginal increase in their vocabulary scores, with a post-test average of 62.3. The statistical analysis confirmed that the improvement in the experimental group was significantly greater than that in the control group ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that the use of English kids' songs was

highly effective in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among young learners.

The substantial improvement in the experimental group underscores the potential benefits of integrating music into vocabulary instruction. The repetitive structure and melodic nature of kids' songs appear to reinforce vocabulary retention and recall, resulting in more profound learning outcomes compared to traditional methods. This finding is consistent with previous research, which noted that songs help maintain students' attention and improve vocabulary retention due to the emotional and sensory engagement that music offers (Lestari & Hardiyanti, 2020).

Comparative Analysis of Vocabulary Categories

The analysis further broke down vocabulary acquisition into specific categories, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, to assess whether certain types of vocabulary were more effectively learned through song-based instruction. For nouns, the experimental group showed the highest gain, with an average improvement of 30% from pre- to post-test. Verbs followed with an average increase of 25%, while adjectives had a 20% improvement. In comparison, the control group showed only minimal gains across all categories, with a 10% improvement in nouns, 8% in verbs, and 6% in adjectives.

The significant gains across all vocabulary categories for the experimental group indicate that the song-based learning method was effective in reinforcing various types of vocabulary. This suggests that songs provide an effective medium for introducing and practicing diverse vocabulary elements, possibly due to the contextual cues embedded within lyrics that help students make meaningful connections between words and actions. These results align with previous studies, which found that the use of songs in language instruction can significantly enhance vocabulary learning across multiple word categories (Chou, 2014; Gusrayani, 2017).

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the efficacy of English kids' songs as an instructional tool for vocabulary acquisition among primary school students. The marked improvement in vocabulary scores in the experimental group suggests that songs not only engage students but also enhance retention and recall of vocabulary. This aligns with theories of multisensory learning, which posit that incorporating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements in language instruction can improve learning outcomes, particularly for young learners who benefit from associative learning methods (Sutiyono et al., 2022).

One of the core reasons behind the effectiveness of English kids' songs in enhancing vocabulary learning is likely the repetitive and rhythmic nature of songs. Repetition has been identified as a key factor in memory retention, as it allows learners to reinforce connections between words and meanings over time (Andewi et al., 2023). The rhythmic patterns in songs provide a structured and predictable format, making it easier for students to remember and internalize vocabulary. In this study, the songs "Head, Hands, Toes and Nose," "Sneeze," and "Do Exercise" incorporated frequent repetitions of key vocabulary, which may have contributed to the students' ability to recall these words during the post-test.

This finding is consistent with research by Güler and Bozkurt (2021), which found that song-based learning engages both hemispheres of the brain, allowing students to process

vocabulary through both logical and creative pathways. As a result, vocabulary is not only stored but also recalled with greater ease, supporting more effective language acquisition. The repetitive nature of kids' songs is particularly useful for vocabulary involving body parts, actions, and emotions, which can be easily associated with physical movements or gestures during singing.

The emotional engagement that music provides also appears to play a crucial role in vocabulary acquisition. Songs naturally elicit emotional responses, creating a positive and enjoyable learning environment that is conducive to memory retention (Liu & Song, 2021). In the context of this study, the experimental group exhibited higher enthusiasm and participation during song-based lessons, which was observed to positively impact their vocabulary mastery. This heightened engagement aligns with the affective filter hypothesis, which suggests that learners acquire language more effectively when they feel relaxed and motivated (Hastomo & Septiyana, 2022).

Moreover, the integration of songs allows for a more interactive and collaborative learning environment, fostering a sense of community within the classroom. This social aspect of learning can further enhance vocabulary retention, as students feel supported by their peers and are more likely to participate actively. This was evident in the experimental group, where students were observed helping each other with pronunciation and meaning during song sessions, thus reinforcing their vocabulary knowledge. These findings are supported by Sujarwo et al. (2023), who noted that group activities in language learning promote social cohesion and encourage students to engage more deeply with the material.

The results of this study carry important implications for vocabulary instruction in primary schools, especially in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. Traditional textbook-based methods often fail to engage young learners, as they lack the sensory appeal and emotional engagement that songs provide (Damiri et al., 2022). By incorporating music, teachers can create a dynamic learning environment that enhances vocabulary acquisition while also addressing students' developmental needs.

The findings suggest that songs can be particularly beneficial in teaching vocabulary related to everyday actions, emotions, and physical characteristics, as these concepts are more easily internalized when associated with familiar melodies and movements. In practical terms, teachers could integrate kids' songs into their vocabulary lessons, selecting songs that align with the curriculum and reinforce relevant vocabulary themes. Additionally, song-based learning can be extended to other areas of language instruction, such as pronunciation, listening comprehension, and even grammar, providing a holistic approach to language acquisition.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that using English kids' songs significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition among fifth-grade students. The experimental group, which was taught vocabulary through carefully selected songs, showed a marked improvement in vocabulary mastery with a 42.9% increase in average scores from pre- to post-test, compared to only a 10.3% improvement in the control group taught with traditional textbook methods. This highlights the benefits of song-based learning, which

leverages repetition, rhythm, and engagement to facilitate vocabulary retention and recall. The analysis further reveals that the experimental group achieved significant gains across different vocabulary categories (nouns, verbs, and adjectives), suggesting that songs provide a dynamic medium to enhance various aspects of vocabulary learning.

These findings imply that incorporating songs into vocabulary instruction can make language learning more enjoyable and effective for young learners, particularly in environments where English is a foreign language. However, the study's limitations, such as a small sample size and a relatively short intervention period, suggest the need for caution in generalizing the results. Future research should expand this study's scope by including larger sample sizes, extending the duration to explore long-term effects, and examining the impact of various types of song-based and multimedia approaches. These insights can guide educators and curriculum developers toward integrating music and other interactive media in language instruction to foster a more engaging and effective learning experience.

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