

An Exploration of English Song-Based Learning in Developing Young Learners' Speaking Skills in an Islamic Primary School

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A B S T R A C T

This study explores the implementation of English song-based learning in developing young learners' speaking skills at MI Kholafiyah Syafi'iyah Zainul Hasan Genggong. Speaking is challenging because English functions as a third language after Indonesian and Arabic in the dormitory environment, influencing students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence. This qualitative exploratory study involved three teachers and 37 students. Data were collected through classroom observations conducted over two months, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis with data triangulation. The findings reveal that teachers use familiar songs whose lyrics are modified with English vocabulary and simple moral values aligned with the Islamic school context. This strategy improves students' pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence while creating an engaging and low-anxiety classroom atmosphere. Therefore, English song-based learning is an effective strategy for developing young learners' speaking skills.

Keywords: *English Songs, Speaking Skills, Young Learners, Islamic Primary School, Vocabulary*

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become an important international language used in communication, education, science, and technology (Rao 2019). In Indonesia, English is introduced at the primary school level to develop students' communicative competence, particularly speaking skills (Zein et al. 2020). Speaking is a fundamental skill because it enables learners to express ideas, share information, and interact meaningfully (Akhter 2021). However, developing speaking skills among young learners in Islamic primary schools presents unique challenges (Pertiwi et al. 2022). In MI Kholafiyah Syafi'iyah Zainul Hasan Genggong, students live in a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) environment, which emphasizes both religious and academic learning, where Indonesian and Arabic are used in daily communication. As a result, English functions as a third language, which affects students' pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and confidence (Jalal et al. 2022). Many students hesitate to speak English due to limited exposure and fear of making mistakes.

To address these challenges, engaging and low-anxiety strategies are required (Fawaid et al. 2024). According to Gidman cited Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, language acquisition occurs more effectively when learners feel relaxed and motivated (Gidman 2025). Songs can reduce anxiety and create an enjoyable learning atmosphere (Kumar et al. 2022). In addition, song-based learning reflects elements of Total Physical Response (TPR) (Mahmudah 2025), where students learn through repetition, rhythm, and physical involvement (Latifovna 2025).

Songs provide repetition, rhythm, and meaningful context, which support pronunciation and vocabulary development (Saldıraner and Cinkara 2021). In this study, teachers use familiar songs with modified English vocabulary, making learning more

accessible and meaningful for students in a multilingual and pesantren-based context. Therefore, this study aims to explore how English song-based learning is implemented and how it supports the development of young learners' speaking skills in an Islamic primary school context. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the use of modified familiar songs in a multilingual pesantren context, where English functions as a third language.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate the implementation of English song-based learning in developing young learners' speaking skills (Rorintulus and Wuntu 2023). The research was conducted at MI Kholafiyah Syafi'iyah Zainul Hasan Genggong. The participants consisted of three English teachers and 37 students who were directly involved in song-based learning activities. The participants were selected purposively (Tajik, Golzar, and Noor 2025). Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation (Gangal and Yilmaz 2023). Classroom observations were conducted over two months, consisting of approximately eight meetings, with each session lasting around 60 minutes. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer during the teaching and learning process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three teachers, each lasting approximately 20–30 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Documentation included lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' worksheets. The songs used in this study were familiar songs commonly known by students, whose lyrics were modified using English vocabulary and simple moral messages relevant to students' daily life.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including data familiarization, coding, categorizing, theme development, and interpretation (Ahmed et al. 2025). To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation (Natow 2020). Participants' consent was obtained prior to data collection.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of English Song-Based Learning

The findings show that song-based learning is implemented in a structured and student-centered manner. Teachers prepare familiar songs and modify the lyrics to match learning objectives.

One teacher stated:

"I use songs that students already know, then I change the lyrics into simple English words so they can follow easily." (T1)

Another teacher added:

"Songs are not only for fun, but we use them to train pronunciation and speaking step by step." (T2)

The learning process includes pre-, while-, and post-activities, allowing students to understand, practice, and produce language.

Role of Modified Songs and Islamic Values

The findings reveal that teachers intentionally integrate moral values into the modified lyrics.

As explained by one teacher:

"We also include simple messages like being polite, saying thank you, and helping others." (T3)

This shows that song-based learning not only supports language development but also aligns with the Islamic school environment.

Development of Students' Speaking Skills



Students show improvement in pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence.

One teacher noted:

"Students who were shy before are now more confident to speak after using songs." (T2)

The repetition and rhythm of songs help students internalize language patterns effectively.

Classroom Atmosphere and Engagement

Song-based learning creates a more enjoyable and interactive classroom. Students actively participate in singing, repetition, and speaking activities. Observation data show that students are more motivated and engaged compared to conventional methods.

Challenges in Implementation

Some challenges include differences in students' abilities, limited vocabulary, and difficulty following certain rhythms. However, teachers address these challenges by simplifying lyrics and repeating activities. The findings indicate that using familiar songs with modified lyrics is a practical and effective strategy for developing speaking skills, particularly in a context where English is a third language. This finding supports Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, as songs create a low-anxiety environment that encourages students to speak more confidently (Jackson Jr 2022). In addition, the repetitive and interactive nature of songs reflects the principles of Total Physical Response (TPR), which facilitate language acquisition through active participation.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that English song-based learning is an effective strategy for developing young learners' speaking skills in an Islamic primary school context. The use of familiar songs with modified English vocabulary provides a meaningful and accessible learning experience for students in a multilingual pesantren environment. This study highlights that modifying familiar songs is an effective and contextually appropriate pedagogical strategy that supports both language development and character education. It improves students' pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and confidence while creating a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere. This suggests that song-based learning can be applied in similar multilingual educational contexts. For future research, it is recommended to conduct quantitative studies to measure the extent of speaking improvement and to explore digital song-based learning, such as using YouTube or educational applications, to enhance learning outcomes.

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This study contributes to the growing field of AI-assisted language learning by exploring EFL learners' perceptions of using ELSA Speak among students from non-English departments. The findings indicate that the application supports pronunciation development, increases speaking confidence, and promotes learner autonomy through real-time feedback and flexible practice opportunities. These results highlight the potential of AI-based applications to complement classroom instruction by providing additional pronunciation practice in a supportive and less intimidating learning environment. The study also suggests that integrating ELSA Speak into English language teaching may enhance students' engagement and encourage continuous speaking practice beyond the classroom. However, the findings should be interpreted with caution because the study involved a small number of participants from a single educational institution and focused primarily on learners' perceptions rather than objective measures of speaking improvement. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples and employ mixed-methods or experimental designs to examine the long-term effectiveness of AI-assisted pronunciation learning.

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