

Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Vocabulary Development

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i4.2891>

*Maylani Ayu Wulandari, Daud Jiwandono^{ab} 

¹²Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: maylaniayu6@students.unnes.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Vocabulary development is fundamental to English language learning, yet conventional instructional methods often limit learner engagement and long-term retention. Although English songs have been widely explored as an alternative learning medium, previous studies have primarily emphasized vocabulary achievement rather than higher education students' perceptions and the challenges they experience. Therefore, this study aimed to explore undergraduate students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary development and identify the challenges they encountered during the learning process. This study employed a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data. Data were collected from 42 undergraduate students through an online questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. The findings revealed overwhelmingly positive perceptions across all indicators, including vocabulary acquisition, contextual understanding, pronunciation awareness, vocabulary retention, and learning motivation. However, students also reported challenges related to fast-paced lyrics, pronunciation variations, unfamiliar vocabulary, and slang expressions. These findings suggest that English songs are an effective resource for vocabulary development, particularly when accompanied by structured vocabulary-focused learning activities that help students engage more meaningfully with authentic language input.

Keywords: *English Songs, EFL Learners, Higher Education, Vocabulary Development*

Article History:

Received 29th June 2026

Accepted 27th July 2026

Published 03rd August 2026



INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of second and foreign language learning, as it significantly influences learners' listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills, as well as their overall communicative competence. Insufficient vocabulary often hinders students' ability to comprehend texts, express ideas clearly, and participate effectively in communication. As highlighted by Sagala & Napitupulu (2026), vocabulary mastery enables learners to connect new concepts and apply language knowledge across various contexts. Therefore, strengthening vocabulary development remains a central concern in English language education.

Recent studies indicate that vocabulary instruction has become increasingly engaging and innovative compared to traditional practices in the past. For instance, the use of songs has long been recognized as an effective tool in language learning, even at the basic level. Simple songs such as alphabet songs are frequently used to introduce new words and language patterns, especially for beginner learners. Recent research highlights that song provide repetition, rhythm, and contextualized input, which support vocabulary acquisition and retention (Mannarelli & Serrano, 2024). Furthermore, songs expose learners to authentic language use and facilitate incidental vocabulary learning in an enjoyable way, making them relevant not only for young learners but also for higher education students (Rahman et al., 2024).

The importance of vocabulary becomes even more crucial in higher education settings. University students are expected to comprehend academic texts, participate in scholarly discussions, and produce research-based writing that requires a broad and functional vocabulary repertoire. Limited vocabulary knowledge may hinder their ability to engage with academic materials and communicate disciplinary ideas effectively. Consequently, higher education students need learning approaches that not only expand vocabulary size but also enhance meaningful retention and contextual understanding.

In many EFL contexts, vocabulary learning is still dominated by conventional methods such as memorization, word lists, and repetitive exercises. Recent studies confirm that traditional approaches tend to be less engaging and may limit students' active involvement in the learning process (Hodood & Hussein, 2024). These approaches tend to limit students' engagement and may not provide meaningful exposure to authentic language use. As noted by Sagala & Napitupulu (2026), students frequently experience low motivation when vocabulary instruction relies on traditional methods, which can negatively affect their learning outcomes. Similarly, Febrianti et al. (2025) found that conventional vocabulary learning practices often reduce students' interest and hinder long-term retention of new words.

In response to these challenges, educators have explored alternative and authentic learning media, including English songs. Songs provide contextualized language input, natural pronunciation models, and repeated exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts. According to Ramadhanti & Farida (2025), English songs can support incidental vocabulary learning by exposing learners to natural language use in an enjoyable and engaging way. Furthermore, songs can enhance learners' motivation, improve pronunciation, and support memory retention due to their repetitive and melodic nature.

Empirical studies have also demonstrated positive student perceptions toward the use of English songs in vocabulary learning. For instance, Karim et al. (2022) revealed that students perceived English songs as an interesting and effective medium that helps them understand and remember new vocabulary. Likewise, Sagala & Napitupulu (2026) reported that students showed positive attitudes toward learning vocabulary through songs, particularly in terms of increased motivation and improved retention. However, these studies also identified several challenges, such as difficulties in understanding fast song tempo, unfamiliar vocabulary, and slang expressions (Febrianti et al., 2025).

Recent studies have provided growing evidence that music-assisted vocabulary learning can effectively support English language acquisition by enhancing learners' motivation, vocabulary retention, pronunciation, and contextual understanding. A quantitative meta-analysis by Odo (2022) found that English songs have a significant positive effect on second language vocabulary learning across different educational contexts, highlighting the value of music as an instructional resource. More recent review studies have further emphasized that songs facilitate incidental vocabulary acquisition through repetition, authentic language exposure, and meaningful contexts while promoting learner engagement and autonomous learning. Likewise, recent empirical research has shown that integrating guided listening, lyric analysis, and vocabulary-focused activities with English songs improves vocabulary acquisition, long-term retention, and learners' motivation. Despite these promising findings, most existing studies have primarily examined the effectiveness of songs in improving vocabulary achievement or learning outcomes, with relatively little attention given to higher education students' perceptions and the challenges they experience when using English songs as a vocabulary learning resource. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates undergraduate students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary development while also exploring the difficulties they encounter during the learning process.

Despite these promising findings, existing research has largely focused on measuring the effectiveness of songs in improving vocabulary achievement or describing general student attitudes. For instance, Febrianti et al. (2025) mainly emphasize students' positive responses and the effectiveness of songs in improving vocabulary acquisition. While these findings provide valuable insights, they offer limited in-depth exploration of students' lived experiences and the specific challenges encountered during the learning process. In addition,

existing research often involves relatively homogeneous participants, which may not fully capture diverse academic backgrounds and learning experiences (Sagala & Napitupulu, 2026).

Therefore, this study aims to explore higher education students' perceptions of using English songs as a medium for vocabulary development and to identify the challenges they encounter during the learning process. By involving students from various academic disciplines within the same level of study, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of the role of English songs in supporting vocabulary learning in tertiary education. In particular, the study's research questions are: 1) How do students perceive the use of English songs as a medium to improve their English vocabulary? 2) What challenges do students experience when learning vocabulary through English songs?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach to investigate higher education students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary development and the challenges they encountered during the learning process. The mixed-methods approach combined quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaire items to describe students' overall perceptions, while qualitative data were obtained from open-ended questionnaire responses to gain deeper insights into their experiences and challenges. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study to achieve a more complete understanding of a phenomenon than either approach alone. In addition, open-ended questions embedded in online surveys can generate rich qualitative data that enable researchers to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in greater depth (Braun et al., 2021). The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize students' responses, whereas the qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. By integrating both forms of data, this research provides a richer and more balanced interpretation of higher education students' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of English songs for vocabulary development.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were 42 undergraduate students in their sixth semester from various academic disciplines. The number of participants was considered adequate to obtain rich qualitative data while remaining manageable for in-depth analysis. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to choose individuals who have relevant experience related to the research topic (Creswell, 2014). The selection criteria included students who are actively enrolled in university, have learned English as a subject, are familiar with English songs, and have experience using English songs as a medium for learning vocabulary. To ensure diversity of perspectives, the participants were drawn from different academic majors, consisting of 7 students from Physical Education, 6 students from Indonesian Language Education, 8 students from Management, and 21 students from English Language Education. This variation in academic background was intended to provide richer data and capture a wider range of learning experiences, particularly in understanding how students with different levels of exposure to English perceive and utilize English songs for vocabulary development.

Research Instruments

The researcher developed an online questionnaire consisting of a combination of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to investigate students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary development. The instrument was designed in alignment with the research questions, which focus on students' perceptions and the challenges they experience

when learning vocabulary through songs. Its construction was informed by recent perspectives on vocabulary learning and the use of songs as authentic language input, which emphasize meaningful exposure, repetition, and learner engagement in vocabulary acquisition (Teng, 2023).

The Likert-scale items were included to capture students' general tendencies and attitudes toward the use of English songs in vocabulary learning. Participants responded to each statement using a four-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing the researcher to obtain quantifiable data reflecting overall patterns of perception and difficulty. In addition, open-ended questions were incorporated to explore students' experiences in greater depth. These questions addressed various aspects of vocabulary learning through songs, including pronunciation awareness, word recognition, meaning comprehension, contextual use, vocabulary retention, as well as challenges such as unfamiliar vocabulary, fast-paced lyrics, and the use of informal or slang expressions.

To accommodate participants from diverse academic backgrounds, the questionnaire was administered in Indonesian to ensure clarity and to allow participants to express their ideas more comfortably. After data collected, all responses were translated into English for analysis purposes. The translation process was conducted carefully to maintain the original meaning and context of participants' responses, ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the data. By combining structured Likert-scale items with open-ended questions, the instrument enabled the researcher to obtain both measurable data and rich, detailed insights. This approach is appropriate for studies aiming to achieve a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives, as it allows for both generalization of trends and in-depth exploration of individual experiences (Creswell, 2014).

Data Collecting Techniques

The data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. This method was chosen to provide flexibility and accessibility for university students, allowing them to respond at their own convenience. Online questionnaires are considered effective for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data on learners' experiences in digital contexts (Braun et al., 2021). The data collection process was conducted by sharing the questionnaire link with selected participants who met the research criteria. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Only those who agreed to give informed consent proceeded with the questionnaire. All responses were collected anonymously and automatically recorded in the Google Forms database, which facilitated systematic data organization and prepared the data for further qualitative analysis. The data obtained directly addressed the research questions by capturing students' perceptions and the challenges they experienced when learning vocabulary through English songs.

Data Analysis Technique

The data collected in this study were analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The responses obtained from the Likert-scale items were analyzed quantitatively to identify general patterns in students' perceptions and challenges. This analysis involved calculating frequencies, percentages, and mean scores to provide an overview of participants' responses. In addition, the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis began with data familiarization, in which the researcher carefully read and re-read all responses to gain a comprehensive understanding. This was followed by the process of generating initial codes by identifying significant statements related to students' perceptions and challenges. The codes were then organized into broader categories based on similarities and further developed into themes that represented meaningful patterns in the data. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure their accuracy and relevance to the research questions before being interpreted and reported. By combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, this study was able to provide both a general overview and an in-depth

understanding of students' experiences. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher ensured careful coding and consistent interpretation throughout the analysis process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation. Their responses were kept confidential, and no personal identifying information was disclosed. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Vocabulary Development

To answer the first research question, students' perceptions were examined using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Agree), and 4 (Strongly Agree). Mean scores were calculated by averaging students' responses across the questionnaire items within each indicator. Higher mean scores indicate stronger positive perceptions toward the use of English songs for vocabulary development.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Vocabulary Development

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Recognizing New Vocabulary	3.43	Strongly Positive
Motivation and Interest	3.38	Strongly Positive
General Perceptions	3.38	Strongly Positive
Understanding Words in Context	3.37	Strongly Positive
Retention	3.35	Strongly Positive
Pronunciation Awareness	3.34	Strongly Positive
Understanding Word Meaning	3.34	Strongly Positive

As shown in Table 1, all indicators obtained mean scores above 3.26, indicating strongly positive perceptions toward the use of English songs for vocabulary development. The highest mean score was found in Recognizing New Vocabulary ($M = 3.43$), suggesting that students primarily perceived songs as an effective source of new vocabulary. To provide a deeper understanding of these quantitative findings, responses from the open-ended questions were analyzed and grouped into five recurring themes: (1) Songs Facilitate Vocabulary Acquisition, (2) Songs Promote Meaningful Vocabulary Understanding, (3) Songs Improve Pronunciation Awareness, (4) Songs Enhance Vocabulary Retention, and (5) Songs Increase Motivation and Positive Learning Experiences.

Songs Facilitate Vocabulary Acquisition

The first theme emerged from three related indicators: Word Recognition ($M = 3.21$), Recognizing New Vocabulary ($M = 3.43$), and Vocabulary Application ($M = 3.22$). This theme indicates that students perceived English songs as a useful source of new vocabulary. Many participants reported encountering words and expressions that were rarely introduced in formal classroom instruction. Through repeated exposure to song lyrics, students became more familiar with vocabulary and learned how it is used in authentic contexts. Since the questionnaire was administered in Indonesian, all quotations presented below have been translated into English by the researcher.

Table 2. Data Sample of the Songs Facilitate Vocabulary Acquisition

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Saya biasanya menemukan kata-kata sehari-hari dan juga slang dalam lagu. Contohnya kata sehari-hari seperti love, miss, stay, dan dream. Untuk slang, saya sering menemukan kata seperti gonna (going to), wanna (want to), dan gotta (got to). Lagu membantu	"I often find everyday words and slang in songs. For example, everyday words like love, miss, stay, and dream. For slang, I often come across words like gonna (going to), wanna (want to), and gotta (got to). Songs help me understand the use of these words in a more natural context." (P38)

saya memahami penggunaan kata-kata tersebut dalam konteks yang lebih alami.

" (P38)

"Iya, saya juga pernah pakai beberapa vocab baru waktu nulis tugas kuliah." (P6)

Yes, I also used some new vocabulary when writing college assignments. (P6)

This response illustrates how songs expose learners to authentic language use beyond formal classroom instruction. Rather than learning isolated vocabulary items, students encounter words within meaningful contexts, allowing them to understand both meaning and usage simultaneously. Similar perceptions were reported by other participants, who explained that they frequently discovered unfamiliar vocabulary through songs and later applied some of these words in academic tasks and daily communication. These findings suggest that English songs facilitate incidental vocabulary learning through repeated encounters with authentic language.

Songs Promote Meaningful Vocabulary Understanding

The second theme emerged from Understanding Meaning ($M = 3.34$) and Understanding Words in Context ($M = 3.37$). This theme highlights students' ability to infer word meanings from contextual information contained in song lyrics. Rather than relying solely on dictionaries, participants often used storylines, emotions, and situations presented in songs to understand unfamiliar vocabulary. One participant explained:

Table 3. Data Sample of the Songs Promote Meaningful Vocabulary Understanding

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Saya pernah mengalami hal ini saat mendengarkan lagu Count on Me oleh Bruno Mars. Ketika pertama kali mendengar kata count on, saya belum mengetahui arti pastinya. Namun, dari lirik yang berbicara tentang persahabatan, saling membantu, dan selalu ada untuk satu sama lain, saya dapat menebak bahwa frasa tersebut berarti "mengandalkan" atau "mempercayai seseorang." Setelah memahami konteks keseluruhan lagu, saya akhirnya mengerti maknanya tanpa harus langsung membuka kamus. Ketika kemudian saya mengecek artinya, ternyata tebakan saya benar, sehingga pengalaman tersebut membuat saya lebih percaya diri dalam mempelajari kosakata baru melalui konteks lagu." (P21)	"I once experienced this while listening to Bruno Mars' song "Count on Me." When I first heard the word "count on," I didn't know its exact meaning. However, from the lyrics, which talked about friendship, helping each other, and always being there for each other, I guessed that the phrase meant "to rely on" or "to trust someone." After understanding the overall context of the song, I finally understood its meaning without having to immediately open a dictionary. When I later checked the meaning, it turned out my guess was correct, and this experience made me more confident in learning new vocabulary through the context of songs." (P21)
"Lirik lagu membantu saya memahami cara penggunaan kata dalam kalimat karena kata-kata tersebut disajikan dalam konteks yang nyata dan mudah diingat. Saat mendengarkan lagu, saya dapat melihat bagaimana suatu kata digunakan bersama kata lain, posisi kata dalam kalimat, serta makna yang ingin disampaikan oleh penyanyi. Misalnya, dari lagu-lagu berbahasa Inggris saya sering menemukan frasa seperti "I miss you" atau "I'm waiting for you", sehingga saya memahami bagaimana kata kerja tersebut digunakan secara alami dalam kalimat. Dengan mendengarkan lirik berulang kali, saya menjadi lebih mudah mengingat pola kalimat dan menerapkannya saat berbicara atau menulis dalam bahasa Inggris." (P21)	"Song lyrics help me understand how words are used in sentences because they are presented in a real-life, memorable context. When I listen to a song, I can see how a word is used with other words, its position in the sentence, and the meaning the singer is trying to convey. For example, in English songs, I often encounter phrases like "I miss you" or "I'm waiting for you," which helps me understand how these verbs are used naturally in sentences. By listening to the lyrics repeatedly, I find it easier to remember sentence patterns and apply them when speaking or writing in English." (P21)

This response illustrates how contextual clues support vocabulary comprehension. Instead of memorizing dictionary definitions, learners actively construct meaning based on the surrounding context. Similar responses were provided by other participants, who explained that song lyrics helped them understand how vocabulary functions in authentic communication. These findings indicate that songs encourage deeper vocabulary knowledge by connecting word meaning with context and usage.

Songs Improve Pronunciation Awareness

The third theme emerged from Pronunciation Awareness ($M = 3.34$). Participants reported that English songs improved their awareness of pronunciation patterns and helped them recognize how words are articulated in authentic spoken English.

Table 4. Data Sample of the Songs Improve Pronunciation Awareness

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Mendengarkan lirik lagu sangat efektif untuk memperbaiki pengucapan (pronunciation), terutama dalam mempelajari fenomena connected speech (penggabungan kata)." (P1)	"Listening to song lyrics is very effective for improving pronunciation, especially in learning the phenomenon of connected speech (word combining)." (P1)

The participant's response indicates that songs expose learners to naturally occurring spoken English. Through repeated listening, students become more aware of how words are pronounced in authentic communication rather than in isolated classroom exercises. Other participants similarly reported improvements in their ability to recognize pronunciation patterns and distinguish spoken words more accurately.

Songs Enhance Vocabulary Retention

The fourth theme emerged from Retention ($M = 3.35$). Participants consistently reported that melody, rhythm, and repetition helped them remember vocabulary more effectively. One participant explained:

Table 5. Data Sample of the Songs Enhance Vocabulary Retention

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Melodi membuat kata-kata terdengar lebih menarik dan mudah dikenali karena otak menghubungkan informasi bahasa dengan pola nada. Sementara itu, pengulangan lirik membantu memperkuat ingatan karena kata atau frasa yang sering didengar akan lebih mudah tersimpan dalam memori jangka Panjang." (P19)	"Melodies make words sound more appealing and easier to recognize because the brain associates linguistic information with pitch patterns. Meanwhile, repeating lyrics helps strengthen memory because frequently heard words or phrases are more easily stored in long-term memory." (P19)

The response suggests that musical elements function as cognitive memory aids. Repetition of lyrics allows learners to encounter vocabulary multiple times without experiencing the monotony often associated with traditional memorization techniques. Similar views were expressed by other participants, who reported that repeated listening enabled them to recall vocabulary more easily even after a long period of time.

Songs Increase Motivation and Positive Learning Experiences

The final theme emerged from Motivation and Interest ($M = 3.38$) and General Perception ($M = 3.38$). Participants generally expressed positive attitudes toward learning vocabulary through songs and considered the method more enjoyable than traditional memorization techniques.

Table 6. Data Sample of the Songs Increase Motivation and Positive Learning Experiences

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Kombinasi antara melodi yang menarik, lirik yang bermakna, pengulangan kata, dan rasa ingin memahami pesan lagu menjadi faktor utama yang memotivasi saya untuk mempelajari kosakata bahasa Inggris secara mandiri melalui lagu. Belajar melalui lagu terasa lebih menyenangkan dan tidak	"The combination of catchy melodies, meaningful lyrics, repetition, and a desire to understand the song's message are the main factors that motivate me to learn English vocabulary independently through songs. Learning through songs feels more enjoyable and less boring than simply memorizing vocabulary from a book." (P2)

membosankan dibandingkan hanya menghafal kosakata dari buku." (P2)

This finding suggests that songs create positive emotional experiences that encourage learners to engage more actively with vocabulary learning. Other participants similarly reported that their interest in understanding song lyrics motivated them to search for meanings, explore unfamiliar vocabulary, and repeatedly interact with English language content. Consequently, songs appear to promote both learner engagement and autonomous vocabulary development.

Challenges Experienced When Learning Vocabulary Through English Songs

Although students reported positive perceptions overall, they also identified several challenges associated with learning vocabulary through songs. The quantitative findings showed that Processing Difficulty. Speed of Songs obtained the highest challenge score ($M = 3.27$), followed by Pronunciation Difficulty ($M = 3.06$), Unknown Vocabulary ($M = 2.84$), and Slang or Informal Language ($M = 2.83$).

Table 7. Challenges Experienced When Learning Vocabulary Through English Songs

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Processing Difficulty (Song Speed)	3.27	High Challenge
Pronunciation Difficulty	3.06	Moderate Challenge
Unknown Vocabulary	2.84	Moderate Challenge
Slang or Informal Language	2.83	Moderate Challenge

Table 2 shows that processing difficulty caused by song speed was the most frequently reported challenge, followed by pronunciation difficulties, unfamiliar vocabulary, and slang expressions. Four themes emerged from the qualitative data. The thematic analysis revealed four major themes: (1) Fast-Paced Lyrics, (2) Pronunciation Difficulties, (3) Unfamiliar Vocabulary and Figurative Language, and (4) Slang and Informal Expressions.

Fast-Paced Lyrics

The most frequently reported challenge was the speed of song lyrics. Participants explained that fast-paced songs often make it difficult to identify words and process vocabulary meaning.

Table 8. Data Sample of the Face-Paced Lyrics

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"jika lagunya terlalu cepat, saya biasanya hanya menangkap gambaran umum dari liriknya tanpa benar-benar memahami setiap kata yang diucapkan. beberapa kosakata baru jadi sulit dikenali karena langsung diikuti kata lain atau diucapkan sangat cepat. biasanya saya harus mendengarkan beberapa kali atau melihat liriknya supaya bisa memahami kata dan maknanya dengan lebih jelas." (P31)	"If the song is too fast, I usually only get a general idea of the lyrics without really understanding every word being said. Some new vocabulary is difficult to recognize because it is immediately followed by another word or is said very quickly. I usually have to listen to it several times or look up the lyrics to be able to understand the words and their meaning more clearly." (P31)

This finding demonstrates that rapid speech limits learners' ability to process vocabulary efficiently. Other participants similarly reported difficulties identifying individual words, recognizing pronunciation patterns, and interpreting meanings when lyrics were delivered too quickly. These findings suggest that cognitive processing demands increase significantly when learners attempt to understand unfamiliar vocabulary in fast-paced songs.

Pronunciation Difficulties

Students also reported challenges related to pronunciation variation. This theme corresponds to Pronunciation Difficulty ($M = 3.06$).

Table 9. Data Sample of the Pronunciation Difficulties

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
--------------------------------	---------------------

Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Vocabulary Development

"Artikulasi yang kurang jelas (terutama pelafalan konsonan) dan modifikasi vokal. Ketika penyanyi terlalu fokus pada nada atau nada tinggi, mereka sering mengubah bentuk vokal sehingga kata menjadi kabur." (P1)

"Unclear articulation (especially consonant pronunciation) and vowel modification. When singers focus too much on pitch or high notes, they often change the shape of the vowels so that the words become blurred." (P1)

This finding illustrates how authentic pronunciation may simultaneously support and hinder vocabulary learning. While songs provide valuable exposure to natural spoken English, pronunciation modifications often make vocabulary recognition more difficult. Similar observations were reported by several participants who struggled to identify words due to connected speech and pronunciation variations.

Unfamiliar Vocabulary and Figurative Language

Another challenge involved unfamiliar vocabulary and figurative expressions commonly found in song lyrics. This theme is reflected in the Unknown Vocabulary indicator ($M = 2.84$). Participants frequently reported encountering difficult words and metaphorical language.

Table 10. Data Sample of the Unfamiliar Vocabulary and Figurative Language

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Saat menemukan kata yang tidak saya pahami dalam lagu, saya biasanya mencoba menebak artinya dari konteks lirik terlebih dahulu. Jika masih belum paham, saya mencari arti kata tersebut melalui kamus atau internet." (P39)	"When I come across a word I don't understand in a song, I usually try to guess its meaning from the context of the lyrics first. If I still don't understand, I look it up in a dictionary or online." (P39)

This response indicates that unfamiliar vocabulary frequently creates comprehension difficulties. However, responses from other participants suggest that these difficulties often encourage learners to adopt independent learning strategies such as contextual guessing, dictionary use, and online searches. Therefore, while unfamiliar vocabulary presents a challenge, it may also stimulate deeper learning engagement.

Slang and Informal Expressions

The final challenge concerns slang and informal language. This theme corresponds to Slang or Informal Language ($M = 2.83$).

Table 11. Data Sample of the Slang and Informal Exspressions

Original Response (Indonesian)	English Translation
"Saya pernah merasa bingung ketika menemukan kata-kata slang seperti gonna, wanna, atau ain't dalam lagu karena bentuknya berbeda dari yang saya pelajari di kelas. Awalnya saya mengira itu adalah kosakata baru yang memiliki arti berbeda. Setelah mencari tahu, saya baru memahami bahwa kata-kata tersebut merupakan bentuk informal yang sering digunakan oleh penutur asli dalam percakapan sehari-hari. Pengalaman itu membuat saya lebih memperhatikan konteks saat memahami lirik lagu." (P38)	"I once felt confused when I encountered slang words like "gonna," "wanna," or "ain't" in a song because their forms differed from those I learned in class. At first, I thought they were new vocabulary words with different meanings. After researching them, I realized they were informal forms often used by native speakers in everyday conversation. That experience made me pay more attention to context when understanding song lyrics." (P38)

These findin suggests that differences between formal English instruction and authentic language use may create confusion for learners. Other participants similarly reported difficulties interpreting informal expressions because their meanings often differed from literal dictionary definitions. Nevertheless, exposure to such language forms may increase learners' awareness of authentic communication and everyday language use.

Discussion

The present study aimed to explore higher education students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary development and to identify the challenges they experience when learning vocabulary through songs. The findings revealed that students generally held

positive perceptions toward the use of English songs as a vocabulary-learning medium. Quantitative results showed that all perception-related indicators obtained mean scores above 3.00, indicating agreement among participants regarding the benefits of songs for vocabulary learning. Qualitative findings further supported these results by demonstrating that students perceived songs as helpful for acquiring new vocabulary, understanding word meanings in context, improving pronunciation awareness, retaining vocabulary, and increasing learning motivation. However, students also reported several challenges related to lyric speed, pronunciation variations, unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, and slang expressions.

Regarding the first research question, the findings suggest that students perceive English songs as an effective medium for vocabulary acquisition. The highest mean score was obtained by the indicator Recognizing New Vocabulary ($M = 3.43$), indicating that students primarily value songs as a source of new lexical items. Participants reported encountering various forms of vocabulary through songs, including everyday expressions, idioms, and informal language that are rarely introduced in traditional classroom materials. This finding supports Nation (2013) argument that vocabulary growth occurs through repeated encounters with words in meaningful contexts. Songs provide such opportunities because learners are repeatedly exposed to vocabulary while simultaneously processing meaning, emotion, and communicative intent. Similar findings were reported by Rahman et al. (2024), who found that songs facilitate incidental vocabulary learning through authentic language exposure. The present findings also align with Odo (2022) meta-analytic review, which concluded that English songs have a positive effect on second-language lexical learning by providing repeated and meaningful exposure to vocabulary.

Beyond introducing new vocabulary, the findings indicate that songs promote meaningful vocabulary understanding. Participants frequently described how they inferred word meanings from the storyline, emotions, and situations represented in song lyrics. Many students reported relying on contextual clues to understand unfamiliar words rather than translating them directly. This finding supports Teng (2023) view that vocabulary learning extends beyond memorizing word meanings and involves understanding how words function within authentic communicative contexts. Similarly, Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge includes not only form and meaning but also contextual use. The findings suggest that songs provide learners with opportunities to construct meaning actively, making vocabulary learning a process of interpretation rather than rote memorization. This result is also consistent with Rahman et al. (2024), who reported that songs help learners understand vocabulary through contextualized language exposure.

Another notable finding concerns pronunciation awareness. Participants reported that songs helped them become more familiar with authentic pronunciation patterns, connected speech, stress, and intonation. Through repeated listening, students were exposed to natural spoken English that differs from the carefully articulated language often found in classroom materials. This finding is consistent with Ramadhanti & Farida (2017), who argued that songs provide authentic language input and natural pronunciation models that support language development. Similarly, c found that learners perceived songs as beneficial for improving pronunciation and listening skills. These findings suggest that songs contribute not only to vocabulary growth but also to broader communicative competence by increasing learners' awareness of authentic spoken language.

The findings further demonstrate the important role of songs in vocabulary retention. Participants frequently associated melody, rhythm, and repeated exposure to lyrics with their ability to remember vocabulary more effectively. This finding supports Mannarelli & Serrano (2024) argument that repetition and musical patterns facilitate vocabulary retention by strengthening memory connections. Similarly, Sagala & Napitupulu (2026) reported that students perceived songs as helpful for remembering vocabulary because repeated exposure to lyrics reinforced lexical knowledge. From a cognitive perspective, musical elements function as memory cues that support information storage and retrieval, making vocabulary easier to recall in future communication.

In addition to supporting vocabulary learning, the findings indicate that songs contribute significantly to learner motivation and positive learning experiences. Participants consistently described vocabulary learning through songs as enjoyable, engaging, and less stressful than conventional learning methods. Many reported voluntarily searching for lyric meanings, exploring unfamiliar vocabulary, and repeatedly listening to songs because they were genuinely interested in understanding the messages conveyed. These findings align with Rahman et al. (2024), who found that students generally hold positive attitudes toward learning English through songs. Similarly, Butar Butar & Katemba (2023) reported that EFL students viewed English songs as an effective and enjoyable resource for vocabulary learning. The findings also support Hodood & Hussein, (2024), who argued that traditional vocabulary instruction often limits learner engagement due to repetitive learning activities, whereas authentic and enjoyable learning resources can enhance motivation. Furthermore, Sunra et al. (2026) found that song-based learning positively influences both vocabulary mastery and learner motivation among Indonesian EFL learners. Therefore, songs appear to create positive emotional experiences that encourage autonomous and sustained vocabulary learning.

Although students reported overwhelmingly positive perceptions, the findings also reveal several challenges associated with learning vocabulary through songs, thereby addressing the second research question. The most prominent challenge was the speed of song lyrics, which obtained the highest mean score among all challenge indicators ($M = 3.27$). Participants explained that rapid delivery often limited their ability to identify words, recognize pronunciation patterns, and process meanings simultaneously. This finding is consistent with Febrianti et al. (2025), who identified fast-paced songs as a common obstacle for EFL learners because rapid speech reduces comprehensibility and increases cognitive processing demands. Similar difficulties were also reported by Karim et al. (2022), who found that learners frequently struggle to identify individual words when songs are delivered at high speed.

Pronunciation-related difficulties also emerged as a recurring challenge. While songs helped students become more aware of pronunciation patterns, participants simultaneously reported difficulties understanding unclear articulation, connected speech, and pronunciation modifications commonly found in songs. These findings highlight the dual nature of authentic language input. On the one hand, authentic pronunciation provides valuable learning opportunities; on the other hand, it may create comprehension difficulties for learners who are still developing listening and vocabulary skills. This observation supports previous research emphasizing that authentic spoken language can both facilitate and complicate language learning processes.

Furthermore, students reported difficulties related to unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, and slang expressions. Song lyrics frequently contain metaphors, idiomatic expressions, symbolic language, and informal vocabulary that differ considerably from the formal English typically taught in educational settings. These findings support the observations of Febrianti et al. (2025) and Sagala & Napitupulu (2026), who found that learners often experience difficulties interpreting figurative and informal language in songs. However, the present findings also reveal a positive aspect of these challenges. Many participants reported actively searching for meanings through dictionaries, translation tools, lyric websites, or discussions with peers. This suggests that challenges encountered during song-based learning may encourage learners to engage in independent learning strategies and develop greater learner autonomy.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored higher education students' perceptions of using English songs for vocabulary development and the challenges they encountered during the learning process. The findings demonstrate that students generally hold positive perceptions of English songs as a valuable resource for vocabulary learning, as they support vocabulary acquisition, contextual understanding, pronunciation awareness, vocabulary retention, and learning

motivation through authentic language exposure. At the same time, students identified several challenges, including fast-paced lyrics, pronunciation variations, unfamiliar vocabulary, and slang expressions, which sometimes hindered comprehension. Overall, the findings suggest that English songs can serve as an effective supplementary resource for vocabulary development when accompanied by appropriate instructional support and structured vocabulary-focused activities. These results contribute to a better understanding of how higher education students perceive music-assisted vocabulary learning and provide practical implications for English language teachers seeking to integrate authentic learning materials into vocabulary instruction.

REFERENCES

- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Braun, Virginia, Clarke, V., Boulton, E., Davey, L., & McEvoy, C. (2021). The online survey as a qualitative research tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(6), 641–654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1805550>
- Butar Butar, E. L., & Katemba, C. V. (2023). EFL Students' Perceptions Toward Vocabulary Learning by Listening to English Songs on Spotify. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 6(1), 194–205.
- Creswell, J W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Creswell, John W, & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Febrianti, M., Putra, A. R., & Pradana, A. (2025). EFL Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Students' Vocabulary Learning at Dehasen University Bengkulu. *Journal of English Education*, 7(2).
- Hodood, M. N., & Hussein, Q. J. (2024). Vocabulary Learning Enhancement: The Impact of Using Songs in Teaching Vocabulary to Iraqi Students. *Himalayan Journal of Education and Literature*.
- Karim, S. A., Sudiro, Annisa, D. R., Khairunnisa, H. I., & Rahmawati, D. A. (2022). Enhancing Vocabulary Mastery Through English Songs: In the Eyes of EFL Students. *VELES Voices of English Language Education Society*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.439>
- Mannarelli, P., & Serrano, R. (2024). Thank You for the Music: Examining How Songs Can Promote Vocabulary Learning in an EFL Class. *Language Learning Journal*, 52(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2022.2092198>
- Murphy Odo, D. (2022). Examining the Influence of English Songs on English L2 Lexical Learning: A Quantitative Meta-Analytic Review. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 35(4), 386–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2021.2022684>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2013). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Rahman, R. W., Syarif, A. R., Prasiska, C., & Tohamba, P. (2024). Enhancing Vocabulary Through English Songs: A Self-Directed Learning Experienced for EFL Students. *Klasikal: Journal of Education, Language Teaching and Science*, 6.
- Ramadhanti, V. A., & Farida, A. N. (2017). The Impact of Listening to English Songs on EFL Students' Vocabulary Acquisition: A Literature Review. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1).
- Ramadhanti, V. A., & Farida, A. N. (2025). The Impact of Listening to English Songs on EFL Students' Vocabulary Acquisition: A Literature Review. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(1).
- Sagala, R., & Napitupulu, S. (2026). Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs to Enhance Vocabulary Mastery: A Qualitative Study. *Educate: Journal of Education and Learning*, 4(1), 108–115. <https://doi.org/10.61994/educate.v4i1.1583>
- Sunra, L., Farahdiba, S., & Melinda. (2026). Examining the Effects of Modified Songs on Vocabulary Mastery and Learning Motivation: A Mixed-Methods Study of Indonesian

Higher Education Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Vocabulary Development

EFL Learners. *Research and Innovation in Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 182–200.

<https://doi.org/10.31963/rial.v4i1.6232>

Teng, F. (2023). *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Perspectives and Practices*. Routledge.