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The Impact of Songs on Vocabulary Acquisition by ESL Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of music on vocabulary acquisition among ESL undergraduate students at the UM School of Languages, students' preferences for music choices, and their motivations for using music as a learning tool. By analyzing the questionnaire responses of 81 participants, the study found the following results. First, the vast majority of participants found listening to English songs helpful in learning the English language. Second, pop music was the most preferred genre of music among the participants, but rock, jazz, and rap also received a significant amount of support. A small number of participants chose other types of music. In addition, students' motivations for using music as a learning tool mainly included singing along with songs, listening to songs repeatedly, and reading lyrics. These motivations stemmed from students' concerns about pronunciation accuracy, vocabulary recall, and song meaning. Strengths of the study include the fact that the quantity and quality of the data were adequate and the results were well presented. However, there are some limitations of the study, such as the limitations of the study population and the subjectivity of the data. Therefore, this paper suggests further expansion of the study population, incorporation of objectivity measurement tools, exploration of the effects of different music genres, and provision of relevant training and guidance for teachers. In conclusion, the results of this study validate the effectiveness of music as a tool for vocabulary acquisition and have practical implications for promoting students' language learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning has long been an important area of research in the field of education, especially in the context of second language acquisition. As globalization continues to advance, mastery of English as a Second Language (ESL) has become increasingly important, especially for those learners whose first language is not English. In many countries, English has become the primary language for international communication, business activities, and academic research; therefore, effective acquisition of English vocabulary is critical to the success of ESL learners.

The goal of this study is to investigate the impact of song on vocabulary acquisition among ESL undergraduate students in the faculty of languages and linguistics at Universiti Malaya (UM). This paper focuses on ESL undergraduates in the UM faculty of languages and linguistics and looks at their preferences for song genres and their motivations for using songs as a learning tool. Music is widely used as an important language medium in the teaching and learning process. It stimulates learners' interest and attention through melody, lyrics and emotion in a variety of ways, and creates a positive, interactive and

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fun learning environment for students compared to traditional teaching methods (Mora, 2000).

A questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool for this study, and the participants were eighty-one ESL undergraduate students from the UM faculty of languages and linguistics. A stratified sampling method was used to select the participants to ensure the representativeness and reliability of the sample. By analyzing the data from the questionnaire, this paper will assess the actual impact of songs on students' vocabulary acquisition and understand their preferences for the type of songs to be used as well as their motivation and purpose for using songs as a learning tool.

The results of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the role and impact of songs in ESL learning. This paper will be able to help understand the attitudes and preferences of ESL undergraduates in the faculty of languages and linguistics toward music and provide insight into their motivations for using music in the vocabulary acquisition process. These findings will help improve teaching practices in the field of language education, provide teachers with more effective teaching methods and strategies, and inform students' self-directed learning. This paper hopes to contribute to the advancement of language learning and education by studying the use of songs in language learning.

Kocaman (2016) investigated the role of songs on English vocabulary acquisition of 60 students of different grades at Sakarya University through a questionnaire. The results of the study showed that songs can stimulate learners' interest and curiosity, affirming the effective role of songs in vocabulary learning. However, in Kocaman's study, the participants' proficiency level was not taken into account, which may have influenced the results of the study. Moreover, due to the limited number of participants, the data were collected in one setting and through only one source. To address this issue, this thesis focused the study on undergraduate students from the same college and explored whether the findings would be consistent with previous studies in different schools.

Pavia (2019) examined incidental vocabulary learning from listening to two songs at school, addressing three dimensions of vocabulary knowledge: spoken form recognition, lexical meaning association, and song listening through grammatical collocation recognition. The results of this selected study suggest that listening to songs produces learning effects, but not necessarily gains. The authors of both studies support the use of songs in the language classroom. However, Pavia's study did not provide a complete timeline of the experiment. Considering the effect of practicing the same test twice in a short period of time, it is possible that the tested students were influenced by the material they were exposed to in the external lessons or by any other possibility. In this paper, we add a careful classification of the ways in which songs have an impact on vocabulary acquisition in the questionnaire based on Pavia's findings.

Davis (2016) examined how songs are widely practiced in the teaching of early childhood language. The authors measured the pedagogical value of songs for acquiring English vocabulary through repeated measures with students in two kindergartens in Beijing. Their study focused on the number of meaningful morphemes produced by the students in tasks completed before and after instruction. The authors used an experimental approach with controlled variables to affirm the positive effects of three ways of using songs to aid vocabulary acquisition: listening to them repeatedly, singing along with them, and reading the lyrics. These ways of using songs informed and inspired the creation of the questionnaire in this paper.

Through observations of children in English classes and analysis of school materials, Millington (2011) found that linking gestures to lyrics helped students better understand the meaning of the lyrics and facilitated stronger recall of vocabulary. Another new idea is that, with the influence of the Internet trend and the Z-era, finger dance has also emerged in some social media as a novel way of acquiring vocabulary.

Saarikallio and Erkkilä (2007) collected data from eight adolescents by means of group interviews and follow-up forms, which were then analyzed using a constructive rooting theory approach. Music was found to encourage and facilitate mental imagery and contemplation, and that the lyrics evoked the listener's thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Songs give listeners new ideas and insight into different issues by evoking memories of certain times, places and people. By imagining themselves as the singers of the songs, they can also reinforce thoughts about desires and expectations for the future. Although the scope of Saarikallio and Erkkilä's (2007) study is small, the findings still expand new ideas about the role of

songs and provide a new classification for this paper in the way songs can be used as a learning aid.

In addition to this, according to Akmajian et al.'s study on Introduction to Language and Communication (2017), the process of vocabulary acquisition can be specifically targeted to the fields of pragmatics, morphology, and pragmatics, and so on. Considering the limitations of the daily applied language of the research subjects, this paper excludes subfields such as language psychology and gives more detailed examples of familiar names such as pronunciation, spelling, and fixed collocations to facilitate better understanding by the research subjects. The relevance of Akmajian et al.'s study of songs is not high enough to power to implement further song-related applications for this paper, but still plays a crucial role in making the questionnaire better categorized and exemplified in illustrating the specific role of songs on vocabulary acquisition.

This study is mainly based on Krashen's (1992) comprehensible input theory and Tse's (2015) study on the use of English songs in Malaysian elementary schools. According to Krashen (1992), second language learners need to be exposed to language input that is slightly above their current language level in order for them to be able to comprehend new input. And songs can provide second language learners with input that is beyond the learners' proficiency level. The lyrical content of songs can provide contextual clues to vocabulary and help learners understand the meaning of words (Coyle & Gracia 2014; Medina 1993; Medina, 2003; Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Safa, 2018). At the same time, the melody and rhythm of the song and its pitch can facilitate the development of the learner's pronunciation. A large number of vocabulary words can be learned by repeating popular songs, thus increasing their potential retention in long-term memory (Murphey, 1992; Piri, 2018). With the help of songs, learners' attention is drawn to the meaning of the vocabulary through the mood of the singer and the complete sentences in the lyrics, making them easier to understand. To further explore teachers' perceptions of songs as a learning aid in Malaysia, Tse (2015) used purposive sampling to administer an English questionnaire to 60 elementary school teachers from different schools in Kuantan and Kampong, Malaysia. The questionnaire was administered using a five-point Likert type scale and the study participants were asked to select the option that best matched their conception of song as a learning aid. Tse's (2015) study effectively represents, to some extent, the perceptions of elementary school teachers in Kuantan and Kampung regions of Malaysia on songs as a vocabulary acquisition aid. Considering that the students' responses may be more diverse compared to those of the more specialized teachers. In order to obtain more reliable data, this study combined closed-option and open-ended short-answer questions to allow UM undergraduate students to more easily express their views on the impact of songs on ESL vocabulary acquisition.

The current research focuses on the following questions:

- 1. What are the effects of music on students' acquisition of repertoires? What are the students' preferences for music selection?
- 2. What are students' motivations for adopting music as a learning tool?

II. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of music on vocabulary acquisition among ESL undergraduate students at UM Language Institute, including preference for songs, motivation to use music as a learning tool, and ways to improve vocabulary through music. A Google questionnaire was used as the survey instrument, and a total of eighty-one undergraduate ESL students from the UM School of Languages participated. Sampling was stratified, and participants had to be undergraduate students from the UM School of Languages who were learning English as a second language. The academic requirements were set to assess the language proficiency of the participants in order to study the effect of music on vocabulary acquisition among students of similar language proficiency.

Samples selection

A stratified sampling method was used to select participants from undergraduate students in the UM Language Institute. Academic requirements ensured that participants were of similar language level and helped to study the effect of music on vocabulary acquisition of students of the same language level.

Participants' nationality, age, and gender were not required, but age was asked in the questionnaire to take into account the possible effects of age differences on language learning ability, receptivity to new things, and ability to use smart devices.

Questionnaire design

The questionnaire as the instrument was created using Google questionnaire based on the research objectives and question setting. The questions in the questionnaire were designed to obtain information about the participants' perceptions, preferences, and learning methods of music for vocabulary acquisition. For example, the questions addressed the length of time participants had been learning English, their perceptions of how listening to English songs helped them learn, their preferred genres of music, their choice of lyrics and subtitles, specific ways to improve vocabulary through songs, which skills they wished to improve through music, and the difficulties they encountered in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling and how they solved them (Appendix 1). Through the design of the above questions, the researcher can obtain detailed information about the participants' attitudes, preferences, learning methods and difficulties in music learning. This information helps to further understand the impact of music on the vocabulary acquisition of ESL undergraduates in the UM School of Languages, and provides practical suggestions and guidelines for teaching and learning. At the same time, the questionnaire was designed to take into account the individual differences and practicalities of the participants, and a comprehensive and detailed investigation was conducted in terms of learning experiences, preferences, difficulties, and solutions to ensure that representative data were obtained.

Data collection and analysis

In this paper, a stratified sampling method was used to design the survey questionnaire using Google questionnaire and to collect and analyze the data. Information about the role and effects of music in vocabulary acquisition can be obtained by investigating participants' length of English learning, their perceptions of music on learning, preferred music genres, choice of lyrics and subtitles, methods of improving vocabulary through music, difficulties encountered and solutions. Data from participants' responses were collected through a Google questionnaire and statistically analyzed. Appropriate statistical methods, such as frequency analysis and percentage calculation, can be used to describe the participants' responses. Based on the research questions, the data can be categorized and compared in order to reveal relevant patterns and trends in terms of the effect of music on vocabulary acquisition, participants' motivation and preferences for learning.

This paper will parse the findings and explore participants' perceptions of the role and effects of music in vocabulary learning. The effects of different types of music, the choice of lyrics and subtitles on vocabulary acquisition, etc. can be compared. In addition, the participants' motivations and reasons for using music as a learning tool, as well as the results they achieved and the difficulties they faced in learning English vocabulary through music can also be discussed. Based on the data analysis and findings, this paper can suggest targeted music learning resources and activities to promote vocabulary acquisition among undergraduate students, and suggest the incorporation of music elements in curriculum design and teaching practices to enhance the interest and effectiveness of language learning.

However, it is important to note that the study did not deliberately control for the nationality of the participants when screening the sample, and that the native language characteristics of the participants may also influence the effect of songs on vocabulary acquisition, which was not reflected in the study. Also the questionnaire of this study used certain open-ended questions that involved subjectivity of the participants and could only represent their own views. In order to further improve and expand the related study, it is recommended to expand the sample size and avoid the chance of the study results. By implementing the above methodology, this paper can provide valuable insights for understanding the impact of music on vocabulary acquisition among ESL undergraduate students at UM's Faculty of Languages and Linguistics.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of music on the vocabulary acquisition of ESL

undergraduate students at UM's Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, as well as their preferences for music selection and motivation to use music as a learning tool.

The study participants were mainly distributed between the ages of 18 and 35, with the largest number of 72 participants in the 18 to 25 age group, and an additional 9 participants distributed between the ages of 26 and 35. Regarding English learning experience, 55 participants indicated that they had been learning English for more than 10 years, 19 had been learning English for 5 to 10 years, while

7 participants had been learning English for less than 5 years. Most of the participants (75) thought that listening to English songs was helpful in learning English, and only a few 6 participants thought that it was not helpful.

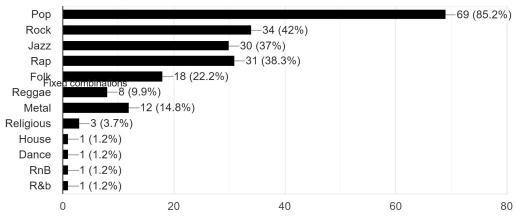


Figure 1. Percentage of song genre preference

In terms of song genre preference, as shown in *Figure 1*, pop music was the most popular choice, with 85% of participants choosing pop music. This was followed by rock, jazz, and rap, with 40% of participants each choosing these genres. A small number chose folk, reggae and metal, accounting for 10 to 20 percent of participants. A very small number of participants also chose religious-type music, R&B, house and dance music, with each genre chosen by between 1% and 3%.

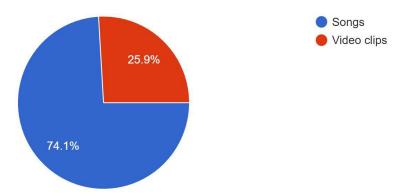


Figure 2. Percentage pie chart for listening to songs and watching videos

When listening to music or watching music video clips, most participants tended to listen to songs only without watching video clips, with 60 participants preferring to listen to songs, while the remaining 21 participants preferred to watch video clips. When listening to music or watching music video clips, most of them looked at the lyrics or video captions at the same time, but still 5% of the participants rarely looked at the lyrics or video captions.

When using songs as a learning tool, 80% of the participants chose to sing along with the song, 70% preferred to listen to the song repeatedly, and 60% found reading the lyrics helpful. In addition to these three common methods, 12% of participants chose to role-play the song, imagining themselves in the situation described by the song or taking on the role mentioned in the song to empathize with it. About 4% of the participants used actions or gestures related to the lyrics to aid in learning vocabulary. Another 1% of participants found it useful to record new vocabulary in the lyrics and learn it further by looking

it up in a dictionary.

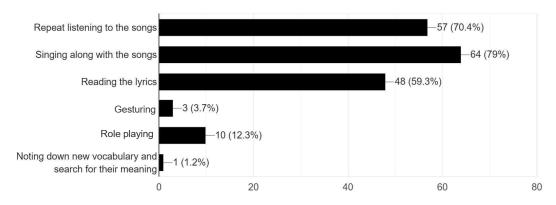


Figure 3. Percentage of song usage options

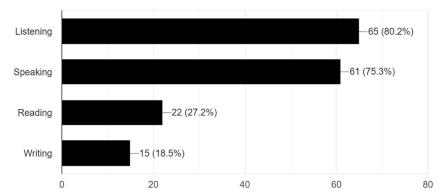


Figure 4. Effects of songs on the four skills in English usage

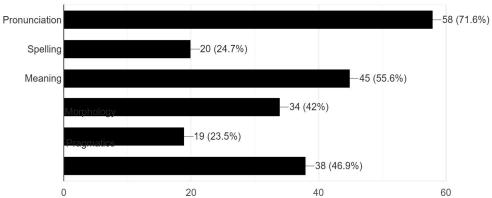


Figure 5. Percentage of songs' specific effects on vocabulary acquisition

Regarding the positive effects of music on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, most participants endorsed the improvement of listening and speaking skills by music, with a support rate of about 80%, respectively. Twenty-seven percent of the participants believed that music could improve reading skills, and 18% believed that it could improve writing skills. Especially in terms of vocabulary acquisition, more than 70% of the participants believed that their pronunciation could be improved through songs, and more than half of them believed that they could understand the meaning of words better. Also, about 47% of the participants and 42% of the participants thought that listening to songs could help them learn pragmatics and fixed collocations of words and phrases. About 24% and 25% of the participants also thought that listening to songs had a positive effect on learning morphology and spelling of vocabulary, respectively.

From the responses to the open-ended questions, most participants encountered problems with pronunciation and meaning when using songs to learn vocabulary. Some songs articulate pronunciation, changing the way words are pronounced or stretching syllables to fit the melody, resulting in unclear

or even inaccurate pronunciation of vocabulary. In addition, some singers may have their own accents, making it a challenge for ESL students who have only studied standard English in school to learn the correct pronunciation patterns. In addition, students sometimes have difficulty understanding the connotative meanings expressed by some words in lyrics due to the use of slang and a lack of knowledge of history or culture. Some participants also noted that with the changing internet trends and the influence of Generation Z, more and more words are being given new meanings and learning vocabulary requires extra effort to understand the stories behind the songs. In addition, after learning the meaning of some words, how to use them in the right context also requires in-depth learning. In addition, grammar is an area that can easily create challenges. Sometimes song writers use incorrect grammar in order to rhyme, and students educated in standard English may have difficulty distinguishing between written and spoken texts, thus acquiring incorrect knowledge of grammar. Some participants also found it difficult to learn spelling or morphology through natural spelling while listening to the songs because of the differences between the alphabetic system used in their native language and English.

To overcome these difficulties, participants adopted different coping measures. Common approaches included listening more and imitating. Students could pay close attention to the pronunciation in the songs and try to imitate the lyrics as they were sung, using the lyrics or subtitles as an aid, which helped to improve the ability to reproduce the sounds accurately. Also, they can look for relevant social media, such as instructional videos on video websites and vocabulary exercises related to songs, to help them better learn the pronunciation and spelling skills of vocabulary. In addition, some participants thought that discussing songs with native English speakers online or offline was a good way to help them understand the use of slang in the lyrics. In addition, taking proper notes and looking up the dictionary were necessary to avoid writing errors or grammatical mistakes in the lyrics presented in the music software. Some of the software or web pages that assisted songs for vocabulary acquisition in the participants' responses included YouTube, Google Translate, and Grammarly.

The vast majority of participants affirmed the positive effect of songs on vocabulary acquisition and indicated that they would continue to use songs as a learning tool in the future. This indicates that participants had positive perceptions and experiences of the effectiveness of songs in language learning. They realized that songs can be used to improve pronunciation accuracy, understand the meaning of vocabulary, and learn fixed collocations and other language skills. This positive attitude further supports the feasibility of music as a teaching resource. It is noteworthy that a few participants expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of songs in vocabulary acquisition at the initial stage, but through careful reflection and answering questions during the process of completing the questionnaire, their attitudes shifted and they began to recognize the positive effect of songs on vocabulary acquisition. This shows that the research process itself had an impact on the participants' perceptions and cognitions, helping them to think more deeply and recognize the value of music as a learning tool. This shift further enhanced the role of music in vocabulary acquisition. In addition, some of the participants suggested that they would actively try to help their vocabulary acquisition by watching English movies in addition to listening to songs. This indicates that participants are aware of the importance of diverse learning resources and approaches to vocabulary acquisition. Watching English movies can provide more linguistic input and also help learners better understand the use of vocabulary and the context through the combination of visual and auditory. This finding suggests that learners are consciously trying multiple learning paths to enrich their vocabulary acquisition experience. Overall, the participants' positive attitudes and endorsements confirm the effectiveness of music as a vocabulary acquisition tool. Learners have access to more language input and cognitive stimulation through music, which helps them to make progress in pronunciation, vocabulary comprehension, and language skills. In addition, participants' awareness and use of diverse learning resources showed the importance they placed on an integrated approach to learning.

In summary, the findings of this paper suggest that music has a positive impact on vocabulary acquisition among ESL undergraduates in the UM School of Languages. Participants generally agreed that songs improved pronunciation, enhanced vocabulary comprehension, and helped in learning pragmatics and fixed collocations of words and phrases. However, there were some challenges such as articulated treatment of pronunciation, difficulty in understanding slang, learning new vocabulary

and acquiring correct grammar. Participants overcome these difficulties by listening and imitating more, finding relevant resources, discussing with native speakers, and aids. These findings provide valuable insights into educational practice and suggest that teachers and students actively use music as a learning tool while seeking out relevant supporting resources and instruction to maximize vocabulary acquisition and English skill development. These findings are not only instructive for undergraduate ESL students at UM's Faculty of Languages and Linguistics, but may also provide useful insights for other similar studies and English language education practices.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper conducted a survey study on ESL undergraduate students at the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics at Universiti Malaya (UM) to investigate the effect of music on their vocabulary acquisition. By analyzing the questionnaire responses of 81 participants, the vast majority of participants affirmed the positive role of music in vocabulary acquisition, in line with the results of previous studies.

They generally believed that listening to English songs could improve pronunciation accuracy, deepen their understanding of the meaning of words, and learn fixed collocations of words and phrases. This finding is consistent with previous research findings and further validates the effectiveness of music as a tool for vocabulary acquisition. Second, this paper also found that participants had different preferences for different types of music. Pop music was their most preferred type of music, followed by rock, jazz, and rap. This result suggests that when using music for vocabulary acquisition, teachers and learners can be more intentional in choosing music that suits students' tastes to increase interest and engagement in learning. In addition, participants faced a number of challenges when using music for vocabulary acquisition. These included pronunciation issues, understanding the connotative meaning of lyrics, grammar usage and spelling. However, by listening and imitating more, finding relevant resources, discussing with native speakers, and using aids, participants were able to overcome these challenges and improve their vocabulary acquisition.

The quantity and quality of data in this study were adequate and well presented. By collecting responses from 81 participants, a relatively large sample size was obtained for this paper, making the findings representative. In addition, the study is comprehensive, exploring not only the effects of music on vocabulary acquisition, but also the participants' preferences for music and the different ways of using music as a learning tool, which is practical and widely applicable. However, this study also has some limitations. The limitations of the study population limit the generalizability and applicability of the findings. Student populations from other schools and different age groups and backgrounds were not covered, so caution is needed in applying the findings to a broader population. Second, a portion of the study data relied on participants' self-reports and subjective evaluations, with the potential for subjective bias and recall error. Future studies could combine objectivity measurement tools and observational data to provide more comprehensive and objective results.

Based on the findings of this paper, future research could further expand the study population to include students from other schools, different age groups and backgrounds, and even screen categories from ESL students' native language characteristics to increase the external validity of the findings. Second, objective measurement tools, such as language tests and speech analysis, can be combined to provide more comprehensive and objective data support. In addition, the specific effects of different music genres on vocabulary acquisition can be explored to further understand the educational potential of different music styles. Finally, relevant training and guidance can be provided to language education practitioners to help them effectively use music as a teaching tool to enhance the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

This study further validates the positive effects of music as a tool for vocabulary acquisition and suggests related studies thereafter to promote the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition in music for language learners. It is hoped that these findings will be helpful to language education practitioners and learners, and provide references and guidance for future related research.

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