From Lyrics to Lexis: Exploring Students' Perceptions of Modified English Songs in Vocabulary Learning

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive qualitative study explores seventh-grade students' perceptions of using modified English songs to enhance vocabulary learning at SMPN 3 Minasatene, Indonesia. The research was conducted over four weeks, during which data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three students selected via purposive sampling. The interviews were analyzed thematically following the procedures of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that students viewed modified songs as engaging and helpful tools for learning vocabulary. Adapting song lyrics to match students' proficiency levels helped them understand word meanings more easily, improve pronunciation, and apply new vocabulary in appropriate contexts. Moreover, the use of songs created a more enjoyable and motivating classroom environment, enhancing students' confidence in learning English. These results suggest that integrating modified songs into vocabulary instruction can strengthen both linguistic and affective aspects of learning by providing meaningful, memorable, and student-centered language experiences. The study highlights the importance of creative instructional media for young learners and encourages teachers to incorporate modified songs as a practical approach to vocabulary development in English language classrooms.

Keywords: Modified Songs; Vocabulary Acquisition; Student Perceptions; Learning Media; English Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery remains a crucial component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, forming the foundation for students' ability to communicate effectively across speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, learners struggle to express ideas and understand others, which can impede broader language development (Shadika, Rijal, & Amir, 2017). Because vocabulary supports all areas of communication, it requires not only memorization but also meaningful engagement through context-rich instruction (Nation, 2013).

However, in many classrooms, vocabulary is still taught through teacher-centered and translation-based methods, which often fail to sustain learners' interest or encourage long-term retention (Latip, 2022).

To address these limitations, educators have increasingly integrated music-based media, particularly songs, as an engaging and motivating tool for language learning. Songs provide exposure to authentic language, rhythm, and pronunciation while creating an enjoyable classroom atmosphere that reduces anxiety and promotes active participation (Johnson, 2020; Medina, 2022). Several studies have demonstrated that songs enhance vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, and listening comprehension (Martinsen, 2019; Good, Russo, & Sullivan, 2015). Recent research also highlights that song-based learning can promote positive attitudes toward English learning among young students (Rokhmawati, Aslan, & Farchan, 2025; Amelia & Suranto, 2025).

Despite these advantages, many existing studies have focused primarily on the general use of songs rather than on modified songs specifically designed for language instruction. Conventional songs often contain complex vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, or cultural references that are not suitable for beginner or young learners. Earlier research seldom explored how adapting and simplifying song lyrics to target specific vocabulary can directly support learners' comprehension and productive use of words. As noted by Ningtyas (2023), modifying song lyrics according to learners' proficiency and lesson objectives can make vocabulary learning more structured and effective. Yet, empirical studies investigating students' perceptions of such modified songs remain scarce, especially in Indonesian junior high school contexts.

This gap is particularly relevant today, as English teachers seek creative and technology-integrated approaches to make vocabulary learning more interactive and contextualized. Recent innovations in EFL pedagogy (Efendy & Haq, 2023; Firdaus & Ritonga, 2024) emphasize the importance of adaptive learning media that align with students' cognitive and linguistic levels. However, little is known about how students perceive modified English songs songs intentionally rewritten or adjusted to introduce targeted vocabulary while maintaining musical appeal. Understanding students' perspectives is essential because positive perceptions can increase engagement, motivation, and the willingness to practice new vocabulary in real contexts (Lolong, 2019; Dörnyei, 2001).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by exploring seventh-grade students' perceptions of using modified English songs as a medium for vocabulary learning at SMPN 3 Minasatene, Indonesia. By focusing on students' experiences and attitudes, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how customized, level-appropriate musical materials can enhance vocabulary acquisition and promote more meaningful, enjoyable learning in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the study adds to recent discussions on creative and context-sensitive

instructional innovations for young learners in Indonesia's evolving educational landscape (Judijanto et al., 2025; Wijayati et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary in EFL Learning

Vocabulary knowledge is vital for learners to access background information, articulate ideas, comprehend new concepts, and participate effectively in communication (Sedita, 2005). Similarly, Liando (2012) argues that strong vocabulary acquisition enables learners to become competent speakers, attentive listeners, and proficient readers and writers. These perspectives highlight vocabulary as a core element of language proficiency that must be prioritized in instructional practice.

Songs as Media for Vocabulary Learning

Using songs as instructional media has long been recognized as an effective way to enhance vocabulary learning. Songs offer authentic and meaningful linguistic input, exposing learners to natural rhythm, stress patterns, and diverse accents. Martinsen (2019) states that songs provide rich and contextualized opportunities for students to encounter new lexical items in enjoyable ways. Furthermore, Johnson (2020) found that students taught through songs demonstrated significantly greater vocabulary comprehension than those taught through traditional methods. The rhythmic and repetitive nature of songs increases memorability and enhances learners' affective engagement.

Modified Songs for Vocabulary Development

Although songs offer many pedagogical benefits, some learners may struggle with fast-paced lyrics or complex vocabulary. Modified songs provide a solution by simplifying lyrics, adjusting difficulty levels, or embedding specific target vocabulary. According to Intani (2012), modified song lyrics are more effective for vocabulary acquisition than unmodified songs or conventional techniques. Nation (2001) also emphasizes that meaningful repetition such as repeated exposure through songs supports long-term memory retention. Modified songs thus serve both as engaging entertainment and as a purposeful pedagogical tool.

Students' Perceptions and Learning Outcomes

Students' perceptions are essential in determining whether an instructional strategy is effective. Positive perceptions toward learning media can enhance motivation, participation, and overall academic performance. Lolong (2019) argues that students' perceptions strongly influence their learning interest and level of engagement. Additionally, Fisher (2006) highlights that students' learning experiences are shaped by their perceptions, which function as mediators that

determine how they interpret and respond to instructional activities. Therefore, examining learners' perceptions of modified songs is crucial in evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of this medium in EFL vocabulary learning.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' perceptions of using modified English songs in vocabulary learning. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to obtain rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives through non-numerical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method, allowing flexibility for probing and clarification while ensuring coverage of key topics. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' perceptions of modified songs as a medium for vocabulary development. This design was considered appropriate because learners' perceptions play a crucial role in determining the feasibility and effectiveness of instructional strategies in language learning (Dörnyei, 2007).

The participants consisted of three seventh-grade students from SMPN 3 Minasatene selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure the inclusion of participants who had direct experience with vocabulary learning activities involving modified English songs. As Patton (2015) explains, purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally select individuals who can provide rich and relevant information aligned with the research focus. The selected students were the first-semester learners considered to possess sufficient exposure to English vocabulary instruction, enabling them to meaningfully reflect on their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of modified songs as learning media.

Instrument and Procedure

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 15 questions designed to elicit detailed information about students' perceptions of modified songs in vocabulary learning. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for exploring participants' viewpoints while still providing structure and comparability across responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interview questions were organized into four thematic areas:
1. Modified Songs – exploring students' general views of using modified songs and their perceived effectiveness in supporting vocabulary learning.
2. Vocabulary Meaning – examining students' ability to understand and infer meanings of new words introduced through modified songs.
3. Pronunciation – probing how song-based learning influenced students' pronunciation accuracy and confidence.

4. Vocabulary Usage – assessing students' ability to apply newly learned vocabulary in meaningful or real-life contexts.

These categories were aligned with the objectives of vocabulary instruction and the pedagogical functions of song-based learning.

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes three interconnected steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the first step, data reduction, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and organized systematically for analysis. The researcher carefully reviewed the transcripts, coding and condensing the information by selecting only the segments that directly related to the focus of the study—students' perceptions of using modified songs and how these influenced their understanding of vocabulary meaning, pronunciation, and usage. Any irrelevant, repetitive, or off-topic statements were excluded to ensure the analysis remained concise, relevant, and clearly aligned with the research objectives.

The next step, data display, involved organizing the reduced data into thematic categories that captured the essence of participants' experiences. The researcher grouped responses under key themes and incorporated representative quotations from students to illustrate their perspectives and support the interpretation. Presenting the data in narrative summaries helped reveal connections among themes and provided a clearer understanding of emerging patterns within the data. This stage allowed the researcher to visualize how different aspects of students' experiences with modified songs related to their engagement and vocabulary learning outcomes.

The final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, focused on interpreting the identified themes to derive meaningful conclusions about students' perceptions. The researcher analyzed recurring patterns and trends, such as improved understanding of vocabulary meanings, better pronunciation, and enhanced ability to use new words in context through the use of modified songs. These conclusions were continually compared with the raw data, relevant theories, and the study's objectives to ensure they were accurate and credible. Verification also involved returning to earlier data and refining interpretations to confirm their consistency and validity, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences and maintained the overall trustworthiness of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the interview data revealed four major themes reflecting students' perceptions of using modified songs in vocabulary learning: (1) perceptions of modified songs as learning media, (2) vocabulary meaning, (3) vocabulary pronunciation, and (4) vocabulary usage. Overall, students expressed positive views

regarding the use of modified songs, highlighting both cognitive and affective benefits.

Perceptions of Modified Songs

Students demonstrated consistently positive perceptions toward the use of modified songs in the classroom. They reported that simplified and level-appropriate song lyrics made learning more enjoyable, engaging, and memorable. One participant explained that "the song felt unique and motivated me to learn new vocabulary" (HR, Interview, 25/08/2025). Students also noted that the use of songs created a more active and dynamic classroom atmosphere, reducing boredom and increasing participation. These perceptions suggest that modified songs function not only as instructional tools but also as affective support mechanisms that enhance motivation and interest in vocabulary learning, aligning with research emphasizing the motivational value of music in language learning (Medina, 2002).

Perceptions of Vocabulary Meaning

Participants reported that modified songs significantly supported their understanding of vocabulary meaning. They explained that simplified lyrics, contextualized within meaningful and familiar themes, enabled them to grasp word meanings more quickly. For example, a student described how learning the word *triangle* through a modified song helped them "immediately understand its meaning without difficulty." These findings indicate that contextualized and meaningful language input such as that provided by modified songs—facilitates semantic processing and comprehension, consistent with the principles of contextual vocabulary learning (Nation, 2001).

Perceptions of Vocabulary Pronunciation

Students also perceived modified songs as beneficial for improving pronunciation. They highlighted that repeated exposure to song lyrics encouraged them to practice pronouncing new words with greater confidence. One participant explained that they were able to pronounce the word *cabbage* more accurately after repeatedly singing it within the song. Repetition, rhythm, and melody appear to support phonological awareness and articulation, echoing findings that musical input can enhance pronunciation accuracy through rhythmic reinforcement (Murphey, 1992).

Perceptions of Vocabulary Usage

Finally, students indicated that vocabulary learned through modified songs was easier to apply in both spoken and written contexts. They reported feeling more confident using newly learned vocabulary because the songs provided clear examples of how words were embedded in meaningful sentences. One participant stated, "I feel more confident writing new words because song lyrics contain many examples of words and sentences that are easy for me to understand" (NF, Interview, 25/08/2025). These perceptions suggest that modified songs help students transfer vocabulary from recognition to productive use, supporting claims

that meaningful repetition and contextual exposure contribute to vocabulary retention and use (Webb, 2007).

Overall, the findings indicate that modified songs positively influence students' motivation, comprehension of vocabulary meaning, pronunciation accuracy, and ability to use vocabulary in context. Students' perceptions reinforce the potential of modified songs as an innovative and effective instructional strategy for vocabulary development in EFL classrooms. These results align with existing literature underscoring the cognitive and affective benefits of music-based language learning.

The findings of this study indicate that modified English songs have a positive impact on students' vocabulary learning, particularly in the areas of motivation, understanding of meaning, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. Students expressed that learning vocabulary through songs made the process more engaging and enjoyable, which in turn helped them remember new words more easily. These findings support existing theories on music-assisted vocabulary learning in EFL contexts and provide new insight into how modifying song lyrics to match learners' levels can enhance language acquisition.

Students' responses reflected that modified songs significantly increased their motivation and engagement during vocabulary lessons. Simplified and level-appropriate lyrics made learning activities feel more enjoyable and less stressful. Many students mentioned that singing helped them focus and retain new vocabulary better because the rhythm and melody made the words easier to remember. This finding aligns with Medina's (2002) view that music reduces anxiety and promotes a more relaxed learning environment, as well as Dörnyei's (2001) argument that enjoyable learning experiences foster intrinsic motivation and sustained participation. In this way, modified songs acted as motivational scaffolds that reduced affective barriers commonly faced by young EFL learners and encouraged greater classroom involvement.

Another key finding was that students were able to understand vocabulary meanings more easily when words were embedded in meaningful song lyrics. By learning new words in context, students could infer meanings naturally without relying heavily on translation. For example, when learning the word triangle through a song about shapes, students quickly grasped its meaning and could recall it later during classroom discussions. This supports Schmitt's (2008) argument that repeated exposure to vocabulary within contextualized input enhances depth of word knowledge and long-term retention. The results also resonate with Nation's (2001) and Laufer and Hulstijn's (2001) perspectives that meaningful and comprehensible input strengthens learners' ability to internalize and apply new vocabulary effectively.

The study further revealed that modified songs helped students improve their pronunciation. The repetitive and rhythmic features of songs allowed learners to practice articulating words accurately and confidently. Participants reported that

singing reinforced the correct pronunciation of challenging words such as cabbage or vegetable, making them more comfortable when speaking English. These findings support Murphey's (1992) view that melody and rhythm enhance phonological memory and aid in pronunciation learning. Similarly, Goodwin (2013) emphasizes that pronunciation teaching becomes more effective when learners receive repeated and natural auditory input—conditions that are naturally provided through singing. In this context, modified songs served as an enjoyable and accessible pronunciation tool that provided learners with repeated exposure and immediate feedback.

In addition to pronunciation, students demonstrated greater confidence in using new vocabulary in both spoken and written contexts after engaging with modified songs. They could recall and use words from the songs when completing assignments or communicating in class, showing a transition from passive to active vocabulary use. This finding is consistent with Webb's (2007) argument that repeated exposure to vocabulary in meaningful contexts supports the development of productive vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Nation (2013) notes that repeated encounters with words in different but related contexts help learners build stronger semantic and syntactic connections, facilitating better usage. The ability of students to apply vocabulary from songs in their writing and conversation also reflects the value of contextualized learning, as highlighted by Tschirner (2004), who stresses that authentic input promotes natural language production.

Overall, the findings emphasize the pedagogical value of using modified songs as instructional media for vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms. By combining enjoyment, repetition, and contextualized input, modified songs address both the cognitive and emotional needs of learners. They not only make vocabulary learning more memorable and meaningful but also help students overcome fear and boredom often associated with language study. This supports Fonseca-Mora's (2000) assertion that music-based learning bridges affective engagement and linguistic development. The study contributes to growing evidence that integrating modified songs into English teaching can create a more dynamic, student-centered learning environment that fosters both vocabulary growth and positive attitudes toward language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the use of modified songs provides an effective and enjoyable approach to improving students' vocabulary learning in English classes. By adjusting song lyrics to match learners' proficiency levels, teachers can create a more accessible and meaningful learning experience that encourages participation and comprehension. Students in this study expressed that learning vocabulary through modified songs helped them understand the meaning of new words more easily, improved their pronunciation through repetition, and increased their confidence in using vocabulary both in speaking and writing. The rhythm, melody, and repetition found in songs helped reinforce word recognition and retention in a

natural and enjoyable way, making the learning process less intimidating and more engaging.

The results also show that modified songs play an important role in creating a positive classroom atmosphere. Many students reported feeling more motivated and relaxed when learning through songs, which helped them focus and participate more actively. Unlike traditional vocabulary instruction, which often relies on memorization or written exercises, using modified songs makes learning interactive and fun. This not only supports vocabulary acquisition but also builds students' interest in learning English. When students feel comfortable and motivated, they are more likely to take part in classroom discussions and practice using new words in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, the use of modified songs allows teachers to integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills within one learning activity. While students listen and sing, they also internalize correct pronunciation and word patterns. When teachers extend the activity by including follow-up exercises, such as writing short paragraphs or dialogues using the learned vocabulary, students can apply the new words in creative ways. This shows that modified songs can be used as a bridge between receptive and productive language skills, supporting both understanding and active use of vocabulary.

In practical terms, teachers can adapt familiar or simple songs by modifying their lyrics to include target vocabulary related to classroom themes or lesson objectives. This approach ensures that the songs are both enjoyable and relevant to the learning material. Schools may also encourage the use of music-based learning by providing access to digital tools or media that support song-based teaching. The findings of this study highlight that modified songs not only make vocabulary learning more engaging but also enhance understanding, pronunciation, and confidence. By combining enjoyment with meaningful language practice, modified songs offer an effective, creative, and student-centered way to strengthen vocabulary mastery in English language learning.

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