

An Investigation of Students' Interest in Learning English Pop Songs at SMAN 4 Wajo

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of tenth-grade students' interest in learning English through English pop songs at SMAN 4 Wajo and identified the internal and external factors influencing that interest. The research employed an integrated mixed-method design. Quantitative data were collected through a 12-item questionnaire organized around four indicators: feeling of enjoyment, students' interest, acceptance, and students' engagement. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with selected students and classroom observations. Questionnaire data were analyzed using score percentages and interest-level categories, while qualitative data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and triangulation. The results showed a total questionnaire score of 694 out of a maximum of 840, producing an overall percentage of 82.62%, which was categorized as high. Feeling of enjoyment contributed the largest share of the total score (186; 26.80%), followed by acceptance (171; 24.64%), students' interest (170; 24.50%), and students' engagement (167; 24.06%). Qualitative findings identified four internal factors - enjoyment, motivation, curiosity about lyrics and vocabulary, and personal preference for pop songs - and two external factors - teachers and learning activities, and accessibility through social media and digital platforms. These findings indicate that English pop songs can provide an enjoyable and relevant learning medium that supports students' interest, motivation, and participation in English learning.

Keywords: Students' Interest; English Pop Songs; English Learning; Internal Factors; External Factors

INTRODUCTION

English functions as an international language in communication, education, technology, and cultural exchange. For Indonesian senior high school students, learning English can provide access to wider academic information and future educational and professional opportunities. Nevertheless, the learning process is not always experienced positively. Students may face limited vocabulary, low confidence, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation, especially when learning activities are perceived as monotonous. For this reason, English instruction needs to address not only language content but also students' willingness to pay attention, participate, and remain engaged in learning.

Interest is an important psychological condition in learning because it directs attention and encourages learners to re-engage with particular content. Hidi and Renninger (2006) explain that interest develops through phases and can grow when learners repeatedly encounter meaningful and attractive learning experiences. More recent work also emphasizes that situational features of learning activities can stimulate attention, effort, and positive emotional engagement (Guo & Fryer, 2025). In the English classroom, this means that learning media and activities that are relevant to students' preferences may help create conditions in which students are more willing to participate and persist.

One form of media that is familiar to many adolescents is English pop music. Songs combine language with melody, rhythm, repetition, and authentic expressions. These features can make linguistic input more memorable and less threatening. Research on song-based language learning has reported benefits for vocabulary, listening, pronunciation, motivation, and classroom engagement. Uswatun Hasanah et al. (2025), for example, review the cognitive, affective, and linguistic benefits of songs in English language teaching. Rzayeva and Asgarova (2026) similarly describe songs as a form of cross-cultural language exposure that can familiarize learners with pronunciation, stress, and intonation.

English pop songs may be particularly relevant for students because they are frequently encountered beyond the classroom. Digital platforms and social media provide continuous access to songs, lyrics, short video clips, and music-related content. As a result, students can bring prior familiarity with melodies, singers, and expressions into formal learning. Wong et al. (2020) argue that interest can be strengthened through an 'interest loop' in which attractive experiences encourage repeated engagement. When teachers connect classroom tasks with materials students already encounter in their daily lives, learning can become more personally meaningful.

The context of SMAN 4 Wajo provided a clear reason to investigate this issue. During a previous teaching-assistance experience at the school, the researcher observed that students often appeared more enthusiastic and engaged when English songs were used than during more conventional learning activities. Students

listened to the audio, followed the lyrics, and showed curiosity about unfamiliar vocabulary. These observations suggested that songs had potential not merely as entertainment but as a medium capable of stimulating students' interest in English learning.

Previous studies have commonly examined songs in relation to particular language skills or motivation. Ayu Sapitri and Suryadi (2023) found a positive relationship between students' interest in English songs and listening skills. Other studies discussed in the thesis focused on motivation, listening comprehension, or students' perceptions of using popular songs. The present study takes a more specific interest-oriented perspective by measuring students' level of interest in learning English through English pop songs and by identifying the internal and external factors that shape that interest. Accordingly, the study addressed two questions: (1) What is the level of students' interest in learning English pop songs at SMAN 4 Wajo? and (2) What factors influence students' interest in learning English pop songs at SMAN 4 Wajo?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning Interest

Learning interest refers to a learner's tendency to pay attention to, feel attracted to, and willingly engage in a learning activity. It involves both affective and behavioral components: students may enjoy a topic, consider it valuable, focus on it, and choose to participate. Hidi and Renninger (2006) describe interest as both a psychological state and a developing predisposition to re-engage with content. Their four-phase model is useful for understanding how an initially triggered situational interest can be maintained and gradually develop into more enduring individual interest.

Interest is closely connected with motivation and engagement. Li et al. (2024) show that learning environments that support intrinsic motivation can strengthen learners' feelings of autonomy and relatedness. In practice, students who find a learning experience enjoyable and personally relevant are more likely to invest effort and remain involved. The thesis operationalized learning interest through four indicators: feeling of enjoyment, students' interest, acceptance, and students' engagement. Together, these indicators capture positive emotion, attraction to the learning material, willingness to accept songs as a learning medium, and active participation in song-based classroom activities.

English Pop Songs as Learning Media

English pop songs can be used as instructional media because they present language in a meaningful and memorable form. Lyrics expose students to vocabulary and expressions in context, while melody and rhythm provide repeated auditory patterns. Songs often contain recurring choruses and phrases, which may support

retention. Medina (1990) reported that music can facilitate second-language vocabulary acquisition, while more recent discussions of song-based instruction emphasize the role of repetition, meaningful context, and affective engagement.

Songs can also expose learners to aspects of authentic spoken language. Through listening, students can encounter natural pronunciation, connected speech, stress, and intonation. Ray (2020) notes that authentic materials can support communicative competence by giving learners access to real-life language use. Rzaeva and Asgarova (2026) likewise highlight the potential of music to support multilingual and cross-cultural language learning. For senior high school students, pop songs may be particularly effective because they match familiar youth culture and can bridge informal exposure with classroom learning.

As learning media, songs can be integrated into activities such as listening practice, lyric completion, vocabulary analysis, pronunciation practice, singing, and group discussion. Novianto et al. (2024) emphasize that instructional media can stimulate students' thoughts, feelings, attention, and willingness to learn. When song-based tasks are carefully designed, students are not simply listening passively; they can interact with vocabulary and meaning, compare interpretations with peers, and respond to teacher prompts.

Factors Influencing Students' Interest

The thesis groups the factors influencing students' interest into internal and external dimensions. Internal factors arise from the students themselves and include enjoyment, motivation, curiosity about song lyrics and vocabulary, and personal preference for pop songs. These factors are consistent with the idea that interest develops when learners experience positive emotion, perceive personal relevance, and have reasons to explore content further. Hidi and Renninger (2021) emphasize that educators can motivate learning by developing and sustaining interest rather than treating interest as a fixed learner trait.

External factors relate to the learning environment. In this study, the most salient external influences were teachers and learning activities, together with the accessibility of English songs through social media and digital platforms. Teachers determine how songs are selected and transformed into learning tasks, while technology increases students' opportunities to encounter English outside school. Althof et al. (2025) similarly distinguish internal and external influences on English learning, suggesting that students' performance and participation emerge from the interaction between personal conditions and environmental support.

Previous Research and Research Gap

Ayu Sapitri and Suryadi (2023) investigated students' interest in English songs and listening skills and reported a substantial positive relationship. Other studies summarized in the thesis showed that song-based English instruction can improve

motivation and generate positive student perceptions, particularly in listening classes. These studies support the general value of songs but tend to focus on skill achievement, motivation, or perception as separate outcomes. The present study differs by focusing directly on the level and composition of students' learning interest at SMAN 4 Wajo. It combines questionnaire evidence with interviews and observation, allowing the study to report both a quantitative interest level and qualitative explanations of why students are interested. This combination provides a contextual description of how enjoyment, motivation, curiosity, preference, teacher practices, and digital access work together in a senior high school setting.

METHOD

Design and Samples

The study employed a mixed-method research design that integrated quantitative and qualitative data. The design was selected to provide numerical evidence about the level of students' interest while also exploring students' experiences and the factors underlying that interest. Guetterman et al. (2015) explain that mixed-method research can produce a more complete interpretation by bringing quantitative and qualitative results together. The research was conducted at SMAN 4 Wajo, a setting selected on the basis of the researcher's prior teaching-assistance experience and observations of students' responses to English songs. The participants were tenth-grade students of class X Aktif at SMAN 4 Wajo. The quantitative questionnaire results reported in the thesis were obtained from 14 students. For the qualitative component, selected students participated in semi-structured interviews. The study focused on students rather than teachers as the primary research participants, while classroom observation was used to document students' attention, enthusiasm, participation, confidence, emotional responses, and interaction during song-related English learning activities.

Instrument and Procedure

Three principal instruments supported the study: a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and observation. The questionnaire consisted of 12 positive statements, with three statements for each of four indicators: feeling of enjoyment, students' interest, acceptance, and students' engagement. Responses were measured with a five-point Likert-type scale. The interview explored students' English-learning experiences, exposure to English songs outside school, motivation, perceived benefits, preferred song-based activities, and expectations. Observation guidelines were used to record visible indicators of interest and participation. Documentation such as learning materials and classroom photographs was used as supporting evidence in the thesis.

Questionnaires were distributed to the tenth-grade students to obtain structured quantitative data on their interest in learning English through songs. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with selected students to obtain deeper

explanations of their experiences and opinions. Classroom observation was carried out during English learning activities to capture students' behavioral and emotional responses. The different sources were used in a complementary manner so that questionnaire patterns could be interpreted alongside interview statements and observed classroom behavior.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed using scores and percentages. The maximum possible score was calculated from the number of respondents, the number of questionnaire items, and the highest response value. The thesis categorized scores of 76-100% as high interest, 57-75.9% as medium interest, and 0-55.9% as low interest. The contribution of each indicator was calculated by dividing its score by the total questionnaire score and multiplying by 100. Qualitative data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and triangulation. Triangulation compared evidence from interviews, observation, and supporting documentation to strengthen the credibility of the interpretation. Rana and Chimoriya (2025) similarly note that triangulation is valuable in mixed-method research for cross-checking findings across data sources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overall Level of Students' Interest

The questionnaire results showed a strong overall level of interest in learning English through English pop songs. Across 14 students and 12 questionnaire items, the study obtained a total score of 694 from a maximum possible score of 840. This produced an overall percentage of 82.62%. According to the interest-level classification used in the thesis, 82.62% falls within the high category. The result indicates that song-based English learning was generally received positively by the participating students.

Table 1. Questionnaire Scores by Learning-Interest Indicator

Indicator	Total Score	Contribution
Feeling of Enjoyment	186	26.80%
Students' Interest	170	24.50%
Acceptance	171	24.64%
Students' Engagement	167	24.06%
Total	694	100%

Feeling of enjoyment received the highest indicator score, 186, accounting for 26.80% of the total questionnaire score. This suggests that positive emotion was a particularly visible component of students' interest. Students frequently reported feeling happy when learning English through songs and when they were able to

understand lyrics or answer song-related questions correctly. The songs' familiar and entertaining character appeared to reduce monotony and create a more comfortable learning atmosphere. Acceptance ranked second with a score of 171 (24.64%). Students generally accepted songs as a useful medium for English learning and recognized benefits for understanding language and developing English skills. Students' interest followed closely with a score of 170 (24.50%). Responses to statements about learning English, vocabulary, and understanding songs showed that students were attracted to song-based learning and were willing to explore the language embedded in the lyrics.

Students' engagement received 167 points (24.06%), the lowest of the four contributions, although the percentage remained close to the other indicators. Questionnaire responses showed that many students answered questions, discussed lyric meanings with friends, and participated in activities such as singing, completing lyrics, or group tasks. The lower relative contribution of engagement does not indicate low engagement; rather, it shows that engagement contributed slightly less than enjoyment, acceptance, and expressed interest within the total score.

Table 2. Overall Level of Students' Interest

Respondents	Items	Obtained Score	Maximum Score	Percentage	Category
14	12	694	840	82.62%	High

Internal and External Factors Influencing Interest

The interview and observation findings explain why the questionnaire produced a high overall interest level. Six main factors were identified. Four were internal factors: enjoyment and interest in English songs, motivation to learn English, curiosity about song lyrics and vocabulary, and personal preference for pop songs. Two were external factors: the influence of teachers and learning activities, and the accessibility of songs through social media and digital platforms.

Table 3. Factors Influencing Students' Interest in Learning Through English Pop Songs

Type	Factor	Summary of Evidence
Internal	Enjoyment	Songs made learning feel interesting, pleasant, and less monotonous.
Internal	Motivation	Students wanted to understand lyrics, gain knowledge, and improve English.
Internal	Curiosity	Unfamiliar lyrics and vocabulary encouraged students to search for meanings.
Internal	Personal preference	Familiarity with preferred pop songs increased enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

Type	Factor	Summary of Evidence
External	Teacher and activities	Games, lyric completion, discussion, and active participation increased interest.
External	Digital accessibility	Social media and digital platforms provided frequent access to English songs.

Enjoyment was strongly supported across the data sources. Interview responses described song-based learning as more enjoyable than conventional activities, while the questionnaire identified feeling of enjoyment as the largest indicator contribution. This convergence suggests that positive emotion was not only reported in interviews but also reflected consistently in the structured questionnaire. The pattern is compatible with Hidi and Renninger's (2006) view that positive and meaningful experiences can trigger and maintain interest.

Motivation formed a second internal factor. Students described songs as encouraging them to learn because English is internationally useful, because they wanted to understand the content of songs, and because learning with music felt pleasant. Motivation was therefore connected to both instrumental reasons and enjoyment. Hidi and Renninger (2021) emphasize that interest and motivation can reinforce one another when learning experiences give students reasons to continue engaging with content. Curiosity about lyrics and vocabulary also sustained interest. Students often recognized songs from social media but did not fully understand their meaning until the songs were examined in class. This gap between familiarity and understanding stimulated questions about words, expressions, and messages. Such curiosity encouraged independent vocabulary exploration and helped transform ordinary music exposure into a learning opportunity.

Personal preference for pop songs further influenced students' responses. Students did not necessarily like every English song, but they showed greater enthusiasm for songs that matched their tastes. This finding is important for classroom use: the educational value of songs depends partly on relevance to learners. Teachers therefore need to consider age, language level, content appropriateness, and students' musical preferences when selecting material. The teacher and the design of learning activities emerged as a major external influence. Students preferred interactive tasks such as games, completing missing lyrics, singing, vocabulary exercises, and discussion. Purnama (2018) characterizes the teacher as a facilitator who creates learning conditions rather than merely transmits information. In the present context, the teacher's role included selecting suitable songs and designing tasks that transformed listening into active language learning.

Finally, digital accessibility strengthened students' exposure to English songs. Students reported encountering songs through TikTok and other digital platforms, and the thesis also discusses access through YouTube and Spotify. This continuous exposure means that song-based learning can extend beyond scheduled classroom time. Students can replay songs, compare lyrics, practice pronunciation, and

encounter vocabulary repeatedly. The accessibility of digital media therefore supports both situational interest in class and continued engagement outside school.

The central finding of this study is that students' interest in learning English through English pop songs was high, with an overall questionnaire percentage of 82.62%. This result should be understood as a combination of four closely balanced dimensions rather than as the effect of a single indicator. Enjoyment had the largest contribution, but acceptance, expressed interest, and engagement were only slightly lower. The balance suggests that students did not merely enjoy listening to music; they also accepted songs as educationally useful and participated in song-related classroom tasks.

The strong role of enjoyment is consistent with theories of interest development. Hidi and Renninger (2006) argue that situational interest can be triggered by features of an activity and can be maintained when learners experience value and positive affect. English pop songs offer several such features simultaneously: familiar melodies, repetition, authentic language, emotional content, and cultural relevance. For students who already encounter pop music in daily life, the shift from entertainment to learning may reduce the psychological distance between school English and everyday experience.

The qualitative findings also show that interest was maintained by curiosity. Students often knew a song before understanding its lyrics. Classroom learning gave them a reason to examine the meaning of familiar language, and this discovery process encouraged further vocabulary learning. This mechanism helps explain why songs can be effective even when the research goal is interest rather than language achievement. The learning material contains an immediate question for students - 'What does this song mean?' - and the answer requires attention to vocabulary, expressions, pronunciation, and context.

The findings are broadly aligned with previous research reported in the thesis. Ayu Sapitri and Suryadi (2023) found that students' interest in English songs was positively associated with listening skills. Uswatun Hasanah et al. (2025) describe songs as providing cognitive, affective, and linguistic benefits in English language teaching. Rzayeva and Asgarova (2026) emphasize that songs expose learners to language and culture in a memorable auditory form. The present study adds a contextual contribution by showing how these potential benefits are experienced by tenth-grade students at SMAN 4 Wajo and by identifying the factors that make the medium attractive to them.

An important implication is that songs alone do not automatically create sustained interest. Teacher design matters. The interview findings show that students valued activities such as lyric completion, games, individual singing opportunities, vocabulary tasks, and discussion. This indicates that the educational effect depends on how songs are used. A song can become background entertainment if students are only passive listeners; by contrast, a carefully designed task can direct attention

toward meaning, pronunciation, vocabulary, or interaction. Novianto et al. (2024) emphasize that learning media are effective when they stimulate learners' attention and willingness to learn, which is consistent with the active use of songs found in this study.

Digital access also changes the learning context. Students' frequent encounters with English songs through social media and streaming platforms create repeated exposure beyond the classroom. Wong et al. (2020) explain that repeated engagement can help sustain interest over time. In this study, digital exposure supported familiarity with songs, while classroom activities helped students convert that familiarity into understanding. The relationship is therefore reciprocal: informal exposure can trigger interest, and formal learning can deepen the value students obtain from the media they already use. The results have practical implications for English teachers at the senior high school level. Teachers can use English pop songs as complementary learning media, particularly for activities involving listening, vocabulary, pronunciation, lyric interpretation, and discussion. Song selection should consider students' proficiency, age, preferences, clarity of lyrics, and appropriateness of content. Activities should also provide active roles for students so that enjoyment is connected with meaningful language use rather than remaining purely recreational.

The study nevertheless has limitations. The quantitative findings were derived from 14 students in a single class at one school, so the percentages should be interpreted as descriptive of this context rather than generalized to all senior high school students. The qualitative interviews involved selected students, and the thesis does not report a comparative control group or a longitudinal measure of whether interest was sustained over time. Future studies can involve larger samples, multiple schools, or repeated measurements and can examine whether high interest in song-based learning translates into measurable development in listening, speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that tenth-grade students at SMAN 4 Wajo had a high level of interest in learning English through English pop songs. The questionnaire produced a total score of 694 out of 840, equivalent to 82.62%. Feeling of enjoyment made the largest contribution to the total score (26.80%), followed by acceptance (24.64%), students' interest (24.50%), and students' engagement (24.06%). The close distribution across the four indicators shows that students' positive response involved emotion, attraction, acceptance of songs as a learning medium, and active classroom participation. Students' interest was influenced by the interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors included enjoyment, motivation, curiosity about lyrics and vocabulary, and personal preference for pop songs. External factors included teachers' learning activities and the accessibility of songs through social media and digital platforms. English teachers may therefore use pop songs as an alternative or complementary medium while selecting

appropriate songs and designing purposeful activities such as lyric analysis, vocabulary practice, pronunciation work, singing, games, and group discussion. Future research should examine song-based learning with larger and more diverse samples and explore its relationship with specific English-language skills.

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