

The Use of Songs as a Medium for English Learning: A Case Study at SDN Maliwuko

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Abstract: This study investigates the use of songs as a medium for English language learning among fourth- and fifth-grade students at SDN Maliwuko, Poso Regency, Indonesia. Conducted over a two-month period (January–February 2025), the research employed a descriptive qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of lesson plans and learning modules. The findings reveal that songs were integrated into all stages of the learning process: preliminary, core, and final activities. During preliminary activities, songs functioned as ice-breakers to motivate students and prepare them psychologically for learning. In core activities, songs were used to introduce and reinforce vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and associate words with physical movements, thereby integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. In final activities, songs served as closing exercises and informal evaluation tools. Interviews with the teacher emphasized the importance of creativity in selecting and implementing songs, highlighting their effectiveness in increasing student motivation, maintaining concentration, and creating a lively classroom atmosphere. Student interviews confirmed these benefits, with most students reporting that songs made learning enjoyable and helped them memorize vocabulary more easily. However, challenges were noted when song lyrics were too long, underscoring the need for careful song selection. Overall, the study concludes that songs are an effective pedagogical medium for English language learning in Indonesian elementary schools. They foster motivation, concentration, and enjoyment while supporting vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation practice. The integration of songs into English learning reflects an innovative and responsive approach aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *Songs; Learning Media; SDN Maliwuko; English Language Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

Elementary school learners are at a critical developmental stage in which cognitive growth, memory formation, and affective engagement are highly influenced by meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. At this level, students learn more effectively when instructional activities appeal to their emotions, curiosity, and natural inclination toward play. Music, particularly songs, has long been recognized as a powerful pedagogical tool for young learners because it combines rhythm, repetition, and melody, elements that naturally attract children's attention and facilitate long-term memory retention. In language learning contexts, songs are not merely a source of entertainment but function as an instructional medium that supports vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation practice, and meaningful repetition in an engaging and non-threatening way.

Previous studies have consistently shown that songs contribute positively to English language learning among young learners. Brewster et al. (2002) argue that songs reduce learners' anxiety, increase motivation, and foster positive attitudes toward English, while also providing rich and repeated language input. Similarly, Nurhayati and Ulva (2017) emphasize that songs help create a relaxed classroom atmosphere that encourages participation and lowers students' affective filters. Through repeated exposure to language patterns embedded in songs, students are more likely to internalize vocabulary and pronunciation naturally. These characteristics make songs particularly suitable for elementary school contexts, where learners are still developing confidence and basic communicative competence.

In the Indonesian context, English at the elementary school level is generally taught as local content rather than as a compulsory subject. This positioning often results in limited instructional time, inconsistent implementation, and varying levels of teacher preparedness. Consequently, many elementary school students experience difficulties in mastering basic vocabulary, pronouncing English words accurately, and expressing themselves orally. These challenges frequently lead to boredom, low motivation, and passive classroom behavior. Such conditions indicate a need for instructional strategies and media that can actively engage students while accommodating their developmental characteristics.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum further underscores the importance of innovative and student-centered learning approaches. According to the Decree of the Head of BSKAP No. 8 of 2022, effective learning should be supported by appropriate instructional media that facilitate active participation and meaningful learning experiences (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2022). Within this framework, songs emerge as a relevant and responsive learning medium because they align with the curriculum's emphasis on joyful learning, learner autonomy, and holistic development. Empirical evidence also supports this view. Studies by Faiza et al. (2021) and Nurseto (2011) demonstrate that integrating songs into English instruction can improve students' learning outcomes while increasing engagement and enjoyment.

Despite the documented benefits of songs in English language learning, their implementation in elementary schools is often unsystematic. In many cases, songs are used sporadically as ice-breakers or fillers rather than as an integral part of lesson planning. This situation is also observed at SDN Maliwuko, an elementary school in Poso Regency where English is taught as a local content subject. Preliminary observations and previous findings (Rawung et al., 2024) indicate that although teachers occasionally use songs during English lessons, students in grades 4 and 5 still display low enthusiasm, become easily bored, and show limited vocabulary development and speaking ability. These conditions suggest that the pedagogical potential of songs has not been fully optimized due to a lack of systematic planning and purposeful implementation.

Existing literature has extensively discussed the advantages of songs in language learning from linguistic, affective, and cognitive perspectives. Kasihani (2010) defines songs as sequences of words sung with rhythm and tone, while Banoe (2003) views songs as musical works performed in specific styles. Brewster et al. (2002) further categorize the benefits of songs into linguistic benefits—such as vocabulary enrichment, grammar reinforcement, and pronunciation improvement—and affective benefits, including increased motivation and reduced anxiety. Cognitively, songs support memory, concentration, and sensitivity to rhythm and sound patterns, while socially and culturally, they expose learners to aspects of English-speaking cultures and promote collaborative learning through group activities.

However, a critical gap remains in how these theoretical benefits are translated into classroom practice, particularly in Indonesian elementary schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Most previous studies focus on measuring the effectiveness of songs in improving specific language skills or learning outcomes. Relatively few studies examine how songs are systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated as a learning medium within real classroom contexts. Moreover, there is limited research that explores teachers' pedagogical considerations in selecting songs, integrating them into different stages of instruction, and aligning them with curriculum objectives, especially at schools where English is taught as local content.

Additionally, while studies often highlight positive student responses to songs, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative investigation into how students and teachers perceive the role of songs in sustaining motivation, concentration, and classroom engagement over time. Challenges such as inappropriate song length, complex lyrics, or mismatched proficiency levels are frequently mentioned in passing but rarely analyzed as part of a comprehensive implementation process. As Kasdi and Wijayanti (2016) note, the effectiveness of songs depends heavily on careful selection, including simple lyrics, repeated phrases, and cheerful melodies. Yet, how these criteria are applied by teachers in authentic classroom settings remains underexplored.

Another gap lies in contextual research. Many studies on songs in English language learning are conducted in urban or well-resourced schools, leaving limited evidence from rural or semi-rural contexts such as Poso Regency. Schools in these areas often face different challenges, including limited teaching resources and reduced exposure to English outside the classroom. Understanding how songs function as an accessible and low-cost learning medium in such contexts is therefore essential.

In line with Permendiknas No. 22 of 2006, English instruction at the elementary level aims to develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, with listening as a foundational skill (Wijaya, 2015, as cited in Wulandari et al., 2017). Sutarsyah (2017) emphasizes that young learners require substantial exposure to comprehensible input before they are ready to produce language. Songs, which naturally emphasize listening and repetition in a low-anxiety environment, are particularly well suited to meet this need. Nevertheless, empirical evidence explaining how songs are practically integrated to support these objectives remains insufficient.

Based on these gaps, the present study seeks to contribute to the literature by providing an in-depth analysis of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of songs as a medium for English language learning in grades 4 and 5 at SDN Maliwuko. Rather than focusing solely on learning outcomes, this study examines how songs are used across different stages of instruction and how they influence students' motivation and engagement. By adopting a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to offer contextualized insights into the pedagogical use of songs in an elementary school setting aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum.

In sum, songs have the potential to function as central instructional resources rather than supplementary tools in English language learning. Addressing the identified research gaps, this study provides empirical evidence on how songs can be systematically and effectively integrated into English instruction at the elementary level, particularly in local content contexts. The findings are expected to inform teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers about practical strategies for optimizing the use of songs to enhance motivation and learning outcomes among young learners.

2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study design. Qualitative research emphasizes the collection of descriptive data in the form of words, images, and observable behaviors (Moleong, 2011). This research design was chosen to explore in depth the planning, implementation, and evaluation of songs as a learning medium in English language instruction for fourth- and fifth-grade students at SDN Maliwuko. By focusing on a single school context, the case study approach enabled the researcher to capture the complexity of classroom practices as well as the interactions between teachers and students within their natural learning environment.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: interviews, classroom observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher, selected students from grades 4 and 5, and relevant school stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of the use of songs in English learning (Rawung et al., 2024). Classroom observation was conducted using participant observation, in which the researcher was directly involved in observing teaching and learning activities. During the observations, the researcher recorded teacher–student interactions, student responses and behavior, and the overall classroom atmosphere when songs were integrated into the lessons. Documentation was used to support and complement the interview and observation data. The documents analyzed included lesson plans (RPP), learning modules aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, field notes, student learning outcomes, photographs of classroom activities, and other relevant school records.

The qualitative data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1992) interactive model of data analysis, which consists of three interrelated processes: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data reduction stage, data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were selected, simplified, and organized according to the research focus. The reduced data were then presented in the form of narrative descriptions, matrices, and tables to identify patterns and relationships within the data. Finally, conclusions were drawn and continuously verified through data triangulation across sources and methods to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This iterative analytical process enabled the researcher to refine interpretations and confirm the consistency of findings based on evidence from the field.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, it is explained the results of research and at the same time is given the comprehensive discussion. Results can be presented in figures, graphs, tables and others that make the reader understand easily. The discussion can be made in several sub-sections.

3.1. Result

The results of this study are presented based on the data collection phases conducted over two months, from January to February 2025 at SDN Maliwuko (Rawung et al., 2024). Initial classroom observations began on January 13, 2025, followed by a series of systematic data collection activities including field observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation until the end of February 2025. The data gathered provide an empirical overview of how songs were implemented as English learning media in grades 4 and 5, and how they impacted student motivation, classroom atmosphere, and learning outcomes.

The observation phase revealed that the use of songs was consistently integrated into three stages of learning: preliminary, core, and final activities. In the preliminary stage, the teacher initiated lessons with greetings and ice-breaking activities by singing together. For grade 4, songs such as Hello, Hello How Are You and Que Sera Sera were sung collectively with accompanying physical movements. This practice was intended to motivate students, create a calm atmosphere, and arouse enthusiasm for learning. In grade 5, students were similarly engaged by leading prayers and singing previously learned songs such as Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.

During the core learning activities, songs were strategically used to reinforce material and re-energize students. In grade 4, when teaching WH-Questions, the teacher observed signs of boredom among students and immediately introduced the song How Many Fingers on One Hand. This intervention revitalized the classroom atmosphere, making students more enthusiastic and engaged. In grade 5, the focus was on

vocabulary related to body parts. Students observed illustrations in their textbooks and then sang Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes while performing corresponding physical movements. This activity not only reinforced vocabulary but also improved pronunciation and strengthened the association between words and physical actions.

In the final stage of learning, songs were used as closing activities and informal evaluation tools. Grade 4 students sang Walking-Walking as a closing song, while grade 5 students repeated Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. These activities were followed by teacher-led questions to review the material and farewell greetings in English. Overall, the observation results concluded that the songs used—Hello, Hello How Are You, Que Sera Sera, How Many Fingers on One Hand, Walking-Walking, and Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes—were effective in creating a dynamic learning atmosphere and supporting material delivery.

Interviews with the English teacher further reinforced these findings. The teacher explained that lesson planning followed the Merdeka Curriculum and ATP (Learning Objective Flow), with songs integrated as supporting media. The teacher emphasized that songs were highly effective in increasing student motivation, maintaining concentration, and creating a cheerful classroom environment. Creativity was highlighted as a crucial factor, as teachers must be innovative in selecting songs, designing activities, and integrating songs into teaching materials. In addition to singing, songs were used to practice pronunciation, read lyrics, and memorize vocabulary, often supported by visual media such as YouTube videos. Evaluation was conducted systematically through assignments, as well as individual and pair-based pre-tests and post-tests.

Student interviews revealed overwhelmingly positive responses. Most students expressed feelings of happiness, excitement, and interest when learning with songs. They preferred singing activities compared to traditional lecture methods, describing songs as fun and effective in creating a lively atmosphere. Many students admitted that songs made it easier to memorize vocabulary and understand material. However, some students reported challenges when song lyrics were too long or when required to memorize them completely, which aligns with Kasihani's (2010) recommendation that songs for elementary learners should be simple and repetitive. Taken together, the data from observations and interviews confirm that the use of songs at SDN Maliwuko was effective in increasing motivation, concentration, and basic language skills among students in grades 4 and 5.

3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that songs are effectively integrated into English language learning at SDN Maliwuko and serve as pedagogical strategies across all stages of classroom activities. In preliminary activities, songs functioned as ice-breakers to build enthusiasm and prepare students psychologically for learning. This aligns with Batubara (2020), who argues that learning media stimulate students' thoughts, feelings, interests, and attention. By beginning lessons with songs, teachers were able to establish a positive emotional climate that encouraged active participation.

In core activities, songs were used to introduce and reinforce new vocabulary, as demonstrated in grade 5 with Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes. This practice illustrates how songs integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of learning. Utari et al. (2017) emphasize that elementary students remember experiences more effectively when they involve direct actions, such as singing combined with physical movements. Similarly, in grade 4, the use of How Many Fingers on One Hand revitalized the classroom atmosphere, showing that songs can serve as energizers to maintain concentration and prevent boredom. Brewster et al. (2002) support this view, noting that songs can be used as transitions, energizers, or concluding activities to sustain engagement.

The benefits of songs were directly experienced by students, who reported feeling happy, motivated, and more confident in their learning. These findings resonate with Christi F et al. (2019), who argue that learning a foreign language through music and songs enhances memory, fosters positive attitudes, and enriches learning experiences. Furthermore, Pamungkas and Tohir (2023) highlight the effectiveness of songs in enriching vocabulary, which was evident in students' ability to recall and pronounce new words more easily.

Nevertheless, challenges were identified, particularly with longer song lyrics that some students found difficult to memorize. This underscores the importance of careful song selection, as Kasihani (2010) suggests that songs for young learners should be simple, repetitive, and contextually rich. Teachers must therefore be adaptive and creative in choosing songs that match students' proficiency levels and learning objectives.

Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that songs are not merely supplementary tools but effective learning media that align with the developmental characteristics of elementary school students. They foster motivation, concentration, and enjoyment, while simultaneously supporting vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation practice. The integration of songs into English learning at SDN Maliwuko reflects a pedagogical approach that is both innovative and responsive to students' needs, confirming their value as a medium for enhancing language learning outcomes in Indonesian elementary schools.

4. CONCLUSION

This study, conducted over two months at SDN Maliwuko, explored the planning, implementation, and evaluation of songs as a medium for English language learning in grades 4 and 5. The findings consistently demonstrate that songs are not merely supplementary tools but effective pedagogical strategies that align with the developmental characteristics of elementary school students. The research revealed that songs were integrated into all stages of learning—preliminary, core, and final activities. In the preliminary stage, songs functioned as ice-breakers to motivate students, reduce anxiety, and prepare them psychologically for learning. In the core stage, songs were used to introduce and reinforce vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and associate words with physical movements, thereby integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. In the final stage, songs served as closing activities and informal evaluation tools, helping students review material in a cheerful and engaging manner. Interviews with the English teacher highlighted the importance of creativity in selecting and implementing songs. The teacher emphasized that songs were highly effective in increasing motivation, maintaining concentration, and creating a lively classroom atmosphere. Evaluation was conducted systematically through assignments, pre-tests, and post-tests, ensuring that learning outcomes could be measured. Student interviews confirmed these findings, as the majority expressed positive feelings toward learning with songs. They reported that songs made learning fun, helped them memorize vocabulary more easily, and improved their confidence in using English. However, some students experienced challenges with longer lyrics, indicating the need for careful song selection that matches their proficiency level.

Overall, the study concludes that songs are an effective medium for English language learning in elementary schools. They foster motivation, concentration, and enjoyment, while simultaneously supporting vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation practice. The integration of songs into English learning at SDN Maliwuko reflects a pedagogical approach that is innovative, responsive, and aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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