

Listening English Song as Habit in Improving Listening Skills

(SMP Pius Students' Perception)

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Abstract: Listening comprehension remains one of the most demanding receptive skills in English Language Teaching (ELT), frequently hindered by student anxiety and constrained exposure within conventional classroom settings. This qualitative descriptive study investigates middle school students' perceptions regarding the autonomous habit of listening to English songs outside the formal curriculum and its perceived contribution to their listening proficiency. Utilizing a purposive sampling approach, qualitative data were gathered from eighth-grade students at SMP Pius Pekalongan through open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with key informants, direct classroom observations, and documentary analysis, complemented by teacher triangulation. The data were iteratively processed following the Miles and Huberman framework, comprising data reduction, data display, and verified conclusion drawing. The findings demonstrate that students hold highly favorable perceptions toward self-directed song listening, categorizing it as an engaging daily pastime rather than a rigorous academic obligation. This continuous exposure significantly facilitates implicit vocabulary acquisition, attunes learners to native phonetic articulation, and lowers anxiety levels in alignment with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Additionally, students identified tracks characterized by moderate tempos, clear articulation, and accessible lyrical structures as the most efficacious for auditory comprehension. While informal song exposure markedly reinforces student confidence and auditory familiarity, it functions optimally as a supplementary learning strategy alongside structured pedagogical instruction.

Keywords: Affective Filter; Autonomous Learning; English Songs; Listening Comprehension; Student Perception.

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension is universally recognized as a foundational pillar in foreign language acquisition, serving as the primary channel for assimilable linguistic input (Nation & Newton, 2009). Despite its critical role, listening remains one of the most formidable challenges for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners within formal pedagogical settings. Students frequently encounter cognitive and psychological barriers during conventional listening exercises, such as rapid speech rates, complex vocabularies, and the absence of visual cues like subtitles (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). In traditional classroom environments, listening tasks are often perceived as rigorous academic assessments rather than meaningful communicative experiences. This formal constraint inadvertently elevates learners' stress levels and diminishes their intrinsic motivation to engage with the target language.

However, the widespread proliferation of digital media and streaming platforms has catalyzed a paradigm shift in how students interact with the English language. Beyond the confines of the formal classroom, a significant proportion of middle school students frequently engage with English media, integrating it into their daily routines. Listening to English songs, in particular, has evolved from a mere entertainment medium into an autonomous, subconscious learning habit. Music naturally offers continuous and repetitive exposure to authentic language, colloquial phrasing, and native phonology in a highly engaging and non-threatening format.

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Theoretically, the efficacy of this informal, continuous exposure can be elucidated through Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theory, specifically the *Input Hypothesis* and the *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982). The *Input Hypothesis* suggests that language acquisition occurs optimally when learners receive comprehensible input in a natural context. More importantly, the *Affective Filter Hypothesis* posits that negative emotional variables such as stress, lack of motivation, and anxiety can construct a mental block that prevents linguistic input from being acquired. Listening to self-selected English songs inherently generates an environment with a profoundly low affective filter, characterized by enjoyment and relaxation, thereby maximizing the potential for subconscious vocabulary and pronunciation acquisition.

While the integration of music in English Language Teaching is well-documented, a critical research gap persists. The majority of previous empirical investigations (e.g., Saeed, 2021) have predominantly concentrated on teacher-directed interventions, examining the utility of songs strictly as instructional tools *within* the classroom environment under direct pedagogical supervision. There is a palpable scarcity of literature investigating the phenomenon of listening to English songs as a self-directed, autonomous *habit* formed outside the academic context, particularly concerning how junior high school learners perceive its impact on their auditory proficiency.

To bridge this literature gap, this study investigates the autonomous habit of listening to English songs among students at SMP Pius Pekalongan. By prioritizing the learners' perspectives, this research is driven by three pivotal inquiries: (1) How do students perceive the habit of listening to English songs in relation to the enhancement of their listening skills? (2) What underlying factors lead students to believe that this habitual exposure facilitates their auditory comprehension? and (3) What specific characteristics or genres of English songs are deemed most beneficial by the learners? The findings of this study are anticipated to provide profound empirical insights into autonomous language learning and offer practical implications for educators seeking to harmonize informal student habits with formal listening instruction.

2. Method

Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, this study aimed to deeply explore the autonomous habits and underlying perceptions of middle school learners regarding English songs. The research utilized a purposive sampling approach, initially distributing exploratory questionnaires to a cohort of 20 to 25 eighth-grade students at SMP Pius Pekalongan to identify participants who engaged in a consistent habit of listening to English-language music outside of school hours. From this preliminary phase, three key student informants pseudonymously identified as Jose, Kinan, and Verren were purposefully selected for an in-depth investigation, alongside one primary English teacher whose participation facilitated robust data triangulation. Comprehensive qualitative data were elicited through a combination of open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, direct classroom observations, and document analysis. Subsequently, the accumulated data were systematically processed employing the interactive analytical framework formulated by Miles and Huberman (1994), which encompasses iterative stages of data reduction to isolate salient themes, structured data display, and rigorous verification for drawing credible conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of this research are derived from a rigorous qualitative analysis of data collected through open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and direct classroom observations involving three purposively selected students (Jose, Kinan, and Verren), triangulated with the perspectives of their English teacher. In accordance with the Miles and Huberman framework, the accumulated qualitative data were systematically reduced and categorized into core themes that directly address the three primary research questions. To provide a structured overview of the findings before a detailed elaboration, the overarching themes and key indicators are synthesized in Table 1.

3.1. Homogeneity Test of Research Samples

The population in this study were grade X students, while the sample was determined through a homogeneity test first obtained from the daily test scores of the science subjects in the previous material. The homogeneity test of variance was carried out using the Levene Statistic using IBM SPSS 25 software. The results of the homogeneity test can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Thematic Summary of Students' Perceptions on Autonomous Song Listening.

Research Focus	Major Themes Identified	Key Findings / Indicators
Students' Perceptions (RQ1)	Enjoyment and Autonomy	The practice is regarded as a daily, stress-free hobby rather than an academic obligation. High intrinsic motivation drives the habit.
Mechanisms of Improvement (RQ2)	Implicit Language Acquisition & Low Affective Filter	Unconscious expansion of vocabulary; increased familiarity with native phonetic articulation; significant reduction in language-learning anxiety.
Preferred Song Characteristics (RQ3)	Comprehensible Input Selection	Preference for tracks with moderate-to-slow tempos, clear vocal enunciation, and structurally accessible lyrical narratives.

Based on the thematic summary presented in Table 1, it is evident that the students' autonomous habit of listening to English songs yields multi-faceted benefits for their listening comprehension. The data reveals a cohesive progression: it begins with the students' highly positive psychological reception of the habit (Theme 1), which naturally activates the subconscious mechanisms of linguistic acquisition and lowers language anxiety (Theme 2), provided that the musical input aligns with their proficiency level through comprehensible song characteristics (Theme 3). To fully understand the depth of these findings, each overarching theme is elaborated comprehensively in the following subsections.

Students' Perceptions of Listening to English Songs as a Habit

The qualitative data unequivocally indicate that the participants hold highly favorable and positive perceptions regarding their habit of listening to English songs. Unlike formal listening exercises in the school curriculum, which are frequently associated with academic pressure, rigorous evaluation, and performance anxiety, the students perceive autonomous song listening as an engaging and entirely voluntary activity. This paradigm shift in perception is crucial; it fundamentally transforms the target language from a rigid, intimidating subject of study into a highly accessible medium of personal entertainment. By decoupling language exposure from the constraints of formal assessment, students approach English with a receptive and open mindset.

Furthermore, the element of learner autonomy emerged as a significant theme in the students' reflections on their daily habits. The participants reported integrating English songs seamlessly into their everyday routines, utilizing them as background music during commutes, study breaks, or periods of relaxation. Because this auditory engagement is self-directed and driven by individual musical tastes, it inherently removes the psychological burden typically associated with conventional language acquisition. The students emphasized that this autonomy grants them the freedom to pause, replay, or skip tracks at their own pace, thereby creating a personalized linguistic environment that feels entirely divorced from traditional pedagogical obligations.

Ultimately, this positive perception is deeply rooted in intrinsic motivation and emotional resonance. The participants expressed that their consistent engagement with English music is sustained not by a conscious desire to study, but by a genuine appreciation for the melodies, rhythms, and narratives embedded within the lyrics. This profound emotional connection to the music ensures that the habit remains sustainable over extended periods. Consequently, the continuous exposure to the English language becomes a natural byproduct of their daily leisure, illustrating how self-initiated habits can effectively foster a positive and enduring relationship with a foreign language.

Factors Contributing to the Enhancement of Listening Skills

When exploring the underlying mechanisms that facilitate the enhancement of listening proficiency, the phenomenon of implicit linguistic acquisition emerged as a primary factor. The students highlighted that their habit involves extensive, **repeated exposure** to their preferred tracks, which provides continuous auditory reinforcement without the cognitive fatigue typically induced by academic repetition. Driven by an authentic curiosity to comprehend the narrative of the songs, participants frequently engage in proactive behaviors, such as independently searching for lyrics and translating unfamiliar terms. This self-initiated exploration leads to significant, subconscious vocabulary expansion, allowing learners to internalize new lexical items contextually rather than through rote memorization.

In addition to lexical enrichment, consistent exposure to authentic musical materials profoundly improves the students' familiarity with **native phonetic articulation**. The qualitative interviews revealed that habitual listeners become increasingly attuned to the nuances of connected speech, varied intonation patterns, and colloquial phrasing elements that are notoriously difficult to grasp through standard textbook audio materials. The English teacher corroborated this finding during the triangulation process, noting that students who regularly engage with English music demonstrate superior phonetic recognition and exhibit noticeably higher confidence levels during formal, in-class listening assessments. This auditory familiarity essentially trains the learners' ears to process natural, conversational English at normal speech rates.

Finally, the psychological benefits of this habit play an indispensable role in maximizing auditory comprehension, a phenomenon that closely aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. The inherent enjoyment and relaxation associated with listening to favorite music significantly lower the students' **affective filter**, neutralizing language-learning anxiety and stress. By fostering an emotionally secure and highly motivating environment, the students' cognitive receptivity to linguistic input is drastically optimized. Consequently, this stress-free state allows the brain to process and acquire auditory information far more efficiently than it would under the high-pressure conditions of a formal educational setting.

Preferred Characteristics of English Songs for Optimal Comprehension

While the habit is generally beneficial, the data revealed that not all English songs are equally effective for listening comprehension. The participants demonstrated distinct preferences for specific musical characteristics that align with their linguistic proficiency. The students explicitly stated that they derived the most educational benefit from songs featuring moderate to slow tempos. Tracks belonging to genres like acoustic pop or ballads were highly favored because they allow the brain sufficient time to process the auditory input.

Furthermore, clear vocal enunciation and relatable lyrical structures were identified as critical factors. Conversely, the participants reported that songs characterized by excessively rapid tempos (such as heavy rap), heavily distorted vocals (such as rock or metal), or an overabundance of obscure slang severely hindered their comprehension and were considered counterproductive for their auditory learning process.

The primary objective of this qualitative study was to critically examine the autonomous habit of listening to English songs among middle school students at SMP Pius Pekalongan and its perceived impact on their listening comprehension. The empirical evidence gathered robustly corroborates the premise that integrating English songs into students' daily routines functions as a highly effective, supplementary approach to language acquisition outside the formal classroom environment. The findings provide a profound understanding of how self-directed leisure activities can bridge the gap between formal pedagogical instruction and informal linguistic exposure.

Autonomous Learning and Positive Student Perceptions

The findings detailed in the initial research question reveal that students hold overwhelmingly positive perceptions toward listening to English songs, categorizing it as an autonomous, stress-free leisure activity rather than a rigorous academic requirement. In conventional English Language Teaching (ELT) contexts, listening comprehension is frequently stigmatized by students due to the high cognitive demands and the pressure of immediate evaluation. However, the participants in this study demonstrated that when linguistic exposure is self-initiated and driven by personal aesthetic preferences, the psychological barriers typically associated with language learning are efficiently dismantled. This paradigm shift highlights the stark contrast between forced academic listening and voluntary auditory engagement.

This autonomous habit empowers students to take complete ownership of their learning trajectory by seamlessly embedding English audio into their daily routines. The participants reported integrating their favorite tracks during mundane activities such as daily commutes, household chores, or relaxation periods. This spatial and temporal flexibility grants learners the freedom to engage with the target language at their own pace, devoid of the rigid constraints of a classroom timetable. The ability to pause, replay, or skip tracks according to their immediate mood further reinforces their sense of agency, making the language acquisition process feel deeply personal and highly customizable.

Consequently, this self-directed approach serves as a potent catalyst for sustaining intrinsic motivation among EFL learners. Because the exposure is anchored in genuine emotional resonance and appreciation for the music's melody and narrative, students do not

perceive the activity as "studying." This intrinsic drive ensures that their engagement with the English language remains consistent and enduring over time. Ultimately, cultivating such positive perceptions through autonomous habits lays a resilient psychological foundation, allowing students to approach more formal and complex linguistic tasks with heightened confidence and a proactive mindset.

Mechanisms of Enhancement: Validating Krashen's Theoretical Framework

The qualitative data addressing the second research question provide compelling empirical validation for Stephen Krashen's Second Language Acquisition theories, specifically the *Affective Filter Hypothesis* and the *Input Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982). The students' assertions that listening to their favorite music makes learning English "easier" and "enjoyable" directly illustrate the mechanism of a lowered affective filter. When learners are relaxed, highly motivated, and free from performance anxiety, their cognitive receptivity expands, allowing linguistic input to be subconsciously internalized.

Furthermore, the mechanisms of continuous, repeated exposure without cognitive fatigue facilitate implicit vocabulary acquisition and phonetic familiarity. Unlike rote memorization utilized in traditional classrooms, the students reported a proactive tendency to independently search for song lyrics and contextual translations. This self-directed inquiry not only expands their lexical repertoire but also familiarizes them with the authentic articulation of native speakers, including connected speech and intonation. This phenomenon significantly addresses the research gap identified in previous studies, such as Saeed (2021), which predominantly emphasized the efficacy of teacher-directed song interventions within the classroom. The current study demonstrates that unsupervised, habitual exposure outside of school hours is equally, if not more, potent in building auditory foundational skills. This was corroborated by the English teacher's triangulation, which confirmed that students with established English music habits exhibited noticeably higher self-confidence and superior phonetic recognition during formal listening assessments.

The Imperative of Comprehensible Input in Song Selection

Despite the overarching benefits of this habit, the findings pertaining to the third research question underscore a critical caveat: the efficacy of auditory enhancement is heavily contingent upon the characteristics of the selected songs. The participants explicitly indicated a preference for tracks with moderate-to-slow tempos, clear vocal enunciation, and accessible lyrical narratives (e.g., pop ballads or acoustic genres). Conversely, genres characterized by hyper-rapid tempos, such as rap, or obscured vocals, such as heavy metal, were deemed counterproductive.

This specific finding aligns seamlessly with Krashen's *Input Hypothesis*, which asserts that language acquisition occurs most optimally when learners are exposed to "Comprehensible Input" slightly above their current proficiency level, conceptualized as $i + 1$ (Krashen, 1982). Songs with moderate tempos provide the necessary cognitive processing time for middle school learners to decode phonetic boundaries and associate words with their semantic meanings. When songs are too fast or saturated with obscure colloquialisms, the input becomes incomprehensible (acting as $i + 2$ or higher), which inadvertently raises frustration levels and negates the benefits of the lowered affective filter. Therefore, while autonomous song listening is highly beneficial, its linguistic utility is maximized only when the auditory input remains structurally and phonetically accessible to the learner's developmental stage.

Pedagogical Implications

The synthesis of these empirical findings suggests that while informal song exposure markedly reinforces student confidence and auditory familiarity, it functions optimally as a supplementary learning strategy rather than a definitive replacement for structured pedagogical instruction. Educators must recognize that autonomous habits, though highly beneficial for lowering affective filters and introducing vocabulary, lack the systematic grammatical and critical thinking frameworks provided by a formal curriculum. Therefore, the primary pedagogical implication lies in harmonizing these informal student habits with the rigorous objectives of academic language instruction.

To achieve this synergy, teachers are encouraged to actively acknowledge and leverage the students' out-of-class musical preferences. By conducting preliminary surveys to map the genres and specific artists favored by the learners, educators can purposefully select comprehensible, moderate-tempo tracks that align with both student interests and instructional goals. Integrating these familiar songs as warm-up or pre-listening activities can serve as an effective cognitive bridge, transitioning students from a state of relaxation into a state of focused academic readiness while maintaining a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere.

Furthermore, educators can design targeted, interactive tasks that elevate passive listening into active, critical engagement. Instead of merely playing a song, teachers can implement activities such as targeted gap-fill exercises, vocabulary matching based on lyrical contexts, or collaborative phonetic transcriptions of specific verses. These structured activities guide students to apply conscious linguistic analysis to the informal input they usually consume passively. Such guided interventions ensure that the implicit knowledge gained through autonomous listening is explicitly recognized and solidified.

Finally, fostering a classroom environment that validates and celebrates autonomous learning is paramount. Teachers should create opportunities for students to share their independent musical discoveries, perhaps through brief presentations or peer-led lyric discussions. By validating their out-of-class habits within the formal academic space, educators not only boost learner self-esteem but also promote a collaborative community of language learners. This holistic approach ensures that the benefits of autonomous English song consumption are maximized, transforming individual leisure habits into powerful, collective educational assets.

The comprehensive analysis of the students' autonomous habits delineates a highly effective, multifaceted trajectory of language acquisition. The positive psychological reception of self-directed listening effectively dismantles affective barriers, while the continuous exposure to comprehensible musical input facilitates implicit lexical and phonetic internalization. By bridging the critical gap between informal, intrinsic enjoyment and formal linguistic development, this phenomenon proves to be an invaluable asset in the EFL landscape. When properly harnessed and integrated by educators, this autonomous habit not only cultivates immediate auditory proficiency but also nurtures a lifelong, self-sustaining engagement with the English language.

4. Conclusions

This qualitative study investigated the autonomous habit of listening to English songs among middle school students at SMP Pius Pekalongan, focusing on their perceptions, the underlying mechanisms of skill improvement, and their preferences regarding song characteristics. The empirical evidence demonstrates that students hold overwhelmingly positive perceptions toward self-directed song listening, viewing it as an enjoyable, stress-free leisure activity rather than a rigid academic burden. This autonomous habit fosters continuous linguistic exposure, which significantly enhances students' listening comprehension by expanding their vocabulary, attuning their ears to authentic native phonetic articulation, and drastically reducing language-learning anxiety in accordance with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the educational efficacy of this habit is closely tied to the principle of comprehensible input. Students derive the most substantial auditory benefits from songs characterized by moderate-to-slow tempos, clear vocal enunciation, and accessible lyrical structures. While autonomous music consumption serves as a powerful catalyst for building auditory familiarity and learner confidence, it functions most effectively as a supplementary tool rather than a standalone substitute for formal instruction. Teachers are strongly encouraged to bridge the gap between informal learning habits and formal pedagogy by integrating students' preferred, comprehensible songs into structured classroom activities.

Despite these insightful findings, this study is subject to certain limitations, particularly its small sample size and focus on a single educational institution. To expand upon these insights, future research should consider employing quantitative or mixed-methods approaches across broader demographic populations to measure the precise empirical gains in listening test scores. Additionally, longitudinal investigations could explore the long-term impacts of autonomous digital language habits on other macro-skills, such as speaking fluency and pronunciation accuracy.

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