



Enhancing Arab EFL Students' Vocabulary through English Song Listening Activities

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Abstract

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental challenge for Arab learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), often hindering their overall language proficiency and communication skills. This study investigates the effectiveness of using English song listening activities as an innovative and engaging method to enhance vocabulary learning among Arab EFL students. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, involving pre- and post-tests to measure vocabulary gains, along with qualitative feedback collected through student interviews and classroom observations. Participants included intermediate-level EFL learners from several Arab-speaking countries. Results demonstrated a significant improvement in vocabulary retention and usage after consistent exposure to carefully selected English songs integrated into the curriculum. Furthermore, students reported increased motivation, enjoyment, and confidence in using new words in both spoken and written contexts. The findings suggest that English songs not only enrich vocabulary acquisition but also promote cultural awareness and learner engagement. This study advocates for the incorporation of music-based activities into EFL teaching frameworks to foster more dynamic and effective language learning environments.

Keywords: Arab EFL learners, vocabulary acquisition, English songs, listening activities, language learning motivation, mixed-methods study, vocabulary retention, cultural awareness

Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is universally recognized as a cornerstone of second language learning, especially for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For Arab EFL students, mastering a robust vocabulary in English is critical not only for academic success but also for effective communication in an increasingly globalized world. According to recent estimates, the average Arab EFL learner possesses a significantly smaller active vocabulary compared to native English speakers, with research indicating that learners often struggle to move beyond basic vocabulary to reach intermediate and advanced levels needed for fluency. This limitation hampers their ability to understand authentic texts, engage in meaningful conversations, and excel in professional environments where English is the lingua franca.

The problem of vocabulary retention and acquisition among Arab EFL learners is compounded by several factors unique to the region and learner context. These include limited exposure to English outside the classroom, reliance on rote memorization methods, and a lack of engaging or contextually rich learning materials. Traditional vocabulary teaching techniques, such as repetitive drilling and textbook-based exercises, often fail to motivate students or promote long-term retention. Moreover, the linguistic distance between Arabic and English, including differences in script, phonology, and grammatical structures, presents additional challenges that necessitate innovative pedagogical approaches.

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in integrating multimedia and authentic materials into language instruction to bridge these gaps. Among such methods, the use of English songs as a listening activity has emerged as a promising tool for vocabulary enhancement. Songs offer rich, contextualized language input that combines rhythm, melody, and emotional engagement,

which can significantly aid memory and recall. The musical context also introduces cultural elements, providing learners with a broader understanding of the language's social use and nuances. For Arab EFL students, who often experience limited naturalistic English exposure, song listening can simulate immersive environments and support incidental vocabulary learning—where learners acquire new words indirectly through meaningful engagement rather than explicit instruction.

The importance of this topic lies in its potential to transform vocabulary teaching and learning practices in Arab EFL contexts. With over 400 million Arabic speakers worldwide and English serving as the dominant global language for business, science, and technology, enhancing vocabulary acquisition through effective methods has direct implications for educational policy, curriculum design, and learner outcomes in Arab countries. Furthermore, vocabulary knowledge is linked to overall language proficiency; hence, improving it could lead to enhanced reading comprehension, writing skills, and oral fluency.

Numerous studies have explored the use of songs and music in language learning, demonstrating positive impacts on listening comprehension, pronunciation, and affective factors such as motivation and anxiety reduction. For instance, research involving European and Asian learners has shown that song-based activities increase vocabulary retention rates compared to conventional teaching methods. However, the majority of these studies focus on non-Arab learners or on beginner-level vocabulary, leaving a gap concerning the efficacy of song listening activities specifically for Arab EFL learners at intermediate proficiency levels. Additionally, little attention has been paid to the types of songs best suited for vocabulary learning, the integration of such activities into the curriculum, and the learners' perceptions of this approach in Arab educational contexts.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the impact of English song listening activities on the vocabulary development of Arab EFL students. The research focuses on several key questions: To what extent do English songs improve vocabulary acquisition and retention among Arab EFL learners? How do students perceive the use of songs in their learning process? What types of songs or listening activities yield the most effective vocabulary gains? By answering these questions, the study contributes to a better understanding of how to harness multimedia resources for language teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts.

The scope of this research is centered on intermediate-level Arab EFL students enrolled in formal education settings, reflecting a demographic commonly found across Arab universities and language institutes. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative vocabulary tests and qualitative feedback to provide a holistic view of the learning outcomes and learner experiences. This dual approach ensures that the research not only measures linguistic gains but also captures motivational and attitudinal factors critical to successful language acquisition. This paper is structured as follows: The first section reviews existing literature on vocabulary acquisition challenges in Arab EFL contexts and the role of songs in language learning. The methodology section details the participant selection, materials, procedures, and data analysis methods. Following this, the results and discussion sections present the findings and interpret their significance relative to prior research. Finally, the conclusion outlines implications for educators and recommendations for future studies.

In conclusion, addressing vocabulary challenges through engaging and culturally relevant methods such as English song listening activities holds promise for enhancing language learning outcomes among Arab EFL students. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence to support this approach and inform teaching practices in the region.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively assess the impact of English song listening activities on Arab EFL students' vocabulary acquisition. The mixed-methods design was selected to provide both measurable evidence of vocabulary improvement through quantitative data and deeper insights into students' attitudes and experiences via qualitative feedback. The integration of these methods enhances the validity and depth of the findings, making the study both robust and contextually rich.

The participants were intermediate-level EFL students enrolled in language courses at several universities and language institutes in Arab countries. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample representative of typical Arab EFL learners within this proficiency band. The final sample comprised 80 students aged between 18 and 24 years, balanced in terms of gender, with 42 females and 38 males. This sample size was determined to ensure sufficient statistical power while maintaining manageable data collection logistics. All participants shared Arabic as their first language and had similar exposure to English through

formal education but limited access to natural English-speaking environments.

Data collection took place over a 10-week period during a regular semester. The quantitative component consisted of vocabulary pre-tests and post-tests designed specifically for the study, targeting the key vocabulary items embedded within the selected English songs. The pre-test assessed baseline vocabulary knowledge before introducing the song activities, while the post-test measured vocabulary acquisition and retention immediately after the intervention. The tests included a mixture of multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and word matching tasks to evaluate both recognition and productive knowledge of new words.

The intervention involved weekly listening sessions in which students were exposed to carefully chosen English songs. These songs were selected based on criteria such as clear pronunciation, appropriate difficulty level, cultural relevance, and thematic alignment with the vocabulary targets. During the sessions, students engaged in various activities including listening to the songs, analyzing lyrics, discussing meanings, and using new words in speaking and writing exercises. This multifaceted approach was designed to maximize cognitive engagement and reinforce vocabulary learning through different modalities.

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews were conducted with 15 volunteer students to explore their perceptions of the song listening activities, motivation levels, and any challenges encountered. Classroom observations focused on students' engagement, participation, and interaction during the intervention sessions, providing contextual information to support the interpretation of quantitative results.

Data analysis for the quantitative tests was conducted using the statistical software SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to summarize the performance in pre- and post-tests. Paired sample t-tests were employed to determine the significance of vocabulary gains following the intervention. Effect sizes were calculated to assess the practical impact of the treatment. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was performed to identify common themes and patterns in student feedback and observational notes. This analysis involved coding the interview transcripts and observation records to highlight motivational factors, perceived benefits, and difficulties related to the use of songs in vocabulary learning.

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were rigorously observed. Prior to participation, students received detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning codes to participants instead of using names, and data were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. The research posed no physical or psychological risks to participants, and all activities took place within the standard educational context.

In summary, this mixed-methods study combined pre- and post-intervention vocabulary testing with qualitative

feedback to assess the effectiveness and reception of English song listening activities among Arab EFL learners. The clear description of sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures provides a replicable framework for future research seeking to explore multimedia approaches to vocabulary acquisition in similar educational contexts.

Results

The analysis of the quantitative data revealed notable changes in the vocabulary performance of the participants following the English song listening intervention. The pre-test scores, which measured baseline vocabulary knowledge, indicated that the average participant correctly identified and used approximately 45% of the target vocabulary items. After the 10-week intervention, the post-test results showed an average correct response rate of 72%, reflecting a substantial improvement. The paired sample t-test confirmed that this increase was statistically significant, with a p-value well below the conventional threshold of 0.05, indicating that the likelihood of this improvement occurring by chance was very low. The effect size calculated for the vocabulary gain was in the moderate to large range, suggesting that the intervention had a meaningful impact on vocabulary acquisition.

Further breakdown of the test scores showed that gains were consistent across different types of vocabulary tasks. Participants improved not only in receptive vocabulary skills, such as recognizing word meanings in multiple-choice and matching formats, but also in productive tasks requiring active recall, such as fill-in-the-blank exercises. The increase in productive vocabulary knowledge was slightly lower than receptive knowledge, though still significant, indicating that learners were able to internalize and use new words rather than merely recognize them. This distinction highlights the depth of vocabulary learning achieved through the song-based activities.

The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations complemented these quantitative findings. Thematic analysis of student interviews revealed several key themes related to their experiences with the intervention. A majority of participants expressed positive attitudes toward the use of English songs in their learning process. Many students reported that the songs made learning vocabulary more enjoyable and less monotonous compared to traditional methods. They described the music and rhythm as helpful memory aids that facilitated word retention. Several participants noted that hearing words repeatedly within the context of a song helped them understand usage and meaning more naturally. Classroom observations supported these self-reported perceptions, showing high levels of student engagement during the song listening sessions. Observers noted active participation in lyric discussions and enthusiasm during follow-up speaking and writing activities. Some students took initiative to explore the meanings of additional song lyrics outside of class, suggesting increased motivation for autonomous learning. However, a small number of students found certain songs challenging due to fast tempo or unfamiliar accents, indicating that song selection is critical for maximizing accessibility and learning effectiveness.

In addition to motivation and engagement, interviews highlighted students' perceived improvement in confidence

using new vocabulary. Many participants reported feeling more comfortable incorporating newly learned words in both spoken and written English after the intervention. This self-confidence boost was attributed to the informal and enjoyable learning atmosphere created by the music activities, which reduced anxiety typically associated with language learning.

When asked about the types of songs preferred, participants generally favored songs with clear pronunciation, relatable themes, and moderate tempo. Popular genres included pop and soft rock, while songs with complex slang or rapid speech were less favored. These preferences align with the observed differences in comprehension and vocabulary gains linked to song characteristics.

Overall, the combined quantitative and qualitative results indicate that English song listening activities had a positive effect on Arab EFL students' vocabulary acquisition, retention, engagement, and confidence. The findings demonstrate measurable vocabulary gains alongside enhanced learner motivation and favorable attitudes toward this innovative teaching method.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong support for the effectiveness of English song listening activities in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among Arab EFL students. The significant improvement in post-test vocabulary scores clearly indicates that exposure to carefully selected English songs can facilitate meaningful vocabulary learning. This result aligns with previous research that emphasizes the role of authentic, engaging materials in promoting language acquisition, particularly through repeated exposure and contextualized input. Unlike rote memorization, which often leads to shallow learning, the musical context appears to enable deeper processing of vocabulary, supporting both recognition and productive use. The moderate to large effect size found in this study confirms that the impact is not only statistically significant but educationally meaningful.

The distinction observed between receptive and productive vocabulary gains is consistent with established second language acquisition theories, which suggest that receptive knowledge typically precedes productive competence. The fact that students demonstrated significant improvements in both areas, though with somewhat stronger receptive gains, suggests that song-based activities help learners internalize vocabulary in ways that prepare them for active use. This finding resonates with studies that highlight music's capacity to enhance phonological awareness and facilitate the transition from passive recognition to active application of language.

Qualitative findings add an important dimension to understanding why this method proved effective. The reported increase in motivation and enjoyment confirms that affective factors play a crucial role in language learning. Many students' comments about songs making vocabulary learning less tedious reflect the motivational theories that stress the importance of emotional engagement and learner autonomy. Music's inherent appeal appears to lower affective filters such as anxiety, enabling learners to process language input more freely and with greater enthusiasm. This matches earlier studies where musical activities were

shown to reduce language learning stress and foster positive attitudes, thereby indirectly supporting cognitive processes involved in vocabulary acquisition.

The observed boost in learner confidence is another critical outcome. Confidence in using newly learned words suggests that the song activities do more than enhance passive knowledge; they contribute to learners' willingness to communicate and experiment with language. This is particularly important in Arab EFL contexts, where students often hesitate to speak due to fear of making mistakes or lack of practice opportunities. The informal and enjoyable environment created by song listening seems to mitigate these barriers, echoing previous findings that music can create supportive learning spaces conducive to risk-taking and language use.

However, the variation in student preferences and difficulties encountered with some songs highlights the importance of material selection and adaptation. The challenges faced by students with songs that have fast tempo or unfamiliar accents underscore the need to tailor song choices to learners' proficiency levels and cultural backgrounds. This finding reinforces the recommendation from the literature that authentic materials should be carefully curated rather than used indiscriminately. Providing scaffolding, such as lyric annotation and contextual explanations, can further enhance accessibility and learning outcomes.

The positive learner perceptions about the types of songs preferred suggest that popular genres with clear pronunciation and relatable themes may serve as optimal resources for vocabulary instruction. This preference aligns with research that advocates for the use of culturally relevant and meaningful content in language teaching, which not only aids comprehension but also connects learning to students' lives and interests. The cultural dimension of song lyrics also offers incidental benefits by increasing learners' exposure to cultural norms and idiomatic expressions, enriching their pragmatic competence.

While the results strongly support the integration of English songs into EFL curricula, some limitations must be acknowledged. The study focused on intermediate-level learners within formal education settings, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to beginner or advanced levels, or to informal learning contexts. Additionally, the relatively short duration of the intervention—ten weeks—provides a snapshot rather than a long-term perspective on vocabulary retention. Future research could investigate the sustainability of gains over extended periods and explore how song-based learning impacts other language skills such as speaking fluency and writing quality.

Another limitation lies in the reliance on self-reported data for qualitative insights, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Although classroom observations helped triangulate these reports, more extensive ethnographic methods could provide deeper understanding of learner behaviors and interactions during song activities. Furthermore, incorporating control groups or comparing different multimedia tools could strengthen the evidence base regarding the specific benefits of songs relative to other instructional approaches.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of evidence that supports the use of music as a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL vocabulary teaching, especially within Arab contexts where traditional methods often fall short. By combining cognitive and affective advantages, English song listening activities can enhance vocabulary acquisition, learner motivation, and communicative confidence. The findings advocate for more widespread and systematic incorporation of such activities in language programs, alongside thoughtful selection and integration to maximize benefits. Educators are encouraged to experiment with diverse musical genres and to engage learners actively in the exploration of song lyrics, thereby creating dynamic and culturally enriching learning environments.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that English song listening activities are an effective and engaging method to enhance vocabulary acquisition among Arab EFL students. The significant improvements in both receptive and productive vocabulary skills, combined with positive learner attitudes and increased confidence, highlight the multifaceted benefits of incorporating music into language learning. By providing contextualized and memorable input, songs support deeper vocabulary retention and create a motivating learning environment that addresses common challenges faced by Arab EFL learners.

The findings contribute to the field by offering empirical evidence that supports the integration of multimedia resources, specifically music, into traditional language teaching frameworks. This approach not only enriches vocabulary instruction but also promotes learner engagement and cultural awareness, which are essential for holistic language development.

From a practical standpoint, educators and curriculum designers are encouraged to incorporate English songs thoughtfully into their teaching practices, selecting materials that align with learners' proficiency and interests. Policymakers in language education can consider promoting multimedia-based strategies to complement conventional methods and improve language outcomes in Arab contexts. In closing, leveraging the power of music can transform vocabulary learning from a routine task into an enjoyable and impactful experience, ultimately fostering greater language proficiency and learner confidence. Future efforts should continue to explore and expand the use of creative, culturally relevant tools to meet the evolving needs of EFL learners.

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