

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the study. It consists of the background of the research, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scopes, conceptual framework, hypothesis, and previous studies.

A. Research Background

English has been established as the global lingua franca, dominating international discourse in science, technology, diplomacy, and the arts (Crystal, 2003). This dominance goes beyond just politics or art; it has become a necessity. In today's digital world, whether it's academic journals, technology updates or international news, English is the key to access global knowledge. For non-native speakers, English proficiency is not just an option but a must to compete in the global market. Individuals lacking English proficiency may be excluded from the global flow of ideas and job opportunities.

In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject taught to students in Junior High School (*SMP*) under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This curriculum is built upon the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Richards, 2006), which seeks to shift from strict grammatical rules towards communicative competence (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

However, as English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) rather than a Second Language in Indonesia, students have limited opportunities to experience and use English outside the classroom. Consequently, their exposure is confined to the few hours of formal instruction they receive at school.

Furthermore, the *Kurikulum Merdeka's* rollout was intrinsically a paradigm shift towards differentiated learning and learner autonomy (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This educational paradigm emphasizes that students should not be seen as passive recipients of knowledge, but as active agents that are capable of customizing their learning experience based on their respective interests and learning profiles.

In this light, Extramural English activities, particularly exposure to digital music, strongly manifested the spirit of autonomous learning promoted by the curriculum. By independently selecting English songs on platforms such as Spotify or YouTube, eighth-grade students engaged in a self-directed differentiated learning process. They autonomously calibrated the pace, genre, and linguistic complexity of their auditory input, thus effectively compensating for the limited exposure provided during formal classroom hours.

However, a persistent challenge remains, such as vocabulary acquisition. The main struggle in this context is how vocabulary is typically learned. Traditional rote memorization, in which students memorize lists of words without understanding how to use them in real situations, is still the most common form of teaching (Nation, 2001). This often results in boredom and low retention (Thornbury, 2002). Students may remember the words for a test but forget them almost immediately afterwards. They then reach a 'lexical ceiling' where they know the grammar rules but do not have the words to actually express their thoughts.

For eighth grade students who are in a transitional phase of cognitive and psychological development, traditional rote memorization often fails to engage their interest leading to boredom and low retention (Harmer, 2007). According to Schmitt (2000), learners need repeated exposure to words in various contexts to truly "own" them. This is where incidental learning through media plays a vital role.

The choice of eighth-grade students as the main population for this research was determined by their cognitive and developmental characteristics. Early adolescence, usually at the age of 13-14, is a crucial period in which students make a transition from concrete to more abstract thinking (Brown, 2000). At this stage, students have a basic understanding of the fundamentals of English grammar from primary and seventh-grade education, but their vocabulary is often not sufficiently developed to understand real media.

Psychologically, this age group is highly focused on the inclusion of their peers and the formation of social identity, which is often expressed through deep immersion in global pop culture and Western music.

Therefore, eighth-grade students were the most appropriate demographic group to study how voluntary immersion in pop culture can bridge the cognitive gap between basic grammar and the ability to use functional vocabulary. The modern digital environment exposes students to a constant stream of English-language content from channels such as Spotify, TikTok, and YouTube.

English songs are especially useful for pedagogical purposes. Songs are authentic materials which include up-to-date language, idioms and cultural nuances (Lopera, 2003). Repetitive nature of lyrics provides frequency of exposure necessary for long-term memory (Webb, 2007). Also, “earworm” effect, when a song gets stuck in one’s head, is an involuntary mental rehearsal of English vocabulary (Murphey, 1992). This self-directed engagement with digital media is an example of the wider concept of Extramural English (Sundqvist, 2009), or learning English outside the classroom, which bridges formal classroom instruction and authentic language use. By choosing to interact with English music, adolescents assume a degree of learner autonomy that transforms a potentially tedious memorization task into a leisure activity.

In this informal, low-anxiety environment, students are more likely to focus organically on the form-meaning connection of new words. This allows them to gradually expand their receptive vocabulary, the foundational ability to recognize and understand words, without the immediate pressure of formal academic assessment.

The impact of this extramural exposure, however, may vary greatly depending on the educational context of the local setting and the extent to which the learners are actively engaged. Eighth-grade students have different levels of access to digital streaming services and different degrees of intrinsic motivation to decipher English lyrics.

Although contemporary studies indicate that Indonesian students are often exposed to Western pop culture through their smartphones and daily routines (Amaliah, 2018), it is not yet known whether such informal, habitual listening brings about concrete academic benefits within their English curriculum.

To understand real value as an auxiliary learning tool, the pedagogical effect of such informal consumption needs to be systematically quantified. It is crucial to determine if merely listening to these songs provides enough linguistic input, or if active engagement with the lyrics is required to overcome the lexical ceiling, a plateau where learners possess basic grammar but lack the adequate vocabulary size to express complex ideas (Schmitt, 2000).

Despite the potential of this exposure, there is a lack of empirical data regarding how significantly students' exposure toward English songs correlates with the vocabulary mastery among junior high school students. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the correlation between students' exposure to English song and their vocabulary mastery.

B. Research Questions

This quantitative research has three main research questions. The questions are stated below:

1. How high is the level of students' exposure towards English songs among eight grade students?
2. How high is the level of students' vocabulary mastery of eight grade students?
3. What is the significance of the relationship between students' exposure towards English songs and their vocabulary mastery?

C. Research Purposes

Based on the research questions, the researcher explores the purpose of the study as follows:

1. To identify the level of students' exposure towards English songs among eighth grade students.
2. To identify the level of students' vocabulary mastery of eighth grade students.
3. To analyse the significant correlation between students' exposure towards English songs and their vocabulary mastery.

D. Research Significance

This study is expected to provide valuable contributions to both the theoretical and practical realms of English Language Teaching (ELT), specifically regarding vocabulary acquisition.

The significances of this research are classified as follows:

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) by providing empirical evidence to support Krashen's Input Hypothesis. It also adds to the growing body of research on Extramural English (EE) by investigating the role of non-formal authentic auditory exposure in the development of formal linguistic competence.

While previous studies have primarily focused on formal classroom interventions, this study takes a paradigm shift by focusing on the educational value of students' autonomous digital habits. It offers a more nuanced understanding of how incidental vocabulary learning occurs naturally through contemporary media, especially in the context of adolescent EFL learners in Indonesia.

2. Practical Significance

The results of this research can be practically utilized as a reference for the stakeholders of the educational sector.

For English Teachers: The results of this research can be used as a concrete material in the development of an interesting "song-based" learning module. By knowing the correlation between the frequency of listening to songs and the mastery of vocabulary, teachers can use it as a bridge between students' interests outside the classroom and the learning objectives in the classroom. This can be implemented in accordance with the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, where teachers can optimize digital media not only as an entertainment but also as a differentiated learning tool that accommodates students' listening preferences.

For students, this study validates their daily listening habits as a productive learning tool rather than a mere distraction. It is expected to raise students' awareness that their interaction with English pop culture can be intentionally

utilized to overcome their 'lexical ceiling' and expand their receptive vocabulary size.

For educational institutions, this study suggests that schools should incorporate modern digital media into the curriculum and make the instructional focus more dynamic and multi-modal rather than textbook-based rote memorization.

For future researchers, the present study can be a starting point for future studies on the relationship between pop culture and language learning. The data collected can be a base for experimental research aiming at creating specific vocabulary interventions based on songs or can be extended to examine other language features (e.g. pronunciation, grammatical correctness) in different educational levels.

E. Research Scope

In order to make the research focused and manageable, the researcher establishes specific boundaries regarding the subject, the participants, and the time of the study. The participants of this research are strictly limited to 40 eighth-grade students at *SMP Negeri Kutawaringin*, selected through a purposive sampling technique.

Furthermore, the subject matter is exclusively focused on the students' extramural exposure to English songs and their receptive vocabulary mastery, specifically limited to the first 2,000 high-frequency words.

Lastly, the data collection for this study was specifically conducted on January 22, 2026. The main scope of the research is to find out the relationship between two variables, those are students' exposure to English songs (Variable X) and students' vocabulary mastery (Variable Y).

Specifically, the "exposure" aspect looks at students' natural listening habits outside the classroom such as how often they listen, how long they listen, and whether they pay attention to the lyrics rather than formal learning activities. Meanwhile, "vocabulary mastery" is limited to the students' receptive vocabulary size, focusing on the form-meaning connection of the 2,000 high-frequency words.

The researcher also acknowledges a key limitation in this study. The information about "listening habits" is collected through a questionnaire, so the

results depend on students' honesty and memory (self-reported data). It is possible that students might overestimate or underestimate their own listening frequency.

However, the questionnaire is designed with detailed indicators to minimize this bias and help students answer as accurately as possible. Moreover, the study does not limit the genre of music, assuming that "English songs" generally refers to popular English songs that is widely accessible to teenagers.

F. Conceptual Framework

This study was based on the exposure of the English song as the X variable and vocabulary mastery as the Y variable. Based on the previous study findings, the more the students are exposed to the English song, the better the vocabulary mastery is in the eighth-grade students in Indonesia.

The current framework is based on theories from Second Language Acquisition and Educational Psychology. The present study is mainly based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis which highlights the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. The integration of English songs into learning can be advantageous as the language is presented in a very authentic and meaningful manner, easily accessible and enjoyable for the learners.

Moreover, research on mnemonics including Medina (1990) and Engh (2013) support the idea that music, rhythm and repetition enhance memory and enable more successful vocabulary acquisition in students. In the digital age, streaming services such as Spotify and YouTube have enhanced this by providing convenient access to English in engaging ways for students.

The framework helps to identify the important concepts to be measured, explains the hypothesized relationship between the concepts and provides the theoretical foundation for the study. It provides a framework for the implementation of a quantitative research design that is used to evaluate the student's level of exposure and mastery of vocabulary. Additionally, it facilitates the analysis of the correlation between these two variables.

The overarching objective of this framework is twofold: first, to contribute to both theory and practice by promoting a student-centred and interest-based approach to vocabulary learning in the Indonesian EFL context; and second, to

provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for vocabulary learning in the Indonesian EFL context.

The visual representation of the relationship between the X variable and the Y variable, along with their specific measurable indicators, is clearly illustrated in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Conceptual Framework

Variable (X) Exposure to English Songs		Variable (Y) Vocabulary Mastery
Indicators: • Frequency of listening • Duration of listening • Engagement (singing along, reading lyrics, searching meanings)	 Correlation	Indicators: • Word recognition • Understanding of word meaning • Written form recognition • Form meaning connection

The conceptual framework establishes the specific indicators for both variables based on established theories in Second Language Acquisition. For the X variable, students' exposure to English songs is measured using indicators adapted from Sundqvist's (2009) framework on Extramural English activities. Sundqvist suggests that engagement with English outside the classroom is multidimensional and includes not only the frequency of listening which takes into account the duration and intensity of daily exposure but also active engagement and attention to input.

Active engagement refers to behavioural interactions such as singing along, looking up lyrics or deliberately searching for word meanings; attention to input assesses the cognitive level of processing, that is, it distinguishes whether students pay close attention to the lyrics or they just treat the songs as background noise.

Meanwhile, the Y variable, vocabulary mastery, is grounded in Nation's (2001) framework of "Knowing a Word," specifically focusing on the receptive dimension suitable for eighth grade students. In this study, the indicators are narrowed down to the form-meaning connection. This aspect assesses the students' ability to

recognize the written form of a word when they encounter it and accurately identify its meaning or synonym.

Consequently, the assessment focuses on the students' receptive knowledge, their ability to understand words when reading or listening rather than their productive ability to use the words in speaking or writing.

G. Research Hypothesis

1. Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is a significant positive correlation between students' exposure towards English songs and their vocabulary mastery.
2. Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant correlation between students' exposure towards English songs and their vocabulary mastery.

H. Previous Studies

Several previous studies have provided empirical support for the role of songs and media exposure in vocabulary learning. Early research by Medina (1990), conducted in the United States with second-grade limited-English-proficient children, and Murphey (1992), who analysed a corpus of pop songs aimed at global ESL/EFL learners, established the effectiveness of songs in facilitating vocabulary acquisition and highlighted the Song-Stuck-in-My-Head (SSIMH) phenomenon as a natural mechanism for linguistic rehearsal.

More recent studies have extended this line of research by focusing on informal exposure and digital media. Léger and Storch (2009) investigated learners' engagement with English media, including songs, among adult L2 learners in an Australian university context, and found that frequent exposure significantly contributed to incidental vocabulary learning. In their study, they emphasized that students who actively consumed English media outside the classroom showed greater development of vocabulary.

Listening to English songs was found to be one of the most potent influences on vocabulary development (p. 6) in the extramural activities of EFL learners in primary and secondary schools in Sweden, according to Sundqvist and Sylén (2016). They noted that vocabulary gains were more strongly linked to the extent of exposure to the language than to formal instruction alone (p. 6).

In a Canadian academic setting, Pavia, Webb, and Faez (2019) investigated the connection between digital media exposure and vocabulary acquisition in L2 English learners and discovered that recurrent exposure to authentic audio input like songs boosted learners' receptive vocabulary knowledge (p. 8). Their results support the idea that informal listening habits can significantly affect vocabulary learning.

Kusnierek (2021) investigated the impact of songs on vocabulary retention in EFL secondary school students in Poland and found that students who listened to English songs had better long-term retention and higher motivation than those who used only traditional methods.

More recently, Lee and Dressman (2022) explored informal digital language exposure among EFL learners in South Korea and found that learners who frequently listened to English songs and watched English videos showed a significant increase in vocabulary breadth, indicating the importance of natural exposure in developing lexical competence.

Kocaman (2016) investigated the role of English songs on vocabulary acquisition for 60 students of different grades at Sakarya University in Turkey in a Middle Eastern context. The study was carried out by means of a questionnaire-based approach and it was concluded that songs stimulated learners' curiosity and played a significant role in their vocabulary learning process. The findings revealed that engaging with music not only acts as an entertaining extramural activity but also provides substantial cognitive benefits for long-term word retention.

Furthermore, focusing on the influence of digital habits, Jensen (2017) conducted a study on out-of-school English activities, particularly listening to music and watching TV programs for adolescent EFL learners. The study revealed that these self-directed digital activities are very helpful for the acquisition of L2 vocabulary proficiency because they provide learners with constant exposure to authentic language use outside the four walls of a formal classroom.

Basori (2022) conducted a qualitative study in the Southeast Asian educational setting to explore the perceptions of EFL students regarding the use of English songs in improving vocabulary mastery at an Indonesian university. The research

employed questionnaires and in-depth interviews and found that students faced linguistic difficulties when listening to the native-speed audio, but the regular use of English songs played a significant role in enhancing students' vocabulary mastery and pronunciation.

Likewise, Amaliah (2018) studied the relationship between students' extramural English practices and their vocabulary size in an Indonesian context. The study revealed that learners who often exposed to extramural English through digital media, for example, streaming music using their smartphones, acquired a larger size of vocabulary. The study indicated that the mobility of smartphones allows students to be surrounded by an English-rich environment anywhere, thus maximizing the opportunity for incidental vocabulary acquisition.

While these prior studies clearly show the benefits of using media for language learning, they also expose a few gaps in the current research. First, most of this research has been conducted in Western or East Asian countries such as Sweden, Canada and South Korea, often focusing on university students or much younger children. Second, from a methodological perspective, many of these studies are based on experimental designs. They tend to measure the success of short-term classroom activities rather than studying students' natural, long-term listening habits outside of school.

The present study aims to fill the gaps by exploring the issue from another perspective. Rather than a formal classroom experiment, this study employs a correlational design to observe a natural and daily habit: listening to English songs. The participants are eighth-grade students in an Indonesian EFL context, who are actively beginning to consume digital media on their own.

By investigating the association of these daily listening habits with students' receptive vocabulary, especially their ability to associate word forms with their meanings, this study hopes to present a more realistic view of how informal and digital exposure plays a natural role in students' vocabulary mastery in Indonesia.