

Missing Lyrics in English Songs: Improving Listening Skills in SMP 16 Palu

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the effectiveness of using missing lyrics in English songs to improving listening skills of the ninth-grade students at SMP 16 Palu. The research applied a quasi-experimental approach involving two groups: an experimental group that experiences the treatment using missing lyrics in English songs, and a control group that continued with the traditional learning skills before and after intervention. The results revealed that the experimental group showed a notable improvement in their listening skills compared to the control group. Using missing lyrics in English songs helped improve students' interest and active participation during lessons. Additionally, this method provided genuine exposure to the English language. Overall, the findings indicate that incorporating missing lyrics in English songs can be an effective technique to support and develop students listening skills in language learning.

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1. Introduction

Listening is one of the first skills we develop and is essential for acquiring a new language. Through listening, learners gain context and meaning behind words and phrases. According to Afriyuninda & Oktaviani (2021), listening is also the most important language skill and a part of communication, from listening we can share our ideas with other people. In addition, Yıldırım & Yıldırım (2016) explained the importance of listening in classroom as follows: (a) the act of listening holds significant importance in the language learning environment. (b) oral communication facilitates interaction among learners, which is essential for achieving comprehension. (c) listening activities offer educators a valuable tool for directing learners' focus towards new linguistic structures and forms. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) also stated that listening is the process of how a person receives information and creates the meaning of a word from what the speaker says. Listening is also one of the important components in communication. This is supported by Hardiyanto et al., (2021) which said that listening is a very complex psychological process involving perception, cognition, attention and memory. Lestari et al., (2019) also stated that listening is a complex mental process that involves perception, attention, cognition and memory.

Based on the results of interview done by the researcher with English teacher and students at SMP 16 Palu, which was conducted on 8th of October 2024, related to the English learning process, the researcher posed several questions to English teachers regarding the primary challenges students faced, and whether instruction was conducted entirely in English or mixed with English and Indonesian.

The researcher found the problem that some of the students are considered lacking in terms of understanding from the material given by the teacher. The lack of vocabulary makes the words they hear unfamiliar, and listening interaction only occurs during English lessons. Therefore, students become bored so that the students' attention are diverted.

Many students have difficulty understanding lessons because their listening skills were underdeveloped. A major issues was that teachers often speak at a fast pace, which made it difficult for students to keep up with the explanation. Even when the teacher repeated the material in Indonesian, students still had trouble grasping the main points and details. This was largely because they did not have enough vocabulary to fully understand what they heard in English (Prihandoko et al., 2021; Ko et al., 2025; Sabila et al., 2025). When they encountered unfamiliar words, it became even harder for them to follow along with the lesson. Another problem was that students only had the opportunity to practice listening during English classes (Rahman & Weda, 2019; Yaumi et al., 2024; Aswad et al., 2019; Youngsun et al., 2024). This limited practice meant they did not have enough chances to improve their listening skills or to learn new vocabulary in context.

As a result, listening activities remained difficult and sometimes discouraging for them. When students consistently failed to comprehend the material, they quickly lost interest in the lesson. Boredom set in, causing their attention to wander away from what the teacher saying. This lack of focus led to cycle where students became less motivated to listen and participate, making it even more difficult for them to develop their listening skills.

Songs are one of the media that can be used in teaching listening. Besides being easy to access, songs also provides various accents and tones, which help learners become familiar with different speech styles in English. In addition, it is contain uncommon vocabulary and expressions that are not typically found in formal lessons. Songs make the learning process more attractive and enjoyable, preventing boredom commonly experienced during traditional teaching methods. Another study has shown that music can improve concentration, improve memory, bring a sense of community to a group, motivate learning, relax the overwhelmed or stressed people, make learning fun and help students understanding materials (Rohana & Saharani, 2023). Caicedo and Lojano in Srirejeki & Darmayanti (2019) also conclude that the use of songs stimulates the students' interest to learn and encourage them to engage more during the learning process because these motivating activities increase the students' confidence, learning abilities and skills.

Based on the discussion with the English teacher, using missing lyrics in English songs as listening material has never been used before. So the researcher would like to use this technique as learning media to teach listening.

2. Methodology

The study used a quantitative approach since the study aims to improve listening skills through missing lyrics in English songs. Research design that used was quasi-experimental. In this approach, the researcher still introduced a change (for example, delivering a lesson or playing a song) and then observed the outcomes. This type of research was commonly applied in real-world environments like schools or workplaces where random assignment was not feasible. Although the findings could reveal meaningful effects, they were generally considered less definitive that those fully controlled experimental studies.

The research involved Junior High School students in grade 9th at one junior high school in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia who used missing lyrics in English songs as the learning medium. There were two groups in this research: the experimental group and the control group. In class IX A consist of 29 students while in class IX E consist 30 students at SMP 16 Palu. The research instrument used in this study was a listening test. The test was administered in two steps: pre-test and post-test. The experimental group was given a pre-test, treatment, and post-test, while the control group received a pre-test and post-test without any treatment from the researcher. The test consisted of 18 questions which consist 5 fill-in-the-blank, 3 multiple-choice, 5 antonyms and 5 change meaning question.

Pre-test served as a technique to evaluate students' prior knowledge on a subject prior to the introduction of new content. This process enabled educators to pinpoint areas of deficiency, tailor instructional strategies to address students' specific needs, and inspire learners by emphasizing opportunities for growth. In this research, the researcher used a pre-test in several forms: first, a fill-in-the-blank test where students were given song lyrics with some missing words; second, a multiple-choice test that presented questions focusing on the meaning, theme, or specific details of the song lyrics; and third, an antonym test where students were given several words and asked to find their antonyms. According to Amin & Wahyudin (2022) that the purpose of the pre-test is to determine whether or not the two classes are already aware of the lessons that will be taught to them. By employing this method, the researcher could design lessons that were more pertinent and impactful, while also optimizing instructional time by concentrating on critical material. Nonetheless, its effectiveness might diminished if students lacked engagement or failed to acknowledge their own knowledge gaps. In summary, pre-test was an essential instrument for improving the educational experience. In this research, pre-test was used as instrument to gain data and was administered before treatment session.

Treatment referred to the intervention or condition administered to an experimental group in order to assess its impact on a particular variable. The purpose of the treatment was to determine whether there was a significant effect from the intervention being tested, such as a new teaching method or a specific type of therapy, on the outcomes measured after the treatment (post-test).

The step of treatment can be classified into three phases:

a. Pre-listening activity

In this phase, each session started with the researcher preparing students for the listening activity. This involved introducing the song, discussing learning objectives, and activating prior knowledge (like discussing favorite songs).

b. While-listening activity

In this step, the students actively engaged with the song by listening to it multiple times and completing a fill-in-the-blanks worksheet based on the lyrics. This focused their attention on specific words and phrases.

c. Post-listening activity

Following the listening activity, the class discussed the answers to the worksheet, and the researcher revisited any challenging sections of the song. The final post-test assessed the overall improvement in listening comprehension after the intervention.

A post-test was an evaluative tool administered to students or participants following the completion of a course or training program. The primary objective of this assessment was to determine the extent of knowledge or skills acquired as a consequence of the instructional experience. In contrast to pre-tests, which assessed existing knowledge, post-tests serve as graded evaluations that illustrate the degree of learning achieved and the enhancement of understanding over a specified period. Meanwhile, Amin & Wahyudin (2022) explain that to ascertain whether the research participants had comprehended the information provided by the researcher, a post-test are employed. In this research, a post-test, using the same test model and scoring system as the pre-test, was used as an instrument to gather data after the treatment session.

To explain the students' scores on pre-test and post-test, the researcher analyzed the data using SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Science).

3. Result and Discussion

This section presented the results of the study based on the data collected from the experimental class. The findings showed how the treatment affected the students' understanding and engagement with the song lyrics. The analysis focused on the key aspects observed during the intervention, including students' ability to recognize and understand unfamiliar words, their pronunciation improvement, and overall participation. The results were discussed in detail to highlight the effectiveness of the teaching method applied in this research.

3.1 Pre-test and Post-test Results

This study proposes to determine whether missing lyrics in English songs is effective in improving students' listening skill. The researcher conducted this research from April 12th until April 24th, 2025 at SMP 16 Palu. The results of this research was acquired from a listening test. The listening test was divided into pre-test and post-test. Pre-test was given in the first meeting and post-test was given in the last meeting in both classes (IX E as an experimental class and IX A as a control class). The outcomes of the pre-test and post-test are presented in the following table:

Table 1. The data of pre-test and post-test

		Pre-test Experimental	Post-test Experimental	Pre-test Control	Post-test Control
N	Valid	30	30	29	29
	Missing	4	4	6	6
Minimum		38	50	40	69
Maximum		78	94	41	70
Mean		62.77	75.92	53.78	56.65

Based on the table above, in the experimental class it can be seen the mean of pre-test was 62.77 with highest score was 78 and the lowest was 38. Meanwhile, the mean score of post-test was 75.92 with the highest score was 94 and the lowest was 50. In the control class it can be seen that the mean of pre-test was 53.78 with the highest score was 41 and the lowest was 40. Meanwhile, the mean score of post-test was 56.65 with the highest score is 70 and the lowest was 69.

3.2 Normality Test

The normality test determines whether a sample data had been drawn from a normality distributed population. The normality test was used to evaluate the distribution of data and determine if the data collected or obtained came from a normally distributed population. The test results could be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Normality Test Statistics

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Student Learning Score	Pre-test experimental	.159	23	.135
	Post-test experimental	.172	23	.078
	Pre-test control	.201	23	.016
	Post-test control	.102	23	.200

Based on the table above, in the experimental class analysis of the pre-test results of the students obtained a probability value (sig.) of 0.135 and 0.078 for the post-test. Whereas, in the control class analysis of the pre-test results of the students obtained a probability value (sig.) of 0.16 and 0.200 for the post-test. The data was normally distributed if the p-value was greater than 0.05. How, if the p-value was less than 0.05, it means that the data was not normally distributed. Therefore, it could be seen that the one of data results was less than 0.05 leading to conclusion that the data were not normally distributed, a nonparametric test namely the Mann-Whitney U Test was carried out.

3.3 Mann-Whitney U Test

The Mann-Whitney U test is a simple statistical method used to compare two separate groups when the data was not normally distributed. Instead of looking at the average values, this test ranks all the data from both groups together and then checks if one group generally has higher or lower ranks than the other.

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U Test

	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Pre-test	Experiment	26	29.88	777.00
	Control	23	19.48	448.00
Post-test	Experiment	26	34.94	908.50
	Control	23	13.76	316.50

Based on table above, the results of the descriptive ranks show that in the pre-test, the experimental group obtained a Mean Rank of 29.88 and a Sum of Ranks of 777.00, while the control group obtained a Mean Rank of 19.48 and a Sum of Ranks of 448.00.

In the post-test, the experimental group obtained a Mean Rank of 39.49 with a Sum of Ranks of 908.50, while the control group obtained a Mean Rank of 13.76 with a Sum of Ranks of 316.50.

These results indicate that the ranking position of the experimental group was higher than the control group, both in the pre-test and especially in the post-test. The increase in Mean Rank for the experimental group in the post-test showed a positive effect after being treated using missing lyrics in English songs as a listening medium.

3.4 Test Statistics

After using the Mann Whitney-U test, the researcher did more analysis to understand the results better. One important part is finding p-value, which helped researcher decide if the difference between the two groups was real just happened by chance. If the p-value was less than 0.05, it means the difference was likely important and not random.

Table 4. Test Statistics

	Pre-test	Post-test
Mann Whitney-U	172.000	40.500
Wilcoxon W	448.000	316.500
Z	-2.554	-5.188
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.000

Based on table above, the result of the Mann-Whitney U test for the pre-test obtained a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.011, which was less than 0.05. This indicates a statistically significant difference in the students' listening skills scores between the experimental and control groups before treatment was given.

For the post-test, the Mann-Whitney U test obtained a Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.000, which was also less than 0.05. This result showed that there was a highly significant difference in listening skills achievement between the students in the experimental class and those in the control class after the experimental group was taught using missing lyrics in English songs.

Based on all the data above, it could be seen that the use of missing lyrics in English song was able to improve students' listening skills. The positive outcomes could be explained by several factors:

a. The use of missing lyrics in English songs as a learning medium increases students' motivation and engagement. Songs are generally enjoyable and familiar to students, which reduces anxiety and creates a relaxed learning environment where student are more willingly participate actively.

b. Songs provide authentic language exposure, including natural pronunciation, intonation, and colloquial expressions. It helps students become accustomed to real-life spoken English, improving their skills to understand native speakers.

c. The missing lyrics technique requires students to listen attentively and actively, as they must identify and fill in specific missing word. Additionally, songs provide meaningful context that aids learners in inferring the meaning of unknown words and phrases, which strengthens their ability to use contextual clues in everyday listening situations.

d. The repetitive nature of songs, combined with their melody and rhythm, helps reinforce vocabulary and language structures, making it easier for students to remember and internalize new language element.

Since this research showed that the technique that the researcher used effective in improving students listening skills. This research is in line with several previous study. First, Nurteteng in Ulfa (2020) stated that English song can help student to learn about listening properly. Second, Millington in Srirejeki & Darmayanti (2019) said that songs can help young learners to achieve their listening skills, pronunciation and speaking skills.

Using English songs as a learning medium to improve student listening skills offers numerous advantages that have been widely recognized in language education research. One major benefit is that songs enhance learners' pronunciation and accent. Songs provide natural language input with rhythm, intonation, and stress patterns that help learners internalize the sounds of the target language more effectively than isolated drills.

Additionally, missing lyrics technique improves overall listening skills by encouraging active listening, requiring learners to concentrate more deeply on the sounds, pronunciation, and meaning of the words they hear. This focused attention also boots students' motivation an engagement, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective. A broader review by Werner (2020) on lyrics-based language teaching supports these findings, stating that lyrics-based activities, including missing lyrics exercises, are valuable tools in foreign language classrooms. They help improve vocabulary, grammar, and overall proficiency while maintaining high learner motivation. Such activities are especially effective when combined with other teaching materials and strategies.

Despite the effectiveness of using missing lyrics in English song, the researcher found challenges while giving the test. the time used for research was not during regular class hours but rather during project hours, which meant it was outside of regular class time, allowing students to leave the room and not participate in the activities. Secondly, some students were not interested in the research being conducted by the researcher, which resulted in the number of students not matching the sample size. Another significant challenge was encountered when working on the exercises. Due to their

limited vocabulary, students found it difficult to complete tasks ranging from fill-in-the-blank questions to finding the antonyms of the given words. While listening to the song audio, students appeared to struggle in identifying the missing words based on lyrics provided in the worksheet. Hadijah & Shalawati (2016) stated that unfamiliarity with the word used by speakers in a conversation or monologue will influence the listeners' ability in English language learners who usually still have limited vocabulary mastery, they will have serious problems in the process of transferring the information. Additionally, they had difficulty answering multiple-choice questions, not only because of their limited vocabulary but also because they did not fully understand the content of the song. Most students left the antonym question blank, which resulted in several incorrect answers. Additionally, external factors such as students' prior motivation, the classroom atmosphere, and the teacher's facilitation skills may have subtly influenced the outcomes. These variables, although not directly measured in this study, likely played a role in shaping students' overall performance during the listening activities.

Therefore, it could be concluded that the use of missing lyrics in English songs had a significant effect on improving the listening skills of the ninth-grade students at SMP 16 Palu.

4. Conclusion

After presenting the research findings, the researcher discussed the findings that had been analyzed. The researcher used test as the instrument in gathering data of research. The results of this research clearly indicated a significant improvement in students' listening skills when taught using the missing lyrics technique in English songs. This was reflected in the increase in mean scores from the pre-test to the post-test in the experimental group, which rose from 62.77 to 75.92, compared to the control group's smaller improvement from 53.78 to 56.65. The statistical analysis using the Mann-Whitney U test further confirmed these findings, showing a highly significant difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, with a significance value 0.000, which was well below 0.05 threshold. This findings suggested that the missing lyrics technique effectively improves listening skills among students.

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