

EXPLORING EFL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION THROUGH MAHER ZAIN'S SONGS

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ABSTRACT

Pronunciation is an important aspect of English learning because it helps students communicate clearly. However, many EFL students still face difficulties in pronunciation due to limited exposure to authentic English input. The study concludes that Maher Zain's songs can serve as an effective medium for teaching English pronunciation. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design involving eighth-grade students of SMP Plus Tahdzibun Nasyiin. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings revealed that students had positive learning experiences when learning pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs. The songs helped students improve pronunciation accuracy, stress, intonation, and confidence. However, students also faced challenges such as fast song tempo and unfamiliar vocabulary. This study concludes that Maher Zain's songs can be used as an effective medium for teaching pronunciation.

Keywords: *English songs, Maher Zain songs, Pronunciation, Students' Experiences*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation plays an important role in English communication because it helps learners deliver messages clearly and avoid misunderstanding (Ferdiyanto, 2019). Ideally, students are expected to pronounce English words accurately so they can communicate effectively in speaking activities. Good pronunciation also supports students' confidence in expressing ideas orally (Dewi & Ahmad, 2021). Therefore, pronunciation should receive sufficient attention in English language learning.

However, in reality, many EFL students still experience difficulties in pronunciation. They often struggle to pronounce English words correctly because of limited exposure to authentic pronunciation models. English learning in many classrooms still relies heavily on textbooks and teacher explanations rather than authentic listening materials (Tran et al., 2024). As a result, students have limited opportunities to practice natural English pronunciation.

This problem was also found at SMP Plus Tahdzibun Nasyiin. Based on preliminary classroom observations, several students had difficulties pronouncing English words correctly and often felt bored during conventional pronunciation activities. Students rarely practiced pronunciation through engaging learning media. This condition shows a gap between the expected pronunciation competence and the actual classroom reality.

One alternative medium that can help solve this problem is English songs. Previous research has shown that incorporating songs into English lessons can improve learners' pronunciation while creating a more enjoyable and less stressful learning environment (Saldiraner, 2021). In addition, songs enhance students' motivation and engagement while supporting the development of correct English pronunciation (Wong et al., 2024). Among many English songs, Maher Zain songs were selected because they have clear pronunciation, meaningful lyrics, and are suitable for junior high school students.

Several previous studies have highlighted the contribution of English songs to English language learning. Students who learned pronunciation through English songs demonstrated better pronunciation performance than those who received conventional pronunciation instruction, indicating that English songs can be an effective medium for pronunciation learning (Febiola et al., 2025). Furthermore, English songs effectively supported students' pronunciation learning by enhancing their awareness of suprasegmental features, such as stress, intonation, and rhythm through authentic and phonologically rich language input (Mulyani et al., 2026).

Although previous studies have confirmed the benefits of English songs in English language learning, most of them primarily focused on pronunciation improvement, learning outcomes, or students' general perceptions toward the use of songs. Limited attention has been given to exploring students' experiences during the process of learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs, particularly among Indonesian junior high school EFL learners. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its focus on exploring students' learning experiences, including the benefits and challenges they encounter while learning English

pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs using a qualitative descriptive approach.

Therefore, this study aims to explore EFL junior high school students' experiences in learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs. The findings are expected to enrich the existing literature on pronunciation learning through English songs and provide practical insights for English teachers in designing more engaging and meaningful pronunciation instruction in EFL classrooms.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Pronunciation in EFL Learning

Pronunciation is one of the important components of speaking skills because it affects communication clarity (Prasad Tiwari, 2023). According to Tiwari, pronunciation helps learners produce understandable speech and avoid miscommunication during oral interaction. Pronunciation includes segmental features such as vowels and consonants as well as suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation (Husna, 2021). Students who have poor pronunciation may experience difficulties in delivering messages clearly even when they have sufficient vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

Many EFL learners still face difficulties in pronunciation due to the influence of their first language (Aeni et al., 2025). Indonesian students often transfer pronunciation patterns from their mother tongue into English pronunciation due to phonological differences between the two languages, which may lead to pronunciation errors (Ristati et al., 2025). Besides first-language interference, limited opportunities to practice pronunciation in EFL classrooms also contribute to students' pronunciation problems. Pronunciation instruction often receives less attention than grammar and vocabulary, resulting in insufficient practice and feedback for students.

In addition, learners need continuous exposure to authentic spoken English in order to develop more accurate pronunciation. Regular listening activities enable students to become familiar with English sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation used by native or proficient speakers. Therefore, teachers should provide learning media that offer meaningful pronunciation practice and encourage students to use English in authentic communication situations.

Songs as Learning Media in Pronunciation Learning

Songs are considered effective learning media because they expose students to authentic English through native speakers' voices and natural language use (Karim et al., 2023). Songs help students learn pronunciation through repetition, rhythm, and melody. Repetition in songs helps students remember pronunciation patterns more effectively and improves pronunciation accuracy (Simanjuntak et al., 2025). Songs also create enjoyable learning environments that reduce students' anxiety and increase motivation during learning activities (A et al., 2025).

In addition, songs expose students to natural pronunciation patterns, including stress and intonation. Through listening and imitation activities, students can become more familiar with authentic English pronunciation. Songs also help learners recognize the pronunciation of unfamiliar words in meaningful contexts rather than learning isolated vocabulary items. This process supports both listening comprehension and pronunciation development simultaneously.

Furthermore, the enjoyable atmosphere created by songs encourages students to participate more actively in classroom activities. Students are generally more confident when practicing pronunciation through singing or repeating song lyrics because the activities feel less stressful than conventional pronunciation drills. As a result, songs can become an effective alternative medium for teaching pronunciation in EFL classrooms.

Previous Studies

Several previous studies have investigated the use of songs in English language learning, particularly for improving pronunciation. Songs have been found to be effective media for improving students' pronunciation. Melody, rhythm, and repetition help learners understand pronunciation aspects such as stress, intonation, and articulation more naturally. In addition, the use of songs increases students' motivation, active participation, confidence, and creates a more dynamic and engaging classroom atmosphere (Fitriani et al., 2025).

Music has also been recognized as an enjoyable medium for improving English pronunciation. Besides helping learners develop pronunciation skills, music supports vocabulary development and enhances learners' understanding of song lyrics. Furthermore, harmony, rhythm, and melody create a positive and memorable learning experience, indicating that music can be integrated as a creative approach to pronunciation instruction (Azwa Arisya, 2025).

The incorporation of English songs has also been shown to strengthen EFL learners' pronunciation proficiency while serving as an effective instructional approach. The findings further revealed that both teachers and students held positive perceptions toward the use of songs in pronunciation learning, suggesting that integrating songs into classroom instruction can enhance the quality and effectiveness of pronunciation practice (Muhammed, 2024).

Furthermore, another study reported that the use of songs effectively improved students' English pronunciation while increasing their motivation and willingness to speak English. Students perceived learning pronunciation through songs as interesting, which encouraged active participation throughout the learning process and contributed to continuous improvement in their pronunciation performance (Nazara, 2017).

Although previous studies have demonstrated that songs positively contribute to pronunciation learning and create engaging classroom experiences, most of them primarily focused on the effectiveness of songs in improving language skills or students' pronunciation achievement. Limited studies have specifically explored students' experiences in learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs, particularly among Indonesian junior high school EFL learners. Therefore, this study focuses on exploring students' experiences, including the benefits and challenges they encounter while learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore eighth-grade students' experiences in learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs at SMP Plus Tahdzibun Nasyiin. The study was conducted during the implementation of pronunciation learning activities using Maher Zain's songs in the English classroom. The participants were eighth-grade students who had experienced the learning activities and were selected using purposive sampling. They were selected because they were considered capable of providing relevant information based on their direct experiences during the learning process.

Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observation was conducted during the pronunciation learning process to examine students' participation, responses, and interactions while learning through Maher Zain's songs. After the learning activities were completed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants to explore their learning experiences, perceptions, and

challenges in learning English pronunciation. Each interview was conducted individually to allow participants to express their experiences more freely. Documentation in the form of photographs taken during classroom activities was also collected to support and complement the research data.

The collected data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation was organized according to the research objectives. The data were then displayed to facilitate interpretation before drawing conclusions. To ensure the credibility of the findings, triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation.

FINDING

This section presents the results of the research based on classroom observations, interviews, and documentation conducted during pronunciation learning activities through several Maher Zain songs. Classroom observations showed that students were actively involved in pronunciation activities, while interview data revealed students' experiences and challenges during the learning process. Documentation in the form of classroom photographs was used to support the findings. The findings were categorized into three major themes: students' positive learning experiences, students' pronunciation improvement, and challenges faced during the learning process.

Students' Positive Learning Experiences

Based on classroom observation, students appeared more enthusiastic during pronunciation activities compared to conventional learning methods. They actively listened to the songs, repeated lyrics, and participated in classroom pronunciation practice.

Student 1 stated:

"I feel happy and more excited to learn English pronunciation through songs."

Student 2 explained:

"Learning through songs is more enjoyable and not boring like only reading."

Student 3 shared:

"I like learning with songs because it feels fun and I can enjoy the music."

Student 4 stated:

"The classroom feels more relaxed when we learn pronunciation through songs."

Student 6 also explained that songs made English learning more interesting, while Student 8 mentioned that songs helped them stay focused during pronunciation practice.

These results indicate that song-based learning created a more enjoyable and engaging learning atmosphere for students.

Students' Pronunciation Improvement

Classroom observation showed that students gradually pronounced English words more clearly after repeating song lyrics several times. Some students also became more confident when practicing pronunciation in front of their classmates. Student 1 stated:

"Listening repeatedly helps me pronounce words better."

Student 5 explained:

"Songs help me imitate English pronunciation more easily."

Student 7 mentioned:

"I understand stress and intonation better when learning through songs."

Student 8 stated:

"I feel more confident when pronouncing English words now."

Student 3 also shared:

"Repeating the song lyrics helps me remember the correct pronunciation."

Student 6 explained that repeated listening helped them recognize correct pronunciation patterns more easily.

These findings indicate that Maher Zain's songs helped students improve pronunciation accuracy, stress, intonation, and confidence.

Challenges Faced by Students

Although students had positive experiences, several challenges were also found during the learning process. Based on classroom observation, some students needed more time to repeat difficult words and follow the song lyrics.

Student 1 stated:

"Sometimes the song is too fast, so I cannot follow all the words."

Student 7 shared a similar difficulty and admitted missing several words because of the song tempo.

Student 2 explained:

"Some vocabulary in the songs is unfamiliar for me."

Student 4 mentioned:

"English spelling and pronunciation are sometimes confusing."

Student 8 stated:

"I feel embarrassed when I pronounce words incorrectly."

Student 5 explained that some words were difficult to imitate correctly, while Student 6 admitted needing repeated practice to pronounce certain words accurately.

These findings indicate that students still faced pronunciation challenges, although they continued participating actively during the learning process.

DISCUSSION

The first finding revealed that students had positive learning experiences when learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs. Most students reported feeling happy, relaxed, and more motivated during pronunciation activities. Classroom observations also showed that students participated more actively than during conventional pronunciation lessons. These findings suggest that the use of Maher Zain's songs created an enjoyable and engaging learning environment that encouraged students to participate actively in pronunciation practice. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which showed that English songs create enjoyable learning environments, reduce students' anxiety, and increase their motivation during language learning (A et al., 2025). In addition, English songs make learning more engaging while increasing students' motivation and confidence (Misa, 2024). Therefore, the findings of this study support previous research indicating that songs not only facilitate pronunciation learning but also create positive learning experiences for EFL students.

The second finding showed that Maher Zain's songs helped students improve their pronunciation accuracy, stress, intonation, and confidence. Students explained that repeated listening activities enabled them to remember correct pronunciation patterns and imitate English sounds more accurately. These findings indicate that repeated exposure to authentic spoken English through songs helps learners internalize pronunciation features more effectively. Previous studies have also reported that English songs expose learners to authentic English through native speakers' voices and natural language use, allowing students to become more familiar with correct pronunciation patterns (Karim et al., 2023). Furthermore, the repetitive nature of songs reinforces pronunciation patterns and contributes to better pronunciation accuracy (Simanjuntak et al., 2025). Therefore, the findings suggest that songs are effective media for improving students' pronunciation while simultaneously increasing their confidence in speaking English.

The third finding revealed that students still encountered several challenges while learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs. Some students experienced difficulties in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, following the fast tempo of the songs, and distinguishing English spelling from pronunciation. These findings indicate that although songs provide authentic language exposure, students still require teacher guidance and repeated practice to

overcome pronunciation difficulties. Similar findings have shown that first-language interference remains one of the major causes of pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners (Aeni et al., 2025). In addition, phonological differences between learners' first language and English often result in pronunciation errors, particularly when learners receive limited pronunciation practice and feedback (Ristati et al., 2025). Therefore, song-based pronunciation learning should be accompanied by appropriate instructional support to maximize its effectiveness.

Overall, the findings of this study confirm that Maher Zain's songs can serve as an effective medium for teaching English pronunciation in EFL classrooms. The songs not only helped students improve their pronunciation skills but also created a more enjoyable learning atmosphere that encouraged active participation and increased confidence. Although students encountered several challenges, such as unfamiliar vocabulary and fast song tempo, these difficulties did not prevent them from engaging in the learning process. Overall, the findings support previous studies on the benefits of English songs in pronunciation learning while providing additional insights into junior high school students' learning experiences through Maher Zain's songs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that EFL junior high school students experienced learning English pronunciation through Maher Zain's songs as an engaging and meaningful learning process. The findings revealed that the use of Maher Zain's songs helped students improve their pronunciation accuracy, stress, intonation, and confidence in speaking English. The songs also created a more enjoyable and motivating learning atmosphere that encouraged students to participate actively during pronunciation activities.

Despite these positive experiences, students also encountered several challenges, including unfamiliar vocabulary, fast song tempo, and difficulties in distinguishing English spelling from pronunciation. However, these challenges did not prevent students from actively engaging in the learning process, especially when they received repeated practice and teacher guidance.

Overall, Maher Zain's songs can serve as an effective alternative medium for teaching English pronunciation to EFL junior high school students. The findings of this study also provide practical insights for English teachers who wish to create more engaging and meaningful pronunciation learning experiences through the use of English songs.

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