

Junior High School Students' Perceptions of Using English Songs for Sustainable Character Education in English Classes

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ABSTRACT

Integrating character education into English language teaching has become increasingly important in promoting both language proficiency and students' personal development. Among various instructional approaches, English songs provide meaningful and engaging learning experiences that simultaneously foster language acquisition and character formation. This study investigated junior high school students' perceptions of using English songs for sustainable character education in English classes. Employing a quantitative descriptive research design, the study involved 101 junior high school students from Jakarta and West Java who completed a structured questionnaire developed based on the four dimensions of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. The instrument consisted of 30 items measuring students' understanding of character values, language learning experiences, moral reflection, and the application of character values in daily life. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings demonstrated that students perceive English songs as engaging instructional materials that facilitate understanding of character values while enhancing vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and motivation to learn English. Furthermore, students report that the songs encourage moral reflection and support the transfer of positive values into everyday behavior. These findings suggest that English songs can serve as effective CLIL-based instructional resources for integrating English language learning with sustainable character education in junior high school contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central priority in educational systems worldwide as schools are expected not only to develop students' academic competence but also to cultivate positive values, ethical behavior, and responsible citizenship. The concept of sustainable character education extends beyond the acquisition of moral knowledge by emphasizing the continuous practice of desirable values that enable learners to contribute positively to their communities and society (Sakban & Sundawa, 2023). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, character education can be integrated with language instruction through meaningful learning activities that encourage students to communicate while simultaneously reflecting on moral values. Rather than treating language learning and character development as separate educational goals, contemporary language education advocates their integration to promote holistic learning. As argued by Yusuf (2026), effective character education develops moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, enabling students to translate ethical understanding into everyday behavior. Similarly, Syafika and Marwa (2024) emphasize that character education is most effective when values are embedded within authentic classroom experiences instead of being taught as isolated concepts. Consequently, English language instruction offers valuable opportunities to integrate linguistic competence with character formation through meaningful pedagogical practices.

One instructional medium that has received increasing attention in English language education is the use of songs. Songs provide authentic linguistic input while creating enjoyable and emotionally engaging learning environments that facilitate vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and communicative confidence. According to Sadiqzade (2024), songs naturally enhance language learning because their rhythm, repetition, and melody promote long-term memory and reduce learners' anxiety. Likewise, Vallejo & Ortega (2024) argues that songs increase learners' motivation by presenting language in meaningful contexts that encourage active participation. Beyond their linguistic benefits, songs can also communicate moral messages and social values that encourage learners to reflect on their own attitudes and behaviors. This dual function makes English songs particularly suitable for integrating language learning with sustainable character education, especially among adolescents who tend to respond positively to music-based learning activities..

The study investigates junior high school students' perceptions of using English songs for sustainable character education in English classes. Specifically, the study addresses four research questions: (1) How do junior high school students perceive the use of English songs for learning sustainable character values in English classes? (2) How do students perceive the contribution of English songs to their English language learning, particularly vocabulary, pronunciation, comprehension, and speaking confidence? (3) How do English songs encourage students' moral reflection and decision-making regarding character values? and (4) How do students perceive the role of English songs in promoting positive social behavior and the application of character values in daily life? By answering these questions, the study seeks to contribute empirical evidence regarding the pedagogical potential of English songs as CLIL-based instructional materials that simultaneously support

English language learning and sustainable character education in junior high school EFL classrooms..

English Songs as Meaningful Resources for Sustainable Character Education

Recent educational research highlights that music is an effective pedagogical resource for fostering both cognitive and affective learning. Through lyrics, melody, and repetition, songs present meaningful messages that are easier for students to understand and remember than conventional instructional texts. Hontarenko & Osmachko (2024) explain that music enhances students' engagement because it combines linguistic, emotional, and social dimensions of learning. Similarly, Babayev (2025) reports that singing facilitates vocabulary retention, pronunciation development, and learner motivation through repeated exposure to meaningful language. When song lyrics explicitly communicate values such as honesty, responsibility, patience, trust, and kindness, students are encouraged not only to understand these concepts but also to relate them to their own experiences. Therefore, English songs represent an effective instructional medium for promoting sustainable character education while simultaneously supporting English language acquisition.

Students' Perceptions as an Indicator of Instructional Effectiveness

Students' perceptions constitute an important source of evidence for evaluating innovative instructional materials because learners directly experience classroom activities and can provide valuable feedback regarding their effectiveness. According to Luo & Derakhshan (2024) students' beliefs and perceptions influence their motivation, classroom engagement, and learning outcomes. Likewise, Printer (2026).) argues that positive learner perceptions increase participation and foster sustained motivation in language learning. Investigating students' perceptions is particularly relevant when introducing English songs for sustainable character education because successful implementation depends not only on instructional design but also on learners' acceptance of the materials. Despite the growing interest in music-assisted language learning and character education, previous studies have predominantly examined teachers' perceptions or the linguistic benefits of songs, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how junior high school students perceive English songs as media for integrating character education with English learning through the CLIL dimensions. This gap provides a strong rationale for conducting the present study..

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to investigate junior high school students' perceptions of using English songs for sustainable character education in English classes (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). The study adopted the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) framework, particularly its four dimensions—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—as the conceptual basis for developing the research instrument (Coyle et al., 2010). The participants were 102 junior high school students enrolled in English classes in junior high school in Jakarta and West Java. Participants were selected

using convenience sampling, as they had experienced learning English through five character-themed English songs designed to promote sustainable character education. Data were collected using a 30-item structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire consisted of four dimensions as follows.

Dimension	Number of Items	Focus
Content	10	Understanding character values presented in the songs
Communication	6	English language learning through songs
Cognition	7	Moral reflection and reasoning
Culture & Sustainability	7	Social interaction and application of character values

The instrument combined multiple-choice questions assessing students' understanding of character concepts, and three-point Likert-scale items (1 = Disagree, 2 = Neutral, 3 = Agree) measuring students' perceptions. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in English language teaching and character education to establish content validity. Students participated in English lessons incorporating five original English songs focusing on the character values of honesty, trust, responsibility, patience, and kindness. After completing the instructional activities, participants responded to the questionnaire anonymously during regular class sessions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize students' responses for each questionnaire item. Mean scores were interpreted to determine the overall level of students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of English songs in supporting sustainable character education and English language learning.

RESULT

The findings obtained from the online survey. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures to answer the four research questions. The results are presented sequentially according to each research question.

The use of English songs for learning sustainable character values

Among the five items of content knowledge, Responsibility (Item 5) achieved the highest level of understanding, with 88 students (87.13%) selecting the correct answer ($M = 0.87$, $SD = 0.33$). The concepts of Honesty (Item 1), Patience (Item 7), and Giving a Smile (Item 9) also showed high levels of comprehension, each with 86 students (85.15%) answering correctly ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 0.36$). In contrast, Trust (Item 3) received the lowest percentage of correct responses, with 79 students (78.22%) answering correctly ($M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.42$). Although this item was relatively more challenging, more than three-quarters of the participants still demonstrated an accurate understanding of the concept.

The standard deviations ranged from 0.33 to 0.42, indicating relatively low variability in students' responses. This suggests that students' understanding of the character concepts was generally consistent across the sample. Collectively, these

findings demonstrate that the English songs effectively communicated the intended character values and helped students comprehend key concepts related to honesty, trust, responsibility, patience, and kindness. The high percentages of correct responses support the use of English songs as meaningful instructional resources for integrating sustainable character education into English language learning.

The second part of the Content dimension examined students' perceptions of how the English songs enhanced their understanding and internalization of the five target character values. Students expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions toward the character-building effects of the songs. The overall mean score was 2.62 (SD = 0.63) on a three-point Likert scale, indicating a generally high level of agreement. On average, 70.10% of the participants agreed that the songs strengthened their understanding of character values, whereas 21.78% selected "Neutral" and only 8.12% disagreed. The Smile song received the highest level of agreement, with 75 students (74.26%) reporting that it taught them to be kind to others (M = 2.60, SD = 0.72). Likewise, 72.28% of the students agreed that the Trust song encouraged them to keep promises (M = 2.61, SD = 0.68), suggesting that the songs were perceived not only as enjoyable learning materials but also as effective resources for encouraging positive behavioral intentions.

Similarly, students demonstrated favorable perceptions of the Honesty, Responsibility, and Patience songs. A total of 69 students (68.32%) agreed that the Honesty song helped them understand the importance of telling the truth (M = 2.63, SD = 0.58), while the same proportion agreed that the Responsibility song reminded them to complete their tasks on time (M = 2.62, SD = 0.60). In addition, 68 students (67.33%) reported that the Patience song helped them control their emotions (M = 2.62, SD = 0.58). Across all five items, the mean scores ranged from 2.60 to 2.63, and the relatively low standard deviations (0.58–0.72) indicate consistent responses among participants. These findings suggest that the English songs successfully communicated sustainable character values and were positively perceived as effective instructional materials for integrating character education into English language learning.

The contribution of English songs to their English language learning

The Communication dimension explored students' perceptions of the contribution of English songs to their English language learning, including vocabulary development, pronunciation, lyric comprehension, speaking confidence, learning enjoyment, and long-term retention. Students reported generally positive perceptions of learning English through songs, with an overall mean score of 2.40 (SD = 0.68) on a three-point Likert scale. Across the six items, an average of 51.65% of the participants selected "Agree," while 36.80% responded "Neutral," and only 11.55% disagreed. These findings indicate that English songs were perceived as beneficial for supporting various aspects of English language learning, although students' responses were more varied than those reported for the Content dimension.

Among the six items, the highest level of agreement was found for Item 11, where 65 students (64.36%) agreed that singing English songs helped them understand new English vocabulary (M = 2.53, SD = 0.68). More than half of the students also agreed that learning English through songs was more enjoyable than textbook-based activities (52.48%, M = 2.40, SD = 0.70), suggesting that songs

created a more engaging learning environment. Nearly half of the participants agreed that songs improved their pronunciation (48.51%, $M = 2.41$, $SD = 0.64$) and helped them remember English lessons for a longer time (48.51%, $M = 2.39$, $SD = 0.66$). Similarly, 49.50% perceived the song lyrics as easy to understand ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.71$), while 46.53% reported increased confidence in speaking English after singing the songs ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 0.71$). The relatively moderate mean scores (2.33–2.53) and low standard deviations (0.64–0.71) suggest that students generally viewed English songs as effective tools for enhancing language learning, particularly vocabulary acquisition and learning enjoyment, although gains in speaking confidence and lyric comprehension appeared to develop more gradually. These findings support the pedagogical value of English songs in fostering meaningful communication and engagement within English language classrooms.

English songs encourage students' moral reflection and decision-making regarding character values

The first part of the Cognition dimension assessed students' knowledge of the moral concepts presented in the English songs by examining their understanding of the consequences of dishonest behavior and the meaning of the proverb "Because haste makes waste." Students demonstrated a high level of conceptual understanding, with an average of 81.19% correct responses across the two knowledge items. The overall mean score was 0.81 (average $SD = 0.40$), indicating that the majority of participants successfully interpreted the moral messages conveyed through the songs.

Among the two items, the highest level of understanding was found for Item 18, in which 85 students (84.16%) correctly identified the meaning of the proverb "Because haste makes waste" ($M = 0.84$, $SD = 0.37$). Similarly, 79 students (78.22%) correctly answered Item 17, demonstrating their understanding of the consequences of dishonest behavior ($M = 0.78$, $SD = 0.42$). The relatively low standard deviations indicate consistent responses among participants, suggesting that students shared a similar level of understanding of these moral concepts. Overall, these findings indicate that the English songs not only introduced character values but also helped students develop knowledge of ethical principles and moral reasoning, supporting the cognitive aspect of sustainable character education in English language learning.

The second part of the Cognition dimension examined students' perceptions of how the English songs promoted moral reflection and reasoning. As presented in Table 5, students reported generally positive perceptions, with an overall mean score of 2.47 (average $SD = 0.64$) on a three-point Likert scale. Overall, 55.64% of the participants agreed that the songs encouraged them to reflect on their behavior and make better moral decisions, whereas 36.04% selected "Neutral" and only 8.32% disagreed. These findings indicate that the songs were perceived as effective in stimulating students' cognitive engagement with character values and encouraging thoughtful consideration of their actions.

The strongest agreement was found for Item 21, where 66 students (65.35%) agreed that the songs encouraged them to make better decisions ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.67$). A similarly high level of agreement was observed for Item 20, with 64 students (63.37%) reporting that the songs helped them understand the consequences of their actions ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 0.64$). More than half of the

participants also agreed that the songs enabled them to distinguish between good and bad behavior (55.45%, $M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.59$). Although lower levels of agreement were found for Item 19 (48.51%) and Item 23 (45.54%), these items still achieved mean scores above 2.30, indicating generally favorable perceptions. The relatively low standard deviations (0.59–0.67) suggest consistent responses among students. Overall, these findings demonstrate that English songs not only facilitated language learning but also promoted higher-order thinking by encouraging students to evaluate their own behavior, understand the consequences of their actions, and apply moral values when making decisions and solving problems in school contexts.

The role of English songs in promoting positive social behavior and the application of character values in daily life

The Culture and Sustainability dimension examined students' perceptions of the extent to which the character values conveyed through the English songs could be applied in their daily lives and contribute to positive social relationships. Students reported generally positive perceptions of the songs' role in promoting sustainable character education. The overall mean score was 2.44 (average $SD = 0.68$) on a three-point Likert scale, indicating a moderately high level of agreement. Across the seven items, an average of 56.01% of the participants selected "Agree," whereas 32.11% responded "Neutral" and only 11.88% expressed disagreement. These findings suggest that students perceived the English songs as valuable instructional resources for encouraging the practical application of character values in both school and everyday life.

The highest level of agreement was found for Item 29, with 66 students (65.35%) agreeing that English songs are suitable for teaching character education ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 0.66$). Similarly, 64.36% of the students expressed their willingness to continue practicing the character values in the future (Item 28; $M = 2.54$, $SD = 0.67$), while 61.39% agreed that the songs helped create a positive classroom atmosphere (Item 27; $M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.66$). More than half of the participants also believed that the songs encouraged them to behave better toward their friends (60.40%, Item 25; $M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.66$) and that learning character values through English songs was effective (59.41%, Item 30; $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.69$). Furthermore, 48.51% reported applying the values learned from the songs at home (Item 26; $M = 2.38$, $SD = 0.68$). In contrast, Item 24 received the lowest level of agreement, with only 34.65% indicating that the values presented in the songs closely matched their daily lives ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.77$), while 41.58% selected the neutral option. This finding may indicate that some students had not yet fully connected the character messages in the songs with their personal experiences. Nevertheless, the consistently moderate-to-high mean scores (2.11–2.56) and relatively low standard deviations (0.66–0.77) indicate that students generally perceived English songs as effective media for fostering positive social behavior, creating supportive classroom environments, and promoting the long-term practice of sustainable character values.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that junior high school students generally hold positive perceptions of using English songs for sustainable character

education in English classes. Across the four CLIL dimensions—Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture—students showed a strong understanding of the character values embedded in the songs and recognized their contribution to both language learning and personal development. The descriptive statistics revealed high levels of agreement that the songs enhanced students' understanding of honesty, trust, responsibility, patience, and kindness while simultaneously supporting vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and learning motivation. Furthermore, students perceived that the songs encouraged moral reflection, helped them distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and motivated them to make better decisions in their daily lives.

The study also indicates that English songs have considerable potential as CLIL-based instructional resources for integrating English language learning with sustainable character education. Students viewed the songs as effective in fostering positive classroom interactions, encouraging prosocial behavior, and promoting the continued practice of positive character values beyond the classroom. Although some students were less certain that all of the song messages closely reflected their everyday experiences, the overall findings suggest that music-based learning provides an engaging and meaningful context for simultaneously developing language competence and character formation. Future studies are recommended to employ experimental or longitudinal research designs involving larger and more diverse samples to examine the long-term effects of character-themed English songs on students' language achievement, character development, and behavioral change across different educational settings.

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