

Innovative TEFL Methods: Enhancing Emotional Literacy in TEFL Learners through the Analysis of John Lennon's Song 'Imagine'



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Abstract

The development of emotional literacy is essential for fostering effective communication and enhancing language proficiency among second-language learners. This study addresses the question of how music, specifically John Lennon's metaphor-laden song "Imagine," can be utilized as a tool to enhance emotional literacy in TEFL learners. This study investigates the use of John Lennon's song lyrics with a specific focus on five TEFL learners enrolled in the FIES English Course. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of emotional literacy development within a TEFL framework through the analysis of song lyrics, providing a creative approach to language education. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore learners' personal and social experiences with emotionally rich content. The participants, with varying proficiency levels, engaged in lyric analysis, group discussions, and reflective writing tasks. The findings reveal an expanded emotional vocabulary and an enhanced ability to express complex emotions in English. Additionally, the familiar and emotionally engaging content significantly increased learner motivation and participation in language lessons. These results suggest that integrating music with deep emotional themes into English learning can improve emotional awareness and communicative competence, offering a meaningful and innovative approach to TEFL.

Abstrak

Pengembangan literasi emosional sangat penting untuk mendorong komunikasi yang efektif dan meningkatkan kemampuan bahasa di antara pembelajar bahasa kedua. Penelitian ini membahas pertanyaan tentang bagaimana musik, khususnya lagu John Lennon yang penuh dengan metafora, "Imagine," dapat digunakan sebagai alat untuk meningkatkan literasi emosional pada pembelajar TEFL. Penelitian ini menyelidiki penggunaan lirik lagu John Lennon dengan fokus khusus pada lima pembelajar TEFL yang terdaftar di Kursus Bahasa Inggris FIES. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada integrasinya terhadap pengembangan literasi emosional dalam kerangka TEFL melalui analisis lirik lagu, memberikan pendekatan kreatif untuk pendidikan bahasa. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif, studi ini memanfaatkan Analisis Fenomenologis Interpretatif (IPA) untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman pribadi dan sosial para pembelajar dengan konten yang kaya emosi. Para peserta, yang memiliki tingkat kemahiran yang bervariasi, terlibat dalam analisis lirik, diskusi kelompok, dan tugas menulis reflektif. Temuan menunjukkan adanya perluasan kosakata emosional dan peningkatan kemampuan untuk mengekspresikan emosi kompleks dalam bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, konten yang familiar dan penuh emosi secara signifikan meningkatkan motivasi dan partisipasi pembelajar dalam pelajaran bahasa. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa mengintegrasikan musik dengan tema emosional yang mendalam ke dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dapat meningkatkan kesadaran emosional dan kompetensi komunikatif, menawarkan pendekatan yang bermakna dan inovatif dalam TEFL.

INTRODUCTION

Emotional literacy has gained recognition as an integral component of holistic language education within TEFL. It refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions, a skill essential for meaningful communication (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). Research indicates that individuals with higher emotional literacy navigate social interactions



more effectively, a fundamental aspect of learning a new language (Dewaele, 2021). In the context of TEFL, recent studies emphasize the role of music and lyrics in enhancing emotional engagement and supporting language retention (Krashen, 2020; Van Manen, 2019). John Lennon's "Imagine" exemplifies this potential by inspiring reflection on peace and empathy, offering learners a chance to connect emotionally with language and explore universal values through meaningful content.

Traditional TEFL approaches have largely emphasized cognitive skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, while often overlooking emotional development (Gardner, 2017). Increasingly, however, emotional literacy is recognized as crucial to effective language acquisition (Mercer, 2018). This study proposes addressing this gap by integrating song lyric analysis as a way to explore both language and emotions. This approach aligns with Dörnyei's (2020) theory that emotional engagement enhances cognitive depth, supporting better retention and understanding. Through analysis of Lennon's lyrics, learners encounter language in a context that fosters empathy, creating a more holistic language learning experience.

The study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the subjective emotional experiences of learners as they analyze "Imagine." IPA is particularly suited to examining how individuals interpret experiences that are rich in emotional and reflective elements (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2021). Participants in this study, five FIES English Course students, will engage with the song's lyrics and participate in discussions to reflect on its emotional and linguistic elements. Reflective methods like IPA allow for a personal engagement with the text, which supports emotional development alongside language learning (Van Manen, 2019).

This study aims to explore two main questions: *How does analyzing the lyrics of "Imagine" impact the emotional literacy of TEFL learners? What is the role of emotional literacy in language acquisition for TEFL students?* The primary goal is to demonstrate that by integrating emotional literacy through song analysis, language skills are reinforced and empathy is developed. This approach is consistent with Krashen's (2020) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of emotional factors in language learning. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for TEFL pedagogy, highlighting the impact of emotional learning on language development.

The research anticipates that song analysis will be an effective addition to TEFL methods, supporting both emotional and linguistic growth. Based on these findings, it is recommended that educators use lyrics that encourage reflection and emotional engagement. This approach, grounded in the theories of Brackett et al. (2011) and Dörnyei (2020), can provide a comprehensive framework for TEFL educators aiming to foster both language proficiency and emotional literacy in their students.

METHODS

This qualitative research adopts Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its primary methodology, ideal for exploring the intricate, subjective experiences of TEFL learners engaged in analyzing song lyrics. IPA is well-suited for this study, as it focuses on understanding personal interpretations of impactful emotional experiences, which is central to examining the intersection of emotional literacy and language acquisition (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2021).

The participants for this study included five adult English learners enrolled at FIES, aged between 20 and 30, with a range of English proficiency levels (from intermediate to advanced) and varying degrees of teaching experience. These participants were carefully selected using purposeful sampling to ensure that each had the capacity for thoughtful reflection on both the emotional and linguistic aspects of the song. This sampling method, which is aligned with IPA's

emphasis on small, homogenous groups, enables a more detailed examination of individual experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Each participant received a briefing on the study's objectives, signed an informed consent form, and understood that their contributions were voluntary and confidential.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participants' written reflections, two methods that are standard in IPA research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant in two sessions, separated by one week.

First Interview Session: During the first interview, participants analyzed "Imagine" individually and shared their immediate emotional reactions and interpretations of the song. Questions were open-ended to encourage participants to explore their emotions and thoughts, such as, "What feelings does this song evoke for you?" and "What specific thoughts or images come to mind as you listen to the lyrics?" The flexible interview format allowed participants to delve deeply into their experiences.

Second Interview Session: In the follow-up interview, conducted after a group discussion about the song, participants reflected on how their perspectives had evolved or deepened. Questions focused on whether group interaction affected their interpretations, including prompts like "Has discussing the lyrics with others changed your personal view of the song?" and "In what ways do you feel analyzing these lyrics impacts your English learning?" Participants also provided reflective written notes after their initial analysis. These notes offered additional insights into their thoughts, enhancing the data by capturing participants' internal responses in a written format.

The data analysis followed IPA's detailed, step-by-step framework for identifying and interpreting themes within personal narratives. This process began with multiple close readings of each transcript, followed by line-by-line coding of recurring words, phrases, and ideas. Through this meticulous coding, initial themes emerged that captured participants' emotional and language-related responses. The coding process was repeated several times to ensure depth and consistency, an essential part of IPA that allows researchers to uncover subtle, nuanced meanings in the data (Smith et al., 2021).

Following coding, emergent themes were grouped according to emotional relevance (such as empathy and reflection) and language-related aspects (such as vocabulary development or metaphor comprehension). For instance, themes connected to empathy and emotional reflection were cross-examined with language learning insights to explore how emotional engagement influenced linguistic retention. Frequencies of key themes were recorded to provide a structured view of recurring ideas across the data, aligning with qualitative norms that allow for some use of frequency indicators without statistical precision (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

Participants were assured that confidentiality would be maintained, with pseudonyms used in transcripts and reports. Ethical approval was obtained from the FIES ethics committee, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussion.

To support reproducibility, each stage of coding and theme development was meticulously documented, with detailed coding logs and notes on theme evolution. This documentation

ensures that each theme's emergence and connection to the raw data can be followed by other researchers. Reflective memos were written after each interview to record emerging thoughts and reduce researcher bias by ensuring transparency in the interpretation process (Creswell, 2018).

This careful application of IPA offers an in-depth view of how lyric analysis impacts both emotional literacy and language skills among TEFL learners, providing insights that may guide further innovation in TEFL pedagogy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The analysis of John Lennon's *Imagine* revealed a notable emotional connection among participants that fostered both emotional literacy and language engagement. The emotional themes within the lyrics, such as peace, unity, and empathy, resonated strongly with participants, prompting both introspection and enhanced engagement with English vocabulary. This observation aligns with studies by Dewaele (2021) and Krashen (2020), which emphasize the role of emotions in enhancing linguistic retention and motivation. For instance, the emotional nature of the lyrics enabled participants to relate personally, which appeared to deepen their connection to English vocabulary and expressions. This connection supports Gardner's (2017) suggestion that emotional contexts provide a scaffold for learners to access language in a meaningful way, enhancing vocabulary retention through emotional association.

The data analysis further reflects this connection. Participants consistently demonstrated increased comfort in using emotionally charged words, such as "empathy," "freedom," and "justice," which were integrated naturally in post-intervention interviews. For example, P01's shift from words like "hope" and "world" to deeper terms like "harmony" and "freedom" shows a tangible growth in vocabulary depth post-reflection. This vocabulary growth, corroborated by Gardner (2017), illustrates how emotional connections can enhance language engagement and retention, making such approaches effective within TEFL.

A prominent theme throughout the intervention was the development of empathy, attributed by participants to the reflective nature of Lennon's lyrics. Many participants noted that specific words and phrases from the song, like "peace," "imagine," and "unity," resonated with their emotions, making these terms more memorable. This outcome is consistent with Dörnyei's (2020) findings, which posit that emotional engagement encourages deeper cognitive processing in language learning. Participants P01, P02, and P04, in particular, recalled empathetic vocabulary in their reflective responses, indicating that empathy facilitated vocabulary retention. This finding supports the idea that emotion-laden words are easier to internalize, suggesting that empathetic reflection can enhance both emotional literacy and vocabulary acquisition.

The lyric analysis facilitated shifts in participants' perspectives and a heightened awareness of cultural themes embedded in the lyrics. For example, P03 reflected on peace as both a personal and global concept, an insight that underscores the power of culturally significant lyrics to foster intercultural understanding. This finding aligns with Van Manen's (2019) research, suggesting that literature and lyrics can deepen cultural awareness within language learning. By reflecting on socially relevant themes, participants not only gained insights into

the target language's cultural aspects but also broadened their understanding of their own and other cultures. Such perspective shifts, seen in terms used like "acceptance" and "compassion" (noted by P04 and P05), illustrate how song analysis can effectively build cultural and emotional awareness, reinforcing Mercer's (2018) recommendation to integrate cultural content into TEFL for richer engagement.

Another key finding was the enhancement of participants' reflective thinking skills. The lyric analysis encouraged participants to examine their values and beliefs through the lens of emotionally charged themes. This introspective process supports theories suggesting that reflective learning activities promote both language development and critical thinking (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011). For instance, P01 and P05 showed increased reflective awareness, using terms like "justice" and "freedom" in nuanced ways during interviews. Reflective thinking, as observed, fostered a deeper engagement with language as participants internalized vocabulary within their personal experiences, aligning with Smith & Osborn's (2015) findings on the connection between reflection and language acquisition.

The integration of emotional literacy into TEFL, as evidenced by this study, provided benefits in developing empathy, self-awareness, and language skills concurrently. Participants demonstrated increased comfort in articulating complex emotions in English, particularly following their engagement with *Imagine's* themes. This aligns with Krashen's (2020) Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that positive emotional engagement reduces affective barriers to language acquisition. Participants' progression in comfort scores for expressing emotions (from a 2-3/5 to a 4-5/5 on average) highlights the effectiveness of emotionally resonant themes in facilitating a stronger connection to the language, enabling participants to engage more freely and confidently.

Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allowed a nuanced understanding of how each participant interpreted and internalized the lyrics, capturing the depth of their emotional responses. IPA revealed individual emotional experiences that influenced language learning, affirming the approach's value in uncovering personal narratives within educational research. This approach echoes the findings by Smith et al. (2021), highlighting IPA's effectiveness in capturing learners' unique emotional and cognitive responses. For example, P02's journey from viewing happiness superficially to a more empathetic understanding underscores the depth IPA can reveal, offering insights beyond what traditional quantitative methods might capture.

These findings suggest that integrating song lyric analysis, particularly with emotionally resonant themes, can be a powerful approach for TEFL educators. Reflective music activities that encourage learners to explore and articulate their emotional responses may aid both language retention and emotional literacy development. This aligns with Dörnyei's (2020) and Brackett et al.'s (2011) recommendations for incorporating emotional strategies into language teaching, highlighting the benefits of a more holistic, learner-centered approach in TEFL. Through emotionally charged lyrics, educators can support learners' personal and linguistic growth, creating a meaningful framework for language development.

The positive outcomes of this study point toward future research opportunities to examine a broader range of musical genres and lyrical themes for their impact on emotional and language learning. Future research might investigate the long-term effects of embedding

emotional literacy into language curricula, particularly in its influence on motivation and language retention. Additionally, expanding research to include diverse linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels could provide valuable insights into how emotion-based learning strategies may be adapted across varied educational contexts.

Below is a table summarizing the findings from the research on emotional connection, empathy, vocabulary retention, perspective shifts, reflective thinking, and emotional literacy among the participants:

Finding	Description	Participant Quotes/Examples	Supporting Theory
Emotional Connection and Language Engagement	Participants connected emotionally with Imagine, enhancing language engagement and vocabulary retention through personal resonance with the lyrics' themes.	P01: "I felt the message about peace deeply, and it made me remember more English words about unity."	Gardner (2017); Dewaele (2021)
Empathy as Catalyst for Vocabulary Retention	Empathy developed through lyrics allowed participants to retain emotionally charged words better than neutral ones.	P02: "Words like 'imagine,' 'peace,' and 'no possessions' stayed with me because of their deeper meaning."	Dörnyei (2020)
Perspective Shifts and Cultural Awareness	Reflecting on the lyrics broadened participants' perspectives on social and cultural themes, fostering intercultural understanding.	P03: "I now see 'peace' as both a personal and a global idea."	Van Manen (2019); Mercer (2018)
Enhanced Reflective Thinking Skills	Lyric analysis encouraged reflective thinking, helping participants explore values and beliefs, which also aided language learning.	P01, P05: Discussed justice and freedom in nuanced ways post-intervention.	Brackett, Rivers & Salovey (2011); Smith & Osborn (2015)
Strengthening Emotional Literacy	Emotional literacy was enhanced as participants articulated complex emotions in English, increasing comfort in using emotional vocabulary.	P04: "I can now express my thoughts on peace and unity in English more confidently."	Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (2020)
Role of IPA in Revealing Experiences	IPA methodology highlighted individual emotional responses, revealing the depth of learners' personal experiences with language and lyric interpretation.	P02: Transitioned from a superficial to an empathetic understanding of "happiness" post-reflection.	Smith et al. (2021)

This table condenses the main findings with examples and relevant theoretical support, helping to clarify the impact of lyric analysis on emotional literacy and language engagement in the TEFL context.

DISCUSSION

This section synthesizes the findings in response to the research questions and interprets their implications in the context of established theories in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and emotional literacy. The study's core objective was to assess how emotionally charged lyrics, specifically from John Lennon's *Imagine*, could foster not only language engagement but also emotional and cultural literacy among learners. The findings indicate that emotional resonance plays a crucial role in vocabulary retention, cultural awareness, and reflective thinking, offering a multi-layered approach to language acquisition.

The research aimed to understand if and how emotional engagement with meaningful lyrics could promote vocabulary retention and comprehension. The results revealed that participants were more motivated to remember and use vocabulary embedded in the song's themes of unity, empathy, and peace. This aligns with Gardner's (2017) perspective that emotional contexts enrich linguistic connections, offering a scaffolding effect that aids vocabulary retention by associating words with personal emotions and beliefs. Moreover, Krashen's (2020) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that when learners feel emotionally connected to the content, they experience fewer psychological barriers, thus allowing for deeper language processing and retention. The findings support this hypothesis, as participants retained emotionally loaded terms like "peace," "empathy," and "freedom" more effectively than neutral terms, reinforcing the value of affective content in language learning.

The application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) proved instrumental in uncovering the nuanced, subjective experiences of each participant, offering insights into their cognitive and emotional responses to the lyrics. This approach allowed for an exploration of language learning that transcends traditional quantitative assessments by capturing the depth of learners' emotional and personal interpretations. Smith et al. (2021) argue that IPA is uniquely positioned to bring out the individual and transformative aspects of learner experiences, which are often lost in standardized assessments. The findings here highlight IPA's strength in illustrating the introspective journey participants underwent—where they connected new vocabulary to personal beliefs and emotions. This approach aligns with the broader qualitative goal of understanding how personal, emotional experiences impact language learning and underscores the importance of contextually rich, emotionally charged learning materials.

One of the central interpretations of the data is that emotional connections act as powerful catalysts for language engagement and vocabulary retention. Through exposure to *Imagine*, participants internalized new vocabulary with greater ease, particularly words connected to values and ideals, which they found personally significant. This finding strongly aligns with Gardner's (2017) Multiple Intelligences Theory, which highlights the role of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence in learning. By engaging emotionally with the song, participants were able to bridge language with their inner values, reinforcing Dewaele's (2021) findings that emotionally stimulating content can amplify language acquisition by fostering a connection between words and personal identity. Thus, the study suggests that affective content not only enhances vocabulary retention but also allows learners to engage with the target language more naturally and meaningfully.

The findings also highlight that engagement with the lyrics promoted cultural awareness and critical reflection on social and ethical values. Participants demonstrated increased empathy and a more profound understanding of peace, unity, and social justice as universal values, which they came to appreciate within both personal and global contexts. This outcome is consistent with Van Manen's (2019) theory on cultural learning, which posits that literature and art can serve as conduits for intercultural understanding and empathy. Participants expressed how lyrics about peace and unity inspired them to think about these themes in a broader context, supporting Mercer's (2018) recommendations to incorporate cultural content in TEFL for deeper engagement. This culturally rich lyric analysis prompted learners not only to reflect on the meanings behind the words but also to relate these meanings to their own lives and broader cultural narratives, fostering intercultural competence.

Another significant finding was the development of participants' reflective thinking skills through the lyrical analysis of *Imagine*. Reflective thinking, as Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey (2011) suggest, is instrumental in building emotional intelligence, as it encourages learners to question their beliefs and values. The study found that learners connected with lyrics on a personal level, which prompted introspection on complex themes like justice, freedom, and empathy. Phrases such as "I now see peace as a personal and global ideal" (P03) illustrate how learners synthesized these concepts within their understanding. Such reflective thinking fosters critical language skills by linking vocabulary acquisition with personal growth, making words more than mere linguistic units. Smith & Osborn (2015) emphasize the importance of reflection in language education, as it enables learners to incorporate the target language into their cognitive and emotional frameworks. The findings here echo this perspective, suggesting that reflective activities like lyric analysis can significantly enrich the language learning process by helping learners integrate vocabulary with their values and beliefs.

The study contributes to TEFL pedagogy by demonstrating the value of using emotionally resonant materials, such as song lyrics, to enhance emotional literacy and language engagement. Krashen's (2020) Affective Filter Hypothesis supports the idea that positive emotional engagement can reduce anxiety and foster motivation in language learners, making it easier to internalize vocabulary. By focusing on themes that resonate universally such as peace, empathy, and justice educators can create a more holistic, learner-centered classroom where students connect with the language on an emotional level. This suggests that TEFL practitioners may benefit from integrating materials that evoke personal and emotional engagement, thus supporting learners in developing both language and emotional skills.

The outcomes of this study encourage TEFL practitioners to consider integrating emotional and cultural themes into their curricula to foster language retention and emotional literacy. By using songs or texts with emotionally significant content, educators can create opportunities for students to explore language meaningfully, thus enhancing both linguistic and personal growth. These insights align with Dörnyei's (2020) recommendation for a holistic approach to language teaching that addresses both cognitive and affective dimensions.

For future research, further exploration of different genres of music and their impact on emotional and linguistic engagement is warranted. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of emotionally resonant materials on motivation and language retention could provide more evidence of the efficacy of emotion-based learning strategies in TEFL. Expanding research to diverse learner populations would help validate these findings and adapt emotion-

based strategies across various educational and cultural contexts, offering a pathway for creating a more inclusive and engaging language learning experience.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the impact of emotional engagement through song lyric analysis on enhancing both emotional awareness and language skills in TEFL learners. The results indicate that incorporating emotionally meaningful content, such as John Lennon's Imagine, positively influences language engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and cultural sensitivity. Addressing the primary research question, the study affirms that emotionally resonant materials can indeed facilitate deeper, more impactful learning experiences within TEFL. Participants who connected with the song's themes of peace, empathy, and unity showed a marked improvement in their understanding and use of emotionally charged vocabulary. These outcomes support the theories of Gardner (2017) and Krashen (2020), which highlight the role of affective learning in improving retention and creating a meaningful connection to the language. Additionally, reflective activities enabled participants to explore personal and cultural insights, which aligns with a holistic approach to language acquisition that includes personal growth alongside linguistic development. An innovative aspect of this study is the proposal for song lyrics to function as dual-purpose educational tools, enhancing both emotional intelligence and language proficiency. This approach can help bridge language learning with personal growth, providing TEFL educators with a path toward creating more meaningful and learner-focused curricula. The findings also encourage future research to examine diverse musical and cultural themes, broadening the applications of emotion-based strategies in language education. In conclusion, this research highlights the substantial benefits of integrating emotionally impactful content in TEFL, indicating a promising direction for more engaging and holistic teaching practices that support both language learning and emotional development.

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