



The Student's Perception of Using Muzak in Enhancing English Language Learning Motivation (*Persepsi Siswa tentang Penggunaan Muzak dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Bahasa Inggris*)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 19 Agustus 2026 Revised: 10 September 2026 Accepted: 29 September 2026 Keywords: English Language Learning Learning Motivation Muzak Student Perception Self-Determination Theory Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Motivasi Belajar Muzak Persepsi Mahasiswa Teori Determonasi Diri	This study explores students' perceptions of using Muzak (soft, non-lyrical background instrumental music) to enhance learning motivation in English Language Learning (ELL). Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this qualitative study examines how subtle auditory environments support the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness among first-year EFL students. Methodological triangulation was employed, combining semi-structured interviews as the primary method with observation and documentation. The participants consisted of five first-year English Education students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The thematic analysis revealed that four out of five participants perceived Muzak positively, noting that it provided significant emotional comfort, reduced language anxiety, improved cognitive focus, and fostered a less monotonous learning atmosphere. Conversely, one participant experienced Muzak as a cognitive distraction, preferring absolute silence for language processing tasks. The findings suggest that while Muzak serves as an effective contextual support to sustain intrinsic motivation, its implementation should remain flexible to accommodate individual sensory preferences and diverse learning styles. Abstrak Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi persepsi mahasiswa terhadap penggunaan Muzak (musik instrumental latar yang lembut tanpa lirik) dalam meningkatkan motivasi belajar dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Berlandaskan pada Self-Determination Theory (SDT), studi kualitatif ini menguji bagaimana lingkungan auditori yang halus mendukung kebutuhan psikologis akan otonomi, kompetensi, dan keterkaitan di antara mahasiswa tahun pertama. Triangulasi metodologis diterapkan dengan menggabungkan wawancara semi-terstruktur sebagai metode utama yang didukung oleh observasi dan dokumentasi. Partisipan penelitian terdiri dari lima mahasiswa tahun pertama Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Analisis tematik menunjukkan bahwa empat dari lima partisipan memandang Muzak secara positif; mereka merasakan kenyamanan emosional yang signifikan, penurunan kecemasan berbahasa, peningkatan fokus kognitif, serta atmosfer belajar yang tidak monoton. Sebaliknya, satu partisipan menganggap Muzak sebagai gangguan kognitif dan lebih memilih keheningan total dalam memproses tugas bahasa. Temuan ini menyiratkan bahwa meskipun Muzak berfungsi sebagai dukungan kontekstual yang efektif untuk mempertahankan motivasi intrinsik,

penerapannya harus tetap fleksibel untuk mengakomodasi preferensi sensorik individu dan gaya belajar yang beragam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, the English language has firmly established its position as the primary international medium bridging science, global communication, technology, and professional corridors. Mastering English at the university level is no longer viewed merely as fulfilling an academic credit requirement, but as an essential competence that determines the global competitiveness of graduates. Therefore, higher education institutions, particularly English Language Education study programs, place tremendous emphasis on the early phases of lectures to ensure that students can adopt the language as an academic and professional tool.

Nevertheless, the process of internalizing English within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia still faces severe challenges. Linguistically, students frequently encounter massive obstacles in vocabulary acquisition, grammar internalization, pronunciation articulation, and achieving speaking fluency. The lack of authentic exposure outside the classroom exacerbates this condition, making language learning feel cognitively and mentally exhausting. Alongside cognitive barriers, the affective dimension also plays a crucial and destructive role; language anxiety, fear of making mistakes in public, and a crisis of self-confidence often isolate students from active participation in class. These conditions are commonly found among first-year students who are experiencing a turbulent transition from the secondary school climate to the academic pressures of higher education.

The accumulation of linguistic complexities and psychological barricades frequently leads to a drastic decline in learning motivation. According to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) popularized by Ryan and Deci (2000) an individual's intrinsic motivation will flourish only when their three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When the learning environment is filled with high tension, pressure, or monotony, these needs fail to be satisfied, causing students to become passive, unresponsive, and mentally disengaged in class.

According to Lehmann and Seufert (2017) reduce such affective tension, auditory stimulation in the form of background music has begun to be explored by educators. Among various types of auditory stimulation, Muzak music offers unique characteristics that are highly potential for educational environments (Koelsch et al., 2018). Muzak is characterized as soft instrumental music with a predictable, patterned structure, a slow tempo (low arousal), and most essentially, it is non-lyrical. This non-lyrical characteristic is highly crucial in language learning because it minimizes cognitive interference on the working memory, which is simultaneously processing foreign language texts or speech (Hiver et al., 2024).

According to Pivo (2019) although studies on music in education have been widely conducted, research specifically focusing on the use of Muzak within the EFL context—particularly from the perceptual perspective of first-year students—remains scarce. According to Bull (2019) most previous literature has focused on the use of popular songs with lyrics or the general effects of classical music on macro academic performance. This study aims to fill that methodological gap by deeply exploring how students perceive the use of Muzak in influencing their affective comfort and the stability of their English learning motivation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory descriptive research design. The qualitative approach was chosen because the researcher aimed to uncover the subjective meanings, interpretations, and in-depth experiences of the participants regarding the phenomenon of using Muzak in the learning environment, which cannot be numerically measured through a quantitative approach.

To enhance the trustworthiness and validity of the data, this study adopted a methodological triangulation technique integrating three data collection instruments: semi-structured interviews, field observations, and documentation. According to Ruslin et al. (2022) semi-structured interviews acted as the primary instrument to deeply explore the dimensions of perceptions, feelings, and internal motivational

dynamics of the students. The interview questions were flexibly developed based on the SDT theoretical framework. Non-participant observations were conducted to directly observe students' motoric and affective behavioral indicators, such as attention levels, task persistence, and expressions of comfort while learning with Muzak accompaniment. A limited pre-screening questionnaire via Google Forms was utilized solely to identify students who met the inclusion criteria (Widuri, 2022).

The subjects in this study were determined using a purposive sampling technique, resulting in five first-year students in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The five participants were identified using pseudonyms (Ziad, Fitrah, Mawa, Aya, and Asya) to maintain data confidentiality and privacy. The data analysis process followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three simultaneous stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Table 1. Data Reduction of Students' Perceptions of the Use of Muzak in Enhancing Learning Motivation

Participant	Key Quote	Code
ZIAD	"Comfortable"	Comfort
ZIAD	"More focused"	Focus
ZIAD	"I feel motivated"	Motivation
FITRAH	"It improve my focus"	Focus
FITRAH	"More comfortable and more free"	Emotional comfort
FITRAH	"Learning with background music makes the atmosphere less monotonous"	Positive atmosphere
MAWA	"It distracts me"	Distraction
MAWA	"I need peace and quiet when I study"	Preference for silence
AYA	"The atmosphere becomes more relaxed"	Positive atmosphere
AYA	"I'm definitely more motivated"	Motivation
ASYA	"I feel more focused"	Focus
ASYA	"I'm very motivated"	Motivation
ASYA	"I'm very confident"	Confidence

The names used in this study (Ziad, Fitrah, Mawa, Aya, and Asya) are pseudonyms. They do not represent the participants' real identities and were used to ensure confidentiality and protect participants' privacy throughout the research process. The data reduction table above summarizes the key interview excerpts that represent participants' perceptions regarding the use of Muzak in English Language Learning. The selected quotations were coded according to recurring ideas and experiences expressed by participants. Overall, Four out of five participants described Muzak as a factor that contributed positively to their learning experience. Four out of five participants associated Muzak with feelings of comfort, improved concentration, increased motivation, and a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. However, one participant perceived Muzak negatively and reported difficulties maintaining concentration while listening to background music.

In summary, the reduced data indicate that students generally perceived Muzak as a supportive element in enhancing learning motivation, although individual differences were also evident among participants. To make these patterns more visible, the next step presents the results of the data display process.

Table 2. Data Display of Students' Perceptions of the Use of Muzak in Enhancing Learning Motivation

Theme	Frequency	Participants
Emotional Comfort as a Motivational Support	4/5	ZIAD, FITRAH, AYA, ASYA
Improved Focus as a Motivational Support	4/5	ZIAD, FITRAH, AYA, ASYA
Positive Learning Atmosphere	3/5	FITRAH, AYA, ASYA
Increased Motivation and Confidence	4/5	ZIAD, FITRAH, AYA, ASYA
Individual Differences in Perceiving Muzak	1/5	MAWA

The data display table above organizes the reduced data into broader themes to make the patterns among participants more visible. The table demonstrates that four out of five participants shared positive perceptions regarding the use of Muzak during English learning activities. The findings indicate that emotional comfort, improved focus, a positive learning atmosphere, and increased motivation and confidence were commonly reported among participants. These themes emerged consistently across interviews and reflected the participants' positive experiences of learning with Muzak.

At the same time, the data also revealed individual differences in perceptions. While Four out of five participants viewed Muzak positively, one participant perceived it as distracting and preferred learning in a

quiet environment. To gain a deeper understanding of these findings, the next section presents the process of conclusion drawing and verification.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings derived from thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, supported by behavioral observations and documentation studies, revealed generally positive perceptions of Muzak as an environmental conditioning element in English language learning. Four of the five participants reported positive experiences with the use of Muzak, particularly in relation to emotional comfort, concentration, learning atmosphere, motivation, and confidence. In contrast, one participant reported a negative experience and perceived background music as a source of distraction that interfered with concentration. The combination of interview data and behavioral observations provided a basis for triangulating the participants' reported experiences with their observed engagement during the learning activities. Participants who expressed positive perceptions generally appeared more relaxed, attentive, and engaged, whereas the participant who preferred silence demonstrated comparatively greater difficulty maintaining attention. These findings indicate that although Muzak may function as a supportive element for some EFL learners, its perceived usefulness is not consistent across all students and appears to be influenced by individual preferences and sensory responses.

3.1 Emotional Comfort and Cognitive Focus in English Language Learning

Emotional comfort emerged as one of the most prominent themes in the participants' experiences with Muzak. Four participants, namely Ziad, Fitrah, Aya, and Asya, described the learning experience accompanied by Muzak as comfortable, relaxing, and enjoyable. Ziad simply described the experience as "Comfortable," while Aya stated, "Yes, it's very comfortable." Similarly, Asya reported, "Yes, I've become very comfortable." These recurring descriptions suggest that participants associated the presence of background music with a more pleasant emotional state during English learning activities. Fitrah further described the experience as "More comfortable and more free," while Ziad stated that he felt "Very free." Collectively, these responses indicate that Muzak was perceived not merely as an auditory background but as an environmental element that could contribute to a sense of relaxation and reduced tension during learning activities.

The finding concerning emotional comfort can be interpreted through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), particularly the psychological conditions associated with autonomy and relatedness. When students experience an environment as comfortable and less stressful, they may perceive themselves as having greater control over their learning experience. In the present study, Fitrah's description of feeling "more comfortable and more free" illustrates this perception of reduced psychological pressure. This interpretation is consistent with Hallam et al. (2002), who reported that calming background music can contribute to positive emotional regulation and engagement in learning-related activities. Within the context of the present study, therefore, Muzak appears to have been perceived by most participants as an element that supported emotional regulation rather than as a direct determinant of learning outcomes.

Cognitive focus and concentration constituted another major theme. Four participants reported that Muzak helped them maintain attention during English learning activities. Ziad stated, "More focused," while Fitrah reported, "It helps me focus better." Asya provided a more detailed explanation by stating, "I feel more focused because this Muzak is my remedy when I'm really stressed out." These responses indicate that participants perceived background music as potentially helpful for maintaining concentration, particularly when they experienced stress during learning. The participants also associated improved concentration with greater ease in understanding learning materials. Ziad stated, "I find it easier to understand the material," while Asya reported, "Yes, I find it easier to understand." Aya similarly stated, "Yes, it helps me a lot." These responses suggest that the participants perceived a connection between their ability to maintain attention and their perceived comprehension of English learning materials.

The behavioral observations provided additional support for these perceptions. Participants who reported improved concentration generally maintained their attention throughout the learning activities, including while reading materials, completing tasks, and following instructions. The convergence between the interview responses and behavioral observations strengthens the credibility of the findings through triangulation. The finding also corresponds with Jäncke and Sandmann (2010), who reported that low-arousal music with relatively constant patterns may support sustained cognitive attention and reduce cognitive fatigue. Similarly, Tokuhama-Espinosa (2018) challenges the generalized assumption that music necessarily interferes with concentration, suggesting that the relationship between music and cognitive performance may depend on the characteristics of the learning context and the individual learner. In the present study, the majority of participants perceived Muzak as compatible with concentration, although this perception was not shared universally.

The relationship between concentration and motivation was also evident in the participants' accounts. When students perceived themselves as more capable of maintaining attention and understanding learning materials, they also tended to describe the learning process as easier and more manageable. This pattern suggests that perceived cognitive ease may contribute to students' willingness to continue engaging with English learning activities. From an SDT perspective, improved concentration and perceived success may be associated with the satisfaction of the need for competence. However, given the qualitative design and the small number of participants, this relationship should be interpreted as a perceived association rather than as evidence of a direct causal effect.

3.2 Positive Learning Atmosphere, Motivation, and Confidence

In addition to emotional comfort and cognitive focus, the findings revealed that Muzak contributed to a more positive and dynamic learning atmosphere for several participants. Three participants, namely Fitrah, Aya, and Asya, specifically described the learning environment as more enjoyable and less monotonous when Muzak was present. Fitrah stated, "Learning with muzak makes the atmosphere less monotonous," while Aya explained, "The atmosphere becomes more relaxed." These responses indicate that background music altered participants' perceptions of the learning environment by reducing the sense of repetition and rigidity that they associated with learning in silence. Fitrah further stated, "When I study without background music, I get bored," suggesting that the absence of Muzak was perceived as less stimulating by this participant.

The emergence of a positive learning atmosphere is consistent with Qi (2024), who emphasizes the role of the learning environment in shaping students' experiences and engagement. In the present study, Muzak appeared to function as an environmental stimulus that made learning activities feel less monotonous for three participants. Rather than changing the academic content itself, the music appeared to influence how participants experienced the learning context. From the perspective of SDT, an environment perceived as enjoyable and psychologically supportive may facilitate the internalization of motivation. Thus, the positive atmosphere reported by participants may help explain why several students subsequently described themselves as more motivated to participate in English learning activities.

Learning motivation was explicitly reported by four participants. Ziad stated, "Yes, I feel more motivated," and Fitrah similarly reported, "Yes, I feel more motivated." Aya connected her motivation directly to her emotional state, stating, "Since I feel comfortable, I'm definitely more motivated." Asya expressed an even stronger perception by stating, "Yes, I'm very motivated." These responses indicate that participants' perceptions of motivation were closely associated with the emotional and environmental benefits they attributed to Muzak. The findings therefore suggest a pattern in which comfort, focus, and a positive learning atmosphere were perceived as interconnected experiences that supported students' willingness to engage in English learning activities.

The participants also reported changes in their confidence while learning English with Muzak. Ziad stated, "Muzak has made me more confident," while Aya responded, "Yes, very much so." Asya similarly reported, "Yes, I'm very confident." These responses indicate that the perceived benefits of Muzak extended beyond immediate comfort and motivation to students' perceptions of their own capability in completing English learning tasks. This finding can again be interpreted in relation to the competence dimension of SDT. When learners perceive that they can concentrate, understand materials, and complete learning tasks more comfortably, they may also develop greater confidence in their ability to perform those tasks. The observation findings were broadly consistent with these reports, as participants who described themselves as more motivated and confident generally demonstrated active participation, sustained engagement, and consistent task completion during the learning sessions.

The individual participant profiles further illustrate the distribution of these themes. Ziad demonstrated a positive outlook characterized by emotional comfort, cognitive focus, and intrinsic motivation. Fitrah emphasized cognitive focus, emotional comfort, and a positive learning atmosphere, particularly describing the environment as "less monotonous." Aya associated Muzak with a more relaxed atmosphere and increased motivation, while Asya reported greater focus, motivation, and self-confidence. Taken together, the four positive participants demonstrate that the perceived benefits of Muzak were multidimensional rather than restricted to a single aspect of learning.

The distribution of the thematic codes reinforces this interpretation. Emotional comfort as a source of motivational support was identified in four participants, namely Ziad, Fitrah, Aya, and Asya. Cognitive focus and concentration were also reported by four participants, namely Ziad, Fitrah, Asya, and Aya. A positive and less monotonous learning atmosphere emerged from three participants, namely Fitrah, Aya, and Asya. These patterns demonstrate that emotional comfort and cognitive focus were the most widely shared perceptions in the dataset, whereas the positive atmosphere theme was somewhat more limited in distribution. The findings therefore provide qualitative evidence that Muzak was generally experienced as a

supportive environmental element by the majority of participants, particularly in relation to emotional and attentional aspects of English learning.

3.3 Individual Variation, Cognitive Distraction, and Implications for EFL Learning

Despite the predominantly positive responses, the findings also revealed an important contrasting experience. Mawa reported a consistently negative perception of learning with Muzak. When asked about the experience, Mawa stated, “It’s not comfortable,” and explained, “It distracts me.” The participant further stated, “I’ve become unfocused” and “No, because it bothers me.” Unlike the other four participants, Mawa did not perceive background music as supportive of concentration or motivation. Instead, the auditory stimulation was experienced as an obstacle to maintaining attention during learning activities.

Mawa’s explanation provides a particularly important insight into the role of individual learning preferences. The participant stated, “I need peace and quiet when I study,” explicitly indicating a preference for a silent learning environment. The observation data supported this account, as Mawa appeared less comfortable and experienced greater difficulty maintaining attention during the observation session compared with the other participants. The participant occasionally appeared distracted during the learning activities, which corresponded with the interview responses. This convergence between reported experience and observed behavior strengthens the interpretation that Muzak was genuinely perceived as distracting by this participant rather than simply being reported as undesirable in retrospect.

The contrasting response from Mawa is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that the effects of background music cannot be assumed to be uniform across learners. The finding is consistent with Abrams et al. (2021), whose work is cited in the original analysis in relation to the importance of quiet learning conditions for some learners. It can also be considered through information-processing perspectives, which recognize that learners differ in their capacity to manage simultaneous sensory information. Schurgin (2018) emphasizes differences in individual processing capacity, while Karthiga (2026) is cited in the original discussion in relation to the possibility that auditory stimulation may produce cognitive overload for learners who are particularly sensitive to external sounds. These perspectives provide a possible explanation for why the same auditory environment was experienced as supportive by four participants but disruptive by another.

The complete participant distribution further illustrates this perceptual contrast. Ziad, Fitrah, Aya, and Asya generally associated Muzak with comfort, focus, motivation, a positive atmosphere, or increased confidence. In contrast, Mawa associated the same intervention with discomfort, distraction, reduced focus, and a preference for silence. Thus, although four out of five participants reported positive experiences, the single contrasting case should not be treated as an insignificant exception. Rather, it demonstrates the importance of accounting for individual differences when considering Muzak as an element of an EFL learning environment.

Overall, the findings indicate that Muzak was generally perceived as a supportive environmental element in English language learning, particularly through its perceived contribution to emotional comfort, cognitive focus, a positive learning atmosphere, motivation, and confidence. The theoretical interpretation through Self-Determination Theory suggests that these experiences may be related to students’ perceptions of autonomy, competence, and psychological comfort, while the findings reported by Hallam et al. (2002), Jäncke and Sandmann (2010), Tokuhama-Espinosa (2018), and Qi (2024) provide relevant conceptual support for understanding the observed patterns. At the same time, Mawa’s contrasting experience demonstrates that the use of Muzak should not be regarded as universally beneficial. Individual sensory preferences and learning conditions remain important considerations, particularly for students who require silence to maintain concentration. Consequently, the findings support a flexible rather than uniform approach to the use of Muzak in EFL learning, in which background music may be offered as a contextual learning support while alternative quiet conditions remain available for learners who do not benefit from auditory stimulation.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of Muzak is generally perceived highly positively (four out of five participants) as an effective environmental conditioning tool in boosting the learning motivation of first-year English language education students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Muzak is proven to provide a multidimensional contribution: affectively creating emotional comfort and reducing anxiety; cognitively helping to maintain concentration focus and improving material comprehension; and contextually building a dynamic and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Nevertheless, significant individual variation exists, where a small minority of students with silence-preferring traits consider background music a cognitive distraction. Thus, Muzak cannot be claimed as a rigid, one-size-fits-all solution, but rather as a flexible contextual support strategy.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several suggestions are proposed for students, educators, and future researchers regarding the use of Muzak in English language learning. Students are encouraged to explore the use of Muzak independently during self-directed learning activities or while completing English assignments at home. However, they should remain attentive to their individual sensory preferences and levels of comfort, as the effects of background music may vary among learners. Students are therefore encouraged to identify the types and volume levels of Muzak that best support their concentration and learning activities without causing distraction.

Lecturers and educators may consider incorporating low-volume or faint Muzak into selected learning activities, particularly during sessions that involve creative tasks, reflective activities, or relaxed writing exercises. Nevertheless, the use of Muzak should remain flexible and inclusive, as not all students may benefit from auditory stimulation while learning. Lecturers are therefore encouraged to provide silent alternatives or quiet spaces for students who concentrate more effectively without background music. Such flexibility may help accommodate differences in students' sensory preferences and contribute to a more equitable learning environment.

For future researchers, the limitations of the present study, particularly its involvement of only five participants and its relatively short micro-observation period, should be taken into consideration when designing subsequent studies. Future research is encouraged to involve a larger and more diverse sample across multiple universities to provide broader evidence regarding the use of Muzak in EFL learning. Mixed-methods and longitudinal experimental designs may also be employed to investigate the relationship between Muzak use and students' EFL academic performance over an extended period. Such approaches could provide more comprehensive evidence regarding the potential effects of Muzak and help distinguish observed associations from causal effects.

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