

VOCABULARY ACQUISITION THROUGH SONGS FOR THE STUDENTS OF THE TERTIARY LEVEL EDUCATION: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

Samuel Praise P* and K. Meenakshi**

Abstract: This paper focuses on the effectiveness of songs and song based activities in the acquisition of vocabulary among the students of the tertiary level education who belong to the Arts and Science College. This experimental study includes eighty students of the first year belonging to different undergraduate courses of the arts and science stream who assembled for their general English class. This study follows the quantitative research method of which the experiment uses the two-group simple randomized design. The students were separated into two groups of forty each known as the experimental and the control groups. The experimental group underwent the facilitation through songs and song-based activities whereas the control group followed the usual teaching method. Pre-test and post-test were conducted for both the groups to assess the level of vocabulary acquired by the students. The significant difference between the two groups and within the same group before and after conducting the experiment was assessed, analysed by using the paired sample T-test and interpreted by the researcher. The experimental group has fared well in the post-test when compared to the control group. This is evident to prove that songs are an effective tool in vocabulary acquisition. The involvement of students in the experimental group is effectively high than compared to the control group. This study can be used for improving vocabulary acquisition among English language learners of various backgrounds irrespective of their cultural differences.

Keywords: Vocabulary Acquisition, Songs, Tertiary Level Education, Song-Based Activities, Experimental Study

INTRODUCTION

As suggested by Lozanov (1978) psychotherapist and physician, Suggestopedia is a methodology in language teaching that promotes the usage of music which pacifies and enhances the curiosity in learners. Burhayani (2013) in her methodology on illustrating *The Effectiveness of Teaching Vocabulary through Songs* insists that a language teacher should be creative and also effective in teaching language to students. Teachers should frame creative lesson plans which will promote an attention-grabbing and exciting class atmosphere. Creative classrooms and lesson plans involve music, drama, action-based, friendly gestures, and more appealing ambience of classroom. Of all the above, music plays an important role. Since vocabulary is the main aspect in learning a new language and songs being an interesting tool to foster learning, the researcher has conducted the experiment to prove the effectiveness of songs. Based on this, the paper provides theoretical background, methodology of the experiment, assessments, analysis using the paired sample T-test, interpretation and recommendation.

* Research Scholar, Dept. of English School of Social Sciences and Languages Technology Tower, VIT University Vellore - 632014, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: samuelpraise.p@vit.ac.in

** Professor, Dept. of English SSL, VIT University, Vellore.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Suggestopedia is a combination of two words “suggestion” and “pedagogy.” The methodology promotes the idea of collaborated learning techniques which Lozanov describes in his book “Outlines of Suggestology and Suggestopedya” that a creative learning atmosphere inculcates eagerness in the learners to learn the language. Lozanov also suggests the implementation of music and an enhancing classroom appearance which establishes curiosity in the learners to learn the language.

On the other hand Murphy’s theory on the “the song-stuck-in-my head-phenomenon” which testifies the process in which the song we heard echoes in our mind. Murphy believes that songs may assist the learner to triumph over the difficulty in retaining vocabularies. Since it has the eminence of sticking in one’s mind, songs play a major role not only in the process of memory retention but also helps in the acquisition of vocabulary. Music inculcates an ambiance of calm and peaceful atmosphere that promotes other physiological benefits which includes lower blood pressure, pain and also improvises learning ability with other general effective physical activities. The process of application of music in language teaching has reportedly reduced anxiety, lower self confidence among learners and also the learning period of language by one third or more. When students are provided with ensuring environment for language learning there is a visible result in the process of language acquisition.

Importance of Songs in Vocabulary Acquisition

As reported by Overy (1998), when students are exposed to a syllabus which emphasizes music instruction over language which promotes the efficiency to pronounce new words. According to Nambiyar songs have an increased inclination to magnetize the attention of students. He also stated that music initiates a mood of gaiety, informality and fun in the classroom. Ayotte observed that music and language impart the ‘same auditory perceptive and cognitive mechanisms that impose a structure on auditory information received by senses. It is examined by Livingstone who provides an anthropological evidence that human beings sang (non-Linguistic Vocalization) before speaking. Jespersen and Rousseau (as cited by Murphy, 1990) in their research reveal that song preceded speech. Song is a relatively short musical composition for the human voice (possibly accompanied by other musical instruments), which feature words (lyrics). When music is accompanied by words which follow a sequenced rhythm, songs are produced. The use of songs in language learning introduces a foreign language in an elevated manner where the students are more relaxed and at ease in learning the language.

Language teachers as a whole suggest that song help in making word memorable. Guglielmino in his study postulates “song bridge the brain’s hemispheres, strengthening retention through a complementary function as the right hemisphere

learns melody and the left words.” Wallace in his study on comparing instantaneous and long-term recall of spoken texts learned through songs. The study positively indicated that recall was considerably higher with music than for the spoken form. Metin also suggested that songs can be easily employed in language classroom. This will induce a change in the regular class room activities and serve as a valuable resource to teach a large variety of entities such as sentence pattern, vocabulary, as well as the four language skills.

Of the above language entities vocabulary is termed as the centre of language acquisition and teaching. Burhayani suggests that mastering vocabulary promotes the learner to come up with many sentences both in spoken and written format. Finocchiaro explains that the students’ vocabulary bank can be divided into active vocabulary and passive vocabulary.⁵ The active vocabulary is words which are comprehended and used by learners whereas passive vocabulary is the words that the learner identifies in the process of reading and listening. Masning Zahro states that vocabulary has the role which parallels with phonology and grammar and also that which enables the learners to master the four skills of language. Vocabulary helps to articulate thoughts more successfully.

Wrenshall said: ‘there is also plenty of evidence that song help memorization and the rhythm and rhyme of the lyrics that can certainly help vocabulary as well.’ Songs provides the student the prospect to enrich vocabulary through vocalizing the language. Medina states that a wide range of useful vocabulary pieces can be attained through popular songs. Thornbury observes that words are categorized in the human mind in a highly organized and inter connected manner. Harmer examines that a word which has been active through regular use may slip back into the passive store if it is not used. A word that students have in their passive store may suddenly become active if the situation or the context provokes its use. In other words, the position of a vocabulary item does not seem to be a permanent state of affairs. Thornbury believes that the efficient use of vocabulary is typically limited and there is an increased need to focus on the students with holding facility i.e., the capacity of remembering things. Songs help the learners to recall words eventually and be able to remember them readily i.e., it assists them to manage with the gaps in word knowledge. Thornbury in his research justifies that the rhythm of a song remains throughout a lifetime in individual’s mind. Therefore whenever the tune is played learners instantly remember the words along with the meaning and cultural accretions. Based on the review of literature focusing the importance of vocabulary and the role of songs, the experiment was carried out.

METHODOLOGY

This section contains three research questions which are answered and the activities and methodology followed in in the acquisition of vocabulary through songs.

Research Questions

1. Is there awareness among majority of the target learners in using songs to teach vocabulary?
2. Are majority of the target learners interested in learning English through the traditional method of teaching or through songs?
3. Can songs be effectively used in the acquisition of vocabulary?

This study was conducted among the undergraduate students of the Arts and Science College in Vellore district, Tamil Nadu, India.

Students studying in the Arts and Science College are from various backgrounds whose medium of instructions at their school are English, Tamil and other languages. So, it was observed by the researcher that majority of the students lacked fluency in the English language. The main aspect of learning a language is to acquire new words of the target language and its usage. As mentioned in the review of literature, songs help in memorising new words, with its pronunciation, along with the sentence pattern without strain.

The implementation of music and songs in language classrooms is only being done in the kindergarten classrooms, after which language is being taught through the traditional teaching method in the higher education. Teaching English through songs for students of the tertiary level is not common and most of the students are not aware that there exists such a method of learning language. But, students of this young age have a great interest and passion to listen to music and songs mostly of their own culture and few from the other cultures too. On the other hand, technology is paving way for music to be both composed and also listened in high quality through the use of software and convenient gadgets respectively. A whole lot of English songs are being composed and released every year and there are songs with simple English and also songs with different types of genres where the listener can choose according to his/her own taste. Through internet and the use of smart phones, mp3 players it is easy for anyone to download songs and listen to it anytime as these gadgets are being commonly used by people nowadays. When all the students often listen to songs and music and have a passion for it, songs of the target language can be introduced to them in language classes and activities be conducted based on the song and aid them acquire new words.

The following songs were used for the experimental study.

1. Nursery rhymes
2. Simple English songs
3. Tuned poems from their syllabus

These types were used so that the students can go on from the simple to the complex or known to the unknown both musically and also based on the usage of words in the songs. The activities were done by playing the songs in-between

whenever required. Nursery rhymes were used for a start, for a trial. Simple English songs were used to give them a taste of the English songs and to introduce the beauty of the English or western music. The poems in their syllabus consist of words which was complicated for them to learn. So the actual target of this experiment is to make them acquire vocabulary which was in their texts in an easy and entertaining way. The researcher being a musician tuned the poems given in their syllabus and composed music using the folk genre of music pertaining to the culture of Tamil Nadu. It was observed by the researcher that the students were able to pay full attention in classes and also enjoyed learning this foreign language through the music of their own culture.

The researcher conducted the experiment among eighty First year Undergraduate students from different courses who come together for their General English class. Out of the eighty respondents, the activities through songs were conducted among forty while the other forty respondents underwent the usual teaching method and were eventually treated as the control group. The aim of the activities was to enhance vocabulary through songs.

Activities that Enhance Vocabulary through Songs

The activities conducted by the researcher are those suggested by Tim Murphy (1992) in his book, *Music and Song*.

Text Completion and Construction

This activity aimed at improving listening comprehension, reading, guessing and composition skills. An appropriate song was chosen to the language level of the class. The lyrics were handed out to the respondents with gap-fillers. The students were asked to think of words that might suit the blanks. Then the recording was played and the students had to write the missing words. Finally the students were asked to tell their answers. The recording was played till the respondents familiarised with the new vocabulary.

List Out Words

This activity aimed at enabling the students to brainstorm on words related to a particular topic.

A very simple, easily learnt song and usually one that has a question to answer was chosen, *e.g.* "Favourite things" – 'Sound of Music'. The repetitive part of the song was taught first, and the respondents had to contribute in listing the words. The respondents learnt from each other as well as made efforts to think of new words.

Jumbled Lyrics

This activity aimed at enabling the respondents to use the new learnt vocabulary in a sentence pattern grammatically.

The respondents were made to sit in pairs after which the jumbled lyrics were distributed. Then the respondents were asked to rearrange the words in the order that they think would be logical and grammatical. When the respondents had arranged all or most of it, they were made to compare their work with the others. Finally the respondents were made to listen to the whole song and discuss further amendments.

Understanding Figures of Speech

This activity aimed at learning idiomatic phrases. The songs chosen for this activity was taken from their syllabus. The respondents were handed out lyrics that had the idiomatic phrases highlighted. They were made into small groups. The respondents had to enact, explain verbally or draw a picture of the literal meaning of the idiomatic phrases. After all the groups had a chance to perform, the researcher explained the meaning of the idiomatic phrases.

E.g. “If” poem by Rudyard Kipling from the respondents’ syllabus which begins with the line, “If you can keep your head, when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you”. This is an idiomatic phrase that has different literal and actual meanings. The respondents learnt the use of idiomatic phrases.

Song Feedback

This activity aimed at teaching vocabulary and to develop critical awareness. The researcher played a song and asked the students how they would describe the song, if they liked it or not and also list out as many adjectives as possible on a sheet of paper. The papers were collected from the students and the words and phrases were used to construct a feedback form. The prepared feedback forms were handed over to the respondents and each of them had to write a paragraph using the words from the list. The researcher then discussed the feedback with the respondents.

Singing, Singing, Singing

This activity aimed at practising pronunciation, intonation and to have fun. The researcher played a simple song for the respondents and the respondents were expected to learn and just sing along as many times as possible. As the respondents sang along they familiarised with the pronunciation, intonation and pattern of word sequence.

Research Question 1

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS' AWARENESS ON THE USAGE OF ENGLISH SONGS TO TEACH ENGLISH

<i>Awareness among respondents that English songs can be used to teach vocabulary</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Aware	15	37.5
Not aware	25	62.5
Total	40	100.0

Table 1 shows that 37.5 % of the respondents were aware while 62.5% of the respondents were not aware which shows that majority of the respondents were not aware of this method of teaching vocabulary through songs.

Research Question 2

TABLE 2: CROSS TABULATION BETWEEN RESPONDENTS SATISFIED WITH USUAL TEACHING METHODS AND THOSE INTERESTED IF SONGS WERE USED AS A METHOD TO TEACH VOCABULARY

<i>Respondents satisfied with the usual teaching method</i>	<i>Respondents interested if songs were used as a method</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Interested</i>	<i>Not interested</i>	
Strongly disagree	16	5	21
Disagree	7	3	10
Neutral	2	2	4
Agree	1	1	2
Strongly agree	2	1	3
Total	28	12	40

Table 2 shows that a majority of 16 out of 21 and 7 out of 10 respondents who **strongly disagreed** and **disagreed** respectively to being satisfied with the usual teaching method were interested in using songs to teach vocabulary since the respondents expect novelty in their teaching methods. 5 out of 21 and 3 out of 10 respondents who strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively to being satisfied with the usual teaching methods were not interested in songs being used to teach vocabulary because they were apprehensive about a new teaching method since they were not exposed to it earlier.

Research Question 3

TABLE 3: PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST

	Mean	SD	Sig
Experimental (Pre & post)	12.27	4.13	0.00
Post-test (Control & Experimental)	22.32	2.40	0.00
	28.35	1.99	

P < 0.05

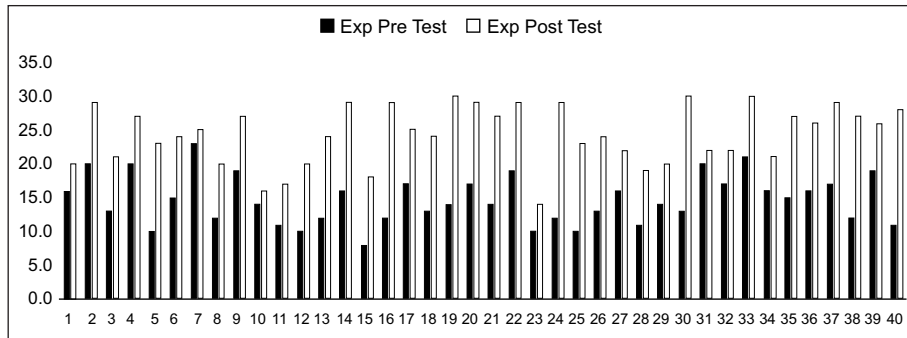


Figure 1: Results of the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group

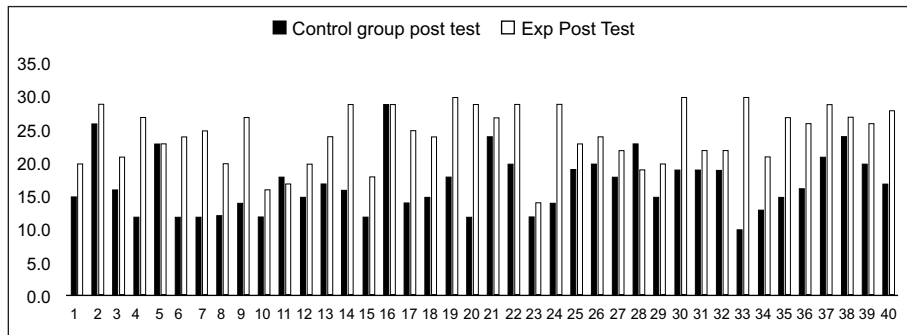


Figure 2: Difference in results between the post tests of the control and experimental groups

The table 3, shows the analysis using the statistical technique called the paired sample *t* test. The first row of the table shows the difference in the level of pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. The second row shows the post-tests of both the experimental and control groups. In both the rows the columns showing

the mean differences and significant values are tabulated. The significant value known as the “*p*” is less than 0.05. The analysis is now interpreted that there is a significant difference or development in the experimental group in the post-test which was conducted after the experiment. The experimental group has fared well in the post-test when compared to the control group. This is evident to prove that songs are an effective tool in vocabulary acquisition.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis, it is evident that students who underwent the teaching through songs fared better than the students who were taught through the usual teaching method. Many target learners of the English language are learning it with lot of difficulty as they are forced to learn this global language for their employment purpose and also to go to the next level. Since this has become a need of the hour, it is the role of a teacher to incorporate innovative methods of teaching and make the class lively. It is strongly recommended by the researcher that songs should be incorporated into the general English syllabus of the students as they learn it easily in an entertaining way. As discussed above, any verbal learnt in the form of a tune, sticks in the mind and isn't easy to forget. The musicians can collaborate with the educational institutions and tune the poems in the syllabus so that it would be easy for the students to learn. English classes shouldn't be another lecture class like the other subjects, instead it should be singing classes where learning becomes interesting and easy for them. As music and songs refresh the brain, English classes and English learning will be more desired and refreshing and also easy for students who are learning this global language with much struggle.

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