
ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY THROUGH SONGS

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Abstract: English occupies an important indispensable place in our education system and life of our country. Vocabulary is the primitive as well as core part to any language teaching and learning. Without sufficient vocabulary one cannot understand others or express their own ideas. This research attempts on acquisition of vocabulary through song by using Audio-visual method, applying Stephen Krashen's theory of "Narrow Reading" to study the findings. This paper attempts to discuss the use of songs in the teaching and acquisition of vocabulary. This method is experimented on college students at the Undergraduate level to test the extent of application and effectiveness of this method in vocabulary acquisition in the present day context. The results prove to be consistent with the theory applied.

Keywords: Acquisitions, Narrow Reading, Songs, Vocabulary.

Introduction: English has been playing an important role in the educational system as well as in the social life. English was supreme during pre-independent India. It was the language of administration, a compulsory subject at school and college, and the medium of instruction for the subjects taught at schools and colleges. English occupies an important indispensable place in our education system and life of our country.

In India, English is taught as a foreign and second language. The main aim of teaching English in India is to help children acquire practical command of English so that it may be useful to them in everyday life. English is largely considered as a skill subject and so imparting the five seminal language skills like thinking, listening, speaking, reading and writing is the primary objective of English language teaching in India. According to Thompson and Wyatt, there are four aims of teaching English to learners. They are to understand simple spoken English, to understand simple written English, to speak simple, correct idiomatic English and to write simple, correct and idiomatic English.

Vocabulary is the primitive as well as core part to any language teaching and learning. Without sufficient vocabulary one cannot understand others or express their own ideas. Wilkins (1972) wrote that ". . . while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111-112). This research attempts on acquisition of vocabulary through song, using Audio-visual method by applying Stephen Krashen's theory of "Narrow Reading" to study the findings. This project attempts to discuss the use of songs in the teaching and acquisition of vocabulary. This method is experimented on college students at the Undergraduate level to test the extent of application and effectiveness of this method in vocabulary acquisition in the present day context.

Acquisition through Songs: Vocabulary forms the vital core of any language. Words are needed to

express thoughts and ideas and also point objects and describe things. Lack of vocabulary serves to be a major handicap for the learner of English as a second language. An important objective of teaching vocabulary is to develop the language of the learners. Words are the building blocks in a language. By learning the lexical items, the learner starts to develop knowledge of the target language. Based on one's experience of being a language learner, one seems to have no hesitation in recognizing the importance of vocabulary in L2 learning. Language practitioners also have reached a high degree of consensus regarding the importance of vocabulary. The findings in a Macaro's survey (2003) indicate that secondary language teachers view vocabulary as a topic that most needs research to shed light on to enhance the teaching and learning in their classrooms. Therefore, it may be claimed that the role of vocabulary in L2 learning is immediately recognized and implications for teaching from substantial research are in great demand.

This research work discusses the importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition (SLA) and presents an overview of the major strands of research on vocabulary acquisition based on the use of songs in the teaching and acquisition of vocabulary.

There are nine reasons why songs serve as the best method to teach English. Some key reasons why songs can work exceedingly well in the foreign language classroom are that songs almost always contain authentic, natural language. A variety of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs. Songs are usually very easily obtainable. They can be selected to suit the needs and interests of the students. Besides, grammatical and cultural aspects can be introduced through songs. Time length is easily controlled and within a limited time slot the students can experience a wide range of accents. Another pivotal reason is that lyrics can be used in relating to situations of the world around the

learners. To top it all, students have a natural ear for sound and song as they think that songs are natural and fun.

These are only some of the many reasons why songs are useful in a language learning classroom. They contain authentic language, are easily obtainable, provide vocabulary, grammar and cultural aspects and are fun for the students. They provide enjoyable speaking, listening, vocabulary and language practice both in and out of the classroom. So EFL, English as a Foreign Language, ESL, English as a Second Language and foreign language teachers should all consider using songs as a regular part of their classroom activities.

Applying Stephen Krashen's theory of "Narrow Reading," this method can be still more effective. "The case of narrow reading is based on the idea that the acquisition of both structure and vocabulary comes from many exposure in a comprehensible context, that is, we acquire new structure and words when we understand message, many message, that they encode. Narrow reading facilitates this in many ways" (Krashen 2001: 144).

The song chosen for the experiment was "Just Like That!" from Cassandra, an album by Abba, a Swedish pop group. This song is chosen for its simple language and could be understood easily by the students.

Participants: Subjects were fifty first-year undergraduate students from Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu. They were given an outline of what they were expected to do. From that few minutes of interaction it was observed that the class was of two different aptitude levels based on their educational background. The class consisted of students from good English medium schools as well as from Tamil medium schools. Discussions with the students indicated that they believed in conscious learning of the words and their meanings. Moreover, they were not aware that they could develop their vocabulary by simply getting exposure to English songs.

Procedure: After a short introduction about the session and their activities, the students were given a pre-test, for 15 marks, on the listed vocabulary from the chosen song. Most of the students who took the test were unable to decipher the meaning of the words on which they were tested. The evaluation also inferred that the students were unable to grasp the meaning of the word and also the context in which it was used. The test served as an eye-opener for the students to understand their level of vocabulary acquisition and also the dire need for leaning vocabulary in the present day scenario.

During the next few minutes the students were told about the different aspects of language, importance

of vocabulary, and its uses and in what ways they can be developed and inherited. It was more of an interactive class. The students were encouraged to interact in the class and they came out with different answers. The aspect of classroom interaction pertains to three aspects: input, interaction and output. They were also explained of various methods involved in teaching vocabulary and in what ways the Audio-Visual method differs from the rest. The growing interest among the students was notable.

The next step was to introduce the song to them. The students were given a copy of song. The song was explained, every word in the lyric was elucidated and explained in context to the song and the song was played later. They were asked to follow the song and the students thoroughly enjoyed it. After playing the song twice they were asked to sing the song in tune with the track. Most of the students in the class were able to sing the song. Then the students were made to sing the song without the track so that they can get involved better. The song was played for a few more times on the request of the students and the meaning of the song was explained again.

A week later, a post-test was conducted to test the efficiency of this method. The post-test was monitored, evaluated and the students' score was recorded. The scores of the students obtained in the pre-test was compared with those obtained in the post-test and are tabulated.

The first numerical row in Table 1 represents mark, and *Frequency* is number of students secured that particular mark. From the table it was studied that a student (2% of the class) had secured the least mark, i.e. 0 mark and 6 students (12% of the class) had secured 8 marks, which is noted to be the highest mark obtained by the students.

Similarly, studying Table 2 it was observed that 1 student had obtained 3 mark and 13 students, i.e. 26% of the class had secured the maximum mark for which the test was conducted and 82% of the class has secured above 10 mark.

Conclusion: It was inferred that students had performed better in the post-test than in the pre-test and the students exhibited more confidence and competence in vocabulary acquisition and retention through the audio-visual method. Hence it was ascertained that, of the different methods of teaching and learning vocabulary, this specific audio-visual method of teaching vocabulary through songs was very effective and efficient. As the role of technology in language teaching has been phenomenal and far-reaching, this method optimizes the use of technology in the classroom and enables the students to have fun with words and learn vocabulary in the most interesting way possible. Further, this audio-visual method can work well with students from both

rural and urban background as they are taught the language in its most natural accent – an accent which these students might well wish to learn and emulate. This method can be adopted while teaching students at the undergraduate level who belong to the discipline of English and also those pursuing other humanities and science programmes.

For all the immense merits and benefits that this method offers to the teacher and the learner, this method has its own limitations. This method cannot be adopted in classrooms which are not provided with audio-visual facilities. Adding to that, proper care has to be taken while choosing the song to be used as a teaching aid.

Thus vocabulary is a seminal aspect of any language.

Vocabulary acquisition can be achieved by adopting various methods practiced in the past and the present. The method of using songs to teach

vocabulary is a novel and resourceful exercise. This method also takes cognizance of the current need of using ICT as a tool in language teaching in an ESL classroom. This audio-visual method maximizes the use of technology while also ensuring that the students obtain a holistic experience of enjoying the language in its most natural and robust form. The method offers ample scope for selection and gradation of the teaching material, optimal use of technology and adopting an empirical methodology of teaching, evaluation and remediation. This modern method of teaching vocabulary through songs is one of the effective and result-oriented methods of teaching language in an interesting and effective way.

Result: Frequency Table					
Pre-Test					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	1	4	8.0	8.0	10.0
	2	8	16.0	16.0	26.0
	3	3	6.0	6.0	32.0
	4	8	16.0	16.0	48.0
	5	7	14.0	14.0	62.0
	6	9	18.0	18.0	80.0
	7	4	8.0	8.0	88.0
	8	6	12.0	12.0	100.0
Total		50	100.0	100.0	

*Maximum Mark: 15

Table 1 Post-Test					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	4	3	6.0	6.0	8.0
	6	2	4.0	4.0	12.0
	9	2	4.0	4.0	16.0
	10	3	6.0	6.0	22.0
	11	2	4.0	4.0	26.0
	12	5	10.0	10.0	36.0
	13	4	8.0	8.0	44.0
	14	15	30.0	30.0	74.0
	15	13	26.0	26.0	100.0
Total		50	100.0	100.0	

*Maximum Mark: 15

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