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Reforming Beliefs

**WHY THIS KOLAVERI DE? SONG AS
A LANGUAGE TEACHING AID - AN EXPERIMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Spoken English classes have become a part and parcel of engineering studies in Tamilnadu. It is because most of the engineering students have good subject knowledge but lack communication skills. Students in Tamil medium schools learn English as a single subject for 12 years. They don't have any exposure to English learning or writing. When they enter into engineering colleges which teach mostly in English, they feel difficult to understand the lessons. They try hard to learn the subject and get good percentage in semester exams, but fail in interviews because of no communication skills. So, many engineering colleges in Tamilnadu insist on conducting Spoken English classes as a part of placement training for the students. Teachers enjoy teaching Spoken English along with the regular syllabus. However, they face problems when they have to use the same course materials in a classroom with mixed-ability students. This paper explains the ways in which a simple song like *Why This Kolaveri De?* can be utilised for language teaching and explores its effectiveness in mixed-ability classrooms.

Introduction

Why This Kolaveri De? is a popular song from the Tamil movie 3. It is written and sung by the Tamil actor Dhanush. The song is composed by the music director Anirudh. It is a downtempo gaana song built around a Tamil folk rhythm. Soon after release, it becomes the most searched YouTube video in India and an Internet phenomenon across Asia. (Suresh, 2011) Parodies of the song are uploaded in the Youtube. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh invites Dhanush for the dinner party hosted for the Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda in New Delhi, India.

The song is echoed at Beating, the Retreat ceremony, during the Republic Day. Police officers use slogans from the song to promote helmet wearing on the road. Political parties in India plan to use the song during their election campaigns. *BBC* and *Time* (2011) magazines attribute bizarre broken English, genre-bending tune, quintessential Tamil street humour, universal love failure theme, etc. for its popularity. Top business schools like Indian Institutes of Management in Ranchi, Kozhikode, Lucknow, Ahmedabad, and Bangalore conduct studies to figure out the popularity of this song. (Singh, 2011)

Background of the Study

Materials for Spoken English are abundant both online and print. However, most of the materials are monotonous and do not catch the attention of the students. When it comes to mixed-ability classrooms, it is really impossible to find out interesting materials to educate and entertain all the students. Experts recommend English songs and movies to be used in the language classrooms. It is difficult for the teachers to find English songs and movies which are easily understandable and pedagogically sound. Students in the 'beginner' level find British English or American English songs or movies very hard to understand. Indian English songs and movies with pedagogical value are rare to find in the Internet. Popular songs like *Why This Kolaveri De?* can be used for teaching English enjoyably and effectively in mixed-ability classrooms.

Description of the Teaching Aid

Why This Kolaveri De? song is written in Tanglish, a mixture of Tamil and English. The beginners can be asked to translate the Tamil words into English. They learn new vocabulary, portmanteau words, parallels for colloquial Tamil words, sentence structure, rhyme, rhythmic pattern, etc. The proficient students can translate or rewrite the lyrics in correct English. They can try singing the song in good English. Group discussions can be conducted for identifying the reasons for the popularity of the song. Social networking, love failure theme, Tanglish usage, etc. can be discussed in detail. The power of social media can be explained in the class.

Location & Samples of the Study

VV College of Engineering is located in Arasoor, Tisaiyanvilai, Tuticorin District, Tamilnadu, India. It consists of five departments (Mechanical, Civil, Electronics and Communication, Electrical and Electronics, and Computer Science Engineering). It has a language lab and digital library. There are 800 students in its vast campus. Every classroom has a system and LCD projector. The college with its modern infrastructure is taken as the location of the study. Undergraduate students from VV College of Engineering are the participants of this experiment. 50 students in 'Beginners' class and 50 students in 'Proficient' class are chosen as samples. Two teachers are involved in the data collection and evaluation.

Data Collection

The students in the 'Proficient' class enjoy translating the Tanglish song into good English. They use words like 'killer rage' or 'desire to kill'. They discuss the portmanteau word 'Tanglish' and its effect on the public. They argue about the meaning of the term 'soup song' which is a colloquial Tamil term. The universal theme of 'love failure' is discussed in detail. The rhyme pattern is explained by the teacher. The students sing the English version of the song using the same rhythmic pattern. They identify social networking, Tanglish usage, folk music, and love failure theme as the reasons for the song's popularity. A test on sentence structure, vocabulary, rhyme, and rhythmic pattern is conducted along with a group discussion.

The students in the 'Beginners' class translate the Tamil words into English with the help of the teacher. They enjoy when the teacher explains the terms 'killer rage', 'Tanglish', 'soup song', etc. They learn rhyme and rhythmic pattern using the English translation. They sing the English translation song individually or in groups. They learn the basic sentence structure effortlessly. A test on sentence structure, vocabulary, rhyme, and rhythmic pattern is conducted for the 'beginner' level students.

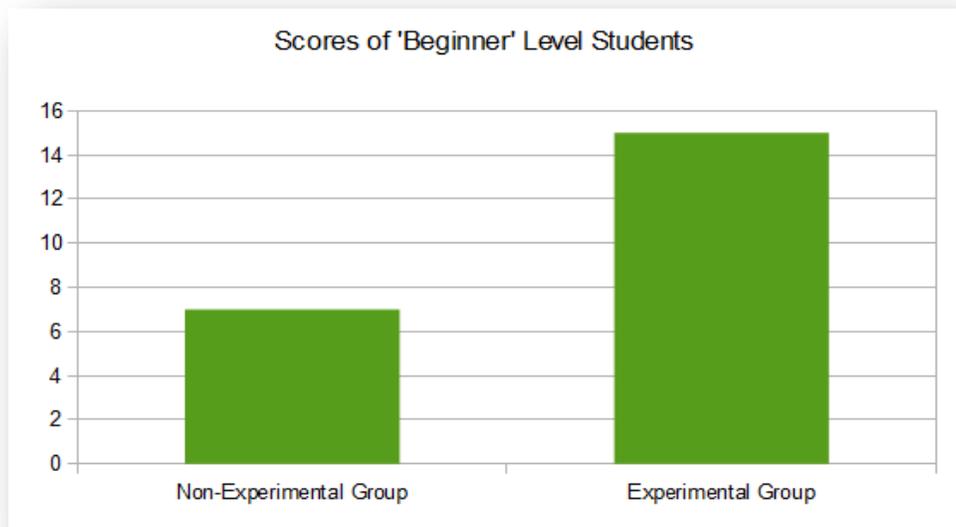
Criteria for Evaluation

A test on sentence structure, vocabulary, rhyme, and rhythmic pattern for 20 marks is conducted both for the proficient and beginner level students. Speaking skills of the 'proficient' students who participate in the group discussions are evaluated using a 5-point rubric. These

scores are compared with the scores of the students for whom sentence structure and group discussion are taught using traditional methods.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

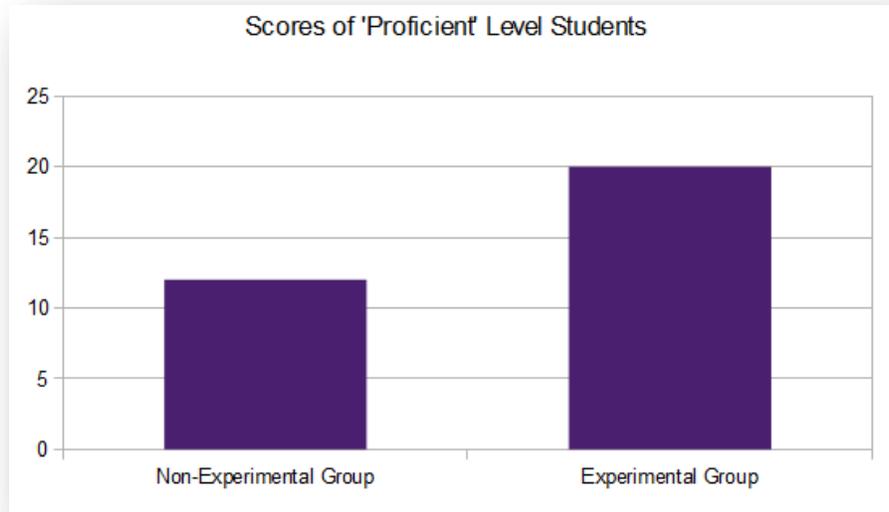
Graph 7.1 Test Scores of the 'Beginner' Level Students in the Non-Experimental Group vs.



Experimental Group:

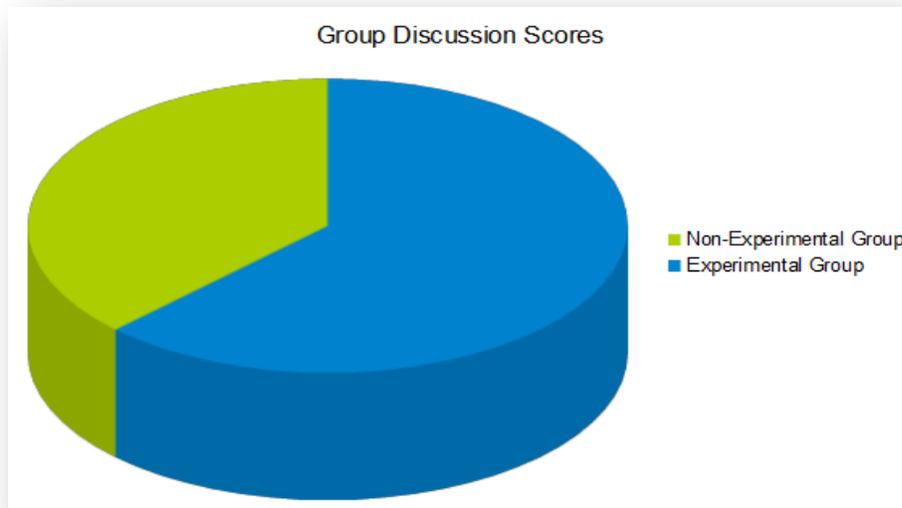
1. Out of 20 marks, 'beginner' level students in the non-experimental group have scored an average of 7 marks.
2. Out of 20 marks, 'beginner' level students in the experimental group have scored an average of 15 marks.

Graph 7.2 Test Scores of the 'Proficient' Students in the Non-Experimental Group vs. Experimental Group:



1. Out of 20 marks, 'proficient' level students in the non-experimental group have scored an average of 12 marks.
2. Out of 20 marks, 'proficient' level students in the experimental group have scored an average of 20 marks.

Graph 7.3 Scores of the 'Proficient' Level Students in Group Discussions:



1. On the basis of 5-point rubric, 'proficient' level students in the non-experimental group have scored an average of 3 points in the group discussion.

2. On the basis of 5-point rubric, 'proficient' level students in the experimental group have scored an average of 5 points in the group discussion.

Findings

1. In the test on sentence structure, vocabulary, rhyme, and rhythmic pattern, both the 'beginner' level and 'proficient' level students in the experimental group have scored more than the corresponding level students in the non-experimental group.
2. In the group discussion, 'proficient' level students in the experimental group have scored more than the 'proficient' level students in the non-experimental group.
3. The students in the experimental group have enjoyed the song, engaged themselves fully in the exercise, and performed well in the test.

Recommendations

1. Easy and interesting songs with pedagogical value should be identified for language teaching.
2. Simple songs like *Why This Kolaveri De?* can be utilised for effective language teaching in mixed-ability classrooms.
3. Interesting videos with current relevance can be used in the classroom.
4. Instead of making the students just hear the song or watch the video, proper language exercises should be given as follow-up.
5. Tests also can be conducted to check the effectiveness of the songs or videos used in the language classrooms.

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