

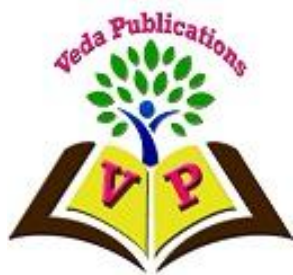


## KARAOKE FOR IMPROVING SPOKEN ENGLISH

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### ABSTRACT



This paper tries to show how 'Karaoke' can be an effective tool in teaching spoken English in the context of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). It is a known fact that existing research supports the use of songs in English Language Classrooms as an effective tool. Yet, this technique is hardly used in the Indian ESL Context. If at all they are used, they are confined to pre-primary and primary classes (nursery rhymes and a few other songs). Hence, there was an experiment to use songs in the ESL classes at the tertiary level at SSN College of Engineering, Chennai. It was found that Karaoke was a very successful technique or method to promote spoken English primarily. Karaoke facilitated language pedagogy in more than one way. First of all, the classes were interesting, engaging and hence motivating. With careful choice, it was possible to provide appropriate language input through the myriad songs available easily. The finding is that it is an effective technique for teaching spoken English at the tertiary level to learners at varied levels of language proficiency, though it particularly seemed to profit those at the low and intermediate levels.

**Keywords:** TL (*Target Learners at the Tertiary Level in engineering colleges*), ESL (*English as a Second Language*), KIC (*Karaoke in Class*), SSNCE (*SSN College of Engineering*), CEFR (*Common European Framework of Reference*)



## INTRODUCTION

Murphy points out that 'Songs can help young learners improve their listening skills and pronunciation, therefore potentially helping them to improve their speaking skills' (Murphey, 1992). From the study conducted at SSNCE, it is evident that KIC (karaoke in class) is a very useful technique in helping teachers promote the spoken skills of students at the tertiary level of education. It is also seen that the technique had a better impact on students with average and low levels of language proficiency. It is a successful method for students with higher levels of proficiency as well. After the students listen to a song a couple of times, they decipher the lyrics on their own or with the help of their teacher, and then sing to the background music (karaoke), there is a magical spell that works in them, improving their fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary and, to an extent, grammatical accuracy. The advantages of students' singing the song to the tune are too many. Vocalization of language through music has contributed to the improvement of all aspects of pronunciation, such as sounds, stress, and intonation patterns. It also helped a variety of expressions and body language. Development of vocabulary and grammatical structures have been other benefits. At a deeper level, it has also been found useful for promoting reading, as karaoke helps in the vocalization and sub-vocalization of language with perfect chunking and other aspects that are important in improving reading skills. This paper throws light on the different stages in the study proving the hypothesis that karaoke is a powerful tool in enhancing Spoken Skills.

## BACKGROUND

The target learners for the study are the students of engineering colleges. Spoken English is very important to them for their career. In-campus placement, a prime objective of most of the students pursuing Engineering Studies in India, tests their communication skills more than any other ability for employment. Hence the need of the hour for them is to improve their communication skills in English in general and spoken English in particular. Students at SSNCE form the sample for the study. The technique of KIC was tried out in class and followed up with individual effort in the TL's own space. The results

were very promising and there is evidence to say with confidence that KIC in class can be one of the techniques to promote language proficiency in general and speaking ability in particular.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

How can the teacher use KIC to train students in spoken English in a short span of time?

## RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

It has been well established by research that songs serve as a useful material for teaching Spoken English the world over. Songs are used not only for improving spoken English but also for teaching several aspects of grammar, vocabulary and, sometimes, even writing. For the purpose of the present study, the focus will be on the use of songs. Though the use of songs is well established, it is not yet seen as a classroom practice at least in the Indian Context at the tertiary level. Hence a study was planned to systematically incorporate songs in the ELT curriculum in engineering education, to start with.

## ADVANTAGES OF USING SONGS FOR ELT

The language used in songs is mostly authentic and natural. Therefore, they will be very useful in acquiring language. Secondly a wide range of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs. One of the objectives in the ELT curriculum is to help the learner acquire contemporary vocabulary with useful phrases and collocations that are easily comprehensible. As songs are always directed at the native-speaking population, they usually contain contemporary vocabulary, idioms and expressions. Easy accessibility, availability of a huge collection of songs, varied in theme, tune and culture, and access to visuals along with the songs are other advantages of using songs for ELT. The range and variety of these songs make it easy for a teacher to find material suitable to the TL. It is easy to find a song suitable to the TL as the resources of English Songs are vast and varied and yet easily accessible. Another advantage of songs is that students can be exposed, through them, to different kinds of English, namely, British English, American English, Indian English and so on. Last but not the least, songs can be used to relate to any contemporary situation of the world around us.



We get very interesting songs relating to pollution, crime, war, civil rights, and any other cause for that matter. Teachers of English as ESL or EFL at all levels of education would find songs a very useful tool to teach English.

### COMPOSITION OF TL

Sixty five first year students from the engineering stream from SSNCE were chosen as the Target Learners (TL) for the study. On the basis of CEPT (Cambridge University Proficiency Test) the TL were divided into three Levels in accordance with the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference); namely, Higher (C1 and C2), Intermediate (B2 and Upper half of B1) and Lower (A1 and A2) based on their performance in the test. The distribution of students across the three levels of CEFR are as follows:

Higher (17) Intermediate (28) and Lower (20)

### METHODOLOGY

#### THE FIRST STAGE

The TL listened to the song 'Dare to Believe'<sup>1</sup> (see appendix A for the lyrics), a philosophical song with minimal linguistic challenge. The students then answered the following questions by way of an 'Ice Breaker'.

1. Do you like the song?
2. What do you like most about it? Music, lyrics, video?
3. Would you like subtitles? Why?
4. Should I play it again?
5. Do you like the lyrics? Why?
6. Some of you were singing in a rather low voice. How many of you would like to sing with the lyrics?
7. How many of you would like to sing with the music (Karaoke)?

Answers, level-wise, are recorded below:

Q.NO	Higher	Intermediate	Lower
1	100% said 'Yes'	100% said 'Yes'	100% said 'Yes'
2	All of them liked all the three aspects. 40% said that they were taken away more by the music than by the lyrics. 20 % said that the video was not as appealing as the music or the lyrics. 40 % of them said that they were not able to follow the lyrics or the meaning.	All of them liked Music  75 percent of them could not follow the lyrics as they could not understand the meaning.  25 % of them enjoyed the video  30 % of them said they liked them all.	All of them liked Music  90 percent of them could not follow the lyrics as they could not understand the meaning.  45 % of them enjoyed the video  20 % of them said they liked them all.
3	30 % of them said that it would help understanding. 70 % of them said that they would like to decipher the lyrics themselves and then	80% of them said that they would like the subtitles as they would understand the song better.  20 percent of them did not want the subtitles as they would like to	All of them felt that subtitles were necessary to follow the song.  They pointed out that, with the subtitles, they would vocalize the song, if not sing it loudly.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkloEa2382U>



	have the sub titles.	write the lyrics on their own by subsequent listening.	
4	All of them said, 'Yes'.	All of them said, 'Yes'.	All of them said, 'Yes'.
5	All of them said 'Yes'	80% of them said 'Yes'. Others said that they did not have a good voice and also that they had stage fear	All of them said, 'Yes'
6	30% wanted the lyrics whereas other wanted to try constructing the lyrics on their own	70% of them said 'Yes' and the others wanted to write the lyrics on their own.	80% of them said that they would not like to sing as they were not good singers. 20% of them said that they wanted to sing.
7	All of them said, 'Yes'	80% of them said 'Yes' and others were hesitant.	80% of them said, 'No' and others had an inclination to sing.

**Inference:** It is very clear that all of them liked the idea of a song in the class. It was a welcome methodology from the students' point of view. The reasons were that it was fun, engaging and interesting. Students from higher levels of proficiency welcomed the idea of singing the song to music. They also showed keen interest in understanding the song. They wanted to reconstruct the lyrics on their own by repeatedly listening to the song. It was found that the improvement in spoken English was considerably more for the students who were at lower levels of language proficiency and gradually lower for those in the intermediate and higher levels of language proficiency.

### THE SECOND STAGE

Now the stage is set for utilizing 'learner motivation and involvement' for meaningful interaction with the text in the song, leading to language acquisition. As the TL were not a homogeneous group in the language proficiency levels, the task at this stage was different for each of the groups. The 'Higher' level attempted to decipher the lyrics by listening to the songs repeatedly. A language laboratory was used for this purpose where learners could attempt individual work. The 'Intermediate' level attempted to decipher the lyrics by repeated listening, but they had the lyrics with them separately as a guide to check themselves now and then. The 'Lower' level listened to the song with

the lyrics on the screen and tried to make sense of the song.

At the end of this exercise, it was noticed that 'learner enthusiasm' was more in many and sustained at the same level in the rest of the class. The TL were given a printed script of the lyrics and engaged in a group discussion. The questions for the group discussion were varied. The objective was to involve them in speaking, using their heightened levels of enthusiasm and their engagement with the song and music. As negotiation of meaning is crucial to acquisition of language, some questions were also set with respect to the comprehension of the song. The questions for the group discussion are given below:

1. Did you have to understand the meaning of the song to enjoy listening to it?
2. Did you find it important to understand the songs? Why?
3. What do you think the song is about?
4. Do you like to learn the song by heart? Why?
5. Which is better, music or the lyrics?
6. Does the song help you to improve your pronunciation? Discuss with examples.

Group discussions had students from all the proficiency levels in each group. This was found to be very useful for effective peer learning to take place. As the song was now familiar to all of them, it was an advantage for group activity in a heterogeneous environment.



From the discussion, it was evident that the students were becoming conscious of the pronunciation of each of the words, caring for individual sounds, stress, intonation and chunking patterns. As they were interested in singing the song themselves, it was crucial to them to get the pronunciation in place. They were also able to relate the meaning of the song with the pronunciation patterns therein. The experience has also rewarded them in acquiring vocabulary, grammatical patterns and a desire for leaning more songs and hence more language.

### THE THIRD STAGE

At this stage all the students were in a mood to sing the song. It was surprising to see that even those who were very shy and had inhibitions in singing earlier showed interest in singing now. This time all the students had the lyrics and also the background music (karaoke). They sang individually in the systems along with the background music. Their songs were recorded and they were able to play it back and make corrections wherever they thought their song had deviated from the original. They were allowed to edit their song till they were completely satisfied that they had produced their best. The final version of the songs of each student was listened to by the peer groups and given comments by the peer group.

At this stage the students had their privacy to sing and listen to their own songs with the background music. It gave them their freedom and space to practice a song, negotiating with the meaning of the lyrics, getting the pronunciation of each sound correct, placing the stress accurately to music, following the intonation patterns and in brief, practising all aspects of spoken language individually. At the same time there were many opportunities for interaction in pairs and groups at their will and volition. The environment was non-intimidating and learning was natural.

The final activity at this stage was to sing individually to background music to the whole class. The objective was to help the learners gain confidence to face a group and perform. The students enjoyed the activity and the feedback from them was very positive. They wanted more of these classes and were also prepared to practise more songs on their own.

The same experiment was repeated with another song, 'Love is Beautiful' by Usha Uthup<sup>2</sup>. As the students were now used to Karaoke in Class, it was possible to skip stage one and move to stages two and three.

### IMPLICATIONS OF KARAOKE FOR ELT

Karaoke guarantees learner participation and serious engagement. There is an enormous possibility for selection of songs to suit the pedagogical purposes specific to the learner traits and language needs. The pace of language acquisition is quick and learning has a tremendous transfer value in the sense that learners lay their hands on many more songs by themselves if they are introduced to one or two in the class. It promotes team spirit as learners are keen on learning from one other. This is one activity where the learners sincerely practice pronunciation from the level of an individual sound to that of stress and intonation, and even body language on their own. The desire to sing is a powerful motivation factor for perfect pronunciation. The interest is natural and stems from an intrinsic natural motivation, unlike the practice of pronunciation for the sake of pronunciation in the classroom, which is mechanical and devoid of a felt need.

Karaoke as a technique makes songs in class more meaningful because it evokes an intrinsic interest in the learner. If the students are only listening to songs and analyzing them it becomes another entertainment show. On the other hand, when the students have a responsibility to sing the song, the entire activity moves from one of mechanical intent to one of dynamic enthusiasm.

### CONCLUSION

Karaoke as a methodology in ELT is a powerful tool to teach spoken English primarily. We know from past experience and research that songs assist language acquisition in areas of vocabulary and grammar, improve spelling and develop the linguistic skills of reading, writing (Jalongo and Bromley, 1984, Mc Carthey 1985); (Jalongo and Bromley, 1984; Mc Carthey, 1985; Martin, 1983; Mitchell, 1983; and Jolly 1975). The use of songs and music is consistent with two of the most popular views of Krashen (1982

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Slfdp8eAQIA>



and 1989), namely, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Many theories support the use of extra-linguistic support from photos, pictures, sounds, music etc., as they have been found to be very useful in the language learning process. According to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1993), human beings possess eight different intelligences, one of which is music. All these intelligences play a role in the learning of language in varying degrees. Theories associated with the psychology of learning support the use of music in the second language classroom. Rote memorization has been upheld by these theories as a useful stage in the process of language acquisition. Music and its sub-component 'rote memorization' have been found to promote language learning process (Deutch, 1972; Palermo, 1978; Serafina, Crowder, Repp, 1984; Borchgrevink, 1982). There is no dearth of critical insight as to the value of songs in ELT classes. The flip side of the story, however, is that it is not seen in practice. Seen against this backdrop, this paper is an attempt to show how Karaoke proves practically to be a viable approach to assist language instruction in classrooms.

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## Appendix

### Lyrics

#### 1. Dare To Believe

Dare to believe there's a song in your heart  
Dare to believe in your dreams  
Nothing can stop you from playing your part  
As long as you dare to believe

Too many people hold themselves back  
When they should be reaching out  
Too many people on the wrong track  
Led astray by a seed of doubt

We don't have to live that way  
Sun is up on a brand new day!!!  
So dare to believe...

Too many people say it's all right  
Never see a need to change  
Too many people hide in their lives  
Underneath a cloud of pain

We don't have to bow our heads  
Lift 'em up sing with joy instead  
And dare to believe...

And there's no time  
Like the present time  
I'm gonna go  
Non-stop, Right now  
I've found something that I know is mine!  
So dare to believe...

#### 2. Love is Beautiful for Mankind by Usha Uthup

Love is beautiful for all mankind  
Living for love is reason 'n' rhyme  
e  
There's so much for us to do  
Why don't u smile and sing along too  
Life is a flower love is a treasure  
Youth its glamour where is the pleasure?  
Come along hand in hand  
Sing along with me  
Life is merry and bright as u can see  
Don't u know it's a waiting for u  
All the world and its laughter too  
Come along sing with me you and you  
Ladies and gentlemen  
I am here to sing for you tonight  
And all I want you to do is  
Shed your inhibitions and clap with me ok? 1-2-3-4  
Come along sing with me sing with me  
Life is merry and bright as you can see  
Don't you know it's a waiting for you  
All the world and its laughter too  
Come along sing with me you and you (life is a flower)  
lalalalaaa lalalalalaaa  
lalalalaaa lalalalalaaa  
Ok folks if u won't join  
I'll do something for u now with this here goes  
shabadabaaa shababdababaaa  
daaraaraa reeraaraaraa (life is a flower)