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Innovative Techniques to Develop English Language Skills through Internet-Enabled Mobile Phones

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Abstract:

Innovative English language teaching techniques through latest technologies like Internet-enabled mobile phones are an interesting phenomenon these days. They provide varied entertainment and intellectual challenge to the learners and teachers. This paper primarily focuses on developing the communication skills of learners focusing on functional language. The study has been tried out using technology embedded phones exploring various resources for the learner groups. The findings appeared very effective when compared to traditional approaches which tend to be monotonous. These Internet-enabled mobile phones are especially useful for creating different communities which share the same feelings and experiences. This also creates communities and not only links them, but also acts like a bridge, thus making the learners confident and self-reliant.

Keywords: *Internet-enabled mobile phones, communication, communities and self-reliance*

1. Introduction

Internet-enabled mobile phones play an effective role in facilitating better language learning when compared to the conventional computer technology. Internet-enabled mobile phones tend to be user-friendly and more versatile in use, supporting language learning innovatively. This kind of technology helps learners of all age groups especially, those, whose L1 is not English, and also for introverts who don't socialize much with others. This type of language teaching-learning can be called as language practice in the palm of one's hand both literally and metaphorically. Mobile devices can act as a bridge in fact, creating an opportunity to join social groups and make sense. Every learner should have this kind of exposure inside and outside the classroom. This technique is extremely useful for introverts, lonely people and elderly people. This is in line with the adage that language learning should be continuous in any form. Conforming to corporate culture second language learning should be in the format of 24 x 7 accessibility and exposedness at every necessary movement. In other words second language learning should not be confined only to the classroom. Synchronous Learning – which means learning at places and times convenient to one – also acts as a convenient link. As David Crystal asserts internet accessibility through mobile phone “enables a dramatic expansion to take place in the range and variety of language, and is providing unprecedented opportunities for personal creativity. The Internet has now been around long enough for us to ‘take a view’ about the way in which it is being shaped by and is shaping language and languages.” (2006: pp 93-94)

2. Rationale

Many adult learners, especially women from conservative families don't have many opportunities to interact in English outside the classroom. Their society does not permit this for cultural, religious and other reasons. Many women possess basic study skills which are not good enough to acquire English and interact with others. Further learning a new language at an older age in an artificial setting like a classroom is never easy. An average of around 6 hours per week of classroom instruction for about a month does not drastically improve their English language skills in any manner. To improve their confidence and to learn quickly they need to interact outside the classroom. The latest mobile phones with hi tech devices and Internet facility is like a God sent boon for such learners.

3. Theoretical Background

If a scholar like David Crystal endorses such a view, then one can really be sure that this type of new technology is more powerful and practical, implementing techniques that encompass all the approaches and methods.

The present researchers carried out a pilot project at the Excel Institute of English; Hyderabad to examine the future prospects of Internet-enabled mobile phone related to English language learning. The study was carried out at three different levels. A total of

50 learners was selected for this project. Of these twenty were undergraduate students pursuing Bachelor degrees in various disciplines such as Commerce, Science and Arts. The other 15 subjects were from semi literate background i.e., Housewives, another 15 were from low income group employees in the age group ranging from 16 – 40. The aim of the project was to examine the impact and effect of Internet-enabled mobile phones on the language learning and the resultant employability opportunities and skills created by the use of such technological devices. It was found that their needs were common though they hail from different socio-literate backgrounds.

4. Learners' Description and their Needs

The aim of the project is to see the degree of improvement when learners use latest mobile technology. There are some enthusiastic and enterprising people, who want to be recognized as successful people in India's social circles particularly financially, socially and educationally, but the lack of acquisition of English language skills and the resultant foregone and lost opportunities made them highly self motivated. The second group consists of learners who could not complete their proper education for various reasons. So they are not really motivated to study but are forced to learn English in order to get better job opportunities.

5. Methodology

Some latest English Language Teaching methods were followed to train them. Collaborative and Cooperative language learning and the mentoring approaches were followed along with Communicative Approach. According to Diane Larsen-Freeman, "Cooperative or collaborative learning essentially involves students learning from each other in groups. But it is not the group configuration that makes cooperative learning distinctive; it is the way that students and teachers work together that is important." More confident and competent students were given the role of mentor. Each of them had to help at least four others. They were provided latest mobile phones with Internet technologies. This enabled them to access learning resources and information whenever they wanted. Indeed, as Jacobs (1999), asserts "language learning through latest technological cooperation is not only a way of learning, but also a theme to be communicated about and studied."

6. Administration of Open Access Materials

Initially the learners were trained to use Internet and social networking sites like Face book, Twitter, Skype etc., for effective communication. Considering all these circumstances the present researchers devised a basic syllabus titled "Spoken English for You" and after one month of instruction, approximately 50 hours, came to the conclusion that mobile phones with the latest technologies can act as a bridge to facilitate language learning in a number of ways. Some of them are:

1. Communication link,
2. Community connection and,
3. Independent and self-reliant attitude.

6.1. Communication Link

One of the latest audio-visual innovative devices for communication is Skype. Here, the students were divided into groups of 4 or 5. Each of the group members has to communicate with his/her group mates only in English. After some days they were able to communicate though not fluently but confidently. It provided wonderful opportunities to communicate in a slow and easy manner, initially, and effectively and can gradually pick up the pace depending on the comfort level of the learners. This is especially effective in promoting 'Speaking Skills'. They use video and audio devices which are recorded and personalized visual prompts can be recorded while capturing still images, and only simple things like pressing proper buttons, installing proper wires or plugs etc., which require only basic training. Whatever they like and video recording becomes a language lesson. As Yates (1996) observes "productivity and proliferation of a variety of communicative approaches which already exists complement these latest techniques."

A simple task of playing a cricket match, washing a dish, preparing coffee or Biryani becomes a classroom material for the teaching – learning process. The visuals are 100 times better than spoken language. The teachers can indirectly teach grammar and the learners can practice even when they are alone. Thus, many teaching activities can be planned in all the core language skills. Blogs are a popular form of developing reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar skills. Listening and speaking can be developed by video recordings subsequently shared and discussed. Sharing the ideas among the students is the syllabus in the class room.

6.2. Community Connection

Mobile phones can act as a connection between communities, groups, regions, religions, value systems, sports, likes and dislikes regarding various issues, movie stars, topics, colleges, etc. Facebook and Twitter through Blackberry and other smart phones even ignited political revolutions in Arab Countries during 2009 – 2012. For women, especially in conservative societies in particular, Internet-enabled mobile phones empowered them and reasserted their authoritative position as the information provider. In the pre-Internet mobile phone days, women were only passive observers of the progress of their children in the English language. Nowadays, many mothers, sisters, even grandmothers are becoming friends of their children on Facebook, Twitter and even chatting, Skyping and sharing with them regularly their everyday feelings and experiences. This gives them almost a homely atmosphere for the introvert learners. Therefore, this type of communication is bridging generational gaps and providing inter-generational opportunities for effective communication. Mobiles are considered as fashionable, acceptable and therefore increase the confidence of introverts and lonely people. They actively participate in society rather than be outsiders, or

strangers in their own land. They can also maintain contacts with the people, places of their origin and become confident thus reducing culture shock, loneliness, trauma etc.

6.3. *Independent and Self-Reliant Attitude*

Once the learner knows the basic techniques of browsing and analyzing information on the Internet and with basic skills of English language, he/she is an autonomous and independent learner and does not need any faculty member's support. They can connect with the society on their own. All types of English Language skills such as idioms, vocabulary, phrasal verbs, listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar can be learnt even doubts can be clarified on their own. Thus, the learner can feel part of the English speaking world and feels at home, even in an alien culture and society. Thus, mobile devices can be a powerful teaching and learning mechanisms in the technology driven new millennium.

7. Conclusion

These days, many students come to the classroom with powerful mobile phones in their pockets with access to internet and other such latest technology. As Prensky (2005) asserts, "Mobile phones are particularly useful mini-computers that fit in student's pocket, are always with them, and are nearly always on." Instead of banning such devices in the classroom it is better to make the students use them productively to develop their language skills. There may be at least the basic English reading, writing and vocabulary skills needed to use them which can be part of the curriculum. Teachers need to be flexible in the classroom and understand the dynamics of the fast changing society of which classroom is a microcosm. They should allow the learners some freedom to let learners take control of their learning in the true sense of the term by involving them in an area they like. This approach will make the learners more responsible and feel more satisfied. A satisfactory learner is always a motivated and productive learner. They can be encouraged to work either independently or in groups. Thus, they will find that language learning can not only be entertaining and engaging, but also help them realize the value of mobile phones as useful learning tools. What is absolutely needed is teachers' awareness on the use of these tools undergoing appropriate training. Managements and owners should consider such training and the financial help needed as an investment in the development of human resources and consider it as an intellectual capital. Overall, this new approach should be given more support by governments and managements as both teachers, learners; institutions and society will benefit a lot.

8. References

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