

ENHANCEMENT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING USING APPS

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Abstract

21st century has entered a new era of education even as technology takes the world by storm. Language teaching too has evolved from grammar translation method into communicative approach which requires innovative methodologies. With advancement in technology, new inventions like mobile apps have made inroads into language learning. It facilitates expanding the learning experience within and without the classroom. The present generation is techno savvy and they are looking for learning methodologies that would suit their fast-paced lifestyle. The traditional methodology of using blackboard does not support the communication English we teach. It needs more of interaction. Though evolution has taken place in learning, language teachers are yet to attune to the new technology.

There are mobile apps galore to teach languages and more are being developed for that purpose. English is a language that is universal and keeps growing. To keep pace with new words and expressions, mobile apps prove to be a great boon. This paper is to analyze the possibilities of learning through mobile apps, how effective it could be as a supplement while learning a language, and what apps are available.

Introduction

Mastering any language requires training in the following skills:

1. Listening
2. Speaking
3. Reading
4. Writing

Listening and speaking are considered as “receptive” skills and, reading and writing are “productive” skills. So just classroom learning is insufficient to achieve mastery over all of the above-mentioned areas. With English being the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca in many regions and in professional contexts such as science, navigation, and law, it has become even more imperative that learning it should necessarily cover all the above areas. One of the most important questions that everyone asks is how to improve their English. Learning English is no longer limited to those who are new to the language but even people who are quite

fluent in the language are constantly looking to improve their language. There are so many approaches available to tackle this. Each person has different objectives, and has different capacities. The most important rule to remember is that learning English is a process. It takes time, and it takes lots of patience! If you are patient, you will improve your English.

The problem with the current generation of youth, which is bound to only intensify in the future, is that they need everything instantly. Books are slowly disappearing and becoming a thing of novelty. All these drastic changes can be directly linked to the advent of the Smart Phone. The mobile phone which started as a humble brick used to wirelessly connect people through phone calls and simple text messages, has now evolved into this mini super-computer that can be used to do anything from taking DSLR quality photos to navigating to any part of the world, in addition to making phone calls. It is not only functional but has also become a fashion statement and a status symbol. In other words, the Smart Phone has become a basic necessity for everyone. With the rapid growth of high speed Wi-Fi and mobile data networks, virtually any type of information is available at your fingertips any time of the day, anywhere in the world. So it can be concluded that Smart Phones are the solutions to a variety of problems, including learning English.

We live in a world that the mobile technology develops at such a fast pace that we have difficulty keeping up. In just a few years the mobile market has changed drastically with the heavy competition between Google's Android and Apple with its iOS powered devices such as iPad and iPhone. Every other young person has one of these devices. The situation is same all over the world. With the growth of these Smart Phones, a whole new world of mobile applications has been created. These Mobile "Apps" started out as simple HTML webpages and have now evolved into beautiful, user friendly applications that can be easily used for a mind-boggling variety of purposes. Apps are easily available online, on the app stores for various platforms. There are millions of apps available currently with a majority of them being completely free of cost. Numerous of these apps are developed for improving your English. These English learning apps can be easily and freely downloaded by students according to their own interests. Besides, there are countless apps with different and creative approaches to teaching English. The competition to stand out in the vast ocean of apps available, more and more innovative and high quality apps are being developed. Also, using apps on mobile devices to learn English also breaks the restriction of time and place. It means that students can learn English at any time and in any place.

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

According to Wikipedia, "Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is language learning that is assisted or enhanced through the use of a handheld mobile device".

MALL is derived from both Mobile Learning (m-learning) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). It has developed to support students' language learning with the increased use of mobile technologies such as mobile phones (cellphones), MP3 and MP4 players, PDAs and devices such as the iPhone or iPad. With this approach of learning, students are able to access language learning materials and to communicate with their teachers and peers at anytime, anywhere.

Enhancing language learning through MALL provides endless possibilities which are not available in traditional classroom teaching. MALL offers unrestricted access to learning anytime, anywhere the user has reception. This enables users to brush up on language skills just before or just after a conversation in the language they are learning. With MALL, group learning becomes much easier and feasible with the availability of social networking and internet connection.

Kloper et al. (2002) claimed 5 properties of mobile devices which can produce unique educational affordances:

- Portability-the small size and weight of mobile devices means they can be taken to different sites or moved around within a site.
- Social interactivity-data exchange and collaboration with other learners can happen face-to-face.
- Context sensitivity-mobile devices can both gather and respond to real or simulated data unique to the current location, environment and time.
- Connectivity-a shared network can be created by connecting mobile devices to data collection devices, other devices or to a common network.
- Individuality- scaffolding for difficult activities can be customized for individual learners.

The problems with MALL a few years back included poor sound and display quality as well as very limited devices and download speeds. The current generation of mobile devices has bridged this gap with higher access speeds, larger screens, having functions and capacities similar to and sometimes even better than some laptop computers

Benefits of using Mobile apps for learning English

Perhaps the biggest benefit of using mobile apps for learning English is that most of them are actually completely free of cost. Though they can never fully substitute an English tutor, they give you a great boost in your learning for not too much of a cost. It is suggested that you use the applications alongside other learning methods as opposed to using it as your sole method of learning English.

Secondly, most of these apps are beautifully designed and interesting to use. They are visually quite appealing and user friendly. This is a huge contrast to dull books which easily put off most from trying to learn the language. And they are also quite enjoyable to use. They are filled with activities and even small games sometimes. This is much

more appealing than just reading and practicing some exercises. As a result, people are motivated to visit these apps as often as possible.

Also, these apps can be opened anywhere and anytime, which is a huge benefit. The user can open them at their own convenience and learn at their own pace. With some apps which use voice lessons, the learner does not even have to look at the device's screen, instead with a pair of headphones, the lessons are available which comes in handy especially while on the move.

Another benefit of using mobile apps is that it is easy to collaborate with others. With the presence of social apps such as Facebook and Twitter, it is easy to track your progress as well as your peers. This further provides motivation to make further progress in advancing in your skills.

Lastly and most importantly, the learning experience can be completely personalized according to the learner's interests and skill levels. They do not have to try to keep up with others of higher skill levels or waste time learning what they already know. Every need of the learner is catered to. This results in a more productive use of time. And the user can even spend more time on areas they feel they need more work on.

Apps that are Currently Available for Learning English

There are countless apps available on the market related to learning English. Mentioned below are some apps that are quite popular among iOS and Android users:

Duolingo - Duolingo is one of the best English language apps today and highly recommended for English beginners. The gamified learning system of the app helps you learn English quickly by spending twenty minutes a day. Duolingo structures your lessons that teaches you about seven new words based on a topic and skill points being awarded for completing the lessons.

Memrise - Memrise uses some creative and easy way to remember words for learning English. The focus of this app is to help the users expand their vocabulary by learning English words in a effective way. Memrise also offers an offline mode to continue learning without internet connection.

Busuu - Busuu helps you learn English language on the go and the lesson's quality are guaranteed as it is based on CEFR language framework. Lessons range from beginner to advanced through comprehensive vocabulary, lesson dialogue, writing practice and tests. Busuu is actually a great English app if you want to improve your spoken English.

LearnEnglish Grammar - Learn English Grammar is an interactive app that is designed to help improve your grammar. If you really like to improve your English grammar in a detailed way, it is an excellent English learning app that helps cover 12 grammar topics with 20 activities per topic for English learners of all levels

Babbel -Babbel is a great language app that has a strong focus on vocabulary. Babbel also lets users learn to understand a language by completing and repeating phrases. The app has four different approaches - Sound Recognition, Picture Recognition, Spelling and Fill in the blanks. Babbel definitely focuses on the quality of your learning rather than the quantity. Babbel also uses a custom goal system that allows users to set benchmarks as they learn a language and to monitor their progress as well.

Conclusion

There is growth when we move with the times. When the whole world is under the sway of technology, it stands to reason that education should be harnessed with the latest technology and bring about a new dimension to the learning process. These mobile apps can never substitute conventional learning, but they can be more effective as a supplement for mastering the language.

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