

INCREASING LEARNER AUTONOMY THROUGH LANGUAGE LEARNING APPS

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ABSTRACT:

Teaching skills like listening skills is one of the difficult skills for a long time for the second language learners in India. In most of the second language contexts availability of accurate pronunciation of speech sample from the teacher or authentic material is a bit difficult. So, in the most of the cases it is neglected in teaching and learning because the individual learner needs of it are very unique. As a consequence it has been an under achieved skills in the language learning process. Moreover, most of the time students were depending only on teacher for all varieties of language needs. Until 2010 there is a little help in acquiring the listening skills or any other language skill for that matter among the students even in the elite institution. This is just one example of meeting the actual learner needs in the face to face classroom. With the advancement of technology in mobile phones and computers and related technology in the current decade gave a new way to teachers and students to teach and learn listening skill with Apps became a new way of learning and the pace of teaching or learning with it actually increased. The most important change we can see is teaching or learning listening skills with digital technology and mobile Apps. Through, mobile Apps and digital tools the target learners may attain more learner autonomy. In this regard, this paper tried to explore the available digital tools and mobile Apps which are very useful in language acquisition. The information of same was brought to the knowledge of the learners and was informed to use them for their language use. After the usage of the Apps learners interviews were conducted to know their opinion on using those apps. In this study students achieved positive results in terms of language improvement especially, pronunciation and learner autonomy.

Keywords - Learner autonomy, Learning Apps, Learner Independence, English Learning apps.

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogically participation of learners and sharing the responsibility of learning in the teaching and learning process is very desirable and it has been observed and placed in the education system and the curriculum. Because of the same reason autocratic teaching- a traditional style of teaching which uses teacher –centered or content centered teaching without taking learner views, opinions and decision, was discouraged. In autocratic method teacher decides the needs of the learners and has complete control over what to teach irrespective of their wants or needs. The Democratic and the Laissez-faire method of teaching were introduced and encouraged against autocratic method of teaching. In these methods of teaching learner participation, sharing the responsibility to learn is more important in teaching and learning environment. Therefore the philosophy of language learning or in teaching the opinions of the learners and engaging them in the actual learning became more important for better learning. At some instances the engagement of teacher and student in the classroom learning redefined to more engagement or involvement of the students than the teachers in the classroom. In the learning process the learner has to take more serious role and responsibility in learning any foreign language. In traditional methods of language teaching teacher controls the overall learning and due to this sometime learners may not learn what are supposed to learn.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: LEARNER AUTONOMY, LANGUAGE APPS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Ever since the language teaching discipline emerged both the educational institutions and teacher continuously trying to provide the best possible engagement of the learner in learning the language. And learners' views, opinion, decisions, etc. are seen as more valuable factor in language learning scenario. In order to increase learner participation and responsibility for learning language in the classroom, teachers have been changing their role from mere teaching in the classroom to facilitator, guide to learn the language best possible way in the classroom and off the classroom situations.

According to Jack C. Richard, “Learner autonomy refers to the principle that learners should take an increasing amount of responsibility for what they learn and how they learn it. Autonomous learning is said to make learning more personal and focused and, consequently, is said to achieve better learning outcomes, since learning is based on learners’ needs and preferences.” Jack C. Richards (P.54).

According to Richards there are five principles for achieving autonomous learning, Viz they are:

1. Active involvement in student learning.
2. Providing option and resources.
3. Offering choices and decision-making opportunities.
4. Supporting learners.
5. Encouraging reflection.

In order to guarantee learner autonomy teacher also started using different kinds of teaching aids and technologies. Initially, the print material were provided to the learners but it could give only limited information or content and had many drawbacks in paper print material. In the language classroom listening, speaking, reading and writing are very crucial. The paper based material could give reading and writing opportunities but no place for listening and speaking. Later on in the history the development of audio based material could provide limited listening material. But the interaction with the audio or video tapes could not give much learner autonomy to the learners in general. Though, after 1950s, the interactive use of machines for language use increased but their usage or accessibility was having lot of limitations. These machine usually audio, video recorders or third generation computers they had their limitations most of the time in terms of accessibility or personal usage. Even, language labs established in the institutions could not provide better autonomy as they were setup in the closed room of the institutions and accessibility was not easy with them. In the time line, (1990s), there were web 1.0 and web 2.0 technologies which paved way for the sound websites and interaction with machine has become handy. After 2010 mobile Apps became popular in India and their applications came into all the sectors of human interface like Social media apps, productivity apps, Entertainment apps, Lifestyle app, educational and informative apps, etc.

The language is a skill which needs the immersion of the learner in it. In order to acquire the language skills learners’ efforts, decisions and responsibility play a great role. The learning of the learner is correlate with the efforts, decision and acts of the learner. Therefore it is often felt that there is need to create a space for the learner to explore his/her own learning. It is certainly learner centered approach where learner learning is more important than teacher’s teaching for the sack of teaching.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is often observed that there is a less participation of the learners in the classroom and actual language learning in English language learning contexts in the second language situation. Most of the time the language learning curriculum is framed by the teachers and language learner’s decision are assumed so actual needs of the learner are not considered. Especially, what components of the language they already know and what need to taught. In most of the classrooms the composition of students is very heterogeneous as they come from different Boards of Schools or College backgrounds, like CBSE; State Boards, etc. By the time they come to the university classroom their actual language needs are unique from students to student. In order to meet the needs of the learners, classroom teaching usually focuses on common requirement of the learner leaving the uncommon requirements of learners. Therefore, the lacuna is felt in every language classroom in terms of learners’ language demands and what is actually provided to them. It is humanly impossible to meet all the requirements all the learners. And it is also difficult for any teacher. So, in such a context use of digital tools and mobile apps may achieve the required learner autonomy among the target group of learners. In addition to this almost all the students in the universities started using smartphones for their personal communication and other purposes. So, considering the language apps for the learner autonomy seemed a better choice in this case.

USE OF MOBILE APPS ENHANCES LEARNER AUTONOMY

App is defined as an application (more commonly known as an app) is a piece of software that bundles together certain features in a way that is accessible to a user. Though, there are numerous Apps for language learning, learners in this study encouraged to use BBC Learning English App. The selection of the app is based on the language used in the App and the language varieties recommend for the classroom i.e. RP English. The other important factor is that all the learners are equipped with smartphones for their communication purpose.

WHAT IS AN ENGLISH LEARNING APP?

“An app is a short form for Application. A mobile application is software designed to run on a mobile device such as a phone, tablet, or watch. English Learning Apps are apps designed with the objective to improve the English speaking skills of the user.” Downloading and installing these apps to the smart mobile phone or tablet allows the user to access English Speaking resources on the go. When one has the English Learning App, he or she can access the resources and practice English speaking from anywhere, any time. Mostly, the resources available on these apps are customized according to the level and requirements of the users.”

These days there are numerous apps for different aspects of language and help in acquiring English language in the best possible way. Each app come with unique features and facilitates with rich learning experiences. The Apps available to improve pronunciation like ‘BBC Learning English’ very useful for understanding and practice of each sound of English. There are free and commercial apps to help the learners to acquire the language. The simplest way to access is downloading and installing in the mobile phones from Google play store or similar stores. They are very user friendly to use and learn English.

SOME OF THE BEST ENGLISH LEARNING APPS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING LIST:

S. No.	Name of App	Description
1	BBC LEARNING ENGLISH	The BBC has developed for the English needs of the world. This uses RP English pronunciation and different category of lesson on listening, speaking, reading and writing. It also offers business English, grammar, vocabulary, learn with news, etc. Each lesson is 2 to 6 minutes duration. It is a free app.
2	DUOLINGO	It has been developed by American Education Technology Company. It provides with all the components of language. Users can practice grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. At the end of the course it also offers a certificate to the learners. It also offers more than 40 languages with more than 100 courses.
3	ENGVARTA	Best English Learning app and English Practice Platform and also helps in English communication skills.
4	HELLO TALK	The main feature of this app is learning a language by chatting with native speakers around the world.
5	FLUENTU	<i>FluentU</i> brings language learning to life through language immersion with real-world videos.
6	MEMRISE	Memrise is a British language platform that uses spaced repetition of flashcards to increase the rate of learning. It is based in London, UK.
7	ECL	English learning app
8	BABEL	English Learning app
9	ENGURU	Enguru is India's most loved app to learn English and speak fluently. It is developed in India.
10	GRAMMARLY	App For Writing English

ADVANTAGES OF APPS:

1. One can study at his/her own pace and that too from the comfort of ones home.
2. It is very convenient and easy way of mobile learning from your own mobile.
3. Several English learning Apps give access to meet the actual needs of the learners.
4. Individual Interaction with the people and machine provides a practical experience.
5. Learning English is choice based and learning-styles based, one can even learn while playing the language games on mobile.
6. Provides learner autonomy in selection of content to be learnt. Etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

- Population of the study: Undergraduate learner of CUSB.
- Sample: First Semester BA LLB students of CUSB.
- Independent variable: Mobile Apps.
- Dependent variable: Language Skills.
- Duration of the time period: Daily 30 min for 1 Month.

THE STUDY

The study was conducted among the first semester students of B.A. LLB who came from different language proficiency levels. They completed their 10+2 and joined in the University for the Law degree i.e. B. A. LLB. They were expected to have good speaking and writing skills. In order to master both oral skills and written learner were expected brush up their language in pronunciation, letter writing, debates, discussion and grammar- Tense and parts of speech at advanced levels. In order to control learning all the learners were informed to focus on pronunciation. After introducing the importance of pronunciation and its compatibility learners were introduced all the phonetic sounds and chart. In order to learn pronunciation all the learners were informed to use BBC Learning English app. Though, there are many apps for pronunciation, this study deliberately informed them to use BBC App for uniformity and the study was conducted to study the effect of the apps in language learning. The target students were expected to use every day 30mins for month duration. In this study initially a pretest and at the end a posttest were conducted to see the actual achievement of the learners.

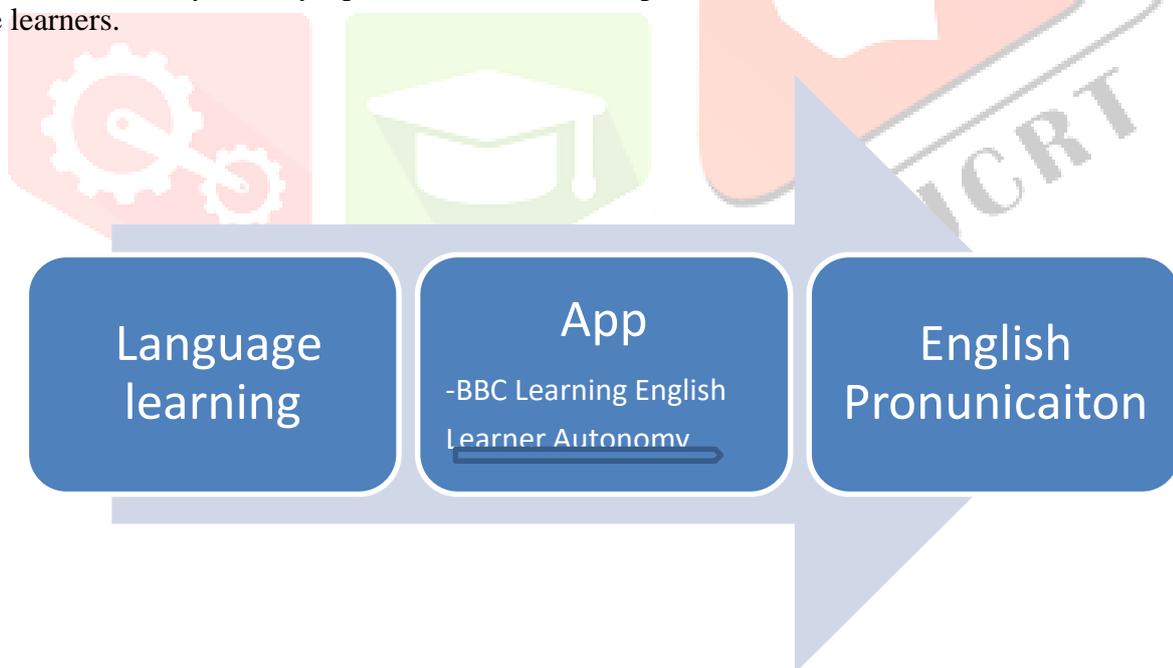


Chart: showing the teaching framework

RESULTS

The use of learning apps could provide better learner autonomy in understanding, identifying and reproducing the sounds of English at individual sound level and even the combination of sounds. The participant learners shared their experience in the focus group discussion that they could find out all the 44 sounds of English and mastered the sound of RP of English at phonemic level and at word level. The role of the teacher was limited to introducing the concept of pronunciation and giving direction what to learn and the learners actively participated and tried themselves to learn all the sounds. As a result the score in the post-test clearly showed the achievement of the learners.

DISCUSSION

Usually in classroom face to face teaching most of the learner do not participate actively and their role is usually confined to just listening to the teacher whereas in App based teaching learners were given only instructions and suggestion but the actual learning began from students' identification of difficult sounds, mastering the examples and reproducing and recording and checking their pronunciation with the machine or mobile was done by the learners. From this it is understood that the app based learning, learners could focus more on the need based learning and students could focus what they were supposed to master in the learning process. They could save the time and learnt all the sounds in much shorter period of time. Though, there were some issues like slow response or buffering of the app, they can easily overcome the issue by choosing better apps. Apps also provided opportunities to personalize their learning. The most important thing in learning with mobiles also certainly needs help of the teacher to guide students and facilitate the learners. Though the concept is learner autonomy, it not certainly free from teacher intervention. Though the app can give better learner autonomy, they cannot replace the teacher in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study clearly suggest that learner participation and sharing the responsibility to learn certainly helped the learners to acquire or master all the phonetic sound in the short span of time. So, in the teaching-learning process, increasing the learner autonomy seems very vital and it is also kept in mind that maximum learners' participation is encouraged in very possible way. So, teacher should adopt strategies to increase learner autonomy as much as possible. It was felt that mobile apps certainly an added advantage for the learner autonomy and language acquisition.

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