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Smart Learning using Smartphone: Current Spell on Language Learning

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ABSTRACT
M-learning is the ongoing trend in education with special reference to ELT. This paper advocates the use of smartphone applications to enhance the English speaking skills of tertiary level learners in remedial classes. This study focuses on the latest instant messaging mobile applications to evoke the young learners' interest in oral discussions. The research has been carried out using Whatsapp, WeChat, and Line, through which instant audio messages are sent in a faster pace. The suggested apps help teachers not only to evoke interest in young learners, who are behind the spell of instant messages, but also help to provide instant feedback from teachers irrespective of time and place. A positive transformation in learners is noted using these instant messaging applications to enrich their English speaking skill. The study proves that the suggested approach to language learning is comparatively positive and convivial.

Introduction

English language teaching is undergoing a great drift with the use of technology in enhancing language skills. The current trend in language learning gets a new turn with M- learning. Gikas and Grant (2013) gave a detailed survey report in their study on the use of mobile computing devices in higher education:

> The Educause Center for Applied Research(2012) survey on Mobile IT in higher education states that students are driving the adoption of mobile computing devices, such as cellphones, smartphones, and tablet computers, in higher education, and 67% of surveyed students believe mobile devices are important to their academic success and use their devices for academic activities. The increased ubiquity of mobile computing devices on college campuses has the potential to create new options for higher education students and the exploration of mobility and social media as an instructional strategy. (p. 18)

M- learning, despite not confining to just mobile phones but all mobile devices brought new phase in language learning with the advent of smartphones in the mobile world. Mobile technologies include mobile phones, smartphones, PDAs, MP3/ MP4 players (e.g. iPODs), handheld gaming devices (e.g. Sony PSP, Nintendo DS), Ultramobile PCs (UMPCs), mini notebooks or netbooks (e.g. Asus EEE), handheld GPS or voting devices, and specialist portable technologies used in science labs, engineering workshops or for environmental or agricultural study (Hashemi, Azizinezhad, et.al,2011, p. 2478). However, Smartphones have been a move among all classes of people likely from two to three years ago. According to Barrs(2011), " smartphones offer the greatest potential into language learning in the second decade of 21st century" (p. 228). With reference to the increased boom of Smartphones, the paper aims at advocating the use of smartphone applications to enhance the speaking skill of tertiary level learners in remedial classes.

"While the internet has become an indispensable tool among the present generation, on move internet access has led to increase the sales of smartphones" (Manish, 2011).The survey by IDC (International Data Corporation), India, indicates that the mobile phone customers prefer smartphones and undoubtedly they are young generation in lead. The computing capability and the advanced connectivity of smartphone lead to wide acceptance among the young generation of a fast moving world. Smartphone is not merely an object of communication and entertainment but has taken a new turn in learning process with special reference to language learning. There have been many studies related to use of mobile phones in language learning. The case study by Gromik(2012) states that the cell phone video recording feature can be used for improving speaking skills. The study conducted by Agca & Ozdemir (2013), was on foreign language vocabulary learning using mobile technologies:

> Mobile learning environment combined from printed course book and mobile devices is used in this study to support vocabulary learning according to English lesson curriculum…. Instructional material is limited with the 7th chapter of the course book. Only cell-phone is used as mobile device in the study. Mobile devices used by students are mostly smart phones and communication within the classroom is provided via wireless connection. The present study focuses on combining entertainment with learning to make the latter more productive and effective. The instant messaging mobile applications are the core of the study using smartphones. (p.783)

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Material and Methods

Smart phones and instant messaging application in remedial class

Young generation with special reference to the tertiary level students is more obsessed with the instant messaging applications available in market. Three major mobile applications, which have been dealt in this paper, are Whatsapp messenger, WeChat and Line. These applications are chosen for their feasibility to be used not only in smartphones but also in

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widowphones or PC or laptops. As mentioned earlier the computing capability of smartphones makes them more liked by the tertiary level learners. The main featureof these applications is the audio messages which connect two or more people irrespective of time and place instantly. The instant messaging applications are not only to get entertained or connect people with one another but also to supplement language learning. The study has tried to open a new door to the language learning world. The purpose of instant messaging applications in connecting people for entertainment has been modified in this study to the ones connecting people for learning with entertainment.

"Remedial or developmental courses are those courses provided by a post secondary institution for students who lack the academic skills needed to be successful at the institution" (Martinez & Snider, 2003) . "The goal of remedial instruction is to provide low-achieving students with more chances to reinforce the basic knowledge in common subjects so that they can meet minimum academic standards" (Huang, 2010, p 167). The use of smartphones can be found convenient in the remedial classes as the slow learners are able to have their own time for discussion, understand the contents and send their views through messages. However, the discussion can be either in pairs or in groups as for the convenience and comfort level of the learner. There are provisions in the applications to create a group in which all group members can participate simultaneously for open discussion whenever and wherever they are contented for the activities. Learning irrespective of place and time leads the smartphones and the applications acceptable among the young learners. "M-learning does not replace traditional learning, but is just another way of learning using a new technology" (Hashemi, Azizinezhad, Nesari and Najafi, 2011, p.2477). But, "it is believed that mobile learning could be an essential factor in involving young adults in learning, where more traditional methods have failed" (Hashemi, Azizinezhad, Nesari and Najafi, 2011, p.2481). With reference to the current drift in learning in mobile environment, an empirical study was thus done to show there has been an improvement in enriching the speaking skills of academically backward learners despite of traditional classrooms.

Participants

The participants of the study were the first year Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students of VIT University, Vellore, Tamilnadu, India. They all headed from lower and upper middle class family of rural Tamilnadu. The primary source for the study was collected from the language and subject teachers and the academic performances of the students in internal examinations based on the syllabus prescribed by VIT University for the first year Under Graduate B.Com and BBA stream. Many of the students were from rural but English Medium educational background. They mainly lacked in the fluency and vocabulary aspects of speaking English language. A survey was conducted with the help of the teachers to draw the slow learners from one hundred and twenty (120) students present. The main criterions evaluated in the learners were the vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence and fluency. Most of the students lacked fluency and coherence. The term fluency, usually restricted for describing L2 speech, can be used in at least two ways. Lennon (1990) distinguishes a broad definition and a narrow definition. In the broad definition, fluency can be seen as overall (speaking) proficiency, whereas fluency in the narrow definition pertains to smoothness and ease of oral linguistic delivery (Jong, 2012, p.1). Fluency is used in its broader sense in this study. The thirty learners who bereft the four criterions were drawn for the study.

Purpose and study

This study aims at civilizing the communication skills among the tertiary level academically slow learners by evoking an interest in language learning with the help of latest instant messaging mobile applications. Slow learners can be identified or defined as those learners who are unable to learn with same pace as of the majority in class from the general textbooks, and other regular teaching materials. Most of the learners have been equipped with the smartphones as the rate of smartphones generally have come down to reasonable prices which make them more common among even a learner coming from lower middle class family. The applications chosen for this study were those which would be even accessible through windowphones or personal computer (PC). A survey using questionnaire was conducted to learn the use of smartphones among the students and to find the instant messaging applications can be used for educational purposes. A number of 120 first year undergraduate students took part in the survey. The questions were divided in two sections. One section comprised of their personal and academic details and the second section was in five-point likert scale related to use of smartphones for learning and entertaining purposes. Nine out of ten (90 percent) students possessed smartphones whereas 98 percent of the students disagreed on using the instant messaging applications for learning purpose.

Thirty students of tertiary level from undergraduate programmes (BBA and B.Com) were chosen for the study. They were divided into ten in a group randomly for an efficient learning process. A total of 30 hours was dedicated to each group with the help of two other teachers who were National Eligibility Test (NET) qualified English teachers of the same educational institution. The help of two other teachers was sought to finish the experiment on the three groups simultaneously. The students were provided with activities such as interview and group discussion using the feature of audio messages in the applications, Whatsapp, WeChat and Line for the three different groups. The messaging processes through audio instant messaging applications are preferred not only to be done in pairs but in groups also .The three applications served the same purpose of speaking practices simultaneously in three different groups. A pre-test was conducted to check the English speaking proficiency of students using two minutes talk on a relevant topic for the learners, such as the importance of English in Academics. They hold the concept and ideas but lacked confidence to present their ideas in English facing others. The four criterions with which the students were evaluated are vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence and fluency. A post test was conducted after the thirty hours classes in which the same criterions were once again tested. The data collected were analyzed using paired sample t-test with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

During the period of the study, the students were directed to install the instant messaging free applications in their smartphones. Active participation was seen throughout the study as the study was not time bound or place bound. The first 10 hours after the pre-test were allotted for the personal interviews that contained multiple questions on personal and professional situations. Questions such as "how will you introduce yourself?", "what are your positives and negatives", "why did you choose this particular course", "what are the job opportunities you think will the course would offer" etc. were the questions asked for which they answered but quite unsure of the vocabulary they should use.

Sample 1
Q. Why did you choose B. Com?
S1.Eh…. I choose B.Com of Dad's ….eh…. eh….
Q. What are your positives?
S2. I'm very smart. I have good …. eh…. eh….. set of friends, that … eh…. I'm good mingling….

The students struggled for proper vocabulary, grammar, coherence or fluency in the first few sessions. Yet, the responses of the students were comparatively higher than in a traditional classroom as instant audio messages helped them to get the answers taking their own time which varied from 1 minute to 8 minutes. Though the paired activity, like personal interview, seemed better in responses, a group discussion was conducted on the issues they face while communicating in English. The issues included the inhibition they felt while speaking in English, the poor grammar base, less exposure to speaking practice were a few to mention. Many students lacked confidence at the beginning stage. The students were seen stammering at every point and even wanted the teachers' continuous encouragement to speak the points they had in mind. The time they got to frame the sentence while discussing through audio messages helped them to gain confidence in speaking. The last ten hours were devoted for the group discussions with the topics of their interest varying from sports, politics, movies, fashion and social issues. The students were more interested in group activities than paired as everyone in the group can read or listen to the others' views and opinions instantly, irrespective of the situate one was in. One of the students was travelling back home after a movie while attending the class through the messaging applications when another student was relaxing herself back at home, and the third participant in the group was participating in the discussion while enjoying homemade snacks . A warm up session with casual chat beginning with how their day went on, had been held before every activity to create the rapport as well as to learn the situation around everyone which would be viable for a one hour discussion.

Another emphasize of this study using applications was the instant feedback the teachers offer to the students. The teachers found it comfortable as they need not confine to a classroom restricting themselves for extra time than their own working hours. They were given the facility of working with the groups and monitoring them according to their availability. The group activities not only provided the opportunity to listen to one's views and opinions but also seemed useful to listen to the feedback given by the teachers too. A common mistake committed by the learners such as usage of phrases like "Please, off the fan" instead of "Please, switch off the fan" was conveyed and corrected among the groups instantly making everyone aware of the correct usages. A few samples are given below:
Mistake: "You bring book or NOT??"
Correction: "DID you bring the book??"
Mistake: "I have FINISH writing"
Correction: "I have FINISHED writing"
Mistake: "You both are fighting, ISNT IT?"
Correction: "You both are fighting, ARENT YOU?"

A post test was conducted after the thirty hours, to evaluate the effectiveness of the method used, by testing the four criterions as tested in the pre-test. The data collected were found reliable using SPSS as the current data showed Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.934 which communicates the reliability of the data collected. Table.1 assures the same.

Results and Discussion

The pre-test and post-test data were compared and analyzed by using paired sample t-test. The four criterions for language proficiency especially with special focus on speaking were traced. The comparison between the pre- test and post- test was tabulated using paired sample t- test (Table.2).

Table 1. Reliability statistics of the variables

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.934	8

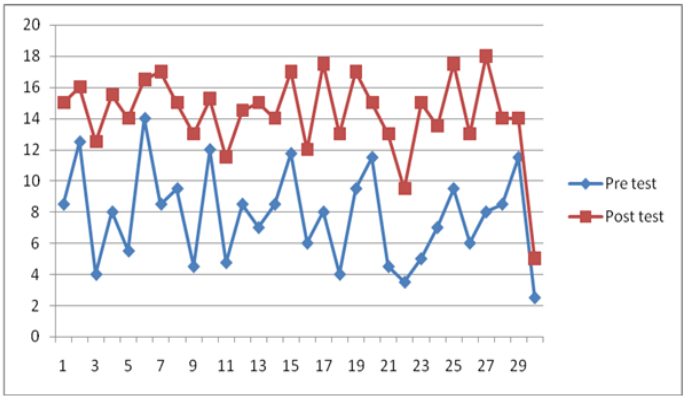
Table 2. Test result of variables in pre-test and post-test

	Variables	Paired differences			Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Pair 1	Vocabulary1-vocabulary2	-1.558	.560	.102	.000
Pair 2	Sentencestructure1-Sentencestructure2	-1.600	.706	.129	.000
Pair 3	Coherence1-coherence2	-1.600	.941	.172	.000
Pair 4	Fluency1-fluency2	-1.658	.668	.122	.000

According to the test done, the signified p value is lesser than 0.05 for every component. The p value attained implies the significant difference between the variables of pre-test and post-test. The signified value is .000 for all the variables indicating the efficiency of the methodology used in the study. The study is thus proved to have made considerable change in the adeptness of English speaking skill through instant messaging applications using smartphones.

Figure 1. demonstrates the efficacy of using instant messaging mobile applications to improve the English speaking competency. As shown in Figure 1, the pre-test shows a low proficiency of the participants in English speaking skills. Majority of the participants lacked in vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence and fluency at considerably high variation. The values of variables tested were quite low. After the study of thirty hours, the post-test graph shows a consistent growth in the proficiency level. The pre-test's maximum mark was only 13 whereas the post test maximum mark lies at 18. The average mark lies between 10 and 15 marks. The graph demonstrates that the maximum number of participants scored below 10 marks in pre-test while in post –test the number declined to 2 among 30. The graph thus illustrates the effectiveness of using smartphones in remedial classes.

Figure 1. Graphical representation of variations in variables



A control group of another thirty low-proficiency students of first year undergraduate students were selected. Personal

interviews and group discussions were conducted for thirty hours with the same topics as given to the experimental group. However, direct approach was assigned in the control group for improving their speaking proficiency. The study shows that there were least considerable change between the pre-test and post-test values indicating the less effectiveness of direct method to the recommended approach implemented in the experimental group. The face-to-face interviews and group discussions provided the participants with less time to express themselves which resulted in lack of confidence. The comparison between the post- tests of experimental and control groups was tabulated using paired sample t- test (Table.3).

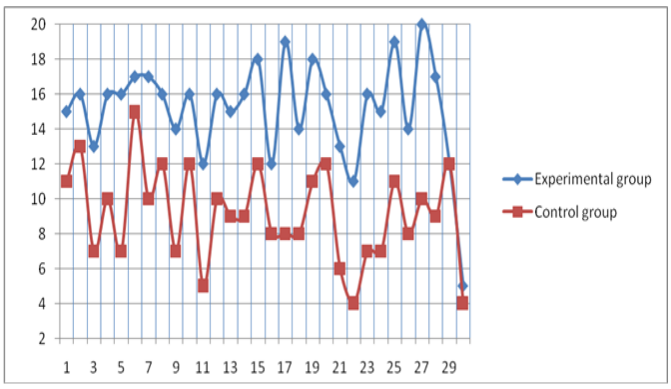
Table. 3. Test result of variables from post-tests of experimental and control groups

	Variables	Paired differences			Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
Pair 1	Vocabulary2-vocabulary3	1.400	.675	.123	.000
Pair 2	Sentencestructure2-Sentencestructure3	1.467	.900	.164	.000
Pair 3	Coherence2-coherence3	1.633	.964	.176	.000
Pair 4	Fluency2-fluency3	1.500	.682	.125	.000

According to the test done, the signified p value is lesser than 0.05 for every component. The p value attained implies the significant difference between the variables of post-tests conducted among experimental and control groups. The signified value is .000 for all the variables indicating the efficiency of the methodology used in the study. The study is thus proved to have made considerable change between the groups in the proficiency of English speaking skill through instant messaging applications using smartphones.

Figure 2. demonstrates the effectiveness of using instant messaging mobile applications to improve the English speaking competency. As shown in Figure 2, the post- test conducted to control group shows lesser improvement among the participants. Most of the participants lacked in vocabulary, sentence structure, coherence and fluency. The values of variables tested were quite low. The post-test graph of experimental group shows a consistent growth in the proficiency level. The post-test of control group's maximum mark was only 15 whereas the experimental group's maximum mark lies at 18. The average mark lies between 10 and 15 marks. The graph demonstrates that the maximum number of participants scored below 10 marks in control group while in experimental group the number declined to 2 among 30. The graph thus illustrates the efficiency of using smartphones in remedial classes.

Figure 2. Graphical representation of variations in variables of post- tests



The experiment conducted to improve the speaking proficiency of tertiary level low-proficient learners of the experimental and control groups using two different approaches, therefore, gives different outputs. The experimental group shows comparatively high and affirmative variation from the performance of control group. As a result, facilitating the English speaking skill using smartphones appears to be more effectual from the post-test results.

Conclusion

The study has thus proved that the suggested approach to language learning is more positive and convivial using the most popular instant messaging mobile applications in smartphones than the direct approach. Smartphones, being more trendy and advanced, have a better acceptance and move among the young generation. The study proves that usage of instant messaging applications like Whatsapp messenger, WeChat and Line have been not only entertaining but also motivating for remedial classes which has been assured through the results of paired sample t-test. Smartphones give a new visage to language learning with the help of these messaging applications. The future of this study lies in conducting classes in a bit more broader way using the smartphones and quite well-liked social networking sites in a larger scale.

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