Use of Tablets and Smart Phones Towards Learning English as A Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

Rapid changes in technology have changed the process of educating students. Mobile phones/smart phones/tablets/phablets have become indispensible to everyone because of their utility and are useful instruments in language learning if used effectively. There are a number of apps for the smart-phone users that help in developing all the skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening for the purpose of communicating the message (weather written or oral) with clarity.

Introduction

One cannot ignore the fact that swift changes in communication technology have changed the way people in the last century used to live without mobile phones/smart phones/tablets/phablets. The change towards use of smart phones/phablets has brought about a transformation in lifestyle as nobody would have imagined. From an article of magnificence, smart phones/phablets have become things of necessity. If you use these efficiently then there is no need for one to leave one's place to buy anything. You just order for it on your phone and within a stipulated time it will be delivered at your doorstep. Banking has been shifted to the click of your button. Truly, smart phones/phablets have made one a cosmopolitan. In such a context, why should it not be used in learning? Mostly, the language of communication for smart phones/phablets users is English. If smart phones/phablets are used efficiently then these can become powerful tool for the learners of English. Also, if used in classrooms then results can be astonishing. We should also consider (Datawind) AKASH Tablet (a part of Indian government scheme for Learners) as an important tool to enhance English language learning capability of our students in classrooms. Aakash is the name given to the low-cost tablet computers being procured by the Indian government to help enhance the quality of education. (Datawind) It is envisioned that computing and internet access used in a blended learning environment will empower both students and teachers. The Indian government has laid out a vision to equip all 220 million students across the country over the next few years with such products during its launch.

The current study/suggestions are based on use of smart phones/phablets in classroom of M.Tech. CSE in Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram University of Science and Technology, Muthal. The current study shows that the use of smart phones/phablets in classroom definitely increases the capability of the students while learning English as a foreign language.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is how the use of smart phones/phablets enhances the capability of the students while learning English as a foreign language. What development takes place related to four skills in English language learning viz. reading, writing, speaking, and listening?

Literature Review and use of Smartphones/Phablets in Higher Education

Previous studies on the use of smart phones/phablets for learning English as a foreign language have shown that language learners expressed positive improvements while learning English through the use of smart phones/phablets. There is evidence of growing interest in the use of smartphones in higher education leading to new pedagogical practices in classrooms. Cochrane and Bateman (2010a), have expressed positive results of using smartphones/phablets in classrooms in their enquiry. Herrington (2009) discusses use of smartphones/phablets in creating digital narratives in order to enhance knowledge towards literature. Nortcliffe et al. (2011) discusses the tutor use of smartphone audio apps for giving intrinsic and extrinsic feedback to a teacher in an interactive environment.

Another study on use of mobile language by students during learning in Australia by Fujimoto (2012) showed that learners expressed their positive attitude towards the use of smart phones and tablet computers for language learning and acquisition. Likewise, White and Mills (2012) in their survey on Japanese university students' attitudes on the use of smart phones for language acquisition and learning indicated that the students expressed appreciation on the use of smart phone technology for language learning in the classroom setting.

Youtube as an application has given opportunity to everyone to be a broadcaster. It has resulted in learning English as a foreign language through watching and listening of videos and audios.

Methodology

All the students (28 in no.) were asked to bring their smartphones/phablets/tablets in the classrooms for four days. Internet facility was provided to them in the form of Wi-Fi. The students were asked to use a common email address for the whole class. Teacher sent the message/instructions to the common address and everyone received it on the spot. Students followed the instructions sent to them and everyday their performance was investigated regarding enhancement in their capability for learning language based upon their filled up response sheets sent back to the teacher. The response sheets had questions regarding development of four skills: reading, writing, speaking, listening and use of mobile phones in relation to education educational activities.

Results and Discussion

As students use a smart keyboard to write a message using a smartphone/phablet/tablet available on the screen, so their mistakes decreases because suggestions of dictionary corrects their writing on a digital sheet. Also, the grammatical suggestions in the software help them reflect on the written sentenc-

es and correct wherein the software shows sentences with red underlines. Students find samrtphones/phablets a better companion in order to convey their opinions in **writing**. Also, the auto suggestions are reliable also.

Reading also becomes easy as one can immediately search electronic dictionary available free of cost for the users of smartphones/phablets/tablets. Also, translations apps helped them by converting the same sentences into their own mother tongue. This increases the comprehension of the given text. Comprehension passage sheets were given to the students through email with objective type questions and students were asked to write their responses in their notebooks and these responses were discussed in the class. This resulted in better understanding and increase in comprehension because of availability of free apps to be used for such purposes.

There are a no. of free apps related to the sounds of English Language on playstore that were asked by the teacher to be downloaded for the purpose of increasing the **speaking** and **listening** skills. These apps are Sounds: Pronunciation Apps form Macmillan Publishers Ltd., English Pronunciation form KEPHAM, Phonetics A Sounds: Book I from Bob Campbell etc. The students were asked to practice the sounds of English and read the sent comprehension passages using the native accent. This kind of practice in the class moulded the accent of the students thereby making their listening skill sharp and also improved their speaking skill. Apart from class, students were asked to follow the method at their homes for overall improvement.

For **Listening**, there are text reading softwares that help a student to pick up the right pronunciation in the real time environment. Apart from it, a student can listen to web-broadcast of news items on different online news channels and can watch movies in English. Listening songs of English is equally beneficial in making the listening skill sharp.

Being students of M.Tech. CSE, the students were quite proficient with the use of smartphones/phablets of different brands having different operating systems which had been purchased by the students as per their financial strengths. All the 28 students declared that use of smartphines/phablets improved the student and teacher interaction thereby making classroom teaching effective. 7 students felt that lack of some features in their smartphones/ phablets hampered their performance in class but all agreed that the students and teachers were on one platform as far as the delivery of lecture notes and assignments was concerned.

100% of the students agreed that main benefits of using a smartphone/phablet are ease and speed of access to internet and immediate access to emails, course material, and assignments. Their views suggested that smartphones/phablets allow them to improve their productivity thereby bringing benefits to their language acquisition and learning. 100% of the students expressed their positivity as an aid in classroom teaching and language learning. "If so, learning is not confined to the classroom setting any longer, it moves out of the classroom boundary, giving learners the opportunity to study at anytime from any location."

78.57% students agreed that use of smartphones/phablets for writing decreased their spelling mistakes due to spell suggestions by the keyboard but rest of the students believes that their capability to write on paper decreased and it increased their spelling mistakes. 82.14% of the students agreed that smartphones/phablets make listening skills sharp related to sounds as many apps are available to help them acquire knowledge of native sounds of English language. 75% students agreed that it can help them in making their speaking skill sharp as they can judge their own recording or can get their recordings judged by the teacher by sending it online and following the suggestions for improvement sent back to the student online. As far as improvement in reading skills is concerned then 92.85% students agreed that smartphones/phablets are best suited to improve comprehension of a student. The chart given below shows enhancement of language skills if smartphones/phablets are used in classrooms by students and is reflective of the responses of the M.Tech. CSE IIIrd Semster Students in Deenbadhu Chhotu Ram University of Science and Technology, Murthal.

Total No. of Students: 28

Conclusion
This study tries to show that use of mobile phones/smart phones/tablets/phablets in English language learning and acquisition is very useful if used effectively. It helps a student to develop all the four skills of English language namely reading, writing, speaking and listening. It improves student and teacher interaction and can make lectures and virtual classrooms for the students even if they are away from institutions on training. If AKASH as a scheme is implemented properly then it can revolutionize the system of education and can act as an important tool in second language learning and acquisition.

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