Effectiveness of Useful ICT Tools to Improve Speaking Ability among Female Students at Tertiary Education

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Abstract

Learning through internet using mobile and computer is common now a day. Here, this research paper highlights impacts of online learning tools and applications available for free in improving students' speaking skills at higher education level. Female students from arts and science colleges were selected for this study because students studying in Namakkal District are mostly from remote village and it is pertinent to note that female students are not allowed to use mobile phone considering various customs and societal concepts. It is duty of a guide to create awareness in using mobile phone for the sake of their self-improvement. Due to COVID-19, students were allowed to use mobile phone in college and they were given free Wi-Fi. Students are from vernacular medium and they mostly speak in Tamil language. By offering a skill-based course titled Oral Communication, a well structured syllabus with lesson plan is approved by the management. Student enrollment for the course is five hundred and seventy one from three colleges run by the same management. Applications and Websites were identified to hone the speaking skills of the learners considering their skill from a pretest analysis. A laboratory with well-equipped audio and video tools is taken. With the objective of finding whether the identified applications and websites were useful in improving the learners' speaking skills and to encourage students to interact and express in English confidently. Data have been collected through various methods like semi-structured interviews and scheduling presentation and giving role-play. The study revealed how activities were planned with applications and websites and what testing measures were taken to evaluate students progress in speaking. The 571 informants were compared with the other students in the colleges studying BA English Literature courses based on their marks in tests and examination and their involvement in taking part in presentation, seminars and other activities organized in departments of colleges. It was found that the candidates enrolled for Oral Communication would be given their phone for use by their parents identifying they are on the right track.

Keywords: *Online Learning Tool; Learning through Mobile Phone and Computer & Internet supported collaborative Learning*

Introduction

The world of Technology is obviously a blessing even though it is believed that there are possibilities to get misguided. It is an irrefutable fact that Information and Communication Technology tools are very much at forefront in assisting and enlightening students in learning and it makes them ease ensuring their presence with utmost confidence (Peterson, 2012; Gordon, 2014; Pegrum, 2014; Mostafavi & Vahdany, 2016; Palmer et al.2017). Apps and Websites have become an integral part of one's own life because multi- functions can be carried out at a time in

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addition to reliable sources (Genclter, 2015). Lankshear and Knobel (2003) highlighted the optimum use of concentration on revolutions in social practices in use of new literacy texts and multiple ways of interpretation pertaining to context and semantics, implying meaning of objects and gestures, dialogues and discussions and particularly use of space and tools like mechanics of paradigms. Finding successful apps and websites, which increase interest in working with and also more user friendly, is essential. Reading, with a support of current technology broadly speaking digital textual messages, online instructions to be followed to cope up with applications and web sites in multiple forms and genres like codes, images, graphical information, symbols, signs and so on, evolves them in involving their skills with visual literacy (Doering et al.,2007 and Kist,2005). It is an undisputable fact that language is mandatory to engage oneself better with a team of good sprit (Jarrin.X and Kim.C, 2019). The informants taken for this study satisfied with sufficient experience in learning English as instructional language. The informants were well informed about the course and the scope of it as well. A pre-test was conducted involving them to talk for five minutes. Here, the fixed time was noted to analyze whether the teaching was able to speak for a longer time or not (Shea,P., Sau Li, C., & Pickett, A., 2006 and Albers, 2007). In order to test their pre-knowledge and expressiveness, variables like 1. Use of phrases and conjunctions. 2. Lengthy sentences. 3. Confidence in pronouncing the phrases and words (Skehan, 2009). 4. Use of filler was taken as testing variables (Burns & Joyce, 1997).

S.No. (17 Groups)	Introduction on Self (10)	Confidence in Speaking (10)	Use of Lengthy Sentences (5)	Total Score (25)
1	6	4	2	12
2	6	5	2	13
3	5	4	2	11
4	6	6	3	15
5	5	4	2	11
6	4	4	1	9
7	5	5	2	12
8	4	4	1	9
9	5	4	1	10
10	4	4	1	9
11	4	4	2	10
12	6	5	3	14
13	4	3	1	8

14	6	6	3	15
15	5	5	2	12
16	5	5	2	12
17	4	4	2	10
Total Average	**4.941**	**4.470588**	**1.882353**	**11.29412**

Table- 01- Pre Test

The pretest report (Table- 01) stated that the average score of 4.941 out of 10 as they were asked to introduce on self. Usage of phrases and conjunctions were lacking, which showed their inexperienced level in proper listening to native speakers of English language. Only three students could use lengthy sentences with average score of 1.882353. Out of 17 groups of students, it was found that two groups of students' confident level reached to 6/10 while speaking and average score was 4.470588. Five groups of students among seventeen used fillers in their talk. The total average score out 25 was 11.29412.

Scope of this Study

This research focuses on identifying and using suitable ICT tools and applications to improve speaking skill of the female undergraduate students in optimum use of a companion: Mobile Phone and trending with technology using computer and headphone to access authentic language learning sources (Zhong Sun et al., 2017). It will help in knowing the effectiveness of using such tools and applications in teaching and learning and its outcome. This action research is designed to improve the speaking proficiency in English by using apps and websites available. The major objectives of the Oral Communication are training students to become very efficient manipulators and to enable the students speak to the situations confidently, make them women of great prowess as well (Sun & Yang, 2015).

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were formulated as research questions by the researcher:

- Why is the speaking skill believed to be difficult?

- What are the ICT tools and applications available to students presently?

- How can ICT tools and applications be used to improve speaking ability?

Methodology and Samples

The research process is based on self-learning and evaluation under the guidance of the researcher (Joan E. Hughes, 2003). To begin with,1. A course syllabi of Oral Communication with website links, 2. A status rating form and follow up with feedback of the teaching, 3. Result of each apps

and websites were included. The process of data analyses was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a classroom test in the name of pre-test was conducted in order to understand the level of students. Results of the test was analyzed by using relevant statistical tools and then the second phase post test with relevant statistical tools focusing qualitative approach were applied (Lu, Zhihong, et al., 2010).

The present study was conducted with 571 female first year undergraduate students soon after they completed their first semester course. Oral Communication (OC) was designed for students of first year UG English literature. Students taking the OC were instructed to entail in engaging themselves to the course continuously for two hours. The course went on as a crash course for fifteen days. They belonged to 17-20 years age group and had completed 12-14 years of school education. Most of them belonged to middle class background and had studied in vernacular medium schools, English medium as well as in CBSE schools. The students were also classified according to the place where they lived and the stream in which they studied in order to analyze lack of an appropriate atmosphere in the class for effective learning like Rural Vs Urban and then medium in which they completed their higher secondary(Jay Derrick and Kathryn Ecclestone, 2008).

Research Tools

The students were instructed to use Mobile Phone (Android) and Computer (Zhong Sun et al., 2017), though here in Tamilnadu the culture and society did not permit female students to use mobile phone, parents were informed of this course and tools to be used by contacting their personal contact numbers. In order to follow uniformity and have uninterrupted network connection language laboratory was used and each respondent was given individual computer with head phone. Class work Progress based on the tests conducted in the department was also analyzed to measure the informants' pro-activeness in imitation of authentic sources. Both Pre-Test and Post Test were conducted so as to collect data for the purpose of investigating effectiveness of OC (Lu, Zhihong, et al., 2010).

Procedure and Discussion

The pre-test results were analyzed qualitatively, the OCC class was started with information related to online and off line resources to improve and evaluate the speaking skill. The trainees were instructed to introduce themselves by using the mobile phone (Hwang et al., 2016). They had to record their voice and listen to it (Albers, 2007). A kind of self evaluation was done in order to inculcate self motivation and self evaluation practices (Richards, 1990). As the campus was a Wi-Fi connected one, the students could make use of the facilities available to improve their skills (Musa Nushi and Mohamad Hosein Eqbali, 2017).

Feedback was collected regularly from the informants so as to evaluate their experience with the Oral Communication Course (Can, 2009 p.25). The informants expressed that they could have accessed mobile phone as Information Communication Technology (ICT), a self- directed learning tool. The respondents had a different experience to listen to them and the same paved way for self evaluation. It was known that they could have autonomy to evaluate and decide on their words and phrases (European Commission 1995b).

The second day class was started with information related to apps available to practice and evaluate one's speech. Apps like "Speechnotes, Voice Notes, Speech Texter, Voice Text, Google Assistant, ListNote and OneNote" were downloaded in their mobile phones (https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/best-android-dictation-apps/) (Musa Nushi and Mohamad Hosein Eqbali, 2017). The trainees were well instructed to use the applications for their practice. Using these applications the students could practice how far they could pronounce English words and sentences. The application 'Speechnotes' helped them practice words and phrases slowly. The respondents stated that they could easily practice and evaluate. When the students pronounced the words, they could evaluate whether the words were rightly pronounced or not. All the words pronounced were coming as texts so that they could check with their pronunciation. The trainees expressed that they could have enough practice in checking and reproducing the words and consequently practiced well in standard pronunciation (Hassam Rajab-653-659).   .

Third class was started with an activity called Pair Discussion. This activity enabled the students to practice in preparing their dialogues and presentation. Using their mobile phones, the informants were able to collect a list of phrases necessary and prepare model dialogues (Tayebinik, M. and Puteh, M., 2012).The students formed pair and delivered the dialogues in front of the participants. They were here allowed to discuss while using the application. The informants felt that this activity helped them share information related to the use of application and websites where a collections of sites were available. It was found that the learners became more creative in learning the additional language using ICT as a language tool (Springer,2012, Costley, 2014, and Murphy et al., 2003).

The fourth day class begun with a model talk, a speech by Swami Vivekananda with subtitles (Harris et al., 2009). An application was introduced to improve their speaking skills (Text to MP3). Here, the students were given enough practice to listen to their sounds and presentation by typing their desired texts. The texts typed were converted and played as MP3. The respondents informed that they could practice well and refresh themselves without other interruptions. This application enabled the informants to inculcate the habit of standard pronunciation (https://www.texttomp3.online/).

Fifth class was to entertain the informants by listening to the speakers of the native speakers of language. Having the aim of giving them a feel of native English, a video was played which

enlightened the students to have situational English (Azmi, Noureddine 2017). A video entitled 'Learn to Speak in English' was downloaded and the same was played by distributing a hand out carrying questions and sentences with blanks (Albers,2007). In order to keep them attentive handouts were issued so that they could easily practice and learn many phrases and words to different situations.

The sixth and seventh classes were planned with the help of applications available online to improve speaking ability like Hello English, Duoling, Lingbe, Memrise, Busuu, Awabe, Learn English Daily, Beelinguapp, Hello Talk and English Speaking Practice. (https://www.hongkiat.com/blog/mobile-apps-learn-english/). These applications covered all aspects of language learning from vocabulary build up to hundreds of recorded conversations where the students could record and practice(Harris et al.2009). The informants were ready to speak in front of other students at the end of the seventh day class. It was believed that these applications would enable the students to be familiar with mobile phone handling for improving their communication skills. From the feedback collected, it was known thatthe learners could have gained confidence in speaking.

Next to all the above activities, a new website (https://www.learn-english-today.com/) was given to the learners. Here, the students were intimated to check with their known phrases and utterances. Learning the use of idioms and phrases along with games was given paramount importance, in addition to self evaluation for in depth understanding of English language. In order to access the resources for learners, the users had to register their names and email ids. The informants were given five days time for maximum utilization of the website to enlighten themselves better with everyday English. The informants of this study were made state their opinion and come out with their doubts in the class room in front of all. (Sutapa Chakravarty-42-46).

Then the learners were given speech training by using computers. An application named LTS-i10 was installed in all their computers. This application was downloaded from a private web site. The learners were made aware of the applications available and installation method. All the students could access their individual application through their own computer. The class was started with a pre test to a good number of exercises. The learners could have practiced words, phrases and sentence structures for the situations they are likely to face. To complete all the exercises available the respondents took three days and at the end of the day the learners could have their scores for each activity. In addition to pronunciation practice they could interact with their computers so that they could gain confidence. Though they were in a group they did not speak with their neighbors. It was monitored that the learners were busy in responding to the activities such as repeat, record, listen to, and speak in addition to typing some requisites.

A test module was given to each respondent. Sixteen learners were in pairs and the seventeenth one was with the researcher so that they could practice dialogues based on their previous practice and topics given in the class. Topics like greeting, introducing on self and others, narrating one's activity, and role play activity were given (Coiro,J and Dobler,E, 2007). The informants were asked to give their feedback on their learning experience with the help of LTS- i10 application. The respondents informed that they gained not only confidence but also necessary practice in pronunciation. While they were unconsciously being involved in speaking activity with the computer, they did not mind about their stumbling blocks. The informants expressed that they could gradually be involved in speaking activity having practiced with pre requisite words and phrases to be used with some differences from traditional way of teaching (Warschauer and Liaw, 2010).

After the fifteen days of workshop using the apps and websites available, the learners were instructed to listen to some downloaded videos on the interested topics and were instructed that they should present on their own topics (Cowie, N and Keiko, S., 2020). As opined by Gnc Iter (2015), it was proved that language related computer oriented activities enable the learners with rapid and appropriate materials with abundant example expressions to situations likely to face. All the students were present when one learner presented on her topic. The participants were entertained to probe questions so that they could have enough confidence and feel free in their expressions (Richards, 1990).

Assessment was done by monitoring the students, who enrolled for this course and other students doing their UG course. Study on both controlled group and OC group students was carried for a semester. Their activities like participation in competitions, presentations and class room activities were monitored. In addition to these, the result of the end semester examination was analyzed. The students were administered an oral test for 25 marks. The marks awarded by the examiner were also analyzed.

At the end of this course, a post test was conducted by involving them in "Interview, Oral Presentation, Interactive Task and Group Discussion". A guest professor was invited to evaluate their skills in speaking (Azmi, Noureddine, 2017). It was a face to face interview between a candidate and the examiner. The interview was conducted for 10 to 15 minutes. During the interview, the learner's communicative ability, understanding the questions, time taken to answer the question and confidence in expression were the testing variables (Seedhouse & Harris-57). Next was Oral Presentation. The candidate was required to give an extended monologue on any topic she prepared for about 1 to 2 minutes. In Interactive Task the candidates were required to discuss on a topic they had chosen. It was like a role play activity. The learners were supplied with sheets for taking notes and consequently the situation and talk of the topic were explained. This task was done in pairs.

The last task was Group Discussion. The examiner did not give any choice in selection of the topic (Stephenson, M., & Hall, G., 2020). The learners were divided into seventeen groups. During group discussion, the respondents' active participation, their response in posting and answering questions, their active involvement in the development of discussion were further taken for evaluation (Bailey, 2004, pp.47-66). Moreover, the examiner was strict with the topic so that some argument would be created to make the candidates be active. Fig. 01 Post Test - 1represents Language Competence, Fluency, Discourse Competence, Interactional Competence and Task Completion were the testing variables for the first post-test analysis. Language competence includes pronunciation, stress, intonation, syntax, vocabulary and cohesion. Fluency includes hesitation, repetition, false starts and self-correction (Richards, J. C., 2010). Discourse Competence includes turn taking, opening, and closing of their talk. Interactional Competence analyses the learners' co-constructed speech (Liubashenko O and Kavytska T,2020).
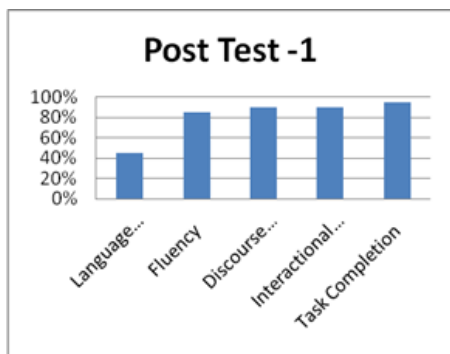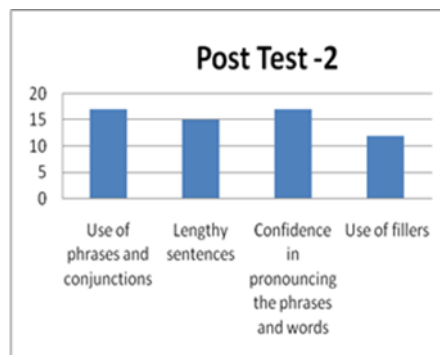

Fig. 01

Fig. 02

Conclusion

In University education, technology oriented language learning becomes an integral part of education so that the learners, who are learning English as a second or additional language are able to listen to native speakers (Solanki and Shaamleel, 2012). There is a sustainable growth in use of English language in their day-to-day expressions; even though the time spent to English language exposure is limited. Language trainers are compelled to use technology in preparing their daily classroom materials and show their wisdom in preparation particularly planning their lesson plan in order to create interest as well as prove themselves (Eady and Locker, (2013), Pourhosein Gilakjani (2017), Kamaşak, R., Sahan, K., Rose, H.,(2020), Jarosław Krajka and Christopher Alexander (2021). In view of the materials, Larsen Freeman and Anderson (2011) opine that technology strengthens both learners and trainers in providing authentic teaching and learning resources. The research study is limited to speaking skills of the students of first year BA English. The study was done with female students in addition to the fact that the sample was

small enrolling only 571 female participants in the experimental group and the same study may be done either with male students alone and in combination. The same research may also be carried out in improving students' writing skills by using authentic materials and ICT tools.

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