

Using Smartphone for Teaching and Learning English Vocabulary

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Abstract

Teaching Vocabulary is one of the basic necessities in teaching any language. No language can be written or spoken without learning its vocabulary. There have been several methods of teaching vocabulary suggested by the experts and experienced teachers. However, the easiest way to learn vocabulary has been using traditional dictionary and memorizing the words. With the emergence of technology the use of hard bound dictionary has considerably reduced. Computers and smartphones are being extensively used to learn English language and its vocabulary during the contemporary times.

Use of smartphone in teaching and learning English is rapidly increasing these days. It helps language learning in many ways. It saves the time and efforts of the learner and also of the teacher. It also helps the teacher and the learner to understand thing in a better and more effective way. Internet has become one of the sources to get information at the click of figure. Internet can be accessed from the smartphones. Besides, there are downloadable software applications meant for language learning which can be easily installed on the smartphone. However, there are some disadvantages involved in the excessive use of smartphone.

The present paper is an attempt to find out the ways of using smartphone and its effectiveness in teaching/learning English language in general and English vocabulary in particular and also to see the disadvantages of using smartphone.

KEYWORDS: smartphone, vocabulary, websites, software applications etc.

Smartphone has become integral part of human life today. Most of the people carry a smartphone though they may use it for different purposes depending on their own requirements and interests. Smartphone is a useful tool for human beings in many ways. It is generally used to make and receive voice calls and video calls. It is also used for chatting with friends on different platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, telegram, twitter etc. Besides, smartphone is used to send and receive electronic mails, text messages, multimedia message, and so on.

In language teaching and language learning, smartphone has been extensively used these days. It is used for teaching vocabulary by some people, for teaching pronunciation by some people, for teaching spellings by some people, for teaching grammar by some people, for teaching writing by some people, while for teaching listening and speaking by some people. The smartphone can be used in many ways by a teacher for teaching English language. It can also be used for communicating messages,

educating people, for giving information, for making collaborations, for helping in problem solving and for assisting in critical thinking.

“Smartphone is a mobile phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touch screen interface, internet access, and operating system capable of running downloaded apps” (Oxford Language Dictionary). Unlike other phones with common calling features, smartphone has cellular as well as mobile computing functions. It has stronger hardware capabilities and powerful operating system. The operating system of a smartphone gives it the facility of web browsing.

A smartphone is a mobile phone that includes advanced functionality beyond making phone calls and sending text messages. Most smartphones have the capability to display photos, play videos, check and send e-mail, and surf the Web. Modern smartphones, such as the iPhone and Android based phones can run third-party applications, which provides limitless functionality. (Christensson Per)

Language teaching is different from teaching other subjects like – History, Geography, Economics, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics etc. Therefore, using smartphone as a teaching/learning aid should also be viewed as different from using it for teaching other subjects or for learning other concepts. General language learning is understood as an act of mastering basic language skills and other sub-skills involved in them. Learning vocabulary by and far is the most basic part of learning a language. It is impossible to use a language without knowing its vocabulary. Language teachers often try to teach new vocabulary items to their students. Students are also often found memorizing new vocabulary items. Smartphone can be a very useful device to teach and learn English vocabulary.

Cambridge Englishdictionary defines vocabulary as “all the words known and used by a particular person” and “all the words that exist in a particular language or subject”. To use a language, a person needs to know the words in that language. The words used either in isolation or in groups in the form of collocations or in the form of phrases, clauses and sentences form the language. Therefore, building vocabulary is very important for learning a language. Using smartphone to learn English vocabulary is one of the very effective ways. It can be used in many ways to learn new words and also to remember the words learnt earlier.

There are various English language learning websites meant for the students and the teachers which can be accessed with fingertips on the smartphone. Using these websites to learn language in general can be a very useful and effective way of acquiring language skills. There are popular websites like- “BBC Learning English”, “British Council Teaching English”, “ISL Collective”, “Cambridge English Online”, “ELT Chat”, “One-Stop English”, “Designer Lesson”, “Wordle, Lesson Stream”, “An A-Z of ELT”, “Amigos Ingleses”, “Duolingo”, “Flo-joe”, “Live Mocha”, “Lyrics Training”, “News in Levels”, “Talk English”, “TED” and so on.

Apart from these websites, there are software applications which can be used to

enhance English vocabulary. These applications are user friendly and help learners in many ways in building strong vocabulary. They not only help in understanding the meaning of a particular word but also in learning to use that word in different contexts. It is important to understand the usage of a word in the appropriate context.

The software applications like “Learn English Vocabulary”, “Education” and “English Vocabulary” are extremely useful for the language learners. They play the role of the teacher and introduce the learner with new words. They also teach how to use these words in the daily conversation. “Improve English Vocabulary”, “English Grammar and Vocabulary” and “Vocabulary Builder” are the smartphone software applications that can be used very conveniently for learning new English words and building the vocabulary. “Vocabulary Daily”, “Quick Vocabulary”, “Word of the Day” and “Skippy” are extremely interesting and useful software applications. They remind the learner of looking for the new words and its meanings. There are vocabulary quizzes of different difficulty levels which help the language learners in understanding new words and their meaning. It also helps them to take quizzes and learn new vocabulary items in an interesting and effective way.

“English Vocabulary Quiz App” is an easy and interesting way of learning new words. This application provides the learner with a lot of quizzes which help in learning new words and consequently in building strong vocabulary. “English Phrasal Verbs” is useful in learning phrasal verbs. It also helps the learner by giving quizzes and questions. “Vocab App: Hindu” is useful for the advanced learners. It gives difficult words to the language learners. There are quizzes under the title ‘quiz of the day’ and the introduction of the new vocabulary items under the title ‘word of the day’ in this application. Vocabulary learning is graded according to the months and days in this application. Learners can set the target of building specific vocabulary in the stipulated time period. This is one of the useful strategies of learning new words and enhancing the vocabulary.

Apart from the famous websites and popular software applications, there are enumerable YouTube channels dedicated to English language study. It is true that all the channels are not really useful but some of them can really help the learners in learning English language in general and building a comprehensive vocabulary in particular. “Speak English with Vanessa”, “English with Lucy”, “Rachael’s English” “Jennifer ESL” and so on are the YouTube channels that help in learning to speak English like the native speakers. Though these channels are not specifically meant for vocabulary, they help in building vocabulary in some ways. The confusing words and their usages are discussed in detail in some of the videos in the channels mentioned above. “EngVid.com”, the contracted form of English Videos.com gives idea about the pronunciation differences and also about the wrongly used words. “Go Natural English”, “English Anyone”, “Learn with Laxman”, “mmm English”, “Worldwide Speak” etc. are some of the useful YouTube channels.

Some people think that using dictionary is the most effective way of learning vocabulary. Smartphones are the devices where many dictionaries can be stored

together. They can be used offline also. Moreover, one does not need to spend time in finding the particular word as one has to do in case of the traditional dictionary. The meaning of the word flashes on the click of the figure. The entries in these dictionaries also include grammatical categories of the word, its exact pronunciation in British English as well as in American English, the usage of the word and so on. There are English to English dictionaries and English to other language dictionaries and vice – versa. This provides great help to the learners who want to know the meaning and usage of the specific word or words quickly.

“Dictionary: Definitions from Oxford Languages” is a very user friendly and simple online mobile website that engages the learner in vocabulary exercise in an interesting way. It gives the meaning of the word in different streams. There are options namely, “all”, “law” and “medicine”. The user can choose any of these options in order to know the contextual meaning of the word. It also gives the meaning of the word according to its grammatical category. There is an option “translations and more definitions”. If the user wants to know more about the word, he/she can click on this option and find out.

Immediately after “translations and more definitions”, the user is asked the question namely, “which word is similar to this word”? There are two options given below the question. User has to choose any one of these two options as an answer to the question. As it needs just a click of the figure, the user touches one of the options. Immediately after the user touches one of the options, the score appears on the right corner of the screen and the next question is flashed within no time. This process continues for five questions. The final score appears on the screen after five questions. The process does not end here. This is followed by the option “take another quiz”. The same process continues for a very long time. This is really a good exercise that tries to teach new words, their antonyms and synonyms to the learner without even letting them know it consciously.

This has been the age of technology. Improved smartphone technology provides us with plenty of facilities. It was found that “the use of smartphone is very effective technique in building vocabulary for Chinese university EFL students” (WuQun 306). However, it comes with a few threats as well. Most of the studies show that using mobile is addictive and its excessive use can be harmful for human eyes and brain. Therefore, it is important to limit the use of smartphone to certain hours a day. Or it should be used when it is really necessary to use it. Dewey says,

As societies become more complex in structure and resources, the need for formal or intentional teaching and learning increases. As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is the danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school. This danger was never greater than at the present time, on account of the rapid growth in the last few centuries of knowledge and technical modes of skill. (9-10)

This is the world of information and technology. There is information explosion.

One needs to choose the needed information carefully. “New mobile and context-aware technology can enable young people to learn by exploring their world, in continual communication with and through technology” (Mike Sharples, Taylor & Vavoula 23). All the information required by a learner of English is available at a single click of the finger on the smartphone. However, it should also be remembered that there is no substitute for an offline class with a teacher assisting the learners. Virtual classrooms might have replaced the actual classrooms in some parts of the world but that cannot take place of the actual classroom everywhere and forever. Online teaching and learning is not a substitute for the actual classroom teaching.

Using Smartphone and other mobile learning technologies one can benefit a lot, as they offer language learning opportunities everywhere, and this is due to their portability and connectivity ability. However, if they are used out of control or outside of standards and not in compliance with learning objectives they can do more harm than good to our educational purpose (NuhiBillaca 314)

Nonetheless, advantages of use of technology in teaching and learning cannot be ignored. There are plenty of advantages of using technology in teaching and learning. But it should not be thought and/or used as the replacement for the actual traditional teaching and learning process. It can be judiciously used to enhance the teaching and learning experience in addition to the traditional classroom teaching. It helps the teachers as well as the learners to a great extent and in many ways. Therefore, the use of smartphones in language learning is greatly advisable. The greatest advantage of the smartphone is that it can be easily carried from any place to any place and used whenever the learner wants to use it. Smartphones are major tools of learning language these days. It is important that all the smartphone users should take due care to use them judiciously.

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