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GRAMMAR APPS: BEST TOOL FOR ACQUISITION OF GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT

The technological evolution has made many transformations in the education field particularly in the teaching-learning process. Role of computers in the educational field became very crucial. This paper highlights the pedagogical nuances in ELT and focuses on the various hindrances faced by the teacher while teaching English language. Further, the importance of grammar in language learning and the drawbacks of conventional mode of grammar teaching is also given emphasis here. Position of English language teacher in engineering colleges and role of mobile technology in English teaching and learning is discussed here in detail. Usage of mobile apps and utilization of What's App groups for language learning is also discussed in the present paper. Finally, this paper proposes an innovative activity for grammar practice using mobile technology which is experimented with author's students and achieved good results.

Key Words: Mobile Technology, What's App groups, Grammar Teaching

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INTRODUCTION

In this age of cyber revolution, the teacher and educational technology are inseparable. Many new advances in technology of 21<sup>st</sup> century have promised a breakthrough in the methods and effectiveness of English language teaching. Particularly, the role of computer, educational technology, mobile technology and their contributions to ELT have to be realized and implemented properly to ensure a notable output. This necessitates the fact that the teacher should always be ready to interact with aspects of educational technology and integrate them into his teaching. The growth of communication networks in the present century has changed the very image of the class room as global class room. It is a novel and beneficial method of teaching when compared to the traditional **chalk and talk** method of teaching.

English language is added as a subject in technological institutions to aid language acquisition. But it is not practically happening because language acquisition is sidelined in the rush for syllabus completion. ELT is no longer just about learning the four basic skills of LSRW through a restricted and structured class room platform. The democratic and interactive process of classroom where the focus is more on students learning than teacher's teaching allows students to be active and autonomous learners. *A learning style in the EFL*

*classroom is multidimensional. It includes not only the cognitive domain, but also the effective and psychological domains. It means that learning is neither essentially a habit formation (i.e. behavioristic approach) nor exclusively a rule formation (i.e. cognitive-code approach) (Mohammad Shaukat Ansari2010)*

Some of the problems an English teacher faces in the technological institutes In general are completion of approved curriculum, fixed time frames, and physical space in the classroom to create the required atmosphere. Firstly, Teachers are always overstressed for the syllabus completion with in time which is always monitored and checked. This creates indirectly answerability for the teacher. Another important barrier is 'Fixed teaching hours, fixed work load of the teacher and deadlines for completion of syllabus within the frame work of course structure'. These factors become a huge hindrance and will damage teacher's autonomy in teaching badly. Further, Language class room demands comfortable physical space for both learner and teacher with movable and flexible seating arrangement. But mostly, the computer assisted labs are established with fixed dimensions and literally no room for activity based language learning. An English teacher depends more on curriculum based teaching where he/she is more driven away by the time bound tasks of syllabus completion, evaluation, assignments etc. even the academic interaction between the teachers themselves is a rare phenomenon. very less scope is there for the teacher to come out with his own original ideas to develop the language proficiency of a student. Because of the rigid examination structure in the academic institutes and the credits and weight age given for the good performance in the said tests also never allows the student to deviate from the s syllabus. It never leaves space for him to concentrate on actual learning and identify his own weaker areas like pronunciation grammar vocabulary. So if the syllabus leaves space for the teacher to add his own ideas to develop his set o students it can yield more good result.

#### **Grammar at school level:**

For the acquisition any language, grammar is the base on which the entire standard of language is built up. Especially in L2 environment of India, grammar teaching and learning plays very crucial role. Once a child is introduced with new language like English, the curriculum mainly focuses on introduction of different aspects of grammar like names (nouns) action words (Verbs) etc.

Grammar forms integral part of any language. It is an important aspect without which a language cannot be acquired. Now a days inspite of continuous grammar teaching and English medium instruction students are lagging behind in spoken and written communications.

If we look at the first step of language learning the facts will be surprising. In all the vernacular medium schools, English language is introduced in III standard and the textbooks also support the bilingual learning. At this stage, the main barrier for language learning originates because of 'the introduction of bilingual teaching methodology where the teachers try to explain every word with its translation of native language.' It creates a serious gap in the learning of the young kid. This ambiguity leads or forces the child into a great confused state hampering his intelligibility levels. Due to this process, the child starts the translation method and tries to follow the structure of his mother tongue in English conversation. As there are fundamental differences in the sentence structure of English and other languages (Indian) like Telugu, Hindi, it results into a total havoc and miscommunication.

Generally, the lessons in the text books are attached with textual exercises which are predominantly grammar topics. Every assignment test and other levels are targeted at testing the accuracy of grammatical skills of a learner. **As there is no exclusive grammar class or grammar text book or practice book as part of curriculum**, very less room is left for teaching and practice of grammar. Most of the times, grammar is taught more "rule based" rather than "usage based". The child is never given awareness of why he should learn different grammar aspects and benefits of grammar. For example while teaching "verb and Tense or Active and Passive voice," never it is explained properly where they are used practically. So, student will have a wrong notion that grammar should be learnt for scoring marks and examination purpose only. With this backdrop, student starts ignoring the practical usage of grammar topics. At one point of time even he is unable to realize or understand where exactly he is doing mistakes in communication.

Even in higher classes also, rather than high standard lessons, more and more grammar exercises are included. This makes the students to treat grammar always a burdensome part of language learning. Naturally,

he enjoys the lessons like story, poem, essay, drama etc. than grammar practice. He never enjoys the practice of grammar and never even taught how to have fun with grammar. No additional practice of grammar is given instead of curriculum based teaching.

In the present scenario, as language got less room in total curriculum, language classes are often cancelled or given very little importance. In these limited number of classes, the teacher will be focused more on syllabus completion. Hence, grammar part of teaching is less emphasized or teacher is forced to finish the syllabus in a hurry, in less time. As, there is no specific cut of mark for grammar, the student focuses on scoring overall marks to clear the language paper. From the beginning, grammar becomes the nightmarish aspect for the learner. The actual purpose of including more grammar topics in to curriculum at different levels is different. To make the learner more comfortable with the language, basic, intermediary and advanced level of grammar is included. But this very purpose is lost and learners are losing the fluency in language skills. The student is unable to apply the grammar topics practically in either written or spoken skills, due to which his communication are badly affected.

#### **Learner's situation at +2 level:**

When the student enters into +2 level, especially in south Indian states, the situation will be discouraging for enhancement of language skills. The general trend is that most of the students (90%) will be aspiring for professional courses like engineering, medicine, Agricultural studies, Architecture etc. and naturally their total concentration will be on science subjects only. Basically, no room is left for language. All the language classes are taken over by other subject teachers. There are two reasons for this – one is syllabus of science subjects is more, and the other importance for other subjects is also more. So it is clear that if learner is weak in grammar upto X standard there is no scope for any kind of further improvement at +2 level. Even the situation of learners may drop to a lower level as he loses touch with language in all the ways.

#### **Emphasis of grammar in Engineering:**

When the student joins in engineering after clearing the entrance test he will be completely in joyous mood to go ahead with his core subjects. Though the 1 year course structure is filled with basic sciences (Maths, Physics, Chemistry) and humanities (English), the actual objectives achieved are not commendable. The student enters the engineering with a wrong notion that no need to improve his language skills except his technical skills. Even his previous experiences in +2, makes him little negligent and reluctant towards English language learning. This makes the classroom mixture of varied abilities and performances. The classroom is occupied by two types of students one, who is comfortable and confident in using language, the other weak and scared of English.

#### **The Analysis of English Curriculum at Engineering Level:**

The curriculum is designed in such a way that it is focused more on science and technology or hardly professional ethics only. The age old literary aspects like poetry, drama or story find no space here. Though, many advanced grammar topics are included in the curriculum, basic grammar is not given more space. The limited teaching time available for language will not allow the faculty to concentrate on basic grammar aspects. The teacher is over stressed to complete the syllabus i.e. lesson and textual exercises only. There will not be any chance to give practice or emphasis on basic grammar aspects like parts of speech tense, voice, sentence construction etc. The teacher can hardly brush up the basic grammar before he proceeds further to handle curriculum based teaching of advanced grammar topics. **“Task Based language learning (TBLL) Is a method of language teaching that focuses to increase the ability of the learner to communicate more effectively and accurately. The advantage of task-based approach, according to its advocates, is that during the task the learners are allowed to use whatever language they have, freeing them to focus entirely on the meaning of their message. This makes it closer to real-life communicative situations. (Bhanu2015)”**

Hence, understanding the struggles of the engineering students especially rural, semi urban students and those who studied in vernacular medium the author has implemented successfully the technology based grammar practice and learning for 1 year engineering students. How the student can be strengthened by utilizing the latest mobile technology is discussed in detail here.

#### **Mobile usage and what's App groups:**

It is a well known fact that man's life comes to a standstill if he doesn't operate the mobile for a while. It is officially accepted communication tool in all the formal situations. Even though the usage of mobile phones by students is restricted and controlled in educational institutes, it is an undeniable fact that students will be frequently using it. All the smart phones have the many facilities for comfortable usage of the user. With uninterrupted internet facilities, users are downloading many mobile applications.

**“Despite the dazzling progress of education through technology when we observe a language education classroom, we find seemingly unchanged learning activities. Technology is still playing a peripheral role at best. Although convinced that technology can enhance learning, language teachers remain unclear how to integrate it meaningfully into the existing curriculum. The potential of the internet as a language learning resources is considerable, yet teachers need to know what uses they want to make of it.” (Devi Archana Mahanty2010)**

In this era of “Apps” even education and learning are being affected by them. **Easy accessibility with minimal cost and freedom at learning without fixed time frames is making the learners to prefer mobile learning through various apps. (Bharti Rathore and Priti M.Faldu 2010)**

Technology has different forms and approaches which affects an individual's daily life whether in education or in professional field. It is necessary to provide the individual recent technology supported learning environment. To develop multi dimensional skills, Technology based teaching and learning is helpful for learner to provide flexibility in learning, to develop self esteem and develop self sustainability in the society. Learning through technology enables students to acquire and refine their analytical skills, synthesize the information.

Generally students make lot of “What's App” groups and will communicate with each other always. Exactly these two important aspects of “frequent checking of mobile and what's App groups” became the base line for the author to design and implement a **learner friendly grammar App** and successfully running it one full academic year.

**Learning Grammar through mobile Apps:**

Once the smart phone usage has increased voluminosly, and App development became easier, thousands of apps started invading the field. Among them many apps are available for English language learning also. Though many Apps are available, author has chosen “English Grammar” (developed by ZAYAN Infotech India (P) Ltd.) app as it is found more flexible and adaptable.

**“English Grammar”- Mobile App:**

This app is found more amicable and user friendly.

Basic features of Grammar App:

The App is divided into three parts basically and it contains three basic elements.

1. Grammar Book
2. Grammar Practice
3. Marks Scored

See figure: 1



figure: 1

**1. Grammar Book:**

In this segment apart from the introduction various important aspects grammar like nouns, pronouns etc. are included. Altogether total 27-30 topics are explained. The learner who wants to use the app can go through the write up once to brush up his knowledge and can proceed further. This facilitates the learner to recollect the basic aspects of grammar if he has lost touch or forgotten (figure -2).

**2. Grammar Practice:**

It is an undeniable fact that “practice makes the man perfect.”

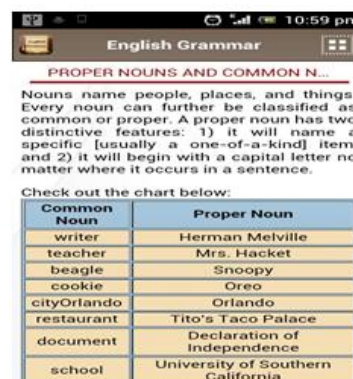


Figure 2

of

For a person, to become perfect in communication either spoken or written he should necessarily become authoritative in grammar. Hence the learner can practice various aspects of grammar in this module. Each topic has 15-20 multiple choice questions and the option of clicking and showing answers icon.

### 3. Marks Scored:

Testing and assessment is very important for any learning, because it gives the true picture of the accuracy of knowledge, memory Power and capacity of retention of a learner. Hence this module is very useful for learner as it is in self-assessment mode and Bar graphs show the percentage of correct answers.

The learner will be free at mind to check the scores and will surely concentrate on improving if the scores are low. As, it is self analysis it won't make the student to hide or feel shy about his performance (figure -4).

**Methodology:** This grammar App is practically implemented in my class of I B.Tech CSE students (2015-16) for two semesters. I could able to implement successfully.

#### Method of Implementation:

- Students were instructed to create a What's App group.
- The coordinators have made a group including the teacher i.e.author.
- Every day morning teacher (the author) has assigned one topic to the group.
- They are instructed to complete the task given in their free time and the score is noted in the "Score Book" available with the coordinators.
- Practicing grammar topics regularly strengthened the student's basic skills.
- Teacher has collected the score book and checked the progress of each student.

#### Outcome

- The teacher can be in touch with the students even after college hours.
- Regular monitoring of the teacher has created answerability and commitment for the student.
- The self-learning process cleared all the fears and grey areas of learning for the student.
- It is clearly witnessed that the student has improved the score from 0 to 100%, gradually.
- It strengthened the micro skills of the student in language learning.

#### Conclusion

Changing the teaching learning process according the current needs of the learner is very much essential in any education. Following same old, conventional and passive methods of teaching without understanding the present needs will not fetch any result. To cater the needs of today's techno savvy global student one should transform the teaching methodologies. Technology develops professional insight and allows both learner and the teacher to practice language effectively and helps to bring paradigm shift from teaching to showing ways of learning. Hence using mobile technology like What's App one can acquire the basic skills of grammar. Moreover, periodically updated versions of apps are preferred by many users and rating given by the users is also verified before downloading the apps. As multiples of apps are available teacher should be very careful in choosing the app as it should match the level of the specific set of students. Teacher plays key role here to motivate, guide and to put the student in the right track.

Finally, the innovative practices of the language learning will be always adaptable and creates more interest in the learner.

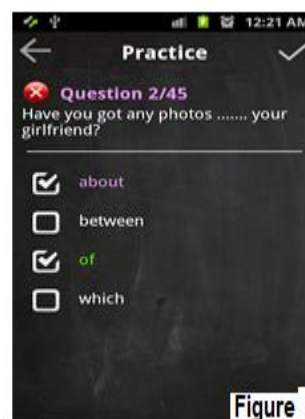
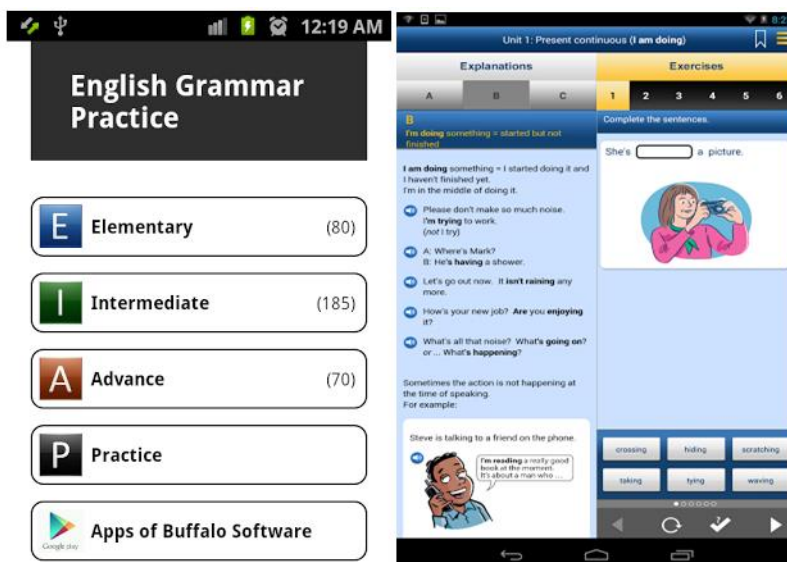


Figure 3



Figure 4



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