LEARNING LANGUAGE THROUGH SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

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Abstract:

Leslie Dickinson, in his 1987 article titled, Self-instruction in in language learning, defines it as, "a learning mode in which a learner, with others or alone, is working without the direct control of a teacher." This implies that the responsibility of gathering and organizing the required material to managing the time rests solely on the self, rather than on a teacher or institution. While this definition gives us a general idea as to what is involved in the process of self-instruction, it is quite broad in the ideas it encompasses. Jones, in his 1998 paper, Self-instruction and success: A learner-profile study, gives a narrower definition: "a deliberate long-term learning project instigated, planned and carried out by the learner alone, without teacher intervention." As there are various schools of thought on this subject, for the purpose of this paper, we will stick to Jones's definition.

In this era where the plethora of information available in the forms of books and online material in incredibly vast, the potential for learning English by oneself without subscribing to any curriculum, is huge. When confronted with this much information, it can be a daunting task for someone who is new to the language to find meaningful material that they can use to yield satisfactory results. This paper explores the various options readily and easily available for learning English and how useful and effective they are. These methods are not necessarily all academic but rather serve to develop fluency in the learner. Also, we will be looking at the various pros and cons of using self-instruction as medium to develop English skills

Introduction:

21st century has entered a new era of education even as technology takes the world by storm. Language teaching too has evolved from grammar translation method into communicative approach which requires innovative methodologies. With advancement in technology, new inventions like mobile apps have made inroads into language learning. It facilitates expanding the learning experience within and without the classroom. The present generation is techno savvy and they are looking for learning methodologies that would suit their fast-paced lifestyle. Learning English in any manner can be a daunting task considering the complexity and ambiguity of the language. So, the biggest challenge faced by any learner as they start out is to make sense of the information available. With English being the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca in many regions and in professional contexts such as science, navigation, and law, it has become even more imperative that learning it should necessarily cover all the above areas. One of the most important questions that everyone asks is how to improve their English. Learning English is no longer limited to those who are new to the language but even people who are quite fluent in the language are constantly looking to improve their language. There are so many approaches available to tackle this. Each person has different objectives, and has different capacities. The most important rule to remember is that learning English is a process. It takes time, and it takes lots of patience. If you are patient, you will improve your English. The explosion of the internet has really revolutionized the world in every way. This is true even for language learning. And no other language has had a higher impact than English, being the global language that it is. The Internet offers many new remarkable facilities and new ways of communication. Yet the speed with which new products, facilities, hardware updates and software developments are delivered and adapted for use by companies and by individuals means that it's difficult even for the most committed enthusiast to keep abreast of the market and an eye on the opportunities now emerging. We will explore the various tools available online to learn English. We live in a world that the mobile technology develops at such a fast pace that we have difficulty keeping up. In just a few years the mobile market has changed drastically with the heavy competition between Google's Android and Apple with its iOS powered devices such as iPad and iPhone. Everybody has one of these devices. The situation is same all over the world. With the growth of these Smart Phones, a whole new world of mobile applications has been created. We will also look at the various mobile applications that are available for learning English.

The Internet:

The Internet has revolutionized the computer and communications world like nothing before. The invention of the telephone, radio, and computer set the stage for this unprecedented integration of capabilities. The Internet is at once a world-wide broadcasting capability, a mechanism for information dissemination, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic location. The Internet represents one of the most successful examples of the benefits of sustained investment and commitment to research and development of information infrastructure. Beginning with the early research in

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packet switching, the government, industry and academia have been partners in evolving and deploying this exciting new technology. This incredible tool has revolutionized learning of any subject as the amount of information available is just staggering. On the downside, this also means that the quality of the material available is substandard more often than not. With that being said, the best way to use the internet to improve your language skills is to use it less to gain academic knowledge than to increase your exposure to the language by various means. Given below are some of the ways in which the internet can be used to learn and improve your English.

- ✓ **English Videos about Your Interests:** Sites like You Tube have an innumerable collection of videos of varying lengths on virtually every topic on earth. Simply watching YouTube videos in English on any topic of your interest can do wonders to one's language. This is good training for improving English comprehension and communication. Watching interviews and reviews will help the learner become familiar with conversational English—how to should communicate with other people.
- ✓ **English Movies and TV Shows:** Watching English movies and TV shows is another great way of learning conversational English. Watching the latest movies and TV shows ensures that the viewer is exposed to the current trends in the language and the current vocabulary. This the learner to learn commonly used slang terms, English idioms and phrases and help in broadening the English vocabulary
- ✓ **Online English Quizzes:** This is one method of ensuring that whatever the learner is learning is accurate and relevant. There are various sites that provide free English quizzes which can be used to test grammar, sentence construction, comprehension and a whole lot more. Doing these quizzes weekly or monthly will greatly improve the technical skills needed to be fluent in English. Most of these quizzes are also interesting and fun and can be highly enjoyable for the user.
- ✓ **Chatting with Friends Online:** This is yet another fun and unconventional way of learning English without even realizing it. This is different from talking to a teacher, or studying in class, or even using English at work because it is relaxed, and the language is informal and easy. There are various applications available like Facebook Messenger, Skype, WhatsApp and so on. This is a very interesting way to learn English as it involves putting into practice what has been learned in a casual, stress-free way.
- ✓ **E-Books, Articles and Online Magazines:** Reading is probably the most important aspect when learning English. Reading and listening both sharpen the mind and train the learner to think in English too. Non-native English speakers always need to translate English in their minds, which cause a delay in their response. But, if the mind is trained to think in English, it will be much easier to understand and speak the language. Reading gives the learner more exposure to English sentence structure, new vocabulary, and formal and casual speech patterns. This means the learner has a whole lot of sentences to choose from when they start to speak English. The internet has a huge collection of English e-books, articles and magazines covering a wide range of topics and can cater to any field of interest be it academic or leisure.
- ✓ **Language Exchange Websites:** As important as reading and listening are to learning English, there is nothing like actually putting into practice all that has been learnt. There are numerous websites that specifically focus on language exchanges. Joining the language exchange community gives the learner a chance to communicate with other self-study students. Speaky is one of the websites where lot of native English speakers are willing to help out other learners and can guide them in the right direction. How Do You Do. Do is another easy website to navigate to find native English speakers.

Mobile Applications:

According to Wikipedia, "Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) is language learning that is assisted or enhanced through the use of a handheld mobile device". MALL is derived from both Mobile Learning (m-learning) and computer-assisted language learning (CALL). It has developed to support students' language learning with the increased use of mobile technologies such as mobile phones (cell phones), MP3 and MP4 players, PDAs and devices such as the iPhone or iPad. With this approach of learning, students are able to access language learning materials and to communicate with their teachers and peers at anytime, anywhere. Enhancing language learning through MALL provides endless possibilities which are not available in traditional classroom teaching. MALL offers unrestricted access to learning anytime, anywhere the user has reception. This enables users to brush up on language skills just before or just after a conversation in the language they are learning. With MALL, group learning becomes much easier and feasible with the availability of social networking and internet connection. There are countless apps available on the market related to learning English. Mentioned below are some apps that are quite popular among iOS and Android users:

Duo Lingo - Duolingo is one of the best language learning apps out there today and is highly recommended for English beginners. The gamified learning system of the app helps one learn English quickly by spending as less

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as 10 minutes a day. Duolingo structures lessons that teaches seven new words a day based on a topic and skill points being awarded for completing the lessons.

Memrise - Memrise has some really creative and easy ways to remember words for learning English. The main aim of this app is to help the users expand their vocabulary by learning English words in an effective way. It also offers an offline mode to continue learning without internet connection.

Busuu - Busuu helps the user learn English language on the go and the lesson's quality are guaranteed as it is based on CEFR language framework. Lessons range from beginner to advanced through comprehensive vocabulary, lesson dialogue, writing practice and tests. Busuu is actually a great English app if you want to improve your spoken English.

Learn English Grammar - Learn English Grammar is an interactive app that is designed to help improve your grammar. If you really like to improve your English grammar in a detailed way, it is an excellent English learning app that helps cover 12 grammar topics with 20 activities per topic for English learners of all levels

Babbel - Babbel is a great language app that has a strong focus on vocabulary. Babbel also lets users learn to understand a language by completing and repeating phrases. The app has four different approaches - Sound Recognition, Picture Recognition, Spelling and Fill in the blanks. Babbel definitely focuses on the quality of the learning rather than the quantity. Babbel also uses a custom goal system that allows users to set benchmarks as they learn a language and to monitor their progress as well.

Pros and Cons of Learning English through Self-Instructional Materials:

Pros:
- ✓ There is no fixed schedule and curriculum. The learner can learn at their own pace and convenience.
- ✓ It is much less expensive than joining formal classes. In most cases the materials available are completely free of cost.
- ✓ Since the information available is huge, the learner can pick and choose material based on their priorities and areas of focus.
- ✓ A lot of the material is much more creative and interesting than the academic textbooks.
- ✓ Learning by oneself greatly increases self-confidence.

Cons:
- ✓ As there is no fixed schedule, there can be a lack of discipline and it can prove to be ineffective over a period of time.
- ✓ As the internet is open and accessible to everyone, there is a lot of sub-standard material which would impede progress.
- ✓ Most of the free materials are not as effective as the paid ones.
- ✓ If the learner does not have a clear idea of what they need, it can become time consuming and frustrating.

Conclusion:

It is evident that in the present age, there is no lack of materials that can be used to learn and master the English language. It is not a matter of how much material is available. Rather it is the ability of the learner to effectively use these tools for their benefit. The key is to make sure that the objectives of the learner are identified and defined right at the beginning. This helps in sifting through the vast store of information and picking out material that will cater to the needs of the learner in the best and most effective way possible. This paper has outlined the various tools available on the internet and on mobile devices. This is not an exhaustive list and is rather a collection of the most easily available and current tools that can be used to learn the English language.

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