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Enhancing Language Skills Using *Learn to Speak English* Software in Engineering Students of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

The methods of teaching and learning English have changed significantly. A new way of learning technique has emerged with the facility of computers and internet. The present paper highlights the use of *LEARN TO SPEAK ENGLISH* software in enhancing language skills among the Engineering students of Andhra Pradesh.

Introduction

English Language Teaching has influenced the experience of learning and teaching of English as a non-native language in India. The development of English language teaching in India has been encouraging before the independence onwards in spite of differences in the levels of initiation of instruction, differences in the socio-economic status, scarcity of teachers, over-crowded classrooms, indifferent students, parents and educators etc.

At present, English has become the language of India's arts, business, government, commerce, justice, science, and technology. Its importance and impact on Indians cannot be ignored. Presently, educational system in India especially Andhra Pradesh has been undergoing diverse changes. This change has been clearly noticed in engineering education also.

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The methods of teaching and learning English have changed significantly. Much importance is laid on linguistic competence, communicative proficiency, grammatical precision and vocabulary building. A student must have effective communication skills if he or she wants to cope with the present competitive world. There is a lot of demand for personality development, LSRW skills, soft skills, spoken English etc., which can be acquired using modern methods of learning. At this juncture, language learning is no more considered as a matter of acquiring final degree.

A New Way of Learning

A new way of learning technique has emerged with the facility of computers and internet. This technology has helped the students study well and enhance knowledge. Top universities in Andhra Pradesh like JNTU, Osmania and GITAM have introduced multimedia English language lab in the curriculum.

The English language lab is well sophisticated with computers, headphones, speakers, LCD and different English language software etc. JNTU is one of the prestigious universities that has been divided into 4 different Universities, 12 constituent units and 284 affiliated colleges in AP. On roll there would be around 1.5 lakh engineering graduates coming out with their degree every year. Osmania University is one of the top ten universities in India. GITAM is the top fourth private deemed university in India and the top private university in Andhra Pradesh according to MHRD survey. Such universities introduced LEARN TO SPEAK ENGLISH software for the benefit of the students. This paper presents in detail the above said software that focuses on improving various language skills among learners.

LEARN TO SPEAK ENGLISH

Learn to Speak - Personalized Learning Technology (PLT) is a language learning programme that focuses on building skills by practising various lessons, exercises and drills. This programme is a combination of video, audio, text and online instruction. The learner can involve him/herself through visual, auditory and interactive methods. The software runs on 166 MHz Pentium® processor or equivalent Windows® 95, 98, Me, 2000, XP along with 32 MB RAM, 125 MB free hard disk space, 256 color SVGA, 4x CD-ROM drive, Windows-compatible sound card, Mouse, Microphone and speakers. The software is published by the learning company and can be bought through online at the rate of \$80.

The learner can develop his/her conversational skills and pronunciation skills. It consists of 4 CDs. The software gets opened containing different icons like:

- User guide – It provides detailed information on how the software works.
- Options – It gives access to internet connection and Electronic registration.
- Web – It gives access to internet connection which can be American online or other internet connection service provider.
- Uninstall – By clicking on this, the programme can be uninstalled.

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- Quit - This icon helps to quit the programme.
- Run programme – By clicking on this, the learner can run the programme.
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Firstly, the learner should click on the ‘New User’ button and enroll his/her name. A file is created that stores scoring details and usage information. Afterwards he/she should click on the ‘Start’ button or press ‘Enter’ to begin the programme. If the learner has already used the programme, his/her name will be displayed in the sign-in list.

The learner can click on the name and press ‘Enter’ or ‘Start’ button. The learner can also remove his/her name by clicking on the ‘Remove’ button’ or can exit the programme by clicking on ‘Exit’ button.



After enrolling, the learner can go to the Home page. A caption bar is displayed throughout the programme at the top of the computer screen along with the menu bar below it that gives entry to different screens like the

- Progress screen which provides information regarding learner’s performance and shows data regarding successfully completed lessons. Learner’s accomplished tasks and the tasks that are still to work are displayed.
- Customization screen allows the learner to modify the programme and change the selected task to suit his/her needs.
- Dictionary consists of all the vocabulary words from the programme. The learner can browse the dictionary either alphabetically or topic wise.
- Grammar screen consists of various grammar topics included in the lessons.
- Online screen connects to personal study plan, online study group or the program’s website called www.elanguage.com where the learner can create his/her own web page or create a own study plan.
- Help button provides the learner with necessary information.

Home screen also allows the learner to return to ‘Home’ or go ‘back’ to the previous screen at any time. There is also a ‘tour’ button that gives the preview of the entire programme. Along

with these features, the home screen shows different courses that can run by installing CDs 2, 3 and 4. These courses are:

- i. Pronunciation
- ii. Basic course
- iii. Everyday life course
- iv. Internet lessons
- v. Cultural movies



i. Pronunciation

Pronunciation provides information on vowels, consonants, vowels consonant combinations etc. It deals with ABC, Vowels, Vowel combinations, Consonants, Consonant combinations.

ABC

The ABC screen shows three columns listing the letters of the English alphabets where the learner can listen to all the letters or individual letter pronounced by the speaker. A pronunciation gauge is provided so as to allow the learner to record his/her pronunciation and compare it with the speaker's pronunciation. The screen also provides pronunciation tips.

Vowels

The pronunciation of different vowels like a, e, i, o, u, with examples are given along with pronunciation tip. The learner can listen to the speaker's pronunciation and record his pronunciation and practise the words.

Vowel combinations

Different vowel combinations like ai, au, ea, ee, oa, oo, oi, oy, ou with examples are given. The learner can hear the speaker's pronunciation and record his pronunciation and practise the words.

Consonants

Different consonants like b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z with examples are given. The learner can listen to the speaker's pronunciation and record his/her pronunciation and practise the words.

Consonant combinations

Different consonant combinations like ch, gh, kn, ng, ph, ps, sc, sh, th, tw, wh, wr with examples are given. The learner can listen to the speaker's pronunciation and record his/her pronunciation and practise the words

ii. Basic course:

The Basic course deals with simple words and expressions needed for learner for immediate speaking. It consists of the orientation, the pretest, Lessons, Basic words, and Simulated conversations.

The orientation

Here the instructor provides an outline of the Basic Course and provides information on language learning.

The pretest

The pretest contains two parts. The first part has ten bits from which the learner has to pick up the most suitable answer to the given sentence or phrase.

e.g. What do you do for fun?

- a. That sounds great b. I like to go hiking c. Me too.

The second part also contains ten bits. The learner is provided with a picture and he/she should interpret the best suitable word or a phrase that describes the picture and record his/her voice. At the end of the test, the score is displayed.

Lessons

These lessons provide the learner with basic conversational skills. It consists of five basic topics that contain exercises on vocabulary, communication, grammar, exercises, communication skills and grammar skills. The introductory lessons are Greetings and farewells, Getting information, Making friends, Getting acquainted and Introductions. One of the lessons is given below:

Greetings and farewells

This lesson deals with how to greet people, how to say good bye etc. Under vocabulary, simple words, expressions and extended word list of related words like Hi, Hello, Good morning, Mr., Mrs. etc. are introduced to the learner where he/she can listen to the instructor by clicking on a word or expression.

The learner can 'record' his/her voice and practise the pronunciation until it matches the instructor's voice. 'Drill' option is provided where the learner can review the words and expressions. For every word or expression, pictorial representation is provided so as to make learning easier. 'Note' is provided that gives information on the selected word.

In Communication, the learner is provided with short dialogues along with corresponding pictures to develop memorization and recognition skills. The learner is provided with some expressions along with three possible responses. He/she can record the responses. To a given situation there may be quite a few possible responses.

In Grammar, pronouns, the use of 'to be' in different contexts and basic sentence structure are provided to the learner. Grammar points are provided where he/she can move through the grammar exercise by clicking one at a time. The learner is also given the access to study the grammar topics either by video or text mode.

In exercises, three kinds are included like drag and match where the learner listens to a phrase said by the instructor's voice and drags the suitable match to it; See it, Say it where the learner pronounces the best item that matches the picture; and multiple choice where the learner is provided with a phrase along with three options and he/she should match the best option.

Basic words

Under Basic words, the learner is provided with numbers, time, calendar, colours along with pictorial representation like six hundred, It's ten after six, Monday, August, Summer, Spring, Yellow, Brown etc. The learner can record his/her voice and practise the pronunciation until it matches the instructor's voice. Drill option is provided.

Simulated conversations

Under Simulated Conversations, the learner is provided with different conversations like being invited to a party and introduced to a friend of one's colleague, approaching a young woman or a man at a party and striking up a conversation with on-screen characters. Different options provided, make the learner understand the conversations better.

The learner can click on the 'text' button to follow the text of the native speaker. The 'response' button is provided to view all the possible answers. Pause button temporarily stops the conversation whenever required.

iii. Everyday life course

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Everyday life course menu gives the language skills needed to communicate in typical travel situations, business situations and everyday life situations. These situations cover various points like vocabulary, drill 1, story, action, drill 2, grammar, drill 3, conversation and games. One of the exercises under Travel situations is given below:

Travel Situations: Under Travel, different situations are included. One among them is Immigration and Customs. The learner is made to learn about how to go through Customs and Immigration, how to use simple and polite expressions with strangers, travel plans, how to use 'to be', 'to have', and 'to go' expressions.

Vocabulary provides essential and extra words related to immigration, travel plans, at the airport, tourist, visa, my, stay, enjoy, go ahead, valuables, stand in line, terminal, flight etc. With essential list of words, the learner can view and listen to a video by clicking on the 'Here In Context'.

The video presents a short dialogue that uses the selected word or expression along with the textual format and 'note' that gives additional information on the selected word. Pictorial representation of the selected word or expression is also provided. The learner can record his/her voice, practise and compare with the instructor's voice.

Drill 1 consists of 'Listen and click' where the learner has to click on the 'begin' button and start the activity. He/she is provided with four pictorial representations. He/she should listen to the instructor carefully and identify the picture that matches with the instructor's word.

Drill 1 also consists of 'See and Say' where the learner has to record the correct word provided or type it into the box. Here the learner can click on 'Show/Hide Answer' button to view the correct answer or hide it. He/she can reset this exercise by clicking on 'Reset' button.

Story consists of a dialogue based on Immigration and Customs. The learner is provided with pictorial representation. By clicking on the 'play' button, the learner can listen to the entire situational dialogue spoken by the instructor/s. He/she can click on the sound icon, listen and record each line individually. The entire text is provided with some learning tips.

Action consists of a video of the above story where the learner can view and listen to the dialogues through actions. By clicking on the 'play' button, the learner can listen to the entire situational dialogue spoken by the instructor/s. He/she can click on the sound icon, listen and record each line individually. The 'text' button gives access to the entire text. Cultural notes are also provided.

Drill 2 consists of fill in the blanks where the learner can click on the sound icon, listen to the sentence and fill in the blank.

e.g. I don't _____ Ans: Understand.

By clicking on the 'Show Answers' button, the correct answers can be seen.

Storyline is where the learner has to listen to a paragraph and then arrange the pictures in the right order. The learner can check the answers by clicking on 'Check Answer' button or the activity can be repeated by clicking on 'Hear Again' button.

e.g. It is early in the afternoon and you greet the immigration agent.

You say: Good afternoon/ Hi/ Hello.

He/she is expected to record or type the correct answer to the given situation; and Reading where a context is provided with fill in the blanks. The learner has to click on the arrow button and choose the correct option. The learner can click on 'Show/Hide Answer' button to view the correct answer or hide it.

Grammar covers various topics on to be, to have, singular and plural nouns, articles and contractions.

Drill 3 consists of fill in the blanks where the learner has to fill the gaps using present tense form.

e.g. I _____ a visa (to have)

Ans: have

Conversation consists of a video based on Immigration and Customs where the learner can listen to the speaker's voice by clicking on the 'Listen' button. He/she can record the response, click on the 'speak' button and listen to his/her response. He/she can go through the practise session by clicking on the 'practice' button.

The learner is expected to record the correct answer to the given situation. The learner can click on the 'Hint' button to see what the character has said or what the learner could say to a given situation. He/she can pause the activity by clicking on the 'pause' button or end the activity by clicking on the 'End Sim' button.

Games are also introduced to the learner to make language learning enjoyable and interesting. It contains items like 'Go fish' where some hints are provided to the learner on different cards. The learner has to type a suitable word based on the hints so as to enhance vocabulary building and 'crossword puzzle' based on Immigration and Customs.

iv. Internet lessons

Here a wide range of lessons from slang to science can be accessed by the learner. These internet lessons allow the learner to choose different topics like proverbs, business calls etc., that can be downloaded and added to the Learn to Speak English. Internet lessons provide access to the learner to add a variety of topics to improve his/her English.

v. Cultural movies

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Cultural movies provide the learner with a chance of exploring different countries. He/she can get access to different videos where the learner can click on the ‘play’ button and listen to the short documentary. A small box is also provided with a ‘text’ button. By clicking on it, the learner can see the text.

The various topics covered in this unit are Washington D.C, New York City, San Francisco, Chicago, Miami, Philadelphia, Santa Fe, Boston, New Orleans and Seattle. The learner has the option either to rewind or forward the video. The learner can listen to the instructor’s voice and make a note on the points or read the text simultaneously.

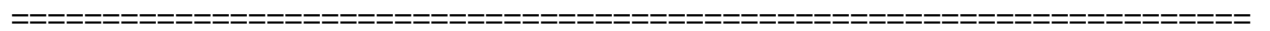
Cultural movies allow the learner to know various places, understand the culture, habitat etc., of different countries. These movies make the learner concentrate on listening, reading and writing skills.

Conclusion

During the language lab sessions, the learner is exposed to learning various activities by using computer and different software for the first time during engineering education. The learner used to be a passive recipient and was not exposed to perform various activities to improve his/her communication skills. This software helps the learner to accustom him/herself with proper pronunciation, basic conversation abilities, participate in various role plays in the classroom setting which in turn help him/her to communicate effectively.

The pronunciation course helps the learner to have a thorough understanding of different speech sounds along with different examples. Instructor’s voice, Pronunciation gauge help the learner to practise the articulation effectively. Basic course provides the learner with a list of words and expressions that are associated with a given situation. Lessons that enhance the basic dialogue skills allow the learner to respond with suitable reply, thus leading to the delivery of apt dialogues to a given situation. Grammar, vocabulary and exercises help the learner to minimize the number of mistakes while speaking. On screen characters and pictorial representation attract the attention of the learner to understand the given situation in an improved way without causing any boredom. Internet lessons give access to the learner to get acquainted to such activities for improving English.

This software provides the learner with appropriate vocabulary essential for role plays or situational dialogues. It provides in detail the usage of different words, expressions that fit in a particular situation with proper enunciation, thus improving conversational abilities, speaking competency and listening proficiency. All these courses help the learner to converse properly and to use proper grammar, vocabulary for improving communication skills.



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