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LEARNING ENGLISH ONLINE: TEACHING METHODS BEHIND THE PLATFORMS SHAPING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the link between online English learning platforms and the teaching methods that drive their effectiveness. Focusing on platforms such as Duolingo, italki, FluentU, and BBC Learning English, the research identifies the pedagogical foundations – gamification, communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based learning, and Krashen's input hypothesis underpinning their instructional designs. A descriptive analysis demonstrates how these methods promote learner autonomy, engagement, and real-world language use. Drawing on prior research and student perceptions, the study argues that these modern, app-based approaches offer pedagogical advantages over traditional English language teaching methods.

KEYWORDS: *English Language Learning, Online Platforms, Teaching Methods, Gamification, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning, Input Hypothesis, Digital Education*

1. INTRODUCTION

English has emerged as the global language of education, commerce, and international communication. As the demand for effective English instruction grows, particularly in multilingual regions like India, technology has offered new pathways to language acquisition. Traditional classroom approaches often characterized by grammar drills, limited exposure to authentic language, and passive learning struggle to meet the diverse needs of learners today.

In contrast, online platforms such as Duolingo, italki, FluentU, and BBC Learning English are reshaping how language is taught and learned. These apps are rooted in established teaching methodologies, yet they deliver instruction in innovative, interactive formats. This paper investigates the connection between these platforms and their pedagogical foundations, ultimately arguing that such methods are not only effective but often more engaging and accessible than conventional classroom instruction. Language teaching methods have evolved from teacher-centered models to learner-focused frameworks. Key methods include:

- **Behaviorism**, which emphasizes stimulus-response learning and reinforcement (used by Duolingo through gamification). The Behaviorism method of teaching English is based on the idea that language learning is a process of habit formation. Rooted in the psychological theories of B.F. Skinner, it views learning as a response to external stimuli, where correct language use is reinforced through repetition and rewards.
- **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**, focused on real-life communication (seen in BBC Learning English). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a method of teaching languages that focuses on helping students use the language effectively in real-world situations. Rather than emphasizing memorization and strict grammar rules, it encourages active participation through meaningful, interactive activities. The main goal is to develop communication skills, and learners often engage with authentic texts and conversational practice both inside and outside the classroom. CLT promotes natural language use and prioritizes fluency and understanding over grammatical precision.
- **Task-Based Learning (TBLT)**, where language is learned through completing meaningful tasks (central to italki). A task-based activity involves learners using the target language to accomplish a particular goal. The most effective of these tasks are designed to mirror real-life scenarios, helping students recognize the practical value of what they're learning and how it connects to their everyday experiences.
- **Krashen's Input Hypothesis**, stressing the importance of rich, comprehensible input (FluentU's approach)**. Krashen's Input Theory** really changed how a lot of people think about learning a second language. It brought in some fresh ideas about how we can teach in a more communicative and effective way.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies support the potential of these methods in digital environments. For instance, Kuswoyo et al. (2022) found higher engagement and learner autonomy in platforms using CLT and behaviorist strategies. Al-Madani (2021) reported that students perceived tech-enhanced language instruction as more effective and enjoyable than traditional methods. These findings suggest a pedagogical synergy between technology and modern teaching principles.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach. Four widely used English learning platforms (Duolingo, italki, FluentU, and BBC Learning English) were analysed to identify their embedded teaching methodologies. Each platform's design, content, instructional strategies were examined. These findings were compared against traditional classroom practices to assess pedagogical alignment, learner engagement, and accessibility.

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4. RESULTS

App	Teaching Method	Key Features
Duolingo	Gamification (Behaviorist)	XP points, streaks, rewards, spaced repetition
italki	Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)	Real-time tutor sessions, speaking tasks, authentic conversation
FluentU	Input Hypothesis (Krashen)	Real-world videos with interactive subtitles, contextual vocabulary
BBC Learning English	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	Dialogues, multimedia news modules, listening/speaking activities

These apps apply their pedagogical models effectively to foster learner motivation, retention, and fluency often surpassing traditional methods in terms of flexibility, real-world application, and learner engagement.

5. DISCUSSION

These apps showcase how educational theory can be applied in user-friendly, scalable formats. Unlike traditional classes often constrained by curriculum pace, teacher availability, and limited speaking time, apps offer flexible practice, multimedia immersion, and interactive design.

Duolingo's reinforcement system echoes behaviorist ideas with the added benefit of motivation through gaming elements. italki builds communication confidence through real interaction, while FluentU enhances comprehension via rich, visual input. Traditional classrooms typically lack these features.

Further, digital platforms democratize access to English learning especially valuable in India, where internet connectivity now outpaces classroom infrastructure in many regions. As students in Al-Madani's (2021) study reported, mobile learning methods increase engagement, self-regulation, and enjoyment, which are key predictors of long-term language success.

6. CONCLUSION

The integration of modern teaching methodologies in English learning platforms marks a significant advancement in language education. These digital tools by embracing gamification, communication, task-based interaction, and input-rich environments cater to varied learner styles and overcome many limitations of traditional classroom settings. As mobile learning continues to expand, these platforms could redefine language acquisition in both formal and informal contexts.

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