

Multimedia Language Lab: Technology in English language learning

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ABSTRACT

With rapid Globalization, the augmented importance of English cannot be denied and ignored since English is the most common language spoken everywhere. With the help of developing technology, English has been playing a major role in many sectors including medicine, engineering, and education, which, in my opinion, is the most important arena where English is needed. If we look into, what language is, language is a medium of communication. Communication implies carrying of message or receiving of message. Students from various cultures feel hard to learn English and its proficiency. The thirst of English language learning needs some solution. Scientific advancements have produced a number of innovative products to assist the learning process. The language lab is a technological break for imparting skills in English. The language lab offers an exclusive result oriented and efficient tool to enrich the English language learning process. The language lab plays a vital role to learn the foreign language in a congenial environment and in a successful way. Both the teacher and the students' inputs are very imperative in this kind of learning activity. Innovative products such as digital multimedia control, wireless headsets and microphones, the interactive response pad, etc. are very useful for students learning languages for communication. These interactive tools are designed to enhance not only language teaching but also class room grading and distance learning. The learner can get the experience of having interaction with native speakers through the laboratory. Hence, the language laboratory has become the need of the hour in any language learning process for communication. Language learning is not the same as learning any other subject. It is not restrained to writing an examination and getting a degree or award. Good communication skills are essential for any skilled professional. If one wants to achieve reaching out to group or peoples, he or she has to master their language. The English language, in certainty, has become vital in the lives of young aspirants to progress their careers and professional life. English language learning has therefore become a necessity for any Indian student today. Communication means one's ability to listen charily so as to infer the meaning and to respond with suitable words and clarity of pronunciation. It has become inevitable in today's context but, at the same time, it poses certain challenges. This article attempts to emphasize the significance of the language laboratory and its challenges imposed on the learner and the teacher.

I THE POSTULATION OF A LANGUAGE LABORATORY

It is obligatory of any learner to command good communication skills in order to deliver his message, with simplicity and precision being imperative for effective and efficient communication. The method and process of learning that language is what helps one to acquire such proficiency in a language.

The syllabus of the current educational system in India does not have a laboratory session for arts subjects. Only those who study science subjects have practical work, which is undertaken in a laboratory. The concept of a laboratory for language learning is new to Indian students, however it is very widespread in Western countries to train students are accustomed to the use of laboratory to enrich their language learning.

Scientific furtherance has shaped a number of novel products to assist the learning process. Innovative products such as digital multimedia control, wireless headsets and microphones, the interactive response pad, etc. are helping students to learn languages for communication. These interactive tools are not only

intended to augment language teaching but also class room grading and distance learning.

The language lab is a technological breakthrough for delivering skills in English. The language lab is shift away from the traditional teaching method with the rich teaching material contents, motivating the student's learning attitude and providing an interactive learning environment. The language laboratory plays an important role in assessing students' speech. It avails students with the technical tools providing best samples of pronunciation in the language.

II KINDS OF LANGUAGE LABORATORY

The language laboratory aids educators in delivering foreign language instruction, and has been through many developmental stages over the years.

Four kinds of laboratories are being focused on here:

(a) **Conventional Laboratory-** This is the primitive form of the language laboratory. The conventional lab has a tape recorder and a few audiocassettes of the target language to teach the learners. The teacher plays the tape and the learners listen to it and learn the pronunciation. As it is used in a normal classroom setup, it is prone to distractions and this type of laboratory is no longer common.

(b) **Lingua Phone Laboratory-** This is again a conventional type of lab, with a little modernization. Learners are given a headset to listen to the audiocassettes being played. Here distractions are minimized and a certain amount of clarity in listening is possible.

There is also a modernized lingua phone laboratory available today, which uses an electronic device that has two functions. It works as a cassette player with all the features of a normal cassette player on the left side, and as a repeater on the right side that helps one to record one's voice and play it back for comparison.

(c) **Computer Assisted Language Laboratory (CALL)-** CALL uses the computer to teach language. The language course materials are already fed into the computer and are displayed according to the features available in the system. Nowadays, there are also laboratories with computers with a connection to the Internet. These are called Web Assisted Language Laboratories (WALL). The development of CALL has been gradual, and this development has been categorized into three distinct phases: Behaviorist CALL, Communicative CALL and Integrative CALL (Barson & Debski, 1996). Though the development of CALL has been gradual, its acceptance has come slowly and unevenly.

(d) **Multimedia Hi-Tech Language Laboratory-** There is a lot of software available on the market that can be used in the multimedia language laboratory, for example:

Renet

Aristoclass

Hiclass

Globarina

Console OCL-908W

HistudioMHi Tech

Online Software

III THE ADVANTAGES

The need and importance of the language laboratory has been a major innovation in the domain of communication enhancement. The world around us is multilingual and multi cultural multilingual, and with the rise in Globalization and new scientific

innovation it's now a very small world. The language laboratory exists to help one to use technology effectively to communicate. It is not merely for learning a single language, but can be used for teaching a number of languages efficiently. To acquire a sensibility for the sounds and rhythm of a language, one has to hear the best samples of a spoken language (Richards, 2001). This is precisely the benefit of the language laboratory. Some highlights of the language laboratory are given below:

ASC Direct. Inc. lists the following characteristics/benefits which apply to language labs:

(a) **Acoustics:** The language lab provides all students no matter where they are seated in the room with equal opportunity to hear the instructor and to be heard by the instructor. Each student can listen to the lesson material at a level set by themselves for their own comfort.

(b) **Privacy:** The headset/microphone provides students with a psychological privacy that promotes their speaking ability. It reduces the inhibitions felt in normal classroom situations.

(c) **Attention:** As the language lab allows the student to listen to the program stimulus individually, each individual student's attention is focused on the program material being studied.

(d) **Individualization:** Even in labs that are not provided with digital recording capability, the equipment usually provides the capability for dividing the class into several groups. These groups can be listening to different programs on varying subject matters and at different levels of inter-activity.

(e) **Developing Listening Skills:** The language lab helps students develop good listening skills and aids the process of communication. Students hear the correct language patterns all the time through their headsets instead of mimicking other students who may be pronouncing incorrectly.

(f) **Efficiency:** The teacher can monitor individual students (and talk to them) much more efficiently than in a regular classroom. Usually in a regular classroom all other students stop speaking when the teacher communicates with an individual student. In a lab they will continue working without interruption. Also, a teacher can interact with many more students since he/she merely presses a mouse key or touches a button in order to be in contact with a student. The language lab makes most efficient use of time, improving the teacher/student time ratio and allowing the instructor to maximize the use of time in a given lesson.

(g) **Variety:** The language lab provides variety from regular classroom situations. The teacher's role is changed and the students are more active for longer periods of time. The use of visual stimulus coupled with selective audio materials increases the attention span of the students.

(h) Oral Testing: Oral test features allow instructors to test students with a question or stimulus and only record the student's answer. Instructors who later play the student recordings can easily mark the students work, which is made up of only the responses given by the student.

(i) Teacher Monitoring: Since the teacher is not concentrating on producing the next question or drill, he/she can concentrate more on the student responses. The instructor has more time to produce materials and oversee class activities due to the automatic rather than manually controlled instructor console features.

(j) Role Playing Exercises: Using the random pairing feature that all advanced modern learning systems incorporate, instructors can generate a variety of exercises structured around role-playing. Students can be paired or grouped together in small numbers and hold conversational practice with each other. Due to the random selection of student partners the students' interest level is always high in anticipation of who their paired partner is likely to be.

IV THE SIGNIFICANCE

As the ability to communicate effectively has become the prerequisite for anyone who ventures into a new profession, the need for developing such a skill is a much-felt phenomenon today. Both governmental and private institutions focus their attention on students developing their communicative skills. As technology has entered into every aspect of human life, it has extended its advanced products into the field of communication. So everyone strives to get the best on the market. Hence we've deduced that

- (a) It is a tool designed for teaching any language.
- (b) It helps one to learn pronunciation, accent, stress and all other aspects of the phonetics of a language.
- (c) Effective communicative training programmes for the general public, private and corporate sectors, junior and senior level officers can be given through the lab.
- (d) Web-content creation, the setting up of in-house news magazines, corporate publicity and identity, and teaching materials can be generated through the language laboratory.
- (e) General documentation, software documentation and all forms of technical documentation can be done.
- (f) Experts can utilize the laboratory for creating and editing scientific and technical materials for teaching language.
- (g) The language laboratory enables one to conduct courses for various groups of people like students, faculties, businesspeople, etc.
- (h) Short-term and long-term coaching classes for international examinations like IELTS, TOEFL and other competitive examinations can be organized.

- (i) Online courses and paperless examinations can be conducted through the language laboratory.
- (j) The ability of each student to speak at the same time and yet be audibly isolated from each other allows efficient use of time and a higher degree of practice and learning. All of the students can practice simultaneously (rather than one at a time) thus increasing the student's actual practice and fluency

V CONCLUSION

English as we all know and realize has become the language of the world and today is spoken in most countries. Effective communication skills are of significant importance during the recruitment process of most companies and educational institutes must ensure that students are equipped with necessary skill sets. The language laboratory is a very helpful tool for practicing and assessing one's speech in any language. It facilitates the student to listen to model pronunciation, repeat and record the same, listen to their performance and compare with the model, and do self-assessment. Since the language laboratory gives every learner of any language liberty to learn at their own pace, it is flexible and does not necessarily require a teacher all the time. At the same time, it is possible for teachers to provide assistance individually and collectively. The language laboratory allows every participant his or her privacy to speak and listen.

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