



Review

Importance of Language Laboratory in Developing Language Skills

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A B S T R A C T

The present paper deals with the importance of language laboratory in developing language skills. It basically presents how language labs are useful in developing the language skills of the learners. Apart from the classroom lectures that students attend, the practical classes held in language labs hone their language comprehension. The present paper discusses the importance of these labs, benefits the receivers receive, and an urgent need for more such labs in academic institutions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning process has been aided by the advent of quite many types of equipment, and one such area is developing language skills. Because of the information technology that has led to the emergence of this equipment that has facilitated the learning process, there has been a production of high-quality teaching resources. The constant use of audio and video resources, in general, has led to the creation and implementation of learning and teaching material in an interactive format that adds to learning.

Learning is part and parcel of the human learning process. Yet, our understanding of teaching and learning is still imperfect, and the consequences irregular. Teaching approaches vary from learner to learner. Since the beginning of the 20th century, language teachers have been making use of technological aids. Both sound and video are important elements of technology, and teaching a language to the learner in the absence of these elements is unimaginable. Both are integral components in providing opportunities for enhancing the learner's experience.

Language teaching today helps in developing learning in the classroom through language

laboratories. A language laboratory commonly clipped as 'lab' is a part of an institution that deals with the language learning process's practical aspects. It is a setting with a particular setup and runs under the supervision of trained language experts.

The early literature states that the first language lab was at the University of Grenoble. In the 1950s until the 1990s, there were tape-based systems using reel to reel or cassette, which has been replaced recently by large multimedia computers. The language lab is a technological setup created for providing skills in English. The multimedia-based language lab helps to learn and increase language proficiency by sharing the course materials.

In the up-to-date digital age, we are all connected regardless of geographic distance. Advancement in technology has literally brought the world into our living room in the form of TV or the internet, allowing us to watch events in other countries or talk to friends and family living in another continent via the internet. As a result, we are exposed to different languages, cultures, and traditions of people worldwide.

We are residing in a multilingual and multicultural world. Language lab provides great assistance to

students in learning the language of their choices and learning at their swiftness. They can record and gauge their performance to make sure that they pay attention to phonetics such as pronunciation, accents, stress, etc. It is through audio-video aids that the learners of the language learn accurately.

The training in a language lab differs from the traditional classroom training. The students actively participate in language learning exercises and undergo training. The practical sessions are conducted in the language lab. A good quality language laboratory should be made an imperative part of an academic institution. Learners of a language get a stand for practical training through these language labs.

In a language lab, students are very willing to listen to the audio files and watch videos. Therefore, there is a facility of recording as well as comparison with the innovative material. Communication happens in pairs or in groups using objective language. Students try innovative things in a lab than in a classroom. Audio, video, multimedia, and the internet collectively provide resources with which the students respond. For students, attending lab sessions is a retreat from the traditional classroom sessions. They find it an effective and versatile tool in providing interactive sessions to the students to learn the language or swiftly undergo any activity.

A language dealing institution lacking lab facilities will provide boredom to the learners and deprive them of real-life language learning situations. Without such labs, the learners will find themselves being debarred from adding interest and creativity in their language-enriching process.

A language lab plays a great role in making the institution's teaching method successful in a very novel way. In addition to audio-visual materials, there can be study materials production which can be made a central activity among faculty staff. One can systematize seminars and workshops and various educational software, production techniques, dubbing, etc. Without a doubt, a language lab stimulates the language learning process. It is significant scientific support for education. Western countries have shown a high degree of trend in involving people in language laboratories to develop their language learning process. However, a laboratory for language learning is something novel for Indian learners.

An effective language lab capably and resourcefully strengthens the language skills of the learners. It is very positive in assessing students' speech. For example, learners of a language can get a realistic experience in learning a sound system of language in phonetics classes. They can listen to a wide variety of human speech sounds through software which is not possible in a classroom setting. Similarly, complex sounds of different languages can also be heard and learned by language learners. In addition to learning articulation, tone of voice, stress, and all other phonetics features can be learned by the learners. The learners of a language can record their speech, listen to their recordings again, and store it.

There has been a lot of technological support for learning languages, including software like PRAAT, which is a heavy source for studying acoustic properties of the speech of any variety for learners and more so for academicians. It is very easy to download PRAAT. If a language lab is equipped with such software, it will enable the students to avail lot of facilities related to speech.

In addition, there are electronic dictionaries of pronunciation available now for learning pronunciation of words. Daniel Jones 'English Pronouncing Dictionary is now available with compact discs for learning accurate pronunciations of English. The online version of such classic work is available too in British and American English. The learners can have such word learning exercises in the language lab itself.

The language labs have become an important part of the paraphernalia for teaching the language in institutions related to language. These also provide coaching classes for standardized language tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and many others. Similarly, online courses and paperless examinations can be conducted through the language laboratory.

Students are provided with the technical tools to get the best samples of the pronunciation of the language. Learners find a very stimulating experience in acquiring language while sitting in language labs. Language lab has become an integral part in any language learning process for communication. Not only can one language be learned, but more than one language can be learned efficiently. Moreover, the learners learn the best samples of any language. This is primarily the

basic and important task performed in the language laboratory.

The material used in the present-day language labs is very rich. Not only are audio and videos being played, but also flash-based games and internet facilities are available. It is different from the traditional language labs, which lacked the modern facilities at language labs. Besides this, the delivery of information from the teacher to student and student to teacher is faster, and much more engagement is there. Further developments in language labs are presently noticeable as access moves from a fixed network and related Microsoft operating systems to online and browsers. Students can now access these new 'cloud' labs from their own devices anytime and anywhere. Students avail the facility to question and record audio and video files and be marked and assessed by their teachers a little.

II. BENEFITS

A lot of benefits can be acquired by the inclusion of these language laboratories. These include the following:

The machinery of a language laboratory serves quite many benefits to both the sender and the recipients. New information and communication can be accessed quickly and easily with the advent of a lab. In it exists a space where which has at disposal the latest technology for language learning. Nowadays, digital language labs with fine audio quality enable teachers to interact with the whole class simultaneously. These offer students the prospect to enhance their language skills, especially the four LSRW skills that enhance the listening, speaking, reading, and writing aspects of communication. Genuine language materials like radio and television programs help students experience the target language in an effective and meaningful manner. Moreover, there is a language regulation through the various thoughts created with the students' intellect.

Our present-day generation is connected to the World Wide Web to get access to information on a comprehensive basis. This leads to immediate access to information worldwide. The content of multimedia comprising text, images, sound, and video involves the language learners in the language learning process, no matter whatever is the learner's style.

A particular class can be divided into several groups. Each member of the group is provided with a user ID and a password. The students can log in to the program with the user ID and the password. The teacher is also assigned a particular ID and password. One day the teacher instructs a particular lesson, and the other day the students. The next day, the students perform the particular task as a part of the students' activity. Similarly, the students listen to different programs on different themes through software.

Lab is a phenomenal platform to overcome shyness among students and enhance their speaking skills. It serves as a high degree of a motivational factor among the students as it removes one's fear and brings joy within the learning atmosphere. Any motivation brings happiness to people, and language lab is a source of joy among learners.

The language lab allows the student to listen to the program. A learning environment is created in a language lab to perform effectively, thereby encouraging participation in interesting exercises.

Nowadays, language labs have evolved to become much more contemporary and realistic. They can fetch English students closer to native-level speech and heighten all their language skills by providing valuable exposure to the language in action. Let us take an example of an English language lab. Basically, it is a place with computers for students to complete a multiplicity of linguistic activities separately. These activities can include listening exercises, vocabulary work, and fluency building. Some programs even allow one to record video lessons or audio exercises for students to view and pay attention to independently.

While working on their pronunciation, the students can categorize words into syllables, find tones, and stress the words' location. These are activities related to Phonetics other than the rest of the activities that can be performed in English labs. Students can also listen to conversations, listen to an audio track, and practice speaking what they hear. They can also read short stories and complete audio exercises that accompany them. Thus, a variety of activities can be associated with English language labs.

It was recently in a piece of news that the District Centre for English at Kozhikode possesses a language lab that has the facility to engage 30-35

teachers to work simultaneously. Here the teachers will be trained in communication skills, ways to handle various software and digital devices. This is a praiseworthy step in the enhancement of teachers in language skills by the management. Learning is a continuous process, and human beings need to improve their knowledge and skills from time to time.

Now let us discuss the labs operating in parts of UK. In few UK language labs, the teacher can keep an eye on students' recordings and interact with them individually or collectively through their headphones. They can basically chat with them. A conversation can be held with a student over the audio channel. It may be an individual and subgroup of the whole class or the whole class where some instructions can be given or so. The teachers can observe a student's desktop and remote control his/her mouse and keyboard.

A particular kind of language lab known as the '*Melissi language lab*' uses analog software that provides most of the conventional language lab functions and integrates video, word-processing, and other computer applications.

Another kind is *the Senako lab*, a learning center that requires only one computer- the teacher's property. It is meant for the teacher/trainer only. Students are equipped with simple to operate user audio panels with high-quality digital sound where they practice listening and speaking using a comparative recording. They listen to lessons or audio passages, record their responses, and then compare original audio files. There are more speaking and listening sessions in this kind of lab. Thus, different labs, no matter what structure they possess, their purpose is almost the same.

Thus, a language laboratory is where students develop practical linguistic and rhetorical skills through information exchange. It makes the process of learning a language and language-related topics easier and in an interesting manner undoubtedly.

III. NEED OF LANGUAGE LABORATORIES

It is high time that we need language laboratories in schools and colleges to promote innovative teaching-learning methods and techniques. A major challenge is that even urban students communicate in English with their mother tongue influence. Many colleges are equipped with language laboratories

to meet the global standards in English proficiency and gain employability skills. Still, there need to be more such laboratories in academic institutions to promote learning with innovation and interest.

Language labs should exist within the school as well as college premises. All students can interact concurrently without disturbing each other regardless of the group of students and their size. Language lab gives a chance to work on individual needs, which are not dealt with in a traditional classroom setting. It strengthens the learner's fundamentals of the language, that is, a language's grammar and sound system.

These days many academic settings are coming up with labs equipped with software that is designed for language labs. Although setting up a language lab is not an easy job. Finance is a big issue. One needs to invest a good amount in setting up a language laboratory. It requires the installation of computers, software related to language activities, and much more.

Right from the very beginning, language laboratories should be made mandatory part of the school and college curriculum. English for example, is a global language. Students should be made to practice in language labs in schools to hone their pronunciation skills and listening skills. Speaking exercises will enable them to master their accuracy in pronunciation.

Although there are language labs prevalent in many academic setups, there is an urgent requirement for such labs in more quantities. We can witness language labs in academic institutions in the present scenario, yet there is a setting of such labs in more numbers. It is true that language labs require a variety of interactive equipment and resources which need to be maintained properly, but the benefits are numerous. Setting up these labs is very expensive and in a country like India there is no syllabus as such and usually language classes are included within theory classes. In terms of finances, upgrade in the medium of instruction will be a taxing job for academic institutions.

Therefore, such setups must be introduced in schools and colleges to promote language development among learners. Classroom knowledge mingled with practical sessions will serve as a collaborative approach for language learners.

IV. CONCLUSION

A language lab aims to engage students in overcoming the mother tongue influence and developing their communication skills. It is different from a traditional classroom setup. The process of learning becomes more participatory and interesting. Language labs and multimedia enables learning to become fun and friendly.

The outline of the lab must be constructive for developing the effective communication skills of the students. Effective communication skills are essential in all professional careers, and language lab can help acquire this important life skill. The language lab is a technological break for imparting skills in English. It is a breakthrough the conventional teaching method with the rich teaching material contents. The digital language

lab motivates student's learning attitude, thereby providing interactive learning surroundings.

Language lab represents the solo largest investment and installment of audio resources in education. The computer presently fulfills all the needs of language educators and gives existence to language for many learners. Apart from English, the learners of the language can learn quite several languages.

Today's modern language labs play an elemental role in language learning, in fact, for students who belong to the cell phone generation. Modern language labs play a primary role in grabbing students' concentration and motivating them to learn well. Thus, we should be thankful to the present technology that has facilitated the language laboratories' existence to enhance their language skills with delight and full participation.

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