
THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE LAB IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Language is a human and social activity without which humans cannot function in society. It is one of our basic needs and cannot be avoided. Amidst thousands of languages used by various groups of people in the world, English has now gained a major role connecting nations as a link language. In this age of technology, the language laboratory plays an important role in the language learning process. This paper tries to discuss the various features of the language laboratory in teaching English to students.

Keywords: ESL, language laboratory, language learning.

Introduction: Language is an integral part of human existence. All human activities revolve around and exist with help of language. "Perhaps because of its familiarity, we rarely observe it, taking it rather for granted, as we do breathing or walking. The effects of language is remarkable, and include much of what distinguishes man from the animals..." (Bloomfield 3). Language is a human and social activity without which humans cannot function in society. It is one of our basic needs and cannot be avoided. Amidst thousands of languages used by various groups of people in the world, English has now gained a major role connecting nations as a link language.

The importance of English is not because of its many users but what it is used for. In the present century English has gained a prime position in every aspect of life. The English language connects the people of a part of the world with every other part of the world and helps them to know what is happening around the world. The importance of English drives one learn this language that has become the very base to link oneself with the rest of the world. Learning is different from acquiring a language. One acquires his/her mother tongue naturally, but when it comes to a second language like English, one needs to learn it through artificial methods. When a non-native is taught English there are several obstacles that hinder him/her from gaining the new language.

While teaching a second language, all the four skills of the language such as listening, speaking, reading and writing have to be imparted to the learner. And a teacher may try through various methods. Some of the methods used traditionally and recently are The Grammar-Translation Method which is the oldest method in teaching language where the grammatical rules are taught and then expected to be applied in writing and speaking; The Direct Method where learning is accelerated by direct contact with the target language in meaningful situations; The Structural Approach which emphasises on the importance of structures which are carefully selected and graded; The Situational Approach which attempts to create situations similar to that of mother

tongue acquisition; The Audio-lingual Method which makes the students over learn the language using elaborate drills focusing mainly on aural and oral skills; Suggestopedia which aims to tap students' mental potential by removing psychological barriers; and CLT i.e., Communicative Language Teaching Approach which is basically an umbrella term covering several methods and stresses on communication skills through conceptual learning. So there have been various methods and approaches invented one after the other, there are always some loop holes in each teaching system. A recent entry in teaching language is the language lab.

The language laboratory is an audio-visual installation used in modern teaching methods to learn the foreign languages. The first lab was at the University of Grenoble in 1908. Until the 1990s, they were tape based systems using reels of tapes or cassettes. P.R.Leon (1962) and P.Peterson (1974) have documented the early use of audio recordings by foreign-language educators since the invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison in 1877. But the current installations are generally multimedia computers. The language lab is a technological break for imparting skills in English. The language lab offers an exclusive result-oriented and efficient approach to facilitate the English language learning process. The multimedia based language lab helps students enhance language proficiency by sharing the course materials within a second on the part of the teacher and the students involved effortlessly. The language lab is developed on the methodology of LSRW skills.

With the most advanced computer hardware performance and multimedia technology, pure software solution will become more and more common. Most of the software companies with experience in teaching software provide pure software-based language lab solutions. It contains the following advantages: Using "Function Oriented" design concept, the divided teaching method and with the user-friendly interface, the user can use it easily. By using professional sound technology with the video broadcasting function, the language lab

provides a rich environment to the learners of the language. Breaking through the traditional teaching method with the rich teaching material contents, the digital language lab enhances student's learning attitude, providing an interactive learning environment.

There are several advantages in using the Language Lab. Since it is basically auditory, the new words and their pronunciation are directly transmitted through the headphone with clear clarity. It also gives step by step guidance to the students. The lab software is more attention enthralling for the students, where they are engaged with individual systems. It even increases the pace of comprehension as students' coaching is purely based on their individual levels of study. The students can record their own voice and play back the recordings, interact with the each other and the teacher, and store the results.

By using the text, the audio and the video facilities, the students can easily be integrated with actuality in everyday situations and thus the lab increases the focus of the students. Moreover, it showers individual attention on students, as the teacher can monitor each student independently, without disturbing the others students. The students can do a periodical self-evaluation to measure the progress as well as evaluate comparing his/her language with that of the expert and this encourages independent learning. And the students certainly become skilled in the language that they are learning.

The language lab plays a key role for the learners to learn the foreign language in a happy atmosphere and in a successful way. This kind of learning activity requires proper inputs from both the teacher and the students. The efforts of both make the lab successful. But one should always remember that the computers are just an aid and not a solution. The well planned contents and practice help the learners learn the language very quickly.

Though the language lab is said to be a self-learning tool, lab needs an expert to handle the classes. And the content that is now used in the new language labs is much richer so that now the lab has not just audio, but also video, flash based games and many more. The speed and the variety of the media delivery from teacher to student and from student to teacher is much quicker now and therefore much more engaging for both the teacher and the student.

Moreover, unlike the normal classroom environment, the automated learning environment removes one's

fear and creates a happy learning situation. Learn the need: The lab fulfils the need of the learner, that is, learning the language skills in an effective way.

The Lab regulates the language through the different thoughts created in the mind of the students and provides practice in a focused setting that eliminates the feelings of self-consciousness. Indu Tripathi in "Role of Communication Labs in English Language Teaching" says, "In short, a learner can get the experience of having interaction with native speakers through the laboratory" (Web).

The students feel different when they learn in a different atmosphere. Apart from the traditional classroom, the lab creates an easy and also an interesting atmosphere, in the present world addicted to the media and the entertainment. The language lab plays a very important role in teaching, learning English, especially imparting all the skills.

Warren B. Roby in "Technology in the service of foreign Language learning: the case of the Language laboratory" emphatically feels that "Within the field of education, the language laboratory must be seen as a singular phenomenon" (Web). This singular phenomenon must be made use of by the college community. In Bishop Heber College the Language Lab there is a lot useful software to learn the English language and the students are benefited by this. The software used here emphasises on not only teaching skills but also on writing skills. Moreover students are made to listen through British English as well as American English so that they can get a glimpse of different accent. Thus students get an overall grip of the target language.

Deepika, and M.Kalaiarasan in "The Role of Language Lab in Learning English as a Second Language" feel that "...the language lab is the solution and need of the hour to learn the English language. The quality of the language proficiency will be more when they learn it from the multimedia, digital and computerised Language Lab" (Web).

Conclusion: By the high merit of its unique equipment and its unambiguous pedagogy, the Language Lab stands alone. The computer now fulfils all the need of the language educators and it gives life for many learners. With a trained expert to teach the faculties how to handle the language lab and the students in a proper way, the lab functioning will totally be a great success.

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