

The Purpose of Language Laboratories

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Abstract

Some English teachers enter the profession without receiving any formal training in teaching English language. They fail in reaching the objectives of the course due to lack of training. The teachers, who teach under graduates, particularly professional graduates, have to teach English with specific purpose where the knowledge of teaching English as a subject is not adequate. Thus, they need to undergo training in how to teach English as a language rather than a subject. Moreover teaching English in professional colleges do not entirely like teaching English in primary and secondary schools. Teaching English in professional colleges is an amalgamation of classroom teaching and language laboratory sessions. Unless the new English teachers know the importance and purpose of the laboratories in colleges, they cannot do justification to their duties. Keeping these facts in our minds, we try to present some imperative insights of the purpose and functions of the English language laboratories.

Keywords: language laboratories, language lab purpose, language labs in professional colleges

Introduction

The introduction of language laboratory into educational institutions gives a lot of support to (English) language teacher to make the student confident in acquiring an alien (English) language. Unfortunately the methods and approaches of teaching a language remain same for

schools and colleges which is the prime drawback to reaching the objectives. It is a well known fact that till the end of the high school education, English is taught as a subject but in professional colleges English is supposed to be treated and taught as a skill or language rather than a subject. English language is introduced into professional colleges with a view to improving communication skills of the professional graduates which are very essential in securing a job and sustaining in a job in the corporate world. But in reality, English teachers, who work in professional colleges, concentrate only on completing the syllabus and they think that their job is finished if they prepare the students for exams to pass. As a remedy to avoid such conventional style of teaching and learning, and to cater an innovative and creative experience of teaching and learning, language lab is introduced. So the language lab provides and creates a natural atmosphere for successful acquisition of language skills. It enhances the chances for the learners to improve their language skills by getting the native social exposure of the target language-English in the language lab by playing audio and video clips.

What is a language laboratory?

Language is not an inborn aspect and thus, an individual must acquire it from nature and the people around him. A mother tongue can be learnt consciously or unconsciously. Learning mother tongue may not be difficult task for any human being on the earth, but when it comes to learn an alien or foreign language, it seems very difficult to learn. If an alien language is not learnt so seriously or for heart's content, one need not learn it meticulously. But, when a foreign language like English is learnt for a specific purpose or aim viz. getting job in a multi-national company or to live in a country where English is the mother tongue of the people, it should be learnt properly and systematically under appropriate guidance. When it is not possible to learn the target language in its native place, a special environment must be created in which a person can hear the target language spoken by a native speaker, repeat it, compare his own language with that of the native speaker and correct his pronunciation. This process should be done on regular basis for an extent time till the learner can communicate with ease the target language. Thus, eminent educational institutions establish language laboratories with a view to prepare the young graduates, who are studying in their institutions, to face and get through the interviews conducted by multinational companies. The language laboratories not only help generating the required environment, but also facilitate the practice required for the acquisition of a language.

Language Lab is an instructional technology tool consisting of a source unit that can disseminate audio, audio/visual, videos, PCs, LCD projector, Internet and/or written materials to students at individual seats, with a wide variety of potential feedback mechanisms. Teacher computer is the Core part of the Language Lab. All features are available in Teacher Console. Connection manager ensures stable and reliable connection with the students. The system automatically notifies if any problem arise between a student system and the teacher system. The system connection manager continuously checks for new incoming connections. Student console needs to login before starting a session. Students are able to listen to files from their own library, practice and learn. The status bar displays the connection status. Whenever Teacher console gets started, the connection manager in Student console will find the teacher automatically and establishes a connection between the servers.

When a student PC gets connected with the teacher PC, it automatically reads out the lessons list from the Teacher Shared Lesson database. Whenever teacher adds a new file to the shared library, the system sends the new lesson details to student. Student can either play lessons directly from student console or they are able to download the lessons to their own local folder. Sharing lessons is the crucial part of LAN based learning systems. The teacher is able to take care of individual student i.e., Call, Chat, Transfer files, Connect/Disconnect a student from Teacher console, etc.

Teacher Console

In the present language lab, the teacher is provided with an exclusive Digital Software System which offers efficient, result oriented and foolproof means to enrich the English spoken learning process. The teacher console is the center of a language lab which enables teachers to run an impressive range of language learning exercises and activities, and support the students individually. It empowers teachers simply walk-in and teaches using any and all of their existing program materials. The teacher can add, play and even test the lessons. Teachers are able to discreetly monitor student activities even when students are working with live video content. Teacher can also create her/his own study materials with the help of advanced tools.

Student Console

Student console enables the student to listen to model pronunciations or question; repeat/answer/record the same if required, listen to his own performance and compare the same with the model for self assessment which is the key to fast learning. It enables the

learner to get effective guidance and individual attention from the teacher. It empowers students to work at their own pace and privacy. It helps students' cognize the language in a veritable context. It enables the student to master the language with ease and flow on his own.

The language laboratories are called with different names such as language resource centers, multimedia labs, centers for language study, language learning centers, interactive media centers, language and technology centers, media centers, open access centers, foreign language centers, open learning centers, open access multimedia centers, self-access centers, individualized language learning centers, independent learning centers, CALL centers/labs, world media and cultural centers, language acquisition centers, and language and computer laboratories.

Purpose of Language Laboratories

The first and far most purpose of a language laboratory is to improve communication skills in a target language- English. Communication is an exchange of information between or among persons. Communication is very essential for social interactions and man's development. Language has been used as a most important instrument of communication for thousands of centuries by human beings. Though a considerable number of alternatives are available to communicate, man, mainly, depends on and uses language to communicate his ideas, thoughts and intentions. Despite the fact that man employs language as a mode of his expression, man's usage of language is not an outstanding achievement. Even in this far advanced era man shows his ignorance and lagging in using language to full extent. Man's strict adherence to prejudice and old principles won't let him to use language freely.

Though English is not legitimately announced as an official language in India, it is used by all government departments for documentation and correspondence. English is used in the court of law for all court proceedings and delivering judgments. In India English is used in all corporate offices and other private offices in their dealings. English is used in banking both in government and private sector all over India besides the regional language. English is used in national and international trade and commerce.

Now-a-days, English communication skills play a crucial role in securing and sustaining jobs in this global era. Fluent English speakers are far in advance in securing jobs. As every trade and business is globalised, English communication skills become very important tool to the

employees those who work in any MNC. They need to deal, correspond, and negotiate with customers belonging to different nations.

If a young graduate wants to occupy a respectable position in any international organization, he must be proficient in not only in his core subjects but also in English communication skills. Presently, all the multinational companies demand for a wide range of life skills and soft skills in additions to the skills in their respective technical subjects. It is the language laboratory that provides the young graduates with all the necessary facilities to acquire the proficiency in English language. It is the primary purpose of language labs to make the learners achieve communicative competence.

It is a well known fact that learning English language is always challenge and difficult for a non-native speaker in a nation where English is not mother tongue. Learners from different cultures, who learn English as a second language, find it difficult to pronounce the English sounds fluently. The desire and need for learning English language requires something which can cater the needs of the learners in getting grip over the language. Language labs play the caterer's role successfully. To get perfection in English pronunciation, language laboratories were established in the late 1880s in the United States of America as people from all the corners of the world settled in America. Since then the language laboratories have been playing an important role in imparting skills of English language. The language lab offers exclusive result-oriented and efficient facilities to enrich the English language learning process.

The language lab plays a vital role in learning a foreign language. It provides a comfortable atmosphere in which the learner and trainer have more facilities and appliances for better learning and teaching. Both the teacher and the students' inputs are very important in this kind of learning activity. The efforts of the both make the process of learning successful. Computers and other equipment in the language lab are just teaching aids and they are not solution unto themselves. They are helpful tools in learning an alien language. The real things that help the learners learn the language very proficiently are well planned contents and their practice. Though the language lab is believed as self learning accessible, we need an expert to handle the classes.

Students enjoy learning if they are taught in a new and different atmosphere. Language lab is different from the traditional classroom and it creates an enthusiastic, encouraging

atmosphere. Language lab plays a pivotal role in learning the spoken English too. The basic proficiency in spoken English is imparted to students through the language lab.

The need for a language laboratory has been much felt in the domain of communication. The language laboratory enhances the sensibility for the sounds and rhythm of a language. The language laboratory helps the learners use technological appliances effectively to communicate. It is also helpful to groom the learners' personality.

The purpose of language labs is to provide the learners or students with the facility to gain auditory exposure to the language they are studying. They can have a direct exposure to native speakers through listening to their speeches. By using language labs, students can develop the language skills especially Listening Skills, and Speaking Skills.

The language laboratory provides the audio exposure to foreign languages. Satellite radio, Internet radio and pod casts are all available in a well established language laboratory.

The language lab provides the learners with the facilities for audio and video recordings and these help them improve their communicative skills as well as their body language.

The language lab makes the production of requisite pedagogical materials imperative, particularly in the case of teaching of languages.

The language lab is the perfect place to organize seminars and workshops and various aspects of educational technology, educational software, production techniques dubbing etc.

A language lab is generally used for two purposes: the primary purpose in which linguistic expressions are learnt and practiced and secondary purpose in which communication expressions are learnt and practiced.

It gives freedom to the learners to express their ups and downs freely without any inhibitions in the process of language learning.

In the globalised world, an employee in an organization has to interact with the world. Hence he needs to know the right pronunciation of the words of the target language. Only language labs help him become aware of the right pronunciation as it has an instructor to explain the techniques to understand certain linguistic functions.

Primary Purpose of Language Lab

The primary function of language lab is to provide the students with all necessary facilities to learn and practice linguistic expressions: grammar, structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation, word accent, stress, tone and intonation etc. The language laboratories which

were in use before the 1960s could serve only the primary purpose. The teaching aids that were available in those labs were sufficient only to be useful for practice in listening and sound production as well as practice with grammatical structure. M. Bygate explains it well: *...when tape recorder and language laboratories gradually came into existence in the 1950s, they were mainly used for pronunciation, grammar and translation practice...* (M. Bygate 15)

Some of the salient features of the language laboratory, in which linguistic expressions are learnt and practiced, are given below:

1. It is a tool designed for learning and/ or teaching any language.
2. It helps the learner learn pronunciation, accent, stress and all other aspects of the language.
3. It helps the learner acquire the language quickly and easily by providing phonology of the target language.
4. It helps in 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.
5. It helps in maintaining good linguistic competence- through accuracy in grammar, Pronunciation and Vocabulary.
6. It develops pragmatic competence, to understand the grammatical form, function and scale of formality.
7. It enriches the discourse competence, to prepare the learner to be able to produce contextualized written text and speech.
8. It helps the learner acquire strategic competence to use both spoken & written language to use in a wide range of communication strategies.

Secondary Purpose of Language Lab

Today, the thought of language lab is widening since its functions are ever increasing. Once, language lab was meant for learning an alien language and its complexities; pronunciation, structure and other rules. But now a days the functions of language learning are extended as to use it for other purposes than linguistic issues. If the language lab is used to the fullest extent, it can be used not only for learning language related issues, but also for conducting numerous activities for training to the learners. The present language lab offers an extensive and growing range of services to users. Most of the language lab services relate to offering a

variety of modes of learning foreign languages and developing a corresponding assortment of materials for such languages. Another area that modern language lab is widening pertains to innovation and development. Modern language lab enables the learners to construct new ideas and so take control over their own learning or drill and repeat. Antich de Leon, R. et al. aptly point out: *The language laboratory is very helpful in teaching advanced students, especially people who are focusing on a certain field of the language.* (Antich de Leon 176)

Language lab provides the learners with a platform conducting a lot of training programs; group discussions, presentations, personal interviews, debates, role plays, JAMs, etc.

With the help of computers and other technological tools available in the language lab, the learners can sharpen their intellectual capability, enhance creativity, and prune their leadership skills.

Language lab helps the learners develop their confidence level and improve competence.

Language laboratory enables the students to get training in market-oriented skills; communication skills, negotiation skills and other life and soft skills.

Language lab helps in grooming the talents of the multitude of students.

Language lab provides a common platform for the student of various disciplines, which they can use to develop their skills and their careers.

Some Suggestions

The teacher first has to go through the contents and material those are installed or incorporated in the language lab or else the teacher himself can design the syllabus along with audio and video files as he perfectly knows the standards and the requirements of his learners in the acquisition of skills of alien language. He may also make use of Live and recorded audio and video clippings related to debates, elusive speeches and vocabulary used by eminent speakers from English news channels.

Conclusion

It is a welcoming sign regarding language labs as many software companies concentrate on designing and producing in an attractive and in a proper way to make the language lab as a complete house for learning English language.

Language teacher should be in a position to analyze the communication in terms of way of expression and the grammar used by the learner whether it is acceptable or sensible or comprehensive.

Learners come from towns and cities may have certain language abilities. But learners from rural areas may not. So for the learners from rural areas, language lab is the right place for successful acquisition of alien language and the students must have adequate computer skills to operate the particular software related to language learning in the language laboratory. Both the language teacher and the language learner should play their individual roles beyond their levels in the process of teaching and learning.

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