

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LABORATORY - CHALLENGES VS. OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT:

Language Laboratory is a very popular technical innovation. It is derived from America, although its use has gained ground rapidly in the United Kingdom in 1960. Language laboratory affords opportunity for the students to hear the language spoken by a speaker and to practice speaking the language themselves. Traditional language teaching does not allow much time for oral and auditory experience and in this respect, the language laboratory is an innovative technique.

KEYWORDS:

Language, Technical Innovation, Language Laboratory.

INTRODUCTION

The language laboratory is a supporting device of teaching and learning like other audio-visual aids. The Language Laboratory is a special classroom for language teaching. This includes three sections,

1. Teaching equipments, audio-visual apparatus, tape recorders, programmed instruction material, Computer, Internet, Net work display and Teachers Module.
2. It is like a workshop for preparing the apparatus of laboratory and preparing instructional material.
3. It is a class room to give individual attention on the students.

All these sections have separate activities related to language laboratory, but third section is the most important. It has the following objectives:

1. To develop reading skills or pronunciation
2. To develop speaking skills and pronunciation
3. To develop listening skills.
4. To develop comprehension ability
5. To facilitate individual in variation in language learning.



Figure 1. Language Laboratory



Figure 2. Lang. Laboratory Diagram



Figure 3. Broadcast Panel Board



Figure 4. Teacher's Console

MERITS OF LANGUAGE LABORATORY

As we discussed in the abstract 'Comfortable Classroom Climate', language laboratory method is adopted in schools. This method is preferred because,

1. Each student is connected with teacher console by a separate computer. So there is no question of peer pressure.
2. Programmed material is used for students.
3. Students are allowed to learn on their own pace. There is hurry – burry.
4. Student's doubts are clarified by teacher on one- to – one basis. So there is no element of shyness which is a dominant aspect in open classroom teaching (Gowrishankar, 2004).
5. Since doubts are clarified one-to-one through on-line, the learning of other students never gets disturbed.
6. There is full of freedom and less psychological threats when compared to conventional class room.

Though Language Laboratory gives good and dynamic results, there are plenty of problems, barriers and bottlenecks in establishing, using, maintaining and over all functioning. They are as follows,

1. Administrative crisis
2. Problems in organising.
3. Lack of expertise - Teachers and Instructors as well. (Ashby, 1992)
4. Stress on using technical gadgets.
5. No clarity in learning methods.
6. No competitive Syllabus and Lessons
7. Alienated language style in speaking modules.
8. No on-line test is possible – only off-line test is possible.

1. ADMINISTRATIVE CRISIS

This is an initial level issue to begin with the purchase of computer, its specifications, Operating systems and its functioning aspects and the requirement of our students. So the administration has to juggle these features so that a good purposive language lab can be established.

2. PROBLEMS IN ORGANISING

This happens in establishing the lab. This involve space required against the specification, electricity points, its low voltage and High voltage aspects, positing an UPS (Uninterrupted Power Supplier), Networking the computers, remodelling the lab with false sealing and air conditioners. Malfunctioning of any one of these aspects will result in the successful close of the language laboratory.

3. LACK OF EXPERTISE – TEACHERS AND INSTRUCTORS

Training is an important activity in skills based jobs. One cannot find a computer person in language labs to trouble shoot the problems. Faculty members with little exposure are given in charge to run the show. There is no training given by experts to utilise the computer lab in an efficacious manner.

4. STRESS ON USING TECHNICAL GADGETS

As innocence as well as ignorance on computers, the said in charge teachers are highly stressed. The job starts from switching on UPS, Computers to network buttons. Mere malfunctioning of anything causes stress. In addition to that there are other expected jobs such as virus scan, installing software, watch over students not use their USBs (Pen drive) causes much job stress for the teachers.

5. NO CLARITY IN LEARNING METHODS

Students are given computers to use the particular software or lesson package. There is a very chance that they can get in to any module and work on it. This spoils the purpose and brings down the integrity of the class. Teacher lives with a hope that all the students are at the same module but in reality students are diverted by many aspects.

6. NO COMPETITIVE SYLLABUS AND LESSONS

Teachers have no control over this aspect. Colleges have to buy the software and lesson packages from outside market. Government makes centralised purchase of computers and has no 'say' in buying software which is very costly affair. Self financing colleges have never under gone this problem because they blink what to do with money, where as Government colleges blink what to do for money. Due to this constraint, Government colleges are forced to buy some sub-standard software which contains some animations and audio files get integrated.

7. ALIENATED LANGUAGE STYLE IN SPEAKING MODULES

In the said software and lesson package, Native speaker voice is used. Our students enjoy this and do not learn anything out of this. Problem is due to the accent and dialect. We cannot expect Madurai students to understand Melbourne accent. This will cause only the inferiority complex in them. There is software with neutralised voice which can be used.

8. NO ON-LINE TEST IS POSSIBLE – ONLY OFF-LINE TEST

In an educational environment, Both Teaching and Testing are important. Speaking about the testing, there is no possibility of on-line test available in the lesson packages supplied by the vendors. So teacher has to teach through computer and conduct a paper test which increases the workload of the teachers. If the lesson packages are designed with on-line test facility, teachers can just take a print out and publish results on the session itself.

SUGGESTIONS TO TACKLE THIS PROBLEM

The above said problems are very common in the colleges possessing language laboratory. At the same time we should utilise it in an efficacious manner. The following are the suggestions for smooth functioning of the Language laboratory.

1. Government should constitute a committee comprising English Language experts and Computer Science Experts to design a software and lesson package which is suitable for Tamilnadu student's skill level.
2. This software should be given to mass samples and Pilot study report should be prepared.
3. This report should be followed by the committee to carry some changes in terms of omission and

commission.

4.This software should be installed in the computer which can be used by the students.

5.In a language lab, a computer instructor (PGDCA or Diploma in Computer Science) must be appointed to support the language lab activities. A year wise training must be given to these instructors to update the advancement in the subject.

6.English Language teachers with thriving computer knowledge should be given as in charge of labs. They must be given training before the commencement of the programme so that they can handle the situation in an effective manner.

7.Many software companies (such as, Sutherlands, Cognizant and Infosys) train our English Professors at college level for soft skills. Government may request these companies to include Language Lab modules so that this hand on experience will give preferred results.

CONCLUSION

Any innovation which speeds up the process of learning of our students must be brought in to the class. Before that we the teachers should know how to use it in a professional way. No Education Technology tools can replace a resourceful teacher but at the same time working knowledge of these tools will make the teaching learning process not only interesting but also enjoyable. Right tool in the Right Teacher's hand will make the learning process permanent one.

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