

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LANGUAGE LABORATORIES IN
TEACHING/LEARNING ENGLISH COMMUNICATION:
A STUDY IN INDIAN CONTEXT**

DR. SAKSHI

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,

DEPT. OF HUMANITIES (DIT UNIVERSITY)

UTTARAKHAND

VINAY SEMWAL

HEAD IT DEPARTMENT

SHUBHARTI GROUP OF INSTITUTION DEHRADUN

UTTARAKHAND

ABSTRACT: *The most urgent need of the hour is for students to develop clarity, confidence and creativity in articulating their views. Every year millions of students graduate for colleges across India. Despite sound training in their respective fields, they often have trouble finding suitable placements, or face problems in their jobs once they are placed, due to poor English language communication skills. This is a particular serious issue for students in technical fields of study. This paper will explore the study about language labs existence in teaching/learning English language. The English language communication skills laboratories course is a great booster for the students. Language labs focus particularly to the needs of both learners and teachers. It provides the much needed help and assistance to both the students and faculty members. Language lab provides a platform where teachers can try experiments on themselves and the learners as well. We, the teachers of the English language, feel the need to strengthen the teaching process so we can use the English language laboratory as a new pedagogical tool to develop and hone the communication skills of the students. Thus the present study shows and analyzes the information on the use of language laboratory to promote English Language Teaching and learning.*

KEYWORDS: - CALL, Communication, Language laboratories, Technology, Foreign Language, Second Language

INTRODUCTION: If we go by census, nearly 60 percent of today's world population is multilingual. It is completely based on contemporary and historical perspective. Bilingualism and multilingualism is not an exception but a trend today. Learning foreign language has been an important practical concern from ages. Learning/Teaching foreign language has now become more important than ever before. In this context English language Learning/teaching leads the other languages. In today's scenario English is world's most widely studied foreign language. The importance of English Language cannot be overstressed. It is the official language of 63 countries and unofficial second language in many countries. English is the pre dominant language of international commerce.

Today's ultra-modern competitive corporate world expects communicative skills and perfect proficiency in English language. A competitor is required to possess high level of communication skills to earn a position in the global market. To achieve success Good communication skills are must now-a-days. Without it a professional can never achieve the desired goal. The students who fail to find a suitable placement after completions of their technical studies are very much dependent on their knowledge efficiently and their ability to express themselves. According to Dr. Thiruvassagam, the Vice-Chancellor of Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, "personality development and communication skills are equally important for students in finding respectable jobs in addition to their academic records" (The Hindu, 25/09/06). In any profession, possessing good communication skills is deemed

advantageous as it helps in reaching out to most people successfully. Having command over English is must for the students who want to climb the stairs of success and dream a foreign placement.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING/LEARNING IN INDIA

English is the global lingua franca and English in the Indian context is a form of cultural capitalism at its purest. Though there is much hype of English in India, its quality in teaching and learning is a matter of grave concern. English is the language of higher education in India. However, David Graddol points out, without English medium root at the school level, one ends up with absolutely not good enough English. (*An Interview with David Graddol, Author English Next India*). In a country like India, it has become essential to be able to communicate in English if one wants to further his/her career. Though the study of English in India began as a historical accident even today it continues to be a language of intellection and communication in business, technical, science, professional and political world. English is a common link language in the country, and is enjoying the status of both as a Second Language (ESL) or as Foreign Language (EFL). Thus; in present scenario English language has become spine for every Indian student. The English teaching/learning role goes on changing from colonial India up to now,

“In colonial India, language studies had been based on literature (Kavya) and grammar (Vayakran). The English teaching was mainly teaching literary texts. ‘Shakespeare’ and ‘Nesfield’ become the ‘two pillars of English Education in India.’ The textual (literary) interpretations were supported by excessive teaching of grammar. Learning was preceded by oral practice—memorization,

recitations and revelation. The ‘Grammar-Translation’ method was employed in Indian classrooms.” Meenakshi p.179

English language learning/teaching for educational purpose are fraught with difficult challenges in India, as English is an alien language for Indian students and they fail to learn correct English. Their mother tongue influence (MTI) always remains with them and it creates a problem for them. Students from various cultures feel hard to learn English and its proficiency. Though our students fare well in their exams, in real life they are left fumbling for words and speak incorrect English. Learning any language is completely different from learning a subject. It is not about mugging up and then sitting up in any examination. Merely passing an exam and getting a degree is of no use until one doesn't master the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. These four skills have to be practiced to get mastery over English language. The thirst of English language learning needs some solution.

India's present educational system provides laboratories only to those who studied science. Only the science students have practical work, which is undertaken in a laboratory. On the other side arts students do not have practical works so no laboratories are there for them. Hence, language laboratory for learning English language is just a whole new concept for Indian students. This is quite different from western countries because language labs are in practice there for quite a long time. It is very common in foreign countries for children to enrich their learning language experiences in the laboratory. With globalization, there has been a rise in demand for gaining command over the English language and communication Skills. With the growing demand for excellent communication skills, there have been explorations in the area of technology to meet this purpose and as a result there are various courses to build skills in the English language and nearly all these courses draw attention to providing a language laboratory.

Information technology has greatly influenced the education and society in India also, so due to its impact multimedia teaching method has been used in school/college/university for learning and teaching English language. The concept of language learning through laboratories has now arrived in India and spreading slowly in various Institutes. Break through the traditional teaching method with the rich teaching material contents, the digital language lab motivates student's learning attitude, providing an interactive learning environment. The ever advancing science and technology now has provided a number of tools and products such as microphones and wireless headsets, the interactive response pad, digital multimedia control, etc. to help the learners and teachers in language learning process. These innovative gadgets not only enhance language teaching but also make learning interesting one and help the teacher in class room grading. These products also provide students an option of distance learning. It has contributed a lot to higher teaching quality. Now a days Chalk and Talk teaching method is not enough to teach English effectively.

With the view of improving and extending lifelong language and making English language teaching more effectively, language lab has become a valuable and obviously challenging trend in the autonomy delegated to higher professional educational institutions. The language lab is a technological break for imparting skills in English. The language lab offers an exclusive result oriented and efficient to enrich the English language learning process. Having a good command over the language with accuracy and clarity makes a person being effective and efficient communicator and for this the process and method of learning that language matters a lot. Up to what level one has knowledge of a language depends on how he/she learn it. So language labs increase the chances to learn a language efficiently. Break through the traditional

teaching method with the rich teaching material contents, the digital language lab motivates student's learning attitude, providing an interactive learning environment.

LANGUAGE LABORATORY:

1. Introduction:

Language labs are chiefly used in schools, colleges and universities. They are sometimes also referred to as language resource centres, multimedia labs, centres for language study, language learning centres, interactive media centres, language and technology centres, media centres, open access centres, foreign language centres, open learning centres, open access multimedia centres, self-access centres, individualised language learning centres, independent learning centres, CALL centres/labs, world media and cultural centres, language acquisition centres, and language and computer laboratories.

“The language laboratory is an audio or audio-visual installation used as an aid in modern language teaching. They can be found, amongst other places, in schools, universities, and academies. Perhaps the first lab was at the University of Grenoble in 1908.^{[1][2]} In the 1950s up until the 1990s, they were tape-based systems using reel or (latterly) cassette. Current installations are generally multimedia PCs. The original language labs are now very outdated. They allowed a teacher to listen to and manage student audio via a hard-wired analogue tape deck based systems with 'sound booths' in fixed locations.”(Wikipedia)

The most primitive or basic form of language lab was Conventional Laboratory. To teach the students this lab includes a tape recorder and a few audio cassettes of language. Here the learners try to learn the pronunciation only by listening the given content of tap. As it has a

normal classroom surrounding, distractions are possible. This kind of labs is no longer in use now-a-days. Than some modified version come in existence in the form of Lingua Phone Laboratory nothing but a little improvisation of conventional type of lab, this lab also occupied with features same as conventional laboratory except that now headphones are provided to the Learners to listen to the audiocassettes being played by the teacher. It provides some more clarity and help to avoid distractions than the primitive form of labs. Recently a modern form of this laboratory has become popular with an electronic device that has two functions. Firstly it uses a normal cassette player along with a repeater to record one's voice and then play it for comparison. Then invention of technically advanced Computer-Assisted Language Lab has been done for the language learners. CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) is a computer based learning program that uses the computer and internet to teach language learning. The 1 course materials are already fed into the system and are displayed as per the schedule and according to the features available in the computer. Labs with internet facilities attached computers are called Web Assisted Language Laboratories (WALL) Multimedia assisted language learning (MALL). There is a gradual development of CALL, and this development has been divided into three categories: Behavioristic CALL, Communicative CALL and Integrative CALL (Barson & Debski, 1996). Though the development of CALL has been gradual, its acceptance has come slowly and unevenly. Understanding the scope of CALL is made complicated by the constant advancements in hardware and software and an increase in computer literacy among both teachers and learners. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is a new way of learning which adds to the modern educational technology. It has given an outstanding result by combining educational theories with multi-media techniques. Computer based teaching and learning of language is entered in the field of education. Due to its

unavoidable success, it is now used in classrooms of various colleges to teach and learn English language. It creates a pleasant communication environment, motivates students to learn English, and gives them enthusiasm to learn in new environment, construct their organizational knowledge, stimulate students' and cultivate their cross-culture awareness and ability. Above all, it also adds and improves English teaching efficiency. Provides unique resources, enlarges the teaching capacity in classroom, a positive role in the respects of, opening study outlets, the method of both teaching and learning is improved, develops students imaginative power and creativity and provides teachers the best chance to raise their level and standard of teaching. Multimedia and Network has now added a whole new dimension in Teaching/learning Mode. This not only provide friendly and interactive environment but also some of the best graphics, lovely pictures, text, pleasant audio sounds, colorful tableaus and video stimulate students' senses. In network environment, interaction between teachers and students, students and students, students and computers, is becoming more plentiful.

Three decades ago, CALL would have been constrained to on-screen written exercises with simple graphics. Currently, CALL interactions are likely to include sounds, animation, video and communication over local area networks, e-mails and internet chat lines.

“Technology cannot be goal in itself. However, a holistic integration of technology in teaching is the need of the hour” - Mini Joseph Nothing succeeds like success. This phrase goes well with technology which has surpassed everything in its progress. Sophistication in computer technology has made it available as a necessary tool for learning and developing the skills of oral and written interactions, commonly referred to as “Computer Assisted Language Learning” (CALL). This new learning of language, especially for non-native learners of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) is fast gaining acceptance globally and

the results are quite encouraging. The best part is that it is learner centric rather than teacher centric. Modern language labs offer a wide range of language-learning services and facilities; they therefore require developed administration and state-of-the-art technical infrastructure. Some modern language labs are also involved in innovative research, training services and informational services.

2. LANGUAGE-LAB FACILITIES

Modern language labs offer an extensive and growing range of services to users. Most of the services relate to offering a variety of modes of learning foreign languages and developing a corresponding assortment of materials for such languages. As a result, such language labs often have a developed administrative and state-of-the-art technical infrastructure. Another area that modern language labs are widening pertains to innovation and development. The Center for Language Study at Yale University for instance engages in professional development, provides funding for research or attempts to strengthen language programs taught at the University. The Cambridge University Language Centre on their research and development e-link maintains that the “language learning and teaching activities of the Language Centre are underpinned and informed by relevant research in second language acquisition and educational technology”. Princeton University Language Resource Center receives support from the Educational Technologies Center and so builds and maintains tools for teaching and research.

3. LANGUAGE-LEARNING MATERIALS’ RELATED

Language labs offer a broad range of learning materials and modes of language learning. This range includes the use of: CDRoms, English newspapers, general language links for students, video conferencing, MP3s , language learning centre blog, multimedia library, materials catalogue, self-access and independent learning, language podcasts, self-access services, film,

video and digital media, audio materials listing, international television broadcasts. Language labs also usually offer a variety of online language links; the following labs offer a wide range of Internet language links: University of Colorado-Boulder, Indiana University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, University of Houston, Washington University, John Hopkins University, Cambridge University, Oxford University, Michigan State University, Princeton University, Ohio ESL, Rice University, Yamada Centre.

4. ADVANTAGES OF TEACHING/LEARNING THROUGH LANGUAGE LAB

There are a lot of advantages of learning/teaching in language lab:

1. Any language can be learned/taught with the help of such labs. The lab is fully interactive with teacher to learner, learner to teacher and learner to learner interactions.
2. Teachers can address all learners at a time or to a specific learner. A learner can individually communicate with the teacher to ask a question or to clarify a doubt. Intra-class communication is done in the target language.
3. Language labs create equal opportunity for each student to hear and to be heard by instructor. Since all the computers are interconnected in the language lab all the student get equal chance to seek the attention of the teacher irrespective of where they are seated.
4. Volume and speed of the course can be well adjusted as per by the comfort of student. He/She can even refer back to it wherever needed.
5. It helps students to learn pronunciation, stress accent, intonation, rhythm, and all other basics of the phonetics of a language. It is the best method to learn phonetics.

6. The learners have freedom to record and play back their own voice recordings, assess them and store it and then re-play it whenever needed. They can perform personal assessments, interact with teacher and fellow students in condition of any doubt.
7. Audio files can also be transferred to student terminal for on-line listening. Option like transcribing the audio material to cross check the effectiveness of their listening can also be given.
8. Introduction of earphone/headphone/microphone provides a student his/her privacy that creates a better environment for their speaking practice with-out hesitation.
9. The students can also do a periodical self-evaluation to measure the progress as well as evaluate his/her language with that of the expert.
10. The Lab software is more attention enthralling for the students, where they are engaged with individual systems.
11. The language laboratory also provides the facilities to conduct paperless examinations and online course.
12. Multimedia Language lab encourages independent learning because students can access to resources beyond the limits of timetable.

The significance of language learning can clearly notice by this statement:

“A persistent theme in the literature is the extent to which ICT can make the learning experience more personalised, more targeted at the needs of the individual learner. Combinations of technology and applications give greater choice in relation to what, when and where to study, selecting according to interests, learning styles and preferences and need. Such systems can give the

pupil more autonomy and independence with regard to learning and a range of sources to draw on. This can be unsettling for some teachers and may well change the dynamics of the pupil-teacher relationship. There is little in the literature on the potential impact on relationships in the classroom as schools develop e-capability and use ICT to support the learning process more widely.” (Condie and Munro 2007: 6-7)

5. STUDY REPORT

A study was done on 110 students at NIT Uttarakhand to know the response of the students about learning English language through language lab. As language lab is currently established three. A software called ‘Sanako-Study 2012’ is installed in the lab and it links all the students’ pc to a single tutor pc. There is a tutor screen for the teacher to operate the whole class. Tutor has all the control related to students study material. A number of tasks are given to students to perform in language lab. Sanako has also provides a software wholly for the students called ‘Solo’. A close-ended questionnaire supplied with specification was administered. The respondents were the students from the first year of study at the following departments: Computer Science Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Electronic Engineering. The students are having language lab once in a week but with the data generated through the study it come into light that 40% of students want at least two labs a week where nearly same percentage (44%) of students strongly disagree with language learning having one lab a week; they want at least three labs a week for better improvement. Besides, there are few students (16%) who want one lab a week. Most significantly, there is no one who does not want to use language lab. Most of the students are from Hindi background so they have a great desire to improve their language so they insist to increase the number of labs in a week because they

feel the need of practical skill and knowledge in English language and communication through the target language. Majority of the students use multimedia aids and software in the lab. Projector for watching English movies and video clips is ranked second whereas internet and web based lessons are used by very less percentage of the students. Students mostly show interest in enhancing their listening and speaking skills so they like to listen audio clips and after listening they repeat the session and record their own voice. For improving their listening skill many students wants to use different forms of conversing and conferencing. Audio and visual products play an ineffable role in teaching/learning process of English language. The collected data shows that majority of students like the tasks related to more and more professional speaking skill (job interviews, debates, group discussions, oral presentations, real-life conversations etc.). Some students prefer role plays or games. Activities related to professional and academic purpose are mostly expected by the learners from the teachers. Each exercise has performed at least twice and the students appraised their development. After the students finish the performance twice in the laboratory, they go back to the necessary information given to them and improve their ability to perform continuously. When they are asked how many difference they see in the roles of teachers and students when they are in a language lab with a different teaching environment from traditional classroom? They feel that the role of learners and teacher move on changing. The teacher takes up the role of a coach and has been shared with the computer and students can evaluate themselves to some extent without the help of teacher. According to the students they feel different when they learn in different atmosphere. Apart from the traditional classroom, lab creates an easy atmosphere. Almost every student is happy with this new modern computer technology learning and looks forward in this direction as it will be beneficial in the coming future to cope with the fast growing world.

CONCLUSION: It is concluded 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 computerized Language Lab. We need some trained expert to teach the faculties to know how to handle the language lab and the students in a proper way. Addressing to the board of studies for English the vice-chancellor of Bharathiar University has requested in his speech to reduce the conventional teaching of English prose and poetry, and has allocated 50% of the teaching time for communicative English (The Hindu, 11/09/06). Even recently Language Lab is not used in every institutes/colleges/universities in India but the language lab setup is growing fast as every educational center knows the need for language lab so they are trying to go forward in this direction. However, language lab should not replace the classical method of language teaching. It supplements the basic training so every Indian institute should setup a language lab to benefit their students and teachers.

REFERENCES:-

An Interview with David Graddol, Author English Next India.(2010)..

<<http://vimeo.com/10456494>>. Accessed 8 Feb. 2013.

Barson, J., Debski, R. (1996): *Calling Back CALL*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.

"Bharathiar University Plans Syllabus Revision", *The Hindu*. Coimbatore: p.4., 11/9/06.

Condie, R., Munro, B. *Impact of ICT in Schools - A Landscape Review*. Coventry Becta web.

[http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=28221&page=1835\(2007\)](http://publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=28221&page=1835(2007)). Accessed
10 May 10, 2013

"Colleges should have Language Laboratory on Campus", *The Hindu*. Coimbatore: p. 4.,
25/9/06.

Frayser, D. (2005) "Creating a New World of Learning Possibilities through Instructional
Technology". Aahetlt Information.

Language lab From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_lab

Accessed 10 May 10, 2013

Raman Meenakshi. (2013): *English Language Teaching*. Atlantic Publilcation and Distributors,
New Delhi.

Richards Jack C. (1994): *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge
Language Education.

Richards Jack C., and Theodore s. Rodgers. (2012): *Approaches and Methods in Language
Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Singh R.P. (2010): *English Language Teaching Skills and Techniques*. Aadi publication, Jaipur
India.