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### Prospects of Learning English Language through Language Lab

#### Abstract:

Integration of technology in education has opened new horizons of learning to which English Language learning is no exception. From LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading & Writing)-linguistic skills to accent training, from simulators to self-instructed exercises, modern language labs have quantified the learning outcomes. The very concept of language lab began with the use of audio-cassettes and now a whole range of software with required hardware in a given setup complements the learning of language to its optimal desired outcomes. Language lab can cater to the needs of different types of learners in a better way. The review of the experiments conducted to ensure judicious use of technology in language lab justify the outcome based learning of English language. This article forms a part of the researcher's Ph.D. thesis titled 'English Language Coaching Centers –A Case Study with Special Reference to Ballari District' and reviews the prospects of Language Lab in learning of English language.

Key words: Language Lab, English Language learning, LSRW skills,

## Introduction

In this digital era where technology is at its boom with feather touch applications the whole world is getting on the bandwagon of smart gadgets for all purposes. No subject under the Sun is left unexplored. As such the pedagogy and andragogy arena of learner centered approach as well has witnessed technological transformation. It has enhanced the possibilities of better outcomes when compared to the traditional method of teaching. It gives a technological tinge to everything worth pondering and kindles creativity, imagination and innovation. May that be in the academia or in a layman's point of view, technological aid has left human minds bamboozled provoking its extreme outcomes. Like pure and applied sciences have both theory and practical aspects of study, aspects of language are dealt identically. And learning of English language is aided with multimedia language lab. It includes various graded modules to train the learner in the focused areas of language. Here is an attempt to review the prospects of learning English language through Language lab.

## Language Laboratory

With the advent of affordable multimedia and computers, the sphere of English language learning through traditional methods of chalk and talk, lecture method, Audio-Visual method became bleak. Language lab adheres to the need of linguistic development through the integration of Communication and Technological (ICT) inputs. The language laboratory is an audio or audio-visual installation used as an aid in modern language teaching. They can be found in the sphere of both formal and informal education; in schools, colleges, universities, academies and English language coaching centers (spoken English institutes) too.

## History of Language Lab

The history of the language laboratory dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. As documented by Leon(1962)and Peterson (1974), foreign-language educators used audio recordings since the invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison in 1877. By 1893 there were commercial record sets available for Spanish and English as a foreign language. In fact the first language lab was established at the University of Grenoble in 1908 (Léon, 1962; Peterson, 1974; & Saettler, 1990, p. 187). Hence the evidence of a laboratory arrangement of phonographic equipment (Leon, 1962) was found only in 1908. By this it means a dedicated facility for foreign-lnguage study. This lab was at the university of Granoble in France. An

American, Frank C. Chalfant, who studied there in the summer of 1909, appears to have been the one who brought the idea to America. He installed a “phonetics laboratory” at Washington State College in Pullman during the 1911-1912 academic year. Students could listen via networked earphones. This lab also had a phonograph-recording machine for students to compare their pronunciation with the native-speaker models. This was followed by other innovations in audio technology such as magnetic tape and digital media (Delcolque, et al, 2000). Developments over 6 decades refined the outlook of the concept of language lab. Hence the 1960s era was considered to be the golden period of the language laboratory that led to an accelerated inclination in the number of facilities available to facilitate language learning. Eventually by 1962, there was a massive increase in the number of labs at the secondary level (Hocking, 1967) in The Soviet Union. Most of these were in medium-to-large school districts (Godfrey, 1967). To be precise, in 1962, there were more than 900 labs in higher education (Hocking, 1967). Although they did not cite a source for their information, Keck and Smith (1972, p. 5) claim that by mid-decade, an estimated 10,000 language laboratories had been installed in secondary schools and 4,000 more could be found in institutions of higher learning”. Finally, Parker (1960, pp. v-viii) wrote about the motivation for language laboratory in conferences. He stated that foreign language teachers feel themselves suddenly involved in a technological revolution, suddenly chin-deep in a tide of new demands upon their competencies, and they seek, some almost frantically, enlightenment and practical help.

It is clearly justified that the concept of Language lab evolved in lieu of the advancements in the field of educational technology, the programmed instruction movement and the foreign language profession. Books by Carroll(1962), Marty (1962. Pp.52-53) and Grittner (1969) provide further evidence of the impact of developments in the field of technology and programmed instruction by foreign language educators especially of audio cassette (Dodge, 1968, pp. 331-335).

A mention could be made of famous movie ‘My Fair Lady’ based on George Barnard Shaw’s novel Pygmalion. In this movie, Professor Higgins transforms a flower selling girl into a lady of the Elite through his Language Laboratory equipped with various kinds of machines. This well illustrated instance of using machines in facilitating language learning gives us an exact picture of how the very concept evolved. In the 1950s up until the 1990s, they were tape-based systems using reel to 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.

From such inception-trials to the present day multimedia digital language lab, the concept has been continuously reviewed under the research and development by various eminent individuals and organizations. Both open access and high end software are available in the market. Commercially, reputed brands have launched the language lab software that requires a fixed configuration to function to its optimal level. With the freebies of data these days all networks support the software solutions on language lab. With the growing number of the internet users of all age groups the use of language lab notion is further customized according to the need and requirement of individuals and organizations. From Microsoft operating systems to the online browsers, the accessibility and developments in the field of the language labs are apparent.

#### Contemporary language labs

Modern Language labs are equipped with multimedia facility. Mentor's server connected individual Computers with headphone and mike facility are in vogue. Mentor's console is connected with students console through LAN. Every learner has a separate workstation (Computer) and can be level specific. Supporting the required infrastructure there is launch of variety of need based software solutions to be installed in Language lab at various levels. Both Open source and commercially available Language lab software are being implemented in teaching of English language in formal education scenario. The modules provide simulated learning for LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) skills for level specific pedagogy.

#### Language Labs in Academia

Most of the reputed universities, colleges and schools are equipped with language laboratories. Establishing a language laboratory is an expensive endeavor though, made mandatory by the regulating authorities. "The States will establish state of the art, appropriate, cost effective and adequate ICT and other enabling infrastructure in all secondary schools. Based on the size of the school, needs of the ICT programme and time-sharing possibilities, States will define an optimum ICT infrastructure in each school. Not more than two students will work at a computer access point at a given time. At least one printer, scanner, projector, digital camera, audio recorders and such other devices will be part

of the infrastructure” (National Policy on ICT in School Education, 2012). In addition to this, pertaining to collegiate UG, PG and technical education, NAAC, UGC and AICTE have made the establishment of Language lab mandatory for both Technical and non-technical institutes (Polytechnics and Engineering Colleges) to avail the benefits of Accreditations (NBA- National Board of Accreditation, NAAC- National Assessment and Accreditation Council). Under the backdrop of the above discussion, let’s move to an important aspect the present article. Here is an instance of empirical perspective of learning English Language and Literature through Technology.

#### Advantages of Language Lab

Compared to the traditional methods of teaching English language, Language lab is advantageous. Following is the discussion on advantages of the language lab focusing on individual differences among the learners.

#### Supplements English Language learning effectively to different types of learners

Considering the fact of individual difference in a language learning context, let’s see how a judicious use of language lab for learning English language can prove to be effective. Based on the cognitive learning styles of the learners, they can be divided into four categories:

- a. Visual learner
- b. Auditory learner
- c. Reading/Writing learner and
- d. Kinesthetic learner

As such the receptivity, perception and pace of acquisition of language differs from person to person. And language lab offers multi dimensional possibilities to cater to the needs of all types of learners.

Visual learners seek visual inputs and if provided they support their better retention of acquired linguistic items. They have strong inclination toward visual strength boosters. They look for demonstrations. For them descriptive learning is at ease. They memorise words by sight and often remember faces of people rather than their names. They are fast paced imaginers. They organize thoughts well and present them systematically. Videos supplement them to pick complex details in learning. But the problem of these learners is they get easily distracted by silliest of the stimulus in their learning atmosphere. In traditional English class, these learners were sidetracked. Under the constraint of syllabi, curricula and prescribed textbooks these learners used to be marginal sufferers. But with the language lab they have

ample of opportunities to gratify their thirst of visual provokers. A Chinese proverb says, 'One picture is equal to 2000 words'. Language lab exercises have it all; images, charts, videos, graphs and are interactive inter-phases to stimulate learner's autonomy in learning and retaining the language acquisition. As the visual learners are good observers, they can even notice the colour and other minute details. As noted by Dr. Ramji Dass Wadhwa, "A survey of the development of educational practice and procedures reveals that the use of audio-visual aids, or multi-sensory aids, has always been an integral part of good education." (Wadhwa R 136)

Audio learners have a strong sense of listening and are auditory learners. They enjoy listening and hence retain it for a longer time. They perform better in role play and other oral activities. Unlike the attribute of Visual learners, auditory learners often remember names but forget faces. They inhibit problem solving attitude and hence look forward to do so by means of talk. Language lab can help them the best by means of providing listening practice. Dual track digital headphones help them in both listening consciously and learning language items through audio. They can even record their own voice and later listen to rectify their pronunciation or accent errors. Spoken element is also enhanced here. They can make the best use of 'Audio Broadcast' and make learning effective. To feed the demands of 'Auditory learners', the facilitators can replace reading comprehension exercises with listening comprehension.

Reading and Writing Learners: This category of learner is mostly active and self interpretative. They learn by their experience and are interested in note-making rather than mere listening and watching. They are quick at organizing their ideas on paper. The language lab facilitator may give them error rectification exercises in initial stages. Later reading comprehension, précis writing and essay writing may be encouraged.

Kinesthetic learner learns by real time involvement in learning process. For them, notes of lesson and vocabulary exercises are less important than doing it practically. While learning they focus on its practical usage. They are performers and hence are very active and energetic. Constant movement is their strong point so the facilitator has to keep them engaged physically and mentally. They have shorter concentration span and often request for breaks. If special attention is not given to 'Kinesthetic learners' they disturb other students of class.

In language lab as every learner has a separate works station, the facilitator can handle this individual difference easily. Every type of learner enjoys and in fact can assist each other with constructive rapport. It is self paced. Hence it is advisable to switch over to language lab. All the expected problems can be easily solved by level wise lab activities. We can divide the syllabus according to the student's levels like beginner, intermediate or advance learner. It can also be skill specific. Before enrolling the student an entrant test can be conducted to ensure their level requirement. English for Specific Purpose can be acquired using Language lab with assured expected outcomes.

#### An Instance of practical implementation of Language Lab

Barad (2009) presents his article on his experiments with Language lab in teaching various facets of English studies under the title 'Experimenting ICT in Teaching English Language and Literature'. The following brief will justify the relevancy of learning Language and Literature through appropriate Technologies.

In his first experiment on Teaching Business English he introduces the selected literature first through OHP (Over Head Projector) with printed transparencies of sketches of images related to important scene from the novel, then Movies and videos on TV, downloaded from web portals like You tube and Video.google.com.

In his second experiment he introduces, report writing and questionnaire. The technological aid he uses are; Surveygizmo.com & moodle survey were used for report writing and cross-tabsurveys.com and monkeygizmo.com for the latest questionnaires. For evaluation and feedback he creates e-groups of his students. He finishes his work through Synchronous and asynchronous mode with the help of emails, Yahoo e-groups and chat applets (Yahoo Messenger, Skype and Google Talk.)

In his third experiment he introduces Commercial English to generate Share Market Report. He uses Moneybhai.com is a Free Online Virtual Stock Market Trading Game portal. Thus, one of the hardest nuts to crack, the Goliath of business English – share market report – was conquered with the help of knight called ICT.

In fourth and fifth experiment other topics, such as letters to editors, modern forms of communication, and advertisement, were also taught and learned effectively through ICT.

Tools and technology used; MS- Office Word for editing, Encarta e-dictionary and thesaurus for drafting SMS and Email, SMS text & email to the editors of newspapers and magazines.

In sixth experiment he shifts towards literature. Emphasizing the benefits of Collective Reading collective reading of websites, online references, e-encyclopedia, PowerPoint and Word files helped in learning:

- (i) Myths and mythology of Greek and Roman,
- (ii) Poems and plays,
- (iii) Literary theories and
- (iv) Modern –isms.

Technological aid: Projection of word, power point files, websites, dictionary, thesaurus etc. through LCD on large screen.

In Seventh Experiment he deals with Teaching Plays / novels through movies with the help of power point. Web resources used; [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com), <http://video.google.com>, [www.keepvid.com](http://www.keepvid.com), [www.yappr.com](http://www.yappr.com), Audio books. E-resources: video and sound editing software.

In Eight Experiment he goes for teaching poetry. He uses Web resources [www.librivox.com](http://www.librivox.com), [www.podcast.com](http://www.podcast.com), e-resources of Sound editing software – Audacity and audio books.

Audio poems downloaded from [librivox.com](http://www.librivox.com) Poems recorded in Audacity, converted into mp3 format for mobile phones and shared among students for listening.

In Ninth Experiment he initiates to towards Teaching Critical Theories and Criticism. He uses Web resources; Writer's blog; [www.chetanbhagat.com](http://www.chetanbhagat.com), [www.wikieducator.org/Literary\\_criticism](http://www.wikieducator.org/Literary_criticism) and experiments with Blended learning , Learning theories in traditional method and Applying criticism on the blogs of the writer and finally Reviewing comments of readers and peers.

And in his final Experiment (10) he uses Synergism of Wiki Educator and Moodle to teach literature through web 2.0 tools, he prepared a unit of literary theories and criticism on 'Aristotle's Poetics' and other critics on Wiki Educator ([www.wikieducator.org/Literary\\_criticism](http://www.wikieducator.org/Literary_criticism)). This is open space, free platform for open editing, preparing content and easy for student to access. The link of that unit was shared with

the students through e-group and classroom interaction. In this unit, at the end of topic, self-assessment questions (SAQs) are given. Here, I have synergized WikiEducator with Moodle. I gave the link from WikiEducator to my moodle site ([www.dilipbarad.com/tell](http://www.dilipbarad.com/tell)). For SAQs, students are directed to moodle, where in multiple choice questions, SCORM, cloze, match the items, true or false etc kind of questions are asked to test their progress. They go through the exercise, see their progress graph within a second and return back to WikiEducator to continue with the unit. WikiEducator and Moodle both give incredible opportunities to explore web resources. Hence the experimenter is enthralled with his result by introducing Reading on Wikieducator and Self-Assessment on Moodle.

Thus, he ends his paper with the findings of Liu et al (2002):

- Research needs to have a solid foundation in theories;
- Software needs to be based upon relevant pedagogical and design principles for them to be effective;
- Studies need to use well-established and reliable measures;
- Research focus should go beyond anxiety, attitudes, vocabulary acquisition, language production;
- More research needs to be conducted in the less explored skills areas such as speaking, listening, and culture.

Through a thorough analysis of the above mentioned experiments it can be inferred that judicious use of level specific, need based technology can transform and enhance the learning outcomes to an optimal level. In addition to this another concept worth mentioning is, Hypermedia Authoring.

### Hypermedia Authoring

In addition to traditional uses of technology; mentioned in the above discussion of Barad's experiments, Teachers facilitators of language lab can make use of Hypermedia authoring of websites as content-based strategies to teach critical literacy, literary analysis, and language and communicational skills, Myers (2004). As taught by Jamie Myers of Penn State University, hypermedia authoring involves the process of juxtaposing, through video sequences or website hyperlinks, various multimedia "texts"—print, image, gesture, artwork, music, video, and more—to focus on a life -relevant issue or experience represented by these texts.

## Conclusion

With an appropriate use of technology, learning of English Language through language lab can prove to be advantageous. As it is self paced; learning through the aid of technology is convenient without the restrictions of time and location. It provides the learner with flexibility, ease of participation, absence of labeling (race, gender, and appearance) training in electronic communication and exposing students to information technology. The sticking feature of technology based learning (eg. Virtual learning) is that it can provide opportunities for rich sensory immersive experiences, authentic contexts and activities for experiential learning, simulation and role-play, melding of complex scenarios, a platform for data visualization and opportunities for collaboration and co-creation that cannot be easily experienced using other platforms. This makes it an ideal platform for engaging students in creating their own learning activities, experiences and environments, and not just be passive consumers of learning. One main feature of such learning is that it is a good way to get students attention and should increase their interest and involvement. These technologies are all related and tied to what is being taught and therefore reinforce the same. With the use of technology in learning English language and literature the learners have scope of continuing their learning even outside the educational institutions in an informal atmosphere. For instance, email, conferencing, computer mediated communication tools etc. The learners can communicate and discuss ideas together even when they are not physically present for learning. The learners get exposed to eminent resource persons' expertise at national and international levels in learning English language and literature. Interactive sessions may be organized for the purpose, for instance, teleconferencing. There are certain specific ways in which the quantity of teaching and learning activity, and the quality of teaching and learning can be enhanced. With proper, well-considered planning, technology has the opportunity to enhance the learner's experience in some key area, provided the teacher or the facilitator makes a judicious use of the available technological inputs. Yet technological use is dependent on the context and predicted on the notion that what works in one context may not be entirely replicable in another. However, it for the facilitator, to be able to see the potential for an ideal combo of traditional and technological inputs, particularly adept at customizing approaches to meet the individual needs of their learners.

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Vol.4 No.1 October 2009, Dilip P. Barad

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