

An Analysis on Role of Language Lab in English Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at determining the relationship between language labs and the effective ways of mastering better performance of English language. The instruments used were tests of all English components to draw significant findings. Globalization is changing the way we teach and learn. Language laboratories in most of our tertiary institutions are used as tools of satisfying accreditation requirements and also developing a passion in those trying to utilize the laboratory. It is becoming quite a challenge to teach using the conventional, digital or multimedia language laboratories and also to establish who is responsible for preparing practical. Generally, the findings proved that using effective language laboratories in teaching English is essential in teaching listening and mastering better features of speaking. In addition, the study recommends that the using of language labs in the teaching of English is highly needed in colleges.

1. Introduction

The Language laboratory (LL) is an electronic device that is designed to help the learning process to become easier. The four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking have to be practiced. Our new multimedia LL can help students in writing, speaking and listening. Listening will not be fully comprehended without merging reading and listening together (receptive skills) as well as linking the written word or passage with audio and pictorial views (productive skills). It is surprising that majority of the schools in Nigeria, secondary schools as well as Universities; do not have the language laboratory. Even when they do, it is not properly equipped to serve as one [1]. Learning using the language laboratory is obviously a challenging trend, which has effects on what to teach, how to teach and what laboratory based lecture is supposed to be. For instance, teaching in the classrooms only will not enable students to understand fully the articulatory auditory and acoustic features. However, using software like PRAAT and Microsoft Power-point (MPP), the three sub-fields of phonetics are clearly and conveniently taught in the language laboratory. With Praat and MPP, students are exposed to the practical aspects of lectures especially in stress and intonation and other segmental aspects. When they pronounce words and see the patterns of their speech, syllables and pitch in the pitch contour, the students get excited and motivated to learn more and pay attention to what is taught and shown to them.

2. Role of language laboratory

The main purpose of LL is to make students improve their communication skills in the target language. It is also proven that one can learn the aspects of the phonetics of a language, such as pronunciation, accent, stress, etc. The presence of teaching and learning facilities and infrastructure are among the factors supporting the smooth teaching and learning activities in the LL. It is not only useful to undergraduate students as beginners in phonetic and phonology. It also facilitates the work of researchers at the postgraduate level in the area of the acoustics of sounds and forensic language analysis in the field of linguistics generally. The language

laboratory is the perfect place to organize seminars and workshops and various aspects of educational technology, educational software, production techniques, dubbing, etc. It provides learners with a platform to conduct a lot of training programmes, group discussions, presentations, personal interviews, debates and role plays. This will enhance their intellectual capability and creativity. As in any other language, LL can be used to study "Tajweed" (in the language of Qur'an) in which the phonological and phonetics aspects of "Tajweed" are clearly practiced, such as the production of nasals and assimilation. This gives the students of Arabic a good opportunity to practice and study the rules of Tajweed, using the software in the LL. In the theater and performing arts, the roles of LL especially in music listening and the recitation of lyrics create a cycle of engagement in which students constantly self-observe, self-judge, self-regulate and self-monitor techniques. These are encouraged as the components of contemporary pronunciation pedagogy. The LL also performs significant roles in enhancing the skills of engineering students through interactive lessons to enable them to face interviews, telephonic conversation and public speaking. The trained students of Robotic Engineering have a role to play with their training in stress, intonation, word accent and rhythm. They can train their robots in especially voice recognition of the target language.

3. The English teacher and the language laboratory

The student is not the only beneficiary of the LL. The teacher also gains a lot being that the process of teaching pronunciation is made easier. The system of LL provides the teacher with the opportunity to listen to the individual sound articulation of students as many times as possible, unlike in the classroom situation where the teacher gets one chance to process the linguistic input. The Multimedia Device provides the teacher with the platform to teach students individually or in groups. The teacher can assess them based on individual performances. Those students that perceive the English sounds and can articulate and pronounce them properly can then move to other aspects of phonetics without being delayed by slow learners.

Acoustic Phonetics and the Language Laboratory

Acoustic phonetics is an aspect that is not usually taught in the classroom teaching of pronunciation. It involves sound waves and how the sounds uttered by a speaker from the output of microphone travel in the air. The LL is the place that

has the facility (Multi-Speech) to show the difference in the fluctuations of the sounds uttered, which clearly illustrates that no two sounds are uttered the same way, even if pronounced by the same person.

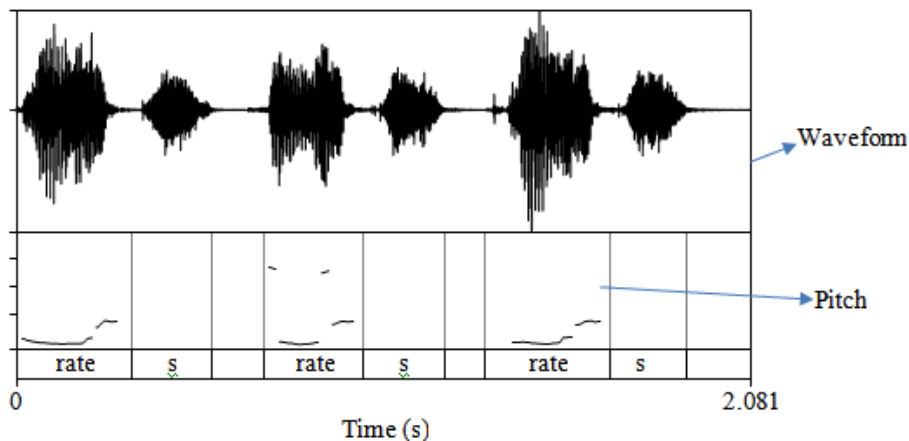


Figure 1.0 Representation of a sound (rates) uttered three times

The appearance of the waveform and pitch as representation of a sound uttered by students, makes them excited and motivates them to utter more sounds until their pronunciation matches with the sample given.

Auditory Phonetics and the Language Laboratory

Auditory phonetics, which is an aspect that deals with the receptive skill, can be taught effectively at the LL. The introduction of the audio-lingual approach has contributed in shifting the focus of the foreign learner (FL) and the second language learner (ESL) of English from reading and writing to listening and speaking. Hence, the function of the LL as a technology of teaching ESL and EFL becomes ideal for the language teacher. The Audio-Lingual approach is based mainly on systematic pattern drilling, in which the repetition of minimally different sentences is allowed. This allows the student to correct his pronunciation through the repetition of minimal patterns generated in different sentences. The electronic device in the LL coupled with high-quality tapes helps the learner's receptive skills in listening to the sound properly, since accurate and intelligent listening is necessary to ESL and EFL learners. The listener has many purposes or goals for listening, which determine his level of concentration. According to the goals of listening are categorized as: listening for enjoyment, for information, for persuasion, for perception, for comprehension and for solving problems. The goal of the foreign or second language learner of English in the LL is mainly for perception, although it can be for information and comprehension as well. The Multimedia Device used in modern language laboratories has facilities that make the student learner an active participant, because the teacher and the student can both communicate with each of them becoming both the encoder and the decoder of the message. The learner can only articulate the correct English phonemes when he listens attentively. Hence, the headphones in the LL enable them to concentrate and listen to the sounds that are encoded through the pronunciation of the teacher or the chosen model. He then decodes the message through his perception and

comprehension of the sounds, which will lead him to responding, if there is need for that

4. The role of teachers in the language laboratory

The teacher of today is considered as a creator and manager of a simulating environment. The role of teachers in language teaching has been misunderstood. Their roles and responsibilities in a LL are actually very important. They have to use their knowledge and skills, and must also be aware of the latest technological approach and methods of teaching in the LL. The English language teacher should conduct writing workshops on letters, report, resume, poster and project writing and provide remedial feedback to learners to brush up their writing skills. The English language teacher is not just a teacher of grammar and sentence structure. He/she is expected to play an active role as a counselor, communication specialist and soft skills trainer. The teacher should help students to overcome their fears in communication. For this, a teacher should be aware of the latest technologies, explore new ideas and have a certain amount of specialization in the subject. The teacher should collaborate with the laboratory technologist to write laboratory manuals with aim, objectives and the procedure to carry out experiments. At the end of a laboratory session, a teacher should assess their students. Proper classroom management is achieved through the use of the LL. This involves activities such as: roll call, attendance and test scoring. Using other devices in the LL (control assistance), the teacher can control students' reception (instruction mode) and even allow them to select from the multiple instructions provided and also online materials (Study hall Mode). Using the Digi-studio, teachers can score students' recorded answers in a grid. For browsing, the teacher can assign a web site like the URL and open all student browsers to it. The teacher can, at his convenience, close all student browsers.

5. Classifications of the language laboratory

There are different types of language laboratory used in various institutions all over the world. However, development and innovations in modern technology bring about more

facilities attached to the language laboratory, such as interactive boards, which are very useful for student learning. The various types of language laboratories are

- i. **Conventional language laboratory:** uses the tape recorder and a few audio cassettes for the teaching of the target language
- ii. **Lingua Phone laboratory:** it is just like the conventional LL with a little electronics modernization that acts as a cassette, which serves as a recorder for play back comparison
- iii. **Computer Assisted Language Laboratory (CALL):** the language materials are already fed into the computer according to the features available. It helps teachers to give practice in particular aspects of language, such as sound, animation and videos. There are also web-based laboratories, which are called Web Assisted Language Laboratory (WALL).
- iv. **Multimedia Language Laboratory:** this type of laboratory uses different types of software available in the market like: Renet, Aristoclass, Hiclass, Globalina, Console OCL-908W, Histudio MHi and Tech Online Software. The contributions of Multimedia in learning can be summarized as:
 - a. Active participation of learners
 - b. Induced learning
 - c. Recalling and applying knowledge
 - d. Control over the level and speed of information
 - e. Freedom to access information according to their needs
 - f. Approach for support information

6. Types and importance of language labs

In addition to what's mentioned in the introduction, to make sure that students are paying attention to all aspects of phonetics such as pronunciation, accents etc., could record and assess their performance. Hmoud, (2014) reveals that the language lab provides access to native-speakers to enhance students learning correctly. To pursue higher studies abroad, language lab would help students in studying the language of the country where they are planning to complete their higher education (i.e. EFL students are required to pass TOEFL/IELTS if they plan to study in some of the English speaking countries). Meanwhile, it is important that the layout of the lab is encouraging for effective communication and monitoring of the learners. As high acquiring of communication skills is essential in almost all fields of careers, language lab can help in gaining this important skill.

The Configuration and Appearance of labs

Generally, the traditional system includes a keyboard that is wired to a number of rows of student compartments, sometimes as 'U' shape carrels, containing a student tape recorder and headset with a boom arm microphone (see the photo below). Moreover, the teacher console (keyboard) is usually fitted with a tape recorder to monitoring each compartment in the class by the teacher headset and an intercom facility to enable 2-way communication between the teacher and his/her students individually.



Figure 2. An Indian high school language lab shows students' positions

First generation laboratories or the simplest ones allow the teacher to control the tape of the student booths (record, stop, rewind etc.) from the monitor desk. This feature allows easy distribution of the master program material, which is often copied at high speed onto the student positions for later use by

the students at any time. As in the photo below, better tape laboratories hold the tape machine behind a protective plate, leaving only a control panel accessible to the students or lock the cassette door. This keeps the expensive and sensitive decks free from student misuse and dust.



Figure 3. Teacher's control (Keyboard)

Operating the Audio Active-comparative System The teacher can hand over control of the decks to the students at the time that the master program is being transferred onto the student recorders. Moreover, the student would simultaneously hear the playback – when pressing the keyboard - of the program whilst being able to record his or her own voice in the pauses using the microphone. Technologically, this overdubbing was made possible by the use of a two-channel tape recorder Digital Language Laboratories Still the principle of language laboratories essentially has not changed. They remain a teacher-controlled system connected to a number of student booths, containing a student's control mechanism and a headset with a microphone. Digital language labs have the same principle. A software of language lab changes the concept of where and what a language lab is. Software can be installed on any networked PCs anywhere on a school, college or university campus. Software systems can be located in one room, from room-to-room or campus-to-campus. The term language lab is no longer favored by recent generation. However, new terms like 'language media center' or 'learning resource center' attempt to replace the term 'language lab' meanwhile they can hold the new goals and new technologies. Scinicariello, (1997; 185-213) reveals that whatever they are called there is no ideal language lab for the twenty-first century. Recently, Lundi (2010) states that language labs are adequate places where a learner can undergo self-learning experience at his own pace, by practicing a host of exercises through technology. These exercises can be done in all the four modalities of language learning.

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Functionality of Language Labs

All current language labs will have a level of teacher control to manage student desktops or any other networked devices. These levels of functionality of labs vary from manufacturer to manufacturer. The more sophisticated software labs have a higher level of teacher management and control over the student desktop the more they will be needed. One of the key differences in the high-end software products is their ability to work live with the students as they record and work with media. Therefore, instead of waiting to correct student recordings after they have been recorded and collected back it is now possible for a teacher to work synchronously and live with students on their own, in pairs or in groups, thus enhancing the immediacy of the teaching and learning experience (direct interactions).

7. Conclusion

Modern LL contributes a lot in teaching languages. This leads to the fact that students that attend the laboratory can utter sounds correctly when compared to students taught in the classroom only. Teachers of languages can use LL, using Power-Point and Praat software. With the help of MLL, teachers and students can do research in auditory, articulatory and acoustics phonetics. Other aspects of the prosodic features of English like the stress and intonation are better learned and taught in the language laboratory.