Digital Language Lab: Facilitating the Needs of English Language Learners

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Abstract Importance of learning English or any other foreign language cannot be denied. The latest way of learning language is the use of digital laboratory. The language lab offers a technology diversion for teaching English language proficiency. Language lab provides a unique, effective way to improve your learning of the English language. With its extensive teaching resources and interactive learning environment, the digital language lab challenges conventional teaching methods and inspires students to study. Use of media in learning a foreign language is natural. The educational language lab is the answer and exigency of the age for English language instruction. When people learn a language in a multimedia, digital, and computerized language lab, the level of their language competency will be higher. It distinguishes apart due to the high caliber of its distinctive equipment and its clear-cut teaching.

Introduction

The time has come to switch from the traditional classroom setting to digital learning, where students are able to monitor their learning much more effectively. In India, the significance of setting up a language laboratory has been widely recognized by researchers in the field of English. For the betterment of the learners' academic achievement, colleges and universities all around the globe are becoming more receptive to the notion of establishing Digital Language Labs. The concept underlying modern language laboratories is to utilize technology to promote one's learning of a new language by actively involving students in it through practical use. Students can study efficiently in the digital language lab's dynamic learning environment. Due to the effective and reliable e-learning environment for students, language laboratories are growing in prominence in institutions of higher education. Institutions make use of language labs to improve students' language learning and promote self-confidence and enrich personality.

English has been adopted in communities all over the world in order to communicate with one another as their lingua franca. In India learning English as a second language has never been easy. English language teaching and learning materials ought to be made in considering the notion that student learning styles can be influenced and defined by traits of personality, cultural differences, and gender inequalities. The digital Language Lab plays an important role in learning English as a second language. To help learners learn English, a Digital language lab set up is established in institutions of higher education which focuses on the following components of English language learning: Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Phonetics, Intonation, Speech Sounds, LSRW skills etc. The LSRW Skills-based program assists learners in learning swiftly and conveniently. They get an understanding of the fundamental English language concepts.

Although current methods of education have been transformed by technology, its impact on language acquisition continues to be incomparable. An innovative technology called Digital Language Lab emerged as a result of the convergence of technology and language learning. The language laboratory is an invaluable virtual and technological resource for refining and grading performances in any English language. "Integrating ICT tools in teaching can lead to increased students' learning competencies and increase opportunities for communication." (Frayer, 2005). Language Lab assists learners in learning and understanding complex ideas and concepts through interactive activities. Language labs, as opposed to conventional classrooms, improve interactive learning, which helps learners pick up the concepts swiftly and with less effort. Students who are studying a foreign language can use audio or visual resources in a designated classroom setting called a language laboratory. By improving the teacher-to-student time ratio and enabling the instructor to use every minute of a lesson, the language lab is the most effective way to present the learning material in a systematic way to the learners.

Language labs in higher institutions are essential because they help students in developing LSRW skills, or listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. These four abilities are vital for language development and acquisition. The students have access to a range of self-instructional, student-friendly language learning methods owing to the language lab. It is beneficial to teach children language skills so they can speak in front of groups, participate in interviews, and give presentations. The language laboratory creates a comfortable learning environment for learners and is an extremely helpful the tool for refining pronunciation, assessing in four skills, and learning independently without instructors. Students feel more at ease since it simultaneously encourages the learner and provide motivation in improving communication abilities. As an outcome, it provides learners the opportunity to prepare for computer-based professional examinations such as GRE, IELTS, TOEFL, GMAT, etc. A language laboratory can substantially help students in learning the English language by enabling them to learn so at their own speed. By emphasizing on word accent, intonation, and rhythm, language laboratories further assist learners develop improved articulation. "A language laboratory is a classroom equipped with tape recorders or computers where people can practice listening to and talking foreign languages" (Collins Dictionary). Digital Language labs offer an encouraging change from conventional methods of instruction and learning becomes a completely distinct and interesting experience.

The Advantages of Digital Language Lab in facilitating the need of English Learners

1. Students have the option of recording and listening to their own speech.
2. Self-access to support independent learning.
3. The three accents: British, American, and Indian can be taught to students and they can easily distinguish between the pronunciation competencies of these three accents.
4. Self-access to support independent learning.
5. Teachers have the ability to make changes in how students learn.
6. Merging of written material, visual content, audio recordings, and multimedia.
7. At regular intervals, testing materials can be uploaded by the teacher.
8. Easily accessible software.
9. Innovative instructional videos to enhance learner's communication skills.
10. LSRW abilities are gradually developed in every learner.

"English Language lab focuses on language skills and efficiently develops the skills in students. Language lab software is used in schools and colleges across the country. In language lab software is a blend of technology that helps in easy and fast learning of English skills. English is a language based on concepts and it is important to understand these concepts and learn them." (Spears Language Lab: What is A Language Lab). The most innovative equipments are available at the language labs of colleges and universities, encouraging learners to put in greater effort there. In the context of technology, a language lab consists of a source unit that may distribute audio recordings to a large number of students at separate workstations. "The influence of technology on EFL teaching and learning has brought many positive effects. Using technological tools in the learning process creates better communication for the learners". (Rodinadze & Zarbazoia, 2012).

Language Laboratory Equipments

Master Console: The instructor can manage the functioning of the Language Lab system using this master equipment. It includes –

❖ Teachers and students carry out language learning tasks and assignments using desktops equipped with language lab software.

❖ Dialing/switching panel with a microprocessor and a microphone.

❖ Each student's registration requests are displayed independently. Instructors and learners are interconnected by LAN (local area network), and in some instances, independent audio cabling.

❖ Accessibility to additional audio equipment (VCD player, PC, VHS player, etc.). Learners make use of a multimedia player and recorder to listen to audio, play video, and keep track of their speech exercises.

Unit for Students: This piece of equipment includes a headphone that is connected to a microphone. One unit is intended for two students. Both learners and educators use headphones that turn out outside noises and interruptions.

Meeting Room

It's easy to use, packed with features, and quick to install. Excellent verbal clarity and a pleasant environment. For all conferences and meetings, this conference system offers a simple yet crucial audio enhancement option. On the whole digital language lab with its complete techno friendly environment facilitates the need of the learners.

Language Lab Software

The highest-quality ESL content software enables educators an extensive range of instructional materials that can be utilised in educational settings for interactive classes and presentations of linguistic material. Later that, the students should practice independently using a programme designed to help them comprehend the objectives of the instructional session in a flexible environment.

The language laboratory has passed through several stages of development throughout the years and helps teachers carry out language instruction. A multimedia arrangement called the language laboratory is used to facilitate the instruction of modern languages can be found, at higher education institutions. From the 1950s until the 1990s, tape-based systems employing reel-to-reel or (later) cassette were used in the early labs. The first linguistic laboratory date back a very long time. Currently, multimedia PC setups are widespread and multimedia arrangement called the language laboratory which is used to facilitate the instruction of modern languages can be found, at higher education institutions. As mentioned by Mambo "language laboratories are environments designed to enhance foreign language learners' skills. Generally equipped with analog and digital hardware, and software (tape recorders, videocassette recorders, or computers), they provide practices in listening comprehension, speaking (listen and repeat), with the goal to reinforce the grammar, vocabulary and functions (grammatical structures) presented in class. (Mambo, 2004)

Various Types of Language Laboratories used through past five decades:

❖ **Conventional Laboratory**: The Conventional Laboratory is the initial type of language laboratory. A tape recorder and a few audio cassettes can be used to teach the learners the target language in the conventional lab. As the teacher plays the recording, students listen and grasp up the pronunciation. The cassette often comprises text read aloud by a native language speaker. Furthermore, each chapter includes listening and speaking assignments. The instructor plays the recording, and learners pay attention to the information and grasp the subject with concentration.

❖ **Lingua Phone Laboratory**: The Lingua Phone Laboratory incorporates certain technological advances with a conventional lab. The learners put on the headphones and listen to the audio-cassettes. There are fewer distractions for learners and they pay attention to audio materials to enhance their learning.

❖ **Computer Assisted Language Laboratory (CALL)**: Computer Assisted Language Learning, or CALL, is a technique of multimedia instruction that helps learners in attaining their instructional goals at their own pace and competence level. In CALL, computer technology is employed throughout the teaching and learning processes, including the presentation, execution, and assessment stages. Today's integrative CALL strategy is built on multimedia computers and the Internet that blend text, images, sound, and video and animation.

❖ **Multimedia Hi-Tech Language Laboratory**: Language labs in today's world exist by many different titles, notably Digital language lab, Multimedia Language Laboratory, Foreign Language Lab, English Language Lab, Multimedia learning centre, to mention a few. The most innovative language lab technologies available today are completely software-based and readily available through a standard web browser. The benefit of these online alternatives at the institution of higher learning is that they don't necessitate installation on the computers. They are affordable and easy to set up and compatible with any operating system. Instructors can give lessons in any language on any device, and learners are able to acquire any language with cloud-based, online language lab software.

The Digital Language Lab has developed over the past few decades into a vital instrument for learning English. With the use of visual, auditory, audio-visual, and verbal communication instruments the learners acquire the basic English communication abilities. The digital language lab is set up to accommodate each learner's diverse range of language acquisition needs. The digital language laboratory is of paramount importance in India because it deals with all the linguistic aspects of language learning, encourages emotional intelligence in the minds of young students, and gets them ready for the demands of not only the Indian job market but also gives them confidence to grab the opportunity across the globe. The constrained exposure to real-world situations is one of the main drawbacks of learning English in a language lab. It can be expensive to set up and maintain a language lab. Language labs cannot correct grammatical faults or give comprehensive descriptions of language conventions. A significant drawback of learning English in a language lab could involve technical difficulties. Language laboratories provide individual classroom instruction, experiential learning, and technological aids, but they are lacking in practical usage, interpersonal interaction, and thorough feedback. According to Thomson "Digital Pedagogy is precisely not about using digital technologies for teaching and, rather, about approaching those tools from a critical pedagogical perspective. So, it is as much about using digital tools thoughtfully as it is about deciding when not to use digital tools and about paying attention to the impact of digital tools on learning"(Thomson,2017). The Digital language laboratory is a highly beneficial tool which promotes participation and interaction in the educational environment via electronic tasks and assignments in order to learn English language. Having more advanced equipment and features, these laboratories offer a completely distinctive experience to learners from the conventional method of teaching and learning English language.

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