Need of an English Language Laboratory in Engineering Universities

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Abstract

This research focuses on the need of a digital language laboratory which will allow the students of a technical university to improve their communication skills not only in work-related situations but also in personal domains. This paper talks about the importance of a language lab in English learning classes at a technical university. It also describes the barriers for teachers using language labs and finally suggests ways how language labs can be useful for students studying sciences.

Keywords: *English language laboratory, importance, advantages, technical and professional.*

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is very much like learning to play a musical instrument. Studying the theory is definitely valued, but chiefly it is enhanced through practice. Teaching English at an Engineering university has always been a challenge for the support subject teachers as they are not much aware of the core subject matter. The purpose of the subject research was to highlight the possible factors to improve English speaking proficiency level of science students in their personal and professional life and discuss the ways to make the language lab useful for potential engineers.

2. Literature Review

Significant amount of research work has been done on the need of an English language lab at engineering universities. Gottschalk (1965) laid emphasis on using visual aids to make the abstract material, given in lectures, easier for the students. A digital language lab plays an important role in the life of a potential engineer as machineries which maintain a cognitive approach to language acquisition are those which permit students utmost ability to be shown in a meaningful framework [5].

The quality of the language proficiency will be more when students learn it from the multimedia, digital and computerized language lab [1]. Furthermore A. Rizvi has highlighted effective technical communication as a

dynamic interchange that may involve a systematic understanding of scientific and technical subjects [2].

Similarly, oral and presentation expertise are measured as one of the best profession boosters which decides the students' career accomplishment or breakdown [3].

Students need to be given sufficient exposure to native speakers in a language lab for learning pronunciation and enunciation of English words because communicating right messages in second language is very challenging for grown persons as they already have ample knowledge of their mother tongues [4].

3. Barriers in Using Language Lab

Following are some of the irritants in the presence of the digital language lab in technical/engineering universities:

- ➢ In a technical or engineering university, educators, management and learners do not give the same rate to English language. Departments focus on their core subjects as they are more concerned about their students' technical knowledge rather than speaking abilities. Therefore priority is given to the core subjects.

- ➢ No lab is available for the enhancement of English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills [LSRW].

- ➢ Most of the language teachers have fear of using technology and quickly get panicked when one of the buttons is not working as per their intent. They are more comfortable with traditional ways of teaching as they find it more convenient.

4. Feasibility Study

Faculty of English spent years discussing the need of technological equipments to support the English language

curriculum which can fulfill the student's needs studying business, computer sciences, engineering and other technical subjects but it was unsuccessful. Because of this, faculty had to revise their syllabi and material several time. An advance language lab enables the teacher to approach each student separately through a computerized Audio-visual network and gives individual attention to guide him/her to acquire a good standard of spoken language and quality pronunciation in double quick time. It also facilitates the students to get their speech recorded and self evaluate their performances.
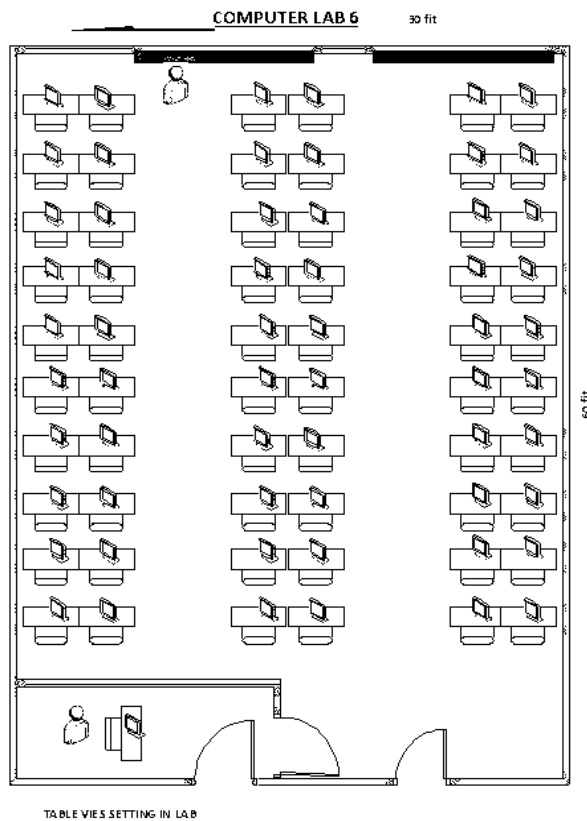
5. Proposed Language Lab Design

Fig. 1- Proposed Architecture of a Digital Language Lab

The proposed digital language lab has a teacher control connected to a number of student cubicle, containing a student control and headset with a microphone (See Fig 1).

It allows both face to face interactions with language instructors and students, as well as materials including newspapers, magazines, movies, pronunciation software, and web articles. All areas to be climate controlled for heat and humidity and balanced for sound and light.

6. Proposed Lab Design Advantages

Following are some of the advantages of the proposed design:

➢ The University of Hull's Open Learning Centre states that students can work independently on language learning in a comfortable and well-resourced environment.

➢ Yale University's Center for Language Study states that students must be self-directed and self-disciplined, and they must be willing and able to assume full responsibility for their learning.

➢ It gives chances for meaningful communication related to their specialized fields.

➢ A Digital Language Lab builds interactive multimedia activities achievable that get our even slow learners grown-ups thrilled about learning.

➢ Students get exposed to a range of recordings from native speakers in genuine situations to help them visualize how they can polish their presentation skills.

➢ Offering privacy of headphones helps introverts to boost their proficiency level with confidence.

➢ Students communicate in English in pairs/groups, giving every student ample time to carry out their listening and speaking skills.

➢ Students record and listen to themselves speaking in English and evaluate their reactions.

➢ Students get familiar with correct pronunciation of several English/technical words which are uncommon in Pakistani context through talking dictionaries available on line.

➢ Students find the language lab a resource to be exploited in a variety of ways, not as a dictator of one particular approach to language learning.

7. Conclusion

The rate of language learning is very high in computer integrated lessons that could be conducted on trial basis. It is to be added here that computer is just a tool which can be used positively or negatively. Overuse of technology

may ruin the beauty of proposed lessons. Therefore it is essential to upgrade the professional competence of the faculty responsible for using language labs as no matter how well the curriculums are designed, the development of English language according to university students' requirements will be handicapped.

The benefits of using technologies in the verbal communication classes can only be achieved if the learning objectives are focused to the need of the users. It is to be remembered here that 'where there is a will there is a way'. With hard and sincere efforts of English language teachers at professional universities, more students centered but less time consuming classes will be seen in future.

8. Future Research Outlook

Besides using language lab effectively for our English courses prescribed by Higher Education Commission (HEC), teachers can rightly exploit the contents of the existing courses and may initiate some other language courses which are helpful for the students to come up to the class standards. Teachers and students both can also get advantage of using this lab for their research paper writing as well.

Future research on this topic may focus on analysing positive and negative aspects of teaching and assessing various English courses in a language lab.

Acknowledgments

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