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Multi-media language lab: A four walled room to groom the communicative competence of engineering graduates

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Abstract

Gone are the days, where the teacher used to teach and the disciples used to follow and acquire knowledge. Teachers were the only sources for the knowledge acquisition in the olden days. They used to follow traditional teaching methods, where they share their knowledge through preaching. The world has changed in many aspects with the advent of scientific and technological evolution. Then the culture of sharing skills and knowledge found its new way with the assistance of modern technology. Education is being learnt and taught with the help of modern technological aids and the system of teaching and learning became comfortable and effective with the use of technical instruments. In the new technical era communication skills play vital role. All the technical knowledge is available in English language. So, English language and communication skills became very essential for the Technical graduates to acquire jobs in MNC's and for the survival in the globalized world. Out of many resources Multi-media language labs are the best to impart the communication skills required for the students. This paper deals with the importance of English language communication skills and the role of Multi-media in enhancing the communicative competence of the Engineering students.

Keywords: English language & communication skills, multi-media language lab, advantages, drawbacks

Introduction

The advent of network age as well as the information technology has brought the new opportunities and challenges to language teachers in teaching Language skills to Non-native speakers of English. The traditional language teaching pattern in colleges and universities like speaking, reading, writing, and listening has gradually changed by these technical aids and given more importance to communication competence and its application. Multi-media language laboratories make full use of modern technologies to provide students with a platform on which they can utilize electronic resources to groom their language proficiency. These labs provide different types of content inputs such as Audio, Video, Text, Graphics, Animation, and interactivity. With these the students can have a unique environment which provides fun in learning. The Non-native speakers of English like Indian students feel learning English is elusive and panic because it is second language for them and they depend much on their mother tongue for everyday communication. Multi-media language laboratory has become a part of language teaching in Indian universities and colleges.

J. Jayachandran rightly observes the importance of interactive learning and the learner centered approach, "Every learner is an individual with different needs and abilities of learning a language. Traditional methods of teaching a language placed the teacher in a role of a transmitter of knowledge while learners were seen as passive recipients of this knowledge. With the advent of communicative method of language teaching, the focus in the classroom shifted from the teacher to the learner. Current trends in the field of English language teaching focus on learner autonomy, learner involvement, learner generated syllabi, creation of relaxed atmosphere for learning and need based training". Therefore multimedia language labs have great importance in the context of the emerging constructivist paradigm as envisioned in the Indian Curriculum Framework.

English Language and Communication Skills

The concept of communication has been changing since early world to this modern world. The Early man started communicating with different signs and signals, along with the world his way of communication also changed a lot, later on he created a language to express his emotions and feelings in an effective way. Human beings started occupying all the geographical areas of this world; according to their community they created their own language. Globalization has changed the shape of the whole world in many aspects. Technology and science helped the modern world to find a new look. According to the majority of different communities in the world, their mother tongues were given priority and preference to communicate with whole world. Then English language started ruling the world. According to Radhakrishnan University Education Commission, "English is a Language which is rich in Literature, humanistic, scientific & technical. If under sentimental urges we should give up English, we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever growing knowledge".

The profusion of technical expansion, international economy, international openings, made the professional world a highly competitive one. These improvements demand a complete persona of an individual with necessary skills sets to survive in the global market. To meet the global standards one has to groom his skills set and also develop English communicative expertise. As an international link English language acquisition has become a necessary requisite. English is not the mother tongue of Indians, they learn it as a second language and it poses a number of social, psychological and linguistic and cultural challenges to Indian learners. In this regard many Indian Institutions are focusing much on interactive learning methodology rather than traditional lecture oriented methods, so that they can groom the English communicative competence of engineering students to meet the demands of MNC's and stand on this cut throat competitive world.

Multi-Media Language Lab and its Evolution

The term Language laboratory was initiated first time by Ralph H. Waltz at the University of Hawaii, United states in the early 1920s. In the beginning language labs were initiated to analyze and study all kinds of physical phenomena of voice. Later on high quality efficiency was attained by applying language lab tape recorders for listening and speaking skills. Since then, many universities and institutions had incorporated language labs all over the world. With the advent of information technology these language labs became functionally more and more powerful.

Five stages of Language Laboratories

1. Audio Passive Language Laboratory (APLL)

These language laboratories were limited to single directional voice transmission facility, where the students were able to listen to the pre-recorded materials with the help headphones. These used to be called listening rooms.

2. Audio Active Language Laboratory (AALL)

These language laboratories enable the students with bi-directional voice transmission facility, where both teachers and students can interact with each other. Students can listen and respond to the dialogues through headphones. These

types of laboratories create active environment in language labs.

3. Audio Active Comparative Language Laboratory (AACLL)

These audio active comparative language laboratories add one more facility in addition to the interaction between students and teachers, students are enabled to have comparative practice by comparing pre-recorded teaching materials with their oral English and teachers can also evaluate student's work.

4. Audio-Visual Language Laboratory (AVLL)

These language laboratories provide both audio and video facilities where teachers can play PPTs, audio files, videos, films and videos related to different materials. Students can learn effortlessly and quickly in vivid and authentic environment created by audio visual language labs.

5. Multi-media Language Laboratory (MLL)

These Multi-media language labs have entered into the digital network age with the rapid growth of information communication and network technology. These language labs are equipped with modern technological tools which can assist the engineering students in grooming their communicative competence. These labs fill the gap between the MNC's requirements and student's skills set.

Multi-media language labs not only help in creating required environment where students can listen to the language on a regular basis but also facilitate number of exercises and practice sessions for language acquisition. Mark Warschauer explains the importance of multimedia saying, "Multi-media technology exemplified today by the CD-ROM allows a variety of media (text, graphics, sounds, animation and video) to be accessed on a single machine. What makes multimedia even more powerful is that it also entails hypermedia? That means all multimedia resources are linked together and that learners can navigate their own path simply by pointing and clicking a mouse." Furthermore a Multi-language lab is one of the best combined methodologies where the language learners avail the dual benefits of Instructor-Led Training (ILT) as well as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). With the help of multi-media component, CALL provides a best platform for the language learners to analyze their self-progress and rate their performances by giving instant feedback.

Multi-media language labs provide extraordinary electronic gadgets and devices to organize, observe and converse with the students. Mark Warschauer aptly lists out the benefits of multimedia, "First of all, a more learning authentic environment is created, since listening is combined with seeing, just like in the real world. Secondly the skills are easily integrated, since the variety of media make it natural to combine reading, writing, speaking and listening in a single activity. Third students have great control over their learning, since they cannot only go at their own pace but even on their own individual path, going forward and backwards to different parts of the program, honing in on a particular aspect and skipping other aspects altogether. While the main lesson is in the foreground, students can have an access to a variety of background links which will allow them a rapid access to grammatical explanations or exercises, vocabulary glosses, pronunciation information or

questions or prompts which encourage them to adopt an appropriate learning strategy.”

The main components of Multi-media language lab

1. Phonetics: Introduction to English consonants, Vowels and Diphthongs with examples.
2. Stress, Accent, Intonation.
3. Situational dialogues / Role play
4. (JAM) ‘Just a minute’ sessions
5. Describing Objects, Places, People and situations.
6. Functional English
 - a. Introducing yourself and others
 - b. Greeting and responding
 - c. Inviting: Accepting and declining invitations
 - d. Asking for and giving information.
 - e. Apologizing
 - f. Asking about and giving directions
 - g. Asking For and Giving Permission
 - h. Asking for and giving advice
 - i. Agreement, Partial Agreement and Disagreement.
 - j. Complaining - Talking about Complaints
 - k. Classifying
 - l. Expressing Your Opinion
 - m. Expressing obligation
 - n. Expressing Hope, Possibility, Prohibition
 - o. Expressing certainty and uncertainty
 - p. Making and responding to suggestions
7. Telephonic conversations
8. Oral presentation: Prepared and Extempore.
9. Interview skills
10. Group discussion
11. Debate.
12. Reading comprehension
13. Resume writing
14. Report writing
15. Presentation skills
16. Video watch.

Multi-media Hi-Tech Language Laboratory

According to the standards and requirements of technical and Non-technical students, lot of software is available in the market, which helps them to groom English language and communication skills. For example

1. Histudio MHi Tech
2. K-Van Solution
3. Gloadina
4. Console OCL- 908w
5. Hiclass
6. Aristoclass
7. Renet
8. DynEd

Advantages of Multi-Media Language Labs

Multi-media language labs are more helpful and better result oriented compared to traditional teaching. Verdugo and Belmonte (2007) focuses on advantages that reach beyond pronunciation and accent: "Multimedia applications for foreign language learning can provide a more realistic picture of the new language and culture in the classroom, including not only linguistic but also paralinguistic features such as body language, gestures, prosody, etc., which help to convey meaning to the learners" (pp. 87-88)

- Multimedia gives more scope of interaction between a teacher and a student, because it provides number of channels to communication like voice chat, video chat and text chat.
- It facilitates automatic learning environment, which creates interest in students and removes one’s stage fear.
- The students can have a periodical self-evaluation to measure their progress as well as to evaluate their language with that of the expert.
- Through Multimedia language lab students can improve their English language and communicative competence.
- By doing number of grammar exercises and attending tests on different grammar topics they can get command over grammar and they will be able to speak and write grammatically correct sentences.
- By listening to the conversations and situational dialogues and by participating in role plays they can improve their conversational ability.
- Multimedia is the best tool to improve pronunciation skills, through this they can learn the phonetic sounds, accent, and intonation and also practice them. It facilitates voice recording. Through speech recognition test they will be able to listen to their own voice and correct it according to Received Pronunciation.
- Labs are more interesting so students are more attentive in the lab than in the theory class.
- Multi-media labs give more freedom to students to learn at their own pace.
- It creates self-confidence in students.
- It helps to develop presentation skills with the help of Windows Power Point.
- Effective participation in Multi-media labs results in fluent communication skills.
- Language labs cultivate the habit of reading comprehensions from the computer monitor.
- Average students improve their effectiveness through MML labs and be able to meet the demands of MNC’s.
- It helps the students to come out of their comfort zones by involving in team work.
- It helps the students to groom their soft skills, interpersonal skills, decision making skills, and business communication.
- Lab trains students to face interviews, group discussions and public speaking providing them a lot of examples.
- Online examinations can be conducted and results can be immediately given through language labs.

Drawbacks of Multi-media Labs

- The establishment of Multi-media language lab requires big space and it incurs high amount.
- The maintenance of software and hardware equipments in Multi-media labs is difficult.
- Most of the Language teachers fail to adapt to contemporary technology due tech-phobia or lack of idea of using them.
- As MMLL is self-study mode language learning, the doubts of the students may not be cleared instantly.

- Language teachers require an eagle eye on every student to have control in language lab.
- Students may lose their attentiveness while listening to the audio tracks continuously.
- The pre-designed software may not be helpful to all classes of students equally; because of the distinctiveness in acquisitive abilities.
- As technology is changing rapidly, Institutions need to upgrade their infrastructure accordingly.
- It is not possible to the instructors to add their own teaching material to the pre-designed software.
- The technical aids have merely artificial intelligence they may not handle the unexpected problems faced by students as teachers do.

Conclusion

Teaching English language and communication skills to engineering graduates has become a great challenge to the language teachers. In order to cope with the requirements of MNC's Engineering graduates should master English efficiency. Though English is part of Indian institutions curricula since elementary level to higher education both in professional and nonprofessional courses, Indian students are flunking in mastering it. It requires rigorous training programs and incessant practice work. It is incumbent upon the English language teachers to assist the students in discovering the incredible power of the English language skills and it is their bounden duty to play a crucial role in nourishing the four skills of English language among the students of Engineering and Technology. The language teachers today are blessed with marvellous electronic tools to teach these language skills. Though Multi-media language labs have a few drawbacks, they provide the best platform to engineering students to acquire Linguistic proficiency and communicative competence.

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