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IMPROVING THE LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS AMONGST THE STUDENTS OF
GOVERNMENT COLLEGES IN TELANGANA

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ABSTRACT

This article talks about the importance of English language in the professional as well as the personal lives of today's youth. It highlights the importance skills for the students to land themselves in better job. In spite of the available technology to improve our listening and speaking skills, the students of a few colleges in Telangana state find it slightly challenging to cope with the rest in speaking English with right pronunciation, stress and intonation etc. This article provides the required solution to resolve this issue through setting up of the English language laboratories across many colleges of Telangana state. This article also provides all the evidences to prove the outcomes of the language laboratory.

Keywords: Language Lab, LSRW, CALL, t-test.

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1. Introduction

Besides the acquisition of knowledge, presentation and communication of the same is very vital for the professional success of today's youth. Communication/presentation skills have become an inevitable part of today's education imparted in different schools/colleges/universities across the state of Telangana. In this regard, learning/using the language, English in particular became an indispensable factor to reach out to various institutions/companies for employment.

Learning a language is very different from learning other subjects. It cannot be compared with that of learning mathematics/sciences. In the subjects like mathematics and sciences, there can be a fixed solution for a particular problem. But where as in a language, English in particular, there may be multiple solutions for single problem/challenge. It means that the same meaning can be expressed with many words/phrases contextually. Therefore, there cannot be a short/quick method for learning the English language except all the four skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) have to be practiced.

With this aspect, the ability to communicate in English is gaining significance due to the rapid growth of information technology. IT has become an inevitable part of every individual's life today. As its usage is increasing day by day, its production and communication of the same is also gaining greater significance. But our students are finding it difficult to acquire listening and speaking skills in English with proper pronunciation, stress and intonation etc. Both the skills listening and speaking are inseparable in the language learning process. One cannot be acquired without another. English being a non-phonetic language, it's common for the

students of the telugu speaking world to find it difficult to pronounce the words correctly. It's also difficult for telugu students to learn and practice stress and intonation correctly. Therefore, the language lab gained significance as it shows the ways to pronounce the words correctly. This article provides an incite in to the role of a language lab in improving the listening and speaking skills of the Telugu students.

What is a language laboratory?

It's important for every student to have the command over any language for communicating with his fellow students, teachers, make presentations in various seminars and even in their class rooms. This is possible only with proper pronunciation, stress, clarity and accuracy etc. There are many ways to improve one's listening and speaking skills. In the olden days, there were tape recorders along with the audio cassettes containing the required words/phrases along with exercises for practice. The problem with this earlier technology was that the available content and practice exercises present in the audio cassettes were extremely limited. Therefore, the thought for more and unlimited content and exercises began in the minds of the language experts. This consequently led to the invention of the modern language laboratory. It contains lot of content and unlimited exercises for practice. It provides a large scope for the students to improve their listening and speaking skills.

The language laboratory is very useful for assessing students' speech. It provides students with the technical tools to get the best samples of pronunciation of the language. The electronic devices used in the laboratory will stimulate the eyes and ears of the learner to acquire the language quickly and easily. The laboratory's collection is designed to assist learners in the acquisition and maintenance of aural comprehension, oral and written proficiency, and cultural awareness. The language laboratory offers broadcasting, television programs, web-assisted materials and videotaped off-air recordings in the target language. In short, a learner can get the experience of having interaction with native speakers through the laboratory. Hence, the language laboratory has become the need of the hour in any language learning process for communication.

Computer Assisted Language Laboratory (CALL) . CALL uses the computer to teach language. The language course materials are already fed into the computer and are displayed according to the features available in the system. Nowadays, there are also laboratories with computers with a connection to the Internet. These are called Web Assisted Language Laboratories (WALL).

2. The advantages of the Language Laboratory

The importance of the language laboratory has been much felt in the domain of communication. We live in a multilingual and multicultural world, which is being shrunk to the size of a village by the advancement of science and technology. The language laboratory exists to help one to use technology effectively to communicate. It is not merely for learning a single language, but can be used for teaching a number of languages efficiently. To acquire a sensibility for the sounds and rhythm of a language, one has to hear the best samples of a spoken language (Richards, 2001). This is precisely the function of the language laboratory.

Some advantages of the language laboratory are given below:

1. It is a tool designed for teaching any language.
2. It helps one to learn pronunciation, accent, stress and all other aspects of the phonetics of a language.
3. Effective communicative training programs for the general public, private and corporate sectors, junior and senior level officers can be given through the lab.
4. Web-content creation, the setting up of in-house news magazines, corporate publicity and identity, and teaching materials can be generated through the language laboratory.
5. General documentation, software documentation and all forms of technical documentation can be done.
6. Experts can utilize the laboratory for creating and editing scientific and technical materials for teaching language.
7. The language laboratory enables one to conduct courses for various groups of people like students, faculties, businesspeople, etc.

8. Short-term and long-term coaching classes for international examinations like IELTS, TOEFL and other competitive examinations can be organized.
9. Online courses and paperless examinations can be conducted through the language laboratory.

Design and Use of an Analytic Scale

Fulcher's (Fulcher, 2003) approach to defining the construct of assessing speaking performance is practical. It considers the limitations of tests in capturing the complex processes of communication or speech. For example, he considers that measurement driven scales, such as the CEFR, are *not sensitive to the communicative context or the interactional complexities of language use* (emphasis added). This is a limitation; and it does not however completely overrule the possibility of providing reliable descriptions of learner language use. For instance, in this study learners were asked to participate in group discussions on themes—adolescence, calligraphy, games and sports—they had studied as part of their instruction. However, they were asked to transfer their knowledge and language to match with the focus of the discussion questions. While in terms of themes it was the same, in terms of functions/language use it was different. It helped us in two ways: formative and summative (partly).

3. Research Questions:

This study was attempted to address the following questions:

- a. To what extent the Language lab has an effect on the beginner level students' speaking performance?
- b. What are the views of learners and teachers about the language lab
- c. It explains in detail about the definition, purpose of the language lab, limitations of the language lab and so on.

Analysis and interpretation of data:

The method used for the study is survey method. In this study the 30 learners were asked to participate in group discussions on themes—adolescence, calligraphy, games and sports—they had studied as part of their instruction. To understand the complex nature of speaking development the 5 point analytical scale as was applied and recorded score. After training those students using language laboratory the same the same test is applied on 5 point analytical scale and recorded on knowledge on speaking and listening skills as posttest. We used a pretest and posttest design to understand the differences between the pre and post groups.

The scores of the posttest is higher than the pretest recorded. We used descriptive statistics and paired t-test for to ensure whether the scores are significantly higher or not paired sample t-tests were administered.

Mean: The mean is the sum of the separate score or measures divided by their number. $A.M = A \pm (\sum fd/N) \times C$, Where A =Assumed mean, $\sum fd$ Sum of the product of frequency and deviations taken assumed mean in terms of class intervals. N indicates total frequency, C is Class interval

Standard deviation:

Standard deviation is the square root of variance. i.e., the mean of the squared differences between the values of each case in the distribution and the value of mean.

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\left(\frac{1}{N} \sum_1^N (x_i - \mu)^2\right)} \quad \text{where} \quad \mu = \frac{1}{N} \sum_1^N x_i$$

t-test: The test of the significance of the difference between two paired means is known as paired t- test Equal or unequal sample sizes, equal variance

The t statistic to test whether the means are different can be calculated as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{S^2 / \sqrt{n}}, \quad \text{where} \quad S^2 = \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{(d_i - \bar{d})^2}{n-1} \right), \quad \text{where } d_i \text{ is the differences of each pair of observation.}$$

In these formulae, n = number of participants, 1 = group one, 2 = group two. n - 1 is the number of degrees of freedom for group, which is used in significance testing.

Testing of Hypothesis: There is no significance difference between pre-test and post-test of mean scores of five major aspects of speaking—content, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency.

The five aspects of speaking proficiency content, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency of the subjects, were measured on the 20 point scale given. The scores assigned to each of the aspects along with the total score were recorded for both the groups. The mean scores for each of the five aspects in the pre and post conditions calculated. To understand whether the difference between the mean scores in the pre and post conditions for both the groups presented following figure-1.

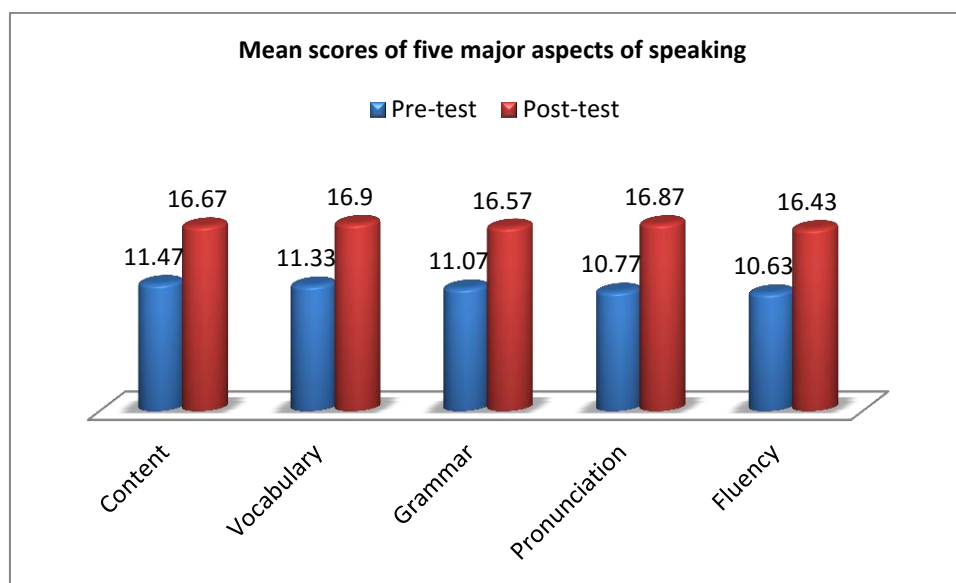


Figure-1: Mean scores of five major aspects of speaking

The mean scores of the groups above indicate that all the groups have showed improvements in terms of securing higher grades in the post test. However, to ensure whether the scores are significant or not paired sample and paired *t*-tests were administered.

Table 1: Paired sample *t*-test table for the five aspects of speaking proficiency

Paired Samples Test								
	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Content	-5.20000	2.89351	.52828	-6.28046	-4.11954	-9.843	29	.000
Vocabulary	-5.56667	2.64814	.48348	-6.55550	-4.57784	-11.514	29	.000
Grammar	-5.50000	2.33046	.42548	-6.37021	-4.62979	-12.927	29	.000
Pronunciation	-6.10000	2.07364	.37859	-6.87431	-5.32569	-16.112	29	.000
Fluency	-5.80000	2.12376	.38774	-6.59302	-5.00698	-14.958	29	.000

In the above table a paired sample *t*-test was carried out to compare the five major aspects of speaking—content, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency—from the pretest with the posttest mean scores. There is a significant difference between pretest and posttest of all aspects of speaking content, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency. That is *p*-value is 0.000 (2-tailed), which is highly significant at

1% level. That indicates the mean score of content in posttest group is significantly higher than the pretests of all aspects. It indicates that there is significantly improvement of speaking performance through Language lab.

4. Findings of the study

In my paper I observed that the students who are undergoing their training in an English lab are not given adequate time for practicing their pronunciation. Hence, more time and content need to be provided for the students. More colleges should be encouraged and funded to set up the language laboratories. Besides the language laboratory, students should be exposed to the standard news channels and should be encouraged to use English for their daily communication in the society. The analysis based on the collected data shows that language labs besides the standard news channels are effective in colleges. The college provides language lab facility and most of the students are making use of it. They know the relevance of computer literacy in the modern era. It is clear from the study that use of computers in language learning is a time saving one and the students find language labs besides the classroom teaching and other means of learning are very effective.

Conclusion:

The language laboratory is one of the helpful tools for practicing and assessing one's speech in any language. It provides a facility which allows the student to listen to model pronunciation, repeat and record the same, listen to their performance and compare with the model, and do self-assessment. Since the language laboratory gives every learner of any language freedom to learn at their own pace, it is flexible and does not necessarily require a teacher all the time. Besides the language lab, students should also be exposed to the standard news channels, listen to radio stations, decent movies and so on. At the same time, it is possible for teachers to provide assistance individually and collectively. The language laboratory allows every participant his or her privacy to speak and listen.

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