

Review

Role of Language Laboratory in English as a Second Language (ESL) Teaching in Special Reference to Speaking of Engineering Undergraduates

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English as a second language teaching is considered to be a difficult task for teachers, as the learners come from varied arenas of society who aspire to speak English but believe in one day success. In Indian scenario where there is lot of impact of regional languages it becomes a challenging job for trainers to judge and improve specially the pronunciation of the learners. The major effective tool is Language Lab which could be used in order to let the learners become effective speakers. This paper tries to find out how far the language lab can be effective in teaching speaking skills.

Keywords: ESL, Language Laboratory, Pre Test, Post Test.

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INTRODUCTION

English as a second language (ESL) teaching has been a challenging job for teachers from years. In India if we look to the history of ESL world English is categorised broadly into three categories:

English as a Native Language (ENL)
English as a Second Language (ESL)
English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Accordingly there are three geographic divisions of English Speaking Nations:

ENL Territories
ESL Territories
EFL Territories (Braj B. Kachru in KOul D Omkar (eds.) 1992:2-3)

During the last phase of British Rule i.e. 1850-1947 English was used as a medium of communication for political awakening and resurgence. English language penetrated into various sections of educated Indians variety of English came into existence and certain words were borrowed and used like coolie, jungle, etc.

The method followed for teaching English as second language was Grammar Translation Method and the spoken element was not taken into much consideration.

Later in 20th century Stephen Krashen has worked a lot on Second language teaching and learning. He has given a well-known theory of Second Language Acquisition which has five main hypotheses:

- the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis,
- the Monitor hypothesis,
- the Input hypothesis,

- the Natural Order hypothesis,
- and the Affective Filter hypothesis. (Krashen, 1987; p 10)

Teaching English as a second language focuses on teaching all four skills- Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. For a trainer the sequence is very important which maximum of the trainers don't focus on. The first is listening, followed by speaking. After practice of these two the trainer can focus on reading followed by writing at later stages.

The system in Indian schools and colleges is different here writing is first skill that is targeted which is just reversing of the actual sequence. Thus the students are able to write, read and even listen but most difficult task is speaking.

Hence when the students turn up to acquire speaking skills they find it difficult and even the trainers are those whose native language is not English. So, they need some aid which could help in the training process. The need of language lab is felt here. 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).

Hmoud, (2014, pp. 84-94) reveals that the language lab provides access to native-speakers to enhance students learning correctly. It is very helpful for the students who aspire to get higher studies from abroad.

Language laboratory is an audio-visual setup wherein modern technologies are used which is very effective in learning a foreign language. The first language lab was at the University of Grenoble. It came up in 1950s and until the 1990s, it was tape based systems using reel to reel or (latterly) cassette. The current language labs are installed with multimedia computers. The language lab is a technological advancement for imparting skills in English. The language lab offers an exclusive result oriented and is efficient to enrich the English language learning process. The multimedia based language lab helps to learn and enhance the language proficiency by sharing the course materials with in a second where the teacher and the students involved effortlessly. First, the teacher facilitates the communication process between all participants in the classroom. The teacher is also a co-communicator who engages in communicative activities with the students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In addition, the teacher acts as analyst, counselor, and group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The language lab is developed on the methodology of LSRW skills.

The language lab has basic software and content software. The content software is either open-ended or closed-ended; in closed ended the trainer is not able to add any of his/her own content whereas in open-ended the trainer can add and use his/her own content. Hence, open-ended one is preferred by trainers.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The trainees who aspire to develop their speaking skills realise at very advance stage. They realise when they are forced to do so mostly at the time of placement in Indian scenario.

The matter of fact is to find out how far the language lab is effective for trainer to teach speaking skills and for trainees to develop their speaking skills.

OBJECTIVES

- To find the most difficult skill to acquire in ESL by learner.
- To find the result of post training changes.
- To find the effectiveness of language lab by trainers in teaching speaking skills.
- To find out whether language lab enhances public speaking skills.
- To find the ease of handling language lab by trainers.

HYPOTHESES

The ESL trainees find speaking skills to be the most difficult task. After the exposure to language lab the trainees will definitely develop their speaking skills.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on the engineering undergraduates students at Peoples University, Bhopal, MP. The students here learn the subject Communication Skills where they work on all four skills and the subject has both theory and practical division.

The current study was done on selected students of first year who undergo the training of speaking skills in language lab for their practical exam. The students come from various backgrounds hence the selected students were taken who has studied in English medium schools but they were not categorised to their first language; regional language and their competency in English speaking skills.

Data was collected from a group of 50 students both male & female of first year engineering course. The members of the group were of 18 – 20 age groups.

INSTRUMENTS

To collect data the pre and post oral test were conducted. A questionnaire was filled by trainers.

Table 1. Percentage of response of pre-oral test

Question No.	Percentage		
	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	Total
1	44.77%	55.23%	100%
2	41.22%	58.78%	100%
3	46.67%	53.33%	100%
4	40%	60%	100%
AV.	43.165%	56.835%	100%

Pre and Post Testing

Pre/Post test is considered a valuable diagnostic tool by ESL trainers which could effectively reveal the development of skills after the training.

The sample group underwent a pretest which they had to attempt using language lab. The test was compiled with the following four category words:

- Pragmatics
- Syntax
- Morphology
- Phonology

Each category had four questions which they had to speak and record using the software. The result was collected through software.

Later the trainees underwent a training session for one month where they were given the basic knowledge of phonetics and their speaking skills were practiced through the software using language lab.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire had four parameters to get the responses of trainers who were involved in the training session.

- Finding the most difficult skill to be taught & learnt.
- Finding out the importance of language lab in training the learners.
- Finding the ease of handling the language lab by trainees
- Finding out whether language lab enhances the confidence in spoken English.

These parameters were designed in questionnaire to collect the data from five trainers who were involved in training the sample group and fifteen other teachers of Bhopal involved in teaching communication skills and conducted practical in language lab.

Data Analysis

In this study two instruments were used the first was oral

test and second the questionnaire. The oral test was pre as well as post. In pre-oral test the actual level of trainees performance was found. The post-oral test was conducted after the training session which found the development and improvement in the speaking skills of trainees through language lab.

Pre-Oral Test

The pre-oral test was conducted on trainees before they underwent the training program. The data was used to compare the performance of the trainees before and after the training session and to find the level of progress of trainees.

The table 1 and Figure 1 represents the difficulty faced by learners in speaking the words correctly. The table shows that average correct answers are approximately 43% whereas the percentage for incorrect answers is around 57%. The result clearly speaks that though the experimental group has English background being studied in English medium schools but their speaking skills are still to be worked upon.

Post-Oral Test

This test was conducted after one month of pre-oral test wherein during this period the experimental group had got training on speaking skills in language lab. (Table 2 and Figure 2)

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Table 3) used Likert Scale of three points. The options were in the series of (a)-(b)-(c) where one was of positive response; one of negative response and one of neutral. The codes were (A) Agree as positive response; (N) Neutral as neutral response; (D) Disagree as negative response.

The objective of this instrument was to find whether the most difficult skill is speaking; language lab is important for ESL teaching speaking skills; ease of handling language lab by trainers and language lab triggers the speaking skills.

This Figure 3 proves the hypotheses correct as the positive response is higher. Seventy five percent of teachers agree that speaking skills is the most difficult in

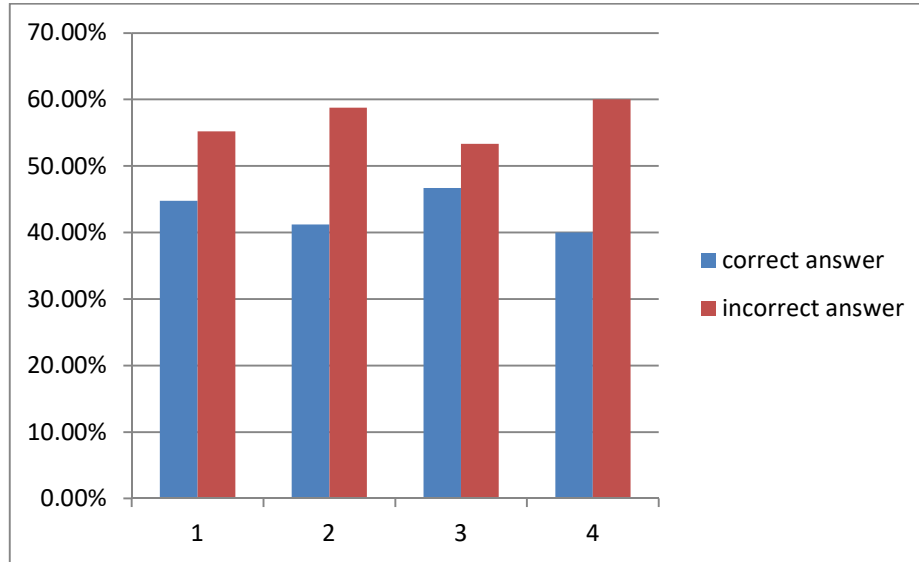


Figure 1. Graphical representation of pre-oral test

Table 2. Percentage of response of Post-Oral Test

Question No.	Percentage		
	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	Total
1	94.70%	5.30%	100%
2	95.30%	4.70%	100%
3	93.80%	6.20%	100%
4	93%	7%	100%
1	94.70%	5.30%	100%

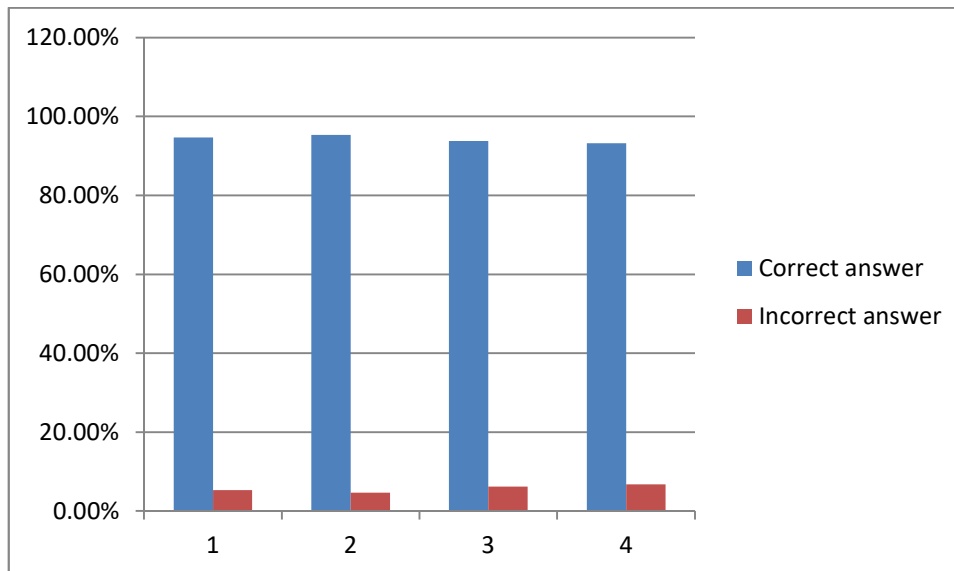


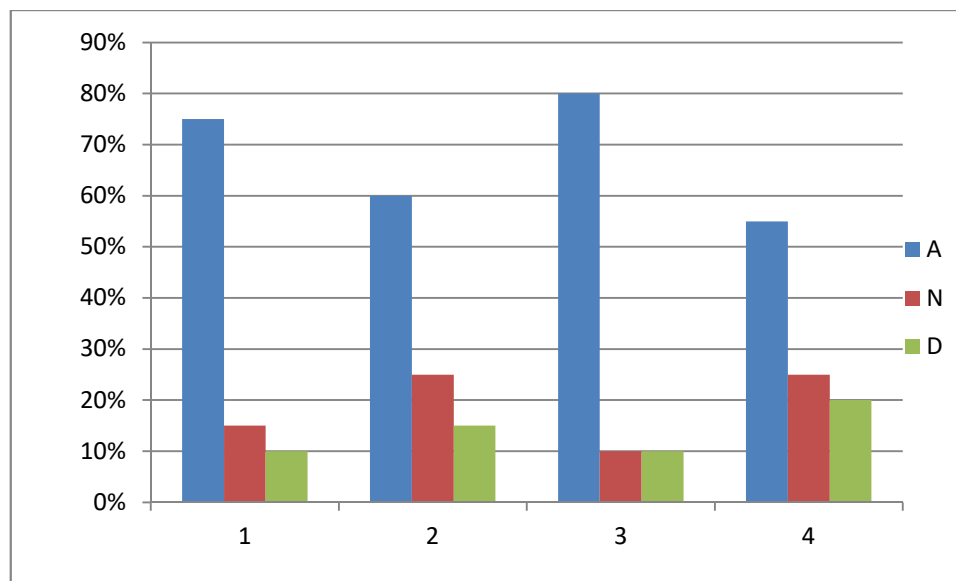
Figure 2. Graphical representation of Post-Oral Test

ESL teaching. Sixty percent of teachers accepted the fact that language lab is important for ESL learners specially for acquiring command over speaking skills. Eighty percent of teachers said that they can easily handle the

language lab. Fifty five percent of the teachers agreed that language lab triggers the speaking skills.

Table 3. Percentage of response of the questionnaire

Question No.	A (Agree)	N (Neutral)	D (Disagree)
1	75%	15%	10%
2	60%	25%	15%
3	80%	10%	10%
4	55%	25%	20%

**Figure 3.** Graphical representation of the questionnaire

RESULT

The study was conducted to find the importance of language lab in teaching and learning of speaking skills in English as a Second Language. The result proved the hypotheses by pre and post oral test which was conducted on the trainees wherein they could not speak correctly in pre oral test but after the training session they could correctly speak the words which was proved by post oral test.

The second instrument used was questionnaire which was filled by ESL trainers who proved that speaking skills is most difficult among all four skills of ESL, language lab is important for speaking skills training, it is easy to handle the language lab and language lab improves the capacity to acquire the speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

The entire study revealed the fact that in today's competitive world every professional need to have good command over English language. Dr. Thiruvagam, the Vice-Chancellor of Bharathiar University, Coimbatore,

explained that "personality development and communication skills are equally important for students in finding respectable jobs in addition to their academic records" (The Hindu, 25/09/06). We in India though study English as Second Language right from primary school but that is only for the sake of clearing the examination.

Learning a language doesn't mean to have a knowledge of it. It asks us to be very much conversant in the language. Learning English language of years at school and college for years never promise us to develop all four skills. It needs a lot of practice for it. Spoken English is considered as major difficult skill to be acquired because we never practice it. Learning spoken English is not a job that can be achieved in specific duration. It depends upon the usage, environment, and zest to achieve command.

It is also a matter of fact that if one makes his/her mind can be a good orator. All the barriers can be overcome as there are equipments available that can help in learning the language quick and better. One is language lab that can to the highest extent help oneself in attaining the command over spoken English.

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