Effectiveness of Language Laboratories in Developing Communication Skills among Engineering Students: An Experimental Study

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Abstract:

Technology has been playing the most essential and effective role in both socio-cultural and linguistic change in the era of globalization. Technologies such as software, computers, PowerPoint presentations, online forums and Language Laboratories are the effective tools in the field of teaching and learning process. In fact, Computer Assisted Language Labs play a significant role as a good teaching-learning resource which provides a rich environment particularly in English language teaching and learning. In this context, the present research article aims to help the engineering students develop communication skills effectively in order to satisfy the requirements of the industry. This experimental study emphasizes that communication skills can be equipped in an effective way by teaching the contents through language laboratory rather than conventional mode of teaching. The investigator has conducted the experiment on the topics such as Group Discussion Skills and Interview Skills. They are taught through conventional mode of teaching and language laboratory. The researcher has tested the performance of students by conducting GD and Interview in conventional class and language laboratory class. The results of both the classes are interpreted in the full paper.

Key Words: *Computer Assisted Language laboratory, Conventional Teaching, Teaching and Learning Process.*

Introduction:

Globalization has enhanced the demands of having fluency and proficiency in English language. So, English language has become a prerequisite to get an employment in the job market. Lack of effective communication skill is a major obstacle preventing the engineering students from getting better opportunities in the multinational companies. Earlier the job-seekers were expected to possess an in-depth knowledge in their filed but presently the recruiters looking for the best, most articulated and result-oriented candidates who can

deliver values to the organization. Therefore, English is considered as the language of opportunities and employment.

For developing communication skills of the engineering students, language laboratory plays a significant role in their curriculum. Every university in the country has drafted the courses or contents on communication skills for their students in order to equip them to the requirements of the industries. Even in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the technical and non-technical universities have designed the communication skills course along with language laboratories and prescribed or suggested software to bridge the gaps between college and industry. The language laboratories are yielding the fruitful results to some extent and they can hone the skills of engineering students from below average to average, average to above average and ultimately make the students proficient in English language and communication.

Importance of English Language Lab:

Technological developments in the field of education have brought enormous change from teacher-centered education to learner-centered education. This change would yield better results in language learning. English Language Laboratory is a dramatic change in the engineering curriculum since 2006 in Andhra Pradesh state universities. It is an audio-visual installation used as a teaching-learning aid in modern teaching and learning process. In the present engineering curriculum, the CALL is used to teach English language and communication skills. The course contents or materials in the form of software are already installed in the computers. Sometimes, the computer systems may be provided with internet connection. Mostly listening and speaking tasks will be held in the language laboratories. In these labs, students get motivated through the communication elements such as texts and its colours, audio, graphics, animations, pictures, photographs and moving videos. These elements certainly make the students get registered the important features in their minds strongly for longer time. This kind of learning influences the students to participate effectively and interestingly in the oral activities by adopting the suitable techniques learnt from the CALL.

Literature Review:

Russel. N Cambell (1967-68), University of California, Los Angels, in his article entitled "The Language Laboratory and Pronunciation Teaching", published in the "Journal of English Language Teaching", expressed that the teaching of modern languages has become a responsible task. Language Laboratories are one of the modern techniques being followed to practice speech sounds and learn right pronunciation. Undoubtedly,

the language laboratories can be used to maximize its contribution to teaching and learning of modern foreign languages.

Mukhopadhyay Rajdoot (2013), in his article entitled "English Language Teaching Professional Institutions: Problems and Prospects", published in 'Literary Perspectives' Journal stated that the approach of CALL to teaching and learning are guided by a wide array of ICT applications. Its latest manifesto is found in the virtual learning environment and web-based distance learning. The chief emphasis is focused on the learner-centered learning materials so that learners feel easier in getting the relevant information.

Objectives of the Study:

The objectives of the experimental study are to identify the effectiveness of language laboratories in developing communication skills and employability skills among engineering students. In brief, the objectives of this study arte shown below:

1. To make the students in an interactive mode in order to improve oral communication.
2. To study the effectiveness of language laboratories by conducting practical classes.

Methodology:

This is an experimental method conducted in the five selected engineering colleges of Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh as a part of research in PhD thesis. Thirty engineering students were selected from each selected college for conducting the experiment. They are taught the Group Discussion Skills and Interview Skills in the conventional mode of teaching as well as through Language Laboratory. After the teaching in both the classes separately, the students are conducted oral test on Group Discussion and Interview separately. The results are compared and interpreted in the discussions of the research paper.

List of Engineering Colleges Chosen for Experimental Study:

The investigator has chosen the following engineering colleges in Anantapur district for the experimental study.

Table-1

S. No.	Name of the Engineering College	College Code
1.	JNTU College of Engineering, Anantapur	JNTUCEA
2.	Intell Engineering College, Anantapur	INTL
3.	Srinivasa Ramanujan Institute of Technology, Anantapur	SRIT
4.	Chiranjeevi Reddy Institute of Engineering & Technology, Anantapur	CRIT
5.	Anantha Lakshmi Institute of Technology & Sciences, Anantapur	ALTS

Topics for Experimental Study:

Group Discussion:

With the impact of globalization and the excessive use of technology, the work of business organizations has not only grown at large extent but also become wide, complex, and different. As a result, the ways of addressing the issues have been changed considerably. Decisions on the policy matters and solutions for the complex problems are now generally taken by a group discussion rather than by an individual.

Most of the professional organizations prefer to recruit the employees who possess the required skills or have the potential to grow as effective participant in a Group Discussion. It is an effective tool for assessing the suitability of a candidate for the employment. The recruiters filter the candidates through a three-pronged procedure, of which GD plays an important role. The other two are the written exam and personal interview.

Interview:

Interview is a social process, which involves interaction between two or more people. During the interview there is generally an interviewee-a person who is asked to answer the questions on one side. On other hand, there is an interview team known as interviewers. The team consists of one or more persons. An interview may differ from situation to situation as it is conducted to achieve different objectives.

Interviewes are usually conducted by the recruiters to recruit and select potential candidates to their organizations. Sometimes, interviews are conducted for different purposes such as admissions into various courses, and knowing the opinions of the people by media. Job interview is the most common method of

selecting the candidates for different jobs. During the interview the recruiter examines the suitability of the candidate for the job for which he is going to be interviewed through different methods.

Teaching and Testing Group Discussion Skills through Conventional Mode and Language Laboratory:
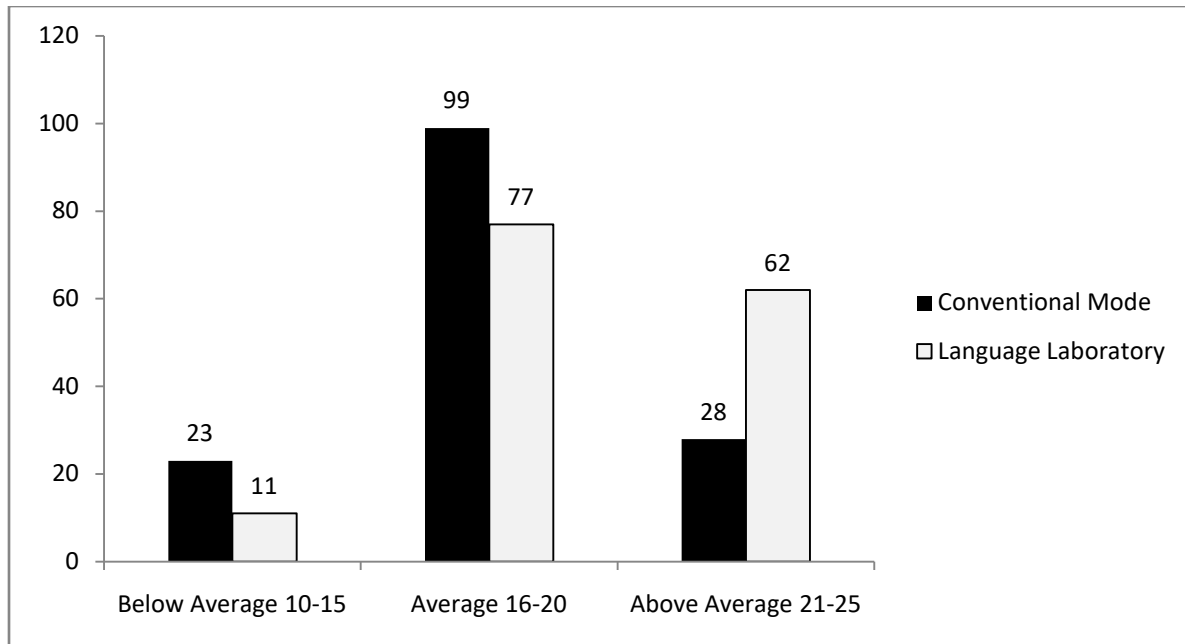
Students from selected engineering colleges are conducted the class on Group Discussion Skills. They are explained the objectives, purposes, methodology, structure, summarization, conclusion, do's and don'ts and evaluation procedure of group discussion. After the conventional mode of teaching on this topic, the students are given an opportunity to participate in a GD. The students are assessed in the aspects of the Content, Choice of Words and Sentences they used, the body language of the participants, Leadership Qualities they shown, and Team Spirit while discussing the topic in a group. The same topic is taught to the students through the language laboratory. After teaching the GD through language laboratory, students are conducted a GD again. The performance of the student participants in both the classes are explained in the following table.

Table-2

Teaching and Testing the Group Discussion Skills through Conventional and Language Laboratory Classes:

S.No.	Name of the College	Performance of the Students					
		Through Conventional Mode of Teaching			Teaching Through Language Laboratory		
		Below Average 10-15	Average 16-20	Above Average 21-25	Below Average 10-15	Average 16-20	Above Average 21-25
1.	JNTUCEA	05	16	09	03	12	15
2.	INTL	02	20	08	01	13	16
3.	SRIT	05	23	02	01	14	15
4.	CRIT	05	21	04	01	18	11
5.	ALTS	06	19	05	05	20	05
	Total	**23**	**99**	**28**	**11**	**77**	**62**

As far as the testing and teaching the Group Discussion skills through conventional mode of teaching and teaching through language laboratory is concerned, the above chart explains that among 150 students: 23 (15%) students are below average in marks (10-16), 99 students (66%) are average in marks (16-20) and 28 students(19%) are above average in marks (21-25) through conventional mode of teaching whereas out of 150 students: 11 students (7%) are below average in marks (16-20), 77 students (52%) are average in marks (16-20) and 62 students (41%) are above average in marks (21-25) through language laboratory.
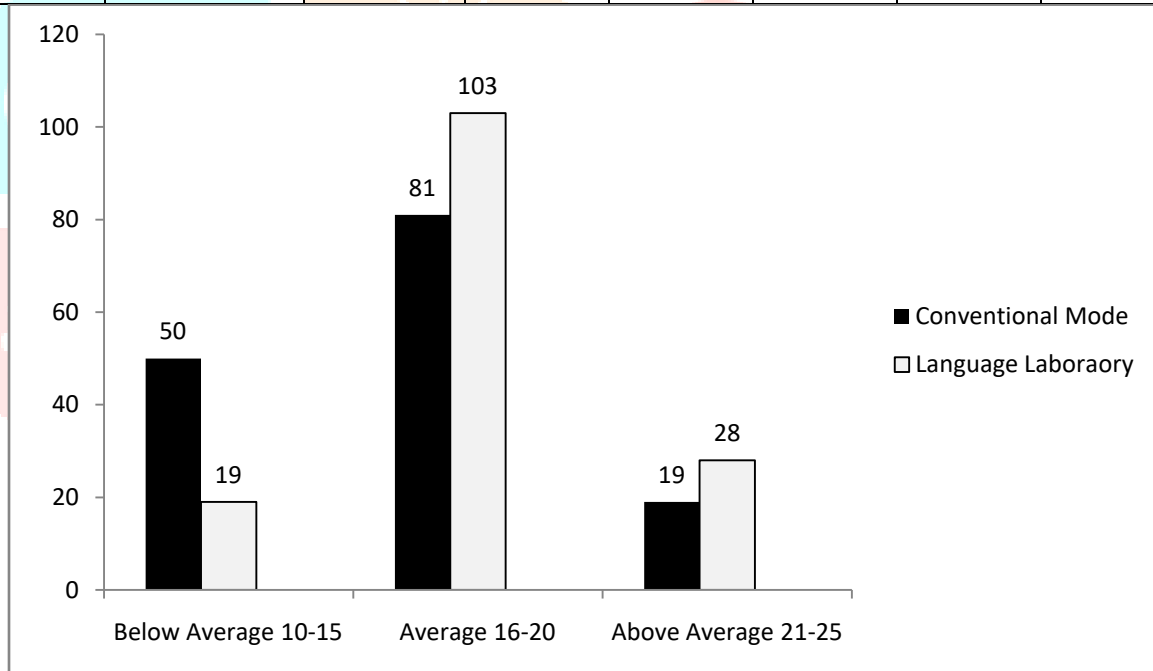
Teaching and Testing Interview Skills through Conventional Mode and Language Laboratory:

The students of chosen engineering colleges in Anantapur district are taught the interview skills through conventional mode of teaching in their classrooms. They are explained interview process, tips for winning the interviews and sample questions. After that Model Interview is conducted. They are evaluated on the aspects of candidates' personality, use of grammatical sentences, body language, and skills during the interview. The same students are handled the class on the same topic through language laboratory. After teaching them, the researcher has conducted an interview test to observe the results. The consolidated performance of the engineering students in the interview through conventional mode of teaching and teaching through language laboratory is analyzed in the following table.

Table-**3**

Teaching and Testing the Interview Skills through Conventional and Language Laboratory Classes:

S.No.	Name of the College	Performance of the Students					
		Through Conventional Mode of Teaching			Teaching Through Language Laboratory		
		Below Average 10-15	Average 16-20	Above Average 21-25	Below Average 10-15	Average 16-20	Above Average 21-25
1.	JNTUCEA	08	16	06	01	20	09
2.	INTL	13	13	04	02	20	08
3.	SRIT	02	22	06	05	23	02
4.	CRIT	14	14	02	05	21	04
5.	ALTS	13	16	01	06	19	05
	Total	**50**	**81**	**19**	**19**	**103**	**28**

Regarding the testing and teaching the interview skills through conventional mode of teaching and teaching through language laboratory is concerned, the above chart explains that among 150 students: 50 (33%) students are below average in marks (10-16), 81 students (54%) are average in marks (16-20) and 19 students(13%) are above average in marks (21-25) through conventional mode of teaching whereas out of 150 students: 19 students (12%) are below average in marks (16-20), 103 students (69%) are average in marks (16-20), and 28 students (19%) are above average in marks (21-25) by teaching through language laboratory.

Results and Discussions:

Based on the above experiment on the effectiveness of language laboratories, the researcher has inferred the following results from conventional mode of teaching and language laboratory:

1. The interest levels of students are very high when they are listening to the topics in the language laboratory whereas they feel somewhat monotonous in the conventional mode of teaching.
2. The performance of the students is yielded better results from teaching through the language laboratory rather than the conventional mode of teaching.
3. Some kind of model videos, pictures, animations, pronunciation, visuals, and text may create a great impact in the minds of the learners in the language laboratory whereas the learners follow the instructions of the teacher in the conventional mode of teaching.
4. The participant responded that they need the combination of both the classes in order to achieve the best results.
5. English language classrooms must be integrated with the language laboratories with high-configured systems in order to developing the communication skills effectively among the students.

Conclusion:

It is a modest attempt. The practical study on the effectiveness of English language laboratory is brought effective results among the engineering graduates. It is a need of the hour to equip the students with latest skill set by adopting advanced and up graded software and technologies the educational institutes. Undoubtedly, the employability rate of the students in the country can be enhanced to a little percentage through the language labs. Finally, the effectiveness of language labs depends on the faculty, functions of the systems, software, maintenance, etc.

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