

## English Language Laboratories (ELLS) Play a Vital Role on Professional Students in Engineering Colleges

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### Abstract

Globalization has created a stipulation for people to learn the English Language in the world. The medium of English playing a prominent role in Indian academics and it signifies the importance of job seekers. There is a huge demand for good communicators from recruiters' side and it creates a competition among students to procure their bright opportunity provided they should develop English Language skills for their competence. It is a major task for them to set the pace for achieving their goals. Especially for rural background students, it is a challenging issue communicating in the English Language. It may be because of lack of motivation, encouragement, confidence, and mother tongue influence. It is one of the main objectives for professional students mounting communication skills to showcase themselves. Though professional students are good at core subjects, they are not in a position to present themselves in front of the interviewer. It has been observed that majority of the professional students are ill-equipped to handle real-life demands in using the English Language for various purposes of communication due to some reasons like lack of interest, awareness, and not able to track an easy going method. In this context, English Language Laboratories (ELLS) would provide an interesting, easygoing and joy of learning platform to develop their communication skills. Therefore the present paper emphasizes the effectiveness of English Language Laboratories on Professional Students in engineering colleges for their elevation.

**Key words:** Vital role, prominent, authentic material, procure, English language skills.

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## 1. Introduction

Learning a language starts with the mother tongue. Everyone learns the mother tongue without any intention or special interest. But one is curious and cautious to learn other languages because he or she is new to that language. One should have the interest to learn other languages other than the mother tongue. Mother's tongue is taught by their mother since childhood. Other languages like English are learnt by different sources, sometimes by force. These sources must be interesting, entertaining and joy-learning. These all possible to teach and learn the English language in an easy-going method to students is conducting English Language Laboratories (ELLS). That is why most of the universities started introducing ELLs in almost all UG and PG colleges especially in professional colleges to make students learn the English language with interest. It is practically-oriented learning goes through the activity-based methodology. Usually, ELLs take place in engineering colleges for I B Tech as well as III B Tech students.

It has become mandatory to all Engineering colleges installing language laboratories which are playing a vital role in developing communication skills of the students. In a complete sense, language laboratory is an integrated activity of good machines with properly compiled material and appropriate multimedia software with good learning strategies designed by the language teacher. In the recruitment corridors and particularly in the multinational companies it is often heard that plenty of jobs remain vacant as suitable candidates are not available with effective communication skills. English Language Teachers (ELTs) make the students gain good command ineffective communication skills with the help of ELLs. Effective communication is a great key to get a job in reputed Multi-National Companies (MNCs). It also paves a magnificent way to climb the steps of the success ladder and to reach a high position in a well-established company or organization. An attempt is made in this paper to discuss what kind of role English Language Laboratories are playing in developing the communication skills of professional students in Engineering colleges.

## **2. History of ELL**

According to Parker (1961), Diekhoff (1965) and Hocking (1967) the English Language Laboratory (ELL) was first launched by the military organizations in 1957. But Leon (1962), Peterson (1974) stated that the first ELL had been established in 1908 by the University of Grenoble. Since 1958 there was a massive increase in the number of labs at the secondary level. There were more than 900 labs in higher education after 1962. As Parker states, finally, foreign language teachers feel suddenly involved in a technological revolution, with new demands upon their competencies. The new language labs have content like audio, video, material, internet etc. But the English Language Laboratory was introduced by Jawaharlal Technological University, Hyderabad (JNTUH) in 2006. It has been introduced generally to enrich the skills of the English language and particularly communication among the Engineering students.

## **3. Importance of ELL**

The English Language Laboratories have been given a significant position in the Engineering colleges for the acquisition of English language and communication skills. In the process of language teaching and learning the ELL is usually equipped with proper systems, a big mirror, an effective sound system, a big round table along with revolving chairs at least to accommodate minimum 10 to 15 students at once and other electronic devices. It is possible to make students cultivate the right pronunciation and fluency particularly communication skills to make them grab the bright opportunity in reputed MNCs. ELL is one of the most important requirements and the great need at present in engineering colleges. Compare to regular subject it is different and interesting and entertaining. Hence, students show much interest to attend the lab slots regularly. Usually, students have ample knowledge of their mother tongue but it is challenging to them communicating right messages without errors in English. Most of the students have this problem and it can be rectified with the help of English faculty in the ELL with the practically oriented method.

#### **4. Methodology of ELL**

An important role is played by a digital language lab in the life of a potential engineer. Students learn the quality of language proficiency from the multimedia, digital and computerized language lab. It is a practically oriented method followed in the language lab. As communicating the right messages in the English language is very challenging for students, sufficient exposure is given in the language lab for learning pronunciation and enunciation of English words. And of course, students already have ample knowledge of their mother tongue.

Audio, video modules, flash-based material, internet etc, are the content that can be used in the language labs. These types of materials are much more engaging for both teacher and student and much quicker in speed and variety of the delivery of media from teacher to student, student to teacher or student to student. There is also a facility for students to interrogate, watch videos and record audio files and be marked and assessed by their teacher consoles.

Much of the interactions of the students use to take place in different activities to enhance the freedom of learning equipped with technology which brings more awareness. Students participate in group activities develop cooperative learning. While participating in group activities they build their confidence for some extent and they are allowed to participate in individual activities which help them to build self-esteem. Similarly, they are made through to develop reading skills as well as writing skills in preparation of resume and report and paragraph writing. Overall ELL methodology helps students to increase enthusiasm, attain satisfaction in the learning experience, and build up the positive attitude, oral communication skills and gain will power.

#### **5. Setup and equipment of ELL**

Modern English language labs are set up with digital technology and multimedia systems. Language labs are mandatory for all graduate institutions in India. A full range of language development materials is also available for students' preparation in these labs. Usually, there are two different labs. They are Computer Assisted Language Lab (CALL) and Interactive Communication Skills Lab (ICS). Both are connected. Students stay for one and half hours in CALL in their computerized cabins for learning language exercises under the master console and then come to ICS for activity practice. CALL is equipped with electrically connected systems to several rows of students' cabins. Headsets are available with boom arm microphone for students self-learning.

Students systems are associated and monitored with teacher control systems. Software is very essential in the language lab. It can be installed and accessed on any networked PC in the ELL. Many software like Renet, Aristoclass, Hi class, Globareena, Console OCL-908W, Hi studio MHi Tech, Clarity Snet, Orell Talk, and other online software's are available in the market and used in the language labs. The more sophisticated software labs have a higher quality of teacher control access to students. The teacher can deliver, display audio, video, multimedia content, control and manage students in the latest generation digital language labs. With the help of teachers and all support system, students can learn language skills easily and develop communication with interest.

## **6. The Role of ELL**

There is a good scope for ELL to play a significant role in a new dimension in teaching and stimulate students in learning English language skills. In the acquisition of language skills, integration of technology and digitalizing the classroom is one of the means of adaptation for assisting the students. It allows students to go through standard native speakers' language and develop an accent. Along with these some textual information in the form of word documents, figures and PowerPoint presentations are also provided to students. So, it is easy for the students to learn the basic LSRW skills and to develop communication with the help of valuable guidance of the teachers in the lab.

## **7. Role of teacher in ELL**

The teacher is a sculpture to bring out the intellectual beauty of students into the society, like how a sculpture removes waste material from rock to make a beautiful statue. He plays a prominent role in the lives and growth of students. Especially in the ELL, he makes students aware of the intonation part of speaking while practising activities and teaches them non-verbal signals while watching video clips. This helps as a rich source to the Indian rural students to develop their non-verbal communication. He provides information from newspaper cuttings and websites and makes the students understand the importance of communication in job interviews and at the workplace. He takes special care for slow learners to bring them to track and allows students to share their experience among themselves after the completion of their assigned task. In ELL, students stay in teacher's console, he monitors from his PC in their self-learning in facilitating and sharing relevant educational videos, audio clips, images and text to them.

He adopts a suitable methodology to develop advanced language skills in students and make them globally competitive. So, in ELL a good teacher can ignite the imagination, inspire hope and instill a love of learning.

### **8. Activities conducted in ELL**

Lab activities are designed to develop students' intellectual thinking. They are important; fun-oriented and create interest in students for effective participation. Here teacher plays a prominent role in adopting a cooperative learning approach to students to learn the language skills in the easiest way along with their friends. Usually, the lab is classified as two types with specific objectives to enhance the proficiency in the students. It helps to improve their knowledge in day to day activities and develop application skills. There are topics like summarizing and note-making, vocabulary building, information transfer, précis writing- paraphrasing, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, report writing, resume preparation, Email writing, time management, problem-solving and discussion making, etiquettes etc, are taught in CALL with the help of master console system with practice exercises.

Activities like describing objects/places/persons, JAM, small talks on general topics, debates, situational dialogues, oral presentation, PowerPoint presentation, poster presentation, Group Discussion (GD); mock interviews (job interviews) are conducted in the ICS.

In group activities students are not alone; they can have moral support and good cooperation from their friends. It gives them the confidence to perform well. Even then there are some rural background students scared to come forward. But while observing the performance of their co-students and proper motivation from teachers make them come to track in a couple of days. Here students' coordination and teacher's encouragement play a major role to feel comfortable in the lab.

Whereas in individual activities like JAM, descriptions; most of the students use to feel shy, and nervous. They are not confident enough to perform because they are new to such type of activities, stage fear dominates them. Here teacher stands as back support shows some videos of their senior students' performance on-screen and motivates them with a sense of humour and colloquial expressions.

However they do in the initial stage he keeps encourages them as “Yes...you are right”

“That’s good”

“Nice performance”

“Well done”

These words boost up their confidence level and they develop their interest in attending lab sessions.

Even in presentational activities like Oral presentation, Poster Presentation, PowerPoint Presentations they commit some mistakes in their way of presentation. Teacher gives them proper training and guidance to improve their presentations. And the mock interview is last but not least (Job Interviews); which is one of the major activities. Because most of the IT firms which come for campus drives use to prefer GD, TR (Technical Round), and HR interviews to scrutinize and select students. An official interview setup uses to take place in the ELL for students mock interviews. All the students get ready with their resume and come to mock-interviews in proper dress code. A questionnaire is given to them with selected frequently asked questions. Faculties take the interview in the beginning for a couple of students and let other students observe it and they join in panel act as interviewers for remaining students in the presence of faculty. After some time interviewers become intervenes; this happens to vice-versa for the entire class.

This is a unique experience to students; all the episodes are shot and projected on a screen to let them know; how is their eye to eye contact? How is their body language? How is their communication? How is their performance? Whether their voice is audible or not? Teachers observe if there are mistakes, and train them to rectify. By end of semester students would be ready with proper soft skills communication skills to attend the placement drives and grab their bright opportunity. So, lab activities help them a lot build their confidence and communication.

## **9. Materials of ELL**

Material is a source to students for regular preparation and to develop language skills in the ELL. Authentic materials are more important for effective learning. As Nunan (1989) defined authentic materials are the texts which have been produced for language teaching and learning. Teachers prepare authentic materials according to university curriculum and supply to the students. Along with that students take notes in the exercise pattern and day to day evaluation takes place regularly. This gives support to students to develop communication for their competency. According to Hymes (1979) communication competence emphasizes both the need for contextualized communication and the knowledge of the language. Although ELL atmosphere is a joy of learning, teachers take a firm hand on students to attend their activities and submit their performance records on time. So, materials are very much supportive for developing essential communication skills.

## **10. Benefits of ELL**

While participating in group activities like debate, GD, and mock interviews, there is a lot of scope for students to develop critical, analytical, creative thinking and interpersonal skills. In almost all the activities and computer-based textual exercises, students have the opportunity to develop LSRW skills and confidence. Individual activities help to build confidence as well as to overcome stage fear. Their interpretation in gaining technical data goes smoothly. Overall teachers' encouragement, motivation, guidance, and experience in activities make them either to procure a good job or to go for higher education in a reputed national University or a foreign University.

## **11. Barriers of English Language skills**

Usually, there are some barriers to learn a language, other than regional language whatever the other languages we want to learn. This is quite common even with English also. They are as follows.

### **11.1. Rural background**

Gandhiji said, "Villages are the backbone to Nation". The rural territory is more in India. Most of the students use to come from villages to nearby towns and cities for their studies. They use frequently their regional language for their communication because they have good command on it. They have a kind of phobia on the English language as they are not acquainted with it.

Speaking English is a difficult task to them that's why they use to get scared about it. This is a common barrier to most of the rural students in India from which they should come out. ELL helps students as a tool to overcome this problem. Speaking practice in lab activities sharpens them to communicate in English.

### **11.2. Mother tongue influence**

Everyone speaks much in mother tongue because before going to school all types of communication used to take place in mother tongue only. Till now, most of the rural students are studying in government schools where teaching use to take place in their regional language. For the majority of the students, the regional language may be their mother tongue and their communication in the school, out of the school is the mother tongue. They treat English, just one of the subjects among other subjects and do not bother to develop communication skills in English. Getting pass marks is a big criterion for rural students in English. So, to overcome mother tongue influence and to develop command in English language, ELL helps them in an easy activity-based method.

### **11.3. Lack of interest and exposure**

After all English is a foreign language, most of the students don't show much interest in learning it and illiterate parents do not insist their children to learn it thoroughly because they do not know the value of it. All these circumstances are interdependent. Due to lack of exposure, they do not come to know the value of English language communication skills till entering graduation. And all of a sudden, in a short time they want to develop communication skills. Here ELL plays a major role to motivate and build up their confidence.

### **11.4. Language phobia**

This is a major problem which troubles especially rural students. As they are less acquainted with the English language, they have a kind of phobia on it. They feel great about fluent English speakers, at the same time they use to get scared to communicate/speak in English. A strong unreasonable fear dominates them. Usually, they have a feeling that they can't speak well in English and if something goes wrong others may laugh at them. So, they may have a different thought that first, they should gain command on it and then they would start speaking it. But in fact, learning a language is only possible through practice. Practice makes a man perfect; it is possible in the ELL.

### **11.5. Giving importance to written than spoken**

Usually, parents concentrate on their children's ranks, grades and marks. They don't bother about quality. This is the problem institutions management is facing now a day. So, management's plan of action concentrates much on the study and writing exercises. But this is not correct. The academic curriculum should be revised according to recruiters' requirements. Much priority should be given to speak as well as written. Academic exercises should be designed according to necessity. This type of practical orientation and implementation is available in ELL.

### **12. Conclusion**

English Language Laboratories has got much importance in developing soft skills as well as the communication skills of the students. They help the students to use the technology effectively in the process of learning language skills. Students have the freedom to learn individually at their own pace. Compare to traditional classroom students involve actively, get more practice in language usage, gain fluency and good accent. Language lab is a pedagogic environment supporting an educational centre where the latest technology is used to provide quality teaching in a practical method. It is a good platform where trained and experienced faculties take special care for students to achieve better results in a short time and lead them towards a decent life. Hence, it is certainly acceptable that English language laboratories play a vital role in professional students in engineering colleges

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