



Language Laboratories and English Communication in Odisha's Higher Education: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Although the overall status of English language learning in Odisha is relatively stable, students' achievement in communication skills varies considerably across educational institutions. This variation is largely attributed to the presence and effective use of language laboratories in the teaching and learning process. Institutions that incorporate language labs into their instructional practices tend to report better student outcomes in communication proficiency, whereas those that do not utilize such facilities show limited progress. This study aims to examine the impact of language labs on university students' English communication skills in Odisha. The research employs a survey method using a structured questionnaire, with data collected from both a private and a public university. The findings reveal that language laboratories play a significant role in enhancing students' communicative competence when effectively managed. Private universities demonstrate stronger results due to modern equipment, skilled instructors, and regular use of the facilities. In contrast, government universities face limitations such as outdated infrastructure, insufficiently trained staff, and a lack of consistent practice sessions. These disparities suggest the need for improved implementation and investment in language lab facilities within public institutions to ensure more equitable language education across the higher education sector in Odisha.

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INTRODUCTION

The 2016 World Bank report on worldwide per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) identified Odisha as a lower middle-income country based on its consistent GDP growth throughout last decade (World Bank, 2016). To maintain this growth rate and meet the radical demand for human resources in increasingly globalised world markets, the country needs to communicate more effectively with the outside world. Inevitably, this means improving the quality of English teaching and learning. The significance of English language in Odisha is really very essential. As we know that Odisha comes under the low level of educational standard (Islam, 2015), even the standard of English language teaching and learning in Odisha has decreased

alarmingly in recent years (Hamid, 2011). Similarly, English language education in Odisha has always been problematic, despite various attempts to initiate curriculum reform. As Hamid & Baldauf (2008) point out, the first of these major shifts in the ELT curriculum took place in the mid-1990s, when the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was replaced with a curriculum based on a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) model. Generally, it is observed that most of the educational institutions in Odisha be it private or public have established English language lab to bring the improvement as well as students understanding in learning English language. Therefore, the present article highlights on the impact of language lab on students' perception in English language learning in the state of Odisha.

Language lab is an important device for learning English language or foreign language in India as this is considered as second language. It has a great effect on every learner of English language. This language lab develops confident and ability among the learners to communicate in the target language. Basically, language lab is an audio or audio-visual installation that helps both teachers and learners in teaching modern language. Particularly it focuses on the language skills especially, listening and speaking skills. Now-a-days the demand of language lab is increasing day by day. Language lab seems to have established in every educational institution in India whether it is private institutions or public institutions. Perhaps the first laboratory was at the University of Grenoble in 1908. In the 1950s up until 1990s, they were tape-based systems using real-to-real or (latterly) cassette (Roby, 2004). This era is characterized as the primitive form of the language laboratory (the conventional laboratory) (Barson and Debski, 1996). The teacher plays the tape and the learners listen to it and learn the pronunciation. As it is used in a normal classroom setup, it is prone to distractions and this type of language patterns all the time through their headsets instead of mimicking other students who may be pronouncing incorrectly. Current installations are generally multimedia computers. The original language laboratories are now very outdated. They allow a teacher to listen to and manage student audio via a hard-wired analogue tape deck-based system with 'sound booths' in fixed locations (Wilson & Thayalan, 2013).

The language laboratory is an extremely helpful tool for language learning, improving language skills, and particularly practicing and evaluating students' speech in any language. It offers a facility which let the students to listen to a model native speech, repeat, record, listen to their performance and compare it with that model, plus do self-assessment. Many modern language laboratories are flexible and do not necessarily require a teacher all the time so that they give the learners of any language a freedom to study at their own. The language laboratory also permits every member (student) his or her privacy to speak and listen. As we live in multilingual and multicultural world, language laboratory can greatly help students to learn language of their choice, as it will allow students to learn at their own pace. They can record and assess their performance to make sure that they are paying attention to all aspect of phonetics such as pronunciation, accents, etc. The language laboratories provide access to native-speaking via audio-visual aids so that they learn correctly (Dwyer, 2010)

Furthermore, language laboratory provides equal opportunity to all the students to hear the instructor irrespective of place where they are seated (Singh, 2013). There will be less

miscommunication because of direct nature of the sound transmission. It also provides the privacy that encourages the shy students to speak without any hesitation. In addition, instructor can speak to individual or group of students in privacy without interrupting rest of class. Language laboratories motivate students to talk freely and lose the shyness when talking in front of their friends. Attention on subject is increased resulting in better retention of the concepts (Hmoud, 2014). Furthermore, Roby (2004), noted that it develops the listening and communication skills, since they hear correct pronunciation through their headphones. Learner will show more enthusiasm and excitement in learning lesson because of learning laboratory system. Teacher can look after each student, which is not possible in case of the regular classroom. In a laboratory instructor can communicate with many students by pressing a mouse key in order to talk with students. Efficient use of time and learning efficiency is much more than usual classroom learning (Singh, 2013). This set up fosters more interactive session between students and teacher. The language laboratory brings variety in teaching learning process instead of boring verbal centred teaching. The student's progress can also be monitored regularly so that teacher can provide feedback based on individual pace and ability. Finally, the students can learn the lesson at their own pace thus allowing the classroom as student-centred approach (Roby, 2004).

Language laboratory provides ample opportunity to both teachers and students to improve the communication skills as well as make the process of teaching English language more interesting (Stack, 2010). Likewise, teachers are able to provide a lot of exercises and activities in English language learning for the learners by the help of Language laboratory. It gives support to the student. The use language lab empowers the teacher to stand independently (Cuban, 2001). Students are able to manage doing their activities even when they are working with live video content. Both teachers and students can also create her/his own study materials with the help of advanced tools (Beatty, 2003).

Besides according to Cuban (2001) language laboratory develops the ability among the students in listening the model pronunciation to improve their communication skills. They can record their own performance and compare them with the real sounds. By this way they can evaluate their tasks (Garret, 2003). Language laboratory is useful for improving the language skills particularly listening skills and speaking skills. Students can do several activities like articulation of sounds, vocabulary activities and developing comprehension ability by practising comprehension passage only for the clarification of meaning. (Harmer, 2001).

In other words, Frayer (2005) suggested that language lab is the best way to assess the speech of any language. Students get a lot of benefit by the use of Language lab as they could practice sounds of the language and they can compare with the model and evaluate themselves their standard of improving. In contrast, Nuboko (2004), stated that many of the educational institutions not able to set up language lab as it is too expensive which is beyond the limit.

Whereas Morsel (2002) argues that the strength of language laboratory maximum should be 60. But it is found that lack of sufficient space in the educational institution, the establishment

of language lab is not being possible. Furthermore, students of the rural areas do not have patience to listen the pronunciation and do not take interest for practice. These are the only reasons of getting failure in the use of language lab in a proper way.

Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) noted that language laboratory facilities are usually not available in schools due to poor educational funding. On the other Hand Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) reiterated that unavailability of language facilities is as a result of weak government interest and lack of adequate capital. According to Nunan (2007) there are growing evidences that English language teachers do not exhibit behaviour which are complementary to achieving the stated objectives which are occasion by inadequacy or absence of well-equipped language laboratories; inadequacy of resources; quantity and quality of teachers. Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) pointed out that the use of language laboratory in the classroom has become a great obstacle both for the teachers and students. Hence without competent teacher, the integration of technology cannot be effective on the students.

The researcher has found through observation about the status of learning English language by the student of Odisha. Generally, the purpose of learning English language is to develop communication skills. Students of Odisha used to learn English communication through the traditional method such as: memorizing words and sentences and translation methods. These two were the best method what the learners used to feel earlier. Even they were not being motivated by the teachers to be acquainted with the technology. But nowadays the government has focused on the importance of language laboratory in teaching English. That's why language lab has been introduced in some of the government colleges and universities of Odisha. The major problems of the study are to find out whether the use of language lab has good impact on students or not. The study aims to explore the status of language lab in Odisha.

The aim of the study is to explore the application of English Language Lab in the university Curriculum of Odisha with a view to shape the Communication skills of students. The basic objectives of this study are centered on understanding the role and impact of language laboratories in degree colleges across Odisha. Firstly, the study aims to identify students' fundamental understanding and perceptions of the language lab as a learning tool. Secondly, it seeks to explore the extent to which students' communication skills have improved through the use of language labs. In addition, the research investigates students' levels of concentration and engagement while participating in various English language activities within the lab environment. Lastly, the study examines the differences between traditional classroom teaching methods and those employed in language labs, particularly in terms of effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

1.4. Research Questions.

Based on the above background and research objectives, the following research questions have been made:

1. What sort of knowledge has been acquired by students on English language lab?
2. What is the students' view about their competency level in communication skills by the use of language lab?

3. What is students' opinion about their concentration level in the traditional classroom and the language lab in the university of Odisha?.

METHOD

Participants

This is both qualitative and quantitative research. Because the researcher analysed the data in a descriptive way where it is called qualitative research as well as the sample collection from the different sources or the field study which is strictly followed in this research where it is called the quantitative research. The researcher has collected data from two different sources such as: the primary source and the secondary source. The primary data includes the field study that means the sample was collected from private universities and government universities. The researcher has taken total 10 universities for this study. five of them are the private universities and another five from government universities. The total number of participants are 100. All of them are post-graduate students of English. The status of participants is given below through the table chart:

Table 1. Background of the participants in the private universities

Serial No	Private Universities	Number of participants	Gender (M+F)	Standard of communication skills
1	Kiit University	10	5+5	Excellent
2	SOA University	10	5+5	Excellent
3	Centurian University	10	5+5	Excellent
4	Sri Sri University	10	5+5	Excellent
5	C.V. Raman global University	10	5+5	Excellent

Table 2. Background of the participants in government universities

Serial No	Government University	Number of Participants	Gender (M+F)	Level of Communication Skill
1	Utkal university	10	5+5	Average
2	Ravenshaw University	10	5+5	Average
3	Ramadevi University	10	5+5	Average
4	Fakir Mohan University	10	5+5	Average
5	Sambalpur University	10	5+5	Average

Instruments

The study was conducted with the set of questionnaires among the students of Universities of Odisha. The researcher set the open-ended questions based on the research questions. The questions were based on the use of language lab in the universities of Odisha. Data was collected from two different types of universities such as: private university and government university. There was total hundred samples collected from the field study. This is experimental research in which the researcher made a survey to prove the hypothesis which was formulated in this research.

Procedure

As per the procedure of the research, the researcher has visited each department of English in the university of Odisha. Ten students from each of the above-mentioned universities were selected randomly from the department. Each student was asked open-ended questions. The same open-ended questions were applied in all the universities for this study. There was no more questionnaire formulated except open ended questions. The open-ended questions were formulated based on the four main research questions. The status of was based on communication skills of the students. Basically, it consists of pronunciation skills, vocabulary, confidence level and fluency in English language. The researcher has taken maximum two weeks for data collection.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Findings of the study has been analyzed on the basis of research questions.

1. The knowledge students possess about language labs at the university level in Odisha

Table 3. Knowledge acquired by the students

Private university	Number of participants	Mark distributed On F.K. on lang. Lab. (out of 200)	Percentage of the performance	Level of grade
Kiit University	10	190	95%	A
Soa University	10	190	95%	A
Centurian University	10	185	92.5%	A
Sri Sri University	10	185	92.5%	A
C.V. Raman Global University	10	190	95%	A

NB: F.K: Fundamental knowledge, language lab.

From table number 3, it is clearly understood that the degree of performance is very high. Students of all the private universities have good knowledge about the language lab and the use of various instruments. Each student was given fundamental questions on language lab and each of them has scored well and got the level of grade 'A'. This is clearly observed that regularly students are taught English in the language lab. Even the teachers are also very competent in the use of technology in the private universities of Odisha.

Table 4. Knowledge acquired by the students about language lab in the government universities Odisha.

Government University	Number Of Participants	Mark Distributed On F.K. On Lang. Lab. (Out Of 200)	Percentage of performance %	Grade
Utkal University	10	100	50%	E
Ravenshaw University	10	120	60%	E
Ramadevi women's University	10	80	40%	F
Fakir Mohan University	10	90	45%	F
Sambalpur University	10	130	65%	D

From the table No. 4, it is clearly observed that students of the government universities seem to be poor regarding the knowledge of language lab. Out of five government universities, the first two have got 'E' grade whereas the next two have got the grade 'F' and the last one has got the grade of 'D'.

2. Students' views on their competency level in communication skills

Table 5. Students' view about their competency level in communication skills

Private University	Competency Level In Pronunciation	Competency Level Fluency	Competency Level in Vocabulary
Kiit University	80%	80%	80%
Soa University	75%	80%	75%
Centurian University	80%	80%	80%

Sri Sri Universit	75%	75%	75%
C.V. Global University	80%	90%	80%

Table shows the best performance of the students in the communication skills in all the above private universities in Odisha. Almost all of them have scored above 70% in communication skills. This may be described about the impact of language lab on students understanding of the language.

Table 6. Students' view about their competency level in communication skills

Private University	Competency Level in Pronunciation	Competency Level in Fluency	Competency level in Vocabulary
Utka University	60%	60%	70%
Ravenshaw University	65%	70%	75%
Ramadevi University	60%	70%	70%
Fakirmohan University	50%	70%	50%
Sambalpur University	60%	70%	60%

The table describes the competency level in the communication skills of government universities in Odisha. As per the table, most of the students in the government universities are showing good progress in fluency, then in vocabulary and last in the pronunciation.

3. Students' opinion about their concentration level in the traditional classroom and the language lab

TYPE OF UNIVERSITY	CONCENTRATION LEVEL IN TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM	CONCENTRATION LEVEL IN LANGUAGE LAB
Private	10%	90%
Government	60%	40%

The table shows that the concentration level among the students in both the traditional classroom and the language lab in universities of Odisha. As per the observation, the researcher found that the concentration level among students in the language lab is very high in the private universities whereas it is very low in the government universities.

Findings of the research properly justifies that the data has been systematically analysed. As per the result of the research question 1, table No-3 & 4, it was clearly observed that there was a great difference between the private universities and the public universities on the basis of students' fundamental knowledge about Language lab. The findings reveal that the students of private universities had a great knowledge on language lab and its various instruments. They were very much familiar with most of the language software used in the language lab such as: use of CALL, CAPT, RINEL LINGO etc. The test which was conducted on the basis of the research question no 1, all students of private universities scored above 90% with the grade 'A'. Whereas the students of government universities did not have the fundamental knowledge on language lab. They were not so much familiar with the instruments of the language lab. Even they could not score well in the test and out of five government universities, only one of them got 'D' grade and two of them got 'E' grade and another two of them got 'F' grade. So, hypothesis 1 is proved as it shows that all students may not have sufficient fundamental ideas on language lab. These are only government universities where the language lab needs to developed more.

Likewise, the findings of the research question 2, table No-5 & 6, was also same as the findings of research question 1. Here the data was collected on the basis of students' competence level in communication skills in English language. The findings show that the competence level among the students in communication skills in the private universities were very nice. Almost all of them were very well in the pronunciation skills, Fluency and vocabulary. This three are the significant part of the communication skills. In contrast, the students of government universities were not comparable to the students of the private universities. Though they might not be comparable but not so poor in the communication skills. Maximum students of government universities scored above (50 – 60) % in pronunciation, (60-70) % in the field of fluency and above 70% in the vocabulary. Hence this is clearly understood that the students of private universities get special care in the communication skills and accordingly they use language lab regularly and the language lab in the private universities are well equipped but in the government universities, students do not get opportunity to learn English language in the language lab. So,

the proper instruments and softwares for communication skills should be enhanced in the language lab. Students should always be motivated and inspired to attend in the language lab. Here the hypothesis no 2, is proved as it shows Some students were very much confident in the private universities while communicating in English language whereas in the govern universities students lacked competency in communication skills.

On the other hand, the findings of the research question no 3, table No – 7, which was based on students' opinion about their concentration level in the traditional classroom and the language lab in both the private university and the government university of Odisha. The findings reveal that the respond and concentration level of the students of the private universities in the language lab was 90% that means 90% students prefer language lab and only 10% of them prefer traditional classroom due to lack of interest. In contrast, the language lab in the government universities do not function properly as well as their ambience cannot motivate students to learn in the lab. Though the government has introduced language lab with the aim of improving language skills among the students, but it remains unfulfilled due to lack of implementation. As per the results only 40% students like to attend language lab whereas 605 students prefer traditional classroom. Hence the hypotheses No 3 and 4 proved that students who were learnt English in language lab, they show better progress in terms of developing confidence and keeping concentration than the traditional classroom.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that language lab is really very essential for the students of university in India. It also shows that there was a great difference between the status of private universities and the government universities. From the study it is clearly understood that the use language lab in the private universities is very effective for the students whereas the language lab in the government universities is not so effective for learners as it lacks standard instruments, and competent teachers as well as regularity is not maintained there. Though the Language Lab curriculum runs with Govt. universities, proper application is not executed there in comparison to private universities. Hence it can be recommended that rigorous emphasis should be given for the application of language lab in the Government universities. Especially expert teachers in the language lab should be appointed in the university

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