A Study of the Role of the Multi-Media Language Laboratory as a tool for enhancement of Communication Skills in Second Language Acquisition.

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Abstract - Language is a means of Communication. The computer-assisted language laboratory is proving to be of immense value to engineering under-graduates in their quest for language learning. The learner is able to improve their communication skills over the course of their study. The LSRW skills gained thus are enabling the learners to gain competence in the acquisition of language. The multi-media English language lab provides an effective platform for learners to overcome the barriers in communication and gain proficiency in English, which further paves the way for enhancing the employability skills and assists them in their career goals.

Communication Skills are crucial for professional & personality development. The Emotional Quotient being more critical than the Intelligence Quotient, Therefore Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication skill-sets like Body language, gestures, posture, attitude, active listening, proper eye-contact, facial expressions etc. determine the criteria for accomplishment of career goals. This paper analyses the training imparted in the computer assisted language lab and shows its impact on the learner at various levels in improvising the acquisition & fluency in English.

Keywords: - Assertiveness, Active Listening, Body-language, Communicative Competence, Fluency, Tone Modulation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a dynamic process of interaction between the sender and receiver. The encoding of the message by the sender and its subsequent decoding by the receiver forms an integral part of the basic communicative process. However if there is a lack of clarity while encoding then the message can be interpreted in various ways depending upon the receiver's perspective. Similarly if the decoding of the message is done from the point of view of the receiver then the feedback received might not match with the original intention of the sender. This results in a gap in communication, which is referred to as the `communication gap'. The barriers and filters have to be removed for communication to be `effective', these barriers are hindrances or obstacles which prevent the transfer of information from one person to another. The goal of communication is to share ideas, thoughts, points –of-view, to put forth one's views effectively, express one's opinion and share knowledge and information through the act of communication. Hence oral and written communication skills need to be learnt both in the personal &professional realms.

II. VERBAL & NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal communication is done using the mode of speech to share information orally through stress, pitch, and intonation of voice. It is used to express one's views, ideas and opinions using the dynamic speech mode. Dyadic communication is an interaction between two individuals. This is the most basic form of interpersonal communication, this form of person-to person communication requires the ability to converse or talk effectively. Situational Dialogues based on specific contexts is a very effective means of expression, Role-Plays also aid in improving the communication skills of learners in the English Language lab. The learners enact a particular role or part this activity improves their verbal and non-verbal competence.

The learners improvise on their conversational skills, how to start, sustain and end a conversation. Conversation is a very common form of communication. Conversation can be formal, semi-formal and informal in nature. It serves as an interactive platform both socially and professionally. It includes many forms like face to face conversation, telephonic conversation, interview, instruction and dictation.

Non-verbal communication includes body language, gestures, postures, and eye-contact. In fact Mehrabian (1971) has analyzed the impact of a message as follows: - 55% of the entire communicative process as Non-Verbal, while 38% is vocal and 7% is verbal. Communication is defined by Krishna Mohan&Meera Banerji as "a network of interactions and naturally the sender and receiver keep on changing their roles. Another aspect…is the deployment of a code consisting of arbitrarily evolved symbols and the determination of the appropriateness of their use in given situations, leading to the emergence of diverse communication patterns".(1990).

In fact communication is not merely an act, it is an art which has to be developed and mastered over a period of time, understanding the subtle nuances of communicating in one's personal and professional spheres would go a long way in charting a suitable path of career growth and overall development of the personality. The word communication is derived from a Latin word `**communicare**`or `**communico'** which means `to share'. Therefore for communication to be effective in nature all the aspects have to be taken into consideration. The multi-media language lab offers an effective ethos for this `communicative process' among second language learners. English is a global language & its importance as an effective `tool for communication' is widespread especially in the Indian context where the medium of instruction is English in a majority of institutions of higher learning. The learner has to gain fluency in the language; hence correct articulation and pronunciation of the sounds of English have to be mastered by the learner.

Received Pronunciation (RP) is used as a standard accent for learning British English pronunciation. Phonetics is the study of the speech sounds in English. The 44 speech sounds categorized into 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds, out of which 12 being pure vowels and 8 Diphthongs or `Vowel Glides'. These have to be incorporated in the process of acquisition of English. Hence `Phonology' and `Phonemes' as per the IPA guidelines. (The International Phonetic Alphabet). The CALL (Computer Assisted Language lab) Lab uses state-of –the art technology in assisting the learner to improve his/her language proficiency. It has proved to be of immense value both to the learners

and teachers of English in imparting training in improving their LSRW skills.

III. METHODOLOGY

The Methodology used is highly interactive in nature and content, enabling and enhancing language acquisition. It motivates the learners to participate in activities which improves their self-confidence and reduces stage fear. In this manner the students interact with their peers, perform and engage in interesting language activities and improve their competency levels.

It is a very useful teaching aid as it provides flexibility to both the teacher and learner. The teachers can design their own exercises and give specific tasks to the students and also effectively monitor, guide and train the learners in a well co-ordinated manner. The master-console of the facilitator/teacher can effectively monitor& control the student –console systems, errors can be rectified, exercises and assignments can be shared over the student-learner consoles through a well connected LAN facility. The language laboratory gives an opportunity for the learner to practice extensively. This also improves their inter-personal skills and team building skills. For Example: If group assignments are given, the learners interact with others in the group and hone their interactive skills. Similarly when group discussions are conducted on a wide variety of topics, the learners improve their fluency in English, active listening techniques enable them to respond appropriately in specific contexts, discuss, analyze, interpret, negotiate and solve problems, thus improving their problem solving abilities negotiation skills

Second language Acquisition: Stephen Krashen distinguishes between learning and acquisition. Learning refers to the conscious aspects of language while acquisition refers to its sub-conscious aspect. There are many learning strategies and communicative strategies. Learning strategies are techniques used to improve learning, such as mnemonics or using dictionaries. Language acquisition is successful if both the strategies are used effectively. Therefore, the language lab is a fine example of strategic planning as it blends all these techniques.

It is user friendly and gives ample options to the learners to improve their speaking skills by recording and correcting their pronunciation in English. Further the lab helps in accent neutralization and voice-modulation, correcting the speech patterns. This assists the learner to improve their vocabulary and diction and make use of new words with finesse. As a result the learner is able to access this excellent

tool which aids in improving listening and reading comprehension, study the structure and meaning of words. As English is a stress based language, learning the different intonation patterns, Rhythm and accentual rules, the software is loaded on to the systems which can be updated regularly.

There are different levels of programmes ranging from the Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced levels focusing on pauses, change in pitch, rising and falling tones, primary and secondary stress, stress markers etc.to a wide-ranging plethora of activities and exercises to improve punctuation, grammar. The training imparted in this manner enables them to speak well and improve their presentation skills, public speaking skills increasing their employability skills, assisting them to perform well in interviews and selection group discussions. Their presentation skills improve as they are able to distinguish the subtle differences between oral presentations and delivering a speech, although they share many common features. Oral presentation is a useful tool of professional interaction which raises a particular issue for discussion.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the above parameters discussed in this paper, the following conclusions can be derived. The Multimedia language laboratory is a very useful tool in enhancing the communication skills of learners. Their awareness of the importance of kinesics(body language),proxemics (distance),haptics(touch), appearance, tone of voice, gestures, posture& ,phonology of English, the selection and organization of sounds in English. The learner's ability to distinguish between voiced and voiceless sounds, enabling them to write the phonetic transcription of words. Formal Language which is the type of language used for serious purpose like academic technical writing, business letters, official reports etc.and informal or `colloquial' language which is the language of ordinary day to day conversation shows improvement. The learners avoid slang words and jargon and speak effectively in a neutral accent.Theyare able to present their ideas and views in a convincing manner.

The multimedia language lab improves learner aptitude and attitude and minimizes the affective factors relating to second language acquisition. It reduces the gap between theory and practice as it offers a practical application of language learning. It aids in the continuous evaluation of the performance of the students by identifying their weak areas and providing remedial measures to correct the errors and improve their language skills. Therefore it is a very effective ICT (Information & Communication Technology) tool

which aids in improving the `linguistic competence' of the learner.

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