



BRINGING A NEW DIMENSION OF LEARNING THROUGH THE USE OF THE LAB MANUAL

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Abstract

The digital language lab provides a wonderful interactive learning environment for the non-native speakers of English. Students from various cultures feel it tough to learn English, especially to 'utter it right' - speak the way native speakers do. When the students are exposed to the accent, rhythm, intonation, situational dialogues, role plays, etc., they learn the nuances of the language, by imitating the native speakers they tend to learn the English proficiency.

The multimedia rich language lab helps the students to learn, share, update the course materials in no time (sharing becomes easy) and is done effortlessly. This is very much different from the traditional teaching methodology with the rich teaching material content. The rich digital language lab when synergized with the rich teaching interactive learning material, I believe we can create a healthy and vibrant learning environment.

I found some students turning passive through the excessive use of digital multimedia software; some are found listening to the songs than learning phonetics, even good but routine things unfurl the positive environment. We need some checks and crosschecks to know how the student is performing after every topic and this paper highlights the use of the language lab effectively and brings a perfect combination of practical and theoretical methods for holistic learning.

Introduction

The digital language lab provides a wonderful interactive learning environment for the non-native speakers of English. Students from various cultures feel it's tough to learn English, especially to 'utter it right' - speak the way native speakers do. When the students are exposed to the accent, rhythm, intonation, situational dialogues, role plays, etc., they learn the nuances of the language, by imitating the native speakers they tend to learn the English proficiency.

The multimedia rich language lab helps the students to learn, share, update the course materials in no time (sharing becomes easy) and is done effortlessly. This is very much different from the traditional teaching methodology with the rich teaching material content. The rich digital language lab when synergized with the rich teaching interactive learning material (lab manual), I believe we can create a healthy and vibrant learning environment. Though the language lab is a self-learning tool, to make the session more interactive we need a well-planned lab manual to check every phase of learning. The activities of the lab manual are intertwined around the structured network of the objective of the activity. This enhances the learning curve and broadens the subject knowledge of the student.

Learning Styles and Lab Manual Usage

The learning styles are the methodologies we adopt to learn. Different people prefer different methodologies for learning. Everyone holds a mix of learning styles. Some people notice that they prefer a particular style of learning at all times. Some may analyze that they perceive different styles of learning at different times. There is no clear cut rule of what is the right combination of learning styles. These learning styles are ephemeral. They can change with time, and are not constant. We can shift our learning styles by constant practice and strong will. Our preference of learning style depends on our age, purpose, need, compulsion, confidence level, time factor, subject knowledge, etc. everyone has a mix of different learning styles, and this has a deep impact on the person's behavior and character.

The classroom is never a homogenous learning community, i.e. people with an inclination to the same learning style, it's always a heterogeneous learning community, i.e. people with different intelligence levels, different preferences (learning styles); accepting the heterogeneous learning community is a positive step to the knowledge transfer. This approach of the educators has brought a wonderful positivism for learning. The different learning styles use different functions of the human brain. By synergizing the different learning style, we will be able to use brain effectively and retain the content for a longer period of time. The brain-imaging technologies have been able to clearly pin point to the different regions of the human brain. So each style impacts a different part of the human brain.

The purpose of the lab manual is to provide a structured network of activities, which helps the students to know where they stand in learning the content, and also to enlighten the students about the hidden and uncharted areas of the topic. I found some lab manuals complete in every way, just like our text books and I found the students reluctant to read, the end result is that students had poor content knowledge, even after possessing wonderful text books. The present generation students like challenges; they like to explore the uncharted areas of knowledge, so we need to give them enough opportunity through



activities and exercises. On the other hand, I found some manuals which are the lab records of the seniors a reference material for juniors and the mistakes of the seniors are passed to the juniors and the saga continues...

Topics added to bring the interactive element of the Lab Manual to the formative Assessment

The purpose of the formative assessment is to test the students' understanding of the subject knowledge. These diagnostic questions are not used for grading. The results of the formative assessment provide direction to the teacher, giving the vital inputs like the pace with which the topic has to be dealt, crucial feedback to know the starting point of the subject, i.e. how early or advanced in the topic they can begin, misconceptions if any in relation to the subject. The assessment strategies include testing the student's hold on the subject by using different types of questions- yes/ no questions, multiple choice questions, fill in the blanks, charts testing prior knowledge, visual representation and even using recorded audio files.

The importance of revealing the objective of the activity

Almost all the projects benefit from clear defined goals and education is no exception. An objective is a target set in a definite time frame. Many consider objective as a synonym to Aim, but that is not so. An Aim is abstract and objective is more specific in character. Aim is a general statement concerning the overall goals, or intention of teaching, whereas Objectives are the individual stages that the learner must achieve on the way in order to reach these goals. Objectives do not include the word- understand or know, instead they include active verbs like –explain, describe, list. Some of the examples of the Active verbs under the broader subheadings of Knowledge, Skills and Attitude are:

Knowledge

Analyze, Describe, Select, Evaluate, Compare, Outline, Recognize, Differentiate, Label, State, List, Define, Identify, Name, Classify.

Skills

Draw, Interact, Practice, Demonstrate, Locate, Organize, Chart, Rearrange, Collect, Illustrate, Measure, Use, Perform, Make, Assemble, Establish.

Attitudes

Accept, Challenge, Evaluate, Specify, Characterize, Formulate, Choose, Judge, Recommend, Approve, Justify, Empathize, Assess, Defend, Manage, Select.

The learning objectives can be made more complex and challenging by adding higher levels of objectives, by asking the learners to solve complex problems, introspecting the outcome of the situation, bringing multiple activities under a single activity, researching and analyzing a topic.

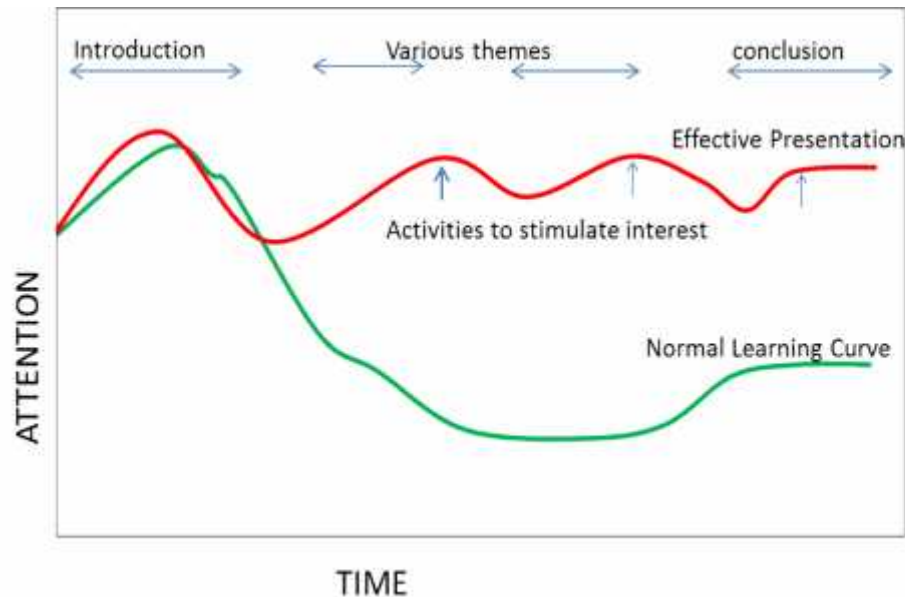
Ex: Objectives (for the topic): Introduction to Phonetics

- Importance and the need to learn Phonetics
- Describe the Speech Mechanism
- Identify different Organs of Speech
- Define the Pulmonic Egressive Air Stream Mechanism
- Define the terms: Glottal and Velaric

Differentiate: Rounded and Unrounded, Place of Articulation and Manner of Articulation, Voiced and Voiceless sound.

Interactive Methodology for the Lab Manual

The content has to be provided in the most interactive way. The faculty can easily and quickly assess if the learners have really mastered the content. Generally, students do not actually learn the content, unless asked to make use of the content in the assessments. At a stretch a person can be focused only for 15-20 minutes. Each lab session is for 3 hours, so unless we take extra care to bring a lot of activities, each with a different purpose and feel, we just can't make the lab sessions interactive. So, several activities have to be planned to stimulate students' interest and to bring an effective interactive presentation. The diagram below shows the relation between time and attention of the student, they are directly proportional for 15-20 minutes then inversely proportional afterwards. Now notice the learning curve leaning, if it is not propelled from time to time by various activities that raise the curiosity level of the learner, thus bringing an effective presentation.



Some of the techniques to bring interactivity

Diagram: Learners are provided a diagram, asked to identify the parts, explain the activity and justify their answers. Do not provide the 'answer' until all the learners have explored all the options.

1. Terminology: Ask the students to guess what the term means and also probe into the relationship with the activity. Give the standard definitions only after all the learners have generated some thought process about the term.
2. Thought provoking: Ask a rhetorical question, and give the learners a minute to think about the situation and ask them to justify their answers. This technique enhances the problem solving skills of the students.
3. Elicit response: The students are asked about the basic 'must know' questions and allow the class to respond. The choral response provides the perfect feedback of the students' comprehension of the subject (this activity generates good noise).
4. Storytelling: An age old technique, this still works brilliantly. An audio clip of a story would be nice if imbued or an inspirational message in relation to the content is also fine.
5. Partly filled blanks: Don't provide the complete information on the topic. Instead split into different activities which are partly filled, and let the students' generate heat to get the answer.
6. Responsive questions: This can be used for diagnostic test or for formative assessment, the question like yes/no, true/false, would be fine. If a statement has 'No' as the answer, ask the student to explain what is right.
7. Everyday ethical dilemmas: Present a case study- a newspaper clipping, video footage, photos, etc. and let the student to respond.
8. Chosen leader: For each activity choose a leader from the class, who can take the initiative, conduct the activity on the guidelines provided by the faculty. This will imbibe leadership qualities in the students.
9. The half-class lecture: Divide the class into two halves. For one half provides the reading material and for the second half, lecture notes. After a thorough discussion, exchange the materials and finally conclude.
10. Jumbled sentence: Whenever there is a sequence of steps followed, don't give the complete sequence of events, instead jumble the sentences and ask the students to arrange and provide a proper sequence to the jumbled sentence. Then discuss the importance of the procedure or the sequence of events.
11. Quote Minus One: Provide a quote relevant to your topic, but leave out a crucial word and ask students to guess what it might be. This engages them quickly in a topic and makes them feel invested.
12. Rapid reading: Ask the students to read the text provided as fast as they can, ask the students to raise their hand the moment they complete reading. Start counting aloud, once they raise their hand; tell the students the counting number denotes their position in the rapid reading activity. Highlight the difference in time between the first reader and last reader; this denotes the quality of time lost, if one's reading ability is slow. This activity helps the student to develop reflexive brain, i.e. to respond at the earliest time in times of problem solving.
13. Conclusion in a minute: At the end of each lab session, ask the students to give a summary of what he/she has learned (it's an oral activity). This would help the students be attentive during the lab sessions, and enhances their memory by recalling and summarization of the content, raises the confidence level of the student.



Quick Review

Bloom's Taxonomy mentions the important skills of Testing: the Lower Order Skills- where the applications, understanding, and remembrance of the student is tested and the Higher Order Skills- where the creative or synthesis, education, and analysis of the student are tested. The assessment can be for 10 questions: 3 questions on facts, 3 for testing the application of the theory, 3 for logical thinking of the theory, and at least 1 for the critical thinking skills.

Learner's Review

Students write a brief essay in which they evaluate to what extent their work fulfills an assignment's objectives, what the learner comprehended through the activity. It's preferable to have self-grading mechanism from 1 to 5 on the basis of the objective of the activity. The teacher gets the feel of the learner's thought process, confidence level, hold on the subject, whether the learner enjoyed the activity, provides the perfect feedback for the complete activity. If some misconceptions still persist, then the teacher has to address them before venturing into the next topic. What is the most important thing you learned today can be a possible question in the end.

Faculty's Review

The outcome of the learner understanding has to be graded not on the basis of marks, but grades like A- Outstanding, B- Excellent, C-Good, D-Average, E-Below Average. Suggestions, if any, of the faculty will create a positive impact on the learners.

Conclusion

Though the language lab is a self-learning tool, to make the session more interactive we need a well-planned lab manual to check every phase of learning. I have clearly highlighted the need to have a lab manual, and in detail the interactive features that we can add to make the content interesting. The activities of the lab manual are intertwined around the structured network of the objective of the activity. Topics added to bring the interactive element of the Lab manual to the fore are Formative Assessment, the importance of revealing the objective of the activity, Interactive methodology for the Lab manual, Quick Review, Learner's Review, Faculty's Review. I believe this immensely benefits the students' and broadens the learning curve.

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