

## **Challenges & Possibilities of Using a Language Laboratory for Teaching in Writing Skills**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The biggest limitation of any human kind is time constraint. A teacher can't teach for many hours but a computer can do the job tirelessly. Teaching writing skills mostly involved developing the linguistic competence of the students which many English Second Language teachers may perceive as a challenging task. The main aim of this study is to look into various challenges encountered by English Second Language teachers in teaching writing skills to students in ordinary classrooms. The teachers should choose instructional materials, textbooks, and technologies that promote the integration of writing as well as associated skills of syntax, vocabulary, and so on. A learning atmosphere is to be created. Language lab provides a platform where teachers can try experiments on themselves and the learners as well. This study aims to unfold the possibilities and challenges of running the language lab at several secondary schools level based on the teacher's perspective. First, on how the English language teachers perceive the importance of language lab in process of teaching and learning writing skills. Secondly, to what extent the teachers' have been utilizing the language lab in their teaching, and lastly, what are the teacher's views on improving the roles of English language laboratories to assist them. The findings confirm that teachers highly considered the writing skills to be more effectively taught in language laboratories, however, several obstacles occur, for instance, the outdated equipment, unskilful teachers to operate the devices, fewer teaching resources, and time allotment, and tight schedules among others.

**Keywords:** task, syntax, laboratory, equipments, device

**INTRODUCTION:**

By observing and reflecting on their problems and failures as learners, English teachers can seek to establish principles, which will help them to improve their teaching writing. The lab is an untiring teacher. Any teacher can teach up to a certain limit. In every educational institute working hours are fixed. After a certain level of teaching trainer gets tired which affects the teaching-learning process as well. With a computer is not a problem. It is a tireless teacher. It can perform with the same accuracy and efficiency throughout the day. Human needs refreshment but a computer completes task after task. Sometimes the trainer may be on leave with personal or medical reason but if the institute has a language lab, the space can be filled easily. If we think from the learner's point of view, many times it is observed that learners hesitate to ask the same question to their teachers. They feel ashamed or afraid to ask questions openly in class and they don't get a chance to ask questions personally. Sometimes the behaviour of the teacher or the behaviour of a classmate is responsible for that. This is the reason why they don't know the usage of many language aspects. When we use the language lab, all the queries can be solved personally at a time. There is no chance of hesitation or insult so the learner can ask questions at any time. Every learner is not a quick learner or scholar but in general, the class teachers can't help these students much. Some learners get the point after more and more repetition. A lab can repeat any topic any number of times until the learner understands it properly. In any traditional Indian class, it is very difficult to manage the number of students. The average number of students in a class is 40 to 50. For any teacher, it is difficult to clarify the students' doubts at a time. Even many students forget their doubts what the teacher responds to other students' questions. According to Seema Mohanty a faculty at engineering college, "Moreover, English language teaching in India today still mainly depends upon the chalk and talk method. Therefore, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the teacher to give special attention to each student in such big classes." (Mohanty 66) 'Every head thinks differently' is very relevant for any class.

**AREVIEWOFLITERATURE**

(Grabe and Kaplan, 1997) stated that educationally oriented second language learners may need to develop writing skills, and with this, teachers may equally need to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills of how to teach writing skills. As has been reported in some studies, most second language teachers find writing rather a complex skill to teach by aptly linking it with their students' learning outcomes. Kellogg, (1999) has nicely pointed out that the teachers' tasks are certainly to explore students' stimulus for writing, which, contains

attainment motivation, fundamental motivation, and extrinsic motivation, which is believed to assist the teachers to plan significant writing tasks by taking into account the students' level of motivation. Interestingly, (Flower and Hayes, 1981) claimed that writing methods can be briefly summarized as a procedure of planning, reviewing, and writing. Upon considering the viewpoints presented in the foregoing along with the context in which the study was carried out, the researcher decided to focus on clarifying how to offer input to students before writing, and how to encourage students to increase their level of understanding of social contexts, and how to respond to students' writing efforts since these reportedly seem to be the most serious difficulties that the teachers in their effort to teach writing skills, had to encounter. Moreover, (Farnan, 2000) stated that the instructors may need to make the worksheets comprehensible to students by training students on how to use them. All of these can facilitate teachers and students to work in concerted efforts. Moreover, (Reid, 2003) argued that individuals with writing difficulties may have a great deal to offer to societies using their creativity, skills, and talents which may remain inactive and untapped owing partly to the frustrations of not being able to write like the rest. The researcher agrees with the above-mentioned author when he asserted that a change of attitude must be observed within the learning atmosphere that is shared by all members of teaching as well as to accommodate students with writing problems in ordinary classrooms. While (Shaywitz, 2003) highlighted that teachers are required to know that students learn in different ways, hence it may require different assets and requirements. For example, a low-achieving student in writing may not be necessarily a low-achiever in other aspects of academic achievement. Every student with writing problems may have their learning style, interests, requirements, and assets. In this regard, it is the teachers who should be able to help the students to identify their interests and strengths.

### **CHALLENGES & POSSIBILITIES OF USING LANGUAGE LABORATORY**

A language laboratory is a handy and efficient tool for practicing and assessing one's speech in any language. It enables the learner to find the activities, practice and complete the same, and perform self-assessment by writing about their performance and comparing it with the model. In a language laboratory, students have access to various writing activity materials. Theoretical knowledge is not enough for learning a language. Language labs make learning more interesting by providing an interactive way to acquire the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A language laboratory also facilitates faster learning compared to a regular classroom setting because it includes a progressive model of teaching and intuitively teaches the concepts. A language lab allows

the students to learn a language using more resources. In a lab, learning takes place in a structured manner, in a real setting, and in a visually stimulating environment which makes language learning more immersive. Technology is predicted to replace human jobs to a great extent but a language lab proves that it offers supplementary materials and assistance to the teachers so their role cannot be diminished. Language labs also include a lot of communication between the teacher and the students as well as amongst the students which are essential for a proper understanding of the language. Since technology keeps upgrading all the time, the equipment of the lab must be constantly upgraded as well. Since there are many students in the lab, it may be difficult for the teacher to attend to all the students due to which the entire lab class may become unorganized. It is noteworthy that developing students' English language writing skills can be a challenging task for any teacher. To write effectively in either a second or foreign language may require both high language skills and experience, and this can be perceived as a challenge for English Second Language learners. Upon observations, it was discovered in the present context that a regular teaching plan happens with the sequential order of listening, speaking, reading, and writing within teaching programs. Referring to this sequential order in which language skills are taught, writing comes as the last skill even though this skill cannot be disregarded and needs considerable attention from both teachers and students owing to its importance in their daily academic lives. Difficulties in teaching the writing skills of the English language are reportedly one of the most challenging tasks which are not only experienced by native speakers but also the English Second Language teachers around the globe. Due to the increased demand that the academic writing place on the students for delivering an effective English language writing sample, it is, therefore, necessary to investigate to gauge whether or not the English Second Language teachers had to face difficulties in teaching writing skills. Good writing requires preparation and suitable feedback, which teachers must never underestimate. Students with weaknesses in the English language writing skills may consequently result in lagging in both their academic and career lives. This research is considered a step to point out the deterring elements, which touch the teaching and the learning methods of the English language writing skills. The main contribution of this research is to highlight the most challenging aspects of the environment and the learners which in many cases, influence the teachers in developing the English language writing skills.

**Objectives of the research**

1. To find out the way language lab influences language learning in writing skills for the students.
2. To identify language laboratory used to assist the teacher to help the students on how to develop their writing skills.

**METHODOLOGY****a. Setting and Participants**

This paper reports on interviews and observations conducted with the eleven English language teachers in several secondary schools in the Chennai district with language laboratory in their facilities. These teachers have been teaching for more than 10 years in the same schools and have rich experience in utilizing the language laboratories.

**b. Data Collection Analysis:**

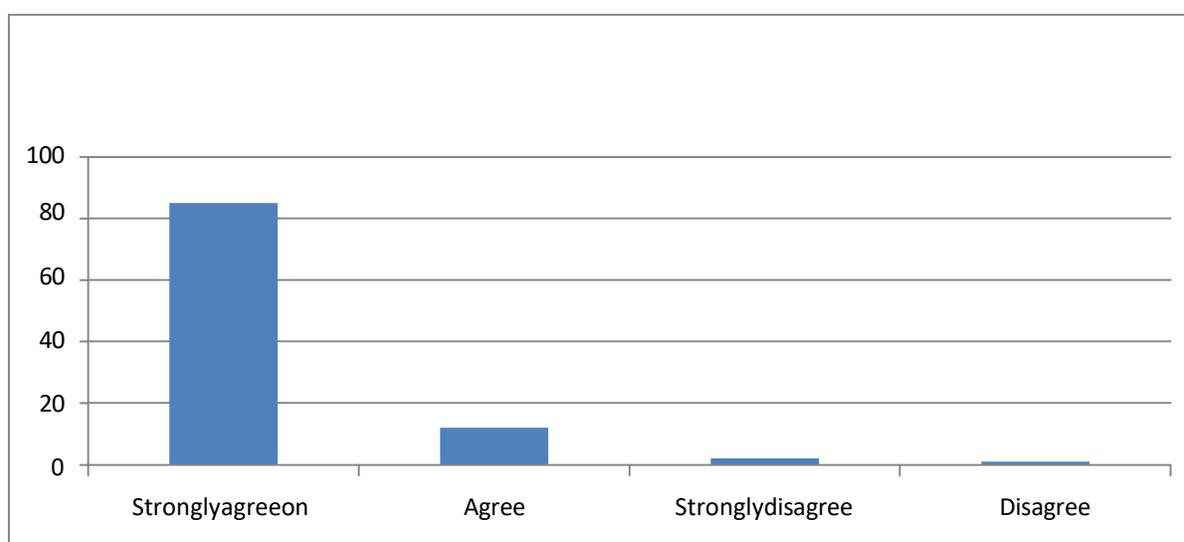
To respond to the research questions mentioned, the qualitative research method is employed. Both interview and classroom observation results are elaborated in a descriptive way. In the interview, the researcher has used both closed-ended and open-ended questions to give teachers the opportunity to add comprehensive detail to their feedback. In addition, unscripted questions are presented during the interview to support the elaborate answers.

**c. Results:**

Language Laboratory (LL) has been utilized by language teachers to enhance their teaching in writing skills by emphasizing exposure to the target language. Many English teachers feel confident in teaching writing skills in the language lab. Apart from the many advantages that are agreed on language laboratories, based on the observation and interview, some challenges inhibit the teachers to optimize the language lab owned by the school. On research questions of how the English language teachers view about the needs of utilizing the language laboratories in their teaching and learning of writing skills, Most of the respondents emphasize that students must get exposed to the authentic use of language by native speakers of English. To emphasise, teachers believe that when students are situated in a language lab during the writing activities class, they will take advantage of having a secured environment with fewer disturbances, which resulted in better focus and concentration on the main features being discussed in the tape. From the respondents, the answers are unanimous that conducting teaching and learning processes in the language laboratories will improve students' proficiency. Most of the teachers are senior in terms of age and employment period; therefore they admit that they have limitations in working with technologies. During the class session at the language lab, many times they

have to encounter machine breakdown, or malfunction of one or two devices, which is emotionally disturbing and time-consuming. And this situation is not effective when the class session at the language lab is supposed to be 50 minutes, and the breakdown will take up the teaching time. As teachers believe that it is necessary to make the students learn English in an ideal environment, in which they can listen to native speakers of English and practice the language with less distraction, many of them suggest that there are several aspects to be improved.

**Teacher competence in using a language laboratory for teaching writing skills will assist in the attainment of developing writing skills in the classrooms.**



**Figure-1**

Figure-1: shows the frequency count of responses to the statement: Teacher competence in using language laboratory for teaching writing skills will assist in the attainment of developing writing skills in the classrooms. Out of the 110 participants sampled in this study, eighty-five percent of the participants strongly agreed that: teacher competence in using a language lab for learning writing skills will assist in the attainment of development of their writing skills in the classrooms. In addition, twelve percent agreed that teacher competence in using a language lab for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of developing writing skills in the classrooms and two percent of the participants strongly disagreed that teacher competence in using a language lab for learning writing skills will assist the attainment of developing writing skills in the classrooms. Finally, only one percent of the participants disagreed with the statement.

## **DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

From the above findings, we can conclude the use of language laboratory in the teaching and learning of writing skills from the teacher's perspective is all positive. However, from the interview and observation during the research, there are aspects of utilizing language laboratory that need to be put into consideration. Need of the language lab at present, shift from the traditional mode to modern one. Classrooms can be shaped into language labs with proper types of equipment. And Language lab administrators need the effective training to use all the equipment well. No matter how language teachers should be highlighted cutting-edge technology, the lab usage is affected directly by the lab administrator or teacher's skills and confidence. Lastly, class management regarding time allocation of the learning to be conducted in the language lab is heavily considered as a success factor in our study. In the light of finding the modern lab is undoubtedly important in supporting for teaching writing skills effectively. Nevertheless, the utmost importance is on the confidence and competence of language teachers to conducting their practical classes in the language laboratory to enhance students' writing skills.

## **CONCLUSION:**

It is of most importance for class teachers to be capable of detecting students who have problems with expressing their thoughts through writing. It is worth highlighting that not all the students with writing problems showed the same features. The study also revealed that the attitude of teachers toward educating students on writing skills can be considered a crucial factor in making it more helpful for all the students. Teachers also stated that once they have diagnosed their students' writing problems, they gave them specific attention. The focus should not only take the center stage on the learners' strengths and weaknesses but also their preferred styles. Consequently, the teaching methods and intervening strategies should address the needs of the students in the language laboratory. Moreover, with regard to linguistic problems, the teachers should identify the mistakes and clarify the ways of avoiding which in turn may offer learners clarification for the achievement of fundamental knowledge, as well as to identifying ways handle the students' mistakes in relation to writing skills. Teachers may also need to collaborate with students by using a language laboratory to develop their writing skills effectively.

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