



RESEARCH PAPER

EFL Learners' Perceptions about the Role of English Language Learning Labs for Improving the Speaking Skills: A Study Conducted at BS Level

¹Aneela Sadaf* and ²Dr. Zohaib Zahid*

1. MPhil Scholar, Department of English Linguistics, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Sub Campus Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Sub Campus Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

zohaib.zahid@iub.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

English Language Learning Labs (ELL Labs) have become integral components of language education, aiming to enhance various language skills, including speaking proficiency. This study explores the perceptions of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners regarding the efficacy of ELL Labs in improving speaking skills. Utilizing Questionnaire to collect data from 274 students of BS studying English Linguistics, literature and language. The findings reveal multifaceted insights into EFL learners' perceptions of ELL Labs. Firstly, participants acknowledge the significance of ELL Labs as supportive environments conducive to speaking skill development. The challenges within ELL Labs are also identified, including technical issues, time constraints, and the need for more personalized feedback. Participants express desire for enhanced instructor guidance and tailored speaking activities to address individual learning needs effectively. The study reveals that the establishment of the English Language Learning Labs is vital for the proficiency of the learners to improve their speaking skills.

KEYWORDS

English as Foreign Language, Individual Learning, Language Labs, Personalized Feedback

Introduction

Globally, English is the most widely used language for communication. To successfully navigate the global village and gain access to the technical, educational, financial, social, and spheres of society, one must be fluent in English. Most wealthy countries in the globe offer state-of-the-art educational facilities to students who desire to learn English as a foreign or second language. By doing so, they are demonstrating their recognition of English's standing as the language that provides worldwide currency. Technology must be incorporated into the teaching and learning process as more people realise how useful it is for teaching English. Because practice is the key to developing language proficiency, language labs have become important.

English language learners still encounter some difficulties speaking the language even after spending a long time studying it. When someone asks them in English, some language learners become perplexed, while others are reluctant to respond because they are frightened of making mistakes. Lack of practise throughout the class is to blame (Abdelaziz, 2017). Due to the availability of communication partners in the classroom, the majority of students solely practise their English there (Zaim, 2017). Unlike in the past, when people acquired English to study material published in the language, individuals now learn English primarily for communication purposes (Rao & Velagalla, 2016).

Scholars and educators have recently come to the consensus that certain language skills are conquerable in language laboratories. Language labs have access to a multitude of possible feedback systems (Khaleel, 2020). Moreover, it improves interactions and focus (Vishalakshi, 2011). The activities available in the language lab are diverse. Instructors are able to control communication in a variety of directions, including monologue, dialogue, and conducting group discussions in enough time without interfering with one another. Joan and Mabel established that pupils who learned a language in a lab setting rather than a classroom were more successful at it (Joan, 2016).

Literature Review

It is a room in an educational institution, college, training centre, or university that has specialized technology that allows students to gain knowledge of a foreign language via watching films, enjoying cassettes, or attending lessons online, according to Bader (2008). Students' vocabulary and structural knowledge are developed by repeated listening in language labs (Mambo, 2004). Furthermore, according to Najah (2013), the lab gives students the opportunity to improve their listening skills and speak the language more fluently. Also, it significantly contributes to the student listening and speaking skills improvement.

A language laboratory is described by Seaton (1982) as "a classroom... containing electronic and mechanical equipment" that is set up and designed to make studying foreign languages easier than is often achievable. According to Geeta Nagaraj (1996), a language laboratory consists of a system that uses tape recorders to offer individualized language learning possibilities.

According to Morley (1998), there is a renewed focus in the role that adults' total communication skill plays in pronunciation, thanks to the present emphasis on communicative approaches to ESL training and the need to develop communication and teamwork skills in an increasingly diverse workplace. Pronunciation is therefore making a comeback from its frequently neglected position in adult ESL training. The state of pronunciation education in adult ESL programs is reviewed in this digest.

A pronunciation lesson's content and the teaching strategy are usually related (Celle-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996). The grammar-translation method was infrequently taught in the past because it largely disregarded pronunciation. Using the audio-lingual approach, students would spend hours in the language lab repeating and listening to various sound combinations. Pronunciation is now taught in the context of actual communication because to the development of more comprehensive, communicative ESL teaching methods and approaches (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Morley, 1991), as well as the elements.

The value of English in today's society

People from various walks of life can express their wants and share scholarly ideas on a global scale thanks to the English language. "If a person knows English, he is sure to be understood anywhere in the world," continues Baruah (1984). The world is getting smaller and smaller due to the incredible advancement in modern transportation and communication technology.

The Value of Speaking and Listening Skills

Learning a language requires mastering the four fundamental skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. These four abilities are frequently categorized under the two major language abilities known as receptive ability and productive ability. The ability to listen is seen to be the most fundamental and significant talent in the natural process of language learning and acquisition, on which the development of other language skills is founded.

According to David Cross (1992), "fluent speech is a product of engagement in receptive activities, not speaking practise. It is obvious that listening skills are essential for involvement in all forms of communication.

Different Types of Language Laboratories

An audio or audio-visual installation called the "language laboratory" is utilized to support modern language instruction. They are located in academies, universities, and schools, among other places. The University of Grenoble may have housed the first laboratory. (Ruby, W.B.) According to Cesar (2006), language laboratories are teaching instruments that need the use of well-designed tasks depending on the needs of the students. Beder (2008) described language laboratories. A classroom outfitted with specialist equipment to help students study foreign languages by self-recording, watching movies, and listening to tapes or CDs is called a language laboratory. These spaces can be found at schools, colleges, training centers, universities, or academies. Languages laboratories have expanded rapidly over time. It supports educators in teaching foreign languages. Aleman classifies language laboratories into four categories (Mercy, 2016).

Conventional Laboratory

It is the previous iteration of the language lab. It comes with very basic teaching aids including audio cassettes in the target language and tape recorders. In traditional language laboratories, tape recorders were utilized in place of people. According to Allen (1974) it was due to the fact that although tape recorders were unstoppable, humans lacked the stamina to drill in the classroom. Teachers use it in the traditional manner, turning on the tape player and having the students listen to it.

Lingua Phone Laboratory

Although it is more contemporary, it is comparable to a traditional laboratory. Students can use the headphones in this lab to listen to the teacher's cassette. Learners are less distracted by this extra help. Students can also hear the clearly, the cassette because the headset helps pupils concentrate better (Sihite, 2017). Another contemporary language lab makes use of a bifurcating electrical gadget. It is used to repeat the recording and play the cassette.

Computer Assisted Language Laboratory (CALL)

In this kind of lab, language teaching is provided via a computer. The computer contains the resources for teaching languages. This renowned speech laboratory already has all of the courses saved in it (Matthew, 2020). It has several characteristics that help teachers choose appropriate assignments to complete. PHONE never stops expanding throughout time. These days, computers come with an internet connection, allowing teachers and students to explore many websites that offer learning activities. Web Assisted

Language Laboratories (WALL) are one type of such facility. CALL is divided into three stages as it grows steadily.

Multimedia Hi-Tech Language Laboratory

Multimedia The Hi-Tech Language Laboratory combines the use of internet resources connected to computers with the use of computers that hold a range of material, including images, videos, graphics, and more. Because it needs hypermedia, Multimedia Hi-Tech Language Lab gains power. Hypermedia is a great resource for language acquisition. It makes thorough self-study easier so that half of the students can learn on their own while the other half is in class for teacher practice. Each learner thus has plenty of chances to practice with the use of sophisticated tools (Kumar, 2017).

Benefits and Drawbacks of a Language Lab Approach to English Language Learning

There are numerous e-learning technologies that can be used in educational initiatives. Universities and education ministries around the world have worked hard to increase the usage of the web in all of its forms (e-books, wikis, blogs, podcasts, text messaging, simulations, and podcasts, for example) to satisfy the needs of cutthroat marketplaces and provide their students with a wide range of learning options. According to reports, the introduction of new technology benefits educators as well as students (Mansor 2001). Researchers have shown that technology advances both students' knowledge and the development of instructional strategies (Friggard 2002; Timucin 2006). According to Lam and Lawrence (2002), technology gives students the ability to control their own learning.

This essay seeks to address both the advantages and disadvantages of technology use in order to give scholars and practicing educators some crucial context and helpful resources. While not all-inclusive, the list offers interested readers a place to start. Let's start with the benefits.

Material and Methods

Approach

The researchers have used quantitative method to conduct this study. Priority is given to quantitative method keeping in view the nature of the study.

Population

Students of ADP, BS and MS in English linguistics and literature programs are selected for this study to participate and provide their response through questionnaire.

Sample Size

The study's sample consisted of 274 male and female English language and literature majors from one of the following Pakistani universities, chosen by stratified-random sampling technique:

Research Instruments and Validation Process

A closed ended questionnaire with ten items is used as research instrument in this study. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire is observed within the required limits.

Data Collecting Technique

Simple data collection technique has been used in this research by asking the students to provide their Responses on the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Techniques

SPSS is used to analyze the data by applying simple frequency test.

Ethical Considerations

All the considerations are observed faithfully to conduct this research.

Research design:

The research study uses a mixed-methods methodology. The current study assesses the mixed data.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Unavailability of Language Lab

Sr. No.	Gender	Frequency	A		SA		N		DA		SDA	
			Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
01	Male	99	53	53.53	35	35.35	08	8.0	3	3.03	8	8.0
02	Female	175	100	57	55	31.4	12	6.8	02	1.1	06	3.4
03	Total	274	153	55.84	90	32.85	20	7.30	03	1.19	08	2.92

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether the absence of language learning labs affecting their performance. Table 4.1 shows that almost 89 % of the male respondents agree (53.53 % Agree and 35.35 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 88 % of the female respondents also agree (57% Agree and 31.4% Strongly Agree) that the absence of digital environments for practicing speaking skills can be challenging. Consider exploring online language platforms, virtual conversation partners, or language exchange apps to enhance their speaking practice

Table 2
Lack of Digital Environments for Speaking Skill

Sr. No.	Gender	Frequency	A		SA		N		DA		SDA	
			Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
01	Male	99	39	39.39	50	50.50	6	6.06	3	3.03	1	1.01
02	Female	175	76	43.42	70	40	20	11.42	3	1.71	6	3.42
03	Total	274	115	41.97	120	43.80	26	9.49	6	2.19	7	2.55

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether The lack of digital environments for practicing their speaking skill is carrying them out. Table 4.2 shows that almost 90 % of the male respondents agree (39.39 % Agree and 50.50 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 83 % of the female respondents also agree (43.42% Agree and 40% Strongly Agree) that absence of digital environments for practicing speaking skills can be challenging. Consider exploring online language platforms, virtual conversation partners, or language exchange apps to enhance their speaking practice.

Table 3
Technology in language Labs

Sr. No.	Gender-Frequency	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
01	Male	99	38	38.38	40	40.40	10	10.10	7	7.07	4	4.04

02	Female	175	84	48	57	32.57	26	14.85	1	0.57	7	4
03	Total	274	122	44.53	97	35.40	36	13.14	8	2.92	11	4.01

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether Technology in language labs is also a very efficient tool to increase their quality of learning. Table 4.3 shows that almost 79 % of the male respondents agree (38.38 % Agree and 40.40 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement,

Whereas 51 % of the female respondents also agree (48% Agree and 32.57% Strongly Agree) that technology in language labs enhances learning by providing interactive exercises, multimedia resources, and real-time feedback. It can significantly improve language acquisition and overall learning quality.

Table 4
Development of Language Labs

Sr. No.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	38	38.38	51	51.51	6	6.06	4	4.04	0	0
02	Female	175	75	42.85	76	43.42	16	9.14	4	2.28	4	2.28
03	Total	274	113	41.24	127	46.35	22	8.03	8	2.92	4	1.46

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether it is necessary to implement language labs because they have important benefits for learner by strengthening their skills. Table 4.4 shows that almost 90 % of the male respondents agree (38.38 % Agree and 51.51 % strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 86.27 % of the female respondents also agree (42.85% Agree and 43.42% strongly Agree) that Implementing language labs is beneficial as it offer a structured environment for skill development. Language labs enhance language learning through interactive activities, pronunciation practice, and real-time feedback, ultimately strengthening their language skills.

Table 5
Pronunciation Issues without Labs

Sr. No.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	34	34.34	45	45.45	14	14.14	4	4.01	2	2.01
02	Female	175	76	43.42	63	36	15	8.57	12	6.85	9	5.14
03	Total	274	110	40.15	108	39.42	29	10.58	16	5.84	11	4.01

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether Without labs pronunciation tends to be a very difficult part for them when learning a foreign language. Table 4.5 shows that almost 80 % of the male respondents agree (34.34 % Agree and 45.45 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 79.42 % of the female respondents also agree (43.42% Agree and 36% Strongly Agree) that without the guidance of language labs, practicing pronunciation can indeed be challenging. Consider using online resources, language exchange apps, or language tutors to get feedback on learner's pronunciation. Consistent practice is key to success

Table 6
Improvement in Pronunciation

Sr. No.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	29	29.29	43	43.43	18	18.18	6	6.06	3	3.03
02	Female	175	82	46.85	52	29.71	25	14.28	9	5.14	7	4
03	Total	274	111	40.51	95	34.67	43	15.69	15	5.47	10	3.65

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether With language labs they can enhance their pronunciation in a very effective way as compared with the traditional method of teaching. Table 4.6 shows that almost 73 % of the male respondents agree (29.29 % Agree and 43.43 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 76.56 % of the

female respondents also agree (47% Agree and 29.71% Strongly Agree) that language labs offer interactive and targeted pronunciation practice, allowing for immediate feedback and improvement. Compared to traditional methods, they often provide a more dynamic and personalized approach to refining their language skills, including pronunciation

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether the absence of language labs in their institute de motivates them to learn English. Table 4.7 shows that almost 67 % of the male respondents agree (36.36 % Agree and 30.30 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 66.28 % of the female respondents also agree (41.14% Agree and 25.14% Strongly Agree) that lack of language labs can indeed impact motivation, as learners may miss out on interactive and focused practice. Consider encouraging the use of online resources, language apps, or arranging speaking activities to compensate for the absence of language labs and maintain motivation among learners

Table 7
Demotivation

Sr. No.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	36	36.36	30	30.30	16	16.16	12	12.12	5	5.05
02	Female	175	72	41.14	44	25.14	34	19.42	16	9.14	9	5.14
03	Total	274	108	39.42	74	27.01	50	18.25	28	10.22	14	5.11

Table 8
Importance of Language Labs

Sr.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	32	32.32	33	33.33	21	21.21	11	11.11	2	2.02
02	Female	175	83	47.42	47	26.85	27	15.42	14	8	4	2.28
03	Total	274	115	41.97	80	29.19	48	17.51	25	9.12	6	2.18

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether the absence of language labs in their institute de motivates them to learn English. Table 4.7 shows that almost 67 % of the male respondents agree (36.36 % Agree and 30.30 % strongly Agree) with the given statement, whereas 66.28 % of the female respondents also agree (41.14% Agree and 25.14% strongly Agree) that the absence of language labs can pose challenges, learners can still make significant improvements in pronunciation and foreign language learning through alternative methods Utilize online pronunciation tools, language exchange platforms, and engage in consistent speaking practice to compensate for the lack of language labs.

Table 9
Non Establishment of Language Labs Creates Hurdles

Sr. No.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	32	32.32	28	28.28	31	31.31	7	7.07	1	1.01
02	Female	175	79	45.14	53	30.28	32	18.28	7	4	4	2.28
03	Total	274	111	40.51	81	29.56	63	22.99	14	5.11	5	1.82

Table 10
Tools Necessary for Improving Fluency.

Sr. No.	Gender	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
01	Male	99	42	42.42	40	40.40	14	14.14	2	2.02	1	1.01
02	Female	175	71	40.57	73	41.71	21	12	6	3.42	4	2.28
03	Total	274	113	41.24	113	41.24	35	12.77	8	2.92	5	1.82

EFL Learners were asked to give their opinion whether the language lab offer the tools necessary for improving fluency. . Table 4.10 shows that almost 83 % of the male respondents agree (42.42 % Agree and 40.40 % Strongly Agree) with the given statement,

whereas 82.28 % of the female respondents also agree (40.57% Agree and 41.71% Strongly Agree) that language labs provide essential tools for enhancing fluency. They offer interactive exercises, pronunciation practice, and real-time feedback, contributing significantly to improving spoken proficiency in a foreign language. Regular use of these tools can boost confidence and fluency in language learners

Discussion

The absence of language labs can indeed hinder learners' communication skills development. Language labs provide a controlled environment for practicing speaking, listening, and pronunciation, which are crucial aspects of language acquisition. Without access to such facilities, learners may struggle to receive adequate feedback and opportunities for real-time practice, potentially impeding their proficiency in the language. Integrating technology and interactive methods into language learning could mitigate this challenge, but it's important to recognize the value of dedicated language lab environments.

English language learning labs play a vital role in enhancing communication skills for learners. These labs provide an immersive and interactive environment that fosters language acquisition. English language learning labs provide a supportive and stimulating environment for learners to develop their communication skills. By combining speaking practice, listening comprehension, feedback mechanisms, interactive exercises, and self-paced learning opportunities, these labs play a crucial role in helping learners become confident and proficient English speakers.

Conclusion

A great resource for honing and evaluating one's English speech skills is the language laboratory. With the help of this feature, students can practice pronouncing words correctly by speaking aloud, recording themselves doing so, comparing their performance to the model, and completing a self-evaluation. The language laboratory is adaptable and does not always require a teacher because it allows each student to study the language at their own speed. Teachers can help students both individually and collectively simultaneously. Everyone taking part in a language lab is given private space to speak and listen.

The answer and necessity of the hour for acquiring language abilities is the language lab. When pupils acquire language skills via the multimedia, digital, and computerized Language Lab, the quality of their proficiency will increase. In any field or subject, there is always room for growth and progress. It is past time for us to update our teaching strategies. If new technology is not integrated into language training, we will not be able to teach our students language skills at the rate at which the competition is growing.

Recommendations

Some recommendations are sent in the following to the concerned party based on the discussion and conclusion.

- Four language skills can be practiced by students in school English departments through the establishment of language labs.
- Students can practice four language skills with the establishment of speaking labs in universities English departments.
- University computer laboratories might be modified to serve as language labs.

- The researchers demand that the money required for additional rooms and labs in universities be secured.
- To successfully foster students' communication skills, English language classrooms and language laboratories with highly-configured systems must be integrated.
- As soon as students start talking, teachers should assist them in overcoming their nervousness.
- Modern laboratories ought to be well-equipped at universities.
- Students should take advantage of language labs as well as the inspiration and support of their teachers.
- 9. It is imperative that children understand the ways in which technology facilitates learning a second language.
- The researchers also recommend that the number of courses that the study plans for those courses be reviewed in order to improve EFL learners' communication skills.
- In order to actively handle language labs, the researchers advise providing universities with academic cadres who are qualified, competent, and have experience with technology.
- In order to better understand how language laboratories support EFL learners in enhancing their language skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing – as well as to suggest strategies for overcoming obstacles in this domain – the researchers call for additional investigations on other educational institutions to determine if they have language labs.

References

- Abdelaziz, M. (2017). *The Role of Language Laboratory in English Language Learning Settings; English Language Teaching,* (Vol. 10). Canadian Center of Science and Education
- Allen, J.P.B and S. Pit. Corder. (1974). *Techniques in applied linguistics*, Vol 3. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bader, M. (2008). *language laboratory of learning spoken and written language.* <http://bederebhashe.blogspot.com>
- Baruah, T.C. (1984). *The English Teachers Handbook*. Starling Publisher Private Limited, New Delhi.
- Cesar, M. (2006). From exclusion to inclusion: Collaborative work contributions to more inclusive learning settings. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 4(21).
- Joan, P. (2016). The Influence of Language Laboratory in the Academic Achievement of Students in French. *European Journal of Language Studies*, 3(2).
- Khaleel, M. S. (2020). Language Laboratory (Issue July) [University of Karbala].
- Kumar, S. (2007). *A Handbook for English Language Laboratories*: Foundation India.
- Lam, Y., & Lawrence, G (2002), 'Teacher-student role redefinition during a computer-based secondlanguage project: Are computers catalysts for empowering change?' Computer Assisted Language Learning vol. 15. languages in United Arab Emirates' schools', *International Journal for Research in Education*, 27(4)
- Mambo, B. (2004). Evolving view, evolving practices: language laboratory and cha supporting the communitive approaches to language instruction. *Journal of Edi Computing, Design and online learning*. 5(3)
- Matthew, F. A. (2020). The Influence of Standard Language Laboratory on the Effective Teaching and Learning of English Language. *Language in India*, 20(7).
- Mercy, M. (2016). Effectiveness of Using Language Laboratory in Teaching English Amng Vii StandardStudents in Coimbatore District. *International Journal of Research-Granthaalayah*, 4(5).
- Morley, J. (1998). Trippingly on the tongue: Putting serious speech/pronunciation instruction back in the TESOL equation. *ESL Magazine*, January/February, 20-23. Calling Back CALL. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- Nagaraj, G. (1996). *English Language Teaching*. Orient Longman.