

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Students' Disposition to the Use of Language Laboratory in Oral English Instruction

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Abstract

This study set out to understand what DLC students think about the language laboratory and whether it actually helps their language learning. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The sample comprised 500 language students purposively selected from five departments in the Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan. Three research questions guided the study. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire and analysed with frequency counts, simple percentages, weighted mean, and independent samples t-test. Findings revealed that distance learning students held a positive disposition towards the language laboratory for language instruction. Learning in the laboratory significantly enhanced students' listening skills and pronunciation accuracy. Further, no statistically significant difference was found between male and female students in their disposition to language laboratory use. Based on these findings, the study recommends that government should equip all schools with functional language laboratories to improve language teaching and learning; that English language teachers be exposed to regular seminars and workshops on innovative uses of language laboratories; and that Parent-Teacher Associations support institutions with alternative power sources to mitigate incessant power failures that hinder laboratory use.

Keywords: Language laboratory, disposition, distance learning students, Oral English, University of Ibadan

Introduction

Listening and speaking are the foundation of real communication in any language. For students learning English as a second language, especially in Nigeria, mastering these skills means more than just passing exams. It means being able to understand others and express oneself clearly in academic, social, and professional settings. To achieve this, language teaching must go beyond textbooks and chalkboards. It should give students direct, practical exposure to spoken English through tools that let them hear, imitate, and correct themselves. This is where the language laboratory becomes important. It provides a controlled space for learners to practise listening and pronunciation, helping them build confidence and accuracy in ways a regular classroom often cannot.

The language laboratory has historically occupied a central place in audiolingual methodology. Its primary objective was to improve learners' aural-oral skills through repetitive drills and controlled practice. Bygate

et al. (2001) note that when tape recorders and language laboratories emerged in the 1950s, they were deployed mainly for pronunciation, grammar, and translation practice. By the 1960s, the language laboratory became a symbol of technological innovation in language teaching, yet it also attracted criticism. Howatt and Widdowson (2004) observed that while the laboratory was a major installation that distorted school budgets, its initial impact was weakened by "rather old-fashioned drill-based learning which it promoted" (p. 243).

Critics of the language laboratory cited challenges related to cost, maintenance, space, lack of appropriate materials, and inadequate teacher training. Aguilar et al. (2003) counter that the core function of the laboratory is to make individual practice more effective and to increase teacher productivity by allowing instructors to focus on learner production and error correction. However, its effectiveness is not inherent in the hardware but in the quality of pedagogical tasks implemented. As Underwood (1984) cautioned, "because of the way it ended up being used the laboratory simply could not

live up to its expectations. Although the hardware evolved through several increasingly sophisticated generations, the software did not pass” (p. 52). Thus, the laboratory is neither a substitute for the teacher nor a method in itself; its value depends on teacher creativity and task design.

Contemporary scholarship repositions the language laboratory within a broader ecology of technology-enhanced language learning. While Lado (1965) warned against viewing the laboratory as “the centre of language teaching,” recent studies emphasise blended and mobile-assisted models. Haphuriwat (1989) earlier critiqued monotonous cassette-based drills that lulled students to sleep, a concern now addressed by interactive digital platforms. Current research demonstrates that computer-assisted pronunciation training and AI-powered speech recognition tools significantly improve segmental and suprasegmental accuracy. For instance, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2021) found that learners using ASR-based applications outperformed those in traditional lab on pronunciation tests. Similarly, Lei and Liu (2022) in a systematic review concluded that AI-based speaking tools provide individualized, immediate feedback that analog laboratories cannot match. Zhang and Zou (2022) further report that state-of-the-art technologies for L2 learning show strong effects for speaking and listening when integrated with pedagogically sound tasks.

In the Nigerian context, scholars such as Aremo (2001) and Ogoanah (2007) documented the positive impact of laboratory-based practical approaches on secondary school students' oral performance, noting increased engagement and attitude change. Yusuf (1999) similarly argued that Oral English becomes “boring and uninteresting when it is taught in abstract,” and that teaching aids arouse curiosity and lay a foundation for creativity. Nevertheless, the transition from hardware-dependent labs to cloud-based and virtual laboratories remains uneven. Ola-Busari (2021) advocates re-thinking the language laboratory in Nigerian tertiary institutions, moving from physical

installations to cloud solutions that are cost-effective and resilient to power failures. Ubah and Onyekwere (2024) compared mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) with traditional laboratories among ESL learners in South-East Nigeria and found that MALL users demonstrated superior oral fluency, though both groups outperformed non-laboratory controls.

The teacher remains pivotal in mediating technology. Tiffen (1986) and Adetugbo (2002) assert that the teacher is “the pivot of the educational lever,” interpreting and transmitting educational philosophy. Nicholas (1988) identified the teacher as the organiser of curriculum activities. Yet, as Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019) emphasise, effective pronunciation teaching today requires teachers to integrate technological affordances with pedagogical expertise. Dale's (1969) principle that “oral English has to be learnt by doing rather than by reading” aligns with constructivist theorists from Montessori to Bruner, who argued that active manipulation of learning objects enhances retention and transfer. This principle underpins the rationale for laboratory use, whether physical or virtual.

Despite technological advances, challenges persist in distance learning contexts. The University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre has installed modern language laboratory facilities and incorporated them into core Teacher Education courses such as TEE 122, 202, 226, 335, and 326. The institutional aim is to produce language experts with native-like pronunciation and communicative proficiency. However, the disposition of DLC students towards these facilities—given constraints of access, electricity, and digital literacy—remains underexplored. While Ogoanah (2005) reported significant gains in academic performance when laboratory methods were used, and Yusuf (1999) highlighted the motivational role of instructional materials, there is a dearth of recent empirical data on distance learners' attitudes, particularly disaggregated by gender.

Statement of the Problem

This study examines University of

Ibadan DLC students' disposition towards the use of the language laboratory in language instruction. It further investigates the perceived impact of laboratory use on listening skills and pronunciation, and tests for gender differences in disposition. Findings will inform policy on infrastructure investment, teacher professional

development, and alternative power provision to optimise language laboratory use in Nigerian distance education.

Answering the Research Questions

Research Question 1: What Is the disposition of distance learning students to the use of language

Table 1: Disposition of students on the use of language laboratory

S/N	STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D
1	I usually enjoy being in language laboratory	215 (43)	250 (50)	20 (40)	15 (3)	3.30	.82
2	Learning in the language laboratory is very boring	40 (8)	65 (13)	235 (47)	160 (32)	2.82	1.14
3	I like going to language laboratory because the work there is interesting	145 (29)	285 (57)	50 (10)	25 (4)	3.11	.76
4	I dislike going to language laboratory because of the way my course mates behaves there	35 (7)	85 (17)	270 (54)	110 (22)	2.78	.98
5	I like going to language laboratory because lesson there are lively	195 (39)	240 (48)	40 (8)	25 (5)	3.08	1.00
6	Coming to language laboratory is a waste of time	25 (45)	70 (14)	155 (31)	250 (50)	3.12	1.10
7	It does not matter what activities go on in the language laboratory, I am not interested	40 (8)	70 (14)	180 (35)	210 (42)	2.98	1.13
8	I like coming to language laboratory because I enjoy language lessons with it	245 (49)	180 (36)	50 (10)	25 (5)	3.31	.81
9	A language laboratory provides the best environment for developing Oral English proficiency	45 (9)	100 (20)	220 (44)	135 (27)	2.85	.95
10	I dislike language laboratory because I am afraid of my lecturer	215 (43)	145 (29)	100 (20)	40 (8)	2.93	1.16
11	I like going to language laboratory because of the method my lecturer uses in teaching	60 (12)	75 (15)	200 (40)	165 (35)	2.66	1.26
12	I don't like going to language laboratory because I find it difficult to cope with the lesson	175 (35)	230 (46)	45 (9)	50 (10)	2.85	1.03
13	Oral English could only be learnt effectively in language laboratory	55 (11)	90 (18)	200 (42)	145 (29)	2.92	.99
14	Without access to a language laboratory, students struggle to master Oral English skills.	200 (40)	130 (26)	120 (24)	50 (10)	2.92	1.06
15	Correct pronunciation and sound of words can only be learnt in the language laboratory	185 (37)	145 (29)	135 (27)	35 (7)	2.92	1.00
16	Language laboratory enhances listening skills	185 (37)	210 (42)	60 (12)	50 (10)	2.94	1.09
17	Listening, sound of words, pronunciation can not be learned effectively without language laboratory	135 (27)	140 (28)	125 (25)	100 (20)	2.55	1.16
18	I am aware that English language could be learnt in laboratory	110 (22)	220 (44)	110 (22)	60 (12)	2.69	1.02
19.	Not every English language teacher is aware of language laboratory	130 (26)	185 (37)	100 (20)	85 (17)	2.68	1.06

Table 1 reveals that the students have positive disposition towards the use of language laboratory in teaching oral English instruction (weighted average = 2.91). This can be seen from the responses to the items in the questionnaire. For instance, they agreed that they enjoy being in language laboratory ($x = 3.30$); They like going to laboratory because the work there is interesting ($x = 3.11$); They like going to language because lessons there are lively. ($x = 3.08$); They agreed that they enjoyed lessons with it. ($x = 3.31$); They agreed that being in language laboratory they shared knowledge with their coursemates ($x = 2.93$); They also agreed that they enjoyed the method of teaching used in

the language laboratory ($x = 2.99$). The students disagreed that learning in the laboratory is boring ($x = 2.82$); They disagree that it is a waste of time ($x = 3.12$); They dislike going to language laboratory because the lesson there is difficult. They do not like coming to language laboratory because they fear their lecturer ($x = 2.66$); They are not interested in any activity going on in language laboratory ($x = 2.98$).

Research Question 2: What is the perception of DLC students on the likely benefits and hindrances of learning in the language laboratory?

Table 2: Benefits and hindrances of language laboratory in teaching and learning of language courses

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D
1	Learning in the language laboratory is very boring	40 (8)	65 (13)	235 (47)	160 (32)	2.82	1.14
2	Coming to language laboratory is not a waste of time	20 (4)	65 (13)	145 (29)	240 (48)	3.12	1.01
3	I don't like coming to language laboratory because learning there is time consuming	45 (9)	100 (20)	220 (44)	135 (27)	2.85	0.95
4	I like going to language laboratory because lessons there are lively	175 (35)	230 (46)	45 (9)	50 (10)	2.85	1.03
5	Oral English could only be learnt in language laboratory	195 (39)	240 (48)	40 (8)	25 (5)	3.08	1.00
6	Correct pronunciation and sound of words can only be learnt effectively in the language laboratory	185 (37)	145 (29)	135 (27)	35 (7)	2.92	1.00
7	Language laboratory enhances listening skill	185 (37)	210 (42)	60 (12)	50 (10)	2.94	1.09
8	Listening, sound of words, pronunciation cannot be learned effectively without language laboratory	135 (27)	140 (28)	125 (25)	100 (20)	2.55	1.16

Table 2 shows that the students disagreed that learning in the laboratory is boring ($x = 2.02$); lessons in laboratory are very lively. ($x = 3.08$); thus disagree that it is waste of time ($x = 3.12$); Also, the students love coming to language laboratory ($x = 2.85$); while they agreed that oral English can be effectively learned in laboratory ($x = 2.92$); thus, agreed that sound and correct pronunciation of words can be learned in language laboratory ($x = 2.92$); They, also

agreed that language laboratory enhances listening skill ($x = 2.94$); and words, sound, pronunciation could be effectively learned in a language laboratory ($x = 2.55$).

Research Question 3: What is the difference in the disposition of male and female Distance Learning students to the use of language laboratory in Oral English Instruction?

Table 3: Summary of t-test showing difference in the disposition of male and female students' disposition

Variable	N	Mean	Std. D.	t-test	df	Percent	Rank
Male students	115	59.17	9.04	1.114	478	0.266	Not Significant
Female students	365	58.26	7.19		130		

$P > 0.05$

This means that both male and female students have positive disposition.

Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female student in their disposition to language laboratory. ($t = 1.114$; degree of freedom = 478; $P > 0.05$).

Discussion of findings

The research question 1 states: Is the disposition of distance learning students to the use of language laboratory in language instruction be positive or negative? The result shows that the students have positive disposition to the use of language laboratory in teaching language Instruction. This is evidenced in the weighted average of 2.91 and mean value of $x = 3.30$. It also revealed that the students like going to language laboratory, because the work there is Interesting, lessons there are lively, they shared knowledge with their coursemates and they enjoyed the teaching methods used in the language laboratory. This result corroborates the findings of Rivers (1970) which also says that language laboratory helps a lot to improve students listening comprehension, speaking, pronunciation as well as grammar in communication context. However, the findings negate the study of Underwood (1984) which states that, the use of language laboratory is boring, and uninteresting to students. The contradiction of his findings might be as a result of time he carried out his research when the use of language laboratory was new, to students, unlike now that its usage is consistent.

Research question 2 asks: What is the perception of DLC students on the likely benefits and hindrances of learning in the language laboratory? The result shows that the students disagreed that learning in the language

laboratory is boring with the mean value of $x = 2.02$ meaning that the students enjoyed learning in language laboratory, agreed that language courses could be effectively learned in language laboratory. It also revealed that language laboratory enhances listening skill and correct pronunciation of words. This result affirms the study of Underwood (1984) which states that the laboratory was seen as a sort of timeless teachers aid that could drill the mechanical aspects of language freeing the teacher from more creative activities which makes the teaching and learning interesting.

This in turn negates the findings of Rivers (1970) which states that, students are going to drop out in frustration and disappointment. The reasons for Rivers findings might be teachers personality and methods which students might find interesting and less attractive then.

The research question 3 asks: Is there any significant difference in the disposition of male and female Distance Learning students to the use of language laboratory in language instruction? Findings reveals that, there is no significant difference between male and female students in their disposition to the use of language laboratory with $t = 1.114$; degree of freedom = 478; $P > 0.05$. This supports the findings of Nunan (2005) when he found that both male and female students found the use of language laboratory attractive, interesting and enjoyable, however negates the findings of Lado (1965) who finds out that female students are more favourably disposed to language laboratory equipment usage than male, this might be as a result of the many researcher that had been conducted which state that female are better in language has then male.

Conclusion

It is one thing for the school authority and the government to provide the equipment (language lab) for the learners, It is another thing for the learners to like using it to its maximum level. This study therefore has been able to show us that learning equipment are being produced with a few to enhancing the quality of teachers produced for language and students have demonstrated positive attitude in using it.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Government: The government has a vital role to play in ensuring that every school is equipped with a language laboratory so that teachers can make the best use of it to teach students this aspect of the language. The provision of these facilities should not be limited to teacher training institutions alone but should be extended to Faculties of Education in various universities, Colleges of Education, and secondary schools where these graduates will teach. This will enable them to transfer the knowledge acquired to their students. In addition, the government should provide standby generating plants to prevent interruptions caused by incessant power failures during lessons in the language laboratory.
- School Management: School management should endeavour to build language laboratories in their various schools to complement government efforts.
- Parents Teachers Association (PTA): The School PTA should also assist in providing language laboratories in situations where the school management cannot afford one.
- Teachers: The school management should use school grants to send language teachers to workshops, seminars, and symposia on the use of language laboratories. This will ensure that they are well versed in how to use the facilities, make teaching easier, and ultimately help solve the problems students encounter in this aspect of language learning.

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