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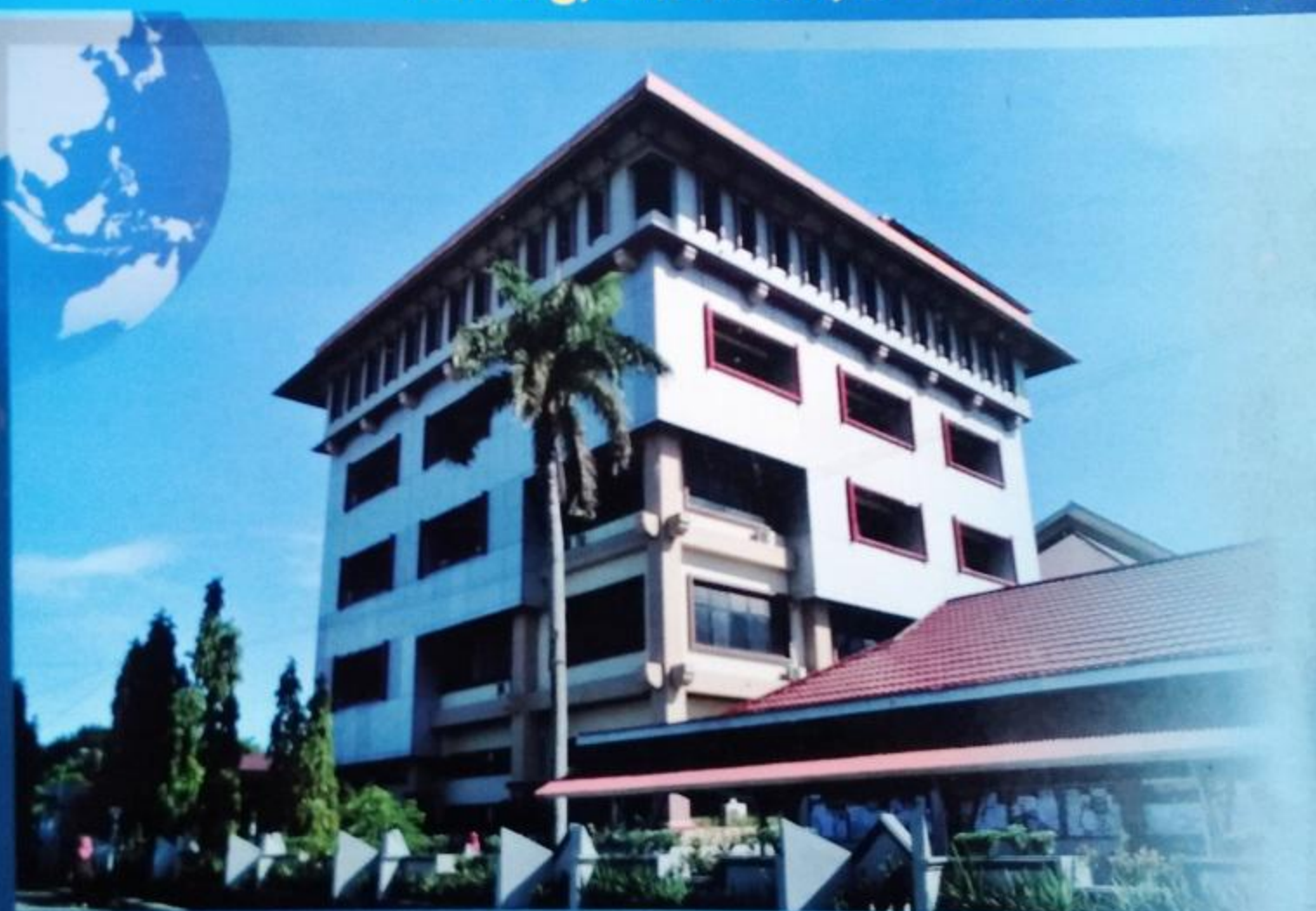


# **PROCEEDING**

## **INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON LANGUAGES AND ARTS**

**(ISLA-2) FBS UNP**

**Padang, Indonesia, 5 - 6 October 2013**



**Empowering Theories and Pedagogical  
Application of Languages and Arts**

**FAKULTAS BAHASA DAN SENI  
UNIVERSITAS NEGERI PADANG**

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Porsiding Seminar Internasional Bahasa dan Seni  
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: M. Zaim  
: Indrayuda  
: Jufrizal  
: Havid Ardi  
: Muhd. Al-Hafizh  
: Yos Sudarman

Desainer Sampul : Yos Sudarman

Lay Out : Havid Ardi

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## MAXIMIZING THE ADVANTAGES OF LANGUAGE LABORATORY FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN YOGYAKARTA PROVINCE

**Titik Sudartinah**  
Yogyakarta State University  
titiksudartinah@yahoo.co.id

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### Abstract

Nowadays, technology is inseparable from any aspects of life, including education. Technology, in whatever form it is, has brought teaching and learning to its new height. It has been used widely, making changes in educational paradigm and delivery. Language teaching and learning is one among many that is also influenced a lot by the development of technology. More advanced facilities are developed along with the rapid changes in technology. One of the basic facilities in language teaching and learning that is based on technology is language laboratory. Both conventional and computerized language lab bring many advantages to the teaching and learning of English. This is what this study focuses on – things that can be done to maximize the advantages of the use of language lab in English teaching. This study reports the discussion results with English teachers in senior high schools in Yogyakarta province, Indonesia. Based on the results of the discussion, there are some common problems experienced by these teachers when using language labs. The problems include the management, human resources, teaching materials, and technical problems. Several ways can be done to minimize the problems and maximize the positive effects of the use of language lab in English teaching. Among them are creating a well-managed language lab, improving the competence and performance of teachers in using the lab, changing or improving the choice and design of teaching materials, and improving the ability to solve technical problems.

**Keywords:** advantages, ELT, language lab, senior high schools, Yogyakarta

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Technology develops more rapidly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These rapid changes in technology have brought many consequences – positive or negative – that surely influence people's everyday life. Today technology has become an important thing that is inseparable from many aspects of life, including education.

Language teaching and learning is one among many that is also influenced a lot by the development of technology. Technology in language teaching has been used for the past 60 years (Tomei, 2003). Starting with the language labs of the U.S. military in World War II, the utilization of various technologies has increased steadily over that period of time. This type of technology, with its interconnected tape recorders, was then moved from the military setting to the high school language class. A more advanced technology was adopted in language labs by combining computers with videotapes and videodiscs networked to provide language instruction in an effective manner (Earp, 2001). Today, the development and application of distance learning opportunities take place, with the advent of satellite dishes and language programs broadcast through this medium (Tomei, 2003).

The technological advancement in language labs probably differs from one country to another. In Indonesia, especially in Yogyakarta Province, most senior high schools have either conventional (tape-based) or computerized language lab but it is still limited in use. Besides bringing many advantages to the teaching and learning of English, there are also some problems concerning the use of language lab for English language teaching. This is what this study focuses on – the identification of problems concerning the use of language lab and some possible solutions to maximize the advantages of the use of language lab in English teaching. This study reports the results of the discussion with English teachers in senior high schools in Yogyakarta province, Indonesia.

## B. LANGUAGE LAB FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

As many as 50 English teachers in senior high schools in Yogyakarta are interviewed. All of them report that their schools provide at least one language laboratory to support the teaching and learning of English. The language lab is either a conventional or a computerized one with various types of machines and programs.

Regardless of the type of the language lab available at schools, whether it is a conventional (tape-based) or computerized (LAN-based) language lab, teachers find that using a language lab is helpful for teaching English. It gives students opportunities to learn English using various tools and allows them to use different skills in a unique environment. Besides, students can also internalize correct grammatical structures and pronunciation through the many activities conducted in the language lab.

It is for sure that language lab plays an important role in language learning. It does not only function to support the learning of a single language, but also function to provide supports for the teaching of a number of languages efficiently. Richards (2001) mentions some of the advantages of using a language lab for teaching languages, i.e.:

1. It is a tool designed for teaching any language.
2. It helps students learn pronunciation, accent, stress, and all other aspects of the phonetics of a language.
3. Web-content creation, the setting up of in-house news magazines, corporate publicity and identity, and teaching materials can be generated through the language lab.
4. General documentation, software documentation, and all forms of technical documentation can be done.
5. Experts can utilize the laboratory for creating and editing scientific and technical materials for teaching language.
6. Short-term and long-term coaching classes for international examinations like IELTS, TOEFL, and other competitive examinations can be organized.
7. Online courses and paperless examinations can be conducted through the language lab.

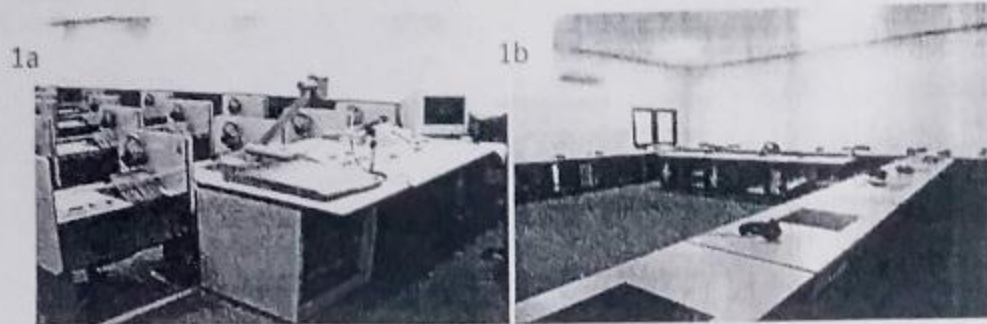
In addition, it provides opportunities for students to work at their own pace, control the flow or sequence of instruction, and have immediate feedback (Mills, 2004). Using it, teachers can flexibly adapt instruction to individual learners needs by varying lesson content, instructional sequence, level of difficulty for each lesson, and the types of feedback.

Furthermore, Massy & Zemsky in Mishra and Sharma (2005) state that a fundamental benefit to students from the best uses of technology in teaching is a more systematic approach to the individualization and customization of instruction. Properly designed, a technology-based learning environment provides students with more options than which are typically available in traditional learning situations, in content, pace, preparation, and review of prerequisites, and for activities such as collaboration, consultation, and evaluation.

## C. COMMON FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES IN A LANGUAGE LAB

The teachers who are interviewed explain that they mostly use the facilities in their school's language labs for listening activities. They usually distribute worksheets to students that is to be completed after listening to passages. Actually there are many other kinds of activities that are possible to be conducted in language labs. Prior to planning the kinds of activities to be conducted in an English class, teachers must know and be familiar with the type of language lab available at school.

Generally there are two types of language lab – conventional (tape-based) and computerized (LAN-based) language lab. The first type of lab uses audiotapes as its main medium for storing teaching materials. Meanwhile, in the second type of lab, computer serves as a central element.



Picture 1a. Conventional Language Lab, 1b. Computerized Language Lab

The facilities in a language lab vary depending on its type. However, there are some facilities that are common in both labs, such as a master console, which is operated by the teacher to control the lesson, lab manager programs on the master console, and student listening booths equipped with headsets, computer or CD/cassette player, and a microphone. The availability of facilities influences the types of activity conducted in a lab. The most common type of activities in a conventional lab is listening activity in which students listen to passages and check their comprehension of the passages. On the other hand, more types of activities are possible to do in a computerized language lab, involving both audio and video files.

Many kinds of activities are possible to be conducted in a language lab, all of which aim to increase the students' four basic skills, i.e. listening, writing, reading, and speaking. The activity that is the most common to be conducted in a language lab is a listening activity. In a focused listening activity, students are usually asked to listen to a certain passage and then answer some questions about it. The questions test the students' listening comprehension of the passage. For example, students are required to listen to a lecture on *How to Deal with Stress* and then write some information about the definition of stress, types of stress and the examples, and ways to cope with stress. The answers to these questions are then discussed in the class.

Another activity that is possible to be conducted in a language lab is a writing activity. Especially in a computerized language lab, the activities to increase students' writing skills can be in a more various form. One of which is utilizing a word processor or simply a notepad in the students' computers. For example, each student writes and records a mini short story outlining their most perfect vacation. Then peers listen and evaluate the stories based on which one sounds the most exciting.

The third skill that can be improved by the use of language lab for English language teaching is the skill of reading. Although a reading activity mainly does not need particular equipment such as a computer, doing this activity in a language lab can present a more interesting way of learning reading. For example, a teacher can ask his students to browse for reading passages in the Internet, read it, then report it to the class.

Providing opportunities for students to increase their competence in speaking English is another goal of a language laboratory. The facilities to record sounds or videos that can be listened and replayed are really helpful for pronunciation practices. These audio or video clips make students aware of the correct pronunciation of words as well as their structures.

#### D. PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE USE OF LANGUAGE LABORATORY

Numerous activities that can be done in a language lab sometimes create problems too, either for the teacher or for the students. The teachers in senior high schools in Yogyakarta identify the problems as dealing with management, their competence, teaching materials, and technical problems.

##### 1. Management

What is meant by the term management here is the control and organization of the language lab: who the person in charge is and the job description of each of the person in the organization structure. Many teachers report that the language lab in their schools is managed by an English teacher who is appointed as a lab administrator. This person is responsible for planning and

scheduling academic activities. Less than fifty percent of the schools hire a technician to maintain the facilities of the lab.

This condition often leads schools to experience problems concerning the maintenance of their language lab. Whenever any problem appears, teachers need more time to solve the problem since there is no one officially having the task to maintain the facilities.

#### 2. Teachers' competence and performance

The next problem that might appear concerning the use of language labs in senior high schools is related to the teacher's competence and performance. Competence is defined as the ability to do something well, in this case to teach in the language lab and use its facilities.

Some teachers who are interviewed do not have the minimum level of IT-literacy needed to run a class in a language lab. Some of the reasons are: they are not familiar with the type of machine/program used in their language lab, there is no training about how to use and benefit from the available language lab facilities, and some teachers have a low motivation to use these facilities.

#### 3. Teaching materials

The second problem is concerned with the choice and design of materials to be used during learning in the language lab. Since teachers are required to use the facilities available in the language lab, they need to spend more time to prepare the materials. Not all types of materials are suitable for learning in a language lab. Thus, teachers often face difficulties in creating the materials. The simplest that they can do is providing a listening activity and distributing worksheets to check students' understanding on the passages they listen. If this sort of activity is repeated over and over, boredom is surely the main problem that is experienced by both teacher and students.

#### 4. Technical problems

The last problem that is common when teaching in a language lab is technical problems, from blackout to major hardware damage. Unexpected errors or damages are two of the frequent problems classified as technical problems. If no solution is implemented immediately, the learning process may not run smoothly or even stop.

### E. SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Based on the results of the discussion with the teachers, several ways can be done to minimize the problems and maximize the positive effects of the use of language lab in English teaching. Among them are creating a well-managed language lab, improving the competence and performance of teachers who are using the lab, changing or improving the choice and design of teaching materials, and improving the teacher's ability to solve technical problems.

#### 1. Creating a well-managed language lab

Management is always a central issue in any organization, including schools. In the discussion, the English teachers reveal that their schools strongly need persons who hold the responsibility of managing the language lab, consisting of at least one person as the head and a technician who is always ready to assist teachers who are using the lab and to solve any technical problems.

#### 2. Improving the competence and performance of teachers who are using a language lab

Teaching English in a language lab is different from teaching it in a classroom. Besides a good competence in the subject that they teach, teachers are required to have a sufficient level of IT-literacy to be able to run a good class in the language lab. Being familiar with how to operate the lab manager program is a must, which shall be in accordance with the lab type at each school. If the technology used in the lab is quite new, a training on how to use it is a must to be held for teachers who are going to use the lab. Other trainings are also important, such as a training on how to insert IT-related content in the syllabus and lesson plan, create multimedia teaching materials, and use published materials to supplement the learning process.

Another problem that is identified concerning the teacher's competence and performance is the low motivation to use facilities in the language lab. Teachers' low motivation is specifically due to the old paradigm of teaching – the teacher as the center – that teachers understand. Since the learning process is teacher-centered, the rapid development of technology used today is seen as a threat to their professional identity. Thus, a resistance appears as a response to this. Some efforts can be done to shift the old paradigm of teaching into the new one, which is student-centered, with the

help of technology, such as a workshop to increase teachers' awareness of limitless materials provided in the Web for language learning.

### 3. Changing or improving the choice and design of teaching materials

Learning materials are one of the key elements of successful learning. Allwright (1990) argues that materials should teach students to learn, that they should be resource books for ideas and activities for instruction/learning, and that they should give teachers rationales for what they do. Materials include textbooks, video and audio tapes, computer software, and visual aids. Different learning environments require different types of materials.

As a unique environment, learning in a language lab requires a different strategy as well as type of materials. The technology used in the lab helps teachers create a more interesting learning environment for any focused skills – listening, reading, writing, and speaking. It is suggested that teachers create the materials themselves since the role of the language teacher as materials writer is an established one (Levy in Barge, 2009). However, they can also take advantage of ready-to-use materials extensively provided in the Internet to support their classes.

Compared to a conventional language lab, a computerized language lab enables teachers to create a higher variety of materials since not only audio materials can be used in the learning process, but also videos and interactive learning software. Using such lab, teachers can stimulate students to be more active and autonomous. Some examples of the use of software and materials that can be used in a computerized language lab are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Types of Materials Used in a Computerized Language Lab

Materials	Examples of Software	Examples of Use
Documents	Microsoft Office	syllabus, lesson plan, worksheets, multimedia presentation slides
Videos/Audio clips	Windows Media Player	discussion, listening comprehension questions
Web pages	Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Opera	online exercises, online collaborative work
Tests	Hot Potatoes, Adobe Captivate	self-paced individual language work, timed quizzes

### 4. Improving the ability to solve technical problems

Teaching in a language lab provides teachers with more challenges in delivering materials to students. Prior to teaching, teachers need to have a longer preparation and have the basic knowledge of the hardware used in the lab. This is particularly important, considering the fact that anything can happen to the hardware anytime, from blackout to a serious hardware damage.

All teachers who are using a language lab should have the ability to handle minor hardware problems such as when a certain audio material cannot be played or stopped. If any major technical problem exists, they should know the first thing to do to prevent it from getting worse before calling a technician.

What teachers should always have is a backup plan – an alternative that can be implemented to ensure the running of the class in case there is any hardware or technical problem that prevents them from teaching as planned.

## F. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To sum up, language lab has an important role in language learning. It supports language learning by providing a unique learning environment that is different from learning in a classroom. Both teachers and students can benefit from using a language lab. With the help of technology, teachers can present more interesting materials than in traditional classrooms. On the other hand, students can have more opportunities to work at their own pace, control the flow or sequence of instruction, and have immediate feedback. Using it, teachers can flexibly adapt instruction to individual learners needs by varying lesson content, instructional sequence, and level of difficulty for each lesson as well as the types of feedback.

However, this may also cause some problems to appear. The problems are related to the lab management, human resources, teaching materials, and technical problems. Some solutions that can be implemented to overcome these problems are creating a well-managed language lab, improving the competence and performance of teachers in using the lab, changing or improving the choice and design of teaching materials, and improving the ability to solve technical problems.

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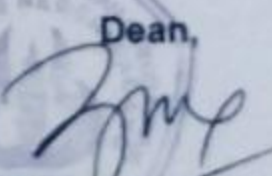
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Dean,  
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