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Implementation of computer-assisted language learning laboratory in the B.A. in English Teaching

Implementación del laboratorio de idiomas para el aprendizaje asistido por computadora en el Bachillerato en la Enseñanza del Inglés

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the role of the language laboratory for computer-assisted learning as a technological tool in the English teaching, in order to improve the attention and oral communication skills in the Bachillerato in English Teaching at the Pacific Campus from the University of Costa Rica. This article responds to the need to identify teaching tools that contribute effectively to the process of teaching a foreign language in a creative and modern way, that adapts to the generations of students immersed in technological media. In this mixed type research, the results were analyzed in the qualitative and quantitative method obtained through a survey applied to 60 students enrolled in the career. Among the main results is the need to provide training in the area of teaching strategies of the different linguistic skills with modern technological tools, to English teachers in public universities, with the purpose of strengthening the development of skills and communicative competences of students favoring their learning process. In addition, one of the most relevant conclusions is the fact that several attempts have been made to migrate from the language laboratory to an updated multimedia class, the technology is not appropriately and with any success to promote language learning in a modern context, so the professional preparation of the teacher in the technological area favors not only the application of authentic pedagogical mediation materials, but also the academic performance of their students.

 Key words: Educational technology, language laboratories, English teaching tools, language teaching.

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza el papel del laboratorio de idiomas para el aprendizaje asistido por computadora como instrumento tecnológico en la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa con el fin de mejorar las habilidades de escucha y comunicación oral en el bachillerato en la Enseñanza de Inglés en la Sede del Pacífico de la Universidad de Costa Rica. Dicho artículo responde a la necesidad de identificar herramientas de aprendizaje que contribuyan de forma efectiva en el proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera de forma creativa y moderna adaptándose a las generaciones de estudiantes inmersos en medios tecnológicos. En esta investigación de tipo mixta se analizan resultados de manera cualitativa y cuantitativa obtenidos a través de una encuesta aplicada a 60 alumnos matriculados en la carrera. Entre los principales resultados se resalta la necesidad de brindar capacitación en el área de estrategias didácticas de las distintas destrezas lingüísticas con el uso de herramientas tecnológicas modernas a los docentes de inglés en las universidades públicas, con el propósito de fortalecer el desarrollo de las habilidades y competencias comunicativas de los estu-

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diantes y favorecer su proceso de aprendizaje. Además, una de las conclusiones más relevantes es el hecho de que a pesar de los numerosos esfuerzos que se han hecho para migrar del laboratorio de idiomas tradicional a una clase de multimedia actualizada, la tecnología no está siendo plenamente utilizada y con éxito para promover el aprendizaje de lenguas en un contexto moderno, por lo que la preparación profesional del docente en el área tecnológica favorece, no solamente, la aplicación de materiales de mediación pedagógica auténticos, sino también el desempeño académico de sus alumnos.

Palabras clave: Tecnología educativa, laboratorios de idiomas, herramientas pedagógicas, enseñanza del idioma

1. Introduction

The use of technology has shaped the teaching and learning process. Using digital materials is very useful, and as Marius Stroia (2012) points out, these have the advantage of being permanently updated, especially the ones that are online. Thus, teachers are not simply relying on the use of books and traditional resources, but instead are engaging in digital research in order to find more convenient materials for their learners. María Quesada Chaves (2005, p.7) says that "the web has made people rethink the nature of teaching, learning, and schooling". For this reason, the objective of this study is to verify if the use of technological resources, available at the language lab, are being employed to promote the mastering of speaking and listening skills in the BA of English Teaching program at the Pacific Campus. This study also explores students´ opinions and reactions about the use of technology in their classes and in their future practice as language instructors.

However, it is important to highlight that both are important – teachers and technological resources. William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.6) indicates that "the idea that we can work without technology or that technology can work by itself is illusory (…) Technology is not the solution, but it is part of the solution". For that reason, teachers are encouraged to make use of these valuable resources to motivate learners in their language learning process.

It seems to be a teaching essential, technology that fosters learning autonomy, by giving the students the opportunity to receive the amount of input they wish or they can afford according to the content being studied. In this way, students will be using language for authentic communication purposes and using the same technological devices they use to communicate in their native language. As Marius Stroia (2012, p.38), says "this pervading of the computer technology has been so widespread and profound, that one cannot imagine life without it anymore". Therefore, technological tools need an appropriate use to fulfill the expectations current generations of students require.

Thus, Martínez and Acosta (2011), affirms that some teaching models are evolving towards methodologies adapted to new environments such is the case of computer-assisted language learning laboratory in education (p.46). Also, based on Sierra and Sotelo (2010, p.549) this new generation of students are looking for modern strategies to acquire content and teachers' new role is to moderate and facilitate structures rather than concepts letting academics to make an effort to adapt knowledge to real practice (Martínez & Acosta, 2011, p.46). Moreover, Martínez and Acosta (2011, p.46), citing Sierra and Sotelo (2010, p.568), point out that, the university has to implement digital innovation and new techniques of teaching and learning, based on new technologies, including training courses for teachers; because the professionals, with enough training, will know how to get the most out of his students.

Furthermore, when students have to take pronunciation or listening courses in their English major, classes are assigned to be taught in a language laboratory. As of now, approximately 35% of the language courses from the whole career are developed in the language lab. As Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.2) affirms this is very positive since:

> The audio-language laboratory has played an important role in language teaching for a long time. Its main objective was to help language students improve the audio-oral skills. With the implementation of the language laboratory, many

language teachers developed new techniques in order to derive all possible advantages of this tool in the field of applied linguistics.

In the case of the career under analysis, which has been separated from the Central campus of the University of Costa for approximately thirteen years and despite the efforts made to offer the same conditions to a student who enrolls in a regional campus to those who are taking classes in the Central Campus, conditions were not the same. Until 2014, it had not been possible to migrate from a traditional laboratory where in each cabin what existed was a cassette player with headphones to a multimedia classroom with a laptop and Internet access for each student. All the cabins were connected to a central software in charge of the teacher. It included all the facilities necessary to promote listening exercises and enhance oral practice. During the study, the students enrolled at that moment in the Major, were asked if they perceived any difference between both laboratories, and the response was able to demonstrate that technology managed to improve the physical and motivational conditions in the language learners. So, the purpose of the present research is to explore to what extent the change to the multimedia laboratory from the traditional and old techniques to develop listening skills has promoted the use of technology for the improvement of the learning of a second language.

Then, the benefits of using technology in an education career like the one under analysis is that in the future, it will have a social benefit because students will become more involved with the teaching process as well. They will become more aware of the need of using technology as part of the teaching and learning process. Every teacher should use technology as a valuable resource in their classrooms. When used correctly, it allows for a more complete, meaningful and efficient learning process. Another important advantage is the possibility of having immediate and individual feedback as the author states below:

> There is also another feature of the computer assisted language learning, which can provide an additional motivation to the learners: the fact that, in case of solving exercises, they can

be provided with an immediate feedback, which comes right on time, as long as their interest in the correct answer is still awake. (Marius Stroia, 2012, p.40).

The principal idea is to reshape the way of teaching we have been accustomed to having in the language classroom. Since technology has become part of our daily lives, it is not possible to take it apart from the learning process. It is also important to increase students motivation through the use of digital tools that allow learners to be autonomous and responsible of their own learning process. Teachers are called to be a guide and a model in the use of technology in English classes.

2. Literature Review

Since the rising of technology, the educational area has developed different teaching techniques and the main goal has been to help students become aware of the creative and significant ways to learn and apply their knowledge. Cunningham (1998), cited by Boutonglang Denduang and Felicia Flores (2011, p.196), mentions that, "After the 1980s, various kind of technology were implemented and integrated into learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) such as films, radios, language laboratories, videos, and computers". Moreover, William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.5) affirms that:

> Times are changing for higher education. We no longer consider learning to be a retelling of facts, nor do we consider knowledge to be exclusively in the classroom or communicated by a single person to a group. The role that the modern university should assume is that of making its academic community produce knowledge.

Therefore, the new generations of students need to apply modern tools to create a better learning experience in their own educational process and in their future tasks as teachers. That is why it is a challenge to promote the appropriate use of language laboratories to contribute in the professional development of professors who can interact in their classrooms not only using books and printed materials, but also with applications and websites

online. In addition, Conway (1997), Warchauer and Kern (2000), cited by Wei-Chih Alec Chang (2007, p.17), state that "learning theories that have been developed and discussed by many educators over the years have often had a profound influence on the use of technology in education, as well as in second and foreign language learning". Thus, the improvement of teaching strategies is considered as a current requirement teachers have to implement in the language laboratories to contribute to students appropriate learning sessions.

Furthermore, Abdurrahman Arslanyilmaz (2013, p.303), indicates that "the learning environment incorporates graphics, audio, animation and text; publication is easy and inexpensive; and the learning environment can be individualized and contextualized". Thus, the role of language laboratories satisfies the necessity to include interaction between students and technology, individually and in groups, which incorporates cooperative work in the class to allow the student to receive pair support and feedback. As María José Quesada Chaves (2015, p.2) remarks, the use of technology and different techniques in the English class has allowed learners to enjoy of an interactive and dynamic language learning process.

2.1. Teachers' role as users of new technologies

The instructors carry a huge responsibility in students' learning processes because they must handle not only learners in a classroom, but also strategies to teach English effectively. Thus, Marco Vinicio Gutiérrez-Soto, Luis Ángel Piedra García, Andrea Melissa Mora Umaña, Susan Francis Salazar, Werner Rodriguez Montero, y Oscar Chanis Reyes, (2012, p.2) determine that a university teacher's profile include the following aspects:

1. Mastery of their discipline and a variety of pedagogical perspectives, methodologies and didactic techniques,

2. Guide the teaching-learning process based on the student's learning needs,

3. Plan and effectively organize the teaching-learning process

4. Have the ability to work in groups with their peers and students,

5. Teach to learn, evaluate, and provide feedback to the formative process, and participate actively in the design and improvement of the curriculum.

Seeing that teaching involves creative and dynamic strategies, the professors should be aware of the importance to include the most modern and attractive tools when teaching, applying tasks that students can complete with their own resources. Even though, "some teachers argued that a lab caused additional problems related to space, cost, maintenance, appropriate materials, and teacher training opportunities" (Cesar Navas Brenes, 2006, p.2) The present-day resources students have in their cell-phones and internet access on university campuses allow them to use the necessary technological applications to implement the tasks teachers assign in classwork.

William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.9), states that "The blending of technology with current teaching practices improves communication, sharing of knowledge, interactivity and spaces, and activities where students can advance at their own pace". Actually, the main goal of using new techniques when teaching is to employ materials that help students to understand the content and apply it in significant learning experiences. Antich et.al (1988), cited by Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.2), explain that "the main objectives of the language laboratory are to make the individual practice of students more effective, and increase the productivity of language teachers who only need to focus on the students production and the mistakes encountered". Then, when implementing original and current resources to develop oral communication and listening skills, the updated teachers show their professional skills to give their best effort in their teaching responsibilities.

Akinwade (2012, p.3), cited by William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.8), holds the position that "with the appropriate pedagogic preparation, certain skills can be specifically enhanced using the new technologies. Study skills and problem-solving, as well as negotiating skills

are advanced by communication and group learning, and by the interplay within an interactive environment". Therefore, the job teachers do by getting enough knowledge and experience to improve the teaching strategies may influence the way students develop the lingüistic competence. Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.4) points out that "Language lab sessions, therefore, should be seen as a helpful complement of language courses as long as creative and special tasks are developed for its use". Moreover, Gutierrez and Piedra (2012, p.84), quoted by María José Quesada Chaves (2015, p.4), argue that teachers are in charged of mediating between culture and students reality in their classroom, so teacher can handle content based on the needs students show and the resources they have access to.

In addition, Cunninghan and Friedman (2009, p.66), quoted by Boutonglang Denduang and Felicia Flores (2011, p.196), remark that:

> Not only students got benefits from using technology (digital video) in the classroom, teachers also got benefits; for example they could access to various kinds of resources, and were able to learn to be more innovative and resourceful in order to build awareness among their students which was the importance of acquiring English language skills.

Thus, teachers develop better teaching skills when using laboratories in classwork because they have to be learners and it plays a relevant role when teaching a second language. Additionally, Tremarias and Noriega (2009, p.40), cited by María José Quesada Chaves (2015, p.2), point out that teachers should be updated when creating new didactic materials, but also when adapting the materials they have to new generations of students.

2.2. Students' role as users of new technologies

Students need to get involved in the tasks they have in the classroom, with the purpose of understanding and applying their new knowledge in their learning experiences. Therefore, it seems necessary to provide activities that catch their attention and interest to

promote significant learning and an effective development of communicative competence. Harris (2011, p.377), cited by Boutonglang and Flores (2011), affirms "Thus, the level of students' engagement in learning can be raised using those accessible technologies in a classroom such as video resource and video recording. Hristova (1990), indicated that using video in a language classroom could help maintain student interest" (p. 196).

Besides, Diaz and Noruega (2009), indicates that when teachers include audiovisual resources in classwork, with previous plans and purposes, students are able to maintain interest in the knowledge they get from those tasks. Thus, as Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.6) states, "The language laboratory should not have the central role in the language classroom on the contrary, teachers must pay close attention to the improvement reached by their students during the time they spend in the lab sessions". Then, Cesar Navas Brenes (2006), remarks that students' results show if the resources implemented during classwork allow them to improve their language level or not. Besides, Harris (2011, p.377), quoted by Boutonglang Denduang and Felicia Flores (2011, p.197), proposes that,"... effective classroom corroborative learning could raise students' engagement in learning. Student engagement in learning could be manifested by their willingness to participate in routine school activities such as attending class, submitting required assignments, or even following teachers' directions in class". The benefits of providing a variety of teaching techniques through technological developments as language laboratories, result in effective learning opportunities that generate educational experiences such as the mastery of new content, and an efficient progression of linguistic skills.

2.3. Use of video as a teaching strategy in English classes.

Pedro Monteagudo Valdivia, Athos Sánchez Mansolo, and Maylid Hernández Medina, (2007, p.2), explain that the video is a means of communication aimed to an homogenous group that shares similar interests, however, the most important dimension to highlight about videos is their use to teach, due to their elements: photography, moving image, text and sound; that complement the teaching-learning process. These authors indicate that

teachers may use the the following types of video in their lessons:

1. Video lesson: used without the presence of the teacher, e.g. in long distance education.

2. Support video: used as a means of teaching more than developing a lecture, theoretical-practical class, practical class from laboratory. (p.2)

3. Interactive video: used with an active and participatory methodology in the teaching process.

4. Teaching pack: multiple means of learning (texts, guides methodologies, videos, films, cassettes and / or educational software) (p.3).

Clearly, there are no limitations when applying videos to teaching, and technology facilitates the teaching process and enriches the learning experiences. As Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.1), states, "Language programs with a communicative goal should focus on the quality of listening tasks based on authentic materials as well as appropriate audio-visual equipment".

Moreover, Wei-Chih Alec Chang (2007, p.1), states that "computer technology has created many opportunities for education; its potential and value for enhancing the learning of foreign languages has also generated a number of possibilities, with many researchers eager to exploit a gap in the area of EFL (English as a Foreign Language)". Furthermore, there is a huge variety of activities that teachers can use to provide content in the classroom, for instance, audiovisuals. The implementation of videos to reproduce information catches students' attention but these require an organized task to promote learning. Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.3), study points out that "a language laboratory is a teaching tool requiring the implementation of well-constructed tasks based on the students' needs".

3. Method

This study used a descriptive survey design based on the mixed approach. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis was used to study the information collected. The instrument was personally administered by both researchers in the language laboratory courses from the career. A sample of 60 students was selected randomly. There are some courses that have the lab component as part of their curriculum. So, only one course from the first three levels was selected randomly. Each course consisted of more than 20 students, so the selection of the sample was done using a raffle system. The researchers asked the teachers to place the names of all the students in slips of paper in a box, and only twenty of them were selected to answer the instrument. Also, there researchers analyzed the perceptions of the participants regarding the use of the language laboratories in their learning process.

The list consists of students who are part of the English Teaching Major, they were all enrolled in the career at the Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica. The ages range from 18 to 25, a little bit more than half of the population were female and 44% were male. All participants were taking courses from first, second, and third year of their study plan.

The survey instrument designed to collect data had 10-items, and the process of validity and reliability of this instrument was carried out before its application. The total time to complete the survey materials was estimated between 10 and 15 minutes. Questions were related to the use of technology in class and the benefits they have obtained by using the language lab. A copy of the survey can be found at the end of this document in Appendix 1.

The instrument consisted of three parts: personal background information, closed questions which asked things like which category students would place the improvement reached in their listening comprehension by practicing in the language laboratory. Also, there were some open-ended questions to ask them if the new language lab equipment (hardware and software) could be compared with the old or traditional equipment, for example. Once the instruments were applied, the information was codified and grouped into categories according to the ideas or concepts that were obtained.

4. Results

Both teachers and students have a great internet access in Public Universities campuses, which does not limit the use of any technological device to complement the teaching-learning process. Aydin (2010), quoted by Boutonglang Denduang and Felicia Flores (2011, p.196), holds the position that "...technology has become accessible for both EFL learners and teachers, and was also widely integrated into EFL learning and teaching in recent years". Although, the access to technology is not a limitation, the teachers' professional skills to implement it in the classroom is, then, this investigation shows that there is an issue in the professors teaching techniques that requires professional updating to innovate their ways to develop their classes, and let the students be participant of modern and relevant learning strategies to improve not only their linguistic skills but also their communicative competence. In addition, Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.2), remarks that:

The audio-language laboratory has played an important role in language teaching for a long time. Its main objective was to help language students improve the audio-oral skills. With the implementation of the language laboratory, many language teachers developed new techniques in order to derive all possible advantages of this tool in the field of applied linguistics.

This aspect is one of the most remarkable results from this research because most of the participants of this study expressed that their listening skills have improved thanks to the practicing in the language class.

During lab classes, students are exposed to different kinds of listening materials and practices. Listening as a receptive skill promotes the incidental acquisition of vocabulary, grammar structures, and specific pronunciation issues such as sentence stress, vowel sounds, and many others. Students are conscious of all these benefits and as figure 1 states, almost all the participants from the study agree on the fact to increment the amount of time they spend at the lab.

Figure 1. Opinions of students about the amount of time of lab classes and if it should be increased in the curriculum from the English Teaching Major
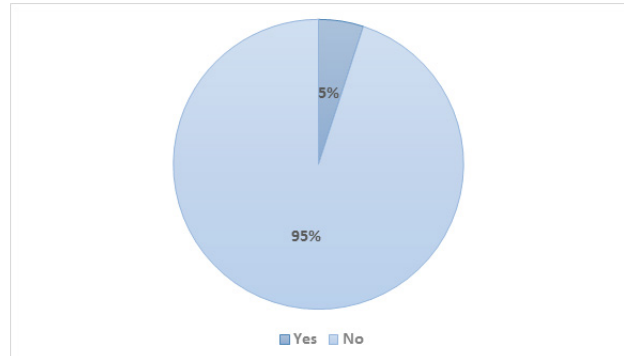
Source: Authors' own elaboration with information collected from the study. (2017)

However, as it can be seen in figure 2, 35% of the students consider that the use of this technological resource has not been employed in an appropriate way because they have not learned the language as expected. It is acceptable when the author mentions that "the language laboratory should not have the central role in the language classroom on the contrary, teachers must pay close attention to the improvement reached by their students during the time they spend in the lab sessions" (Cesar Navas Brenes, 2006, p.6).

Figure 2. Opinions of students regarding if the lab has been used as a didactic resource to promote language learning in the English class.
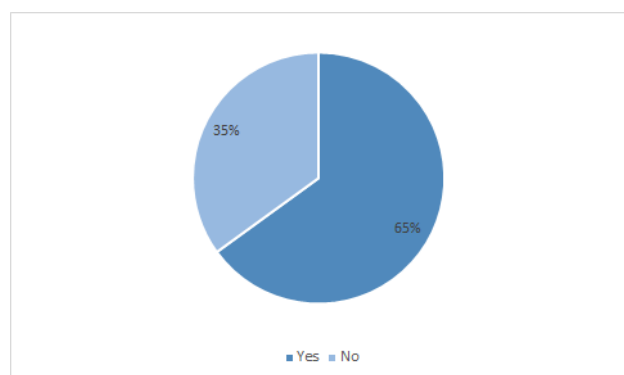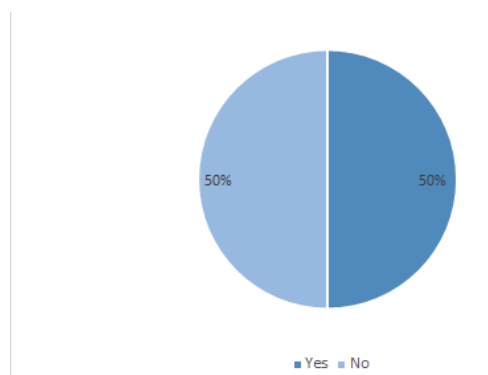

Source: Authors' own elaboration with information collected from the study. (2017)

The use of multimedia classrooms in language labs should promote the development of students listening skills and become a resource all teachers must take advantage of. Therefore, it seems necessary to provide specific training to language teachers in public universities due to the lack of listening strategies to teach a foreign language through technological tools.

Figure 3, highlights that what happened to listening skills development is very similar when focusing on grammatical structures in the language lab. Almost half of the population believes that they have not done enough practice to improve or learn new grammar structures through the use of technology in class, which is a very unfortunate situation because teachers can work on different skills, opposed to only studying pronunciation in an isolated form, when they utilize audio.

Figure 3. Grammatical structures are mastered through the use of the language laboratory

Source: Authors' own elaboration with information collected from the study. (2017)

Language must be contextualized, to provide valid teaching materials and in the same way documentaries, radio interviews, and other resources are very rich to use when studying a second language. In this sense, María Mertzani (2011, p.119), points out that:

> Computer Assisted Language Lab (CALL) is capable of promoting greater communicative interchange than any other educational medium has so for been able to do. (...) CALL offers access to natural language resources by taking into consideration learners´ needs and interests.

(...) CALL promotes personalized instruction and individualization in L learning, which, consequently, can increase learners` motivation since students direct much of the learning themselves. (...) CALL allows L teachers to process and present authentic materials with flexibility.

Then, this research remarks the need to provide training to university language teachers with the purpose of improving creative teaching techniques regarding the use of technology to enrich students' learning experiences and the production of original teaching materials, which can be adapted to different content and population.

Because of these findings, it can be inferred that valuable technological resources such as a well-equipped language lab has not been used to promote authentic language learning. Thus, there could be a perfect learning environment and the most modern technological tools, but if there is not an updated teacher who can take advantage of every detail when teaching, then the resources may not be enough without the appropriate training. On the other hand as Figure 4 shows, when learners were asked about the level of achievement of their pronunciation skills development in the language lab, 90% of them attributed their positive performance to the use of both the equipment and the software used during their classes at the lab.

Figure 4. Opinions of students when asked about if the equipment and the software employed in the language lab has helped them to improve pronunciation skills
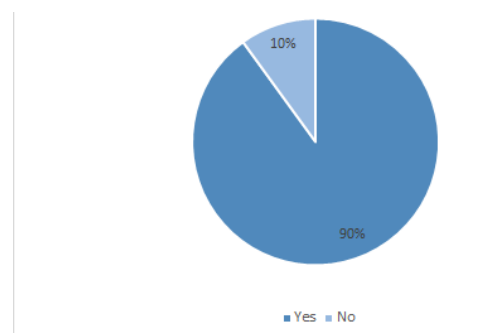
Source: Authors' own elaboration with information collected from the study. (2017)

Besides, Figure 5 indicates that students are not aware of all the facilities that language laboratory classes can have almost 90% of the participants did not know that they were able to record themselves during classes so that they can use this valuable material in a personalized way in order to have a feedback session.

Figure 5. Students knowledge about all the functions that can be done through the use of the language laboratory
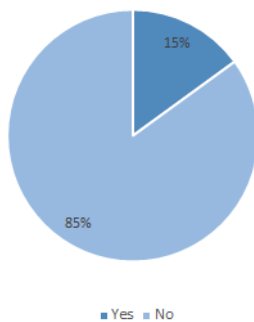
Source: Authors' own elaboration with information collected from the study. (2017)

One advantage of in-class recordings is the opportunity for peer and teacher feedback. This allows the speaker(s) to receive immediate feedback and the peers a chance to increase their listening skills. It is best to have classmates listen for a particular feature agreed upon in advance. A taped recording permits all parties to review the performance afterward and to fill out an evaluation form. (Marianne Celce-Murcia, Donna Brinton and Janet Goodwin, 1996, p.352).

Additionally, students agree that listening is one of the hardest skills to master. They need a lot of practice to develop their abilities to comprehend what native speakers say. Participants consider that there is a lack of interest of some teachers because they do not come up with creative and technological listening practices during lab classes. Jeremy Harmer (2008, p.133), explained that:

> listening is good for our students´ pronunciation, too, in that the more they hear and understand English being spoken, the more they absorb

appropriate pitch and intonation, stress and sounds of both individual words and those which blend together in connected speech.

For this reason, teaching listening does not have to be reduced to drills or repetition per se, it implies more aspects that need to be considered such as students active participation, learner autonomy, and motivating practices among others.

Students consider that listening practices should not only be part of laboratory sessions, they think that they have to be covered also during normal classes. Figure 2 shows that 48% of the participants agree on the fact that topics studied in the lab should also be part of a normal class, meanwhile 44% think that only with the lab practice is enough.

Figure 6. Places where students feel more comfortable when exposed to listening materials
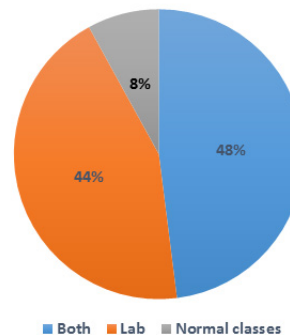
Source: Authors' own elaboration with information collected from the study. (2017)

Participants also consider that language professors at the campus should maximize the use of all the technological resources they have available in the language laboratory. Some of them consider that all of these this materials are not being completely used. In some occasions, learners affirmed that they do not really enjoy language lab classes because they just go there to there to have repetition exercises. They rarely listen to songs or videos. This situation is worrying because at any moment, the setting or resources can substitute a teacher's role in a language

class. On the contrary, Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.16), argues that, "language teachers must implement creative and interesting techniques especially designed for language lab sessions".

Students also consider that having a technological class in which they can improve language skills is very useful. Having internet access and individual laptop computers for each learner is very helpful because they can follow at their own pace and be aware of their own progress during clases. However, there are things that have to be improved since the interviewees believe that some of the professors do not use the lab correctly because they do not know how to use the equipment. At this point, William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.9), proposes that "the blending of technology with current teaching practices improves communication, sharing of knowledge, interactivity and spaces and activities where students can advance at their own pace". This means that language instructors are called to be a guide during their learning process, and they should be ready to implement authentic materials and creative strategies to keep students involved in class activities and providing successful learning experiences to get learners interest when applying the language.

Finally, almost 100% of the participants of the study agreed that the language class time should be increased since the curricular distribution at this moment does not propitiate enough audio practice through the use of the language lab. Following with this idea Hassan Saleh Mahdi and Muji Eddin Mohammed El-Naim (2012), considers that there are a lot of benefits provided through the use of technology in the language class because it enables students to have meaningful and authentic conversations with others in the target language, encourages a collaborative spirit among students, enhances motivation, and reduces anxiety. It also improves the quality of language output, and offers an effective environment for learner autonomy and empowerment. In addition, it provides an opportunity for learners to monitor their own language production and learn from each other. There is no reason why teachers should not take advantage of this valuable tool to enhance language learning not only during lab class, but in speaking, reading or writing sessions.

5. Conclusions

To conclude, the new generations of students require more dynamic and practical techniques to learn a new language, and language laboratories are part of the modern teaching strategies due to the influence of technology in the educational process. William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.6), points out that "(...) Technology is not the solution, but it is part of the solution". Furthermore, Harris (2011) and Hristova (1990), quoted by Boutonglang Denduang and Felicia Flores (2011, p.197), indicate that "several studies had shown that using technology in the classroom could effectively increase students' engagement in EFL contexts". So, Technology in the classwork not only motivates students and facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge but also as María José Quesada Chaves (2015, p.3), concludes, it works as a resource that provides support to those students that present difficulties when learning a second language.

Furthermore, this study remarks that the language laboratories allow students to improve their listening skills, which is one of the most difficult skills to develop due to the lack of practice in Spanish speaking countries . As Boutonglang Denduang and Felicia Flores (2011, p.205), state, "Using technology such as video in language teaching in an English language classroom provides opportunity to students in experiencing "authentic language" learning tools".

Also, this research concludes that language laboratories require teachers with professional skills and creative lesson plans to complement the teaching process and provide significant learning experiences to learners not only to motivate them but also to develop their linguistic skills efficiently.Then, teachers should use updated online materials that allow students to practice not only in the classrooms but also at home, which may benefit the use of computer to study, solving exercises, and receiving feedback after each homework practice.

As Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.16), concludes "language teachers must implement creative and interesting techniques especially designed for language lab sessions". In addition, Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.2), states that "Language instructors may use the language laboratory

in order to improve those areas in which the students are facing problems such as structure or pronunciation". Besides, William Charpentier Jiménez (2014, p.16), indicates that:

> Professors serve as models to students, especially to those who want to work in the field of education. By not using and therefore, not showing students how to use digital tools when teaching English, learners do not develop the necessary skills and do not feel confident to use these tools themselves.

 Therefore, it is essential to clarify that teachers' support and feedback cannot be replaced by any pedagogical resource and as Marisela Díaz Tremarias and Teresa Noriega Velásquez (2009, p.43), establish, videos do not take teachers' place but rather function as an educational tool to reinforce the acquisition of knowledge.

So, modern teachers in the University field must be updated to implement the use of language laboratories in their English classes, as Cesar Navas Brenes (2006, p.8), indicates "the field of applied linguistic requires teachers who can easily deal with technological innovations".

Finally, this study suggests that the more practice students have in the target language, the better linguistic competence development they get from the tasks in the language laboratories. Thus, the teachers, their plans and teaching strategies, as well as students engagement in their own learning process work as a whole to acquire knowledge and apply communication abilities, which can be improved by working with didactic tools in the language laboratories.

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7. Appendices

Appendix A. Cuestionare A

**This instrument is targeted to students from the English Major at the
Pacific Campus of the University of Costa Rica**

The main objective of the following questions is to identify the main benefits produced when using the language lab for mastering listening and speaking skills. The information will be used for academic purposes only. Thanks in advance.

Date: _____

Level in your career : _____

Age: _____   Gender:_____

Instructions: Mark with
an (X) the option that best expresses your opinion according to the required information.

Skills improvement through the use of the language lab					
Statement	**Very Good**	**Good**	**Regular**	**Poor**	**Very Bad**
1. In which category would you place the improvement reached in your listening comprehension through the practice performed in the language laboratory?					
2. Have you improved your English pronunciation thanks to activities performed in the language laboratory? In which category would you place this achievement?					
3. Have you improved your grammar through exercises performed in the language lab sessions? How would you place this achievement?					

Learners autonomy through the use of the language lab				
Statement	Always	Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
4. Do you take advantage of the language laboratory sessions, and actively participate repeating words or sentences aloud?				
5. In this course you are able to record the language lab session; as a result, you can listen to your improvement as well as to the mistakes you have made. Therefore, do you take advantage of this opportunity and practice at home the material your have recorded in class?				

Instructions: Read the following questions and answer them completely

6. Do you have any comment about the language lab session in general?

_____
_____

7. Have you found advantages or disadvantages with the new Language Lab equipment?

_____
_____

8. How can you compare the new language lab equipment (computer and software) with the equipment we had in the previous years?

_____
_____

9. How should it be the length of time of the language lab sessions?

_____
_____

10. Where do students feel more comfortable at the moment of repeating sentences aloud?

_____
_____