

Establishing English Language Clinics for the EFL Students at the Educational Institutions

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Abstract: *Though the EFL students learn English at schools and colleges, the time allotted for their English lessons is very limited per day. Setting up English Language Clinics at the EFL schools and colleges will help students improve and develop their language skills. This paper aims at helping the EFL students develop their English language skills by opening English language clinics in schools and colleges. The paper presents the definition of clinic and its usefulness and also provides some of the language clinics successfully run by various colleges and universities around the globe. Finally, it suggests various ways in which English language clinics can be established and implemented successfully for the benefit of students as well as teachers. It also provides some suggestions for extended tasks that can be carried out by the language clinic with enough financial support.*

Keywords – *Clinic, EFL students, English language skills, resources, technology.*

I. Introduction

The realisation of English language as an international language and as a widely spoken and used language in the world by the non-English-speaking countries has urged the governments to introduce English Language at the start of the early education in schools. However, the EFL students don't spend much time in learning English at schools and colleges since the medium of instruction in most schools of the non-English-speaking countries is not English but the primary language. So, the students tend to either find difficulty in implementing the language skills taught in the English lessons efficiently or forget the learned language skills eventually. When they reach the college level, they are unable to cope up with the higher education syllabus which is considered to be an important issue to deal with by the schools and colleges. Therefore, to help the students practise and develop the English language skills at an early stage, many schools, colleges, and even some universities have opened English language clinics in the English department and have been running them successfully.

II. EFL Students

EFL is an acronym used to refer to English as a Foreign Language and indicates, "the study and use of English language by non-native speakers in countries where English is generally not a local medium of communication." [1] In the EFL countries, English is not the medium of instruction in schools, but English is taught as a subject just like Math, Science, and History. Thus, it involves teaching English to children as well as adults whose first or main language is not English. [2] In EFL schools and colleges, the time allocated for English lesson is one or two hours maximum in a day just as it is allocated for other subjects. Within these few hours, the EFL teachers will have to complete the course syllabus set by the institution and prepare the students for the exam. Consequently, the language skills learned during these limited hours become either neglected skills or forgotten skills by the students, because after the English lessons when the students go out of the language classrooms into the real world, they find themselves in a restricted environment where they switch back to their mother tongue immediately. So, the opportunities to develop or apply the language skills learned in the language classrooms in real life are very rare.

III. English Language Clinic

At the outset, it is important to discuss the definition of clinic in the light of some well-known dictionaries. The word 'clinic' basically refers to a building where medical help is given to sick people. It is "a place in which outpatients are given medical treatment or advice, often connected to a hospital." [3] Of other meanings given in Oxford dictionaries, clinic mainly means "an establishment or hospital department where outpatients are given medical treatment or advice, especially of a specialist nature." [4] It can also be "a private hospital where patients have to pay directly for their treatment." [5]

However, these dictionaries don't stop with one meaning. Another meaning that refers to 'clinic' is "a group or centre that offers advice or instruction." [6] It can be a conference or short course on a particular subject. [7] It is also an occasion when an expert teaches a class on their subject. [8] As defined in Merriam

Webster dictionary, it can also refer to “a group meeting devoted to the analysis and solution of concrete problems or to the acquiring of specific skills or knowledge.” [9] Finally, the most fitting definition can be found in the Webster dictionary where the word ‘clinic’ refers to “a lesson or series of lessons taught to persons not expert in some activity, in which the errors of the students are pointed out, and remedial actions are suggested.” [10]

Thus, an English Language Clinic can be well-summarised as a place in a school, college, or university where an English language expert (English language teacher in this context) offers a lesson or series of lessons to a student or a small group of students weak in English language to help them identify and correct the area of weakness in language learning by undertaking some remedial measures and to help them practise, improve, and use the acquired language skills in real life situations by creating an encouraging learning environment.

IV. Need For English Language Clinic

It is an undeniable fact that English is a globally important language and widely used language in almost every field such as banking, business, communication, education, medicine, technology, tourism and the list goes on. So, more and more non-English speaking countries are stressing the importance of English language competency among the young and the adult learners. However, though the EFL students learn and practise several English language skills in their English classrooms, it is almost impossible for them to master the language due to the limited hours dedicated to the English lessons which results in lack of adequate practice of the language skills learned. Moreover, the students’ doubts, errors, or any related problems in the language learning experience are left unclarified or unanswered.

If the school or college has an actively working language clinic, the students can approach the clinic to practice, develop, and master the language skills taught in the class. The language clinic provides an opportunity for the students to improve their LSRW skills in English by giving them one-on-one lessons or small group lessons which create personalised learning experience. The errors are pointed out and corrected in a nonthreatening way, and doubts and problems based on language skills are clarified and solved in non-intimidating way. Since the learning atmosphere is friendly and relaxed, even the shy students with weak level of English are motivated to involve actively in the language learning process.

First of all, the clinic can offer help in enhancing the writing skills of the students from writing correct simple sentences to writing assignments, reports and projects. Secondly, the students can also develop their speaking skills in the clinic by participating in one-to-one informal conversations or small group discussions on various topics and can acquire fluency, clarity and accuracy in speaking. In this way, the language clinic prepares the students to face the challenges confidently in the competitive real world. Added to that, the students with difficulty in listening skills can improve their listening ability by doing the online components and the listening software specially designed for listening purposes which are available at the language clinic. Finally, they can develop their reading skills and improve their reading and understanding of various academic texts at the language clinic. A wide range of reading activities available at the language clinic can enrich the learners’ accumulation of high frequency vocabulary. Thus, spending time at the language clinic can be an excellent way of utilising students’ free time productively.

V. Review Of English Language Clinics

Having realised the importance and impact of English language clinics, many educational institutions have recently opened English language clinics and are running them successfully.

The English Language Proficiency Clinic is a specialised speech and language clinic associated with the main Kent State University Speech and Hearing Clinic. They work with non-native English speakers to improve oral English skills including “perception and pronunciation of the sounds of English, rhythm and intonation in patterns of English, and associated speech production skills in lecturing and presentations.” [11]

The English Language Institute at the University of Michigan offers two skill-based clinics to the members of its academic community. Firstly, **the ELI Speaking Clinic** provides the students who want to improve their spoken English pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy in speaking, with a flexible framework in individual or small group settings. Interested students can utilise the clinic to increase the vocabulary accuracy, enhance presentation skills, augment voice projection, and repair communication breakdowns in particular contexts. [12] Secondly, free service is offered at **the Graduate Student Writing Clinic** for the students in improving their writing skills. The writing lab stresses on critical independence in written English tasks providing the students with guided self-help. [13]

The English Language Centre at the City University of Hong Kong operates two language clinics: one for writing and the other for speaking. **The Writing Studio**, formerly known as the Language Clinic, provides free service to all City University students, and one-to-one help is offered in writing assignments. [14] Interested

students can fix an appointment to make use of the service. The **Speaking Studio** is another free service available for CU students who can practise and receive feedback and advice on individual or group presentations, IELTS speaking practice, conversation skills, and job interview skills on prior booking. [15]

The English language learners of Indiana University of Pennsylvania can make use of one or all of the services offered by the **IUP Speech, Language, and Hearing Clinic**. The students can undergo “accent reduction treatment” [16] which helps them produce English speech sounds that don’t occur in their language and pronounce words and sentences with correct accent and intonation. The students can also get help in improving their English grammar and sentence structure. The students can also approach the clinic if they would like to improve their vocabulary and conversational skills.

The Speech and Language University Clinic at Laurentian University, Northern Ontario, provides rehabilitative services for people with communication disorders as well as clinical activities that help the students bridge the gap between the theory learned in their courses and practice. The clinic offers services in fluency, voice, articulation, expressive and receptive language and assessment and intervention to individuals of all ages. [17]

The Centre for English Language Learning, formerly known as the English Language Clinic, at the English Language Centre, University of Bahrain, offers four fold services to the UOB students. The speech club provides help for the students with difficulty in speaking English fluently to improve English speaking skills especially in formal/informal conversations, poetry reading, role-playing and performing short skits, presentation skills and mock interviews. The Writing Centre offers help in writing assignments and reports. The Learning Resource Centre gives the students opportunity to develop extensive reading and listening skills. The Tutoring Desk provides one-to-one tutoring for students who need individual help in areas that need improvement such as grammar and sentence structure. [18]

VI. Establishing an English Language Clinic Successfully

Setting up an English Language Clinic in educational institutions is not a laborious task if it is done on a small scale basis. For a start, only basic amenities are needed for a fully functioning clinic.

1.1 Who are needed?

Team work produces best result. A language clinic is a place where experts are needed to assist, help, correct, tutor, and motivate the learners who are in need of improving their language skills. So, the English experts (English teachers) can form a team (small or big) to formulate, prepare, and execute plans. Getting approval from the higher authorities of the institution to start such a language clinic is very important. As a team, you can also generate some suitable objectives and guidelines for your clinic.

1.2 What are needed?

- a. A room big enough to accommodate teachers, reasonable number of students and resources.
- b. Furniture: tables, chairs, cupboards, etc and stationery items: pens, pencils, papers, glue sticks, etc.
- c. Resources
 - Books: (essential) course books, story books, grammar books, etc
 - Worksheets (essential)
 - Newspapers and magazines (optional)
 - Working computers (optional)
 - CDs (optional)
 - Head phones (optional)
 - Internet (optional)
- d. Suggestion box (essential) to get the students’ feedback, comments, or suggestions
- e. Language clinic schedule sheet (weekly schedule)
- f. Attendance card (essential) to record the students’ visits and for follow up
- g. Clock (optional)

1.3 How to conduct a consultation (student’s visit)?

- Greet the student. Create an informal conducive atmosphere. Make the visitor (the student) feel at ease.
- Find out the student’s language skill that needs improvement.
- Based on the required skill, use suitable resources and teaching techniques and explain clearly in simple clear understandable words.
- Involve the student. Let it not be a one sided instruction.
- Keep the time. Each visit or appointment should last for 20 to 30 minutes maximum to give chance to the other students waiting as well.
- When you close the session, you can review with the student what was accomplished in the session briefly.

- Encourage the student to make appointment for further follow up.

1.4 When and how long to open the clinic?

The clinic can be open during the working days. But the opening hours should be decided depending on the availability of the English teachers and their free time. Each English teacher can dedicate one or two free hours in a week for the language clinic. It is suggested that appointment system is followed to avoid too many visits at a time and also to avoid unnecessary waiting of the students. Walk-in students can be accepted if any appointment is cancelled or the scheduled student is very late. The following link from the City University Language Clinic, Hong Kong, gives some useful guidelines regarding appointments: <http://www.cityu.edu.hk/elc/writingstudio/>. Arrangements can be made for the students to make appointments through phones, emails, Facebook, or twitter. Using flyers and posters is a great idea of attracting more students to utilise the clinic efficiently.

VII. Conclusion

Though classroom learning is the most important language acquisition method, the EFL students need more hours for error-correction, practice, and reinforcement of the language learned in the English classes, and so the English language clinics can contribute significantly in the EFL students' language acquisition process. The informal learning environment and personal attention from the teachers in the language clinic help the students feel relaxed and stress-free which makes the language learning process more effective and fruitful. Based on the success and need and the availability of budget and financial support, the English language clinic can be expanded with more resources and equipped with modern technology such as multi-media projectors, computers with the latest English language software installed, and headsets for listening practice. The language clinic can also do multi-tasking by giving presentations on popular demand topics, organising skill-oriented workshops, and preparing the students for qualifying tests such as IELTS and TOFEL. Other extension activities of the clinic can be conducting various contests on essay writing, poetry writing, poem recitation, and public speaking which would increase students' confidence and competitive spirit and also running an English language journal which would give an excellent opportunity for both teachers and students to express and share their valuable thoughts and insights on English language with others.

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