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Effectiveness of Modern Language Laboratory in Improving Students' Communicative Competence

Aturamu, O. O. (Ph.D)
Department of Languages and Linguistics, School of Humanities, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
Tel: +23430594409 **E-mail: aturamu.olayinka@bouesti.edu.ng**

Abstract
This study evaluated the efficacy of the contemporary language laboratory in enhancing students' communicative skills at the secondary school level. Data were obtained using a descriptive survey methodology through questionnaires administered to both students and teachers, then analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings indicated that language lab training improved students' aural-oral skills, with a cluster mean of 3.31, especially in intonation, fluency, and comprehension. The laboratory was also determined to diminish speaking fear and enhance confidence, resulting in a cluster mean of 3.66, as students indicated a heightened readiness to volunteer and articulate in class. Teachers highlighted substantial pedagogical and technical issues, with a cluster mean of 3.20, including inadequate training, difficulties in delivering individualised feedback, insufficient technical support, and time-consuming lesson preparation. The study suggests that although the language lab significantly enhances students' oral communication abilities, its optimal effectiveness relies on specialised teacher training, dependable technical assistance, and systematic curriculum integration. The study advised that, due to the language laboratory's substantial enhancement of students' intonation, fluency, and comprehension, schools should officially incorporate lab-based instruction into the English curriculum.
Keywords: Language laboratory, Communicative competence, Aural-oral skills, Speaking anxiety, Teacher challenges

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Introduction

The notion of the language laboratory emerged in the mid-20th century, principally as an audio-visual facility for second language education. Initial laboratories, which use reel-to-reel and cassette recordings, were grounded in behaviourist theories of language acquisition, which asserted that language learning is a process of habit development through repetition, imitation, and reinforcement (Lado, 1964). This strategy utilized the language lab to create a controlled setting for learners to practise pronunciation, emulate native speakers, and obtain quick feedback, thus maintaining accurate language habits.

As applied linguistics transitioned to cognitive and communicative methodologies, the function of the language laboratory transformed. The emphasis shifted from simple mechanical exercises to significant engagement and understanding. The emergence of computers and multimedia technology enabled the creation of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). CALL integrates audio, video, and text, facilitating more participatory, student-centered, and communicative activities (Chapelle, 2005). Contemporary language laboratories, frequently software-driven, are founded on cognitive learning theory, which underscores profound information processing, and constructivism, which advocates for active, self-directed learning (Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 1999).

Akinjobi (2015) notes that language is a systematic method for conveying ideas using sounds, gestures, signs, or marks. It is the system employed to articulate oneself and convey messages to others. It is the cognitive ability or capacity for verbal communication. Language is any method of conveying ideas, particularly human speaking, characterised by vocal expression expressed through the organs of the throat and mouth. This is a linguistic system employed by a certain community to generate meaning through word combination. Language is a unique attribute of humans, serving as the fundamental capacity that differentiates humans from all other living organisms. Language is thus a communicative medium that may articulate ideas, thoughts, moods, sentiments, and attitudes (Egwuogu, 2012).

Multiple studies have demonstrated that language laboratories are very efficacious in enhancing aural-oral competencies. The capacity to engage with genuine, high-fidelity audio from native speakers and to record and evaluate one's own speech enables students to enhance their pronunciation, intonation, and fluency (Mohammed, 2017; Akhdiyati, 2018). The prompt feedback mechanism and the chance for repeated practice in a non-threatening setting alleviate speaking anxiety and enhance confidence (Khaleel, 2020). Language laboratories enable differentiated education by permitting pupils to progress at their own speed and concentrate on particular areas of deficiency (Sanako, 2024). Educators may deliver customised exercises and track individual advancement via a centralised interface, guaranteeing that each pupil has the essential assistance. The transition from a teacher-centered, uniform classroom to a more individualised, student-driven one is a significant benefit (CAE, 2023).

The multimedia and interactive characteristics of contemporary language laboratories greatly enhance student engagement, since the integration of video, games, and online activities renders the learning experience more dynamic and engaging than conventional "chalk and talk" approaches (Eragamreddy, 2024). This heightened engagement fosters enhanced motivation and improved learning results. The optimal utilisation of a language lab occurs within a blended learning framework, wherein lab sessions augment and reinforce the material presented in traditional classroom settings. The laboratory offers a pragmatic environment for students to implement theoretical concepts and refine communication skills in a concentrated setting, thereby liberating class time for more innovative and cooperative endeavours.

Notwithstanding the evident advantages, the successful execution of language laboratories encounters obstacles. This encompasses insufficient facilities, technical difficulties, and the necessity for more proficient educators capable of creatively integrating

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technology into their teaching methods (Seemita, 2022). To maximise the language lab's potential, educators must be proficient not just in utilising the technology but also in crafting innovative, communicative, and task-oriented activities that exploit its functionalities.

Statement of the Problem

The conventional "chalk and talk" approach to language teaching, which predominantly depends on rote memorisation and grammatical exercises, has frequently been condemned for its failure to effectively cultivate students' communicative competence (Eragamreddy, 2024). This method often leads to a teacher-centered classroom atmosphere that lacks the dynamic, engaging, and personalised possibilities essential for effective language acquisition. Secondary school students may acquire a robust understanding of grammatical rules yet encounter difficulties with practical skills, including pronunciation, intonation, and fluency in authentic conversations (Mohammed, 2017; Akhdiyati, 2018). This weakness may result in considerable speaking anxiety and an overall deficiency in confidence, which subsequently obstructs their capacity for efficient communication (Khaleel, 2020).

The emergence of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and contemporary software-based language laboratories has been praised as a remedy for these issues; nonetheless, their successful application, especially in developing nations, encounters considerable barriers (Seemita, 2022). Insufficient facilities, technological difficulties, and a scarcity of qualified educators capable of creatively incorporating technology into their teaching are prevalent obstacles. Consequently, the complete potential of these technological instruments frequently remains unexploited. Educators might utilise the language lab solely as a digital equivalent of conventional drills, instead of exploiting its interactive and multimedia features to foster engaging, student-centered learning experiences (CAE, 2023).

A significant gap persists in comprehending how to reconcile the theoretical advantages of contemporary language laboratories with their practical implementation in educational environments. Although many studies have confirmed the efficacy of language labs in enhancing aural-oral skills (Akhdiyati, 2018; Akinjobi, 2015), additional research is necessary to tackle the particular pedagogical and implementation obstacles that hinder the universal attainment of these advantages. This study aims to examine the degree to which a modern language laboratory may remedy the observed shortcomings in communicative competence among students and to analyse the elements that affect its successful incorporation into the secondary school curriculum.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using a modern language laboratory in improving students' communicative competence at the secondary school level. The specific objectives are to:

i. assess the impact of language lab-based instruction on students' aural-oral skills, including pronunciation, intonation, and fluency.
ii. examine the influence of language lab use on students' speaking anxiety and confidence when communicating in the English language.
iii. identify the pedagogical and technical challenges teachers face in integrating a language laboratory into the language curriculum.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. To what extent does language lab-based instruction, compared to traditional methods, improve students' aural-oral skills (pronunciation, intonation, and fluency) in the English and indigenous languages?

2. Does the consistent use of a modern language laboratory reduce students' speaking anxiety and increase their confidence in oral communication?
3. What are the key pedagogical and technical challenges encountered by teachers during the integration and use of the language laboratory for instructional purposes?

Literature Review

The concept of the language laboratory

Hindu (2016) defines a Language Laboratory as a designated space within educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, training centres, universities, or academies, equipped with specialised tools to facilitate foreign language acquisition through auditory and visual media, as well as self-recording capabilities. The Language Laboratory is an audio or audiovisual facility utilised as a resource in contemporary language instruction. It was additionally referred to as the Speech and Writing Laboratory. All four language acquisition abilities (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) are prioritised, and learners are afforded numerous opportunities to practise through audio programs and video clips. A Language Laboratory is a room equipped with instructional technology that can distribute audio, audiovisual, and written materials to multiple students at individual seats or carrels, incorporating various feedback mechanisms for students, teachers, or peers.

The Language Laboratory facilitates language tutorials attended by students and others who voluntarily enroll in remedial English programs. Lessons and exercises are documented on a cassette or computer, providing students with diverse listening and speaking drills; this particularly aids those with little English proficiency and also seeks to enhance confidence for interviews and competitive examinations. The Language Laboratory sessions encompass word games, quizzes, impromptu speaking, debates, and skits. These sessions may also be conducted online, as numerous websites offer practice opportunities. Deepika and Kalaiarasan (2016) assert that a Language Laboratory is an audiovisual facility employed in contemporary pedagogical approaches for the acquisition of foreign languages.

The inaugural Language Laboratory may have been established at the University of Grenoble. From the 1950s until the 1990s, they utilised tape-based systems, employing either reel-to-reel or, more recently, cassette formats. However, the existing deployments predominantly consist of multimedia PCs. The Language Laboratory is a technological advancement for delivering English and indigenous languages skills. The Language Laboratory provides a unique, results-driven, and efficient approach to enhance the English and indigenous languages learning experience. The multimedia-based language laboratory facilitates the acquisition and improvement of language ability by enabling the instantaneous sharing of course materials between teachers and students. The Language Laboratory is based on the technique of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills (LSRW).

The Availability of the Language Laboratory

The availability of instructional materials and the preparedness of the learner are inherently interconnected. Consequently, the provision of sufficient educational resources facilitates and motivates pupils in their endeavours. The efficacy of teachers utilising the language laboratory for student instruction largely hinges on the availability of relevant and current resource materials, including tape recorders and associated equipment within the laboratory. High-quality materials will yield favourable results. Consequently, the provision of sufficient facilities for the instruction and acquisition of the English language will significantly enhance student performance.

Ubakwe (2017) emphasised the need to utilise instructional resources to enhance the significance of teaching and learning oral English. He stated that advancements in technology,

particularly in electronics, have yielded more accurate instruments for analysing linguistic sounds, making a language laboratory a vital, if not indispensable, and component for effective modern language instruction. Ihenacho (2017) expressed concern that the absence of language laboratories in Nigeria has hindered the effective instruction and acquisition of oral English. Regrettably, Nigeria, specifically Ekiti North Local Government, possesses minimal or no language laboratory facilities.

Limitations of the Laboratory

Certain scholars contend that language laboratories do not provide a magical answer for language training and cannot yield a near-native proficiency in a second language; thus, they advocate for their elimination. Ruley (2015) contested Pimslear's (2015) assertion that the language laboratory, in conjunction with the teacher, facilitates faster and superior learning, arguing instead that the laboratory is no more effective as a teaching aid than other instructional tools. Every mechanical apparatus possesses its merits and demerits. It is expensive, and the processes may get tedious. If the student's alertness is not sustained, he may get lethargic and only partially attend to the teacher or model. Monotony can be mitigated by eschewing lengthy recordings, incorporating musical selections, and facilitating student interaction. This can be accomplished by intermittently pausing for students to reiterate. The learner may also record their own voice onto the record or cassette.

Methodology

The study utilised a descriptive survey methodology. The study sample comprised sixty (60) teachers and twenty (20) students, randomly recruited from six public senior high schools in the Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State.

The study utilised a random selection method to choose participants from the six designated secondary schools.

The study employed a self-designed questionnaire created by the researcher, concentrating on the efficacy of contemporary language laboratories in enhancing students' communicative ability. Section A of the questionnaire requested respondents' personal information. Section B consisted of items structured in four-point Likert scales: Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). Additionally, Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The researcher individually administered the questionnaire to the participants. Before addressing the items, the objectives of the entire exercise were elucidated to the respondents. Participants were directed to answer all questions with complete honesty and were guaranteed that their information would remain anonymous. The respondents were provided with directives for precisely completing the surveys.

Data collection commenced immediately after administration, with response sheets collected from participants, thereafter compiled and evaluated accordingly. A descriptive analysis of the weighted mean and standard deviation was conducted to evaluate the study data at a significance level of 0.05, using SPSS Version 26.

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Results

Question 1: To what extent does language lab-based instruction, compared to traditional methods, improve students' aural-oral skills (pronunciation, intonation, and fluency) in the English and indigenous languages?

Table 1: Response to the extent that language lab-based instruction, compared to traditional methods, improves students' aural-oral skills in the English language

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	To what extent has the use of the language lab helped improve your pronunciation of English and indigenous languages words?	3.14	.522	Great Extent
2.	To what extent has the language lab helped you recognize and correctly use intonation patterns in spoken English and indigenous languages?	3.61	.531	Great Extent
3.	To what extent has the language lab improved your fluency, allowing you to speak more smoothly and without frequent pauses?	3.44	.501	Great Extent
4.	To what extent has practicing with audio recordings of native speakers in the lab enhanced your ability to understand spoken English and indigenous languages?	3.34	.411	Great Extent
5.	To what extent do you believe the language lab is more effective than traditional classroom methods for developing aural-oral skills?	3.01	.321	Great Extent
Weighted Mean		**16.54**		

Total mean = **16.54**
Cluster mean = **3.31**

The analysis in Table 1 reveals a cluster mean of 3.31, indicating that respondents largely concurred that language lab-based teaching improved their aural-oral skills. Students indicated that the utilisation of the language lab most significantly enhanced their intonation patterns (Mean = 3.61, SD = 0.531). Respondents similarly reported significant improvements in fluency (Mean = 3.44, SD = 0.501) and pronunciation (Mean = 3.14, SD = 0.522), underscoring the lab's role in enhancing speech production and the precision of word articulation.

The utilisation of audio recordings of native speakers in the laboratory significantly enhanced students' comprehension of spoken English (Mean = 3.34, SD = 0.411). Students judged language lab instruction more favourably than regular classroom techniques (Mean = 3.01, SD = 0.321). The comparatively low standard deviations for all items (0.321 to 0.531) indicate that students' replies were consistent. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that language lab-based instruction significantly enhances students' aural-oral skills in English and indigenous languages, particularly in intonation, fluency, and comprehension of spoken English and indigenous languages, with comparatively less focus on pronunciation and effectiveness relative to traditional teaching methods.

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Question 2: Does the consistent use of a modern language laboratory reduce students' speaking anxiety and increase their confidence in oral communication?

Table 2: Response to whether the consistent use of a modern language laboratory reduces students' speaking anxiety and increases their confidence in oral communication

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Using the language laboratory helps me feel more confident when speaking English in front of my classmates.	3.87	.621	Agreed
2.	I feel less anxious about making mistakes while practicing my pronunciation in the language laboratory compared to a regular classroom.	3.64	.521	Agreed
3.	The opportunity to record and listen to my own voice in the language lab has increased my belief in my ability to speak English and indigenous languages correctly.	3.51	.442	Agreed
4.	The repetitive drills and exercises in the language laboratory have made me less nervous about participating in class discussions.	3.41	.501	Agreed
5.	I am more willing to volunteer to speak in class after having practiced in the language laboratory.	3.87	.522	Agreed
Weighted Mean		**18.3**		

Total mean = **18.3**
Cluster mean = **3.66**

According to Table 2, the highest mean scores were seen in Item 1 (M = 3.87, SD = 0.621) and Item 5 (M = 3.87, SD = 0.522). The findings indicate that students unanimously concurred that the language laboratory enhances their confidence in speaking English and indigenous languages in front of peers and elevates their propensity to volunteer to speak in class. Item 2 (M = 3.64, SD = 0.521) reinforces the assertion that the language lab alleviates speaking fear. Students reported feeling less worried about making errors when practicing pronunciation in the laboratory than in a conventional classroom setting. This indicates that the laboratory fosters a psychologically safe atmosphere, allowing learners to experiment and self-correct without the apprehension of humiliation.

Item 3 (M = 3.51, SD = 0.442) indicated that the ability to record and listen to their own voices enhanced students' confidence in their proficiency in speaking English and indigenous languages accurately. This underscores the significance of technology-driven feedback in enhancing self-awareness and self-efficacy in oral communication. The lowest mean was seen in Item 4 (M = 3.41, SD = 0.501); however it remained within the "Agreed" range. This indicates that although frequent exercises in the language laboratory alleviate anxiety during class discussions, students may regard these drills as less efficacious than confidence-enhancing activities such as volunteering or listening to their recorded voices.

The cluster mean of 3.66 indicates that students largely concur that regular utilisation of the language laboratory markedly alleviates speaking anxiety and enhances confidence in oral communication. The comparatively low standard deviations across categories (.442 – .621) suggest that students' responses were consistent, indicating shared good experiences.

Question 3: What are the key pedagogical and technical challenges encountered by teachers during the integration and use of the language laboratory for instructional purposes?

Table 3: Response to the key pedagogical and technical challenges encountered by teachers during the integration and use of the language laboratory for instructional purposes

S/N	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	I lack sufficient training on how to effectively design and implement communicative and task-based activities using the language lab software.	3.52	.714	Agreed
2.	I frequently encounter technical issues (like software crashes, audio problems, and network connectivity) that disrupt my lessons in the language lab.	2.61	.772	Agreed
3.	The time required to prepare lessons and materials specifically for the language lab is a significant challenge.	2.87	.601	Agreed
4.	The lack of adequate technical support makes it difficult to resolve issues with the language lab equipment or software promptly.	3.44	.562	Agreed
5.	I find it challenging to effectively monitor and provide individual feedback to students when they are working independently on the language lab system.	3.57	.600	Agreed
Weighted Mean		**16.01**		

Total mean = **16.01**
Cluster mean = **3.20**

The findings in Table 3 indicate that all selected issues had mean values over the decision threshold of 2.50, with respondents largely concurring that they were substantial obstacles. The aggregate cluster mean of 3.20 further substantiates that educators continuously encounter both pedagogical and technical obstacles in their use of the language laboratory. The most significant problem was the difficulty in successfully monitoring and delivering individualised feedback to students working autonomously in the lab (Mean = 3.57, SD = 0.600). This discovery underscores a pedagogical issue, as a primary objective of the language lab is to promote personalised learning. Teachers, however, recognise constraints in their capacity to monitor progress and assist effectively, thus undermining the stated advantages of the facility.

A significant problem was the inadequate training in creating and executing communicative and task-based activities utilising the language lab software (Mean = 3.52, SD = 0.714). The elevated mean indicates that, despite the availability of technology, numerous educators perceive themselves as inadequately equipped to incorporate it effectively into their teaching practices. This indicates that insufficient professional development obstructs the effective use of the language lab. The insufficient technical support (Mean = 3.44, SD = 0.562) was identified as an obstacle. The minimal standard deviation signifies a strong consensus among responders. Educators depend on operational equipment and timely assistance to maintain lessons; in their absence, disruptions become frequent and extended.

On the technical front, recurrent concerns, including software malfunctions, audio complications, and connectivity difficulties (Mean = 2.61, SD = 0.772), were recognised as

substantial limitations. Despite having the lowest mean of the enumerated problems, this item nonetheless surpassed the threshold, indicating that technological reliability continues to be a significant issue. The laborious process of producing language lab-specific lessons and materials (Mean = 2.87, SD = 0.601) surfaced as an additional barrier. This highlights the workload consequences of incorporating new technologies into education, as educators must modify or develop resources suited to the laboratory setting.

The findings reveal that both pedagogical constraints (training, monitoring, feedback, preparation time) and technical challenges (system dependability, lack of assistance) hinder the successful utilisation of the language laboratory. The moderate to high mean values across the questions indicate that these issues are commonly experienced by instructors, with relatively low standard deviations reflecting a solid agreement.

Discussion of Findings

This study's findings indicate that language laboratory-based training markedly improves students' aural-oral skills, diminishes speaking anxiety, and boosts confidence in oral communication. Nonetheless, the findings reveal that educators face significant pedagogical and technical obstacles in the successful incorporation of the laboratory into classroom instruction. The findings indicated that language lab training significantly enhanced the aural-oral skills of secondary school students. Students specifically indicated significant improvements in intonation patterns, fluency, and comprehension of spoken English following exposure to recordings of native speakers. These findings support Akhdiyati's (2018) assertion that regular exposure to authentic audio materials improves learners' suprasegmental aspects of speech and promotes listening comprehension. In a similar vein, Seemati (2022) discovered that language laboratories enhance fluency and pronunciation precision by offering opportunities for repetitive practice and prompt feedback.

Nonetheless, although participants in the current investigation recognised enhancements in pronunciation, this aspect showed comparatively fewer advancements than intonation and fluency. This stands in contrast to the findings of Mohammed (2017), who highlighted pronunciation as the foremost area for enhancement in laboratory-based training. The results underscore the psychological advantages of language laboratory instruction. Students confirmed that the laboratory enhances their confidence, diminishes speaking fear, increases their readiness to address classmates, and bolsters their assurance in engaging in class discussions. These findings align with Eragamreddy’s (2024) argument that organised technological environments mitigate communication apprehension. Similarly, Egwuogu (2012) indicated that language laboratories offer a psychologically secure environment in which learners can practise speaking without the apprehension of adverse judgment.

However, repeating drills, although beneficial in alleviating anxiety, were seen as less effective than interactive and feedback-oriented activities. This partially diverges from Seemita (2022), who emphasises drills as fundamental to developing automaticity in speech skills. The distinction may reside in learner preferences, since modern students tend to choose communicative methods over rote repetition. Notwithstanding the apparent advantages, the findings indicated that educators encounter significant obstacles in executing language laboratory instruction. The primary issue was the challenge of monitoring and delivering personalised feedback. This discovery aligns with Seemita (2022), who observed that personalised learning spaces, such as laboratories, frequently restrict teachers' capacity to provide immediate assistance. The insufficiency of training and limited technical support were recognised as major limitations. These findings align with Mohammed (2017), who identified that deficiencies in professional development and inconsistent support systems impede technology integration in language classes.

In contrast to Chapelle (2005), who identified technical breakdowns as the primary difficulty, this study assigned a lower ranking to these concerns, albeit still over the decision threshold. The disparity may indicate infrastructural differences, with certain institutions seeing greater technical instability than others. The laborious development of lab-specific lessons underscores the implications for workload. This corresponds with Eragamreddy (2024), who noted that educators frequently encounter difficulties in reconciling curriculum requirements with the personalisation needed for technology-integrated teaching.

Conclusion

The research examined the efficacy of the language laboratory in improving students' aural-oral competencies, alleviating speaking anxiety, and boosting confidence in oral communication, alongside the pedagogical and technical obstacles faced by educators throughout its implementation. The results demonstrate that the language laboratory is an excellent educational instrument for enhancing intonation, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension of spoken English. Students reported considerable psychological advantages, such as less fear, enhanced willingness to communicate, and heightened confidence in their verbal skills.

Nevertheless, the study indicated that educators encounter significant obstacles in optimising the laboratory's potential. Prominent challenges include difficulty in monitoring and delivering personalised feedback, limited training in task-based language instruction utilising laboratory technologies, insufficient technical assistance, and the time-consuming process of developing lab-specific instructional materials. Although technological issues such software breakdowns and connectivity problems were recognised, they were regarded as less significant in comparison to pedagogical considerations. The findings reveal a dual reality: whereas the language laboratory has substantial potential for enhancing students' oral communicative ability, its complete efficacy is limited by systemic and instructional obstacles.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the subsequent recommendations are put forth:

i. Given that the data indicate the language laboratory markedly enhances students' intonation, fluency, and comprehension, educational institutions should officially incorporate lab-based instruction into the English and indigenous languages curriculum.

ii. Considering that students indicated a heightened readiness to engage in conversation, less speaking fear, and enhanced confidence during laboratory practice, educators ought to utilise the laboratory as a secure setting for communicative exercises.

iii. Given that educators indicated a lack of training, insufficient technical assistance, and difficulties in overseeing student engagement, educational authorities and school administrators ought to allocate resources towards professional development initiatives and technical support frameworks.

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