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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# MEDIA: TOOL FOR ENHANCING FOREIGN-LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### ABSTRACT

Languages are complex in nature and subsume social and cultural elements along with linguistic patterns. They are the access points to knowledge. It is thus that languages form an integral part of learning in the Indian context. Moreover, foreign-languages broaden the perspective and expose learners to new cultures, societies and ways of life. Accordingly, many foreign languages, especially French, are taught in educational institutions across the spectrum. However, it is important to ensure that foreign-language learning puts an emphasis on the communicative and socio-cultural aspects of the language. With an increasing base of users and viewing, media presents a potential for access to global content. This media potential may be exploited in a language classroom to give students an exposure to foreign-languages and to highlight its complex nature. This study explores the role of media in a French-language classroom. Media-based activities were conducted in an undergraduate French classroom which yielded positive results in the form of improvement of student participation and language skills. This study thus defines the scope and role of mediated content as a pedagogical tool for language learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Languages are deeply rooted in society and interactions. Languages become the medium of accessing knowledge and society (NCERT, 2005). Moreover, foreign-languages broaden the perspective and open up access to societies, cultures and learning across the globe. Foreign-languages expose learners to faraway knowledge and cultures which enhances the social and cognitive capacities of students. It is with this objective that foreign-languages form an integral part of learning in India. NCERT (2005) states that the three-language formula is adopted in the Indian curriculum so as to build the learners capacities to learn and acquire new languages. Thus, various foreign-languages are taught at the school, college and university level to students across the country. Given its important global stature, French as a foreign language has a large learner-base in our country. For language-learning to be holistic, all the various aspects of languages, especially its communicative and socio-cultural elements must be addressed in the learning process. However, learners learn from experience and thus it is necessary that learners experience the language in its real and true form to acquire the language skills. In order to attain these objectives, this researcher explored media as a tool in a French language classroom. In what way can media be integrated in a foreign-language classroom? Can the diverse forms of media be used as a tool for learning French? Can students benefit from media-integration in classrooms? What is scope of media integration in the teaching process? In order to answer these questions, the researcher conducted a study in an undergraduate French classroom, where media and its multifarious forms were exploited as pedagogical tools.

Through this research, the researcher aims to validate the hypothesis— media can be an effective pedagogical tool in a foreign-language classroom. This study presents the favourable influence of media on learning and defines the scope of media-integration in the learning process.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Languages are complex in nature and subsume cultural and social codes along with the linguistic codes. Language is first and foremost a means of interpersonal communication (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1998). Thus, foreign-language learning implies the acquisition of not only linguistic skills, but also an enhancement of communication and interaction skills along with the development of intercultural and social sensibilities. It is with this objective of contextualising foreign-language learning that the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - CEFRL (Council of Europe, 2001) advocates an intercultural, plurilingual and action-based pedagogical approach. While interculturality is the capacity to understand and empathise with the "otherness" and engage in a fruitful exchange leading to accomplishment of common objectives (Council of Europe, 2009), Blanchet (2004) prefers to consider it, beyond a theory, as an "intercultural approach" which refers to certain principles of pedagogical action in language learning in order to overcome the difficulties in interaction created by cultural differences in the two contexts. The intercultural approach aims to expose foreign-language learners to socio-cultural differences, help them to appreciate these differences without forgetting their own social and cultural identities.

Going beyond this interaction of cultures, the plurilingual approach emphasises on the interaction between languages. According to Coste, Moore and Zarate (1997), plurilingual capacities imply the knowledge of a repertoire of languages, which learners use at their discretion according to the situation. The plurilingual approach thus highlights the use of different languages in different contexts.

While the intercultural and plurilingual approach bring out the diverse and complex nature of the languages, especially the foreign-languages to be taught, the communicative and action-based approach, as advocated by the CEFRL (Council of Europe, 2001), aims to define the methodology of teaching. The constructivist and socio-constructivist philosophies as promulgated by Piaget and Vygotsky respectively govern the principles of the action-oriented approach. The constructivist theory considers learning to be a personal activity which is affected by the past and current contexts. It accepts that each learner brings to the classroom a baggage of his experiences. Learning should integrate this baggage while constructing new meaning for the learner (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005). The socio-constructivist theory further considers learning to be a collaborative effort, where meaning is constructed together with others in a social setting. According to this approach, learners should be given opportunities to imply their existing knowledge for acquiring new knowledge. An emphasis is placed on collaborative and collective action in the classroom. Language being a tool of communication, should be taught as a competence. The action-based approach should be administered by the task-based pedagogy (Rosen, 2009). The accomplishment of tasks in real life is to be simulated in language classrooms through role-plays and collaborative activities (Puren, 2006). Authentic source documents, those which are a part of everyday life should be used as examples of language use. Learning should be learner-centric, giving importance to use of language in real-life situations by the language-learner. Foreign-language learning thus involves multiple aspects. Teaching of a foreign language is based on the communicative and action-based approach, which considers the language-learner to be a language-user and aims to make him a “social agent” who operates in a given context. Thus, foreign-language teaching should expose learners to real-life language use, in order to inculcate the foreign language in its real and true form. This is where, media plays an important role. Communication being the basis of media, recent developments have led media to evolve as a daily life practice. Various forms of media such as social media, online platforms, movies, television, songs, comics, animé have been developed and propagated as popular forms of content viewing. But what does media, as a means of communication, transmit to the viewers? Lobato (2019) states that “watching television always involves some kind of imagined interaction with faraway places, situations and symbols”. Moreover, media creates an “experience”.

How a viewer reacts to the mediated content depends upon the geography and context of the viewer (Clark, 2013). According to Silverstone (1999), “the structure and content of media narratives and the narratives of our everyday discourses are interdependent, that together they allow us to frame and measure experience”. Media thus enables an interaction with new contexts along with a retrospection of one’s own context. Media thus becomes an access point to societies, cultures and the languages as a means of communication. Moreover, media content is authentic, i.e. not conceptualised for teaching, but in fact for daily-life situations. Media, in its diverse forms, has proven to be useful in the learning process- Badrinathan, 2008; Tschirner, 2011; Zourou, 2012; Churcher, Downs and Tewksbury, 2014; Mishra & Sharma, 2005. However, in what way can this media be integrated in a foreign-language classroom to enhance communication and interactional skills? This article studies the relation between the two variables- media and the communicative approach of foreign-language learning and brings out in what way the diverse forms of media enhance the action-based intercultural approach of language learning.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objective of this study is to define the role of media and its diverse forms in the learning and teaching process of a foreign language. The research was conducted with the aim of gauging the scope of mediated content in the communicative, action-based, plurilingual and intercultural approach of French-language teaching. In what way does media enhance French-language learning? And how does media contextualise the language for the learners in order to enrich their language learning experience? A qualitative research methodology was adopted in order to conduct the research. Such a research has contributed immensely to studies related to language classrooms as it is capable of providing detailed insights (Richards, 2009). The study was conducted in the context of the University of Mumbai. Over the period of one semester (approximately five months), media-based activities were integrated in an undergraduate classroom. The students were enrolled for the BA French programme and activities were carried out in their “Language development” classes. This researcher, in the role of the teacher, exploited diverse media such as movies, web series, memes, animés, songs, social media and comics and developed activities and exercises which aimed at language-skill development. These activities were then conducted in the classroom regularly as one part of the curriculum, i.e. one activity of approximately forty minutes was incorporated at the end of every class of two hours. Students engaged and completed these activities in the class or completed certain parts of these activities as home assignment. The activities done as home assignment were subsequently discussed in the next class. The media choice was based on its pertinence and adaptability to the classroom. Given the plurilingual approach of language-learning, media of multiple languages – English, French, Hindi and Marathi was exploited to enable students to experience the interaction between the languages. Popular Hindi and English songs and movies were chosen so that students could relate to this content. The learners being adolescents were well versed with social media and thus, memes and social media content was contemporary to them. While selecting French movies, songs and web-series, the presence of everyday use of the language and representation of socio-cultural elements was used as basis.

Once the media was selected, mainly four types of activities were conceptualised. The four types of activities, namely language development activities, game-based activities, story-building activities and interactional activities, maintained diversity in the classroom and ensured that all skills such as interaction and communication were enhanced. Moreover, game-based and story-building activities allowed the students to be creative and work in a relaxed atmosphere. This ensured implicit learning, rather than taxing the students. These activities were then regularly integrated in the French language classroom. The classification of the activities is given in the Table 1:

**Table 1. Classification of Media-based activities**

Activities using media	
Language development activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Translation of songs</li> <li>● Grammar through song lyrics</li> <li>● Exercises on phonetics</li> </ul>
Game-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Guess the character</li> <li>● Guess the movie</li> </ul>
Story-building activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Using anime, movie characters to build a story</li> <li>● Imagining alternative story ends</li> <li>● Role-plays</li> </ul>
Interactional activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Discussion on movies/web-series</li> <li>● Writing movie/series critique</li> <li>● Writing a comic strip</li> <li>● Making memes in French</li> </ul>

The research design was thus action-based. The media-based activities were incorporated in the French language classroom.

This researcher, in the role of the teacher observed student participation, their interaction, motivation and performance. These observations form the corpus of this study. This researcher has analysed the classroom proceedings in order to define the role of media in language-learning.

## RESULTS

The integration of media-based activities yielded positive results in the foreign-language classroom. The activities involved the students in the learning process. It not only helped them to remain motivated and interested in learning, but these activities also positively influenced their language skills. The results and findings of the study are presented below with respect to two aspects.

**Student participation and motivation:** The media-based activities enhanced student participation. This researcher ensured that each student got an opportunity to speak and give his opinion in each and every class.

It became thus mandatory for all students to express themselves. Gradually, instead of an obligation, students were at ease to give their opinion. The researcher observed that even timid students actively participated and expressed themselves, with decreasing hesitation. The innovative activities piqued the students' interest and this researcher observed an improvement in their motivation. In every subsequent class, students took initiative in completing the activities and we also observed a more assiduous and regulated approach towards the completion of home assignments. Students who were irregular with their submissions at the start of the semester started submitting their work within the stipulated period. Moreover, the students creatively approached the activities. This is illustrated by various role-plays and stories that they developed by using movie and web-series characters. They imagined Hindi movie characters having an encounter with a French local, characters from Harry Potter studying in a French wizardry school, as well as imagined creative alternative endings to some French movies watched in class together. They also used social media meme formats and made them into memes related to French language. Due to the contemporary relativity of the content, the students gave the feedback that they "enjoyed the class". Thus, the creativity and imagination of the students was put to task and they did not passively interact with the content but became content creators by way of memes, role-plays, movie critiques written and developed in class. In addition to this, the students were led to work in groups for completing the activities, thus enhancing student collaboration and interaction. The classroom atmosphere became more relaxed and cohesive for student development. With each group activity, the researcher felt a lesser need to intervene, as students were comfortable working and collaborating with each other to carry out the activities. The group discussions became more fruitful as student interaction improved.

**Language-learning and performance:** With respect to the complex aspects of language learning, media proved to be a useful tool for enhancing student skills. The various French web-series, movies and songs portrayed the use of the French language and the daily life in France. The students were thus introduced to socio-cultural aspects such as work culture, gastronomy, family relations and communicational aspects like greeting, chatting and letter writing. Group discussions showed that these media formats had created intercultural sensibilities in students as they compared French culture with their own. Activities like song translation enhanced plurilingual capabilities as students used their first and second language for creation in the foreign language. Role-plays, critique writing, story-building, meme developing activities gave importance to the student contact with the foreign language. They used the language to express themselves, to opine on matters and have informal discussions with their colleagues. This researcher noticed an improvement in the fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation of the students. The students were thus equipped with improved linguistic skills, which led to an

improvement in classroom interaction. The researcher observed a considerable difference in student interaction with respect to the beginning of the semester. The students easily communicated with each other about daily life situations in French, using newly acquired vocabulary and structures. Thus there was overall improvement in the language skills of students. Thus, the integration of media-based activities in the French-language classroom had a favourable effect on the language learning process. It not only enhanced motivation and participation, but visibly enhanced language skills of students. The following part thus defines the role and scope of media with respect to elements of language learning.

## DISCUSSION

Media and its diverse forms played the role of a catalyst in the French language classroom. The learning process was made more creative due to media integration. Through the integration of media, it was possible to ensure that the learning was based on the communicative, action-based, intercultural and plurilingual approach of teaching. The scope of media in this complex approach of foreign-language teaching is analysed with respect to three aspects.

**Media authenticity and language exposure:** The media forms integrated in the classroom were not conceptualised for teaching purposes and were representations of daily-life situations. Thus, these "authentic resources" exposed learners to real-life use of the language. As per the action-based approach, students were led to discover the meaning of the language (practical usage) before studying its form (grammar and structure). The interactional activities led the students to reuse the "form" of the language that they learned for expressing themselves, thus constructing "meaning" for themselves. Thus, the learning followed the process as advocated by the communicative approach, going from meaning to form and leading students to the reuse of form for the "construction of meaning". When students used the language for expressing themselves, it enhanced their communication skills. While accessing French media, students became "social actors", simulating French-language users and viewing content and sharing their opinions about the same, thus engaging in media citizenship. Thus, media authenticity exposed the learners to the French language in its true form, thus following the principles of the action-based approach.

**Media diversity and student creativity:** The activities exposed students to a variety of media formats. Moreover, they interacted with media-forms from multiple languages. Firstly, as social-agents, they accessed and viewed media content. Secondly, learning from it, they became content creators themselves— developing memes, writing role-plays, dialogues, scenes as well as movie critiques. As advocated by the action-based approach, the learners were implied actively in their interaction with the resources. Thus learning became learner-centric, giving priority to learner creativity and participation rather than an importance to the language and its form. This not only enhanced student motivation, but led to autonomy of learning. As discussed in the previous part, students took initiative in their learning. Thus, interaction and exploration of diverse media led students to take charge of their learning, leading them to become autonomous learners. Media diversity ensured that the learning was learner-centric, making the students autonomously and creatively access resources.

**Media as a pedagogical tool and language development:** As seen in the previous part, media integration facilitated the development of language skills of the students. It is important to consider the different aspects of language learning. The activities helped the students to improve their communication and interaction skills. In addition to this, the interaction with media led to the creation of intercultural sensibilities and the development of the plurilingual repertoire of the learners. Students not only acknowledged cultural differences between the French and the Indian culture but also analysed them. Moreover, multilingual media made the students call upon their existing linguistic capacities to explore the foreign-language. Through the media-based activities, learners were led to complete "tasks", thus

ensuring learning as per the action-based approach. Similarly, due to the relaxed atmosphere of the class, “errors” became a source of information. Students collaboratively corrected each others’ errors, without penalising them, ensuring again a learner-centric approach. Thus, media became the catalyst in the holistic language development of the French-language learners. This study has proven that media can be integrated in a foreign-language classroom in order to enhance language-learning. Media not only ensures a creative and veritable interaction with the language, but plays an important role as a pedagogical tool. The scope of media in a language classroom is thus dual. It becomes the access point to the knowledge and also enriches the teaching and learning process. Thus, the hypothesis has been validated— media can be effectively integrated as a pedagogical tool in a foreign language classroom.

## CONCLUSION

We can deduce from this study that media as a pedagogical tool is effective in engaging students in learning and that it facilitates the learning process. However, this study highlighted certain limitations with respect to media integration in a language classroom. Firstly, media accessibility and the uniformity of such access amongst all students may hamper the use of media in the classroom. It is not possible to view all movies and web-series in the classroom. If all the students do not have access to the required online platform or digital services, then it becomes impossible to use this media as a resource in the class. Secondly, media being a contemporary and current social topic, students may become overtly involved with the media. The focus of the class may shift from language learning and media may become the sole centre of attention. The teacher thus has to make sure that the objectives of the classroom are respected and that the media is integrated at the pertinent time. Moreover, if the selected media does not give enough input for learning, the integration is futile. Hence, the teacher also has to ensure that content which is incorporated should be relevant to the learning process. Thus, media, though an effective pedagogical tool, has to be manipulated pertinently by the teacher, for learning to be cohesive. We can conclude that for effective media integration in a language classroom, pedagogical intervention by the teacher should be apposite. This study thus presents further scope for research with respect to teacher’s role and media integration in a foreign-language classroom.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare. The author has seen and agrees with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. We certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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