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Audio-Visual Aids and Foreign Language Learning: A Case Study of French Language in Nigeria

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Abstract

In the last century, trends in the teaching of foreign language had resulted into the emergence of a number of methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of foreign language across the world. Due to globalization and urbanization and the tendency in man to reduce the world into a global village through breaking the communication barriers via foreign language learning, attempt has been made to revolutionize the teaching and learning of foreign languages using audio-visual aids. Suffice to say that audio-visual aids combine both the motivational and learning features. However, it is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The full potentials and benefits derivable from using audio visual aids in foreign language class have not been fully exploited. This may be considered as one of the factors underlying high rate of drop-out or attrition in the foreign language class. This paper therefore highlights the significance of using audio visual aids in the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

Keywords: Audio-Visual, Aids, Foreign Language ,French

Introduction

Revolutionizing the teaching and learning of foreign language through the use of audio visual aids has been a subject of debate among experts in the field of instructional technology and foreign language educators. This phenomenon is considered a step in the right direction considering the heterogeneity of learners and diverse characteristics of learners in the foreign language class. Suffice to say that learning does not take place in a vacuum but through the use of various media, ranging from audio, visual and audio-visual aids. It is worthwhile reiterating the fact that learners' perception of foreign language inputs could be based on the use of the five sense organs such as ear, tongue, nose, skin and eye. Learners are passive recipients of foreign language inputs. Their ability to learn through the five senses should not be undermined by the foreign language teacher. However, extension of learning beyond the scope of conventional or traditional method of teaching should be the hallmark of a foreign language learning program. Audio visual materials such as projector, television set, radio, overhead, slides, maps and charts should be perceived as teaching aids without which the teaching and learning of foreign language will only be taught in abstraction.

The use of audio-visual materials can bridge the gap between the classroom situation and the real life situation. It should be noted that contact with the target language community or the native language speakers of the foreign language is sometimes impossible while learning a foreign language. It is not impossible to be proficient in a foreign language without any contact with the native speakers or target language community but through the use of audio-visual materials. The learners can succeed in acquiring the native like-pronunciation and get acquainted with the culture and traditions of the target community via the use of audio-visual materials in the teaching and learning process. Paralinguistic behaviours such as facial expressions, nodding, cues, gesticulations, body movement, signs and symbols that are culture bound could be presented to the learners through audio-visual aids. The major problems that could deter

the realization of the full potentials of using the audio-visual materials in the teaching of foreign language are time constraint, lack of financial resources and technical competence.

Helena (1988), in the study conducted on ability of audio visual aids in facilitating second language acquisition in the study of Spanish as second language, concluded that the audio visual aids group performed significantly better in vocabulary and listening comprehension but no difference was found in structure. Canning–Wilson (2000) affirmed that the use of video offers foreign and second language learners a chance to improve their ability to understand comprehensible inputs. Foreign language teacher should avoid unnecessary use of traditional language teaching method and embrace the use of modern technologies such as CD Rom and computer assisted language learning (CALL). The benefits derivable from the use of educational technologies could avail the learners the opportunity to be actively involved in the learning process and also learn at their own pace. Cuning-Wilson (2000) maintained that if video is to be exploited in the foreign language class to improve listening comprehension it must be shown in segments and not as a whole. The segments should be broken down to incorporate the movement from micro listening skills to macro listening skills. One significant effect of video on the second language acquisition is its ability to show visual stimuli even without being accompanied with language. Learners can easily comprehend the trend of events evolving on the screen. It should be noted that natural human communication can still be realized through gestures, signs, eye contact and gesticulations without the use of language. In view of this fact, one would wonder the magnitude of aid the use of video will offer in the learning of a foreign language. Aside serving as motivational technique, video can also be used to teach stress patterns, body or speech rhythm and at the same time offer authentic materials to the learners in form of opening the world of communication similar to a real life situation. Foreign language teachers should note that video could be used to supplement teaching efforts in the foreign language learning situation. A particular language skill taught to the learners can be complemented with the exposure to similar learning experience through video or visual aids.

A good number of audio visual materials can be used by foreign language teachers. These include piano, a victrola, a radio, a recording machine, a screen with projector, film stripes and slides, maps, wall papers, and pamphlets and costumes, products of foreign language countries. However, considering the inevitability of teaching science based courses without the use of a well equipped laboratory through experimental approach. It is however excruciating to incorporate the use of audio- visual aids to compliment the teaching and learning of foreign languages. The two fundamental aspects of foreign language teaching include language teaching and the teaching of the civilization and culture of the language community and these two domains of foreign language learning can best be taught effectively using the appropriate language teaching aids. This will bridge the gap between the foreign language learners and the language community.

Tobe (2006) is critical of the view that learning foreign language through the use of textbooks alone will deny the learners the opportunity to acquire paralinguistic features of the language. Learners may find it difficult to apply such paralinguistic features in the communication process if they are not earlier exposed to it. The problem of selecting appropriate audio-visual aids that correspond to the learning experience of the learners and their needs and interest is one major confronting foreign language teachers in the teaching and learning endeavour. The increasing number of foreign language learners coupled with heterogeneity in the learners' characteristics further compound the teachers' skills in selecting the appropriate audio-visual aids in the teaching and learning of a foreign language.

However, despite wide spread campaign for the use of audio-visual aids in enhancing foreign language teaching and learning, some foreign language teachers still have penchant for the use of traditional method due to their inability to improvise teaching aids that could aid in realizing the curriculum objectives. Suffice to say at this juncture that audio visual aids are not used for the fun of it. Some foreign language teachers use instructional materials out of compulsion not as a necessity while some use it in order to showcase their professionalism and differentiate themselves from quacks in the teaching profession but the purpose and intent of using teaching aids in language class must not appear vague and ambiguous.

The use of audio visual aids in the teaching of French language

Foreign language teachers hardly adhere strictly to the dictates and demands of contemporary teaching methodologies. They always delve towards the use of traditional methods which advocate for long memorization of vocabularies and translation from the target language to the mother tongue and vice versa. The problem of insufficiency in vocabularies is one of the factors responsible for setback in foreign language class. Learners are obliged to memorize a number of vocabularies in the foreign language and the teacher measures the learners' vocabularies strength in oral and written expressions.

The traditional method of memorizing a long list of vocabularies denies the learners the opportunity to juxtapose the image of the object or action being learnt with the equivalent word or expressions that correspond to the object or action. This action is synonymous to a deliberate attempt or self- induced aim of acquiring a new language through strenuous memorization of a number of vocabularies in the language with the aim of using them in speech act in communicative situation.

Learners found in this situation sometimes suffer oral defect but may display grammatical dexterity forming sentences through combination of words with complete obeisance to the rules of grammar governing the foreign language in question. The teaching of French language has suffered tremendous setback most especially in the developing countries due to non-availability of audio-visual materials to cushion the effect of teaching efforts of the foreign language in the course of teaching French language as a foreign language in Nigeria, Learners of French are always faced with difficulty in exploiting the oral skills in the French language textbooks due to limited oral or visual stimuli that could facilitate speedy acquisition. It is not an understatement to say that the significant value of audio visual aids such as slide projectors and overhead in the teaching of French language cannot be over -estimated.

In addition to using audio-visual materials in the foreign language class, the French teacher can make sketches or drawings on the board that are representation of either concrete or abstract nouns. This requires competence and dexterity on the part of the foreign language teacher. He or she needs to be versatile and skillful in creative arts and design. His or her ability to draw will save him or her time and efforts in carrying concrete instructional materials or teaching aids into the class. Teaching the African learners of foreign language about the expression weather in Europe or America where snow is common requires the teacher to demonstrate the weather condition by drawing a small picture on the board. The teacher must be able to make some recognizable drawings of objects that learners are already familiar with at home. It is lack of professional conduct to see a language class turn to a lecture class where learners are passive recipients of foreign language inputs with little or no participation. The practical aspect of foreign language learning can be orchestrated through the use of audio visual aids. If audio visual aids could not be improvised, perfect drawings can make a difference. The learners' mental consciousness is at alert whenever the teacher places a drawing on the board and the learners identify the object. It is also important to know that the name of the object remains permanently in the memory of the

learners for a long time unlike when it is learned in the abstract. A French teacher either places himself on or under the table while demonstrating the use of prepositions "sur" and "sous" which literally mean "on" and "under". The expression "the teacher is under the table" will be accompanied by an action that requires the teacher to place himself under the table. The teacher took this step to bring humour and life into the foreign language class even though he or she could otherwise do this by using pictures of objects or human beings placed on or under the table. However, the learners laugh seeing their French teacher under the table but the message has already been passed in a comic and humorous manner.

On the other hand, the French teacher must make sure that there is provision for a French room where wall papers, maps and drawings are pasted for the purpose of imparting foreign language knowledge to the learners. These materials can serve as supplementary aids to complement foreign language skills already imparted in normal classroom situation. Some of the visual materials available on the wall of the French room are the map of the world written in French, the parts of the body, numerals in French, French alphabets, months of the year or days of the week and the French gastronomy in regions across metropolitan France. French language teacher must be informed that an entrance into the French room should welcome the breath of French language and the touch of the target language community. This is a viable source of motivation for the learners of French as a foreign language.

The use of modern technologies in the teaching of foreign languages

Technology plays an important role in teaching and learning; it will enable the learners to learn more efficiently and effectively (Liu, 2000). The introduction of ICT into foreign language classroom has engendered the emergence of modern techniques of teaching French language as a foreign language. Internet facilities such as e-mail, conferencing and virtual classes allow the students to interact with other students across the world and it enhances the quality of teaching. The most effective exchange projects are ones that are well-integrated into the course goals and are based on purposeful investigation rather than just electronic chat (Warschauer, 1999). Such projects might involve joint exploration of culture, social conditions, film, or literature and often result in some kind of collaborative publication. The internet is a new technological innovation that permits rich multimedia interaction. It stimulates the interest of the learners in the foreign language.

Power point presentation is another modern technique of foreign language presentation. Foreign language topics such as fashion, music, geography and history of France can be learnt on-line using modern technologies. Some other topics such as cuisine, news, music and contest are interesting topics that learners could learn through the on-line radio channel. Students can learn the regions and geography of France through the computer soft ware. On-line interaction with the students whereby the teacher interacts with the students and there is a transfer of knowledge and exchange of information between them is a welcome development in a foreign language class. The teacher can assess and correct students' project on-line. On the other hand, the students can peruse French online news groups to follow how French students are discussing a proposed minimum wage cutback. This helps them learn background cultural information about current events and attitudes in France, as well as the precise methods used by native French speakers for argumentation, persuasion, and negotiation (Scinicariello, 1995).

Students can learn the regions and geography of France through the computer soft ware. The use of internet makes the language class interesting and raises curiosity in the students. Students could enrich their vocabularies with little or no efforts. Surfing the net offers the students a wide range of information

is not readily available in the textbooks. Based on the new technologies, the teacher assumes different roles and responsibilities as new methods and techniques find their way into the class.

The challenges of using the new technologies are enormous. The time management, homework and a large volume of documents that would be sorted out and corrected by the teacher, group work supervision and expected level of mastery can mar an effective use of modern technologies in foreign language class. However, the students are motivated because of the novelty of the method, interdependence and game activities involved. The teacher embraced the use of modern technologies because of the advantages inherent in them compared to traditional method of teaching. Students watch French movies through the satellite TV and follow French on-line news. They follow discussions, argument and negotiations through paying attention to the native speakers discussed current affairs such as tax payment, politics etc.

The audio based language laboratory has been replaced with computer language laboratory. Computer assisted classroom discussion can be used to facilitate discussion in a single class. Networked computer laboratory where students send message through writing rather than talking foreign language.

There are so many advantages and disadvantages of using modern technologies in the teaching of foreign languages. There is a departure from reading, writing and communicating in print to screen. In the past, students are encouraged to write essay or read magazines but it has been replaced with sending e-mail messages. There is immediate change from the teaching of rules of grammar into discourse in foreign language. Consequently, language changing goals necessitated the use of modern technologies. Students are encouraged to engage in cultural interactions for the purpose of academic growth. The major disadvantages of using modern technologies include time, money and uncertainty of results.

Rationale behind using audio visual aids in foreign language classroom

It is of prime importance to incorporate the use of audio-visual aids into the foreign language class. Foreign language teachers should strive to provide adequate learning experiences for learners so that they can acquire the necessary language skills. Audio visual aids are not substitutes for learning experiences. It has no significant influence on the competence of the teacher. Audio-visual aids should complement the teaching efforts of the foreign language teacher. Audio-visual aids must therefore be seen as part of teaching and learning process in second language learning situation. There are factors that should be considered in selecting audio-visual aids. Some of these factors include practicality, simplicity of use, cost effectiveness, easy manipulation and relevance to the curriculum content. If these criteria are not strictly considered, it may defeat the purpose of using audio visual aids language class.

In furtherance to above claimed assertion, Raymond (2012) observed that prior to selection of audio – visual aids, a teacher must have some questions at the back of his mind i.e. what do I want to achieve with these aids and what can I achieve with them? He further maintained that the choice of an audio visual aid depends mainly on what one wants to teach. Audio visual aids are used to arouse learners' interest which will later metamorphose into learners' involvement in the teaching and learning process. Al-Sharhan (1993) conducted a research on the use of Audio visual aids in teaching in the Saudi girls' college. It was concluded that there should be increase in the use of audio-visual aids, more training programs for teachers, more teacher release time, more teaching equipment and better classroom facilities. This is to further emphasize the relative importance of audio-visual aids in enhancing foreign language proficiency.

Conclusion

Effective teaching and learning of foreign language is the function of the learning environment that is highly stimulating and captivating. A conducive learning environment stimulates effective learning of a foreign language. Learners of foreign language learn better in the classroom environment where the audio-visual aids are effectively utilized in the teaching and learning process. The advantages derivable from the use of audio-visual aids include: motivating learners to learn, increasing the learning outcomes of the learners and sustaining the memory span of the learners in remembering the foreign language inputs or resources. The improvisation of audio visual aids in the absence of available ones could substantiate the teaching learning activities in the foreign language class and bring out the creativity in the teacher.

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