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French Foreign Language Teaching And The Internet: An Experiment

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents partial findings of a study of teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning French as a foreign language on the Internet, after explaining the demands of the XXI century on (Foreign Language) Education. An experiment, carried out to evaluate the efficacy of integrating electronic mail (E-mail) writing into French Language classrooms explores the dynamics of the process of e-mail exchanges. This paper will attempt to provide Indian, (French) language teachers with the impetus to use and to integrate the tremendous resources available on the Internet into the classroom.

Keywords: Foreign Language Education, Electronic mail(E-mail), 21st Century Skill

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE INTERNET: AN EXPERIMENT

Introduction

Recent years have seen a tremendous expansion of ways in which higher education goes 'international' with internationalization and globalization of education, and with rising needs for an increasingly educated and more adequately trained workforce universities have to offer more flexible programs, assisted by new educational and communications technologies. We, educators in India have entered a critical time for education reforms and we have the responsibility of preparing our students for the 21st century, to pursue their further studies or to join the workforce.

In this context when it is more advantageous to be multilingual and be capable of communicating with others in their own language, does the French Foreign Language Education in India meet the requirements of the global era? In this article we will analyse briefly the demands of the XXI century in foreign language education and go through an ongoing experiment which is trying to sensitise students to

learn and to acquire french foreign language by incorporating the internet into the everyday teaching methodology.

THE XXI CENTURY DEMANDS ON (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) EDUCATION

The representatives of the 19 APEC (Asia-Pacific Economics Cooperation) economies at the 4th AEMM (APEC Education Ministerial Meeting) issued a Joint Statement of educational priorities, the promotion of **21st Century Skills**. To help APEC education systems achieve these **21st Century Skills**, the APEC Ministers have identified four **priority areas**—math and science, career and technical education (CTE), **language learning**, and information & communications technologies (ICT) and systemic reform—in which to achieve 21st Century competencies and skills:

Peru, June 2008.

Since language learning is considered as one of the vital skills necessary for the global economy, Developments

in society and economy require that educational systems equip young people with new skills and competencies, which allow them to benefit from the emerging new forms of socialization and to contribute actively to economic development under a system where the main asset is knowledge.

Thus the demand for languages, 21st century skill has arisen due to

i) trade;

business and professions seek employees fluent in more than one language to participate in the international marketplace. Employers increasingly want their employees to be inter culturally competent. They want them to be skillful negotiators in the current intercultural work situations.

ii) worldwide travel;

Population mobility continues throughout the world at an all time high of human history, bringing intensive cross-cultural contact among diverse languages and culture groups.

iii) instant international communication;

cheaper and advanced communication technology is available to meet today's need for authentic communication..

The future of countries would be largely determined by their abilities to compete in a global market where industrial based economies are giving way to knowledge based industries(Kerka.1993). The educational need in the post-industrial society of the present is preparation for and involvement in life, not mere graduation.

Hence, learning a language no longer means internalizing a closed system of formal rules and structured paradigm rather, it means acquiring a mode of communication, a way of expressing, interpreting and negotiating socially encoded meaning in varied contexts. It is no longer enough to be able to construct grammatically correct sentences: one must know when to say what to whom for which purpose to convey which meaning and which register to use. (Kramersch 1996).

With this focus on language, communication, and culture, foreign language teachers are continually searching

for better ways of accessing authentic materials and providing experiences that will improve their students' knowledge and skills in these target areas. As the Internet has transformed communication around the world, it is natural that it should play a major role in foreign language education.

ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN THE INDIAN FL CLASSROOM

In the Indian context, use of technology is very limited in most educational institutions as technology is still very expensive for many and secondly only a very small percentage of Language teachers are equipped to use computational skills. Thirdly awareness to the prowess of the internet is still not known.

METHODOLOGY-PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This valid small scale experiment evolved out of the problems me and many of my colleagues face as teachers of French in India, problems relating in a general sense to the attitudes, motivation and proficiency achievements of students of French. Many French teachers feel themselves to be under constant pressure to improve the performance of their students who happen to be in an acquisition environment.

French Language classes are generally very traditional. Our students are so embedded in the traditional educational system and their objectives for learning the French language is rather more for the marks it fetches them than for wanting to communicate in a foreign language or to know more about their culture. In addition it does not help when the attitudes of Parents and the Management is also for availing maximum marks. Finally technology is beyond their means.

Yet, as using technology is our only solution to surmount the obstacles in our language program, we have started with the E-mail, "the mother of all Internet applications" (Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000), which is so easy to use in practice today and the infrastructure requirements for e-mail are also minimal. Hence making it the most accessible of all Internet tools to be integrated into the experimental methodology.

EXPERIMENTATION INTO FL TEACHERS' EXPERIMENTAL METHODOLOGY

The main aims of the experiment

- To develop students' interests, self confidence and positive attitude towards learning French
- To cultivate the pupils' language sense and enable good interaction among students of French
- To promote student centered language education.

The Experiment-

STAGE 0 – The pre-E-mail stage. The students were given a talk on the relevance of learning a language in the global age. The experiment was explained and the expectations clearly explained. Interested students were given the option to volunteer.

STAGE I – The E-mail address for communication was given to the students and the students without an E-mail address were helped to obtain one.

STAGE II – A simple and unorthodox teacher/student E-mail

exchange was implemented. Thirty students were paired up to exchange E-mail messages in **French** every weekend with their teacher and with other students for one semester.

Questions which required one or two lines answer were posed on work done during the week plus comments, requests the students wish to make. The condition being the questions or requests in French only will be answered. Linking the E-mail messages to course content encouraged integration of new vocabulary and forms and also discourages overuse of the dictionary which can lead to frustration and discouragement.

STAGE III- Supplemental Activities

Through E-mail, the teacher assigned supplemental activities which enhanced class activities. The students with Internet facility may get the answers from Internet resources and explain to the class.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Student Participation (in pairs)

Total no. of students	Active students	Passive/Infrequent students
15	9	6

2. Expands Topics beyond Classroom-based Ones.

Language teachers in India often have to follow a rigorous schedule in terms of content and/or grammatical topics to be presented and practiced in a semester. There is no time to be spared for free communication. Whereas with the E-mail the learners get an additional context for discussion that can be linked to topics being covered in class.

3. Promotes Student-centered Language Learning.

E-mail allows for communication between students in a context where the teacher's role is no longer at the center (Patrikis, 1995). In E-mail communication, FL learners can experience increased control over their own learning, since they can choose the topic and change the direction of the discussion. The end goal is to communicate with another

person in the FL rather than to produce a mistake-free composition.

4. Interaction via e-mail lends a feeling of reality to students' Communicative interaction among students with similar interest becomes a motivating factor. Helps the students to develop their writing, thinking and comprehensive skills

5. E-mail between the Teacher and the Learner

Writing only to the teacher through an e-mail journal provides a communicative outlet. Another advantage to intensive communicating individually with the teacher at the early stages of language acquisition is the extent of authentic input and corrective feedback learners receive in this context as contrasted with the type of input learners would receive

from the language and content their peers might send (Gonzalez-Bueno, 1998).

OUTCOME OF THE EXPERIMENT

- The students are motivated and express more in the written exercises as they have the grammar check and the online dictionary to facilitate their writing skill. There is more participation in discussions during class.
- The students are more expressive in their E-mail as they have no fear of being ridiculed by their peers.
- More interaction in class with the teacher as well as with their peers
- Students ask the teacher questions on culture, places in France, monuments.

FUTURE RESEARCH

1. To promote a study on E-mail exchanges in tandem between Indian students and French native students.
2. To study the effects of Chatting among students.

CONCLUSION

Today's teachers are required by circumstances to connect Learners to an international arena. Learners must have the ability to meet the challenges caused by

globalization, acquire skills and competences for the increasing international competitiveness and to ensure that they have skills that are global in nature. Our traditional teacher centered, classroom bound education needs spring cleaning. The Internet has to be given its true recognition and incorporated into Foreign Language classes as it seems today's mantra for staying in the mainstream. While E-mail is now already considered a relatively "low-tech" medium, it can bring effective benefits to the process of learning a foreign language. The most important benefit is its potential to offer learners opportunities for much more valuable communicative interaction in the target language than was ever possible in the traditional foreign language classroom.

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