

Enhancing Classroom Communication Using Online Quizzes – Experiment in Teaching French as a Foreign Language

Chinika Prabhu

Student, MA French, University of Mumbai (M.S.) India

Abstract

This paper aims at understanding the use of online applications, in a foreign language classroom (French as a foreign language) at secondary and higher secondary school level. The use of technology assisted language learning (TALL) has proven to be beneficial for enhancing active participation of students as well as enriching the student-teacher relationship. This study is based on the organisation of online quizzes using applications in order to encourage the students to communicate effectively in the target language making learning more student-centred, interactive and less monotonous. The Quizlet application, for example, gives opportunity to the students to take charge of their own learning keeping in sync with the socio-constructivist approach. It allows the students to build upon their prior knowledge and revisit the new concepts learnt. The teacher can also keep track of the progress of the students and assign necessary home assignments using this or other similar applications. The classroom activities can be organised individually or in sub-groups which result in creating cohesion in the entire class. Introducing such activities also permits the teacher to play the role of a facilitator and a mediator in the teaching-learning process. Thus, classroom communication no longer remains a one-way process but rather a multiple level, interactive approach i.e. teacher-student, student-teacher and most importantly student-student. This research proves that technology assisted creative strategies for language teaching have the capacity to transform the classroom climate profoundly and make learning more meaningful and pleasant.

Key Words: TALL, interactive, communication, online applications, quiz

Introduction:

The main objective of this research article is to present and analyse the use of online quizzes in the teaching-learning process mainly in a foreign language class. These innovative methods lead to a positive change in the classroom climate while enriching the learner-teacher relationship. However they also have certain limitations which obstruct the optimum use of this methodology. This article gives a generic idea of how and when online quizzes can be used in a foreign language classroom – French as a foreign language and how they have proved to be fruitful in language

acquisition and evaluation through an interactive approach.

Technology Based Teaching-Learning Approach:

The recent innovation in the field of foreign language teaching has been the socio-constructivist approach. According to this approach, responsibility of learning lies on the learner himself. He/she has the complete autonomy of the learning process and is the architect of his/her own understanding. As John Dewey (1916) has said, "*education is not an affair of telling and being told, but an active and constructive process.*" The communicative approach in language teaching is another

remarkable methodology where, “communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence,” (Richards, 2006). This approach focuses on collaborative learning wherein interaction between learners is the key to building one’s knowledge bank.

In a foreign language class, the new emerging technology plays a vital role in building a positive classroom environment making TALL (technology assisted language learning) its important part. The use of interactive exercises on vocabulary and grammar instead of the traditional rote-memory “grammar-translation approach” helps enhance the classroom experience. The students come in contact with the language as it is used in the outside world and enhance their linguistic skills through active classroom communication. Several activities can be planned using online tools, songs, films, videos etc. in order to avoid the monotonous nature of the class and to make the class stimulating.

Methods of Using Online Quizzes in a Language Class:

In order to make a language class more creative and stimulating, a combination of communicative and socio-constructivist approach can be used wherein various techniques and new trends can be applied for classroom activities. Many online tools allow the teachers to make customized quizzes for the students which can be used at different stages of teaching at required group sizes.

A. Prior Knowledge – The teacher can make use of online quizzes to test the prior knowledge of the learners before starting a new topic. As the process of learning is more effective when it builds on the ‘known’ to discover the ‘unknown’, the

use of a quiz at this stage is beneficial for the teacher and the student to assess the prerequisite.

B. Continuous Assessment – In a foreign language class, several quizzes can be organised in order to keep a check on the vocabulary, grammar and communication skills during a unit. This helps the student to understand where he/she lacks and also allows the teacher to plan further lessons according to the needs of the students.

C. Home Assignments – Some online tools like Quizlet allow the teacher to generate home assignments which need to be completed online. The teacher can prepare the required quiz and send it to a group of students to do at home with a deadline for submission. The teacher is notified as and when it is completed by each student.

D. Evaluation – Evaluation can be a sensitive phase which needs to be handled thoughtfully in order to encourage the students to work better. The use of a quiz at this stage can make the students more competitive as well as more confident. It not only helps the teacher to evaluate the student but also helps the student to self-evaluate his/her performance.

These quizzes can be organised using various gadgets depending on the availability of the same and in different group sizes as per the total class size. Students have easy access to laptops, tablets or mobile phones easily at home to do the home assignments. In the class it is possible to organize these quizzes using an interactive board. The teacher can also divide the students in small groups where each group may have access to one laptop or tablet. As many institutes today have a technologically rich library, it may be possible to organise these quizzes in the

library area instead of the normal classroom. However, the availability of this kind of equipment differs in every organisation. Hence, it also depends on the teacher to make the optimum use of the available resources in order to deliver the best to the students.

Positive Changes in Classroom Communication:

This study is based on a close observation and survey done in a French language classroom wherein 17 out of 20 students found this methodology more effective and more challenging in their learning process. Following are some of the positive changes which were observed in this class.

A. Learner Autonomy – These activities gives the learner more control over his/her own learning. The learner takes responsibility of his/her learning as an integral part of the teaching-learning process. As stated by Prof. David Little, Leni Dam, Lienhard Legenhause (2017) "*Knowledge is constructed through the learner's involvement in linguistically mediated interactions, encoded in language, and reproduced via communicative activity (speaking or writing).*" This makes the learning process more learner-centred, i.e. the learner is at the centre of the process. However, with the new methodology and the easy access to information, students often form their own perceptions and frameworks. In this process, the learner builds his/her own sense of language by reading, writing, speaking and - most importantly, thinking.

B. Teacher as a Facilitator – As learners gain autonomy, there is a consequent change in the role of the teacher as well. The teacher is no longer the connoisseur of the class as s/he used to be in the traditional teaching pattern. The teacher

assumes the role of a facilitator who plans the lessons with interactive quizzes which give scope to the students to apply their knowledge.

C. Change in Student-Teacher Relationship - With the change in roles of learners and teachers, there is also a change in their relation in the class. Learners feel more confident and free to express themselves as the teacher is not there just to deliver the information but to make the learners think and to encourage them to ask questions.

D. Multi-Level Communication–Unlike the traditional methods where communication was only one way i.e. teacher to student, now with the revised methods, communication takes place at multiple levels – teacher-student, student-teacher as well as student-student. It is the notion of collaborative learning or group work which brings about this positive change while doing a quiz. Therefore, the entire class works as a team, as one unit.

E. Group Cohesion and Healthy Competition –The learners become friendlier and help each other to overcome their difficulties. The weak learners do not feel discriminated rather they feel motivated by talking to their peers. While making groups for any quiz, the teacher considers the level of different students in order to make heterogeneous groups. This allows the students to compete amongst themselves with a positive attitude - with the sole objective of optimum learning.

F. Motivation - This process of learning and teaching helps the teachers and the learners to self-evaluate. When learners do not perform well during these quizzes, teachers are in a better position to observe their shortcomings. This motivates the teacher to plan the further lessons in order

to help the learner overcome them. Besides, it encourages the learner to work better in order to improve.

Challenges:

Though, the method has shown a lot of benefits, it is equally true that it has certain drawbacks. These are:

A. Large Number of Students – It is possible to organise such quizzes when the total number of students in the class is around 20 or 25. With larger groups it becomes difficult to manage the use of gadgets and avoid the misuse of the same.

B. Lack of Equipment – For these activities to be successful, it is necessary to have access to technology – both, hardware and software. Hence teachers face a big challenge as not all institutes can provide the latest technology.

C. Marks Oriented Mindset – The ultimate goal is to prepare for the final examination where the student is expected to acquire a good score. Therefore, teachers face a dual challenge of preparing the students to use the ‘real language’ and preparing them for a ‘good score’ in the exam which does not really emphasise on the speaking abilities of the learners.

D. Restricted Curriculum Design and Syllabus - Communicative and socio-constructivist methodologies demand a constant change in the curriculum as well - in order to keep in sync with the evolving

technology. However, since the syllabus does not suit these methodologies, teachers find it difficult to implement them. As the syllabus provided by the educational boards does not undergo a major change with the changing times teachers still tend to use obsolete, out-dated books along with the traditional teaching methods.

Conclusion:

By closely observing the use of online tools in classes of French as a foreign language, by analysing their advantages and disadvantages in teaching, this study concludes that using technology-assisted methods definitely brings about a massive positive change in the process of teaching and learning a language. The students seem to feel more connected with the learning. They respond with more enthusiasm and motivation when the new classroom techniques are introduced. They highly appreciate the new-found autonomy in learning. Teachers also enjoy the status of being facilitators in class and to be able to freely interact with the students and understand their problems and concerns. Though, in our education system, there are some big hurdles to overcome, the benefits that these innovations bring to our classrooms are meritorious. They provide a base to transform our classrooms radically thus leading to a positive change in the way a foreign language is taught.

References:

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