

Integration of ICT Tools in French Language Learning- Scope and Role in the Action-Oriented Approach

VINITA TULZAPURKAR

JRF Scholar and Ph D Student
Department of French, University of Mumbai

Abstract

Today, languages have claimed an important position in learning. Foreign-language learning has become an integral part of the Indian education system. Accordingly, French is widely taught in educational institutions. Like all other classrooms, the foreign-language classrooms have evolved and adapted to the use of ICT for learning. This article explores the role of ICT tools in a French language classroom.

The influential Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) advocates the action-oriented approach for language learning. Through ICT-based activities conducted with French language students, this study analyses and defines the scope of ICT tools with respect to key elements of the action-oriented approach such as construction of meaning, collaborative action, task-based pedagogy and learner autonomy.

Keywords: ICT tools, french as a foreign-language, language Learning, action-oriented approach, task-based pedagogy.

Introduction

French-language has a wide learner-base in India. French language learning is governed by a European framework called the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment” — CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), which provides the basis for defining uniform levels of language which imply a certain skill-set. It advocates a communicative approach of language learning.

The techniques used for language learning have also evolved, especially with the innovations in the technological field. ICT—Information and communication technology has inevitably affected classroom practices. Hence, it is pertinent to explore “how” and “for what purposes” should this technology be used.

This article aims to broaden this perspective by establishing a link between the principles purported by the CEFR and the impact of ICT integration in language classrooms. How can ICT be integrated to develop communication skills of French? How can ICT help to motivate and make students independent in their learning? Through this research, the researcher aims to validate the hypothesis— ICT can be integrated in a French language classroom as a tool to ensure quality learning with the communicative and action-oriented approach. The

research studies three popular ICT tools integrated in a French language classroom in the Indian context and analyses the manner in which they uphold the action-oriented approach of language learning.

Review of Literature

Foreign-Language Learning through the Action-Oriented Approach

A language is a dual social reality; a tool of communication and a socio-cultural obstacle, which imposes a systematic linguistic structure (Porcher, 1980). The goal of language learning is to make the learner a language-user, who uses the instrument of language to communicate. Hence, the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) advocates the communicative methodology of language learning and enhances it with an action-oriented approach. Language is considered as a means of not only communicating but also taking action; acting and reacting according to the context.

For a foreign-language learner, language learning entails individually learning the linguistic aspects and understanding their social and cultural implications. A language-learner thus uses his baggage of social experiences to better understand the language (Mascolo & Fischer, 2005) as promulgated by the constructivist theory. The socio-constructivist theory further considers learning

to be a collaborative effort, where meaning is constructed together with others in a social setting. The learner with his own perception of the context and situation, thus becomes the epicentre of the learning process.

The action-oriented approach, specific to language learning, stems from the constructivist and socio-constructivist theories and thus is learner-centric, not only considering him as a user of the language according to his perception but also with respect to other users, in a certain setting, acting as a “social agent” (Council of Europe, 2001, p.9). Considering that language is a way of completing an action, importance is given to acting and reacting with the other social agent-learner. Language is perceived in its “double articulation”- organisation of the meaning and organisation of form (Council of Europe, 2001, p.116). Since, construction and co-construction of meaning is the foremost objective, the action-oriented approach guides the learning from the meaning towards the form.

The action-based approach is administered by the task-based pedagogy. Learners are led to the accomplishment of tasks. The accomplishment of tasks in real life is simulated in language classrooms through role-plays and collaborative activities (Puren, 2006). The pedagogy considers errors as a source of information for improvement. The ultimate objective is to make the learner autonomous not only in his use of the language, but also in his learning, gradually making him independent in the learning process by guiding him from the meaning to the form and then enabling him to construct and co-construct meaning.

ICT in Language Learning

With the advancements in technology and particularly in the context of the pandemic, ICT has carved its place in the field of education (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). With technology, the access to knowledge has broadened. Technology provides an interconnected and interlinked environment which encourages collaboration and participation, not bound by time and space factors (Develotte, 2010). The integration of ICT in language learning is essential to enable the learners to access the foreign-language through an interactive medium, and to

place their learning in the digital context, which is the social reality today.

The advantages of the integration of ICT in learning have been proven (Sangra and Gonzalez-Sanmamed, 2010; Azmi, 2017) and particularly so for language learning (Cakici, 2016; Jayanthi and Kumar, 2016). Certain studies show the particular usefulness of specific ICT tools and how they allow for creativity and improvisation by the students; such as Kahoot (Hong, 2020) and blogs and emails (Rodriguez & Parra, 2005).

However, technology cannot be the catalyst in changing pedagogical practices, the pedagogy should be reformed according to needs and technology should play the role of the tool of change (Watson, 2001). ICT without the correct strategies cannot help in a language classroom. Hue (2020) explores the integration of ICT in the context of the action-oriented approach of language learning and concludes that though ICT tools improve student achievement, they need to be integrated in the classroom after rigorous scrutiny by the teachers. We may conclude that the role of ICT needs to be scrutinised to analyse if it goes beyond enhancement of participation and motivation to attain learning outcomes, here, communicative competencies.

Methodology

This research analyses the impact of integration of ICT tools in a French language classroom, exploring its role in an action-oriented approach through a qualitative research. In order to study this phenomenon, a set of three ICT tools were selected on the basis of their functionality and popularity:

1. Learning Apps
2. Padlet
3. Kahoot

These tools were used to develop and conduct multiple activities over a period of two semesters with a group of 20 students studying French. These students were studying French either in a private institute or in the University of Mumbai. The students were divided into four classes on the basis of their language proficiency (as defined by the CEFRL), and language-related activities pertinent to their linguistic capacities were conducted. The

distribution of students according to the classes is as follows:

Table 1 Distribution of Students According to Language Level

Level of Language (as defined by CEFRL)	No. of Students
A1	3
A2	3
B1	9
B2	5
Total	20

After the period of two semesters, a questionnaire was developed in English to receive a feedback from the students. It elicited the students' opinion, broadly divided into three parts-

1. Pertinence of Integration of ICT in classrooms
2. Usefulness of Individual ICT tools
3. Scope of ICT in the future

In the context of the pandemic, the classes were conducted online, on the "Zoom" platform. "Google Classroom" was the Learning Management System that provided the setting for coordination, communication of material and feedback. The activities were either conducted during the class or they were assigned to students as homework.

This researcher played the role of the teacher, to gain an insight of the formulation and implementation of ICT-based activities in a foreign-language classroom. The observations of this researcher and the feedback of the students form the corpus of this study. The deductions aim at analysing how the popularly used ICT tools support the action-oriented approach of foreign-language learning, in an online environment.

Results

This researcher, in the role of the teacher, conceptualised and created the activities using the ICT tools for implementation at various stages in the French language classroom. All students actively participated in the tasks assigned, using all the different ICT tools, either in class (online) or as a home assignment.

Table 2 Types of Activities Conducted with the ICT Tools

ICT tools	Types of Activities
Learning Apps	1. Revision of Grammar 2. Vocabulary 3. Listening Exercises 4. MCQs based on Videos/Articles
Padlet	1. Note/Letter writing 2. Expression of opinion 3. Speaking exercises
Kahoot	1. Revision of Grammar 2. Trivia quiz 3. Formative evaluation (to verify comprehension)

The observations and feedback received from students for the activities conducted is presented in three parts. The figures represent the data/feedback received from the students in the questionnaire.

Integration of ICT in classrooms

According to the researcher's experience, ICT tools enhanced student participation and motivation and helped to approach content creatively. Students state that ICT tools enhance language learning by making it "interactive, interesting and flexible". Students think that ICT tools motivate them to learn and make them more responsible. For example, one student expressed the following:

"Though everybody is at his own place, one can respond each others' homework . One can complete the activity according to one's convenient time. One can practice the exercise again and again. They are really useful."

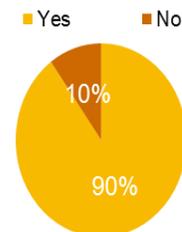


Figure 1 : Does the use of technology generate interest or motivate you to learn?

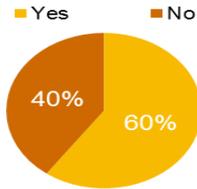


Figure 2 : Does the use of ICT in language classrooms help you to take charge and be responsible for your learning/ progress?

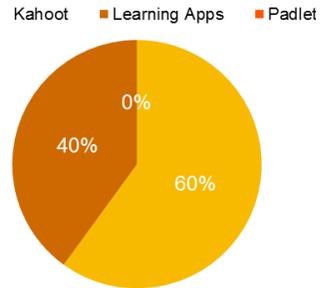


Figure 5 Which of the Following ICT Tools do you find the most Interesting to Work with?

Individual ICT Tools

Google Classroom is an efficient LMS which facilitated material and resource sharing, assignment of work and feedback. This researcher found it convenient to give individual feedback (qualitative and quantitative) to students on their work. “Zoom” provided an online environment with features that allowed group as well as individual activities. This researcher (as the teacher) used the whiteboard for explanations and the break-out rooms were used for group activities. Students’ opinion reflects the usefulness of these platforms.

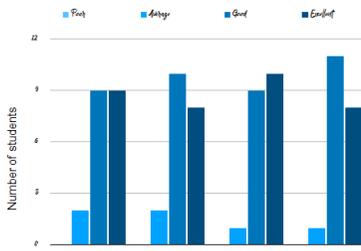


Figure 3 Rate “Google Classroom” on a Scale of 1 to 4

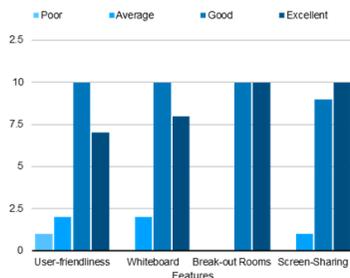


Figure 4 Rate “Zoom” on a Scale of 1 to 4

Of the three ICT tools, the students preferred working with Kahoot, the most.

This teacher created activities for revision as well as for a formative evaluation using Kahoot. Kahoot provided a user-friendly platform for creation of quizzes. The set-up, the background score and imagery made the game interesting. Students found it interactive and fun.

“Kahoot helps me focus and builds my competitive behaviour, thus making me want to learn as quickly as possible, hence piquing my interest to learn.”

“Kahoot requires us to respond quickly which makes us aware of how fast we can interpret the questions and answer it”

“Learning Apps” provides a variety of templates to choose from which enabled this researcher to formulate multifarious activities. The activities are individual and have an in-built evaluation system, and thus students independently completed the tasks, without having to consult the teacher at each stage. 65% of the students confirmed that they redid the activities on Learning Apps for practice.

“I tried till I got all correct, which actually made me learn that topic completely.”

“It allows you to practice according to your pace & time. It allows to practice repeatedly.”

“You can do thorough study of one topic and then test yourself.”

“Padlet” provides a collaborative space where students expressed themselves, orally or in writing. Moreover, it allowed students to read, comment and appreciate others’ work. However, only 65% liked posting their work on Padlet.

ICT in the Future

Learners responded positively when asked if ICT should be regularly integrated in their language classroom.

“ICT gives learners access to information, promote interaction and communication, and enhance digital literacy skills.”

“It is fun to learn online and the tools are pretty easy to understand.”

Overall, the integration of ICT tools in language classrooms enhances learning and makes it interactive. This researcher observed that language skills taught in the class with the help of ICT tools were put to use by the students during activities. The semester-end evaluations reflected an improvement in performance and an acquisition of language skills. The objectives of learning were thus fulfilled, enhanced by the ICT tools.

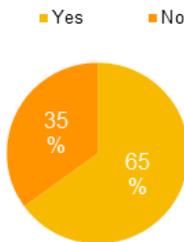


Figure 6 Did you like Posting your Work on Padlet?

Discussion

In this section, the scope and role of these ICT tools is analysed with respect to some key elements of the action-oriented approach.

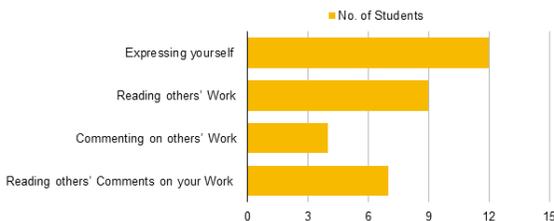


Figure 7 If yes, which aspect(s) did

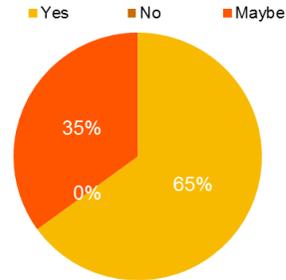


Figure 8 Would you like ICT Tools to be Regularly Integrated

Construction and Co-Construction of Meaning

The action-oriented approach emphasises on the construction of meaning, advocating a process where the learners approach the meaning first, then comprehend the form and finally create meaning themselves.

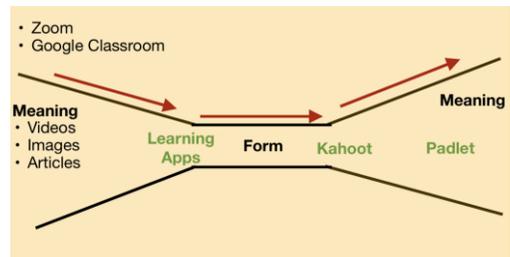


Figure 9 Meaning to Form

The ICT tools have facilitated this process. Zoom and Google Classroom provided the setting for the learning. Multimedia (Videos, Images, Articles on websites) gave access to meaning— use of language in real-life situations. Learning Apps enabled the passage from meaning to form (conceptualise and practise the grammar). Kahoot facilitated the next step— reinforcement, revision and evaluation of the concepts learnt. Padlet provided a platform for expression, thus enabling students to construct the meaning themselves and co-construct it with their peers. A carefully curated learning process, integrating the right ICT tools at the pertinent stage, enabled the passage from meaning to form and then construction of meaning.

Learner - A Social Agent

In the action-oriented approach, the learner is considered to be a social agent who acts and interacts with society.

The collaborative activities made the learners play different roles in the group. A social agent also accomplishes actions. Thus, a language-learner has to accomplish tasks that may be directly or indirectly language-related. This is illustrated by interactions in the classroom where the students interacted with one another or with the teacher regarding the ICT tools. "How to solve, when to solve, which website to use, how to post answers" were the type of questions discussed, in the foreign-language. Moreover, as pointed out by a student, they developed "digital skills" using these tools. Thus, ICT tools enhanced interaction and digital skills (using French), thus shaping the learners as francophone social agents.

Task-Based Pedagogy and Pedagogy of Error

The action-oriented approach is rooted in a task-based pedagogy, presenting parallels to real-life situations. Padlet provided a platform which simulated a discussion forum, enabling students to explore French as their medium of expression in a life-like situation.

A pedagogy of error exploits errors as source of information. In the classroom, the teacher used the students' errors to reformulate activities. Kahoot enabled the teacher to individually spot repeated errors and construct a revision activity. Moreover, Learning Apps allowed students to redo activities and correct their errors. As confirmed by them, this enabled them to clarify doubts and grasp the concept.

Implication, Motivation and Autonomy

Affective elements play a key-role in the accomplishment of tasks. ICT tools helped create a positive social environment where the students were involved in the learning process. The possibility of synchronous and asynchronous tasks with ICT tools ensured learning beyond the classroom. In the classroom, features like "Break-out Rooms" enabled multi-modal activities (individual, in pairs and in groups). The interactivity and variety brought to the classroom by the ICT tools involved the students in their work, leading to intrinsic motivation and an inclination to learn and grow. This enabled the passage from dependent to independent learners. The learners took charge of their learning with discipline. From

the linguistic point of view, the learners gradually became autonomous in the language use. In terms of learning, ICT tools helped the students be aware of their progress and take charge of their development.

Conclusion

ICT tools have enhanced the learning process with an innovative, multi-sensorial and interactive setting. However, apart from the limitations caused by the requirement of uninterrupted access to Internet and technical instruments, these tools present certain limitations at the functional and operational level.

Collaboration and exchange may generate a language-related anxiety in some students. Moreover, the interactivity of ICT tools runs the risk of becoming the focal point of the classroom. The ultimate goal is learning French. However, learners may be distracted by the ICT tools and lose focus of their objective. Thus, the teacher needs to be pertinent in ICT integration.

ICT tools have enabled and enhanced the teaching-learning process, in spite of certain risks and limitations. The observations of this researcher and the feedback of the students have proven that ICT tools can be integrated in a Foreign-language Classroom to motivate the students and develop their communication skills. At all levels of language learning, ICT integration has proven to be conducive to learning based on the action-oriented approach. The analysis presented above helps to validate our hypothesis — ICT can be integrated in a French language classroom as a tool to ensure quality learning with the communicative and action-oriented approach. We wish to further this research and explore the full potential and scope of ICT tools in foreign-language learning, in order to refine the teaching-learning process, keeping in line with the principles of the action-oriented approach.

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