

Chapter 4. Foreign Language

Myriam Met

Every day, foreign language teachers make important instructional decisions as they plan and implement lessons. Research can make a significant contribution in informing these decisions, so that daily instruction reflects the best of what is known about foreign language teaching and learning. Research cannot and does not identify the right or best way to teach, nor does it suggest that certain instructional practices should always or should never be used. But research *can* illuminate which instructional practices are most likely to achieve desired results, with which kinds of learners, and under which conditions. Foreign language professionals know more today than ever about how learners acquire new languages and about the conditions under which language acquisition is most likely to occur.

The prevailing view among foreign language educators today is that the goal of instruction is to prepare students to function effectively in the real-life situations they are likely to encounter. This view, most frequently associated with the terms "proficiency-oriented instruction" or "communicative language teaching," has had a substantial impact on foreign language teaching practices in the last decade. The research base for communicative language instructional practices is both direct and indirect. Some evidence directly supports practices associated with the communicative approach; other practices may be inferred from the research on cognition and information processing. While some of the evidence to support emerging approaches may be indirect or limited, it should also be noted that there is a scant body of research to support past approaches to foreign language teaching, particularly the grammar-based approach.

Current constructivist theories of learning are consistent with the communicative approach

to foreign language teaching and learning. As a result, foreign language educators share many beliefs about good instruction with those in other disciplines:

- Learners must be actively engaged in constructing their own understandings and knowledge.
- New knowledge builds on previous knowledge, and the learner's background knowledge plays a significant role in the construction of meaning.
- Classroom tasks should closely parallel the real-life tasks to which students may expect to apply their knowledge and skills.
- Real-life tasks are meaningful, purposeful, and rooted in context.
- Approaches to assessment should reflect the complexity of integrating knowledge and skills into performance.

Some cautions about interpreting the research reported in this chapter and its implications for classrooms are in order. The research base in foreign language education, particularly in secondary schools, is not extensive. Educators and pedagogical theoreticians are, therefore, forced to rely on studies drawn from English as a Second Language (ESL) settings, on research conducted primarily with postsecondary learners, or on research based on short-term studies. In addition, implications for foreign language instruction are occasionally extrapolated from research in first-language development, particularly in the area of reading and writing skills development. Keeping these limitations in mind when interpreting the research, it appears that learners benefit from:

- extensive exposure to meaningful, understandable language in use;
- opportunities to use the target language to interact with others, to understand others, and to make oneself understood;

- opportunities to use the target language in tasks that reflect real-life purposes and require the exchange of meaning;
- culture instruction that links cultural information, skills in observation and analysis, and ways to make meaning in a socioculturally appropriate manner;
- explicit instruction in strategies that facilitate making meaning when reading or listening to the foreign language; and
- the use of certain technological resources to assist in language learning and practice.

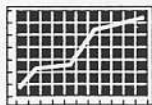
There are a number of areas of interest to foreign language educators where research is equivocal or minimal. Research is equivocal on the role of explicit grammar instruction and on the benefits of error correction. Further research evidence is needed that elucidates:

- the variables that affect the ways in which technology can enhance language learning, particularly in the area of distance learning;

- effective ways to teach culture, teach cross-cultural communication, and reduce ethnocentrism;
- the relationship between length and frequency of class meetings (i.e., spaced practice) and language attrition/loss, a question of particular interest to those considering block scheduling; and
- the development of reading and writing skills in secondary language learners.

While research may provide direction in many areas, it provides few clear-cut answers in most. Teachers continue to be faced daily with critical decisions about how best to achieve the instructional goals embedded in professional or voluntary state or national standards. A combination of research-suggested instructional practices and professional judgment and experience is most likely to produce students who can fill the need for a language-competent America.

4.1. Comprehensible Input: Extensive access to comprehensible input is required for acquisition of the target language.



Research findings:

Most researchers and classroom practitioners today acknowledge the critical role that comprehension plays in language acquisition. Comprehensible input is a term coined by Krashen to describe language (oral or written) that is understandable. For language growth to occur, Krashen posits that input must not only be understandable, but must also contain language that is just beyond the learner's current capacity. Some researchers also point out that salient features of the input must be "noticed" by the learner in order for "intake" to occur. That is, merely understanding the message may be insufficient; learners must also take note of the way the message is conveyed. Language development proceeds, then, from understanding what is heard (comprehensible input); noticing salient features in the input (intake), particularly those that are not yet part of the learner's repertoire; and internalizing language features that eventually become part of the learner's production.

Studies of students in immersion programs (programs in which the language is the medium of instruction for at least half of the school day) show that students develop high levels of language proficiency. Comprehensible input is accepted by most researchers as a necessary condition for successful language acquisition.



In the classroom:

The learners' need for comprehensible input suggests that teachers should use the target language extensively. Use of English decreases opportunities for comprehensible input and intake; conversely, extensive use of the target language provides an important source of input.

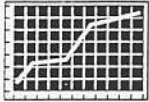
Teachers' language must be understandable to the learner, with multiple clues to meaning. These may include visuals, body language, and context clues to promote student understanding. In addition, comprehensible input and subsequent intake can be facilitated through use of readings that are understandable to students because of students' prior knowledge, visual cues, and context cues within the text itself. For example, reading an advertisement in a foreign language can be facilitated by knowledge of the text type (how advertisements are structured and where information can be found), prior knowledge of the advertised service or product, linguistic cues (recognizing word families or cognates), or visuals. Listening to and following commands and listening to books on tape while reading the print versions are also effective means of developing language skills.



References:

Asher 1984; Ellis 1990, 1993; Krashen 1982; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; Lightbown 1992.

4.2. Opportunities for Interaction: Frequent opportunities for interaction in the language, especially with their peers, help students develop oral language proficiency.



Research findings:

A number of studies have examined interaction in the classroom. These studies have shown that tasks in which students need to negotiate meaning (that is, make themselves understood and work to understand others) contribute to language growth. Further, student-to-student interaction may require more negotiation of meaning than teacher-student interaction. Teachers all too often are able to understand student utterances regardless of how poorly formed and communicated, while classmates may be less capable of deciphering their peers' mangled messages, increasing the need for students to work on understanding and being understood.

Tasks that depend on a meaningful exchange of information among students generate more negotiation of meaning than those in which information exchange is not required. Research has also shown that students working in pairs or groups do not produce more errors than in teacher-conducted instruction, that students can successfully correct one another, and that students do not learn one another's mistakes.

While research supports the importance of comprehensible input as a necessary condition for language development, research also suggests that input by itself is insufficient for the development of the ability to speak or write another language. The "comprehensible output" hypothesis holds that the need to express one's meanings leads learners to consider the relationships between meaning and form, and to refine their language so that it is comprehensible to others.



In the classroom:

The research findings suggest that teachers should provide extensive opportunities for students to interact with one another.

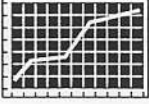
Interactive tasks are most beneficial when they require students to negotiate meaning and to exchange information in order to complete the task. These tasks may involve an information gap (each student in a pair may have one part of the information needed) or an opinion gap (each student needs to find out the other's views/opinions). An information gap task may require students to negotiate purchases based on the shopping list that one of the students has and the various store advertisements the other has, in order for the pair to buy a given set of items within a fixed amount. An opinion gap task may require students to find out their partners' preferences and then compare and contrast how these preferences are similar to and/or different from their own. Pooling and exchanging needed information will promote negotiated interactions between students.



References:

Doughty and Pica 1986; Gass and Varonis 1985; Long and Porter 1985; Nunan 1991; Swain 1985.

4.3. Communicative Language Practice: When classroom language practice is set in a context and requires meaningful and purposeful language use, students are enabled to communicate in a foreign language.



Research findings:

Researchers have found that engaging in interactive communication is necessary to develop fluency and to construct an understanding of the grammatical structure of the target language.

Cognitive theory suggests that language learners need to develop *automaticity* (speed, fluency, and efficiency) of language use, and be enabled to put their knowledge of the language to use in performance. Research suggests that learners can achieve automatic control of knowledge through practice under real operating conditions. That is, classroom practice needs to parallel authentic communication to the fullest extent possible, and students need adequate opportunities to develop the procedural knowledge necessary for real-life communication.



In the classroom:

Communicative language teaching is organized around the purposes people have for communicating and the things people do when they communicate. In foreign languages, this communication-based approach has been termed "proficiency-based," "proficiency-oriented," or "communicative" instruction.

Communication is a process of collaborative meaning-making. It involves interpreting the meanings conveyed by others, expressing one's own meanings, and negotiating meanings to ensure that one understands and is understood. If the goal of language learning is communication, it follows that the classroom should provide opportunities for language practice and use that include the critical features of communication: *it is always set in a context, has a purpose, and involves interpreting and/or expressing meaning.*

Foreign language educators have proposed principles for foreign language instruction derived from the research on language learning:

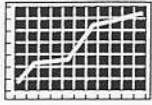
- Foreign language activities should be set in a meaningful context and be meaning-driven.
- Students should have opportunities to practice using language that reflect the range of contexts they are likely to encounter and the functions (tasks) they may need to carry out outside the classroom.
- Students should be encouraged to express their own meanings.
- Students need to be stretched to the limits of their language repertoire.



References:

Ellis 1990; Omaggio 1993; Savignon 1991; Shrum and Glisan 1994.

4.4. Instruction in Learning Strategies: Explicit instruction in learning strategies can help students learn languages more easily and increase student autonomy.



Research findings:

A number of studies have shown that teaching students the purpose, nature, and appropriate use of language learning strategies has long-term benefits. Explicit strategies instruction has been found to contribute to learner autonomy and enhanced language acquisition. Students who use strategies frequently and effectively are self-directed and autonomous learners who can manage their own learning with less dependence on teachers for guidance and direction.



In the classroom:

Learning strategies are mechanisms through which students engage in the process of learning and by which they can become more autonomous learners. Some learners discover and use these strategies independently without explicit knowledge of the strategy or awareness that they are using it. Researchers have investigated the strategies used by successful learners with the end goal of teaching these strategies explicitly to all students. These include:

- *Metacognitive strategies*—processes such as monitoring one's comprehension and production (checking to ensure that one understands the text as one is reading), self-assessment (evaluating the effectiveness of one's communication), and planning (brainstorming needed vocabulary and structures or outlining ideas prior to undertaking a writing task).
- *Cognitive strategies*—those used to organize information for learning (making a vocabulary web, or pairing synonymous or antonymous adjectives); to elaborate information (explaining to oneself how one aspect of cultural behavior is like another, drawing inferences about a grammar rule from given examples, or calling on prior knowledge); or to practice (rehearsing, experimenting, or imitating).
- *Social/affective strategies*—interactions such as asking peers or the teacher for assistance or clarification, collaborating with others, requesting feedback on one's communicative efforts, and self-talk to lower anxiety and urge oneself on.

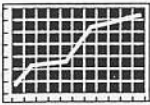
Teachers can help students be more successful learners by teaching students what learning strategies are and when to use them.



References:

Chamot and Kupper 1989; O'Malley and Chamot 1993, 1990; Oxford 1990; Rubin 1981, 1995; Wenden 1991.

4.5. Instruction in Listening and Reading for Meaning: Teaching students effective ways to listen and read results in more fluent listeners and readers.



Research findings:

In addition to more general learning strategies, research has identified a number of strategies used by effective listeners and effective readers. Local strategies include using cognates and contextual clues, skipping over unknown words, and using linguistic knowledge (grammatical structures, word families). Global strategies include using background knowledge or evaluating/validating one's predictions and hypotheses. Fluent *readers* are able to predict text content and developments; they synthesize information from the text with their own background knowledge to construct an understanding of the text; and they self-monitor (check for comprehension) and self-regulate (consciously use strategies). Similarly, effective *listeners* use top-down strategies such as predicting based on background knowledge to construct meaning. They also monitor their own comprehension and they set a purpose that guides what they listen for. They synthesize their background knowledge with the context and message of what they hear. The most successful listeners use more, as well as more varied, strategies.

At lower levels of foreign language proficiency, students use fewer of the comprehension strategies that underlie successful first-language reading, and use these strategies less effectively.



In the classroom:

Teachers can improve foreign language students' ability to listen and read for meaning by providing explicit instruction in effective listening and reading strategies.

Although listening and reading differ in terms of time constraints and the opportunity to go back to parts of the message that were not understood, there are, nonetheless, great similarities in what is involved in successful listening and reading.

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Models for teaching reading and listening developed by researchers include several stages:

- *Pre-reading/pre-listening activities* teach students to anticipate and predict based on background knowledge, use of advance organizers, and contextual cues. Teachers may need to supply cultural background information and establish a purpose for listening.
- *Skimming/scanning tasks* help students to locate specific information.
- *Decoding/intensive reading activities* may include guessing content or the meaning of unknown words and phrases and using connecting words to ascertain relationships within and between sentences. Decoding helps students develop rapidity by teaching them to cope with unknowns that might slow them down as they read. Intensive reading helps to identify main ideas and related supporting details.
- *Comprehension activities* include checks to see whether students have fulfilled the purpose for reading or listening, and having students summarize information or compare their interpretations with supporting evidence in the text.
- *Transfer activities* and personal reactions allow students to apply reading/listening strategies to new tasks or contexts. Students personally respond to what they have read or listened to, and compare their own perspective with that given in the oral or written materials.

Both reading and listening require an extensive vocabulary and knowledge of the structure of the language. Since foreign language readers know far fewer words than

do native speakers, vocabulary development is critical to reading ability in another language. This is not to suggest, however, that pre-teaching vocabulary using lists of new words is beneficial. Rather, it is more effective to present new vocabulary in the context and topic of the text (oral or written). Teachers can use pre- and post-reading/listening activities to link vocabulary to linguistic knowledge such as word families, synonyms, and how context affects meaning.

Text organization and culture also influence the ability to interpret meaning. Certain text organizations facilitate recall (for example, cause-effect, compare-contrast). Because different cultures tend to organize texts differently, teachers can aid student comprehension by capitalizing on text organization where it is facilitative or by pointing out organizational differences when they may interfere with processing meaning.

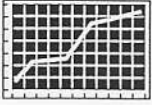
Other research-based recommendations for teaching reading comprehension skills include: instructing students in specific strategies and extensive reading for long, concentrated periods to help students develop automaticity, increase their vocabulary and awareness of language and text structures, and develop confidence and motivation.



References:

Bacon 1992; Barnett 1986, 1995; Carrell 1984; Chamot et al. 1987; Glisan 1988, 1995; Grabe 1991; Phillips 1984; Shrum and Glisan 1994.

4.6. Writing Instruction: Effective approaches to the teaching of writing in the foreign language classroom should reflect student needs, abilities, and purposes for writing.



Research findings:

Most research on the teaching of writing has been done with students writing in their first language. Research on writing in a second language has been done primarily with English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, not with English-speaking students learning a foreign language. Of these studies, very few have been done with students below the college level or below the intermediate level of language proficiency.

Among the findings in an extensive review of the literature on teaching writing in the student's first language (L1) were: teaching grammar in isolation does not improve writing; sentence combining can contribute to improved writing; and the use of criteria/checklists for peer editing can improve writing.

A thorough review of the foreign language research related to error correction found that studies are inconclusive. The effectiveness of error correction approaches seems to vary by student cognitive style, student attitudes toward the teacher, and teacher approach to error correction. Research studies suggest that error correction may be beneficial when teachers provide a code for composition errors that students use for self-correcting and rewriting their text, or when teachers underline errors and students then rewrite. One study found that grading compositions did not affect the quantity of errors, but did result in longer compositions with more complex language.



In the classroom:

When deciding what methods to use to teach writing, teachers should consider the proficiency level of students, the purposes for writing, the intended audience, and the needs and preferences of the students.

Students of foreign languages may benefit from learning the writing strategies used by good first-language (L1) writers: they plan, pause frequently to reread what has been written and to plan what will come next, and revise. They are recursive—that is, they go back over and over again to make sure their meaning will be clear to the reader. Good writers have an awareness of their audience and bear in mind the needs of the reader. However, teachers of foreign languages should be aware that, while L1 writing research may provide some guidance for foreign language instruction, there is some question as to whether L1 writing is similar to writing in a foreign language and whether writing skills from L1 transfer. Further, the organization and style of discourse may differ between languages.

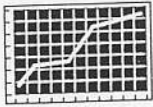
Although the effectiveness of error correction is questionable, some studies show that students want their errors corrected. Error correction may range from teacher comments without corrections, to comments with corrections embedded, to suggestions for improvement, to identification of the type of error without help, to a coding system for student self-correction, to explicit error correction. In addition, teachers may choose when to correct errors: always? only on the final product? only on early drafts? Teacher decisions may also depend on the kind of writing to be done and its purpose.



References:

Chastain 1990; Cooper 1981; Fathman and Whalley 1990; Gass and Magnan 1993; Hillocks 1986; Kaplan 1966; Krapels 1990; Krashen 1984; Lalande 1982; Omaggio 1993; Rieken 1991.

4.7. Explicit Grammar Instruction: Some types of explicit grammar instruction can improve students' grammatical competence.



Research findings:

The role of formal grammar instruction in language learning has occasioned great debate in the last decade, with research showing moderate, but not conclusive, value for explicit grammar teaching. Studies comparing students who receive grammar instruction with those who do not have shown varied results, in part because of the limitations of research designs themselves: length of the study, nature of the grammar point itself in light of each student's readiness to learn it, and method of assessment. The question of error correction is closely aligned with questions about how to develop grammatical accuracy. Reviewers of the research on error correction in foreign language instruction have found that the results are inconclusive. The studies conducted have produced contradictory evidence for the value of error correction of written work or during oral communicative activities.



In the classroom:

It is unclear whether explicit grammar instruction helps language development. The value of grammar instruction may be to highlight the structure or morphology in the input so that students gain a heightened awareness (that is, they notice the feature in the input). Over time, with sufficient exposure to comprehensible input containing the language feature, students will incorporate it into their own internalized system and produce it with ever-increasing frequency and accuracy. In contrast, grammar instruction aimed at immediate production is unlikely to be successful.

Teachers can promote language development by providing students with extensive input that includes new grammar points. Teachers may use explicit instruction combined with implicit activities to draw students' attention to significant language features. Or, tasks may require students to demonstrate their comprehension of the feature (for example, "Which word in this sentence tells whether the event took place already?").

If the purpose of grammar instruction is to enable students to notice features in the input (leading to intake), then instruction should begin with input in which the feature is deliberately embedded and in which the feature is noticeably salient (for example, a story contrasting events that took place in the past vs. events yet to take place). Teachers may then draw students' attention to the feature through a series of well-designed, meaning-focused input activities (oral and/or written) that require students to attend to the new features at the sentence and discourse level. This type of interactive, guided-induction approach can help students construct their own understanding of the grammatical principles involved.

Teachers should have realistic expectations about the ability of students to accurately produce grammar, especially while students are still gaining an understanding of a new grammar concept. Most importantly, teachers should be mindful that it takes time for students to gain control over grammar.

Teachers will need to consider a wide range of options for correcting student errors to determine which errors should be corrected, under which circumstances, and the form of correction in light of the purposes of the activity. Decisions about when and how to correct errors will depend on the purpose of the lesson, the nature of the error, and student variables. There is a range of options for correcting errors in students' oral and written production. Some theorists have argued that only certain types of errors

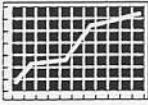
should be corrected. For example, since discourse-level errors (such as word order) are more likely to result in miscommunication than are sentence-level errors (such as the wrong ending on the verb), the former may be more important to correct.



References:

Adair-Hauck, Donato, and Cumo 1994; Celce-Murcia 1991; Dekeyser 1993; Ellis 1993; Gass and Magnan 1993; Heilenman 1995; Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991; Mings 1993; Schmidt and Frota 1986; Van Patten 1993.

4.8. Integration of Culture: Integrating culture in language instruction improves students' ability to communicate and function in another culture.



Research findings:

Research on cross-cultural communication indicates that cultures vary in the ways in which individual factors such as sex, age, and the relationship between speakers play a role in determining how one may speak to whom. Variables inherent in the social relationships and context of communication also influence how messages determine choice of lexicon or grammatical forms. The rules governing the expressing of apologies, complaints, requests, and compliments also vary across languages.

A review of the research on the teaching of culture highlighted four factors important in preparing students for success. Teachers need to understand:

- the roles of student attitudes toward language learning in general and their willingness to learn about and understand other cultures;
- the process of acculturation: learning to see the world through the perspectives of others is a process that teachers must facilitate and support, as this process can be emotionally provocative for students;
- readiness for culture learning: since culture learning goes beyond facts to understanding of the beliefs, behaviors, and values of a culture, students must be prepared to cope with ambiguity and frustration.
- the role of self-awareness: students must understand how they are bound to their own cultural beliefs, behaviors, and values.

Research on current practices in the teaching of culture suggests that the compare-and-contrast approach to culture may lead to misperceptions. When teachers are careful to contrast cultural differences, students tend to assume that whatever has not been specifically addressed as different between cultures is, by default, the same. Similarly, using a "shared humanity" viewpoint as a point of departure in culture teaching further encourages students to assume implicit differences whenever explicit similarities are not addressed.

Research also suggests that it is unlikely that full cultural understanding can take place in the classroom, as students need the experience of being in the target culture and experiencing it. Student attitudes toward other cultures are enhanced when students have both information and direct contact with other cultures.



In the classroom:

Culture instruction focuses on developing several areas of student competence: skill in cross-cultural communication, knowledge about the civilization and daily life patterns of the target culture, and ability to observe and analyze another culture. Ultimately, language educators hope to develop positive student attitudes toward the people whose language and culture they are learning.

Culture instruction cannot and should not be separated from language instruction, because culture is the playing field on which language use takes place. Culture gives meaning to words, and different cultures may define words differently (for example, family, home, bread, work). Communicating accurately is more than using grammar and vocabulary correctly; it is ensuring that one can convey and interpret meanings accurately within the cultural context of communication. Learners may not be able to parallel native speaker usage, but research on cross-cultural communication can help make students aware of potential differences in how meanings are conveyed and sen-

sitize them to the possibility of miscommunicating. Instruction may focus on helping students react appropriately to a variety of communicative differences, but may focus on only one or two important strategies for conveying their own meanings accurately.

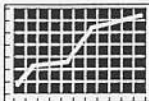
Many theorists suggest that the purpose of culture instruction is not to teach facts, but rather to enable students to interpret the facts they encounter in order to increase their understanding. This problem-solving approach (as opposed to a facts-based approach) is necessary because facts are always changing; teaching facts may reinforce stereotypes rather than dispel them; and teaching facts will not, by itself, prepare students for successful encounters with the culture outside the classroom. Students also need to recognize how their own culture pervades their attitudes and beliefs, and the dangers of projecting these onto another culture.



References:

Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991; Mantle-Bromley 1992; Olshtain 1993; Omaggio 1993; Robinson 1981.

4.9. Appropriate Assessment of Student Progress: The design and methods of student assessment should be appropriate to measure the kinds of information desired about student progress.



Research findings:

Researchers have found that assessment methods affect assessment results. For example, the extent and type of language that students produce in an oral task varies according to whether students are face-to-face with their interlocutor or speaking to a recording device. Oral production may also vary according to other testing conditions: whether the test requires spontaneous or prepared speech; whether the student speaks to the teacher, to other students, or into a recording device; and whether the task requires responses to specific questions, picture description, or is conversational in nature. Performance on reading comprehension tasks varies both by the nature of the task and the language of response—students perform differently on tasks that require constructed responses (such as open-ended questions) than on those requiring recognition and/or selection (e.g., multiple choice).

Beginning in the early 1980s, researchers began to focus on assessing students' ability to use their knowledge to communicate in real or simulated situations. To find out whether students could explain how to get from one place in town to another, researchers had students role-play giving directions. To find out whether students could listen with comprehension to gain information, researchers asked students to listen to a weather report to determine which types of activities and clothing would be appropriate on a given day. These tasks look at student performance—the ability to use knowledge and to integrate skills—rather than at knowledge or skills in isolation.



In the classroom:

Teachers assess students for diagnostic purposes as well as to ascertain the level of student learning. Teachers may find written tests of knowledge one of many useful sources of information. But these tests should be part of a broader assessment approach that looks at the student's ability to integrate knowledge in use.

Complementary assessments that provide multiple sources of evidence of student learning, including tests, should be used to measure and evaluate student progress. Oral performances, whether spontaneous or rehearsed, are important if the goal of language learning is to use language to communicate. Similarly, the ability to communicate in writing needs to be assessed through communicative writing tasks. Among the many possible sources of information about student progress are: dialogue journals; teacher-student interviews; teacher observations; student reports, exhibits, and demonstrations; student self-assessment; and portfolios of student work.

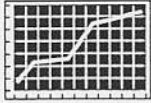
Finding out what students know and can do in their new language requires multiple sources of information and differing types of assessments. If the goal of instruction is to enable students to use the language to communicate, then tests should examine whether, indeed, students can communicate.



References:

Huebener and Jensen 1992; Phillips 1995; Shohamy 1984, 1991, 1994; Underhill 1987; Wolf 1993.

4.10. Use of Technology: Use of various forms of technology can result in improved skills in comprehending and producing a second language.



Research findings:

Because the use of technology in foreign language instruction is relatively new, the research base relating technology to language learning is not extensive. Studies have shown that use of word processors for composing in a foreign language improved student attitudes toward writing, increased accuracy in spelling and grammar, increased complexity of expression, and improved student writing. Other forms of technology have also been researched. Video-supported instruction, including use of captioned video, has been shown to improve listening comprehension. Video that allows students to call on prior knowledge and experience, and that provides visual cues to the meaning of what students hear, results in greater student learning.

One study found that individual learner characteristics such as strategy use, learning style, motivation, and gender had significant impact on the effectiveness of distance learning. Despite the proliferation of distance learning opportunities, little research is available to document its effectiveness. Many foreign language educators believe that while distance learning can contribute to language learning, by itself it cannot meet the objectives of most language curricula or standards, particularly those related to spoken language. Since the ability to communicate orally depends on opportunities to negotiate meaning through purposeful interaction, the efficacy of distance learning may rest, in part, on the quality and quantity of provision made for student interaction.



In the classroom:

Technology is increasingly used in all subjects as part of the teaching/learning process. In addition to the use of word processing software, video-supported instruction, and distance learning mentioned above, there are many ways that foreign language teachers can make use of technological tools.

An area that offers great promise, although little research has been conducted to date, is that of computer communications. Computer communications, particularly the on-line chat mode, have many of the features of oral discourse. They involve spontaneous, unrehearsed, informal language use that focuses on meaning rather than on form. Communication networks have a number of positive features that contribute to language development, including increased student participation and lowered anxiety levels due to the psychological distance imposed by computer-mediated communication.

The Internet and World Wide Web can provide access to resources that are richer and far more extensive than those available in most school or community libraries. Because these provide immediate access to authentic language and cultural resources, they can significantly impact the ways in which language is practiced and enrich opportunities for meaningful contact with the target language without physically leaving the classroom.



References:

Garza 1991; Oxford et al. 1993; Pusack and Otto 1995; Rubin 1990; Secules, Herron, and Tomasello 1992.

References

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