

Engaging and Motivating Foreign Language Learners with Audiovisual Aids: The Case of French in Selected High Schools in Ghana

Mensimah Thompson Kwaffo, Ashesi University, Ghana

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Abstract

The integration of multimedia in language teaching and learning has been a subject of interest to many educators in recent times, as research has shown its impact to be outstanding. In Ghana, French as a foreign language (FFL) is the only foreign language, aside English, which is taught from the early stages of the educational trajectory through to tertiary levels. Studies however confirm that very few of Ghana's populace is fluent in French, despite all measures put in place. This study seeks to explore the use of audiovisual teaching and learning materials in the FFL classroom, whilst exposing the benefits of using videos to motivate FFL learners and develop their communicative competence. An exploratory study is conducted in selected senior high schools in a Ghanaian city. Data is gathered using questionnaires, interview guides and a non-participant observation of an FFL lesson which integrates video as the main instructional material. Although the FFL teachers attest to sometimes using audiovisuals in class, we gather that the integration of videos in the FFL classrooms is almost nonexistent, given some challenges. Despite the setbacks, both teachers and students maintain that videos contribute greatly to motivating and enlivening language lessons. We recommend teachers to develop practical, creative and effective methods of incorporating videos in the FFL classroom. Students are also encouraged to develop self-learning strategies which will drive their personal communicative development. Finally, the Ghana Education Service (GES) is encouraged to develop policies that actively integrate technology in teaching and learning of FFL.

Keywords: Audiovisual learning, Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA), French as a Foreign Language (FFL)

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Introduction

The past few years have seen interesting technological advancements, some of which have been adopted into the classroom for educational purposes. Research has further revealed how positively impactful these technologies tend to have on language learning and communication development when these tools are well integrated into the language classroom (Hirschsprung, 2005; Williams 2013; Owusu-Mante, 2014). Individuals in the 21st century have direct access to equipment such as mobile phones, laptops, tablets and the like, and with rapid connection to the internet, there is almost no reason to stay in the unknown, so far as knowledge or innovation is concerned. Our study focuses on the use of videos in language instruction, though quite common around the world, but quite unpopular in the Ghanaian educational system with respect to the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

Ghana is an Anglophone country in West Africa which is surrounded by three francophone neighbouring countries (Togo, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast). As a result of this geographical position, inhabitants in Ghana, especially those living in border towns and capital cities tend to have frequent contact and interactions with citizens of neighbouring francophone countries, usually for commercial, healthcare and educational purposes, just to mention a few. In addition to this, the French language, after English, seems to be the most widely taught foreign language in the Ghanaian educational system and averagely, almost every Ghanaian who benefits from the local educational system should have studied some French in basic and high school. It is however observed that many Ghanaians struggle to effectively communicate in French, and the few who manage to carry out some level of communication are unable to go beyond the basic exchange of pleasantries (Asiedu, 2019). In an attempt to discover the reason for this phenomenon, we seek in this study to examine the teaching methodologies and materials that are employed in French education, specifically in selected secondary schools in Cape Coast, a metropolis and a capital city in the South-western part of Ghana. We specifically examine the presence and frequency of use of videos and audiovisual materials as Teaching and Learning Material (TLM) in teaching French as a Foreign Language (henceforth FFL). The term *video*, referred to in this study mainly represent audiovisual motion pictures that are intended to promote learning in the foreign language classroom. These could be relatively short representations of concepts in the form of cartoons, music clips, animations, short films or extracts of documentaries, including news items, trimmed for classroom application and language instruction (Balogun & Kaaku, 2012). This study also examines the elements of motivation and classroom engagement that instructional videos possibly unravel once they are well integrated in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. The possible challenges of using these TLMs in Ghana are also described further down in this study.

Background to the study

As mentioned earlier, FFL is a widely studied discipline in the educational system of Ghana, and as such, it is introduced into the educational system from Primary School (PS) and Junior High School (JHS), and serves as one of the main core courses, thus, making it a requirement for entry into the Senior High School (SHS). At the SHS level, FFL becomes an elective course that has to be chosen as part of a bouquet of other courses, depending on a student's major (Csajbok-Twerefou, Chachu, & Viczai,

2014). Cuq (2003) expresses that the major goal for individuals in foreign language acquisition is to be able to obtain the knowledge needed to communicate effectively in the target language. In line with this, teaching and learning French in Ghana aims at developing in students, the knowledge and competences necessary to thrive in a francophone environment whilst communicating in a culturally appropriate manner with other French speakers (Ghana Education Service, 2010). This is validated by the words of the current president of the republic of Ghana, H.E. Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo-Addo in his speech at the 17th La Francophonie Summit, 2018, held in Armenia. The president reiterated the importance of learning to communicate in the French language. He states: “Our goal is to live, one day, in a bilingual Ghana, i.e. English and French, together with our own indigenous languages... History tells us that this is the best route to general progress and prosperity” (Akuffo-Addo 2018).

Despite the good intentions of the Ghanaian government with regards to the development of the French language, as well as the emphasis placed on French education by the Ghana Education Service (GES), very few of the students who have studied French in Ghana are able to communicate effectively in the language (Appiah-Thompson, 2015; Asiedu, 2019). We believe this could be as a result of a number of factors, including the methodologies of teaching French in Ghana which do not seem to be meeting the communication needs of learners (Kuupole, De-Souza & Bakah, 2012).

Objectives of study

In this study, our primary aims are to investigate the frequency with which videos are integrated in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) instruction in selected schools. We also seek to report on the challenges in effectively exploiting these videos, as well as the perceptions that teachers and students have concerning the deliberate integration of videos in teaching and learning French in second cycle institutions in Ghana. By so doing, it is our hope that teachers will begin to deliberately include video activities in foreign language education, which can in turn improve the communicative competence of French language learners (Mayer, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

Prior studies such as that of Williams (2013) and Hirschsprung (2005) have confirmed the invaluable role that multimedia plays in foreign language instruction, hinged on a number of theories that explain the effectiveness in integrating multimedia such as audiovisuals in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. In this section of our work, we discuss one main theory which serves as the bedrock to our study –the Cognitive theory of multimedia learning, proposed by the renowned psychologist, Richard Mayer.

Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning

Cognitivists base their studies on mental processes and activities of the brain that are responsible for the acquisition of concepts; and for the purpose of our study, language. For cognitivists, human beings rely on internal mechanisms and mental processes to achieve goals and results related to their learning (Cuq, 2003). In the domain of foreign language acquisition, cognitivists are of the view that learning a

foreign language is a conscious process which involves a great amount of thought processing and reasoning, as against the behaviourists who believe language acquisition to be innate and automatic. We choose to base our work on the cognitive theory for multimedia learning, postulated by Richard Mayer, which stems from the cognitive theory and has a direct relationship to our topic of study.

Mayer (1997, 2001) is of the view that multimedia (and for the purpose of this study, audiovisuals) engage learners in three cognitive processes: selection, organization, and integration. Significant learning occurs when the learner is able to actively select the transmitted information after which the information is later mentally organized by the learner. The learner is therefore able to store and integrate the information acquired in the long-term memory, by means of coherent verbal and visual representations (Mayer, 1997; 2001).

This leads us to the three types of memory stores that Mayer's cognitive theory of multimedia learning proposes - the sensory memory, working memory and the long-term memory. The sensory memory is described as that which receives stimuli and stores information for a short time. When stimuli is processed and mental constructs or "schemas" are formed, the information is then transferred into the working memory. Information is later transferred into the long-term memory after logical mental constructs are formed. This theory postulates that significant learning occurs when the learner processes information with pictures, words and sound, as compared to when learning is done with words alone. Multimedia, such as audiovisuals, therefore help with the formation of strong mental constructs, which are able to transfer concepts from the short-term memory through to long-term memory.

The cognitive theory for multimedia learning stems from three main assumptions. The first being that the human brain has two separate channels for information processing; the auditory and visual channels. The second assumption is that each of these channels (visual and auditory) have a limited capacity and can perform given tasks up to a certain limit. The last assumption is that learning is an active process which includes filtering, selecting, organizing and integrating information based upon prior knowledge. Therefore, hinging on these assumptions, it is safe to deduce that when information is actively learned in the foreign language class with the aid of videos, which include motion pictures, sounds, and sometimes written texts (subtitles), learners are able to recall a great detail of the lesson and eventually store the information in the long-term memory. With lessons that include audiovisuals, learners have the opportunity to store vocabulary, replicate speech acts and even understand some cultural components of the target language. Through multimedia, learners are able to connect verbal representations to visual representations in their working memories and thus store these concepts. In the FFL classroom, if the learner should hear the word *un chien*, (which means *a dog* in English) and sees a visual image of a dog simultaneously, the word *un chien* is represented both visually and verbally and is more likely to be moved to the long-term memory. This cognitive theory is therefore of the notion that the brain selects and organizes multimedia presentation of words, pictures, and auditory information simultaneously to produce strong logical mental constructs, that are easily recalled by the learner (Mayer, 2001).

Literature review

For our literature review, we focus on the role and importance of integrating videos in language instruction, as represented in some selected articles.

One of the primary purposes of integrating videos in teaching languages is to heighten and arouse the interest of learners in the target language (Jhuree, 2005). Stagnitto (2011) postulates that, videos help to develop positive attitudes among learners as they become well motivated to speak in class, thus, ensuring a high level of classroom engagement. Language learning is often seen as a challenging feat, and so, if learners succeed in developing positive attitudes towards learning the target language, they are more likely to eventually develop the ability to effectively communicate and understand the target language (Stagnitto, 2011).

According to Gilakjani (2012), videos, when integrated into language instruction, help to improve learners' understanding. Williams (2013) also adds that learners are stimulated by rich media content that help them understanding complex topics. Language learners therefore able to associate images with words grasped from the videos and also succeed in identifying the contexts for communication. By so doing, learners are able to increase their memorization and also their ability to code and recover language structures (Mekheimer, 2011; Gilakjani 2012)

Research has also revealed a direct relationship between the frequency of use of video documents and the motivation that learners develop in their quest for effective communication skills in the target language. Studies such as Williams (2013) and Park & Jung (2016) have shown how teachers who frequently use videos in instruction, discover that their students learn a lot more and are well motivated enough to want to pick up new words in the target language.

Finally, Mekheimer (2011) finds that videos allow learners to have a feel of the social settings and cultural practices found in the target language. This heightens classroom engagement, as he explains how video clips deepen the cultural understanding of foreign language learners.

Research Questions

In the following paragraphs, we seek to respond to the following research questions:

1. How frequently do teachers integrate videos in teaching FFL?
2. What are the challenges associated with the use of these videos in the FFL classroom?
3. What are the perceptions of FFL teachers and learners on the integration of videos in FFL lessons?

Methodology

This study leans towards the exploratory research approach which allows the researcher to identify and familiarize first-hand with the actual situations on the ground. This approach is however not sufficient enough to draw a fixed conclusion with specific generalizations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). In this exploratory study, we

also employ the mixed method of data collection with our main research instruments being questionnaires, interview guides and non-participant observation rubrics.

The population of our study is made up of teachers and learners of FFL at the Senior High School (SHS) level in Cape Coast, Ghana. We deliberately sampled two public schools of high repute, with the hope that they would have the tools needed to carry out video-based lessons in FFL. We shall represent the chosen schools by the codes *SHSA* and *SHSB*, for confidentiality purposes. We had to specifically select one FFL class each in these high schools, as FFL does not cut across all disciplines. We therefore worked with 60 students and 7 teachers in both schools, as specified in Table 1 below.

Name of School	No. of students	No. of teachers
SHSA	34	4
SHSB	26	3
TOTAL	60	7

Table 1: Basic demographics

To gather our data, we first observed (with the help of a video recorder and a non-participant observation guide) as a teacher an FFL class. Here, the main teaching material used for this lesson was a French cartoon, played with the help of a video projector and a laptop. Students filled two types of questionnaires – a pre-lesson questionnaire and a post-lesson questionnaire. Teachers also responded to our interviews and questionnaires.

Presentation of results and discussions

The presentation of results is divided into three different themes in line with our research questions and objectives. First, we gather from students and teachers the frequency of the use of audiovisuals tailored towards the teaching and learning of FFL. We go on to present the challenges that are faced or likely to be faced in the exploitation of audiovisual materials in the FFL classroom and finally their perceptions concerning the active integration of videos for the purposes of French language instruction.

Frequency of the use of instructional videos

To gather data on the types of teaching and learning materials and the frequency at which they were used respectively, we gathered that the teachers mainly relied on text books for instruction. Table 2 shows a clear representation of responses from the students.

Question	Response	No.	%
Which of the following teaching and learning materials do your teachers often use in your French lessons?	French Text books	46	76.67
	French Audio files	1	1.67
	French Video clips	0	0
	None of the above	12	20
	Other	1	1.67
TOTAL		60	100

Table 2: Teaching and Learning Materials Used in the FFL classroom

An analysis of the results in Table 2 justifies our assumption that the presence of audiovisual materials in the FFL classroom is almost absent, as about 76% of our respondent chose the textbook as the most used instructional material. Though we cannot draw a conclusion or generalize the situation, this somewhat confirms our assumption that teaching methods in Ghanaian second cycle institutions are not as diversified as would have been required for a language class. We note that one student chose the option “Other”, to which he or she explains that teachers come to class with lesson notes already prepared.

In order to get a better picture of the situation, we sought to probe further and attempt to be more specific on how often videos were integrated in FFL lessons. Table 3 adequately sums up responses of the students.

Question	Response	No.	%
How often do your teachers include videos in their teaching of FFL?	Once a term	1	1.67
	Twice a term	1	1.67
	Once in an academic year	0	0
	Once in a while	6	10
	Never	52	86.67
TOTAL		60	100

Table 3: Frequency of the use of instructional videos in the FFL classroom (students’ perspective)

From Table 3, 52 students, being 86.67% of the population report that instructional videos are never used in the FFL classroom by their teachers. This figure is followed closely by 6 students (being 10% of the student population) who report that instructional videos are only used once in a while during FFL instructional periods. We therefore gather that even if instructional videos are used, their presence in the FFL classrooms are almost non-existent.

We found it necessary also to find out from the FFL instructors how often they use instructional videos in the teaching of the French language. Their responses to this question is summarized in Table 4.

Response	No.	%
Once a term	2	28.57
Twice a term	1	14.29
Once a year	0	0
Never	2	28.57
Other	2	28.57
TOTAL	7	100

Table 4: Frequency of the use of instructional videos in the FFL classroom (teachers' perspective)

We realize that majority of the teachers we encountered do not use instructional videos as often as we may have desired. The two teachers who responded "other" stated that they include the video clips only once in a while whilst teaching.

Bases on both responses from the teachers and students we encountered, it is safe to say that instructional videos are not used more than twice in a term, where a term, in the Ghanaian educational system is made up of approximately three months in a year. It seems to us that there is a huge gap that needs to be filled with respect to diversifying teaching materials that are used in the FFL classroom. In a foreign language classroom, learners must have the opportunity to learn from real-life situations because the notions that the learner seeks to acquire are linked to communication situations, which are also embedded in the culture of the target language (Balogun & Kaaku, 2012). The adequate integration of audiovisual materials is one of the means by which real-life communication situations can be presented in the FFL classroom.

Challenges associated to the use of these instructional videos

After establishing our assumptions on how rarely videos are integrated in the teaching and learning of FFL at the secondary level, we believe it is ideal now to find out the reasons behind this. In the following paragraphs, we discuss factors that impede the frequent use of instructional videos by teachers of FFL.

The first challenge that was raised by the teachers we encountered was the complaint that instructional video materials were not readily accessible or easy to find. Five out of the seven teachers said it was difficult for them to get access to video clips in French. Only two teachers stated that they easily found instructional videos in French when they needed to. We observed however that internet access in the schools we visited were limited. This may be one explanation as to why they found it difficult accessing videos to teach.

Another challenge raised by the teachers was the seemingly inadequate training they had acquired with respect to integrating video clips in their teaching routines. Five out of the seven teachers indicated that they had benefited from a training session focused on integrating videos in teaching concepts at a point in time, but it seems this training was not sufficient enough to develop in them, the competence, confidence and technological know-how required. Indeed we believe the integration of videos in teaching concepts should be carried out in a professional and organized manner, in order to meet the learning objectives for a given lesson. Some basic training therefore for the teachers be needed to carry out such a task (Hirschsprung, 2005)

The third constraint that was reported by the teachers was the large class sizes that they teach. Indeed, per our observations, the students we encountered struggled greatly with space during the lesson. Due to the large class sizes, students who sat at the back of the class found it very difficult to see the board where the video was being projected and also very difficult to follow the sound adequately. This is a genuine problem which needs to be addressed in order for video-based instructions to take place smoothly.

Furthermore, the teachers also noted that they had inadequate materials to carry out video-based instructions in the FFL classroom. We believe that if some investment is made into acquiring gadgets suitable for audiovisual based instructions, especially in relation to the teaching of foreign languages, much progress will be made.

According to Hirschsprung (2005, p. 38) videos for instructional purposes are not often used in the language class because its exploitation is limited by the constraints of classroom use, and sometimes, classrooms are not adequate enough for this kind of teaching materials. These responses from our interaction with the FFL teachers have confirmed this assertion.

Perceptions of FFL students and teachers on video-based instructions

This section of our work seeks to answer our final research question on the perceptions teachers and students have on the use of video-based FFL lessons. We will discuss students' responses to the pre-lesson questionnaire before we proceeded to reporting perceptions after the video-based lesson. The perceptions of the teachers will then be discussed after.

Before the lesson took place, we first asked the students whether they thought instructional videos should be integrated into the teaching of FFL. 59 out of 60 students responded in the affirmative, being 98.3%. As a follow-up to this question, students were asked to give reasons for their answers. One student out of the 60 stated that he thinks instructional videos should not be used in teaching oral French expressions because public schools lack basic gadgets and the logistics needed in carrying out such tasks. Table 5 however gives a detailed representation of the responses of the 59 students who responded in the affirmative.

Response	No.	%
Better understanding of the lesson	21	35
Lessons will be more practical	16	26.67
Motivation and confidence to learn and speak French	7	11.67
Acquisition of vocabulary and correct pronunciations	15	25
TOTAL	59	98.3%

Table 5: Students' perceptions on why videos should be integrated in the teaching of FFL

We gather from 35% of our respondents that they hoped to understand a lesson better when videos are included in teaching. Research tends to confirm that indeed, students have better understanding when audiovisuals are included in teaching concepts (Williams, 2013; Stagnitto, 2011; Mekheimer, 2011). For 26.67% of our respondents, they believed that integrating videos in lessons would make the lessons more practical since they get the chance to follow the images, listen to how words are pronounced and also get the opportunity to observe how communication takes place in the target language, given a particular setting. For 25% of our respondents, integrating videos in lessons meant an increased level of vocabulary acquisition, and the guidance to the right ways of pronouncing words in French. Researchers like Mayer (2001) have shown that audiovisual aids offer another means of presenting information to learners, whereby students are more likely to remember information that was acquired with the aid of multimedia. 11.67% of our respondents believed that video-based FFL instructions would increase their interest and motivation to learn the French language, whilst boosting their confidence and desire to speak in class. We tend to agree with this opinion since videos and other audiovisual aids place an interesting and exciting twist to foreign language learning.

As we mentioned earlier, part of our data collection included observing an FFL class where the instructor taught students with a video clip. The following section of our work addresses the perceptions of students after the video-based lesson. Students were therefore asked to indicate how beneficial the lesson was to them and their opinion on the lesson. Table 6 summarizes their responses.

Response	No.	%
Better understanding of concepts	4	6.67
Vocabulary acquisition	40	66.67
Interesting approach to learning	5	8.33
Practicality in learning pronunciations	4	6.67
No response	6	10
TOTAL	60	100

Table 6: Students' opinions on the integration of videos in FFL instruction (Post-lesson)

As seen in Table 6, 40 students, representing 66.67% claim to have acquired new vocabulary during the lesson. According to Mayer's cognitive theory of multimedia learning discussed earlier, students are more likely to keep in their long-term memories, concepts and mental representations that are built from a combined presence of words and pictures. Four students were of the view that they had a better understanding of the concepts that were taught. Five of them also found the lesson interesting, whereas four thought the lesson provided a practical approach in learning the pronunciation of French words. We went on to ask the students whether video-based lessons could be a motivating factor to their studies in French, to which all 60 students responded in the affirmative.

Our study on students' perceptions on the active integration of French videos in FFL instruction revealed an overwhelming positive disposition. Among the responses given, most of them aspire to increase their vocabulary in French, increase their level

of confidence to communicate in French as they also hoped to be more motivated to study and excel in FFL.

Teachers' perceptions on the integration of videos in FFL instruction

We sought to gather from the teachers, their opinions on the role that integrating video clips in their teaching practice could play in the FFL classroom. One teacher was of the view that the French language and its rich culture is best taught with the help of audiovisuals. All seven teachers were of the view that videos served as a factor of motivation for students. Five teachers expressed that teaching FFL with video clips was likely to make teaching and learning more interesting and exciting for both parties – students and teachers alike. Five teachers also stated that videos make up for those concepts that are not extensively captured by the textbooks as it presents a practical option to teaching and learning the French language.

We followed up with a more specific question on student motivation, to find out the perceptions of the teachers on this topic. We asked them whether they thought students were more likely to get motivated to learn French, with the integration of video clips in FFL instruction. All seven teachers responded in the affirmative, that video-clips could be great tools of motivation for FFL students. Our interviews with some of the teachers, revealed how they had noticed over their years of experience, that students were highly motivated by videos that are usually adapted for classroom instruction. Garrabet (2012) confirms this notion as he explains how his FFL students were motivated by authentic videos in the classroom. In his study, he notes that students were motivated by the desire to understand a video in French, motivated to learn new concepts, motivated by the change in the method of instruction and also motivated by the learning of French concepts which were situated in context.

The teachers concluded by expressing how they would be ready to learn how to effectively include videos in their teaching of FFL given the right conditions, logistics and facilities.

Responses to research questions

Discussion of our research questions in the preceding paragraphs lead us to the following conclusions with respect to the two schools visited:

With regards to our first question, which is in relation to the frequency of the use of videos in teaching, we can safely conclude that with the schools involved, the use of video clips for instructional purposes in FFL was very rare or almost non-existent.

Concerning our second research question on the challenges involved in actively integrating videos in FFL lessons, we gathered some setbacks including the following: Teachers complained of accessibility of the video clips in French, problems of logistics, large class sizes and inadequate training to carry out video-based instructions in FFL.

We can also safely say that a greater percentage of both FFL teachers and students maintained favourable perceptions towards the integration of instructional French videos in teaching and learning of FFL at the senior high school level. Among the popular opinions of both teachers and students were that video-based language

lessons were likely to increase learner motivation and vocabulary acquisition, as well as classroom engagement and the confidence to speak French better, all of which are key for the development of communication competence in a language.

Didactic recommendations and conclusion

It is no doubt the wealth of impact that audiovisuals have on foreign language acquisition. Some recommendations on the integration of videos in teaching foreign languages in the Ghanaian context are as follows.

We recommend that teachers find creative measures to include videos in their teaching practice. Given that there are many difficulties that are encountered in its effective integration, we believe some active and creative measures can be taken. Foreign language students are also encouraged to develop an interest in audiovisuals themselves and not only depend on classroom practices to learn and speak a language. We believe that when students are actively involved in their linguistic development, they become responsible for their learning in a way that influences their performance positively (Owusu-Mante, 2014). We recommend that institutions that teach languages must actively put measures in place to make the integration of multimedia very favourable for both the teachers and students. On a larger scale, the state, through institutions such as the Ghana Education Service (GES), need to be more abreast with global trends that promote the active learning of foreign languages.

Favouring the integration of audiovisuals in language education, we believe, is one of the many methods that can produce great results in order to change the narrative of students who learn French for so many years, but are not able to speak a word of it.

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