Dialog on Language Instruction

Volume 34, Issue 2
2024

DLIFLC
DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

A Journal By and For DLIFLC Faculty and Staff

Dialog on Language Instruction

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Target Language Use among DLIFLC Faculty and Students

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A considerable body of research has shown the benefits of target language use in language instruction; challenges and questions remain, however, in terms of how to use the target language effectively. To emphasize the importance of target language use at DLIFLC, the Target Language Use Command Policy #21 was issued in October 2022 and reinforced in July 2024. This research project was conducted two years after the policy was originally issued (i.e., from February to August 2024) and sought to evaluate the implementation of the policy, as well as to identify best practices for target language use in Basic Courses. Six Undergraduate Education (UGE) languages were studied: Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Persian Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. Data collection consisted of aggregated and anonymized End of Program Student Questionnaire, (ESQ) ratings and comments; 20 classroom observations; 15 interviews with deans and chairs; and survey results for faculty (N=83) and students (N=222). Quantitatively, students and faculty report that the Target Language Use Command Policy is generally followed by faculty and students and that schools and teachers enforce the policy. For example, in their ESQ final course evaluations, students reported that their teachers "ensured that the target language was the primary language in the classroom" at a level of 3.73 out of 4.0 (N=6,631), and a majority of faculty respondents reported that the policy is enforced in their school (4.06/5.0). Yet interviews, observations, and survey comments reveal challenges to implementing the policy and opportunities for training and greater enforcement.

Keywords: *Target Language Use, Effective Teaching Practices, Faculty Development and Training*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

A considerable body of research has shown the benefits of teachers and students using the target language (TL) in language instruction, including increased student learning and increased student motivation (see Turnbull & Arnett, 2002); however, challenges and questions remain in terms of how to do so effectively, such as proficiency level considerations, how to manage grammar instruction, and validity in assessment. DLIFLC has long had policies to emphasize the crucial role of TL use in foreign language study, yet implementing these policies in day-to-day practice among teachers and students can be complicated. To emphasize the importance of target language use at DLIFLC, the Target Language Use Command Policy #21 was issued in October 2022 and reinforced in July 2024. The aim of this study, conducted approximately a year and a half after the policy was issued, was to evaluate the implementation of the policy and best practices for target language use in Undergraduate Education's (UGE) Basic Course programs for six National Defense Strategy (NDS) languages: Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Persian Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. Following policies is crucial and expected at a military educational institution such as DLIFLC; how effectively the policy is being implemented and how to increase effectiveness when necessary are key concepts that guided this research project with the goal of furthering our mission to produce warrior linguists for the U.S. Department of Defense.

For the sake of clarity, this article will use ACTFL's definition of the TL: "The use of target language refers to all that learners say, read, hear, write, and view – production and reception of language on the part of learners, educators, and materials" (actfl.org). TL use, thus, expands from the teacher to the student to instructional materials and assessments. At DLIFLC, because the final graduation tests include some English in addition to the TL, it is necessary for some of the curricular materials to be in English in order to prepare students. This is not in opposition to the policy, yet emphasizes the importance of utilizing maximum classroom time for the use of the TL by teachers and students.

Challenges in Teaching in the Target Language

DLIFLC courses are fast-paced and demanding, with students needing to achieve Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) scores of 2 (intermediate level) in reading and listening and an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) score 1+ in speaking within a relatively short period of time (e.g., 36 weeks for Spanish, 48 weeks for Russian or Persian Farsi, and 64 weeks for Chinese Mandarin, Korean, or Arabic). Preparing students to reach this level in this period of time causes many challenges, a major one being the amount of information that needs to be conveyed quickly (e.g., grammar structures, a considerable amount of vocabulary, cultural information, military-related topics). Teaching in the target language can slow the pace of instruction, given that students need extra time to process the information when the target language is used. Both students and teachers can feel anxious about a slower pace of instruction, concerned about potentially not covering all required material prior to unit tests or the DLPT/OPI.

Teachers and students must also keep in mind the realities imposed by students' cognitive load limitations. Cognitive load reminds us that students will need extra time to learn a language given that they must process information in their limited-duration working memory first, before they can transfer it to their long-term memory. The implication of cognitive load learning theory is that "instruction needs to be organised in a manner that reduces unnecessary working memory load," meaning that teachers will need to be very clear with instructions and principles, ensure that they use language that is at their students' level, and ensure that the information they convey to students is not beyond what they can process with their working memory limits (Sweller, 2017). The pace of a course and the amount of material covered and expected to be remembered by the student each day are thus crucial considerations and potential challenges.

Other possible challenges to target language use can be university policies that are inconsistent or unclear, examinations that do not encourage or require the target language, or the realities of classes that prove to be particularly challenging for an instructor (Chambers, 2013). Another challenge to the use of target language in the classroom can be teacher perceptions of the degree to which it is needed or even useful for language instruction; this perception can be directly or indirectly passed on to the students (Rust & Nel, 2024).

Possibilities in Teaching in the Target Language

While time constraints and other challenges undoubtedly exist in this environment, teachers and researchers have agreed for some time that language instructors "should aim to make maximum use of the target language" in their classes (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002, p. 211). This is not to say that the students' native language should never be used (Hall & Cook, 2012); decisions about which language to use for instruction and when to use either one of them, however, should be made based on the learning context and goals in an effort to ensure that instruction is maximally effective. In line with these realities, ACTFL's official policy statement recommends that "learning take place through the target language for 90% or more of classroom time" so that the students can be immersed in the TL "unless there is a specific reason to NOT use the target language" (actfl.org). While this policy statement provides a certain amount of general guidance, it also relies upon the expertise of teachers to determine how to use the target language effectively 90% of the time and what reasons are considered valid for when to use the native language instead. These determinations can be quite challenging.

While focusing on the TL is necessary, all agree that use of learners' native language is not disallowed; there are circumstances when it is appropriate and pedagogically useful, such as (a) for immediate classroom management; (b) to address an immediate and quick learning need that would be too complicated in the TL; (c) during the initial days of class until the TL is more understood (Littlewood & Yu, 2011); or (d) if there is any type of emergency. Further complicating the situation is the reality that simply exposing students to the TL isn't sufficient; use of the TL for teaching needs to be strategic and done effectively (Ellis, 1994).

Many factors can maximize the use of the TL in class. Some of them include the teacher's own determination and confidence, teachers having a TL communication strategy in place, and

teachers starting with more simple TL vocabulary and structures and moving to more complicated TL as students progress (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Teachers are more likely to meet the needs of their students and develop effective target language use policies for their classes when they adopt language approaches that are responsive to student needs (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). Also important is for students to be encouraged to take risks and build their confidence and comfort with speaking and learning in the TL and for them to feel engaged with course content and with the TL use; they can build a sense of pride in their learning and use of the TL in class (Chambers, 1991).

It is therefore clear from the literature that using the target language in teaching and learning is crucial for student success, while at the same time some use of the native language is also acceptable. What teachers need to navigate is this: In their own contexts and within their institution, how can they use the TL effectively so that both teachers and students use the language for maximum learning? That is ultimately what this study set out to investigate, within the context of the fast-paced courses of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.

Research Questions

1. To what degree do faculty and students perceive that their communication with students meets the expectations of the Target Language Use Command Policy #21?
2. What do faculty and students see as the challenges to implementing the Target Language Use Command Policy #21?
3. What Target Language Use best practices can be identified to disseminate across DLIFLC?

Data Collection and Analysis

Context

This research was conducted at the request of DLIFLC leadership and took place at the Presidio of Monterey with UGE Basic Program courses in Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, Korean, Persian Farsi, Russian, and Spanish. All DLIFLC and Department of Defense protocols were followed (including gaining proper permissions and documentation within the Provost Organization and UGE leadership, the DLIFLC Human Protections Program, and the Army Records Management Directorate Research Office for survey approval) and spanned the timeframe from February to August of 2024, approximately one and a half years after the policy was originally issued.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection consisted of the following quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. *End of Program Student Questionnaire (ESQ) Ratings for Relevant Questions*
   Composite reports of Teaching Effectiveness-based ESQs from Fiscal Year 23 and Fiscal Year 24 Quarter 1 were reviewed. A total of 6,631 students completed the ESQs from the six

languages involved in this research. In addition to open comments, the ratings (scale: 1–4) for the four questions were reviewed for this analysis. See Table 1 for the questions that were reviewed. Averages for the key questions were calculated, and responses to the open-ended questions were used for thematic analysis.

2. *Classroom Observations*
   A checklist was used by two researchers to guide data collection for each classroom observation. Focus areas included the amount of time teachers and students used the target language during class, as well as strategies utilized by the teacher to maximize target language. After the class was over, researchers also asked students the degree to which the target language usage was typical for this instructor for most days. (See Appendix for the observation checklist.) Observations were conducted across all semesters for each language studied, with the information that was gathered used for thematic analysis.

3. *Student Survey*
   Students studying the six languages were invited to respond to the following survey questions (survey approval #ISES-RMZ-24-106 by Army Records Management Directorate). The voluntary survey directions included a brief explanation of the survey purpose, some copied text from Command Policy #21, a link to the policy, a request for their semester and language, a question if they have reviewed the policy before, and four Likert-scale questions (scale: 1–5) about policy implementation. See Table 3 for the specific questions. They were also invited to answer two open-ended questions: (a) Challenges to maximizing target language use in language school facilities, and (b) Suggestions for maximizing targe language use in language school facilities. Averages for the questions were calculated, and responses to the open-ended questions were used for thematic analysis.

4. *Faculty Survey*
   Faculty from the six languages in this project were sent an anonymous, voluntary online survey to complete. Questions were similar to those on the student survey. See Table 4 for the four Likert-scale questions. They were also invited to answer three open-ended questions: (a) Challenges to maximizing target language use in language school facilities, (b) Suggestions for maximizing target language use in language school facilities, and (c) Final comments. Averages for the questions were calculated, and responses to the open-ended questions were used for thematic analysis.

5. *Interviews with Deans and Chairs*
   Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with five UGE deans and a semi-structured focus group of 10 chairs was conducted, with all UGE schools represented by a department chair. Responses to each interview were summarized, triangulated with other data, and used for thematic analysis. See the Appendix for the interview questions.

The process for data collection and analysis was iterative, with the ESQ ratings used to inform the student survey questions and faculty survey questions. Interview questions were based on the information gathered from the surveys and observations. The data were coded into themes,

guided by the research questions and following the two-cycle coding system put forward by Miles et al. (2014). During the first coding cycle, provisional codes were identified, largely based on a review of the literature, and during the second cycle, patterns were coded into final themes. Following are the findings, grouped by instrument and then themes gathered from interviews, observations, and open-ended comments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that in general, students and faculty report that Command Policy #21 on Target Language Use is being followed and enforced. However, opportunities exist to maximize the effectiveness of using the Target Language inside and outside the classroom. For example, while faculty and students self-report that they and their peers are following the policy, classroom observations demonstrate opportunities for refinement, including further support for students to use the target language and not English. These results also identify best practices utilized by teachers in both using the target language effectively and also in ensuring that students use it during class as well. An analysis of the data collected follows.

Final Course Evaluation Ratings, Teacher Effectiveness

The ESQ ratings of students in the six focus languages reveal that, overall, students perceived that the target language was being used in classes, that English was used effectively when it was needed, and that teachers could tell if the student didn't understand something. See Table 1 for overall averages of student responses.

Table 1

ESQ Ratings by Students in Six Focus Languages for FY23 and First Quarter of FY24 (N=6,631)

	FY23/FY24Q1 out of 4.00
My teachers ensured that the target language was the primary language in the classroom.	3.73
My teachers used the target language effectively	3.80
My teachers used English effectively when English was needed	3.74
My teachers could tell if I did not understand something	3.68

Note. 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree

Classroom Observations

In most of the classes observed, the teacher used the Target Language at least 80% of the class time (see Table 2). For the classes that used the TL less often, they were either Semester I classes or the topic was one that could be considered as warranting more English use (e.g., grammar instruction). It should be noted, however, that not all grammar classes were taught in the TL; in

one observed course for lower-proficiency students in Semester I, the entire class was conducted in the TL. Students appeared to understand the class, based on their ability to answer questions and follow directions for skits, activities, etc. After-class questions to the student confirmed their understanding and their appreciation for being taught grammar in the TL.

The students' use of the Target Language in the observed classes showed more variation, with students speaking English less often than the teachers. The classes with less TL use spanned semesters and class topics. These findings represent an opportunity for further exploration in terms of strategies that teachers can use to maximize students' TL use when they speak to the teacher or peers during class time. The teacher's behavior and use of the target language in class often influenced students' behavior. For example, in some classes, when students became confused about what the teacher said in the TL, they asked the teacher, who rephrased the statement in different ways still in the TL until the student understood (demonstrated by their body language and answering questions correctly); in other classes, in the same situation where students became confused, the confused student asked a peer in English to explain and the teacher did not attempt to support in the TL. Another example involves classroom phrases: in some classes, teachers had clearly taught students how to use key TL phrases to request clarification, ask for support, etc., while in others, students used English in these situations and the teachers did not re-direct them to the TL. These findings represent an area for future research and professional development.

Table 2

Target Language Use by Teachers and Students in Observed Classes (N=20)

	0-49%	**50-79%**	**80%+**
What percent of class time teacher used the TL when it was possible/would be expected	2 classes	2 classes	18 classes
How often students responded to TL questions from the teacher in TL	3 classes	5 classes	12 classes
How often students asked questions or initiated conversations with teacher or peers in TL	4 classes	9 classes	7 classes

Observations also recorded strategies utilized by teachers to encourage TL use. Data collection indicated a range across teachers in the frequency these strategies were used; while some used them frequently and consistently during the class observed, other teachers engaged in fewer of them. In some cases, this was due to the proficiency level of the students and their apparent need for TL support; in other cases, students would have benefited from more use of these strategies. It was also found that some teachers were hesitant to engage much at all with struggling students in the TL, simply not asking them any questions.

Observed strategies utilized by teachers to maximize the use of the TL in class included: (a) using circumlocution and code switching to allow a student to quickly understand the meaning of a

word/concept and then moving back to the TL; (b) allowing students to have sufficient processing time before they were required to produce in the TL; (c) correcting student errors when using the TL in an effective manner, e.g., knowing when to focus on comprehensibility and fluency vs. accuracy in their answers or speaking; (d) utilizing peer support, e.g., by inviting students to re-state a peer's English statement with one in the TL; and (e) creating interactive tasks in class such as role playing or improvised skits.

Observed strategies used by teachers to help students apparently having difficulty following the rest of the class when the TL is being used as the main language included: (a) closely monitoring student behavior and communication for signs of student confusion; (b) encouraging students to use the TL in any way they can and to take sufficient time; (c) adjusting their use of the TL to match student proficiency on an as-needed basis; (d) providing hints or support for students struggling to use the TL; and (e) using visuals or writing on the board/screen to support students.

Use of these strategies is in line with cognitive load learning theory, in that students are given sufficient time to process what they hear in the TL and then to respond, and that the TL is at the students' proficiency level (Sweller, 2017). More research is needed into how these practices can be spread across all teachers and used more consistently, particularly for how teachers can help students speak in the TL language more often and more confidently.

Student Survey Responses

A total of 222 students in the six languages completed the voluntary online survey (Arabic=9; Chinese Mandarin=105; Korean=39; Persian Farsi=1; Russian=45; Spanish=18; Unknown Language=5). Of the 222 students, 78 reported being in Semester I, 85 in Semester II, and 59 in Semester III. One hundred and twenty-eight (128) of the respondents reported having reviewed the policy before taking this survey; 37 reported that they read it when they took the survey but didn't remember seeing it before; and 57 reported having heard about it but never having looked at it. These numbers reveal an opportunity for ongoing reinforcement of the policy for all students across the length of the program.

As can be seen in Table 3, students overall report that the TL Policy is being enforced (M=4.16/5.0) and that teachers use the TL appropriately (M=4.39/5.0). Students reported feeling less confident in the TL use of their peers (M=3.86/5.0) or themselves (M=3.98/5.0). These results are consistent with class observations and represent areas of opportunity for teacher training and implementation across UGE.

Table 3
Student Survey Responses (N=222) Regarding Target Language Use by Self and Others

	Mean	1	2	3	4	5
This policy is enforced by our teaching team	4.16	2.2%	4.5%	10.7%	40.6%	42%
Use of the TL by our teachers in class meets the expectations of the Command Policy	4.39	2.2%	2.7%	6.3%	32.1%	56.7%
Use of the TL by my classmates in class meets the expectation of the Command Policy	3.86	4.0%	9.4%	12.5%	45.1%	29%
My use of the TL in class meets policy expectations	3.98	2.7%	8.0%	11.6%	44.2%	33.5%

Note. 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree

It is not clear why students are using the TL less in class. One possibility is that teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of students' TL use could be impacting their willingness to try; that is, students may decide not to bother with TL use if a teacher directly or indirectly discloses their opinion that it is not necessary for students to use the TL in class or that they do not have the time for students to try due to the amount of material that needs to be covered. This would be consistent with findings by Rust and Nel (2024) that teacher perceptions impact student TL use. It is also the case that many students lack confidence in their TL use and/or are risk-averse to making mistakes. These are areas that can be supported by teachers and warrant further exploration.

Faculty Survey Responses

A total of 83 faculty completed the survey (Arabic=23; Chinese Mandarin=18; Korean=12; Persian Farsi=15; Russian=7; Spanish=8). In general, these faculty respondents reported that students follow the TL policy less often than faculty. This is consistent with other data sources in this project. Also, overall, faculty reported that they think the policy is enforced and used by their team, students, and themselves (see Table 4). Faculty in some languages (i.e., Chinese Mandarin, Korean, and Spanish), however, expressed concern with implementation of the policy and prevalence of the TL. It could be that between these languages, there are differences in policy enforcement and use of the TL, or it is possible that respondents in some language programs answered this anonymous survey more honestly with their opinions than did others. More exploration into the possibility of actual program differences is warranted, extending beyond anonymous surveys into a more comprehensive analysis, for example utilizing ongoing unannounced classroom observations or interviews with students with targeted questions about how and when the target language is used. The potential role of realities external to teachers (e.g., how the curriculum is structured and the amount of English in the textbooks) could also be explored.

Table 4
Faculty Survey Responses (N=83) Regarding Target Language Use by Self and Others

	Total	Arabic	Chinese Mandarin	Korean	Persian Farsi	Russian	Spanish
This policy is enforced by my school/department	4.06	4.30	3.72	3.92	4.53	4.00	3.50
Use of the target language by our students in class meets policy expectations	3.69	3.91	3.44	3.25	3.87	4.14	3.50
Use of the target language by my teaching team colleagues meets policy expectations	4.05	4.04	4.06	4.08	4.00	3.71	4.38
My use of the target language in school facilities meets policy expectations	4.19	4.09	4.50	4.00	4.40	3.71	4.13

Note. 1=Strongly Agree to 5=Strongly Disagree

Challenges to Students Using the Target Language

An analysis of the survey responses, observations, and interviews revealed the following challenges to students using the TL. These are divided into feedback from students, and then feedback from teachers, chairs, and deans (see Table 5). A careful reading of these points reveals that schools have an opportunity to increase effective TL use and that many of these challenges can be addressed with appropriate attention and planning. Also, it can be seen that some challenges are shared between groups—for example, both students and faculty/supervisors think that time crunches make using the TL challenging, and both perceive a lack of student motivation to be challenging. Both groups also note that students are demotivated or lack confidence to speak the TL. There are many reasons that students may feel frustrated and lack confidence in their speaking, yet observations revealed that not all teachers were taking advantage of all available pedagogies to create environments where students would be most likely to speak the TL. The role of the teacher in student attitudes and willingness to speak the TL is crucial and is one that merits further research. It should also be noted that when asked, no chairs or deans were aware of any student facing a disciplinary action due related to the Target Language Policy. These are also challenges that many teachers across the Institute are successfully addressing on a daily basis in their classrooms.

Table 5
Challenges to Student Use of the TL, as Expressed by Students, Teachers, and Supervisors

Feedback from Students:
1. Frustration/lack of confidence 2. Not being able to fully express oneself in TL 3. Insufficient understanding in TL (vocabulary, grammar, etc.), esp. for teaching complex grammar points 4. Insufficient TL to be able to ask questions 5. Lack of motivation or exhaustion on students' part 6. Time it takes to speak in TL, which takes away from class time/content
Feedback from Deans, Chairs, Teachers:
1. Lack of training/support for students on how and when to try to use TL 2. Lack of accountability/expressed expectation that students will use the TL 3. Lack of an environment conducive to students using the TL (e.g., risk taking, engaging) 4. Lack of student motivation to speak in TL 5. Perception that speaking in TL is less necessary since OPI graduation requirement requires only 1+ 6. The DLPT requires English, and many curricula require English 7. Lack of teacher commitment to and enforcement of TL policy 8. Ineffective time management and classroom management by teachers

Also noteworthy in this table is the perception by some teachers and supervisors that there is a lack of a serious enough commitment to and belief in the TL policy by some teachers. One comment from the faculty survey illustrates this reality: "If the teachers are speaking English in the classrooms, one cannot enforce that on the students." Also, teachers and supervisors commented on ineffective time management by teachers potentially impacting teachers' ability to teach in the TL. As noted from the faculty survey, "While it's easier to convey ideas in English, with added time and care the use of the TL would bring more benefits to the students." One Semester I student noted in their survey the importance of some English between peers: "Students do use English a lot during breaks in between class, but I think that's actually good since it fosters a more tight-knit classroom environment." This perspective of the role of authentic communication in classroom dynamics is one to keep in mind as well. A general reluctance about enforcing the TL policy with students is also noted, with all supervisors interviewed having no recollection of any student being held accountable (e.g., with a disciplinary counseling) for not speaking the TL in school facilities.

Challenges to Teachers Using the Target Language Effectively

An analysis of the survey responses, observations, and interviews revealed various challenges to teachers using the TL effectively (see Table 6). A careful reading of these points reveals the

opportunity for there to be greater buy-in regarding the use of the Target Language in Basic courses, in addition to developing a shared understanding of some of the specifics regarding the policy, such as that the Target Language is not required 100% of the time. The role of English being used inside the curriculum was brought up several times by respondents across all levels, meaning it must also be used in class. Also, the role played by a teacher's English proficiency is interesting to consider, and how that dynamic can impact language use in the classroom. For example, teachers who are strong in English may be reluctant to speak as much of the TL since they can convey much more information in English within the same period of time; at the same time, teachers with lower English proficiency may find themselves less able to determine which language to use under which circumstances and how. They may try to codeswitch but find that they cannot switch easily between the two languages and become mired in trying to explain a complicated concept in English and yet unsure of how to explain the same complicated concept effectively in the TL.

Table 6

Challenges to Teachers' Effective Use of the TL, as Expressed by Teachers, Chairs, and Deans

Feedback from Deans, Chairs, Teachers:
1. Teacher has high proficiency in English
2. Teacher has lower proficiency in English
3. Incorrect understanding of policy requirements—e.g., TL isn't *always* required
4. Perception that teaching in the TL is unnecessary for students' language acquisition
5. Perception that speaking in TL is less necessary since OPI requirement is only 1+
6. Lack of accountability for teaching in English when not necessary
7. Requirement of some English in class due to the DLPT and heavy-English curricula
8. Insufficient experience/training in TL use: • Tailoring TL to student's level, teaching all skills (including grammar) in TL
9. Time it takes to speak in TL, which takes away from class time/content

Taken together, the data from this study provides a comprehensive and nuanced view of the implementation of Command Policy #21 on Target Language Use, on strategies and conditions that maximize the potential for the Target Language to be used effectively, and on training and professional development opportunities. These implications are discussed in the following section.

Pedagogical Implications and Training Opportunities

The study shows that faculty and students in the studied UGE Basic Program languages are generally aware of the Command Policy on Target Language Use (the Policy hereafter) and have made noticeable efforts to promote target language use in all school facilities. The study also identifies several challenging areas that require attention from all stakeholders. In this section

we review five main challenging areas and discuss their possible administrative and academic implications, particularly future faculty professional development.

Challenge #1: Better Communication of Expectations

The Policy requires that students adhere to TL use while inside school facilities. It also reminds teachers that TL use is part of the standards in their performance elements. But there was a general reluctance to implement the policy through disciplinary enforcement, as is stated explicitly in the policy. According to the findings in this study, no disciplinary actions have ever been taken against any student or faculty member to enforce the policy although non-compliance was by no means a rare occurrence. One possible reason is that faculty or students didn't know what constituted non-compliance, what exactly they were held accountable for, and what exactly would be the consequences. The Policy states, "All students and teachers will ensure they do not engage in English conversation unless identified as necessary by a staff or faculty member." This statement basically allows individual staff or faculty members to decide when they should use the TL and when they can use English. Schools therefore have an opportunity to provide specific guidance and training to supervisors, teachers, and students on the most likely scenarios that warrant the use of English, and typical circumstances where the target language has to be used as the dominant language. There should be clear communication of expectations for all stakeholders regarding their accountability and the consequences of failed accountability.

Challenge #2: Understanding the Importance of Speaking

Feedback from students, teachers, and program managers points to a noticeable lack of internal motivation among students and teachers to seek opportunities to speak the TL. One factor that negatively impacts motivation is the perception that the graduation requirement for speaking (Level 1+ on the OPI) can be reached without continuous and extensive practice through all three semesters, and the push to maximize TL use may take time and resources away from reading and listening. This perception seems to be supported by the fact that when students are not able to pass DLPT/OPI graduation requirements, it is almost always because they cannot pass the listening or reading portions, not because of their speaking score. This perception reflects and probably in turn affects the way speaking is taught, assessed, and thus valued.

Underappreciation of the importance of speaking is also due to a lack of understanding of the interconnectedness between speaking and other skill modalities and especially between speaking and listening. Extensive research in second language acquisition shows that speaking, in addition to being an important skill modality, helps learners improve fluency and accuracy, retain knowledge and skills, and facilitate the understanding of nuanced aspects of the language through the mental processes typically connected with language production (Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). The faculty at DLIFLC are generally aware of the importance of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) but there is much less familiarity with the essential role of comprehensible output or language production in second language acquisition. Successful implementation of the Policy needs buy-in by faculty and students, which is more likely to happen when faculty and students recognize the benefits of language production to language acquisition in general and

development of listening skills in particular. A better understanding of the role of comprehensible output may also positively impact the way different skills are integrated in teaching and curriculum development.

Challenge #3: Effective Use of Target Language

When promoting maximal TL use, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of effectiveness. The TL is used effectively when it facilitates a student's learning process. All would agree that no amount of TL input will help students learn if it is not comprehensible to them. To ensure their TL use is comprehensible to students, teachers must tailor their language to the approximate level of their students' TL proficiency. They can also use appropriate communication strategies such as circumlocution, code-switching, and non-verbal strategies to make the input more comprehensible to the students. Successful adaptation of the TL to students' proficiency is a continuous, dynamic process during which teachers need to assess individual students' comprehension continuously and adjust their own language use accordingly. It requires teachers to have the linguistic skills and a strategic mindset, especially when there are considerable proficiency gaps among the students in the same class.

Comprehension of TL input is not solely determined by the linguistic properties of the input; comprehension is also affected by the listener's effort and motivation. How teachers conduct a class in the medium of TL impacts students' motivation to use the TL. In some classes observed, the teachers kept students actively engaged in using the TL receptively and productively by continuously interacting with them collectively and individually. In the process, these teachers constantly assessed students' comprehension, provided instant feedback and assistance, and adjusted their own language as needed. The personal attention from the teachers facilitated students' learning. The students not only listened more attentively but also spoke more in the TL. Best practices such as these should be identified, validated, disseminated, and integrated into faculty training in a way that is consistent and ongoing.

Finally, another factor teachers should consider when deciding how much of the TL should be used and how it should be used is the learning objectives of a lesson. For example, for a first semester grammar lesson on complicated grammatical rules, the teachers may want to use more English to make sure that students have an exact understanding of the nuances of these grammatical rules so that they will be able to apply these rules correctly by the end of the lesson. On the other hand, they may want to use the TL as the dominant language if the students are not expected to accurately understand all the details of the message or are even encouraged to guess the meaning from context.

Challenge #4: Encouraging Students to Take Risks Using TL

Apprehension of making mistakes is a major reason for students to avoid speaking the TL. A learning environment that encourages students to speak the TL without being afraid of making mistakes is typically associated with the following characteristics:

- First, all students feel respected and included, regardless of their language proficiency. The opinions and feedback from all students are valued by teachers in planning and executing learning activities, and their individual academic and emotional needs are attended to. Students' buy-in likely leads to more active participation in these class activities.
- Second, teachers and students share the belief that making mistakes is part of learning a language and constructive feedback provides opportunities for growth. The challenge for teachers is to deliver potentially critical messages tactfully to minimize possible anxiety or even resistance from students. Poor delivery of the message can distract students from the message and encourage avoidance behavior.
- Third, teachers maximize opportunities for all students to do what they *can* do in the TL rather than focus on what they *can't* do. Affirming what students have accomplished and providing verbal or non-verbal cues to help students produce more TL can help students reinforce and expand what they have learned and help them build confidence in using the TL. On the other hand, interrupting students constantly to correct every mistake they make or simply completing the sentence that students are struggling with reduces their opportunities and motivation to speak the TL.

Challenge #5: Creating a Linguistically and Culturally Rich Environment

Just as organizers of immersion activities use cultural realia to simulate an environment in a target language speaking community, all language programs can use cultural realia to create a more authentic and meaningful learning environment in all school facilities. The visual images of cultural realia can be a source of stimulation for formal and informal learning such as an improvised conversation on a cultural topic and recall of words and expression students have learned.

The findings from this study and these pedagogical implications highlight the importance of teachers. Language teachers play a key role in creating a linguistically rich environment. By speaking the TL in and out class and by insisting that their students do so as well, they serve as a valuable source of comprehensible input to students and help students grow comfortable using the TL for communication. More importantly, they set a convincing example for their students to follow in the implementation of the TL Policy.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

No research study is without limitations. In this study, the interpretation of the results must take into account the reality of response bias, whether that be in students' ESQ final course ratings, the student surveys for their current classes, or faculty responses in the survey of teacher perceptions of how well this policy was being implemented. Students or teachers may feel pressured to respond with answers that are socially acceptable and not feel they could express their true feelings. At the same time, classroom observations may have been impacted by the presence of observers, where teachers and students were putting forward their best

performance for those who were taking notes. Given these limitations, further exploration and ongoing analysis into these topics is warranted, where teachers and students become more accustomed to regular observations and are less likely to change their behavior based on having an observer present. Doing an in-depth analysis into the effectiveness of the target language that was being used was beyond the scope of this project and therefore warrants further research so that best practices can be identified, detailed, and shared across the Institute. Future studies can explore strategies that teachers can use to maximize students' TL use, as well as how to use the TL effectively during class time for all subjects (i.e., including grammar) in a way that maximizes student understanding within the realities of cognitive load demands.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights a key accomplishment at DLIFLC: teachers and students alike report that the Command Policy #21 on Target Language Use is largely being followed in terms of speaking the target language in school facilities. At the same time, the study identifies challenges faced by students and teachers and therefore some training opportunities. For one, there is a lack of clarity on when the use of English is appropriate in the classroom. But perhaps more importantly, this research points to the need for teachers to have an in-depth understanding of how to use the target language in level-appropriate ways according to students' proficiency levels. The target language a teacher uses in a Semester I class, for example, should (a) use simple grammatical forms, (b) be spoken with vocabulary the students are familiar with, and (c) spoken at a rate that is sufficiently slow and understandable for the students. As students grow in their proficiency level, the teacher's language use can simultaneously increase in complexity. This presents a clear training opportunity across Basic program courses.

A second challenging area is students' motivation and willingness to speak the TL in class. This provides a training opportunity for teachers to be more informed of how to raise students' awareness of the importance of them taking risks in class and trying to use the TL whenever possible. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that the classroom environment encourages and supports TL use; teachers can also help students understand ways they can use the TL even though they are at a beginning level (e.g., times they can try to use it, useful vocabulary, etc.). As teachers and students alike grow in their comfort to teach and learn in the target language, teaching in the TL will become more of a way of life at DLIFLC, and less of a policy to be followed.

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Action Research

The Read-Aloud Method as an Effective Teaching Tool: Mixed-Methods Action Research

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The purpose of this exploratory action research is to examine whether the Read-Aloud Method is beneficial for improving underperforming students' reading fluency and automaticity, which in turn may help improve their reading comprehension. Data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to assess the method's potential benefits. Results indicate that the Read-Aloud Method not only contributed to improved fluency features but also helped increase student confidence in learning Korean.

Keywords: *Read-Aloud, Reading Fluency, Student Confidence, Student Motivation*

BACKGROUND

Motivation for this Action Research

Our team sought to address the challenge of helping students reduce attrition rates and support DLIFLC's "80/40/10" goal for Basic Course students. That is, 80% of students in each class should earn a 2/2/1+ in overall production on the DLPT/OPI, 40% should earn a 2+/2+/1+, and 10% should earn 3/3/1+. We aimed to help higher-proficiency students achieve a reading and listening proficiency level of 2+ or higher, while concurrently assisting struggling students to meet level 2 in both areas as well as achieving level 1+ in the OPI. As a team, we tried various methods to help struggling students and found the Read-Aloud Method to be beneficial for increasing their reading fluency and confidence.

Previous Studies

Numerous studies indicate the benefits of the Read-Aloud method. For instance, it has been found that this method enhances vocabulary knowledge, word recognition (Gibson, 2008; Lane & Wright, 2007; Stroh, 2012), automaticity (i.e., immediate word recall), and reading fluency (Chol & Lewis, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2010; Makebo et al., 2022; Rasinski, 2012; Taguchi & Iwasaki, 2008; Yildirim & Rasinski, 2014). Baker et al. (2020) found that the Read-Aloud approach helped students improve their comprehension ability for future reading passages. Researchers also found that the Read-Aloud practice enhances the confidence of foreign language learners (Lam, 2012).

Despite its positive effects and benefits, this method is not widely used in classrooms. Lane and Wright (2007) point out that one frequently cited reason for the limited application of the Read-Aloud method in real classrooms is a lack of time. The method necessitates considerable time for practice, making it challenging to implement as a standard instructional tool in an ordinary classroom setting. Another difficulty with the Read-Aloud method is that few researchers have developed and tested specific techniques for reading aloud (Lane & Wright, 2007). Similarly, teachers often lack knowledge about this teaching method, leaving them with vague and incomplete notions that limit their ability to foster the development of reading fluency in students (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

The most positive results for Read-Aloud have typically found that students benefit most from this method when it is tailored to their needs (Gibson, 2008). The current exploratory action research project customized classroom time, textbooks, and lesson content to implement this method, hoping that DLIFLC instructors in any language will consider adopting similar approaches in their classrooms.

Research Questions

This action research case study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Does the Read-Aloud method improve reading fluency with Korean texts?

2. What is the student's perception of the Read-Aloud method for supporting them in Korean language learning/development?

ACTION PLAN

Context

This action research case study was conducted within a period of six weeks with one student. At the beginning of the case study, the student read and spoke very slowly and had inaccurate pronunciation; she reported that a lack of confidence in her pronunciation caused her to

minimize participation in classroom activities. After considering several learning methods such as shadow reading, paired reading, and scaffolded reading, we decided to utilize the Read-Aloud method to help her improve her reading fluency and regain confidence.

The following seven reading fluency features were selected from previous studies as fluency measures and were marked in the transcript during the read-aloud session (see Appendix) and then counted. The reason for counting these measures was to obtain a general idea of the degree to which reading aloud could have contributed to the student's improved reading fluency and therefore improved comprehension of Korean texts. For two of the measurements (i.e., reading speed and self-correction), higher numbers demonstrate student improvement; for the remaining measures (e.g., number of pauses, etc.), lower numbers indicate student improvement.

- Reading speed (higher number is better)
- Self-correction (higher number is better)
- Pause which is complete silence (lower number is better)
- Abrupt halts in Utterance (lower number is better)
- Rising intonation (lower number is better)
- Errors, both lexical and grammatical (lower number is better)

Actions Taken

The following actions were taken to prepare the student, have the student engage in Read-Aloud, and then assess potential benefits.

1. *Student Training*. The student was trained on potential benefits, procedures, and homework assignments. For homework, the "Read and Record Homework" designed for this case study replaced part of the student's typical daily homework.
2. *Read-Aloud Practice*. The student read aloud a text (selected from the following day's reading materials in the textbook) in the presence of the researchers, followed by a feedback session (total time: 20–25 mins). The researchers noted the student's performance on the seven fluency features on the transcript (see Appendix). In total, the student recorded a read-aloud of 10 texts for this step.
3. *Correction and Explanation*. The researchers corrected the student's errors and gave explanations (e.g., where to pause, how sentence intonation works, grammar features). This step aimed to help the student understand the context and structure of the sentences while reading, rather than merely imitating sounds.
4. *Shadow Reading*. The researchers guided the student through a shadow reading 2–3 times—meaning the researcher read a portion of the text aloud and asked the student to re-read that portion but with more accurate pronunciation and phrasing.

5. *Recording of New Passage*. The student pre-recorded a different text from the next day's reading materials from the textbook without any prior practice (1st recording). In total, the student recorded herself reading aloud for 10 new texts in this step.
6. *Homework for Reinforcement*. Homework was assigned that required the student to read aloud the same text seven times, and then record herself. This assessed the degree of improvement from the 1st recording (without practice) to the 2nd recording (with practice).
7. *Student Feedback Collected.* Student feedback was collected through an unstructured interview at the conclusion of the study. An open-ended question was asked without probing questions: "How was the Read-Aloud practice for you?" The student shared her thoughts freely based on her experience.
8. *Data Analysis.* After all the information was collected, the researchers analyzed the results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Effectiveness of the Read-Aloud Method on Fluency Features

Coded fluency features were analyzed to answer Research Question #1: Does the Read-Aloud method improve reading fluency with Korean texts?

Table 1 shows the ranges and averages for each measured variable across two readings. The reading speed was converted by dividing the audio length by the number of syllables. Therefore, "Syllables per Minute" denotes the number of syllables uttered per minute during speech for two different readings. The numbers in the Minimum, Maximum, and Mean columns indicate the average of the results from 10 texts for each feature.

As can be seen in Table 1, many features demonstrated considerable improvement; for example, the number of syllables per minute increased (*M*=117.9 to *M*=156.7), pauses decreased (*M*=5.1 to *M*=0.9), abrupt halts decreased (*M*=11.3 to *M*=7.4), and the number of errors decreased (*M*=8.2 to *M*=6.5). The students' self-corrections (*M*=7.1 to *M*=8.0) and rising intonations (*M*=13.7 to *M*=10.1) also improved, but to a lesser degree. Thus, the student demonstrated improvement in all areas studied.

Table 1
Counts of Seven Coding Features for 1st and 2nd Recordings

Feature	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Higher Number is Better			
Number of Syllables per Minute (1st)	107.3	148.4	117.9
Number of Syllables per Minute (2nd)	142.2	185.9	156.7
Self-Corrections per Minute (1st)	3.3	10.5	7.1
Self-Corrections per Minute (2nd)	5.0	14.1	8.0
Lower Number is Better			
Pauses per Minute (1st)	2.1	9.5	5.1
Pauses per Minute (2nd)	0	1.5	0.9
Abrupt Halts per Minute (1st)	5.2	18.4	11.3
Abrupt Halts per Minute (2nd)	2.8	15.9	7.4
Rising Intonations per Minute (1st)	10.9	16.6	13.7
Rising Intonations per Minute (2nd)	2.8	24.1	10.1
Errors per Minute (1st)	3.8	11.0	8.2
Errors per Minute (2nd)	3.2	16.5	6.5

Student Feedback Regarding the Effectiveness of the Read-Aloud Method

Below we report the findings for Research Question #2: What is the student's perception of the Read-aloud method for supporting them in Korean language learning/development?

The student reported her perception of the Read-Aloud method itself and also commented on its perceived benefits for her. About the method, she viewed it as a multi-step process that required commitment and regular practice and support. For this reason, the student noted that time management was both a key and a challenging factor in this project, since students must consistently allocate time for practice outside of class. As researchers, we note that some regular instructional hours and Special Assistance hours can be allocated to Read-Aloud practice, or it can also be assigned as Homework. Using class or homework time would reduce the student burden and increase potential positive impacts.

In terms of benefits, the participant perceived the Read-Aloud method as helping her overall Korean language skills improve, particularly in her speaking and reading, including correct and fluent pronunciation and sentence parsing. This is because during the reading practice with the student, the researcher explained where to break down sentences, and these breakdown points often overlapped with natural pause points. In other words, understanding where to pause naturally facilitated her understanding of the sentence structures, which appears to have helped her comprehension. The student also noted that the Read-Aloud method boosted her

confidence, and she felt more prepared for class. In fact, the student ultimately recommended this method to her peers.

The following section will explain specifics about conducting the Read-Aloud method.

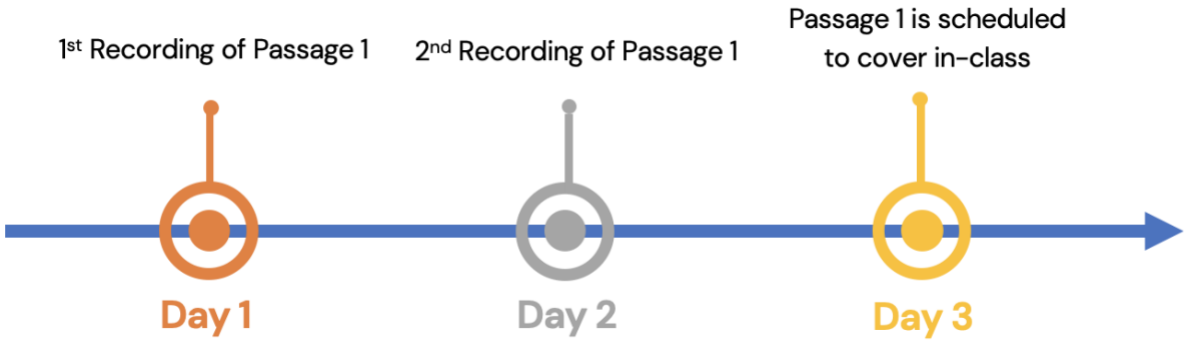
Suggestions for Recording

My team practiced the Read-aloud method with our students in several different ways and found that subtle differences in steps can lead to significant differences in results. In this section, we would like to share the most effective Read-Aloud practice method my team implemented.
To accomplish the desired outcomes, we propose detailed steps that include the number of recordings, the time intervals between the first and second recordings, and the optimal timeframe.

1. *Initial Recording*. First, the student(s) should do the initial recording without any prior practice. By recording the reading material without prior practice, teachers can pinpoint the learner's exact level and the areas that need improvement. This approach allows for a clear demonstration of the learner's improvement during the second recording. The reading passage should be selected from the following day's reading materials in the textbook.
2. *Teacher Feedback & Student Practice with Teacher*. In this step, the student(s) reads the text aloud, with *teacher intervention being crucial*. This is because repeatedly practicing any errors yields no productive results. In our team, Step 2 was conducted during the 7th hour, when Special Assistance (SA) sessions were scheduled.
    a. The teacher should first demonstrate proper pronunciation, intonation, and pauses while explaining sentence breakdown points, based on grammar features.
    b. Then, the teacher and student engage in shadow reading practice a few times.
3. *Student Practice Alone*. The student practices reading the passage aloud independently at home, at least seven times.
4. *Second Recording*. The student completes a second recording at the end of the independent practice in Step 3. The following day, while reviewing the second recording, the teacher can provide feedback to address areas where the student continues to struggle. Based on our experiences, better results are achieved when there is a one-day gap between the first and second recordings.
5. Repeat Steps 1–4 for the new passage.

To briefly wrap up, the Read-Aloud approach begins with practicing the next reading materials with the teacher about two days in advance, followed by the student practicing independently the day before class, and then completing the second recording. Figure 1 illustrates a recommended timeline for recordings.

Figure 1
Suggested Timeline for Recording



Limitations

While the student's reading fluency improved throughout this case study, it must also be noted that the reading skills accumulated from the earlier units might have influenced the reading as the texts progressed to the next unit. Also, this action research did not look at the difficulty of the texts the student read aloud, and these factors can impact reading speed and fluency. Future projects could take this factor into consideration in the action research design.

CONCLUSION

In a general language education setting, particularly in the DLIFLC context, finding ways to help underperforming students improve in a short period of time is a major concern for all teachers. The Read-Aloud method investigated in the current case study was initiated in response to these demands, and its potential benefits have been shown. The student improved her reading fluency, as she read texts faster with fewer pauses and abrupt halts after having practiced the Read-Aloud method. The interview with the student showed that this method boosted her confidence, as found in previous research (Lam, 2012). Given the importance of reading fluency elements accumulating over time, it is believed that the cumulative effect of such a practice ultimately aids in enhancing overall reading comprehension.

The process of reading consists of many skills, ranging from vocabulary knowledge to automatic/fast word recognition and an understanding of how grammar/sentence structure impacts intonation and pausing. The Read-Aloud method seeks to help students build these skills in order to gain reading fluency. Increased fluency leads to increased comprehension. This case study has shown how Reading-Aloud can benefit a student, similar to previous research in these areas (Baker et al. 2020; Chol & Lewis, 2018; Gibson, 2008; Kuhn et al., 2010; Lane & Wright, 2007; Makebo et al., 2022; Rasinski, 2012; Stroh, 2012; Taguchi & Iwasaki, 2008; Yildirim & Rasinski, 2014). It is important to note that the Read-Aloud method does not ask students to read out loud and immediately answer comprehension questions. Instead, this approach is used to

help students build their fluency and understanding of grammar structures for meaning so that they can improve their reading comprehension over time with future reading passages.

While this action research presented results from data collected and analyzed over a short period with one student, examining the long-term developmental process using data collected throughout the entire language program (e.g., 64 weeks for the Korean Basic Program) in the future would provide more comprehensive information regarding the benefits of the Read-Aloud method.

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Acknowledgment

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Dr. Jongoh Eun (Director, Osan LTD) for his generous contributions in transcribing recordings and providing insightful opinions for this project. His dedicated support, expertise, and thoughtful advice have greatly enriched the quality of this research.

Action Research

Recycling Lower-Level Concepts in Semester III to Build Language Proficiency

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This action research investigated the efficacy of an 8-week program designed to improve language proficiency in Arabic language programs during Semester III at DLIFLC. This analysis aims to determine whether this program led to improvements in students' language proficiency as assessed by the In-Course Proficiency Test (ICPT) 302 and the Defense Language Proficiency Test/Oral Proficiency Interview (DLPT/OPI). The program integrates principles such as recycling, review, and repetition, derived from established literature on language acquisition. The instruction incorporated core curriculum and authentic materials encompassing listening, reading, speaking practice, and comprehensive reviews, basing material selection and individualized instruction on a careful analysis of student needs and test performance. This action research project compared students' scores on the ICPT 301, ICPT 302, and DLPT/OPI. The findings suggest that the program effectively reinforces foundational language skills and knowledge. Further investigation can focus on adapting this program for other language categories; examining its potential as an intervention for at-risk students; or as part of Graduation Readiness Intensive Training (GRIT) courses.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Strategies, Educational Intervention, Curriculum Enhancement, Recycle and Review*

INTRODUCTION

An extensive body of research exists regarding second language acquisition (SLA) teaching practices related to the reinforcement of prior learning. A common theme cited in second language (L2) research is students' inadequate retention of key concepts or lexical items covered in previous learning (Cheng & Matthews, 2018). Alhawary (2013) noted that a learner is not likely to retain input of lexical items or language constructs from a single exposure.

Not surprisingly, therefore, several studies have researched the role of repetition or recycling of vocabulary and lexical items and have found them to be crucial to learning (Azim et al., 2020; Masrai, 2019). While there are various approaches related to the role of repetition, recycling, and review found in SLA literature, researchers stress the integration of effective strategy use. These include tasks such as integrating listening and reading activities (Brown et al., 2019) and promoting the development of students' metacognitive skills to increase retention (Dubiner, 2019).

Reviewing and recycling the learning materials at a specific interval is also important to consider (Rogers, 2017) and was a fundamental aspect of this 8-week program. Essentially, when a learner retrieves a word form or meaning based on a specific cue, representation and connection are strengthened. Nakata (2015) determined that spaced distribution of materials led to significantly higher scores for explicit knowledge on posttests, particularly regarding contextual vocabulary learning. Schuetze (2015) examined short-term gains and long-term retention in experiments on vocabulary acquisition. He found that over an 8-week instructional period, with three tests, one immediately following material introduction and the other two spaced at four-week intervals, students showed gradual improvement in retention after each review and test. These studies provide a foundation for this action research and for the analysis of the results.

Statement of the Problem

A high number Iraqi and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) students fail lower-level questions (levels 1, 1+, and 2) on the 3rd semester tests ICPT 301 and 302, indicating potential gaps or deficiencies in their understanding of foundational materials or vocabulary. This pattern is concerning because it suggests that students may struggle with fundamental concepts, which will likely adversely affect their overall DLPT/OPI performance.

My awareness of this concern was raised when I analyzed the ICPT 301 and ICPT 302 scores of several previous classes and found that an average of 30%–40% of students missed a large number of questions at varying proficiency levels on topics covered in the Sem I and Sem II curricula. An analysis of the breakdown of ICPT 301 results by ILR levels 1-3 revealed the same consistent pattern: numerous students (both low- and high-achievers) missed 40% - 60% of low-level questions (1 and 1+) and an average of 20% of questions at the 2 and 2+ level. To address this problem, I developed and conducted an action research project intended to improve students' language acquisition and retention for foundational topics.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this action research was to implement an 8-week program to review and practice foundational grammar structures, lexical items, and language skills in order to ultimately improve students' performance on the DLPT/OPI. The program was implemented during Sem III with three separate classes in two different language programs. The program was initiated after students took ICPT 301, ICPT 302 was taken four weeks later, and an analysis of the results was used to determine whether any modifications to the program's content were required. The DLPT was

taken four weeks after ICPT 302, and the researcher compared the results between the three tests in all three modalities to assess the potential effectiveness of the program in improving students' performance.

This action research aimed to answer the following question: Does implementing this 8-week program—which incorporates repetition, spaced review, and the integration of listening and reading activities—result in demonstrable improvements in students' language proficiency, particularly in speaking, reading, and listening skills, as measured by the ICPT 302 and the DLPT/OPI?

ACTION PLAN

Background and Structure

The 8-week program is an instructional action plan utilizing an open architecture approach and is designed to be implemented following completion of ICPT 301. Open architecture is a design approach that embraces flexibility and adaptability in instruction, allowing for the integration of diverse teaching methods, resources, and technologies. This approach enables educators to tailor their teaching methods and materials to meet the specific needs and preferences of learners. The program framework integrates teaching materials sourced from the Arabic Basic Course (ABC) or Iraqi Basic Course (IBC) curriculum books Semesters I, II, and III, complemented with authentic, supplementary materials ranging from ILR Levels 1 to 3. Instructors act as facilitators during instructional hours. Tailored homework assignments reinforce the content covered during the day, helping students assimilate and effectively retain foundational grammar structures, vocabulary, etc. Students could also seek individual assistance or join a remediation group during any of the non-instructional hours.

The process intends to hone core language proficiencies for each student by revisiting earlier, lower-level materials and systematically progressing through core curriculum activities and more complex, authentic supplementary materials. There are two crucial elements of this program. First, it is vital that instructors conduct diagnostic assessments to identify and address any problems a student encounters in a lesson, or if necessary, to schedule the student for remedial instruction to cover knowledge gaps. Another key element of the program is guided self-study, in which students utilize any free classroom time by revisiting relevant materials or accessing online sites recommended by facilitators. Through this process, students are fully engaged and assume responsibility for their learning. Based on a self-assessed process of need, they are free to revisit any area of the materials that they feel require more review.

Actions Taken

In designing the 8-week program, I placed a strong emphasis on the principles of repetition, recycling, and spaced review of learning materials. Research indicates that these elements are critical to language acquisition, particularly in the context of vocabulary retention (Azim et al., 2020; Masrai, 2019; Nakata, 2015). To operationalize these principles, the program was structured to ensure that students engaged in repeated exposure to key vocabulary and grammatical structures through integrated listening and reading activities. Specifically, materials from the Arabic Basic Course and Iraqi Basic Course curricula were revisited in intervals that aligned with findings from spaced repetition research (Rogers, 2017).

Furthermore, I adopted an approach that emphasized the development of students' metacognitive skills, which has been shown to increase retention (Dubiner, 2019). Students were encouraged to actively engage with the material, self-monitoring their understanding and progress, and incorporate the action plan developed from the diagnostic assessment that informed their tailored review sessions.

By integrating these strategies into both the morning and afternoon instructional blocks, I aimed to reinforce foundational language skills and facilitate long-term retention, which are essential for success in the ICPT 302 and DLPT/OPI assessments.

1. *Needs Analysis*. I analyzed each class's results in the ICPT 301 to determine the specific areas of difficulty that these students were experiencing. This analysis provided a baseline to evaluate each student's performance. I compiled a sub-set of the number of questions missed by level with MS Excel and later compared these to the scores of each student's results in the ICPT 302 and DLPT/OPI (see Appendix for students' scores).
2. *Content Selection and Scheduling*. I selected level-appropriate content and existing supplementary materials, focusing on authentic materials selected from a bank of resources created by faculty and adapted as needed.
    a. 1st and 2nd hours: Listening and reading, with students reviewing designated passages drawn from the core curriculum books for 30 minutes and then reading or listening to instructor-chosen authentic materials.
    b. 3rd and 4th hours: Students review authentic materials and passages presented earlier in the course, with 30 minutes allocated for a designated number of passages and 20 minutes for online materials on the same topics.
    c. 5th hour: One-on-one speaking practice conducted on Teams with no cameras on, simulating the environment in which they will take the OPI.
    d. 6th hour: Students review higher-level listening and reading materials, utilizing GLOSS, JLU, and other prepared materials.
    e. 7th hour: All students encouraged to attend and designated for a comprehensive review of the lessons covered during the day.

3. *Faculty Training*. I conducted familiarization sessions with team members so that they could have a thorough understanding of the sequencing and intent of the teaching materials and the daily schedules. This session included a discussion of findings from the analysis of the students' needs from the ICPT tests (step 1 above) and rationales for the study materials selected (step 2).
4. *Monitoring and Communication*. I conducted weekly meetings with teaching team members to gather perceptions and recommendations during the process.
5. *Class Observations*. I observed the three classes at least once a week to gauge students' engagement in the process as well as appraising instructors' preparedness.
6. *Individualized Student Instruction*. Teaching team instructors evaluated each student's daily and weekly performance and provided recommendations for attendance in additional instructional hours (Zero-hour, 7th hour, and 8th hour) based on the student's availability. Forty-two students voluntarily participated in these sessions.

Data Collected

In order to explore how this 8-week program may have helped students in Semester III answer test questions related to Semesters I and II, the scores of each student in these three courses studied were analyzed. The data sets included listening, reading, and speaking scores of students for ICPT 301, ICPT 302, and DLPT/OPI in three independent classes: Group 1 MSA program; Group 2 Iraqi program A; Group 3 Iraqi program B. See Appendix for students' scores. Students' identities were anonymized. The results for both ICPTs were converted from letter grades to numerical scores using a range scale modeled on the DLPT levels ranging from 1 (F, D-) to 26 (A) points. The DLPT score levels (0 through 3 for MSA and Iraqi lower-range tests) are equated at specific numeric values. For example, level 0+ = 6; level 1 = 10; level 1+ = 16; level 2 = 20; level 2+ = 26; level 3 = 30. Upper-range scores begin at 3+ (36) and higher. Of note here is that the numeric value is not the raw score. The DLPT level to numeric value was obtained from the Directorate of Academic Affairs and is uniform across all DLPT tests. All other data involved in the research was internally available to the researcher and no student interaction was required.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings derived from the data analysis provide valuable perspectives into the efficacy of this language program and demonstrate improvements in language proficiency among students and across all three groups. Improvements were noted in all skills, though particularly in speaking more than listening and reading comprehension. The program's effectiveness in reinforcing foundational language skills and preparing students for the DLPT and OPI assessments highlights the importance of needs analysis and tailored language instruction in facilitating meaningful learning outcomes. An informal comparison of the scores of these three groups of students compared to the scores of previous students who were not in this program shows that the program did help students with foundational language concepts.

Group 1: Modern Standard Arabic Program

Of the 14 students in the MSA group, only one achieved a lower score in reading on the DLPT than the ICPT 301 (see Table 1, Appendix). Comparing scores from ICPT 301 to 302, approximately half of the students' scores on ICPT 302 stayed the same or improved across each modality. The areas where students continued to struggle between ICPT 301 and 302 were in Listening and Reading; there was a greater score increase in Speaking. All students had higher scores on the DLPT/OPI than on ICPT 302 across all modalities.

Observations and Feedback

During my class observations, I observed that students appeared less confident during listening and reading activities, which may indicate a need for more active learning strategies. I noted that students seemed to answer and complete the reading and listening tasks such as content questions or multiple-choice answers by speaking in the target language, which may explain the greater score increase in that modality. Teachers' feedback highlighted that while students participated well during class discussions and speaking exercises, they often struggled with the complexities of reading comprehension and the nuances of listening tasks, particularly when dealing with authentic materials. Students expressed that they sometimes found reading texts dense and overwhelming and that listening audios often felt too fast-paced, contributing to their difficulties. Students also expressed anxiety about focusing on lower-level materials in SEM III due to the requirements for higher-level content.

Why the Challenges in Reading and Listening

I believe the students' struggles in reading and listening between ICPT 301 and ICPT 302 can be attributed to a few factors. First, the complexity of authentic materials might have posed a challenge, especially if students lacked sufficient exposure to similar texts or audio resources during their study hours. Second, it's possible that the pacing of the lessons didn't allow enough time for students to fully process and engage with the material. Additionally, the lack of varied and repeated exposure to vocabulary and syntax in authentic contexts might have hindered students' ability to internalize and recall information effectively during the activities.

Suggestions for Improvement

Moving forward, I propose modifying the 8-week program to focus more time on developing students' reading and listening skills. This could include integrating more scaffolded exercises that gradually increase in difficulty, breaking down the passages into 2 to 3 sections, and incorporating more recycling games or short activities. Also, slowing down the pacing of listening activities will ensure students have adequate time to process and understand the material. Providing students with the listening transcription at the end of the activity would also allow students to self-assess on what they missed from the text.

Additional Observation

Students achieved higher grades in reading and listening on ICPT 302 compared to ICPT 301. I believe one contributing factor to this improvement may be attributed to the shorter time frame prior to ICPT 301, during which students were learning to incorporate new strategies and materials. By ICPT 302, students were able to recall vocabulary presented earlier in the course more quickly and accurately.

Group 2: Iraqi Program A

Of the nine students in the first Iraqi group, all achieved a higher score on the DLPT than the ICPT 301 (see Table 2, Appendix). Comparing the scores from the ICPT 301 to 302, approximately half of the students' scores on ICPT 302 stayed the same or improved across each modality. All students had higher scores on the DLPT/OPI than on ICPT 302 across all modalities

Observations and Feedback

During my class observations, I noted that students seemed more comfortable working on reading and listening passages. Reducing the emphasis on speaking the TL during these activities allowed students more time to focus on comprehension rather than spending effort on articulating their responses. This shift contributed to a more effective engagement with the reading and listening tasks. Teacher feedback highlighted that the recent adjustments in the program, such as more scaffolded exercises and adjusted pacing, were well-received. Students appeared more confident in their reading and listening tasks, demonstrating improved comprehension and performance. Students were highly engaged with the program and motivated to attend extra teaching hours during zero, 7th, and 8th periods. Additionally, some students requested extra and tailored homework assignments that were relevant to the lesson.

Why the Challenges in Reading and Listening

Despite the overall improvement, there were still some challenges noted in reading and listening tasks. Initially, the complexity of authentic materials and the pacing of lessons may have posed difficulties. However, the successful incorporation of targeted strategies, such as scaffolded exercises and practice with authentic materials, addressed many of these issues. The improved results suggest that while challenges existed, the adjustments made were effective in mitigating them.

Suggestions for Improvement

Moving forward, I recommend continuing to refine the program in the following ways:

- Maintain and possibly expand the use of scaffolded exercises that progressively increase in difficulty to further support student development.

- Continue breaking down reading passages into manageable sections to aid comprehension.
- Ensure that listening activities are paced according to students' expressed needs, allowing them sufficient time to process and understand the material.
- Provide transcriptions of listening exercises to help students review and self-assess their understanding.

Additional Observation

The positive impact of these changes may have contributed to the improved scores across both ICPT 302 and the DLPT. I believe the implementation of the suggested improvements led to higher scores and demonstrated that teachers were more adept at applying the revised program effectively. The enhanced strategies and teacher expertise contributed to the successful outcomes, reflecting well on both the test results and the overall program.

Group 3: Iraqi Program B

Of the 19 students in the second Iraqi group, results showed more consistent improvement on the DLPT than the ICPT 301 across all modalities 301 (see Table 3, Appendix). Comparing the scores from ICPT 301 to 302, most students' scores on ICPT 302 stayed the same or improved across each modality. The areas where students continued to struggle between ICPT 301 and 302 were in Reading and Speaking; there was a greater score increase in Listening. All students had higher scores on the DLPT/OPI than on the ICPT 302 across all modalities.

Observations and Feedback

During my observations of Group 3, students exhibited varying levels of comfort and proficiency in handling reading and listening tasks. The group, which was divided into two sub-groups based on ability, one of high achievers and one of students who struggled from the beginning, showed distinct patterns in their engagement. High-achieving students demonstrated a high level of confidence and effectiveness in tackling the material, leading to notable improvements in their performance. The struggling students initially faced challenges with material complexity and pacing, but adjustments like scaffolded exercises and varied pacing helped. Despite these benefits, the larger class size limited the ability to provide individual support to all students.

Teachers appreciated the flexibility of the modified program, which allowed them to better cater to the diverse needs within Group 3. They reported high-achieving students responded well to the increased focus on reading and listening without the added pressure of frequent speaking tasks. Students in Group 3 expressed a range of responses to the program modifications. High-achieving students reported feeling more engaged and challenged by the adjusted activities and appreciated the opportunity to delve deeper into reading and listening tasks. They valued the additional practice and the tailored homework assignments that aligned with their needs. Students in the struggling sub-group also acknowledged the benefits of the scaffolded exercises

and the adjusted pacing. They noted that these changes helped them better manage the complexity of the materials and improved their overall comprehension.

Why the Challenges in Reading and Listening

Despite the overall improvement, there were still some challenges noted in reading and listening tasks. Initially, the complexity of authentic materials and the pacing of lessons may have posed difficulties. However, the successful incorporation of targeted strategies, such as scaffolded exercises and practice with authentic materials, addressed many of these issues. The improved results suggest that while challenges existed, the adjustments made were effective in mitigating them.

Some students voiced concerns about not receiving enough one-on-one attention due to the larger class size of 19 students. We therefore divided the larger class into smaller groups of approximately 6 to 8 students for certain activities. This division allowed for more focused group work and peer collaboration. Also, extra teaching hours were offered, allowing students to seek additional help outside of regular class time. Third, students could request customized homework assignments that targeted their specific areas of difficulty. These opportunities were well-received and played a significant role in enhancing student motivation and engagement.

Suggestions for Improvement

While the program modifications contributed to improving student outcomes and maintaining engagement, the feedback highlighted the ongoing need for balancing resources and providing adequate support for all students within a larger group setting. Extra teaching hours were offered, enabling students to seek additional help outside of regular class time, during zero and 8th hours. Students could also request customized homework assignments targeting their specific areas of difficulty.

Additional Observation

The positive impact of these changes may have contributed to the improved scores across both ICPT 302 and the DLPT. I believe the implementation of the suggested improvements led to higher scores and demonstrated that teachers were more adept at applying the revised program effectively. The enhanced strategies and teacher expertise contributed to the successful outcomes, reflecting well on both the test results and the overall program.

CONCLUSION

As the culmination of the DLIFLC's language programs, Sem III encompasses the totality of the learning experience. Students are continually exposed to the higher levels of the language, while still building upon and attempting to maintain previous learning. This action research intended to provide insights into the impact of an 8-week foundation-building program on students'

DLPT/OPI scores. The results from all three classes suggest that the process and content of the program were effective in reinforcing foundational language skills and bridging knowledge gaps, resulting in improvements in language proficiency. Of note is the improvement in speaking skills at each benchmark stage, which indicates that conducting instruction in a virtual environment simulating the OPI was beneficial for students.

Also interesting are the results from the Iraqi programs. For both classes of Iraqi students, the program produced consistent improvement in Listening, Reading, and Speaking, specifically evident on the DLPT/OPI tests. Of note for this language program, in the first four weeks, most students only maintained or even decreased scores on the ICPT 302. However, in the last 4 weeks of the program, there was a universal, very pronounced improvement for the majority of students across all modalities, indicating that the cumulative effect of the review of materials during the latter part of the program was particularly effective. This finding is consistent with the research completed by Nakata (2015), which stated that the spaced distribution of materials results in higher scores on posttests, particularly regarding contextual vocabulary learning. Also, Schuetze (2015) found that over an 8-week instructional period, with spaced-interval tests, students showed gradual improvement in retention after each test. This finding is consistent with the current research regarding spaced repetition and remediation strategies.

Considering the need to cover new material in Semester III, some DLIFLC language teachers may question how to fit such an enhancement program into the curriculum. However, the program addresses this concern by allowing flexibility in scheduling and content delivery to complement existing curriculum materials. Teaching teams can integrate new Semester III material as needed while ensuring that foundational language skills are reinforced effectively. Additionally, by utilizing zero, 7th-hour, or 8th-hour sessions, instructors can incorporate the program and still cover essential curriculum content. This approach ensures that students are not overwhelmed or overworked.

The 8-week program was initially designed for Category IV Arabic language programs aimed at addressing identified deficiencies in student performance in Semester III. The program could be effectively adapted to a Category III language program with a thorough assessment of applicable curriculum and supplemental resources. Also, the program can be used in blended learning or immersive activities to facilitate its integration. Additionally, there is a potential to explore its utility as an intervention for at-risk students or as part of Graduation Readiness Intensive Training (GRIT) courses. Future action research projects can explore some of the findings from this study, such as how best to support students with individualized instruction in larger classes, or how to help students build bottom-up listening and reading skills (e.g., decoding, word boundaries) that they can apply to any future listening or reading activities.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Scores of Group 1: MSA Students on ICPT 301, ICPT 302, and DLPT Tests

Student	ICPT 301 L	ICPT 302 L	DLPT L	ICPT 301 R	ICPT 302 R	DLPT R	ICPT 301 S	ICPT 302 S	OPI S
S1	13	24	26	26	24	24	18	18	24
S2	20	13	30	24	24	30	20	20	24
S3	24	24	30	24	26	30	22	22	24
S4	20	24	30	22	26	30	22	24	24
S5	10	13	26	22	22	26	18	20	22
S6	20	24	30	22	24	30	20	22	28
S7	24	22	30	24	26	30	18	22	24
S8	24	22	26	20	16	26	18	18	24
S9	22	22	36	22	26	30	20	24	24
S10	26	26	36	24	26	30	24	24	28
S11	20	16	26	22	13	26	18	20	24
S12	13	2	24	13	16	16	18	18	22
S13	20	22	30	22	22	24	18	20	24
S14	6	2	16	3	2	6	18	18	24

Table 2

Scores of Group 2: Iraqi Students on ICPT 301, ICPT 302, and DLPT Tests

Student	ICPT 301 L	ICPT 302 L	DLPT L	ICPT 301 R	ICPT 302 R	DLPT R	ICPT 301 S	ICPT 302 S	OPI S
S1	16	20	24	13	3	24	18	18	24
S2	20	26	24	16	16	26	20	20	24
S3	16	3	24	1	13	24	20	18	22
S4	16	16	24	13	10	26	24	16	24
S5	24	26	26	16	24	26	22	20	22
S6	16	16	24	13	13	26	18	16	22
S7	20	16	24	20	16	30	18	20	22
S8	26	26	30	16	22	24	24	24	24
S9	24	20	24	20	24	30	22	20	24

Table 3

Scores of Group 3: Iraqi Students on ICPT 301, ICPT 302, and DLPT Tests

Student	ICPT 301 L	ICPT 302 L	DLPT L	ICPT 301 R	ICPT 302 R	DLPT R	ICPT 301 S	ICPT 302 S	OPI S
S1	13	24	26	26	24	24	18	18	24
S2	20	13	30	24	24	30	20	20	24
S3	24	24	30	24	26	30	22	22	24
S4	20	24	30	22	26	30	22	24	24
S5	10	13	26	22	22	26	18	20	22
S6	20	24	30	22	24	30	20	22	28
S7	24	22	30	24	26	30	18	22	24
S8	24	22	26	20	16	26	18	18	24
S9	22	22	36	22	26	30	20	24	24
S10	26	26	36	24	26	30	24	24	28
S11	20	16	26	22	13	26	18	20	24
S12	13	2	24	13	16	16	18	18	22
S13	20	22	30	22	22	24	18	20	24
S14	6	2	16	3	2	6	18	18	24
S15	16	16	16	20	3	24	18	20	24
S16	16	13	24	20	6	24	22	20	24
S17	10	13	24	16	24	24	20	20	24
S18	20	26	26	22	24	30	22	22	22
S19	24	22	24	6	24	26	22	22	24

Faculty Forum

Teaching Culturally-Complex Topics: Nuancing DLIFLC Students' Views of the « Headscarf » among French-Speaking Muslim Women

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Given the recurrence of debates in France regarding "the headscarf" and France's secularizing laws, the topic of Islamic dress in France and francophone countries must be approached with care. This reflection discusses my design of a two-hour lesson on French "secularism" and "the headscarf" to include the voices of Muslim women. Availing multiple perspectives on a singular issue invites learners to see culture as dynamic rather than monolithic, an approach that I call a "diverse voices" approach to studying culture (Anderson, 2022). The lesson utilized a content-based approach, incorporating multiple modalities and tasks to maximize student engagement. The following day, I asked students to complete a 5-question survey to explore their perceptions of studying topics related to Islamic culture within francophone countries. Feedback was strongly positive; students appreciated the content-based approach and engagement strategy employed within the lesson. One student's comments highlighted the presence of a test-centric "washback" effect, demonstrating that more explicit scaffolding was needed. This perspective suggests that students' pedagogical goals and values may not perfectly align with the instructor's. Inventorying students' pre-extant assets and conducting a needs analysis of our students' future work as warrior-linguists could better inform pedagogy. Insights from this successful lesson could be utilized to spark ideation or replication across the Institute when teaching sensitive cultural topics.

Keywords: *Culture, francophone, French, Islam, Muslim, Secularism*

INTRODUCTION

Linguistic competence is of little value if unaccompanied by relevant cultural competence. Pedagogies that develop students' cultural competencies must be careful to not reduce complex cultural phenomena to simplifications or generalizations that will be of limited applicability within our students' future roles. Cultural learning is exponentially complex for the DLIFLC's French learners given that learners' future work may span many French-speaking countries across multiple continents.

Analyzing the effectiveness of a recent lesson, this teacher reflection reviews a skills-integrated, multi-modal lesson on Muslim women's attire in French-speaking societies. The topic has proven to be a hot-button issue for French society in recent decades because of the complexities it presents to France's secular tradition. A 2010 law banned face coverings in public, including the *niqab* (the face covering worn by Muslim women); violators would be fined $150. Neither French laws governing the wearing of the veil nor French secularism are above reproach: during the pandemic, France continued to enforce the law despite mandatory mask-wearing, which Amnesty International cited as transparently Islamophobic (Silverstein, 2020). What's more, only four of the 13 official public holidays in France are *not* religious (read: Catholic) in nature (Barleau & Nadeau, 2017).

The lesson familiarized students with France's laws before exposing them to varying viewpoints on Muslim women's attire from Muslim, French-speaking women themselves. In doing so, the lesson included a range of diverse opinions, thereby demonstrating the multidimensionality of complex social and cultural phenomena. This reflection includes some crucial background on the topic which informed the pedagogical choices made in designing this lesson. The reflection then outlines the lesson's tasks. Finally, students' feedback on the lesson is presented. Altogether, the lesson and approach seem promising for facilitating students' learning vis-à-vis complex cultural topics through authentic, diverse sources.

Background

In the final week of our 36-week program, I was scheduled to teach a two-hour lesson on "The Wearing of the (Islamic) Headscarf." Initially, the lesson focused exclusively on France. This section provides relevant background knowledge needed to understand the structure and conceptual framing of my redesign of the lesson.

Key Terms

To understand the sensitivities of this topic, some key terms must be defined. The definitions, provided here to facilitate the readers' understanding, are not necessarily identical to those within the studied texts. Moreover, concepts used within French and Francophone contexts may differ from their usage in other regions.

French "Secularism"

In France, secularism (French: "*laïcité")* is an indispensable concept. Barlow and Nadeau (2017) defined laicité as, "a government policy that excludes religion from anything related to state institutions" (p. 262). Secularism as practiced in France is viewed as the supportive tissue of the famed national motto *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* (Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood).

Headscarf

Recognizing a great variety of garments, styles, and traditions used by Muslim women worldwide, "headscarf" collectively refers to the *hijab, niqab, haik, chedor, abaya, etc.* France's laws both define the headscarf and determine the spaces in which wearing a headscarf is legal. Again, such laws are specific to France.

F/francophone Countries

This term refers to countries where the French language was and/or is utilized, excluding France. The French do not consider themselves to be "francophone" (Barlow & Nadeau, 2017, p. 191), instead seeing the French language as a defining characteristic of French-ness (p. 158). Recently, 74 countries were counted among French-speaking nations, to varying degrees (Reynolds, 2024). Furthermore, "francophone" (uncapitalized "f") differentiates French-speaking countries (e.g., Algeria) from member-states of the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (capitalized "F"), an international body comprised of both French-speaking and non-French-speaking countries (e.g., Egypt, Mexico).

THE INTERVENTION, IMPLEMENTED

I retained the first hour's focus as proscribed, centered on a text explaining French laws regarding religious attire at work, in school, and public spaces. I modified the lesson for the second hour, with permission. As a non-Muslim, non-French national, I felt that I should not attempt to speak on behalf of these cultures. Instead, students should hear from Muslim women who chose to explain their views.

In the first hour, I introduced the topic through the following tasks.

1. Students (n=5) read aloud from PPT slides I had prepared that contained short definitions of French secularism followed by political cartoons satirizing pro- and con-positions on this issue. Satirical cartoons are an important tradition in French social discourse and offer glimpses into prevailing public sentiment on hot-button issues.
2. I then presented slides with internet headlines containing some key vocabulary I had previously screenshot. Students deduced their meaning. This approach draws from the incremental input-based approach to teaching vocabulary (Barcroft, 2012).

3. Students read the text, a summary of French laws (ILR Level 3; 507 words), framed within the following task: "An American Muslim soldier and family will be relocating to France. They want to respect local French laws, as the wife wears a headscarf. Create a graphic organizer of French laws to help her understand French laws." I told students they would use these graphic organizers in the following hour.
4. Students read and, in small groups, drew their organizers on the board; then, after approximately 20 minutes, students explained them aloud as I corrected any ambiguities.

In the second hour, I led students to perform a skills-integrated, multi-modal lesson, using the following order:

1. Students guessed the number of Muslims worldwide and the number of Muslim-majority countries, then named francophone Muslim-Majority countries. I provided answers and then projected one image for each Muslim-majority francophone country. I assembled these images after Googling "women of Chad," for example, and collecting the first image of women wearing a head/face covering that appeared (an ILR 0+ task).
2. Students orally compared the clothing styles they saw, quickly realizing the diversity of styles, colors, and shapes of the attire worn by women (an ILR 1 task).
3. Afterwards, each student was assigned to watch one video. I selected five 18–20 minute-long YouTube videos of Muslim women speaking in standard French about their clothing and their relationship to it. I had decided against cropping the videos given the personal nature of the anecdotes shared. Seeking a variety of views on Islamic dress, I included the videos of one woman who wore the *niqab*, one who wore Western clothing, one who converted to Islam, and two others who recently (re)started veiling.
    a. Before watching, I used slides to teach students five common Islamic expressions in Arabic they would hear intermixed within the women's French. The goal was to recognize the expression and have an awareness of its socio-cultural meaning.
    b. For each video, I created a set of slides that contained four to six vocabulary items—presented using the aforementioned internet-headline deductive method—and five multiple-choice questions in English, with an answer key. Individually, students read these materials prior to watching.
    c. Finally, students' watching was oriented toward the assigned task: report to the class (your) specific woman's name and identity, her relationship to Islamic attire, and where in France she could circulate without changing her attire (an ILR 2 task). This last task would require the graphic organizers created the previous hour. According to Bloom's taxonomy, this task required learners to remember and understand (lower-order thinking skills) as well as analyze (a higher-order skill).

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The lesson utilized content-based instruction (CBI), which posits that students, "learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of understanding content, rather than as an end in itself" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 118). I intended the lesson to be stimulating, recognizing that boredom, specifically within the foreign language classroom, is little understood but highly deactivating (Pawlak et al., 2020). The lesson reflected an approach that I had piloted when creating the "Diverse Arabic Voices Project" in 2022 as a university Arabic instructor (Anderson, 2022). The project aimed to develop students' appreciation of the diversity of Arabic speakers. The project personalized broad social categories ("Muslim," "Tunisian," etc.) by exposing students to short, recorded interviews I had conducted with Arabic speakers who represented an array of nationalities, religions, gender, dialects, etc. Pedagogically, the project centered on the principle that no single person's perspective can define a culture. Instead, multiple perspectives add depth and breadth to learners' emergent understanding of culture.

FINDINGS

Student Feedback

I was curious to know: *How did students perceive this lesson about Islamic culture within the francophone countries?* To answer this question, I asked students to voluntarily complete an anonymous, 5-question survey to inform DLIFLC's pedagogy. Four Likert-Scale questions (LSQ), (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree) preceded a final question that asked for four written sentences. The morning after implementing this lesson, I sent the Microsoft Forms questions via Microsoft Teams to all students and asked them to direct-message me their responses. Four of five responded, while only three of four completed the final write-in question. Results of the LSQs are displayed in Table 1.

Table 2
Results of LSQ's (1-4 Only)

Question	Responses
1. After the lesson 7/30 on *laïcité* and Islamic dress in France, I have a better understanding of the topic.	strongly agree (3) agree (1)
2. After the lesson 7/30 on Muslim francophone women's relationship with veiling, I have a better understanding of the topic.	strongly agree (3) agree (1)
3. During that lesson, it was helpful to be exposed to 4-5 common Islamic expressions in Arabic.	strongly agree (2) neutral (1) agree (1)
4. The French language curriculum should include more cultural content on Islamic, francophone countries and societies.	strongly agree (1) agree (2) neutral (1)

Themes

Studying French Secularism and Muslim Women's Attire

Findings demonstrated that the lessons on French secularism and on Muslim women's attire were perceived to be beneficial to students' learning. One respondent wrote, "I found this lesson extremely useful. I had never studied Islam before this, so I was able to learn a lot." This quote demonstrates that the student perceived his cultural awareness was developing. What's more, these comments demonstrate that students may come to DLIFLC without any previous knowledge of Islam or knowing any Muslims. Instructors should therefore inventory the various assets and experiences students bring to the DLIFLC classroom, allowing instruction to be tailored to students' individual strengths and weaknesses. Such inventorying would help faculty to move beyond uninformed impressions of military students (Miller, 2016).

CBI, Anti-Boredom Approaches Beneficial

The quote above also suggests that learning through the CBI approach was successful. One student wrote: "The ability to each have something separate to talk about helped us not cover the same thing over and over." This suggests that these activities make each student responsible for providing classmates with unique (not duplicative), meaningful information and may promote engagement and prevent boredom within the language classroom. As an institution, DLIFLC requires that adult learners attend a daily minimum of six hours in the classroom. Conversely, faculty may not teach six consecutive hours, nor may ever have experienced a daily routine of six consecutive hours of second language learning and the cognitive load that it requires. As such, instructors must be aware of the levels of social-emotional stimulation that lessons afford learners, both within their teaching hours and across the learners' entire day.

A Testing-Centric "Washback" Effect

Less pedagogically desirable, the short survey uncovered signs of a serious misalignment between one student and curricular objectives. One student wrote: "The overall topic was useful, though I'm not sure it's quite required to understand French culture quite yet. Although, there's a chance it will appear on the DLPT." This student also responded "neutral" to questions on the benefit of studying Islamic culture within francophone countries. These views support his perception that a lesson's utility ultimately depends upon its inclusion within final assessments, not within his career as a warrior-linguist. This view denotes a form of washback, meaning the influence of an assessment on the learning and teaching that the assessment intends to assess (Green, 2012). As research has noted, washback may be influenced by other factors and stakeholders (Rahman et al., 2023). For example, his affinities to France may have narrowed his focus to France. This student was fortunate to participate in a month-long immersion in France, and at the time of this writing, did not yet have plans or orders that would deploy him abroad. Further follow-up with this student could have identified his perceived future needs for the French language and French/francophone cultural knowledge, uncovering his imagined identities—imagined not meaning unreal, but rather how he envisions his future relationship to France and French/francophone culture (Norton & Pavlenko, 2007).

Notwithstanding, this student's perspectives demonstrate the need for additional scaffolding within the lesson on Islamic attire in France when implemented in the future. Scaffolding must emphasize the size (Pew Research Center, 2017) and the importance of the Muslim population in France (Aziz, 2022). Regarding test washback, it is instructors who are best positioned to articulate to students the goals of testing, what testing seeks to measure, and the relationship between testing and curriculum (Rahman et al., 2023). To this end, instructors themselves must be equipped with a clear understanding of these issues.

The foci of this lesson, as with curriculum development in general, should be based on a needs analysis. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), this analysis consists of:

> the use of observation, surveys, interviews, situation analysis, analysis of language samples collected in different settings—in order to determine the kinds of communication learners would need to master if they were in specific occupational or educational roles and the language features of particular settings. (p. 95)

For DLIFLC's French program, this would include an understanding of the conditions (geographies, dialects) in which students will work and live, and the linguistic tools (vocabularies, registers, rhetoric) they will need to be effective within those settings. Serving all branches of the military and given the security-sensitive nature of their work, it may not be feasible to implement such a needs analysis. Recently, one such analysis was conducted by a British government agency, which may offer insights into replication within DLIFLC's context (Davie, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This two-hour lesson aimed to expand students' understanding of French secularism and Muslim culture within France and francophone countries. Through a CBI, multi-modal lesson that incorporated multiple skills, students utilized French as a tool to explore culture. Rather than static, monolithic depictions of culture, multiple perspectives on socially sensitive topics were made available to students. Feedback from students was positive. What appeared most challenging was not social sensitivities, but rather orienting students' understanding of the importance of this content toward their careers, beyond the DLTP. For this reason, explicit scaffolding will be needed in future iterations. Conversations with military linguists, both for faculty and for students, may better inform both about the cultural knowledge and skills DLIFLC students will need when they deploy. Feedback also demonstrated that the CBI, engagement-inducing lesson design was appreciated. These insights can spark ideation across the institute when teaching and designing lessons on complex cultural topics.

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Faculty Forum

Preparing Students for Iso-Immersion: Activities about Cultural Norms to Improve Speaking Skills

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This article explores an innovative, experiential-learning based approach to enhance the speaking skills of students and raise their cultural awareness during Isolation Immersion (Iso-Immersion). The focus lies in designing and implementing real-life scenarios that aim to cultivate a better understanding of diverse cultural traditions and improve their ability to communicate effectively.

Keywords: *Real-Life Scenarios, Immersions, Cultural Norms, Speaking Skills*

INTRODUCTION

Iso-immersion (i.e., Isolation Immersion activities held at Fort Ord) at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) offers students a two-day crash course to develop their intercultural competence and knowledge of the target culture. In Iso-immersion, students are immersed in an environment in which they speak the target language as they experience challenging situations through real-life scenarios. This teaching method is different from traditional language teaching methods, which often fall short in adequately preparing students for realistic experiences, particularly in grasping the intricacies of various cultural norms. This article focuses on how to create and conduct real-life activities to bolster students' speaking skills and increase their cultural awareness through activities at the Institute's immersion facility. The scenario is based on experiential learning, where students engage in an activity and then de-brief to highlight learning and discuss any questions/challenges.

SCENARIO OBJECTIVES

Real-life scenarios not only allow language teachers to practice linguistic functions but also prepare students to successfully perform a military task by enhancing cultural competence with Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) as listed below:

- Participate in work-related conversations
- Recognize cultural differences and similarities
- Develop argumentation and persuasion skills
- Deal with unpredictable transactions or situations
- Analyze information and behavior
- Create and justify an action plan
- Develop interpersonal skills (rapport building, relationship building)
- Acquire and demonstrate the general ability to adapt to different situations

The objectives of the scenario described below is to expose students to one type of Hispanic culture through situations that students may encounter during their Outside Continental U.S. Immersion (OCONUS) with the local inhabitants of the target country, and provide them the opportunity to practice the following linguistic functions:

- Ask and answer open-ended questions
- Provide an explanation
- Give instructions/directions
- Give a description
- Perform a transaction
- Report an event

The scenario will help the students, in the 1+/2 level of speaking proficiency, gain cultural awareness and sensitivity, develop problem-solving skills, and increase their speaking fluency and confidence. These types of Iso-Immersion activities are conducted with students at this proficiency level for two key reasons: (1) they can become broadly aware of these concepts early on so that they can notice them throughout the program; (2) they can begin developing OPI-related linguistic skills (e.g., discuss abstract topics, persuade others, etc.) and culturally-based information while covering Semester II topics. Students will also practice many formal and informal linguistic features, such as relevant verb tenses and key vocabulary. An added benefit will be increased student motivation through realistic cultural experiences.

The following sample scenario is one of three scenarios that students role played with the “local inhabitants”/teachers. During the total Iso-Immersion time, each student will participate in each of the three scenarios.

SAMPLE SCENARIO

The Iso-Immersion scenarios described in this article take place during Semester II. Students are told they are members of a commission tasked with surveying the crops in an area of the Andes in Bolivia, where the population is mostly indigenous and deeply traditional. The inhabitants of this region are highly committed to environmental conservation and the preservation of their ancestral traditions, including the consumption of coca leaves. Part of the mission is to engage with the local inhabitants to convince them that the U.S. intends to help eradicate illegal coca cultivation and replace it with crops that will provide the people from that region with greater long-term benefits (i.e., soybeans, corn, potatoes, and fruits). Students will meet a local leader to find out their customs and traditions, with the goal of building better rapport to be able to persuade them. All interactions are to take place in Spanish.

Information for Teachers

The teacher plays the role of a local leader representing indigenous communities, where traditions are highly valued, and the consumption of coca is considered important in providing a connection with nature. Prior to the activity, teachers receive detailed guidelines on how to respond to various types of potential student communication (e.g., if the student is overly direct or pushy) and on how to determine if they should allow the student to persuade them to change their crops. The teacher/local leader should begin by reporting that the community is unwilling to give up coca cultivation. The teacher/local leader further states that in their opinion, Americans consume too much cocaine and do not sufficiently respect nature. Plants should be used for good purposes, not for creating drugs. The teacher/local leader will argue that instead of asking their village to change their crops, the Americans should reduce their addiction to cocaine.

The scenario set in the Andes of Bolivia provides a unique platform for students to engage in cross-cultural communication and exercise HOTS through analyzing, negotiating, persuading, and justifying their proposed agricultural changes. Their encounter with the local leader (a.k.a. teacher) offers the opportunity for them to navigate through cultural nuances and articulate the benefits of their mission. This scenario not only cultivates linguistic skills but also enhances cultural competence by placing students in a context where cultural understanding plays a key role. The interplay between cultural sensitivity and HOTS is a significant aspect of the scenario, fostering a holistic development of foreign language fluency and problem-solving skills in an unexpected situation.

GUIDELINES

Students are given homework the day before the Iso-immersion so that they can become familiar with the topic. The homework entails readings (i.e., Characteristics of Culture) and watching news articles and videos related to three specific scenarios. Students also review necessary vocabulary and useful grammatical structures related to persuasion and also showing respect. They also are

given the definition and rubric of cultural characteristics and cultural competence so that they know how they will be assessed.

Part I

The activities start at 8:30am. During the first 15 minutes of the first hour, the teacher will divide the class into three groups of three students per group, explain their roles in the scenarios, and answer questions they might have about the homework and the rotations through different stations. Then, each group will decide the order in which each group member will lead, support, or observe during their visit to each station. Group members will review all three scenarios to plan for their meeting with the local inhabitants/teachers. Students are told general guidelines to consider cultural appropriateness of their communication along with their behavior and body language. They are told to make a plan together on how they will approach the first scenario, keeping in mind that they can revise their communication as needed for scenarios two and three.

Planning

During the first hour, after they have formed their groups, the students will designate their alternating roles for each station, which is important because students will be allowed to choose the scenario and the theme they would like to observe or lead when interacting with the local inhabitants/teachers.

At each station one student will lead while a second student will be the leader's partner to provide support and a third student will observe the pair's performance at that station. The observer will take notes on the "Debrief Form" (see Figure 1) and will keep track of time. It is recommended that a two-minute warning be given before the time is up (see Figure 2 for timings). The observer will not interact with the rest of his group members or the local inhabitants/teachers. She/He will pay attention to the linguistic and cultural competence of their group. Later, the observer will lead the debrief for five minutes and ask group members to self-reflect.

Figure 3
Debrief Form for Students, to be Completed by the Student in the Observer Role

	Station 1/Scenario 1 **Leader:** **Observer:**	**Station 2/Scenario 2** **Leader:** **Observer:**	**Station 3/Scenario 3** **Leader:** **Observer:**
Lexical and structural control: (Proper use of vocabulary, verb tenses, and expressions)			
Cultural appropriateness: (Awareness and command of common cultural and social norms)			
Cultural Characteristics identified: (Power distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, etc.)			
Communication skills applied: (Verbals/non-verbals, greetings, gestures, turn-taking.)			
Did the speaker accomplish the objective set by the group?			
What recommendations do you have for the group for the next station?			

Part 2

Part 2 runs from 9:30am to 11:45am. The students will interact with the local leaders (preferably teachers from other teaching teams). This is when students obtain the greatest benefits through role play situations in that they will:

- build speaking confidence.
- learn to express themselves and understand responses, fostering communication skills crucial for fluency.
- practice vocabulary and grammar structures in a natural, conversational context, which facilitates vocabulary expansion and syntactic accuracy.
- have the opportunity to correct any errors they notice, and the observer can note errors for each student to reflect on after the activity.

Interacting with a native speaker in a role-play offers a dynamic and authentic approach for students in the development of their foreign language speaking abilities, integrating language skills with cultural understanding in practical, real-life scenarios.

Part 2 Logistics

- Students stay 30 minutes at each of the three stations (country).
- Students take an active role in asking questions and making conversation.
- Students carefully observe the local leader for cultural characteristics (e.g., eye contact, body language, preferred communication style) and modify their communication as appropriate.
- Teachers allow students to take an active role and let them ask questions. When a teacher needs to ask questions, they will be open-ended.

Teachers can organize the groups and rotations as in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Rotations of Groups for Part 2 of the Activity

Time	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
9:30–9:55	Station 1 Scenario 1	Station 2 Scenario 2	Station 3 Scenario 3
9:55–10:00	Debrief	Debrief	Debrief
10:00–10:25	Station 2 Scenario 2	Station 3 Scenario 3	Station 1 Scenario 1
10:25–10:30	Debrief	Debrief	Debrief
10:30–10:40	Break	Break	Break
10:40–11:05	Station 3 Scenario 3	Station 1 Scenario 1	Station 2 Scenario 2
11:05–11:10	Debrief	Debrief	Debrief
11:10–11:45	Entire Class Debrief & Feedback, including: • cultural characteristics identified and how the U.S. culture is similar to and different from other cultures (individualistic vs. collectivistic) • power distance characteristics identified and how the U.S. culture is similar to and different from other cultures in terms of going through local leaders or being able to make decisions on a more local basis		
	Lunch Break		

Part 3

Part 3 runs from 1:00pm to 1:50pm. After visiting all stations, all groups will gather to discuss their learning experiences. During the first 10 minutes, each group will prepare a final 10-minute debrief for the rest of the class in which they will discuss the linguistic and cultural challenges they encountered at each station and how these challenges were overcome. After all groups have presented their debriefs and feedback, they will take a 10-minute break.

Part 4

From 2:00pm to 3:00pm**,** the class will split into small groups or pairs to prepare a 10-minute presentation (in the target language) for their commanding officer about the meetings they held with the local population. This final briefing activity aims to simulate a scenario in which students will analyze the benefits of the information obtained, propose strategic action plans, and finally, present their findings to their commanding officer to show their understanding of the language and culture. The final briefing will focus on justifying the proposed action plan. This activity holds importance in the development of foreign language speaking skills for several reasons:

- The small group/pair activity encourages students to engage in meaningful conversations about analyzing information and cultural aspects, creating an action plan, and justifying the proposed action plan. This conversational activity allows students to practice HOTS to improve fluency and articulation in the foreign language.
- Through discussions about cultural norms, the students can use diverse vocabulary related to traditions, behaviors, and values, which may help broaden their lexicon and enhance their ability to express complex ideas in the target language.
- Students apply their language skills in a practical setting. They practice listening, speaking, and comprehension in real conversations about cultural aspects, honing their language proficiency.
- Exploring and discussing cultural nuances in a foreign language helps students understand the language in its cultural context.
- Analyzing and comparing cultural norms in various countries develops language skills and fosters the ability to communicate effectively in diverse cultural environments. This skill is invaluable in a globalized world where effective cross-cultural communication is crucial.

GUIDELINES FOR THE BRIEFING

Introduction and Planning (5 minutes)

The teacher divides the participants into small groups or pairs, ensuring each group has a clear understanding of their task. Guidelines for the teachers to lead this briefing follow.

Group Analysis and Action Plan Formulation (15 minutes)

- Instruct each group to analyze the information and/or skills obtained during the activity, identifying key benefits and challenges.
- For groups that did not accomplish the goal set by the group at any of the stations, have them formulate an action plan including what went well and what they would do differently given the opportunity.
- Allocate time for each group or pair to prepare a concise five-minute briefing presentation (see guidelines below).
- Emphasize the importance of clearly justifying their proposed action plan, linking it to the information and experience obtained in the previous scenarios.

Briefing Presentations (25 minutes)

- Each group or pair delivers a five-minute briefing to the military commanding officer.
- The presentations will cover the identified benefits, proposed action plans, and the rationale behind each recommendation.

Q&A and Feedback Session (5 minutes)

- Open the floor for questions and feedback from the military commanding officer.
- Encourage thoughtful discussion and clarification on any aspects of the action plans.
- Provide constructive feedback on the presentations, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

The immersion will conclude by highlighting the importance of understanding and appreciating cultural diversity and its role in effective communication and understanding in a global context. This activity is instrumental in enhancing students' foreign language speaking skills by providing an authentic context for conversation, using mid and low frequency vocabulary, and fostering an understanding of language within a cultural framework.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Upon completing this task-based activity, students will have had the opportunity to further develop their language proficiency and cultural competency. The goal is for them to develop their ability to engage effectively with a local population in authentic cultural contexts, employing appropriate linguistic strategies and demonstrating sensitivity to cultural nuances. Furthermore, students will have continued to practice their intercultural communication skills and developed a heightened awareness of cultural differences, being able to apply this knowledge to navigate through intercultural interactions with confidence and respect. We recognize that cultural awareness is integral to effective language learning. These scenarios can play a strong role in their journey toward becoming culturally competent and proficient language learners.

Faculty Forum

The Role of Student-Centered Approaches in the Success of Mini-Immersion Activities

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This article describes a "Job Fair" session, designed for Russian Basic Course students at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC). This immersion-based activity emphasizes the importance of a student-centered approach in crafting motivational teaching resources. The 6-hour activity plan includes interactive learning exercises, homework assignments, and a mini-immersion scenario that actively engages students, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural codes and vocabulary learning.

Keywords: *Student-Centered Approach, Immersion*

INTRODUCTION

The field of foreign language education is based on research in psychology and learning and therefore requires a continuous re-evaluation of pedagogical approaches. Previous understandings of a student's role as being a passive recipient, with class time being dominated by teachers lecturing, has inverted. More recent models have given rise to a paradigm in which students assume a more active role in their learning, and teachers adopt the roles of facilitator and coach as they continue to structure learning experiences for their students. This shift has resulted in positive changes in the educational process in general (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, a fundamental question remains for foreign language instructors who are constantly developing activities for their students: *How can an educational activity be designed to comprehensively address the most complex challenges for students with different language learning needs?* These challenges include maintaining a student-centric approach, fostering inspiration and motivation, and integrating cultural elements within a classroom setting, while maintaining a focus on language learning objectives. *Immersion-based learning activities* provide one way to address these challenges and are the topic for this paper.

Immersion-Based Activities: Benefits and Challenges

In the context of educational processes at DLIFLC, considering the intensive pace of studies and a general lack of time to fully engage with all program elements, periodic immersion-based learning activities can be an effective approach for several reasons. First, such activities provide a context-rich environment in which students are exposed to the language in real-life situations while still in the classroom. This exposure can help students better learn and practice vocabulary. Second, well-developed, highly motivating activities offer students practical insights into their learning. Third, immersion-based activities include exposure to the target culture associated with the language, which is crucial for successfully passing the final tests and for job performance. Additionally, it aligns with the paradigm of target language communication and the student-centered approach promoted at the Institute, thereby enhancing speaking, listening, and overall communication skills. Finally, immersion requires students to adapt to various situations and contexts, enhancing their ability to use the language flexibly and effectively. Even short-term immersion programs benefit students; the U.S. Department of Defense, in fact, found that short-term foreign language immersion programs "stimulate language and cultural learning" and benefit students' listening and reading (Savage & Hughes, 2014).

Immersive activities, however, can be challenging to plan and execute. True immersion situations where students travel to a region that is largely populated by speakers of the target language are expensive and complicated for any educational institution; fortunately, less-complicated and costly versions of immersions can be carried out closer to home. The term "mini-immersion" is used at DLIFLC to refer to tasks where teachers set up scenarios at different stations for students to interact with peers and teachers in the target language. These mini-immersions occur during class time, over two to three class periods. It can be challenging, however, to create activities that are interesting and that are feasible during the time allotted; the activities must also be connected to the student learning objectives/curriculum and must be at the appropriate proficiency level. Teachers and students alike must be prepared for the activities and must have a clear understanding of what will occur. Yet these challenges can be overcome with careful planning. This article will give an example of a mini-immersion activity that can be adapted and used in any language at DLIFLC. This article will also discuss challenges we faced and how we overcame them, along with lessons learned.

SCENARIO DESCRIPTION

Mini-Immersion Session Context

The project "Ярмарка вакансий" (*Job Fair*) serves as the final assignment for Lessons 39–41 within Module VII of the Basic Russian Course, scheduled for week 31 or 32 of the curriculum (out of a 48-week course). Students are therefore expected to be at approximately Level 1+ or 2 on the ILR scale. This mini-immersion session requires students to apply the vocabulary and linguistic structures learned throughout the module, with a focus on the themes of education and job-seeking. The primary linguistic objective is to enhance students' proficiency in using job-

related vocabulary. Culturally, the session introduces students to Russian professional etiquette expectations and processes.

Prior to the Immersion Session

Adequate preparation and planning are crucial for a successful mini-immersion event. Before the day of the mini-immersion, students are assigned a 2-hour preparatory homework task related to job fairs. The homework includes various activities, the primary objectives of which are to activate students' schemata, provide cultural insights into the Russian approach to job fairs, and stimulate the application of required vocabulary, grammar structures, and discourse.

The day of the main activity begins with a feedback session on the aforementioned pre-immersion homework. The feedback process is interactive, with students initially assisting each other, and the teacher intervening when necessary, adopting the role of an observer rather than an active participant.

The students are then given another 50 minutes to prepare for the immersion activity by formulating interview questions (for those playing the role of employers) and listing the characteristics of an ideal candidate and prior work experiences (for those acting as job seekers).

During the Immersion Session

Group Division

The class is divided into two equal groups, each group consisting of five students in our example. One group undertakes the role of employers, while the other acts as job seekers. The criteria for group selection can be determined based on the group and the instructors. In our case, we assigned the students with lower language proficiency to the role of job seekers, while the students with higher proficiency assumed the role of employers. This approach facilitated more effective communication within the groups, as students were able to assist one another.

Main Objectives

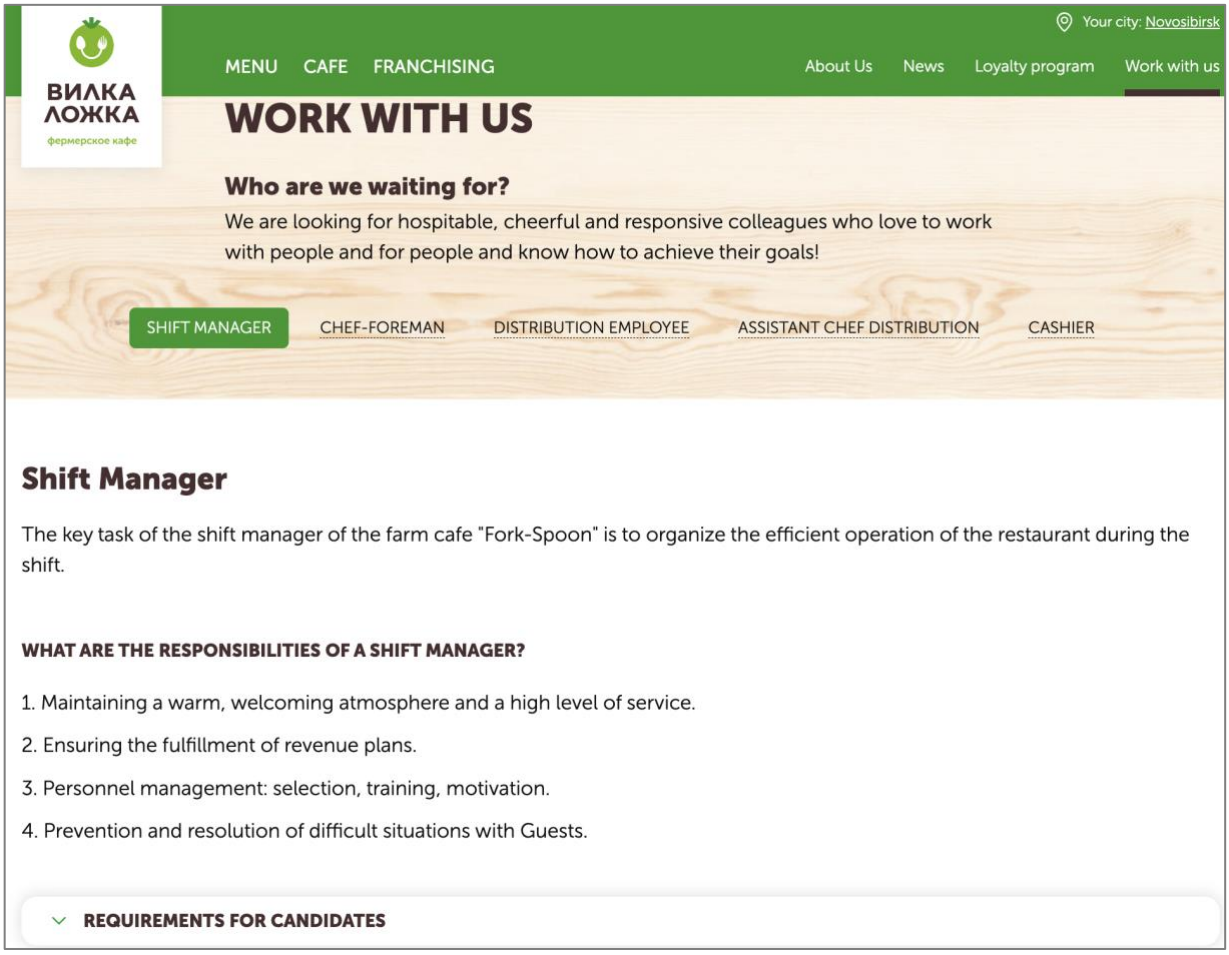
The primary objective for "employers" is to successfully identify at least one suitable candidate for the job vacancies in their institution. Simultaneously, the "job seekers" aim to secure a position in at least one of the companies represented at the job fair. It is important to highlight that if learners are uncertain about their tasks and how the mini-immersion contributes to their learning, its effectiveness may decline. Therefore, establishing clear objectives supported by the teacher's enthusiasm and accompanied by printed instructions is essential for fostering student confidence and mitigating negative emotions.

Activity Setting

The students are told that the activity is set in a Russian city where a job fair is taking place. They are given a list of companies that are present at the job fair. The companies chosen by the teachers for this job fair should have websites with job openings in the target language and should be at the desired proficiency level for the student population; the types of companies should also be aligned with the curriculum in terms of topics and vocabulary. Companies can be restaurants, car dealerships, universities, medical facilities, etc. During the mini-immersion activity, each "employer" represents one company and has a room for the interview. The interview process for each candidate is observed by one instructor.

Figure 1 demonstrates a website used in this example, but for the purposes of the article is translated into English. Note that the level of the language is not complicated, that it is an appealing and easy-to-read website, and that the responsibilities are clearly listed. These are the types of job sites that we found to be most appropriate for this mini-immersion activity.

Figure 1
Example of a Job Website for the Job Fair Mini-Immersion



Source: https://vilka-lozhka.com/jobs/

Assignment of Employers

As part of their pre-immersion preparation, students who will play the role of the employers will formulate a set of interview questions after they explore their company site to review the current openings. The instructor then provides them with a list of three job vacancies, including positions for highly qualified specialists and unskilled workers, each with specific job requirements. For example, if one of the scenarios is for a clinic that needs a nurse, the requirements such as nursing education and/or experience, strong communication skills, and the capacity to work flexible hours (nights and weekends) might be specified. Using these descriptions, employers are responsible for formulating a set of interview questions for potential candidates, for example:

- *У вас есть медицинское образование?*
  Do you have a nursing education?
- *Сколько лет опыта работы по специальности вы имеете?*
  How many years of relevant experience do you have?
- *Приведите пример проблемной ситуации, которую вам пришлось решать на предыдущем месте работы, и как вы ее решили?*
  Can you provide an example of a challenging situation you faced during your previous experience and how you handled it?
- *Можете ли вы работать по гибкому графику, включая ночные дежурства и выходные?*
  Are you willing to work flexible hours, including nights and weekends?
- *Почему вы хотите работать в Новосибирской клинической больнице?*
  Why are you interested in working at our hospital?

During the interview, employers take notes to provide their reasoning for selecting a candidate and to justify their choice based on the candidate's qualifications for the job requirements. The template for these notes is developed by the instructor in advance. It includes the following categories: name of the candidate, education, experience, constraints to work, strengths, and weaknesses. As employers have openings for both highly qualified and unskilled workers, they can adjust their offers during the interview based on the qualifications of the job seekers.

Assignment of Job Seekers

The students who will play the role of job seekers will create imaginary profiles for ideal candidates suitable for potential job openings in the five represented companies, after familiarizing themselves with the company names and information from their websites.

During the interview, the job seekers must be able to describe the strengths and positive characteristics of their ideal candidate, be ready to discuss their prior work experiences, and respond to questions of the potential employers. In addition to answering questions, job seekers

should be able to ask questions to potential employers about the company requirements, job responsibilities, and work conditions.

Post-Immersion Session

After conducting interviews, employers and job seekers gather in the conference room. The employers present job offers to the most suitable candidates, underlining their selection criteria. The job seekers then assess the offers and choose the most fitting company, explaining their decision. Naturally, all conversations for the entire activity take place in the target language, with support from the teachers as needed.

CHALLENGES

During our first immersion session, we did not encounter major challenges, only minor issues that can be easily addressed in future sessions. These challenges can be summarized as follows:

1. **Time management.** Initially, we allocated 10 minutes per job seeker across five groups of students. However, the interviews often exceeded this timeframe due to the students' high level of engagement. Thus, instructors may want to consider scheduling two periods for the role-play portion of the immersion session to have enough time for the interviews and the following job offer discussions.
2. **Resource allocation.** With more than four groups of students, there might be an insufficient number of rooms and instructors to observe the interview process. A practical solution would be to use a single large room with stations corresponding to the number of student groups, like a real-life job fair, where the companies share the same space. This setup would minimize the need for more than three instructors and better simulate a real-life scenario.
3. **Instructions for job seekers.** Job seekers must have clear instructions to engage their imagination during the process. Creativity is key to successfully securing a job. For example, one student during our session invented various life stories to match different companies (e.g., *a mother of five children seeking any job in a hospital* or *an experienced car dealer with strong recommendations*). Such adaptability resulted in three job offers from different companies, with employers even offering bonuses to this job seeker during the final discussion. It also resulted in more realistic language use and increased vocabulary retention.
4. **Interview process**. One potential concern could be the repetitiveness of employers' questions of job seekers. However, this concern proved to be unfounded in our situation as students were deeply immersed in their roles, with dynamic and engaging interactions. Each employer managed to adjust their questions based on responses, contributing to a realistic and engaging scenario.
5. **Inclusive job offers**. To maintain motivation for all students, it seemed beneficial to ensure that the last employer offer one position to the job seeker who had not yet received an offer if there were any. This practice could provide every student with the opportunity to receive a positive outcome at the end of the mini-immersion. While we did not anticipate this

scenario, our last presenter intuitively made a considerate gesture by offering a position to the student who had not received any other offers, thereby maintaining satisfaction among all participants.

CONCLUSION

Our mini-immersion program "Ярмарка вакансий" demonstrated the practical benefits of such activities, highlighting the effectiveness of a student-centered approach to language learning. It provided students with a unique opportunity to apply their language skills in authentic professional settings, resulting in positive feedback. Students found the experience both challenging and engaging, with their largest concern being the time and complexity of the homework assignment. However, they affirmed that after thorough review, feedback, and explanations from instructors, they realized their concerns were unfounded. The autonomy during the session, where the teacher assumed a role as an observer and coach when needed, was particularly appreciated by the students. This approach was instrumental in fostering a greater sense of responsibility among the students, leading to their full engagement in the process. These types of mini-immersion activities can be conducted in any language and at any point in the curriculum. Careful planning and student preparation are the keys to success.

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Faculty Forum

Transformative Language Learning and Teaching: Reflections on Theory and Practice

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Transformative learning theory is being widely discussed in the field of adult learning. Some scholars suggest that the application of this theory to world language education is an effective way to reach higher levels of proficiency and intercultural competence. The purpose of this article is to share my ideas, reflection, and thoughts on transformative education in the context of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), after having read the book Transformative Language Learning and Teaching *(Leaver et al, 2021). The book offers key insights into learner engagement and autonomy as well as teacher reflection. I have found the concepts in the book to be inspiring to me as a language teaching professional and in this article outline how I apply these concepts in my teaching routines.*

Keywords: *Transformative Education, Intercultural Competence, Proficiency*

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, when I encountered the term "transformative learning" as a key concept in the field of language education, I took it as perhaps yet another buzzword making the rounds among field practitioners. However, some of the key principles of this theory, such as the learner's critical reflection, learner changes in perspectives, and learner autonomy led me to examine the idea further. The concept of how teachers can reflect on their own profession and craft appealed to me as well. Taken together, these principles resonate with my teaching experiences and philosophy in world language education. This article will briefly explain the terms "transformative learning" and "transformative language learning and teaching" (TLLT) and examine the application of TLLT in the DLIFLC context for both students and faculty.

Mezirow (2012, p. 76) defines transformative learning as:

> the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.

Transformative learning theory suggests that adults can learn in four distinct ways: by expanding existing frames of reference, by acquiring new perspectives, by changing perspectives, or by altering habitual ways of thinking (Mezirow, 2012). The catalyst for the changes in frames of reference is what Mezirow (1978) terms "disorienting dilemmas"—situations in which the learner is confronted with varying perspectives that lead the learner to question previous assumptions and ways of thinking and acting (p. 7). Disorienting dilemmas provide the learner opportunities to engage in critical reflection and reframing of perspectives. As Leaver (2021) observes, disorienting dilemmas "shake learners' belief systems and cause them to reflect, dissect, and analyze" (p. 17). Learner-focused reflection can ultimately lead to personal transformation as the learner discards the original frames of reference for new ones.

Regarding TLLT, the primary goals of TLLT are to develop bilingual/bicultural competence and learner autonomy through transformational language-learning experiences (Leaver, 2021). I agree with these goals for current and future language education in today's increasingly interconnected world. These goals are in keeping with those of the DLIFLC: "To provide exquisite, culturally based foreign language education" (Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, 2023).

Leaver (2021), a leading scholar and early adopter of TLLT in government programs such as those at DLIFLC, outlines the concepts behind TLLT. She compares three major educational philosophies as they relate to language learning: transmission (grammar translation), transaction (communicative approaches), and transformation (personal transformation that leads to bilingual/bicultural competence). TLLT posits that personal transformation involves cognitive, emotional, and cultural shifts occurring within the individual as one develops self-awareness, resolves disorienting dilemmas, identifies cognitive distortions like black-and-white thinking, manages emotions, and ultimately integrates both the home culture and the target culture on their own terms (Leaver et al., 2021; Lyman-Hager et al., 2021).

After extensive reading about transformative learning and TLLT, I had three main questions: (a) What is TLLT's essence?; (b) how can I apply it in my classroom?; and (c) how does TLLT impact my own teaching? In recent decades, transformative education theory has been well-researched, especially in the field of adult learning, but not many scholarly works have dealt with the application of this theory to language education. The book, *Transformative Language Learning and Teaching* aims to fill this gap and provide valuable and readable studies of both the comprehensive theory of TLLT (chapters 2–4) and its application (chapters 5–15). I have found the concepts in the book to be inspiring as a language teaching professional, and in this article, I outline how I apply these concepts in my teaching routines.

THE APPLICATION OF TRANSFORMATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING IN THE DLIFLC CONTEXT

Innovations in Curricular Design

Besides presenting TLLT theory, the various contributors of this edited volume share their professional experiences for applying this philosophy in various contexts. They relate both successes and challenges in government, university, study abroad, and K-12 programs. For example, Campbell (2021), who participated in initiatives on Open Architecture Curricular Design (OACD), a fundamental principle of TLLT, at DLIFLC, provides evidence that OACD can contribute to achieving higher proficiency among graduates. She presented two case studies actualizing OACD in the context of Continuing Education at DLIFLC where proficiency on the Defense Language Proficiency Test (DLPT) increased. Some reasons for the success are learner-centered instruction, differentiated instruction, and the use of authentic materials. In parallel, impressive DLIFLC statistics exist for the period when OACD was being practiced: Between 2008 and 2013 in the intermediate, advanced, and "refresher" language courses in all languages, attainment of graduation proficiency requirements rose from 50% to over 80% for 850 intermediate- and advanced-course students (Leaver & Campbell 2015).

OACD has been discussed as a unifying curricular design framework that can enhance transformative learning in the context of adult world language education. Key principles of OACD are a theme-based syllabus (rather than a textbook) that integrates interchangeable unadapted authentic texts, tasks, and other activities; ongoing learner involvement in the selection and delivery of content, as well as the design of activities; and continual and systematic (vs. occasional and limited) tailoring to learner and cohort needs.

Concerning the OACD principles and features just outlined, I have observed that ongoing learner involvement in the learning process increases individual motivation, responsibility, and achievement. For example, when we implemented a Weekly Current Social Issues Project, where students reported and discussed current social issues using the news, in a 19-week Korean Intermediate, and Advanced Program, the teaching team asked students to choose their topics, listening or reading texts based on their interests and needs to empower learner decision-making. While providing teacher guidance in student selection of the news, allowing student ownership over the learning process was shown to enhance educational benefits, including linguistic and cultural competencies. Most students gave highly positive feedback, noting that this significantly aided their language skills, fostered critical thinking by understanding different perspectives, and raised their awareness of global issues (Lee, 2024).

Innovation in Assessment

A fundamental feature of TLLT is the use of formative, with occasional summative, assessments. Formative assessment is typically contrasted with summative assessment because the former

aims to provide feedback for the ongoing teaching and learning process, while the latter focuses on reporting the results of learning (Bachman, 1990).

In TLLT and in contemporary language learning, use of formative assessments such as well-designed real-world tasks incorporating authentic materials, short- and long-term projects, presentations, and learner journals related to the learner's personal interests and needs are a key part of the learning process. TLLT practitioners believe these tasks can facilitate change in learner frames of reference or perspectives. I agree with this belief and have implemented formative assessments for my teaching team. I have observed changes in learner perspectives and increased intercultural competency through tasks such as learner journals, student essays, and discussions, which, for example, facilitate the changing of stereotypes about the target culture.

Teacher Transformation

Kubler (2021) mentions the evolution of the instructor's role from that of a facilitator to that of a mentor, coach, or advisor, focusing on the transformative aspects of teacher education and the difficulties faced by teachers who practice TLLT. Kubler points out that teachers who grew up in Asia, where heavily teacher-centered education has been practiced for a long time, may have some difficulties transforming their beliefs and behaviors regarding language and culture education. This is my case. When I studied in my native country, South Korea, teachers led classes, and students were merely expected to follow their teachers' instructions. Students were rarely if ever involved in designing the content or curriculum of a class or a course. These aspects made me reflect on whether I had ever practiced transformation in my learning. And if not, how might I implement the principles of this philosophy effectively in my teaching? As Kubler suggests, teacher education and training programs may need to implement transformative learning activities that shake teachers' thoughts about education via critical reflection.

In alignment with this idea, to leverage transformation, I initiated the practice of maintaining a learning and teaching journal, encouraging critical thinking through reflections on my learning and teaching experiences from various sources. These include my professional development opportunities, daily instruction, and feedback from students and peers on my teaching. I dedicate a portion of my time each week to self-reflection, questioning my assumptions or biases regarding a topic or teaching approach before engaging with it, and contemplating what I have learned, or the different perspectives gained on both my learning and teaching practices. For example, I frequently reflect on the implementation of the learner-centered approach in my teaching and document what proved effective or did not, aiming to enhance my teaching. This practice is not only crucial for embodying the essential features of TLLT but also represents my ongoing transformation from someone rooted in a teacher-centered culture to someone who embraces and practices learner-centeredness. Through this practice of self-reflection, I have identified areas for future professional development that guide my own learning choices.

CHALLENGES WITH THE APPLICATION OF TLLT IN THE DLIFLC CONTEXT

Although formative assessments have the aforementioned benefits, some DLIFLC learners do not fully understand the value they offer, especially for short- and long-term projects and presentations, because they tend to be driven by a focus on the multiple-choice standardized exit test—the DLPT, which is designed to measure language proficiency and is composed of authentic materials followed by content questions. Some learners ask teachers to focus on test-taking activities that replicate the DLPT format. Therefore, some teachers at DLIFLC might encounter difficulties in implementing the formative assessments that are a key feature of TLLT.

My observations indicate that learners who effectively engage in formative assessments tend to achieve higher scores on the DLPT and the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). For example, learners who are more conscious and proactive in their learning process are better able to identify their weaknesses and adjust their study strategies. Therefore, guiding learners to become aware of the various learning strategies and encouraging them to reflect on their strategy use in learner journals can significantly enhance their learning efficiency and outcomes. Instructors at DLIFLC may need to explain to their learners how these activities related to formative assessments are advantageous in achieving their goals, extending beyond their DLPT and OPI scores.

Explaining why we do what we do in the classroom is a key part of teaching, yet some instructors may not find it necessary. Additionally, some may not fully realize the impact of sharing learning goals with students. TLLT encourages instructors to clearly communicate their pedagogical choices to foster learner engagement and align shared goals with students.

CONCLUSION

In summary, TLLT's over-arching goal is personal transformation into a bilingual/bicultural autonomous individual. All language teachers promote bilingualism, but how much do we systematically focus on facilitating the learner's journey towards bicultural competence, where the learner integrates both the first and the second culture, each on its own terms? Although the application of this approach to the classroom needs further discussion depending on the educational context, TLLT has allowed me to critically reflect on my teaching and ponder ways to continuously improve it to help learners become bilingual and bicultural autonomous learners. First and foremost, I would like to adopt TLLT for my personal and professional growth toward becoming a cross-cultural lifelong learner. How else will I be able to coach learners to become bilingual and bicultural linguists?

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Quick Tips

Best Practices in Supervising and Mentoring Teaching Teams: Self-Reflection Checklists and Guiding Questions

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INTRODUCTION

The team teaching environment at DLIFLC is unique in many ways, not only with teachers' responsibilities and schedules, but also for supervising and mentoring. Supportive and knowledgeable leadership is crucial. It provides vision and builds efficient systems that encourage teachers to communicate openly, share in decision-making, and feel like part of the team. Successful leaders are trusted, foster a sense of safety, are authentic and willing to admit to mistakes, prioritize the well-being of the greater team, focus on a shared vision more than unnecessary hierarches, and celebrate group successes (Sinek, 2014). They listen and understand how the opportunities and constraints of a workplace environment affect teachers' lives and sense of well-being, and they are knowledgeable about what teachers need in order to succeed.

In the 2023 1st issue of *Dialog on Language Instruction* (Vol. 33), we shared checklists and guiding questions that teachers can use to guide self-reflection and to create professional development plans. These tools were based on the results of a study we conducted in order to identify characteristics that make teaching teams consistently more successful (see Bikowski & Lim, 2022). In this current article, we share tools that supervisors in UGE (i.e., Deans, Department Chairpersons, Academic Specialists) can use to reflect on their skills in the areas of Curriculum and Teaching, Team Creation and Environment, and Communication and Decision-making.

Of course, supervisors face several potential distractions as they seek to lead and mentor teaching teams, but we hope that these Self-Reflection Checklists and Guiding Questions will provide a means for leadership to streamline the time that is available and focus on these areas, which have been shown to be important for teaching success (Bikowski & Lim, 2022).

SELF-REFLECTION CHECKLISTS FOR SUPERVISORS

Supervisors can use the Self-Reflection Checklists in Figures 1-3 to reflect on their skills for leading teaching teams. Department Chairs can answer the questions at the department level as a unit of the team, while Deans can answer them at the school level. Use the three-point scoring system below when you read the checklist and write notes as needed. Remember, it is normal to find some things you can change for the better, and taking a few minutes every week to think about how you can do things differently with your team can save a lot of time in the long run.

3 = I excel in this area and can mentor or share practices/information with others.
2 = I feel competent in this area, though I have some questions or opportunities for improvement.
1 = I need more information or guidance in this area.

Figure 4
Leadership Self-Reflection Checklist: Curriculum and Teaching

Leadership: Curriculum and Teaching	**My Score (1, 2, 3)**	**If you don't have 3 yet, what can you do to strengthen this element?**
I know the curriculum thoroughly and provide curricular direction and support based on a shared vision and faculty input.		
I create a venue and online systems where teachers can share their activities and collectively look for solutions to common problems.		
I conduct class observations in a way that is supportive and collaborative.		
I engage in post-class observation discussions that are respectful and learning-driven.		
I provide professional development opportunities for teachers on topics they express interest in, and ones that I see the need for.		
I work to build teacher buy-in for new academic initiatives.		
I create an environment where teachers are willing and able to experiment with new and creative instructional ideas.		
I organize workshops as needed for students.		
I support teams in holding high standards for students in terms of discipline and academics.		

Figure 2
Leadership Self-Reflection Checklist: Team Creation and Team Environment

Leadership: Team Creation and Team Environment	**My Score (1, 2, 3)**	**If you don't have 3 yet, what can you do to strengthen this element?**
I consider various aspects of teachers (e.g., dialects, teaching styles, teaching experience, culture, communication skills, personality styles, etc.) to help create successful teams.		
I create venues or events to build team rapport.		
I create an environment in which teachers communicate, collaborate, and support each other.		
I create a venue where I acknowledge team successes (e.g., Team Leader award, Best Team of the Year, Team Leader Summit).		
I create a venue where I express my gratitude to teachers (e.g., Certificate of Appreciation, Certificate of Achievement).		
I help with conflict among teachers by using active listening skills, problem solving skills, and mentoring skills.		
I mentor teachers to work for the team goals and the institutional mission.		
I mentor and support rising leaders and model behaviors valued by the school and DLIFLC.		
I employ specific strategies to empower my teams to be their best.		

Figure 3
Leadership Self-Reflection Checklist: Team Communication and Decision-Making

Leadership: Team Communication and Decision-Making	**My Score (1, 2, 3)**	**If you don't have 3 yet, what can you do to strengthen this element?**
I design and develop weekly meetings that are effective and efficient.		
I communicate with C/MLIs, chain of command, and military units regarding student issues.		
After following up on student issues, I communicate with teachers as needed.		
I know how to bring out teachers' strengths.		
I know how to have crucial conversations with teachers regarding their performance and am willing to mentor teachers if necessary and appropriate.		
I listen carefully to teachers' wants and needs and include them and their inputs in the decision-making process.		
I include students' input in making major decisions in curriculum or scheduling, etc.		
I have a systematic process of reviewing all available data (e.g., classroom observations, I/ESQs, sensing sessions) to ensure that students are being included as part of the learning team.		
I develop action plans based on data analysis, implement them, and continuously reflect on their effectiveness to ensure improvement.		
When possible, I use bottom-up, instead of top-down, processes for decision-making.		
I practice asking probing questions that can promote critical thinking skills and help analyze the root causes of the problems in my teams, when needed.		

We suggest that you periodically review your responses by reflecting on your responses in Figures 1-3, ideally on a weekly basis. You may want to set your goals quarterly to measure your progress in your focus areas. Let your supervisees know that you are seeking their feedback. For example, you can offer an open door policy and encourage faculty to share any input, or place a "Suggestions, Successes, and Support" box where faculty can leave comments anonymously or with their names. Finally, you can discuss ways to develop your skills and knowledge by talking to your colleagues, supervisors, or mentors and by researching your field of interest. You can also use the questions below for self-reflection.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF AS A SUPERVISOR

Every week, try choosing one or two of the following questions that relate to your position to guide your self-reflection. Or write your own reflection questions. There is no need to push yourself too hard—small changes can accumulate over time and lead to improved outcomes.

Leadership in Curriculum and Instruction

1. Do I create events for teachers to share best practices at the department level or school level?
    a. How do I collaborate with other department chairs and/or the academic support group in the school to bring new ideas based on teachers' needs?
    b. How do I minimize obstacles so that teachers are willing to participate in these events?
    c. How do I show that I respect diversity among teachers?
    d. How do I support teachers taking risks and using creative ideas in class?
2. What actions do I take to create a community environment where teachers collectively examine situations and explore solutions to issues and challenges in teaching and learning in my department?
3. If I feel like I need more information on a teaching topic, do I know people I can contact to get more resources and guidance?
4. What communication strategies do I use to generate interest and buy-in for new academic initiatives?
5. Do I conduct class observations that help teachers be their best and spread best practices? If not, do I have resources to ask for guidance?
    a. Do I conduct effective post-class observation discussions with teachers that focus on self-reflection and professional growth with feedback that is specific, actionable, and timely?

Leadership in Team Creation and Team Environment

1. Do I consider a variety of factors when I create teaching teams (e.g., dialects, teaching styles, teaching experience, team dynamics, culture, etc.), as possible given the circumstances?

   a. What efforts am I making to minimize teacher rotations or disruptions during the course?
   b. Am I proactive in communicating through my chain regarding my department's needs (e.g., staff changes, retirements/resignations, new classes, etc.)?

2. Do I show my gratitude to my teachers?
   a. When expressing gratitude, do I praise specific things in a timely manner? Do I recognize the individuals in the department meetings?
   b. Am I willing to make timely recommendations for various awards available for my teachers (time-off award, certificate of appreciation, certificate of achievement, teacher of the quarter, etc.)?
   c. Do I create a venue to build team rapport through appropriate social gatherings? Do I know the regulations to comply with when creating such social activities?

3. Do I know how to address conflict among teachers and am I willing to do so?
   a. Am I an active listener?
   b. Do I know how to support individuals as they work conflicts to ultimately reach solutions?
   c. Do I use my critical thinking skills to solve problems?

4. Do I have venues where I acknowledge team successes in various ways (e.g., Team Leader award, Best Team of the Year, Team Leader Summit, time-off-award, recognition by the CMDT)?
   a. How do I express my gratitude to teachers (e.g., Certificate of Appreciation, Certificate of Achievement)?

5. How do I empower my teams and enlist their motivation for professional growth?

Leadership in Team Communication and Decision-Making

1. Do I make a conscious effort to ensure that my meetings with my teams are streamlined and productive?
   a. Do I circle back to my teams when necessary?
   b. Do I intervene in a timely manner?

2. Do I proactively communicate with C/MLIs, chain of command, and military units regarding student issues and update teachers regarding my findings?

3. Do I make efforts to bring out teachers' strengths and find ways that their strengths can best come out and contribute to the mission?

4. Do I have regular conversations with teams about their performance and when needed, do I know how to have crucial conversations regarding their performance?
   a. If needed, do I know which office I should contact to receive further guidance (e.g., CPAC – LMER, SJA, EEO, Chain of Command).

5. Do I know how to listen actively to teachers' wants and needs?
   a. Do I give my full attention when listening?

   b. Am I trying my best to engage conversations with appropriate body language, provide feedback when necessary, and respond professionally and appropriately?

6. Do I have a systematic process for reviewing all available data (e.g., classroom observations, I/ESQs, sensing sessions) to ensure that students are being included as part of learning team and making decisions in curriculum?
   a. Am I willing to provide teachers with professional development opportunities based on their needs and interests, suggest that they add the relevant items to their IDPs and follow up with them on the process?
   b. Do I have information on what professional development opportunities are available for my supervisees?
7. Do I encourage bottom-up processes for decision-making?
8. Do I know how to ask probing questions that can promote critical thinking skills and analyze the root cause of the problems in my teams?
9. Do I communicate my vision for the school/department? Do I communicate the institutional mission and near-term strategic goals to my teams?

CONCLUSION

We hope that these tools can be useful for supervisors across DLIFLC as they support teaching teams. Self-reflection can be a fundamental yet powerful tool for all individuals at the institution. Using the guiding questions presented in this paper, supervisors and managers can regularly look back on their knowledge, skills, and abilities to improve their leadership competence while mentoring their teams for success. Ultimately, when leaders put these into practice, a culture of giving and receiving feedback can naturally be rooted into the institutional culture of collaboration and development of the workforce. As we all work to further develop ourselves professionally, we can strengthen our collaborations within our respective teams and build student success across DLIFLC.

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Quick Tips

Purposeful Pairing Design (PPD): Pairing for More than Sharing

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While many agree on the benefits of pair work, how to pair students for language learning remains uncertain (Storch & Aldosari, 2013). As such, this article offers Purposeful Pairing Design (PPD) to upgrade Think Pair Share from a collaborative discussion strategy to an invaluable teaching tool. PPD is a pairing technique created by the author, where the teacher designs interactive activities that result in students figuring out who their partner will be for the rest of class. Students' curiosity during PPD activities can boost their engagement, focus, and overall motivation for language learning. Additionally, PPD can be a useful teaching tool to activate students' background schemata, formal schemata, and mostly, critical thinking skills. Students appreciate PPD activities, as they are collaborative and promote community-based learning amongst the students.

Keywords: *Think Pair Share, Purposeful Pairing Design (PPD), Collaborative Discussion Strategy, Student Engagement, Background Schemata, Formal Schemata, Critical Thinking Skills*

INTRODUCTION

Over forty years have passed since the creation of Think Pair Share by Dr. Frank Lyman (1981) and today this collaborative discussion strategy is an important part of many language classes. In this three-stage strategy, students individually reflect on an activity, pair up to share their understanding, and then compare responses and complete the task.

Think Pair Share is one of the most commonly used techniques of the communicative approach. It can enhance students' critical thinking skills and active participation (Bukit, 2021), as well as verbal communication skills (Ardhy, 2018; Bukit, 2021; Mustikawati, et al., 2018). Moreover, pair work can boost students' engagement as they enjoy learning from each other through the exchange of thoughts, ideas, and experiences (Almanafi & Alghatani, 2020). Pairing and grouping allow teachers to monitor student performance more freely and provide ongoing feedback.

While many agree on the benefits of pair work, how to optimally pair students for language learning remains uncertain (Storch, & Aldosari, 2013). This article suggests that Purposeful Pairing Design (PPD) can guide how students should be paired during Think Pair Share activities. It will outline how a teacher can use PPD to indicate to students who their partner will be. This article will not go into detail on the types of activities the partners can do *after* they are paired up; instead, it will focus on how to pair up students in an interesting way. First, I will give background on different pairing options.

RANDOM PAIRING AND CRITERION-BASED PAIRING: BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS

Random pairing is the most used strategy since it is quick and requires no preparation. Random pairing is preferred especially in online environments like MS Teams, where creating break-out rooms can take too much time. One common way of random pairing is for students in a class of 6 to sound off 1–3; then students with the same numbers pair up (1 with 1, 2 with 2, 3 with 3). In in-person settings, instructors usually pair students who sit next to each other since it requires the least rearrangement and saves time. However, if used routinely, this pairing technique can lead to stagnant ideas and boredom as students often sit in the same seats throughout the course.

Criterion-based pairing, on the other hand, relies on student variables that can affect the quality of student interaction and as a result, is more advantageous than random pairing. These variables range from student age, gender, L1 background, proficiency level, sensory preferences, personality traits, cognitive preferences, collaborative attitudes, interpersonal dynamics, as well as the goal of the activity. There is abundant literature on the effect of these variables on student achievement. For instance, Storch and Aldosari (2013) posit that in fluency-focused activities, pairing two low-proficiency students would lead to more collaboration and scaffolded learning which in turn helps them develop fluency. Pastushenkov et al. (2021) also suggest that peer familiarity could result in more language production during pair work.

Purposeful Pairing Design was created by the author to address the limitations of random and criterion-based pairings, and to increase student collaboration and creative problem-solving.

PURPOSEFUL PAIRING DESIGN

In Purposeful Pairing Design, the teacher uses the lesson content in addition to student variables that impact learning affordances to provide more opportunities for engaging L2 gains. The idea is that the teacher decides whom to pair up by considering student variables. But instead of directly assigning students to dyads or groups, the instructor creates activities that provide hints derived from the lesson content and lets the students figure out the pair composition based on the clues. The students must refer to the lesson content to determine the pair composition.

Purposeful Pairing Design can be used as an occasional alternative to criterion-based paring and grouping in any language class. It can activate background and formal schemata, support the

review of concepts introduced (particularly grammar and vocabulary), and promote critical thinking skills. The examples below clarify how PPD can be planned and implemented. English is used for the examples, but in a classroom, they would be in the Target Language. Note that all names listed are pseudonyms.

Example 1—Topic: Word Collocations

1. Students study a topic in class, in this case *word collocations*.
2. The teacher considers which students to pair.
    a. In this example, the teacher wants to pair up students according to the "global-particular" cognitive preference concept by Ehrman and Leaver (2003). Global learners prioritize meaning, while others focus on form. So, using the results of the Ehrman and Leaver Learning Style Questionnaire v. 2.0, the teacher can identify more global students and those who are more particular in their cognitive preferences (see Figure 1).
    b. Students are assigned an activity to complete to uncover their partner while also reviewing collocations (see Figure 2). Students need to form four pairs based on matching terms: "ceasefire agreement," "round of applause," "positive impression," and "financially strong." The goal is to land students in the pairs as shown in Fig. 1. The matching process itself becomes a learning experience. Note that in this example, a moment of confusion might arise when students decide between "positive impression" or "strong impression." However, considering "financially strong" as the only logical pairing in this context, students will ultimately need to agree on "positive" and "impression."
    c. Once students have their partners, the teacher can assign other pair-based, in-class activities, keeping in mind that students will work in global-particular pairs.

Figure 1

The Partner Assignments Planned by the Instructor (a global with a particular learner)

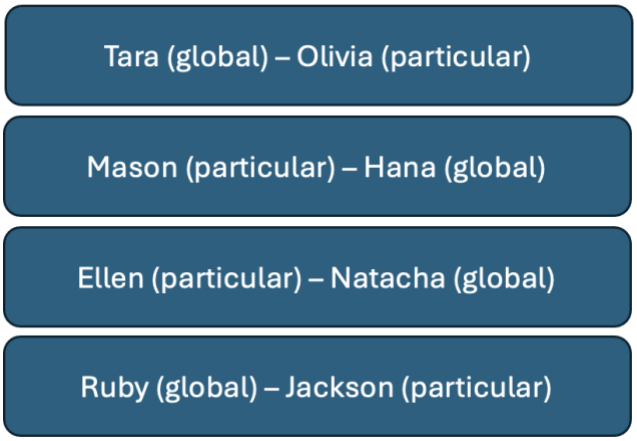


Figure 2
Purposeful Pairing Design Activity for Students to Engage In: Word Collocations

Ready for a collocation challenge?

Directions: Dear students—working as a group, identify matching components of the words listed under your names and create four collocations. Pair up accordingly.

Olivia Agreement	Hana Applause	Ellen Financially	Tara Ceasefire
Mason Round of	Jackson Impression	Natacha Strong	Ruby Positive

This activity is both fun and engaging, fostering internalization of the concepts through discussions in the target language. Besides forming pairs based on pre-defined cognitive preferences (particular-global), students actively review the lesson, promoting their critical thinking.

Example 2—Topic: Parts of Speech

1. Students study a topic in class, in this case *parts of speech*.
2. The teacher considers which students to pair.
    a. In this example, the teacher wants to pair up students based on their language proficiency levels (high proficiency with low proficiency). So, the teacher identifies the high and low-proficiency level students, as shown in Figure 3.
    b. Instead of directing students to form four pairs - "Olivia-Tara," "Hana-Mason-Sara," "Jackson-Oceana," and "Ellen-Natacha" - the teacher adds a twist.
    c. Students are assigned an activity that reveals partners while also practicing parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives). The teacher presents Figure 4 on the Smartboard, encouraging students to decipher the grouping structures. This approach compels students to rely on their comprehension and analysis of the lesson content (parts of speech).
    d. If the students encounter difficulty identifying patterns and determining pair and group compositions, the teacher can provide further guidance by displaying Figure 5. This visual aid helps students decode the patterns and form pairs based on the select categories of parts of speech.
    e. If some students might still be confused, the teacher can write the partner names on the board to dispel any lingering confusion.
    f. With students partnered up in high proficiency with low proficiency pairs, the teacher can introduce other in-class activities designed for pair work.

Figure 3

The Partner Assignments Planned by the Instructor (a high with a low-proficiency learner)

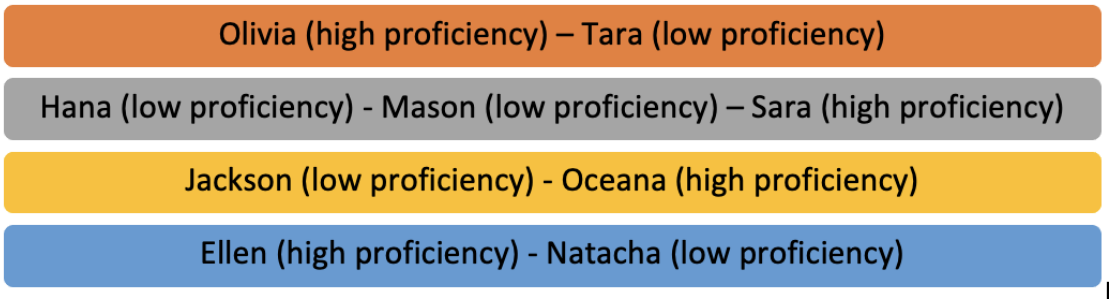


Figure 4

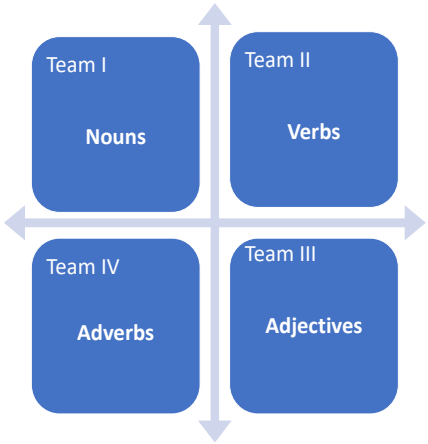
Purposeful Pairing Design Activity for Students to Engage In: Parts of Speech

Directions: Dear students—please identify commonalities among words listed under each of your names and form four pairs accordingly.

Olivia Happiness	Hana Create	Ellen Delightfulc	Tara Generosity	Mason Evaluate
Jackson Elegantly	Natacha Intelligent	Sara Analyze	Oceana Bravely	

Figure 5

Visual Aid if Students Need More Support: Part of Speech Categories Specified



While the students try to identify the pairing and grouping composition by understanding the logic behind the design and later applying their understanding of this grammar concept to create teams, they activate their linguistic schemata in a fun and engaging way that can boost their overall L2 gains.

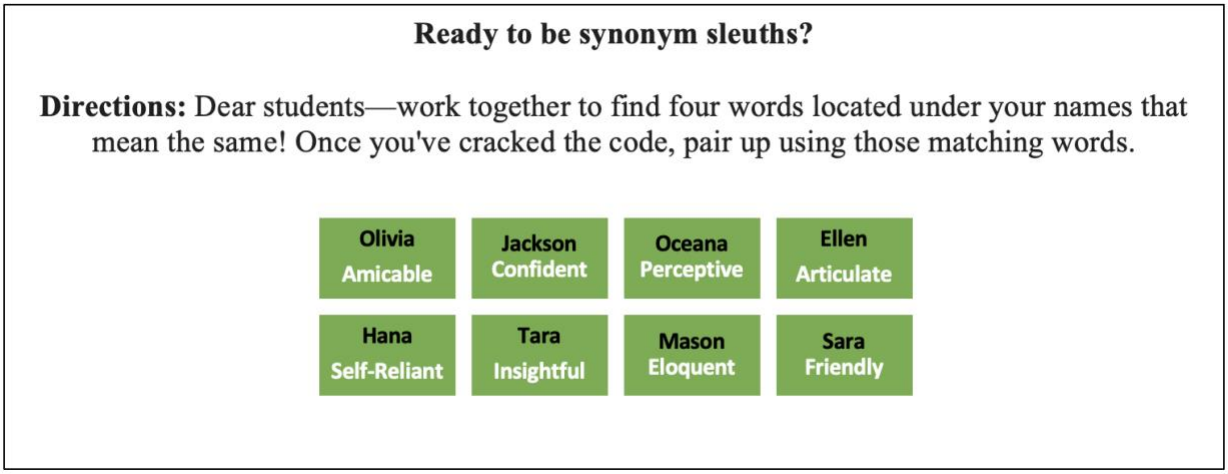
Example 3—Topic: Synonyms

1. Students study a topic in class, in this case *synonyms*.
2. The teacher considers which students to pair.
    a. In this example, the teacher wants to pair up students based on their personality traits (introverts with extroverts). So, using the results of the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the teacher can identify who is more introverted or extroverted, as shown in Figure 6.
    b. Instead of directly instructing students to pair up as "Olivia-Sara," "Hana-Jackson," Tara-Oceana," and "Ellen-Mason," the teacher offers a twist.
    c. Students are assigned an activity to find their partner/s while practicing synonyms. The teacher uses synonymous pairs from the lesson content (shown on the Smartboard) as hints, guiding students in forming pairs, as displayed in Figure 7.
    d. The students become word detectives, searching for word pairs with similar meanings ("amicable-friendly", "confident-self-reliant", "receptive-insightful," and "articulate-eloquent").
    e. Once they have cracked the code, they'll form four dyads as originally planned by the teacher.
    f. With student pairs formed, the teacher can introduce other in-class activities designed for collaboration.

Figure 6

The Partner Assignments Planned by the Instructor (an introverted with an extroverted learner)

Figure 7
Purposeful Pairing Design Activity for Student Engagement: Synonyms



Identifying antonyms can be another scheme for purposefully pairing students. The curiosity the students feel while trying to decode the synonymous or antonymous patterns can put them in a state of flow which can enhance their learning. The Purposeful Pairing Design can boost student engagement with the content and increase motivation for language learning.

CONCLUSION

Purposeful Pairing Design can be a useful addition to any language instructor's toolbox. The key to the success of these activities is to explain clearly to students what the purpose of an activity is and how it relates to their learning and the overall lesson. Even though PPD can take some preparation time, its advantages in upgrading pairing and grouping from a routine to a fun and engaging collaboration strategy make it worthwhile. The curiosity that students feel while trying to understand the rationale behind the design and while decoding the patterns can boost student engagement, focus, and overall motivation for language learning. PPD can be a valuable teaching tool that activates students' schemata and critical thinking skills, and functions as an interactive content review system. Additionally, the process of deciphering a pair composition is collaborative, which further promotes community-based learning among students. Finally, the discussions among students while figuring out pair compositions are being conducted in the target language, thereby maximizing L2 gains.

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