

STRENGTHENING FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FRENCH LANGUAGE BY EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF LISTENING STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES AMONG YOUNG LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the significance of listening skills in the acquisition of a foreign language, particularly French, among middle school students in the Hindiphone region of Rajasthan, India. It delves into the challenges faced by students in mastering listening comprehension and suggests incorporating theoretical frameworks and effective strategies into the curriculum to enhance language learning outcomes. This paper aims at exploring the enhancement of foreign language acquisition, among young learners in the Hindiphone region of Rajasthan, where English serves as the second language and French is treated as a foreign language. The study proposes effective integration of listening strategies and techniques to facilitate language learning. It discusses the importance of incorporating foreign languages such as French, Spanish, and German into the curriculum, particularly in Rajasthan, and provides insights into schools in Jaipur that offer French language courses. It also brings forward the challenges faced by young learners, and effective strategies to improve listening skills are elaborated upon using relevant theories. The paper concludes with suggestions for effective implementation and underscores the significance of foreign language acquisition in today's globalized world.

Keywords: *Listening Skills, Language Acquisition, French Language, Hindiphone Region, Rajasthan, Effective Strategies.*

Introduction

In today's rapidly changing global landscape, proficiency in foreign languages serves as another feather in cap and has become increasingly vital for personal, academic, and professional growth. The French language has a rich historical legacy in India, dating back to colonial times. In Rajasthan, its presence can be traced through cultural exchanges and diplomatic relations. Despite being a foreign language, French holds importance in educational and professional domains, contributing to its inclusion in school curricula across the state. Among the various skills required for language acquisition, listening holds paramount importance. Effective listening skills not only facilitate comprehension but also contribute significantly to speaking, reading, and writing proficiency in a foreign language¹. In the context of middle school students learning French in the Hindiphone region of Rajasthan, India, where linguistic diversity is abundant, integrating tailored listening strategies into the curriculum becomes imperative to address the unique challenges faced by learners. In the multicultural and multilingual landscape of Rajasthan, where English holds the status of the second language, the acquisition of foreign languages like French presents both challenges and opportunities for young learners in middle schools. Although French language is taught in mostly all private schools of Jaipur today, but students still struggle when it comes to speaking or listening the target language. As the curriculum focuses mainly on the grammatical and written parts. Classroom activities of a French-language text would mainly include vocabulary, reading, grammatical explanations and exercises, subjects for writing assignments and cultural

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¹ (Flowerdew and Miller)

knowledge. Reading skills is not something less important, but listening is certainly the key. This study highlights the importance of listening skills in the acquisition of the French language. The action of speaking depends on listening because it is necessary to know what the question is, what the subject is, if one does not listen correctly or actively, it becomes really difficult for the speaker to engage in the current conversation¹. Recognizing the significance of language acquisition in fostering cross-cultural communication and cognitive development, this paper aims to explore the effective integration of listening strategies and techniques to enhance French language learning among students in the region. Philippe Blanchet, a renowned linguist and expert in language acquisition, emphasizes the crucial role of listening skills in the process of language learning. He argues that effective listening is not only essential for comprehension but also for the development of linguistic competence and communicative proficiency. Blanchet asserts that listening serves as the foundation upon which other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing, are built.

Process of Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to the process through which individuals acquire the ability to understand, produce, and use language. It encompasses the development of various language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and occurs naturally through exposure to linguistic input in the environment. Language acquisition is a complex and multifaceted process that unfolds over time, influenced by factors such as age, cognitive development, social interactions, and linguistic input².

The four major components of language acquisition are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening involves the ability to understand spoken language and extract meaning from auditory input. It is a fundamental skill that serves as the foundation for language acquisition, as learners rely on listening comprehension to access linguistic input and develop their understanding of the language. Listening facilitates vocabulary acquisition, comprehension of grammar and syntax, and the development of pronunciation and intonation³. Speaking involves the ability to produce and articulate spoken language. It enables individuals to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings, as well as to engage in verbal communication with others. Speaking proficiency is essential for language learners to participate in conversations, convey information effectively, and interact with speakers of the target language. Through speaking practice, learners develop fluency, accuracy, and confidence in their oral communication skills. Reading involves the ability to interpret and comprehend written language. It enables individuals to access information, ideas, and perspectives presented in written texts, such as books, articles, and websites. Reading proficiency is essential for language learners to expand their vocabulary, enhance their comprehension skills, and develop their knowledge of grammar and syntax. Reading also promotes critical thinking, analytical skills, and cultural literacy. Writing involves the ability to produce written language and communicate ideas through written text. It enables individuals to express themselves creatively, convey information, and engage in written communication with others. Writing proficiency is essential for language learners to communicate effectively in various contexts, such as academic writing, professional correspondence, and personal expression. Through writing practice, learners develop their grammar, vocabulary, and organizational skills, as well as their ability to convey meaning clearly and coherently.

Each component of language acquisition plays a vital role in developing overall language proficiency and communicative competence. By actively engaging with listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, language learners can enhance their linguistic skills, expand their knowledge of the language, and become effective communicators in both spoken and written contexts.

Importance of Listening Skills in Foreign Language Acquisition such as French Language

The integration of foreign languages such as French, Spanish, and German into the curriculum offers numerous benefits to students, including enhanced cognitive skills, cultural awareness, and expanded career opportunities in a globalized world. In Rajasthan, where multilingualism is prevalent, exposure to diverse languages enriches the educational experience and promotes linguistic diversity. Listening comprehension serves as the foundation for language acquisition, enabling learners to understand spoken language in real-time contexts. In the acquisition of French or any foreign language, listening skills play a crucial role in developing accurate pronunciation, expanding vocabulary, grasping grammatical structures, and fostering cultural understanding. Moreover, proficient listening enhances

¹ (Ames et al.)

² (Jones and Plass)

³ (Vandergrift and Goh)

communication skills, boosts confidence, and fosters intercultural competence, essential for students in a diverse and interconnected world. Several schools in Jaipur offer French language courses as part of their academic programs. These institutions recognize the value of foreign language proficiency and provide dedicated resources and support to facilitate language learning among students. Paul Nation, a prominent scholar in the field of language acquisition, has conducted extensive research on vocabulary acquisition and language learning strategies. While Nation is perhaps best known for his work on vocabulary, he has also emphasized the importance of listening skills in language acquisition. One of Nation's key contributions is the concept of "listening for vocabulary acquisition." He argues that listening plays a crucial role in vocabulary development, as learners encounter new words in context and reinforce their understanding through auditory input. Nation suggests that exposure to spoken language allows learners to acquire vocabulary through meaningful encounters with words in authentic contexts. Moreover, Nation emphasizes the importance of extensive listening for language learners. He suggests that regular exposure to spoken language, through activities such as listening to podcasts, radio programs, lectures, and conversations, can significantly contribute to learners' overall language proficiency. By engaging with a wide range of listening materials, learners can expand their vocabulary, improve their listening comprehension skills, and develop a more intuitive understanding of the language.

Challenges faced by the Young Learners

Middle school students in the Hindiphone region of Rajasthan encounter several challenges in mastering listening comprehension in French. These challenges include linguistic differences between French and Hindi, limited exposure to authentic French audio materials, lack of interactive learning opportunities, and cultural barriers. Additionally, technological constraints and inadequate resources further hinder students' progress in developing listening proficiency. Young learners in middle schools encounter various challenges in acquiring a foreign language like French. These may include limited exposure to authentic language input, difficulty in understanding pronunciation and intonation, and lack of motivation. Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions and pedagogical strategies tailored to the needs of young learners¹.

Active and Passive Listening

Active listening involves conscious effort and engagement with the speaker's message, while passive listening refers to the act of hearing without active participation or comprehension. Effective language acquisition necessitates the development of active listening skills, enabling students to extract meaning from spoken language and respond appropriately².

Active listening and passive listening are two different approaches to engaging with spoken language input, each playing a distinct role in the process of language acquisition. Active listening involves focused and intentional engagement with spoken language input, where the listener makes a conscious effort to comprehend and extract meaning from the auditory stimulus. In active listening, the listener is actively involved in the process, employing strategies such as prediction, clarification, and summarization to enhance comprehension. Examples of active listening in the process of language acquisition, such as French, include: actively engaging with language learning podcasts by listening attentively, taking notes, and practicing pronunciation, actively participating in conversations with native speakers or language partners, asking questions, seeking clarification, and responding appropriately, actively watching French films with subtitles, pausing to review unfamiliar vocabulary, and making connections between spoken and written language, actively completing listening comprehension exercises, such as dictations or gap-fill activities, to practice understanding spoken language in context.

Passive listening involves exposure to spoken language input without active engagement or conscious effort to comprehend. While passive listening does not require focused attention, it still contributes to language acquisition by providing learners with exposure to natural language use and reinforcement of linguistic patterns. Examples of passive listening in the process of language acquisition, such as French, include: background listening such as French radio or music playing in the background while engaging in other activities, such as cooking or commuting, listening to French audio books or podcasts for enjoyment without actively trying to understand every word, exposure to French conversations, television shows, or advertisements in everyday life situations, even if not actively attempting to comprehend, immersive environment where French is spoken regularly, such as living in a French-speaking country, allowing for passive exposure to the language.

¹ (Yildirim and Yildirim)

² (Bond)

While active listening is essential for focused language practice and skill development, passive listening complements active learning by providing additional exposure to the target language and reinforcing learning over time. Both active and passive listening are valuable strategies in the language acquisition process and can contribute to overall proficiency in French or any other language.

Integrating Theories and Strategies for Effective Listening Practices

To address the aforementioned challenges and enhance listening skills among middle school students learning French in the Hindiophone region, educators can integrate theoretical frameworks and effective strategies into the curriculum:

- **Communicative language teaching (CLT)**¹: Emphasize the interactive and authentic language use, CLT promotes meaningful communication through listening and speaking activities, role-plays, and real-life simulations.
- **Task based learning (TBL)**: Structuring learning around meaningful tasks, TBL encourages students to engage in purposeful listening activities such as listening for specific information, summarizing audio passages, and solving problems collaboratively.
- **Audio-Lingual Method**: Incorporating repetitive drills, pattern practice, and audio materials, this method reinforces listening skills through continuous exposure to authentic language input².
- **Use of Multimedia Resources**³: Integrating multimedia resources such as audio recordings, podcasts, videos, and online platforms provides students with diverse and immersive listening experiences, catering to different learning styles and preferences. Learn french with Alexa, Duolingo, TV5monde, RFI Savoires, Anki, Lingoda, Yabla etc are certain online applications that could be used in language classrooms to foster effective listening skills.
- **Cultural Integration**: Embedding cultural elements and real-life contexts into listening materials fosters students' understanding of French culture, enhancing their motivation and engagement in language learning.

To enhance listening skills, educators can employ various strategies and techniques, including pre-listening activities to activate prior knowledge, during-listening tasks to focus attention and comprehension, and post-listening exercises to reinforce learning and promote reflection. Drawing from cognitive and socio-cultural theories of language acquisition, these approaches facilitate meaningful engagement with spoken language and foster linguistic development.

Process of Pre Listening, Listening and Post Listening

The pre-listening phase involves preparing students for upcoming listening tasks through activities such as brainstorming, predicting, or activating schemata. During the listening phase, students listen to authentic audio materials while engaging in comprehension activities such as note-taking, summarizing, or answering questions. The post-listening phase encourages reflection and consolidation of learning through discussions, reflections, or extension activities⁴.

Pre-listening ← Listening → Post-listening

Pre listening refers to the activities that are done before commencing the listening exercises. This may include brainstorming vocabulary, predicting content and activating prior knowledge. Before listening to a dialogue or audio clip in French, learners can brainstorm vocabulary related to the topic. For example, if the listening task is about travel, learners can generate a list of travel-related words such as "voyage," "avion," "hôtel," etc. The learners can predict content based on the title or a brief introduction to the listening task, learners can predict what they expect to hear in the audio. For instance, if the title of the listening activity is "La vie quotidienne en France," learners might predict that they will hear about daily routines, meals, and cultural customs. The teachers can encourage learners to activate their prior knowledge about the topic can help them make connections and better understand the content of the listening material. For example, learners can share their own experiences related to the topic or discuss what they already know about French culture⁵.

¹ (Canale and Swain)

² (Brinegar)

³ (Yang)

⁴ (*Strategy Instruction in Listening for Lower-Intermediate Learners of French - Graham - 2008 - Language Learning - Wiley Online Library*)

⁵ (Vijayalakshmi)

Listening refers to the ongoing process of listening to activities or exercises wherein the learners listen to a dialogue or conversation in French between native speakers. The dialogue may cover various topics such as everyday situations, travel, shopping, or leisure activities. After listening to the dialogue, learners answer comprehension questions to assess their understanding of the content. For example, learners may be asked to identify specific information, infer meaning from context, or summarize key points. The process of listening can also be made easy by encouraging the learners transcribe a portion of the dialogue by writing down what they hear. This activity helps improve listening accuracy and reinforces spelling and punctuation rules in French.

Post listening activities refers to the activities that happens after the listening process which mainly deals with the output such as discussion and reflection, expansion of vocabulary and follow-up activities. Learners discuss their thoughts and reactions to the listening material in small groups or pairs. They may share their opinions, ask questions, or express their understanding of the content. Learners identify new vocabulary or expressions from the listening material and discuss their meanings and usage. They may create flashcards, write sentences using the new vocabulary, or practice using the words in context. Learners engage in follow-up activities that extend their understanding of the topic or theme introduced in the listening material. For example, they may read related texts, watch videos, or participate in role-plays or simulations based on the content of the dialogue.

By incorporating pre-listening, listening, and post-listening activities into language learning lessons, educators can provide learners with comprehensive opportunities to engage with spoken language input, develop their listening comprehension skills, and deepen their understanding of the French language and culture¹.

Conclusion

According to, Stephen Krashen, a renowned linguist and educator, listening plays a central role in providing comprehensible input to language learners. Through exposure to spoken language, learners have the opportunity to hear natural language use, including vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse features. Listening allows learners to develop a sense of the rhythm and intonation of the language, as well as an understanding of contextual cues and communicative strategies. Krashen emphasizes the importance of extensive listening in language acquisition. He argues that learners benefit from exposure to a wide range of spoken language input, including authentic materials such as podcasts, radio broadcasts, conversations, and lectures. By listening to diverse sources of input, learners can develop their listening comprehension skills, expand their vocabulary, and internalize the grammatical structures of the language². In conclusion, the acquisition of French listening skills among middle school students in the Hindiphone region of Rajasthan necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates theoretical insights and effective strategies into the curriculum. By addressing the challenges faced by learners and fostering a conducive learning environment, educators can empower students to develop proficiency in listening comprehension, thereby laying a strong foundation for overall language proficiency and intercultural communication competence. Through collaborative efforts between educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, we can enhance the quality of French language education and promote linguistic diversity in India's educational landscape. Hence, the effective integration of listening strategies and techniques holds promise for enhancing French language acquisition among young learners in middle schools of the Hindiphone region of Rajasthan. By addressing challenges, leveraging historical and cultural contexts, and incorporating innovative pedagogical practices, educators can foster a supportive learning environment conducive to foreign language proficiency. Embracing linguistic diversity and promoting cross-cultural communication are essential for preparing students to thrive in an interconnected world.

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¹ (Vandergrift)

² (*The Effective Schools Model: Learning to Listen - ProQuest*)

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