Book Review - Media in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Wai Meng Chan, Kwee Nyet Chin, Masanori Nagami, & Titima Suthiwan (Ed.).

Reviewed by Rania Kabouha & Amira Saleh.

The book “Media in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning” is a three-part collection of articles, which explores the use and effect of media in the study of foreign languages. The editors begin the book with a five part introduction to its content which includes the role of media throughout history in the field of education as well as an attempt to define ‘media’ with a focus on educational media which leads to the question of its influence in education. They cite several studies, which point out that the use of media, should be applied with effective and appropriate instructional methods to ensure its delivery of the expected learning outcomes. The method used should also focus on the learners and how it can support their knowledge and culture construction. The introduction also sheds light on computer media and multimedia. This particular form of media was chosen for its potential and increased usage in the field of education. The book primarily focuses on computer-based multimedia as well. This introduction is followed by four articles on the theoretical and pedagogical issues in the use of media. The next seven chapters cover empirical research on the use of media in teaching and learning a foreign language. The last four chapters cover the use of media in curricular practice.

In the first chapter of the first part of the book, Tschirner argues that the importance of audio and video clips in the acquisition of oral proficiency based on cognitive linguistic processes. Based on his review of literature, he also talks about the importance of selection in using videos for learning a foreign language based on relevance, validity, the quantity and quality of language and comprehensibility for learners. Beyond a theoretical justification for the use of videos in the classroom, Tschirner also suggests a four step method of working with videos. Chapter 3 written by Siddell covers using media for listening comprehension in foreign language classrooms. Like Tschirner, Felix Siddell, also highlights the explosive popularity of the internet and the rich and varied authentic material it brings to foreign language teaching and learning especially for the development of listening skills. He recommends the use of broadcasting websites that provide audio and video accompanied by a range of complementary materials such as illustrations, headlines, summaries, etc., which serve as a support for learners in learning the target language. In Chapter 4, Kubler discusses the promises and perils of educational technology for the foreign language curriculum and materials development. He sees media and technology as another tool that instructors can use to effectively reach ones pedagogical goals. He warns against looking at technology as more than a medium and instructional method. He writes, “the computer should be seen as one more arrow in our quiver or as one more tool in our tool kit, but not as the be-all and end-all of foreign language teaching” (81). The focus of Chapter 5 by Steve McCarty is the social media where he shows how these websites utilized to motivate language learners and become active creators in the target language. McCarty identifies the potential of such platforms which allows students to create their own. He cites 5 cases from Japan which supports his theory that social media provides integrative motivation because the students have a global audience for communication which also includes their instructors.

Part 2 of the book is devoted to empirical research on the role of media in foreign language education. The articles in this section shed light on findings on various media-related studies. The studies have diverse institutional and ethnic settings. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the use of media in EFL classrooms for children in an abstract manner. In Chapter 6, Amy Tsui highlights that in order to understand the importance of foreign language learning, it is essential to understand the meaning-making processes the learners are engaged in the
classroom, as well as the tools that facilitate these processes and the adoption of these tools by learners in the discourse process. She illustrates these concepts and processes through the analysis of discourse data collected in EFL classrooms in Hong Kong primary schools. In Chapter 7, Sugino, Kawashima and Koga present the findings of a case study involving EFL classrooms in Japan. They take the view that tasks can serve both as learning activities and media. As media, tasks are a window to the world beyond. They used ‘classroom profiling’ to find out if indeed, media helped students connect to the real world experience. Chapter 8, by Wai Meng Chan and Seo Won Chi, looks at how popular media interface with foreign language learning motivation. They used questionnaire data collection to find out how Korean pop culture, propagated through the media phenomenon of the Korean Wave has contributed to a strong interest in Korean language learning in Singapore. However, he found out that end of semester data collection showed that interest in the general culture and other factors prompted the students to be motivated to learn the Korean language.

In chapter 9, Tae Umino’s study emphasizes that L2 self-instruction through audio visual (AV) media can facilitate language learning. The results showed that students were very satisfied to learn English through this method. In the following chapters 10 and 11, the concept of “corrective feedback” has been investigated in two different ways. Katerina Zourou in chapter 10 discusses “corrective feedback” in technology enhanced learning environments. She mainly concentrates on error corrections that deal with CMC (computer-mediated communication) environments supporting human interactions, particularly “asynchronous communication tools”. Nevertheless, in chapter 11 Ching-Ya Chiu, Feng-Cheng Chiang and Shu-Chuan Chung suggest applying a new system called WE COOL (Writing & Evaluation – Cooperative On-line Learning) to correct argumentative writing. This computer software is based on the idea that students can correct each other’s work through computers after being introduced to the writing rubrics that enable them to focus on certain points. Stephanie Houghton in chapter 12 explains the notion of silence among foreign language learners. She presents several types of silence (oral and written) related to the use of mail as a sort of computer mediated communication via using Nekanes’ (2007) analytical model of factors. The researcher used “silence” to show how both teachers and learners should react towards intercultural communication variables in EFL context and how an intercultural communicative tool such as silence affects EFL learning.

In chapter 13, Harrison examines how far media can play a huge role in enhancing learner’s opportunities to learn a foreign language, particularly, Japanese language. He believes that the use of different media have an influence on the level of mediation that is required for a task to be successfully finalized. In the following chapter 14, Mei-hui Liu discusses the beneficial aspects of replacing paper-based portfolio with web-based portfolio in a way that could promote meta cognitive and affective awareness in language acquisition. The findings of the study showed that students found web-based portfolios much more flexible, enjoyable, and beneficial than paper based portfolios. However, major limitations such as time-consuming tasks and non-credible assessments’ results may act against applying such sort of portfolios in EFL classrooms.

In chapter 15, Richard Warner discusses the concept of Wimba/written feedback combination procedure, which is direct correction on the writing paper, and audio tape in which instructors record their comments using Wimba Voice tool to be heard by students. The researcher suggests having face-to-face discussions after the written/oral assessments to make sure that students understood the major comments. The last chapter focuses on the concept of humor and how it could create useful pedagogical practices in EFL context. Hodson states that teachers can teach the language of humor, which is short, authentic, and funny through using newspaper cartoons. The main goal of the study is to introduce humor as a way of learning L2 using authentic sources. However, this sort of language should be constructed for a purpose in order to be motivating and not distracting, and it has to be long rather than short so that it can be easy for learners to understand its lexis. In addition, understanding the cultural background can make it easier to laugh at certain local expressions.
In summary, the authors made a very good attempt at developing their thesis. This set of articles provides a range of topics in the study of the use of media in teaching foreign languages. The fact that the studies covered in the book range a wide variety of populations makes the book useful to everyone in the field of teaching and learning foreign language. The first section promotes further research in the field. The editors have offered a lot of freedom to the writers in choosing their topics. This can be seen in the variety of topics covered in the research section of the book. Although, the book gives a wide range of topics, demographics and variables involved in the study of the use of media in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, it has no order or flow in its presentation. The way each chapter has been written varies considerably and could have been guided by the editors to make them seem more consistent and the flow of the book more ordered. In addition, it considers the word ‘media’ as any form of communication that shares or gives a message. This might prove to be misleading to some as the current use of the word ‘media’ deals with audio and video materials provided by digital equipment, the internet and television as well as for social networking websites. Then again, as the editors define the word ‘media’ in the introductory chapter, this conception is rectified.

References


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