

## **The Role of Online Media in Language Learning in terms of Special Focus on Journalism Students at Nangarhar University**

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**Abstract:** The study is trans-disciplinary in nature where it explores the role of online media in language learning. In this connection, one cannot ignore the close tie up of language and media, which is means of mass communication. It is further a crystal clear fact requirement of certain level of linguistic knowledge for anyone who is entitled a reporter or correspondent. Being a reporter in the sense of communication is more difficult as compare to someone who uses language for daily communication. The language used in journalism is entirely mass communication in nature. The study focuses on particular tools of online media that are proved to be effective and more efficient in the process of foreign language learning since we are living in the era of technology and development. The study even try to proof the contribution of media in general and online media in particular to the discipline called language teaching. The study further made a participant observation that has come along with considerable findings.

**Key Words:** Online Media, Communication, Foreign Language Learning, Social Networking, Engagement

### **Introduction**

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, Online Media by definition is forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos. It is also called Digital Media, which includes photos, video and music, distributed over the Internet, which are either non-copyrighted or copyrighted materials provided either freely or for a fee. Examples of digital media include software, digital images, digital video, video game, web pages and websites and also including social media, data and databases, digital audio, such as MP3 and electronic books. Digital media often contrasts with print media, such as printed books, newspapers and magazines, and other traditional or analog media, such as images, movies or audio tapes. Digital media has a significant broad and complex impact on society and culture. Combined with the Internet and personal computing, digital media has caused disruptive innovation in publishing, journalism, public relations, entertainment, education, commerce and politics. Digital media has also posed new challenges to copyright and intellectual property laws, fostering an open content movement in which content creators voluntarily give up some or all of their legal rights to their work. The ubiquity of digital media and its effects on society suggest that we are at the start of a new era in industrial history, called the Information Age, perhaps leading to a paperless society in which all media are produced and consumed on computers. However, challenges to a digital transition remain, including outdated copyright

laws, censorship, the digital divide, and the spectre of a digital dark age, in which older media becomes inaccessible to new or upgraded information systems. Digital media has a significant, wide-ranging and complex impact on society and culture (James, 1988).

The nature Language learning from linguistic viewpoint either in the context of foreign or second language is always complex (Justice, 2001). At the same time language according to Ron is not a simple packed unit or package one can learn over night, but it is a multiple, complex and sophisticated process that is in a progressive changes (Brown, 2007). Keeping the mentioned facts in mind, research went beyond the traditional way language learning and teaching and provide number of methods, tools and techniques of teaching in order to make the process of learning easier and productive. For instance, language teaching according to Communicative Language Teaching CLT is to develop the communicative competence of learners. (Richards, 2006) while the same teaching according to Grammar Translation Method GTM is to develop the grammatical competence of students. Moreover, people in twenty first century with the rapid movement of technology are obsessed to using online media apps such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Viber etc. Therefore, the study explores the role of online media tools in the process of language learning, which will help the students of journalism and mass communication who study English and Dari as subjects of specific purposes in the long run in order to meet the criterion of international media once they step into the employment.

### **Review of Literature**

Media and language are both majors of rich literature and information. For instance, there are countless books and research articles written on the role of online media in learning a language. Besides publications, there are websites that promise to help us learn a language in just ten minutes per day (Sockett, 2014). YouTube for instance has channels dedicated to foreign language learning, and it plays vital role in language learning because linguistically listening is the primary mood of language, the more you listen, the better you speak (Justice, 2001). In terms of teaching methodology, there has been countless publications from expert disks discusses various approaches, methods and techniques of language teaching. For example, Larsen Freeman put her pen to the paper discussing the classical and update methods of Language teaching starting from Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

In contrast to traditional way of language teaching, Caleb Gatengo insists that teaching should not dominate, but it should facilitate the learning (Freeman, 2008). Keeping this in mind, the Audio Lingual Method (ALM), Community Language Learning (CLL), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task Based and Content Based Language Teaching and other interactive approaches do give space to online media as a tool and specific technique in order to develop the communicative competence of student. That's why, teaching language through ALM is rarely possible if you don't have colorful classes based on all facilities (Freeman, 2008).

### **Methodology**

The study is based on library and argumentative research. The study is the product of rich library readings in terms of language, linguistics, journalism and mass communication. In this connection, the researcher did a trans-disciplinary study where the major of language learning is studied from the lens of media in order to depict the role of online media in language learning.

In terms of argumentative research, the study is based on participant observation of English language classes for the students of journalism and mass communication (English for Journalism and Mass Communication). The researcher participated the English language sessions for one academic semester, twice a week for sixteen weeks. Each session was forty five minutes long.

## Findings

The ways in which we learn foreign languages have changed substantially over the past decades. With the rapid development and spread of new technologies, we now have more opportunities than ever before to engage with any language we like in a myriad of ways (Sundqvist, 2011). There are countless websites and apps that promise to help us learn a language in just ten minutes per day. There are MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), podcasts, and YouTube channels dedicated to teaching foreign languages. However, the emergence of a progressively globalized culture also means that we frequently encounter other languages *informally* – that is, when our intention is not to learn, but to be entertained: We can stream music, films, and TV series in countless languages with subtitles in our mother tongue, follow (video)bloggers from other countries, and use social networking sites to connect with people from around the globe (Kuppens, 2010).



Figure 1: Image Credit: [www.theodysseyonline.com](http://www.theodysseyonline.com)

With an ever-increasing number of people throughout the world gaining access to the internet, the ready availability of online foreign language resources seems to be a great potential equalizer among language learners from vastly different backgrounds. For example, learners living in communities where their target language may not be spoken widely (or even taught at all) now have not only unprecedented access to a brimming pot of educational and non-educational media, but also opportunities to immerse themselves in virtual communities, where they can freely communicate and collaborate with other speakers or learners of their target language (Cole, 2015).

Recent studies indeed indicate that informal online language practices are becoming more and more common, and that they are an effective way to learn (Sundqvist, 2011). Research in Sweden (Sundqvist, 2011), Belgium (Kuppens, 2010), and Finland (Olsson, 2010) found correlations between the time that pupils spent engaging with popular English language media and their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar. There is even some evidence that it may be more effective for certain people than traditional classroom learning (Cole, 2015).

However, the findings of previous research do not unanimously support the conclusion that informal language practices lead to language learning: The correlation between these factors seems to vary (or disappear altogether) depending on a number of variables, including the learners' gender, socioeconomic background, and their attitude towards language learning. Moreover, the explanations that have been offered for these findings so far have been tentative and vague – for example, that boys and girls engage with media 'in a different way'. Nevertheless, researchers seem to agree that there must be something about the *nature* of informal engagement with foreign-language contents among these different groups that predicts language learning gains (Philp & Duchesne, 2015).

Therefore, the study is currently examining in more detail what type of informal online engagement leads to successful language learning. For this purpose, I will model the relationship between language proficiency gains and four dimensions of informal *engagement*: (Philp & Duchesne, 2015).

- **Behavioral:** What resources do individuals use to engage with foreign languages and how much time do they spend using these resources?
- **Cognitive:** Do individuals consciously attempt to learn a new word, phrase or grammatical feature, and how?
- **Affective:** To what extent do individuals feel enthusiasm for, interest in, and a personal connection to the content with which they engage (e.g. a particular TV series, book, or blog)?
- **Social:** In how far do individuals interact with other language users (e.g. through commenting, sharing, or messaging)?

A better understanding of the qualities that make informal language learning effective could inform strategies for those wanting to learn a language independently. Of course, not all learning must immediately move into the digital space; this research may also help to expand methods for teaching foreign languages in classroom contexts. Teachers might, for example, wish to address the potential of informal language learning in their classes by teaching students how to effectively engage with informal resources to maximize their learning. In a language class that includes students with widely varying interests, it is often impossible to teach every individual the specific language skills or vocabulary that he or she needs. However, since in informal learning, every learner him- or herself chooses which materials to engage with, it could be a valuable tool for meeting the individual learning needs of every student (Philp & Duchesne, 2015).

### Observation Findings

The Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Nangarhar University was established under the academic supervision of the Faculty of Languages and Literature. After two years, the Faculty run its academic and administrative affairs autonomously. In the curriculum of this faculty, English is studied as required subject in order to meet the criteria of English as Foreign Language (EFL). Therefore, certain authenticated contents are brought together under the seal of four integrated skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). In every academic semester, a professor is coming from the Department of English in order to handle the teaching responsibility of the subject of English for Journalism and Mass Communication.

In 2018 spring semester, I observed various observation of Mr. OmidWali's classroom. Mr. Wali is Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Nangarhar University. He holds his Master's in English Language Teaching plus rich teaching experiences. The classes he taught were freshmen and sophomore. There were 105 students in freshmen and 96 students in sophomore. Therefore, both classes are considered large language classrooms. The duration for one period was 45 minutes. The classes were usually started with greetings and lead-in activities where few students were participated. In terms of pre-teach vocabulary, he write the words on the whiteboard and ask students to find out their meanings. Later on in terms of reading, the only method he used throughout the semester was silent reading followed be a few random comprehension questions. In terms of writing, the professor engaged his students by writing small paragraphs where peer checking was used as a method of giving feedbacks. Yet speaking was huge burrier before the methodology of his teaching, he could not make it possible for such large classes to give equal opportunity where every student can take part in the speaking sessions.

In order to overcome the mentioned challenges, the study found using online media as a tool for effective language teaching in such a huge classroom. Almost every student in both classes has had the access to internet and online search engines. Everyone uses Facebook and other means of social media. The professor made a Facebook messenger group for both classes and put a topic for discussion every day, so students could practice their written English there. Besides this, students were trained by email writing, and it became assignment for students to submit their assignments via email to professor which further develop their communication skills. At the meantime, the professor list down the most important and easy You-Tube channels in order to practice their listening skills. The native language of students were blocked in a maximum level. It was only used in the time of necessity in order to clarify the confusion and difficult learning situation based on the principle of post method era (**Brown, 2007**).

At the end of the semester, students were found improved in four integrated skills at the pre-intermediate level. In their pre-test based on ILA (International Language Test) developed by British Council, over 75% of the class were placed in A1 level while the same test were given at the end of the semester and over 75% of the class increased their one CEFR Level. CEFR stands for the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, often referred to as CEFR or CEFRL, is an international standard for working out your ability within a language. It was established by the Council of Europe and aims to validate language ability. The six levels within the CEFR are A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2.



Figur.2: Image Credit: [www.Studylink.com](http://www.Studylink.com)

## Conclusion

It is always interesting and a deeply academic appreciation if one can explore a discipline from the lens of another discipline (trans-disciplinary). Thus, the current study explores the role of online media which is a department of Journalism and Mass Communication in the process of foreign language learning particularly English language. The study after a comprehensive reading and critical observations found that online media such as YouTube, email, WhatsApp and etcetera can be effectively used as the appropriate tool for learning a foreign language. The observation of this study further found specific tool of online media for the developing and refining of particular language skill. For instance, watching YouTube learning videos will master the listening and speaking skills of learners. Finally, gaining the skills of English language is highly mandatory for students of Journalism and Mass Communication particularly at the context of Nangarhar University where students are coming from poor English language background in order to work for international media.

## Recommendations

English as a passport of employment, as a language and research and professionalism is highly recommended for the learners of any major particularly Journalism and Mass Communication. It is found that most of the alumni from the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, however, are quite professional in their major, but they fail in one thing which is the lack of international languages by which they can access to international media and extend the scope of their works. Therefore, they are confined within their home country since they are very less job opportunities with the local media. If they together with their professionalism gain the skills of English language, they will be able to work with international media, which will help them both professionally and financially.

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