Ohio University
College of Education
Department of Educational Studies
Instructional Technology Program

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Leonce F. R. Rushubirwa, Ph.D.

Experiences of Faculty and Students Integrating Multimedia and Web-based Technologies into University Language Learning: A Study of Three Languages

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Director of Dissertation: Sandra V. Turner, Ph.D.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the experiences of faculty and students integrating multimedia and web-based technologies into university foreign language learning. The study took place at a large university in three language classes-- Japanese, Swahili and Yoruba--where technology was integrated into the curriculum to teach language skills and cultural knowledge. In Japanese, locally developed HyperCard programs were the main technology utilized; in Swahili, web-based course materials were used; and in Yoruba, multimedia CDs were the major tool of instruction. In addition, all three language classes used web resources, e-mail, and WebCT to some extent. The participants were students, instructors and program directors of the three languages studied. The researcher used multiple methods of data collection: extensive class observations; in-depth interviews with twelve students, three instructors, two program directors; and analysis of syllabi and teaching materials. The data were coded and analyzed by language and across all three languages. The students and instructors believe that technology contributes significantly to improving students' communicative language skills such as listening, speaking, writing, vocabulary and grammar as well as their cultural knowledge. Both instructors and students regard the technology as a supplemental tool to enhance, not replace, traditional instruction. They report that technology is beneficial because it provides a variety of language activities, allows students to learn at their own level and pace, and enables instructors to attend to individual students. The study provides evidence that the integration of multimedia and web-based technologies, combined with willingness of the instructors to use a student-centered approach, creates an interactive, collaborative learning environment in which students share knowledge with each other and experience confidence and independence as learners. This pedagogical approach enables the instructors to become facilitators while allowing students to take more responsibility for their learning. Based on the findings of this study, the role of technology in teaching foreign languages cannot be ignored. The experiences of the students and instructors in these three language classes support the integration of technology.