

Effectiveness of using newspapers in learning French as a foreign language: a case study

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***Abstract :** The purpose of this article is to examine the effectiveness of newspapers in teaching as well as enhancing French Language skills. It will be an attempt to explore how the newspaper can inspire the learners to use it as an effective course material and also how it can play a helpful role in their language learning. Fifty students of French language at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka as well as fifteen teachers have participated in this study. This study based on qualitative as well as quantitative data was conducted by distributing some questionnaires to the participants. By analyzing their responses and suggestions, we have a clear idea about the effectiveness of using newspapers in the French class. I will also try to figure out some challenges of using newspapers in the classroom. To conclude, some suggestions will be provided on how to select suitable newspapers to make the classes more engaging and useful.*

1. Introduction

Currently, many foreign language teachers are advised to use newspapers as course materials in their classes. One of the reasons behind this is that to some extent newspapers seem to be a better course material as compared to regular textbooks. Textbooks generally contain many stories or conversations based on some specific situations whereas a newspaper has a variety of subject-based materials. In addition to providing new ideas and useful information, observing the language used in newspapers helps to enhance linguistic knowledge as well. They also make it easier for students to become acquainted with the culture of a society. Over the past decade, foreign language teachers and researchers have consistently emphasized the importance of newspapers, leading them to become one of the most effective materials for learning a new language. The textbooks used in French Language courses do

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not express the exact situations around our lives. The main reason is that these teaching methods are mostly dependent on the context of other countries and their authors are also foreigners. As a result, most of the time we find no similarities between our life and reality with such language learning textbooks.

Without following newspapers and depending solely on such kind of books, students cannot increase their proper knowledge and their ability in using that language. Therefore, one of the reasons why students in different French language courses have difficulties in learning the language properly despite attending regular classes with great enthusiasm could be the lack of actual familiarity with the language and society that newspapers could easily render, for as we said, newspapers are a true reflection of society. Most of the learners, including the teachers of this course, do agree that they do not get any encouragement or interest in learning French just by reading some of the conventional books of French language course mentioned in the syllabus and that they feel a more positive attitude towards using authentic material like newspapers as course material.

2. Literature review

The use of authentic materials has long been recognized by teachers and researchers in foreign language learning. Numerous studies have shown that such materials have a strong effect on learners who practice the communication process using these particular materials. Widson (1990) argues that one of the purposes of creating authentic reading materials instead of teaching and learning in the classroom is to create real communication. As authentic material, a newspaper allows us to have access to a wide range of knowledge and depth of events. In addition to other books except for textbooks such as stories, essays, letters and even reports on social, political, cultural, economic and contemporary issues can be considered as useful reading materials in language learning. In this way, a connection can be established between the language of the newspaper and the language of our daily life so that learners can have the opportunity to gain knowledge about the whole world while staying in the classroom.

Generally, French Language textbooks are usually produced in French-speaking countries and therefore the cultural contexts associated with them may seem strange to students of other countries. Karpova (1999:18) mentioned that many beautiful and colorful interesting language learning books are available but such books create an isolated learning situation. Although these imported textbooks have a variety of topics with some engaging and useful activities, unfortunately, some of these seem surprisingly strange to the learners, as has been identified by Akter and Chowdhury (2010). From this point of view, newspapers are very effective, because in these materials, we find events from all over the world, including our students' own country, most of which they are already familiar with.

3. Objective of the study

One of the objectives of this study is to find out how newspapers can play an important role in enhancing students' language skills and learning capacity. Here, the research started with an emphasis on some specific objectives based on the following six questions which will be helpful to discover our main objective as the effectiveness of newspapers in learning French as a foreign language.

- Question-A:** Do you think newspapers are helpful to acquire linguistic knowledge?
- Question-B:** Do you believe that newspapers play a strong role in gaining knowledge on social, political, economic and contemporary issues?
- Question-C:** Do you agree that newspapers enhance students' analytical ability?
- Question-D:** Do you think it is possible to build useful and effective vocabulary with the help of newspapers?
- Question-E:** Do you think using newspapers as class material is problematic?
- Question-F:** Do you think it necessary to observe the strategies that teachers apply when they use newspapers in the classroom?

4. Methodology of the study

The survey has been designed with the above six questions for both the groups of participants as teachers and students of the French language. 50 students of different French language programs and 15 teachers have participated in this study. 25 among them were from the honors program and 25 from different certificate programs. All of them willingly agreed to participate in this research study by responding to the survey and also providing their suggestions. Most of the questions mentioned above are close-ended. They have been distributed among the 50 participants and their answers have also been collected along with some suggestions.

The answers to the questions given to them have been arranged on a 5 point scale respectively: 1= Strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. The survey was mainly based on quantitative analysis by collecting answers from them. The same questions were distributed among 15 teachers of the French language of which 7 teachers are from Bangladesh University of Professionals and others are from Alliance Française de Dhaka. Since the number of teachers is relatively small, apart from their answers to the various questions, we have taken some suggestions from them and they have given short interviews so that both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis can be considered.

Since we are in a time of pandemic, all the questions had been sent to the participants and their answers have been collected through Google survey forms. The data thus collected have been presented in a chart so that one can have an overall idea only by looking at the percentage mentioned in the picture without reading the details.

5. Authentic materials

The purpose of this article is to examine the effectiveness of using authentic materials such as newspapers in foreign language classes. First and foremost, it is essential to know the exact definition of authentic materials. According to RAO (2019), these are materials, either spoken or written, that are not prepared to serve pedagogical

purposes. While reading them, learners get a chance to observe firsthand, and understand the different patterns of a new language that are frequently used by native speakers. Among many authentic materials, newspapers are extremely practical documents and can give rise to numerous advantages when used in foreign language classes. For instance, learners can get a positive motivation by using authentic materials like newspapers than other readymade pedagogical materials. When authentic materials are used in the classes, learners' concentration, inspiration, dedication and dynamism increase automatically. As Brinton (1991, cited in Oura, 2001) states that "Authentic materials relate more closely to learners' needs, for which they build a connection between the language classroom and the outside world". Secondly, they provide us with a wide range of linguistic styles, levels, categories and contexts so that learners can easily enrich their linguistic knowledge with the help of this kind of material. In this regard, French teachers, as well as French learners, can benefit from using newspapers as authentic materials because they are different from what they learn in their regular classrooms. Thirdly, these materials allow us to find all possible cultural values which are interconnected to our daily life. Using authentic materials in the French classes has several more advantages both for teachers and learners of French because with their help, learners are able to get more exposure to the language as used in the real world.

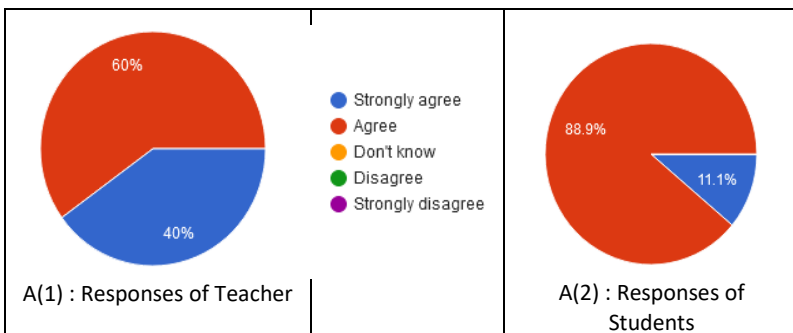
6. Discussion and Analysis

6.1. Discussion and Analysis of the findings of Question (A)

From responses to Question (A), 60% of the teachers gave a strong opinion about increasing the vocabulary and 40% of them have simply agreed with it. Fortunately, no teacher has disagreed with Question (A). On the other hand, a large number of the students (89.1%) have strongly agreed and only 11.9% have simply agreed with it. If we compare charts A(1) and A(2) prepared with the responses of teachers and students respectively, it becomes very clear that the students are quite confident with expressing their agreement to this question. But fortunately, there was not any single participant who disagreed with this question. They also

realised that it is not possible to acquire real language skills just by following conventional textbooks. The studies of Baker & Brown (1984) observed that authentic material like newspapers could enhance learners' motivation for learning new languages.

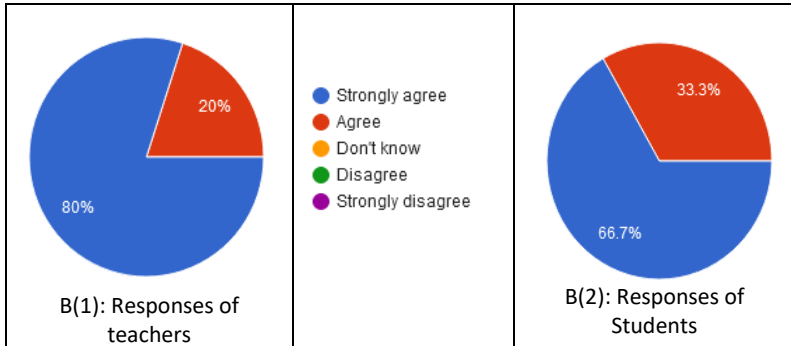
Among many other authentic materials, newspapers are very much up to date in terms of vocabulary that provides modern style and new information, which are rarely found in other textbooks. From the data generated by the answers to Question (A), it is clear that most of the students and teachers think that the newspaper is a powerful tool for improving their language skills. It is possible to gain new experience by reading news articles and reports on various events related to our daily life in these newspapers as well as to acquire new vocabulary which is not possible when using language textbooks alone. In this way, students can easily master their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, usage techniques according to their position by engaging more with the language in newspapers. Moreover, through the use of these authentic materials, not only learners but also teachers can develop their linguistic knowledge, linguistic skills and ability to understand intercultural conceptualisation.



6.2. Discussion and Analysis of the findings of Question (B)

With the data obtained from responses to Question (B), two charts B(1) and B(2) of the survey have been prepared below which reflect the views of teachers and students respectively. Surprisingly, all the participants of both groups had positive responses in agreement to

the question. Chart B(1) shows that 80% of teachers agreed very strongly and only 20% of them simply agreed. Similarly, in Chart B(2), it is seen that 66.7% of students agreed very strongly and 33.3% of them merely agreed to it..



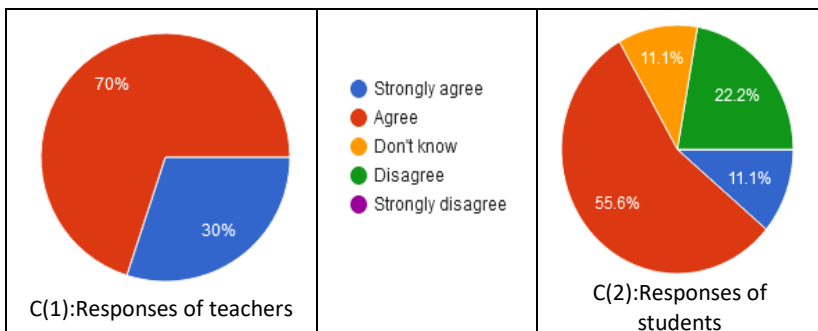
In newspapers, we get world news based on all kinds of topics such as political, social, economic, educational, environmental, sports, daily lifestyle etc. These kinds of news and incidents are comprehensively presented with detailed terminology, in a way that the mass people can understand the news. They are constantly updated with new information which is not possible with traditional foreign language learning books.

As a result, the level of linguistic development in terms of style and appropriate vocabulary that can be achieved with the newspapers is not possible in any way with traditional textbooks. So it can be said that the newspaper is a perfect material which is easy to use, carry and readily available in the class. There are some more specific underlying reasons for using newspapers as authentic materials in French language classes to find a reflection of the continuous change in language and the culture. As a result, students will be able to discover not only the literal meanings of words used in the newspapers but also their cultural meanings. Since newspapers include information spanning a wide range of topics and subjects, students can easily find any topic that interests them. In this case, whenever they face a new article, for a clear understanding they will master their brains, organize their ideas, use their knowledge to determine the right and easy way Riaz (2012) and Ping (2011).

6.3. Discussion and Analysis of the findings of Question (C)

There is also a question on analytical ability in sorting out questions for surveys on the effectiveness of using newspapers in foreign language learning classes. Analytical ability is defined as a particular skill to deconstruct information into smaller categories to conclude. Analytical skill consists of categories that include logical reasoning, critical thinking, communication, research, data analysis, and creativity. In the newspapers we get news from different categories which will enable the readers to increase their knowledge and at the same time, readers can also develop their thinking, logical capacity, ideas and creativity without anyone's help.

With the data obtained from responses to Question (C), two charts C(1) and C(2) of the survey have been prepared below which reflect the views of teachers and students respectively. The two charts prepared by answering Question (C) where the majority of the students and all the teachers had positive responses in agreement to the question. Their analytical ability can be enhanced by using regular newspapers in the class so that they can express their views on any issue related to our society. Taking a look at Chart C(1), it is seen that 70% of the teachers believe that newspapers are really helpful for increasing the analytical ability and the remaining 30% agree even more strongly. No one among the teachers who participated in the survey expressed disagreement. However, in Chart C(2), even though most of the participants from the learners' group have responded positively, about 22.2% of them have disagreed.



After having a talk with the students who disagreed, I found that many of them have no experience of using newspapers as authentic materials in foreign language classes. So they have no real idea about its effectiveness. Some of them said that their language learning system is mainly based on examinations, tests, assignments, homework, and marks so they give more importance only to the main textbook but not to any additional materials.

Therefore, foreign language teachers should use newspapers regularly in the class to develop learners' language skills. Of course, newspapers have a great influence on language learning, which is not the case with ordinary textbooks. I strongly agree with Baker & Brown (1984) about the belief that reading, for the students, is an effective practice of learning to pronounce words correctly. French teachers can improve learners' language learning in a short time by using regular newspapers in the class following some appropriate techniques and activities.

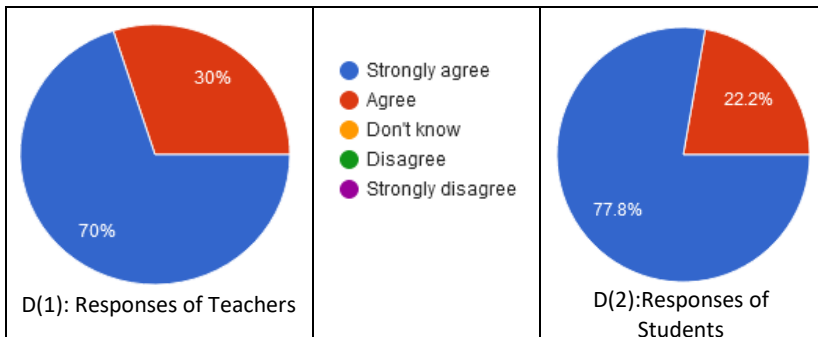
Reading is considered as a continuous process of learning to find the meaning of a piece of text as suggested by Olson (1994). This means that sometimes, the meaning of the text is not found on the text but after reading the text, provided with references, readers can discover the inherent meaning. Therefore, according to Yore, Craig & Maguire (1998), reading practice is really important because reading depends on his /her previous knowledge which is essential to contextualize the text and at the same time actively build up new knowledge. In this way, if the students are introduced to the newspaper while learning the language, then it is possible to develop skills in various aspects of the language such as increasing vocabulary, expanding knowledge based on different topics, expressing one's point of view, presenting reasoning and reviewing etc. These cannot be achieved in any way with the help of specific reading materials except newspapers. Since newspapers are a unique source of authentic materials, teachers can regularly exploit them for maximum benefit in language learning. This tool has become known as a great resource for mastering the real-life language in the classroom as stated by Baker & Brown (1984).

In addition, if students of any foreign language program are investigated more seriously, mainly two types of active learners come up— one group that tries to learn and master the language supported by their interest while the other group tries to learn the language just to have a good result in the examination. As a result, the level of their language proficiency, comprehension, performance, experience and perception in the class is not at a satisfactory level.

6.4. Discussion and Analysis of the findings of Question (D)

Here, Chart D(1) below shows that 30% of teachers think that it is possible to get acquainted with some special and effective words through the newspaper, but 70% of them considered it quite positively. Fortunately, all the teachers who participated in the survey showed a positive attitude towards the use of newspapers. Similarly, the students did not show any negative attitude with the given question which is seen in Chart D(2). Of the students who took part in the survey, 77.8% strongly supported the use of newspapers, and the remaining 22.2% only partially supported it.

Everyone in both groups has made it clear that in newspapers we get all kinds of news such as sports, education, politics, science, culture, environment, weather etc, that are not found in the traditional materials. As a result, there are some useful and specialized words in those newspapers which are truly appropriate to express a particular meaning and expression in a selective discussion. So they have admitted that it is illogical to develop such language by reading only textbooks. Surprisingly, both the groups noticed that those who were already habituated to reading the newspaper regularly have more vocabulary than others who score well in the French language classes.



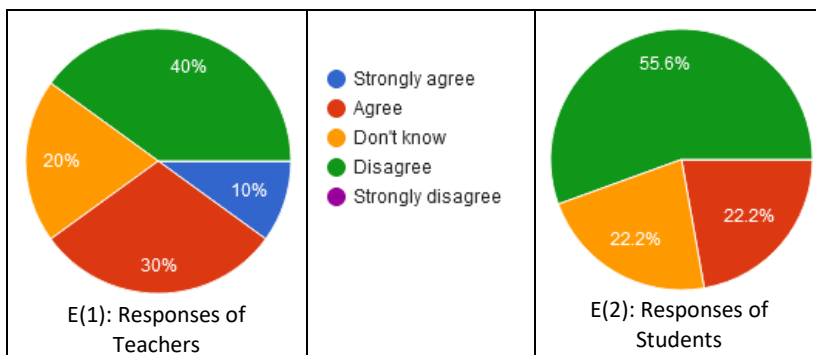
By reading newspapers regularly, students can develop and improve their language skills as well as their self-confidence and motivation. In light of the long experience of teaching foreign languages, it seems that students can get acquainted with new words through newspapers, master the writing style, choose the right words, spread the vision with which they will be able to enrich their language a lot in a short time, agreeing with Brown (2004) who has added that newspapers can increase the number of readerships, enrich readers' vocabulary, improve speaking or writing skills, develop their critical thinking capacity and promote cultural values. It is possible to develop the ability to clearly express opinions and decisions on any subject which is not possible in any way by following ordinary language learning textbooks. In this way, if the newspaper is considered as a language learning material, it becomes much easier to express the right idea by choosing an appropriate word, especially in writing.

Thus, when we gradually build up a huge vocabulary, we will inadvertently notice a radical change in our writing style and technique. Riaz (2012) himself has admitted and mentioned that learners would be familiar with different styles and techniques of writing when reading different sections of journals which are written differently since each section serves a distinct purpose. By reading the newspaper regularly we will find many useful and effective words that all carry one kind of special feature and meaning. Since repetition of such words is common in newspapers, readers can easily become familiar with words that are not possible through textbooks. As a result, regular newspaper readers can apply such words appropriately from time to time. The advantage of this is that there is no need to make a separate list of such words for remembering as they are regularly repeated in newspapers.

6.5. Discussion and Analysis of the findings of Question (E)

With the data obtained from the answers to Question (E), two charts- E(1) and E(2) of the survey have been prepared below where the responses of teachers and students are respectively reflected. Most of the teachers do not realize any major problem in using the

newspapers as course materials in the class of which 40% disagreed with the matter, 20% did not give any opinion only 10% agreed strongly and the rest of the 30% only agreed partially. Observing these opinions of teachers, it seems that using newspapers in foreign language classes is not a very difficult task. Rather, it should be noted here that 40% of the teachers disagreed with the given question of which most of them said that they opposed the use of newspapers inside the class but allowed it outside the class. In other words, they suggested that students could continue their language practice outside the classroom with the help of newspapers. They believe that using them in class is a waste of time and results in the course not being completed on time. On the other hand, if we look at Chart E(2) prepared with the responses of the students, it is seen that majority of the participants understand that there is no serious problem in using newspapers in foreign language classes. The chart shows that 55.6% disagreed with Question (E), 22.2% did not give a clear answer, and only 22.2% found some problems in using the newspaper.



Through this survey, it is clear that the students are very interested in newspapers. As a result, more than half of them do not think they have a problem. Most of the students who did not give any feedback, similar to the teachers, expressed considerable interest in using the newspaper. They claim that by practicing regular newspaper reading, it is possible to better understand the language and expression of daily life which cannot be achieved in any way by reading textbooks in the French language. In this case, they

suggested that it is more effective for the newspaper to be used as practice independently, rather than just in the classroom.

There are some problems with the use of newspapers in the classroom, but these problems can be overcome if we select different newspaper articles by considering the language level of the students properly. At the beginning of the class, different groups can be formed depending on their competency, and then group studies can be arranged by distributing different articles accordingly. The goal is for each group to read their text so that they can continue to practice their language of interpretation, criticism, and expression as quoted by Babalola (2002). Sometimes if students may not be able to read the news in the newspaper clearly, then looking at the headlines may give them an idea of the given news. The main reason for not understanding is the lack of vocabulary among them.

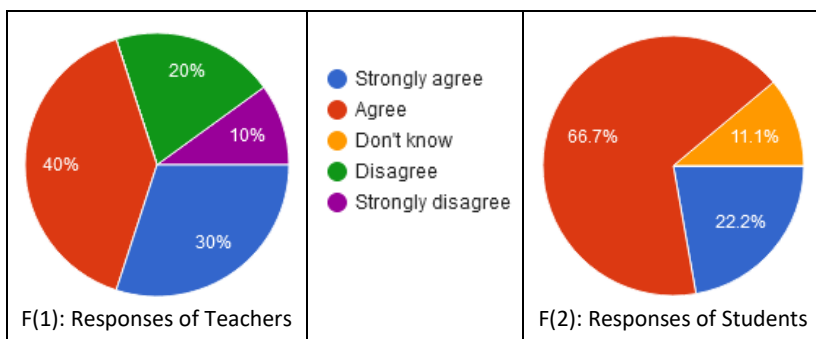
Generally, learners try to express their experience by reading various real-life events in the newspaper and at the same time take an initiative to develop their skills by knowing real-life French. This is an exceptional opportunity because it is almost impossible to know and understand a language just by following the textbooks used in the classes. The level of linguistic knowledge of the students participating in the class is different which must be taken seriously while working with the newspaper. Moreover, when the reader reads the newspaper, he/she will be noticed properly from a general point of view whether he/she was able to establish an interaction by reading the article or the person can explain the article in the capacity of his/her knowledge. Of course, there are some challenges in using newspapers in class but they can be overcome by taking some useful steps mentioned above.

6.6. Discussion and Analysis of the findings of Question (F)

The data obtained from the answers to Question (F) reflects the views of teachers and students in the given charts F(1) and F(2). Looking at Chart F(1) based on the teachers' responses, it can be seen that the various articles of newspapers used in the classroom play a strong positive role in teaching the foreign language to the

students and there is no disagreement among them. The data reflects the direct opinion of the teachers themselves where 70% of them think that the newspaper is the most effective material in foreign language learning if it can be used in the classroom properly, of which 30% strongly agreed and 40% agreed only partially. Again, there is some disagreement observed- around 30% of the participants of whom 20% considered the role of newspapers as unimportant and the remaining 10% strongly opposed it. In this case, of course, they all gave their opinions based on their experiences and point of view. Reviewing all of their suggestions, it is clear that the majority of them have agreed to the use of the newspapers as helpful materials along with the textbook. Surprisingly, it is true that some teachers are already habituated to using them regularly in class.

They suspected that regularly following the newspapers along with textbooks may reduce the focus on language learning, but suggested that using the newspaper may be considered as an extracurricular activity.



As can be seen in Chart F(2) based on the responses of the students, none of them had a negative attitude towards the use of newspapers as authentic materials. In this regard, a total of 88.9% have expressed their intention to use the newspaper as a proper reading material of which 22.2% strongly agreed and 66.7% seem to have partially agreed and the remaining 11.1% did not give any opinion. After talking to the students, I found that they are very

interested in various newspaper articles on contemporary events because all of them are familiar to them and they are related to their daily lives which is reflected in this chart. Here, the views of all the participants are shown clearly which means that no one opposed it. Furthermore, they also mentioned the importance of using newspapers along with traditional textbooks to get more inspiration. In this case, however, for better results, the students of each class are advised to select the appropriate text materials by verifying the correct skills. This means that the learners are very conscious about their learning process and always expect an up-to-date strategy for enriching their course materials.

Students are usually more interested in exploring newspapers' articles than textbooks because the newspaper presents many well-known facts about daily life, that provide the right opportunity to test their language skills. However, some strategies need to be worked out for using newspaper articles in the class. Otherwise, no positive results can be obtained by casually following these things. For example, the kind of practice that can be done by the upper-level students of the French language using newspapers cannot be done by the students of elementary level. So in the beginning, the selection of newspaper articles is crucial to categorize according to their language level and prepare different types of exercises according to their ability.

Therefore, our strategies will be specified. For example, articles for beginner students must be short and simple in terms of language that can be used to discuss various aspects of the language for example grammar, tenses, words, synonyms etc. On the other hand, those who have linguistic skills need to collect some descriptive texts that can be used to prepare various analytical exercises, which must be tested by their level of proficiency. Teachers must consider their needs and interests when selecting authentic materials so that their level of motivation prevails. It is the responsibility of the teachers to collect various materials from the newspaper as an ongoing process which may include daily incidents, short stories, short articles, advertisements, biographies, weather reports, sports, world news etc. Even then, if some of them in the class find the

collected materials to be difficult, then the teacher can simplify the article so that it will be easier for them to understand. The fact is, when practicing different exercises in a language class we need to make sure that the right article is given to the right student.

7. Suggestion & Conclusion

This article presents us with a detailed analysis based on teachers' and students' perceptions about the effectiveness of newspapers as authentic materials along with textbooks in French language classes. In addition to short interviews, some suggestions have also been collected from them through extra questions. The majority of the participants have repeatedly mentioned the need for newspapers. As a French teacher most of the time I also agreed with them. After considering all the information provided by both groups along with some more suggestions mentioned below, I firmly believe that the use of newspapers in learning French as a foreign language will make language teaching much more effective and pleasant.

The materials used in the classroom should be appropriate to the level of skill of the students and the teachers should also prepare different exercises accordingly so that they may be involved in the class activities for a longer period of time. According to Brinton (2001), these documents help to establish a close link between students and their needs because they can connect the language classroom to the outside world.

Reading newspapers regularly in the classroom makes it possible to establish some changes in different aspects of language development such as pronunciation, awareness, self-confidence and fluency. On the other hand, some negative aspects can be removed such as hesitation due to fear of mistakes or doubts Bernadowski (2011). Sometimes, to become a skilled reader by understanding any article well, it is not enough to understand the article literally but one has to know the implicit meaning of it.

In this way, the students have to develop the habit of reading newspapers during the learning period by following the instructions

which have already been mentioned before in the discussions above. Through the process of regular monitoring, it is necessary to observe whether they have achieved the proper level in their language.

In this situation, some common steps are required to be taken to measure the development of students' language skills in a very careful manner such as-1. structure of sentences 2. dependency on the original article 3. a number of ideas 4. own opinion 5. fluency 7. manner of expression etc.

It is also important to keep in mind that standard language learning books are usually used in foreign language courses. This type of book is very helpful for the purpose of practicing different exercises but inside them, we do not really find many contemporary events. However, considering the psychological aspect of the learners, it can be seen that they are more interested in the news of daily life and contemporary events. So, I believe that newspapers can play a great role in increasing students' engagement with the class and ensuring successful communication among them. There is no choice because in today's reality newspapers can be considered as a source of inspiration for the readers to learn new styles of language as well as undoubtedly, a faithful companion in mastering the modern conventional language genre.

With the spirit of Izquierdo (2004), when the students get an article to do some exercises on it, at first they may be given some time to read the title of the article so that they can try to assume the body of the text. This helps them to form some good questions and then leads them further to consider a few more assumptions and arguments.

It is easily possible to arrange such activities because, in the age of information & technology, any newspaper in any language is now readily available. The reason why many consider the newspaper as one of the best authentic documents in learning a new language is that it reflects our life in various ways such as social, political, economic, religious, scientific, educational etc. as pointed out by Bankole & Babalola (2011).

Again in a word, to read a news article in class means to be able to understand it, to be able to interpret it and to be able to analyze it Philips & Norris (1999). In this way, newspapers can play a vital role in enhancing the skills of students at all levels of language learning.

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