

Proposed Presentation: UN SDGs and Contemporary Language Education

Dr. Olenka Bilash

Professor Emerita, University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract

Background: Language learners in minority contexts frequently lack up-to-date engaging resources that reflect contemporary cultural realities, sustainability challenges, and global perspectives. Resources available online may be too advanced as they are intended for native speakers and may not address real-world topics such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), limiting the development of communicative interaction in and beyond the classroom and global citizenship awareness. Video resource production is costly and requires the expertise of linguists, content developers, media curriculum specialists, and designers. The complexity of reaching students and piloting such projects are usually undertaken by large publishing houses who naturally protect their trade secrets. It is difficult for publishers to keep pace with change in world affairs and produce contemporary content in a timely and cost-effective manner. This study sought to determine what makes an effective multi-media resource for beginner to intermediate level language learners in minority contexts.

Methodology: The project followed a multi-phase cyclical mixed methods action research process to build, test, and revise language video resources to meet the language competencies of beginner and intermediate level learners in a minority language context. "Action research is fundamentally a cyclical process aimed at addressing and resolving specific classroom-based problems (Kemmis et al., 2019). We sustained an iterative cycle of developing videos and accompanying activities, testing them with individuals and in classrooms, obtaining qualitative and quantitative feedback, and refining products throughout the project. "Action research not only provides a systematic approach to improving video resources but also empowers educators to respond to the specific needs of their learners, ultimately enhancing the language learning experience." (Zhan, 2016).

Results: This presentation will include data highlighting six cycles of research conducted with approximately 200 students 2019-2025. Implications and future research will also be discussed. The focus of each cycle follows.

Cycle 1: which oral language accent is most appealing.

Cycle 2: Conduct an extensive literature review (LR) on the use of multimedia in second language learning.

Cycle 3: Adapt the Literature Review to produce two short documentary-style semi- animated videos on environmental and cultural issues inspired by the UN SDGs and pilot test with speakers of different ages.

Youth found the videos about mental health and poverty "interesting". They learned "something new" and desired "more". They responded positively to the music, pacing, content, language level and characters. They especially appreciated the "tips" as to how to improve the issue presented in the SDG. Their primary recommendation was to include local examples, when possible.

Cycle 4: Develop and pilot additional videos (narrative and conversational style using animation and real-life footage) and accompanying classroom activities with learners in schools and universities.

Cycle 5: Revise videos and activities according to feedback from students; develop a teacher/user guide.

Cycle 6: Develop further videos in a game show style to increase interactivity and pilot test.

Contributions & Implications

- Publications about features that make second language videos engaging and comprehensible may help teachers develop classroom activities and criteria for student creation projects.
- The project may encourage others in creating/using videos in language classrooms.
- When carefully planned and structured, learners can learn relevant content through language in a minority language context.
- Video development is a long and expensive process.
- Through ongoing surveys and feedback collection, the project has advanced by repeatedly refining its video resources, ensuring they remain effective and relevant.
- A diversity of formats (documentary, narrative, game-based) allows the content to be adapted for different age and competency target groups.
- A low level of language proficiency is not a barrier to engaging in contemporary content if strong visual and expressive auditory support is provided.
- Our scalable model may be beneficial for other minority language communities.

