



**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND ROLE OF MANUALS: FRENCH TEACHING IN
INDIAN SCHOOLS**

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Abstract

Manuals or Textbooks are a key component in most language programs. In some cases, they serve as the basis for much of the language input learners receive and the language practice that occurs in the classroom. They often provide the foundation for the content of the lessons, the balance of skills taught and the kinds of language practice the students take part in. In other situations, the textbook may serve primarily to aid the teacher in carrying out classroom instruction. For learners, the manual may be provided by the teacher. In the case of teachers with little or no experience, textbooks may also serve as a form of teacher training - they provide guidance and suggestions on how to plan and teach lessons as well as strategies that the teachers can use. As an educator, we are philosophically committed to student diversity. We need to appreciate the fact that learning differences are natural and positive. The focus can be on identifying individual students' interests and strengths. But making inclusive education work requires a solid support system and also effective strategies with special emphasis on the quality of manuals used. In the Indian context, middle school language classrooms make use of specific recommended manuals which serves the needs of all students irrespective of their interests, learning abilities, and preferences. In this paper, the study highlights the role of manuals and inclusive education in French Pedagogy. Are the manuals used in French language teaching differentiated well enough to meet the needs of diverse student levels and interests? Do the

exercises or activities designed at the end of the lessons cater to different learner profiles particularly to suit the needs of students with special needs? Are the recommended manuals sufficient to match the learning needs of students or should more reference manuals be included? Also, talking about the formative and summative assessments, can more emphasis be laid on differentiated exercises on oral and written comprehension rather than standard written tests based on grammar skills? In this paper, we will consider the role of the textbook in terms of its normal day-to-day use in teaching and learning French, and then consider its role in the process of differentiation. We will also discuss the implications of a more detailed and positive view of the role of the textbook, stressing upon in particular, the textbook content creation and differentiation keeping in mind different learner needs and inclusive education.

Keywords- *Manuals; formative and summative assessments; inclusive education; Differentiation; content creation; learning abilities; oral and written comprehension*



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Introduction

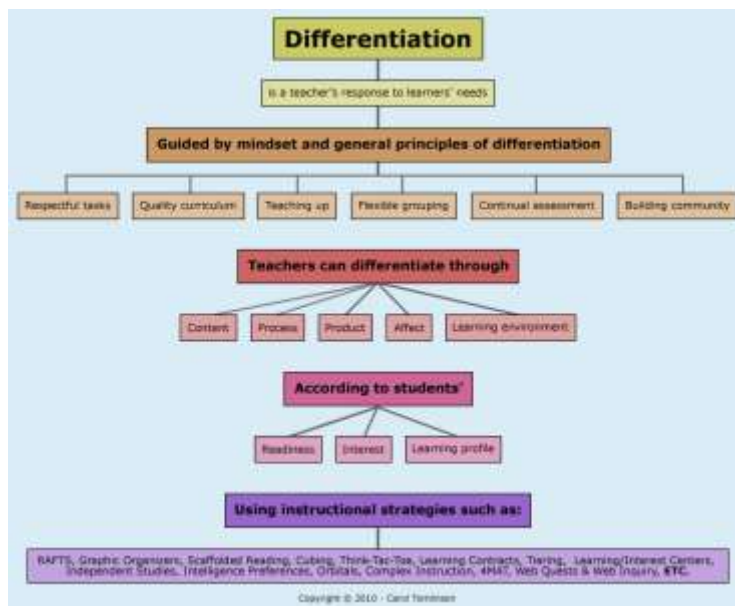
In the education world, much of the French language teaching is with the help of a wide range of commercial textbooks. It is thereby very crucial for a French language teacher to learn how to use and adapt textbooks and this forms a part of professional knowledge acquired by the teacher.

What are Manuals/Textbooks? Are they guides to language learning? "What do we want teaching materials for?"

Several textbooks in the market involve the teacher to take a lead role in helping learners and also look at minimum involvements of learners in the process of learning.

The graphics and illustrations in the manuals are so presented such that different learners are able to use them as per their requirements and levels. Differentiated content in textbooks can be used successfully for a wide range of different groups. Learner groups may seem unique but a textbook/ manual can provide the basis for learning. Also, for those learners who are not able to attend regular classes or have been missing out on lessons, the use of textbooks is immense. The learners are also able to have some advance preparation before their classes with the help of reference manuals and textbooks.

The Differentiated Language Classroom-Carol Ann Tomlinson describes a differentiated French Language classroom with students often working with written tasks at differing levels of complexity and with different amounts of teacher support. Oral communication tasks focus on the same basic topics, but completion requires different levels of sophistication, and sometimes students can “opt out” of review sessions to create their own products or presentation or to read a French language magazine. Students often work in teacher-assigned, mixed-readiness pairs to prepare for checks on fundamentals and may, from time to time, select a partner to prepare for a challenge demonstration.



In this study we will consider the role of textbooks/manuals in Content, Process, Learning Environment, Student's Readiness, Interests, and Learner Profile. Also, we will analyze the importance of content, curriculum and process with respect to the learning environment inclusive of special needs students.

Textbooks play an important role in foreign language teaching. In instructional contexts, they comprise of the syllabus teachers follow. Furthermore, assessments are often based on textbook content. Therefore, textbooks/manuals must be designed in a way such that it meets the requirements of diverse groups of learners. Also, the assessments at the end of the lessons must be differentiated and made interactive so that learners are able to attempt it with interest and can comprehend the concepts assessed. Textbooks provide a proper system of study and structured

syllabus in language learning. Good quality textbooks must be accompanied with audio material and activity books to enable students to carry out listening activities and comprehend the concepts. Textbooks that contain an integrated audio, information-gap activities, role play, reading texts, songs, listening skills, games, grammar summaries, and tape transcripts contain a wide range of contexts and concrete rubrics for different activities. Learning activities must be based on deliberate and explicit instruction that allows multiple opportunities for student understanding of the lesson's key content goals and activities; better opportunities for students to practice activities comfortably; and repeated connections to student's personal, cultural, linguistic, social, and academic experiences. A language classroom is a community of learners, each with distinct learning preferences, interests, strengths, capacities, levels and potential. It is important to plan instruction such that acknowledges and respects these differences and provides each student with opportunities to learn in a manner so that each can reach his or her maximum potential. Learning preferences typically refer to the general environment in which a student learns best. Different learners like to learn in different ways for example, some learners prefer to learn with the use of word games, puzzles, riddles and songs, or work in groups or with partners. Learners differ in general motivation to learning and in responding to specific learning tasks. Therefore, students must be encouraged to choose their own topics for projects and to carry out discussions with parents and teachers about learning that is engaging and fun. For instance, when students are encouraged to select reading material of interest to them, they are more likely to be engaged in that particular activity for longer duration and without much persuasion and assistance. This would further help to inculcate the habit of reading and working independently on the work undertaken from very early stages of learning. This also helps in improving the reading performance.

There may be several cases where student interests differ than the actual learning that is being carried out, in such a situation motivation is needed and a variety of learning resources needs to be made available. Also, the student's prior knowledge could as well be a hindrance to the current learning pace and interest. Particularly, when students do not have personal interests in the task at hand the question that arises is 'How do we persuade or motivate our students to learn with the help of manuals that are interesting?' Also, the role of teachers is to think 'how can I motivate this student? What type of task should I create in order to motivate this student? Determining and designing tasks that take into consideration the motivation of particular students

is the basis of interest-based differentiation. It is important for teachers to consistently design curriculum and instruction in response to student readiness, interest, and learning profile; Differentiation must be carried out and practiced as a reflection for improving the quality of instructional methods and materials. Student outcomes will be good when the curriculum and instruction are at par with diverse learners in the French language classroom. Textbooks/manuals must therefore be adapted to meet the wide range of learning needs, levels and interests.

Use of Manuals and Inclusive education in French language classroom in India

In India, the French language classroom comprises of students differences resulting from learning problems, advanced learning, second language, or cultural variance. Language teachers accept learner groups with mixed abilities and mild disabilities into their classrooms but the effort they put in terms of providing support and reinforcement is very little. French language teachers find it difficult to carry out strategies that ask for making changes to teaching materials, instructional practices and the revision of rubrics for grading purposes. The French classroom almost always comprises of learners with limited abilities or special needs students. The system of inclusive education does give the slow learners an opportunity to learn foreign language but these learners are often included in whole-class reading and writing activities and they tend to stay away from participating or to a limited extent because of their limited exposure to the language and their limited learning abilities. The students do not receive what could be called differentiated instruction.

Importance of interactive Digital textbooks and reference manuals in language learning-

Digital textbooks are inclusive by nature such that it has the potential to meet the different learning needs of students with special needs. Students with visual impairment can use the text-to-speech or screen readers so that the text can be read aloud to them. With these features and more, the digital textbooks can help the teachers to cut down on their lesson planning time and thus spend more time interacting with students and sharing the lesson materials. For the teachers, use of the digital textbooks is assistive technology which enhances the teaching learning process and minimizes the planning time. For the students, the use of digital textbooks or reference manuals is helpful as they can improve the text readability. They can customize the text font and size as per their individual needs.

When traditional textbooks are used in the French language classroom, the content is quite complex and sometimes difficult for students with special needs to comprehend. Teachers

sometimes use different strategies to tackle this problem in the classroom and address the learning needs of all students irrespective of their levels. Thus in an attempt to deliver the text to the varying needs of students in the classroom, the teachers often miss out on important grade level content and hence the learning is not complete.

The Indian Context

India, the CBSE curriculum complies with the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE Act) wherein "*no child can be refused admission on any grounds and will be admitted to his / her age appropriate class and have a right to receive special training so that the child can cope with the current curriculum. Education will be inclusive and the schools are supposed to make appropriate arrangements for children with disabilities and with special needs.*" Also, complying with the *Individuals with*

Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA, 2004) assistive technology resources must be made available to all persons with disabilities and funding is provided to make these resources possible. In addition, Public Law 100-407, the *Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act*, requires that all students who are exceptional receive technology resources that support access to grade-level appropriate content.

As a result of these regulations and requirements, French language teachers in Middle schools across India need to use differentiated instruction strategies and study materials. These include reference manuals and textbooks, technology related resources to support above grade level students to excel further and also assist in the learning process of below grade level and special students. The students at grade level can benefit from a combination of these strategies. The use of manuals along with technology resources and some reference manuals can prove to be very useful in French language learning.

Differentiation strategies with focus on special learners in the French language classroom -

In most language classrooms students spend a lot of time trying to accomplish tasks that are too difficult for them and without much practice in the same. Also, there are situations where above grade level students are carrying out tasks and assignments in which they are already competent and struggling learners are working on activities which are beyond their grasping capacity. According to Carol Ann Tomlinson, in a French language classroom oral communication tasks focus on the same basic topics, but completion requires different levels of sophistication, and sometimes students can "opt out" of review sessions to create their own products or presentation

or to read a French language magazine. Students often work in teacher-assigned, mixed-readiness pairs to prepare for checks on fundamentals and may, from time to time, select a partner to prepare for a challenge demonstration. The teacher often organizes the students into groups based on the information of their growth and learning needs into formative and summative assessments. This is often referred to as 'a tiered lesson'. In tiered lessons, the students who are struggling and need more structured assignments are given special importance. Also, students who are willing to learn are given more concrete assignments. The classroom with its different learner levels can be given the same questions and goals but although the tasks may be different for students at below grade level, they must be towards constructive learning and respectful. According to Tomlinson, teaching with the learner in the center would make differentiated instruction the natural way to organize instruction and it would help instructors to be aware of learner needs and customize instruction whenever and whichever way possible. So the method of teaching would aim at planning, doing, checking and adjusting. Also, collaborating with students is as important in the teaching learning process as is differentiating instruction.

Complementing Manuals with I-pads

For teaching/learning French to students with special needs it was found that i-pads helps teachers to custom design individual student learning materials particularly for special needs students. The teacher can download several applications to the I-Pad to maintain schedules, tell stories, create study materials and carry out communication. The i-Pad being very easy to manipulate touch screen technology allows learners of different age groups to use technology. Although the use of I-Pads has changed the style of teaching languages, the more traditional methods like the use of manuals/ textbooks and reference books are still very important. The I-pad serves as an extra supportive teaching/learning resource and not a complete replacement for the already existing teaching material. The students have text material, notes and worksheets and also an I-pad to help them learn. Apple introduced the iPad, the tablet is becoming more popular with students with special needs, especially learning disabilities and autism spectrum disorders. Language teachers now prefer to use iPads in their classroom to improve communication and reading along with other virtual tools.

It helps the students to organize their work and take down notes in the classroom. Students feel motivated and enthusiastic to learn using the I-Pad because of its ability to engage students and

provide the feedback. Also, they may reduce or increase the font as may seem necessary. Students with fine motor difficulties can now work easily with the help of the tablet which has touch screens.

Analysis and Future Trends

In most French language classrooms, the good textbook / manual is a key component and can be an excellent tool for long lasting learning results. Good reference manuals help teachers to structure the teaching process. Textbooks form the main tool in most language courses that occurs in the classroom. They also supplement the teacher's instruction methods and resources. The learners depend on the textbooks as the medium to the language being learnt and the instruction process. New teachers and those that are less experienced in the field of teaching may depend on textbooks and reference manuals. For the teachers, learning how to use and adapt textbooks is part of skills development in terms of professional development.

In the future, learners with special needs would have appropriate access to rich content suited to meet their specific learning needs and teachers would be able to save time planning for the lessons with the help of digital textbooks. Digital textbooks are being developed using a universal design for learning (UDL) approach. Using this technology, complex content is presented using simpler language. Many students with special needs also now have access to mobile devices. These devices can also be used to access digital textbooks, therefore meeting the majority of student learning and communication needs with the help of one simple device. Moreover, there would be several financial benefits for schools as well as learners as digital textbooks would mean reducing expenditures of schools in terms of prescribing textbooks. The cost of printing, bringing in newer editions of manuals and replacing them would definitely be much more when compared to digital textbooks wherein an I-pad or mobile device is fully loaded with access to all textbooks and resources which any student would need throughout the elementary school years, or throughout the middle school years, or throughout the high school years.

Conclusion

The present article has looked into the relevance of textbooks / manuals with respect to differentiation in strategies and teaching resources. We are still in the early stages of looking at the use of technology based teaching resources as a reference manual. This study is not comprehensive or extensive, and it has covered only few dimensions-like the general attitude of learners and teachers towards the use of manuals and reference books in the French language classroom. Also, meeting the diverse learning needs of students with special needs. In this study, I have looked at the current use of manuals/ textbooks in middle school French language classrooms in Bangalore. Also, a detailed analysis of supportive resources apart from the use of textbooks to aid the learning needs of special students is done with the help of simple examples. Looking at future prospects of digital textbooks as a means to differentiate instruction to help learners with special needs, it is seen that they hold lot of potential.

Since foreign language teaching in India is not supported by comprehensive guidelines from the government which is why an arbitrary attitude is found especially at the middle school level. In learner centered environment this type of inclusive education is crucial but it has not been incorporated in curriculum designing.

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