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Support lessons with the use of supplemental material for improved learning outcomes in German (Level A1/A2)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on exercise typology that is to be projected on the whiteboard and is greatly application-oriented. Specifically, it pertains to tasks suitable for elementary schools and simple forms of exercises for the most part, as participants use only their pencils to solve them or play word-games in the classroom with their classmates. Some important advantages of such exercises are that almost no preparation is needed on the part of the teacher and that they are independent of textbooks. Thus, they can be immediately implemented in the classroom and are simple for pupils to understand and carry out. Methods included in such exercises offer all children the opportunity for developmental progress regarding perception, motor skills, concentration, language, and emotionality. Pupils hardly lose interest in the lessons as they move around the room, write, listen, read, and communicate with each other (even participants with special needs can be successfully included). Assignments are solved both individually and in small groups leading to learning autonomy, while they enable cooperative learning, boost the children's self-confidence and promote independent work, all at the same time. Another main objective is to awaken the interest of the pupils so that they take part in the lesson with sheer joy and fervid enthusiasm; time flies so fast that the children do not even realize it and, at the end of the lesson, they feel as if they have spent their entire time playing, though at the same time, they have learned a lot.

Keywords: Second language acquisition, German as a foreign language, projector use in the classroom, memory-play with words and phrases, play in the classroom

1. Introduction

The main concept came in response to the challenges encountered in teaching a second foreign language in public schools and is directly linked to the overarching objective of helping both teachers and pupils. It introduces supplemental exercises for language learning (German) projected on a board which does not have to be a smart one, as a simple whiteboard would suffice. This is a solution realistically (with no extra cost) incorporated in the classroom in order to achieve the innovation levels required.

The proposed material is mainly used for syllabus revision and has been applied in certain primary schools to determine its effectiveness in terms of pupils' interest and active participation in the lesson.

We focus on creating more engaging lessons through extra material. The proposed exercise typology uses no internet, no videos or mouse clicks, just the whiteboard (for the projection of exercises) and is greatly application-oriented. Specifically, it pertains to tasks suitable for elementary schools and simple forms of exercises for the most part, as participants use only a whiteboard marker to solve them. Some important advantages of these exercises (for the teacher) are that they need almost no preparation and they are tasks independent of textbooks.

2. Direct and cognitive learning Strategies

Since German is taught either as a first or second foreign language in public schools in various countries of the world (as mainly learnt as a subsequent language after English [Neuner, 2002]) and is included in the curriculum, there has been a strong and growing interest in learning it.

The main purpose of this project is to show which direct language strategies, in the theory communicated by Rebecca Oxford, are suitable for elementary school ages and can be applied onto the projector method (exercises suitable to be projected on the board using a projector and solved by groups of pupils or by a single pupil). Direct learning strategies entail the following main features:

- − They directly involve the target language.
- − The proposed approach is based on direct learning strategies (Oxford, 1990).
- − They include memory, cognition and compensation strategies.
- − They help pupils/children to store and recover information.

Direct language strategies "...require mental processing of the language" (Oxford, 1990: 37). Their main aim is to help learners develop their own system of language learning, such as understanding new words and phrases, as well as organize and produce vocabulary and accurate communication. Through direct strategies learners comprehend and produce a second language (Chilkiewicz, 2015).

Direct strategies directly involve the target language and require mental processing of it (Nemati, 2009). All strategies based on Oxford taxonomy (Oxford, 1990) can be also used for vocabulary and grammar learning tasks, while our research focuses more on vocabulary consolidation and indirectly on practicing sentences that are grammatically correct. The main feature is that it exclusively concerns exercises projected on the whiteboard via a projector. The incorporation of a projector in the classroom is designed to facilitate memory games and ball play (pupils aim at the correct answer on the board by throwing a small ball), which, in conjunction with handwriting on the whiteboard (pupils write the answers on the board), and moving around the classroom (pupils are activated as they have to get up from their seats) has a positive effect. In particular, the exercises projected on the board are based on the following strategies:

Processes which may contribute directly to learning (Chilkiewicz, 2015):

A. Clarification/verification – the learners ask for examples of how to use a word or expression, ask for the correct form to use, etc.

B. Monitoring – the learners correct their or others' errors, note their sources, observe and analyse language use.

C. Memorization – the learners attempt to acquire words or other language elements through associations, use of mechanical devices, etc. (Chilkiewicz, 2015)

D. Guessing/inductive inference – the learners use various hunches to guess the meaning or general rules of language. etc.

F. Practice – the learners experiment with new elements of the language, etc." (Chilkiewicz, 2015).

Almost all of the above strategies are applied in this research for the exercises projected on the whiteboard, promote education through play and motivate pupils' learning.

3. Benefits of incorporating a projector in the classroom

Incorporating a projector in the classroom has many advantages. Nowadays, the interactive whiteboard (IWB) is regarded as a cutting-edge instructional tool in educational settings that not only supports clear and seamless instruction but also raises the level of interactivity in classrooms (Mercer et al., 2010) (Mildenhall et al, 2010), as the projection of exercises clearly increases classroom interactivity. The projector enables easy games with words, such as memory games or ball plays (pupils aim at the correct answer on the board by throwing a small ball). Moreover, handwriting on the whiteboard (pupils write the answers on the board) and moving around the classroom (pupils are activated as they have to get up from their seats) is beneficial for the learning process. By displaying the chosen image at the front of the classroom, all pupils can view the task in unison with their attention already engaged (Donnelly, 2022), thus reaching the best possible levels of involvement throughout the lesson. Pupils classified as 'visual learners' remember best when they have an image or physical representation in front of them (Donnelly, 2022), therefore, visualization of words and meanings is also included, in combination with all of the aforementioned. We can also further the results with interactive lesson plans, be it getting pupils to come up to the front to write something or participate in an activity (Donnelly, 2022).

3.1 Key Role of play in the classroom

Play is very important for the children's best development and has been recognized by the United Nations for Human Rights as a right for every child (Ginsburg, 2007). Children can learn better through playing and develop their social interactions more effectively (Vygotsky, 1967).They actually learn through their live experiences; as such, the play method can be used by teachers to encourage pupils in the process of learning language and vocabulary (Dewey, 1939). Teachers already have a wealth of knowledge of how to best educate their class, but by bringing play-based methods into the mix, they can best help children adapt to

new social environments. Play is considered the "work of the child", however, this task does not have a definite aim or ending (Dewey, 1939). As it enhances emotional security, it gives children the opportunity to reveal their negative emotions and channel their opinions (Carr, 2000).

3.2 The importance of handwriting

Handwriting is integrated in the proposed approach because it influences brain development and activates brain reading systems more than other sensory kinetic techniques. Neuroimaging revealed that learning to write is based on the development of a network of brain structures. The perception of letters is helped by the handwriting experience, upon which the ability to process the letters in the person's brain during reading is also based. The sensory kinetic experience gained through handwriting seems to develop the person's brain. According to research that looked into the brain regions that are activated when writing by hand, it has been found that many regions of the nervous system and many brain networks are involved in the process of writing.

In a recent meta-analysis, Planton, Jucla, Roux, and Démonet (2013) co-evaluated findings from 18 neuroimaging studies, conducted to identify the cerebral network of areas commonly activated during handwriting.

Based on the meta-analysis data, three brain regions, known as "writing centers", appear to be consistently activated in all writing activities and support cognitive processes crucial to writing skills.

These regions are the parietal cortex and the premotor (frontal) cortex in the language-dominant hemisphere (the left, in the vast majority of people), as well as the contralateral (right) posterior cerebellum.

3.3 Movement and visualization in the classroom

Children often get distracted by noises or by their classmates, and sometimes they need to move around a bit in the classroom. This enhances learning and critical thinking skills and the lesson becomes more interesting.

Figure 1: Match the correct article with the correct noun. (Valavani, 2023)[1]
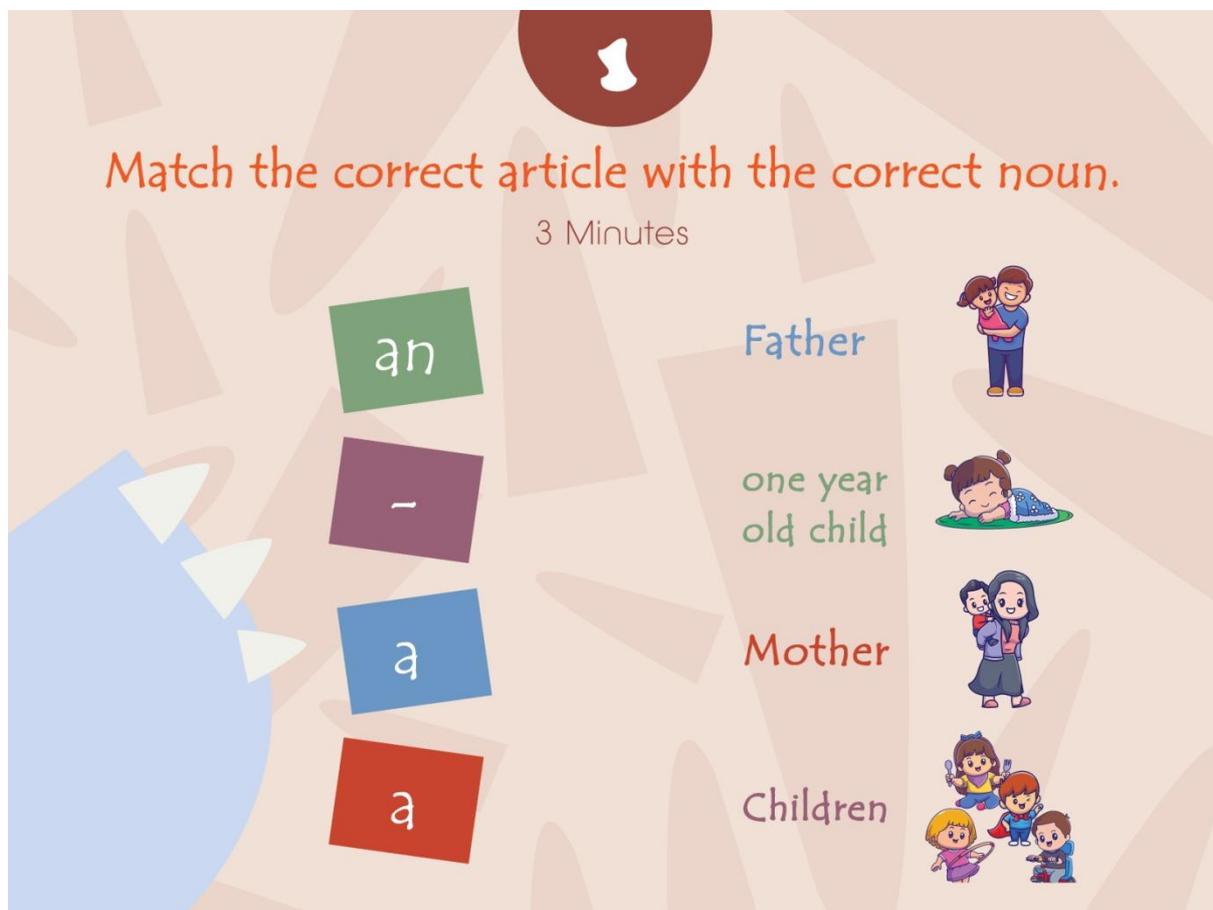
In order to solve the above exercise, the pupil has to come up to the board and solve the exercise using a marker. If this becomes a regular pattern, then the pupils become alert and almost everyone stands up. Movement breaks can relieve stress and anxiety, improve pupils' mood, and help them acquire social skills, such as refocusing their brains when attention starts to wander or regulating impulsive behavior. Realigning the body/brain connection helps re-energize the learning process (Literacy and Language Center Media, 2016) and heightens the pupils' attendance and participation in class. Moving around can also promote class cohesion, which develops self-esteem and a sense of belonging, while it boosts listening skills and communication, promotes laughter and fun while learning, and improves self-discipline and motivation at the same time (Literacy and Language Center Media, 2016).

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[1] The content of the images was translated from German into English so that they be included in the article.

4. Exercise typology appropriate for projection on the whiteboard

In this paper exercise methods offering all children the opportunity for developmental progress regarding perception, concentration, language, and emotionality are included.

The participants hardly lose interest in the lessons as they move around the room, write, read, and communicate with each other (even participants with special needs can be successfully included). Dividing the children into groups enhances competition. The members of each group help each other, while each team separately tries to gain points. Nevertheless, such division does not constitute a prerequisite and exercises are not necessarily carried out in groups. They may also be solved on the whiteboard by just one person. The method to be followed and the best way to support the class rests solely within the discretion of the teacher. There is absolute flexibility in solving exercises.

The focus in the design of the exercises rests on the following features:

- Simple exercises
- Individual promotion
- Learning through movement
- Writing, reading, listening, communicating
- Colors, games, non-moving pictures, applying images and sounds and creating mental linkages (Oxford, 1990:17)
- Pedagogical support
- Role of awareness and attention in language acquisition
- No additional material necessary /only a marker for the children and a projector for the teacher, sometimes a ball/
- Using writing as a learning strategy
- Plenty of exercises and games which lower anxiety (Oxford, 1990:17)
- Form-focused attention control
- Reaching higher levels of competence by building groups, where children learn how to cooperate (Oxford, 1990:17)
- Enhancing pupils' concentration

4.1 Memory play with pictures and words

Children look at pictures and words that create mental linkages (Oxford, 1990:17) (2 or four words for each group), memorize them and then, on the next slide, they are asked to get to the board and, using a marker, write the missing words (articles/meaning of the words).

They are usually divided into two groups and, as each group tries to remember as many words as possible, a pleasant atmosphere is created in the classroom (the teacher can count points if they so wish). The teacher can also show the word along with a picture (not necessarily the meaning of the word written in the mother tongue) on one slide and, when the

pupils memorize the words, on the next slide they are asked to remember how to spell the word by looking only at the picture.

It is also important that the requested word be in a sentence alongside the picture (see figure 1). Pupils memorize the word written in a different color from the others. On the next slide, everything is the same but the requested word is missing; there is a gap at that point and the pupils are asked to remember which word is missing (or which article e.g. for the German language). Then, one pupil from the group stands up and fills in the gap. The children are not stressed as these are simple exercises and, in addition, the team spirit that prevails turns the lesson into a game. In the next picture there is an example of an exercise where pupils have to fill in the gaps either by listening to the correct answer or by having memorized the correct article of the nouns.

Figure 2: Filling in the gaps exercise by listening (Valavani, 2023).

4.2 Memory play with mini dialogues

Children/pupils are divided into two groups in the classroom and each group is asked to memorize a short dialogue (max. four sentences) from a thematic unit, e.g. family. On the next slide, the sentences of the dialogues are presented in a different order. The pupils are asked to place the sentences in the correct order. Something similar can be done with the same dialogue memorized and then presented on the next slide with one sentence missing. The pupils are asked to remember which sentence was at that specific place. Note that the dialogues are quite simple and contain vocabulary familiar to pupils. In this way they revise words within a text, usually combined with corresponding images, where possible.

Rote memorization is a learning technique not recommended for young children, as it is no mean feat for them to cross language barriers, especially in second or third foreign languages. Such exercises contribute to a good review of vocabulary and, indirectly, of grammar without the pupils feeling that they have to carry out the task.

4.3 Put words or phrases in a correct order

A common type of exercise is the one where pupils put words or phrases in the correct order to form proper sentences. The mixed words or phrases are projected on the whiteboard and the pupils are divided into groups. After each group is given the necessary time to think and discuss the answers, one person from each group gets to the board and writes the correct answer. Alternatively, the pupils can combine syllables to form words or phrases or circle words /phrases or sentences they hear in order to form short dialogues. The exercise can also be carried out collectively, namely by dividing the pupils in the classroom into groups. The team that manages to find the correct answer can get a point, though it is not required.

4.4 Finding errors

In this case, sentences, words or short dialogues are given and pupils have to find mistakes. Specifically, one version is to find errors in sentences/dialogues/words by listening to the correct sentences/dialogues/words (see figure 3). Alternatively they may be asked to find mistakes in dialogues shown on the board (without listening), which can then be explained/analyzed in class by the teacher. The mistakes are always based on the material the pupils have been taught; for example, if they have learned the formation and use of the accusative, then most of the mistakes may be about the accusative (not all of them).

Figure 3: Find the mistakes (Valavani, 2023).

If we wish to develop children's reading comprehension then, we may give them a text or a dialogue with a wrong sentence (e.g. the words of the sentence in the wrong order). That is, they will need to identify the mistakes regarding the position of the words in the sentence. This exercise can also be carried out in groups. The pupils are divided into two groups and each group is asked to correct their own text/word etc. in the time given. The team that will correct all the mistakes wins. All pupils actively participate in the lesson and practice at the same time (see figure 3).
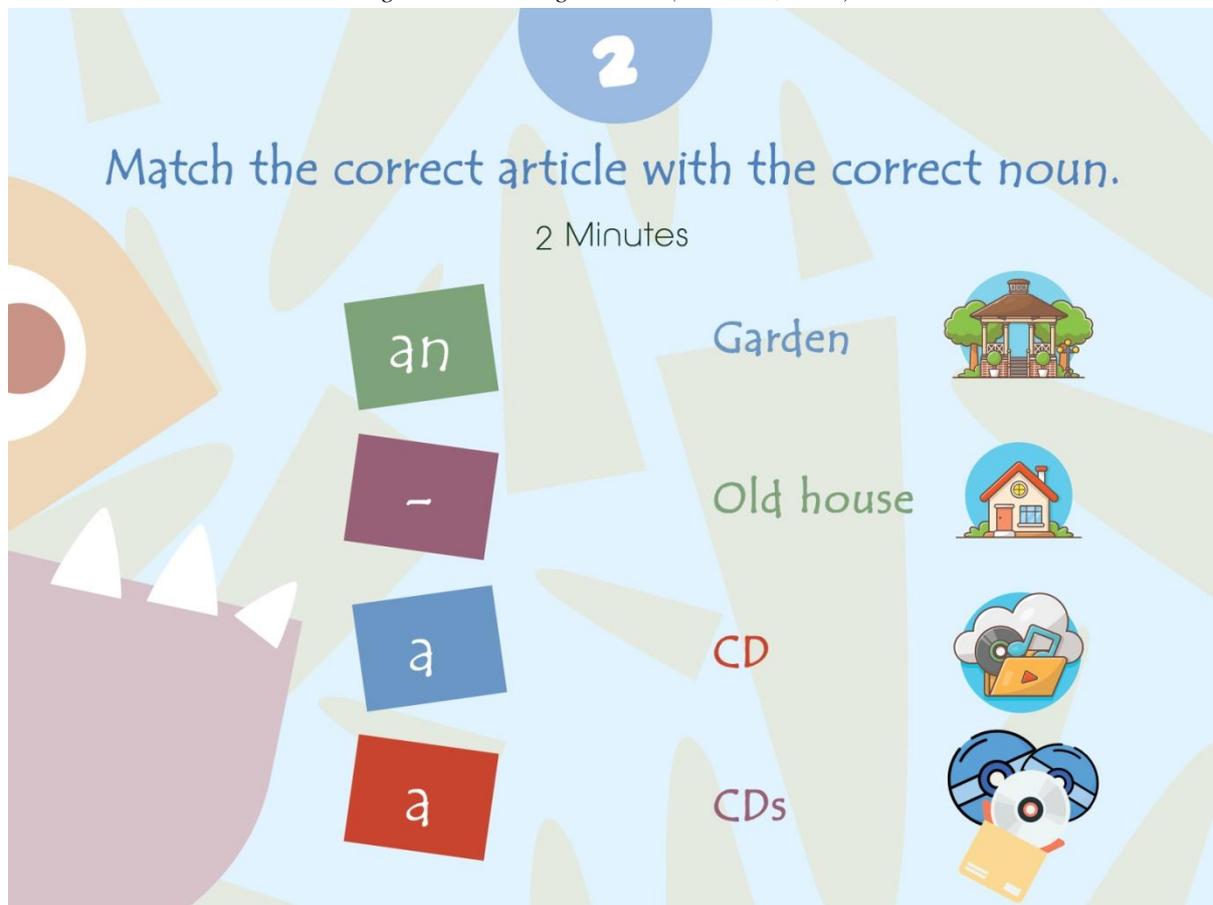
4.5 Other exercises

-The pupils circle words they hear by putting them into the right order, thus building a sentence.

-Filling in the blanks with words (e.g. placing articles to corresponding nouns) (Neuner et al., 1981). At a starter's level, this exercise can also be done through listening. The two groups are given some sentences where different or the same words are missing; the pupils listen to the sentences and try to fill in the gaps based on listening (see Figure 2).

-Matching exercises (Neuner et al, 1981).

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Figure 4: Matching exercise (Valavani, 2023).

5. Advantages of the projector approach

Using the innovative technology of a projector in a classroom allows pupils to interact better with their peers, as most of them stay engaged in learning activities. Children have fun and enjoy the learning process, while the proposed method enhances children's interest in vocabulary learning and grammar comprehension which stimulates language learning.

An important advantage of the projector approach has to do with how pupils feel in the classroom.

By making use of such a devise, the today's tech-savvy pupils will enhance their confidence and boost their self-esteem as they are allowed to collectively participate in presentations, games, and other group activities, all in one session. Furthermore, the use of such educational technologies maximizes pupils' outcomes in learning vocabulary and subsequently in their reading comprehension capacity, as it promotes their performance due to an effective and flexible learning mode. Memory play eases some of the anxiety pupils experience when required to learn vocabulary, as it is one of the most demanding aspects and difficult barriers in language learning. Simultaneous combination of images, sounds, and text in a digital

environment would allow pupils to have multiple references to a certain word, therefore it is expected that multiple references to words combined with an active learner role would increase the pupils' learning capacity for vocabulary. Moreover, using writing in pre-chosen tasks on content material facilitates their learning by consolidating information in their long-term memory. It also gives the teacher greater versatility both in the way of solving the exercises chosen and in the amount of materials used (this material can be used only in the last fifteen minutes or 45 minutes of class).

6. Findings and conclusions

Implementation of the proposed exercises on the projector has largely confirmed our initial expectations. Keeping the activation of pupils' interest in learning a second foreign language in public education in mind, we aimed mainly at the active participation of children and, at a second level, at vocabulary learning, practicing and consolidating the foreign language. The pupils interact and the exercises/games on the projector keep the children engaged. Pupils are concentrated for longer (younger pupils have a shorter attention span), and it has been observed that most of the pupils participate in class as they take on a specific role through play and movement. Standing up in class makes pupils feel more responsible, they take action throughout the game, and they are given the opportunity to help each other within the framework of cooperation. It was feasible to hold the children's attention for a longer period of time, resulting in a direct increase in the learning rate.

Upon implementing such exercises in a variety of primary school classrooms, it was established that there is whole-class interactivity in all groups formed by the teacher. It was observed that self-concentration of the pupils was at a fairly high level, and the interaction between the teacher and the pupils was in focus throughout the entire "game" time. The results for pupils' performance on knowledge were not measured; the focus was on assessing the pupils' active participation, enthusiasm and positive attitude towards learning vocabulary in a playful way. The results have been very encouraging as the pupils, both during and after the exercises, had a permanent smile on their faces and kept on talking about the exercises with great excitement. It was also observed that they stopped chit-chatting during the lesson. While it was common for some pupils to tittle-tattle in class, through these learning games they collaborated, worked as one and learned in a pleasant atmosphere.

Acknowledgment

11

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