

THE USE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN MULTICULTURAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION (CASE STUDY: DUOLINGO, LINGQ, MEMRISE)

The modern world is characterized by active processes of globalization, cultural mobility, and digitalization, which inevitably influence the education system. This is especially evident in the teaching of foreign languages, where digital technologies open up new horizons. Today, online platforms have become not only assistants but also independent tools of multicultural education. Resources such as Duolingo, LingQ, Memrise, and others are actively integrated into educational practice and require in-depth analysis of their effectiveness and cultural adaptability.

The integration of digital tools into language instruction allows for more personalized, engaging, and accessible learning. In a multicultural environment, these technologies serve not only as linguistic aids but also as cultural mediators. By presenting language within authentic cultural contexts, they help learners form a deeper understanding of the norms, customs, and worldviews of the speakers of the target language.

Multicultural Education: Definition and Objectives

Multicultural education involves developing students' ability to understand and respect representatives of other cultures, as well as to interact effectively with them. In foreign language learning, this becomes especially important since language is closely tied to cultural context, norms, and values. Instruction should aim not only at developing lexical and grammatical skills but also at fostering intercultural competence.

The core objectives of multicultural education include:

- Promoting tolerance and empathy among students from diverse backgrounds;
- Expanding cultural awareness and sensitivity through authentic communication contexts;
- Encouraging reflection on one's own cultural identity and values in relation to others.

This pedagogical approach becomes particularly relevant in modern classrooms, where cultural diversity is the norm rather than the exception. As educators seek to prepare students for global citizenship, the inclusion of multicultural perspectives in language learning becomes essential.

Digital Platforms as Tools for Multicultural Education

Digital platforms offer learners a unique opportunity to study a language at their own pace, adapting content to their interests and proficiency level. One of the key advantages of these platforms is access to authentic material,

opportunities to interact with native speakers, and multimedia tools that make learning interactive and culturally rich.

Duolingo is one of the most popular language platforms in the world, offering courses in over 40 languages. The program is gamified, which boosts motivation. Duolingo provides examples from everyday life, adapted to different cultural situations. The interface and exercises often reflect cultural specifics of the target language [1]. As of 2024, the number of active monthly users surpassed 74 million [2]. Additionally, Duolingo Stories and Podcasts offer narratives featuring real-life cultural situations, allowing users to practice language skills while gaining insights into social norms and traditions.

LingQ emphasizes immersion in real speech. Users read and listen to texts narrated by native speakers. The LingQ library contains materials on culture, art, and history, helping learners not only master the language but also develop cultural awareness [3]. The platform has over 1 million registered users and offers access to more than 1000 hours of audio content [4]. LingQ also allows users to create their own lessons from YouTube videos, articles, and books, fostering independent exploration of culturally rich content.

Memrise uses videos featuring real people speaking the language, presenting culturally significant phrases and situations. This is especially important in a multicultural context, as it allows learners to see and hear real language use in authentic contexts [5]. According to official data, by 2023 the app had been downloaded over 65 million times worldwide [6]. The use of native speakers ensures that users are exposed to correct pronunciation, local dialects, and culture-specific phrases, which improves both comprehension and intercultural competence.

Cultural Aspects in Platforms

Digital platforms increasingly integrate features that promote intercultural communication:

- Digital platforms often include a variety of cultural content to immerse users in the cultural environment of the language they are learning. This includes materials about traditional holidays, culinary customs, historical references, and idiomatic expressions that reflect local ways of thinking.
- Many platforms also offer extensive opportunities for interaction with a global user base through features such as live chats, discussion forums, virtual clubs, and peer-to-peer practice groups. These tools allow learners to engage in authentic intercultural communication, ask questions about customs and etiquette, and even develop friendships with people from other countries, thereby building empathy and intercultural sensitivity.
- Another significant feature is multilingual support across the platform interfaces. This allows learners from various linguistic backgrounds to navigate the platform comfortably and supports inclusivity. This fosters a sense of belonging and lowers entry barriers for learners from diverse regions.

The multicultural approach is also evident in task topics: users explore how people introduce themselves in different countries, how politeness is expressed, and how dialogues are constructed according to cultural norms.

For example, in Duolingo, lessons are adapted to reflect different registers of speech depending on the target language – the formal “usted” in Spanish or “vous” in French is introduced early on, with cultural notes.

Memrise, through its “Meet the Natives” feature, includes short video clips of people from various regions using the language in everyday situations. This provides not only linguistic knowledge but also insight into diverse cultural practices and gestures. LingQ’s focus on curated content allows exploration of region-specific articles, traditional storytelling, and podcasts, enriching the user’s cultural literacy.

Advantages of Digital Platforms

- **Accessibility:** Learning is possible from anywhere in the world with internet access. This makes language education more democratic and inclusive, especially for students in remote or underserved areas.
- **Flexibility:** Users choose their own pace and intensity. This is particularly helpful for adult learners or those balancing work and study.
- **Motivation:** Gamification and visual achievements sustain learning interest. Learners are rewarded for regular practice, building positive learning habits.
- **Content Diversity:** Authentic materials allow learners to engage with real cultural contexts. This exposure prepares students not only to speak the language but also to act appropriately in intercultural interactions.

In addition, many platforms now include speech recognition technologies, leaderboards, personalized review sessions, and AI-driven feedback systems, which further increase learner engagement and effectiveness.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite their advantages, digital platforms have limitations:

- **Insufficient depth of cultural analysis:** often focused on everyday language. While greetings and basic social etiquette are covered, deeper issues such as sociopolitical differences or cultural taboos are often ignored.
- **Lack of live communication** may hinder the development of communicative skills. Although some platforms offer community features, real-time interaction is limited.
- **Automated task checking** does not always consider context and cultural nuances [7]. Machine evaluation may not distinguish between a linguistically correct but culturally inappropriate response.

Another challenge is that many platforms are developed with Western cultural perspectives, which may limit their inclusivity and relevance for non-Western users. Moreover, subscription models or premium content may restrict access for economically disadvantaged learners.

Practical Application in Education

In educational institutions, digital platforms can be used as supplementary resources. Teachers may integrate Duolingo or Memrise tasks into core curricula, thereby creating a motivational and multicultural environment. For example, students can be assigned weekly lessons in Duolingo and asked to reflect on cultural observations in class discussions.

Project work using LingQ is also possible, where students analyze cultural texts and create mini-projects reflecting learned cultural features. Educators can guide learners in choosing content related to holidays, social issues, or national identities, which fosters critical thinking and cultural awareness.

Blended learning models – combining face-to-face instruction with online practice – offer a balanced approach. Platforms can serve as homework tools, while in-class sessions focus on interaction, feedback, and deeper cultural discussions. This helps bridge the gap between digital exposure and real-world communication.

Conclusion

Digital platforms have become an essential component of modern multicultural foreign language education. They not only facilitate access to knowledge but also help develop learners' ability to understand and respect cultural diversity. By incorporating authentic content, interactive tools, and global communication, these platforms expand learners' horizons and prepare them for effective participation in the multicultural world.

However, to achieve the best results, these platforms should be combined with live intercultural interaction and pedagogical support. Teachers play a key role in guiding students through the cultural dimensions of language learning, helping them interpret, question, and appreciate the diversity they encounter through digital media.

References

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