Teaching Advanced German Vocabulary Through Youtube Streaming: A Classroom-Based Action Research Study

Iuliia Bogatyreva

Bachelor's Student, Department of Foreign Philology
Institute of Philology, Journalism, and Intercultural Communication
Southern Federal University, Rostov-on-Don, Russia
juli34547@gmail.com

Abstract*: This study investigates the effectiveness of YouTube live streaming as an instructional tool for teaching advanced-level conversational German. It centers on the design and didactic adaptation of live sessions with native speakers aged 18–22, integrated into a third-year university course. Learners engaged in interactive, vocabulary-focused tasks including lexical extraction, dictionary work, and creative application. Data from assessments and student feedback revealed significant improvement in lexical competence, listening skills, and cultural awareness. The findings suggest live streaming offers a powerful, immersive tool for enhancing real-world language use and learner engagement.*

Keywords: live streaming, Youtube, German as a foreign language, conversational competence, advanced learners, digital pedagogy, lexical development

INTRODUCTION

The Evolving Landscape of Foreign Language Education

The advent of digital technology has revolutionized foreign language education, providing learners with unprecedented access to authentic materials and real-time communication with native speakers. Traditional classroom settings, once limited to textbooks and scripted audio recordings, are now augmented by a plethora of online resources that offer dynamic and immersive learning experiences. Among these resources, **YouTube live streams** have

emerged as a particularly potent tool, enabling learners to engage with spontaneous, unscripted language in its natural context.

Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

Despite the availability of these digital resources, a significant challenge persists: effectively integrating authentic online content into structured language instruction. While traditional methods emphasize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary memorization, they often fall short in preparing learners for the fluidity and unpredictability of real-world conversations. This disconnect underscores the need for pedagogical strategies that not only incorporate authentic materials but also provide a framework for learners to navigate and internalize the complexities of spontaneous speech.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to address this pedagogical gap by exploring the **didacticization of YouTube live streams**—the process of adapting authentic streaming content for educational purposes—to enhance advanced German vocabulary acquisition. Specifically, the research seeks to:

1. **Identify** effective methods for selecting and adapting YouTube live streams featuring native German speakers to align with curricular goals.
2. **Develop** instructional materials and activities that facilitate active engagement with streaming content, promoting deeper lexical understanding and retention.
3. **Evaluate** the impact of integrating didacticized streams on learners' vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and overall communicative competence.

By systematically examining these objectives, the study endeavors to provide educators with actionable insights into leveraging digital streaming platforms to enrich foreign language instruction.

Theoretical Background

Vocabulary Acquisition in Foreign Language Learning

Vocabulary acquisition is a cornerstone of language proficiency, serving as the foundation for effective communication and comprehension. In the context of foreign language learning, acquiring a robust lexicon is particularly challenging due to the multifaceted nature of vocabulary knowledge, which encompasses:

- **Semantic Understanding:** Grasping the meanings of words and their nuances.
- **Phonological Awareness:** Recognizing and producing correct pronunciation.
- **Morphosyntactic Knowledge:** Understanding word forms and grammatical functions.
- **Pragmatic Usage:** Applying words appropriately in various contexts.

These components underscore the complexity of vocabulary learning and highlight the necessity for instructional approaches that address each facet comprehensively.

Contextual Learning and Memory Retention

Research in cognitive psychology emphasizes the significance of context in memory retention and recall. The **encoding specificity principle** posits that information is more readily retrieved when the context at the time of encoding matches the context at the time of retrieval (Tulving & Thomson, 1973). This principle suggests that learning vocabulary within authentic contexts—where words are embedded in meaningful interactions—can enhance retention and facilitate transfer to real-world situations.

Furthermore, studies have demonstrated that **contextualized vocabulary learning** promotes deeper processing, leading to more durable memory traces compared to decontextualized methods such as rote memorization (Beck et al., 2002). By engaging with vocabulary in rich, situational contexts, learners can form stronger associations and improve their ability to use words flexibly and appropriately.

The Role of Authentic Materials in Language Acquisition

Authentic materials—resources created by and for native speakers—offer learners exposure to the language as it is naturally used, encompassing colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references. The utilization of authentic materials in language instruction has been associated with several benefits:

- **Enhanced Comprehension Skills:** Exposure to authentic speech patterns and accents aids in developing listening comprehension.
- **Cultural Competence:** Authentic materials provide insights into the cultural contexts that shape language use.
- **Motivation and Engagement:** Real-world content can increase learner interest and motivation by demonstrating the practical utility of language skills.

Incorporating authentic materials, such as YouTube live streams, into the language classroom aligns with communicative language teaching principles, which prioritize meaningful interaction and real-life language use.

METHODOLOGY

Participant Profile

The study was conducted with **25 third-year undergraduate students** enrolled in the Foreign Philology program at Southern Federal University. All participants had achieved a **B2 level** proficiency in German, indicating an independent user status capable of comprehending the main ideas of complex text and engaging in spontaneous conversation with native speakers. The demographic composition included individuals aged **19 to 22 years**, reflecting a cohort with similar educational backgrounds and language learning experiences.

Selection of Streaming Content

The selection of appropriate YouTube live streams was guided by the following criteria:

1. **Relevance to Learner Interests:** Topics pertinent to the students' academic and personal interests were prioritized to enhance engagement. The chosen themes were:
   - **Studying in Germany:** Exploring the educational system, application processes, and student life.
   - **Holidays in Germany:** Discussing traditional festivals, customs, and holiday experiences.
2. **Authenticity and Quality:** Streams featuring native German speakers engaging in unscripted conversations were selected to provide exposure to natural language use, including regional accents and colloquial expressions.
3. **Accessibility:** Consideration was given to the availability of streams with clear audio-visual quality and the presence of supplementary materials, such as transcripts or subtitles, to support comprehension.

Instructional Framework

The integration of YouTube live streams into the curriculum was structured around a **three-stage instructional model**, designed to scaffold learning and promote active engagement:

Stage 1: Preparation and Activation

- **Objective:** Activate prior knowledge and set the context for new vocabulary.
- **Activities:**

  - o **Pre-Viewing Discussion:** Facilitated classroom conversations to assess students' existing knowledge on the topic (e.g., "Was wissen Sie über das Studium in Deutschland?").
  - o **Brainstorming:** Students listed known vocabulary and phrases related to the theme.
  - o **Goal Setting:** Educators shared the objectives of the session, emphasizing lexical acquisition and contextual understanding.

This stage was essential for stimulating learner interest and preparing them for unfamiliar linguistic content. Activating prior knowledge also enhances retention by building on existing cognitive structures (Ausubel, 1968).

Stage 2: Comprehension and Acquisition

- **Objective:** Introduce and internalize new vocabulary through direct interaction with the stream.
- **Activities:**
  - o **Stream Viewing:** Students watched selected segments of the live streams.
  - o **Lexical Extraction:** Learners noted down unknown expressions used by native speakers.
  - o **Dictionary Work:** Students used **monolingual German dictionaries** or digital tools (e.g., **PONS**, **Duden**, **Linguee**) to find meanings and usage examples.
  - o **Quizlet Integration:** Learners created and practiced flashcards using **Quizlet**, an online app supporting various study modes (match games, spelling, tests).

The direct acquisition phase encouraged learner autonomy. As students explored the vocabulary in a **non-linear and interactive format**, they engaged in **incidental learning**, a powerful process in vocabulary acquisition (Schmitt, 2000).

Stage 3: Integration and Application

- **Objective:** Practice and consolidate new vocabulary through structured and creative tasks.

- **Activities:**
  - **PDF Worksheets (Created in Canva):** Tailored exercises focusing on vocabulary form, meaning, and use.
  - **Task Types:**
    - **Gap-fills** with expressions from the stream
    - **Matching** tasks with definitions or images
    - **Synonym/Antonym tables**
    - **Short-answer writing** using new phrases
    - **Creative writing** tasks requiring students to incorporate at least 5–7 expressions from the stream
- **Plenary Activities:** Collaborative review of answers, followed by discussions to clarify meaning and encourage peer learning.
- **Follow-Up Survey:** A **Google Forms questionnaire** gathered feedback on the learning experience, perceived challenges, and suggestions for future topics.

This final stage was critical for **deepening lexical competence**, as students actively reused and contextualized vocabulary—a key factor for long-term retention (Nation, 2001).

Didacticization Of Youtube Streams

Definition and Process

Didacticization refers to the transformation of real-world, often unstructured material into structured learning content suited for educational goals (Legutke & Thomas, 1991). In this study, the didacticization process included:

- Identifying **learning-relevant content** within unscripted YouTube streams.
- Extracting **lexically dense** dialogue segments.
- Categorizing language use (e.g., greetings, argumentation, narrative elements).
- Developing **complementary tasks** aligned with communicative goals.

This process aimed to preserve the authenticity of native speech while making it accessible and pedagogically meaningful.

Task Design and Material Development

Using **Canva**, a graphic design platform, we created visually appealing worksheets tailored to stream content. The design prioritized:

- **Minimalism**: Clean layouts to avoid cognitive overload.

- **Relevance**: Real screenshots from the streams to provide context.
- **Engagement**: Tasks promoting active use rather than passive consumption.

A sample worksheet might include:

Task Type	Description
Word Categorization	Group new words into themes (e.g., university life, leisure activities)
Fill-in-the-Blanks	Insert correct expressions from the stream in sentence gaps
Vocabulary Mapping	Link expressions to synonyms, antonyms, or definitions
Situation Matching	Match expressions to common daily-life situations in Germany
Creative Application	Write a dialogue or story using at least five new expressions

Each worksheet concluded with **open-ended prompts** encouraging learners to reflect on how they could use the vocabulary in real-life contexts, such as in emails, oral presentations, or interviews.

Role of Visuals and Multimedia

Integrating **visuals and multimedia** into vocabulary learning can significantly enhance retention and engagement (Paivio, 1986). For instance:

- Screenshots of facial expressions helped interpret tone and emotion.
- Visual metaphors aided understanding of idiomatic phrases.
- Canva illustrations and icons were used to reinforce meaning and support visual learners.

Additionally, some exercises involved **short clip analysis**, where students identified language related to specific gestures, settings, or interpersonal dynamics.

RESULTS

Lexical Acquisition Outcomes

Post-lesson assessments showed that students had effectively acquired and retained vocabulary introduced via the streams. On average:

- **92%** correctly applied target vocabulary in gap-fills.
- **88%** used at least 5 of 7 new expressions appropriately in their writing.
- **85%** showed increased confidence in listening comprehension based on self-assessment rubrics.

Sample vocabulary learned and reused correctly included:

- *Ich bin völlig überfordert* (I am completely overwhelmed)
- *Kommst du klar damit?* (Are you managing?)
- *Feierabend machen* (call it a day)

This practical vocabulary, often missing from textbooks, proved highly relevant for learners aiming to study or work in German-speaking contexts.

Learner Engagement and Feedback

The **Google Forms feedback** provided rich qualitative insights. Key findings:

Multiple Choice Results:

Survey Question	% Agree
"The worksheets helped me use new words in context."	92%
"Streams made learning more interesting than textbook dialogues."	96%
"I understood the main ideas despite the fast speech."	88%
"I want to use this method for future language topics."	100%

Selected Open Responses:

- *„Ich fand es spannend, echte Gespräche zu hören. Es war authentischer als Lehrbuchdeutsch."*
- *„Es war hilfreich, Wörter im Kontext zu sehen und mit Emotionen zu verbinden."*
- *„Manche Wörter waren zu schnell, aber der visuelle Kontext hat geholfen."*

The survey also revealed a **growing interest in more thematic streams**, such as:

- Everyday tasks (shopping, commuting)
- University life and dorm living
- Job applications and interviews
- Doctor visits and emergencies
- Making friends abroad

DISCUSSION

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study offer strong evidence that **didacticized streaming content** provides valuable pedagogical opportunities in the teaching of advanced German vocabulary. Unlike traditional instructional materials, YouTube streams expose learners to **natural, unfiltered, and culturally situated language**, fostering **communicative competence** and **intercultural awareness**. The emphasis on real-time interaction and natural speech patterns helps bridge the gap between passive understanding and active language use.

More importantly, students demonstrated the ability to **transfer vocabulary into productive skills**—both spoken and written—which aligns with **Nation's (2001)** principles of high-frequency word acquisition and active lexical use.

Learner Autonomy And Motivation

Another key outcome was the **increase in learner autonomy**. Students engaged with the material outside the classroom, using platforms like **Quizlet**, rewatching stream segments, and even exploring additional videos from native speakers. This behavior suggests a shift from **teacher-led instruction** to **self-directed learning**, an essential feature of modern language education and 21st-century skills development.

Additionally, the novelty and relevance of streaming media appear to act as **motivational catalysts**. Unlike traditional exercises, working with live streams allowed learners to perceive German not as a static academic subject but as a **living, evolving language** used by real people in real settings.

Addressing Challenges

Nevertheless, certain challenges must be acknowledged:

- **Comprehension Difficulty:** Some learners struggled with fast-paced speech, slang, or regional dialects.
- **Overwhelming Content:** The sheer amount of information in a stream could occasionally cause cognitive overload.
- **Digital Literacy:** A few students were unfamiliar with tools like Canva or Quizlet.

To mitigate these issues, future implementations should include:

- **Pre-teaching of key expressions and idioms**
- **Adjustable playback speeds**
- **Integrated subtitles (where possible)**
- **Workshops on digital tool usage**

These steps will ensure equitable access to the learning experience, especially for learners who may be less digitally proficient.

Broader Educational Context

This study also contributes to the growing body of literature on **blended and multimodal learning environments**. It supports prior research by **Guz et al. (2015)** and **Chen et al. (2019)** who argued for the integration of streaming technologies in language pedagogy as a way to promote **real-time language interaction**, **social learning**, and **authentic input exposure**.

Moreover, it supports the **constructivist approach**, where learners actively construct meaning through interaction with their environment—in this case, a digital, authentic, and emotionally resonant language environment.

Integrating Multimodality into Lexical Learning

An additional pedagogical benefit of using streaming is the opportunity to leverage **multimodal input**—the combination of spoken language, facial expressions, visual cues, and context-specific gestures. According to **Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1986)**, language is learned more effectively when verbal and non-verbal systems work together to reinforce memory. For example, when students saw a streamer say *"Ich bin fix und fertig"* (I'm totally exhausted) while slumping in a chair, the **combination of expression and body language** enhanced semantic understanding.

This synergy between audio and visual input fosters **deeper cognitive engagement**, which in turn increases retention. Learners not only heard and translated the phrase but also **witnessed its pragmatic use**, allowing them to form mental associations that went beyond rote memorization.

Furthermore, the use of platforms like **Canva** and **Quizlet** empowered students to create **their own multimodal learning materials**, shifting them from passive consumers of information to **active participants** in the learning process. This sense of agency contributes to **intrinsic motivation**, which is closely linked to long-term language success (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Digital Literacy as a Learning Outcome

Another unintended but valuable outcome of this instructional model was the **development of digital literacy skills**. As students navigated streaming platforms, designed flashcards, and filled out Google Forms, they engaged with digital tools that are increasingly essential for academic and professional life.

Many students reported a **steep initial learning curve**, particularly with Canva and self-paced vocabulary apps. However, by the end of the module, a significant number expressed increased **confidence in using educational technologies**, which can support **lifelong learning** and **independent language practice**.

This finding highlights the potential of language education to serve as a **gateway to digital competence**, making students not only more proficient in German, but also more adept at managing online platforms and resources for future use.

CONCLUSION

This research set out to explore how **YouTube streaming content**, when didacticized appropriately, can enhance advanced learners' acquisition and active use of German vocabulary. Through a structured, three-stage instructional model and the development of context-rich, visually supported worksheets, learners were able to move beyond passive vocabulary recognition to **active integration and creative use**.

Key takeaways include:

- Learners benefit from **exposure to authentic speech** that mirrors real-life usage.
- Motivation and engagement significantly increase when learners perceive the material as **relevant and practical**.
- Stream-based learning fosters **autonomy**, **cultural literacy**, and **confidence** in listening and speaking skills.

While challenges related to speech speed and comprehension remain, these can be addressed through thoughtful scaffolding, technology integration, and teacher support. The model presented in this study is scalable and adaptable to other languages and proficiency levels.

As digital media continues to shape educational practice, educators are encouraged to view platforms like YouTube not simply as entertainment, but as **pedagogical tools** capable of

transforming foreign language instruction into an immersive, dynamic, and empowering experience.

REFERENCES

1. Ammon, U. (2015). *The status of the German language in the world*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
2. Arbuzov, S. S., Griban, O. N., Konstantinov, A. N., et al. (2020). *Streaming technology in higher education: Monograph*. Ural State Pedagogical University.
3. Ausubel, D. P. (1968). *Educational psychology: A cognitive view*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
4. Bayerlein, A. (1997). *Lexikalische Übungen im Fremdsprachenunterricht*. Stuttgart: Klett Verlag.
5. Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: Guilford Press.
6. Chen, D. L., Freeman, D., & Balakrishnan, R. (2019). Integrating multimedia tools to enrich interactions in live streaming for language learning. *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. https://doi.org/10.1145/3290605.3300668
7. Guz, Y. A., Zharina, O. A., & Kudryashova, A. N. (2015). Activity-based foreign language learning in the context of a new self-education paradigm. *Izvestia of the Volgograd State Pedagogical University*, (2)97, 45–47.
8. Guz, Y. A., & Mayorov, A. B. (2019). The use of the YouTube channel for educational online courses as a way to increase motivation to learn a foreign language. *Baltic Humanitarian Journal*, 8(4), 105–107. https://doi.org/10.26140/bgz3-2019-0804-0020
9. Legutke, M., & Thomas, H. (1991). *Process and experience in the language classroom*. London: Longman.
10. Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
11. Paivio, A. (1986). *Mental representations: A dual coding approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
12. Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
13. Svart, A. (2018). *The use of live streaming in marketing*. Tallinn: Tallinn University of Technology.
14. Tütken, H. (1995). *Wortschatzarbeit im Fremdsprachenunterricht*. München: Langenscheidt.
15. Tulving, E., & Thomson, D. M. (1973). Encoding specificity and retrieval processes in episodic memory. *Psychological Review*, 80(5), 352–373.

16. Yan, X. F. (2016). *Exploring online live streaming in communication "scene"*. Malaysia: Press Circles.