


**MULTIMODAL CREATIVITY AT THE SERVICE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL: THE JASM PROJECT**

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ARTICLE INFO	<u>ABSTRACT</u>
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p><b>Received:</b> Jan, 22<sup>th</sup> 2025</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> Mar, 21<sup>th</sup> 2025</p>	<p>The JASM project used the Korsakow6 platform to produce <i>Storytelling</i> in foreign languages (FL), by students of the Media Studies degree course (Higher Education-HE) of the <i>Escola Superior de Educação de Viseu</i> (ESEV, Portugal).</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Pedagogical Innovation; Higher Education; Foreign Languages; Linguistic and Cultural Diversity; Digital Tools; Multimodal Creativity.</p>	<p><b>Objective:</b> Look into the impact of non-linear digital narratives upon FL learning in HE, assessing the role of multimodal tools in fostering linguistic, cultural, and technological skills.</p> <p><b>Theoretical Framework:</b> The study was grounded in active methodologies with a focus on integrating intercultural skills. Using new technologies is a catalyst for enhancing student motivation and autonomy.</p>
	<p><b>Method:</b> The project, developed within the context of French and English, involved 25 voluntarily participating students attending the first year. Following language level tests, each group gathered information about the nationality and culture of migrants living in Viseu. Students conducted interviews and documented migrants' life stories, traditions, using digital narratives. Final outputs included short films, social media posts, exhibitions, and an e-book.</p>
	<p><b>Results and Discussion:</b> Students enhanced cognitive, emotional and aesthetic skills within collaborative environments, integrating experiences from multilingual and multicultural contexts with creative and multimodal abilities and increased autonomy and initiative. Challenges were identified, highlighting the need for ongoing teacher training.</p>
	<p><b>Research Implications:</b> This project showed how digital and active pedagogies can foster the development of FL and intercultural competencies in HE students.</p>
	<p><b>Originality/Value:</b> This study provides for an innovative approach relying on multimodal technologies for teaching FL in HE. The transformative potential of digital narratives as an impactful pedagogical tool is highlighted.</p>
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A CRIATIVIDADE MULTIMODAL AO SERVIÇO DO ENSINO DA LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA NO ENSINO SUPERIOR EM PORTUGAL: O PROJETO JAM

RESUMO

O projeto JASM utilizou a plataforma Korsakow6 para produzir *storytellings*, em línguas estrangeiras (LE), com alunos da licenciatura em Comunicação Social da Escola Superior de Educação de Viseu (Portugal).

**Objetivo:** Investigar o impacto das narrativas digitais não lineares na aprendizagem de LE no ensino superior (ES), avaliando o papel das ferramentas multimodais na promoção de competências linguísticas, culturais e tecnológicas.

**Enquadramento teórico:** O estudo baseou-se em metodologias activas para integração de competências interculturais. A utilização das novas tecnologias é um catalisador para aumentar a motivação e autonomia dos alunos.

**Método:** O projeto foi desenvolvido no âmbito do Francês e Inglês, envolvendo 20 alunos voluntários do 1.º ano. Após testes de nível linguístico, cada grupo trabalhou sobre uma nacionalidade e cultura de migrantes em Viseu. Realizou entrevistas e documentou as histórias de vida e tradições, utilizando narrativas digitais. Os resultados incluíram curtas-metragens, publicações nas redes sociais, exposições e *eBook*.

**Resultados e Discussão:** Os alunos melhoraram as suas competências cognitivas, emocionais e estéticas em ambientes colaborativos, com maior autonomia e iniciativa, integrando experiências de contextos multilingues e multiculturais com capacidades criativas e multimodais. Foram identificados desafios, salientando-se a necessidade de formação contínua de professores.

**Implicações para a investigação:** Contribuiu para perceber como as pedagogias digitais e ativas podem promover o desenvolvimento de competências interculturais e de LE nos alunos do ES.

**Originalidade/Valor:** Este estudo introduz uma abordagem inovadora baseada nas tecnologias multimodais no ensino de LE. Destacou o potencial transformador da criação de narrativas digitais como uma ferramenta pedagógica de impacto.

**Palavras-chave:** Inovação Pedagógica, Ensino Superior, Línguas Estrangeiras, Diversidade Linguística e Cultural, Ferramentas Digitais, criatividade Multimodal.

LA CREATIVIDAD MULTIMODAL AL SERVICIO DE LA ENSEÑANZA DE LA LENGUA EXTRAJERA EN LA ENSEÑANZA SUPERIOR EN PORTUGAL: EL PROYECTO JAM

RESUMEN

El proyecto JASM recurrió a la plataforma Korsakow6 para desarrollar narrativas digitales en lenguas extranjeras (LE) con estudiantes de Comunicación Social en la Escola Superior de Educação de Viseu (ESEV, Portugal).

**Objetivo:** Investigar el impacto de las narrativas digitales no lineales en el aprendizaje de LE en la enseñanza superior, analizando el papel de herramientas multimodales en el desarrollo de competencias lingüísticas, culturales y tecnológica.

**Marco teórico:** El estudio se basó en metodologías activas para integrar las competencias interculturales. El uso de las nuevas tecnologías es un catalizador para aumentar la motivación y la autonomía de los estudiantes.

**Método:** El proyecto se llevó a cabo en el contexto del francés y el inglés, con la participación voluntaria de 20 estudiantes de 1º año. Después de las pruebas lingüísticas, cada grupo trabajó sobre una nacionalidad y cultura migrante de Viseu. Se realizaron entrevistas y se documentaron sus historias de vida y tradiciones mediante narrativas digitales. Los resultados finales incluyeron cortometrajes, publicaciones en las redes sociales, exposiciones y un libro electrónico.

**Resultados y debate:** Los alumnos mejoraron sus competencias cognitivas, emocionales y estéticas en entornos colaborativos, con mayor autonomía e iniciativa, integrando experiencias de contextos multilingües y multiculturales con competencias creativas y multimodales. Se identificaron retos, destacando la necesidad de formación continua del profesorado.

**Originalidad/Valor:** Este estudio aportó una visión innovadora sobre pedagogías digitales y activas, destacando el potencial de las narrativas digitales como herramienta pedagógica transformadora en la enseñanza de LE.

**Palabras clave:** Innovación Pedagógica, Enseñanza Superior, Lenguas Extranjeras, Diversidad Lingüística e Cultural, Herramientas Digitales, Creatividad Multimodal.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Research on the link between foreign language (FL) proficiency and employability in the Viseu region (Portugal) has highlighted the critical role of language skills in the job market. These skills are essential for hiring and career development, offering opportunities for greater responsibilities and higher pay. Multilingual competence enhances market participation, broadens access to diverse audiences, and fosters enduring relationships by addressing the emotional aspects of communication such as awareness, empathy and adaptability (Delplancq *et al.*, 2017; Costa Lopes *et al.*, 2018; Oberste-Berghaus, 2024). Multicultural awareness is essential for effective communication.

Teaching FL in higher education (HE) extends beyond imparting language skills. It prepares students for intercultural interactions, promoting innovative and enduring experiences that inspire engagement and facilitate professional integration (Amara, 2020; Atamova, 2024). Contextualizing language learning is essential; an interdisciplinary perspective helps tailor education to real-world communication needs, fostering a multifaceted and multimodal approach to learning (Rozati *et al.*, 2017; D'Souza & Fernandes, 2021).

Resorting to information and communication technologies (ICT) in language teaching provides numerous advantages. These tools enable one to diversify teaching methods allowing for student engagement in authentic, immersive communication scenarios that enhance motivation. Collaboration in pairs or groups is central to this learning model enhancing both the learning process and outcomes (Cao, 2015; Zhang, 2019). ICT also supports learner autonomy, motivation, and engagement, under the guidance of a mentor or facilitator (Crinon, 2013; Ting, 2015; Holmes, 2023). ICT also supports learner autonomy under the guidance of a mentor or facilitator (Crinon, 2013). Observable outcomes include increased ideas, better organization, enhanced precision in writing, more spontaneous verbal communication, and improved confidence and independence in skill development (Delplancq *et al.*, 2019).

As societal and labor market demands evolve, HE must innovate with regard to FL instruction. Project-based pedagogy is a powerful method to create meaningful learning experiences, fostering student motivation and self-reliance. This approach reshapes the teacher's role, requiring constant adaptation to student needs and progress.

The JASM project illustrates an example of pedagogical innovation at the Higher School of Education (ESEV, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal). The project aims to enhance multilingual skills and raise plurilingual awareness by targeting Media Studies students

enrolled in various FL courses. It integrates languages' aesthetic, emotional, and cognitive dimensions into creative, interdisciplinary, and collaborative activities. The methodology combines FL education with interdisciplinarity, digital arts, and creativity to achieve its objectives.

## 2 HIGHER EDUCATION, PROJECT PEDAGOGY, AND FL LEARNING

Higher education (HE) aims to equip professionals with the skills to effectively address problems, think critically, and adapt to various situations. Encouraging students to actively engage in their educational journey challenges educators to revisit their teaching methodologies rather than being mere transmitters of knowledge for passive learners (Hoffmann, 2013; Freeman, 2014). Instructors now take on the role of mentors, guiding students as they actively shape their learning experiences. In this context, pedagogical innovation becomes critical, improving teaching quality and fostering positive student engagement. Achieving this requires deliberate and creative approaches implemented through a flexible, inclusive, ongoing process that evolves across multiple dimensions (Walder, 2014; El Galad *et al.*, 2024).

Project-based pedagogy has become essential in advancing teaching and learning dynamics, particularly in FL education. Lafortune (2010) characterizes this approach as creating ideal conditions for meaningful learning, using projects as the core element. Students are encouraged to take hold of their learning path heading towards a final product while exploring their interests. This autonomy boosts motivation and allows learners to perceive their efforts as imperative for achieving tangible outcomes. Teacher supervision ensures that the working conditions reflect the environments students will likely encounter in their future careers. Often shared with broader audiences, final projects add further value by making the work more relevant. Berdal-Masuy and Botella (2013) found that projects closely tied to students' career aspirations and featuring clear objectives tend to have positive emotional effects.

Applying this framework to FL education for HE students in non-language-specific fields can support the development of competencies that align with the demands of a globalized workforce. These include professional, methodological, linguistic, communicative, and socio-cultural skills (Karyawati & Ashadi, 2018). Combining project-based pedagogy with an interdisciplinary approach fosters interactive, dynamic engagement among educators and students. Adopting a socio-constructivist outlook, as emphasized in the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (Conseil de l'Europe, 2001), positions each learner as an active participant in his/her education. Interactions, cooperative tasks, and contextualized activities are pivotal in this process. Project-based learning binds theoretical knowledge to its meaningful practical application, fostering responsibility and independence. Typical phases include preparation, planning, execution, and evaluation (Van Thien, 2013).

Numerous studies highlight the benefits of project-based learning in FL education, particularly when paired with information and communication technologies (ICT). Bernal Pinzón and Monroy Nova (2018) concluded that ICT-supported project-based learning enhances teamwork, critical thinking, and professional development. Bell (2010) observed that students value collaborative classroom activities complemented by independent work outside class. However, this method requires substantial time and effort from educators, whose roles evolve into those of facilitators and co-learners (Barge, 2010). Sustained motivation throughout the process is crucial for success, as is the teacher's ability to use pedagogical and technological expertise to guide students effectively (Marwan, 2015). The digital transition demands that teachers rethink how they present information, responding quickly using multimodal strategies to guide students throughout meaningful cognitive processes with objectives rooted in social and critical understanding (Farias, 2011).

Integrating the Arts in FL instruction is not novel (Ekoç, 2020). However, leveraging specific aspects of digital art within HE creates opportunities for innovation. For example, photovoice projects have been shown to elicit cognitive and emotional insights through active participation in community-based projects (Carlson, 2006). Budach (2018) wrote a report of a project where the University of Luxembourg Master's students created animated films based on personal artifacts. Such initiatives demonstrate how material culture, and digital representation can promote FL learning and critical thinking.

The JASM project advances pedagogical innovation in HE for FL courses in non-specialist contexts and reexamines the role of FL educators. It fosters greater student autonomy, enhances motivation, and strengthens the tie between academic learning and its potential applicability to real-world scenarios. The project facilitates FL acquisition through social, cultural, and artistic engagement. By employing project-based pedagogy within a context of linguistic and cultural diversity, students create FL content while participating in interdisciplinary assignments. This approach develops knowledge, interpersonal skills, and practical competencies in collaborative environments. Ultimately, the project aims to cultivate

multilingual and multicultural awareness through creative, multimodal, and varied learning experiences.

### **3 PROJECT STRUCTURE**

The JASM project was implemented with students enrolled in the Media Studies programme (1st and 2nd years) at ESEV, a three-year degree course (180 ECTS). The curriculum comprises three compulsory FL courses (French and English; 4 ECTS each), along with an elective FL option (4 ECTS). Career opportunities for graduates include journalism, production, information management, and institutional communication. A distinctive feature of this programme is that students can engage in the FL coursework for four semesters, allowing them to follow the project experience throughout. The programme offers courses such as photography, digital art, and intercultural communication. These courses not only enhance cognitive abilities but also connect students to the emotional and aesthetic aspects of language through artistic creativity, including media arts, multimedia art, and photovoice, ensuring an interdisciplinary approach. Students practice multimodal communication in both French and English, focusing on the cultural and linguistic diversity of Viseu, located in Beira Alta, Portugal. Student progress and the roles of teachers were evaluated through tests and interviews conducted at the start and end of the project, including a mid-term review. The multidisciplinary JASM team consisted of both Portuguese and international higher education (HE) instructors, FL experts, and professionals in digital art, educational innovation, and migrant integration.

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

The project was launched with first-year students in the Media Studies degree, and twenty students volunteered to join the project team. These volunteers and their classmates took placement tests in French or English. The tests, based on CEFR levels, evaluated written and oral comprehension and written and oral production, with a resemblance to the former DELF, DALF, and TOEFL formats. Response times were measured for each set of competencies. The average results revealed a B2 level in English, while French proficiency ranged from A2 in speaking to B2 in writing.

The students were organized into five groups of four, each focusing on a different nationality represented in Viseu, selected based on statistics from the Foreigners and Borders

Service. The chosen nationalities were Angolan, Belarusian, Indian, Italian, and Ukrainian. Each group researched its assigned country and examined stereotypes about nationality or culture, reflecting the city's cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings were presented in class, in both French and English, as part of the semester's continuous assessment methodology.

Students participated in a seminar on photography led by a specialist to consolidate their work. This complemented their regular coursework and highlighted specific contextual aspects of the photographs they took. Each group also met with a migrant living in Viseu. Social media facilitated information exchanges, while the Local Support Centre for the Integration of Migrants helped establish contacts.

The first meeting aimed to introduce the project and conduct interviews, enabling students to document the migrant's life story in both French and English. Consent was obtained to publish these stories and their illustrative photographs. Students used photos with captions in both FL to emphasise key aspects of the migrants' lives and personalities. This material was presented during FL lessons in both languages and was the basis for mid-term assessments.

Through this project, students applied transversal skills picked up in their FL classes and other coursework, providing a practical dimension aligned with their training objectives and professional aspirations. A second evaluation involved a group discussion with project participants and their peers in assessing progress, gathering feedback, and understanding their experiences.

The results were overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported increased awareness and sensitivity toward migrants and their stories. They recommended replicating the project, potentially with themes of their choice. They acknowledged the project's role in motivating them to acquire new knowledge and skills. Collaborative work was highly valued, with students sharing tasks effectively and harmoniously. However, they also noted the increased workload associated with project-based learning.

Although classmates appreciated the innovative approach, many preferred traditional, structured learning and assessment methods. FL teachers observed that students became more autonomous, took the initiative in developing and presenting their work, and contributed spontaneously to discussions by sharing insights, explaining data, and addressing challenges. Teachers guided the groups, providing feedback and corrections for all oral and written work.

Due to COVID-19 health restrictions, the final evaluation involved individual interviews. Despite these constraints, participants expressed great satisfaction with the

methodology and the skills they had developed in real-world contexts, often drawing on knowledge from other subjects.

Using cultural artifacts or migrant traditions as inspiration, students created stories and storyboards, culminating in animations developed on the multilinear narrative platform Korsakow. These projects, completed in both FL, explored material culture and digital scenography. The outputs included social media posts, exhibitions, event screenings, and the publication of an e-book. The project website documents these activities in detail: <https://www.esev.ipv.pt/jasm/>.

## 5 CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

The JASM project prioritizes language's social and interactive aspects, fostering communication in diverse forms, collaboration, and participation in authentic contexts that align closely with the course curriculum objectives. Through a project-based learning framework, language skills were consistently integrated with cultural and social knowledge, resulting in a holistic educational approach.

Students were not merely learners within an academic setting but were recognized as social actors capable of performing tasks beyond the boundaries of course unit programmes. They applied interdisciplinary skills relevant to their field of study, enhancing their understanding of their forthcoming professional contexts.

The project's interdisciplinary focus on specialized FL work enabled students to explore their future professions more comprehensively. Activities were organized around a specific thematic framework, encouraging students to engage deeply with content while producing outputs in various formats. These digital, textual, or multimedia outputs significantly increased student motivation and engagement.

Research shows that active learning methodologies surpass traditional strategies in fostering student motivation and autonomy, especially when combined with collaborative work. This approach promotes dynamic interaction between students and teachers and facilitates the acquisition of FL knowledge and competencies.

This experiment offers new perspectives on the teaching and learning of FL in HE, providing valuable insights into the evolving landscape of FL education in academia.

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