Teaching French Through Dynamic Assessment: The Case of The First Year Undergraduate Students FLE

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It is well established that at the university, one forms the critical spirit, the spirit of analysis and the spirit of synthesis. What we advocate is a spirit of evaluation. The process we followed is part of a problematic of teaching French and especially in didactics of writing. We have implemented an experimental device in our teaching practice. This is the dynamic evaluation. This evaluation allows the measurement of the initial level of achievement of a written production. And also the introduction of elements likely to help the subject to modify his usual strategies involved in the realization of a failed written production. But above all the appreciation of the way new strategies are involved. It is a four-phase experience that lasted a whole year. We first put our sample audience to a pre-test; with them, we determined the teaching objectives; then we set up the training workshops for the dynamic assessment, and finally we closed the process with a final test of measurement and evaluation. Two questionnaires were used and an observation grid.

Keywords: dynamic assessment, learning potential, skills, transferable macrocompetence, strategies, mediation

We are interested in the problem of mediation and the impact of evaluation tools on the activity of those who evaluate. The choice to work on these emanates from the fact that students and future teachers who arrive at the university in first year are far from achieving in all writing situations a “correct” production in French. Indeed, there are many errors or more objectively dysfunctions that occur in the written productions of these learners and attest to their lack of scriptural competence. These errors affect both the formal and semantic rules of language as well as the rules of textual coherence and cohesion.

We consider that the dynamic evaluation integrated into a didactic sequence of the writing can not only considerably improve the competence of the oral of these students but especially their competence with the writing. According to Professor Feuerstein (1990), effective mediation leads to change and alleviates dysfunctions. Mediation is nothing more than a quality of interaction between the mediator and the learner. This interaction is of quality and can produce changes that must meet specific criteria, such as intentionality, transcendence, and meaning. The mediator explains, identifies, and formulates the learner’s difficulties, approves and encourages him to help him overcome his dysfunctions. It is the mediation of meaning.

The method of dynamic assessment of the potential of learning is based on the principles of the theory of modifiability and cognitive educability. Loarer (1998) gave cognitive education the following definition: for him, “we speak of cognitive education when we explicitly seek, through the implementation of a training
process, to improve intellectual functioning of people” (p. 121). In fact, it is a question of measuring, through the use of tests, the extent and quality of learning potential. It is a method of assessing thought processes, perception, and problem-solving. It highlights the subject’s ability to develop his or her effectiveness in performing a task when he or she accepts mediation. The mediator, whether he is the teacher or the learner, makes the learner aware of the errors he may have made by responding to the instructions in the proposed matrix, particularly in writing. This complicity in diagnosing inadequacies allows the learner to evaluate for himself, to value himself, and to improve himself. In general, the evaluation process implemented by the teacher (the expert) and the responsible, effective, and meaningful participation of the trained (peers) in this process ensures this awareness and allows real learning. According to Laurier, Tousignant, and Morissette (2005), “evaluation is a collective approach. In the same way that learning is a process that feeds on exchanges within the group, evaluation should also appeal to the group” (p. 37).

The Experimentation

We have adopted a four-phase approach:

a. The survey. Two questionnaires were used (one at the beginning and the other at the end of the experiment).

b. The pre-test. A pre-test assessed the level of notional acquisition and scriptural abilities.

c. Mediation. It is a phase of training or mediated learning. The teacher (the expert) and the trained ones (the peers) play a very important role. Throughout the formative workshops, the didactic sequence takes all its meaning and the multiple interventions of the peers (the trained ones) in posture sometimes of evaluator and sometimes of evaluation of their written productions provide a certain number of aids, and guide the activity of the learner so that it solves itself the task previously failed.

d. The final test. A final test makes it possible to measure the acquired gain and its stability on a case by case basis.

Protocol of Research

To carry out our experiment, we used two research questionnaires in order to describe the teaching practices and the evaluation of the writing from the point of view of the 1st year Français Langue Etrangère (FLE) students. Our first research questionnaire included 28 questions, including 27 closed questions and an open question in Arabic as well. Our second research questionnaire consisted of 23 questions, 22 closed and one open. The five questions that were removed from the first questionnaire related to the teaching and writing practices that students had experienced since entering high school. We consider that it was useless to ask these questions again in the second questionnaire since the data would not have changed in this one. With regard to the results of the questionnaires, we present the answers to some aspects of the questions (Questions 4 and 5) that appeared only in our first questionnaire. We then continue with the presentation of the results of the questions appearing in the two questionnaires (Questions 9 and 14) and comparing them. Finally, we present the results of Question 28, an open question that is part of the two questionnaires.

We used a second data collection mode which is the observation grid. We present here the observations of three subjects that we compared during the first and the second presentation of their written productions. We present, first, the one who is in a situation of language insecurity learning (score = 5/20 in writing), then the subject in situation of language stability unstable learning (score = 10/20 in writing), and finally, one who is in
a stable and easy learning situation (score obtained = 13/20 in writing) in this order. We analyze and interpret the results of these three subjects under the prism of linguistic, discursive, and communicative competences.

**Analysis and Interpretation of Results**

**Analysis and Interpretation of the Results of the Questionnaires**

**Uncompared results (Questions 4 and 5). Question 4.** In what ways did your French teachers teach you written communication? Students should determine how often they received each of the types of instruction listed in the questionnaire. The choices of the answers were “never”, “rarely”, “often”, “always”, and “I do not know”.

The first type of education offered was giving you instructions (Question 4.1). No student answered “I do not know”. Twenty-two students, more than half of all students, said they “often” received instruction in writing with instructions. Twelve students answered “always” having had a teaching of the writing by being given instructions. Four students responded “rarely” to being instructed, and two students “never” responded.

![Graph](image)

*Figure 1. Frequency at which students were instructed to teach written communication based on the number of students.*

The third type of education for which we asked students the frequency of practice was showing you how to make a plan for your written production (Question 4.3). No student answered us “I do not know”. Nineteen students said they were “often” shown how to make a plan of their written production as a teaching of written communication. Ten students told us that they “rarely” had this type of education, nine students told us they had “never” had it, and only two said they “always” had this type of education.
In terms of the fifth way students were taught writing, we asked them how often they were asked to do a draft before writing (Question 4.5). No student told us that he did not know the answer (“I do not know”) and no student “always” told us he was taught this. Twenty-four students, more than half of them, answered that they “never” received this type of education. Twelve students answered us “rarely” and four “often”.

The 10th type of education for which we asked students the frequency of practice was by doing group work-related workshops (Question 4.10). Twenty-five students told us that they had “never” had a written education by doing workshops related to group work. Ten students told us they had “rarely” done this, three did not know (“I do not know”), one said they “often” had this type of teaching, and another student “always” answered.
The 12th type of writing instruction for which we asked students the frequency of practice was teaching you how to make a feedback, that is, a comment on a written production (Question 4.12). None of the students replied that they “always” had a lesson on how to give feedback. Nineteen students, however, replied that they had “never” had any education on the subject. Eleven students reported that they “rarely” had this type of education, seven said they had “often”, and three students said they did not know (“I do not know”) if they had ever had a lesson on how to make feedback.

For all the answers to the 12 aspects of this question, it was possible for us to see, as Kadik (2014) research shows, that the majority of students received a teaching of writing limited to give instructions and to be told to write their written production.
Our results also show that students were often shown how to make a plan for a written production. These are the three types of writing instruction that students have received.

We also found that for many of the types of education offered, a majority of students responded that they never received these types of education. This is the case of being asked to do a draft, to be helped to write, to be told to follow the situations of written communication proposed in textbooks.

Our results indicating that the ways of teaching writing are very limited could be explained by the fact that teachers have an ambiguous relationship with written communication, which means that many teaching practices are not included in the courses intended for teaching writing (Kadik, 2014).

Moreover, our results could be explained by the fact that “even if writing is present in training programs, few teachers implement it in classroom activities” (Riba, 2013a, pp. 75-86).

The low diversity of the ways in which the writing of our research has been revealed to us confirms the research of Kadik (2014) who found that teachers often do not know how to teach writing.

Lussier and Turner (1995) were similar in saying that the ways of teaching writing are limited. The fact that the teaching of the written word is perceived negatively by several teachers could also explain why they are limited in their ways of teaching the written word.

**Question 5.** In the fifth question, we asked what types of texts did you do in French class since the beginning of your secondary school (evaluate or not)? The students had to determine the frequency of the types of written texts they did in French class by choosing between “never”, “rarely”, “often”, “always”, and “I do not know”.

The first element of the question was the argumentative text (Question 5.1). No students said they did not know (“I do not know”) if they had already done so. Twenty-four students said they “often” wrote argumentative texts, seven said they “always” did, and seven others said they “rarely” did. Finally, two students answered that they had “never” made argumentative texts.

![Figure 6. Frequency of argumentative texts according to the number of students.](image)

Then, we asked the students how often the narrative texts were (Question 5.2). No students said they did not know (“I do not know”) if they had already done so. Twenty-two students said they had “often” written
narrative texts. Thirteen said they “rarely” did, four others said they “always” did, and only one said they had “never” done narrative texts.

Students were then asked for the class frequency of the summary (Question 5.5). Half of the students said they did the summary often. Ten students claim to have “rarely” done so, four students say they “never” did, and four said “I do not know”. Finally, only two students say they have “always” done the summary in French class since the beginning of high school.

The 13th type of text in the fifth question was note taking (Question 5.13). None of the students replied that they had “always” written this text in writing and no student answered “I do not know”. A majority of
students, that is, 30 students, responded that they have “never” taken notes in French class since the beginning of high school. Nine, however, reported having “rarely” practiced this type of text, and one student said he had “often” practiced it.

Figure 9: Frequency of note taking practice in French class since the beginning of secondary school according to the number of students.

By Question 5, we wanted to learn more about the types of texts that have been taught to students in French class since the beginning of their high school studies.

The results of the questionnaire allowed us to know that the majority of students have often made argumentative texts and narrative texts since the beginning of secondary school. Few students “never” \((N = 2)\) or “rarely” do \((N = 7)\) argumentative texts. With respect to narrative texts, despite the fact that many students say they have done so “often” \((N = 22)\), many others said they “rarely” did \((N = 13)\). The argumentative text is therefore more frequent.

The results of our questionnaire also showed us that for several types of texts, a majority of students answered infrequently and often. It is about the descriptive, the exhortative, the expositive, and the report of a reading of a project, an event.

As for the types of texts whose students have mostly said that they have never practiced this type of text in French class, we found the dissertation, the prescriptive, the commentary, the reading sheet, the diary, the text lacunary, and the taking notes.

Our research results show that the types of texts that have been seen in French classes since the beginning of secondary school among the students we interviewed are not very varied.

This practice does not match what is prescribed by national education (Reuter, 2000) and Baily (2000) who said that it is essential to vary the types and types of texts in written productions. Indeed, according to Baily (2000),

It is necessary (...) to concentrate the teaching on types of formal public communication, namely, on those which serve the school learning in French and in other disciplines; on the one hand, and those of public life in the broad sense of the term. (p. 92)
Our results are consistent with those of Kadik (2014), Lussier and Turner (1995), and Barre-De Miniac (2002) who argue that it is the argumentative and narrative text that dominates in French class to the detriment of other types of texts.

**Comparative results.** We now compare the answers of the first questionnaire to the answers of the second questionnaire. The results of the first questionnaire are represented in the graph by a black band while the results of the second questionnaire are represented by a gray band.

**Question 9.** In this question, the majority of students said they were in favor of the importance of learning to make sound comments in both questionnaires. However, after peer assessment, the students responded more positively as the number of unfavorable students decreased in favor of the number of students in favor. We do not find any more students who do not know after there has been a peer review. This result corroborates the comments of several researchers. Indeed, according to Lafontaine (2008), a teacher “must absolutely train the learners to grade a peer, give and receive a critique in order to avoid settling scores or fear of judgment” (p. 31). Dumais (2008) agreed, saying that it is important to train learners to make informed comments, “because peers can be merciless to one another” (pp. 5-25). Moreover, according to Durand and Chouinard (2006), “educating learners to respect and exchange is also part of the role of the teacher” (p. 245). Topping (2005) also stated that meaningful commentary develops communication skills and develops diplomacy among learners.

![Figure 10. Importance of learning to make meaningful comments based on the number of students.](image)

**Question 14.** The results of this question clearly demonstrate a significant change in the students’ view that evaluating students in their writing group can help improve future written productions, after there was peer review. Indeed, in the second questionnaire, we noted a decrease in the number of students who did not know while the number of students in favor increased significantly. Durand and Chouinard (2006) believed that evaluating one’s peers allows one to become aware of how others make oral or written production and thereby their own way of doing things. For Durand and Chouinard (2006), assessing peers helps the learner become more independent and able to recognize strengths and weaknesses. In addition, according to Topping (2005), peer assessment engages the learner in a number of complex cognitive activities (clarify, summarize, etc.) that can enable integration, consolidation, and deepening of understanding. Gibbs (2006) also pointed out that
pressure from peer reviewers may encourage learners to work more carefully than if the work was for the sole teacher. According to him, the internalization of the criteria for the correction of the works of the peers also contributes to the control of these aspects in their own productions.

**Figure 11.** Students’ view that evaluating students in their writing group can help improve future written productions based on the number of students.

**Question 28.** Question 28: According to you, what can it bring you that the learners of your group participate in the evaluation of your written production? Was an open question given in Arabic, too. By this open question, we wanted to know the learners’ perspective on the effects of peer evaluation. We present here some answers obtained by comparing them from one questionnaire to another.

Based on the results we obtained, we found that students found several benefits to peer assessment. Among other things, they mentioned that doing peer assessment when evaluating written productions allows for a better ability to express oneself in a general way.

This is a consequence reported by Topping (2005). Indeed, the latter states that peer evaluation develops the skills to communicate, it requires the learner to be precise and understandable.

Gibbs (2006) also stated that “the fact of explaining to the other request to structure well and articulate one’s own knowledge” (p. 35).

The students also reported that the mutual evaluation allows a more authentic evaluation. This is what Durand and Chouinard (2006) argued by saying that peer assessment leads learners to be more critical of them and helps them to develop better judgment when assessing their peers.

Gibbs (2006) agreed with the statement that, through peer review, “the subject learns (…) to develop critical thinking and use it constructively” (p. 34).

Peer review has also highlighted the benefit of having a more empathic assessment. Gibbs (2006) argued that peer assessment “allows learners to refer to the ideas of others, to consult without fear a comrade about some work, to exchange with peers on the strategies used to solve a problem” (pp. 23-36).

Topping (2005) and Lussier and Turner (1995) also argued that peer evaluation promotes interaction among peers.
Brown, Rust, and Gibbs (1994, as cited in Durand & Chouinard, 2006) stated that peer assessment is a good preparation for working life and “develops several reusable skills in a subsequent career” (p. 244). The students came to the same conclusion because they told us that the peer review will have repercussions in their future teaching career.

Laurier et al. (2005) also stated that peer assessment “develops a transferable ability out of the classroom” (p. 136). The students came to the same conclusion because they told us that peer evaluation will have repercussions in the world of work.

In addition, students reported that doing peer assessment led them to see that there is something positive about writing. This confirms Baily (2000) who argued that it is good to comment on the presentation of a learner who has just produced since it allows to bring out positive comments that are essential to the individual.

Also, the students said that practicing peer assessment promotes an increase in self-confidence. This finding from students confirms Barthelemy and Roux (2013) claimed that doing peer assessment can improve self-esteem.

Finally, the students responded that the fact that their colleagues participated in the evaluation of their written productions allowed them to learn. This finding confirms what several authors have said about the benefits of peer assessment of learning. Gibbs (2006) argued that peer assessment helps the learner to improve learning through peer interaction. Figari and Lopez (2006) also argued that mutual evaluation promotes learning among learners and Durand and Chouinard (2006) argued that doing peer assessment improves performance in the learning process and learners become more integrated.

**Analysis and Interpretation of the Results Relating to the Observation Grid**

**Linguistic competence—Language.** With regard to the language component of linguistic competence, we observed in subject S2A only negative traits with respect to the morphosyntax. Indeed, there was no respect of the genre and agreements of the kind, nor respect of the number and the agreements, he had poor mastery of the verbal conjugation and the concordance of the times and his connections were incorrect.

In terms of syntax, in general, there was ungrammaticality of utterances. For the lexicon, this subject had used vague and imprecise terms and too many repetitions which had nothing to do with the instructions of his written production.

At the second presentation of his written production, we have seen an improvement. Positive traits have appeared, especially in morphosyntax. There is, in general, respect of the genre and the agreements of the kind, the number and the agreements of the number, it showed a more or less control of the verbal conjugation and even the concordance of the times and its connections were more or less correct. As far as the lexicon is concerned, this subject has used more or less precise terms and has not repeated the same terms much, on the contrary there was a variety in the terms.

With regard to the subject S5A, we have been able to observe several negative traits in morphosyntax. Indeed, several times in the presentation of his written production, we have observed a lack of respect for gender and gender agreements and poorly constructed sentences. The links were however correct. On the lexicon side, the vocabulary was generally varied even if some terms were often repeated.

In the second presentation of his written production, this subject has well respected the morphology. In general, he respected the genre and the agreements of the genre, the number and the agreements of the number; he mastered well the verbal conjugation and the concordance of the times. The connections were once again
well done. As for the lexicon, we observed that it was varied and the terms more precise.

With regard to the language component of linguistic competence, we observed in the subject S13A, some negative traits related to the morphosyntax. Indeed, we observed a non-respect of the genre and agreements of the kind as well as the non-respect of the number and agreements of the number. The links were done correctly. The syntax as to it was, generally respected, there was thus grammaticality of the statements. As for the lexicon, the vocabulary was quite rich and there was no repetition.

During the second presentation of his written production, we observed a very great improvement of the morphosyntax. This subject generally respected more genera and agreements of the kind, the number and the chords of the number, it mastered the verbal conjugation and the concordance of the times and its connections were once again correct. There was also grammaticality of statements. Regarding the lexicon, his vocabulary was more precise and varied.

**Discursive competence.** With regard to the discourse competence of the subject S2A, we were able to observe several negative traits during the first presentation of the written production. Indeed, the speech of this subject was not structured at all and there was no final situation. All the text did not exceed seven lines. There was also a lack of highlighting of the important aspects of the story and a lack of articulation between the ideas.

In addition, we observed a poverty in the intensity of the information to be transmitted. The theme of the story was poorly defined. As for the relevance and credibility of the story, we observed that the subject had a dubious understanding and lacked a lot of imagination. The information he gave was poor. He did not establish a relationship between the characters, the processes of the narration are totally absent, and the trigger of the story does not exist.

We do not know exactly the status of the narrator, nor his point of view. The dialogues were totally absent from the production. However, we observed that this subject used a time indicator.

At the presentation of the second written production, we observed some improvement. And some positive traits have appeared. Regarding the organization of the speech, there was a highlighting of important points of storytelling, there was also a clear articulation between ideas and relationship markers were well used. There was a lot of consistency in the comments. We could observe an organization of the story according to the intention of communication, a richness in the information.

There is no more confusion between narrator and character, the places are clearly specified. We have also been able to observe much more imagination and the narrative processes are varied. Indeed, the narration was shared between prose and dialogue.

With regard to the subject S5A, we observed during the first presentation of the written production that the content of the story told was poorly structured. Indeed, there was no modifying element of the story, the initial situation did not contain all the elements that were to compose it, there was a total absence of temporal articulators. There was a lack of highlighting of the important points of the story told which generated an inconsistency.

There was not enough relevance and credibility for the information that was staked in the story told. The status of the narrator was not defined enough. There was no character and even the descriptions were totally absent. The subject restricted himself to using prose as a narrative process, no dialogue was observed. The subject however organized his speech according to the intention of communication.

In the second presentation of the written production, we observed a very great improvement in discourse competence. Indeed, in terms of the organization of the speech the content was well structured and there was a
highlighting of the important points of the story.

The narrative schema was present that the trigger of the events is well marked. An articulation between the ideas and the temporal and relationship markers were correctly used. The theme of the story was clearly expressed through the feelings and relationships between the characters.

Moreover, in terms of relevance and credibility, the discourse was organized according to the intention of communication. Finally, the text is much longer. The subject was very imaginative.

Regarding the subject S13A, we observed, during the first presentation of the written production that despite a well-structured content, there was a lack of highlighting important aspects, a lack of articulation between ideas and a fairly good use of time markers. Indeed, the narrative scheme in all its dimension was used.

The relationship between the characters in the story was marked. There was a coherence. The text was more or less long. The instruction was respected. The theme of written production was well circumscribed. In terms of relevance and credibility, we have seen a number of positive features. The speech was organized according to an intention of communication.

The subject S13A had a lot of imagination, he knew his subject well. The ideas and information he provided were of high quality and the narrative procedures were used appropriately. We observed two negative elements. It was a confusion in the status of the narrator and lacked descriptions of either places or characters.

At the second presentation of the written production, we were able to observe a very great improvement of this skill. As for the organization of the speech, the content was rigorously structured. There was still a highlighting of the important points, an articulation between the ideas and a good use of the temporal markers. The theme was well circumscribed in relation to what is asked in the instructions. Regarding the relevance, credibility and coherence in the remarks, we have the same positive elements as in the first presentation of the written production.

Communicative competence. With respect to the S2A topic, her first oral presentation of her written production contained several negative traits related to communicative competence, that is, while being evaluated as an evaluator. Indeed, generally in terms of interaction, we observed that the subject watched, head down, constantly his notes, it closed to the audience. The words came out of his mouth very hard. As for the non-verbal, a lack of spontaneity, a lot of uneasiness were observed and enormously nervousness. Indeed, the subject had several nervous twitches and a fleeting look. In terms of posture, the subject was rigid and did not move. We could see that he was putting his hand on his head and he closed his eyes. He did not do anything.

At the second presentation of the written production while being evaluated evaluator, the subject S2A had a better interaction, that is to say a better relation with the public. It showed an open to the audience and a concern to arouse the interest of the public. As for the nonverbal, the subject showed a fairly good ease and a greater naturalness. His posture was more adequate and balanced. The words came out of his mouth more easily and he also showed a certain self-confidence. Finally, he had gestures that more or less supported his speech, a more authentic look and he looked at least several of his comrades closest to him.

Regarding the subject S5A, his first presentation of his written production had several negative features. Indeed, in terms of interaction, we observed that the subject was constantly looking at his notes and that he showed a certain indifference to the audience.

His non-verbal indicated a lack of enthusiasm and gave the impression of being elsewhere. He spoke and he stopped constantly and he also seemed to look for his words a few times. He only watched his notes and
never the audience. It showed some signs of nervousness and discomfort.

His presentation was also punctuated with spurious gestures and his eyes were fleeing.

In his second presentation, while being in a position sometimes as an evaluator and sometimes as an evaluator, the interaction between this subject and his audience was better. The subject was open to the audience. As for the nonverbal, it is quite remarkable that the nervousness was gone and the subject seems really comfortable in his remarks and he shows a lot of confidence in himself. Finally, we could see that the parasitic gestures had completely disappeared and the subject seems in harmony with his speech and knowing his subject perfectly.

Finally, with regard to the subject S13A, we also observed several negative traits during the first oral presentation of his written production. As for the interaction, that is to say, of its interaction with its audience, we were able to observe a certain opening to the audience but a more or less constant look at the sheets. Regarding the non-verbal the subject seems uncomfortable but it showed enthusiasm and spontaneity. He watched his audience discreetly. The gesture supported his speech but seemed to be a little poorly controlled. However, he had a certain self-confidence and a lot of conviction.

At the second presentation of the written production, we noticed that the subject has improved a lot. It looks like he has found his marks. He smiled all the time and scanned his audience from top to bottom. Indeed, the interaction between this subject and the audience was very different. The subject was this time an opening to his audience. He showed a concern to arouse interest and motivation for his audience. He exuded a lot of spontaneity and enthusiasm. As for the non-verbal, the subject had a much better body. It allowed a lot more authenticity and naturalness to appear. He was constantly watching his audience and in a sustained way. Finally, the few and uncontrolled gestures that appeared during his first presentation had disappeared.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we will be able to affirm that the experimental system of teaching/learning French through dynamic assessment has demonstrated that learning subjects with learning difficulties have improved and previously noticed dysfunctions have lessened. The dynamic method is very effective in the development of scriptural skill. It has allowed our audience to update its macro-skills to cross-search a strategy of solving problems related to writing by anticipation, comparison, planning and control and by the same to change and to improve and allowed us to measure cognitive abilities such as the ability to learn, adapt, and change behavior through mediation.

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