



An Innovative Pedagogy For Enhancing Writing Skills Among Algerian Middle School Students

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Abstract:

We have very limited data on the impact of innovative pedagogy on the improvement of writing skills. This study aims to explore the effect of innovative pedagogy on the development and enhancement of written production among fourth-year middle school students. To achieve this, we employed an experimental approach (comparing a control class with an experimental class) and used questionnaires as investigative tools.

The results of the experimentation demonstrate that a good application of innovative pedagogy leads to a positive effect on students' writing, making their texts clearer, more structured, and better aligned with the success criteria outlined in the evaluation grid. Analysis of the questionnaires revealed that teachers still have gaps in mastering concepts related to innovative pedagogy, particularly in designing integration tasks. Therefore, significant efforts are needed from various educational stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of innovative pedagogy.

Keywords: innovative pedagogy, reinvestment, linguistic resources, written production.

Introduction:

Many students acquire knowledge at school but are unable to apply it in their daily lives. UNESCO refers to these learners as 'functional illiterates.' For example, a student who knows by heart the conjugation of verbs in the present indicative may be unable to use this knowledge spontaneously to introduce himself or to write a receipt, an invoice, or a thank-you letter. This has led schools to reform their programs in terms of competencies and the integration of acquired skills.

In this context, Algeria officially adopted a competency-based approach in 2003, grounded in integrative pedagogy: Through its PARE program, UNESCO supports Algeria's transition to a competency-based approach underpinned by integrative pedagogy, involving several components of the curriculum: school textbooks, curricular

programs, and assessment. Consequently, new textbooks have been launched, and programs, training sessions, and seminars have been organized. "The integration activity may represent the most striking change. We will witness a new vision of pedagogy to be implemented, with new objectives and strategies that educators must master. The challenge lies in assisting teachers in practicing their profession with pedagogical approaches that enhance the academic level of students.

In this perspective of integrating acquired knowledge, teaching and learning proceed in two phases. First, through various activities, the learner acquires knowledge, skills, and competencies. Subsequently, the learner engages in an integration activity in which they must mobilize and integrate these acquired elements. As Roegiers emphasizes, "The learner in a French class participates in an integrative approach, mobilizing and integrating their acquired knowledge." For example, in the fourth year of middle school, students are asked to write a descriptive text with an argumentative aim, in which they will describe the beauty and richness of an Algerian city to encourage people to visit it. To compose this text, the learner must: write according to a structured plan, use qualifying adjectives, employ argumentative vocabulary and the complement to express their opinion, use relative clauses to avoid repetition, conjugate verbs in the present indicative tense, and apply expressions of cause and effect to support their arguments.

Studies provide information on the positive impact of the skills-based approach, operationalized by the pedagogy of integration, on the academic performance of students: "The Pedagogy of Integration has been tested mainly in primary education in many countries, particularly in North America (Quebec), in countries of Europe (Great Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal), Asia (Lebanon) and Africa (Gabon, Burkina Faso, Tunisia and Morocco). It has demonstrated its effectiveness as a model of educational intervention." (Abdelaadim TAHIRI, 2012: p 4). Studies provide information on the positive impact of the skills-based approach, operationalized by the pedagogy of integration, on students' academic performance: "The Pedagogy of Integration has been tested mainly in primary education in many countries, particularly in North America (Quebec), in countries in Europe (Great Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal), Asia (Lebanon) and Africa (Mauritania, Gabon, Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Djibouti, Tunisia and Morocco). It has demonstrated its effectiveness as a model of educational intervention." (Abdelaadim TAHIRI, 2012: p 4).

Studies provide information on the positive impact of the skills-based approach, operationalized through integrative pedagogy, on students' academic performance: "Integrative pedagogy has been tested mainly in primary education across many countries, notably in North America (Quebec), various European countries (Great Britain, Belgium, Switzerland, Portugal), Asia (Lebanon), and Africa (Mauritania, Gabon, Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Djibouti, Tunisia, and Morocco). It has proven effective as a pedagogical intervention model." (AbdelaadimTahiri, 2012, p. 4).

Today, in Algeria, many concerns are expressed by French teachers in middle schools regarding the issue of written production among their learners.

After a relatively long educational period, a student in the fourth year of middle school finds themselves unable to produce a correct statement appropriate to the communicative situation. The situation is alarming; at the Middle Education (BEM), the results in written production are notably concerning.

Similarly, it is through written work and the performance of students that a teacher can assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their own pedagogical practices. Therefore, we question whether there is a deficiency in teaching practices related to the teaching/learning of written production.

This research is based on our observations as educators regarding the "erroneous" practices and perceptions of integrative pedagogy. Integrative pedagogy is an innovation that was introduced at too high a rate. Today, we find ourselves in a situation where only a small proportion of students have access to this innovation, and these students are supported by a limited number of teachers in a small number of schools. Some teachers are unaware of the benefits of integrative pedagogy, while others apply it incorrectly.

During the learning sequence, teachers often choose activities focused on declarative knowledge rather than procedural knowledge. Teachers tend to offer exercises that involve applying questions from the lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy. As a result, learners are unable to transfer these acquired skills to a situation because they have not been trained. We believe that teachers should help their students integrate their knowledge by continuously providing them with high-level, relevant activities. As the saying goes, "Practice makes perfect."?

Written production has always been a major challenge for our students, but today, few teachers apply integrative pedagogy. After conducting participant observation, we observed the positive impact of integrative pedagogy on improving the writing skills of students, particularly those in the fourth year of middle school.

We designed this research work to address the needs and meet the expectations regarding the teaching/learning of written production in this perspective of the integration of acquired knowledge.

Compared to neighboring countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, in Algeria, we have little data regarding the impact of integration pedagogy, this is also a reason that prompted us to address this theme.

In this study, we aim to examine: "Integrative Pedagogy in the French as a Foreign Language (FLE) Classroom for the Improvement of Writing Skills: The Case of Fourth-Year Middle School Students."

In this perspective of integration of acquired knowledge, we are concerned by the following observation: FLE students remain unable to reintegrate their acquired knowledge into written production. The grades obtained in various assessments (homework, exams, BEM) indicate that their performance in integrative situations is unsatisfactory.

This observation has led us to investigate the factors within the teaching-learning process that have contributed to this difficulty. Consequently, we have chosen to focus on the pedagogical impact of integration on the improvement and development of writing skills. We believe that a proper implementation of integrative pedagogy would enable students to correctly resolve the integration situation and successfully achieve the expected transfer of the concepts studied.

This has led us to pose the following questions:

- To what extent can integrative pedagogy promote the reinvestment (transfer) of linguistic resources in written production?
- What does the contribution of a good implementation of integration pedagogy consist of on the writing skills of learners?

Given this, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- Integrative pedagogy in the French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classroom would be an effective device for improving the writing skills of fourth-year middle school students.
- With proper implementation of integrative pedagogy, a fourth-year middle school student would be able to reinvest the linguistic resources studied into written production and, consequently, achieve a good grade in integrative tasks.

To address our research question, we will first conduct an experiment involving a comparative study between a control group (traditional teaching) and an experimental group (applying integrative pedagogy). We will analyze the integration situations completed by students at the beginning of the school year and those completed at the end of the first project to measure progress in written production and the students' ability to integrate the studied concepts. Indeed, comparing the written production scores of students from both groups should allow us to identify the impact of integrative pedagogy on the improvement of students' written outputs.

In this research, we pursue the following objectives:

- Evaluate the contribution/effectiveness of integration pedagogy on improving the written production of fourth-year middle school students.
- Verify the degree of mastery of this pedagogy by fourth-year middle school teachers.

The Experiment

Objective:

The aim of this experiment is to determine whether fourth-year middle school students, the sample for our study, are or would be capable of addressing the integration situation proposed by their teacher and thereby integrating the linguistic resources they have studied. Additionally, we seek to verify if integrative pedagogy in the French as a Foreign Language (FLE) classroom could be an effective strategy for improving students' writing skills.

Context

Our experiment took place at two educational institutions: CEM Chami Mohamed and CEM Djafel Mohamed in Khenchela, Constantine. The study was conducted from September to December 2023.

Sampling:

In the context of our research, we selected fourth-year middle school students who are at the end of their educational cycle. Since this class is concluding its school cycle, it provides an ideal field for analyzing and evaluating their language skills and assessing their success or failure in terms of writing skills.

The experimentation involved 60 fourth-year middle school students, distributed across two classes, each containing 30 students and supervised by two different instructors. It is important to note that the working conditions were those typically found in a regular classroom. To ensure reliable results, we implemented the following procedures:

- Selection of two educational institutions with relatively equivalent socio-cultural backgrounds and educational levels.
- Selection of two teachers with equivalent years of experience (10 years teaching French at the middle school level) and similar educational backgrounds. However, the teacher of the experimental class received training in integration pedagogy and its various challenges from her inspector in 2014, whereas the teacher of the control class did not receive any training in this regard.

Thus, our experiment comprises three phases:

- Phase 1: Initial test
- Phase 2: Project 1, which spans the first trimester and includes three sequences. Both teachers followed the same trimester progression and the same sequence of activities to ensure that students in both classes covered the same concepts.
- Phase 3: Final test

Initial test:

At the beginning of the experiment, it was necessary to ensure that the two classes were comparable, meaning they had a roughly equivalent level in written production. To achieve this, a diagnostic test was administered to the students in both classes at the start of the school year (2022/2023). This test consisted of a complex task corresponding to the end-of-year OTI1 for third-year middle school (3AM) students.

Instructions:

The instructions presented to the students were as follows:

You have been deeply impacted by a childhood memory, an event that has remained etched in your mind. Write a narrative of 7 to 8 lines in which you recount this memory. In your text, you must: Introduce the event by specifying where and when it occurred, describe what happened, Explain how you experienced the event.

Results and Comments:

The results indicate that the two samples can be considered of equivalent level, as the students in both classes demonstrated approximately the same proficiency in written production. Therefore, the two classes are comparable.

Moreover, the analysis of the collected data reveals several common findings across both groups, the "control class" and the "experimental class":

1. **First Finding:** There was a lack of reintegration of the studied linguistic resources.
2. **Second Finding:** The written productions were unsatisfactory; the students did not possess the required level of proficiency.

In summary, the initial test highlighted the difficulties faced by the fourth-year middle school students in addressing the integration situation. The majority of students were unable to effectively reinvest the necessary acquired knowledge.

The Experiment Itself: To address our research question and determine whether the difficulties encountered by fourth-year middle school students can be overcome with effective implementation of integrative pedagogy, we followed a well-considered protocol. It should be noted that the experiment is conducted over Project 1, which includes three sequences. Both teachers adhered to the same trimester progression and the same sequence of activities to ensure that students in both classes covered the same concepts. To provide a clear understanding of the work conducted with the students, we will subsequently present an overview of the linguistic resources studied during Project 1.

Linguistic Resources Covered in Project 1:

Level: Fourth Year Middle School (4AM)

Project 1: Create a tourist blog encouraging the exploration of Algeria

Terminal Competency (C.T.1): Understand and produce oral and written texts in a manner that is appropriate and aligned with the communicative situation, including descriptive texts with an argumentative aim and various linguistic resources such as the present subjunctive, relative clauses, the present indicative, enumeration connectors, and expressions of cause and consequence.

Thus, by the end of the first project, the learner should be capable of writing a descriptive text with an argumentative aim, which includes three parts: an introduction, a development, and a conclusion. To successfully complete this task, the student must be able to reinvest the linguistic resources they have studied.

Protocol:

For the control class, throughout the first project, a final integrative task is proposed to the students at the end of each sequence. The teacher will allocate a single hour to the written production activity, which is the final integrative task. Thus, students will respond to three writing prompts throughout the first project.

In the other class, referred to as the experimental class, the teacher adheres to the foundational principles of integrative pedagogy. The same approach is adopted, meaning that at the end of each sequence, students are guided to address a final integrative task.

In addition, for each linguistic concept, we proposed an extra activity that was not offered to the students in the control class. This involves a partial integrative task conducted at the end of each learning activity to train students in writing by mobilizing the studied concept. As a result, the teacher allocates more time to written production, allowing her students to become well-trained in solving problem situations and reinvesting linguistic resources in context.

Final test

At the end of Project 1, after covering the various programmed concepts, we administered an integrative task to students in both classes, which served as the final test.

In both the control and experimental samples, students completed strictly individual productions. In each class, students were arranged so that each student sat alone at a desk.

We designed a topic that addressed the terminal competency of Project 1. We followed the subsequent approach:

Approach and Preparation

Communication Objectives to Integrate:

- Describe in order to argue
- Argue to encourage discovery
- Support a position with arguments

Integrative Task:

- On the occasion of World Tourism Day, celebrated annually on September 27, you are participating in a competition for the best text, with the aim of inviting tourists to come and discover the beauty of our country.
- Write a text of 10 to 15 lines in which you will extol the charm and richness of the natural, cultural, and historical heritage of a city or region of your choice.

Correction of the Final Test:

Our corpus consists of 60 written productions completed by students from both classes. Once the productions from both classes were collected, we proceeded with their analysis. It is important to note that we will not be describing individual errors but rather evaluating the overall quality of the argumentative text according to the criteria indicators proposed in the correction grid. This grid, from a pedagogical perspective, serves as a tool to aid in the correction of papers with maximum objectivity. Thus, the collected papers were evaluated using the following grid

Analysis of the Final Test Results:

The final test demonstrates a clear and valid superiority of the experimental class over the control class. We believe this difference could be explained by the fact that the students in the experimental class were more capable of mobilizing the studied resources, as they were trained through partial integrative tasks completed at the end of each learning activity.

The results obtained from this experiment demonstrate the positive impact of integrative pedagogy on students' writing. Consequently, it positively influences students' written performance, regardless of their level. Both struggling students and high-achieving students were able to benefit from it.

This study, conducted with 60 fourth-year middle school students on complex integrative tasks in written French, shows that integrative pedagogy provides students with a significant gain in written production, estimated at an average of 2 points out of 8. This is a notable result in a context where low scores on integrative tasks are often the norm, particularly in end-of-cycle exams (BEM). In terms of effectiveness, it can also be affirmed that all categories of students, strong, average, weak, and very weak, benefit from integrative pedagogy. Regarding equity, those who seem to benefit the most from integrative pedagogy appear to be average students, followed by less proficient students, then very weak students, and finally strong students. This study has demonstrated how, by playing on a single factor, namely the exploitation of final integration situations with partial integration situations at the end of each activity, we can provide a significant

qualitative gain in the learning of writing, for all students, but especially for the average and weak among them.

Conclusion

At the end of this study, we can conclude that the development of writing skills is a long-term project that progresses gradually through methodical and consistent work following an appropriate methodology.

The results obtained from the experiment show that writing skills are cultivated and developed throughout all activities in the sequential process, not solely during writing workshop sessions. As noted, learners are asked in each educational activity to manipulate and invest the concepts and resources worked on to produce short statements in order to gradually train them to resolve the final integration situation. This confirms our first hypothesis.

It is strongly recommended and necessary to propose integrative tasks in textbooks or other appropriately formulated activities that meet quality criteria. However, this alone will not be sufficient for students to produce coherent, relevant, and intelligible paragraphs. To achieve this, it is essential to provide ongoing training and practice throughout all activities in each learning process through reflective and autonomous writing tasks.

Indeed, the missing link for effectively investing linguistic resources in written production lies in the neglect of preparation which always begins at the beginning of the sequence until the session of the final integrative task. At the end of each session, allocating just five to ten minutes to an activity, such as producing a sentence in grammar or drafting a statement in vocabulary, gradually prepares students for the final integrative task. In other words, throughout the sequence, each session should conclude with a mini written production, known as a partial integrative task. By the time the final written production at the end of the sequence arrives, the student should be capable of making at least one attempt to mobilize the concepts studied throughout the sequence. This approach requires a strategic mediator, namely the teacher, and demands significant effort from educators.

Our research has highlighted, from both pedagogical and didactic perspectives, the positive impact of effectively implementing integration pedagogy on the improvement and development of writing skills. In fact, integration pedagogy offers educational systems enhanced learning effectiveness, a reduction in functional illiteracy, and a better mastery of writing proficiency.

Certainly, miracles do not exist in pedagogy. However, this study has demonstrated that focusing on a single factor, namely the use of final integrative tasks combined with partial integrative tasks at the end of each activity can significantly enhance writing learning for all students, particularly for average and weaker students. This success is largely attributed to the teacher's commitment, which is often rare in our institutions and deserves recognition.

In conclusion, this research raises the following question: Could a proper implementation of integrative pedagogy also positively impact the development of oral skills?

This opens many avenues for further research in the continuation of this work.

