

Teaching Argumentation in The Flipped Classroom of French as Foreign Language: What Are the Effects On the Development of Writing Skills?

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Abstract: More than ever before, pedagogical innovations, based mainly on the use of digital tools, are increasingly at the centre of didactic concerns. Within this scope, we propose to implement a flipped classroom with students enrolled in the first university cycle at the Algerian higher education level. We assume that flipped teaching could improve and enhance their writing argumentative skills compared to transmissive teaching. Methodologically, the data collection corpus consists of argumentative texts (pre- and post-tests) produced by over a hundred students, that are analyzed and described. The results show that flipped classroom helps students to appropriate the theoretical knowledge of the argumentative genre conveyed by the instructional videos.

Keywords: Flipped classroom, argumentation, written production, instructional videos, FFL.

Introduction

Today, it is impossible to ignore the profound upheavals in university teaching, which are largely due to the use of digital technology. This practice use is not an end in itself, nor is it a guaranteed prerequisite for the effectiveness of the new methods that are being deployed in this digital direction, whether intended or imposed, but rather it constitutes one element, among others, that can be invoked to optimise the teaching/learning process, which crystallises statements, often exhaustive, such as the famous expression "we learn better with digital" (Amadiou

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& Tricot, 2014). Far from these challenging claims, the actual use of digital technology in the language classroom seems paradoxically restrictive and encouraging. Although it is full of opportunities that rely on the transmissive methods, it heavily triggers the scientific community. The whole issue, then, is simply to justify one's choices with evidence of effectiveness in the face of the demands which, it would seem, are still being questioned.

At this stage, the stakes are high. We cannot deny that, over the years, tensions have arisen between a traditional movement that is conservative and even resistant to the use of digital technology in the language classroom and another that is constantly emerging, open to all possible technological configurations, and according to which we can give up face-to-face teaching in favour of distance learning (e-learning). Unequivocally, the gamble is neither complete nor resolved, but it has shifted towards a third party, one that appears to be calming. In fact, between these two extremes of conservative and distanced methods, where dogmatism and scepticism were a good mix, a 'hybrid' pedagogical compromise is being developed which gives particular importance, and at the same interval, to the phases of face-to-face and distance teaching, following the example of the flipped classroom or 'do it yourself' pedagogy (Cailliez, 2017, p.29) which we focus on in this article.

The flipped classroom, which has become a "benchmark pedagogical innovation" (Trémion, 2019, p.11), represents a pedagogical revival that advocates a spatio-temporal reshaping of learning by outsourcing the transmissive part of knowledge outside the classroom, most often through video capsules, so that the classroom is devoted to application and interaction. As Lebrun and Lecoq (2015) postulate, it is therefore a question of placing "the transmissive elements at a distance, in particular thanks to technology, the teacher enables his students to experience the appropriation of more complex knowledge and opens up a space conducive to the co-creation of knowledge and experimentation with a form of collective intelligence". (Marcel & Lecoq, 2015, p.73)

In this contextually demanding and promising debate on flipped teaching, the foreign language teacher's mission is widening due to the fact that a certain vagueness as to how to conceive and effectively implement such an innovative pedagogical practice, particularly in writing classes.

In this problematic situation, we notice a lack of reflection on how to design flipped sequences in writing lessons made available to Foreign Language learners and a lack of scientific resources on the possible effects of this pedagogical practice on the skill of producing argumentative writing. In this case, a review of literature is necessary to determine what approach should be followed to develop a course in writing that is rooted in the logic of the flipped classroom? What is such a system supposed to contribute to argumentative writing? And above all, what impact does it have on the quality of the texts produced?

In order to provide some answers to these questions, we propose in the following lines to integrate a flipped classroom approach to writing with undergraduate students and to analyse the effect of such an implementation on the quality of the argumentative texts produced in terms of adherence to the argumentative outline, improvement in logical construction and the informational contribution of the texts produced.

1. A Few Theoretical Preliminaries On the Flipped Classroom: Where Does It Come from and Where Is It Going?

A rapidly emerging practice, the flipped classroom has been the subject of a great deal of research in recent years, with a review of the scientific literature leading to the development of the principles underlying its implementation in foreign language teaching. Moreover, when we look at the growing number of scientific documents on flipped teaching, it quickly becomes apparent that there is no consensus on this innovative method. This lack of consensus only serves to impose a variety of terminologies illustrating the spectacular nature of its development, ranging from the 'inverted', 'reversed' (Cailliez, 2017), 'virtual mode' (Tardif & Rivard, 2021) or 'hybrid' classroom (Lebrun & Lecoq, 2015; Lebrun, 2016). That being said, defining the boundaries of such innovation is all the more difficult given the constant evolution of typologies and characteristics in the scientific literature.

However, the term used to describe the flipped classroom as a hybrid system seems to be the most well-developed, at least in terms of a review of the French-language literature, thanks to the pioneering work carried out by the 'Hy-Sup' collective (Deschryver & Charlier, 2012), which offers a detailed and coherent description of the characteristics of hybrid systems, ranging from the link between presence and distance, human support, mediation/mediatisation of knowledge and,

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finally, the flexibility of the system (Peraya & Peltier, 2012). All of these dimensions are deeply rooted in any conception of the flipped classroom, and it is for this reason that we include the flipped classroom in the philosophy of hybridisation.

What is indisputable is that the history of flipped classrooms goes back to the 1990s, in that they were initially triggered by Eric Mazur, a physics professor at Harvard University in the United States, with his interactive "Peer instruction" method, which served as a precursor to the flipped classroom. The originality of his pedagogical approach lies in the repositioning of lectures outside the classroom, with the emphasis on self-learning, followed by face-to-face teaching, the aim of which is the collective construction of knowledge, provided that the heterogeneity of the groups is controlled. (Nizet et.al, 2016, p.40).

At this stage of the debate, one might think that the philosophy behind this repositioning is not new in itself and that it will not lead to any real changes in classroom practice, since a good number of trainers find in the Socratic method, the prologue to Pancatantra and the disputatio the premises of the inverted classroom (Younès, et. al, 2016, p.136). However, the inversion in question is not limited to the simplistic idea of asking learners to prepare in advance (usually on an optional basis), but involves mobilising an entire system in which the spatio-temporal framework, the learning activities, the techno-pedagogical tools and the expected postures of the teacher are meticulously articulated and arranged in the two learning phases.

On this hybrid continuum, which combines presence-distance topicality, the flipped classroom stands out from the outset because of its break with traditional teaching methods, which favour passive transmission of knowledge, meaning that the teacher's role is no longer to "tell everything, learn everything and teach everything in a masterly, frontal manner. Instead of being a 'sage' on the podium and a transmitter of knowledge, they will be a guide, a facilitator alongside their learners" (Cynthia Eid, et. al, 2019, p.31). More concretely, the transmission part, corresponding to the classroom sessions, will be outsourced outside the lecture theatre. The face-to-face sessions, on the other hand, will be devoted to practical work and will be a space for interaction, application and collaboration. Of course, the link between presence and distance learning is driven by information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly video capsules.

2. Argument in The FLE Classroom: An Imperative to Support Writing Skills

Today, as in the old days of ancient rhetoric, argumentation remains a seductive linguistic power which presents the speaker with an oscillation, a very particular hesitation to use an eloquent persuasive sermon and/or a convincing reasoned demonstration in the face of an interlocutor who, faced with this monstrous power to say well, finds himself condemned to silence.

In the case of ancient rhetoric, the art of argument was mastered by a religious, political or literary elite, at the bar of the court, on the rostrum of a political assembly, in the preacher's pulpit or in the works, treatises, letters and prefaces of the great figures of French-language literature such as Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Montaigne and others. Modern rhetoric, for its part, gives increasing importance to argumentation in its communicational dimension as a socially shared language practice, and consequently breaks with the classical perception of argumentation "as the deployment of logical reasoning outside of any interpersonal relationship" (Amossy, 2021, p.08).

In such an actualised situation, where argumentation is immediately corollary to communication, there is no point in asserting, denying, nuancing, denouncing, supporting, pleading, convincing or persuading other than a coherent argumentative discourse in which eloquence and reasoning take precedence. This is why it is obvious to take a particular interest in the teaching/learning of the argumentative genre with regard to new teaching methods such as the flipped classroom, which we have just mentioned above, in a constant quest to innovate and adapt teaching practices to the communicative needs in writing of learners whose evolution has been marked by the new demands of globalisation.

The choice of tackling argumentation in our reversal sequence is far from fortuitous, but it is essentially based on the major observation that the teaching of this textual genre is becoming inevitable in order to support communication in the language classroom. All the more so when this teaching is aimed at foreign language learners in a plurilingual context. The reason for this is, a priori, the lack of written production skills in the Algerian university context.

The production of argumentative texts represents a major challenge, particularly in the context of Algerian higher education, because the nature of the assessments (essays, commentaries, reports, etc.) requires learners to master this textual genre in order to convince teachers of the coherence and relevance of their

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writing. Ipso facto, in view of the difficulties that students face when confronted when trying to write argumentative compositions, it is necessary to propose pedagogical guidelines and strategies that can help them to undertake argumentation with ease, especially as its teaching has undergone several transformations as a result of the variety of theoretical and methodological conceptions from various disciplines such as rhetoric (classical and modern), linguistics, psychology and didactics, etc.

3. Method

This study is an action-research illustrating the implementation of a hybrid device of the reversed type undertaken with students enrolled in the first year of a Licence in the department of French language and literature at Badji Mokhtar University. The research involved 114 students of both genders divided into four groups: two control groups with 54 students (out of 93 students) and two experimental groups with 60 students (out of 92 students). Most of the students were aged between 18 and 24.

In order to identify the impact of the flipped classroom on writing skills, the control group received ordinary (lecture-based) teaching of writing, while the experimental group received flipped teaching of the module in question. The aim was to compare the quality of the argumentative texts produced in the two learning situations. Therefore, we subjected the students to two writing assessments before and after the teaching sessions. The writing activity represents an argumentative text on the subject of vaccination between "duty to vaccinate" and "mistrust of vaccines".

It should be noted that we maintain the same writing instructions for the diagnostic and summative assessments to not impact learners' ability in writing. The latter call on knowledge derived from learners' everyday experience, which may vary from one medium to another. Thus, the mobilisation of a body of encyclopaedic and rhetorical knowledge would be essential for the production of written work. Consequently, adopting the same test makes it possible to minimise the influence of encyclopaedic knowledge on learners' performance.

In short, the experimental protocol is maintained according to the following research plan:

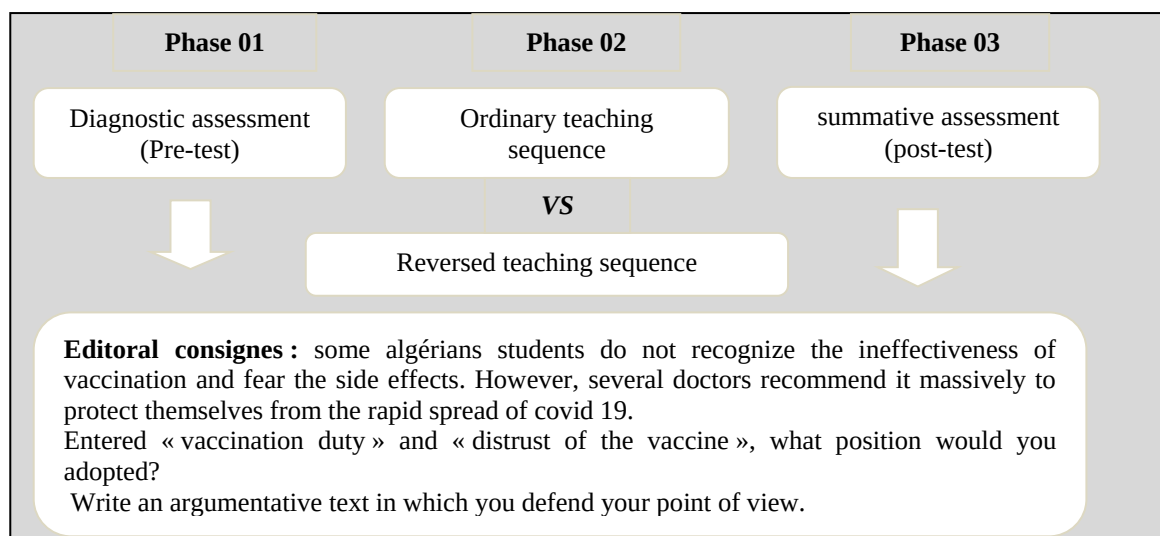


Figure 01. Experimental protocol

In this sequence, no changes were made to the usual flow of the argumentative sequence in the two control groups. In other words, the teacher combined lectures on the theoretical side of argumentation with face-to-face tutorials involving the application of the knowledge imparted to extracts of argumentative texts, culminating in writing tasks.

However, the reversed argumentative sequence involves repositioning the learning times in the experimental groups by outsourcing the out-of-class lectures via video capsules, while maintaining the face-to-face tutorials. This inversion is explained in the table below:

Session 01	Distance Learning	- Video clip: general information on the argumentative text followed by an online quiz.
	In class (1h 50min)	- Tutorials: Analysis of argumentative statements followed by activities involving identification, classification, false/true, gaps, open/closed questions, etc.
Session 02	Distance Learning	video clip and handouts on types of argument followed by an online quiz
	In class (1h 50min)	- Tutorials : Analysis of argumentative texts followed by activities involving spotting, classification, false/true, gaps, open/closed questions etc. focusing mainly on identifying types of argument.

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Session 03	Distance Learning	Video clip: how to get involved in an argumentative discourse + handouts
	In class (1h 50min)	- Tutorials : Analysis of argumentative statements followed by activities involving identification, classification, false/true, gaps, open/closed questions, etc. focusing on modalisation.
Session 04	Distance Learning	- Video clip: how to write the introduction and conclusion of an argumentative text?
	In class (1h 50min)	- Tutorials : Activities involving production, reformulation and organisation of the argumentative structure (introduction and conclusion).
Session 05	Distance Learning	- Video clip: how to write the development of an argumentative text? followed by an online quiz.
	In class (1h 50min)	Tutorials : Activities to produce, reformulate and organise the argumentative structure (development)

Table 01: Articulation of presence-distance topicality in the flipped classroom

It should be noted that the video clips were produced using Powtoon, a video editing tool for creating animated explanatory videos, as well as a slide show with commentary using Powerpoint and X-recorder (see appendices 1 and 2). In order to evaluate the appropriation of the knowledge transmitted remotely through these video clips, online quizzes were also offered to learners to ensure better remediation in the classroom of concepts or passages that were incomprehensible remotely.

4. Analysis grid

In order to identify the contribution of the flipped classroom to the development of learners' writing skills, our analysis grid takes into account three variables that we consider to be representative of the quality of the produced argumentative texts, based on work carried out in the field of textual and semantic linguistics:

Respect for the argumentative schema: This variable refers to the production of texts that are more in line with the dialectical plan. In this respect, Adam (2005) states that the argumentative framework must take into account the following stages: an introduction, an explanation of the thesis, support by arguments, mention of the opposing thesis and a conclusion.

Improving logical construction: it is clear that the appropriate use of argumentative connectors ensures the logic of the texts produced. To this end, we quantified the use of these textual markers on the basis of the classification developed by Adam (1984; 2005). For our analysis, we have selected the introductory, conclusive, enumerative, substitutive, hypothetical, explanatory, additive, contrastive, consecutive, causative and purposeful connectors.

The informational contribution of the texts produced: In order to shed light on the contribution of the flipped classroom to the epistemic value of the texts produced, we quantified the occurrence of semantic propositions and ranked them according to their degree of relevance: relevant, moderately relevant, irrelevant. Within this framework, we referred to propositional analysis (Kintsch, 1998) in order to measure the semantic contribution of the productions. This method consists of breaking down the text into minimal units of meaning to which we can apply a truth judgement relating to the degree of relevance (Tiberghien, 1997). According to Ouhaibia (2010, p.05), this decomposition makes it possible to "obtain a 'text base' which constructs the semantic microstructure. This microstructure is fundamental for the building of the semantic macrostructure and consequently ensures the referential coherence of the text".

5. Analysis of results

Following the analysis of the texts produced before and after the proposed didactic sequences, the achieved quantitative and qualitative results are presented and analysed below.

5.1. Adherence to the argumentative framework

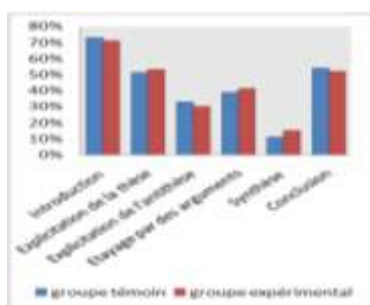


Figure 02. Adherence to the framework (Pre-test)

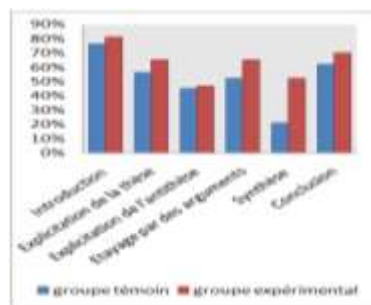


Figure 03. Adherence to the framework (Post-test)

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The graphs presented above show a comparison of the results for adherence to the argumentative framework in the pre-tests and post-tests carried out with the control group, which had received ordinary teaching in writing, and the experimental group, which had received reversal teaching. As we can see, the percentages for the presence of each stage of the dialectical plan reveals two key findings:

Firstly, the level of the students in the diagnostic assessment seems more or less homogeneous according to the five stages, with a few minor discrepancies: more than half of the learners manage to introduce, conclude and explain their thesis to be defended. However, the antithesis, the support of the arguments and the synthesis appear to be less developed, which makes the teaching of this textual genre, at the very least, essential in order to compensate for the lack of discourse skills.

Secondly, although we saw an improvement in the results of the post-tests in both learning situations, it turned out that the texts produced by the experimental group followed the dialectical framework more closely than those produced by the control group. The difference was even more noticeable at the synthesis level. Consequently, we can confirm our initial hypothesis that the flipped classroom enables learners to produce texts that are more in line with the required framework than in ordinary teaching.

5.2. Improvement in logical construction

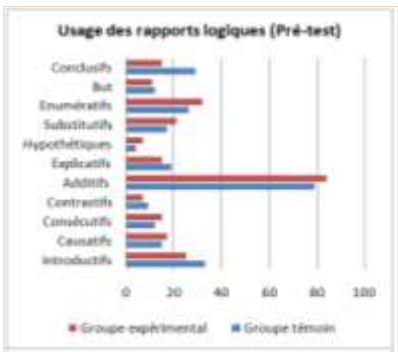


Figure 04. Use of logical relationships (Pre-test)

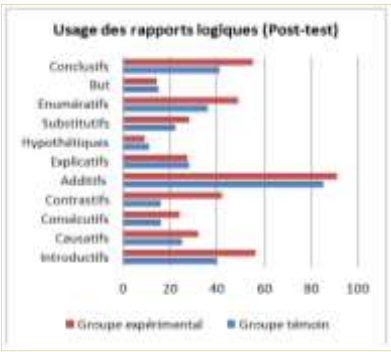


Figure 05. Use of logical relationships (Post-test)

As regards the logical construction of the texts produced, which is inevitably ensured by the use of logical relationship connectors, the figures presented in the graphs above attest to the improvement in the use of logical connectors in both groups compared with the diagnostic assessment.

Digging deeper into the results provided by the analysis of the scripts, we find that the learners optimised a homogeneous use of additives, substitutives, explicatives, hypotheticals, causatives and consecutives in an almost convergent way in the summative assessment.

However, the occurrence of introductory, conclusive and contrastive markers in the experimental group far exceeded that of the control group. Given that the contrastive ratio is the basic index of the dialectical plan, this improvement is in line with the results mentioned earlier, according to which the students who benefited from inverted teaching were more respectful of the argumentative framework.

5.3. Information content of the texts produced

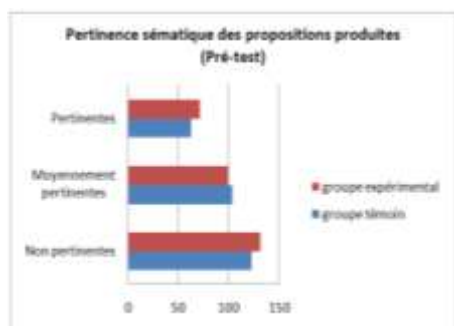


Figure 06. Semantic value of texts (pre-tests)

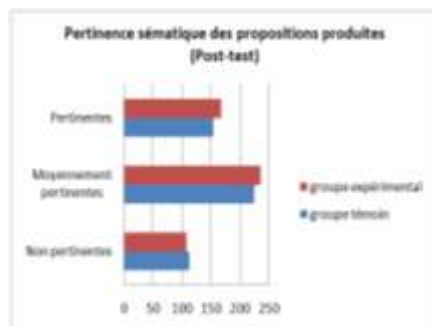


Figure 07. Semantic value of texts (post-test)

A focus on the results relating to the semantic value of the texts produced in the two learning situations (reversed vs. ordinary) reveals a convergence in the relevance of the propositions produced by the two upstream groups. In this respect, we noted that the experimental group produced more relevant, moderately

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relevant and irrelevant information in the pre-tests, although the difference was far from significant compared with the control group.

The same observation can be made when analysing the post-tests, insofar as both groups improved the semantic construction of their texts. However, the difference in semantic contribution between the two types of teaching remained minimal and insignificant in the summative evaluation. However, the last hypothesis stipulating that the texts produced would be more valuable, in terms of their informational contribution, in the reversal teaching situation than in the control group, is rejected.

6. Discussion

Digging deeper into the results, we can notice that the extent of the effect of the flipped classroom on the improvement of argumentative productions in terms of respect for the argumentative framework, the relevant use of logical relationships and the semantic contribution of the texts produced. Hence we can draw up an assessment from which a few salient points deserve to be examined below. From the outset, in terms of discourse, the flipped classroom seems to be the most optimal environment for writing texts that conform to the argumentative genre, compared with the ordinary learning environment, especially in terms of the phases specific to the dialectical plan (antithesis, synthesis), where the difference is very significant.

It follows that, in terms of logical construction, the learners in the experimental group achieved a better logical construction of their texts, which can be seen in the increase in the relevant use of connectors, particularly contrastive connectors, which are the keystone of the dialectical plan. Therefore, the learners assimilated discourse theory relating to the argumentative genre effectively in the flipped classroom. It should be remembered that this knowledge was transmitted remotely via video clips in complete autonomy and applied in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher.

However, from a semantic point of view, the results did not seem to favour flipped teaching insofar as the difference between the improvement of the control group and the experimental group was minimal compared with the pre-tests. Obviously, the semantic relevance of the statements is unequivocally linked to the mobilisation of a body of encyclopaedic knowledge relating to the subject being dealt with (vaccination). These findings about the positive effect of the flipped

classroom on optimising writing skills are all the more perceptible in terms of rhetorical knowledge of the argumentative genre, compared with encyclopaedic knowledge, which testifies to the positive effect of video capsules on the assimilation and memorisation of this theoretical knowledge.

In this respect, a great deal of research (Legros & Crinon, 2002; Coiro, 2003; Tricot, 2007) has attested to the cognitive contribution of digital tools, which make it possible "to design and validate aids and aid systems at all levels and in all phases of reading, comprehension and production" (Marin & Legros, 2008, p.133). Recently, faced with the excessive spread of technologies, including video capsules, "the use of paper-based media is becoming less widespread in favour of more digital practices by learners" (Déro, 2019, p.348).

The use of video capsules can avoid saturation of attentional cognitive resources as learners face up to the monomodal constraint (visual or sound information source alone) and are open to exploiting multimodal digital media (Roussel, 2021, p.152). This is why varying digital resources leads to a better understanding/memorisation of theoretical knowledge transmitted at a distance. This refers in particular to Paivio's double coding theory (1971, cited by Baccino; Draï-Zerbib, 2015, p. 203), according to which presentation in visual and auditory modality in a learning support confers better recall of the items included than those coded in a monomodal support.

Moreover, the most advanced cognitive models of text production (Baddeley, 1992, Hayes, 1996) assign a central role to memory in the writing process. This role, with the help of digital tools and support systems, is facilitated insofar as these aids appear as "external memories" (Marin & Legros, 2008, p.134). In other words, they are like a database from which the learner draws knowledge and compares it with his or her own in order to "contribute to the construction of new knowledge and the development of skills in understanding and producing text" (ibid.).

However, over and above the growing role of theoretical knowledge of the genre in the writing task, encyclopaedic knowledge has an impact on the quality of the texts produced, since it inevitably depends on the knowledge, know-how and interpersonal skills which the learner has stored in his long-term memory of the world around him and which will be semantically activated in the writing process. At this stage of complexity, we return to Fayol's postulates (2020, p.120)

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stipulating that "knowledge about the theme influences both the product and the production process. Often neglected, this dimension has a strong influence on performance and limits the texts or themes to be written". Without being exhaustive, developing this encyclopaedic knowledge requires in-depth investment and longitudinal teaching compared with rhetorical knowledge, which can be worked on across the board, which is one of the limitations of our experimental protocol.

Conclusion

In conclusion, flipping the classroom certainly presents a challenge for the language teacher, but it is above all a resource that enables him or her to vary and differentiate classroom practices in presence and at a distance. In fact, the improvement in writing skills as a function of theoretical knowledge of the argumentative genre suggests that the reversal system, through the variety of learning methods it offers both face-to-face and remotely, in groups or individually, and the diversity of communication tools on offer, ranging from face-to-face to synchronous/asynchronous communication via video clips, may contribute to developing the skill of written production at the discursive level. However, a great deal of work remains to be done to adapt this system so that it contributes to enriching learners' encyclopaedic knowledge at the epistemic level.

This positive contribution gives teachers more freedom, availability and flexibility, mainly in terms of space and time, to vary the learning materials according to the profiles of the learners and, consequently, to provide more effective remediation and differentiation compared with transmissive teaching. As for the learner, he or she can proceed at his or her own pace and work independently using the tools suggested by the reversal system, such as video capsules, which offer the possibility of reviewing the course several times, enabling each learner to acquire knowledge at his or her own pace.

All things considered, these parameters have enabled learners to optimise their knowledge of the argumentative genre compared with transmissive teaching, which focuses more on vertical exposure of knowledge, with the teacher as the sole possessor, to the detriment of autonomous and collaborative assimilation in the flipped classroom, hence the involvement of constructivist and socioconstructivist theories in the advent of this innovative method.

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