

Innovation in French language teaching: between pedagogical requirements and practical considerations

Zineb Hmidi¹ and Moulay Mohamed Tarnaoui²

¹Society, Language, Art and Media Research Laboratory (LARSLAM), Ibn Zohr University, Morocco.

²Society, Language, Art and Media Research Laboratory (LARSLAM), Ibn Zohr University, Morocco.

Corresponding author : zineb.hmidi@edu.uiz.ac.ma

Abstract. The main thrust of this research is that improving learning outcomes lies not only on improving pedagogy by introducing new techniques, but also on addressing all factors that directly or indirectly affect teaching and learning. The crucial objective of this article is to discuss some issues related to the concept of pedagogical innovation and how it can be applied to the teaching of the French language. However, before addressing these issues and examining ways and means of implementing this concept, it is worth recalling the evolution of this concept in terms of means to achieve educational objectives. Indeed, for effective learning, the integration of ICT alone could not improve learning because attention must also be focused on the ability of teachers to change their attitude in order to respond to existing real challenges. Moreover, the invention of new devices and processes is only valid if pedagogy is oriented by a search for meaning by putting it on the horizon of the purpose of educational institutions.

Keywords: learning, pedagogical innovation, ICTE, educational devices.

1 Introduction

The forces of dynamics, coupled with the assessment reports of international organizations and agencies, exert strong pressure on governments to change. As a result, modes of change flourish by giving rise to the novelty of models, slogans, recommendations, guidelines, and practices. Thus, the quest for novelty and innovation becomes greater than ever. In a sector like education, which is known to be very conservative, reactions to pressures for change are varied and range from rejection, imitation, adoption, adaptation, etc.

The paradigm shift to learning, among others, centering, autonomy, learning strategies, high-level skills, and critical thinking is pushing teachers to change their approach, strategies, and techniques. In other words, they must be innovative. However, it is legitimate to ask the following questions: Are teachers not innovative enough? (Tricot, 2017). What are the prerequisites for pedagogical innovation? At what level and under what circumstances can innovation be introduced? To what extent are teacher-pedagogical advisors prepared and willing to be innovative when they are expected to implement a formal curriculum in accordance with a set of official rules and guidelines and prepare their learners to

take national examinations? These are some of the questions that need to be addressed before embarking on the substance of pedagogical innovation. The crucial objective of this article is to discuss the issues related to the concept itself and how it can be applied to teaching the French language. However, before addressing these questions and examining the ways and means of implementing pedagogical innovation, it is worth recalling the evolution of this concept in terms of means to achieve educational objectives.

2 Definition and necessity of pedagogical innovation

A brief review of the existing literature indicates that many definitions are available. These have historically evolved, particularly with the emergence of new approaches to education in general and the teaching of the French language in particular. The following, although broad, offers a general definition.

Indeed, "pedagogical innovation" is defined as the emergence of new learning models supported by the use of technology and networking technologies. In addition, organizational innovation is defined as the emergence of new organizational models that support learning. In both cases, the term "new" does not imply the emergence of unprecedented models, but rather refers to models that are substantially different from current practices in formal education and training contexts. CRC, EU, 2010 p.13. As mentioned in the introduction, the pressure to innovate is greater today. In addition to the technological revolution that increasingly affects all aspects of our lives, including education, many factors explain this trend among the concerns (economic, social, etc.), which currently underpin the field of education, seem very influential and clearly revolve around the following:

The pressure to increase equity and improve student outcomes is growing around the world. As a result, teaching practices as opposed to students' original variables such as socioeconomic status and cultural capital are factors affecting student learning that are more easily modifiable. In addition, other professional practices are attracting attention, particularly those that have contributed to transforming the school into a professional learning community* (OECD, 2014, p.15; in Patrick. Rayou, 2017)).

However, despite all the claims that can be made, pedagogical innovation as a concept and as a practice is not a recent phenomenon. Drawing its sources from various fields, pedagogical innovation has accompanied all the educational changes that have occurred since the twentieth century. Indeed, a careful examination of the history of pedagogy indicates that many pedagogical revolutions have taken place and have affected all aspects of education. These range from educational concepts to educational planning, curricula, teaching methods and techniques, assessment

*OECD, (2014).PISA Results 2012: *Equity for Excellence (Volume II)*: Giving every

student the opportunity to succeed, PISA, OECD Publishing.

and examination methods and techniques, classroom management, teacher training, etc. As it is practically impossible to take stock of pedagogical innovation in all these areas, we will focus on pedagogical innovation in general terms, showing the areas of innovation in teaching the French language in order to illustrate not only the evolution of pedagogical innovation but especially to highlight the evolution of the concept.

Traditionally, the concern for knowledge has often been posed to that of pedagogy, as if scholars were naturally pedagogues and as if concern for pedagogy were the mark of disinterest or at least a certain casualness towards knowledge. We observe this opposition of knowledge and pedagogy in the recent "quarrels" around school reforms since the 1980s. Durkheim says that "pedagogy is nothing but reflection applied as methodically as possible to the things of education[†]." (Durkheim, 1990). In other words, pedagogy is a subject in its own right in educational policy. Any pedagogical reflection strives to reconstruct a new articulation of its methods.

During the last century, the field of education in general and that of teaching the French language in particular witnessed many pedagogical "revolutions" across the educational spectrum: approaches, programs, teaching methods and techniques, and materials. When they were launched, they have labeled "Innovations". Criticism came from a variety of sources such as advances in knowledge and technology, economic and social pressures, competition, human development, etc. The teaching of the French language is perhaps one of the areas of education that best illustrates the educational "revolution" especially since the adoption of discovery and project approaches. Thus, the technological revolution has given rise to new teaching methodologies (vs. methods) that have become significant premises and appropriate undertakings for pedagogical innovation.

Innovation as a concept and as a practice has gained momentum and has become a widespread slogan. Therefore, sources of innovation were sought in all fields: industry, business, IT, media, internal, etc., and other disciplines such as computer science, management, communication, neuroscience, social psychology, anthropology, cultural and media studies, etc.

2.1 Innovation: a conceptual framework

Originally, pedagogical innovation was assimilated into pedagogical practices inspired by the technological innovation of the twentieth century, coupled with professional behaviors and actions largely inspired by various psychological academic results rooted in *Behaviorism* or *Cognitivism*. This is how most educational practices today (curriculum, classroom practices, assessment, etc.) illustrate this approach. In addition, the main driver has been pedagogical effectiveness measured in terms of educational performance. We point out that we

[†]Durkheim, E, (1990). *L'évolution pédagogique en France*, introduction by M. Halbwachs,

Alcan ; reprint "Quadrige", PUF.

reject the idea that pedagogy can be reduced to the invention of techniques or processes. However, a recent trend is gradually taking hold, giving a new dimension to pedagogical innovation:

[...] Research on school effectiveness asserts that practices based on these theoretical ideas are insufficient to promote student learning. On the contrary, a combination of clear and well-structured classroom management, a supportive and student-centered classroom climate, and cognitive activation (stimulating content that promotes deep reflection in the student) has been shown to be effective. The conceptual framework thus integrates both socio-constructivist thinking and more classical research on product processes that builds a bridge between Constructivism and direct teaching approaches to education[‡].(OECD, 2012).

As suggested above, pedagogical innovation should not be limited to the use of technology or the use of new teaching techniques or classroom management techniques but should be conceived as encompassing both new techniques and traditional modes of teaching and learning. The ultimate goal is to achieve better learning outcomes and thus school efficiency. Indeed, research on school effectiveness clearly indicates that improving learning outcomes lies not only in improving pedagogy by introducing new techniques but in addressing all factors that directly or indirectly affect teaching and learning. Moreover, any conception of innovation cannot ignore the influence of learners' environment on their learning patterns, strategies, and achievements. All these aspects pose real challenges for families, schools, and teachers.

3 Pedagogical innovation in the face of current educational challenges

The new millennium is characterized by rapid and extensive use of technology and families are currently experiencing unprecedented changes that are manifested in new patterns of behavior towards traditional institutions, including schools, especially among young people. Today, no one can deny the effects of multimedia information technologies and the Internet on education[§] (F. Mangenot, 2000; P. Meirieu, 2000). On the one hand, the paradigm shift towards focusing on learning, autonomy, learning strategies, high-level skills, critical thinking, etc., has created new demands and expectations requiring differentiated educational treatment. In the field of French language teaching, the adoption of the communicative approach, for example, in formal curricula poses enormous problems for practitioners. In the same vein, the adoption of a competency-based approach struggles to find its place in classroom practices. There are many reasons, among which we mention: lack of clarity of concepts, insufficient human and material resources, etc.

[‡]OECD, op. cit.

[§]Mangenot, F.,(2017).*The integration of ICTs in a systemic perspective*. Modern

On the other hand, the social changes brought about by, among others, the economic crisis, technology, globalization, democratization of access to information, and a demand for more freedom are increasingly creating a new social culture with new values, including those related to education. Indeed, the computer revolution is a good illustration of the changes that affect both society and school and that are reflected in new behaviors. "Electronic media (television, computer, interactive video) now dominate as the primary means by which people receive information and spend their free time. Electronic media will far exceed, for example, the influence that schools can have**". (Littlejohn:2000). In this turmoil, one of the main challenges facing the school is how to safeguard its main function as a place of education and learning as the social and cultural roles of the school are increasingly questioned, even if no one has yet called for its closure. Instead, many voices are being raised to demand change by reorganizing its different components and modes of organization. This is what we see in some private schools. Without succumbing to the current trend, the traditional public school has been able to impose new requirements provided that a new strategy is adopted.

3.1 Institutions for pedagogical innovation in Morocco

There is a broad field for pedagogical innovation that can lead to change. The example below from the Moroccan curriculum of French language teaching is an attempt not to give examples of pedagogical innovation but to show areas where this innovation can be designed and implemented. Taking into account the following general guidelines for secondary schools, teachers can design and implement appropriate tasks and activities as well as classroom management techniques to achieve the objectives set under the following standards:

3.1.1 Standards for the Teaching of the French Language

The French Language Teaching Standards refer to the guidelines and benchmarks that teachers and educators use to design and implement the French language curriculum and instruction. These standards generally describe the skills, knowledge, and competencies that learners need to acquire at different levels of competence and provide a framework for assessing and measuring their progress. These standards define students' expectations of language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening at each level, from beginner to advanced. For example, in France, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages^{††} (CEFR) provides a standard reference for language learning and

**Littlejohn Andrew, (2000). *Language Teaching for the Future. Shaping our futures:*

Proceedings of the 7th ELICOS Conference. Elicos, Sydney, Australia.

††Council of Europe, (2001). *A Common European Framework of Reference for*

Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Paris: Didier.

teaching and serves as a basis for French language teaching standards based on four strategies:

Communication: learners will communicate both orally and in writing, interpret oral and written messages, demonstrate cultural understanding, and present oral and written information to diverse audiences for a variety of purposes. Three modes of communication are concerned here: interpersonal, interpretative, and presentational communication.

Culture: learners will gain a deeper understanding of their culture(s) and other cultures in terms of perspectives (values, ideas, attitudes), practices (patterns of social interaction) and products (books, laws, music, etc.), and the connections learners will make with other subjects and acquire information and use it through French for their own purposes.

Comparison: learners will become aware of intercultural similarities and differences in terms of language(s) and culture(s).

Communities: learners will extend their learning experiences from the FLE classroom to the outside world through activities such as using the Internet. They will thus be made aware of the fact that we live in a global world.

Using these standards aims to guide their teaching and ensure that learners progress toward achieving their language learning objectives. This may involve selecting appropriate learning materials, designing activities and assessments, and providing targeted feedback to students.

Overall, having clear standards for teaching French ensures that learners receive a high-quality education that is consistent with best practices in language teaching and learning.

3.2 Areas of pedagogical innovation in French language teaching

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in pedagogical innovation in the teaching of French. Among the areas where innovative approaches have been implemented, we find technology that has transformed the way we teach and learn French. Innovative tools such as online language labs, virtual reality environments, mobile apps, and social media platforms have created new opportunities for language learning. Teachers can use these tools to engage students and provide more personalized instruction. Another area of innovation relates to task-based language teaching^{††} (TBLT) which is an approach that emphasizes the use of real-world tasks as the basis for language teaching. In the TBLT, students work on tasks that require them to use French in meaningful ways. This approach promotes learner autonomy and provides opportunities for students to develop their communication skills. In addition, innovation in pedagogy can focus on content

^{††}Ellis, R., (2021). *Task-Based Language Teaching*. In: Mohebbi, H., Coombe, C. (eds)

Research Questions in Language Education and Applied Linguistics. Springer Texts in Education. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79143-8_25

and language-integrated learning^{§§} (CLIL) which is an approach that consists of teaching the content of a subject in a foreign language. In the teaching of French, CLIL^{***} can be used to teach subjects such as history, geography, and literature. This approach helps students develop their language skills while learning about other subjects. In addition, there is collaborative learning involving students working together on tasks and projects. This approach promotes interaction and communication between students, which can help them develop their language skills. Collaborative learning also helps students develop their interpersonal and teamwork skills. Finally, game-based learning promotes the use of games and fun activities to teach French. Games can be used to teach vocabulary, grammar, and communication skills. This approach can be particularly effective for young learners, who may find teaching the traditional language boring.

In sum, there are many innovative approaches to teaching French that can help students develop their language skills in meaningful and engaging ways. By integrating technology, task-based teaching, CLIL, collaborative learning, and play-based learning, teachers can create a dynamic and effective learning environment for their students.

3.2.1 Dimensions of pedagogical practices in the Classroom

Pedagogy refers to the art and science of teaching and involves a complex set of practices that teachers use to facilitate classroom learning. The dimensions of classroom pedagogical practices are the different aspects of teaching that teachers must take into account when designing and delivering instruction. We find the structuring dimension of pedagogical practices that clarify the structure of the unit or lesson and its ultimate objectives and check whether all students have understood the content and performed their tasks. Another dimension focused on pupil guidance: group work and adaptation of teaching, pupils' participation in classroom planning. It should be noted that these two dimensions require practices

^{§§}de Craen, V., Joret, P-M. and Surmont, J., (2015). 15. *Emile in all his states. Why multilingual education is better education. The role of implicit learning.* In X. Gradoux (ed.), *Agir dans la diversité des langues: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Anne-Claude Berthoud* (pp. 237-250). Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium: De Boeck Supérieur.

^{***}Damanticou, E. and Kordoni, A., (2020). *The integration of CLIL in Greek primary education through English as a foreign language, Contexts and didactics* [Online], 15 | 2020, published online 11 July 2020, accessed 26 March 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ced/1988>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ced.1988>

that involve close interaction of the teacher with the whole class, small groups, or individual students. Then comes an improved dimension of activities that synthesizes practices that allow students to work independently over a longer period of time. The learning environment is also an important dimension of pedagogical practice. This refers to the physical and social setting in which learning takes place. Teachers can create a positive learning environment by setting clear expectations, providing a safe and welcoming space, and encouraging collaboration and active participation.

In summary, the dimensions of classroom pedagogical practices are diverse and interconnected^{†††}. By paying attention to these dimensions, teachers can create a rich and effective learning experience for their students. Indeed, education aims to provide learners with an adequate and safe learning environment led to learning using all necessary resources (material and human) to help them develop their potential and ensure their well-being taking into consideration the differences between learners that require differentiated treatment and adaptation.

3.2.2 How can teachers be innovative?

Innovation in education is essential to keep pace with the rapidly changing world and meet the needs of modern learners. Teachers can innovate in many ways, including embracing technology by leveraging its power to improve their teaching strategies. For example, teachers can use online platforms to facilitate discussions, assign and grade assignments, and broadcast multimedia content. In addition, teachers can be innovative by creating a collaborative learning environment and encouraging collaboration between students can create an atmosphere of teamwork and can help students learn from each other. Teachers can create group activities, assign group projects, and foster discussion to encourage collaboration. In addition, personalized teaching may also be possible. This is because each student learns differently and teachers can differentiate teaching according to the individual needs of each student. Teachers can assess students' learning styles and design the teaching that best meets each student's needs. Moreover, creativity and teaching go hand in hand^{†††}. Thus, teachers can encourage creativity by providing students with open assignments, encouraging brainstorming, and providing opportunities for creative expression, while emphasizing critical thinking: teachers can promote

^{†††}Hilton, H.,(2014).*Terminological development: to end the acquisition-learning*

dichotomy in language didactics. Research and Pedagogical Practices in Specialty

Languages, **33(2)**, 34-50. Available online

<https://journals.openedition.org/apliut/4385#quotation>.

^{†††}Kordoni, A. and Belli, C.,(2018).*Inverting the language class: evolutions, objectives,*

challenges. Psychology-Pedagogy. University of Craiova, Romania, 7-19.

critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze and evaluate information, challenge assumptions, and solve problems.

In fact, innovation in education requires a willingness to try new approaches and a commitment to creating an environment that fosters creativity and critical thinking. Teachers can innovate by embracing technology, creating a collaborative learning environment, personalizing teaching, encouraging creativity, and emphasizing critical thinking.

3.3 How can different types of activities promote effective learning?

Clarify the structure and purpose of the learning experience by informing, describing, explaining, and using questions, dialogues, and discussions to facilitate and explore student learning. Promote improved learning through structured reading and writing tasks, investigative work, individualized work programs, small group learning, or through the experience and use of ICT. It is undeniable that the task of being innovative seems daunting. However, in order to meet current and future challenges and achieve effective learning through the implementation of the suggested actions, there is an urgent need to develop and strengthen a new culture of education within schools. This culture will require a change in the vision of the school and its roles including the roles of all actors in the educational enterprise. This can start by breaking down the barriers posed by the traditional conservatism of school teachers and parents by gradually introducing new attitudes towards learning and education, one of which concerns the professional development of the teacher^{§§§}.

3.3.1 Teacher Professional Development and Teacher Communities

Since its inception, the concept has evolved and been operationalized in various ways. The following definition captures the essence of teacher professional development in all its dimension indicating areas of potential educational innovation and thus the effectiveness of learning. "Personal development goes hand in hand with other forms of learning such as the acquisition of knowledge and skills for practical and professional purposes. Evidence shows that interaction between members – regardless of the purpose of the community – is mainly achieved through the acquisition of horizontal skills such as critical thinking, active participation, initiative, and socio-civic competencies. Little support is provided to members to structure the scaffolding they are learning or to develop learning skills^{****}. Aceto, S, et al (2010).

Traditionally, teachers have limited their role to the transmission of knowledge by implementing the various components of the curriculum. Today, they can no longer

^{§§§}Vieluf S., et al.,(2012).*Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: TALIS Results*, Publishing, OECD.

^{****}Aceto, op. cit. Cit.

afford to lie down in the comfortable position defined by the curriculum, textbooks, and guidelines that provide a sense of security. Indeed, the need for change and therefore continuous development is no longer a sinecure. One way to enhance professional development is to create professional learning communities. In fact, the changing environment is constantly pushing teachers to change their ways of doing things. Many factors affect learning and teachers can no longer work effectively individually; Tasks can be manageable if teachers embrace the culture of professional learning communities. "The concept of professional learning communities is also rooted in socio-constructivist ideas as well as models of learning organizations. These come from the business sector focus on teacher-student interactions and how these interactions can achieve the goals of fostering student learning^{††††}" Aceto, S, et al (2010). As such, these interactions are governed by norms, rules, and expectations that are, to a large extent, shaped by teachers and school leaders requiring a system that fosters collaboration and the sharing of values and knowledge.

4 Conclusion

Just like states, economies, societies, etc., education systems are today more than ever challenged by rapid changes in all areas. Indeed, globalization has reached an unprecedented level of influence on people and is increasingly breaking down borders and barriers, leaving no one behind. Liberal values, among others, of competition, efficiency, and profitability have become the driving forces of all systems, including education. As such, schools are required to address these challenges; otherwise, they run the risk of becoming obsolete or simply disappearing, at least in their current form. Similarly, teachers, whatever their specialties, have a crucial role to play. The survival of their socio-economic and cultural functions depends largely on their ability to modify their attitudes and behavior in order to respond to existing real challenges. Moreover, the invention of new devices and processes is only valid if pedagogy is oriented by a search for meaning by putting it in the horizon of the purpose of educational institutions^{‡‡‡‡}.

The eagerness to continuously improve students' educational experience has continued to grow worldwide. We are now more aware of how teaching practices help shape students' learning experiences and advance their motivations and achievements. When teachers work well together, they also tend to work well with students. It has therefore become important to encourage teachers to share their expertise and experience more and in a way that goes beyond the exchange of information.

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^{††††} Ibid.

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