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The Impact of Tales on Learning French in the Algerian Primary School

تأثير سرد القصص على تعلم الفرنسية،
في المدرسة الابتدائية الجزائرية

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Abstract:

Education for children at the age of six is enshrined in Algerian laws and the constitution. The teaching of foreign languages starts with French, then English in the 3rd Primary School and 1st Middle School, respectively. Currently a large number of the pupils in the primary school face difficulties in leaning French. We are concerned with this situation and feel urged to find solutions to the 5th year primary school students' difficulties in understanding French. In our hypothesis, we devise the story to provide the learners at this phase with better remedial means to reading comprehension. The impact of the story is great on pupils and thus its effect on their involvement in reading texts in French is conspicuous. The results obtained are positive according to the observation of the reading activity and the distribution of the questionnaire to the teachers.

Keywords: reading; comprehension; didactics of reading; story

الملخص:

إن تعليم الأطفال في سن السادسة مكرس في القوانين الجزائرية والدستور. يبدأ تدريس اللغات الأجنبية بالفرنسية في الثالثة ابتدائي ثم الإنجليزية في الأولى متوسط. يواجه عدد كبير من المتعلمين في المرحلة الابتدائية حاليًا صعوبات في قراءة اللغة الفرنسية كلغة أجنبية ولا يمكنهم الحصول على معنى اللغة المكتوبة. نحن ننبه عن هذا الخلل ونحث على إيجاد حلول لصعوبات طلاب المدارس الابتدائية في فهم النصوص باللغة الفرنسية. يركز هذا المقال على "دور القصة في فهم النص لطلاب الصف الخامس".

ننصوّر سرد القصص كوسيلة لتزويد المتعلمين في هذه المرحلة لفهم أفضل لنصوص الفرنسية من خلال سرد القصص على هؤلاء المتعلمين الصغار وبالتالي فإن تأثيرها على مشاركتهم في تعلم الفرنسية يبدو جليًا من خلال النتائج الإيجابية التي تم الحصول عليها وكذلك وفقًا لملاحظة نشاط القراءة وتوزيع الاستبيان على المعلمين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: القراءة. فهم ؛ تعليم القراءة ؛ القصة

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1.INTRODUCTION

In the Algerian school, French is not a common language of learning at the early school age. Consequently, when the beginner pupils start learning this language, it is not only a "foreign" language but rather a "strange" language as it differs totally from the mother tongue Arabic. The former, French, is with left-to-right direction, while the latter is from right-to-left. Besides, the learner might stumble over the new alphabets because of the way the two languages are written with different

scripts. However, learning to read French language helps learners with good speech and better writing it. It is thus, significant to give priority to train pupils to read because this enables learners to communicate, to know more and above all to act using French language. Nowadays due to globalisation, the world has become a tiny village where the teaching of foreign languages is necessary for easy contact between the world people. By reading more and more of French texts, the students will certainly develop their reading skills, habits and their ideas. With the ideas they get while reading, the learners will be able to converse with others, argue with them and convince them if necessary. Moreover, they will come across new ideas and will be exposed to different cultural situations which they either assimilate or at least compare to theirs.

From this, reading becomes an obligation or even a requirement for the professional, cultural, social and personal needs. Reading a foreign language means understanding other people's way of life. Hence, learning to read is learning to understand what is written (Charmeux, 2018). Reading is then a whole of mechanisms which the apprentice reader implements in order to be able to learn how to understand various kinds of texts including a story. The story helps in guiding a learner to write a foreign language, which is the purpose behind learning French at the Algerian primary school.

Reading, as psycholinguists affirm, is "the first of all the implementation of the various perceptive and cognitive processes of dealing with letters and rendering it possible for the reader to identify written words" (Marin & Legros, 2018, p. 28). Stories generally exert an impact on young learners of foreign languages and thus there is an effect on their implication in the reading of the texts chosen for this purpose. These texts

constitute stories which are particularly suitable for learners at young age. They must be stories that are commonly used in learning. In this respect, to undertake our research, we have initially clarified certain notions that are related to the process of reading

2. Reading as a distinctive Recall

According to the dictionary *Le Petit Larousse Illustré 2012* (the Small Illustrated Larousse), reading means:

- To recognise the graphic signs of a language, to form mentally or with high voice the sounds which these signs or their combinations represent and to associate a direction to them.

- To decipher a text.

- *To utter a written text (in voice), to make its content meaningful for others.* In other words, reading is to extract from a logogram the pronunciation and the significance which corresponds to it.

3. To learn to read to know what to read and to enjoy reading

J Jaurès advised tutors to help children to learn to read in an easy way and without hesitation because reading is the key to all the rest of the learning process. He adds that the teacher is judged according to the learners' reading pace because learning how to read is the area where the true difficulty of any teaching resides (Erny, 2003). To know to read is not only to recognise the letters, to assemble them and translate them into sounds but also, to explore the whole sentence at a glance. Moreover, learning to read boosts the taste and the pleasure of reading.

Consequently, it is advisable foreign language teachers to use stories in teaching children how to read well. The purpose behind using a story in teaching French, especially the kind of a folktale, is to stimulates the learner's intellect through a rubric 'story' and to give the opportunity to the various learners to participate in the course, by creating a French-speaking environment. After all, the desired outcome of the language learning process is the ability to communicate competently and not the ability to speak the language exactly as a native speaker does. In the analytic approach, the teacher should help the learner become familiar with language beyond the level of the sentence in order to make students able to use and understand written or spoken discourse (Türkyılmaz, 2015).

The two didacticians P.Guilbert and Verdelhan when thinking of children who are learning to write they suggest familiarizing the child with reading. They estimate that to learn how to read contributes to the development of the general competence of learning at the textual, grammatical and lexical levels (Claudine, 1996, p.46). These two experts in the field of teaching affirm that the acquisition of a language goes hand in hand with learning to read this language. We suggest the story to help the reader build up a lexical and syntactic luggage that would enable him to read. In this sense, Sylvie Heude adds that success in comprehension of a foreign language depends much on the learner's ability to move from the least part of a text to the broadest one, i.e., to develop novice learner's comprehension from the smallest bit of a text to the whole of it (2018).

4. Methods of teaching the reading skill

There are a number of methods or series of procedures that can be used or adapted to be used according to each different

situation for the orientations and the implementation of the teaching of the reading. Three essential methods are recommended:

4.1. Synthetic or syllabic method:

For this method, the teaching of the reading starts with the smallest linguistic unit which is the letter-sound, a grapheme and a phoneme. Once that a learner gets commands of his alphabets, he starts to go towards the syllable, then towards the word and then towards the sentence. In other words, the spirit goes from the graphic signs to the deciphering of the words and the sentence, i.e., from the part to the whole. Here, the teacher is a facilitator and a collaborator in the process of learning the French language by leading the learner to think and act in order to help the learner develop his own autonomy and critical thinking

4.2. Analytical or total method

Nowadays learning a foreign language, contrary to the precedent traditional methods of learning, proceeds from the simplest graphic elements to the more complex ones by analysing the different elements in the foreign language. This method makes it possible for the child to develop his visual memory and his attention. Nevertheless, the child can guess the words which he encounters without any necessity to decipher them. Social Science Researchers believe that more than 60% of the learners are gifted with visual strength (Vakos, 2003). They find it easy to learn through descriptions. They often recognize words by sight. They often have well developed imaginations. Visual learners rely mostly on written information, notes, diagrams and pictures.

4.3. Mixed or eclectic method

This method brings the two preceding ones together by adapting them both. It is the most practised method of teaching the reading skill. This method knows a large success. The fact that it covers the two needs — the analytic and the synthetic methods — makes it possible to reach the sense and the code simultaneously. As we are living in a world of dissimilar multitude of signifiers for a single code, foreign language teachers are doomed to teach their pupils to recognise the various semantic relationships between utterances. The *meaning* of a word is *meant by* the person who utters it and is *taken to mean* something by the person who hears it (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1995).

5. Teaching of comprehension in reading

In this experience in teaching French as a foreign language (FLE), in order to understand a text, we devise some procedures to help pupils learn French. These procedures must be followed in the long term to ensure a fairly relevant result. While dealing with a text in a French course the students move from of the conscious use to the automatic and instinctive use. Then they start decoding written material to end with interpreting literal comprehension, i.e., to retell the key events from a text using their own words. To follow these procedures, there are some strategies. Among these strategies the researcher lists the following ones that he finds quite useful and effective:

- Analysis of the form of the texts;
- self-management of comprehension (e.g. checking of comprehension during the reading);
- use of graphic and semantic representation (synthesizing and conceptual images);

- Analyzing Text Structure and Features
- Use of metacognitive strategies such as replay, reformulation, silent reading, story scanning.
- formulation of questions and the corresponding answers and searching for more clarification;
- making predictions
- summary;

6. Overview on the textbook of the 5th PS

The textbook is considered as the main educational object for learning foreign languages without contest. Contrary to those shabby and monotonous old manuals, it nowadays bears an attractive front cover. This one comprises in top, the emblem of the Algerian State: *People's Democratic Republic of Algeria* and *Ministry of National Education*. The textbook for the 5th year primary and the title: *My French book* "Mon livre de français". Below, there is the school level: *5th PS* (Five primary school), and an attractive, coloured image, tempting introducing pupils.

The school manual consists of 144 pages as a whole, with a high number of titles and subtitles, comprising:

04 projects which proceed in 03 sequences

Project 01: introducing jobs;

Project 02: reading and writing a tale;

Project 03: reading and writing a documentary text;

Project 04: reading and writing a prescriptive text.

As for a sequence, it is a duration of two weeks, spread out to six sessions. Each session lasts 90 min and is divided into two activities of forty-five min. The latter contains headings and sub-headings: the activity of the oral examination is entitled: *the*

oral activity and the part of the reading is entitled: *the reading activity*. As for the structure activities (grammar) , one notes that they are presented under the heading *I learn in... (I learn in... vocabulary, I learn in... grammar, I learn in... conjugation, I learn in.. orthography.*

The written expression is divided into two headings entitled: *I learn to write* and *the written production*. In addition to these, there are other headings: *I discover a long history* in the form of fragmented texts and *evaluation* in the form of an exercise at the end of each sequence. At the end of each project, *a study of text* is proposed to accustom the pupils to this kind of texts and to prepare them to future final examination. This activity is followed with *a poem* in order to allow pupils discriminate the various oral statements using their prosodic features.

7. The Role of the story in the pupils' learning:

The 2nd project "Reading and writing a tale" is divided into three sequences entitled as follows:

- identifying the narrative structure of the tale
- identifying the characteristics of a tale
- allowing the characters to speak about the tale

This project presents several texts for the pupils to study. The texts cover various topics for pupils to comment on/ interpret, for example: *The magic pencil*, *The small black cock*, *The stupid wolf*, and *The ogre's oak*. These are stories to serve as models/ rubrics for pupils to produce other stories of their own at the end of the project. Reading these stories, here, sets up the possibility of understanding of the general linguistic structures and the special text features (Deep Learning, 2018). There are texts through which Students monitor their understanding and

become encouraged to make a deeper analysis of characters to reach a synthesis of ideas. For example, after being directed towards an overall comprehension of the text these young learners will detect the various structures and decipher stereotypes. When the students manage to get the elements of a narrative together to create an overall meaning, they can retell a story and synthesise what has been read to the rest of their classmates. Then, they will be able to invent writing of their own or make similar stories; though the teacher remains the mentor for the learners' oral and writing expressions - which will help them to write well.

Oral comprehension and *written production* are skills that need to be developed by creating patterns that emphasize the specificities, characteristics, and type of utterances across different linguistic cursors. These steps are very important to build the general meaning of the passage and to reproduce a similar text.

8. Aim of the study:

Our present study has four aims:

- identifying the causes of the insufficiency featured in reading and seeking the means and ways to cure it gradually;
- improving the practice of reading as pedagogues, specialists, and parents recommend and make of this situation a people's concern.
- creating an environment where reading foreign languages (in this situation, the French language at early age) becomes a fashion.

- inciting the pleasure of learning how to read with the FLE primary students.

9. The Methodology applied in the research

In this phase of collecting data for this research study, work is based mainly on:

- a) Observation during the five reading sessions;
- b) the questionnaire which is distributed to the FLE teachers.

9.1. Procedure of the investigation

This research consists of both the observation and the collection of data through the questionnaire to be filled in by ten teachers after a reading session to which I attended, asking them to consider my presence as an opportunity for a close observation and as a tool to guarantee that the course goes in a natural way without any other unplanned considerations: I think that the teachers should avoid giving answers that can be considered biased. For this, I planned the first task in one single school and the second task in a dozen schools.

To do this, I got an authorisation from the part of the Inspector of Primary Education in Khenchela district who made the necessary arrangements to allow me access as teacher-observer, to a number of primary schools higher than the one targeted above by the means of introductory letters addressed to the directors of these schools located in Khenchela area.

9.2. Observation, population, and field

The study was carried out on the level of the primary school "Berken Zarouel".

The target population of the observation consists of a class of 5th PS. of 23 students including 13 boys and 10 girls.

The investigation was made with the intention of observing the behaviour of pupils while learning reading courses. It consists of three parts:

- Pre-test: it resides in a documentary document entitled *the pollution of the oceans*

- Test: it consists of 03 stories whose themes are: *The Secrecy of the House*, *The Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Canary and Elephant*.

- Post-test: it consists of writing a summary of one of these texts in order to check the Comprehension. It should be known that the choice of text is left to the students' initiative.

9.3. Questionnaire ,location, population

The questionnaire starts with stating the purpose for which it is intended clearly to the target teachers. The researcher's queries are generally related to students' reading skills, comprehension and the choice of text. The questionnaire was hand-delivered to eighteen targeted FLE teachers working at the following eighteen schools: Hafidhi Mohamed El Hadi - Daoudi Abdel Hamid - Mebarki Zeroual - Ibn Sina - Menasria Ammar - Berken Farhet - Houha Athmane - Arbi Tebbessi- Belkassem Nsaibia - Tarbia or Ta'lim-Mansouri Mohamed Chérif - El Amir Abdel Kader- Ecole 20 Août - Gharyani Al-Moussa Radeh El Djadida - Bouchareb Abd Arrahmene - Kellil Moukhtar - Guouaref Lakhdar. The choice of the teachers is justified by the fact that they all were working with the 5th year classes at the

time of the investigation, which serve as the ground for our feedback

10. CONCLUSION

Many debates have been made around the topic of how to improve the level of the reading skill in foreign languages in the Algerian schools in the recent years. It is an ambiguous and complex topic. It is not easy to make a common consensus about the definition of *reading*; however, the majority agrees that *reading* does indeed go beyond the level of words. In fact, it is not just joining letters to obtain phonetic concepts. To read is to pass from the dimension of decoding and sound to go to the conquest of meaning. Therefore, this skill is almost essential and its acquisition remains a capital necessity. It is even more important when school children are engaged at early age with French as a foreign language (FLE). Indeed, learning to read through stories is closely related to motivation and pleasure throughout the whole learning process. Consequently the capital factor that can increase learners' motivation for learning French is to read folktales. The use of tales in primary school is therefore very interesting and profitable. It is good to introduce the children to the learning of foreign languages by means of a story, but it is necessary to exploit the story thoroughly, by making use of it at the different levels. In addition, reading texts that recounts well-known stories by learners - which they have already been told in their mother tongue - facilitates the understanding of the text in French.

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