

Challenges and Written production in French language learning

Producción escrita en el Aprendizaje de la Lengua Francesa

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to analyze the written production process in learning French as a foreign language (FLE) in a group of B1.2 level students at a Colombian public university. Using a qualitative approach and case study, non-participatory observations, interviews, and analysis of written productions were applied in three different contexts: independent work, classroom activities, and assessments. The theoretical foundations were based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2000) and the contributions of Vigner (2012), Chartrand (1993), Bouchard, and Kadi (2011), among others, who highlight linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic skills as pillars of the writing process.

The results show that students recognize written production as an integral skill that combines discursive, linguistic, and sociocultural elements. They also value teacher support, planning, dictionary use, and prior reading as strategies for structuring their texts. Their strengths include coherence, cohesion, and vocabulary management, while their main difficulties are related to grammar, connectors, and error correction. The study highlights the importance of promoting teaching strategies that strengthen autonomy, reflective revision, and systematic writing practice in French language learning.

Keywords: written production; learning French; foreign language; language skills; sociolinguistic competence; pragmatic competence; writing strategies; university teaching.

Resumen

El estudio tuvo como propósito analizar el proceso de producción escrita en el aprendizaje del francés como lengua extranjera (FLE) en un grupo de estudiantes del nivel B1.2 de una universidad pública colombiana. Desde un enfoque cualitativo y estudio de caso, se aplicaron observaciones no participativas, entrevistas y análisis de producciones escritas en tres contextos distintos: trabajo autónomo, actividades en clase y evaluaciones. Los fundamentos teóricos se apoyaron en el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (Consejo de Europa, 2000) y en los aportes de Vigner (2012), Chartrand (1993), Bouchard y Kadi (2011), entre otros, quienes destacan las competencias lingüística, sociolingüística y pragmática como pilares del proceso de escritura.

Los resultados muestran que las estudiantes reconocen la producción escrita como una competencia integral que combina elementos discursivos, lingüísticos y socioculturales. Asimismo, valoran el acompañamiento docente, la planificación, el uso del diccionario y la lectura previa como estrategias para estructurar sus textos. Entre sus fortalezas se destacan la coherencia, cohesión y manejo del vocabulario; mientras que las principales dificultades están relacionadas con la gramática, los conectores y la corrección de errores. El estudio evidencia la importancia de promover estrategias didácticas que fortalezcan la autonomía, la revisión reflexiva y la práctica sistemática de la escritura en el aprendizaje del francés.

Palabras clave: producción escrita; aprendizaje del francés; lengua extranjera; competencias lingüísticas; competencia sociolingüística; competencia pragmática; estrategias de escritura; enseñanza universitaria.

1. Introduction

This research focused on the process of written production for learning French as a foreign language (FLE). Written production refers to the process by which ideas are recreated, and learners form and express feelings, opinions, thoughts, interests, criticisms, and reasoning as a form of communication with others. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), “in written production activities (writing or written expression), the language user, as a writer, produces a written text that is received by one or more readers” (Council of Europe, 2000).

In this regard, Thao (2007) states that written production “is an activity that has a purpose and meaning: learners write to communicate with one or more readers.” This project therefore focuses on the process of written production within the field of French as a foreign language (FLE) in a university context.

It was decided to conduct this research because written production is one of the most heavily emphasized skills in the B1.2 French course, where students express themselves and convey their ideas in writing. In this regard, it is considered important to understand how this skill is acquired, taking into account all the factors involved. In other words, the aim

is to observe the progress of students at this level in their writing, paying particular attention to linguistic competence and how students use syntax, morphology, lexicon, semantics, and spelling in their writing.

In addition, we analyzed how students approach the practice of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence, which is related to discursive competence, all of which are referenced in the CEFR.

Based on previous studies, some important elements in the teaching and learning process of written production were identified, such as the work of Vigner (2012), who highlights aspects related to the development of written discourse, such as planning, revision, text organization, rereading, textualization, and writing. On the other hand, regarding the elements of a written composition, the studies of Chartrand (1993), García (2010), and Tomas (1994) are taken into account, who assess the dimensions of linguistic, pragmatic, and textual competence. In line with Vigner, these authors emphasize the organization of ideas based on planning that precedes the writing of the text.

The contributions of Bouchard and Kadi (2011) are also considered, who propose a classification of texts from the perspective of a real classroom context, where students must identify literary and non-literary texts and understand how these allow them to categorize the types of texts that should be worked on during the learning of written production.

Likewise, Darmawangsa (2006) emphasizes the importance of using the internet as a pedagogical tool, as it allows teachers to achieve the objectives of

progressing learners toward written production, given that students can find information and correct their own work.

However, these previous studies do not delve deeply enough into the difficulties students face when writing. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze learners' difficulties and strengths, both in their independent work and in written productions completed in class and in exam situations. In other words, it seeks to identify how written production skills develop in three different situations.

This study is guided by the central question: How do FLE learners work on written texts inside and outside the classroom? To answer this question, we analyzed the strategies that students use when writing a text, identified the difficulties they face and their strengths, and examined the progress they have made during their learning process.

2. Theoretical framework

In this regard, Thảo (2007) states that written production is a practice with intention and meaning, through which students write in order to establish communication with one or more interlocutors. More recently, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2000) emphasizes text production and reception, noting that “in written production activities (writing or written expression), the language user, as a writer, produces a written text that is received by one or more readers” (Council of Europe, 2000).

This same document, in chapter five, lists the skills that learners must put into practice during their written production and which will be taken into account for this study.

Firstly, linguistic competence, which is made up of several sub-skills:

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2000), lexical competence is defined as mastery of the vocabulary of a language, comprising both lexical and grammatical elements, together with the ability to use them appropriately in different communicative contexts. Grammatical competence, on the other hand, refers to the ability to understand and express meaning through the construction of well-formed sentences, and is subdivided into two dimensions: morphology, which deals with the internal structure of words, and syntax, which deals with the organization of words within a sentence according to categories, functions, and structural rules.

The CEFR also highlights semantic competence, understood as the learner's awareness and control over the organization of meaning, and orthographic competence, which involves the ability to recognize and correctly produce the graphic symbols that make up written texts. However, the process of written production does not depend solely on linguistic aspects, but also on sociolinguistic competence, linked to the use of language in its social dimension, and pragmatic competence, related to knowledge of the principles governing the organization and appropriateness of discourse according to communicative functions and the discursive patterns used (Council of Europe, 2000).

The process of teaching written production.

In the process of teaching written production, there are numerous previous

studies related to how to teach writing. With regard to the process of teaching written production, the work of Vigner (2012) has been taken into account, who highlights aspects related to the development of written discourse, such as planning, revision, text organization, rereading, textualization, and writing.

Likewise, planning a text, which is related to gathering ideas, is the first phase that learners must complete before beginning to write; the next is textualization, which emphasizes the act of writing; and finally, revision, the stage in which the text is reread and corrected.

The process of learning written production.

Several authors have studied the process of learning written production. Bouchard and Kadi (2011), for example, classified texts from the perspective of a real classroom context, where students must identify literary and non-literary texts and understand how these texts can be categorized for use in the learning process.

For these authors, it is important for learners to practice writing, as this helps them in the language learning process.

Similarly, studies by Darmawangsa (2006) highlight the importance of using the Internet as a teaching tool, which allows teachers to achieve the objectives of progressing learners towards written production, given that students can find information there and correct their own written work. In this case, creating a blog motivates students to write texts with the aim of strengthening the writing process.

This is a form of teaching that encourages students to be critical of their own work.

Aspects of text production

When discussing the aspects necessary for written production, certain elements can be observed, such as planning, organizing ideas, control, textualization, vocabulary, and lexical, semantic, and syntactic knowledge for text production (Chartrand, 1993).

Barbier (2011) states that there are two types of aspects in written production. First, he points out the positive aspects, which include: the organization of ideas, control, planning, lexical and syntactic knowledge, rhetoric, stylistics, and writing skills, as well as semantics, grammar, vocabulary, and discursivity during textualization. However, he also states that there are negative aspects to the process of written production, such as difficulties in writing, especially in the formulation and composition of sentences, as well as word repetition, which can deteriorate the quality of a text.

For his part, Tomas (1994) takes into account the external structure of the text, which emphasizes cohesion and coherence, and the internal structure, which refers to the construction of sentences to form a text, considering elements such as pronouns, synonyms, verbs, punctuation marks, connectors, vocabulary, and the way in which different types of text are worked on in the classroom. In addition, he focuses on written production from a formal perspective, that is, on the use of language as a social activity that demonstrates argumentative ability in texts intended for publication, such as

articles, books, or academic contexts, where formal discourse can be observed depending on the type of production.

On the other hand, Kristmanson, Dicks, Bouthillier, and Bourgoin (2007) highlight the importance of vocabulary acquisition in written production, especially knowledge of synonyms, as well as the motivation and encouragement necessary to construct a text. From this perspective, students can organize their ideas based on a plan to begin writing their own texts.

Regarding the text revision stage, Demirtas and Gumus (2009) refer to the treatment of errors in written production, with the aim of correcting them. These authors explain that errors are the result of ignorance of grammatical rules, unlike mistakes, which are due to inattention or fatigue experienced by students at the time of writing.

It is relevant today to address the convergence between technology, pedagogy, and writing, as evidenced in recent studies that address the challenges of contemporary education. Vergara et al. (2022) analyze the articulation between Industry 4.0 and Education 4.0, highlighting the role of the Internet of Things (IoT) as a driver of transformation in educational processes by promoting active learning and pedagogical innovation. Along the same lines, Vásquez Ruiz, Caicedo Villamizar, and Gélvez Suárez (2023) propose the pedagogical strategy of suspense metamorphosis to strengthen creative writing in secondary school students, based on Kike Mailló's eighth dimension technique and Cassany's postulates, which enhance imagination and narrative coherence, although structural challenges in writing persist.

Complementarily, Caicedo et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of collaborative writing mediated by the teacher, identifying lexical-grammatical difficulties and proposing the use of digital tools and reflective feedback to consolidate writing skills. Vásquez (2025), for his part, demonstrates how critical reading strengthens generic skills and contributes to the fulfillment of SDG 4 by promoting critical thinking and educational sustainability. Likewise, Vásquez Ruiz, Plata, and Durán (2025) delve into the strengthening of writing and oral skills in teacher training, highlighting advances in the critical and communicative abilities of future graduates. Finally, Vásquez and Caicedo (2023), in *Los roleanos y otras narraciones*, consolidate creative writing as an educational action research practice, highlighting youth literary expression and its contribution to the development of communication skills in hybrid learning scenarios. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that the integration of technology, creativity, and critical reflection is essential for transforming teaching and learning processes in the 21st century.

3. Method

A qualitative approach was used to collect data for this research, characterized by a perspective that seeks to describe and analyze a group of people, especially through a case study, defined in the educational field by Merriam (1988) as an interpretive approach that associates the phenomenon of human beings and, in turn, their complexity.

The population selected to carry out this study corresponds to level B1.2 of a French course. At this level, learners have completed six semesters of French language study at university, where they

work on developing various linguistic skills.

The participants in this study are three students, without distinction of age, gender, or other factors. The three participants are identified by the pseudonyms Amina, Romera, and Samahara; they are studying for a Bachelor's Degree in Foreign Languages at a public university in Colombia and demonstrate performance consistent with level B1.2 in written production. Thanks to classroom observation, it was evident that these learners are very responsible, disciplined, and dedicated to their studies.

For data collection, non-participatory observations, interviews, and an analysis of the participants' written work were carried out. First, the corpus of observations consisted of two FLE class sessions, each lasting two hours, in a Colombian university setting with B1.2 level students, held over two consecutive weeks. The information collected describes the written production activities carried out in class.

On the other hand, the written production documents were collected during the first and second parts of the academic semester. Four texts per participant were collected in three different situations:

- ✓ The first was an independent assignment,
- ✓ The second was an activity carried out in class,
- ✓ The third and fourth were texts produced in an exam situation.

4. Results

According to the students' perception of written production, they emphasize that it is a skill that combines discursive and linguistic elements, that is, the organization of thought and text, and that in order to express ideas and opinions, it

is necessary to have a good command of grammar and vocabulary.

Written production inside and outside the classroom

Our first question sought to determine how students work on written production inside and outside the classroom. Regarding the classroom situation, Amina, Romera, and Samahara emphasize the importance of teacher support, as teachers provide recommendations that help clarify their doubts.

The participants explain that, in order to produce a text in this context, the teacher introduces the topic through a reading exercise so that they can familiarize themselves with the vocabulary, and they use the dictionary as a tool to write their texts.

Based on the observations made, it is clear that written production is based on reading comprehension, i.e., reading a text. The teacher proposes a sequence of activities where he or she provides a context for the writing situation, teaches and explains vocabulary, expressions, grammatical aspects, the use of verbs, and connectors. Likewise, textual structure is worked on; for example, in the class observed, the structures of the motivation letter, the curriculum vitae, the critical review, and the argumentative article were addressed.

Furthermore, during the interview, the teacher stated that written production is developed in accordance with the CEFR B2 level and following the French teaching method. He also pointed out that he begins with reading so that students recognize the structure of the text, understand the text in context, and

acquire useful expressions and vocabulary for writing.

In addition to the written work done in class, there is other work that students do independently. In other words, once the teacher has guided the process in the classroom, learners must develop this skill individually at home.

This research found that the participants wrote a critical review of a film, an argumentative article, and a letter of motivation in an independent context, where they organized their content and described their perspectives as viewers, writers, or job applicants.

According to their perceptions, they affirm that having a clear structure is essential for writing their own texts, since at home they can work more calmly, use tools such as dictionaries or the internet, search for information on the subject, use synonyms, organize their ideas in advance, and then begin writing.

To compare these aspects observed in participants working in class, we refer to the theories of Chartrand (1993), Barbier (2011), and Vigner (2012), who highlight the importance of text planning, related to the collection of ideas, considered the first phase that learners must complete before beginning to write. The next phase is textualization, which emphasizes the act of writing, and finally revision, the stage in which the text is reread and corrected.

The strengths of the participants in their written productions

Our second question of analysis was related to the strengths of learners when producing a text. Linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic skills were taken into account, as students must develop these to demonstrate their command of the language at level B1.2.

Firstly, positive aspects can be observed in the written documents collected, such as the pragmatic competence in the texts by Amina, Romera, and Samahara, who demonstrate thematic organization, coherence, cohesion, and logical structure in their motivation letters, reviews, and argumentative articles.

The organization of the texts and ideas demonstrates that they have the ability to argue logically when defending their points of view. Likewise, the participants indicate that they can express themselves better when the topic is familiar to them and they know the content to be developed.

On the other hand, sociolinguistic competence is mainly manifested in the use and choice of greetings, forms of address, and rules of courtesy. This is evident in the writing of the letter of motivation, where the students took into account the markers of social relations and the closing formulas typical of a formal letter, such as: “Monsieur, Madame, Je reste à votre disposition pour tout renseignement complémentaire, l'expression de mes salutations distinguées.”

In terms of the participants' linguistic competence, the texts are characterized by a broad lexical repertoire that allows them to describe situations and express their opinions accurately. They also use synonyms and a variety of vocabulary to argue their ideas, demonstrating their semantic competence. In terms of grammatical competence, the participants show the ability to construct complex sentences, correctly following the rules of agreement and conjugation.

Regarding the strengths observed in correction and evaluation, it can be said that the teacher provides feedback on the most frequent errors in the students'

written work. In addition, he ensures that learners use expressions, synonyms, and connectors that are appropriate for the type of text.

Written production strategies

The last question in the analysis focuses on the strategies used by participants when writing a text. According to the perceptions of Amina, Romera, and Samahara, strategies such as planning, which refers to preparation before starting to write, are identified. They seek information, rely on the teacher's explanations, use the dictionary, exchange ideas with their classmates, and use their prior knowledge of the language to produce a text.

According to the participants' perceptions, the importance of reading, memorization, and repetition is highlighted: by listening to the teacher and their classmates, they learn useful vocabulary for written production.

Other strategies are manifested individually. For example:

- ✓ Amina makes “mind maps,” classifies ideas from most important to least relevant, and uses the dictionary to look up unfamiliar words.
- ✓ Romera points out that she looks for information on the topic to better express her ideas and uses the internet to supplement them.
- ✓ Samahara, for her part, believes that the most important thing is to search for expressions that take into account the correct use of grammar and how to apply it in writing, especially through the use of connectors that reflect her level of language proficiency. Samahara also explains that the most effective way for her is to relate unfamiliar vocabulary to examples from everyday life, and that

she corrects her difficulties with prepositions and connectors by making a list of useful connectors for introductions and conclusions, as well as rereading her work to improve this skill.

Now, in terms of remediation strategies, the students use self-correction of their own written work. According to the opinions gathered in the interviews, the participants say that they review and correct their texts several times, adding ideas that are missing from their written discourse before handing it in to the teacher. They also say that they review their work in detail during the evaluation and feedback provided by the teacher.

5. Conclusions

Firstly, it is concluded that written production in FLE is a complex and interdisciplinary process, in which linguistic, cognitive, and social factors converge. The students demonstrated significant progress in structuring formal texts, applying grammatical rules, and using contextualized vocabulary, which shows a progressive mastery of the competencies established by the CEFR. Teacher mediation was essential in guiding the planning, textualization, and revision stages, while autonomous activities favored the consolidation of communicative competence and critical thinking.

Secondly, the findings highlight the need to strengthen pedagogical strategies aimed at reflective and meaningful writing. Incorporating digital resources, promoting collaborative correction, and encouraging self-assessment would help overcome weaknesses in grammar, coherence, and cohesion. The study reaffirms that teaching writing in a foreign language should be conceived as a

dynamic process that stimulates creativity, analysis, and learner autonomy, thus contributing to the comprehensive development of communicative skills and the improvement of educational quality in the training of foreign language teachers.

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