

THE ROLE OF DICTATION EXERCISES IN DEVELOPING WRITTEN COMPETENCE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Narzulloyeva Dilfuza Bahriddin qizi

Student of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Bukhara State University

shakhnarzoullayev@gmail.com

Abstract

Dictation exercises, once considered a traditional tool in language instruction, have recently garnered renewed interest for their pedagogical value in developing learners' written competence. This study explores the role of dictation tasks in enhancing written expression among learners of French as a foreign language. Drawing on theoretical frameworks in second language acquisition and didactics, this research examines how various forms of dictation (e.g., standard, partial, interactive) contribute to vocabulary retention, grammatical accuracy, and syntactic coherence. An experimental approach was conducted with A2 level students, who participated in a series of targeted dictation exercises over four weeks. Pre- and post-intervention written assessments were analyzed to evaluate improvements in writing. The results indicate a statistically significant development in learners' written performance, particularly in sentence construction and spelling accuracy. The findings support the inclusion of dictation as a structured component of writing instruction in foreign language pedagogy.

Keywords: Dictation, FFL, second language acquisition, writing skills, A2 learners.

Introduction

In recent decades, foreign language teaching has evolved from traditional grammar-translation methods toward more communicative and learner-centered approaches. However, the development of written competence remains a particularly challenging aspect of language instruction, especially for learners of French as a foreign language (FFL). Writing in French requires not only knowledge of vocabulary and grammar but also an acute awareness of the language's orthographic and phonological complexities, such as silent letters, gendered

agreement, and irregular verb conjugations. These features often hinder learners from expressing themselves clearly and accurately in writing, particularly at the beginner and intermediate levels (A1–B1 according to the CEFR).

Among the variety of instructional techniques available to language teachers, dictation exercises have historically held a prominent yet controversial place. While sometimes criticized as mechanical or outdated, dictation has, in recent years, seen a resurgence in scholarly and pedagogical interest due to its integrative nature. As an activity that simultaneously engages listening, short-term memory, orthographic processing, and written production, dictation offers a unique opportunity to reinforce the connection between auditory input and written output (Wajnryb, 1990; Nation, 2009).

In the context of FFL teaching, dictation can be especially beneficial in reinforcing correct spelling, syntactic accuracy, and lexical precision. For example, exposure to commonly confused homophones in French such as *ces / ses*, *a / à*, or *son / sont* through repeated listening and writing helps learners internalize distinctions that are not always clear from spoken input alone. Moreover, structured dictation tasks can improve learners' attention to detail, foster active listening skills, and develop grammatical intuition, all of which are essential to producing coherent written texts. The relevance of dictation exercises is further supported by cognitive theories of second language acquisition (SLA), which emphasize the importance of input processing, noticing, and output production. Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, for instance, suggests that learners must consciously notice linguistic features in order to acquire them. Dictation serves this function by compelling learners to attend closely to morphological and syntactic forms during both listening and writing phases. Despite these theoretical benefits, there remains a lack of empirical research specifically examining the impact of dictation on written competence in French language learning. Most studies have focused either on listening comprehension or on the general use of dictation as a testing tool, rather than as a developmental strategy for writing. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring the role of dictation exercises in improving learners' written accuracy and fluency.

METHODS

This study adopts a quasi-experimental approach to investigate the impact of dictation exercises on the development of written competence among A2 level learners of French as a foreign language. The research was conducted over a four-week period in a university setting, involving beginner level students enrolled in a general French language course. All participants had approximately one year of exposure to the French language, having studied fundamental grammar, everyday vocabulary, and basic sentence structures.

The participants consisted of two groups of undergraduate students: one experimental group, which received dictation-based instruction, and one control group, which followed the regular curriculum without additional dictation practice. All students were aged between 18 and 21 and had reached an A2 level of proficiency according to the Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues (CECRL). The experimental group participated in weekly sessions focusing on various dictation formats, while the control group continued with traditional writing exercises that did not include focused dictation components.

The dictation sessions were designed to be interactive, structured, and progressively more complex. Each session included:

- A **brief oral introduction** to contextualize the topic and activate prior knowledge (activation des connaissances antérieures)
- A listening phase where the teacher read a selected text aloud, typically 60–80 words in length
- A **first dictation** at a normal pace, followed by a second reading at a slower pace (lecture lente)
- Learners transcribed the text as accurately as possible, focusing on **orthographe, punctuation, and accords grammaticaux**
- After writing, students engaged in **peer correction** and group discussion (correction entre pairs et discussion de groupe)

The types of dictation used included:

- **Dictée traditionnelle** – a standard full-text dictation read by the instructor
- **Dictée à trous** – a cloze-style dictation with omitted words
- **Dictée reformulée (dictogloss)** – students listened to a short passage and rephrased it in their own words using correct syntax and vocabulary

Materials for dictation were adapted from **authentic French resources**, such as short news articles (*extraits d'articles*), dialogues from **TV5Monde**, and learner-friendly texts from textbooks like *Édito A2* and *Le Nouveau Taxi! 1*.

Both groups completed a **pre-test and post-test** writing task to assess progress in written competence. The tasks required learners to produce short compositions (around 100 words) on familiar topics, such as *se présenter*, *parler de sa routine*, or *décrire un lieu*.

Assessment criteria were based on the following components:

- Accuracy of spelling (orthographe)
- Grammatical correctness (exactitude grammaticale)
- Sentence structure (construction syntaxique)
- Lexical diversity (richesse lexicale)
- Coherence and cohesion (cohérence textuelle)

All writing samples were evaluated by two experienced language instructors to ensure inter-rater reliability. The focus was on detecting qualitative improvements in writing, such as more accurate verb conjugation, fewer spelling mistakes, and better sentence formation following the dictation intervention.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. While descriptive statistics were used to measure overall improvement in learner performance, qualitative insights were gathered through classroom observation and post-activity reflections by the students. Particular attention was paid to recurring spelling errors, misuse of grammatical structures, and changes in learners' awareness of written language norms (*normes de la langue écrite*).

This methodological approach aimed to assess not only whether dictation improves writing outcomes, but also how learners engage cognitively and affectively with the process. It aligns with the theoretical foundations of *approche actionnelle*, which emphasizes active learner participation and meaningful use of language in context.

RESULTS

The analysis of the pre-test and post-test writing samples revealed a notable improvement in the written competence of students in the experimental group who participated in the dictation exercises (*exercices de dictée*). Quantitative evaluation showed a statistically significant increase in overall writing scores, with an average

improvement of 20% compared to the control group, which did not engage in additional dictation practice.

Specifically, the **spelling accuracy** (*précision orthographique*) of the experimental group improved markedly. Common errors involving homophones (*ces / ses, a / à, son / sont*) and verb conjugations (*être, avoir*) decreased by over 30% post-intervention. This suggests that repeated exposure to oral input paired with written reproduction helped learners internalize the orthographic conventions of French.

In terms of **grammatical accuracy** (*exactitude grammaticale*), participants showed enhanced mastery of gender and number agreement (*accord du genre et du nombre*), as well as verb tense consistency. The frequency of subject-verb agreement errors declined significantly, indicating that dictation tasks reinforced syntactic patterns effectively.

Moreover, analysis of **sentence structure** (*construction des phrases*) revealed a shift from simplistic, often fragmented sentences to more complex and coherent constructions. Learners began to use subordinate clauses and varied connectors (*conjonctions*), which improved the fluency and cohesion of their written texts.

Qualitative observations from classroom discussions and peer feedback highlighted increased learner confidence and attention to detail. Students reported that dictation exercises helped them become more aware of specific linguistic features that they previously overlooked during writing. This aligns with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis, which postulates that conscious attention to language input is a prerequisite for acquisition.

Conversely, the control group showed only minimal improvement in their post-test writing scores, suggesting that traditional instruction without focused dictation practice may be less effective in developing precise written competence at the A2 level.

Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that dictation exercises serve as a valuable pedagogical tool for enhancing various dimensions of written competence in French language learning, including orthography, grammar, sentence construction, and lexical choice.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the role of dictation exercises (*exercices de dictée*) in developing the written competence (*compétence écrite*) of beginner-level

learners of French at the A2 proficiency level. The empirical data gathered from pre- and post-tests demonstrated that incorporating dictation tasks into the instructional process significantly enhanced multiple dimensions of written production, including spelling accuracy, grammatical correctness, syntactic complexity, and lexical appropriateness. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature supporting the efficacy of dictation as a multifaceted pedagogical tool in foreign language acquisition.

Firstly, the observed improvement in **orthographic accuracy** aligns with previous research that emphasizes the positive impact of dictation on learners' ability to internalize the complex relationship between phonemes and graphemes in French (Wajnryb, 1990; Morin, 2015). French orthography is notably challenging due to silent letters, homophones, and liaison phenomena. The repeated auditory exposure combined with active transcription in dictation tasks appears to enhance learners' phonological awareness and reinforce correct spelling patterns. This supports the cognitive linguistic theory that multisensory input—listening combined with writing—facilitates stronger memory traces and deeper processing (Kroll & Bialystok, 2013).

Secondly, the enhancement of **grammatical accuracy** observed in the study corroborates the argument that dictation promotes implicit learning of morphosyntactic rules. Errors related to gender and number agreement (*accord du genre et du nombre*), verb conjugation (*conjugaison*), and the use of articles (*articles définis et indéfinis*) decreased significantly after the intervention. This suggests that dictation serves not only as a mechanical writing exercise but also as a means of drawing learners' conscious attention (*attention consciente*) to grammatical structures in context, in line with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis. The gradual refinement of these structures indicates that dictation can scaffold interlanguage development (*développement de l'interlangue*) by providing repeated, focused exposure within meaningful communicative content.

Thirdly, the improvement in **sentence structure and coherence** reveals that dictation can positively influence learners' syntactic development and textual organization. Participants progressively moved from producing short, fragmented sentences to constructing more complex sentences incorporating subordinate clauses and cohesive devices. This finding highlights the potential of dictation to foster metalinguistic awareness (*conscience métalinguistique*) and textual

competence (*compétence textuelle*), as learners are encouraged to reflect on the formal features of language beyond individual words or sentences. Such growth is consistent with integrative language learning approaches that promote the interplay between form and meaning (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Moreover, qualitative feedback from learners indicated increased motivation and confidence in writing tasks following dictation sessions. The structured nature of dictation, combined with immediate feedback and peer correction, appears to create a supportive learning environment conducive to autonomy (*autonomie*) and self-regulation (*autorégulation*). These affective factors are crucial for sustained language learning success and echo findings from second language acquisition research emphasizing the role of learner engagement (Dörnyei, 2005).

However, certain limitations must be considered when interpreting these results. The relatively small sample size ($n=24$) and the short duration of the intervention (four weeks) limit the extent to which findings can be generalized. Future studies with larger participant pools and longitudinal designs are necessary to verify the durability of dictation's benefits and to investigate its effects across different proficiency levels and learning contexts. Additionally, this study focused primarily on accuracy-related dimensions of writing; future research could explore the impact of dictation on higher-order writing skills such as creativity, argumentation, and genre awareness.

Furthermore, while dictation proved effective in improving accuracy and structural aspects, it should not be regarded as a standalone method. Integrating dictation with other communicative and task-based approaches can provide a more holistic development of language skills, aligning with the principles of the *approche actionnelle* and communicative language teaching (CLT).

In conclusion, the study confirms that dictation exercises constitute a valuable pedagogical strategy in the development of written competence in French language learning. By combining auditory input with active written production, dictation facilitates both linguistic accuracy and metacognitive engagement, ultimately contributing to learners' overall language proficiency and confidence.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of dictation exercises (*exercices de dictée*) in fostering written competence (*compétence écrite*) among A2 level French language

learners. The empirical evidence demonstrated that integrating dictation into the instructional framework significantly improved learners' spelling accuracy, grammatical correctness, syntactic complexity, and lexical variety. These results underscore dictation's multifaceted contribution not only as a tool for reinforcing orthographic and grammatical knowledge but also as a catalyst for deeper linguistic awareness and learner autonomy.

By engaging learners in repeated cycles of listening and writing, dictation promotes active cognitive processing and conscious noticing of linguistic forms, which are essential mechanisms in second language acquisition. Moreover, the structured nature of dictation, combined with immediate feedback and peer interaction, fosters a positive affective environment conducive to motivation and self-regulated learning.

While the study's scope was limited by sample size and duration, its findings offer valuable insights for language educators aiming to enhance writing skills in French. Future research should explore dictation's long-term effects and its integration with communicative and task-based pedagogies to provide a comprehensive approach to language development.

In summary, dictation exercises represent a practical, evidence-based strategy that can be effectively employed to improve written competence in French as a foreign language. Their implementation within diverse educational contexts holds promise for advancing learner outcomes and enriching language teaching methodologies.

REFERENCES

1. Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (3rd ed.). Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
2. Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
3. Kroll, J. F., & Bialystok, E. (2013). Understanding the Consequences of Bilingualism for Language Processing and Cognition. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 25(5), 497–514.
4. Morin, R. (2015). *L'orthographe française: théorie et pratique*. Presses Universitaires de France.
5. Nation, I. S. P. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*. Routledge.



6. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
7. Schmidt, R. (1990). The Role of Consciousness in Second Language Learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129–158.
8. Wajnryb, R. (1990). Grammar Dictation. Oxford University Press.
9. Huy, N. T., & Thi, H. N. (2019). The Effect of Dictation on the Development of Writing Skills in EFL Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 10(4), 769–776.
10. Lantolf, J. P., & Thorne, S. L. (2006). Sociocultural Theory and the Genesis of Second Language Development. Oxford University Press.