The skills-based approach and the action perspective: what impact on writing performance?

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Abstract— *The teaching/learning of French in Morocco faces several difficulties. Learners' performance in this area leaves something to be desired, so finding didactic solutions turn out to be a complex task. As part of the action-oriented approach, Social tasks that are fairly engaging and adapted to the needs of learners respond to the problematic of this study.*

This study presents the design of two didactic units around the same theme "water and life" in order to raise awareness of the protection of natural resources : The first unit is mounted according to current practices : the skills approach, the second is developed according to the principles of the action-oriented approach. The tasks were designed and tested with a class group of 15 learners with the intention of analyzing and comparing them to define how they can better improve the performance of learners in writing

Keywords— *Conception, didactic unit, evaluation, performance, task.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching/learning of French occupies a prominent place in the Moroccan education system. Many reforms insist on its teaching, among others *the National Charter of Education and Training* (1999), *the Strategic Vision 2015-2030*. However, the winners of this system demonstrate the underperformance of communication in this language. This is confirmed by the summary report given by the Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research as part of the National Program for the Assessment of Prior Learning (2008). In this sense, the use of the word performance implies the idea of result, realization, finalization of a production which can be (a written text, an oral message, a conversation, a dialogue ...).

In order to respond to this problematic, this study tests didactic devices : two learning units. And assesses their impact on the performance of learners in writing production, starting from the question how a teaching device mounted around action tasks could improve the performance of learners in writing production ?

Before the implementation of this study, we assumed that the didactic units according to current practices would be inconsistent insofar as they use several didactic supports. The teaching / learning of French is mainly based on literary texts (disciplinary knowledge) and language

courses (taught implicitly). Which would demotivate the learners, the action-oriented approach is a new perspective which could alleviate the communicative difficulties of the learners and action tasks would improve learners' performance in writing.

The teaching of French occupies a privileged place in our education system compared to other foreign languages. Its status as a first foreign language strengthens its position in the socio-economic-political-educational landscape of Morocco. Benzakour (2010) "French in Morocco is a component of a bunch of languages that interpenetrate one another"

However, observing the performance of learners in communication in this language reveals a great difficulty. This is due to the fact that the context of transition from a pedagogy by objectives to a pedagogy by skills leads to two paradoxical paradigms: what is recommended by pedagogy by skills and the practices in force.

Should we then continue to widen the gap between what Moroccan society needs in terms of skilled workers and the performance of our learners? Is it not necessary today to dare to experiment with a new didactic perspective?

Our study, from an action perspective, is a new didactic vision inspired from action perspective, which will be

tested and evaluated in order to determine its impact on the performance of learners in writing.

The difficulties in teaching/learning French are sufficiently remarkable, they are linked to the gap separating what is required by the skills-based approach and the practices in force. Many reports, both national and international, we cite Education in morocco : sector analysis (2010), report on the underperformance of laureates in our education system in terms of learning, in particular foreign language learning.

The complexity of the question is institutional, organizational, educational and didactic. This makes the quest for solutions quite complex. We are intersted in what is didactic.

Faced with this, we believe that it is necessary to experiment with new didactic devices: learning units, anchored in a new perspective called action in order to answer this question which is, in our eyes, of great importance for the promotion of knowledge on this field of investigation: How could a learning device mounted around action tasks improve the performance of learners in learning French ? A question to which we will try to provide an answer throughout our article.

II.   PEDAGOGIC CONCEPTION AND TASKS

1.   What is conception ?

In its general sense, conception means "the way of conceiving, understanding or imagining, of planning something" Rey (2009). It is "the act of developing something in one's mind, of conceiving it; result of this action " (Larousse). So, it is certain that conception is a very complex creative process that takes place at the level of the mind, it requires an extremely fertile, creative and above all coherent imagination. The result of the design must offer something new, different.

Didactic design is part of educational engineering, the design of which is at the heart of the engineering profession. In language teaching, the design marks out the acquisition path by offering learners progressive and coherent learning.Puren (2011) offers the following three levels of didactic engineering:

The micro level : (the level of the tasks: a concept which we will explain in detail later). It is an inescapable level of conception of learning activities that Puren defines as the units of meaning within the learning action.

The "meso" level : what is traditionally called the teaching unit. It is an inherent element of the teaching / learning process. It allows, first of all, to segment the

contents and skills into intermediate tasks and micro tasks arranged progressively in a coherent and controlled course. In addition, as its name suggests, it brings unity, clear coherence. It synergizes the different tasks offered to learners or ensures the essential intensive repetition of a limited number of linguistic and cultural content.

The macro level : didactic projects, which take place over several weeks, months or even an entire year. In other words, long-term educational projects.

Indeed, designing in didactics turns out to be such a complex mental process: the didactic designer is supposed to cut out, transpose, mount, imagine, foresee and above all create. Since the didactic unit imposes itself as an organizer of learning allowing, at the same time, progression and coherence, it constitutes an essential tool for our study.

2.   Concept of the task

Leplat (1983) defines the task "According to current meanings, the task indicates what needs to be done (...) the notion of task carries with it the idea of prescription, if not obligation." The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2000), from now on CEFRL, defines the task as:

"Any action goal that the actor presents as having to achieve a given result according to a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfill, a goal that has been set. It may just as well, according to this definition, move a wardrobe, write a book, take the decision in negotiating a contract, play a game of cards, order a meal in a restaurant, translate a text into a foreign language or prepare a class newspaper as a group. "

It turns out that the definition is global as long as it brings together what the learner does in class "problem to solve; obligation to fulfill; translate a text in a foreign language "and social life" order a meal in a restaurant; take the decision with you when negotiating a contract. " Indeed, the social issue is inherent in the task which covers different situations, both linguistic and concrete. This remains normal as long as the CEFRL considers the learner to be a social actor supposed to carry out tasks rooted in social life according to a predetermined objective in order to achieve a specific result "achieve a given result; a goal we set for ourselves. "

By way of description of the task, the CEFRL mentioned that Tasks are one of the common facts of daily life in the personal, public, educational and professional fields, the execution of which involves the mobilization strategic skills given according to a specific goal and leading to a particular product. These "target" or "rehearsal" or "real-

life" tasks are chosen based on the needs of learners outside the classroom.

3.   The actional approach.

Since our sttudy is focused on the design of tasks, we find it crucial to highlight the concept (action-oriented approach).

The terms "method"; "Methodology" has been replaced by that of "approach" with the appearance of the communicative approach. The CEFRL, which provides a common basis for the development of modern language programs, guidelines, exams, manuals, etc., is the result of work carried out by the Council of Europe for ten years (1991-2001). The CEFRL has adopted a new approach called action.

"The perspective privileged here is, very generally, of the action type in that it considers above all the user and the learner of a language as social actors having to accomplish tasks (which are not only linguistic) in circumstances and a given environment, within a field of action in a social context which alone gives them their full meaning " The CEFRL (2001).

From this definition, the action-oriented approach assigns to the learner a new role : that of the social actor supposed to carry out tasks contextualized so that they have a meaning.

It must be mentioned that the achievement of these tasks requires the strategic mobilization of cognitive, emotional and volitional skills and resources. In short, all the capacities that a social actor has. In this sense, the action-oriented approach does not break with the communicative approach Puren, (2009) since it aims to develop the communication skill in the learner but it exceeds it insofar as it anchors this communicative skill in a social context, in authentic, even real, situations.
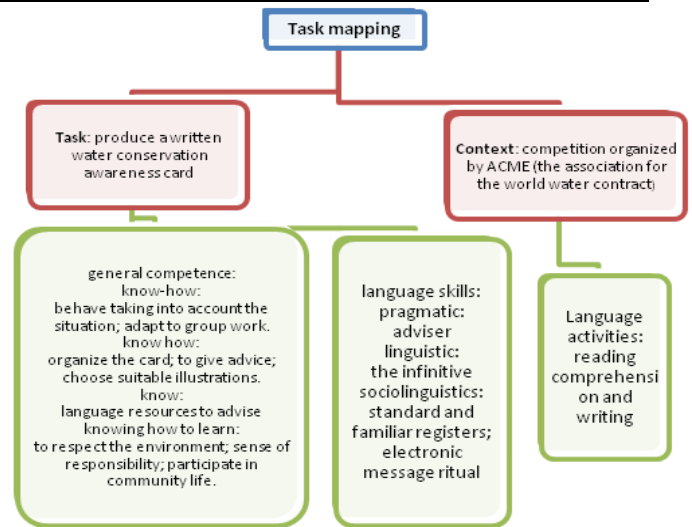
4.   The schedule of the task.

Fig. 1 : the diagram of the task unit 2 (E-mail)

So that our unit is built in a coherent way, we have schematized the task to be carried out represented

in the diagram above.

The task is to produce a written water conservation awareness card, it draws its authenticity from the fact that it is anchored in a real social context as long as the association for the global water contract does exist.

The task requires that learners strategically mobilize general skills: knowing, knowing how to do, knowing how to be and knowing how to learn as well as skills to communicate in language: pragmatic, linguistic and sociolinguistic.

After having chosen and studied the triggering support, we built a didactic unit according to the steps explained in the table below:

Table 1 : The structure of the teaching unit

Steps	The description
Anticipation	A phase in which the learner is, from para-textual elements (title, image, etc.), is expected to make reading hypotheses
Global understanding	The learner checks the assumptions made during the previous phase.
Detailed understanding	The learner identifies the information necessary for a deeper understanding.
Tracking	Language learning in the action-

| Conceptualization | oriented approach is preferably done implicitly, so the identification of the language fact is done in the trigger text sufficiently understood in the comprehensive and detailed understandings.

A phase consisting in the formulation of the rule in a deductive way: the learners by carrying out micro-tasks manage to conceptualize themselves using their own metalanguage. |
|---|---|
| Systematization | It is a procedure for fixing language tools |
| The production | Perform a production task orally and / or in writing |

The completion of the task implies that the learners follow a well-crafted and coherent path during which they carry out micro-tasks to acquire the strategies and the language skills to be mobilized at the time of the completion of the final task.
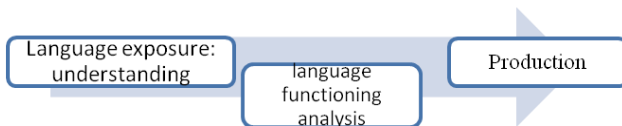

Fig. 2: the process of learning an action task

III. EXPERIMENTATION

The experiment was conducted with a group of 15 learners who belong to a public school located in *Khmiss Anjra (village in northern Morocco)*. To get an idea of the group with which we conducted this study, we developed a "Learner's sheet" which they filled out and in the results were used to draw up the profile of the group.

Table 2: list of learners participating in the experiment

Students	Level	Sex
1	2nd year of college	M
2	3rd year of college	F
3	3rd year of college	F
4	3rd year of college	F
5	2nd year of college	F
6	3rd year of college	F
7	3rd year of college	M
8	2rd year of college	F
9	3rd year of college	F
10	3rd year of college	M
11	2rd year of college	F
12	3rd year of college	F
13	3rd year of college	F
14	3rd year of college	F
15	3rd year of college	F

This is a group of teenagers aged between 13 and 16 years old, they belong to different school levels: second and third year of the college secondary cycle). By answering a few questions about their representations concerning the learning of French, they showed positive affection in this regard. On the other hand, they mentioned that they encounter a lot of difficulties in oral and / or written production as well as in language lessons.

Table 3: Distribution by level

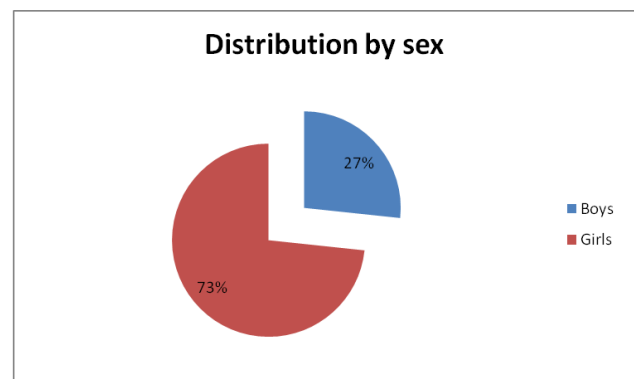|	Number	Boys	Girls	%
2nd year of college	4	1	3	26,67%
3rd year of college	11	2	9	73,33%
Total	15	3	12	100%

Fig. 3 : Distribution by gender.

The management of the first didactic unit designed according to current teaching practices, namely the skills approach, spanned two weeks due to 4 hours and 75 minutes per week, the temporary range is distributed as follows:

Table 4: hourly volume of the experiment (unit 1)

1st week (4 hours and 75 minutes)

Activities	Duration
Reading	60 minutes
Grammar	45 minutes
Conjugation	45 minutes
Vocabulary	45 minutes
Spelling	45 minutes
Written production	45 minutes
total	285 mins.

2nd week (4 hours and 75 minutes)

Activities	Duration
Reading	60 minutes
Grammar	45 minutes
Conjugation	45 minutes
Vocabulary	45 minutes
Spelling	45 minutes
Written production	45 minutes
total	285 mins.

The piloting of the second unit was carried out in one week, due to six hours distributed over the tasks to be carried out as follows:

Table 5: the hourly volume of the experiment (unit 2)

activities	Duration
language exposure	3 hours
language reflection	1 hour
Written production	6 hours

The evaluation system

In order to assess the learners' productions, we first determined the assessment criteria relating to three aspects:

Table 6: evaluation criteria (Unit 1)

Leaflet evaluation criteria		
compliance with the instruction	1 point	
organization and consistent progression of content	3 points	4points

Linguistic aspect assessment criteria

varied and precise vocabulary	1 point	
construction of correct sentences	2 points	
respect for spelling rules	1 point	6 points
correct use of verbal time	1 point	
punctuation (adequate)	1 point	

From these criteria, we created a grid to evaluate the leaflets produced by the learners. Concerning the second unit, we started from the scales of descriptors of language competence concerning the elementary level (A2) the CEFRL (2000), we established the evaluation grid with the intention of evaluating the performance of learners in production at writes it.

User Basic	Can understand isolated sentences and frequently used phrases related to immediate priority areas (for example, simple personal and family information, shopping, nearby environment, work). Can communicate during simple and usual tasks requiring only a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and usual subjects. Can describe with simple means his training, his immediate environment and evoke subjects that correspond to immediate needs.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

At the end of the experimentation of the didactic units, we realized two productions in writing: the first consists in developing a leaflet concerning the theme "water and life" composed of three parts: Definition of water, the dangers threatening the water and tips to preserve this wealth.

Ten learners participated in this written production and at the end of the activity, we collected ten leaflets which were evaluated according to the evaluation grid

The second is to build an awareness card that contains an illustration and ten tips for preserving the water whose body was sent to the professor in an email message for correction.

The same learners performed this production task in writing, in fact we obtained ten emails which were evaluated. In sum, we obtained 20 productions, the results of their evaluation are presented in tables.

After evaluating the ten leaflets, the results of the evaluation were entered into a nine-entry table containing learner numbers, evaluation criteria numbered 1 to 7 and the average on a 10-point scale. As for e-mails, the results of the assessment were entered in a table with thirteen entries containing the numbers of the same learners, the assessment criteria from 1 to 11 and the average on a 10-point scale.

With the intention of analyzing the results of this evaluation, the figures were transformed into graphs in the form of curves, to do this, we used the Excel program in the Microsoft Office suite. The choice of curves is relevant insofar as it allowed us to compare the performance of the learners by treating each criterion in isolation and then to compare the performance of the learners in writing production as a whole. We recall that the learning processes have kept the same content but have adopted different pedagogical approaches.
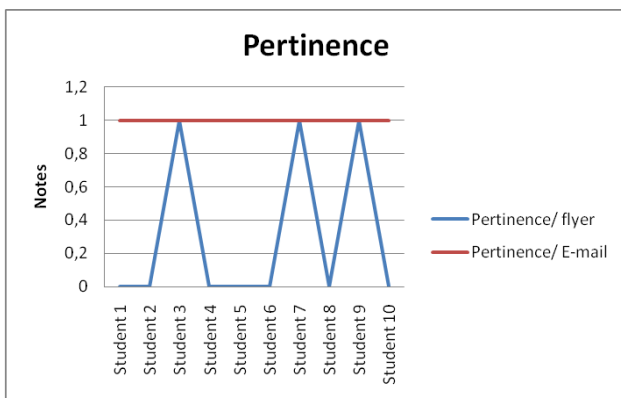
1. Pertinence

Fig. 4: assessment of relevance

Among the ten learners who produced the leaflet, only three of them were able to understand the instruction and we respected it (30%) but 7 learners representing 70% did not respect the instruction. On the other hand, all of the same learners respected the instruction of the action task: e-mail which was proposed to them with a percentage of 100%. So and since the schematization of the action task is well studied and since it is well contextualized, the learners come to better understand and respect it.

2. Coherence

In the production of the leaflet, the learners performed poorly in terms of coherence / cohesion since only one learner scored the mark assigned to this criterion which represents a percentage of 10%, only one learner obtained a grade above average which also represents 10% at the same time 80% of the remaining learners demonstrated below average performance.
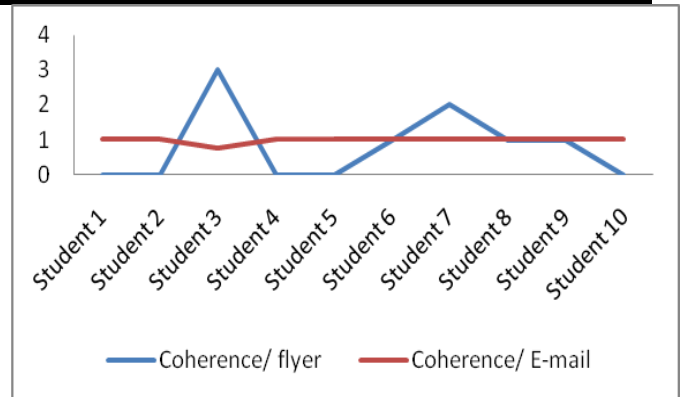

Fig. 5 : consistency assessment

Unlike the flyer, in email production, 90% produced consistent, semantically correct sentences, and only one learner scored below average.
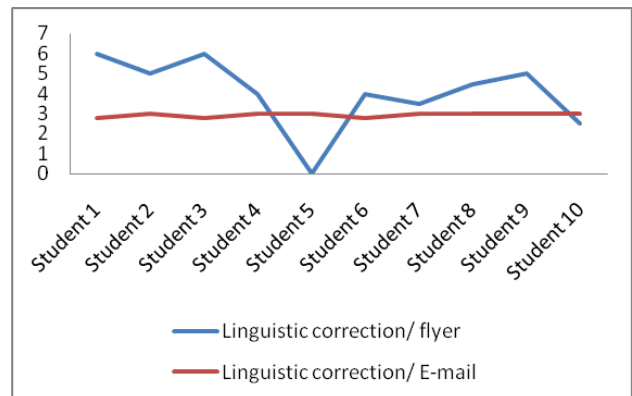
3. Linguistic correction

Fig. 6 : linguistic performance

Regarding lexical performance, only one learner obtained the maximum score (3) assigned to this performance and seven learners scored below the average (1.5). This means that 70% of these learners were unable to use the lexicon suitable for the proposed situation. On the other hand, in the action task, 40% of the learners obtained the total score assigned to the criterion and 80% obtained a score above the average (0.5). This shows that, in the action-oriented didactic unit focused on a single medium, the time space which is devoted to exposure to the language helps to fix the lexicon, to reuse it when carrying out the task and transversely during any similar real communication situation but the multitude of supports in the didactic unit elaborated according to the practices in force hardly helps the learners to appropriate the words necessary for the written production.

From a grammatical point of view linked to the production of the leaflet, Of all the learners who participated in the experiment, 60% demonstrated good grammatical performance and 30% picked up the average but only one

learner who represents 10% had 0/2 as long as all the sentences he produced are agrammatical.

On the other hand, all of the learners demonstrated a very good grammatical performance with a percentage of 100% in the production of e-mail. This proves that the teaching of grammatical competence in an action teaching unit makes it possible to develop said competence better than in the unit assembled according to current practices.

Regarding spelling, 50% of learners performed very well (1/1), while 30% were able to achieve an average score (0.5 / 1). On the other hand, all the learners achieved a very good orthographic performance with a percentage of 100% and this thanks to the flexibility of the descriptors which, at level A2, take into consideration only the phonetic accuracy differently to the criterion of the leaflet which sanctions rigidly the orthographic component.

The evaluation of the production of the leaflet shows that 80% of the learners demonstrated a very good conjugation performance and 20% could not use correct verbal tenses. We mention that the learners did not use the infinitive mode. On the other hand, the evaluation of the task mentions that 70% of the learners achieved a very good conjugation performance, 20% obtained a quarter of the score assigned to the criterion and 10% scored a score above the average. We find it crucial to mention that they all used the infinitive mode disproportionately.

It should be noted that linguistic performance has been treated criterion by criterion: that is to say, each component has been evaluated and treated independently of the other components, then these data have been represented globally in Chart 4. In short, the learners were linguistically more efficient in performing an action task than in performing a production following a learning process rooted in current practices.

Among what current practices do not take into account, we cite these three components inherent in the learning of cultural languages: the act of language, the situations of communication and the sociolinguistic component. These components were part of the action task evaluation process, the results of which are explained in the graph below:

4. Sociolinguistic

The graph above shows that 90% of the learners achieved maximum pragmatic performance by earning the mark assigned to this criterion (2point). 10% of them were able to score above the average (1/2). Regarding the sociolinguistic component, 90% have more or less respected the ritual of formal email, it is important to note that they are not used to using email.

An action teaching unit therefore allows learners to acquire

speech acts to be used to express themselves orally and in writing in real or simulated situations.
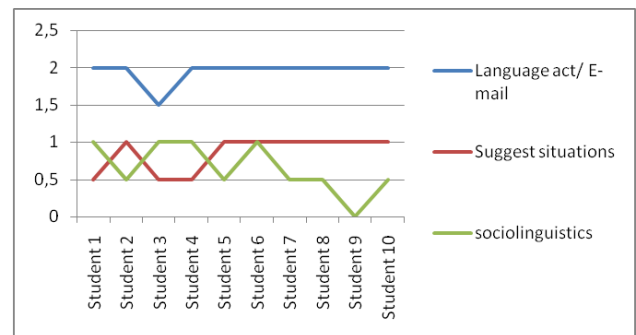

Fig. 7 : evaluation of the sociolinguistic component
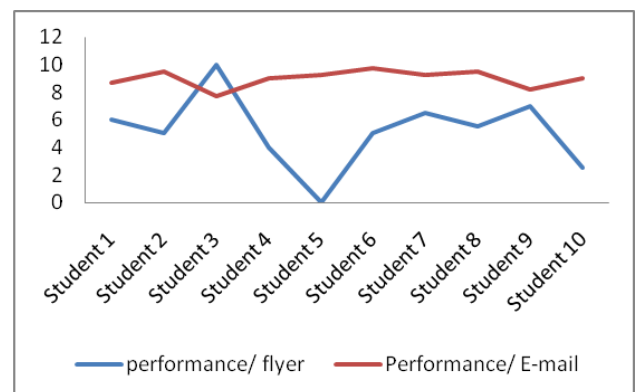
5. Performance

Fig. 8 : overall performance

The performances achieved by the ten learners in the two productions indicate that the same learners demonstrated a better performance in written production by performing the task than by producing according to current practices.

6. Discussion of the results

According to the results obtained, a didactic unit set up in accordance with the action-oriented approach helps learners much more to improve their language performance than a unit developed according to current practices.

Since the first unit gives great importance to language courses at the expense of communicative skills. Learners do not actively interact with the courses and feel demotivated.

Faced with the multitude of didactic supports (reading texts, language support, grammar support ...) used, the learners find themselves lost in misunderstanding and seek to understand the text rather than concentrating on the linguistic fact studied as they do not appropriate or only with difficulty the linguistic means necessary for the production in writing.

In addition, the decompartmentalization between the parts of the unit with regard to the thematic, the production instructions and the absence of the act of communication to learn the deprive of its coherence and is transformed into a crumbled knowledge whose divisions are falsely chained. That said, the learners have achieved performances ranging from low to medium.

Since the second teaching unit focused on a written production task is characterized by the following:

Coherence :

The teaching unit is developed according to a logical and coherent sequence which begins with exposure to the language to lead to a production in writing while being based on the same support in carrying out the tasks.

Language :

The teaching of linguistic facts is implicitly based on the text supporting the understanding of the written word, which means that the learners, during the sessions devoted to the study of the language, do not waste time understanding the supporting text. and go directly to the tasks of location, conceptualization and systematization consequently the language courses become less time-consuming and the learners appropriate the linguistic tools essential to the production in writing.

Setpoint :

In production, the deposit must be targeted and aims to achieve a clearly determined result. The terms and expressions chosen must be concise and precise. The task, for its part, must be well contextualized and anchored in a social dimension in addition it must meet the language, emotional and social needs of the learners. This is how a well-crafted instruction guides the learners in their productions. The task mapping allows teachers to target their teaching, to get around it in a coherent way. So the task allows learners to acquire, develop and consolidate their language performance.

V. CONCLUSION

A conclusion section must be included and should indicate clearly the advantages, limitations, and possible applications of the paper. Although a conclusion may review the main points of the paper, do not replicate the abstract as the conclusion. A conclusion might elaborate on the importance of the work or suggest applications and extensions.

In this article, we have carried out a comparative study between the results of two evaluations (flyer and e-mail units) from which we have drawn the following conclusions:

- In relevance, the learners are more efficient in carrying out the task.
- In vocabulary, learners are more efficient in carrying out the task.
- In grammar, learners are more efficient in performing the task.
- In spelling, learners are more efficient in performing the task.
- In conjugation, the learners are more efficient in carrying out the task.
- In coherence / cohesion, the learners are more efficient in carrying out the task.
- In pragmatics, learners are more efficient in carrying out the task.
- In sociolinguistics, learners are more efficient in carrying out the task.

So these conclusions allowed us to confirm the initial hypotheses:

- The teaching units according to current practices are inconsistent.
- Language courses demotivate learners.
- The action-oriented approach can alleviate learners' communicative difficulties.
- Tasks improve learners' performance.

In summary, a task-based unit helps learners much more to improve their language performance than a unit based on current practice for the following reasons:

The unit 1 (according to current practices) It gives a lot of importance to the language course at the expense of the development of communicative skills so the learners feel demotivated, It uses several teaching aids (texts) so the learners get lost in misunderstanding and seek to understand instead of acquiring language skills, It presents a fragmented knowledge, that is to say the coherence between the components of the unit is almost absent.

The unit 2 (from an action perspective), It is coherent as long as it follows a logical sequence (exposure to the language, reflection on the language and oral and / or written production). it is based on the same triggering document in carrying out the tasks, the language course is taught implicitly from the triggering document so it becomes motivating and less time-consuming and thanks to the schematization, the production task is targeted and aims to achieve a determined result.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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