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The Process of Verbalization: A Lexical Teaching Approach for Undergraduate Students in French Language and Literature

Abstract

University teaching is characterized by its dual mission: producing knowledge and preparing students for professional integration while considering the specific profile of learners. In Algeria, many students face persistent difficulties in reading and writing due to cognitive constraints, unequal access to cultural resources, and prior schooling gaps. In this multilingual academic context, it is essential to equip students with tools for success, enabling them to master written expression and apply disciplinary knowledge in various communicative situations. This article explores a pedagogical framework to develop lexical practices that enhance students' academic writing, drawing on the concept of verbalization.

Keywords: *academic writing, second language learning, verbalization, lexicon, lexical awareness, text dramatization, theatricalization*

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Verballaşdırma prosesi: Fransız dili və ədəbiyyatı ixtisası üzrə bakalavr tələbələri üçün leksik tədris yanaşması

Xülasə

Universitet tədrisi ikiqat missiya ilə xarakterizə olunur: həm bilik istehsalı, həm də tələbələrin peşəkar həyata hazırlanması, eyni zamanda öyrənənlərin spesifik profilinin nəzərə alınması. Əlcəzairdə bir çox tələbə idrak məhdudiyyətləri, mədəni resurslara qeyri-bərabər çıxış və əvvəlki təhsil boşluqları səbəbindən oxu və yazı bacarıqlarında davamlı çətinliklərlə üzləşir. Bu çoxdillilik akademik kontekstdə tələbələrin yazılı ifadəni mənimsəməsinə və fənn biliklərini müxtəlif kommunikativ situasiyalarda tətbiq etməsinə imkan verən uğur alətləri ilə təmin olunması vacibdir. Bu məqalə tələbələrin akademik yazı bacarıqlarını gücləndirən leksik təcrübələrin inkişafı üçün pedaqoji çərçivəni təqdim edir və tərəfindən irəli sürülən “verbalizasiya” anlayışına əsaslanır.

Açar sözlər: *akademik yazı, ikinci dilin öyrənilməsi, verbalizasiya, leksikon, leksik şüur, mətnin dramatisasiyası, teatrallaşdırma*

Introduction

University education occupies a specific position within the broader educational landscape, as it is simultaneously a site for knowledge production and a space for preparing students for professional integration. In the Algerian context, this dual mission has been complicated by the persistent challenges faced by students in mastering academic literacy, particularly in French as a Foreign Language (FLE). Despite institutional frameworks designed to strengthen linguistic competence, many undergraduates continue to struggle with academic writing, lexical accuracy, and the ability to transfer disciplinary knowledge into coherent written discourse. These difficulties can be attributed to cognitive limitations, unequal access to cultural resources, and insufficient preparation in prior schooling.

Within this multilingual and academic environment, the development of lexical competence emerges as a crucial issue in language pedagogy. Lexical knowledge is not merely the acquisition of isolated words but involves the ability to mobilize vocabulary reflexively across communicative contexts, to integrate it into academic genres, and to reappropriate it in writing. Yet, conventional approaches to vocabulary instruction—often reduced to explanation and rote learning—have shown their limitations in addressing what is commonly described as “lexical poverty” in student writing.

This situation raises the central problematic of the present study: *What type of didactic framework can foster lexical practices that effectively support the development of academic writing skills among Algerian university students?* Addressing this question requires a reconsideration of traditional models and the exploration of more interactive and reflexive approaches to vocabulary teaching.

In this respect, the notion of verbalization, as conceptualized by Grossmann and Bosch (Grossmann & Bosch, 2003), provides a promising theoretical and pedagogical framework. Verbalization refers to the process by which learners reflect on, categorize, and reinvest lexical units through oral and written activities. It emphasizes the role of reflexivity, dramatization, and oral preparation in strengthening lexical awareness and facilitating the transfer of vocabulary into academic writing.

Research

The hypothesis guiding this research is that the integration of verbalization and dramatization activities into the FLE classroom will significantly enhance students' lexical competence and, consequently, improve the quality of their written academic production. More specifically, it is expected that students who engage in such interactive practices will demonstrate measurable progress in lexical accuracy, cohesion, and the ability to appropriate disciplinary discourse.

The objective of this study is therefore twofold: first, to evaluate the effectiveness of verbalization as a pedagogical tool for the development of lexical and meta-lexical competence; and second, to determine its impact on students' academic writing within the framework of university-level French studies. By doing so, the research seeks to contribute both to the theoretical discussion on vocabulary teaching in foreign language didactics and to the renewal of practical strategies for enhancing academic literacy in multilingual contexts.

1. Context of french language teaching in Algerian Universities

The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Algeria has established a framework for the core curriculum in literature and foreign languages that is structured around two central dimensions: the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and its practical application. Within this framework, students are first expected to acquire a solid grounding in French grammar and syntax, before being able to mobilize these rules in the production of various types of texts. By the end of their undergraduate studies, spanning six semesters, learners are expected to have integrated the French language into both their academic routines and their prospective professional activities. In terms of graduate outcomes, the profile officially targeted by this curriculum highlights a proficient mastery of French, particularly in academic and educational contexts, and includes the possibility of pursuing advanced studies at the Master's level.

Yet, despite this carefully designed framework, the current state of French language instruction at the university level raises a number of concerns. In an educational landscape where more than half

of university courses—around 55%—are taught in Arabic, the demand for strong competence in foreign languages, and particularly in French, has continued to grow. As Queffelec and colleagues (2002) observe, students often consider foreign languages as key instruments for accessing specialized knowledge, improving their training opportunities, and enhancing their chances of social mobility. Nevertheless, many Algerian students are confronted with French in a sustained academic setting only once they enter university. In response, curriculum designers in the French Language and Literature departments have sought to build programs that foster the gradual and systematic development of linguistic proficiency. These programs typically combine core linguistic modules—such as phonetics, syntax, and oral and written comprehension—with transversal competencies including academic methodology and research skills.

Despite this institutional effort, academic failure in French studies remains a recurring phenomenon. Numerous students, even after completing a full undergraduate cycle, continue to struggle with written expression, particularly in constructing arguments and articulating ideas in coherent, well-structured texts. This situation leads to a fundamental pedagogical question: what type of didactic framework should be adopted in order to support lexical practices that effectively enhance students' academic writing skills? The issue is particularly pressing given that Bachelor's programs in French not only prepare students for teaching but also open career pathways in professional writing, editing, and publishing.

In practice, however, writing instruction in these programs often relies on a genre-based approach. While this orientation can provide learners with useful models of textual organization, it also carries the risk of being reduced to a prescriptive exercise, where students perceive genres as rigid templates to imitate rather than as flexible tools for communication and thought. Delacambre and Lahanier-Reuter (2012) have shown that students' difficulties in academic writing are largely attributable to their limited familiarity with the genres of university discourse, their struggle to adapt to new conventions of academic communication, and the persistent gap between their oral linguistic background and the more demanding requirements of written scholarly expression.

2. Verbalization for the development of lexical competence in FLE

The notion of verbalization, which is central to our study, can be understood as a process through which language is not only used as a medium of communication but also as a tool for thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving. As Gee (Gee, 2008) explains, the learning of a language goes beyond the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar; it also entails the ability to mobilize words within meaningful contexts and to interact effectively in social situations. This perspective underlines the importance of considering lexical competence not as a static accumulation of words, but as the dynamic ability to comprehend, appropriate, and reinvest lexical knowledge across diverse communicative situations.

Lexical mastery requires more than simply knowing the form and meaning of words; it also involves an awareness of their pragmatic, cognitive, and discursive functions. In this regard, Bazerman (Bazerman, 1997) points out that genres should not be reduced to rigid textual formats but are better understood as socially situated practices that shape how individuals think and interact. His perspective highlights the strong relationship between lexical development, discourse genres, and the learner's capacity to participate in academic and professional communication.

In light of these reflections, a central pedagogical question arises: what type of framework is most effective in fostering lexical practices that enhance students' academic writing skills? We argue that verbalization represents a promising approach because it encourages learners to reflect on lexical units and to recontextualize them within written and oral production. Grossmann and Bosch (2003) have shown that verbalization requires learners to mobilize categorization skills derived from their cognitive and experiential knowledge of the world. This involves the ability to name and identify lexical items, to engage with culturally shared scripts and stereotypes, and to recognize the emotional and connotative dimensions of vocabulary. Such lexical reflection goes far beyond the mere introduction of new words or the mechanical classification of lexical units; it requires a deeper engagement with the cognitive structures and representations that underpin linguistic competence.

Research in psycholinguistics further suggests that the effective mobilization of lexical knowledge in writing depends largely on the development of preparatory oral skills. The phenomenon often referred to as “lexical poverty” in student writing can be partly explained by a lack of oral preparation and insufficient activation of vocabulary. This observation stresses the necessity of integrating oral activities that reinforce lexical awareness prior to written tasks. In this regard, we hypothesize that theatrical activities in the FLE classroom constitute a particularly valuable complement to traditional writing instruction. By combining oral preparation, dramatization, and subsequent reinvestment in writing, these activities stimulate both lexical and meta-lexical competence. They also encourage learners to transfer vocabulary more effectively into discourse, making the language learning process more interactive, embodied, and immersive.

3. Experimentation

This study was conceived as an exploratory inquiry into the persistent lexical difficulties observed in students’ writing, with a specific focus on evaluating the effects of verbalization through lexical and meta-lexical training activities in oral expression. The underlying assumption was that strengthening students’ ability to reflect on lexical units before engaging in written production would have a measurable impact on their overall lexical competence.

To frame this investigation, it is important to clarify the concept of meta-lexical activity. Drawing on Gombert (Gombert, 1990), metalanguage can be understood as a particular dimension of metacognition that concerns both language and its uses. It includes, on the one hand, the learner’s capacity to reflect on linguistic structures and, on the other, the ability to plan and regulate their own language processing. This definition highlights the essential role of reflexivity in language learning, as it situates lexical awareness not simply in the acquisition of items but in the conscious regulation of their use. In a complementary way, Flavell (Flavell, 1979) provides a broader cognitive account of metacognition, describing it as the learner’s knowledge about their own cognitive processes and products, together with the active monitoring and regulation of these processes during learning. Taken together, these perspectives underline that successful lexical development depends on a learner’s ability to combine reflection, self-monitoring, and control in order to optimize comprehension and reinvestment of vocabulary in communication.

Such a reflexive dimension is all the more important given the complexity of each language system. In line with Anctil (2005), we argue that meta-lexical activities should encompass several interrelated processes, such as the systematic reflection on lexical units, the exploration of meaning and its variations through phenomena like polysemy, homonymy, and synonymy, and the ability to identify and mobilize collocations and fixed expressions. These activities situate vocabulary learning within a broader framework of lexical awareness, which is essential for bridging the gap between recognition and productive use in academic writing.

3.1. Methodology and data collection

The study was carried out with undergraduate students enrolled in the French Department at the University of Mascara. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of verbalization as a pedagogical tool for the development of lexical competence, the participants were divided into two groups. The first, which functioned as the control group (G1), followed the conventional model of lexical instruction that relied on traditional teaching methods. The second, the experimental group (G2), was exposed to an enriched program that combined lexical and meta-lexical training with activities of verbalization and dramatization, thus integrating oral and theatrical practices into the teaching of written production.

The research design followed a pre-test/post-test structure. During the initial phase, both groups completed a written production task without any explicit lexical scaffolding, which enabled us to establish a baseline and identify their lexical difficulties. In the subsequent phase, the control group continued to receive instruction in line with traditional approaches, whereas the experimental group engaged in verbalization activities and dramatized text-based tasks that encouraged reflection on vocabulary, awareness of lexical structures, and the reinvestment of these items in writing. This contrastive design provided a framework for assessing the specific contribution of verbalization and

dramatization to the development of lexical competence and for validating, or potentially challenging, our initial hypothesis.

3.2. Experimental work conditions

In order to guarantee consistency in the experimental design, both groups worked with the same narrative text, which was selected as a basis for analysis and for the reinvestment of lexical items in written production. Nevertheless, the pedagogical treatment of the text differed significantly between the control and the experimental groups.

The control group (G1) approached the lexicon of emotions through traditional methods of instruction. Their work included exercises of reformulation, the analysis of narrative structures, and explanations of key lexical concepts. Although these activities provided some guidance, students were required to proceed to the writing task without any explicit oral preparation. This limitation reflected the conventional approach, in which lexical work is often restricted to explanatory or analytical tasks that precede immediate written production.

In contrast, the experimental group (G2) was given the same text, *After the Storm... Love at First Sight*, but their learning pathway incorporated an additional phase of oral preparation before moving to written expression. The purpose of this pre-writing verbalization stage was to foster lexical reflexivity and to facilitate the reinvestment of targeted vocabulary in writing. Students engaged in oral discussions of the text, participated in explicit reflection on selected lexical items, and took part in dramatization activities that integrated theatrical elements into the language-learning process. Through dramatization, learners were encouraged to embody the emotional lexicon, to explore associations of meaning, and to engage with vocabulary in contextualized interaction. As Benmessabih (Benmessabih, 2021) has shown, such dramatized activities not only strengthen comprehension and memorization but also provide learners with an interactive and immersive experience that enhances lexical integration.

By comparing these two pedagogical configurations, the study sought to determine the extent to which verbalization and dramatization could contribute to more effective lexical acquisition and to a deeper reinvestment of vocabulary in students' academic writing.

3.3. Presentation of results

In order to evaluate the impact of verbalization and dramatization on the development of students' lexical competence, a comparative analysis was carried out on the errors produced in the first draft (J1) and the second draft (J2) of their written productions across both groups. The first stage of analysis concentrated on the initial drafts, with the objective of identifying both the types and the frequency of lexical errors. Four main categories of errors were considered: lexical combination errors (V1), violations of lexical properties (V2), inappropriate use of verb tense (V3), and errors related to formal aspects of lexical items (V4). The data were analyzed using the $S \times V4$ model, in which S represents the subject as a random factor, G denotes the group variable (with G1 as the control group and G2 as the experimental group), and V designates the type of error under examination.

The results of this preliminary analysis showed that both groups exhibited comparable lexical difficulties at the outset, thereby confirming the validity of Hypothesis 01 and Prediction 01. In other words, the two groups entered the experimental phase with a similar baseline, which ensured that any subsequent differences could be attributed to the specific pedagogical treatment applied.

The second phase of the analysis focused on the comparison between the first and second drafts, in order to assess whether the integration of verbalization and dramatization activities had a measurable effect on error reduction. This post-test evaluation highlighted the progress made by the experimental group (G2) in contrast to the control group (G1). The results of these analyses are presented in the following tables, which illustrate both the mean values and the distribution of error types across the two groups in J1 and J2.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Errors in J1 and J2 for Control and Experimental Groups.

Group	J1 Mean (μ)	J1 Standard Deviation (σ)	J2 Mean (μ)	J2 Standard Deviation (σ)
G1 (Control)	5.4	1.2	5.1	1.1
G2 (Experimental)	5.5	1.3	3.2	0.9

Histogram 1. Mean Errors in J1 and J2

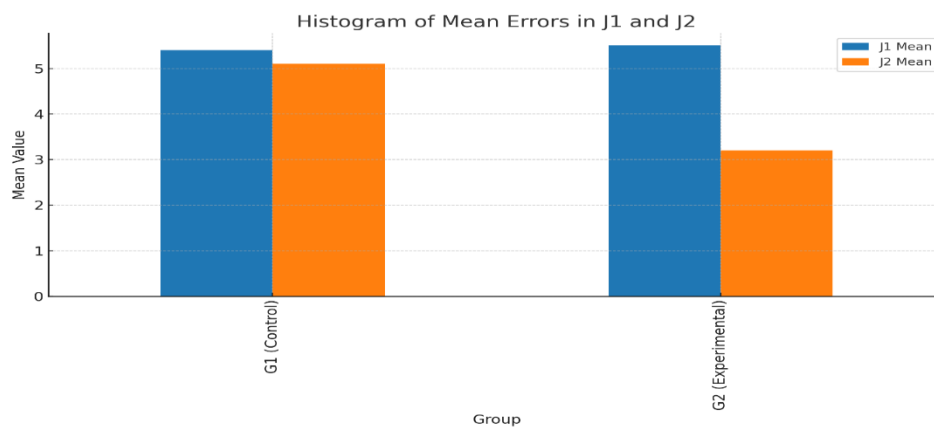
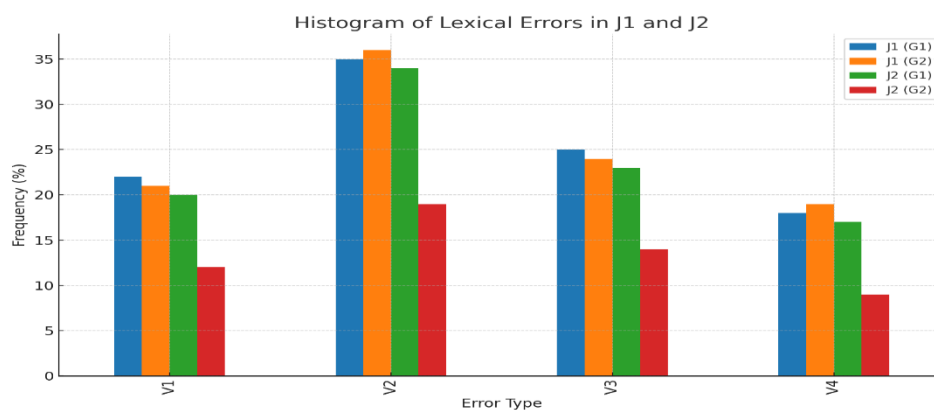


Table 2. Frequency of Lexical Errors in J1 and J2.

Error Type	J1 Frequency (G1)	J1 Frequency (G2)	J2 Frequency (G1)	J2 Frequency (G2)
V1: Lexical combination	22%	21%	20%	12%
V2: Failure to respect lexical properties	35%	36%	34%	19%
V3: Incorrect use of verb tense	25%	24%	23%	14%
V4: Form-related errors	18%	19%	17%	9%

Histogram 2. Lexical Errors in J1 and J2



4. Key findings

The statistical analysis of the first draft (J1) revealed that the group factor was not significant ($F(1,18) = 5.466$, $p > .8579$), which indicates that both the control and the experimental groups produced a comparable number of lexical errors in their initial written productions. By contrast, the error type factor was highly significant ($F(3,18) = 109.772$, $p < .0001$), showing that certain categories of errors occurred more frequently than others. The distribution followed a clear descending order, with violations of lexical properties (V2) being the most frequent, followed by errors in lexical combination (V1), inappropriate verb tense usage (V3), and finally, errors related to form (V4). The interaction between group and error type was not statistically significant ($F(3,54) = 1.988$, $p > .101$), suggesting that, regardless of instructional method, both groups encountered the same types of lexical difficulties at this stage. These findings confirm that, at the outset, the two groups were equivalent in terms of their lexical challenges, thereby supporting Hypothesis 01 and Prediction 01.

The analysis of the second draft (J2) offered a more nuanced perspective by highlighting the effects of the pedagogical intervention. Results demonstrated that the experimental group (G2) made significant progress between the first and second drafts, with a notable reduction in the frequency of lexical errors. Students exposed to verbalization and dramatization activities displayed a higher degree of lexical accuracy, which points to the effectiveness of integrating oral preparation and theatrical practices into the writing process. By contrast, the control group (G1) did not exhibit any substantial improvement between J1 and J2, indicating that traditional lexical instruction alone was insufficient to bring about the expected gains in lexical competence.

When comparing the two groups in their second drafts, students in the experimental group demonstrated a stronger command of lexical usage than those in the control group. This finding suggests that theatrical activities served as a catalyst for lexical transfer, enabling learners to integrate vocabulary more effectively into their written discourse. Overall, these results confirm the central hypothesis of the study, namely that verbalization—and particularly dramatization—significantly enhances lexical competence. Learners who actively participated in oral and theatrical activities showed measurable improvements in lexical accuracy, whereas students who were limited to conventional instruction did not attain comparable progress.

5. Interpretation of results

The analysis of the post-test data clearly demonstrates that the experimental group (G2) achieved a significant reduction in lexical errors between the first and second drafts, whereas the control group (G1) showed only marginal progress. This divergence indicates that traditional approaches to lexical instruction, when confined to explanation and written practice, do not sufficiently enhance learners' lexical competence. By contrast, the integration of verbalization and dramatization into the experimental group's training had a marked effect, not only improving overall accuracy but also reinforcing the ability of learners to mobilize lexical knowledge in context.

A closer examination of the error categories reveals that the most substantial improvements within the experimental group concerned violations of lexical properties (V2) and errors in lexical combination (V1). This pattern suggests that verbalization and dramatization were particularly effective in helping students to internalize semantic constraints and to develop more appropriate word associations, both of which are essential for the accurate and meaningful use of vocabulary.

Taken together, these findings confirm the central hypothesis of the study: verbalization, and especially its dramatized implementation, plays a decisive role in strengthening lexical competence. Students who actively engaged in oral preparation and theatrical activities demonstrated measurable progress in lexical precision and application, thereby validating the pedagogical value of integrating interactive and reflexive practices into the teaching of written production.

6. General discussion

The purpose of this experiment was to examine the effects of verbalization, particularly when implemented through the dramatization of theatrical texts, on the development of lexical competence in university students. By integrating oral preparation, dramatized interaction, and written reinvestment, this approach sought to move beyond traditional lexical instruction and to promote a

more reflexive engagement with vocabulary. One of the key features of lexical teaching that combines oral and written activities is precisely its capacity to stimulate reflexivity, encouraging learners to reflect on lexical structures, to test their usage in communicative practice, and to reinvest them more effectively in academic writing (Matencio, 2008).

Our initial hypothesis posited that the dramatization of a narrative text, especially one where the emotional lexicon predominates, could facilitate the transfer of lexical knowledge and contribute to a more robust mastery of the French lexicon. The analysis of the first drafts (J1) confirmed that both the experimental and control groups encountered similar challenges with respect to lexical errors, notably in lexical property violations, inappropriate word combinations, incorrect use of verb tenses, and form-related mistakes, following a descending order of frequency ($V2 > V1 > V3 > V4$). This finding established the equivalence of the two groups at the outset. However, the second drafts (J2) revealed a sharp divergence: students in the experimental group showed significant improvement, reducing their lexical errors after engaging in verbalization and meta-lexical training, whereas those in the control group, who followed a traditional approach, exhibited little progress. These results confirm that theatrical activities not only facilitate the reinvestment of the emotional lexicon but also enhance lexical accuracy and precision in writing (Little, 1991).

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings align with the position of Grossmann and Bosch (2003), who argue that verbalization fosters categorization processes rooted in cognitive experience, enabling learners to engage with semantic constraints, stereotypes, and the emotional dimensions of vocabulary. Similarly, Bazerman's (Bazerman, 1997) conception of genres as socially situated practices is relevant here: the dramatization of texts can be seen as a way of placing learners in authentic discursive situations, thereby supporting the transfer of lexical knowledge from oral interaction to written production. Moreover, the difficulties faced by many students in adapting to the conventions of academic discourse, as highlighted by Delacambre and Lahanier-Reuter (2012), help explain why conventional approaches remain insufficient: without opportunities for reflexive and interactive engagement, learners often fail to bridge the gap between their oral linguistic repertoire and the demands of academic writing.

The implications for pedagogy are significant. The results underscore that traditional lexical instruction, which often limits vocabulary teaching to spelling or isolated word acquisition, as noted by Polguère (Polguère, 2003), does not adequately prepare students to mobilize vocabulary in discourse. By contrast, the theatrical approach proves to be a dynamic pedagogical tool that not only reinforces lexical knowledge but also promotes group cohesion, creativity, and confidence in linguistic expression. Through the integration of oral and written components, dramatized activities provide an interactive and immersive learning environment that fosters both lexical and meta-lexical competence. Ultimately, the findings suggest that verbalization through dramatization constitutes a powerful didactic framework for enhancing academic writing in FLE, as it equips students with the skills to reflect upon, manipulate, and reinvest lexical knowledge in meaningful communicative situations.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the role of verbalization, and more specifically the dramatization of texts, in the development of lexical competence among undergraduate students of French at the University of Mascara. The research was motivated by the observation that traditional lexical instruction, largely focused on explanation and written exercises, has not sufficiently addressed students' persistent difficulties in written expression, particularly with respect to lexical accuracy and reinvestment.

The findings clearly indicate that while both control and experimental groups began with similar challenges, only the experimental group, which engaged in verbalization and dramatization activities, demonstrated significant improvement between the pre-test and post-test phases. The reduction of lexical errors, especially in areas such as lexical properties and word combinations, confirms that

reflexive and interactive activities provide learners with a more effective framework for mobilizing vocabulary in academic writing.

From a pedagogical perspective, these results highlight the importance of integrating oral and dramatized practices into the teaching of written production. Such practices not only strengthen lexical and meta-lexical awareness but also create an interactive and engaging learning environment that fosters deeper student investment and improved linguistic performance. This supports the view, advanced by Grossmann and Bosch (2003) and echoed in subsequent research, that lexical acquisition is most effective when learners are actively engaged in reflexive and contextualized use of vocabulary.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. The experiment was conducted with a relatively small sample and within the specific context of one university department, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Moreover, the intervention focused on the emotional lexicon, and further research would be needed to determine whether similar results could be obtained with other lexical domains or in different institutional contexts.

Future studies could extend this line of inquiry by exploring the long-term impact of dramatization on lexical retention, by testing its effects across varied genres of academic writing, or by integrating digital tools to support theatrical practices in blended or online learning environments. Such perspectives would not only deepen our understanding of verbalization as a didactic strategy but also contribute to the ongoing renewal of teaching practices in French as a Foreign Language.

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