



Cognitive and Social-Emotional Strategies for the Development of Oral Competence in the FFL Classroom in 3rd Year Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the cognitive strategies implemented for developing oral skills in FFL classes among 3rd-year undergraduate students. Given the difficulties encountered by learners in oral expression, it becomes essential to use teaching methods targeting specific cognitive strategies to strengthen their interaction and oral skills in French.

Through a questionnaire and non-participant observation, this study aims to analyze different cognitive and socio-affective strategies implemented during oral lessons and their contribution to the speaking and oral performance of the students observed. The data collected make it possible to identify the most effective techniques to encourage the active engagement of learners and facilitate their progress in oral expression.

Keywords: cognitive strategies, socio-affective strategies, oral expression, FFL, university.

Introduction

The question of oral expression has been recurring for over forty years and has given rise to many debates. Indeed, according to JF Halte (2002), the revaluation of oral expression and its new status reaffirm the idea that mastery of oral expression is a determining factor in academic success.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, oral communication has raised many questions. Halté and Rispaill point out that “oral communication has long been considered a non-object, neither didactic nor pedagogical, that was not used in teaching. However, oral communication is today a domain that is not identified, where we take our concerns with us and which we have difficulty understanding” (Halté and Rispaill, 2005: 12).

For François, the oral is presented in its most complex dimension. Instead, it is “that which is supported by the body of oneself and of the other, the looks and everything which gives a context to the words and at the same time comments on them” (François, 2002:57).

The Belin Teaching Guide characterizes oral teaching to the extent that “it involves work on sounds, on rhythm, on intonation, and it is up to the learner to become familiar with these different means, to appropriate them gradually” (2005: 30). Dolz and Schnewly (1999: 18) emphasize that speaking should be considered as an Object of teaching and learning in each discipline in each subject. To do this, teachers are encouraged to create learning situations where students can speak actively and engagingly: “Speaking should become an integrated learning objective in all disciplines. Teachers will ensure that situations of effective speaking practice by the student are developed during their learning: listening, explaining representations on the themes of study addressed, questioning, observation reports.” (Dolz and Schnewly, 1999: 18)

According to Charraudeau and Maingueneau (2002), oral means teaching the specificity of the oral language and its learning through listening and production activities from sound texts, preferably authentic. Plane (2015) suggests that “oral” encompasses both pedagogical methods, a tool facilitating learning, and a learning Object. Three main conceptions of oral can be distinguished: 1) oral as a means of classroom management, for example, through the teacher’s questions and instructions; 2) oral as a lever for learning, by encouraging students to adopt a critical view and to question particular actions or behaviors to improve the performance of tasks; and finally 3) oral as an Object of teaching and learning, where students are led to develop communication skills related to the different facets of oral.

This contribution examines the different strategies the oral teacher adopts to teach FLE and tends to answer the following question: What strategies does the teacher use during oral lessons to encourage the FLE student to express himself confidently? What are the most stimulating communicative activities for student participation?

To answer these questions, we will present the results of a questionnaire survey sent to 40 students enrolled in the 3rd year of the Bachelor's degree. Then, we will present the results of the observation of two sessions of the oral course. Our empirical approach is based on the description of data collected in the field.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Teaching/Learning Strategies

Whether they are concerned with teaching or learning, strategies arouse primary interest among teachers and learners. For JP Cuq (2002), a teaching strategy means "adapting teaching to the needs and styles of learners through the variation of the activities proposed." The teacher must choose and diversify his approaches and the activities proposed in class following the profiles of the public with whom he works.

For teachers, they represent essential means to guide learners in their learning journey. They allow teaching to adapt to student's needs and create learning environments conducive to acquiring knowledge and skills. Indeed, teaching strategies make it possible to structure learning activities, to choose the best methods and tools, and to motivate students to be actively involved in their learning.

On the other hand, learners, aware of learning challenges, also seek to optimize their acquisition process. For them, learning strategies represent a way to make this learning more effective and thoughtful. These strategies allow them to structure their efforts, manage their time, improve their memory, or adopt techniques for understanding and assimilating knowledge. Thus, learning becomes an active and methodical process in which the learner takes a more conscious and thoughtful part to meet the teaching requirements better.

Choosing a teaching strategy represents a crucial moment in educational planning. It consists of determining a coherent set of approaches and resources the learner must mobilize to develop his or her skills (Peters and Viola, 2003; Tardif, 2006). This choice is left to the teacher's discretion, while the learners' performances result directly from these pedagogical choices. Focusing on the strategies implemented in FLE classes is now becoming essential.

1.1. Cognitive strategies

Memory strategies, also called memorization techniques, refer to cognitive approaches that facilitate information processing, retention, and retrieval. These strategies involve specific mental activities such as repetition, grouping, inference, evocation, or selection of information. They construct meaning from the information-processed elements and are essential for integrating knowledge into long-term memory (Martineau, 1998; Matlin, 2001). These mental processes constitute the fundamental mechanisms at the origin of memory functioning because they are responsible for the encoding, organizing, and transforming of information, from its reception by sensory receptors to its storage and representation in memory. They are also involved in more complex processes such as problem-solving, comprehension, and language production (Matlin, 2001).

These strategies are not limited to simple repetitions or automatic memorizations but involve reflective acts that require commitment on the part of the learner, helping him to structure, organize, and integrate information more efficiently and sustainably in his memory. Thus, they constitute potent means to optimize learning, regardless of the field of study or the type of task.

1.2. Socio-affective strategies

Socio-affective strategies involve interaction with others (native speakers, teachers, peers) to promote the appropriation of the target language and the control or management of the personal affective dimension accompanying learning. (Cyr and Germain, 1999). These strategies involve interaction with others to reinforce learning (Oxford, 1990). In writing, for example, collaborative activities such as peer assessment, group discussions, and debates can encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills (Muller, 2009; Garcia-Debanco and Plane, 2004). Social strategies such as group interactions, conversations, presentations, and debates are crucial to improving communication skills in oral activities. Engaging learners in interactive dialogues promotes reflection, active listening, and communication rules.

2. Teaching oral communication at university

Oral expression occupies a central place in teaching the target language, the ultimate goal of which is to learn to express oneself and interact verbally in class. As a teaching and learning strategy in FLE classes, oral expression develops students' critical thinking and argumentative skills, changes the pace and methods of learning, and encourages learners to become engaged actors in society. The action perspective considers the following:

The user and learner of a language are social actors having to accomplish tasks (which are not only linguistic) in given circumstances and environments within a particular domain of action. If speech acts are realized in

linguistic activities, they are part of actions in a social context, giving them their whole meaning. There is a “task” to the extent that the action is the work of one (or more) subject(s) who strategically mobilize(s) the skills at his/her disposal in order to achieve a specific result. (Council of Europe, 2001: 15).

This linguistic and discursive competence also contributes to shaping the learner’s personality, identity, and intellectual autonomy, thanks to social and linguistic interaction, allowing him to express himself in varied situations in front of an audience in an FLE class. As Halté points out, speaking in class is defined as follows: “Speaking is not only the students’ speaking time; it is also listening, body postures and gestures, as well as the complex management of interpersonal relationships” (Halté, 2002: 16).

FLE students encounter many difficulties practicing oral expression, including linguistic (lexical, morphosyntactic, and phonetic), psychological, sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and communicative (discursive) obstacles. These obstacles hinder their ability to communicate and participate in front of an audience in class (Rehal and Abu Duhair, 2023).

At the Algerian university, the teaching of oral communication has been relatively underdeveloped and was often limited to organizing a few communicative activities. Since the 2003 reform, and in the face of these challenges and the importance of oral communication once again taking on in our society, current programs recommend strengthening and increasing teaching sessions dedicated to oral communication throughout the degree.

According to the new program of the recent reform validated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in 2022, the teaching and learning of the subject “Oral Comprehension and Production” are integrated throughout the degree. This subject is highlighted in the first fundamental unit. It is equivalent to writing, with a time volume of 45 hours per semester for semesters S1, S2, S3, and S4, and 22h30 for semesters S5 and S6.

The teaching/learning of this subject aims to develop the student’s skills, allowing him to think and spontaneously produce oral statements in French quickly. Furthermore, this teaching aims to form a cultured and engaged citizen capable of integrating into social and professional life by encouraging him to open up to others and become familiar with their culture. Finally, it is also about developing skills in reception and production. In reception, the student must learn to understand and interpret oral information through auditory training and attentive listening, which helps to improve his phonetics, prosody, and ability to distinguish various dialectal accents. He must also identify essential information, understand the speaker’s intention, and be able to summarize what others say.

2. Methodology

To answer the research questions, we used two different methods. The first exploratory stage was implementing a questionnaire survey among 36 students enrolled in the 3rd year of the bachelor’s degree program. In addition, by observing an “Oral Comprehension and Production” course, we were also interested in the different strategies the teacher implemented.

2.1. Research participants

In our present research, our sample is mainly made up of 36 students enrolled in the 3rd year of the Bachelor’s degree in the French department of the University of Oum El Bouaghi (Algeria). Most are women (76%), and their average age is 23.

2.2. Material and data collection

Following our objectives, we opted for the questionnaire and non-participant observation as survey tools. We chose to observe teaching practices during oral classes during three sessions in October 2022. The session on which our corpus focused. The instruction proposed by the teacher was topical and captured the interest of most students: “Do you think that influencers have a particularly positive or negative influence on their subscribers and society in general?”

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results of the questionnaire survey

In the following section, we present the results obtained and the answers to the fundamental questions we collected concerning our research’s main axes.

To check how often our respondents participate in oral classes, we asked them question no. 4, “How often do you participate in oral activities in class?”. Most students surveyed (20) often participate in oral activities in class. This could be a sign of good motivation or an opportunity to express themselves more in French in class and not elsewhere. Twelve students sometimes participate when the teacher requires it or the instructions or the oral genre in place motivates them.

Question #9 asks students to answer whether their teacher generally uses effective strategies that allow their active participation in different activities: “Generally speaking, does your teacher use interactive activities (discussions, debates, role plays) to improve your oral skills?” All of the research participants answered affirmatively and suggested that oral teachers are concerned about the participation of the entire class.

Question #10 addresses the teacher's different cognitive strategies during oral classes to enable students to speak effectively. To determine the importance given to each strategy, we assigned points for each rank (First rank = 7 points, second rank = 6 points, third rank = 5 points, fourth rank = 4 points, fifth rank = 3 points, sixth rank = 2 points, and seventh rank = 1 point). Then, we calculated the average between 1 minimum and seven maximum. The results obtained for the question are listed in the table below:

Table No. 1: Cognitive strategies implemented by the teacher according to student statements

Strategies	Frequency
Repetition	6.01
Clarification	5.87
Reformulation	4.04
Illustration	3.56
Reformulation	2.81
Modeling	1.45
Native language	0.73

The table below shows that the cognitive strategies most used by the teacher to facilitate speaking in oral classes are repetition (6.01) and clarification (5.87), with similar averages. These strategies are essential in any discipline, not only in oral classes, to reinforce understanding and help students assimilate the knowledge transmitted. Reformulation, with an average of (4.04), is also frequently used, allowing ideas to be reformulated more easily and assimilated. Illustration (3.56) is used at an average level, followed by modeling (1.45), which is rarely used. It suggests that the teacher prefers encouraging students to invest in the activity rather than directly showing them how to structure a speech. Finally, using the mother tongue (0.73) is rare, which could reflect a desire to involve students in an exclusively French-speaking environment to maximize their exposure and practice of the French language.

Question #13: "Does your teacher help you overcome stress when you speak in public? Yes, a lot - Yes, a little - No, not really - Not at all". Most students (26) answered, "Yes, a little." This choice indicates that although the teacher is aware of their students' difficulties in terms of stress, they do not necessarily adopt socio-affective support strategies to help them feel more comfortable. Ten students chose the option "Yes, a lot" and argued that their teacher significantly reduces their stress when speaking in public. These students emphasize that their teacher gives them positive feedback after their interventions, thus valuing their efforts and reinforcing their self-esteem. One of the students explains: "Our teacher always encourages us to speak and express ourselves by telling us that the most important thing is to participate regardless of the mistakes." Another student adds: "After each intervention, the oral teacher intervenes to emphasize the strong points of what I said. This encourages me because even if I make mistakes, there are also things that I still succeed at."

Question #15: "How helpful do you find the teacher's encouragement and support in helping you feel comfortable during oral activities?"

Table No. 2: Assessment of the encouragement of oral teaching

Items	Frequency
Very useful	20%
Useful	80%
Not very useful	00%
Not at all useful	00%

Analysis of the responses to question 15 reveals that students consider the encouragement and support of their teacher as a source of motivation to feel comfortable during oral activities. Indeed, 80% of students find this support "useful," and 20% consider it "very useful," while no student perceives it as "not very useful" or "not at all useful".

These responses show that the support and encouragement offered by the teacher play a determining role in their perception of these situations, which are often considered stressful and disabling.

Question 16 asks students to answer whether their oral teacher provides feedback on their oral presentations to help them progress. The majority of students (76%) answer affirmatively, confirming that feedback from the teacher is an essential lever for improving their oral skills. One student writes: "When I speak in class, my teacher always explains what worked well and the mistakes I may have made without it being humiliating. It encourages me to speak and correct my mistakes next time." 26% of the students surveyed say the opposite, stating that their teacher does not often take the time to provide active feedback on their speeches. One student answers: "Sometimes, we do presentations, reports, and oral presentations, but the teacher only makes general comments at the end of the session. I would like him to take the time to listen to me and tell me individually what I did well and what I need to improve." »

Question #17: "Does your teacher encourage you to interact in groups (presentations, role plays, skits, interviews)"? The unanimous response from students to question #17 shows that the teacher regularly

integrates interactive group activities, such as presentations, role plays, skits, and interviews, into his or her oral comprehension and production course. These oral genres promote active participation and the development of communicative and social skills among students. Working in a team also builds self-confidence, as students feel supported by their peers, which reduces the stress associated with public speaking. In addition, these activities encourage collaboration and mutual assistance, encouraging students to share ideas and support each other while strengthening team spirit.

Question #18, “In your opinion, what strategies could be implemented or improved to develop your oral skills better?” invites students to discuss the strategies they would like their teacher to implement during oral classes. Their answers highlight several avenues, such as feedback and constructive feedback, fun and creative activities. In addition, most students surveyed would like to devote more time to oral expression, mainly interviews and debates on current topics. Some even suggest obtaining written feedback and monitoring their writing and speaking progress.

3.2. Results of non-participant observation

The debate we recorded and analyzed took place in October 2023 in a 3rd-year undergraduate classroom in the French department of the University of Souk Ahras. We asked the teacher to arrange the tables in a U shape to promote the interactions. The debate lasted one hour and ten minutes. A group of 20 students participated, 16 females and four males.

The topic chosen for the debate was the effect of influencers on the lives of today’s youth. More specifically, the question was, “Do you think that influencers have a particularly positive or negative influence on their followers and society?”. We assessed and validated the topic, which could give rise to divergent opinions. Note that the teacher was the main moderator of the debate.

To transcribe our oral corpus, we chose the orthographic transcription mode, for which we adopted the conventions usually used by researchers. According to Beguelin: “an oral transcription provides a “tabularized” representation of the discourse, that is to say, a representation where the successive language units are co-present before the eyes of the reader” (Beguelin, 2000: 211).

Table No. 3: Number of speaking turns for each participant in the debate

Participant	Number of speaking engagements
E 1	4
E 2	3
E 3	0
E 4	0
E 5	4
E 6	2
E 7	0
E 8	0
E 9	6
E 10	3
E 11	0
E 12	4
E 13	0
E 14	3
E 15	4
E 16	5
E 17	0
E 18	7
E 19	3
E 20	3
Teacher	48
Total	93

From the data in the table above, the teacher occupies a sufficiently dominant place in the recorded debate with 28 speaking turns out of 59, i.e., a participation rate of %51. Almost half of the class could intervene and express their point of view. The speaking turns of which varied from one participant to another. This could be explained by the intense interest that the students have in the subject of the debate – the role of influencers in modern society – a topical theme close to their daily lives, which was selected jointly by the teacher and the class group. The choice of this subject probably encouraged the students’ engagement and stimulated their motivation to express themselves.

3.2.1. Cognitive strategies

Table No. 4: Cognitive strategies implemented by the teacher

Strategies	Frequency
Repetition	13%
Explanation	21%
Reformulation	19%
Question	28%
Illustration	14%
Modeling	5%
Native language	00%

The analysis of Table 5 reveals that the teacher implements various cognitive strategies to facilitate comprehension and oral production among her students during oral classes. Among these strategies, questioning is the most frequently used (28%). This strategy seems to play a central role in the teacher's approach, encouraging students to think and check their understanding by actively involving them in the learning process.

Explanation follows with 21%, which shows that the teacher emphasizes clarifying unknown concepts and expressions, giving detailed explanations to make the contents more accessible. Reformulation is also common, with 19% frequency, indicating that the teacher often rephrases information or instructions to ensure that students understand them well, especially if misunderstandings arise.

Illustration (14%) and repetition (13%) are used moderately. Illustration, which consists of giving concrete examples or analogies, helps students visualize abstract concepts and relate them to familiar situations, thus reinforcing their understanding. Repetition, on the other hand, helps consolidate information by recalling key points, but it seems less present, which could reflect a choice to vary approaches to maintain students' attention.

Finally, modeling is the least used, with only 5% frequency, indicating that the teacher rarely uses this technique to demonstrate a performance model or an example to follow. Furthermore, there is a total absence of recourse to the student's mother tongue (0%), which suggests that the teacher favors total immersion in the target language without recourse to linguistic support from the mother tongue to explain or clarify concepts.

The table shows that the teacher favors interactive strategies such as questioning and explanation to encourage active student participation and understanding. The variety of strategies used highlights a diverse pedagogical approach. However, some aspects, such as modeling or using the mother tongue, could be explored to support particular learners, particularly those with specific language needs.

3.2.2. The strategies and socio-affective measures implemented by the teacher

Table No. 5: Socio-affective strategies implemented by the teacher

Strategies	Frequency
Encouragement	22%
Relaxation technique	13%
Emotion control	19%
Student involvement	34%
Empathy	8%

The table above shows that student involvement is the socio-affective strategy most practiced by the teacher, with a frequency of 34%. This indicates a desire to promote the active engagement of learners, to help them overcome their fears and participate fully in oral activities. With 22%, encouragement is also essential, reflecting the importance of valuing students' efforts to build their confidence. Emotional control, at 19%, reveals that the teacher also focuses heavily on managing anxiety and stress related to speaking in class. On the other hand, the relaxation technique (13%) and empathy (8%) are less frequent. These results indicate that the teacher favors active and direct strategies to support students while giving less space to more individualized strategies such as empathy and relaxation techniques. However, these can play a decisive role in reducing anxiety.

Table No. 6: Examples of statements relating to socio-affective strategies implemented by the teacher

Strategies	Example
Encouragement	Excerpt 1: Well done for this excellent effort! Can you try again? Excerpt 2: Today, we are going to talk about influencers. Who can start? I am sure you all have some exciting ideas to contribute.
Relaxation technique and control of emotions	Excerpt 1: It is expected to have a little stage fright, but remember that we are all here to share ideas and learn. Excerpt 2: Breathe deeply; you do not need to go very fast. Take your time, dear student. We are listening to you.

Student involvement	Excerpt 1: Listen carefully to what your friend says and try to build on his idea. It is probably excellent. Excerpt 2: Okay, you have 10 minutes. Work in pairs and exchange your ideas first before starting our debate. Everyone must speak today; the subject is close to your heart.
Empathy	Excerpt 1: Yes, I fully understand that the debate of ideas may seem difficult to you. If you feel stuck, we are here to help you, okay? Excerpt 2: I know that speaking to others can be intimidating. It is normal, but you can still try; we are listening.

From the excerpts presented in the table below, it was found that by addressing a current topic, “Influencers,” the teacher could implement several socio-affective strategies to encourage the active participation of students during oral lessons. These strategies help create an environment conducive to expression and speaking on a topic that students find relevant and inspiring.

Anis, it is undeniable that reducing anxiety is essential, especially for students who might feel intimidated or blocked by a particular security in French. We noticed that the teacher visibly encouraged relaxation before the exchanges by reminding us that mistakes are part of the learning process. Similarly, the control of emotions was recorded via the discussions in small groups, allowing students to familiarize themselves with the theme without the pressure of addressing their classmates directly. This strategy helps to limit stress-related blockages while facilitating more effective speaking.

The cooperation strategy with others mainly involved shy students who had difficulties. The exchange in pairs led the students to debate the impact of influencers on the behavior of young people today, at school, at university, and in society. Finally, empathy was partially noticed in the teacher, who values opinions and encourages students to respect those of their peers. This attitude creates an atmosphere in the classroom and stimulates open-mindedness towards the different points of view that the subject of influencers can generate. Using these strategies, any teacher could promote better student involvement, develop their confidence in expressing themselves on current topics, and help them develop their oral skills in French.

Conclusion

It is certainly recognized that the oral teacher often uses modeling to lead his learners to master the various aspects of oral expression appropriately (adaptation of flow, rhythm, and voice, correction of pronunciation, adjustment of articulation and intonation, control of gestures, movements, etc.). We have seen above that future FLE trainers need to acquire linguistic and communicative skills that will allow them to express themselves effectively and correctly in French. This is why we conducted this research first to analyze the representations that 3rd year Bachelor’s students have of the strategies put in place by their teacher during oral lessons, then verify the implementation of these strategies in the field to measure the extent to which FLE teachers are aware of the importance of cognitive and socio-affective strategies in teaching oral expression.

It emerges from the analysis of the results of this research based on quantitative and qualitative data that implementing cognitive and socio-affective strategies in teaching interventions constitutes a critical lever for improving the speaking of students observed in French. After an in-depth analysis of the data from our questionnaire, it was found that students are conscientious of the different strategies implemented by their teacher in class while wishing to target more particularly collaborative activities (debate, role plays, skits) and encouragement.

The quantitative-qualitative data collected from our observation indicated that the teacher’s interventions focused on different cognitive and metacognitive strategies and positively impacted the effectiveness of students’ exchanges and speaking.

Regarding cognitive strategies, the results showed that explanation, reformulation, and questioning were more widespread than other strategies, with a rate of 58%. More than 55% of the socio-affective strategies focused on student involvement and encouragement, which shows a particular interest in collaboration.

By adopting these strategies, the teacher perceived the oral class as an opportunity to refine her students’ oral expression skills rather than as a class designed to assess them, which led to a reduction in stress and thus increased their motivation to complete the tasks.

Although the present study has made significant contributions, it must be acknowledged that a relatively modest sample size limits it. Therefore, the results drawn from our research must be seen as partial, highlighting the importance of further research with more extensive and more diverse samples to validate and extend our initial observations.

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