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Original research paper

## THE INTRODUCTORY PHASE OF FRENCH TEACHING: AN ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN LESSON PLANS FROM THE TEACHER LICENSING EXAMINATION\*

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### A B S T R A C T

The introductory phase of a foreign language lesson serves a key pedagogical function: it stimulates students' motivation, activates prior knowledge, prepares them for more complex tasks, and encourages participation. The aim of this study is to identify which activities Serbian French language teachers use in the introductory segment of lessons in their written lesson plans for the teaching license, how these activities reflect their understanding of glottodidactic principles, and to what extent they align with contemporary learner-centered approaches. The research is based on a content analysis of forty-nine lesson plans from primary and secondary school teachers. The results confirm previous research findings that thematic sensitization and motivation are often overlooked and that students are not sufficiently emotionally engaged. They also highlight the discrepancy between recommendations in the glottodidactic literature and actual practice, especially in primary schools. The analysis shows that lesson introductions mainly focus on ritual exchanges, while discussions of lesson objectives, learning outcomes, tasks (metacognitive strategies), and use of the blackboard are often neglected. Creative and cooperative activities such as games and brainstorming are particularly marginalized. The conclusions highlight the need for a more systematic approach to planning the introductory part of lessons in teacher training, with more examples of good practice and stronger support for licensing candidates.

### **Keywords:**

introductory phase of the lesson, French as a foreign language, written lesson plan, teacher licensing examination.

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

A foreign language lesson consists of several stages, the number of which varies from four (Develotte, 1996) to five (Brajović, 2021; Defays, 2018; Durbaba, 2011; Mikić, 2008; Robert et al., 2011) or six (Končarević, 2018; Weiss, 2002) in contemporary glottodidactic literature. The traditional lesson structure includes an introduction, main activities, and a conclusion (Končarević, 2018; Stančić, 2023). The introductory part of the lesson (Durbaba, 2011; Končarević, 2018; Mikić, 2008), also referred to as sensitization or motivation (Brajović, 2021; Robert et al., 2011; Weiss, 2002), allows students to become familiar with the content and prepares them for learning. This stage is therefore crucial and should not be omitted. Nevertheless, the stage of thematic sensitization is sometimes excluded, as shown in a questionnaire-based study conducted among French language students at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade between 2021 and 2023 (Bakaluca, 2024). As Mikić (2008: 31) notes, “motivation in the initial phase of a teaching unit is often neglected due to established practice and a traditionalist approach.” Stančić analyzed 21 lesson plans from the *Exam for Teaching License* Facebook group, three of which were written for non-French foreign language lessons and five for Serbian language lessons. In the introductory part of the lesson, only two plans included activities such as “focused on emotionally engaging students, activating their prior knowledge that is not necessarily school-based, and stimulating their curiosity” (Stančić, 2023: 175). Inspired by these findings, the present study aimed to investigate how the introductory part of a French language lesson is conducted at schools in the Republic of Serbia, compare the results with previous research, and propose guidelines for both initial and ongoing teacher education. Insight into this topic is particularly important given students’ declining interest in learning French.

In the present paper, an overview of the theoretical foundations and research methodology is followed by an analysis of lesson plans written by teachers who took the licensing exam for French language teaching. The analysis relied on glottodidactic and neuroscience approaches. The lesson plans constitute the written part of the exam, which assesses the trainee teacher’s professional competence. According to Article 16 of the Regulations on the License for Teachers, Educators, and Professional Associates, candidates have three days to prepare a lesson plan, which may be up to two pages in length, with no specific template provided. The final section of the paper features conclusions pertinent to teacher education and teaching practice.

### Theoretical Foundations of the Research

Contemporary theories of foreign language learning and teaching, and literature on learning principles and processes have increasingly featured findings from the rapidly growing fields of neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and neuropsychology (Defays, 2018). Hence, this paper draws on the work of two Francophone professors, contemporary neuroscientists, and cognitive psychologists from France and Quebec, whose research provides key elements for the present study and the implementation of the introductory part of a lesson. Dehaene discussed the four pillars of learning “essential for our mental constructions” (Dehaene, 2018: 207). These include *attention*, *active engagement*, which is fundamentally curiosity, *seeking feedback to identify errors*, and *repetition of learned material*, which leads to the formation of automatisms. As Dehaene (2018) emphasized, a teacher’s success in activating these four functions in students leads to accelerated and enhanced learning, with “the greatest talent of a teacher” lying in the ability to arouse and channel students’ attention (Dehaene, 2018: 212–213). Similarly, Masson proposed seven neuroeducational principles, including activation of neurons related to targeted learning, repeated activation of neurons, practice of memory retrieval (fr. *l’entraînement à la récupération en mémoire*)<sup>1</sup>, explanation, spacing and distribution of neuronal activation, maximal seeking of feedback, and fostering a dynamic mental state (Masson, 2020). Masson highlighted the importance of activating neurons related to targeted learning through the effort of recalling previously learned elements, achieved by answering posed questions. Namely, “to effectively activate the brain, preference should generally be given to learning activities during which the student must be active and produce a response” (Masson, 2020: 227).

In contemporary glottodidactic literature, recommended activities at the start of a lesson align with the neuroscientists’ suggestions (Brajović, 2021; Končarević, 2018; Mikić, 2008; Šotra, 2010): a) checking homework (providing students with feedback on their work) or reviewing the previous stage (repeating learned material); b) stimulating students’ interest, curiosity, and attention (creating a “dynamic mental state”); c) activating prior knowledge, both general and lexical, that is, sensitizing students to the content to be addressed; and d) clearly formulating learning outcomes or expectations for students, which supports better learning (Dehaene, 2018) and simultaneously presents the elements to be assessed at the

1 Masson explains this principle as follows: “Retrieval practice consists of recalling knowledge multiple times from memory, that is, making an effort to remember something again” (Masson, 2020: 67).

end of the lesson, thus establishing a didactic contract with the students. In the introductory part of the lesson, contact is established, “the ice is broken” (Brajović, 2021: 56), “a favorable psychological climate for learning is created” (Končarević, 2018: 303), and the foundations for subsequent activities are laid. Mikić (2008) observed that during this phase, general competences are primarily engaged, with general and sociocultural knowledge being particularly important. In other words, “during the announcement of the theme and content of the teaching unit, students apply knowledge acquired from other school subjects (history, geography, biology) and personal experience (travel, conversations, books, media)” (Mikić, 2008: 31). To engage students, glottodidacticians suggest using an intriguing title, a game, an anecdote, a drawing, a guided conversation on a topic in the main lesson document, a picture, a word, or a question, that is, brainstorming or free association activities (Brajović, 2021; Cuq & Gruca, 2013; Končarević, 2018; Mikić, 2008; Šotra, 2010). Durbaba refers to this activity as an *associogram*, which also involves the use of the board, which “even today – in an era of many other, even highly sophisticated media – remains one of the most commonly used teaching tools” (Reinfried, 2003, cited in Durbaba, 2011: 144).

To obtain a comprehensive view of the situation in Serbia regarding the introductory parts of foreign/French language lessons, curricula for primary schools (grades five to eight) and secondary schools were examined, specifically the Guidelines for Didactic-Methodical Implementation of the Curriculum. No recommendation for the introductory part of the lesson was found. However, in secondary school programs, one activity corresponding to brainstorming is recommended under the Comprehension of Speech rubric, where it is listed among the Before Listening criteria: “I tried to recall as many words as possible related to the topic to be discussed” (Rulebook on the Grammar School Curriculum, 2020: 69, 141, 284, 381, 481, 505, 673, 695).

## ■ METHOD

This descriptive study analyzed the introductory parts of lessons within a corpus of lesson plans written by teachers who took the licensing exam for French language teachers. The study examined activity types, functions, and manners of implementation (teaching aids, forms of work). The aim was to investigate which

types of activities French language teachers use in the introductory part of the lesson and to what extent these reflect an understanding of glottodidactic principles and contemporary student-centered learning approaches.

The research encompassed all lesson plans from exams held between October 31, 2022, and May 22, 2024. In total, there were 49 plans, 38 from primary school exams and 11 from secondary school exams. Out of all plans analyzed, 39 were lesson plans for content processing, and 10 were for other lesson types. The corpus was collected by obtaining a copy of each candidate's plan directly at the exam, upon receiving an invitation from the Ministry of Education, which meant that there was no way to influence the disproportion between primary and secondary school plans. Teachers were unaware that their plans would be analyzed, which reduced the "possibility of interactions or researcher bias during the data collection phase" (Fajgelj, 2020: 387).

The data were analyzed using inductive content analysis, with categories formed based on the content of the plans (Patton, 2001), "as near to the material as possible" (Schilling, 2006). First, context units were identified, encompassing the introductory parts of the plans, which provided descriptions of the planned lessons before introducing the main document used in the lesson. From these context units, analysis or coding units were extracted (Fajgelj, 2020; Popadić et al., 2018; Schilling, 2006), consisting of descriptions of individual activities, teacher questions, and sentences included in this part of the plan. The analysis units represented "meaningful units" (Schilling, 2006: 31) on the basis of which categories were formed by grouping similar questions or sentences (minimum analysis unit) and paragraphs (maximum analysis unit) into the same categories. For instance, the question "How are you?", the sentence "Today we will talk about the weather", and several related sentences and questions ("Which famous people do you know? What do they do? Who is your favorite person?") were considered analysis units, which were then grouped into categories such as *establishing contact*, *defining the topic*, or *guided conversation*. In the subsequent phase, the frequency of each category was calculated across all 49 plans. Examples of activities and questions are provided to illustrate the results, ensuring the verifiability of the findings. This qualitative study also included an interpretation of the functions and methods of implementing activities in the introductory part of the lesson.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the activities identified in the exam lesson plans for the introductory parts of lessons at primary and secondary schools, excluding activities related to teachers introducing themselves to students and getting to know the students (generally conceived as writing students' names on papers), which are typical for this type of exam lesson (i.e., the first lesson with a class).

TABLE 1. Activities in the introductory part of the lesson  
at primary and secondary schools

Activities	f	Content- focused lesson PS (N=32)	Other lesson types PS (N=6)	Content- focused lesson SS (N=7)	Other lesson types SS (N=4)
Establishing contact	34 (69.39%)	20	5	6	3
Defining the topic	25 (51.02%)	14	2	6	3
Guided conversation	19 (38.78%)	10	1	7	1
Defining the objective	15 (30.61%)	9	1	4	1
Picture description	14 (28.57%)	12	-	2	-
Reviewing the previous stage	9 (18.37%)	4	2	1	2
Asking a single question	3 (6.12%)	2	-	-	1
Game	2 (4.08%)	1	1	-	-
Word-picture association	2 (4.08%)	1	-	1	-
Vocabulary exercise	2 (4.08%)	-	-	2	-
Without specific activities	2 (4.08%)	1	-	-	1
Defining learning outcomes	1 (2.04%)	-	-	-	1
Checking homework	1 (2.04%)	1	-	-	-
Brainstorming	1 (2.04%)	1	-	-	-
Teacher monologue	1 (2.04%)	-	-	1	-

Note. f – frequency; PS – primary school; SS – secondary school; N – number of participants.

As the table shows, at the beginning of the lesson, teachers most frequently established contact with the students. Here, establishing contact does not refer to introductions, but rather questions related to the “school’s natural situation (recording the lesson)” and “language content from the school context” (Šotra, 2010: 135), which also aim to develop listening comprehension and speaking skills, that is, “automatic responses to the questions asked” (ibid.). These may also include short conversations about the weather, health, and similar topics (Brajović, 2021). Examples of such questions from the analyzed lesson plans include:

*Comment allez-vous ? Est-ce que vous êtes fatigués ? Qui est absent ? Qui est de service ? Quel jour sommes-nous ? Quelle date sommes-nous ? Quel temps fait-il ? Est-ce que vous avez tous des cahiers et des crayons ? Est-ce que vous avez vos portables avec vous ?<sup>2</sup>*

As some candidates explicitly stated in their exam lesson plans, the purpose of these questions is “to help students relax for the lesson” (TT PS 2023; ĐS SS 2023) or “to establish working contact and introduce students to the French lesson” (DS PS 2024). Lesson plan analysis showed that most teachers used questions to establish contact, especially at secondary schools (65.79% at primary schools, 81.82% at secondary schools). For some primary school teachers (12.49%), the introductory part of the lesson was limited to these questions alone. This quick transition from the initial stage was probably the result of teacher-perceived unimportance of an introduction and/or simple imitation of a model. Furthermore, some teachers asked nearly all of the cited questions, even though asking students about the weather may seem unnatural and irrelevant unless the lesson subsequently addresses weather conditions or moods influenced by them. By contrast, most lesson plans established a routine of stating the date and writing it on the board, which corresponds to authentic school communication to which students are accustomed in other subjects as well. Most importantly, it is useful, having in mind the differences between French and Serbian, students’ mother tongue. Repeated writing of the date in accordance with French norms and orthography (with the article and without full stops) helps build automatisms.

Interestingly, a phenomenon reminiscent of trends in popular psychology was observed in teacher presentations. Namely, some teachers believed they could establish good contact with students by giving a short motivational speech. Thus, 10.20% of the lesson plans contained sentences identical or similar to the following:

*Je m'appelle XX et je suis votre professeur de français aujourd'hui. Je peux sentir déjà des vibrations positives et j'espère qu'aujourd'hui on va apprendre beaucoup de choses utiles et qu'on va s'amuser bien !* (MAK PS 2022, APN PS 2022)<sup>3</sup>

The second most common introductory activity was defining the topic. Half of all teachers defined the topic during the initial part of the lesson (e.g., *Aujourd'hui on va*

2 English translation: “How are you? Are you tired? Who is absent? Who is on duty today? What day is it? What is the date? What is the weather like? Do all of you have your notebooks and pencils? Do you have your mobile phones with you?”

3 English translation: “My name is XX, and I will be your French teacher today. I can already feel the positive vibes, and I hope that we will learn many useful things today and have a great time.”

*parler de la météo*<sup>4</sup>) and wrote it on the board. However, this practice was not equally common at primary and secondary schools. Namely, only 42.11% of primary school teachers defined the topic, compared to nearly twice as many secondary school teachers, that is, 81.82%. This indicates that for most primary school teachers, this is not a regular introductory activity, which should change.

The situation was similar with defining the objective. Although this activity was conducted by nearly one in three teachers in the sample, it was almost twice as common at secondary schools (45.45%) compared to primary schools (26.32%). Considering that effective learning requires “a clear idea of the goal being pursued” and the learners’ acceptance of this goal (Dehaene, 2018: 243), teachers should make greater efforts to motivate students by discussing the lesson objective and tasks. Provided below is a good example of defining the lesson objective, following a guided discussion, where the teacher encouraged and motivated students by noting that they already knew quite a lot and would expand this knowledge during the lesson:

*La professeure remercie les élèves et annonce l’objectif du cours: Très bien, merci tout le monde! Je vois que vous connaissez déjà un bon nombre de produits alimentaires. Parfait! Aujourd’hui, nous allons découvrir d’autres produits, les lieux où on peut les acheter et nous allons également apprendre comment exprimer leurs quantités. (SDj SS 2023)<sup>5</sup>*

Only one primary school teacher planned to engage students in a discussion about the tasks in which they would apply what they had learned. The following example features questions that were used to encourage students’ reflection on learning and thus stimulate them affectively, strategically, and metacognitively:

*Regardez le contrat d’apprentissage à droite, qu’est-ce que l’on va apprendre ? Pour réaliser quelles tâches concrètes ? Quelle est celle qui vous paraît la plus utile ? La plus surprenante ? La plus intéressante ? (MAK PS 2022)<sup>6</sup>*

Only one secondary school lesson plan (a review lesson) contained the definition of learning outcomes, in which both the objective and the outcomes were defined together, although the candidate mentioned only the objective in the description:

4 “Today we are going to talk about weather conditions.”

5 English translation: “The teacher thanks the students and announces the lesson objective: *Very good, thank you all! I can see that you already know quite a few food items. Perfect! Today we are going to discover other products, places where they can be bought, and we will also learn how to express their quantity.*”

6 “Look at the learning contract on the right – what are we going to learn? Which specific tasks will help us achieve this? Which task seems most useful to you? Which one surprises you most? Which one is the most interesting?”



I highlight the lesson objective: *Aujourd'hui on va répéter et pratiquer l'hypothèse dans le présent et l'hypothèse dans le passé et aussi on va faire une révision du vocabulaire de la santé des leçons précédentes. En pratiquant tout cela, vous allez pouvoir exprimer plus facilement une hypothèse dans le présent et une hypothèse dans le passé. [...] (MM SS 2024)*<sup>7</sup>

Defining the objective and/or outcomes sometimes appeared declaratively in the lesson plan, but considering that there were no concrete elements, such teacher activities and insufficiently clear formulations were not taken into account:

*Once we have introduced the lesson topic, I highlight the lesson objectives and the outcomes we aim to achieve by the end of the lesson, and write the lesson title on the board. (TS PS 2024, MA PS 2024, TJM PS 2023)*

*Given that the lesson topic has been introduced, the teacher highlights the lesson title and writes it on the board, after emphasizing the objectives and outcomes to be achieved by the end of the lesson. (JP PS 2024)*

The table also shows that in primary school, students' prior general and lexical knowledge was most often activated by describing a picture (31.58%). In three lesson plans (7.89%), the introductory part of the lesson was limited to picture description. In secondary school, students' prior knowledge was usually activated through a guided discussion (72.73%) in the form of a series of questions through which the teacher mobilized existing knowledge and sensitized students to the topic. For example:

*Quels sont les personnages célèbres que vous connaissez ? Que font-ils ? Quel est ton personnage préféré ? Que fait-il ? [...] Qui est sur la photo ? Quelle est sa profession ? (PV PS 2023)*<sup>8</sup>

According to Masson, "every time a question must be answered and the response requires the use of knowledge stored in long-term memory, recall occurs" (Masson, 2020: 79), with recall representing one of the seven neuroeducational principles of successful learning, along with the activation of neurons associated with targeted learning. Hence, it is crucial for teachers to regularly implement activities involving oral interaction guided by their questions. In these interactions, the teacher should

7 "Today, we will review and practice hypothetical sentences in the present and past tenses, and we will also revise health-related vocabulary from previous lessons. By practicing all of this, you will be able to express a hypothesis more easily in both the present and the past."

8 "Which celebrities do you know? What do they do? Who is your favorite celebrity? What does he or she do? Who is in the photograph? What is this person's profession?"

stimulate students' motivation by showing interest in their answers, as in authentic, out-of-school communicative situations.

In the present study, thematic sensitization was the goal of 89.79% of all activities (guided discussion, picture description, games, connecting words and images, single question, lexical exercise, teacher monologue, and brainstorming). However, given that some teachers proposed several different activities, it was important to determine exactly how many teachers practiced thematic sensitization. The results showed that this practice was implemented by 65.31% of all teachers, 81.82% of secondary school teachers, and 60.53% of primary school teachers. This is in line with previous research findings indicating that thematic sensitization is sometimes omitted (Bakaluca, 2024). As the present results revealed, this practice was absent in nearly 40% of primary school lesson plans.

A total of 15.79% of primary school teachers and 27.27% of secondary school teachers planned to remind their students of the previous stage of the lesson. Furthermore, only one primary school teacher planned a homework review. It is possible that most teachers did not include this activity type in their plans because they planned exam lessons in unfamiliar classes. Still, the results revealed an undesirably low representation of learned material review, that is, recall from memory.

Contrary to recommendations in the professional literature, games, brainstorming, and other creative ways of mobilizing knowledge, attention, curiosity, and motivation were limited to a handful of individual cases and observed only in primary school lesson plans. Two candidates designed a game activity in the introductory part of the lesson. One planned for the teacher to “guide students to discover the lesson title with the help of a cryptogram” (JP PS 2023), and the other used a riddle “to engage students with the planned content” (AS PS 2022). Brainstorming was used by only one candidate, who described this activity at the beginning of the main part of the lesson:

#### Activity 1 – Brainstorming

*The teacher writes Les saisons in the middle of the board and then asks the students what this word first makes them think of. The teacher then writes the students' answers on the board around the word to make it clear and organized. Once the students share their associations, the teacher asks them to open their notebooks and copy what is written on*

*the board.* (The teacher expects the students to mention the seasons and weather conditions related to them.) (IV PS 2022)

Two candidates recognized that it would be desirable to plan a brainstorming activity, but they did not demonstrate a full understanding of what it would involve. Both lesson plans featured the exact same wording:

*The teacher, using the brainstorming technique and briefly reviewing previously acquired knowledge, gradually introduces the topic to the students through several questions in French.* (MJ PS 2023, JP PS 2024)

The underrepresentation of creative activities highlighted a gap between theory and practice. In glottodidactic literature, brainstorming is recommended as a “collective search for ideas” (Cuq & Gruca, 2013: 347) that allows every student to contribute at least one word, thereby “mobilizing collective vocabulary” (Cuq, 2003: 214). This activity is particularly suitable for encouraging free expression “without self-censorship” (Bertocchini & Constanzo, 2017: 129). Furthermore, brainstorming and games can stimulate students’ attention and curiosity, two of the four pillars of learning according to Dehaene (2018), which are crucial to the introductory part of the lesson. The results align with Stančić’s conclusions, who noted that “activities aimed at emotionally engaging students, raising energy, stimulating reflection, as well as activities organized to develop collaborative relationships among students, are generally missing” (Stančić, 2023: 177).

The formulation “without specific activities” (Table 1) means that the candidate did not describe any activities planned for the introductory part of the lesson, but instead gave a general indication of what was expected in this part of the lesson. There was one such example among both primary and secondary school teachers:

*Motivating students to work on the new lesson unit, gaining insight into students’ prior knowledge and opinions, highlighting the objective of the new lesson unit, and writing its title on the board. Emphasizing the outcomes and familiarizing students with the planned activities.* (JM PS 2023)

*New and unfamiliar content is gradually introduced by reviewing with students the material they have already learned and acquired.* (BK SS 2024)

With the exception of one audiovisual recording, only visual teaching aids were planned for the introductory part of the lesson, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Teaching aids used in the introductory part of the lesson at primary and secondary schools

Teaching aids	f	Content-focused lesson PS (N=32)	Other lesson types PS (N=6)	Content-focused lesson SS (N=7)	Other lesson types SS (N=4)
Blackboard	34 (69.39%)	22	5	6	1
Picture	14 (28.57%)	13	-	1	-
Illustrated flashcards	1 (2.04%)	1	-	-	-
(City) map	1 (2.04%)	1	-	-	-
PowerPoint presentation	1 (2.04%)	-	-	1	-
Bulletin board	1 (2.04%)	-	-	-	1
Video recording	1 (2.04%)	1	-	-	-

Note. f – frequency; PS – primary school; SS – secondary school; N – number of participants.

The previously cited examples point to another characteristic of the analyzed lesson plans. Namely, in most cases, the board was used only to write down the date and the lesson title. However, there were several exceptions. In four primary school lesson plans (10.53%), the board was also used to write down words during brainstorming activities (IV PS 2022), review the previous stage of the lesson (AS PS 2022, AD PS 2024), and anticipate the lesson topic (future tense) by drawing a timeline with appropriate sample sentences (MO PS 2024). A significantly larger percentage of secondary school teachers used the board, with five lesson plans (45.45%) including writing down key words and expressions (VR SS 2023; DjS SS 2023; DV SS 2023; SDj SS 2023), or previously learned grammatical constructions with examples (JG SS 2024). Still, apart from writing the date and lesson title, 90% of primary school teachers and more than half of secondary school teachers did not use the board in the introductory part of the lesson. As it is desirable to build up the board from the very beginning of the lesson, this result suggests that teachers would also benefit from training in the use of the board as a highly significant cognitive tool. The board should be used to note words, concepts, and students’ assumptions, which can later be compared with the words and concepts found in the main document or text in the next stage of the lesson. Furthermore, through the collective construction of the board, most evident in brainstorming or association map activities (Durbaba, 2011), desirable interaction is established both between students and the teacher and among students themselves, fostering a suitable working atmosphere. The board is “the point on which the collective gaze and attention of the entire class focus” (Cuq

& Gruca, 2013: 461), which makes it a valuable teaching technique, particularly at lower education levels.

As expected, the dominant form of work in the lesson plans was plenary (exchange in the form of questions and answers), as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Forms of work in the introductory part of the lesson at primary and secondary schools

Forms of work	f	Content-focused lesson PS (N=32)	Other lesson types PS (N=6)	Content-focused lesson SS (N=7)	Other lesson types SS (N=4)
Plenary	46 (93.88%)	30	6	7	3
Frontal	3 (6.12%)	2	-	1	-
Individual	3 (6.12%)	1	-	2	-

In one primary school and one secondary school lesson plan (MA PS 2024; JG SS 2024), there were examples of a teaching practice involving planned teacher exposition, that is, frontal teaching. This work mode is less effective than one that is based on questions that students must answer and thereby activates neurons associated with targeted learning (Masson, 2020). The individual form of work was used in one primary school lesson plan, while watching a video (JP PS 2023), and in two secondary school plans, during a lexical exercise (MP SS 2023; DV SS 2023). No one planned pair or group work.

## CONCLUSION

In the context of taking the license exam, teachers are expected to demonstrate their competencies in a single lesson. Hence, it is expected that the lesson plans reflect careful design of the lesson's beginning. Therefore, we believe that the results of the present lesson plan analysis fairly accurately reflect the knowledge and beliefs of this group of teachers at the start of their careers. Based on the findings, several relevant conclusions can be drawn that future research could compare with analyses of more experienced teachers' practices, conducted on more balanced samples of primary and secondary school teachers.

In this study, the introductory part of the lesson, although theoretically a key stage for activating the cognitive and affective prerequisites for learning, often had a limited scope in the practices of novice French language teachers. The analysis

of lesson plans for the licensing exam revealed three main tendencies: 1) ritualized exchanges as the most common format for the introductory part of the lesson, 2) insufficient planning of motivational and thematic activities, and 3) highly limited use of metacognitive and cooperative strategies. These tendencies shed light on how novice teachers interpret the function of the lesson introduction and the extent to which they have adopted contemporary didactic approaches.

First, the results showed that most teachers began the introductory part of the lesson with common school-related questions, which is a practice that contributes to the development of linguistic automatisms and has communicative value. However, in a relatively small number of primary school lesson plans, this segment remained purely ritualized, without activities to activate students' prior knowledge, attention, and curiosity. This finding is important because it indicates that teachers are declaratively familiar with the lesson structure but lack an understanding of the deeper pedagogical meaning of the first phase, which contemporary glottodidactics recognizes as a stage that involves cognitively guiding students towards the objective and enabling entry into the task.

Second, teachers' limited understanding of how the introduction connects to the main teaching activities was reflected in the absence of a clear definition of the lesson topic and objective in most primary school lesson plans, along with the fact that one in three teachers in the entire sample did not plan for thematic sensitization. These findings align with previous research showing a gap between theoretically understood principles of the communicative approach and their practical implementation. It would be highly beneficial if teachers more frequently conducted activities that activate students' prior knowledge and stimulate curiosity, that is, activities that support learning principles based on contemporary neuroscience.






Third, the infrequent use of metacognitive activities (such as discussions about learning outcomes and tasks) and the near absence of cooperative strategies revealed that teachers had not fully adopted a student-centered approach, which involves active student participation in constructing knowledge and reflecting on their own learning. This is particularly important because these activities help students understand what and why they are learning, which is a core principle of contemporary learning and glottodidactic literature.

A comparison of primary and secondary school teachers' lesson plans showed that secondary school plans were generally of higher quality. Namely, the activities planned for the beginning of the lesson were more numerous and stimulating, and

the use of the board was more frequent and better designed. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as it needs to be verified on a larger and more balanced sample. At the same time, primary school lesson plans included individual examples of highly creative and cognitively relevant activities.

In summary, teachers had partially and unevenly adopted contemporary, student-centered approaches. They recognized the importance of engagement, interaction, and motivation, but their implementation often remained fragmented. The present results help illuminate this gap by indicating that the greatest challenge is not related to theoretical knowledge, but its thoughtful operationalization. This highlights the need to improve (initial) teacher education through greater inclusion of practical examples, scenario analysis, and, especially, systematic practice in designing the introductory part of the lesson. The implications of these findings lead to a clear recommendation: teacher education should include a deeper integration of glottodidactic and neuroscience knowledge, more opportunities for critical reflection (e.g., guided teaching practice journals with questions focusing on this part of the lesson), and more precisely formulated expectations in curricula. Additional training, materials with examples of well-designed introductory activities, and the use of foreign textbooks and digital tools can support teachers not only in expanding their repertoire of activities but also in gaining a deeper understanding of their function. This way, the introductory part of the lesson could be more consistently used for intellectual activation, motivation, and guiding students towards learning.

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