**Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences**

www.pjlss.edu.pk

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Crosswords in FFL Class and Motivational Learning

Ghimouze Manel[1*], Bentounsi Ikram Aya[2], Boudebouda Fatiha[3]

[1, 3] University Mohamed Seddik Benyahia - Jijel (Algeria)
[2] DECLIC Laboratory (Didactics, Enunciation, Corpus, Linguistics, Cultural Interaction), University Larbi Ben M'hidi - Oum El Bouaghi (Algeria)

| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| | Motivation plays a pivotal role in the learning process, directly influencing commitment, perseverance, and the quality of knowledge assimilation. Therefore, creating an environment that fosters the development and discovery of knowledge is essential. French as a Foreign Language (FFL) teachers are tasked with designing engaging activities that facilitate language acquisition while providing an enjoyable experience. As an educational tool, crosswords offer a unique combination of entertainment and efficacy in language learning. This study aims to evaluate the learning outcomes of french language among third-year middle school students and, secondly, the level of motivation elicited through the use of crosswords in the classroom. |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Crosswords, a unique word game, stand out for their potential to enhance vocabulary acquisition and stimulate critical thinking and logical reasoning. They require players to fill a grid with words based on provided clues, with each white square representing a letter of a word to be identified. The clues often take the form of definitions or indicators of the word's nature. The objective is to complete the grid, so the words intersect correctly, leveraging the present letters to deduce subsequent words. In various formats and difficulty levels, crosswords are versatile tools for language education, offering a blend of entertainment and efficacy.

### 1. Play in the Classroom: A Source of Motivation

When integrated into the classroom, games are a highly effective strategy for fostering learner motivation. By introducing elements of fun and piquing students' curiosity, games become a powerful catalyst for learning. In this context, motivation is evident in what students accomplish and internalize through engaging activities. Indeed, games rank among the most influential strategies for inspiring the desire to learn. The enthusiasm students show when they learn that a session will feature games is a testament to this effectiveness.

Viau (1997) conceptualizes this as a "motivational dynamic," describing it as a phenomenon rooted in students' perceptions of themselves and their environment. According to Viau, this dynamic leads students to commit to and persist in educational activities with the goal of learning:*"Motivational dynamic has its source in the perceptions that the student has of themselves and their environment, resulting in their choice to engage with the proposed educational activity and persevere in its completion, all in the pursuit of learning."*
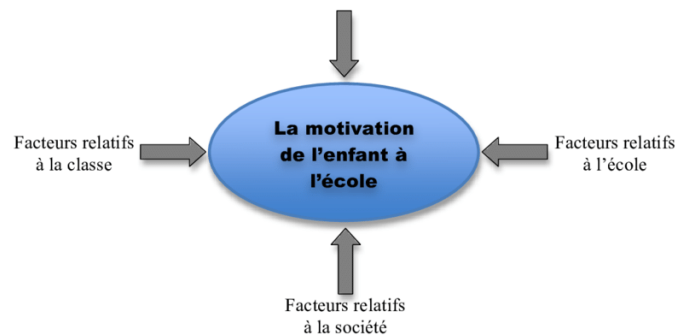
**Figure 1:** *Factors Influencing Academic Motivation According to Darveau and Viau (1997, p. 40)*

In his analysis, Vianin (2007) draws on Roussel to delineate two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is "the forces that incite one to perform activities voluntarily, out of interest, for their own sake, and for the pleasure and satisfaction they provide." In contrast, extrinsic motivation originates from external factors such as rewards or reinforcement. In the latter case, a child's motivation is driven not by the enjoyment of learning but by the anticipation of a reward.

## 2. Crosswords: Play to Learn

Martine Kervran (2002) emphasizes the educational value of games, describing them as:*"a communication activity based on the challenge: to achieve a specific goal while adhering to well-defined rules (...). It creates the need and the desire to master the language: to participate effectively and win, one must listen, speak, and understand. Linguistic acquisitions are presented, reinforced, or revised in a motivating and natural context"* (Kervran, 2002, p. 48).

Crosswords serve as a dynamic and effective tool for learning French as a Foreign Language (FLE), particularly in enriching vocabulary and reinforcing grammatical concepts. By searching for answers that align with given definitions, learners enhance their ability to mobilize lexical knowledge while simultaneously improving spelling and contextual understanding. This activity also fosters critical thinking and memorization by encouraging learners to draw connections between words and their meanings.

Moreover, learners gain insights into the target language's culture by exploring vocabulary. As De Carlo (2007) notes:*"The lexicon represents a privileged domain of culture within language: the environment, social practices, techniques, institutions, and beliefs of a population or nation are expressed through words. The presence or absence, richness, or paucity of specific types of words reflects the customs and worldview of a people"* (De Carlo, 2007, p. 101).

Aside from their linguistic benefits, crosswords provide an interactive and engaging approach to language learning. This interactive nature makes learning enjoyable and accessible to students across different proficiency levels. It engages both the students and the educators in a dynamic learning process.

## 2.1. Types of Crosswords

There is a wide variety of crosswords, each suited to different educational objectives or levels of difficulty. This diversity allows teachers to select the type most appropriate for their class needs. These include classic crosswords, illustrated crosswords, thematic crosswords, grids with grammatical clues, and inverted crosswords.

1. **Classic Crosswords**: These involve filling in a grid based on provided definitions, focusing on the search for specific vocabulary.
2. **Illustrated Crosswords**: Definitions are replaced with images, making this type particularly suitable for beginners or younger learners.

3. **Thematic Crosswords**: These focus on a specific lexical field (e.g., animals, professions, or vegetables), enabling targeted vocabulary practice.
4. **Grids with Grammatical Clues**: These include prompts about grammatical aspects, such as word gender or number, reinforcing grammatical concepts.
5. **Inverted Crosswords**: These encourage creativity by requiring students to create definitions for given words, enhancing their understanding of and engagement with the language.

These variations make crosswords an adaptable and appealing activity tailored to the diverse needs of learners, empowering educators to cater to their students' learning styles and levels of proficiency.

## 2.2. Crosswords in the Digital Age

Advances in digital technology have transformed the crossword experience, offering innovative and interactive learning opportunities. Mobile applications and online platforms now provide features such as touch-based grid filling, automated clues, instant verification, and collaborative play options. Additionally, automated crossword generators enable the creation of personalized grids tailored to specific themes or difficulty levels.

By integrating technology, the traditional crossword puzzle is revitalized, combining the appeal of modern tools with the enjoyment and cognitive benefits of play. This blend of modernity, customization, and engagement enhances the educational value of crosswords, making them a versatile tool in the contemporary language classroom.

## 3. Class Activity

Crosswords are recognized as a valuable and engaging tool for language learning. To explore their effectiveness in enhancing motivation and learning outcomes, we conducted an activity integrating crosswords into a French language course. Our target audience consisted of middle school students. The activity involved presenting a crossword puzzle to evaluate their motivation and learning progress in French. We used a pre-test and post-test design to measure the learning outcomes and a Likert scale survey to assess the students' motivation. An observation grid facilitated the analysis and helped address the initial research questions.

### 3.1. Selecting the Crossword Grid

The careful selection of a crossword grid is crucial, particularly concerning the difficulty level, as it needs to align with the learners' abilities. For this activity, we chose a straightforward grid suitable for the class's proficiency level.

The students were divided into two groups to foster collaboration and encourage communication in the target language. Each group, consisting of ten members, collaboratively worked on identifying the correct answers, promoting both teamwork and linguistic engagement.

### 3.2. Approach

The activity commenced with the distribution of crossword grids. It was essential to reiterate and explain the game's rules to ensure all participants understood the task. To facilitate the process and set the activity in motion, we read a few clues aloud and collectively proposed an initial response as a demonstration.

The grid used in the activity, *Grid No. 13*, was sourced from the website Fortissimots, a platform offering a variety of educational puzzles, including crosswords, arrow words, word searches, coded words, Sudoku, cross numbers, and letter and number games.

**FORTISSIMOTS · MOTS CROISÉS · N°13**
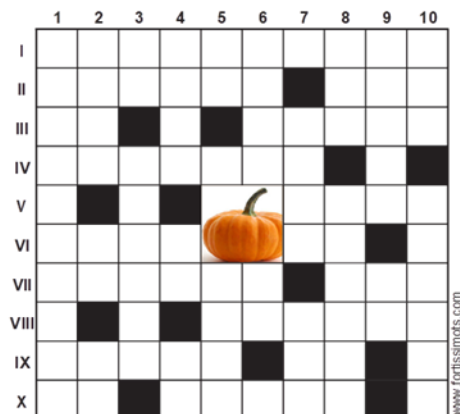


**HORIZONTALEMENT**

**I.** Un légume qui se transforme en carrosse pour Cendrillon. **II.** Un désodori- sant, c'est fait pour masquer les mauvaises     Un liquide indispensable à la

vie. **III.** Adjectif démonstratif. Au-dessus du rez-de-chaussée, c'est le premier ..... . **IV.** Très connu. **V.** Coupe la laine des moutons. **VI.** Jour de fête et de cadeaux. Fait la liaison entre deux parties d'une phrase. **VII.** Atteint de la rage. Personne : il    n'y a pas     qui vive. **VIII.** Complètement stupéfaits.

**IX.** Toute petite lumière. Négation. **X.** Dans. Je me suis moqué d'elle devant tout le monde, maintenant elle est ......

**VERTICALEMENT**

**1.** Rouge à points noirs, on l'appelle la "bête à bon Dieu". **2.** Pensée. Pronom indéfini. Chiffre proche de zéro. **3.** Pronom personnel. Plante qui grimpe le long des murs. **4.** comme un renard. Note de musique. Des rayons du soleil contre lesquels il faut se protéger. **5.** Métal jaune. C'est là qu'on prend le train. **6.** Abimer. .. toi ! Viens ici. **7.** 0 + 0 = la    à Toto. La première page

du journal. **8.** Prénom féminin. Une sorte de phoque qu'on voit dans les cirques. **9.** Le bord de mer dans les îles du Pacifique. Note de musique. **10.** Obtenue. A la station service, on choisit entre    ou essence.

**Figure 2: The chosen grid, Fortissimots n°13**

**Grid Description**

The selected crossword puzzle comprises a 10x10 grid (10 columns and 10 rows), with black squares separating certain words. A notable feature of the grid is a central illustration—a picture of a pumpkin (located in rows V-VI and columns 5-6)—a visual clue for one of the words.

The clues provided in the crossword are either literal or figurative, guiding participants in identifying the words corresponding to the boxes in the grid. Below are examples of the clues and answers:

- **Horizontally**: *1 - A vegetable that turns into a carriage for Cinderella (ten letters)*
- **Answer**: Pumpkin (the word matches the number of squares).
- **Vertically**: *5 - Yellow metal (two letters)*
- **Answer**: Gold (the word matches the number of boxes).

This crossword puzzle was chosen for its relevance to the learners' level and its potential to enhance vocabulary acquisition while promoting active engagement with the target language.

**3.3. Evaluation of Responses**

The students began their work, and it is noteworthy that they were instructed to use French-French and Arabic-French dictionaries. However, they were permitted to use only the former to verify spelling. Both groups responded with varying degrees of accuracy, as shown in the percentages below. Participants were tasked with identifying 16 horizontal words and 21 vertical words. The results are summarized in Table 1:

**Table 1: Activity Results**

| Group | Horizontal Responses | Percentage of Horizontal Responses | Vertical Responses | Percentage of Vertical Responses | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Group 1 | 6/16 | 37.5% | 8/21 | 38.1% | 48 min |
| Group 2 | 10/16 | 62.5% | 12/21 | 57.1% | 45 min |

The results indicate that Group 2 outperformed Group 1, achieving higher percentages of correct answers for horizontal (62.5% compared to 37.5%) and vertical (57.1% compared to 38.1%) responses. Moreover, Group 2 completed the task in less time (45 minutes versus 48 minutes). These disparities reflect a stronger vocabulary, more effective strategies, or a more dynamic collaboration within Group 2. These findings emphasize the significance of organization and methodological approaches in such activities. Below are the grids deciphered in color by the two groups (see Figure 3).
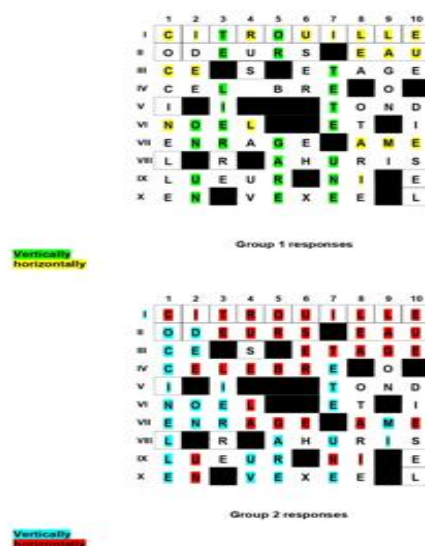


**Figure 3: The responses of both groups**

The findings further reveal that neither group could complete the task or fully identify the words. While group members demonstrated an understanding of the clues and their referents and could translate some words into Arabic, they needed help to provide accurate equivalents in French.

The challenges faced by both groups in solving the crossword puzzles may be attributed to several lexical, grammatical, and cultural deficiencies. Specifically, a lack of familiarity with certain rare or infrequently used adjectives and common nouns with multiple meanings likely increased the complexity of the clues. Additionally, conjunctions—often short and functional—proved difficult for participants to identify within the grid. Furthermore, limited vocabulary, inadequate comprehension of cultural references, and errors in analyzing grammatical clues (e.g., confusion between adjectives and nouns) further complicated the task.

These obstacles highlight the need for improved language proficiency and greater contextual knowledge to enhance performance in such activities.

### 3.4. Observation Results

To assess students' participation, vocabulary comprehension, and puzzle-solving abilities during the activity, we employed an observational grid with the following indicators:

## Table 2: Participation Evaluation Grid

| Activity Progress Indicators | Weak | Average | Good | Excellent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Participate enthusiastically in the activity by working on the crossword puzzle. | | | | + |
| 2. Understand the instructions to complete the crossword, such as definitions or black square indications. | | | + | |
| 3. Use appropriate vocabulary to fill in the grid boxes based on the given definitions. | | + | | |
| 4. Employs strategies to solve crosswords, such as identifying intersecting words or leveraging keywords from definitions. | | | | + |
| 5. Commits individually to the task. | | | | + |
| 6. Mobilizes prior knowledge to overcome obstacles. | | | + | |
| 7. Engages in group interactions and idea-sharing to solve puzzles collaboratively. | | | | + |

Classroom observation revealed that students exhibited good motivation and engagement during the crossword activity, though their enthusiasm was moderate overall. The students effectively understood the instructions and used the definitions to identify and apply appropriate vocabulary. However, they could have demonstrated more use of problem-solving strategies, such as leveraging previously placed letters or focusing on keywords from the definitions. This suggests a need for greater encouragement to develop more autonomous problem-solving techniques.

Individual engagement and group collaboration were rated excellent, with students actively interacting and sharing ideas to solve puzzles. Furthermore, their ability to draw on prior knowledge to overcome challenges reinforced their motivation to succeed.

### 3.5. Sharing and Correction
The correction phase and collaborative sharing were crucial in the learning process. By comparing the answers of both groups and discussing errors or missing words, learners identified the correct terms and their contextual usage. This collaborative exercise not only consolidated prior knowledge but also introduced new vocabulary.

Discussions surrounding unknown words enriched the learners' lexicon, making the activity more interactive and engaging. The use of crosswords as a learning tool aligns with Weiss's (1983) observation that such activities "can greatly contribute to livening up language classes and to allowing students to become more involved in their learning by enjoying playing with the words, sentences, and texts that they will create individually and collectively" (Weiss, 1983, p. 8).

### 3.6. Teaching Suggestions
To help language learners overcome the difficulties associated with solving crosswords, several teaching approaches can be implemented. Firstly, vocabulary building is essential: encouraging learners to regularly read a variety of texts in French, such as stories or comic strips, helps them to broaden their lexicon. Secondly, they need to be made aware of the cultural and thematic context: exposure to a variety of subjects, such as history, traditions or animals, helps them to better understand the crossword clues. In addition, reinforcing fundamental grammatical concepts, such as conjugation and word agreement, promotes greater linguistic proficiency. Frequent practice is also crucial: incorporating crossword exercises into the curriculum, with detailed explanations of the answers, helps to develop confidence and problem-solving skills. Finally, it's important to encourage learners to explore new grids and experiment with different approaches, which cultivates their independence and curiosity. By combining these methods, teachers give learners the tools they need to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, while building their language skills and confidence.

## CONCLUSION

Crosswords are more than a mere pastime; they represent a powerful educational tool for enriching French as Foreign Language (FFL) language skills. Through their playful and engaging nature, crosswords capture learners' attention and foster an active interest in language, promoting dynamic and participatory learning. These exercises encourage students to engage with the language creatively, stimulating memory, logic, and reasoning. By attempting to identify words that correspond to given definitions, learners expand their vocabulary, improve spelling, and gain a deeper understanding of nuanced meanings.

Moreover, crosswords are a practical medium for reviewing grammatical and syntactic concepts. Tasks such as ensuring agreements, conjugating verbs, and applying idiomatic expressions require learners to master fundamental language rules to complete the grid accurately. This process reinforces existing knowledge while fostering learner autonomy as students actively participate in their learning journey.

Integrating crosswords into teaching practices introduces an interactive and participatory element to lessons. By breaking the monotony of traditional exercises, this method can spark students' enthusiasm and curiosity, making learning French more engaging and enjoyable. Consequently, crosswords transcend their recreational purpose to become a holistic and stimulating educational tool. They provide a meaningful avenue for learners to advance their linguistic competencies effectively while enjoying the process.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- Darveau, P., & Viau, R. (1997). *Children's motivation: The role of parents.* Quebec: Les Éditions du Renouveau Pédagogique Inc.
- De Carlo, M. (2007). *The Intercultural.* CLE International, France.
- Kervran, M. (2002). *Teaching English with ease.*Bordas.
- Vianin, P. (2008). *School motivation: How to arouse the desire to learn?* 2nd ed., Educational Practices.
- Viau, R. (1997). *Motivation in a school context: Developing pedagogies.* De Boeck University.
- Weiss, F. (1983). *Game and communicative activities in the language classroom.*Practice Teaching Collection, Hachette.
- ACDEC Quebec. (n.d.). The benefits of crosswords for language learning. Retrieved from https://www.acdec-quebec.org/les-bienfaits-des-mots-croises-pour-lapprentice-des-langues/