

The Didactic Contract in Hybrid Education: A Prospective Analysis

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Abstract

Following the COVID-19 epidemic in March 2020, Algerian universities were forced to implement remote teaching across the country. Nonetheless, the major players in this context have not been pre-implemented. We are therefore interested in the difficulties encountered in this new context, mainly in the didactic relationship. Having made this preliminary statement regarding distance teaching, we should now ask what the nature of the problems is that flow from these breaches of the didactic contract and what their consequences are for both the introduction of teaching content and for the assessment methods. To answer these questions, a questionnaire was addressed to both teachers and students of the faculty of letters at Hassiba Benbouali University, in the French department, to detect the nature of the obstacles encountered. In other words, the data analysis aims to solve the various problems presented by these new hybrid teaching situations within Algerian university settings. The findings provide valuable insights into preparing for and addressing the challenges of hybrid and remote teaching. Thus, it is crucial to proactively develop actionable strategies to elevate the overall quality of education in this ever evolving academic prospect.

Keywords; Algerian Universities; Didactic contract; Distance learning; French department; Hybrid learning.

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Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has taken on an important role; it contributes to the development of teaching and learning. Since March 2020, and following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Algerian university was obliged to put distance learning throughout the country. However, the fundamental elements such as teachers and learners in this context were not prepared in advance. The study is focused on the difficulties encountered in this new situation, and more particularly in the didactic relationship in distance learning. The primary aim of this paper is to explore and analyze the attitudes of teachers and students towards distance learning, and to understand the implications of the abrupt transition to remote education and its impact on the educational process (Schneider & Council, 2020; Vaughan, 2007). This research seeks to address two fundamental research questions:

- What are the problems caused by these breaches of the didactic contract following the introduction of distance teaching?
- What impact does this situation have on teaching content, presentation, and assessment methods?

Based on these two main research questions two hypotheses were suggested:

- Distance learning introduces a new chronological organization of knowledge.
- The break in the didactic relationship will introduce new assessment methods.

1. Literature Review

The didactic contract in hybrid teaching refers to the implicit, reciprocal, and specific expectations between teachers and students regarding the content to be studied (Amade-Escot, Elandoulsi, & Verscheure, 2015). This contract defines the responsibilities of both teachers and students in the interaction between teaching and learning, regulating the three-way interactions between the teacher, the student, and the subject of studies (Chevallard, 1985). Furthermore, the didactic contract is a crucial element in the teaching and learning situations, as it can either facilitate or hinder the acquisition of new knowledge by the learner (Brousseau, 1997).

1.1. Definition of Didactic Contract

The didactic contracts conceptualized by Yves Chevallard, refers to the implicit or explicit agreement between teachers and students regarding the goals, methods, and norms of teaching and learning within a specific educational context (1985). It encompasses the expectations, roles, and responsibilities of both teachers and students in the learning process. The didactic contract serves as a framework for organizing and structuring classroom interactions, guiding the transmission of knowledge, and shaping students' learning experiences (Brousseau, 1997). It involves the negotiation of meanings, the establishment of learning objectives, and the regulation of teaching practices to ensure the attainment of educational goals (Filloux, 1996).

The didactic contract in hybrid teaching refers to implicit, reciprocal, and specific expectations of the parties involved: teachers and students, about the content to be studied. More specifically, the contract defines the responsibilities of teachers and students in an interaction between teaching

and learning, regulating three-way interactions between the teacher, the student, and the subject of studies. In addition, the didactic contract forms a critical element of teaching and learning since it may assist or obstruct the new knowledge acquisition by the learner.

1.2. Didactic Contract Relationship

Contracts are an essential part of social life, encompassing various domains such as social contracts, educational contracts, communication contracts, and teaching contracts. Every educational situation, for instance, involves an implicit or explicit contract that shapes interactions and expectations. Establishing a contract means creating a common framework that governs all relationships between individuals, ensuring a structured and predictable environment conducive to achieving mutual goals. Guy Brousseau, a psychologist renowned for his work in the field of didactics, elaborates on the concept of the didactic contract in his seminal work "Theory of Didactical Situations in Mathematics" (1997). Brousseau posits that the didactic contract is a set of implicit agreements and expectations between teachers and students that underlie the teaching and learning process. This contract regulates the responsibilities and roles of parties, shaping their interactions and influencing the educational outcomes (Wenger, 1998). The didactic contract is crucial in educational settings because it provides a framework for the transmission and acquisition of knowledge. It encompasses various aspects, including the content to be taught, the methods of instruction, the evaluation criteria, and the behavioural norms expected in the classroom. By establishing clear expectations and responsibilities, the didactic contract helps to create a conducive learning environment where students can thrive. In addition to Brousseau's work, Amade-Escot et al. (2015) further explore the significance of the didactic contract in hybrid teaching environments. They emphasize that the contract defines the specific and reciprocal expectations between teachers and students regarding the content to be studied. This relationship regulates the three-way interactions between the teacher, the student, and the subject matter, highlighting the dynamic nature of the didactic contract in adapting to different educational contexts.

Overall, the concept of contracts in education underscores the importance of establishing a common framework that governs relationships and interactions. By delineating roles, responsibilities, and expectations, these contracts facilitate effective communication and collaboration, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for all participants.

1.3. Types of the Didactic Contract

Different types of contracts are used in the field of didactics; the main criterion is that of the space. Thus, various spaces can be mentioned: those of institutions, those of the school or university discipline, those of the psyche, and so forth. In 1974, Filloux developed the concept of the "pedagogical contract," deriving it from an initial contract of institutional origin (Filloux, 1996). The first contract, of institutional origin, determines the status of teachers and learners by defining their respective positions within the social structure. This initial contract sets the foundational framework for the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and students. It establishes the societal and institutional expectations for education, thus influencing the dynamics within the educational setting.

Building on this, the pedagogical contract specifically addresses the agreements and expectations that emerge within the educational context. This contract encompasses the goals, methods, and norms of teaching and learning. It regulates the interaction between teaching and learning processes, guiding the behaviors and practices of both teachers and students.

The pedagogical contract can be further understood through various spaces of origin:

1. **Institutional Spaces:** These include the overarching educational policies and regulations set by educational authorities. They define the curriculum, assessment methods, and overall educational goals. The institutional contract shapes the formal framework within which teaching and learning occur.
2. **Disciplinary Spaces:** These pertain to the specific academic disciplines within schools or universities. Each discipline has its own set of norms, methods, and content that must be adhered to. The disciplinary contract ensures that the teaching and learning processes align with the standards and expectations of the particular field of study.
3. **Psychological Spaces:** These involve the cognitive and emotional aspects of the learning process. The psychological contract addresses the individual needs, motivations, and learning styles of students. It highlights the importance of creating a supportive and engaging learning environment that fosters students' personal and intellectual growth.

In conclusion, the concept of contracts in didactics underscores the complexity and multifaceted nature of educational interactions. The initial institutional contract lays the groundwork for the broader educational framework, while the pedagogical contract refines and specifies the expectations and responsibilities within the teaching and learning context. By understanding and addressing these various spaces of origin, educators can create more effective and meaningful educational experiences for their learners.

2.4. Research Methodology

The research project under consideration proposes two approaches:

Approach 1

Analyse the components of the teaching system as they are. Compare the changes in learner responses before, during, and after learning how to use the system. Analyse the assessments, which reveal the didactic contract (Hodges et al., 2020).

Approach 2

This approach involves introducing a disturbance into the teaching system, thereby placing the subjects involved in the didactic relationship in a situation where the contract is broken. This entails adapting the traditional implicit reference points and tweaking the contexts in which students apply their knowledge. By doing so, teachers are engaged in behaviour that is not consistent with their expectations (Wenger, 1998). The contract negotiates roles, interaction modes, limits, and individual freedom, covering learning objectives, teaching methods, assessment, and self-assessment procedures.

These students, enrolled in Master 1 FLE, underwent training within the COVID-19 context. They had several online subjects: listening comprehension, English, human and social sciences, cognitive psychology, translation, and ICT. The subjects taught in hybrid mode were written expression, and phonetics. The teachers who responded to our questionnaire have been teaching for more than five years. Some taught only one subject (phonetics), others two (writing and speaking; or drama and ICT), and others more than two subjects (TTU, CEO, corpus linguistics, ICT; TTU, writing workshop). The nature of the difficulties experienced by students is significant.

2.5 Discussion

Based on the provided data, the discussion is grounded on three critical elements: the learning objectives, the allotted time, and the content. These elements are pivotal in shaping the overall effectiveness of the educational process, particularly in the context of remote and hybrid teaching environments (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz, & Santiago, 2017).

A. Learning Objectives

The feedback from the respondents indicates that a significant majority, approximately 80%, found the subjects in hybrid mode to be manageable and accessible online. They were able to navigate through the curriculum effectively, using online resources and platforms. However, a notable minority, around 20%, encountered challenges, particularly in the context of dissertation preparation. For these individuals, the hybrid format posed difficulties, due to the condensed nature of the coursework or the complexities inherent in dissertation work (Schneider & Council, 2020).

B. Learning Time

A significant portion, comprising 60%, expressed dissatisfaction with the allocated study time, deeming it inadequate for the demands of their coursework. This sentiment likely reflects the challenges inherent in balancing academic responsibilities with other commitments, particularly in the context of hybrid learning arrangements (Hodges et al., 2020). Conversely, 40% of the respondents reported that the provided study time met their needs adequately. Their perspective suggests that, with the right approach and resources, it is indeed possible to manage the demands of hybrid learning within the confines of the allotted study time (Vaughan, 2007). The discrepancy between these two groups highlights the diverse experiences and needs of students in hybrid learning environments. By the same token it underscores the importance of flexibility in academic planning, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach may not adequately address the varied circumstances and challenges faced by learner.

A significant majority of teachers, accounting for 85.7% of respondents, opted to reduce the subject content in response to the challenges posed by hybrid learning. This proactive approach reflects educators' recognition of the need to adapt instructional materials to the constraints of online and hybrid formats. By streamlining the curriculum, teachers aimed to mitigate the potential overwhelm and cognitive load associated with navigating complex subject matter in a remote learning environment.

On the one hand, reducing subject content can enhance accessibility and facilitate deeper engagement with core concepts, particularly in a remote learning context where students may face distractions and competing demands on their time. On the other hand, there is a risk that oversimplification or omission of essential content may compromise the attainment of learning outcomes and hinder students' long-term academic progress.

Alleviating this tension requires a balanced approach that considers both the practical constraints of hybrid learning and the overarching educational objectives. Educators may need to engage in the ongoing reflection and assessment to ensure that curriculum modifications effectively support student learning. Thus, collaborative efforts among teachers, students, and educational stakeholders are essential to address these challenges and optimize the learning experience in hybrid environments.

C. Teaching Methods

A notable proportion of respondents, 57.1%, reported making adjustments to their teaching methods in response to the demands of hybrid learning. These adaptations encompassed various aspects of pedagogy, ranging from traditional classroom instruction to virtual meetings and video conferencing sessions.

D. Interactions

The majority of respondents, comprising 71.4%, identified insufficient students' participation as a notable challenge in the context of hybrid learning interactions. This finding underscores the complexities inherent in fostering active engagement and collaboration among students in online and blended learning environments. By proactively addressing the issue of insufficient student participation, educators can create more vibrant and dynamic learning communities that empower students to take ownership of their learning journey and actively contribute to the collective pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Through the ongoing collaboration and reflection, educators can continue to refine their approaches and strategies to optimize student engagement and participation in hybrid learning environments.

E. Evaluations

A significant majority of respondents, with a response rate of 71.4%, acknowledged that the hybrid learning system in place had an impact on assessment methods. This recognition highlights the interconnectedness between instructional modalities and assessment practices in hybrid learning environments, where traditional assessment methods may need to be adapted to accommodate the unique challenges and opportunities presented by remote and online learning formats. The adoption of varied assessment activities reflects educators' commitment to promoting authentic and comprehensive assessment practices that capture the multifaceted nature of student learning in hybrid environments.

By embracing flexibility and innovation in assessment design, educators can create meaningful and equitable assessment experiences that empower students to demonstrate their learning achievements effectively. Moreover, the ongoing evaluation and refinement of assessment practices are essential to ensure alignment with learning objectives, promote fairness and transparency, and support students' academic growth and development in hybrid learning environments. Collaborative efforts among educators, instructional designers, and educational stakeholders can facilitate the sharing of best practices and the implementation of evidence-based strategies to enhance assessment effectiveness and student learning outcomes in hybrid learning contexts.

In conclusion, the effective integration of learning objectives, allotted time, and content is essential for the success of remote and hybrid teaching. By focusing on these elements, educators can create a structured and engaging learning environment that meets the diverse needs of students, ultimately enhancing the quality of education.

Conclusion

The didactic relationship is a fundamental component that must be considered in every teaching and learning context. This relationship summarizes the dynamic interactions between educators and learners, covering the implicit and explicit agreements that govern the educational process. By thoroughly understanding and effectively managing the didactic relationship, educators can enhance student engagement, facilitate clearer communication, and better align instructional strategies with learners' needs and expectations. Furthermore, a well-established didactic relationship fosters an environment of mutual respect and trust, which is essential for the development of a positive and productive learning atmosphere. It also enables educators to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles, thereby promoting inclusivity and equity in education. Regular evaluation and adjustment of the didactic relationship are crucial for continuous improvement in teaching practices, ensuring that educational experiences remain relevant and effective in evolving academic contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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