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Pedagogical Co-Design as a Tool for Integrating Learning: An Exploratory Case Study in a Master's Programme in French as a Foreign Language

Krassimira LACOUSTETE*, Géraldine LARGUIER**

Abstract

This article presents an exploratory case study of pedagogical co-design in a Master's programme in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) at the University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour, France. The device articulates two course units - Project Approach and Instructional Design and Integration of Digital Tools-around a shared authentic Learning and Assessment Situation (LAS): the design of a hybrid course on the Moodle platform. Grounded in the competency-based approach and mobilising project-based pedagogy, blended learning and Universal Design for Learning, it aims to develop in students an integrated vision of pedagogical design that articulates theory and practice, pedagogical engineering and digital-tool use. We define pedagogical co-design as the collaborative process through which two teachers jointly design an integrated device across their respective courses while engaging students as co-designers of the final artefact, and we situate it within the literature on co-creation and collaborative curriculum-making in higher education. The device was implemented and refined over two successive iterations (2024–2025, collaborative; 2025–2026, individual). Data were collected through three questionnaires-two standardised institutional course evaluations and one researcher-designed questionnaire - combining four-point Likert items, categorical items and open-ended responses, analysed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings indicate high student satisfaction, positive engagement fostered by continuous assessment, and a recurrent tension between conceptual input and hands-on practice. Most importantly, students voice an explicit demand for greater curricular coherence, echoed by the coexistence of two non-harmonised assessment grids. The study contributes a two-level account of pedagogical co-design and identifies the collaborative construction of a shared assessment grid as the decisive threshold for integrating learning across articulated courses.

Keywords: competency-based approach; pedagogical co-design; project-based learning; blended learning; digital accessibility

* Deputy Director of the Pedagogical Support Department, University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour, krassimira.lacoustete@univ-pau.fr

** Director of the French Studies Institute for Foreign Students, University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour, geraldine.larguier@univ-pau.fr



1. Introduction

Contemporary transformations in higher education are profoundly reshaping training modalities. The adoption of the Bachelor–Master–Doctorate system and the progressive institutionalisation of the competency-based approach (CBA) have brought significant changes to the design of university curricula. Yet these reforms have not systematically improved the pedagogical coherence experienced by students, and programme-level coherence remains a recognised challenge in the higher education literature (Villarroel et al., 2018).

In many university programmes, students may perceive their courses as fragmented: content is addressed in compartmentalised ways, links between disciplines remain implicit, and the articulation between theory and professional practice can be difficult to perceive. Such fragmentation constitutes an obstacle to learning integration and, consequently, to the development of complex professional competencies (Tardif, 2006). While these observations are widely shared among practitioners, they call for context-specific inquiry rather than general assertion, which is the purpose of the present study.

It is in this context that a device of pedagogical co-design was designed, implemented and studied, articulating two courses of the Master's FFL programme at the University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour (UPPA): Project Approach and Instructional Design and Integration of Digital Tools. The initiative rests on several complementary principles: the competency-based approach, project-based pedagogy, the creation of an authentic Learning and Assessment Situation (LAS), and a concern for digital accessibility and inclusion.

This exploratory case study addresses three research questions. **RQ1:** How does the co-design of two articulated courses around a shared authentic LAS influence Master's FFL students' perception of curricular coherence? **RQ2:** To what extent does the shared LAS support the integration of pedagogical and digital competencies, as perceived by students and evidenced in their productions? **RQ3:** What tensions and conditions of transferability emerge from implementing pedagogical co-design across two distinct course units?

Accordingly, the study pursues three objectives: to describe a pedagogical co-design device articulating two courses around a shared authentic task; to analyse students' perceptions of coherence and competency integration; and to identify the limitations and transferable conditions of such a device. Given its exploratory and descriptive nature, the study does not test predefined hypotheses but is guided by two working propositions: that articulating the two courses around a shared LAS would strengthen students' perceived coherence and render the integration of pedagogical and digital competencies more visible to learners.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Defining Pedagogical Co-Design

Although widely used, the notion of co-design covers distinct realities in higher education and therefore requires explicit definition. The literature on co-creation defines it as staff and students working collaboratively to create components of curricula and/or pedagogical approaches (Bovill et al., 2016), a strand rooted in students-as-partners scholarship (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017; Bovill et al., 2011). More broadly, co-design designates a collaborative, iterative process in which multiple stakeholders-teachers, students, educational developers, technologists-jointly design, prototype and evaluate educational solutions such as courses, tools or curricula.

In this article, pedagogical co-design refers specifically to the collaborative process through which two teachers jointly design an integrated learning and assessment device across their respective course units-negotiating objectives, activities, resources and assessment criteria around a single authentic task-while engaging students as co-designers of the final hybrid-course artefact. Distinguishing these two levels (teacher-teacher co-design of the device and teacher-student co-design of the artefact) is analytically important: it locates the present contribution within collaborative curriculum-making rather than within student-staff co-creation alone, and it frames the central question of coherence as an effect of teacher-level articulation.

2.2 The Competency-Based Approach: Institutionalisation and Debates

The competency-based approach (CBA) has progressively become established in the European higher education landscape following the Bologna Process (1999) and OECD recommendations for structuring training around competency blocks. In France, this institutionalisation materialised through the decree of 30 July 2018, modifying the decree of 22 January 2014, which prescribes the organisation of training around competency blocks for bachelor's, professional bachelor's, and master's degrees.

The adoption of CBA has not, however, been consensual. In France notably, several academics have voiced reservations, highlighting risks of utilitarian logic, forced implementation, and persistent conceptual ambiguity surrounding the notion of competency (Chauvigné & Coulet, 2010). Despite these reservations, when collectively elaborated, CBA offers a relevant framework for articulating theory and practice, disciplinary knowledge and professional contexts (Poumay & Georges, 2022). A consensual definition has progressively coalesced around the notion of 'complex know-how-to-act' (Tardif, 2006; Georges & Poumay, 2020): competency mobilises not only knowledge but also the capacity to deploy it in an integrated, adapted and reflexive manner in varied and complex contexts. This conception directly motivates the search for pedagogical devices-such as the one studied here-that make the integrated mobilisation of competencies both possible and visible.

2.3 Project-Based Pedagogy as a Learning Lever

Project-based learning stands out as a particularly relevant experiential method for translating CBA intentions into concrete practice (Bédard et al., 2012). It is a contextualised, learner-centred and generally multidisciplinary method that emphasises learning transfer by placing students before complex, authentic challenges to be resolved collectively, mobilising research, critical analysis and collaboration competencies. Recent meta-analytic evidence associates project-based learning with positive effects on student learning and engagement across disciplines (Zhang & Ma, 2023), while also underlining that these effects depend on careful scaffolding and assessment design—a caveat directly relevant to the device studied here.

A structuring element of project-based pedagogy lies in the production of a concrete final artefact—report, design plan, prototype or model—intended to be presented to the class or to an external audience (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). This production gives meaning to learning and creates a form of authenticity that motivates learners. It also constitutes an ideal anchoring point for competency assessment: by observing how students accomplish a complex, authentic task, one can access the integrated mobilisation of competencies, including its cognitive and conceptual dimensions, which often remain tacit (Tourmen, 2015).

2.4 The Learning and Assessment Situation and Authentic Assessment

The Learning and Assessment Situation (LAS), known under various names (integrative activities, authentic tasks), is defined as a complex situation, experienced in a learning context and representative of common professional situations that the novice professional must be able to manage (Heinen & Lemenu, 2015). Its defining feature is authenticity: the situation should resemble as closely as possible the everyday reality of the future professional. This principle converges with the international literature on authentic assessment, which argues that assessment should replicate the cognitive and contextual demands of real-world practice (Villarroel et al., 2018) and should be conceived as preparation for work, well-being and society rather than as mere measurement (McArthur, 2023).

Through the LAS, students mobilise and combine internal and external resources (knowledge, skills, attitudes) and learn to position themselves relative to their objectives, whether by self-assessing or by drawing on the perspectives of teachers, experts and peers (Georges & Poumay, 2020). The LAS thus does not limit itself to assessing declarative knowledge but targets the integrated mobilisation of competencies in a complex situation; Tourmen (2015), drawing on Vergnaud (2001), stresses the importance of 'descending to the cognitive'—analysing the conceptualisations and action schemes that structure activity. Contemporary work further reframes authentic assessment as a lever for inclusion, arguing that authentic, flexible tasks can widen access and reduce assessment bias (Tai et al., 2023; Nieminen et al., 2023), and systematic evidence links authentic assessment to improved learning experience and employability

(Sokhanvar et al., 2021). Connecting these strands, the LAS operates as an operational bridge between theoretical CBA, project-based pedagogy and authentic assessment, and it is precisely this articulation-rather than any single concept-that the co-design device seeks to realise.

3. The Pedagogical Device: Designing a Hybrid Course

3.1 Context and Objectives

The LAS, titled 'Design of Hybrid Pedagogical Sequences', requires students to design a two-week hybrid course, transforming a traditional teaching unit into a blended one. The device spans two articulated units of the master's FFL curriculum, whose volumes differ: one comprises twelve hours of seminars and six hours of autonomous work, the other ten hours. The device rests on two complementary frameworks: the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation), which methodologically structures the students' design process; and pedagogical alignment (Lebrun, 2005), which ensures coherence between learning objectives, activities, resources and assessment. It also involves a reasoned selection of digital tools and resources, each student or group producing a syllabus detailing objectives, activities, assessment modalities and mobilised resources. Blended learning is understood here not as the mere juxtaposition of face-to-face and online components but as their pedagogical integration, a distinction repeatedly emphasised in the blended-learning literature (Rasheed et al., 2020).

3.2 Fundamental Characteristics of the LAS

Professional authenticity. The project places students in a situation close to their future professional activity; the final product-a complete hybrid course-is a pedagogical artefact potentially reusable in a real context.

Cognitive complexity. The project simultaneously mobilises pedagogical, technical, organisational and collaborative competencies, requiring students to articulate pedagogical reflection, technical design and project management.

Integration of learning. The LAS articulates pedagogical engineering and digital-tool integration through the design of Moodle activities and the use of multimedia and interactive resources, countering the fragmentation of teaching by offering an integrated vision of pedagogical design and creating an operational bridge between theoretical frameworks and their concrete implementation.

Collaboration. In its first iteration the project was conducted in groups, promoting collaborative learning: students negotiated their choices, argued their decisions and collectively constructed a coherent approach (see Section 4.1 on the subsequent shift to an individual task).

3.3 Pedagogical Architecture and Technical Modalities

The hybrid course designed by students typically extends over two to three weeks and alternates face-to-face time and remote activities. Each unit must include explicit learning objectives, a detailed pedagogical scenario, articulated face-to-face and remote activities,

at least one comprehension activity conducted remotely, and interactive autonomous activities. Courses are developed on Moodle with the integration of H5P activities and varied multimedia resources. Deliverables include a syllabus, a pedagogical scenario, a Moodle sequence with interactive activities, and an oral presentation.

3.4 Digital Accessibility and Universal Design for Learning

Accessibility is envisioned as an essential pedagogical and ethical dimension of the device, embedded in a progression developed throughout the semester. Students are introduced to pedagogical alignment and to accounting for learner diversity, and dedicated activities on the accessibility of digital resources help them identify obstacles likely to limit access to learning. These outcomes are then mobilised in the LAS through the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles: multiple means of representation, of action and expression, and of engagement. The aim is not to design a perfectly accessible device but to lead future teachers to integrate accessibility from the earliest stages of pedagogical design—an orientation consistent with evidence on the effectiveness of UDL (Almeqdad et al., 2023) and with broader accounts of inclusive pedagogy in higher education (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021). In the present device, accessibility functions primarily as a formative design intention rather than as a graded criterion (see Section 4.2).

3.5 Hybridisation and Learning Spaces

Hybrid devices require reflection on the organisation of physical and digital spaces. Within the UNITA alliance and in partnership with national higher-education improvement projects, several active-pedagogy rooms were equipped at UPPA to promote collaborative, hybrid and flexible learning. Sharing such a room for the two courses was a key success factor: modular furniture and shared technologies facilitated the negotiation of pedagogical choices and the co-construction of the final artefact, and the spatial configuration attenuated the boundary between the two courses, strengthening the perception of a single integrated project. Such environments combine spatial flexibility, integrated technology, inclusive accessibility and pedagogical support, becoming a catalyst for the student engagement and practical application that learners expect.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design, Context and Participants

This study adopts an exploratory, descriptive case-study design (Yin, 2018), suited to investigating a pedagogical innovation in its authentic institutional context with small, purposively defined populations. The case is a co-design device articulating two Master's course units around a shared authentic task, studied across two successive iterations: a first iteration (2024–2025) in which the project was carried out collectively, and a second iteration (2025–2026) in which it was redesigned as an individual task. This iterative

implementation reflects a design-based logic of progressive refinement, the evaluation of the first iteration informing the redesign of the second.

The device was implemented at UPPA, in the second year (M2) of the Master's programme in French as a Foreign Language, across two semester-9 course units: *Démarche de projet* (Project Approach and Instructional Design) and *Intégration des outils numériques* (Integration of Digital Tools). Each cohort comprised approximately twenty students. In the first iteration (2024–2025), students worked in four to five project groups (collective project); in the second iteration (2025–2026), the culminating task was completed individually. Data were collected from both cohorts, as detailed below.

4.2 The Assessed Task and Assessment Modalities

In the individual iteration, within the shared task, each student designed a hybrid teaching unit targeting CEFR level A2: a two-week unit (one hour at a distance, two hours face-to-face) with an explicit title and objectives, a table sorting activities into face-to-face and autonomous, at least one distance reading- or listening-comprehension activity, and interactive autonomous activities (for example self-paced grammar or lexical practice), deposited on the Moodle (Elearn) platform.

Reflecting the co-design across two course units, each of the two teachers assessed students' productions with her own criterion-referenced grid, the two grids not yet being harmonised. In the *Integration of Digital Tools* course, the grid (out of 16) weighted the overall scenarisation of the unit for a hybrid course (/4), the ergonomics and clarity of the activity descriptions (/4), the transformation of autonomous activities into appropriate interactive activities (/6), in-course participation (/2). In the *Project Approach and Instructional Design* course, the grid (out of 10) rated fourteen finer-grained criteria: adherence to the announced schedule and sequencing, welcome and closing messages, SMART objectives, constructive alignment, Moodle configuration, interactivity, an assessment quiz, forum and communication, variety of resources, creativity, originality, writing quality, and a task-tracking trace. The coexistence of two separate grids concretely illustrates the study's central tension: although the two courses are co-designed around a shared task, their assessment is not yet harmonised (see Section 7). It is worth noting that constructive alignment is an explicitly graded criterion, whereas accessibility remains a formative design intention rather than a scored one.

4.3 Data Collection, Analysis and Ethics

To document students' perceptions, the study triangulates three questionnaires across the two iterations. In the first iteration (2024–2025), two standardised institutional course-evaluation questionnaires (administered by the UPPA Evaluation Office in June 2025) were used, one per course unit (*Project Approach and Instructional Design*, $n = 10$; *Integration of Digital Tools*, $n = 11$). These instruments combine four-point Likert items (1 = not at all to 4 = completely), categorical items (perceived level, pace, online resources, continuous-assessment experience) and three open-ended questions. In the

second iteration (2025–2026), a researcher-designed questionnaire focusing on the integrated unit was delivered via Moodle (December 2025–January 2026, $n = 5$), combining categorical items (general interest, importance for training, balance of theory and practice, distance/face-to-face alternation) and open-ended items.

Two of the three instruments are therefore institutional satisfaction questionnaires not specifically designed for this study; they capture perceived satisfaction and clarity rather than competency gains. This constraint, addressed in Section 4.4, motivates the triangulation with the researcher-designed questionnaire and with students' open-ended comments.

Closed and categorical items were analysed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages). Open-ended responses were analysed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), using inductive coding to identify recurrent themes, which were then triangulated across the three sources to strengthen interpretive validity.

The institutional course evaluations were collected anonymously under the university's standard evaluation procedure. For the researcher-designed questionnaire, administered via the course's Moodle space, students were informed orally in class of its purpose before responding; because the platform recorded respondents' identities, all responses were pseudonymised prior to analysis and no identifying information is reported. Participation was voluntary.

4.4 Limitations

Several limitations constrain this study: small, non-aggregable samples ($n = 5$; 10; 11), instruments measuring satisfaction rather than competency integration, lack of a comparison group, and a shift from collective to individual tasks between iterations. While the findings are consistent, they remain context-specific and not generalisable.

5. Results

Results are reported in three movements: quantitative findings drawn from the first iteration's institutional course evaluations (Section 5.1); qualitative findings, namely the theory–practice tension identified in the second iteration and the demand for coherence recurring across both cohorts (Section 5.2); and a concluding synthesis (Section 5.3).

5.1 Satisfaction, Clarity and Engagement

Across both institutional evaluations, students reported high overall satisfaction (mean = 3.8/4 for Project Approach and Instructional Design, $n = 10$; 3.6/4 for Integration of Digital Tools, $n = 11$) and rated learning objectives and assessment rules as clear (3.6–3.8/4). For Project Approach and Instructional Design, 80% of respondents gave the highest satisfaction rating and 90% considered the course level appropriate; figures for Integration of Digital Tools were comparable (level appropriate: 90.9%). Online resources were judged satisfactory by all respondents in both courses (100%).

Among students concerned by integral continuous assessment, perceptions were very positive: respondents agreed that the frequency of assessment was appropriate and

that continuous assessment fostered both their investment in the course and their success (means of 4.0/4 for Project Approach and Instructional Design, $n = 4$; 3.8/4 for Integration of Digital Tools, $n = 5$). These items provide an indication-rather than a direct measure-of the behavioural and cognitive dimensions of engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004).

5.2 Theory–Practice Tension and Demand for Coherence

In the second iteration, both closed and open data reveal a consistent tension between conceptual input and hands-on activity. Three of five respondents judged the integrated unit 'too theoretical', while the remaining two found it 'balanced'. Open-ended comments repeatedly expressed a wish for more practice and content creation: students valued theoretical inputs such as project-management tools as useful for their forthcoming internship, yet wished to engage further in the actual creation of pedagogical content. Tellingly, the tools mentioned as difficult (Gantt charts, H5P, Moodle configuration, writing learning outcomes) were also those students most wished to develop further, suggesting productive difficulty rather than rejection.

The strongest qualitative signal, recurring across both cohorts, concerns curricular coherence. Students praised the professional relevance of the device, the direct manipulation of tools, group work (described as very useful for the future), and the teaching team's field experience and support. At the same time, several comments pointed to fragmentation: an imbalance in workload across projects and groups, and instructions for the main projects that would have gained from being more clearly stated. Most tellingly, one respondent described the project course as disconnected from the rest of the programme and called for the teaching team to ensure it is better integrated into the curriculum. This explicit demand for integration directly echoes the rationale of the co-design device.

5.3 Synthesis

Taken together, the sources converge on two findings that hold across both iterations. First, students express strong appreciation for the integrated, professionalising and hands-on character of the device, and for continuous assessment as a driver of involvement. Second, they articulate a clear demand for greater coherence-across the two courses, in workload distribution and in the clarity of project expectations-together with a recurring call for more practice relative to theory. These results are consistent with the literature on project-based and authentic learning while highlighting integration, not motivation, as the principal lever still to be strengthened.

6. Discussion

6.1 Transformations in Teaching Practices

The implementation of the LAS transformed teaching postures, marking a shift from a content-delivery model to a function of piloting learning. Teachers progressively adopted a posture of support and scaffolding rather than top-down transmission, placing students

at the centre of the construction of their know-how-to-act. This support materialised through exploratory questioning aimed at making solutions emerge from students; moments of co-regulation during group work, allowing real-time adjustment; spaces for collective reflexivity on mobilised action schemes; and a valorisation of the right to error, treating experimentation during Moodle configuration or accessibility implementation as essential learning opportunities. This evolution created a climate of trust conducive to iterative revision, and it underscores that co-design concerns not only content but also the way teachers and learners collaborate—an interpretation consistent with accounts of co-creation as relational and process-oriented (Bovill et al., 2016).

6.2 Authenticity, Assessment and the Limits of the Device

A quality LAS requires attention to two criteria: complexity and authenticity. In this case both are satisfied: students simultaneously mobilise pedagogical theory, technological competence and collaborative competencies, and designing a hybrid course is a genuine task of future teachers. Yet the results locate the principal limit not in motivation but in assessment. The theory–practice tension reported by students (Section 5.2) resonates with the authentic-assessment literature, which insists that perceived authenticity depends on an appropriate balance between conceptual input and productive activity (Villarroel et al., 2018; McArthur, 2023). More decisively, the demand for coherence (Section 5.2) can be read, through the lens of collaborative curriculum-making, as a call for articulation at the level of the teachers themselves: coherence is produced less by the shared student project than by the alignment of the two teachers' objectives, criteria and assessment. The coexistence of two non-harmonised grids is the concrete expression of this unfinished articulation.

A further limitation concerns the nature of the evidence. Because two of the three instruments are institutional satisfaction questionnaires, the study documents perceptions and satisfaction rather than measured competency gains; integrated competency development is inferred from students' artefacts and comments rather than assessed directly. Future work should therefore complement perception data with analysis of the artefacts themselves, using a shared rubric, so as to evidence competency integration more directly.

7. Conclusions and Perspectives

This exploratory case study suggests that pedagogical co-design articulated around an authentic LAS can strengthen students' perceived coherence and engagement, while making visible the conditions under which learning integration is-or is not-achieved. Across two iterations, students valued the integrated, professionalising and hands-on character of the device and the continuous-assessment regime, yet consistently called for greater coherence between the two courses.

A central lesson concerns assessment. While the two courses now share a common authentic task, they still rely on separate assessment grids, reflecting the same fragmentation the co-design process aims to overcome. The next critical step is to

collaboratively develop a shared assessment framework that aligns evaluation criteria across both courses. This would not only address students' demand for coherence but also enhance the visibility of transversal competencies and strengthen assessment equity. In our view, this transition from co-designed tasks to co-designed assessment marks the decisive threshold of pedagogical co-design.

A second perspective concerns the progressive and critical integration of generative artificial intelligence, which students could use to create linguistic activities, generate supports, adapt content to different difficulty levels or analyse written productions. The objective would not be merely to introduce tools but to train future teachers in their critical, ethical and reflective use within pedagogical design.

These findings unfold in a particularly favourable context - an involved teaching team, motivated Master's students and adequate digital resources-conditions that are not always met. Nonetheless, the principles implemented here (pedagogical co-design, production of authentic artefacts, and reflexive, inclusive assessment) are transferable and adaptable to other contexts and disciplines. The study thus illustrates how universities can create complex, authentic and transformative learning environments in which theory and practice articulate, and it identifies the shared assessment grid as the concrete next step toward integrating learning across articulated courses.

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