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# Investigating the links between TBLT, oral competence, and student retention in FSL

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## Abstract

Through a survey, interviews, and document analysis, this mixed-methods research study involving 751 Ontario university students and a French professor investigated the issue of decreasing enrollment in Ontario FSL programs after Grade 9, low numbers of functionally bilingual graduates, and the possibility of TBLT to improve students' oral abilities, motivation, and consequently retention in FSL. Following the findings of Lapkin et al.'s (2009) literature review on Core French, the researcher found that a lack of oral practice in FSL classes has been a serious issue leading students to discontinue or feel unsuccessful in FSL programs. Students would enjoy experiencing an approach like TBLT and the language use it provides may help students feel success at any language level. To help effectively implement the MEO's (2013, 2014) new action-oriented FSL curriculum and increase the number of functionally bilingual graduates, teachers must have professional development and resources to help them implement approaches like TBLT.

## Keywords

French as a Second Language, FSL, Task-Based Language Teaching, TBLT, tasks in FSL, oral fluency, motivation, L2 acquisition, SLA, French, oral skills in FSL, language learning motivation, action-oriented

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## Chapter 1

### 1 Introduction

This introductory chapter presents the roots of the research problem that inspired and compelled this research study to take place. This is followed by a brief introduction to the research problem itself, the research questions, and the definitions of key terms used throughout the thesis.

#### 1.1 Origins of the Research Topic

It was clear to me from speaking to friends and acquaintances that my somewhat negative personal experiences studying French as a Second Language (FSL) in Core French programs in elementary and secondary school were shared by many other second language (L2) learners of French in Ontario. I graduated from secondary school after studying FSL for nine years without feeling I had the ability to hold a conversation in French. I was not required by my teachers to speak French throughout those nine years, and the lack of oral practice meant a complete lack of confidence in my oral skills. I was lucky enough to have a mother who encouraged me to continue with my French education in order to improve my future teaching prospects, but truth be told I did not enjoy my French education until my second year of taking French courses in university. That was the first time I was required to take a specifically oral French course and I very nervously discovered that I could, in fact, speak some French and not only read and write it well. The traditional ways I had been taught, reading from and completing activities in a textbook or *cahier*, taught me what I needed to know in terms of grammar, reading, and writing, but due to a lack of opportunities for oral practice, I did not acquire well-rounded skills in the language.

As an FSL teacher now, I would call my current level of French “fluent” on any working application, but in reality I consider myself a step down from that. I am very

aware that I lack a strong ability to communicate spontaneously in French. I was still bothered not only by a lack (and by lack, I mean none at all) of authentic oral practice in the FSL classroom during elementary or secondary schooling, but also from insufficient listening practice during class time due to my teachers not speaking enough French, particularly with regards to every day topics. The French I heard was always with regards to the work being assigned. It is easy to become accustomed to “daily classroom language” in French, but once outside the classroom, the vocabulary that I only read, wrote, and memorized was unrecognizable to my ears and I was unable to easily formulate sentences and speak.

I worked hard to get where I am now as an FSL teacher able to teach a lesson fully in French, but still I cannot say that I am confidently fluent due to my weaknesses communicating spontaneously with native French speakers. I get nervous teaching students who speak French at home because their natural abilities are higher than mine due to authentic oral practice from a young age, even though I may be twenty years their elder. I spent nine years studying FSL through elementary and secondary school and achieved good grades without having to speak a word of the language, aside from asking to use the washroom, and the only thing I enjoyed about it was seeing my friends in the class. I now feel the effects strongly and would like to contribute to future FSL students having better experiences.

After graduating from a teacher education program in 2014 and teaching for a year, I was not only still bothered by my weakness in speaking French outside of school contexts, but also by my lack of understanding of how people actually learn languages. My teacher education very much focused on teaching through traditional teaching methods and how to be a teacher who teaches French, not how to be an L2 teacher of French. I wanted to learn more about teaching and learning languages, specifically in order to make my own teaching practices more engaging and useful for students. I also wanted to understand why so many students graduate without the ability to speak French and I decided to investigate a way to help improve this.

While taking a course titled “Understanding Second Language Acquisition,” I was drawn to the notion of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). This approach to language teaching immediately stood out to me as something I wished I had had the opportunity to experience in learning French, and wanted to look into it further. I imagined the wonderful and meaningful oral language practice I could have had if taught through such an approach where the language was used to complete real-life tasks and used as a tool for communication, not just as a subject I had to study (Ellis, 2013). I believe this approach would have made me more motivated to learn French and would have made me enjoy learning it a lot more.

The aspect of teaching French that excites me the most is the fact that any fun activity or topic can be adapted to a French lesson, as long as the language is being used, and TBLT appeared to be the perfect approach for doing this. There are so many possibilities for teachers to plan creative and engaging lessons based on student tasks. TBLT has the potential to improve students’ opportunities for engaging and meaningful oral practice through various topics and tasks that teachers can choose based on students’ interests and needs. Thus, it seemed to be exactly what I had been looking for.

The inspiration for this research therefore comes from my personal experiences as both a student in FSL programs and as an FSL teacher. I am passionate about ensuring that students leave school with the ability to actually use the French language meaningfully, particularly if they have made the choice to continue studying it to benefit themselves in the future. The frustration I have felt with not feeling entirely able to do the job I want to do due to a lack of oral practice in French in my earlier years has inspired me to do what I can now to ensure that other students see better progress. TBLT became a part of that inspiration.

## 1.2 The Research Problem

A main goal of French education in Canada is giving students the opportunity to be able to speak and communicate in the language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), and

without oral practice it is impossible to achieve that goal as oral practice is necessary to learning to speak a language (Skehan, 1998). Not only is it clear from my own experience and those of friends and acquaintances that some FSL students graduate feeling they have not learned sufficiently, but this sentiment is also expressed in a literature review on Core French conducted by Lapkin, Mady, and Arnott (2009). They reveal findings from Canadian Parents for French (CPF) and Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) surveys that demonstrate that young Canadian students choose to discontinue French studies after the mandatory time (e.g. up to Grade 9) because they feel they are not making enough progress, are unable to express themselves in the language, and wish they had experienced more of a focus on spoken interaction. Ontario Core French enrollment statistics reflect an 88.1% decrease in enrollment from Grade 9 to Grade 12 in the years 2011-2012 to 2014-2015 (CPF, n.d.).

This research seeks to delve into the findings presented in the Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review and investigate why there is such a significant decrease in enrollment in French programs after the minimum required time up to Grade 9. It also investigates the possibility of TBLT as one feasible solution to the problem of students not being motivated to continue with French and lacking, or at least feeling that they lack, functional oral abilities. Mixed-methods research involving the use of a survey, interviews, and document analysis was therefore conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. (a) How do university students who completed French studies to Grade 12 perceive their successfulness at learning the French language, and why?, (b) How do university students continuing with French studies in university perceive their own preparedness for university French level studies, and why?, and (c) How do university French professors perceive student preparedness to undertake university French level studies?

2. (a) How do university students who completed French studies up to Grade 12 perceive the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation? and (b) How does a university French professor perceive the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation?

3. Why do students choose to continue or discontinue their French studies in secondary school?

Without making any generalizations or claiming relationships between variables, through the use of a survey I sought to have the numbers to demonstrate that students feeling they lack oral skills by the end of their FSL education is problematic, and to have qualitative answers to help explain why, from students' own perspectives, they may be dissatisfied, even if only partially, with their FSL education.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (MEO) revised the FSL curriculum documents for elementary and secondary levels in 2013 and 2014 respectively for the purpose of increasing the number of functionally bilingual graduates in Ontario (Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association (OMLTA), 2014; MEO, 2013, 2014). It is important to ensure that teachers are supported in implementing the changes they attempt to implement to ensure success of the FSL teaching and of their FSL students' learning. A revitalized 'action-oriented' approach is key to the new curriculum for improving students' functional fluency, and to move away from more traditional teaching methods (OMLTA, 2014). Particularly for those teachers whose teaching was based on traditional methods for years (i.e. more focus was on grammar with a heavy reliance on worksheets and textbook materials that promoted mechanical repetition, imitation, memorization, and an overall artificial use of the language (Piccardo, 2014)), moving to creating action-oriented lessons is not a change that can easily be implemented. Teachers must have resources and research to support them and make their transition to the MEO's (2013, 2014) recommended methods of teaching smoother, particularly so that they continue to adopt and implement them, instead of ignoring or discarding them because they are too time-consuming (Erlam, 2015). This research and investigation into the effectiveness of TBLT as an effective action-oriented approach to language teaching, based on the opinions and experiences of FSL students and a university French professor, is intended to foster resource and professional development to help teachers effectively implement action-oriented approaches like TBLT in order to achieve the desired outcomes of the new FSL curriculum and, particularly, to develop students' functional oral skills,

heighten their enjoyment of FSL programs, and ultimately also heighten retention rates throughout secondary and post-secondary studies.

### 1.3 Definitions

The following are definitions of key terms that are significant to this research and will therefore be used throughout this thesis:

**Communicative language teaching (CLT):** The dominant approach to language teaching for the last three decades, it emphasizes the use of real-world and authentic tasks for communication in a student-centered classroom (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008; Piccardo, 2010; 2014; Taylor, in press).

***Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):*** Introduced to Canada as the most comprehensive and comprehensible way to measure bilingualism (CPF (Ontario), 2010). The CEFR brings an authentic, action-oriented approach to language learning and provides a framework for tracking and recognizing progress, as well as goal-setting. The framework is divided into 6 levels for describing language proficiency and each level consists of five categories to describe what effective communication at each level should look like: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing (Council of Europe, 2001). It was introduced to schools in Ontario to bring more of a focus to actual language use (Taylor, 2016).

**Action-oriented approaches to language teaching:** In the new FSL curriculum, this approach aims to engage students in completing tasks or problems within authentic and meaningful contexts (OMLTA, 2014). Students take real action to practice and develop their language skills. Taking action is the distinguishing factor between this and general communicative approaches. Learners become social agents and action “makes it possible to contextualize other key notions such as goal, needs, social context, strategy, task, and competence” (Piccardo, 2014, p.5).

**Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT):** A communicative language teaching approach that places students in authentic situations for meaningful interaction in the target language. Students complete realistic and relevant tasks where the major focus is on completing the task while using the language, not on the language itself (Long, 2014). This promotes incidental and implicit language learning as students do something of meaning to them (Lantolf, 2011).

**Traditional approaches to language teaching:** Traditional methods are the more ‘textbook’ methods of teaching languages. More traditional methods rely on mechanical repetition, imitation, memorization, and an overall artificial use of the language (Piccardo, 2014).

**FSL:** Acronym for French as a Second Language

**L2:** Acronym for second language

**The four skills:** The ‘four skills’ of language teaching are reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Sometimes culture is considered the fifth skill as it plays a significant role in learners’ language acquisition and understanding of language usage. Lack of understanding of a language culture can be a barrier to effective communication (Mihal & Purmensky, 2016).



## Chapter 2

### 2 Literature Review

This literature review outlines and discusses the research problem in-depth, demonstrating the need for the current research study. TBLT is also explored, including its potential positive and negative aspects, as a possible approach to help alleviate the problem and improve students' oral skills and motivation in FSL.

#### 2.1 A Closer Look at the Research Problem

A main goal of the Ontario FSL curriculum is to develop students' abilities to communicate and interact in French (MEO, 2013). Employing the MEO's (1998, 1999, 2000) previous FSL curriculum, the view was that Ontario was not meeting its goal and not increasing the number of functionally bilingual graduates (CPF (Ontario), 2008). In spite of the 2003 Action Plan (Privy Council Office, 2003) which sought to double the number of bilingual graduates in Canada by 2013, census data indicated that the percentage of bilingual Anglophones aged 15 to 19 actually decreased from 16.3% in 1996 to 13% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Kissau and Turnbull (2008) suggest that more effort needs to be directed at promoting French education amongst Anglophones, and more particularly amongst adolescent boys, because two-thirds of students who discontinue studying FSL after the mandatory period are male.

As a response to this continued shortcoming, the Ontario FSL elementary and secondary curricula were revised in 2013 and 2014 respectively (MEO, 2013, 2014) to feature a revitalized action-oriented approach for improving students' functional fluency in French, and move away from more traditional teaching methods (OMLTA, 2014).<sup>1</sup> The more traditional methods relied on mechanical repetition, imitation, memorization, and an overall artificial use of the language, which placed the importance of structure and

<sup>1</sup> Traditional methods and action-oriented approach discussed further in '2.1.1: Why use TBLT in FSL' on page 24.

grammatical rules before that of oral abilities (Piccardo, 2014). Traditional methods are effective for language learning in many ways, but the artificiality it provides can lead students to see the language as useless and as just a subject they are forced to study. If students do not feel they are learning French in a useful and meaningful way, they will be less likely to become successful, self-regulated learners in the language (Lapkin et al., 2009). The effects can be seen in the dramatic decrease in Core French students studying French after the minimum required time. It would seem that a lot of teachers' and students' time is wasted in FSL classrooms if students leave feeling they have not actually gained the skills to use French or if they do not feel motivated to continue learning French.

CPF (n.d.) reports the Ministries of Education's enrollment statistics for Core French and French Immersion programs in Canada for the years 2014-2015, 2013-2014, 2012-2013, 2011-2012, and onward. The Ontario Core French statistics demonstrate the significant decrease in students' enrollment after Grade 9 when French becomes an elective course, rather than a mandatory one. In the school year 2011-2012, 85,826 students were enrolled in Grade 9 French in Ontario. From that group, 24,395 continued on to study French in Grade 10 in 2012-2013. This demonstrates a 71.6% enrollment decrease. By Grade 12 in the 2014-2015 school year, enrollment was down to 10,247 students, showing a decrease of 88.1% from Grade 9.

French Immersion enrollment decreases as well, though most significantly from Grade 8 to Grade 9 as some students move to non-Immersion schools at the end of their elementary schooling. There was a 34.5% decrease demonstrated in enrollment from Grade 8 French Immersion in 2011-2012 to Grade 9 French Immersion in 2012-2013. The numbers decrease steadily by approximately 1000 students each year thereafter. Overall enrollment for French Immersion programs in Canada and Ontario has been increasing, though, whereas Core program enrollment has been decreasing over the last several years. French Immersion enrollment in Ontario for the 2013-2014 school year was 187,741, which increased to 200,258 for the 2014-2015. Core French enrollment for 2013-2014 was 796,887, which decreased to 777,833 in 2014-2015 (CPF, n.d.). Bilingualism is increasingly valued in the workplace and "Early French Immersion

remains the best option within the English school boards for achieving the highest level of proficiency in French,” so it comes as no surprise that more parents are enrolling their children in French Immersion programs to help give them a perceived advantage over other future professionals (CPF, 2008, p. 10).

In their literature review on Core French, Lapkin et al., (2009) highlight a survey that the APEF conducted in 2004. The APEF surveyed nearly 3000 Grade 11 students who were formerly in Core French studies. Their results indicated that the typical response for why young Canadians chose not to continue with their French studies was because they felt they did not make any significant progress in learning the language and did not feel capable of expressing themselves in the language. They would have preferred a greater emphasis to be on spoken production through things like group work and engaging hands-on activities. For instance, research suggests that collaborative activities in Core French can increase both teacher and student motivation while enhancing oral proficiency and accuracy in the language (Lapkin et al., 2009). The literature review also relays the findings of a 2004 CPF survey of 105 university students who continued with Core French until Grade 12, which found that the majority of these students did not feel they could carry on a conversation in French, despite their continuing with French studies to the end of secondary school. Lapkin et al. (2009) report: “Almost half reported they could not understand spoken French...and most said they would not be able to carry on a conversation in French beyond a few set phrases” (p. 9).

Kissau (2005) draws on the APEF and CPF surveys as well to note that another common reason why students do not continue studying French is due to school scheduling conflicts, which affects French enrollment across Canada. With the elimination of a fifth year of schooling in Ontario, students must obtain 18 compulsory credits out of 30 in a shorter period of time, leaving many students unable to find space in their timetables for French. From the CPF survey of 105 students, 17% mentioned lack of space in their schedule for French, and from the APEF survey of 3000 Grade 11 students, 25% mentioned this reason. Kissau (2005) suggests that students’ inability to take FSL courses because other mandatory courses take precedence conveys a negative message to

students about the importance of learning French and results in students questioning the value of it.

Jones and Jones (2001) also discuss the negative reactions of boys to traditional, teacher-centered classrooms where they had little opportunities to actually use the target language, and therefore did not develop any significant oral proficiency, causing them to not continue their L2 or foreign language (FL) studies. The traditional approaches to FSL teaching, as well as habitual repetition and imitation, made male students feel they had less control over their own success and that there was nothing they could do on their own to improve, making them less motivated (Jones & Jones, 2001; Kissau, 2006). It is very difficult for students to find motivation to learn a subject that they feel they are not learning successfully or meaningfully and motivation is a key factor in students' success (Lapkin et al., 2009). The following section discusses the significant role motivation plays in language learning, specifically how it can affect student achievement in FSL.

### 2.1.1 Motivation and achievement in the FSL classroom

Motivation is key for improving L2 learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2001). It has been claimed to be “one of the most important concepts in psychology” (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008, p. 55); however, it is also a very complex idea that a wealth of theories and research attempt to describe. This paper will not discuss all of the cognitive processes and theories that underlie and accompany the idea of motivation – it will be discussed in its most basic form to provide a general understanding of what it entails. Dörnyei (2001) compares the complexity of motivation to the Indian fable about blind men encountering an elephant, each touching a different part of the elephant and coming up with very different images in their minds of what they were touching. He explains that researchers are very selective in what aspect of motivation they choose to focus on since it is impossible to capture the entire picture of what can affect an individual's motivation.

Motivation is very abstract and dynamic and therefore cannot be measured in only one way. When individuals say they want something and they explain why it is important

to them, this alone cannot articulate that they are motivated (Gardner, 2010). Individuals can explain that something is important to them, but that does not mean they are motivated. They must expend the effort, have the desire, and enjoy the activities involved in the process (Gardner, 2010). Gardner (2010) describes three components that together can provide a concrete estimate of an individual's motivation to learn an L2: desire to learn the language, attitudes toward learning the language, and motivational intensity/effort expended. He also distinguishes between two aspects of motivation in L2 acquisition: language learning motivation and language classroom motivation. The former accounts for a student's underlying individual differences, their willingness to learn and integrate into the language culture, and the effect of their classroom experiences. The latter "is affected by the environment in the classroom, the nature of the course and the curriculum, characteristics of the teacher, and the very scholastic nature of the student" (Gardner, 2010, p.10). These two aspects also affect one another. Through these, it is clear that motivation to study an L2 cannot be defined simply by a student presenting reasons for wanting to study it.

Dörnyei (2001) explains that the motivation to do something involves stages and evolves gradually. Particularly in the long process of learning an L2 over the course of months, years, and even during one lesson, motivation is not constant. It increases and decreases depending on internal and external factors, which are sometimes uncontrollable. These factors include, but are not limited to individual differences, home and community attitudes towards the language, the classroom environment, and teacher practices. Piccardo (2014) explains that language learning "always happens in relation to a context that each individual perceives differently, based on his or her own life experience, expectations, prior knowledge, and disposition" (p. 32). Student perceptions and other factors influence their motivation, which consequently affects their L2 learning.

Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) conducted a study involving over 1,300 students in ESL classes, which found that student motivation is also related to teachers' motivational practices in the classroom. Teachers play an important role in motivating their students by providing engaging activities, creating a good rapport, supporting students in their learning, helping them experience and feel good about their success, and

also demonstrating their own motivation to teach the students (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008). Their motivational practices thus affect student achievement.

Home and community attitudes also influence students' attitudes toward learning an L2, and thus their motivation and overall achievement (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). If the general attitude toward French in a community, or a classroom, is negative, students are less likely to develop a positive attitude towards learning it, and thus feel less motivated to study it. It is important that teachers help develop students' positive attitudes toward learning French (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008). Kissau (2006) also demonstrated how young Ontario male students' interest and motivation within the FSL learning context can be negatively impacted by (homophobic) society-based perceptions about learning French (e.g. as a feminine language or endeavour).

Investment plays a noteworthy part in an individual's desire to continue studying a language as well (Peirce, 1995). Peirce (1995) argues that the general conceptions of motivation, such as an individual being motivated to learn for employment purposes or to integrate into the target language community, "do not capture the complex relationship between relations of power, identity, and language learning" (p.17). Despite the high motivation participants in her study had to learn English since they were immigrants to Canada, relations of power between interlocutors were demonstrated to sometimes affect the willingness and comfort of those L2 learners to speak. Their degree of motivation was not what caused their ambivalence towards speaking English; it was the material or symbolic investment they had in particular people (e.g. their bosses and customers) that made them more hesitant or anxious to speak.<sup>2</sup> A student's oral performance can therefore not be entirely tied to their motivation, or lack thereof. Many factors affect a student's desire or ability to successfully acquire a language.

In the Canadian FSL context where studying French is mandatory to the ninth grade in many provinces, learning the language is often not done out of necessity, particularly in Ontario. Gardner (2010) suggests the lack of external impetus is what

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<sup>2</sup> The term "symbolic investment" was later expressly defined by Dr. Julie Byrd Clark (2009) in her book *Multilingualism, Identity, and Citizenship: Voices of youth and symbolic investments in an urban, globalized world*.

makes motivation necessary when learning an L2, as opposed to a first language (L1) or other languages learned in the home, which is done just through experiencing life and growing up. Understanding what motivates individual students is very difficult. Given some students' personal interests, environment, investment, identity, and other individual differences, they may never be motivated to learn French; however, many things could be done to improve FSL teaching practices to try to increase student motivation by making French a subject they want to study and find useful, rather than a subject they are forced to study.

### 2.1.2 The Ontario FSL Curriculum: Out with the Old

When the old curriculum was created, one of the main aims of the MEO's (1998) elementary Core French curriculum was for students to "develop a basic usable command of the French language" (MEO, 1998). This phrase is repeated in the Grade 9 and 10 and Grade 11 and 12 curriculum documents, and the claim is made that by the end of the four years of Core French study at secondary school, students would be able to "participate in a straight-forward conversation in French" (MEO, 1999, 2000). The Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review on Core French and CPF (Ontario) (2008) "Report and Recommendations to the Ontario Minister of Education" clearly indicate that this claim is unsubstantiated for many students. Revising the curriculum and putting a new curriculum in place evidently does not guarantee that the MEO's (2013, 2014) current goals will be met either. The needed improvements can only be made by teachers implementing effective teaching strategies in the classroom and by school boards supporting schools in efforts to reach the new goals.

The Grade 9, 10, 11 and 12 FSL curriculum documents from 1999 and 2000 state, "The study of French is an important part of the secondary school curriculum. French is not only one of Canada's two official languages, but is also widely used around the world" (MEO, 1999, 2000). Considering the number of students who do not continue studying French past the ninth grade, it does not seem to be considered a very important part of the secondary school curriculum, particularly in comparison to the mathematics



and sciences that students continue to study. A lack of space in students' timetables for elective courses also does not help this issue (Kissau, 2005). French could become a more significant part of the curriculum if a larger number of students reacted positively to the new curriculum and chose to continue with French studies, which can only occur if the new curriculum is implemented effectively.

The new Core French 2013 elementary and 2014 secondary curriculum documents include the goal that students “use French to communicate and interact effectively in a variety of social settings” (MEO, 2013, 2014, p. 6). The curriculum further states that in order for students to achieve the new goals, students must “acquire a strong oral foundation in the French language and focus on communicating in French; [and] understand the value of learning another language” (MEO, 2013, 2014, p. 6). The curriculum documents also point to the importance of students being able to communicate with French Canadian speakers and other speakers of French around the world, as well as to the benefits of bilingualism for having “a competitive advantage in the workforce” (MEO, 2013, 2014, p. 6). Learning about the French/French Canadian culture has also long been an important part of the FSL curriculum goals. Gardner (2010) views student understanding of the connection between language and culture as linked to increased motivation to learn an L2. Understanding why the French language is part of their curriculum and what benefits it could provide them in their futures is important as students need to “see relevance in the academic work they are completing” (Parsons & Ward, 2011, p. 462). When students do not see the relevance of this academic work, they are more likely to discontinue studying it (Lapkin et al., 2009).

Interaction is an essential part of the new curriculum and there are multiple examples of the documents specifying the importance of providing opportunities for authentic oral communication for students to reach their goal of effectively interacting in French (MEO 2013, 2014). In their discussion of authentic tasks in content literacy, Parsons and Ward (2011) explain that authentic tasks can enhance students' motivation and help build vocabulary, which are both very significant to L2 learning. As phrased by the MEO (2013, 2014): “Students need to see themselves as social actors communicating for real purposes” by engaging in communicative and action-oriented activities that “put



meaningful and authentic communication at the centre of all learning activities” (p. 9). To do so requires that teachers provide students with “comprehensible input” and relevant input (Krashen, 1982), while scaffolding and repeating words and phrases in order for students to begin producing the language (MEO, 2013, 2014). The role of the teacher evidently remains very important in a more student-centred, action-based approach, particularly because the authentic communicative activities that students complete in accordance with such an approach must be planned effectively to be successful (Parsons & Ward, 2011; Van den Branden, 2016). As was noted before, putting in place a new curriculum cannot solely create change. The effectiveness of the new curriculum greatly depends on the effectiveness of its implementation by teachers and school boards, as well as on student reactions to the new approaches chosen.

### 2.1.3 The importance of speaking practice in the FSL classroom

Acquiring the skill of speaking an L2 is very important in the L2 learning process, particularly because it provides students with the ability to interact orally with native speakers of the language, whether that be within the speaker’s city or country of origin, or in an employment or school environment. The Ontario FSL curriculum documents evidently place a high importance on students’ development of strong oral communication skills in French, and students value this skill as well (MEO, 2013, 2014).

Swain’s (1985) *output hypothesis* outlines the importance of producing language in the language learning process. Speaking and writing are forms of productive learning where learners must “search for and produce a word form” (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 5). Such productive learning is said to result in more and stronger knowledge acquisition than receptive learning (Griffin & Harley, 1996), which occurs through reading and listening where learners find the meaning of word forms (Nation & Newton, 2009). Producing output can result in stronger knowledge and acquisition because it “pushes learners to process language more deeply—with more mental effort—than does input” (Swain, 2000, p. 99). When students engage in spoken interaction, they are able to notice gaps in their learning when they are unable to produce what they would like to say. It is a

very important function as learners become aware of and try to fix a gap in their knowledge. They can do this, and try to avoid a communication breakdown, by drawing from previous knowledge to try to guess what to say or use an analogy, or they can even consult a teacher or peer or use their L1 (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Use of the L1 in an L2 classroom has often been argued to be counterproductive to L2 language learning goals. The ‘monolingual principle’ in language learning emphasizes that the target language of a language class must be the exclusive language of instruction to enable students to think in the target language almost exclusively (Howatt, 1984). Cummins (2007) discusses evidence that demonstrates why there are occasions for L1 use in L2 classroom settings, including in FSL. He argues that the L1 can be used as both a cognitive and linguistic tool, functioning as a scaffold to increase student output. Tognini and Oliver (2012) also demonstrate how L1 use is a positive interactional strategy that children draw on to avoid communication breakdowns. Rather than miscommunicate or not communicate at all, students can use their L1 to get a word or point across. Learners are able to co-construct meaning together, and when learners do not know a word and say it in their L1, the other learners may be able to provide the word in the L2 (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015).

Swain and Lapkin (2000) also demonstrate that students’ use of their L1, English, in French Immersion programs can be to the students’ advantage. They explain that French Immersion teachers were often unwilling to engage their students in group work because teachers feel the students will speak a lot of English. These researchers found, though, that students often used English while completing group tasks as part of “important cognitive and social functions” (p. 268). This finding led Swain and Lapkin (2000) to conclude that L1 use can be put to good use in L2 learning, but it should not be actively encouraged to avoid it impeding, rather than supporting, the students’ L2 acquisition. Nor should the L1 be used consistently by teachers as this practice may limit students’ opportunities for L2 learning (Tognini & Oliver, 2012). In FSL settings in Ontario in particular, where students have far fewer opportunities for exposure to the language outside the classroom than in other contexts (leading some to view it as more of an FL rather than an L2), some use of L1 English inside the classroom is useful to ensure

understanding, but should not be overused in order to maximize the amount of L2 exposure students encounter.

Learning the skill of L2 speaking is also important because it assists in the learning of the other three skills: reading, writing, and listening. All the skills support one another, and work together to facilitate a well-balanced acquisition of an L2 or FL (Nation & Newton, 2009). Learning all four skills right from the beginning of L2 education is central to the communicative language teaching (CLT) model, and the development of children's speech has profound links to their literacy development (Taylor, in press). CLT has been the dominant approach to language teaching for the last three decades, and emphasizes the use of real-world and authentic tasks in a student-centered classroom (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008; Piccardo, 2010; 2014; Taylor, in press). As has been demonstrated, the new Ontario curriculum documents place significant importance on students learning spoken interaction skills through authentic, action-oriented means; an area previously lacking. To develop these skills, there must be increased oral practice in FSL classes, with maintaining an emphasis on the other three skills. Teachers must also recognize students' desire to often learn speaking more than the other three skills, which can be seen through the fact that students choose to discontinue studying French because of a lack of progress in oral abilities (Lapkin et al., 2009; Jones & Jones, 2001).

The higher value that students place on the skill of speaking French can be seen through the popular opinion demonstrated in an *Edutopia* (2017) blog posting by Sarah Wike Loyola (2016). Loyola is a Spanish teacher, Spanish Team Leader, and Technology Mentor in Charlotte, North Carolina. She has taught Spanish at the middle school, high school, and university levels for 15 years, and encourages the use of authentic materials. She spent ten years teaching *about* the Spanish language, using worksheets and encouraging memorization, instead of truly teaching students Spanish, but then had a so-called 'enlightenment.'

In Loyola's blog posting from September 9, 2016 entitled "In Language Classrooms, Students Should be Talking," she discusses how students are intrigued

mostly by speaking an L2, and that is the one skill L2 classes do not focus on enough. She states, “Students are not allowed to focus on the one aspect of learning a language that intrigues them—the speaking. So much time is spent teaching students about the language that they rarely have time to use it in a genuine way. The result is that most students decide to stop studying a foreign language once they realize they’re not actually achieving their goal of speaking it.” Her solution is quite simple: teachers should speak less so that students must speak more. CLT promotes this and has supposedly been used for three decades now, but the effects have not been seen and students express still experiencing more traditional approaches, like the audio-lingual method (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008).

Loyola’s (2016) presentation of this idea that students mainly want to learn to speak an L2 and should therefore be given more opportunities to speak is supported by the many comments that her blog received, many from other L2 and FL teachers, as well as over 9,800 social media ‘shares’ by members of the *Edutopia* community. One notable comment states, “I think that conversation practice helps students realize that international languages are living, vibrant things, rather than just lists of vocabulary and concepts to memorize.” Another says, “This is old news. If second language teachers still aren’t doing this, then intervention is needed.” Clearly, the CPF (n.d.) and CPF (Ontario) (2008) reports along with the Jones and Jones (2001) study and Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review document low levels of bilingual graduates and student dissatisfaction with the limited number of opportunities for speaking practice in their FSL classes. It is also clear that intervention is needed at this point, which has been set in motion through the introduction of the new curriculum. It must now be ensured that teachers are prepared to implement this curriculum effectively to successfully achieve its goals.

#### 2.1.4 Helping teachers implement the new curriculum

The revitalized “action-oriented” approach outlined in the new Ontario FSL curriculum documents aims to engage students in completing tasks or problems within authentic and meaningful contexts (OMLTA, 2014). The OMLTA (2014) “Fact Sheets” provide a good

overview of the revisions to the curriculum and how teachers can implement the action-oriented approach. It suggests that teachers develop action-oriented tasks based on the curriculum expectation they wish to address and overall goal they want students to achieve. To develop an action-oriented task, teachers should choose authentic material and scenarios for communication, giving students the ability to make real-world connections to their learning in the classroom. Language conventions, such as specific grammar points, should be addressed based on the social context that the teacher uses to achieve the action-oriented goals and are therefore no longer explicit as they were in the old curriculum documents (OMLTA, 2014; MEO, 1998, 1999, 2000). The “Fact Sheets” overall demonstrate the new expectations of teachers for effective FSL teaching.

The curriculum’s use of action-oriented approaches seeks to increase the number of Ontario graduates who are functionally bilingual, which means not only that the program needs to be improved to ensure authentic oral practice, but also that the improvements must meaningfully engage students to motivate them to continue to study French. These improvements cannot be effectively introduced without teachers being trained to implement them. In a study of the connection between teacher effectiveness and student achievement in reading and mathematics, Strong, Ward, and Grant (2011) found the teacher is the common denominator in school improvement and student success. Riley (1998) supports this finding, noting that: “Providing quality education means that we should invest in higher standards for all children” (p. 18) and without educating good teachers to implement the new curriculum, the revisions to the curriculum goals will not succeed at helping students reach their full potential in FSL.

The action-oriented approach is a very different method from the traditional methods that were used before. Teacher education programs that pay attention to the realities of how French education is changing in schools will better prepare their teachers for what they will actually face in their future classrooms (Salvatori, 2009). This process of revitalizing FSL programs to increase graduates’ functional bilingualism was already in place before the new curricula were released, but as Salvatori (2009) explains, most teacher programs had not reflected the change in classroom practices and continued to educate French teachers to teach using only the same traditional methods, and not

additionally action-based ones. It is essential for teacher education to focus on the current classroom realities, as well as both pedagogic and linguistic preparation, in order to ensure that truly qualified and prepared French teachers are being hired to implement the new practices and improve FSL programs (Salvatori, 2009).

Long (2014) also discusses how the more traditional way of teachers using mass-produced teaching materials in the language classroom has weakened students' L2 or FL education. He explains that the fact that the materials are mass-produced does not indicate that they are effective; rather it reflects that they are easier to write and use for teaching grammar than adapting teaching and creating lesson plans to suit each individual class. Such materials are good for helping those many non-native speakers who have a weaker command of the language they are teaching, but they are not useful for the purpose of students successfully acquiring an L2 or FL. Teachers need to focus on the learners, and provide plenty of access to comprehensible input and opportunities to produce comprehensible output through communicative activities (Long, 2014). Action-oriented lessons are aimed to do just that.

To assist teachers in implementing the new action-oriented curriculum, my research sought to further investigate the issue of students possibly lacking oral skills and the motivation to learn French, and the potential of TBLT to improve students' oral fluency, increase their motivation to learn the language and, thus, increase their retention in FSL programs. In order for students to learn to speak, they must be allowed to speak (Skehan, 1998). TBLT can act as a frame to help scaffold FSL students' speaking practice and increase their motivation to learn French through well-planned, authentic and action-oriented lessons (Nation, 2013).

TBLT is an action-based approach that engages students in using a language to complete realistic and relevant tasks. The language is used as a tool for accomplishing a goal, rather than as an object to be studied in and of itself (Ellis, 2013), which Loewen (2014) has referred to as "focus on forms." If TBLT is perceived to be effective and practical for improving students' oral skills and increasing their motivation, further research could be completed to guide its implementation in Ontario schools and not only

increase the number of functionally bilingual graduates, but also increase the number of Canadian citizens who are functionally bilingual over their lifespan.

There is significant research to support the successfulness of TBLT in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, as will be discussed in the subsequent section, *2.2: An Option for Improvement: Task-Based Language Teaching*. However, the topic has been under-researched in elementary and secondary FSL programs in Ontario. Implementing such an approach in Ontario schools would require professional development for current teachers, as has been suggested as necessary for proper implementation by Van den Branden (2009; 2016), and training for teachers in teacher education programs as suggested by Salvatori (2009). This research sought to first see if the extra work involved in creating the professional development and educational materials for teacher candidates would be worthwhile.

## 2.2 An Option for Improvement: Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT is a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach that encompasses both meaning-focused and form-focused (i.e. focus on communicating an idea and focus on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary and pronunciation) interaction and places students in authentic situations for practicing oral skills. It enforces meaningful communication by students completing realistic and relevant tasks where the major focus is on completing the task while using the language, not on the language itself. A focus on form is used only as a need arises, for example if students consistently repeat the same grammatical error, this should be explicitly corrected (Long, 2014). TBLT is grounded in the idea that language should be used as a ‘tool’ for accomplishing communicative goals, and not as an ‘object’ to be studied (Ellis, 2013) (i.e., not focus on forms as the sole goals; Loewen, 2014). Children learn their L1 in this way, as a necessity to understand and be understood (Ellis, 2013). They learn their L1 implicitly through interaction and by doing something of meaning to them (Lantolf, 2011). It seems evident from this fact then that TBLT



would be a good interactionist approach for L2 teaching as it promotes incidental language learning through doing something realistic and of interest. When learning a language, I believe the main goal should be gaining the ability to actually use the language. Language knowledge and acquisition of a language are largely influenced by their relation to real contexts and one must engage in using a language in order to develop the ability to use it effectively (Bygate, 2015). TBLT can provide such opportunities for meaningful language learning to FSL learners, in turn increasing their motivation as they experience opportunities to use the language authentically and give them confidence in their ability to acquire an L2.

There is a distinction made between two key types of tasks in TBLT: real world tasks and pedagogic tasks. These types of tasks are distinguished by the types of authenticity they generate, as noted by Bachman (1990). Real world tasks generate ‘situational authenticity’, meaning that the language is being used in a real life situation, such as actually completing a job interview. Pedagogic tasks generate ‘interactional authenticity’ where the situation may not be real (e.g., a mock job interview with a peer), but the interaction that takes place while completing the task stimulates the same interactional processes as during natural language use, such as negotiating for meaning and monitoring (Ellis, 2009). Long (2014) suggests that only real world tasks can be used for genuine TBLT, but this research focuses on pedagogic tasks and interactional authenticity in TBLT given the reality of Ontario FSL classroom settings. In an FSL classroom in Ontario where teachers are often not native French speakers and students remain in the classroom, opportunities for ‘real world’ practice and situational authenticity are rare, but pedagogic tasks can still serve the necessary purpose of engaging students in natural language use.

An example of a pedagogic task that would be effective for TBLT in FSL is a ranking task in which students have to rank a list of items in terms of their importance to take on a camping trip. Students would have to interact with one another in the target language, discussing their reasoning for their ranking choices and justifying the final outcome. A task such as this provides room for creative flexibility and amusement, which Van den Branden (2016) suggests is a positive aspect of TBLT as this helps increase



student motivation and enrich language use. Students are able to work towards a common goal, discussing with their peers and helping one another with this very student-centered teaching approach. There are also many other types of pedagogic tasks that can be successful in engaging students in interaction in the target language, such as problem solving tasks, information gap tasks, and jigsaw tasks (Nation & Newton, 2009).

TBLT can provide students with the opportunity to interact in the target language in both engaging and meaningful ways, giving students the opportunity to practice and become confident in their abilities to acquire and use an L2. Ellis and Shintani (2014) suggest that the completion of relevant tasks can nurture learners' natural language capacities and transform their role from 'language learner' to 'communicator.' I believe that communicators and motivated, self-regulated students are what education should nurture, and thus research into the possibilities of practical implementation of TBLT in French classrooms has the potential to be extremely worthwhile for both teachers and students.

### 2.2.1 Why use TBLT in FSL?

There is significant research by Ellis (2009, 2013, 2015), Bygate (2015), Ellis and Shintani (2014), Long (2014), and Van den Branden (2006, 2009, 2016) to support the success of TBLT and its benefits over more traditional language teaching methods, such as grammar translation and the audio-lingual method, which have often been used in FSL programs (Piccardo, 2014). Grammar translation looks at language more as a group of rules to be studied and lists of decontextualized words to be memorized in order to achieve grammatical accuracy. The audio-lingual method entails memorization and repetition to internalize automatic responses through scripted exercises (Piccardo, 2014; Spada, 2007). More traditional methods such as these have, in my experience, helped develop some oral language skills, as well as listening, reading, and writing skills, but they do not incite as much motivation or provide as many opportunities for meaningful and realistic oral practice to truly acquire the target language as do action-based

approaches like TBLT. Action-based (specifically “action-oriented”) teaching and learning is a key part of the new Ontario FSL curriculum.

An action-oriented approach to language teaching, as described in conjunction with the Council of Europe’s (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), views students as “members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 9). The tasks that are performed are completed within a wider social context that is relevant to the students and helps them find meaning in performing the actions to complete the task and use the language. There are no strict rules laid out for how students must complete a task; students complete them naturally as they would through their own strategies and expertise. An action-based approach overall provides students with opportunities to meaningfully interact while reinforcing or modifying their own language, and other, competencies (Council of Europe, 2001). They can practice what they know, notice what they do not know, and make changes to improve their abilities. Learners are also able to co-construct meaning and build knowledge about the L2 while they problem solve in collaborative dialogue with their peers (Swain and Lapkin, 2000). TBLT, as well as the CEFR, are strong action-based approaches for L2 teaching.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2.2 The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*

The CEFR in conjunction with TBLT can help further improve the action-based language learning experience of students. The CEFR was introduced to Canada in 2008 by Dr. Lawrence Vandergrift as the most comprehensive and comprehensible way to measure bilingualism and overall help determine what changes can be made to language programs to increase the number of bilinguals in Canada (CPF (Ontario), 2010). It was introduced

<sup>3</sup> ‘Action-oriented approach’ is the common term used with the CEFR and new FSL curriculum documents, but for this research study the term TBLT was chosen as the main focus for discussing task-based learning. The term ‘action-oriented’ is used when the literature being discussed (e.g. on CEFR or FSL curriculum documents) use this term. Elsewhere, the term ‘action-based’ is used.

to schools in Ontario to bring more of a focus to actual language use (Taylor, 2016). Lapkin et al. (2009) note that students drop out of FSL programs after the mandatory time up to Grade 9 mostly due to a limited use of oral French and a feeling of a lack of progress with the language (Lapkin et al., 2009). The CEFR brings an authentic, action-oriented approach to language learning and provides a framework for tracking and recognizing progress, as well as goal-setting, to help motivate students in their language learning (Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, & Crowley, 2011).

The framework is divided into 6 levels for describing language proficiency: A1 and A2 (basic user), B1 and B2 (independent user), and C1 and C2 (proficient user). Each level consists of five categories to describe what effective communication at each level should look like: listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production, and writing. The categories are accompanied by “Can Do Statements” for students to positively say what they can do in each category, and see what they need to practice to progress to the next level. This is therefore used as a self-assessment grid. For example, at level A1 in the “spoken production” category, a student can confidently say they are at this level if they “can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where [they] live and people [they] know” (CPF (Ontario), n.d.). The reference levels also assist teachers in their planning to help students reach a specific level. The CEFR will be particularly helpful in choosing level-appropriate tasks when using TBLT.

Connecting TBLT with the use of the CEFR will help increase student motivation even more through the use of positive “can do” statements and students’ ability to see how they have improved, set goals, and become self-regulated learners (O’Dwyer, Imig, & Nagai, 2014). O’Dwyer, Imig, and Nagai (2014) note that “a strong form of TBLT shares the principles of the teaching philosophy embraced in the CEFR, an action-oriented approach” (p. 233). Authenticity is key to both of these approaches.

Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, Smith, and Crowley (2011) conducted a study of 93 teachers and 943 elementary and secondary school students in Ontario “to examine the feasibility of using the CEFR as a frame of reference for FSL education programs” (p. 7). In a post-study questionnaire, after teachers had been introduced to and used task-based

and CEFR-based instruction, it was found that teachers can have difficulties when first implementing these approaches, but implementation had profound benefits for students, like increased autonomy and motivation, which made implementation worthwhile. It also found that “the more teachers used task-based activities and CEFR-informed instruction, the more they would like to use them in their future lessons” (Faez et al., 2011, p.8). The study demonstrates the overall positive impact of introducing an action-oriented approach to FSL classrooms. From this it seems clear that with their authentic action-based approaches, TBLT, especially in connection with the CEFR, could have a very positive impact to help achieve the goals of the revised Ontario FSL curriculum and provide an improved and overall enjoyable French learning experience for students (MEO, 2013, 2014).

In her research guide for educators regarding the CEFR and action-oriented approach, “From Communicative to Action-Oriented: A Research Pathway,” Piccardo (2014) also discusses the importance of students’ communicative competence (i.e. ability to communicate effectively and perform actions) and the capacity for the CEFR, action-oriented instruction, and task-based instruction to improve students’ communicative competence and increase their engagement in L2 activities. She highlights an important distinction between the communicative approach and action-oriented approach in that action-oriented means students are actually acting as social agents. Piccardo (2014) explains that this “brings an element of innovation to the communicative approach” (p. 14). Learners become social agents and action “makes it possible to contextualize other key notions such as goal, needs, social context, strategy, task, and competence” (p.5). Students are seen as members of society with tasks to accomplish, and accomplishing those tasks in the L2 adds important meaning to their learning. The CEFR, as well as TBLT, employ an action-oriented approach that, as Ellis (2009) would also agree, makes students L2 communicators instead of just L2 learners. Students build their communicative competence by engaging in communicative activities, and these activities must be effectively implemented by teachers. As will be discussed in the following section, implementing a new framework like the CEFR or approach like TBLT is not a simple task.

### 2.2.3 Difficulties in implementing TBLT

Though the research on TBLT is overwhelmingly positive, researchers also bring to light some of the barriers teachers can face in implementing this approach. It is important to be aware of the difficulties, as well as the benefits of using a new approach such as TBLT. These possible complications further support the goal of this research to question the feasibility of TBLT for FSL teachers and students before attempting to design professional development, resources, or introducing the approach in schools. Many implementation barriers can be reduced through strong professional development and the creation of ready-to-use resources for teachers.

One of the main difficulties that teachers have encountered when using TBLT is that it can be very time consuming. Erlam (2015) performed a study in New Zealand with 48 L2 teachers of French, Spanish, German, Japanese, and Chinese participating in a year-long Teacher Professional Development Languages program through which they were introduced to TBLT along with a complete range of language tasks. The study uncovered that teachers can develop many grievances implementing TBLT after training. The main grievance mentioned was that tasks were too time consuming. Teachers found that it was not only too time consuming for them to try to adapt to this new approach after having used traditional methods for many years, but also that the students also needed a significant amount of time to adapt to the approach. Even though teachers were for the most part provided with the tasks to use, they still found that it took significant extra time to differentiate the tasks to suit particular students' needs. Erlam suggests that if TBLT is too time consuming, teachers will simply end up reverting back to traditional textbook methods.

O'Dwyer et al. (2014) also discuss the problems of TBLT being too time-consuming for teachers, though they notably mention that its use in association with the CEFR makes assessment much easier and less time-consuming for teachers as the CEFR provides a very effective assessment framework for teachers, as well as for students to self-assess. That these difficulties exist supports the idea that much more research, resources, and professional development are needed on TBLT prior to implementing it in

Canadian FSL programs on a large scale. Van den Branden (2009) concluded his own study investigating the reactions of teachers to TBLT training with the belief that it may take several years for TBLT to be incorporated into school practice. Bygate (2015) also mentions that much more research on the positive effects of TBLT needs to be done in a pedagogical setting.

With relation to the Faez et al. (2011) study previously mentioned on the feasibility of implementing the CEFR in FSL education, the two main challenges identified that teachers faced when implementing CEFR-informed activities were time restrictions and a lack of understanding of the CEFR and how it could be applied in teachers' classrooms. The time required for students to become familiar with it and complete the activities was a concern, as Erlam (2015) also indicated, and teachers struggled to understand the CEFR levels and its many dimensions. They expressed the need for more exemplars to demonstrate student performance at each level. Some teachers also viewed the CEFR as something they had to do in addition to teaching the curriculum, rather than something through which they could improve their teaching of the curriculum.

Faez, Taylor, Majhanovich, Brown, and Smith (2011) discuss the same study, with more of a focus on the quantitative results. They suggest that teachers' attitudes towards implementing a new approach like the CEFR play a significant role. Teachers who really took advantage of a task-based approach in connection with the CEFR enjoyed using it more and were more inclined to continue using the approach. Those who changed their practices had a positive change in attitude towards focusing classroom instruction more on communication and interaction than on grammar. They also saw more significant positive change in their students' abilities. On the other hand, those teachers who did not use the approach as much were less inclined to continue using it and did not see changes in their students' performance as significantly. Piccardo (2010) also indicates that negative attitudes towards new approaches like the CEFR can be the greatest barrier to their implementation.

Along with the possibility of being very time-consuming, the creation of tasks can be difficult. Tasks must be carefully created to be authentic, relevant and at an appropriate level for the students (Ellis, 2009). Performing a needs analysis to discover what tasks a particular group of students should be able to do is the first step (Long, 2014). Ellis (2009) then specifies four criteria that a task must follow to be considered a task in TBLT. The four criteria are:

1. The primary focus should be on ‘meaning’ (by which is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).
2. There should be some kind of ‘gap’ (i.e. a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning).
3. Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) in order to complete the activity.
4. There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e. the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right) (Ellis, 2009, p. 223).

It is very important that teachers understand TBLT well before attempting to implement it (Erlam, 2015). Fully understanding the concept of what a “task” entails is another one of the difficulties that teachers can face when attempting to implement TBLT successfully (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Faez et al., 2011). Long (2014) and Ellis (2013) make a clear distinction between task-supported language teaching and task-based language teaching. The former involves a linguistic syllabus, meaning that tasks are used to address specific linguistic items, whereas the latter, true TBLT, involves no linguistic specifications, unless the need arises for a focus on form. The four task criteria laid out by Ellis (2009) provide useful assistance in the task creation process to minimize difficulty and help make evident what a task in TBLT should be like to successfully engage students in authentic language use.

Though TBLT appears to require extra work from teachers, enough professional development and resources could be created to make its implementation much less time-

consuming and difficult if the justification to do so was found. Despite the difficulties that have been noted to accompany first attempting to implement TBLT, following through with implementation with the help of resources and professional development could prove to be very worthwhile for both students and teachers.

## 2.3 Gaps in the literature

There is a gap in the research literature on TBLT as studies on TBLT have largely focused on the ESL and EFL contexts, as well as other FL contexts. The literature has demonstrated that it is possible for TBLT to be effectively implemented to improve students' language abilities and increase motivation, but I believe there is a need for research to be completed on the effectiveness of TBLT specifically in FSL classrooms, in association with the CEFR. The possibilities for the success of TBLT in an FSL setting are considerable and I believe my research may fill a gap in the current literature and contribute to research into the pedagogical application of TBLT in Ontario FSL classrooms.

Additionally, research on the use of task-based approaches (though not specifically TBLT) has mainly been completed within elementary and secondary school settings, for example the Faez et al. (2011) study on CEFR-based and task-based instruction; however, it will be useful to learn whether those who have graduated from those Core French and French Immersion settings and have begun experiencing FSL at a university level view TBLT as feasible. It will also be very useful to learn university students' opinions of and experiences in their secondary school FSL programs to further support and help explain the enrollment statistics and statistics presented by the Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review. How these data will be gathered is explained next.



## Chapter 3

### 3 Methodology

The following section discusses the mixed-methods research conducted through the use of a survey, interviews, and document analysis. The data collection and analysis processes are explained, as well as participant information and the study limitations.

#### 3.1 Mixed-Methods Research

A mixed-methods research approach immediately stood out as a practical method for obtaining the answers and enhancing my understandings of the answers to the research questions, which are as follows:

1. (a) How do university students who completed French studies to Grade 12 perceive their successfulness at learning the French language, and why?, (b) How do university students continuing with French studies in university perceive their own preparedness for university French level studies, and why?, and (c) How do university French professors perceive student preparedness to undertake university French level studies?
2. (a) How do university students who completed French studies up to Grade 12 perceive the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation? and (b) How does a university French professor perceive the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation?
3. Why do students choose to continue or discontinue their French studies in secondary school?

I was pragmatic in choosing a mixed-methods approach based on these research questions and my desire to have both quantitative and qualitative responses to answer the questions. Mixed-methods research ensures triangulation and improves validity as it allows one type of data (either quantitative or qualitative) to be supported by the other in

order to help further inform or develop the data (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). The combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a better understanding of the problem of students' presumed lack of functional oral abilities in French, and the possible effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' competence in this skill (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The design to gather quantitative and qualitative data included a survey, interviews, observation, and document analysis. As will be discussed later in the chapter, the observation portion could not be completed, but the survey, interviews, and document analysis were all completed to still ensure triangulation.

Through a mixed-methods approach, not only could a large quantity of responses be received (751 surveys were completed), but qualitative answers could also be gathered (through the survey and through post-survey interviews) to help flesh out the quantitative results; specifically, they explained why some FSL learners felt they did not get enough oral practice, and how they believe their instruction could have been delivered differently. Observations and post-observation interviews were intended to capture the reactions of students experiencing a TBLT lesson and further enhance my understanding of the possible benefits or challenges of this approach for students. Finally, document analysis was used to help draw contrasts and comparisons between what students were expected to learn (e.g. based on the MEO's 2000, 1999, and 1998 curriculum documents) and what they felt they actually learned.

Quantitative and qualitative methods on their own, just like any approach, each have strengths and weaknesses. Mixing the two approaches helps to offset the weaker sides of the two, and produce a more accurate and adequate understanding of a research problem (Biesta, 2012). In this case, a mixed-methods approach helped increase the accuracy and adequacy of the descriptive statistics, explanations, and overall understandings gained through discussing students' lack of functional oral abilities in French by the end of their high school French education with university students and a university French professor, as well as discussing with participants the possible effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral competence and increase student motivation to learn French.

Ultimately, the choice to conduct mixed-methods research proved beneficial: 751 surveys were completed, which gathered a solid amount of data on students' desire for more speaking opportunities in elementary and secondary FSL classrooms. The survey also helped answer the questions of why students chose to discontinue French studies and whether students who completed an FSL program to Grade 12 believed they were (not) successful at learning the language. The survey also gathered other opinions through open-ended questions (qualitative responses) that will help teachers, curriculum designers, and other educational professionals prepare learners to gain functional fluency in FSL. I conducted interviews with five students and a university professor, and also conducted document analysis to further substantiate and connect to the trends arising from the survey, and to help answer the research questions regarding students' preparedness for university level French and whether TBLT would be a feasible approach to use. The results are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

## 3.2 The Data Collection Process

### 3.2.1 Survey

Data collection was conducted over the period of one month. The first step in the data collection process was gathering survey results. A Qualtrics survey was administered through the Registrar's Office at an Ontario university to all Canadian-born undergraduate students, with 751 students completing it. I designed the survey to elicit university students' opinions of and experiences in an FSL program. I first sought to understand students' background in FSL programs (e.g. French Immersion or Core French, to what grade they studied FSL, if they continued FSL in university), their perceptions of their own strengths and weakness (e.g., through questions based on the CEFR self-assessment grid), and their motivation to learn French. Students were asked to indicate the level of motivation they felt to learn each of the four skills in FSL, either "Very Motivated," "Somewhat Motivated," or "Not Motivated," as well as why they felt motivated or unmotivated overall in FSL in order to understand which areas students feel

more or less motivated to study, and why. The questions were also designed to elicit students' experiences with oral practice, why they believe they were successful (or not) at learning French, and, finally, if they believed they were sufficiently prepared for university level French courses. The term "sufficiently" was intended to mean that students were comfortably confident in their ability to be successful in French studies at the university level though this definition was not provided to students before completing the survey.

Many survey questions were only made available to students who expressed that they completed French studies up until Grade 12, as I assumed their more extensive experience with French studies would allow them to provide more in-depth answers to those questions, for example, questions regarding the CEFR, why they did (not) feel motivated, sufficient preparation for university FSL, and successfulness in FSL by the end of Grade 12. A few survey questions intended for students who discontinued French studies after Grade 9 and before Grade 12 were also asked to answer the final research question on why students discontinue French studies and to gain more insight into the impact of a lack of oral practice in the FSL classroom.

The survey was a very useful way to gain insight into the (perceived) successfulness of secondary school FSL education in Canada, with particular focus on Ontario. Given the many open-ended questions, students were able to explain their opinions. The survey responses were intended to flesh out the claims made by Lapkin et al. (2009); namely that students who completed Core French to Grade 12 did not feel able to carry on a conversation in French and students discontinued French studies due to feeling a lack of progress and that they did not have enough opportunities for oral practice. Their research is frequently cited to point to the consequences of students' weak oral competence, and I drew on it to support the rationale for this research project.

### 3.2.2 Interviews

The survey was also used to recruit participants for interviews, which was the second step in the data collection process. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using pseudonyms at the consent of participants. Participants for the post-survey interviews included five university students whose responses fleshed out the information gained through the survey, adding additional qualitative explanations for both positive and negative experiences, particularly with regards to speaking practice in the FSL classroom during secondary school. The students were asked the same questions as were asked on the survey, but interviews were semi-structured to allow for more relaxed and in-depth conversation about the topics, as well as about TBLT.

The interviews were also intended as a venue to recruit student volunteers to participate in a TBLT lesson that I would administer by myself, and from which I would draw my observations; however, no students volunteered, therefore that portion of data collection was not completed. All student interview participants expressed an interest in participating and willingness to be contacted regarding their availability, but when contacted via email to arrange their participation in the lesson, no students responded. At that point, I had already received over 700 survey responses and successfully recruited interview participants. The surveys and the interview data proved strong enough to confidently answer the research questions, and I could still triangulate with the document analysis. Therefore, I dropped the observation component from my final design.

I also interviewed an Ontario university French professor to gather those stakeholders' perceptions of students' preparedness for university French courses and perceptions of the effectiveness of TBLT. In the interview, I also provided the professor with some anonymous survey data and asked her to provide her opinions and thoughts, particularly in relation to the 47.5% of students who expressed the view that speaking was their weakest skill by the end of their FSL studies.

### 3.2.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis was completed through the use of a first-year French course syllabus at the Ontario university from which participants were recruited,<sup>4</sup> new and old Ontario FSL curriculum documents (MEO, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2013, 2014), the Council of Europe's (2001) CEFR self-assessment grid,<sup>5</sup> the OMLTA's (2014) "Fact Sheets" regarding the revised FSL curriculum,<sup>6</sup> and Piccardo's (2014) research guide for educators regarding the CEFR and action-oriented approaches, "From Communicative to Action-Oriented: A Research Pathway."<sup>7</sup> These documents were discussed at particular points within the literature review in Chapter 2, as well as throughout the literature review. They are also referred to in Chapter 4 to help buttress interview statements and draw contrasts and comparisons between what is expected in FSL programs and what students felt they actually experienced and achieved.

## 3.3 Participants

Survey participants include Canadian-born Ontario university undergraduate students over the age of eighteen who completed French studies at least up to the ninth grade. Certain survey questions were administered only to students who indicated they completed French studies up to Grade 12 and therefore have more experience studying the language and could presumably provide more well-informed responses.

Five student interview participants were chosen after indicating on the survey that they would like to participate in further research. Out of 194 who completed French studies up to Grade 12 and expressed interest in being interviewed, four of the participants were chosen through random selection of evidently long and detailed responses to the question, "Why did you choose to continue with French studies after Grade 9?" as this was the first group of responses that appeared in the Qualtrics "Data &

<sup>4</sup> This course syllabus is discussed in Chapter 4 on page 69 and 87.

<sup>5</sup> See discussion on page 25.

<sup>6</sup> See discussion on page 19.

<sup>7</sup> See discussion on page 26.

Analysis” section. I assumed that students who took the time and thought to write more detailed answers on the survey were more interested in sharing their experience, rather than receiving the \$10 gift card offered. The fifth interview participant was chosen because they personally emailed me to further express their interest in sharing their FSL experience. I refer to participants by the pseudonyms Allen, Diana, Gwen, Haley, and Nina. Further information to distinguish each student participant can be found below in *Table 1*.

*Table 1: Student interview participant information*

<b>Participant pseudonym</b>	<b>FSL program in secondary school</b>	<b>Graduated secondary school</b>	<b>University program</b>	<b>Continued French studies in university?</b>
Allen	Core French	Early 2000s	Science	Yes
Diana	French Immersion	In 2010s	English	No
Gwen	Core French	In 2010s	Science	Yes
Haley	Core French	In 2010s	Science	No
Nina	Core French	In 2010s	Science	No

Four of the five interview participants studied Core French and by chance all happen to have chosen to study science in university. Diana, the French Immersion student, chose to study English. Only Allen and Gwen, both in science programs, chose to take French courses in university, though Allen began to study French after completing his university science degree, and more than ten years after graduating from secondary school. The four females all completed high school in the early to mid-2010s. As a note, this sample is somewhat representative of the population, though not entirely, as 10.5% of FSL students studied in French Immersion programs in the year 2014-2015, which increased from 7.9% in 2010-2011, whereas this interview population demonstrates a 20% French Immersion population (CPF, n.d.). The survey also demonstrated a 40% French Immersion population. Nevertheless, the data cannot be generalized.

The professor interview participant, referred to simply as ‘the professor’ throughout, has over twenty years of a variety of university French teaching experience and is a francophone, like most in the department. Her main interests lie in French pedagogy in higher education.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Survey data and interview data were analysed concurrently to seek convergence in the data elicited from the students through the survey and interviews and from the professor's interview in order to more comprehensively analyze the problem of students' lack of oral fluency and the possibility of TBLT alleviating the problem (Creswell, 2003).

Quantitative data was kept simple and is not being generalized. No in-depth statistical analyses have been completed to make inferences further than the face value of the data. The survey was used to gather descriptive statistics and through Qualtrics, data groups were able to be generated for specific demographics of respondents (e.g. to find what the responses of Core French students were compared to French Immersion students). Qualitative data was coded based on themes that were most frequently mentioned and thus considered most significant. Trends and similarities are discussed in Chapter 4 without generalizations, as the majority of the data is qualitative and therefore not generalizable.

The results of two survey questions in particular were drawn on for a response to the first research question regarding students' feelings of successfulness and preparedness for university French. The first question was a simple quantitative 'yes' or 'no' asking students if they felt they had been sufficiently prepared to take French in university. They were then given the opportunity to explain their answer in an open-ended survey question asking why students believe they were overall successful or unsuccessful at learning French. Both questions were administered to all students who continued French studies up to the end of Grade 12. Codes were developed for the qualitative responses based on answers which frequently appeared, namely mentions of lack of oral skills, oral practice in the FSL classroom, and positive and negative comments about teachers and curriculum. The interviews completed with a university French professor and five university students also enrich the quantitative responses with qualitative data. Both the professor and the student interview participants were asked the research question directly.

The second research question seeks the perceptions of the university student interview participants who took French studies up to Grade 12 and of the university



French professor interviewed on the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral French skills and motivation to learn the French language in the classroom setting. The professor and student participants were asked during their interviews for their opinion on the approach after a brief discussion of what it entails. Student participants were asked if they believed that an approach like TBLT might have improved their oral skills and overall FSL classroom experience, and the professor was asked if they believed it could better prepare students to successfully continue with French studies in university. Their responses were coded based on the opinions they expressed regarding what they believe might be positive or negative about the approach.

The responses to the third and final research question regarding why students choose to discontinue French studies before Grade 12 was drawn from data collected in response to two open-ended survey questions: (a) one inquired into why students discontinued French after Grade 9, and (b) inquired into why students continued studying French after Grade 9, but did not take it up to Grade 12. The qualitative responses were coded based on the most frequently mentioned themes of a lack of ability or confidence in the language, unfulfilling experiences, a general dislike or disinterest, career disparity, issues with the curriculum, issues with teachers, and issues with school FSL programs or scheduling. These responses were coded further to additionally highlight and discuss the responses that pertain to oral abilities and motivation, the two key areas which this research seeks a way to improve.

With the survey data and interview data coded and analysed, document analysis was completed to further enhance our understandings of the data. The documents used were analysed based on connections that could be made with the survey and interview data in terms of comments made regarding speaking practice, the importance of grammar, teaching strategies, and curriculum. The key points that come out of the document analysis are: (a) students need authentic oral practice, (b) students need improved and increased opportunities for action-based learning, (c) students need to be aware of their own abilities through self-assessment and experience success through a wide variety of activities and tasks, and (d) teachers must be prepared to use action-based approaches in order to teach students effectively.

### 3.5 Study Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study that must be noted. These limitations do not necessarily weaken the data retrieved, but simply demonstrate further why they cannot be generalized. These limitations include: the individual differences of participants and non-participants; some surveys were not completed entirely by all participants; the survey was not a random sample, and thus is not representative of everyone; and my inability to complete the observation of TBLT portion of my research design.

The individual differences that can affect student learning relate to both students and teachers. Between Kindergarten and Grade 12, students are taught by many different teachers and through a variety of teaching methods and strategies; students also grow up in very different homes and communities. One student may enjoy one teacher's approach and be more successful in that course, while another may dislike that approach and be unsuccessful. Also, as will be seen in the data, just because students are enrolled in a particular program (e.g. French Immersion) does not necessarily mean they use French more than students in other programs (e.g. Core French). Home and community attitudes towards languages such as FSL can also play a role in student motivation and success; if L2 learning is viewed negatively or is not widely supported, students may be less motivated and less successful (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). One student's experiences in an FSL classroom can be completely different from another's in that exact same classroom for a variety of personal, school, home, and community factors that cannot be accounted for in this research.

Aside from those differences, students could also interpret some questions differently or have different perceptions of the meaning of terms used, such as 'successfulness' and 'motivation,' which further make generalizations unsuitable. In terms of motivation in particular, students were not provided with a specific definition for what it means to be motivated to learn a second language; they responded based on their own understandings of motivation. An explanation of motivation could not be added to the survey due to obtaining ethics approval prior to the research on motivation being completed.

Of the 751 total survey participants, some did not accurately answer the questions that were asked (due to misinterpretation or misreading) and some disregarded entire questions, as was allowed due to ethics policy. Data could also be skewed due to a bias that students who would choose to take a survey regarding French education generally would not be those students who were disinterested in or disliked studying French. Another factor to note is that four students who completed the survey indicated they did not study FSL in Ontario; it is possible that there were others who did not indicate this. All experiences described still present valuable insights into Canadian FSL programs.

In terms of being unable to conduct a TBLT component and observe student reactions as included in the research design, it is unfortunate that these data could not be gathered, but I was still able to answer the research questions regarding the effectiveness of implementing an action-oriented pedagogical approach. Observation and post-observation interviews would have yielded interesting data, but responses received based on interview participants' impressions of what it entails were complete enough to add to the overall data collected.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

There were no foreseeable potential risks or harms in completing this study, and none arose in the duration of the data collection period. The participants were over the age of 18. Any student who indicated they were not of at least 18 years of age were blocked from completing the survey. The only identifiable information collected from student participants was if they chose to provide their email address at the end of the survey to enter a draw to win a gift card or to volunteer to complete interviews. Their email addresses were only used to contact them for purposes of setting up an interview or entering them into the draw. Students and the professor who participated in interviews were contacted via their email address. All participants' information was kept anonymous and interview data was transcribed and discussed using pseudonyms.

## Chapter 4

### 4 Results & Discussion

The Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review on Core French in Ontario draws on reports by organizations such as CPF (2004) and APEF (2004) that highlight the issues of student attrition in French studies and insufficient abilities in oral French. The research presented in this chapter fleshes out these issues through the research questions being investigated.

A key finding that emerges from Lapkin et al.'s (2009) literature review regards Core French students discontinuing French studies due to feeling that they do not make any significant progress in the language, do not feel capable of expressing themselves in French, and would have preferred more of a focus on spoken production in the classroom. That is, students do not feel they are learning French in a useful and meaningful way, and so they are less likely to succeed or to continue studying French. CPF (n.d.) reported an 88.1% drop out rate for Core French students from Grade 9 in the year 2011-2012 to Grade 12 in the year 2014-2015. Lapkin et al. (2009) note this is typically due to limited opportunities to use oral French, and the feeling they were not making any progress learning the language. Kissau (2005) also reports that this can be due to school scheduling conflicts. These issues also arose in the data I collected. I present and discuss this data and these issues in this chapter, as well as other issues that arose and answer the research questions.

#### 4.1 Results

Both the survey and interview results are presented jointly in this section as interview data was designed to support the survey results. The data is presented separately by the major themes that help answer the research questions. The major focus will remain on oral French as per the research problem and questions; the other three skills (listening,

reading and writing) do not receive as much attention. It is important to emphasize as well that the data presented is based on individual perceptions and interpretations.

Interviews were completed with 5 university students who completed French studies to Grade 12 and a university French professor.<sup>8</sup> Students Allen and Gwen were the only two participants who continued taking French courses in university. Four students, Allen, Gwen, Haley, and Nina, studied in a Core French program in secondary school and are currently enrolled in a science program in university, while Diana was in French Immersion and now studies English. The professor is francophone, like most others in the French department, and has over 20 years of university level French teaching experience.

The survey received a total of 751 responses, though it must be noted that not all respondents answered all questions asked of them, due to ethics requirements (as previously noted in Chapter 3). Many questions were also presented only to those students who indicated they continued to study French through to Grade 12. 684 (91.3%) respondents indicated that they last studied French in secondary school between the years of 2009 to 2016, 340 (45.4%) between 2009 and 2012, and 344 (45.9%) between 2013-2016. 30 (4.1%) were last enrolled between 2005-2008, and 35 (4.7%) earlier than 2005. 488 students indicated that they continued French studies beyond the mandatory Grade 9, and 334 continued all the way to Grade 12. The number of respondents to each question that will be discussed are listed in *Table 2*.

The “themes” in *Table 2* represent the key areas for discussion that directly connect with the survey questions, as will be seen throughout this chapter. These themes include motivation, why students discontinue French studies, why students continue French studies, students’ weakest skill in FSL, students’ preparation for university level French, and students’ perceptions of their own successfulness. Other notable themes that arose from responses that did not directly relate to the research questions will also be discussed in this chapter, such as students’ negative experiences with their French teachers.

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<sup>8</sup> See *Table 1* in Chapter 3 regarding participant information on page 38.

*Table 2: Number of respondents to each significant survey question discussed*

Theme	Question	Who was asked?	Number of respondents
Duration in FSL programs	Did you study FSL after Grade 9?	All	731 (488-Yes; 243-No)
	Did you study FSL until Grade 12?	'Yes' to above	488 (334-Yes; 154-No)
Program type	French immersion in secondary school?	334 who continued to Grade 12	319 (120-Yes; 199-No)
	French immersion in elementary school?	334 who continued to Grade 12	319 (130-Yes; 189-No)
	Core French in secondary school?	334 who continued to Grade 12	319 (147-Yes; 172-No) <sup>9</sup>
Motivation	Indicate level of motivation (very motivated, somewhat motivated, or not motivated) to learn each of the four skills	All	679
	Why do you believe you did, or did not, feel motivated to learn the French language?	All	596
Why discontinue studying French?	Why not continue after Grade 9?	243 who did not continue past Grade 9	216
	Why not continue to Grade 12 after choosing to continue beyond Grade 9?	154 who did not continue to Grade 12	142
Why continue studying French?	Why did you choose to continue studying French after Grade 9?	488 who continued after Grade 9	311
Weakest skill in French	Weakest skill by the end of secondary school FSL? (Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing)	All	680
Preparation for university-level French	Do you believe your Ontario FSL education sufficiently prepared you for university-level French courses?	334 who continued to Grade 12	318
Students' perceptions of successfulness	Why do you believe you were successful/unsuccessful at learning French?	334 who continued to Grade 12	272

The comparison of the number of students asked a question to how many actually answered the question can be seen clearly (e.g. all 751 participants were asked what they felt their weakest skill was, and 680 responded). As well, it is evident that a higher

<sup>9</sup> 52 students indicated they studied neither French Immersion nor Core French in secondary school, either due to enrolment in an International Baccalaureate or French first-language program, or they possibly did not know the term "Core" French.

percentage of students answered the questions that required them to select a response as opposed to the open-ended questions which required them to type a descriptive response (e.g. 488 students indicated they continued French past Grade 9, and only 311 answered to explain why). Still, a respectable amount of data was collected to answer the research questions and shed light on the positive and negative experiences students had in their FSL programs.

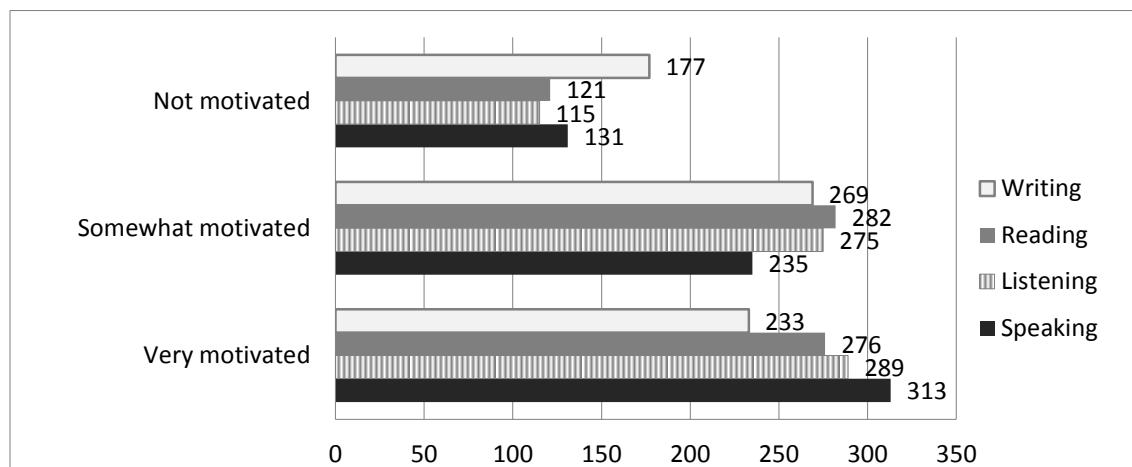
#### 4.1.1 Motivation to learn French

As noted in section 3.2.1, to investigate students' motivation, student survey participants were asked one quantitative and one qualitative question on the survey, and the five interview participants were asked to expand on their answers. Students were asked to indicate their level of motivation to learn each of the four skills in the classroom setting. It is important to note that students responded based on their own individual understanding of motivation; they were not provided with a specific definition or explanation of what it means to be motivated to learn a second language. They were then asked to explain why they believe they did or did not overall feel motivated to learn the French language. Through these questions, we hope to understand specific reasons why some students do not feel motivated to learn French so that we can try to remedy those issues and motivate more students to continue with French studies.

Students could indicate they were either "Very Motivated," "Somewhat Motivated," or "Not Motivated" to learn each of the four skills. Complete results for the 679 respondents to this question are presented in *Figure 1*. Speaking received the highest response rate for "Very Motivated" with 313 (46.1%) participants, and listening received the second highest with 289 (42.6%) very motivated, indicating more students were motivated to learn the skills of spoken interaction. Those percentages of students very motivated to learn reading and writing are not too far off from these percentages, though. 276 (39.3%) students were very motivated to learn to read and 233 (34.3%) were very motivated to learn to write. The vast majority of participants overall lie between

somewhat and very motivated to learn each of the four skills. Listening had the most overall students indicate that they were at least somewhat motivated or very motivated to learn that skill with 564 (83%) students. 558 (82.2%) students were at least somewhat motivated or very motivated to learn to read, 548 (80.7%) to speak, and 502 (73.9%) to write. These are quite positive results for students expressing motivation to learn French.

Figure 1: Levels of motivation to learn each of the four skills



The negative results of those not motivated to learn the four skills are not too high. Writing received the highest response rate for “Not Motivated” with 177 (26.1%) students. 121 (17.8%) were not motivated to learn to read, 115 (16.9%) not motivated to learn to write, and 131 (19.3%) not motivated to learn to speak. 68 (10%) of the 679 respondents were not motivated to learn any of the four skills, of which 9 continued French studies through to Grade 12. These results are interestingly not directly reflective of respondents’ open-ended responses to explain why they overall felt motivated, or not, to learn French and there are 596 qualitative responses to help explain why.

Students were asked the open-ended question “Why do you believe you did, or did not, feel motivated to learn the French language?” to which 358 (60%) students indicated they were motivated to learn French, and 238 (40%) were not. Of those students who indicated that they were motivated to learn French, themes most frequently mentioned include: good teachers, a desire to be fluent, strong interest and enjoyment in learning French, it is a useful skill, it can enhance future career opportunities, because of feelings of accomplishment from successes in the language, and to get good grades. In an



open-ended survey response, one student noted, “I was motivated by my teachers who made learning French an interesting experience for me, as well just the thought of being able to speak a different language was appealing to me.” Another student wrote:

I was mostly motivated to learn French because I knew I wanted to study French in university and become a French teacher, thus it was important to learn for my future plans. I was also motivated because I enjoyed learning and knowing how to say things in another language, and felt successful when I was able to do it.

This student was motivated to learn French for their future, because they enjoyed it, and the success they felt also made them want to continue studying it. A third student stated, “It is extremely useful in Canada for jobs, and being bilingual can be an asset even when you don't expect it.” Many students also mentioned good grades as their only motive. Notably, two students stated, “I was basically just motivated by grades, I wish I had been more interested in the language itself,” and “Other than good grades, there was little motivation or push to use French.” Interestingly, another student explained that they were only motivated to learn reading and writing because those are the skills that were focused on in class and that they would be graded on.

Of those 238 students who indicated they were not motivated to learn French, the following themes were most frequently mentioned: “incompetent” or “horrible” teachers, classes were not engaging, the language was too difficult, a general dislike and/or disinterest, feelings of a lack of progress, and lack of recognition of its usefulness. There is an overwhelming focus as well within students’ explanations of these themes on a lack of oral practice. Of the 596 invaluable quotes that were provided by students, these are some that help convey why 40% of them felt unmotivated to learn French: “I believe that the teachers were not teaching French in a way that connected the students to the culture and the purpose of learning the language”; “The classes were not fun or interactive and I felt that all I was doing was memorizing grammar. There was no oral practice or correction of mistakes given”; “I did not see the relevance of it in my life since no one around me knew how to speak the language”; and “I didn't understand it, and I felt like I never would. Why would I invest effort into something I truly do not understand? It made

me feel dumb.” Students mention lack of connection to the French culture and overall purposeful learning, lack of interaction and too much memorizing, and lack of understanding as affecting their motivation. The following three quotes also demonstrate a lack of speaking practice and motivation from teachers:

Teachers who have taught me French have not been very motivating...the majority of students find the language difficult or do not take French courses seriously, and this results in a lack of passion and enthusiasm from teachers. When teachers are not motivated to teach, students are not motivated to learn;

A second language is hard to learn and since I rarely spoke it in class and never outside of class I felt like I would never learn it based on the current model that emphasized writing and grammar...I think the goal should be, at least in non-French immersion courses, to learn how to speak it because that would be way more useful than all the grammar and writing and theory that is focused on in class; and,

I didn't feel like the curriculum was based around conversation so for me it didn't feel like I was learning anything valuable. I took it for 9 years and was still not proficient or very good at all, so obviously there was something missing in the curriculum.

Students place value on learning to speak the language, and motivation from teachers is important for fostering student motivation (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008). They want to learn to speak French. Notably, several students who stopped studying French after Grade 9 also explained they were not motivated because they were forced to study it as part of the overall Ontario curriculum; it was not their choice to take it.

The desire to be able to interact in French is reflected in many of the qualitative responses. One student stated, “I really wanted to be able to speak French because it seems like the most important area of the language. To be able to speak the language would help with travel and jobs, etc., whereas reading & writing is also important, but seemingly less useful.” In another example, the student explained:

I have always been eager to learn French, mostly because I like a challenge, but also because I think it is extremely beneficial to know an L2 (especially in Canada). I did however feel less motivated when learning reading and writing because I felt like every day and every year was redundant and we weren't learning anything new. I think speaking is the most important aspect of learning an L2, and I did not get the oral experience I had hoped for.

These two students saw higher value in learning to speak French as a useful tool that can be used in their real lives, and placed less emphasis on reading and writing.

Despite the benefits to oral fluency that some students recognize, still 131 (19.3%) respondents indicated they were not motivated to learn to speak French, and 34.6% were just somewhat motivated. Explanations for this from students' qualitative responses reflect embarrassment to speak and lack of opportunities to speak in order to become comfortable and confident with it. One student explained, "I did not feel very encouraged to speak during French class and I felt very embarrassed to make a mistake as there were many students who had a higher French proficiency than I did in my classes." Another notably said that it was difficult for them to stay motivated to speak French because few people in their class wanted to. As well, they stated that "the teachers did not provide enough free-time to speak freely to classmates in French." It is significant to note as well that 68 (52%) of those 131 students who indicated they were not motivated to speak French also indicated that they were not motivated to learn any of the four skills in French.

The quantitative survey data regarding students' levels of motivation to learn each of the four skills speaks to the findings from the 5 interview participants who also indicated that they were at least somewhat motivated and very motivated to learn each of the four skills. Four expressed they were very motivated to speak French, while the fifth, Diana, the French Immersion student, said she was just somewhat motivated. Diana explained that she was less motivated because her teacher did not enforce the rule of speaking French and so she often did not. Her teacher also "had a science degree, but she was stuck teaching French, so she wasn't very passionate about teaching us." Gwen

explained that she was very motivated to learn all the skills except reading, because that personally interested her less. Diana mentioned that she was most motivated to write French because she loves writing and is a creative writer. Both of these examples demonstrate the significance of individual differences in determining an individual's motivational orientations.

Haley and Nina mention they were less motivated to learn the skills they felt they could already do well, and were therefore more motivated to improve the skills they could not do as well, which was primarily speaking. Diana also mentioned that she was more motivated to learn those skills that “required less effort on [her] part.”<sup>10</sup> Allen was not motivated at all in elementary school, but became motivated in Grade 9 French when he finally had a passionate teacher who made French class engaging and demonstrated to students that the language was a useful tool that they were capable of using. By the end of secondary school FSL, he said he was very motivated to learn all of the four skills, and mostly to improve his speaking skills.

Only three of the five (60%) interview participants indicated they were overall motivated to learn French, which is also directly reflective of the qualitative survey results. The three who were motivated, Allen, Gwen, and Haley, explained that they really enjoyed learning French and were interested in the future opportunities the L2 could provide them. They enjoyed being able to speak an L2 and really wanted to improve their skills. Nina and Diana, on the other hand, did not feel motivated overall. Nina explained that she was less motivated because she did not see French as a “need” in Canada where everything is in English and she never felt a “push” to have to learn it. She also explained that what she was learning in French class was very isolated from “what will be used in the real world.” She wishes there was more of a cultural aspect within her learning experience to show her that there was a real reason why she had to learn the language and how it could be applied. Diana was motivated by travel and future job opportunities, but overall not motivated because of a lack of engagement in the

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<sup>10</sup> This conveys an important difference between those language skills that are receptive (listening and reading) and those that are productive (speaking and writing). Receptive language skills can be learned, or used, more passively, while productive skills require more work on the part of the learner as they must produce the language.

classroom. She was never forced to speak French, and so she did not, and she had teachers who wanted to be teaching other subjects. She felt that she was just “sitting in a classroom learning grammar.” She also mentions that she just personally did not feel very motivated and did not have “a personal appreciation for the language beyond job usefulness.” Individual differences are very significant in the case of motivation, which makes it inappropriate to generalize these results. These five interview participants evidently all had different language learning experiences, in different cities, from different families, and with different personal interests that made their experiences unique.

#### 4.1.2 Why continue French studies after Grade 9?

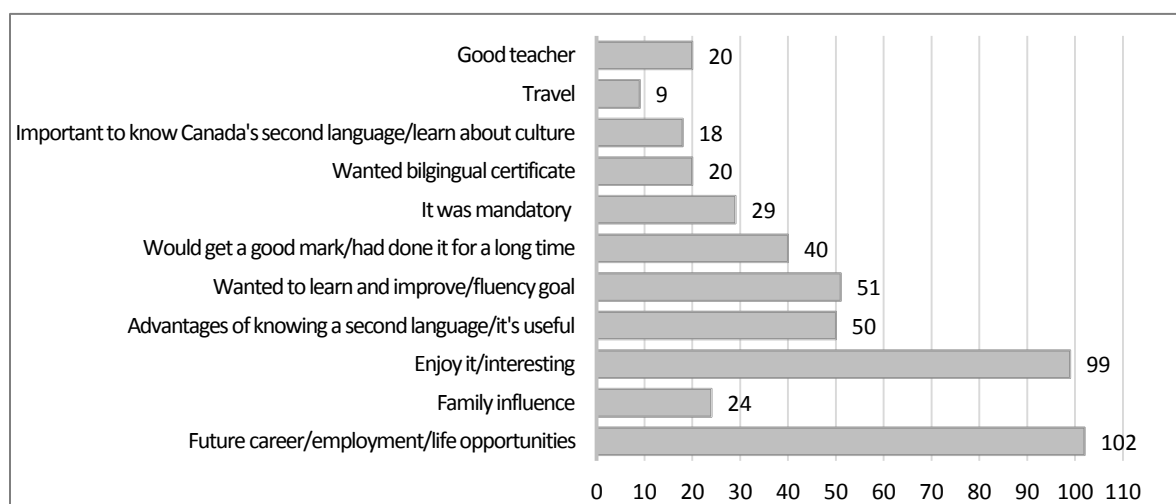
The survey asked students who continued to study French after Grade 9 why they decided to do so in order to better understand students’ overall reasons for choosing to continue to study French. The 488 students who continued represent an overall 66.8% of the 731 survey participants who indicated whether they continued or not, which is a much higher percentage than actual reported numbers of students who continue to study French.<sup>11</sup> This may be due to skewed results; that is, those students who are less interested in French and did not continue with French studies would be less likely to complete a survey regarding French education. Of those students who stated on the survey that they continued to study French after Grade 9, 311(63.7%) students responded to explain why. There were 11 overall reasons, demonstrated in *Figure 2*. Note that some students mentioned multiple reasons, and therefore the numbers total to 462 and the percentages do not add to 100%, as they represent the percentage of the 311 students, not the 462 comments.

Of those themes most frequently mentioned, 102 (32.8%) students mentioned future career, employment, and/or life opportunities as reasons to continue, 99 (31.8%) mentioned enjoying it and/or finding it interesting, 51 (16.4%) wanted to learn and improve and/or had a fluency goal, and 50 (16%) mentioned the advantages and usefulness of knowing an L2 like French. One student notably said, “I didn't want to give

<sup>11</sup> See enrollment statistics discussed on page 9.

up on something I had started since Grade 1. Also, I knew French had many benefits, especially in Canada and it would all pay off in the near future. And to top that off, I really enjoyed learning French, it was something that came as a joy to me.” Another student said, “I felt that French would be a useful tool to have, aside from the fact that I simply enjoy the language.” Those numbers are on trend with the explanations that interview participants provided as well.

Figure 2: Why do students continue to study FSL after Grade 9?



Another 40 students (13%) said they continued because they would get a good mark or because they had been doing it for a long time already, 29 (9.3%) said they continued because it was mandatory as part of their International Baccalaureate program, 24 (7.7%) mentioned being influenced by their family to continue, and 20 (6.4%) said they wanted their bilingual certificate. A student explained, “I wanted to get my bilingual diploma upon graduation from high school. I also enjoyed French, and the content that was taught was always interesting.” 20 (6.4%) said they had good teachers,<sup>12</sup> 18 (5.8%) mention the importance of knowing Canada’s second official language and/or learning about the culture, and only 9 (3%) mention travel, which is surprisingly low.

Interview participants had the opportunity to go into more depth about why they continued, mentioning a variety of reasons which include the above reasons already

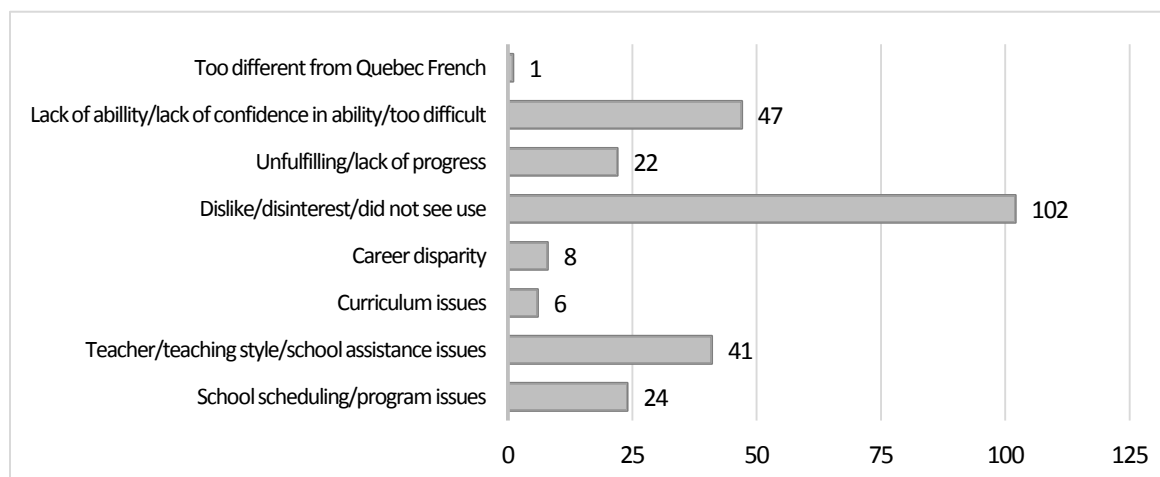
<sup>12</sup> See further discussion of good teachers inspiring students to continue in ‘4.1.6: *Inspiring teachers*’ on page 64.

stated. Allen explained that he continued beyond Grade 9, after initially not thinking he would, because he had a very encouraging teacher who made French class engaging and entertaining. He learned and applied knowledge that made him able to communicate, get good grades, and be confident in his language abilities. French class was no longer just memorization; it became useful and real. Diana explained that she continued French mostly because she was enrolled in a French Immersion program since kindergarten and for practical reasons because she grew up in Ottawa, so being bilingual is advantageous in the job market there. Other than that, she was somewhat motivated for travel. Gwen said that she enjoyed learning an L2 and that French class was a nice break from all her science classes. Haley and Nina both said they were interested in being bilingual and having that advantage in the job market. Nina further explained that her teachers had made French seem like something that would help them a lot in the work force in Canada, and so she decided it would be a good idea to continue. She also mentioned that she liked learning languages and French helped her with her Latin studies.

#### 4.1.3 Why discontinue French studies before Grade 12?

The qualitative survey question asking students why they discontinued French studies is very useful for understanding what can be changed to encourage and motivate more students to continue studying French. A total of 243 (33.2%) survey participants indicated they discontinued French studies after Grade 9 and another 154 (21%) did continue after Grade 9, but stopped studying it by the end of Grades 10 or 11. These participants were given the opportunity to explain why they chose to not continue. Of the 243, 216 (88.9%) students who did not continue to study French after Grade 9 responded to explain why. There were 8 overall reasons, demonstrated in *Figure 3*. Note that some students mentioned multiple reasons, and therefore the numbers total to 251, and the percentages do not add to 100% as they represent the percentage of the 216 students, not the 251 comments.

Figure 3: Why do students chose to discontinue French studies after Grade 9?



The most frequent response used by 102 (42%) students explained that they simply did not like learning the language, did not find it interesting, or did not see the use in learning it. The comments that accompany those explanations mostly include simple phrases like, “It’s useless,” “It didn’t interest me,” and “I hated it.” Another 47 (19%) students said they lacked the ability, lacked confidence in their abilities, or found French too difficult to learn, and 41 (17%) described issues that they had with their teachers or teaching styles that were used. A respondent stated, “My French teacher was not friendly and it became uncomfortable to be in her classroom. I was struggling a bit with the Grade 9 course content but there was no additional help offered.” Some students explained that it was simply too difficult for them and so they were not interested, while others explained that it was too difficult and they did not receive the help they needed, so they discontinued due to a lack of support.

Students also reported not wanting to continue studying French because they found that Grade 9 French was unfulfilling and/or they felt a lack of progress, as 22 (20%) students explained. A student stated, “I did not feel like continuing with French would actually develop my skills in speaking the language enough for it to be worth the amount of studying the subject required.” Another student said, “It was my lowest mark and I did not find it useful as we only learned about random topics not how to speak French. After the 5 years of taking it, I had learned very little.” These students wanted to learn to actually speak French, but did not feel that this goal could be achieved in the FSL

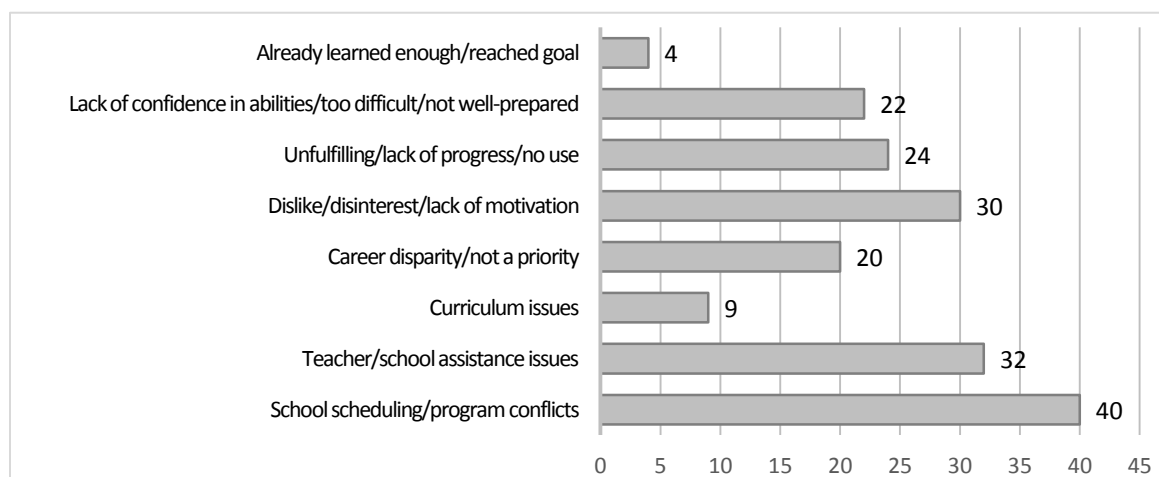


classroom. A third said, “I felt that I did not have the knowledge I should have to move on. I felt like my Grade 9 education had failed me, and dissolved any interest I had in the language.” This student’s lack of progress made them overall disinterested in further continuing French studies when it was no longer required.

Another 24 (11%) students mentioned they had school scheduling or program issues that prevented them from continuing to study French, 8 (3.7%) said it did not align with their career choice, and 6 (2.8%) described issues with the curriculum. One student also said that they chose to not continue because the French they were learning in class was too different from the French spoken in Quebec. The latter comment is also reflected in interview responses from Diana, Haley, and Nina, who wished there were more real-life, everyday Quebecois words and phrases taught in the classroom.

Of the 154 students who chose to discontinue French studies by the end of Grades 10 or 11, 142 (92%) responded to explain why they did not wish to continue after initially choosing to continue past Grade 9. There were 8 overall reasons, demonstrated in *Figure 4*, and a total of 181 comments regarding each reason. 40 (28%) students mentioned not being able to continue studying French due to school scheduling and program issues. Many expressed frustrations about this as they wished they could have continued. This student’s comment reflects a desire, but inability, to continue: “I really wanted to continue studying French as a second language after Gr. 10 but my school was too small and not enough other students were interested in taking French so there were no upper year French classes offered.” 32 (22.5%) also explain their frustrations about issues with their teachers or with school assistance. A student stated, “I found that the curriculum wasn't engaging and did not inspire me to continue and I saw my progress was very minimal. My teachers were also very unhelpful in providing further improvement.” 24 (17%) overall explained they found French class unfulfilling, felt a lack of progress, or did not see the use in learning the language.

Figure 4: Why do students choose to discontinue French before Grade 12?



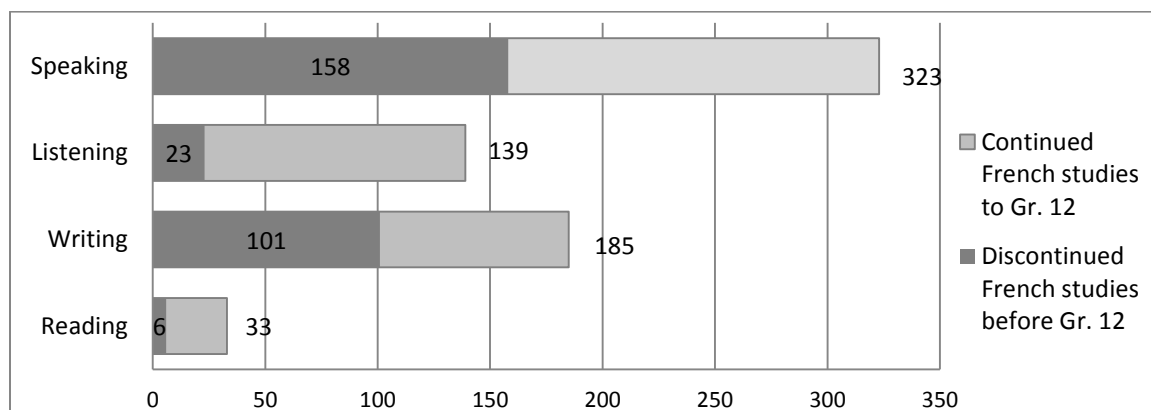
It can be seen in *Figure 4* that 30 students (21%) expressed a dislike, disinterest, or lack of motivation to learn French, 22 (15.5%) expressed a lack of confidence in their abilities, that it was too difficult, or that they were not well prepared to continue, and 20 (14%) said French did not align with their career goals or was not a priority. A respondent explained, “I wasn't enjoying learning it, I wasn't confident enough with the language to continue with it despite the fact I had been taught French in school for 6 years and I felt it was unnecessary for my future career path.” Finally, 9 (6%) mentioned issues with the curriculum, and 4 (2.8%) felt they had already reached their goal and had learned enough.

The lack of progress expressed by 17% of these students was often tied to inabilities to speak the French language. One student explained, “I discontinued studying French...because I felt that the French program was no longer structured well enough for me to feel I was actually learning French as opposed to just memorizing the information...there were not enough oral components to the classes.” Another said, “I wasn't doing well and it wasn't a requirement for my post-secondary studies. I was still unable to hold a conversation in French despite studying it for over 5 years.” With little progress or feelings of successful acquisition of the language to be able to communicate, students chose not to continue studying French.

#### 4.1.4 Speaking practice in the FSL classroom

Students were asked to indicate what they felt was their weakest skill by the end of their FSL education. 680 students responded, of whom 323 (47.5%) stated that speaking was their weakest skill (see *Figure 5*). 165 (51%) of those students who stated speaking was their weakest skill completed French studies to Grade 12 and 158 (49%) did not. 60 (36.4%) of those who continued were from a French Immersion background through secondary school, 78 (47%) from a Core background through secondary school, and the remaining 27 (16.6%) either studied in an extended French program or switched from French Immersion to Core French during secondary school. 4 of the 5 interview participants, with the exception of Allen, also stated that speaking was their weakest skill. The explanations for this feeling by survey participants and interview participants overwhelmingly point to a lack of speaking activities in the classroom and a lack of enforcement of the rule of speaking French in the classroom. Explanations also point to the memorization of information with a lack of opportunities to apply that information and turn it into knowledge, and embarrassment to try to speak and make mistakes.

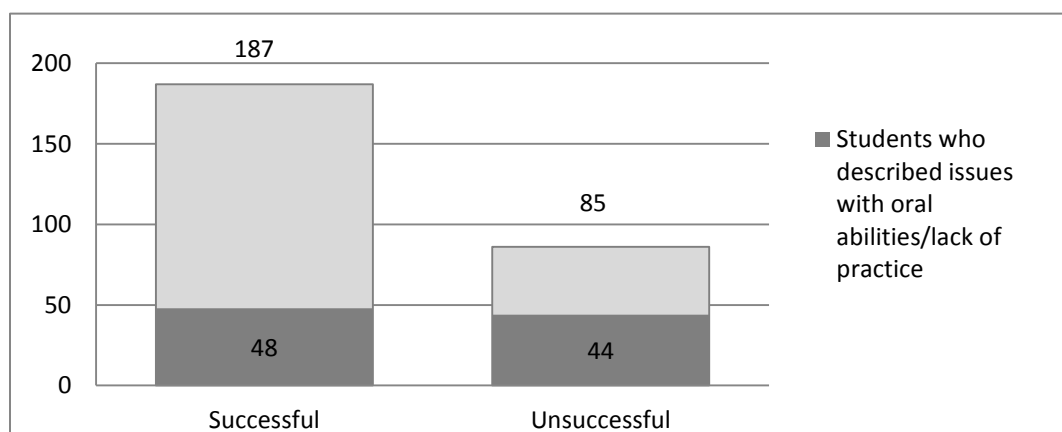
*Figure 5: What do students believe was their weakest skill by the end of their secondary school FSL education?*



Students who completed French to the end of Grade 12 were asked the question, “Why do you believe you were successful/unsuccessful at learning the French language by the end of secondary school?” Their responses help explain why students felt their speaking skills were lacking. 85 (31.3%) of the 272 respondents stated that they felt they were unsuccessful at learning French by the end of Grade 12 and 44 (51.2%) of those

students explained that they felt unsuccessful either in whole or in part due to issues with oral abilities and oral practice in the FSL classroom (see *Figure 6*). One student explained, “I don't believe I was successful at learning French...because there were not enough opportunities to practice speaking. We would have listening exercises and give presentations but I don't think these were very effective in learning how to carry out conversations.” The idea of “successfulness” can be interpreted differently by every individual, but the issue still remains clear that these students did not feel they received sufficient opportunities for speaking practice in the FSL classroom. Even of the 187 (68.8%) students who said they were successful at learning French by the end of Grade 12, 48 (25.7%) of them explained that they were successful except for in the oral French component.

*Figure 6: Do students believe they were successful or unsuccessful at learning French by the end of Grade 12?*



The issue of having a lack of opportunities to apply the knowledge learned in the classroom helps to explain why so many students felt that speaking was their weakest skill. A survey participant explained, “The French we learned in high school was very grammar based and was more about what you could memorize than what you could apply and actually use.” This lack of practice also feeds into other issues, such as lack of confidence and embarrassment to speak. Survey participants who completed French to the end of Grade 12 were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, “I did not feel comfortable speaking to my classmates in French.” Of the 321 respondents, 138 (43%) said they agreed, they did not feel comfortable. Some students mention that the

classroom environment was negative or it was uncomfortable to try to speak French in it because of the lack of practice. A student said, “We were not encouraged to speak French very much and...my classmates would refuse to speak the language. If you spoke it to them you would be mocked and it did not create a comfortable environment. The teacher spoke mostly English.” This comment is in relation to a high school French Immersion class. Many students explain that they were not comfortable trying to speak French because they were afraid to make mistakes and be made fun of, and they also were not forced to speak French, so they never became comfortable with it. Another 117 (36.4%) respondents said they were not forced to speak French in class, so they did not. A student said, “Teachers did not make students speak French, and therefore no one did. People became timid of speaking French amongst peers.” This issue is also reflected in interview responses.

Diana and Gwen both agreed they did not feel comfortable speaking with peers and that they were not forced to speak French so they did not. Allen explained he felt less comfortable speaking with peers than with his teachers for fear of making mistakes and being judged, but he still did because speaking French was required. Haley and Nina said they both felt comfortable speaking with peers. Haley also spoke French in class when it was required because the teachers enforced the rule of speaking French, and Nina explained that it depended on the teacher whether she spoke French. She had a “terrifying” elementary French teacher, so no one really spoke, but towards the end of high school when they had smaller group activities to do and speaking French was enforced, she spoke French. Interestingly here, it is evident that those two who were not forced to speak French were not comfortable speaking with peers, and those three who were, were more comfortable interacting in French with peers.

The issue of a lack of opportunities to speak French in class and the difference that more opportunities and an enforcement of the rule of speaking French can have is demonstrated clearly by a comparison of two of the interview participants’ situations. Diana, the French Immersion student, stated that speaking was her weakest skill, while Allen, a Core French student, stated it was his strongest. These two scenarios are anomalies that the participants explain were largely due to their teachers, as well as their

own personal feelings, or lack thereof, of motivation. Diana explained that her teachers did not enforce the rule of speaking French in the classroom and so she never spoke it. Allen explained that his teacher was so inspiring and provided so many beneficial opportunities to practice the language and to not be afraid to make mistakes that he was able to become very comfortable with it and use it outside the classroom with French first language speakers. He found the experience very enjoyable, while Diana did not enjoy her experience and had a teacher who also did not enjoy teaching French. Allen was given many opportunities to apply the information he learned in the classroom through oral activities, as well as written, listening, and reading activities. Diana only finally applied some of the information she was able to remember when working in Ottawa where she had many Quebecois coworkers to interact with. She explained that her oral French only really improved when she was forced to use it in her work setting.

Diana brought up another issue, which Nina and Haley also mentioned, of only formal French being taught and not enough, if any, informal, common, everyday French-Canadian language being taught. She stated:

I found after I graduated high school and started working at my job, I had a hard time communicating with French Canadian speakers because they used words that I didn't learn in school, because we were told you're supposed to use standard French, but most French speakers don't use standard French on a regular basis.

Students desire speaking practice, but also practice with the conversational skills and phrases that they may encounter outside the classroom. A survey participant also stated that they chose to stop learning French because there was too much of a gap between what is taught in the classroom and the French that is actually used in Quebec. Nina and Haley also both explained that they wished they could have learned more common words and expressions, particularly because those words and expressions are an important part of the Quebecois culture.

Gwen provides a good summary of what she thinks needs to be done to improve the issue of students' lack of oral skills: "When students aren't allowed to speak English, when they enforce it more, I think that would force me to speak French... If they

have...better ways of creating oral communication rather than just memorizing skits, I think that would be more effective.” She felt she would have better succeeded in the oral component if teachers enforced speaking French in the classroom and if there were more of a variety of speaking activities to engage students in using the language in a meaningful and useful way.

#### 4.1.5 Negative experiences with FSL teachers

It is somewhat disappointing that this section was necessarily added to discuss the many comments that arose with regards to students’ issues with their French teachers, which affected their motivation to learn French and overall successfulness, or lack thereof, in learning the language. The subsequent section will end the topic of teachers on a positive note though, as many comments also referred to inspiring teachers who went above and beyond to ensure their students were successful and enjoyed their French education. It is important to emphasize again that the opinions and experiences presented are based on students’ perceptions and interpretations. There are often teachers that are well-liked by many and disliked by few, and vice versa.

Survey participants mention various issues with teachers as reasons why they felt unsuccessful or why they discontinued French studies. Four of the interview participants also mention issues with teachers causing them to feel unsuccessful in specific areas of their learning, like the oral component. Of the 216 students who did not continue French studies after Grade 9, 41 (17%) described issues that they had with their teachers or teaching styles that were used. Of the 142 students who discontinued French studies after Grade 10 or 11, 32 (22.5%) described issues with teachers or school assistance causing them to not continue. Finally, of the 85 students who felt they were unsuccessful at learning French, 25 (29%) said their teachers were partially to blame.

Issues discussed regarding teachers range from teachers’ alleged lack of ability to teach French, to teachers’ reported lack of interest in teaching French, to teachers just being strongly disliked. One student notably reported that their teacher discouraged them

from taking French essentially by telling them that what they were going to teach them would not make them successful: “The language wasn't being presented in a usable way. I asked my teacher "will I be able to speak French after four years of this class?" She responded no. I decided it would be a waste of my time.” There were teachers who mostly spoke English and teachers who spoke French, but did not know how to teach it. A student explained they did not continue studying French after Grade 9 “for lack of understanding, due to uninvolved and poorly trained teachers. The teachers knew how to speak French but not how to teach.” There were teachers who taught the same things every year, and teachers who were just “rude” or “terrible.” Another student stated, “I felt that the teacher did not do a good job of teaching us the materials and did not have a good understanding of them herself.” A third explained, “Incompetent teacher in Grade 9 made me hate French. Dropped it the first chance I had.” A lot of frustration is evident in student’s responses that regard their dislike of teachers.

One very significant issue that affects students is one that Diana described which was that her teacher was not passionate about or interested in teaching them French because she was a science teacher, but French was the only class available for her to teach. A survey respondent explained a similar issue:

My French teacher openly told our class she was only a French teacher because she could not find any other class to teach and really did not like her job, and that she did not care. In addition, she gave higher marks to individuals who she socially preferred and spent most of our class just talking about her personal life. Ultimately, I found the class to be fairly unpleasant and I did not feel that I learned very much from the experience. Therefore, I did not continue my French education.

This student explained that their teacher made it clear to students they did not want to be teaching that class and did not care about teaching the students French, which did not encourage this student to continue studying French. Another student explained they stopped taking French “because the 9th Grade French was incredibly ineffective and a waste of time. Watched movies with French subtitles and conjugated the same verbs over



and over with no explanation of the purpose. We did nothing else.” A similar sentiment is reflected in this students’ statement regarding why they believe they were unsuccessful at learning French:

I was not taught French properly throughout my four years in high school. My high school French course was considered a "bird course". Every student knew that the French teachers are lazy and there is no work involved in order to receive a fantastic grade. When my teacher did decide to teach, it was the same material that we learned from Grade 10. We only focused on grammar and did little to no oral practice. Now that I am a first year student enrolled in the French course, I am struggling. It is very unfortunate that my high school French teachers did not set me up properly for university French.

This statement comes from a student within the 29% of students who indicated their teacher played a role in their lack of success learning the language. Frustrations are even more evident in the following comment from a French Immersion student who felt their education deteriorated by the end of secondary school due to teachers who were not well-trained or skilled enough to teach French:

I was successful at learning the French language by the end of secondary school because my elementary school teachers were phenomenal teachers with excellent French speaking skills. After speaking mostly French from Grades 1-6, my French was 100% fluent by the time I began Middle school. From Grades 7-12, however...I learnt nothing new, and my French actually deteriorated for the next 6 years and I had to really work hard to maintain my French on my own time. Reason? The teachers were terrible. They were not native speakers and had only learnt the language through University courses. All of my friends from elementary school and I spoke better French than they did and understood French grammar better than they did, it was just embarrassing. They also never enforced speaking French which my elementary school teachers did. I understand that there are not enough French teachers and so anyone is accepted, but I still think there should be

higher standards or at least more intensive training if there really are not enough people. These children deserve better than what they are getting.

This student demonstrates their experience with a lack of French speaking enforcement in the classroom and the effects of a lack of engaging oral activities. This student went from feeling completely fluent to feeling as though they had to work very hard on their own time to maintain their fluency because there was not enough French speaking happening in class. Their strongest point is that teachers need to be trained properly to effectively teach the curriculum and ensure students' success.

#### 4.1.6 Inspiring FSL teachers

There were many very positive comments about teachers that are also important to note. Of the 187 students who felt they were successful at learning French, 48 (25.7%) accredited their success in part or in whole to their French teachers: "I attribute a lot of my success at learning the French language from my amazing teachers and their motivation to teach the subject"; "I believe that I was successful because all of my teachers were very knowledgeable and motivating"; "I believe that I was successful because I had teachers who were invested in our French education. They worked with us to ensure that our French was at the place it needed to be for a transition into university"; and "I had a very good teacher that worked with us to achieve our French goals and provided various ways for us to learn the French concepts." These students clearly valued the efforts that their teachers made to help them succeed.

A total of 334 (45.7%) of 731 survey respondents indicated they continued French studies up to Grade 12. These students were asked to explain why they decided to continue studying French. Of the 311 responses received, 20 (6.4%) said they continued because they had effective teachers. This is evidently a small percentage, but it is still significant to note and to understand how some students describe their teachers who they believe helped them in their FSL education. Interview participant Allen also stated that his teacher was the main reason he continued to study French, after originally going into

Grade 9 believing it would be his last year studying French. Allen also made it clear in his interview that he was aware his experience was unlike most others he had spoken to and he was very fortunate to have the teacher he did.

One student gave a very inspiring description of their teacher:

I believe I was successful at learning French by the end of secondary school largely due to my French teacher. She was extremely patient, kind, and motivating. She always encouraged us to practice our spoken French and was never condescending when we made mistakes, giving us helpful feedback that did not discourage us from continuing to try in spite of making errors...My teacher was also very thorough in explaining all the grammar to us and would answer all questions to clarify; after the lesson we would get a homework sheet to practice and/or play a fun and engaging game to help solidify the concept...While it is true that we focused more on grammar in Core French, I found that it was extremely helpful coming into university since the introductory course I took covered what I found was essentially the same material.

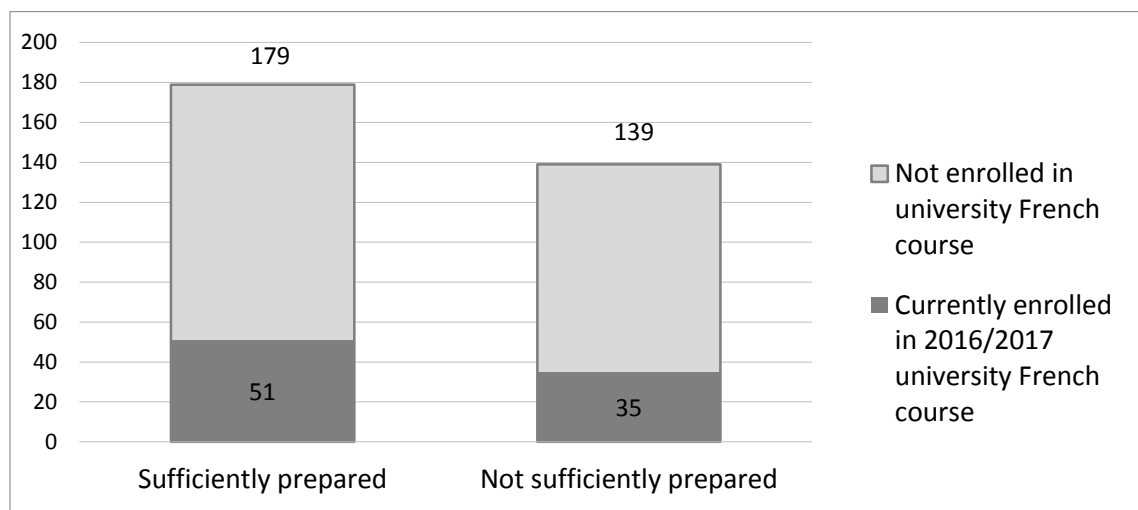
This student felt their teacher was encouraging and made them aware that making mistakes is part of the language learning process. They felt their teacher provided good feedback to help students and gave students opportunities to reinforce their learning. They felt they were prepared for university French courses because their teacher was thorough, provided extra help when needed and overall helped them feel successful at learning French.

#### 4.1.7 Preparation for university French courses

All students who completed French studies to the end of Grade 12 were asked if they felt their FSL education sufficiently prepared them to take French courses in university. Of the 318 students who responded, 139 (43.7%) of them stated they did not feel they were sufficiently prepared, and 179 (56.3%) felt they were (though not all of these students

actually experienced university level French courses). Of the 86 who said they were enrolled in a university French course in the school year 2016/2017, 35 (40.7%) said they were not sufficiently prepared, and 51 (59.3%) said they were sufficiently prepared (See *Figure 7*). The term “sufficiently” was intended to mean that students were comfortably confident in their ability to be successful in French studies at the university level, though this definition was not provided to students before completing the survey.

*Figure 7: Do students believe their secondary school FSL education sufficiently prepared them for university level French courses?*



Of the 51 students who believe they were sufficiently prepared, 31 (60.8%) are from a French Immersion background and 20 (39.2%) are from a Core French background. Of the 35 who are currently enrolled in a university French course and expressed they do not believe they were sufficiently prepared, 9 (25.7%) are from a French Immersion background and the remaining 26 (74.3%) are from a Core French background. This demonstrates that 22.5% of 40 respondents who graduated French Immersion programs and continued French in university did not feel they were sufficiently prepared, and 56.5% of 46 respondents who graduated from Core French did not feel they were sufficiently prepared to take French courses at university.

Students explained they did not feel prepared mostly due to the inability to speak French and due to an ineffective teacher who spoke English, did not force students to speak French, or who was overall unsupportive in preparing students. Of the 35 students

who felt unprepared, 22 (63%) explained this was because they could not speak French. Six (66.7%) of those students are of the 9 from a French Immersion background, and they all explained that they were not forced to speak French so they did not. Other explanations include that there was too much of a focus on grammar, or that oral practice came far too late in their education, like this student:

Although my teacher in Grade 12 focused on oral French, the 11 years before that were so heavy on grammar that my spoken French was not up to par. We did not have a full classroom "immersion" experience until Grade 11, and before that I did not have any chances to put my grammar into practice with my speech. I would have preferred to become comfortable with speech and listening before grammar because I would have understood what I was learning... It just felt like everything was learned in a bubble and then I made it to University and was expected to speak to Francophones and ex-Immersion students and I had no experience with that pace of speaking or listening.

This student recognized that being able to practice their grammar skills in speech would have benefitted their L2 learning, as well as better prepared them for French in university. They felt they were expected to already be able to speak and hear French well enough to converse with native speakers, but did not feel entirely comfortable doing so.

Of the survey participants who felt unprepared, 10 (28.6%) perceived their teacher was at least partially at fault for not teaching effectively or not enforcing speaking French in the classroom, and 7 of those 10 indicated their teachers spoke mostly English. One student said, "My teacher was amazing, but I feel like the oral communication part wasn't enforced very strongly. It would be more beneficial if there was a rule that we could only speak French, but there wasn't." Only 4 (11.4%) students, who were all from a French Immersion background, explained that their grammar was not strong enough, two of which also said they are nearly failing their university French course. Two also said they believe they were not prepared because of the lack of time that is spent in French class, which is not conducive to true, natural language acquisition.

The feeling of lack of preparation due to a lack of oral skills is reflected in four of the five student interviews as well. Diana, Haley, Gwen, and Nina all mentioned they felt they were prepared except for the oral aspect. Only Allen and Gwen were actually enrolled in a university French course for the year 2016/2017. Allen explained that his teacher prepared him so well that when he began taking university French courses in 2014, after graduating high school in the early 2000s, he was more comfortable with the material than most students in the class. He recognizes the significant part his teacher played in his success, but he also believes that the feeling of accomplishment he had when he realized he was able to speak French motivated him and helped him be successful. Gwen explained that she was well prepared, except for the oral aspect, which makes her feel intimidated to speak in class because most students in her class were from a French Immersion background and were more confident speaking. She noted that her first year university French course was much more difficult than high school French, but that she was very well prepared because the course mainly focused on grammar review as her Core French program had. The importance of grammar is evident in the first year French course syllabus at the university, and the university French professor interviewed also discusses the importance of grammar for success, as well as this divide she also notices between Core French and French Immersion students in the classroom.

The professor, who has over 20 years of university French teaching experience, noted in her interview the significant comparison between the levels of preparedness of French Immersion and Core French students. She agreed that French Immersion students tend to have much stronger oral skills, but weaker grammar, and Core French students have a stronger knowledge of grammar and are less confident in speaking. The first year French course syllabus plainly demonstrates the necessity for students to have a strong knowledge of grammar in order to be successful, as each class focuses on a grammar point. The professor stated that she believes students' knowledge of grammar is their weakest skill upon entering university French courses. Despite agreeing that speaking is the most important skill, and explaining that she is sure to provide speaking activities at the beginning of each class, she explains that grammar is especially significant because when students speak, they should speak correctly. She stated that students "absolutely need to learn grammar, otherwise they will never master the language." A survey

participant agreed: “While it is true that we focused more on grammar in Core French, I found that it was extremely helpful coming into university since the introductory course I took covered what I found was essentially the same material.” Overall, the professor said that out of 30 students in a class, 25 tend to be well prepared to be successful.

#### 4.1.8 Students’ perceptions of their successfulness in FSL

On the survey, 272 students who continued French studies to the end of secondary school responded to the open-ended question, “Why do you believe you were successful/unsuccessful at learning the French language by the end of secondary school?” to which many responses demonstrate that students distinguished their success based on whether or not they could communicate orally in the language. Of the 85 (31.3%) students who felt unsuccessful at learning French, 44 (51.2%) claimed that this was either in whole or in part due to an inability to communicate orally in French (See *Figure 6* on page 59). The remaining 187 (68.7%) students felt they were successful, with 35 (18.7%) of them explaining their success is obvious through their ability to communicate orally. Of those who felt successful, 48 (25.7%) still mentioned they were not successful in the oral component. Four of the 5 student interview participants also said they were successful except for the oral component. The idea of “successfulness” can be interpreted differently by every individual, and some students interpreted the survey question as “What makes you think you were successful/unsuccessful?” while others interpreted it as, “What do you think made you successful/not successful?”, but it remains clear that students value the oral component in learning French. Please note that results are representative of the two different understandings of the question, and the latter interpretation was the intended meaning that will be mainly discussed.

The 3 main reasons the 85 students described for why they felt unsuccessful at learning French by the end of their secondary school FSL education were because they felt they had a lack of oral abilities (44 students; 51.2%), they personally lacked motivation or interest in learning the language (11; 12.8%), and/or they felt their teachers were not effective (25 students; 29%). Other students also explained that they did not

realize the value of learning an L2, the classroom environment was not conducive to learning, the curriculum was not sufficient, or they felt there was simply not enough class time to learn it and not enough opportunities for real immersion.

One student's comment brings up two key points to help explain students' frustrations with their lack of oral competencies, and lack of success: the significance of the classroom environment and the need for teachers to enforce the rule of speaking French during French class. The student stated, "I was able to read, write and listen to French by the end of high school, however I am not fluent in speaking it because I was not put in an environment where I was often forced to speak French." Also with regards to a lack of French speaking enforcement by the teacher in the classroom, a student said:

Core French did not require students to speak French in the classroom. It was encouraged, and we tried, but often got away with speaking English to our peers and asking questions in English to our teachers if we couldn't figure it out fast enough in French... There needs to be more conversational practice!

It is a very common theme mentioned that speaking French in class was not enforced, and therefore students took advantage and spoke English most of the time. Students desire the conversational practice, but do not feel the need to speak the language if the teacher does react to them speaking English with their peers. Significantly, in relation to motivation another student said, "Whether the teacher enforced speaking French in class made a world of a difference in terms of my improvement and motivation in the language." Another issue relates to teachers not speaking French in class: "Teachers rarely spoke in French and we were never obligated to speak in French during class, so none of us did." Students' frustrations are evident in many responses, and such comments beg the question of whether teachers' own French proficiency was good enough for them to speak French in class.

The issue of simply memorizing information also comes up several times as it relates to a lack of oral practice and an inability to feel a natural connection with the language. A student explained, "I felt unsuccessful because I still lacked many of the basics to build sentences, understand texts, etc. It felt more like memorizing than



learning, unnatural, and ultimately I feel...unable to be fluent in the language.” Another student said, “the curriculum was all verbs and just ‘memorize the verbs and you’ll be good for the test.’” This student explained that after 9 years of studying French, they are nearly failing university French.

Of those students who felt unsuccessful, 12.8% also mentioned they were simply unmotivated to learn or uninterested in learning the French language. One student said, “I learned quite a bit of French but it never interested me and that is a personal thing...It’s just hard to learn a completely new language if you are not interested in it.” Another said, “I lost motivation as French became less important to me compared to other subjects that I was planning to pursue in post-secondary.” Other students explained how a lack of immersion opportunities and lack of language use made them unmotivated: “I was not motivated to speak French in the classroom because my French teacher would speak English...No one in my family speaks French so practicing at home was not something I was motivated to do.” A lack of opportunities for immersion into the French language environment is expressed by many other students as a reason for a lack of motivation, and therefore lack of success, but this is unfortunately in many cases also something that cannot be changed as many areas of Canada simply do not have large French-speaking populations. Another student said:

I do not think there is enough of an intense immersion into the language that you can master the four areas of it due to lack of time of classes. Because we have such short classes we have to cram the curriculum into that one hour we get and are therefore not learning natural French and how it would actually be used in daily life.

Time restrictions for French classes are an issue, and this student identifies the issue that covering curriculum takes precedence over learning the language naturally. Natural, real-life use of the language is an evident desire of students learning the language.

Finally, 29% of students who felt unsuccessful put the most blame for their unsuccessfulness on their teachers, many claiming that a bad teacher experience either

made them unmotivated to learn or they simply did not learn enough because the teacher was not effective. A student explained:

I felt very successful until Grade 12 -- I had a very motivated, passionate teacher who was fluent in Quebecois French and embedded the course with a lot of extra material that wasn't required by the curriculum. It was enjoyable and I learned a lot. When the teacher changed to one without experience teaching French, who wasn't as good a speaker as I was, I lost my motivation as I was learning nothing new.

This student claimed they lost their motivation because they felt their new teacher was unexperienced and not as good as their previous teacher. They felt their French skills were superior to those of the teacher and they were not progressing in their learning. Many students express frustrations with teachers who are non-native speakers, particularly in French Immersion programs and in relation to speaking too much English. Also, as previously discussed, many students expressed how the issue of teachers not enforcing the rule of speaking French in class allowed students to speak in English and not get the required oral practice in French.

Those students who felt they were successful, on the other hand, mainly believe they were successful at learning French because they were personally motivated and enjoyed learning French (21.2%) and/or they had inspiring teachers (25.7%). 11 (5.9%) explained that they were successful because they had studied in a French program for a long time or had the opportunity to travel to a French-speaking area. 35 (18.7%) explained they know they were successful because they can speak French. Still, another 25.7% of those who felt successful did not feel their oral communication skills were strong enough to confidently interact in the language.

Many students noted having a personal interest in French, enjoying learning it, and working hard to earn their success, both inside and outside the classroom. One student said, "I believe I was successful at learning French because it was extremely interesting to me. I found that my motivation to learn French made it a lot easier for me to learn the language and practice outside of class time." Another student explained that

they believe they were “relatively successful since [they] enjoyed the language and thus worked harder to improve at it,” however, they also explained that they felt only relatively successful because they had a lack of opportunities to speak the language.

One student made a very significant comment that touches on the key points of motivation, effective teachers, and authentic oral practice in French:

I was successful at learning the language by the end of secondary school mainly because I was motivated myself. I know students often drop French courses after Grade 9 because they don't like it and I believe that is due to the teachers. It is very hard to be successful without having teachers that teach their students in various ways that allow them to learn all parts of the French language including speaking. I think it's important to learn the language while being put in real life situations. I was successful because I practiced French at home with my sister as she attended French immersion as well. I took extra steps in order to better myself.

This student was personally motivated to work on their French skills outside of school and was fortunate to have the opportunity to do so, and this is what they believe made them successful. Their understanding of why other students discontinue French studies is that the teachers make them not like studying the language by not engaging them through using various strategies, specifically those that will engage them in speaking in real life situations.

Allen credits a large part of his success at learning French to his high school French teacher. He entered Grade 9 French believing it would be the last time he would ever study it because his elementary school experiences made French seem tedious and useless. He ended up continuing to study French, though, because of his high school French teacher who brought meaning and practicality to the language. When he discovered he could actually apply what he was learning through completing engaging speaking and writing activities presented by the teacher, he felt more motivated:

Before high school...there seemed to be no utility in it. It was a memorization exercise...You may as well have just laid down a series of playing cards and told someone to memorize the order of them because it felt exactly that meaningful and exactly that tedious. Like it means nothing...You couldn't speak French.

He could not see the usefulness of French in elementary school and felt the way he learned it was meaningless. When he realized he actually could speak French after being engaged in speaking exercises by his Grade 9 teacher that allowed him to apply and reinforce his knowledge, that became motivation for him. His teacher implemented plans that allowed him to see that he was successfully learning the language and could use it to communicate effectively, and this was in a Core French program. Because of his teacher, and the motivation he was able to find through her engaging teaching strategies, he expresses even better success in French than Diana who studied French Immersion through elementary and high school. Diana explained that her teachers did not enforce speaking French in the classroom, and so she never spoke it and did not feel confident using the language until she had to use it at work to interact with Quebecois co-workers.

On the survey, 25.7% of students who felt successful at learning French had very positive things to say about their teachers, like Allen did, and their effective teaching strategies that helped them be successful. These are a few of the positive things they had to say: "I attribute a lot of my success at learning the French language from my amazing teachers and their motivation to teach the subject"; "I believe that I was successful because all of my teachers were very knowledgeable and motivating"; "I believe that I was successful because I had teachers who were invested in our French education. They worked with us to ensure that our French was at the place it needed to be for a transition into university"; "I had a very good teacher that worked with us to achieve our French goals and provided various ways for us to learn the French concepts"; and "I had some good French teachers who emphasized learning through practice." These students not only explain that they had good teachers, but they also indicate why they were so good. They were motivating and motivated, knew the subject well, were hardworking and dedicated to helping students reach their goals, and presented different ways for students to apply their knowledge.

Another 25.7% of students still mention not being successful orally, though, largely due to lack of opportunities to apply their knowledge through practice. One respondent stated, “I was successful in that I was sufficiently taught verb conjugations and a good amount of relevant vocabulary...But there was certainly not enough of a focus on speaking spontaneously or listening, which has greatly hindered me.” Another student said, “I was very successful in learning the language. The only lack of success was speaking fluently in French and being able to think of words and phrases quickly in normal conversation in French.” The interview with the French professor reveals that students are very successful in university French when they have that strong background in grammar, and the first year course syllabus emphasizes the importance of grammar as well, but the speaking part is still very significant, particularly outside of the classroom.

Some students expressed frustrations in comparing bilingualism between Anglophones and Francophones in Canada:

I think I was moderately successful. On one hand, I don't think I ever achieved as high of oral fluency or writing skills as I would have liked while in school. While I rarely have any difficulty expressing myself or being understood by native speakers, I do still feel anxious about my level of fluency. I work on Parliament Hill in the summer, so we are expected as a group to have a high degree of bilingualism. I often find that my Francophone co-workers tend to be more comfortably fluent in English than do my Anglophone co-workers who, like me, went through the French Immersion program. I wish that I had gained a better level of fluency younger in life, because, in my opinion, more practice and exposure to the French language would have been beneficial. I found that my French markedly improved after constant daily practice over the summers, so I'm confident that my French could have improved during my elementary and secondary school years had we been given more chances to practice spoken French, not only in the classroom, but also in other environments.

This student did not believe they had enough opportunities to practice speaking in class and recognizes this through the fact that they are now much more comfortably fluent after

having to practice it daily with native speakers. They first experienced anxiety with having to speak due to a lack of practice, but the real-world practice they had through working with native speakers helped alleviate at least some of that anxiety. Another student stated:

The whole point of learning a language is to speak...Adopt what they do in Europe because everyone can speak a little bit of English, [while] almost no one can recall or retain their French from grade school [here]. It's quite pitiful to be honest, so much lost potential for a generation of school children.

The word "pitiful" really demonstrates frustration with this deficiency. This statement agrees with what the professor mentions in his interview as well: "Many other places in the world have people who at university speak four or five languages, and correctly." These university students clearly now wish they had been able to reach such proficiency.

Individual differences amongst students also help explain why some students are successful and some are not. Many students explained that they were successful at learning French because they were hardworking and motivated students: "I believe I was successful at learning the French language by the end of secondary school because I practiced often through written homework and verbal interactions with teachers, peers, friends, and family. I strived to do well in school." Many students acknowledge that it was their own lack of effort, motivation, or confidence that made them unsuccessful: "Personally, I did not take advantage of the opportunities to speak French (to my classmates, for example) and as a result my oral French abilities were not as strong"; "I wasn't confident enough in myself"; and "I did not realize the value of learning an L2." It still remains evident, though, that many students place considerable importance on oral proficiency as a determinant of success at learning French, and a significant number of them therefore felt at least in part unsuccessful at learning the language by the end of Grade 12.

#### 4.1.9 Opinions of TBLT

Student interview participants and the professor interview participant were asked for their opinions of TBLT after a short discussion of what it encompasses. This was a significant part of the research purpose, because if these students and the professor did not see the value in using TBLT, it would not be worth looking into it further. All interview participants agreed that TBLT would be a valuable and feasible teaching strategy to use to increase students' motivation to learn French and improve their oral abilities, particularly because of its focus on realistic and authentic speaking practice. They brought up a few possible disadvantages that they saw to the approach as well, as will be discussed.

Interview participants overall had very positive things to say about TBLT. Allen stated that if the tasks chosen surround topics that students are interested in, they will find ways to participate and be more invested in finding out how to express what they want to say. Haley similarly said that it would provide good opportunities to practice oral language skills and that students could be more motivated by the content that is chosen in the task. Diana mentioned its benefits for getting more students to participate as part of a team in smaller group settings, rather than having most students sit around and listen to the same students participate. When it was explained to Nina that the tasks in TBLT would be more authentic and realistic everyday tasks relevant to students' lives, involving conversation and discussion between students with the task completion as the main focus, she stated, "That sounds far more useful than anything I had to go through." She also expressed the importance of having significant vocabulary provided to support students' speaking. She, as well as the other four participants, believe that this kind of interactive approach would greatly help kids become more engaged and motivated in French class and help them develop strong oral abilities.

The professor had many positive things to say about TBLT through her own experiences with it. She said it is a good interactive learning strategy that can allow students to be creative and "feel good about their learning because they've done something." She explained that TBLT is both individual and collective at the same time,

and it not only gives students the freedom to think, but also to think critically. She also believes that it can help those students who are shy and not used to speaking in class, particularly Core French students, like Gwen who expressed anxiety speaking French when the French Immersion students were so much more comfortable with it. If students are given more opportunities to work in small groups speaking the language, they will become more confident to use the language, and, “that’s the one thing they need, really. It’s the confidence.” After having students complete speaking tasks at the beginning of each of her classes, the professor notices the progress in those shy students by the end of the course, not just in their speaking abilities, but also their confidence.

The opposite of the professor’s final point was also noted as a downside to TBLT by two of the student interview participants. Haley and Nina both explained that they do not believe TBLT would be good for students who were shy or more introverted and preferred to work on their own. Interestingly, Haley and Nina are the two who experienced more enforcement of the rule of speaking French in class. Diana and Gwen also mentioned that TBLT may not be entirely effective because when students break off into groups, they often end up speaking in English. This then reinforces the importance of teachers enforcing the rule of speaking French in the FSL classroom for TBLT to be successful.

#### 4.1.10 Students’ CEFR self-assessments

In relation to the CEFR, three separate questions were asked on the survey for students to self-assess their abilities in listening and reading, interacting and speaking, and writing. Students were asked to indicate either “Yes” they felt capable, “No” they did not feel capable, or if they were “Unsure” about their ability to perform specific skills laid out by levels A2 and B1 of the CEFR self-assessment grid. Level A2 and B1 were chosen because these are the “elementary” and “intermediate” levels that straddle the boundary between basic user and independent language user. By the end of Grade 12, students should absolutely be independent language users. It is important to note that



approximately 60% of respondents studied in Core French programs, and approximately 40% studied in French Immersion programs.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that “Yes” they felt capable of performing each of the skills, which was surprising, particularly in terms of interaction and speaking capabilities. 47.5% of students had indicated that their weakest skill in French by the end of their FSL education was speaking, which would appear to be inconsistent with these responses. For example, 60.2% of respondents indicated they “can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).” 70% of students indicated that yes, they “can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.” 79.5% indicated they “can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms [their] family and other people, living conditions, [their] educational background, and [their] present or most recent job.” 86% also said they “can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities.” The discontent students expressed with regards to other questions compared to the abilities they indicate here they feel they have raise a significant distinction between knowing a language and using it, as will be discussed in the following section.

## 4.2 Discussion

Following is a discussion of the data presented in the first section of this chapter with relation to how it successfully helps to answer the research questions and adds to the research literature regarding the low levels of bilingual graduates in Ontario, the lack of speaking practice students encounter, and the usefulness of TBLT. The major focus of discussions will remain on oral practice and motivation in the FSL classroom.

The responses to the research questions inform my discussion of whether a teaching approach like TBLT would be a feasible and worthwhile approach to train teachers to use to help effectively implement the new Ontario FSL curriculum and help

increase the number of functionally bilingual graduates in Ontario. The research questions are:

1. (a) How do university students who completed French studies to Grade 12 perceive their successfulness at learning the French language, and why?, (b) How do university students continuing with French studies in university perceive their own preparedness for university French level studies, and why?, and (c) How do university French professors perceive student preparedness to undertake university French level studies?

2. (a) How do university students who completed French studies up to Grade 12 perceive the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation? and (b) How does a university French professor perceive the effectiveness of TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation?

3. Why do students choose to continue or discontinue their French studies in secondary school?

#### 4.2.1 Students' perceptions of their own successfulness in FSL

The new Ontario 2013 elementary and 2014 secondary curriculum documents state, "The main purpose of learning a language is communication" (MEO, 2013, 2014, p. 9). The documents emphasize the importance of students gaining oral fluency and becoming effective communicators in French. On the survey, 51.2% of students who indicated they felt unsuccessful at learning French by the end of secondary school claimed they were unsuccessful either in whole or in part due to an inability to communicate orally in French. Of those students who felt they were successful, 18.7% said their success was evident to them through their ability to communicate orally, and 25.7% of them mentioned they were successful except for the oral component. Four of the 5 student interview participants also said they were successful except for the oral component. The idea of "successfulness" can be interpreted differently by every individual, but it remains clear that students, as well as the curriculum with its revitalized action-oriented plan for

improving oral fluency, place substantial importance on oral French as a determinant of successfulness in learning the language.

#### 4.2.1.1 Unsuccessful students

Students who felt they were unsuccessful at learning French by the end of their secondary school FSL education most often explained this was because they felt they had a lack of oral abilities, they had a personal lack of motivation or interest in learning the language, and/or they felt their teachers were not effective. There will always be students who are simply not interested in learning French and that will not change, but issues with lack of oral skills upon graduation, particularly for those students who expressed they were motivated to learn French, and issues with teachers have the potential to be improved.

Most of those students who felt unsuccessful due to a lack of oral abilities explained they believed this was due to a lack of focus on oral communication in the classroom and too much of a focus on grammar, which was also expressed by interview participants Diana, Gwen, Haley, and Nina. The issue of just memorizing information arises frequently. Learning grammar is essential in learning a language, as the professor interviewed would agree, and often learning it does involve a certain level of memorization, but students must be given opportunities to apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom and realize that the language has an actual use beyond trying to get good grades. It can be seen from Allen's experience that when a teacher is enthusiastic and passionate about teaching and provides many opportunities to apply the information learned through meaningful oral communication, there is a possibility for students' experiences in the classroom and overall skills in the language to be improved.

Haley also discusses the importance of receiving feedback and error correction from teachers during oral activities, because even though she did have some opportunities to practice speaking French in class, she never knew if she was speaking correctly. TBLT is a useful teaching approach for ensuring that students are given those authentic oral opportunities for applying their knowledge, and it also involves a focus on form so that if

a teacher notices the same grammatical errors occurring frequently, these can be corrected without much interruption in students' natural language usage (Long, 2014).

The classroom environment is also very significant to students' motivation and can affect their success (Gardner, 2010). If the classroom environment is negative or uncomfortable, students are less likely to succeed, particularly in the oral component. Forty-three percent of students who completed French to Grade 12 said they did not feel comfortable speaking to their classmates in French and 68% of those who did not feel comfortable stated speaking was their weakest skill. Many students expressed that this discomfort comes from a fear of being mocked or judged by other students for making mistakes, as well as a lack of confidence to speak because of a lack of practice and feeling as though it is not okay to make mistakes.

If students do not feel comfortable speaking with peers, they are less likely to be practicing spoken interaction and improving their oral skills, especially if speaking the language is not enforced. A classroom where students mock and judge or simply will not participate in oral activities is not a positive environment for language learning and practice. A partial cause of the problem of students feeling uncomfortable to speak French can be seen from students' perception that some teachers do not enforce the rule of speaking French in the classroom. Consequently, students continue speaking English and do not get the necessary practice speaking French to become comfortable with it. As one student said, "Teachers did not make students speak French, and therefore no one did. People became timid of speaking French amongst peers." When students are not forced to speak French, they never have the practice to become fully comfortable speaking it and speaking French never comes to feel like a regular habit. Students need to practice speaking to learn to speak, and teachers must therefore enforce the rule of speaking French in class in order for students to get that oral practice (Skehan, 1998; Bygate, 2015). As the university professor expressed, their confidence is key to oral communication. Teachers should also not prohibit the use of English entirely, though, as it can serve an important function in student's French language development (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Teachers must also demonstrate language usage and be role models of best language practices in order to encourage students to practice and become successful communicators in French (MEO, 2013, 2014). It was mentioned often that teachers spoke mostly in English during French class. Students would feel less obligated to try to speak French if the teacher did not even speak French. When students are in French class, they must be in a French speaking environment where speaking the language is encouraged and making mistakes is part of the language learning process (MEO, 2013, 2014). It is very difficult for students to find motivation to learn French when they do not feel comfortable in class, do not feel they have to participate, and as a result do not feel as though they are making any progress or gaining success in the language. As was also demonstrated by Peirce (1995), students may be motivated to learn a language, but if they are not comfortable speaking to a particular individual due to their symbolic investment in that individual, such as the teacher, they may not speak, which hinders their chances of success.

Twenty-nine percent of students who felt unsuccessful put the most blame for their unsuccessfulness on their teachers, many claiming that a bad teacher experience either made them unmotivated to learn or they simply did not learn enough because the teacher was not effective. It is evident that a teacher can make a noteworthy difference in a students' success, particularly if students can tell that a teacher is not well prepared to teach or does not want to teach French. A student can at first be very motivated to learn French, but if what is being taught in the classroom and the way it is being taught is not engaging and fulfilling to make students feel like they are progressing in their learning, they will likely lose their motivation.

Of those students who felt unsuccessful, 12.8% mentioned they were simply unmotivated to learn or uninterested in learning the French language. Some students also explained that they would not need to be able to speak French to be successful in their future career. Future goals that do not require the French language and a lack of personal interest are things that may not change, even with an effective teacher or engaging teaching strategies.

Other students explained how a lack of immersion opportunities and lack of time in French class made them unmotivated. In Ontario there is limited access to French-speaking areas and there is only a limited amount of class time that can be dedicated to learning the language, but effective teaching strategies for improved and more natural oral French practice in class can be implemented to improve student success. As Lapkin et al. (2009) point out, the Ministry's curriculum documents specify the number of instructional hours to be dedicated to French instruction, but they do not specify how that time is distributed. The way the time is used depends on the teacher and their plans, making teacher training and professional development for effective implementation of the new curriculum even more evidently necessary for ensured success (Salvatori, 2009).

Students' perceptions for why they felt unsuccessful at learning French further demonstrate how essential it is for French teachers to be well trained to implement the new curriculum effectively. Providing a variety of engaging oral activities, enforcing the rule of speaking French in the classroom, planning lessons well to optimize the minimal time dedicated to French classes, and effectively training French teachers are all things that can be done to improve students' experiences and success. TBLT is one possible approach for teachers to be trained to use in order to accomplish these goals and the goals of the new curriculum.

#### 4.2.1.2 Successful students

The perceptions presented by students who felt they were successful at learning French by the end of secondary school helped to deduce the importance that personal motivation and enjoyment of learning French can have on success, as well as the benefits of having good teachers who care about students' success. But, 25.7% of those who felt successful, some being those who expressed they had inspiring teachers and were motivated, still did not feel their oral communication skills were strong enough to confidently interact in the language.

Personal motivation and interest in learning a language can certainly improve a students' overall success as they want to work harder to succeed, though ability and external factors, like teacher's motivational practices and supporting a positive learning environment, do play a part as well (Dörnyei, 2001; Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008; Piccardo, 2014;). Many students expressed that it was their own motivation and interest, and overall hard work that made them successful at learning the French language, though it is unknown to what extent teachers and classroom activities played a part in their success. If a student enjoys the subject and has the motivation to learn, they can be successful, but success at all four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking can also largely depend on the planning and teaching strategies of the teacher, particularly in terms of speaking if a student does not have opportunities to speak French outside of school.

A few students explained that they had siblings who were also in French Immersion programs that they were able to interact with in French outside of school for extra practice. As well, many students who studied in Ottawa found opportunities to use French outside of school and found real meaning for the language in their everyday lives, but, in most cases in Ontario, students did not have opportunities to speak French outside of the classroom. This makes it all the more important for classroom plans and activities to effectively engage students in meaningful interaction in French. When students can see the usefulness in learning the language, and feel that they are actually able to use it, they will be more motivated (Parsons & Ward, 2011; Lapkin et al., 2009). Allen's experience illustrates the motivation that students can find when they feel success in language learning and when they have an exceptional teacher.

An appreciative 25.7% of successful students reported they had inspiring and effective teachers who gave them a well-rounded FSL education and many opportunities to apply their knowledge orally. Teachers evidently play a very large role in students' education. They are responsible for providing the knowledge that the curriculum sets for students to learn, like the important grammar principles, as well as the practice to help reinforce their learning. The application piece is extremely valuable when learning an L2 and finding motivation to continue learning, so that students can feel like there is a

purpose behind their learning. Students expressed their appreciation for teachers who worked hard to ensure they had the most positive and genuine experiences.

The positive things that students said about their inspiring teachers and their overall FSL experiences are things that every student should be able to express. It is noteworthy to mention the comments from students that say their teacher made it clear that they did not want to teach French. If they do not put in the effort to teach, students are less likely to put in the effort to work, particularly if the work is just 'busywork', and does not have clear set goals to guide productive learning. As one student expressed, if there are not enough French teachers and someone must teach French, they absolutely have to be trained to do the job correctly and prevent students from feeling like they were cheated out of the best education they could have. Some students do not care about learning French, but many do and would appreciate the opportunity to learn it successfully.

The interview with the French professor reveals that students are very successful in university French when they have a strong background in grammar, and the first year French course syllabus for the Ontario university emphasizes the importance of grammar as well, but the speaking part is still very significant, particularly outside of the classroom. Speaking has many benefits for students who want to travel or have a career that requires fluency in the French language. The skill of speaking and ability to interact in the language is what may assist those students most to be successful in their travelling and work, more so than the other three skills as they encounter native speakers to ask for or provide assistance. Students should be able to confidently say that they are bilingual by the end of their secondary school FSL education, after studying the language for 9 years or longer, and improvements may be able to be put in place to help more students succeed in their speaking abilities, while still maintaining appropriate focus on the other important skills as well.

Teachers and opportunities to practice oral language skills evidently have an important role to play in ensuring a student's success. So do personal motivation and effort, but not every student has out-of-school opportunities to practice the language and



allow them to see the usefulness of the language in their everyday lives. This fact makes it all the more important for the minimal in-class time students get in FSL programs to be effective and productive. Teachers are essential to the success of students (Strong, Ward, & Grant, 2011). Without good teachers, and without training them to implement the new curriculum effectively, the revisions to the curriculum will not help students succeed to their full potential (Riley, 1998). TBLT would be a valuable teaching approach for teachers to be trained to use to ensure students are getting authentic oral practice in French, improving their chances at successful language acquisition.

#### 4.2.1.3 So what is responsible for students' lack of success?

Regardless of whether students' success lies in the hands of the teacher, parents, curriculum, or students themselves, there is room for improvement in FSL education. Systemic weakness cannot be attributed solely to any one person or thing, nor does it matter who may be most accountable. All that matters in this case is that some students clearly did not have positive experiences in the FSL classroom and improvements can be initiated to help ensure more students in the future do. At a certain point, students' successfulness in learning very much comes down to individual characteristics. Some students are motivated; some simply are not. Many external factors, like community attitudes and access to necessary resources, play a part in an individual's motivation, and so does investment (Peirce, 1995). In some cases, as noted by Peirce (1995) a student may appear to be unmotivated because they are unwilling or anxious to speak French, but this may not be due to a lack of motivation, it may reflect the relationship between relations of power and the students' particular investments, such as towards a teacher. One must therefore consider a student's motivation within a larger social context in which power relations dictate possibilities for language learners to speak (Peirce, 1995). Some students find French interesting, while others never will. It is impossible to say to what extent a teacher is responsible for the success or failure of their students, or if students were just unmotivated of their own accord and simply did not like the language.

Some students who claimed they did not enjoy learning French also stated they did not like their French teacher, but it is impossible to say whether it was their lack of enjoyment or their teacher that most affected their success. All that educators can do at this point is put forth efforts to improve FSL education in ways that will engage more students, make them feel that French has a practical place in their lives, and show them that they can successfully learn the language.

#### 4.2.2 Preparation for university level French courses

Following the lack of successfulness that some students felt after completing French studies to the end of Grade 12, 40.7% of students who continued to take French courses in university in the 2016/17 school year expressed that they did not feel they were sufficiently prepared to do so. The syllabus for the introductory first year full-year university French course at the Ontario university emphasizes the importance of grammar. Written tests, exams, and reading responses comprise 70% of the grading structure, while 30% is dedicated to lab work (based on listening and speaking), participation, and one oral presentation. Weekly classes surround a different grammar point, from the present to the subjunctive, with nouns, pronouns, and the like in between. The reasons why students felt they were not prepared to take such a course are discussed below, followed by a discussion of what a university French professor's perspective is of students' preparedness.

##### 4.2.2.1 Students' perceptions of their preparedness

It is interesting to see that some students who continued to study French in university did so out of interest and motivation to be able to speak French, despite the fact they indicated they did not feel prepared to do so after their secondary school FSL education. It is unfortunate for those students who genuinely wanted to learn the French language that they did not feel they had a positive and fulfilling experience in secondary school.

A few students expressed they felt unprepared because of the grammar component, but most felt unprepared due to an inability to communicate orally in the language upon graduation, particularly because they mostly spoke English in class. This sentiment was even expressed by 6 of the 9 French Immersion students who did not feel prepared for university French. Many also expressed they were not prepared because their teachers had not taught the language effectively, particularly due to a lack of opportunities to apply the grammar and vocabulary taught in class to reinforce their learning. It is also interesting to see that despite the fact that 70% of the grading for the general first year university French course focuses on grammar, most students expressed they did not feel prepared due to a lack of oral abilities.

The oral component is evidently very important to students. They need opportunities to apply their knowledge, which will help them better understand the very important grammar points as real working concepts. They need to be able to see that they are able to use the language in real contexts (Bygate, 2015). They need teachers who will provide plenty of oral activities for authentic and engaging practice and who will enforce speaking French in the classroom.

Interview participants Gwen and Allen continued to take French courses in university, and Gwen felt that she was unprepared only in the oral component. She expressed her anxiety in communicating orally in class as most other students came from a French Immersion background and were more comfortably fluent, whereas she did not receive sufficient oral practice in secondary school. She was prepared to meet the grammar requirements of the first year course and felt successful in that, but her lack of oral abilities was discomfoting. She expressed that she would have benefitted greatly if her teachers enforced speaking French in class and if they provided more of a variety of speaking activities.

Allen, on the other hand, felt prepared in all components, with reading as his weakest skill. He explained that his teacher provided a variety of activities that covered the four skills, which allowed him to engage in authentic French communication on topics of interest to him. Through these activities and the hard work of his passionate

teacher, he was able to feel well prepared for his university French courses over ten years after graduating secondary school. Through his teacher, he was able to find utility in the language, which he believes made a world of difference for him in his transition from hating learning French to it becoming the class and subject he enjoyed the most and found the most success in. Every student deserves to have a French teacher like Allen had to instill motivation in them through real language practice and ensure the success of each student so they feel they have the ability to continue with French studies should they choose to do so. Ideally, all students should have a teacher who enforces the rule of speaking French and provides a variety of opportunities for authentic oral French practice.

#### 4.2.2.2 Professor perceptions

The university French professor stated that in an introductory first-year French course, 25 of 30 students tend to be well prepared to be successful in the course. French Immersion students tend to struggle more with the grammar, and Core French students tend to struggle more with speaking and, more specifically, confidence in speaking. She believes that the confidence piece is key, and that if students do not have opportunities to practice, they cannot become confident in their speaking abilities. She provides opportunities for students to speak to their peers in French at the beginning of every class and notices the progress in their speaking skills and overall confidence by the end of the course.

Many students expressed in open-ended survey responses that there should be less focus on grammar and more focus on speaking in secondary school French courses, but the grammar component, and the three other skills, still require a strong focus to acquire a well-rounded understanding and fluency in the language (Nation & Newton, 2013). Certainly less of a focus on grammar than was evidently emphasized in the old FSL curriculum documents is necessary, and precise grammar focuses have been removed from the new curriculum, but grammar still requires a predominant focus. As the professor stated, when students speak, they should speak correctly, and without a strong knowledge of the grammar, they can never master the language. Students need to be

taught the grammar, and given opportunities to apply what they have learned through oral activities, and the professor agrees that TBLT would be a feasible approach to help students do this.

### 4.2.3 TBLT: Feasible for improving oral skills and motivation?

The overall reactions of student interview participants and the university French professor to the idea of using TBLT to improve students' oral skills and motivation to learn French were very positive. There were some possible limitations mentioned that are important to be aware of, but none that would rule out TBLT as an effective approach to language teaching.

#### 4.2.3.1 Student perceptions of TBLT

Based on the reactions of the 5 student interview participants, TBLT would certainly be a feasible teaching approach for teachers to use to try to improve students' functional fluency in French upon graduation and increase their motivation to learn the language. This can be achieved through TBLT's focus on authentic language use and practice that helps students see and experience real world uses for the language that could help them in their everyday lives. Allen's experiences in elementary school French were meaningless and tedious, and he could not use the language. When his Grade 9 teacher presented a wide variety of activities for oral practice, as well as practice of the other three skills, listening, writing, and reading, he discovered he could actually use the language and that success became his motivation. Real use of the language and application of knowledge learned, as TBLT can provide, can give students more positive and worthwhile language learning experiences. As the Faez et al. (2011) study on the feasibility of the CEFR and task-based instruction for FSL education found, implementation of authentic task-based approaches can have profound benefits for students like increased motivation and autonomy.

All 5 interview participants agreed that TBLT could have further improved their language learning experiences. Four of the 5, Nina, Gwen, Diana, and Haley, expressed frustrations with their lack of abilities to speak French fluently after studying in an FSL program for 8 or more years, and believe that TBLT, along with enforcement from the teacher to speak in French, would help improve their oral skills. Working in smaller groups, all students would be more likely to participate rather than those same few students participating all the time while the rest of the class does not. Students will be able to engage in conversation with their peers in small group discussions to resolve a task, using the language as best they can while focusing on the task itself. The topics that are chosen for tasks should be those of interest to students, and students will be able to find motivation through those topics and the content for discussion and problem-solving (Nation & Newton, 2009; Long, 2014; Van den Branden, 2016). Allen said that he would be more engaged and try harder to figure out how to say things in French if he really wanted to express his opinions or ideas based on a topic of interest. The overall authenticity and student-centeredness of completing a real world task in French through TBLT spoke to the interview participants as very positive things, and Allen remembered experiencing tasks that he found to be very useful and engaging. Still, it remains important for the teacher to be present and circulating to ensure students are speaking French and to provide appropriate corrective and positive feedback so that students know if they are speaking correctly, as Haley explained she did not.

Enforcing the rule of speaking French will be very significant to the success of TBLT in FSL classes. 117 (36.4%) of 321 students on the survey mentioned they were not forced to speak French and so they did not, and they therefore never improved their oral skills in the language. This includes Gwen and Diana as well. Gwen and Diana both explained that a possible weakness to TBLT could be students speaking English with friends when they are working in small groups, because through their experiences that is what would often happen. Swain and Lapkin (2000) also found that French immersion teachers reduced the amount of group work they provided in class because students would mostly speak in English. To reduce this issue instead of avoiding it, teachers should consistently enforce the rule that students speak in French right from the beginning of the year and they should circulate the classroom to listen to conversations

and provide corrective feedback. Being a presence in the classroom and showing students there is someone not only listening as a rule enforcer, but also listening as a helper would be potentially helpful to students' learning. Though this should be a strict rule, the use of English should not be prohibited outright as it can serve useful cognitive and social functions in students' language learning, particularly in terms of scaffolding and avoiding communication breakdown between students (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Still though, Haley, who was forced to speak French in class by the teacher during oral activities, did not graduate confidently able to speak French, which further points to the issue of a lack of opportunities for oral French practice. Gwen said that it would be much more effective if teachers used "better ways of creating oral communication rather than just memorizing skits." Students need better and more opportunities to speak French. TBLT can give students more opportunities for authentic and meaningful oral practice, and be optimally effective if teachers enforce the rule of speaking French and are present to help and listen to students throughout task completion.

A second weakness to TBLT that Haley and Nina mentioned was that it may not work well for students who are shyer and prefer to work on their own. In such a case, though, if those students were not willing to speak and try to communicate in the language, they would never learn the language. As the professor indicated, students need to practice speaking to become confident speakers in the language, and they also cannot learn to speak without speaking (Skehan, 1998; Bygate, 2015). Learning speaking right from the beginning of L2 education, along with the other three skills, is central to the communicative language teaching model and encourages natural and authentic language development (Taylor, in press). The sooner these students are given the opportunity to engage in consistent oral practice with their peers and teachers, the sooner they will become comfortable using the language and completing oral activities in small groups. There is always the possibility for conflict between students in small group settings, and in large group settings, but if students are not given opportunities to try or refuse to try, they will never learn. A positive environment set by the teacher where trying to speak and making mistakes is encouraged, like that of Allen's secondary school experience, will further enhance students' FSL learning experiences (OMLTA, 2014).

From their interviews, it is clear that these 5 past and present FSL students believe that if TBLT is implemented and used consistently, students will receive the oral practice they desire and opportunities to apply their knowledge and become more comfortably fluent in French. Their experiences shed light on the Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review as four of them expressed their frustrations with their lack of oral abilities upon graduation, and Allen expressed his frustrations with the lack of progress he had achieved throughout elementary school, which made him initially uninterested in continuing. When tasks are created using topics and content that are of interest to students, TBLT can engage and motivate more students to participate and get the necessary practice using the language (Nation & Newton, 2009; Long, 2014; Van den Branden, 2016). It also provides opportunities for natural and authentic language use that allows language to be used as a tool to accomplish a goal, rather than as an object to be studied (Ellis, 2013). The data suggest that it would be useful for teachers to enforce the use of the French language during class and encourage students to try their best, while being present to correct students when necessary. They should also encourage the use of English when necessary to avoid communication breakdown, but not so much as to limit students' opportunities for language learning (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Tognini & Oliver, 2012).

#### 4.2.3.2 Professor perceptions of TBLT

The French professor explained in her interview that confidence is what students really need in order to communicate well in French, and she expressed her positive opinion of TBLT as a positive way to help shyer students get the practice they need to become more comfortable and confident with their oral language skills. Not only can TBLT provide engaging opportunities for students to practice and improve their oral skills and confidence speaking, but they are also able to think critically and creatively while accomplishing something that they can feel good about. If students do not feel good about their learning, they are significantly less likely to be motivated to continue and to be successful. The creative and fun aspect of solving a task that relates to students' lives can really help foster motivation to learn the language and enrich students' language use



(Van den Branden, 2016). This creative and fun aspect can only exist, though, if the teacher plans it so.

A limitation to TBLT, as previously suggested in *Chapter 2: Literature Review* is that task-based lesson plans must be carefully created, which can be difficult and time-consuming for teachers. According to Ellis (2009), tasks must follow four criteria to be considered a task in TBLT: Focus on meaning, have some kind of a ‘gap,’ learners should rely on their own resources, and there must be a clearly defined outcome to be achieved other than language use alone.<sup>13</sup> The professor also discussed the necessity for tasks to be well planned and organized with clear goals in order to be successful. If a task is not planned well and does not have set goals for students to achieve, it is less likely that students will be engaged. Students must see the meaning behind completing a specific task, which is why it is important that tasks be authentic and relate to their everyday lives. Tasks also require extra planning to use content that is of interest to students and that will inspire them more to participate because they have something to say.

Though this limitation may always exist due to the many different classroom situations and need for differentiated instruction, even if resources were created to further assist teachers in their planning, the results and successes of students through using TBLT may prove to make the extra effort worthwhile. As the Faez et al. (2011) study on the feasibility of the CEFR and task-based instruction for FSL education found, teachers can have difficulties when first implementing a CEFR and task-based approach, but implementation had profound benefits for students, like increased autonomy and motivation, which made it worthwhile. They also found that “the more teachers used task-based activities and CEFR-informed instruction, the more they would like to use them in their future lessons” (Faez et al., 2011, p.8). The study demonstrates the overall positive impact of introducing an action-oriented approach to FSL classrooms.

The professor interviewed agreed that TBLT could achieve very similar positive results if implemented effectively, like increased motivation through allowing students to

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<sup>13</sup> See further details on the four criteria on page 29.

be creative and “feel good about their learning because they’ve done something.” It gives students opportunities to think, think critically, and become more comfortable speaking the language. TBLT is grounded in the idea that students learn their L1 implicitly through interaction and by doing something of meaning to them, and L2 acquisition should try to mimic this (Lantolf, 2011; Ellis, 2013). Students must engage in using the language in real contexts in order to develop the skills to use the language effectively, and TBLT can provide such opportunities (Bygate, 2015). Students’ completion of relevant tasks in FSL classrooms can help to nurture their natural language capacities and become communicators, rather than just language learners (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

Through interview responses, it remains clear that TBLT, despite its possible limitations, is a feasible teaching approach to use to help implement the new Ontario FSL curriculum and improve students’ functional fluency and motivation. If further research was completed and professional development and ready-to-use resources were created to assist teachers, many of the possible limitations could be eliminated or diminished when it is implemented correctly. Piccardo (2010) notably indicated that teachers’ negative attitudes toward a new action-oriented approach to teaching, like the CEFR, can be the greatest barrier to implementation. It is therefore important that teachers have access to necessary resources and research to help them implement a new approach like TBLT and see the positive results that it could have for their classes should they choose to use it.

#### 4.2.4 Why do students continue or discontinue French studies?

Knowing the reasons why students discontinue French studies can assist in understanding why Ontario has seen such low levels of bilingual students upon graduation. Identifying the reasons can help researchers and teachers be aware of what to avoid and what to do instead to try to encourage more students to continue. The reasons why students choose to continue can also help researchers and teachers understand what to continue to do to motivate students and help them become successful communicators in French.

#### 4.2.4.1 Why did students discontinue?

The Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review on Core French suggested that students often discontinued French studies due to feeling that they had not made any significant progress in the language, did not feel capable of expressing themselves in French, and would have preferred more of a focus on spoken production in the classroom. The students did not feel they were learning the language in a useful and meaningful way, just as interview participant Allen described his elementary school FSL experience, which made him initially not want to continue.

These issues of students discontinuing French studies due to not feeling that they are making progress in their learning, that they are not able to speak French due to a lack of focus on spoken production, and an inability to see the use in learning the language are reflected in many responses received from survey participants. In addition to these reasons, many students expressed a general dislike or disinterest in learning French, they felt they did not have the skills to learn the language, or they felt it was too difficult. Even more concerning, many students discontinued French studies due to perceived issues with their French teachers or school assistance.

The two most frequently mentioned reasons used by those 216 students who explained why they discontinued French studies after Grade 9 were that they were simply disinterested or disliked the language, and/or did not see the use in learning it (42%), and that they felt they lacked the ability to learn it and/or found it was too difficult (19%). It is impossible to say from the data collected whether students disliked it or were not interested just because of personal feelings, or if they disliked it and were not interested due to negative or unengaging experiences in French class. Either way, disinterest in and disliking learning an L2 may always be present in some students due to individual differences, but it is still possible to make lessons more engaging and meaningful for students.

In a province like Ontario, it is unrealistic to say that every student will need to use French at some point in their life. As interview participant Nina explained, she somewhat lacked motivation to learn French because everything around her was always

in English and so she could get by just fine without knowing it. Some students will never be interested and never find a use for French in their lives, but while it remains a mandatory course for students up until Grade 9, it becomes even more essential to try to use different strategies to engage all students. They should not feel that their time is being wasted, they should still feel that they can be successful, should they choose to continue studying it. Some students may not enjoy learning French or see its usefulness in their lives even if their French teachers do use engaging and meaningful teaching strategies, but having the option and opportunity to learn meaningfully is important for each student. As can be seen through interview participant Allen's experience, it is possible to change a student's mind about learning the language when it is taught meaningfully and is made engaging instead of tedious. Unlike math, French, above all other school subjects, has the greatest potential to be engaging in many ways because any subject can be incorporated into a French lesson plan, as long as the language is being used. French teachers should take advantage of this potential as much as possible for their students' benefit, and their own. Teaching French is, after all, for the benefit of the student and teaching should reflect that goal of teaching the learners (Long, 2014).

Twenty-one percent of the 142 students who explained why they discontinued French in Grade 10 or 11 also said they disliked it, were uninterested, and/or had a lack of motivation to learn it. Again, some students simply are not interested and will never be interested in learning particular subjects, but improving French teaching to be more engaging and meaningful could possibly have a positive effect on those students' views of learning French (OMLTA, 2014; Lapkin et al., 2009). Some students may enter French class with previously established negative views of learning the language due to community attitudes, or previous personal experiences. Community attitudes towards learning an L2 can have a large effect on how a student views learning the language, and therefore on their motivation and overall achievement (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). If what is happening in the classroom is exactly how community members describe it negatively, or is exactly as their own past experiences were, like French class only consisting of grammar exercises, students will be less likely to become engaged in such an environment that has already been tainted in their minds. It is important that students are given opportunities to learn French in a variety of different and meaningful ways so

that they can make their own well-informed decision of whether or not they enjoy it and wish to continue studying it.

Students who feel like they lack the ability to learn the language and find it is too difficult may also always feel that way, perhaps because language learning is not their particular area of strength. 19% of students who discontinued after Grade 9 and 15.5% of those who discontinued after Grade 10 or 11 used these two reasons to explained why they stopped. In some cases, students not only said it was too difficult or they were just not good at it, but some also said they felt it was too difficult and never improved because they did not receive the help that they needed. If students do not receive the help that they need, they are much less likely to be successful and to want to continue, especially in high school when they are aware they may have the same teacher the following year. This issue then ties in with the third most frequently mentioned reason why students explained they discontinued French studies after Grade 9 (17%) and the second most frequently mentioned reason why students discontinued after Grade 10 or 11 (22.5%): issues with French teachers or school assistance.

Issues discussed regarding teachers range from students' perceptions of teachers' lack of ability to teach French, to teachers' lack of interest in teaching French, to teachers just being strongly disliked. One student notably reported that their teacher discouraged them from taking French by telling them that what they were going to teach them would not make them able to speak French. Another student expressed their frustrations that they were not learning anything new because their level of French was higher than the teacher's. If it becomes obvious to students that the teacher is not knowledgeable enough about the subject they are teaching, students will have a lot less respect for that teacher. They may feel cheated out of the best education they could have and that they desired, and will feel their time is being wasted. One student alleged that the French teachers at their school were not very good and so they "thought spending [their] time towards another course was more worth [their] time." It is an unfortunate reality that some students simply cannot receive the education they desire, especially if they do continue to study it and through all the time spent in class still feel that they have not made much progress.

The issue of teachers speaking too much English in class came up several times as well, and this issue is sure to arise in a classroom where the teacher is not entirely comfortable with the language. Students express their frustrations that their teachers were not fluent enough in French and so their opportunities to hear and speak French were minimal. It is then essential for the teacher, as the teacher and role model, to work on improving their skills, as well as openly and positively admit to students that they are aware of the issue and that they will do their best to ensure students will still receive the education they deserve. Teachers are meant to be lifelong learners and engage in professional development, whether formal through their school board, or in their own time.

Students also express their frustrations with teachers who did not want to teach French, but had to because there were no other French teachers available, as interview participant Diana expressed. One student said, “My French teacher openly told our class she was only a French teacher because she could not find any other class to teach and really did not like her job, and that she did not care. In addition, she gave higher marks to individuals who she socially preferred and spent most of our class just talking about her personal life. Ultimately, I found the class to be fairly unpleasant and I did not feel that I learned very much from the experience. Therefore, I did not continue my French education.” It is alarming to hear a student’s account of such behavior from the role model in the classroom and the person who chose a career of teaching and helping students succeed. When teachers do not want to teach the subject they are assigned, they are much less likely to be inspired to create engaging and effective lesson plans for the benefit of their students. This teacher inhibited the student’s opportunity to learn French, and the lack of progress that they experienced that year made them not feel able to continue French studies.

Student motivation is related to a teacher’s motivational practices in the classroom, which then affects student achievement, and so if a teacher clearly does not want to teach the students, the students are significantly less likely to successfully learn French (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008). One student explained they stopped taking French “because the 9th grade French was incredibly ineffective and a waste of time.

Watched movies with French subtitles and conjugated the same verbs over and over with no explanation of the purpose. We did nothing else.” This laziness in lesson planning is also reflected in another student’s statement in which they explain that “every student” in their school “knew that the French teachers were lazy” and that they did not have to do a lot of work to get a good mark. They did “little to no oral practice,” “only focused on grammar,” and when their “teacher did decide to teach, it was the same material that [they] had learned from Grade 10.” This statement comes from one student out of the 29% of 86 students who continued to study French in university, felt they were unsuccessful at learning it by the end of Grade 12, and indicated their teacher had a hand in their lack of successfulness. This student is now struggling in their first year university French course.

When the students become secondary and the goal of improving their education is forgotten, it is the students who feel the negative impact most. As Long (2014) suggests, it is easy to just teach a grammar point or conduct a lesson from a mass-produced language textbook, or play a movie. It can take a lot of extra effort to create engaging lesson plans that cover all of the four skills, but the role of the teacher is to teach students effectively (Erlam, 2015; Long, 2014; O'Dwyer, Imig, & Nagai, 2014). Instruction is meant to focus on the learners, and not on simplicity and ease for the teacher (Long, 2014). As strongly stated by Riley (1998), “Providing quality education means that we should invest in higher standards for all children” (p. 18). Change and positive implementation of the new Ontario FSL curriculum must start with the teachers and training them to effectively implement it. The new 2013 elementary curriculum also indicates, “effective instruction is key to student success” and there are many aspects to effective teaching that teachers must be trained to use (MEO, 2013, p. 30).

The most frequently mentioned reason why students discontinued French studies after Grade 10 or 11 was that other mandatory courses for their future college or university programs conflicted with available French class times, or because their school did not continue to offer French courses (28%). Another 11% of those who discontinued after Grade 9 also used this reason. School scheduling issues affect FSL enrollments across Canada (Kissau, 2005). This is an unfortunate reality as many students wished

they could have continued, but some schools simply cannot offer it in certain periods or cannot offer it at all. Kissau (2005) suggests that such scheduling difficulties convey a negative message to students about the importance of learning French and causes students to question the value of it because other mandatory courses take precedence. A lack of progress in L2 learning is evident through such a situation where students can no longer study it, and many students expressed their frustrations with this. Possibly an even more concerning issue is that many students expressed their frustrations with the lack of progress they felt even though they were able to continue taking French.

The following comment from a student reflects the lack of progress that many students explicitly mentioned was a reason why they discontinued French studies: “My teacher had retired. The new one was terrible and I did not learn anything I needed to know for Gr. 11 French in the Gr. 10 French class. I felt that the class and learning French was ruined and I decided not to continue because I would have been so behind.” Overall, 10% of those students who discontinued French after Grade 9 said this was because French class was unfulfilling, they felt a lack of progress, and/or they did not see the use in learning the language, and 17% of those who discontinued in Grade 10 or 11 used these reasons. One student explained, “I discontinued studying French in my last two years of secondary school because I felt that the French program was no longer structured well enough for me to feel that I was actually learning French as opposed to just memorizing the information. For example, there were not enough oral components to the classes and so I felt that I was substantially better at reading than speaking the language.” If students are not making progress in their learning, do not feel like they are learning something of use to them, and do not see the use in it at all, they would be significantly less likely to be motivated and successful.

Most students’ comments with regards to a lack of progress were tied to their lack of ability to speak the language, such as expressed by the student above, which also reflects the findings presented in the Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review. Another student said, “I did not feel like continuing with French would actually develop my skills in speaking the language enough for it to be worth the amount of studying the subject required. It is a demanding subject which requires a lot of written practice with little to no



progress in being able to speak the language.” A third said, “It was my lowest mark and I did not find it useful as we only learned about random topics not how to speak French. After the 5 years of taking it, I had learned very little.” These responses also support the Jones and Jones (2001) finding that young male students’ negative reactions to their second or FL studies were often towards traditional approaches to teaching that created a student-centered classroom and provided them with very limited opportunities to improve their oral proficiency. Students overall explained that their lack of progress was mainly tied to an inability to speak French, they felt they were learning the same things every year, and they felt that they were mostly expected to memorize information and were not given the needed opportunities to apply their knowledge. As the Lapkin et al. (2009) literature review also stated, students desire more speaking practice and must feel they are learning in a useful and meaningful way.

This issue with a lack of speaking practice and lack of progress in learning the language was also mentioned by many students who chose to continue studying French to graduation. Four of the five student interview participants, Diana, Haley, Gwen, and Nina, all explained that they were not confident with their speaking abilities and wish they could have had more opportunities to improve in their secondary school FSL classes. Despite the lack of progress in this area, though, they all continued with French studies for various reasons, as did many other survey participants.

#### 4.2.4.2 Why did students continue?

The top two reasons that 311 survey participants used to explain why they continued to study French were for the benefit of knowing the language for future career, employment, and/or life opportunities (32.8%), and because they enjoyed learning the language and/or found it interesting (31.8%). All interview participants with the exception of Diana said they found French enjoyable, and Diana, Haley, and Nina all mentioned the advantages of having French for their futures in the job market.

It is encouraging to hear that many students truly enjoy learning French. It is also very positive that many are working towards making a better future for themselves by trying to improve their employability and knowledge. Another 16.4% of students mentioned they really wanted to improve their skills and/or had a goal of becoming fluent, and 16% mentioned the advantages and usefulness of knowing an L2 like French. When students can recognize the benefits and meaningfulness in learning a particular subject, it can make a world of difference on their motivation (Parsons & Ward, 2011). As Dörnyei (2001) would agree, motivation is a key factor in improving students' successes in L2 learning.

If so many students wish to learn the language for future opportunities and because they enjoy it, it is essential that FSL programs are effective and engaging to help students reach their goals. As was previously discussed, many of these students who chose to continue to study French because they enjoyed it also explained they felt they were unsuccessful at actually learning the language by the end of their high school FSL education. When students do actually enjoy it and truly want to learn, teachers must do what they can to ensure they are fulfilled in their learning and feel capable and confident to continue to study it further, or else there is a lot of wasted potential from students who wanted to graduate bilingual, but did not due to an insufficient education.

Another 13% of students said they continued to study French because they would get a good mark and/or because they had been doing it for a long time already, like interview participant Diana. Grades are important to high school students as they largely define what post-secondary studies a student can advance to. Many students mention not continuing to study French because their grades in other subjects were higher than in French and they needed to keep their average as high as possible. Others found French came more easily to them, or they had already been studying it for a long time so they knew they would get a good grade to bring up their average. Many students mentioned good grades as their only motivation to continue studying French. Notably, two students stated, "I was basically just motivated by grades, I wish I had been more interested in the language itself," and "Other than good grades, there was little motivation or push to use French." Interestingly, another student explained that they were only motivated to learn

reading and writing because those are the skills that were focused on in class and that they would be graded on.

It is not an ideal situation when students continue to study French solely for the purpose of getting good grades. Often getting good grades does not indicate that a student has truly learned and absorbed important information, or in this case actually acquired the French language. Memorization was an issue that many students mentioned, as well as a lack of application to actually apply what they memorized and turn it into practical knowledge. Memorization is part of more traditional methods of language teaching, like the audio-lingual method, which the new curriculum is trying to move away from (OMLTA, 2014; Piccardo, 2014). Students can easily memorize grammar information to be successful on a test, but they would not succeed in an oral exam this way or be able to effectively communicate with a native speaker, which is a key goal of the new Ontario FSL curriculum (MEO, 2013, 2014). The action-oriented method that the new curriculum promotes will provide students with more opportunities for meaningful interaction in French, as the action-oriented approach of the CEFR does (Council of Europe, 2001).

Also notable, 6.4% of students who continued to study French said they continued because they had good teachers. Allen attributes his reason for continuing to study French after Grade 9, after initially not wanting to, entirely to his teacher. She made French class engaging with a wide variety of activities and was extremely encouraging and supportive. When students feel supported at school, they are better able to take the risks necessary to practice using the language, which Allen reported he did (OMLTA, 2014). He became motivated to learn because the activities she engaged the students in made him realize he was actually capable of successfully learning and using the language for real purposes. A survey participant also explained, “I continued to study French after Grade 9 because I genuinely enjoyed the program and what was being taught...I also thought the French teachers were some of the best, nicest, and most amazing faculty members in the school!” Another student said, “I had a wonderful French teacher in Grade 9 and I wanted to continue to take a class with her.” Teachers can truly make a positive difference in students’ lives and educations. In Allen’s case, and for these two survey participants, their teachers were such a positive part of their education that they

wanted to continue to have them. It is impossible to say whether the survey participants believe their teachers were great because they were nice and welcoming, or if they were truly effective French teachers, but it is clear from Allen's descriptions that he not only had a teacher who was a good person and positive presence in the classroom, but also an effective French teacher, which truly improved his learning experiences.

Only 3% of students mentioned travel as a reason why they continued to take French, which is surprisingly low. A quick google search of "why study French?" automatically brings up sources that list the 'Top 5' or 'Top 10' reasons to study French, which all list the numerous countries that speak French around the world and why it is useful to know for travel, business, and employment. It is very positive to see that so many more students wish to learn French to better themselves as bilingual citizens in the workforce and because they truly enjoy learning the language, and not just to be able to communicate when they travel to French-speaking countries or areas.

There are evidently many reasons why students choose to either continue or discontinue French studies, all of which greatly rely on the individual differences of those students. Two students in the same class with the same inspiring teacher may have very different views and opinions of the class and the teacher, one side negative, and the other positive. Two students in the same class can thoroughly enjoy their experience, while one chooses to continue with French and the other does not. Two students in the same class can have bad experiences, after which one chooses to give up French studies, and the other remains motivated to try to learn the language. The student, the parents, the school, and the community all play a role in a students' education and success, and it is often impossible to control these unpredictable factors. Still, the teachers have their own very significant role to play to help students succeed as best they can and ensure that students have the opportunities to be successful and prepared to continue if they choose to. Giving students opportunities for success and supporting them along the way is a significant part of a teacher's motivational practices, which overall affect student achievement (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008). Teachers are the ones who must implement the new curriculum effectively for positive change to occur (Strong et al., 2011; Riley, 1998). It is not always an easy task, and it does require extra effort to ensure that lesson plans are

created to be engaging and meaningful for students, but the success of students should be a teacher's overall goal and such lesson plans would help improve the possibility of success and bilingualism for more students.

#### 4.2.5 Interpreting students' CEFR self-assessments

The survey results regarding students' self-assessment of their abilities in FSL at the A2 and B1 levels of the CEFR indicate that most students felt respectably proficient by the end of their FSL education. The majority of respondents indicated they were capable of performing each skill, which was surprising in comparison to the many survey responses that demonstrated students were unhappy with their FSL education. This could be in part explained by the fact that the self-assessment grid leaves some room for individual interpretation, or it could also indicate that students truly feel like they know the language, but it is the language use that they have been missing.

The CEFR "Can Do" statements are sometimes vague and use terms like "briefly" and "simple" that individuals can interpret differently. For example, the phrase "I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events)" in which 60.2% indicated that they felt capable, is vague in that one student may have indicated "Yes" because they are able to converse spontaneously about one of the everyday topic examples, while another student may have indicated "Yes" and is capable of discussing a wide range of topics. Another example regards the phrase "I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans" for which 70% of students indicated they felt capable. The term "briefly" can be interpreted in many different ways. Some students who indicated they are capable of this skill may have interpreted "briefly" to be just a few words, while others can express a few sentences. This room for interpretation leads me to suggest that when the self-assessment grid is used in the classroom, the teacher must make it clear to students more specifically what indicates successful attainment of each level. In order for teachers to make it clear to students, though, they must understand the CEFR fully themselves, which they often do not (Faez et al. 2011).

Aside from possible misinterpretations, it is evident that many students recognized their own knowledge of the French language, but still many expressed dissatisfaction. 86% indicated they “can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities” and yet many still said they did not feel successful at learning French. The lack of oral practice many students encountered can partially explain this. If students have the opportunity to actually use what they know, they may become content with their level of knowledge. Those students who disliked or did not enjoy learning French may also have a change of heart.

If the CEFR and task-based instruction are fully understood and implemented well, students will begin using the French language and identifying their own strengths as real and useful. There is a different way that students can view their level of language knowledge. If they looked through a CEFR or TBLT action-based lens, they may see their level of knowledge differently. It is possible that many of those students who were unhappy with their level of successfulness at learning French would have been content with their level of knowledge had they had the practice that made them aware they could use the language. Students with even just partial competences at an A1 level can feel successful and content with this level if they understand exactly how they can use it. They can receive the practice they need to make that level come alive. Through action-based approaches like the CEFR and TBLT, students can learn that no matter what their level is, they can use the French language, but this can only occur if French teachers understand the aspects fully and can use it effectively.

Students must be taught to recognize the value of partial competences in L2 learning. Students who discontinue French studies often do so because they feel a lack of progress or inability to express themselves in the language. If those students were given valuable opportunities for real language practice, they may still discontinue French studies, but they can discontinue pleased with their level of knowledge (Lapkin et al., 2009). They can only become aware of the usefulness of their level of knowledge, no matter how basic, if they actually use the language. If students understand that even the most basic level of A1 can still be useful, teachers have been successful. The

overwhelming issue remains that many students have not had opportunities to practice even basic language use.

The CEFR and TBLT are excellent venues for authentic language use that students can benefit from, but students cannot benefit from them if they are not implemented effectively by teachers with a thorough understanding of them (Piccardo, 2014; Faez et al., 2011; Erlam, 2015; Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Students learn valuable information in FSL classes, but they must be able to recognize why and how it is valuable. Like interview participant Allen, for example, he found motivation in Grade 9 French after becoming aware of his ability to use the language in tasks and activities provided by his teacher. The CEFR and task-based, action-oriented teaching have the potential to improve students' language experiences and satisfaction at every level. Students can become social agents, language users, and communicators if teachers have the appropriate resources. Even those teachers who are insecure about their own proficiency in French can successfully teach it to a certain degree if they have the resources and professional development to help them implement task-based and action-oriented approaches. No matter what level of language knowledge, language use is what will bring the language to life.

## Chapter 5

### 5 Naming the Problem, Implications, Recommendations & Conclusions

This research study yielded noteworthy results, the implications of which are significant for FSL teaching in Ontario. The following is a discussion of the vicious cycle revealed and implications, as well as recommendations for further study and final thoughts.

#### 5.1 Naming the problem: The vicious cycle

An interesting question to ask current, past, and future FSL students would be, “What is your definition of success at learning a language?” L2 teachers know that true acquisition of a language requires strength in all four areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but young L2 learners may have a different idea. Based on the data retrieved through the survey administered to university students who completed French studies either just to Grade 9, to Grades 10 or 11, or who continued all the way to Grade 12, it would seem they place a great deal of emphasis on their speaking ability in determining their success at learning the French language. The new FSL curriculum documents also place substantial importance on oral abilities (MEO, 2013, 2014). Many students described their strengths in terms of reading, writing, and listening, but expressed frustration with their inability to communicate orally. The key reasons they gave to explain their lack of progress in the oral component were: not enough focus on oral activities in the classroom; not being forced to speak French by the teacher; and teachers who spoke too much English. Students referenced these reasons to not only explain why they discontinued French studies, but also to explain why they did not feel entirely successful by the end of their FSL education, and why they felt unprepared for university level French courses. These findings support the findings presented by Lapkin et al. (2009) in their literature review on Core French.



My own experience also reflects that of the experiences expressed by four out of five of the student interview participants, Diana, Gwen, Haley, and Nina. I would say that I was sufficiently prepared for university French in terms of being competent in grammar and thus successful on tests, but with regards to oral abilities, I cannot recall having a real conversation in French until my second year of French studies in university. Luckily, it was at that point that I discovered that the grammar drills I had repeated over and over came to mind naturally when trying to form correct sentences, and I realized that I could actually speak French. What really hindered me was a lack of confidence, and that lack of confidence came from a lack of opportunities to practice using the language. Use of French during class was not enforced by my teachers, which is a key issue that emerges from the data. If students are given the opportunity to use French through an action-based approach like TBLT, particularly in conjunction with the CEFR, they may become content with whatever level of French proficiency they are at, as long as they are able to recognize their ability to use the language meaningfully.

The new Ontario elementary and secondary FSL curriculum documents promote action-oriented teaching for improved bilingual outcomes (i.e. proficiency levels) for students upon graduation (MEO, 2013, 2014). Many students express frustration at an overwhelming proportion of their French education focusing on grammar, and not on spoken interaction. In this thesis, I have argued that action-based pedagogical approaches have the potential to improve student's opportunities for authentic interaction in French. Students who expressed that they enjoyed learning French also expressed a dislike for repetitive grammar activities and a lack of oral activities. If students who enjoy learning French are unhappy with those activities, students who dislike learning French are certainly unhappy with them. Grammar remains a significant part of L2 learning, because the language must be used correctly enough not to impede communication, but students need and desire more oral practice to make the L2 acquisition process more useful and meaningful. Two very positive aspects of TBLT therefore are: (a) its use of authentic tasks and (b) its focus on form, within context, as opposed to form for the sake of form alone.

Given the student data, traditional approaches to language teaching seem to prevail. As it is simpler for teachers to adhere to old practices, they need assistance to be able to implement the new action-oriented approach for authentic L2 learning effectively. Not only older teachers who have taught using the same approaches for years, but also newer teachers who were quite possibly exposed to traditional methods in their teacher education programs will need adequate professional development (Salvatori, 2009; Faez et al., 2011). The change to and implementation of new curriculum begins with teachers, and if they are not appropriately prepared, the change will never take place. Teachers must also begin to independently seek out the many resources and professional learning opportunities that already exist to improve students' oral competence.

The MEO's (2013, 2014) FSL curriculum documents were revised because the goal of increasing the number of bilingual graduates in Ontario was not being met, but the revised curriculum may have little effect if teachers do not adapt their teaching to suit its new goals and approaches. The vicious cycle of not seeing results in students' oral language abilities, decreasing retention in FSL programs, and revision of the curriculum could continue. TBLT is an effective communicative teaching approach that could help motivate more students to continue studying French because it encompasses engaging and meaningful interaction in the language. This approach could prepare students to learn to communicate orally more effectively and confidently. In conjunction with the CEFR, TBLT can be an even stronger action-based approach to help students see their ability to use the language and feel confident in their learning, whether they are at an A1 or B2 level (O'Dwyer et al., 2014). If the number of students who wish to continue French studies increases because they feel successful and see its usefulness in their lives (e.g., through TBLT and increased opportunities for authentic oral practice), the number of bilingual graduates in Ontario is bound to increase.

## 5.2 Points to ponder

The most surprising and noteworthy findings apart from the answers to the research questions relate to students' negative experiences with their former FSL teachers. Some

teachers made it clear to their students that they did not want to teach French, and one notably told a student that what they would be teaching them would not enable them to speak the language. Some teachers spoke a lot of English; some did not provide many, if any, opportunities for oral interaction, and some did not teach anything new from year to year. The descriptions provided by students really bring the problem of teachers' negative impact on FSL students to life.

It is evident from the research findings that ineffective teachers play a significant role in both students' lack of success in FSL programs and in their decisions to discontinue French studies altogether, whether that be due to these teacher disinterest in teaching French, lack of effort in creating engaging lessons for students to truly learn and practice the language, or because they were not very kind and welcoming people. If students do not feel comfortable in the classroom, particularly if they are not comfortable enough to practice speaking an L2, their chances of successfully acquiring the language are diminished. Teachers play a significant role as motivators in the classroom through providing encouragement, creating engaging lessons that allow students to feel successful, and establishing a good rapport with students (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). They are also responsible for developing and maintaining a positive learning environment for students. Teachers' motivational practices and the classroom environment they develop and maintain affects student motivation, and in turn student achievement (Gardner, 2010; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

Motivation is key for improving L2 learning outcomes, and if teachers are unmotivated themselves (e.g. to teach the students), students are less likely to be motivated, and therefore less likely to succeed (Dörnyei, 2001). One survey participant stated, "I have felt that throughout my educational experience the teachers who have taught me French have not been very motivating... When teachers are not motivated to teach, students are not motivated to learn." Students will not be engaged if they can tell that the teacher is not interested in teaching them, or that the teacher is "incompetent," as one survey participant described their teacher. It is also important that teachers help students develop positive attitudes toward learning the French language, particularly by portraying a positive attitude about it themselves (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). A

student who has negative views of the language is less likely to be engaged, especially if the lessons are already unengaging. Also, if students feel their teacher does not care to teach them or help them, they will be less likely to seek that teacher's help or expend extra effort to succeed. Creating engaging lesson plans takes time, thought, and effort, which some teachers do not put forth. Students not only need a teacher to provide them with engaging, meaningful lessons, but they need to believe that their teacher truly cares to help them and see them succeed. Faez et al. (2011) demonstrated that a task-based approach can increase student motivation, as well as autonomy. Teachers should want to achieve such positive outcomes with their students.

Many students make the conscious choice to continue with French studies because they enjoy it or they see how it can benefit them in the future. When even students who truly want to study French feel they are not making progress in the language, it is a significant problem that needs to be addressed. A student stated on the survey, "I understand that there are not enough French teachers and so anyone is accepted, but I still think there should be higher standards or at least more intensive training if there really are not enough people. These children deserve better..." I could not agree more with this student, and Salvatori (2009), Strong et al. (2011), Riley (1998), and most other researchers and educators would certainly agree as well.

This problem then comes full circle – speaking again to teacher education and professional development. Teachers are the ones who deliver the curricular instruction and who must implement it effectively in order to help students achieve their goals. Therefore, FSL teachers need to be educated on effective action-oriented approaches like TBLT to engage their students in meaningful interaction in French and end the vicious cycle of curriculum revisions due to low numbers of functionally bilingual graduates and low retention rates in FSL programs.

### 5.3 Implications

Key stakeholders in the Canadian education system, especially principals, FSL consultants, and teachers, should be aware of the levels of student dissatisfaction reported in this study and take action to put improvements in place, like professional development for teachers on action-oriented teaching. Not only do students desire better FSL education, but the Ontario government has put in place the new curriculum documents discussed throughout the thesis in order to achieve better results and to increase the numbers of functionally bilingual students graduating (MEO, 2013, 2014). There needs to be heightened awareness and understanding of the reasons why students choose to continue or discontinue studying French so that they can make specific changes for improvement, such as improved school scheduling that does not devalue FSL education and allows more students the opportunity to continue French studies without course conflicts (Kissau, 2005).

To implement the new action-oriented curriculum, principals and FSL consultants need to ensure that teachers are familiar with approaches such as TBLT and ensure that teachers have the resources they need to effectively implement such action-oriented approaches. The MEO's (2013, 2014) revisions to the curriculum documents spoke to the need for an action-oriented approach, and TBLT has been demonstrated to be very effective in ESL and EFL settings (Bygate, 2015; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Ellis, 2009, 2013, 2015; Long, 2014; and Van den Branden, 2006, 2009, 2016). The present research on TBLT in FSL suggests that it is a feasible option for improving teaching practices in FSL settings, given the views of former FSL students who wish they had the opportunity to learn through TBLT. The enthusiasm that the students and university French professor in the study expressed for trying out its effectiveness can be used as a starting point for galvanizing change in schools and encouraging the creation of resources and professional development to help teachers implement action-oriented approaches broadly and TBLT specifically to improve outcomes in terms of the development of functional bilingualism in FSL graduates.

## 5.4 Recommendations for further study

More research needs to be conducted that involves current and future Ontario FSL teachers. Research should be conducted with current FSL teachers to investigate any reluctance to implement action-oriented approaches such as TBLT. After they have had the opportunity to use them, they may be able to suggest the exact types of resources and professional development they believe would best help them to understand and implement these approaches. Change can really begin with future teachers currently enrolled in teacher education programs. Teacher education programs that pay heed to the realities of how French education is changing in schools will better prepare their teachers for the conditions and challenges they will actually face in their future classrooms (Salvatori, 2009). Students evidently desire more oral practice, and so teacher education programs must reflect such a need, as well as the curriculum's focus on action-oriented approaches. To develop truly qualified and prepared French teachers, they must be prepared to meet the challenges of such classroom realities to improve student's chances of continuing to study French and becoming functionally bilingual. If teachers are prepared to teach using action-oriented approaches from the beginning, and if they are provided with effective resources to help them, they will be less likely to resort back to more traditional ways of teaching, as teachers in the TBLT research projects reviewed did (Erlam, 2015; Long, 2014).

With increased use of technology in schools as well, it would be interesting to see research on the use of technology within TBLT lessons in FSL settings. There are many ways that teachers are creatively using technology in the classroom these days, and there could be many ways to use it within authentic tasks as well, seeing as students use technology every day in their everyday lives.

Finally, it would be very intriguing to conduct research with Ontario FSL teachers regarding their knowledge of L2 teaching in general. I personally was unaware of terms such as “negotiate meaning” and “comprehensible input” until beginning the Applied Linguistics stream of my Masters program, and these terms are used in curriculum planning documents, such as the OMLTA (2014) “Fact Sheets.” These documents will

not fully help teachers plan if they have not heard such terms or do not understand such terms that are so significant to L2 teaching. Evidently, from this research I have developed a growing interest in the role of the teacher in FSL and how teacher effectiveness can be improved.

## 5.5 Final words

A need for change was evident from the enrollment statistics that demonstrated a significant decrease in FSL students between Grade 9 and Grade 12, and from the disappointing number of bilingual graduates in Ontario that did not meet the goal of the government's "Action Plan" (Privy Council Office, 2003). The new elementary and secondary FSL curriculum documents (MEO, 2013, 2014) reflect a cognizance of this need, but simply revising curriculum documents does not create change. Now teacher education, professional development, and resources must also be revised and the revisions implemented for the new FSL curriculum to be implemented. Increasing both French language usage in the classroom and the number of engaging and authentic speaking activities students experience in the classroom are two key ways to motivate students to continue learning French and eventually become bilingual. As can be seen through the experience of interview participant Allen, a teacher can truly make a world of difference; that is, teachers can motivate students, engage them in their own learning, and inspire them to take their language success outside of the classroom.

Based on my own discussions with peers and the five interview participants, there was consensus that a lack of opportunity to speak French in FSL classes is a major impediment that hinders students' French language development and leads students to discontinue French studies. This view was also confirmed in a popular blog on *Edutopia* by Sarah Wike Loyola (2016); over 9,800 readers expressed their agreement by sharing an article that argues that students need to speak in the L2/FL in language classrooms, and that the speaking aspect is what intrigues students the most about L2/FL learning. Students desire and are attracted by opportunities to speak a new language. Whether they

want to travel or work in an environment where they can use the French language, the L2 skill they most commonly need is the ability to speak the language.

I have encountered many teachers who regret not having continued their French studies because they cannot find a full-time teaching position while colleagues who teach French have had a full-time position for years. They explain that if they had had a better French education and had more opportunities to see the usefulness of French, they may have continued studying it. Improve K-12 FSL programs, increase the number of students who become functionally bilingual, and the numbers of teachers who can successfully teach French will also increase. Through this and improved teacher education programs, we can have more French language teachers, instead of teachers who teach the subject French.



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## Appendix A: Student Survey

### Ontario FSL Student Experience Survey

Q0 Please indicate your age range.

- 50+ (1)
- 31-50 (2)
- 23-30 (3)
- 18-22 (4)
- 17 or younger (5)

Q1 In what range of years did you last study French in secondary school?

- 2013-2016 (1)
- 2009-2012 (2)
- 2005-2008 (3)
- Earlier than 2005 (4)

Q2.1 Did you study French as a Second Language (FSL) after Grade 9?

- Yes (5)
- No (6)

Answer If Did you study French as a Second Language (FSL) after Grade 9? Yes Is Selected

Q2.2 Did you study French in a French as a Second Language (FSL) program until Grade 12?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Answer If Did you study French in a French as a Second Language (FSL) program until Grade 12? Yes Is Selected

Q3.1 Why did you choose to continue with French studies after Grade 9?

Answer If Did you study French as a Second Language (FSL) after Grade 9? No Is Selected

Q3.2 Why did you choose not to continue with French studies after Grade 9?

Answer If Did you study French in a French as a Second Language (FSL) program until Grade 12? No Is Selected

Q3.3 Why did you choose not to continue with French studies?



Q4 Are you currently enrolled in a French course for this school year, 2016-2017, at Western University?

- Yes (1)  
 No (2)

Q5 Were you enrolled in a French Immersion program during elementary school?

- Yes (1)  
 No (2)

Q6 Were you enrolled in a French Immersion program during secondary school?

- Yes (1)  
 No (2)

Q7 Were you enrolled in a Core French program during secondary school?

- Yes (1)  
 No (2)

Q8 The following questions have been formulated with relation to the Council of Europe's (2001) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and their reference levels for self-assessment of language skills. Please indicate whether you felt capable of performing the following skills in French by the end of your secondary school FSL education in relation to understanding through listening and reading:

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure (3)
When listening to French, I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When listening to French, I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When listening to French, I can understand the main points of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can read very short, simple texts. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency every day or job-related language. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand short simple personal letters. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus, and timetables. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q9 Please indicate whether you felt capable of performing the following skills in French by the end of your secondary school FSL education in relation to speaking through spoken interaction and spoken production:

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure (3)
I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can handle very short social exchanges even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events). (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background, and my present or most recent job. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 Please indicate whether you felt capable of performing the following skills in French by the end of your secondary school FSL education in relation to writing:

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure (3)
I can write short, simple notes and messages. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q11 What do you feel was your weakest skill in French by the end of your secondary school FSL education?

- Reading (1)
- Writing (2)
- Listening (3)
- Speaking (4)

Q12 Please indicate your level of motivation to learn each of the following skills while completing FSL courses in secondary school:

	Very Motivated (1)	Somewhat Motivated (2)	Not Motivated (3)
Speaking (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Listening (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Writing (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q13 Why do you believe you did, or did not, feel motivated to learn the French language?

Q14 Please indicate whether you agree with the following statements regarding speaking practice in the FSL classroom in secondary school:

	Yes (1)	No (2)	Unsure (3)
My teacher(s) did not speak enough French during class time (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was not required to speak French in class so I didn't (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel motivated to try to speak the language (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel comfortable speaking to my classmates in French (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel comfortable speaking with my teachers in French (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I did not feel confident speaking without using notes (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 Overall, were you pleased with your FSL education in secondary school?

- Extremely pleased (1)
- Moderately pleased (2)
- Slightly pleased (3)
- Neither pleased nor displeased (4)
- Slightly displeased (5)
- Moderately displeased (6)
- Extremely displeased (7)

Q16 Overall, do you believe that your Ontario FSL education sufficiently prepared you for a smooth transition to taking university level French courses?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q17 Why do you believe you were successful/unsuccessful at learning the French language by the end of secondary school? Please be as specific as possible.

Q18 Thank you for participating in this survey. If you would like to be entered into a draw to win one of two \$30 gift cards for Hospitality Services at Western (all on campus eateries), please provide your UWO email address here. Your email address will not be used for any purpose other than contacting you if you win.

Q19 If you would like to participate in an interview to further discuss these survey questions and have the opportunity to participate in further research, please indicate so here by providing your UWO email address. Participants chosen to complete interviews will receive a \$10 Hospitality gift card.

## Appendix B: Professor Interview Questions

### Professor Interview Questions

Professors will be reminded at the beginning of the interview to not share any identifiable information in the anecdotes they may share about previous students' preparedness for university French studies, or lack thereof.

1. For how many years have you taught French at the university level?
2. What do you find are the most significant issues affecting students' success in university French?
3. Which of the four skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) do you place the highest importance on?
4. What importance do you place on learning oral French? Why?
5. Do you think that students come sufficiently prepared out of high school to learn French at the university level? Why/why not?
6. What do you find are the weakest skills students enter university French courses with? The strongest?
7. Can you provide any notable examples or anecdotes to illustrate students' lack of preparedness for university French?
8. Can you provide any notable examples or anecdotes to illustrate students' preparedness for university French?
9. What is your knowledge of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)?
10. Do you believe that TBLT could be a feasible teaching approach for you to implement in your own courses? Why/why not?
11. Do you believe that TBLT could be a feasible teaching approach for secondary school teachers to use in their French classes? Why/why not?
12. How do you think students could benefit from TBLT? Teachers?
13. How do you think teachers could struggle with implementing TBLT? Students?

Survey findings to discuss:

- 43% did not feel they were prepared for university French (total 318 respondents)
- only 89 of 339 respondents stated that they actually continued with French at university
- 47.5% say speaking was their weakest skill by the end of Grade 12 (680 respondents)
- A student said: "Teachers didn't have time to speak to us all individually to practice conversational skills, so learning French in school never felt very practical."

## Appendix C: Student Survey Recruitment Email

Hello,

This message has been sent to you on behalf of the Faculty of Education's Graduate Research. You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Shelley Taylor and Alexis Newman, are conducting. Briefly, the study involves completing an approximately 15 minute long survey of 20 questions regarding your experience in a high school French education program and your opinions of the successfulness or unsuccessfulness you felt in that program. At the end of the survey, you will be given the opportunity to provide your email address to enter a draw for one of two \$30 Hospitality Services gift cards, and also to volunteer to participate in further research.

If you would like to participate in this study please click on the link below to access the letter of information and survey link:

[https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_e5a5xY3gCU5hJD7](https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_e5a5xY3gCU5hJD7)

Thank you,

Alexis Newman, MA candidate  
Faculty of Education, Western University  
([e-mail address](#))

## Appendix D: Professor Interview Recruitment Email

Hello,

We have received your email address from Western University's French Department website. You are being invited to participate in a study that we, Dr. Shelley Taylor and Alexis Newman, are conducting. Briefly, the study involves completing an interview that will take up to one hour to complete regarding your perceptions of students' preparedness for university French, as well as your perceptions on the feasibility of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) to improve students' French oral skills and increase their motivation to learn French. For your participation in the interview, you will be given a \$15 gift card for Hospitality Services at Western.

A reminder email will be sent on January 4, 2017 if volunteers have not yet been acquired.

A Letter of Information for this study has been attached to this email. If you would like more information or would like to volunteer to participate in an interview, please contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Thank you,

Alexis Newman, MA candidate  
Faculty of Education, Western University  
([e-mail address](#))



## Appendix E: Ethics Approval Notice



Research Ethics

### Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Shelley Taylor  
**Department & Institution:** Education\Faculty of Education, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 108557  
**Study Title:** Investigating the links between TBLT, oral fluency, motivation & retention in FSL

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** December 08, 2016  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** December 08, 2017

#### Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Western University Protocol	Received November 29, 2016	
Other	Appendix A - References - Received September 30, 2016 for Information	
Instruments	Appendix B - Student Survey (including LOI/Implied Consent) - Received November 29, 2016	
Instruments	Appendix C - Student Post-Observation Interview Questions - Received September 30, 2016	
Instruments	Appendix D - Professor Interview Questions - Received November 14, 2016	
Letter of Information & Consent	Appendix D - Professor	2016/11/29
Letter of Information & Consent	Appendix F - Student	2016/11/29
Recruitment Items	Appendix G - Student Survey Recruitment Email	2016/11/29
Recruitment Items	Appendix H - Professor Interview Recruitment Email	2016/11/29

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Ethics Officer, on behalf of Dr. Riley Pinson, NMREB Chair or delegated board member

Ethics Officer: Erika Basile \_\_\_ Nicole Kaniki \_\_\_ Grace Kelly \_\_\_ Katelyn Harris  Vikki Tran \_\_\_ Karen Gopaul \_\_\_

Western University, Research, Support Services Bldg., Rm. 5150  
London, ON, Canada N6G 1G9 t. 519.661.3036 f. 519.850.2466 www.uwo.ca/research/ethics

## Curriculum Vitae

<b>Name</b>	Alexis Newman
<b>Post-secondary Education and Degrees</b>	The University of Western Ontario, 2009-2013 Bachelor of Arts. Honours Specialization in History Certificat de Francais Pratique
	The University of Western Ontario, 2013-2014 Bachelor of Education Intermediate & Senior Divisions, History & FSL
<b>Honours and Awards</b>	Dean's Honour List 2009-2010 2012-2013
	RTO Scholarship 2013-2014
<b>Related Work Experience</b>	Occasional Teacher London, On 2014-Present