Integrating Digital Technology in Core French Classrooms

By

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INTEGRATING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN CORE FRENCH CLASSROOMS

Abstract

Within the last decade, the world has experienced a surge of technology, and this has implications for schooling and education. Students are becoming more proficient and knowledgeable about the digital world through the Internet and social media, and through digital devices such as computers and smartphones. This research analyzes how teachers use technology in their classrooms to motivate French as a Second Language (FSL) students to support their learning in core French programs in Ontario. The participants selected for this research are core French teachers who frequently use technology in the classroom to support FSL learning for intermediate grade levels. The findings elucidate the potential of technology integration in core French classrooms for supporting students’ French language education.

Key Words: Technology, Core French, French as a Second Language, Instruction
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the Research Study

In today’s modern society, we have experienced a surge of technology. Notably, in major cities of Canada, such as Toronto, it is difficult to find anyone without technological devices such as smartphones, iPods, and portable tablets. In addition to these devices, within the span of a few short years there has been an emergence of new media such as podcasts and an array of social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Skype. Today’s youth are experiencing the impact of living and developing under the everyday influence of digital technology. In response, inspired educators go to great strides to develop relevant methods for meaningfully incorporating these technologies into students’ classroom learning experiences (Blackwell, 2012; Borges, n.d.)

Canada’s largest school board, the Toronto District School Board (TSDB), is committed to encouraging and integrating the use of technology in classrooms. As of November 2012, it has invested in nearly 18,000 laptops, which it has delivered to more than 360 schools for use by students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Providing students access to technology has the potential to transform the way students learn and help prepare them for success by enhancing their knowledge and application of technology in ways that will inform their future careers (TDSB, 2012). The TDSB also envisions that by 2015 all schools will have Wi-Fi, every teacher will have access to a computer in the classroom, and every student will have access to an electronic learning environment (http://www.tdsb.on.ca/aboutUs/, 2010).
Recent research has demonstrated the benefits of implementing technology in the classroom through various subjects such as mathematics, science and literacy (Bruce, 2012; Hughes, 2007). Technology has been shown to improve student attention, peer collaboration and cater to different types of learners (Cutrim Schmid, 2008). Although the integration of technology has been used in other subjects, technology has not been an influential component in core French classrooms in Ontario schools as evidenced from the 2013 French as a Second Language Ontario curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 2013).

A recurring problem in core French education in Canada is that the retention rate of students who choose to stay enrolled in the program between grade 10 and 12 is declining (Canadian Parents for French, 2010). In fact, only three percent of Grade 9 core French students stay in the program through to the end of Grade 12 (CPF, 2008). In 2001-02, a survey of 3000 grade 11 students in Atlantic Canada who discontinued their study of core French found that students were disappointed with “…their inability to express themselves in French” and they would have liked more spoken language including “hands-on fun activities, group work, projects” (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 2004, p. 18). The findings from the APEF study underscore the importance of motivation for maintaining student interest and engagement in French language learning.

Research states that the integration of digital technology supports students’ active thinking skills, attention and motivation, decision-making, and peer collaboration (Cutrim Schmid, 2008; Curriculum Services Canada, n.d.). In addition, Lee (2000) found that digital technology has been shown to improve student achievement and emphasize the
individual needs of each student. In light of such findings, it is important to explore potential implications of integrating technology with core French learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to learn how a sample of core French teachers integrated technology to support French as a Second Language (FSL) learning. An additional objective was to identify a range of instructional methods and strategies for integrating technology that participating teachers found effective in the core French classroom. Furthermore, it was aimed at learning what impacts these teachers observed on student motivation to learn French. In this study, I focused on intermediate core French teachers (Grade 7 to 9) who were teaching in Ontario schools.

This study is important to the education community because technology surrounds and influences our students both inside and outside the classroom. As educators, we need to be mindful of integrating technology and modifying our pedagogical approaches in the classroom. I am interested in learning how technology can be integrated into the core French program to create authentic and relevant learning experiences that motivate and support students to learn French as a second language.

**Research Questions**

The overarching question guiding the research study was:

*How is a small sample of teachers integrating digital technology to support student motivation and learning in the Core French program?*

Moreover, I also asked the following sub-questions:
1. How are these teachers integrating digital technology to encourage interactive, authentic French learning for students?

2. What benefits and challenges do these teachers experience while using digital technology in their core French lessons?

3. What factors related to technology integration do these teachers believe impacts student motivation in the core French program?

4. What perceived impact have these teachers observed on student motivation and academic performance?

Through these questions, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how core French teachers were integrating digital technology into their classroom teaching and learning environment so that I could learn what devices and programs may be used by more teachers, including myself, to support French as second language learning.

**Background of the Researcher**

I have always had an interest in learning French as a student in all three levels of my education (elementary, secondary and university). In my undergraduate years, I minored in French as a Second Language. At first, I had difficulty learning French because my oral and aural comprehension was not at the same level of proficiency as some of my classmates. I then realized that my weak proficiency in French was likely influenced by how I was instructed. My instruction was mostly teacher-directed. Furthermore, classes included rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar and endless amounts of worksheets. Some of my peers perceived learning French as useless to their future and they immediately discontinued studying core French after Grade 9. In fact, I am surprised that I stayed in the program. Now, those same peers regret their decision because there are more career opportunities for bilingual people.
Through my experience of shadowing teachers, I was amazed to see how technology has advanced and supported student learning in various subjects such as literacy, science and mathematics. I observed that students seemed engaged and motivated to learn as technology was integrated into their lessons. In contrast, I noticed that the core French classes were still similar to my experience of learning French. This led to my interest in researching how to engage core French students through technology. In my research, I consequently focused on instructional strategies to motivate students to learn French through technology integration.

Overview

In Chapter Two, I review the literature to situate the research question in the broader field of technology integration in education and in the core French program specifically. In Chapter Three, I describe the research methodology and procedures that were used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. In Chapter Four, I describe the research participants and report the research findings. Lastly, in Chapter Five, I discuss what was I learned through this study, share insights, discuss implications, review limitations and articulate next steps for further study.
Current State of Core French Education in English-Speaking Canada and Ontario

Core French in Canada and Ontario

Core French is a component of the French as a second language program in Ontario in which French is taught as a subject in daily class periods of 20 to 50 minutes in length (LeBlanc, 1990). Core French programs in Canada vary across provinces and territories; they might be compulsory or optional, may begin at different grade levels, and vary in the amount of total class instruction time (Turnbull, 2000). Nevertheless, the common approach of core French education is that students receive approximately 600 hours of instructional time by the end of their elementary school program (Grade 8), and most of the time students begin their core French studies at the junior level between grades 4 to 6 (Turnbull, 2000).

In Ontario, core French education is compulsory and is first taught in Grade 4 (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1998). Ontario students must receive 600 hours of core French instruction by the end of their elementary school program (Grade 8). In addition, students must enroll and complete one Grade 9 course in core French, after which French language study becomes optional (Marshall, 2011).

Status of Core French Programs

In Ontario, the objective of teaching core French is that of communicative proficiency. This objective is clearly stated in the Ontario curriculum for all core French programs throughout the province: “The aim of The Ontario Curriculum: French As a Second Language – Core French, Grades 4-8, 1998 is to develop basic communication skills in French and an understanding of the nature of the language, as well as an
appreciation of French culture in Canada and in other parts of the world” (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1998; p. 2). Despite the aims and objectives of the core French program in Ontario, research has identified several challenges that affect the efficacy of core French FSL education (Carr, 1999).

According to the Canadian Parents for French (CPF, 2000), Ontario is experiencing declining enrollment in FSL programs at the secondary level. In fact, only three percent of Grade 9 core French students stay in the program through to the end of Grade 12 (CPF Ontario, 2008). Other issues that pertain to the status of core French programs in Ontario are a) poor attitudes toward FSL education on the part of students, parents, communities, school boards, the media, b) a lack of teaching resources, and c) funding cutbacks (CPF, 2000, p.28). In response to this declining trend, the Government of Canada published Plan 2013 in 2003, an initiative aimed at doubling the proportion of secondary school graduates with a functional knowledge of French by 2013 (Government of Canada, 2003). The Government of Canada published their most recent midterm report of Plan 2013 in the fall of 2005. In this report, growth varied from department and sector. However, at that time, $12 million had been distributed to all provinces and territories to recruit students, upgrade their knowledge of French and to prepare older students for the transition of elementary to secondary school (Government of Canada, 2005). At the time of this research, there had not been an updated report on the status of Plan 2013.

**Approaches and Methods of Teaching French as a Second Language in the Core French Program**

*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the Action-
Oriented Approach

The Council of Europe developed the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in 2001 and it is recognized as a valuable asset for informing instruction and assessment practices in FSL education in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This framework advocates active language use that develops five language skills – spoken production, spoken interaction, listening, reading and writing which includes the skills required for writing to interact (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d). The CEFR emphasizes an action-oriented approach, which focuses on learning functional language related to accomplishing real-life tasks. This approach views students as social agents who use acts of speech to interact with others in order to complete tasks that involve a “purposeful action…to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfill or an objective to be achieved” (CEFR, 2001; p.10). The Ontario Policy document A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools: Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2013) for example, suggests that teachers present language activities to students that imitate tasks they might face in everyday life. These tasks are open-ended and complex and require oral and/or written interaction between partners or small-groups. The importance that CEFR places on student interaction underscores the constructivist approach for language learning. The intention is for students to collaborate and build their knowledge of French and then take charge of their own learning.

The Action-Oriented Approach and Technology

The action-oriented approach is an authentic approach that engages students to learn French as a second language in relevant and realistic scenarios (Curriculum Services Canada; n.d). Curriculum Services Canada (n.d.) stated that using technology in
action-oriented tasks could facilitate and support greater French proficiency for Core French students. According to *FSL: A Guide to Reflective Practice for Core French Teachers: The Action-Oriented Approach* (Curriculum Services Canada; n.d) technology can offer “a risk-free and safe environment for students to communicate, facilitate the delivery of feedback from teachers, allow students to review and self-assess their oral skills, and help motivate students by endorsing them into an area of interest, comfort and expertise” (p. 10). This technology might include cell phones, media (television, radio, websites), social media (blogs, email, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, podcasts) and Video/Voice recorders. Technology as a learning tool can be powerful and can “enhance and complement the authenticity inherent in the action-oriented approach” (Curriculum Services Canada, n.d., p. 10).

**Technology**

One important responsibility of teachers is to prepare our students for their future professions. Therefore, we need to call to attention on implementing technology in the classroom to engage and enhance our students’ learning and preparedness for their future careers. Moreover, technology is in flux – with technological innovations becoming better, faster and more powerful. With the rise of new digital technologies, it is therefore also important that educators understand the potential influence these technologies can have for classroom teaching and student learning. As educators, we need to recognize many forms of technology such as computers, smartphones, iPads (smart tablets), and interactive whiteboards (eg. SmartBoard). In addition, educators must acknowledge the digital tools that accompany these devices such as email, Internet conferences (e.g. VoiceThread), WikiSpaces, blogs, apps and of course, social media (Facebook, Ning,
Research has demonstrated pedagogical benefits of using multimedia technology in the classroom (Hur and Anderson, 2013; Wilson et al., 2013). Cutrim Schmid (2008) found that using technology via an interactive whiteboard a) increased engagement and enhanced student motivation by improving their attention and participation, b) helped students understand the content of their lessons better, and c) catered to various learning styles through audio and visual modalities. In spite of the benefits of using technology in the classroom, there are disadvantages to be addressed by educators. Some disadvantages include high costs of, and inequitable access to, these educational technologies, lack of computer knowledge and technological experience (Cutrim Schmid, 2008).

**The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) Framework**

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework created by Mishra and Koehler (2006) describes the necessary knowledge by educators who integrate technology in their teaching. The three main components of teachers’ knowledge are content (CK), pedagogy (PK) and technology (TK). Together, these are what is know as TPACK. Here, Mishra & Koehler (2009) explain the underlying meaning of TPACK:

TPACK is the basis of effective teaching with technology, requiring an understanding of the representation of concepts using technologies; pedagogical techniques that use technologies in constructive ways to teach content; knowledge of what makes concepts difficult or easy to learn and how technology can help redress some of the problems that students face; knowledge of students’ prior knowledge and theories of epistemology; and knowledge of how technologies can
be used to build on existing knowledge to develop new epistemologies or
strengthen old ones. (p. 66)

Through their understanding and use of this framework in the core French
classroom, teachers can support the acquisition of French as a second language for their
students.

**Integration of Technology**

*Recent Studies on Integrating Technology in Second Language Learning*

According to Lawrence (2002), an exemplary second language classroom
involves constructivist tasks that are student-centered, collaborative, and that create
opportunities for authentic and meaningful communication with native and near-native
speakers. There is reason to believe that integrating technology tools in a second
language classroom could potentially contribute to promoting that level of authentic
second language interaction and learning. In a quasi-experimental research study, for
example, Verugo and Belmonte (2007) investigated whether internet-based technology
and digital storytelling (an authentic social experience for young children) could improve
the listening comprehension of youth Spanish learners who were students of English as a
Foreign Language. They found that the experimental group outperformed the control
group and that the digital stories promoted concentration and focused children’s attention
on the oral input received. In addition, they observed greater learner autonomy as
children had the control to play the story several times, demonstrating a longer time of
exposure to the target language.

Other technological platforms such as video sharing and YouTube have also been
found to facilitate second language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2007). Video sharing
websites provide a large quantity of the target language usage by real people, which may serve as a possibly rich resource for language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2007). Using video is a great tool because once again, the learner can control their learning of the target language at their own pace. Educators may provide vocabulary and/or transcripts to help students work with the authentic video, thus promoting reading and aural comprehension with the target language. In addition, through the use of video learners can record and review their oral practice of the target language. Learners can also upload their videos on video sharing websites and receive feedback in written form and/or as a video response in the target language.

**Recent Studies of Integrating Technology in the Core French Program**

Research and studies on the efficacy of using technology to support core French language learning, specifically, is not as extensive as the research on integrating technology in second language learning more generally. Lawrence (2002), and his study on using email as a learning tool to enhance FSL in a core French classroom, is an exception. Lawrence points out that email is one of the most accessible and commonly used Internet tools in our society. Through his research, he found that email exchanges (in this case, exchanges between students in Haiti and France) create a multipurpose, student-centered forum that stimulates second language production. He found that the use of email can result in improved second language writing and reading skills and can enhance students’ oral communication abilities.

Despite the age of this study, email continues to be relevant today. However, there are other innovative varieties of digital technological platforms that educators can use to support FSL education such as blogs and video sharing (Curriculum Services Canada;
Arguably, the most relevant and most intuitive digital technology for students that could be integrated into classroom teaching and learning is social media (Okoro, 2012). Social media is highly interrelated, collaborative and communicative by nature; therefore this digital platform could potentially serve as an excellent educational tool to support a more authentic and meaningful core French class.

In core French teachers and technology: Classroom application and belief systems (2001), Turnbull surveyed many core French teachers and found that they are eager to learn about integrating technology into their classrooms. A number of teachers reported that they never used computer technology in their classes because of a lack of training and knowledge. Certainly, the use of technology in the FSL classroom has progressed from archaic VHS, tape cassettes and those sound-proof rooms called Language Laboratories, and it is necessary to research progressive ways of integrating technology into core French teaching and learning. While this research context elucidates the extent that the integration of digital technology into core French has potential to impact student motivation and French language learning, it also points to several challenges being confronted by teachers in doing this work. For my research study, I did not want to focus more on these challenges but instead on the possibilities. For this reason, I concluded that there would be the most opportunity to learn from core French teachers who were consistently using digital technology in their core French classroom teaching so that I could learn from them how they do this and what impact they perceive it having on student motivation and learning in core French.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The research described herein followed a qualitative research design and employed teacher interviews as the principal research method. I conducted semi-structured interviews with two core French teacher participants who were reflective of my participant selection criteria, which is explicitly outlined in the “Participants” section (below). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, I took written notes during and after the interviews. Upon transcribing my interviews, I completed an in-depth analysis of the interview data. In this process, I coded data for dominant themes that respond to my research questions.

Instruments of Data Collection

As previously stated, the instrument of data collection that I used for my research is the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Interviews provide in-depth information about participants’ experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic (Turner, 2010). To maintain consistency and reduce researcher biases within my research, I used the Standard Open-Ended Interview format (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). According to Gall, Gall, and Borg, this format is structured in terms of the wording of the questions and participants will always be asked the same questions. Nevertheless, the questions are worded so that the answers are open-ended (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). Therefore, participants will be able to fully express their viewpoints and experiences.

Participants

I sampled for two teachers who were teaching core French full-time at their schools. A further criteria that was important to me was that these teachers consistently
use digital technology devices and platforms such as computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards, social media, blogging and email in their everyday classroom teaching. Additionally, participants had to have at least one full year teaching experience of core French in intermediate grade levels (Grade 7-9). In the end, these participants included two high school teachers (current), Jane and Bob. Jane had been teaching grade 9 core French for 3 years and grade 7 core French for 4 years. Bob had been teaching core French to grades 9-12 for 9 years.

Data Collection and Analysis

As previously stated, I conducted one structured interview with each teacher. Each interview lasted 30-45 minutes. Both interviewees were referred to be by other educational colleagues and were initially contacted via email. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. After transcribing the interviews, I conducted a thorough analysis of the interview data. In this process, I read the transcribed interviews and focused on key terms, words and themes. This was completed over several rounds of reading of the collected data and careful revisiting of the literature. I organized the codes based on the answers given for each interview question. I coded data by highlighting certain themes and words that related to how teachers integrate digital technology in the core French classroom and the perceived impact of using technology on student engagement and/or learning. I used as hybrid method of using a priori and emergent analysis (Falk and Blumenreich, 2005). Prior to my analysis, I created a list of predetermined themes to sort the data that I had collected from my study (a priori) (Falk and Blumenreich 2005). In addition, I identified emergent themes as they appeared
throughout my data. Furthermore, I created charts and tables to organize my interview data.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

Before conducting the interviews, I asked each participant to read and sign a letter of consent form (see Appendix B). I also verbally shared my background knowledge of my research topic. In the letter, I provided each participant with information regarding the data collection process, how the data were to be used, and the confidentiality of the information provided. In addition, I stated that their participation was entirely voluntary and reminded them that they could freely choose to withdraw from participating in the study at any point (including having their digital recordings destroyed). I also reminded them that their names and the names of the schools where they were working would be replaced by the use of pseudonyms.

I ensured that each participant was comfortable by allowing him or her to ask questions before, during and after the interview process. Furthermore, during the interview, I reiterated that each participant could refuse to answer any question, could return to any of the questions, and could request which data they do not want to be used at any point of the research process. I told the participants that they would be informed when the research was complete, and that I would be happy to share the findings with them at that time.

**Limitations**

There is a range of potential limitations to my research approach. These include, for example, the small sample size of participants chosen for the interviews. In particular,
including only two teachers increased the impulse to compare the perspectives and practices of teachers, rather than focus on what could be learned from each. I also felt limited with the amount of time afforded to design, conduct, and write the research study within the parameters of a joint graduate degree program that includes an initial teacher education program and an educational research component.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are divided into three overarching categories of data. Within each, I identify the specific themes that I interpreted. These themes are closely aligned to those reviewed from literature (Chapter 2). The three categories are:

1. Instructional strategies for integrating technology into core French teaching
2. Perceived impact of technology and core French language learning
3. Challenges of integrating technology in core French education

Instructional Strategies for Integrating Technology into Core French Teaching

The findings indicated that both participants implemented various types of technology to complement their lessons. The two participants were inclined to use digital technology devices such as interactive white boards, tablets, laptops, audio recorders and DVD players. With the use of these devices, the participants used various forms of media such as video clips, films, audio clips, websites featuring online magazines and articles, and music. Based on the experiences of the participants, they mainly used the Internet as their main digital platform to showcase these forms of media in the classroom.

Using Audio and Video for Verbal Proficiency and Listening Comprehension

Jane and her students had extensive access to technology. Each student and teacher had their own school email address. Students conversed and conferenced through an online e-learning platform portal called Moodle. Jane used Moodle as a “classroom” outside of a “real” classroom to support her core French students. She used Moodle to post copies of handouts, homework reminders, announcements, plans, links to websites and other online resources to facilitate student learning in core French. In addition, she
found it highly effective to post audio clips of text read in class by students and then have each student playback and practice their pronunciation from the recordings as homework or independent work. While in class, Jane stated that she used audio recording devices such as Dictaphones to support student assessment.

...when students are doing audio, speaking assessments, we might be in the hallway outside of class, I will record what they are saying so that I can upload and then have it to re-listen afterwards.

Furthermore, Jane expressed that recording her students’ speech allows her to re-listen and take notes effectively. By having the function of doing this, she stated that she was confident in consistency assessing her students fairly.

Jane also expressed the effectiveness of using film to help students develop their oral proficiency and French vocabulary. For example, she introduced a new unit with an overarching theme of the challenging differences in social exclusion. In this unit, she presented several movies and short films that were reflective of this theme. Furthermore, she provided supplementary lists of vocabulary from the films. With these strategies applied, she expressed that the use of films supported students to engage in classroom discussions in French.

Jane’s school also had a team of Information Technology (IT) professionals to support and manage everything related to technology. Jane stated:

We are really lucky with our IT department, that we got a staff actually of four people in our IT support, so they are not computer science teachers, they are actually IT support.

The support of the IT specialists allowed students to sign out technological devices such as video and audio recorders. Jane felt that this access to technology provided students
the opportunity to do project summative-based tasks such as creating short documentary films and audio recordings, thereby creating more opportunities for them to develop French language proficiency in a practical, inquiry-based and constructivist manner.

**Using Social Media**

In spite of the many benefits of creating an authentic core French learning environment with the integration of digital technology, the two teachers also reported that they confronted many challenges integrating technology, and these primarily had to do with social media. Both teachers expressed that using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were not effective teaching tools to foster an authentic learning environment for students in most situations. More specifically, they struggled with the issue of privacy. Neither participant encouraged using Facebook or Twitter because their students did not respond well to the fact that their privacy would be compromised. Jane, for example, stated that her students were very conscious of the notion that anything they post online is open to the world and anyone has public access to retrieve personal information such as their name, age, location of their school and home, and photos.

Bob, who also taught Spanish as a second language, shared his experience with using social media in the classroom. Though, it was Spanish class, his experience could be transferable to that of a core French classroom:

*I haven’t had a lot of opportunities to use social media in core French. I’ve tried it with my Spanish classes, where students wrote blogs back in the day of Blogspot – not successful. It was not an authentic experience for them because writing a blog, even though it’s talking about their thoughts and their opinions, it was not authentic in a sense that there were too many tools at their disposal to*
allow them to cut corners. So like, Internet translators, things of that nature were often used.

Instead of participating in Facebook and Twitter via posts, tweets and sharing personal information, Bob suggested that as a class, students could read posts and tweets, follow francophone celebrities on twitter and initiate in classroom discussions about what was trending on social media to create a more authentic learning environment for students. This example elucidates one way of integrating technology in the core French classroom to connect students to real-life contexts that are also relevant to their interests.

Relevant and Reflective Teaching Practices

Both participants believed that they effectively used technology into their teaching and pedagogical practice for core French, and both were fairly confident in their knowledge of technology and its applications through their own efforts at educating themselves. It was important to each of them that they be progressive and up-to-date with what was new in the realm of technology and education. They also both reported that they enhanced their technological knowledge through collaboration with colleagues and IT specialists.

Each teacher used different strategies and teaching practices that were reflective and relevant to their students’ needs, level of proficiency in the French language and their interests. Such examples included featuring current francophone music that reflected the interests of their students. They also both stressed how important it was that technology equipped them to be responsive to a wider variety of learning styles. In particular, they noted how technology supported multiple learners, especially audio, visual, interpersonal learners. Jane, for example, stated:
Print is great…but it’s more static and the same year-to-year and with technology we can bring more up-to-date, richer selections of activities for them (her students) to do. In terms of teaching to different learning styles, it is really important because not everyone is a visual learner, so in addition to the conversation work that they do, they have audio files, songs and films. You really notice the emotional learners and the interpersonal strengths and you notice that when certain activities come out where they are watching a clip and it sparks a discussion in a way that I don’t think you necessarily could get with something in print.

Bob admitted that he frequently avoided commercial resources because they were not relevant and up-to-date. He stated:

*The vast majority of it (resources for his lessons) comes from the Internet, YouTube. I don’t tend to use resources from commercial programming…it’s really key for me that the information that I find is relevant, up-to-date and practical…Most Ontario high schools and elementary schools are using resources from the 1990s…this is the way (integrating technology) to get away from the stale old textbook, which is not communicative, often dated in content, and in the case of grade nine materials, is not relevant to their daily life…I try to find the judicious use of appropriate materials and integrate them into my classroom.*

**TPACK Framework**

The ways that the participants integrated technology into their core French instructional practices and teaching beliefs aligned with the TPACK framework. The
main driver of their effective integration of technology heavily depended upon how they reconciled technology with the learning content and the teaching practices. In other words, rather than presenting flashy technological devices, they focused on harmonizing technology with their pedagogy and student interests and learning needs. Jane, for example, expressed the importance of having a balance of technology, content and pedagogy through her teaching experience, which is reflective in the TPACK framework:

*I don’t believe in using technology for the sake of technology…I know in some schools everyone has a laptop all the time. I wouldn’t always find ways to make it useful…I would say, “show me the pedagogical usage for it (technology) as well”, because ultimately I’m not just trying to keep them interested and think French is great by watching movie after movie…I actually want them to learn French with technology supporting them. So, if it is content and technology without pedagogy, then…they won’t actually get much from it.*

**Perceived Impact on Technology and Core French Language Learning**

*Teacher and Student Motivation, Engagement and Interest*

Participants reported that technology integration in a core French classroom supported student motivation, student engagement, classroom interactivity and students’ interest to learn French language, culture, heritage and history. In addition, the participants believed that integrating technology into their core French classroom had supported their motivation to teach French as a second language. In particular, both participants reported that students responded well to the use of YouTube videos in the classroom and that these fostered increased levels of student engagement.
The participants profited from the seamless, convenient and easy access to search for specific videos and other online content that complemented their students’ interest. These teachers did not struggle to find Internet resources that were appropriate to the level of French knowledge of their students. According to these teachers’ perspectives, students were inclined, motivated and engaged to learn French as a second language.

Although they preferred not to use them consistently because of students concerns over their privacy (as previously reported), both teachers believed that incorporating social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter in the right context could serve as a great starting point to motivate and engage students to the francophone culture. Bob, for example, stated that:

…[U]sing it (Twitter) as an appropriate scaffolding point is a good start but again, it must be used judiciously at an appropriate level and to further your goals in class and my goals are about interaction and communication, so that’s what it needs to be used for.

Not only did these teachers believe technology motivated students to learn French, the participants expressed that they too were more motivated to teach French while integrating technology. Jane, for example, stated:

I actually enjoy what I am teaching more than I would if I was limited and I didn’t have access to that (technology)... in order to get students to enjoy what they are doing helps if the teacher is enjoying it too.

In essence, integrating technology in core French lessons supports teacher motivation to teach French as a second language which then could be a possible factor to transfer to student motivation and engagement to learn French as well.
The teachers also expressed some negative attitudes and beliefs concerning the integration of technology in core French language learning. Both participants noted the extent that apathetic attitudes amongst students still exist in core French. Both participants have taught grade 9 core French and they have noted that apathy for learning French generally begins in the elementary school years and unfortunately transfers into high school. They felt that it was difficult to change the attitudes of students entering grade 9 core French. In addition, they found it especially challenging that other subjects such as mathematics, science and social science overshadow core French. They believed that the reasons for this were influenced by the culture of the school, which was heavily influenced by the parents and the community. As a result, they observed that many students lost sight to the purpose of learning French as a second language and frequently discontinued their French language learning after grade 9.

**Authentic Learning Experience**

These teachers expressed that the integration of digital technology facilitated an authentic learning environment for core French students. The teachers found that many learning opportunities were designed through technology integration. The participants agreed that technology was an excellent tool to build the basic skills of French language learning such as reading, writing, and oral/listening comprehension skills. Furthermore, the participants each reported that technology facilitated students’ capacity to make connection to real-life situations. Through the use of technology, students were supported to demonstrate their prior knowledge of the French language and were equipped to build the necessary skills to decode French and to use it effectively. Both participants reported
that their main goal was to have their students feel comfortable and confident with speaking and writing in French.

In addition, they strived for students to understand French and to be understood, and to be able to use French in contexts as authentic as possible. Here, Bob explains how technology helps create authentic learning experiences in his classroom:

...Technology is an essential component to expose students to an authentic cultural situation ... and authentic linguistic situations, so we are using the internet, film, websites, YouTube videos, whatever the case may be, whatever the format is, to introduce students to authentic real life language use...using the technology to mimic or mirror these situations is really key for me

The participants believed that students made connections to real life situations by using technology in the core French classroom. They noticed that using technology explicitly in the classroom allowed students to be authentically exposed to the Francophone culture, language, heritage, history and geography specifically. For example, watching videos of French youth discussing about current topics such as fashion, sports and music. Furthermore, students were exposed to follow the lifestyles of other French-influenced communities such as African and South-Asian groups. In essence, both participants were in favour to using technology in their core French classroom because it helped students see the purpose of learning French and applying their skills for the future in real-life situations such as work, travel and/or higher education. In sum, when they could access it, both participants noticed that having access to technology had positive effect on student French language communication, reading, engagement, authentic learning experiences, and critical thinking for their students.
Challenges of Integrating Technology in Core French Education

Access to Technological Resources

Both participants had access to technology to support their students and their lessons and their schools each had school-wide Wi-Fi access. However, one participant reported a range of challenges they faced with having access to technology in the classroom. Bob stated that his school was somewhat underserviced in terms of technology. In his school of just over 1000 students, there are only two computer labs with 24 computers each. As a result, there were fewer computers than students and often times, staff members competed to book these computer labs in advance. In addition, Bob expressed the challenge of not having the sufficient amount of time to dedicate to integrating technology and the efficacy of the technology. Bob believed that more technological resources such as computers and laptops were needed, as well as more professional technological support. He also felt that it was important for school boards to fund and offer French language learning software that was interactive to foster spontaneous language use.

Professional Development for Integrating Technology

Another challenge reported by the teachers was that core French teachers were limited in the amount of preparation and instructional time they had to incorporate technology in the classroom. Bob stated:

Teachers are so overstressed and overworked. So many responsibilities are downloaded onto teachers now, there are less and less time and fewer and fewer opportunities to spend the time to find what you need...an overworked teacher
Bob mentioned that a lot of teachers want to make a difference and improve their teaching practices by incorporating technology, however, they have no idea where to start. He mentioned that if teachers had a resource “toolkit” as an initial start that it would be beneficial. Moreover, he stated that it would be a logical next step for the ministry and school board collaborate and take the initiative to supply technological resources and professional development workshops and conferences for core French teachers.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research was to understand how a sample of core French teachers integrated digital technology to support student learning of French as a second language. Furthermore, another purpose of this study was to hear from these teachers what impact they observed technology integration having on student motivation to learn French. Speaking with two teachers about their instructional strategies and perspectives on the integration of technology in the core French classroom informed my understanding of the range of potential impacts on students as well as the range of challenges that teachers confront doing this work. I have a strong appreciation for how these core French teachers were committed to being progressive and relevant by taking risks such as integrating technology into their everyday instruction, despite the multiple challenges that they encountered.

Some of the challenges they faced included a) how to use particular digital platforms to create an authentic learning environment, b) lack of access and resources to integrate technology in the classroom, c) how to change apathetic and disinterested attitudes of students who are transitioning from elementary to high school, and d) how to balance the integration of technology with the French language learning content and the pedagogical skills needed for instruction.

One important avenue for responding to these challenges is the allocation of funds to provide more resources and support for technology use in the core French program. It is also important that more meaningful professional development workshops with concrete examples and tools be developed and made accessible to teachers so that they are not left to their own “devices” when preparing to do this work. Lastly, another way to approach these challenges is to judiciously incorporate technology in the classroom.
Therefore, teachers should make the conscious effort for their teaching practices to balance French language learning content with purposeful instruction supported by technology. The research suggests that TPACK knowledge is fundamental. Even though teachers are trained and well versed with technology, there are still teachers who will not use technology effectively or not use it at all. Therefore, educating teachers about the TPACK framework and concentrating on the significance of technology integration in ways that merge curriculum content and technology together would be advantageous.

**Situating the Findings within Existing Research**

There was an alignment between the themes generated in the literature review and the data gathered through the interviews with the core French teacher participants. Both the literature review and the research data led to several key themes on the topic of integrating digital technology in core French education. The key themes that emerged from the research data included: a) the usage of audio and video for verbal and oral proficiency, b) the usage of social media, c) relevant and reflective teaching practices, d) TPACK framework, e) teacher and student motivation, engagement and interest, f) authentic learning experience, g) access to technological resources and, h) professional development for integrating technology.

The status of core French education in Ontario remains an issue due to students declining to enroll in core French beyond grade nine. As the literature suggests, the teachers who participated in my study observed poor attitudes toward French language learning from their students. Both of the interviewees believed that their students’ parents, communities, and school culture influenced these attitudes as well. Notable links between both interviewees and the literature review included the issue of not having a
sufficient supply of teaching resources, especially technology-based resources.

Contributing to the lack of resources, the results of the current research and the literature review raised the problem of cutbacks to the core French program.

Both the literature in this area and the teachers that I interviewed emphasized the importance of creating authentic learning experiences for students in the core French classroom and both emphasize the potential of technology integration toward that end. In order to effectively engage and to hold the interests of students in learning French as a second language, it is important that educators incorporate an action-oriented approach that is relevant to real-world contexts and responsive to students’ interests. The perspectives of the teachers in my study aligned with the focus in the literature on integrating technology through action-oriented learning tasks. These two teachers used a range of digital technology platforms and devices to help connect French language learning with real-life situations and both perceived that a significant impact of these opportunities for learning were that they enhanced students’ authentic learning experiences, thereby affecting their motivation and French language learning.

The teachers were mindful of incorporating technology into their instruction with a purpose rather than using technology for the sake of technology. It was important to both participants that they integrated technology in their teaching practices in ways that aligned with, rather than compromised, the core French curriculum content and pedagogical norms. In essence, these teaching practices are closely aligned with the TPACK framework.

Limitations and Next Steps to the Research

Though the experience of conducting this research was incredibly invaluable, there remain a number of limitations and next steps that could serve to build upon and
expand these research findings. The number of participants interviewed in this study was very small and speaking with more teachers would have potentially broadened the range of instructional practices and contextual considerations. Furthermore, finding specific core French teachers who integrate technology regularly was a challenging task since there are few. In addition to having a small sample size, the timeframe of this research project was a contributing limitation. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted were exclusively focused on the teachers rather than their students. A next step for researchers who are interested in the topic of integrating technology in core French education might be to introduce a set of core French teachers to technology through professional development and collaboration. Then, a further next step might be to conduct follow-up interviews through a longer period of time to observe and collect data on their experience trying to meaningfully incorporate technology into their lessons. Another next step might be speaking with students who are exposed to technology in their core French classroom to hear their perspectives about the impact on their motivation. It would be immensely beneficial to hear directly from them about how they experience technology integration the core French classroom.

**Implications**

This research project broadened my perspective on the complex factors that impact the integration of technology into core French language learning. The instructional strategies that the teachers shared with me are a model for my own professional practice. Even though I am not yet a core French teacher like my teacher participants, I firmly believe that teaching models such as the TPACK framework and incorporating relevant and responsive practices are definitely transferable to my future
teaching endeavours. I admire the level of tenacity and passion of my participants for continually searching for resources to support their instructional practice and their students’ learning. In addition to my professional practice, I truly believe that designing and carrying out this research has helped me understand the significance of the “teacher as researcher”. I am committed to continuing this work in an effort to consistently reflect on my practice and its impact on my students’ learning by frequently collaborating with the educational research community. Moreover, it is important to me that I stay engaged with current issues in educational research and integrate this work into my instructional and professional practices.

Conclusion

Through this study I was able to learn about a range of instructional strategies and practical considerations for integrating technology into core French language learning that I hope other teachers will also find helpful as we navigate 21st century technology saturated living and learning contexts. If schools are going to be responsive to students’ learning needs and interests, it is important that we continue to research the potential of technology integration for all classroom learning. Motivating students to learn a second language such as French can be truly beneficial to their future through the opportunity to experience an enriched education. Learning French is an opportunity to develop deeper insight into French culture, people and heritage which are so foundational and integral to Canadian history and identity.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

General Background

1. How long have you been teaching core French education?

2. How would you describe your teaching philosophy as a core French teacher?

3. What is the school climate (colleagues, parents, students) with regards to students learning French, especially in the core French program?

4. How did you develop experience and knowledge of integrating technology in the classroom?

5. What digital/technological resources do you have access to in your school?

Technology Beliefs

6. What are you personal beliefs and perspectives of using technology for core French instruction?

Technology Practices

7. What are some of the specific ways you integrate digital technology into your French classroom to encourage active and authentic learning experiences?

8. In what ways have you used technology to support oral communication/ reading/ writing of your students in core French instruction?

9. To what extent do you use digital technology platforms (the Internet, social media) in your classroom? In your experience, how do students respond to using these technologies to learn French?

Impact on Students

10. In your experience, which technologies are most effective at engaging students in French?

11. In your opinion, what are the advantages of integrating technology into core French? In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges with integrating technology into core French?

12. What other important thoughts/experiences/opinions do you have to share about the use of technology in support of French teaching?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

My name is Beverly Hestick and I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the integration of digital technology in the core French program for the purposes of a graduate research project for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Kim MacKinnon. My research supervisor is ____________. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: _________________________________

Phone number, email: ________________________________

Instructor’s Name: ____________________________________________
INTEGRATING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IN CORE FRENCH CLASSROOMS

Phone number: _________________ Email: _______________________

Research Supervisor’s Name: ___________________________________
Phone #: ______________________ Email: _______________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ______________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: _____________________