Motivating Boys in Core French Classrooms in Ontario

By

Jessica Chan

A Major Research Project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Copyright by Jessica Chan, April 2016
Motivating Boys in Core French Classrooms in Ontario
Jessica Chan
Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
2016

Abstract

There seems to be an alarming number of students from both sexes dropping Core French classes after the government mandated grade 9 Core French course. In a world where people from different countries are connecting and conducting business with each other, it is important to address the issues with language learning. There is low male student enrolment in post secondary level French courses. This research explores different reasons why students, in particular boys, are choosing to opt out of French courses. Two teachers who have taught Core French for more than 5 years participated in this research. One participant is a male native French speaker and the second participant went through the French Immersion program in Ontario. This research aims to find ways of supporting our students, specifically males, through French studies in order to keep them engaged and motivated.

Key Words:
Core French, boys, male students, low enrolment, motivation, French immersion program, segregated French teachers, male French teachers, French support, government mandated French classes, and parental perception
Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge and thank my parents for supporting me through this research process where there were many late nights of furious typing. They have always been there to keep me company on late nights since I was a student in elementary school and this was not different.

I would also like to thank Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic for all of her support throughout my first three chapters. Without her support and guidance, it would have been a longer process to complete these three chapters. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Eloise Tan for her support and guidance for the chapter four and five.

Additionally, I wish to acknowledge and thank my participants for taking the time to out of their busy day to participate in my interviews. They showed a genuine interest in the research and had a lot of experiences to share with me. Without them I would not have been able to complete the research and go in depth with the research.

Lastly, I would like to thank my grade 12 French teacher for awakening a love of the French language and French culture. Without her, I would have been one of the students who would opt out of French after high school. She will never know the profound effect she had on my life and my view on education.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Research Context and Problem</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Research Purpose</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research questions</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement</td>
<td>11-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Overview</td>
<td>13-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Extrinsic and Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Gender stereotypes and masculinity</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Core French teachers</td>
<td>17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Second language learning: Core French</td>
<td>19-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Implementation of different strategies aimed at motivating boys</td>
<td>22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 The perception of the French language</td>
<td>25-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Gaps in the research</td>
<td>28-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Procedure</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Research Approach &amp; Procedures</td>
<td>30-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Instruments of Data Collection</td>
<td>31-32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. FINDINGS

Introduction 39-40

Students' attitude towards mandatory core French classes 40-42

Lack of resources 42-44

Teaching strategies affecting student motivation 44-46

Teachers' thoughts on gender-based interests 47-49

Challenges participants faced in their core French classes 49-53

5. DISCUSSION

Introduction 54-55

Key Findings 55-56

Implications 57-59

Recommendations 59-61

Areas for Further Research 61-63

Concluding Comments 63-64

REFERENCES 65-67

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview 68-69

Appendix B: Interview Questions 70-71
Chapter 1

1.1 Research Context and Problem

Canada is a bilingual country and in Ontario, it is mandatory for all students to take core French (CF) classes until grade 9 in order to graduate. There have been some cases where students were exempted from taking French but those are rare. There are significantly less students in Core French grade 10-12 and in university level French courses. This is mainly because they choose not to continue to study the language either due to their lack of interest and motivation, or they view other subjects as more important. In high school, approximately 3% of students continue to study French as a foreign language until grade 12 (CPF Ontario, 2008). As a consequence, there is a lack of French teachers that are males, which then perpetuates the idea that French is a female dominated language (Callaghan, 1998).

There have been assumptions that boys value education because it is something that they have to get in order to find employment in the future (Whitehead, 2003). This is a generalization of the issue at hand, this assumption would be validated if it could be proven that all boys are motivated by the same factor: future employment opportunities (Whitehead, 2003). There are certain students who recognize that there are benefits to continuing their education with the language and choose to continue to take French classes. Yet, others, given the choice, will choose not to study the language all together. This is a factor that Even in a country that is English-dominated, it is an asset to know more than one language. It is the teacher’s job to show students that a second language is just as important as other school subjects such as math or science.
What is concerning is that some Canadian parents thought that learning a foreign language is useful but they did not necessarily think that French had to be the chosen language (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). The researchers identified that there are many factors that affect the way students, not just males, view French in Canada. These factors include community beliefs, parents' views and teachers’ motivation in teaching the target language (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). Many CF teachers admitted to wanting to stop teaching CF because of their dissatisfaction with their teaching assignments as mentioned in Lapkin, MacFarlane and Vandergrift (2006) and can be found in Arnott, Lapkin and Mady (2010).

Due to the lack of male students continuing French studies in high school and university, there are fewer male French teachers in CF classrooms today. This is an issue because it perpetuates the notion that French is a female dominated language and therefore male students should not want to learn it and excel in French (Kissau, 2006; Callaghan, 1998). Since there is a perception that French is a gendered language, male students blame it on luck when they excel in order to avoid being classified as homosexual (Kissau, 2006). There are a lot of preconceptions about the French language and who is supposed to study it. There is a belief that girls are better in languages than boys, if this is in fact true, teachers should now have to find a way to make French learning interesting and motivating for the male students. French is seen as a female-dominated language and this may be a big part of the reason why male students tend to stay clear of studying it.

Kissau (2006) explores a few different reasons why male students are much less engaged in French studies. He found that adolescent boys seem to be more
sensitive to sex stereotypes and this affects their decision to drop out of French studies. In addition, he found that students who have high anxiety in French class are often not confident in the language and as a consequence, they lose all motivation to excel. In addition, students who have high anxiety in French class are often not confident in the language and as a consequence, they lose motivation to excel (Kissau, 2006). Furthermore, children commonly mimic parent’s attitude towards a language and if there is no encouragement, students tend to lose interest (Kissau 2006).

1.2 Research Purpose

In view of this problem, the goal of my research is to learn how samples of teachers are engaging their male students in French Language Learning in CF classrooms. There are two main reasons why students choose to study a language: they want to be able to be apart of the community in which the language is spoken (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010) and they do it to have a greater chance at obtaining a job in the future (Kissau, 2006). Unfortunately, many students, specifically male ones, do not identify French language skills as being as important as other subjects and in consequence, there are fewer male students studying French and fewer male French teachers.

This research is important, especially in a Canadian context, due to the vanishing borders and the promotion of internationalization and multiculturalism (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008). It is even more important to understand why these
students are not interested in learning the language considering the changes in Canadian society.

Research has been done supporting the claim that girls outperform boys at a young age when it comes to languages (Gavard, 2003). Sometimes, because of this, boys are less inclined to try since they are convinced that they can’t excel in that language. There is also a belief that girls talk more than boys in general and as a consequence, teachers will tend to encourage the boys more in the classroom (Gavard, 2003). It is so important to design lesson plans according to who the students are. The teacher should always try to keep in mind that male motivation in a French classroom is extremely important. This is a problem that must be addressed in the early years of studies for students because it will affect the way they feel about French for the rest of their lives or they may end up regretting not continuing their studies in the language.

Kissau (2008) and Wierzalis (2008) point out that there has been a lack of studies and research on this topic within the field in Canada and the United States. This is alarming because male students have been dropping out of French classes for years and this has had an effect on the population of male French teachers.

Now that this issue has been identified, teachers should be adjusting their lesson plans while keeping in mind the needs of male students in the French classroom. The reasons for male student disengagement are important to identify since it teachers can modify lessons but also keep in mind the needs of all students.
1.3 Research questions

1. What do a sample of core French teachers observe about the relationship between gender and learning engagement in the core French classroom?

2. How do these teachers differentiate their instruction to engage their male students, and motivate them to continue with French language learning past grade 9?

3. What indicators of engagement and motivation do these teachers observe from their students, in response to their instruction?

4. What other exterior factors affect motivation in the French classroom?

5. What strategies are core French teachers currently using to engage their students in the target language?

6. How do parents feel about their children having to study French in the junior and intermediate level in schools?

7. What are the differences in motivation and engagement in Core French students in an English stream or dual track school and Core French students in a French Immersion school?

These are some of the questions I will be thinking about throughout my research and throughout my interviews that I will conduct.

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

Throughout my education in the French immersion system and in the post secondary French program, I have become aware of the lack of male students in the higher-level French classes. In all of my post secondary level French courses, there
have always been 2-3 male students in a class of approximately 30 students. I always wondered why students felt that learning an additional language would not be beneficial especially when a large number of European citizens pride themselves for speaking multiple languages.

The material and texts that teachers choose to use in their classroom are vital for student engagement. In my experience at school, throughout elementary school, teachers would choose material that was not interesting to me and as a result, I lost interest in learning French and couldn’t wait to drop it from schedule. It was not until grade 11 when the teacher finally chose novels that were interesting and engaging and that is when I realized how much I loved the French language. These are memories and knowledge that stay with students throughout their lives and hopefully this is what all teachers try to achieve.

I remember that throughout my school experience I only had one male teacher that taught French, the rest of them were females. There is a clear dominance of females in this language within the educational system. Throughout elementary school and high school, I never noticed that there were rarely any male French teachers. I remember that male students would generally not participate during French class unless they were called upon.

This observation changed slightly in high school because the male students who chose to stay in French class understood that there was a purpose to studying the language and that it would, hopefully, help when they come out of university to look for employment. Male students in high school French class were more engaged because they chose to be in French immersion. These students would participate
and were more motivated and so I did not see the issues that were presented in the various studies.

When I decided to continue studying the language in university, I noticed that there were only a couple of male students in all the French classes. Female students in university seemed to be happy and enthusiastic when there were male professors or male students in the class, which made me think that there is a serious lack of males in a French classroom. This made me realize that there are fewer Anglophone males that choose to study French.

When I was studying at York University, there were more male French professors who specialized in literature. These professors were native French speakers and the majority of them completed their studies in France. When they presented a piece of literature in French, it was clear that they had a love for the language and the many ways the author could convey a message through different words. It may be interesting to see what teachers from France are teaching in order to promote French literature to male students.

The consensus seems to be that male students shy away from continuing their studies in French because of a few reasons. These reasons include their perspective on the language, their belief that it has no practical value and their lack of motivation, among other reasons.

1.5 Overview

I will be conducting a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview 3 teachers about their instructional strategies for meaningfully
integrating male students in the French classroom. In chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of language learning and inclusive pedagogy. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In chapter 4, I report my research findings, and in chapter 5, I discuss these findings and their significance in relation to the literature and the implications for my own practice as a beginning teacher.
Chapter 2: Review of literature

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will be reviewing the research and studies that have been done on gender differences in young students, the perception of the target language among students, and motivation of boys in classrooms, specifically, CF classrooms.

Research has identified the problem that boys are not interested in literacy programs. EQAO test scores indicate that boys are not achieving the same scores as girls in the literacy section of the test (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001). They tend to self-identify as non-readers in French and in English. Teachers need to ensure that young students do not classify themselves as non-readers because they are constantly reading even if it is a comic book or a poster.

It is important to first of all define the terms that will be used throughout this chapter. We will be looking at what masculinity means to the general population and how that affects the way boys in all societies feel about it. An important thought to keep in mind is how big is the effect of society’s views of masculinity affect the way boys feel in school and the subjects they are learning. Secondly, teaching in French and other languages has become feminized and boys are often times left without a male model in the primary grades (Wilson, 2006). In addition, the French language has been viewed as a female domain and therefore boys do not want to be associated with something that will take away from their masculinity (Kissau, 2006).
2.2 Indications of the lack of motivation from boys

To start, we must understand why it is crucial that we look at motivation when it comes to boys in CF classrooms. Motivation is the most influential factor in learning a new language (Gardner, 2001). Teachers should be thinking about how they can increase the level of motivation in their students in CF classrooms.

Boys come to hate school because, as Lisak and Sax (2001) puts it, they are discouraged to act the way they naturally do in kindergarten and throughout their schooling. Boys are not allowed to play with toy guns or toy weapons at school in order to demote violent behaviour. As a result, boys are disinterested in school and view it as a place where they are constantly restricted (Lisak & Sax, 2001).

Margaret Sandra (1982) concludes that boys believe that by acting in a certain that align with male stereotypes and that teachers are then forced to react in order to keep control of the classroom.

In addition, the low scores that boys are getting on the EQAO seem to be due to the lack of male role models in the classrooms and the growing number of female teachers in our schools (Greig, 2003).

Research has been done to explain why kindergarten and elementary schooling is failing boys. Boys are forced to read and write before they are physically or emotionally ready; this has a great impact on their perception of school (Lisak & Sax, 2001). There has been a significant amount of research done on the speed and the rate of development of maturity in boys and girls. Girls mature faster than boys and as a result, schools must accommodate these differences (Lisak & Sax, 2001).
2.3 Extrinsic and Intrinsic motivation

The reasons why students choose to study French are important in understanding what motivates them. If teachers can understand what types of activities motivate male students, they may be better able to engage these students and influence their decision to continue taking French until grade 12.

The first type of motivation, extrinsic, is defined as motivation driven by external factors such as external rewards like money or food (Nicholson, 2013). Many boys seem to fit into this category of students that are extrinsically motivated in French classes and other language classes (Nicholson, 2013).

The second type of motivation that is being explored is intrinsic motivation. Nicholson (2013) defines this motivation as that which comes from within; in other words, learning is rewarding and students find pleasure in solving puzzles or playing games (Nicholson, 2013). Intrinsic motivation is the type that will push students and encourage them to want to do well in their language class. For French studies, girls tend to have intrinsic motivation pushing them through their study of the language. Many girls see learning French as a second language learning as rewarding just due to the fact that they can speak and understand the language (Gavard, 2003). Many students cease to take CF courses because they feel that they have not made any progress throughout the years and as a result, they lose motivation (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). Early and Yeung (2009) also concluded that students lacked motivation due to their lack of academic success in the program and as a result, students chose to drop out.
It is often assumed that boys view academic success as the key to obtaining employment (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010; Greig, 2003; Whitehead, 2003). More research needs to be done on this issue since it will help with understanding why a great number of boys are not motivated. Research has been done that suggests that some students were motivated extrinsically by rewards that they would obtain a high-status job or recognition. What really pushed the students to continue their education past age sixteen was intrinsic motivation (Whitehead, 2003).

Contrary to what Whitehead believed, Kissau (2005) argues that the reason why externally motivated students don’t succeed in the same way others would is due to the fact that if that external factor was taken away, students would have no reason to try to succeed. The example given is that if their reason for taking French is so that they can increase their chances at obtaining employment after graduation, they would have no more motivation if that reason was taken away (Kissau, 2005).

Whitehead (2003) concluded that boys are the ones who are mainly extrinsically motivated. This is what he uses to explain underachievement with boys. He goes on to explain that what was found to be the most successful indicators of achievement for students were the following three factors: intrinsic motivation, rejection of stereotypes, and intelligence (Whitehead, 2003). This research was done with students in England and Wales but can also be applied to students in Canada with regards to motivation for boys in school. In Canada, male achievement in literacy is much lower than the scores that girls are achieving (Greig, 2003).

Furthermore, when we talking about motivation from students, it is important to factor in a teacher’s motivation. There are a number of CF teachers that
are no longer motivated because of the challenges that they face in a CF classroom (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). This is important because if the teacher is not motivated to help the students learn the language, the students will not have a positive experience and will no longer want to continue to learn the target language (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010).

2.4 Gender stereotypes and masculinity

Research shows us that teachers tend to act differently towards boys than to girls. More attention is placed on boys in the classroom even without teachers realizing (Beaman, Kemp & Wheldall, 2006).

When children are born into this society, most parents are constantly showing their children that boys and girls must act a certain way and that they must like certain things based on their gender. A clear example of this is when the sex of the baby is announced; it is done with either pink or blue. There is a belief that boys are not supposed to be as skilled in language learning as girls and when they do succeed in French, they tend to blame it on luck (Kissau, 2006). During the same study conducted, the participants explained that throughout their life, society has told them that a subject like French is inappropriate for boys and as a result, boys are less interested and less motivated in these fields (Kissau, 2006).

Kissau and Wierzalis (2008) found, in their study, that even if boys did enjoy studying the French language, societal perceptions tended to persuade them to discontinue learning the language. This clearly shows the impact of societal norms on students. In a different study, Kissau also found that some languages like Spanish
and Italian were viewed as a female dominated field of study and male students tended to avoid taking those courses (Kissau, 2006). Due to the fact that French is still viewed as a female dominated subject, boys are avoiding the language (Kissau, 2006).

Can we make a connection between the number of boys pursuing a career in teaching and the number of male teachers in Ontario classrooms today? Education is becoming highly feminized and boys may be reluctant to admit that they might want to teach as a career (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2006). French, in particular, is being perceived as a female domain (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008) and as a result, male students tend to suppress any enjoyment towards this language.

In the Ontario Ministry of Education document, “Me read? And How!” (2009) there are a range of strategies that are suggested in order to encourage boys to be excited about literacy and reading. There has been much research done on boys and literacy throughout the years (The Ministry of Education, 2009).

Lisak and Sax explained what Maccoby researched in regards to the social and verbal skills that are developed by girls (Lisak & Sax, 2001). Maccoby discovered that girls were better able to communicate and articulate ideas earlier than boys (Lisak & Sax, 2001). In addition, girls were forming more complex sentences than the boys. As a result, boys are more inclined to believe that their language skills are not as developed as those of girls and that any achievement in the language is due to luck rather than skills (Kissau, 2005).
2.5 Core French teachers

There are a large population of French teachers that are females and this does have an influence on the way boys view the language and even the teaching profession. There is a lack of male presence in classrooms today and in particular, French class. Since boys lack motivation in French class (Callaghan, 1998; Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008), there is a rarity of males teaching in CF classrooms. As a result, French teaching has become increasingly feminized (Kissau, 2006; Callaghan, 1998).

Moreover, another barrier that boys must face is that there is a lack of male role models in their lives and specifically in classrooms at school (Callaghan, 1998). Wilson stresses the importance of finding good male role models for male students (Wilson, 2006). There are not enough male teachers at the primary level classrooms. It is important for boys to be exposed to male figures at a younger age because they are much more impressionable. Due to the lack of male teachers in primary classrooms, many boys do not have an appropriate educational male role model to look up to (Francis and Skelton, 2005). This does not mean that if there are more male teachers in the classrooms that boys will be motivated in French class or any other class. In addition, a study was conducted by Stanworth in 1982 that tested a group of pupils. In that study, it was found that boys preferred male teachers and girls were divided in their preference (Callaghan 1998). In the study, the boys agreed that they were more involved and relaxed in a class that was lead by a male teacher.
2.6 Implementation of different strategies aimed at motivating boys

In the Ontario Ministry of Education document “Me Read? How?” (2009) there is a clear acknowledgement of boy’s underachievement in literacy. A variety of solutions are provided for teachers with regards to different methods to try in order to engage boys. Some of the solutions include letting boys choose the books they want to read or allowing them to choose graphic novels to study (The Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This was done for English literacy but can also be applied to French literacy. It is possible that if boys are offered a variety of choices in French reading material, they may be more engaged and feel more involved in their learning of the language.

The Ontario Curriculum for French as a Second Language does focus on the communicative approach since it is important to encourage students to speak as much as possible in the target language (The Ministry of Education, 2013). This approach has been highlighted throughout the curriculum and may not be the appropriate approach for boys in the CF classroom (Kissau, 2005). Since the communicative approach uses certain styles of interaction like peer interaction and studies show that boys thrive in teach-led interaction (Kissau, 2005; Chavez, 2000). In addition, Barton (1998) suggests that teachers explain the learning goal for all students so that the boys understand that they are learning and what they are going to achieve (Barton, 1998).

There are strategies that teachers can use in order to increase student engagement in the language classroom and these can be applied for both boys and girls. It is the role of the teacher to break down the gender stereotypes and
promoting the idea that there is no checklist for what it means to be a boy (Martino, 2008). In the document published by the Ontario Ministry of Education “Me read? And how!” (2009) it is suggested that teachers should create a boy’s corner in the classroom or the library as one of the methods to use in order to build interest with boys and literacy. The problem with a solution such as this is that this may create an even greater divide between the boys and the girls in the classroom.

2.7 Second language learning: Core French

A large number of students who are enrolled in the French immersion program were there because their families had enrolled them. Most of them came from families with a French background. It was found that about 60% of the students that were enrolled in the French immersion program opted to leave the program in grade 11 (Makropoulos, 2007). Although the study was done on grade 11 students, it is important to note that the level of motivation does not increase or change for many male students (Kissau, 2006). This is the problem that Kissau identified in his research, that from an early age, boys are disengaged. As a result, there are less male students in French classes in intermediate and senior level, as well as post-secondary levels. Consequently, there are fewer and fewer males teaching the language and the cycle then repeats itself (Kissau, 2006).

Moreover, the percentage of students that choose to stay enrolled in CF classes is 3% passed the mandatory grade-9 level (CPF, 2008). Kissau (2005) mentions a study that was conducted by Netten et al. (1999) that indicated that out
of the sample of participants, 59% of the students had the desire to continue taking CF in grade 10. Out of those students, most of them were female (Kissau, 2005).

Canada prides itself on being a bilingual country yet less than half of the population speak both languages. Many people do not support the two languages being taught in schools today (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). There are some that believe that French is not necessary and that it is a waste of time to encourage any dedication or interest in the target language (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). The way their parents perceive the language is crucial in the motivation of learning a language from a student (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). It was found in the study conducted by Arnott, Lapkin & Mady (2010) that parents believed that it was important for their children to learn an additional language but they did not think that the language necessarily had to be French.

This lack of interest in literacy and in language learning is not limited to French language. Scores that boys obtained in their EQAO have been significantly lower than the girl’s scores. Due to low scores from the standardized test, the Ontario Ministry of Education gave instructions to all school boards to implement different strategies to improve student achievement (Greig, 2003). Among the strategies put in place by the Ontario school system, one sticks out: “the introduction of more male role models and teachers” (Greig, 2003). Though this was research done specifically for English language in Ontario schools, it can also be applied to the French language. If boys are not motivated to learn a language that they use in their everyday life, chances are that they will not have much motivation to learn a secondary language. Especially a language that is perceived as a female
domain, boys are less likely to engage in the classroom. In many school boards, they have chosen to place fault for the lack of achievement from boys in schools on the way their brains develop (Greig, 2003). There are limitations to this view, for example, if boys’ brains are developed differently than girls’ brains, why is it that not all boys are underachieving (Greig, 2003)?

The curriculum documents provided by the government seems to be straying away from explicit instructions on grammar. The focus outlined in the curriculum is for the students to use the French language effectively in a variety of social settings (FSL Curriculum, 2013). They stress that students should learn the Canadian culture associated with the target language. The aim is to create global community of language learners and in the process, mould responsible and productive citizens.

Kissau (2005) suggests that in order to keep enrolment in CF consistent, the government could make French mandatory throughout high school. He also highlights the argument that if CF was given the same amount of importance as other core subjects like math and science, students would have more pressure and more reason to excel in French class (Kissau 2005). A problem with this solution is that it does not address the issue at hand, which is motivation. By making a subject mandatory does not increase motivation and it does not help students to succeed in the classroom (Kissau, 2005).

2.8 The perception of the French language

There have been a variety of reasons offered to explain the disengagement of boys in French classes and the consequences that related to the issue. French is
becoming more of a feminized language and boys tend to stay away from it for fear of being categorized as effeminate. The rarity of male French teachers is not only a problem that has been identified in Canada (Kissau, 2006). It is also an issue in the United Kingdom where males are not choosing to pursue a career in teaching French as a foreign language (Kissau and Wierzalis, 2008). The problem now is that this trend seems to reinforce the idea that French is not an appropriate for boys. Kissau and Wier identify an issue that is troubling in our growing society especially since we put an emphasis across all subjects on globalization, internationalization, and multiculturalism. In an officially bilingual country like Canada, one would expect most of the population to be bilingual but this is not the case. Many parents seem to have a negative view on French classes in schools. Conversely, Arnott, Lapkin and Mady (2010) found that parents had positive thoughts towards their children learning a foreign language but did not think that it had to be French. CF teachers have a lot of influence when it comes to how students feel about the language. Teachers seemed to be aware that French was a subject of little importance in comparison to other subjects in school (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010).

Why is it important that we discuss the way the French language is perceived by students, male and female? Males from English-speaking countries tend to steer away from a career in teaching French as a foreign language (Kissau and Wierzalis, 2008). This promotes the idea that French is a highly feminized language to learn and to teach and most males will find it unappealing for this reason (Kissau, 2005; Callaghan, 1998). The lack of male students choosing to continue their French
studies past the mandatory grade 9 Core French is alarming particularly since Canada is a bilingual country and it is not the case that the whole population speaks both languages (Kissau, 2006).

There is a strong link between French and masculinity because many boys tend to want to stay away from any subject that will make them look anything less than manly (Whitehead, 2003). If we are using this data and applying it to a French context, we can assume that boys will stay avoid a highly feminized language that is perceived as a female domain. As a result, boys will avoid achieving good marks in French class since they feel that any achievement in the language and they will be associated with femininity (ibid).

A troubling finding from Kissau and Wierzalis’ research is that from the participants interviewed, it was clear that both students and teachers perceived French as a feminized language. This notion is being perpetuated when students enter classes in Ontario and find that the majority, if not all, of the French teachers are females (Kissau, 2005; Callaghan, 1998). In French class, boys tend to use luck as the reason why they are achieving high marks (Kissau, 2005). A lot of the research that has been done is regarding gender differences in motivation in literacy classes in English (Greig, 2003). There has been a growth of female teachers throughout the years that many researchers have noticed that there is a feminization of teaching (Kissau, 2005; Callaghan, 1998). The number of female teachers as opposed to male teachers is significantly higher (Francis and Skelton, 2005).

French class isn’t only about the language, when we learn a foreign language we are also learning culture. During the same research, the male students admitted
that French culture does not interest them, as it is a female concern. This is particularly important to note because this has been an issue for many years and is not limited to French studies.

Some would argue that what determines whether or not boys will be interested in French is dependant on their culture and identity. It is not accurate to assume that this interest in solely based on the sex of the student. It is vital that we recognize that not all boys are disinterested in French or underachieving in their language classes. The research that has been done shows that the number of boys that are underachieving is significant enough to warrant studies (Martino, 2008). There are a variety of reasons why boys are not interested in French and none of them is because of a difference in the way the brain develops. Boys tend stay away from French study because of the language’s feminine characterization (Kissau and Wierzalis, 2008). This has a great impact of class enrolment in secondary schools.

2.9 Gaps in the research

There has been little research done on what teachers have been doing to address the decrease in motivation in boys in CF classrooms (Kissau, 2005). The research that has been presented here shows that there is still an issue with underachievement among boys. It is clear that there is a problem when it comes to boys and literacy according to surveys and research that has been done by the Ontario Ministry of Education and standardized test scores (EQAO).

In addition, it is important to understand the reasons why male students avoid doing well in French class and why they do not like the language. If we truly
understand some of the reasons for disengagement in French class by boys, then teachers may be able to implement some strategies to help encourage these students. It is vital to recognize that this research does not represent every single male student in Ontario but rather a general population of boys.

Further research is required in order to find ways of supporting boys’ achievement throughout their schooling. The problem has been identified but there hasn’t been many proven methods to increase motivation. Furthermore, once these strategies have been identified, schools require more funding in order to get the material that appeal to boys (i.e books, technology, etc.).
Chapter 3

3.1 Methodology

I started this research study with a review of the literature in order to learn and analyze what is already known about this study. This provided me with a basic understanding of what other researchers have found and what data they all have in common. It is also a chance to see what research methods have already been applied to this topic. The interview process will follow the review of literature that has been done.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology used, beginning with an explanation of the procedure that was followed. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures and data collection instruments, before expanding on participant sampling and recruitment. I explain data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. I identify a range of methodological limitations, but I also speak to the strengths of the methodology. Lastly, I conclude the chapter with a summary of the key methodological approaches and my rationale for these decisions, keeping in mind the research purpose and questions.

3.2 Research Approach & Procedures

This is a qualitative research study that involved semi-structured interviews with four teacher-participants and a review of the relevant literature. Participants will be deciding where they would feel the most comfortable being interviewed. Trumbull (2005) explains that it is best to conduct interviews in the natural setting
of the environment in which the participants work but this may not be possible. The rationale behind conducting a qualitative research study is to be able to draw upon experiences of these participants through interviews and to identify the significance of the research that has already been done (Trumbull, 2005).

The data that will be collected are typical examples of qualitative data like interviews, literary texts (Walliman, 2006). This type of data is crucial in a research study like this since the research focuses on the experiences that other have in teaching Core French and what other researchers have found throughout their research.

This research is important because it attempts to shed light on a growing problem in language teaching and learning. By using semi-structured interviews, I will be able to keep the interview feeling more like a conversation, which may put the participants at ease (Fylan, 2005).

Through the interviews, I hope to learn different strategies that teachers are currently using in order to engage all intermediate and senior level students in French studies. In order to gain insight into Core French teaching struggles and strategies, it is crucial for me to select exemplary teachers. These teachers need to have years of experience and they have to believe in making a difference in their Core French classrooms.

3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

Before the interview process began, I carefully developed open-ended questions that allowed the participants to express their opinion on every aspect of
the question. I did not provide my participants with the questions beforehand but I did inform them that they will be interviewed for 30-45 minutes and that are four different parts. This is important because it structures the interview and lets the participants know how the interview will be conducted. Depending on the availability and schedule of the participants, there are two options for interviews.

3.4 Participants

In this section, I will review the sampling criteria that were established in order to select the participants. I have also included a section where I will introduce my participants.

3.4.1 Sampling Criteria

The goal of this study is for me to learn about teaching, and I felt that in order to do that, I had to choose exemplary teachers that have shown an initiative to find strategies that will aim to maximize student motivation and potential. These teachers need to have demonstrated a clear initiative in developing and implementing strategies to encourage their students to want to continue studies in French.

All of the participants that I will select for this study are teachers who have been teaching for a minimum of 5 years in Core French classrooms. This is important in this study since I want to ensure, with the small sample size, that I have experienced teachers in order to draw data from the interviews. I will select four teachers to interview, two male and two female. I will need to interview teachers of both sexes so that I can identify whether or not anyone has noticed difference in student
attitude and achievement towards the French language in Core French classrooms. This is important as my research focuses on male motivation and I would like to understand whether a male Core French teacher can make a difference in the views that boys have of this language.

- Teachers with 5 or more years of experience in teaching Core French.
- Teachers that have shown leadership and/or expertise in implementing a Core French program aimed at encouraging students to continue their French studies.
- At least one participant must be a native French speaker.

These criteria are important for my research because by interviewing teachers with positive attitudes to Core French teaching, I may learn different strategies that are being used and that are possibly making a difference. The reason why I wanted to interview teachers that went through the French immersion or Core French program in Ontario because I think it would be beneficial to hear them compare their experiences with their teaching.

3.4.2 Sampling Procedures, Recruitment

In terms of sampling procedures, the participants that I am hoping to interview will all be located in Ontario where my research is being focused. The reason why I chose to stay within this province is because there are different policies with regards to French studies in other provinces. In order to compare the data as consistently as possible, I would like to concentrate my study in one area in Canada.
Due to the context of the study, I was not able to interview more than four participants. This sample size may not allow me to make any assertive conclusions but will give me insight on what other exemplary teachers are doing in their classroom. As a result, I used convenience sampling since I relied on the contacts that I make in order to recruit participants (Creswell, 2013). By setting up criteria for the participants, I also applied purposeful sampling. I interviewed teachers that are involved in the Core French program in Ontario high schools. It is crucial to set criteria for participants so that they are able to answer the questions that I have developed.

3.4.3 Participant bios

The first participant I chose is a French teacher at a high school. For this research, we will call him John. He has been teaching Core French for 17 years and his native language is French. He has taught in both English stream or dual track and French Immersion schools at all levels.

The second participant that I chose to include in the research was a Core French teacher with 7 years of experience and she teaches at a junior and intermediate level. She currently works at a French Immersion school but has worked in an or dual track stream school teaching Core French. Carmen grew up in Ontario and went through the French Immersion program herself.
3.4 Data Analysis

During the interviews I recorded, with the prior consent of the participants. Before I began to analyze any data collected, I have to first transcribe the recordings. From there I coded each transcript individually by using the interview questions as an interpretive tool. The transcribing stage will be beneficial to the process of analyzing the data; it brings the researcher ‘close to the data’ (Denscombe 2014). Denscombe also states that this process allows the researcher to analyze data in a much easier way by having a written copy of the interview instead of going through the recordings.

Following the coding stage, I identified themes from the interviews. This is extremely important when going through the information that I pulled from the data.

It is very important to draw themes from the data. This does not mean that I would pick a few themes in which I have a few quotes and pieces of evidence to support the identification of that theme. This means to connect the themes back to the research and understand why this theme is or is not important to the participants. By reading literature on the research topic at hand, it gives me another lens for to me use in order to further interpret the data. Once themes have been identified, I then compare how teachers feel about it and what the literature says about the same theme.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Interview participants will be given letters of informed consent prior to engaging in the interview process, which they were required to read and sign before the interview. This will allow me to record the interviews but still keep all related information about their identity private. There are no risks to participation since each one was assigned a pseudonym and they were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. In addition, both participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts and to clarify or retract any statements before I conduct data analysis. Participants were given all information before doing interviews. During the interview, the participants have the right to refrain from answering questions that they don’t want to answer.

After having done all of the interviews, the recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer that only myself and my course instructor will have access to. I will destroy the data that I have collected once this research paper is completely.

3.5 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Creswell (2013) recommends that a larger sample of participants be used in order to fully support the study but due to the time and program restrictions, this will not be possible.

Given the ethical parameters for this study, I will not be able to interview students that are studying the language to find out what they thought of Core French
classes. This would have been useful data to have when conducting research and formulating my questions for the teachers. Having that information would have been an interesting addition to the study since it would give me insight on both stakeholders’ position on the topic.

As Denscombe mentions, (2014), the problem with any interview, it may be a challenge to identify whether the participant is being truthful when describing their strategies that they have implemented in their classrooms and the way they feel about teaching Core French. It is therefore vital to make the participant feel at ease with the careful development of my interview questions.

On the other hand, by conducting interviews, teachers may have the opportunity to reflect on their teaching strategies and may also help me to conceptualize different theories and concepts that have been presented in texts.

3.6 Conclusion: Brief Overview and Preview

As mentioned before, the purpose of this research is to identify different strategies that teachers are using to address the dropping number of student enrolment in Core French classrooms. There is a focus on male students since there have been a number of research studies that address this issue within boys in Ontario. This will be a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with four teachers-participants. By interviewing multiple teachers I had access to more than one experience and points of view regarding this topic. This gave me an idea of what types of challenges and successes these teachers have faced and overcome in order to motivate students in pursuing this language in higher levels. In order to keep the
participants at ease, I elaborated on the interview process prior to the interview itself. This included the time limits that I have set and the four sections of interview questions. Next, in chapter four, I will present my research findings. This will allow me to present my findings from the interviews and also conclusions from the literature.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings from the interviews that were conducted by myself with two participants who have taught core French (CF) for more than five years. There are five themes that I have identified: students’ attitude towards mandatory core French classes, the lack of resources, the teaching strategies that affect student motivation, teacher’s thoughts on gender-based interests, and some of the challenges that core French teachers face.

The first participant, Carmen, has been a teacher for 22 years and has taught grade 1-8 core French in an English and French Immersion public school. She began teaching in a small town outside of Peterborough where most of the families in the community owned farms. Carmen’s first language is English and she learned French in a French school in Ontario.

The second participant I chose teaches at a French Immersion high school and has taught for 17 years. I will refer to him as John. John has taught core French from grade 7-13 and he is a native French speaker.

To begin, both participants agreed that it is important to learn French in Canada for added advantage in employment opportunities and to be able to communicate in French speaking countries. They also believe that these are the main reasons why students would be interested in learning the target language. There is a huge emphasis on globalization, internationalism and multiculturalism that a lack of core French students in the secondary level is an issue worth
addressing yet there is a lack of research in North America (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008).

4.1 Students’ attitude towards mandatory core French classes

In Ontario, students are required to enrol in CF classes until grade 9. Students are not required to continue their studies in French and a large percentage of them choose to opt out of French class (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008). It is especially a concern that indicates boys seem to be the most likely to discontinue their studies in French due to a variety of reasons. One main reason for this issue is the feminization of the target language (Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008; Callaghan, 1998).

Throughout his years of teaching, John noticed that students often did not react positively to the mandatory CF. Rather than attempting to learn the language and to overcome a challenge, many students, according to John, regard CF classes as a way to pass the time. The following passage indicates the connection that the participant has made towards government mandated CF classes and the students’ attitude towards the target language.

“Most of them are taking French because they have to...have been thrown into the French courses...to kill the time. So, very few of them are really trying to learn the language, that that's why we see some lack of interest or sometimes, difficult attitude towards the language.”
John noticed that there is a difference between students who are in a French Immersion school and students in an English stream school in terms of motivation. He noticed through his years of teaching that students who are in French Immersion (FI) schools are more motivated since they have friends who are in the Immersion program. He observed that those students tend to be more motivated since they want to be able to connect with their friends who speak French fluently. He has observed through the years that these CF students will not hesitate to ask FI students for help with homework or assignments. Many male students are on sports teams and when they hear their peers communicating in French or talking about French assignments, John feels that the core French students are motivated to be more interested in French. Some students ceased to think of French class as mandatory but as a challenge that they can overcome with the help of their peers. John noticed that these male students did not hesitate to ask their peers for help with their French homework.

Additionally, John believes that male students are not interested in continuing to take core French classes since they often have to choose between core French and physical education. The system in high school does not seem to be set up so that students will continue their French studies.

Carmen believes that core French students are at a disadvantage if they are enrolled in a French Immersion school. They are under the impression that they will not be able to speak as well as their peers in the French Immersion program. In addition, Carmen found that the students who did poorly across all subject areas in school were also the ones who were disengaged in French class.
A report published by CPF in 2010 indicates that 40% of allophone parents (recent immigrants whose first language is neither English nor French) enrolled their children in the French Immersion program. Students’ attitude towards learning French matches their parent’s attitude even after being discouraged from switching to the French Immersion program. This research was done with the French immersion program although it may be applied to core French since they are learning English as well as French when they arrive to Canada.

John noticed that new students whose first language is something other than English or French tended to do poorly in core French classes. He revealed during the interview that he felt that many allophone parents do not appear to pay much attention to their child’s core French grade. He further reveals that there have been many situations where allophones parents are surprised to find that their child is doing well in French class.

4.2 Lack of resources

There appears to be a lack of research with regards to the resources that are available to CF teachers. I believe that this is an important issue since this directly impacts student learning and student motivation.

Both participants revealed that during the time they were teaching, there was a lack of French resources that match the level of the students in their classrooms. If they were able to find resources that were at the same level as their students, then the content was at a lower level.
Carmen indicated that when she first started teaching core French, she had difficulty finding resources that met the needs of the students in her classes. She had difficulty finding resources that were at the same level as her students with appropriate content. Either the resource was at a lower level and the content was not appropriate for her students or the level was too advanced and the content was appropriate. At the beginning of her teaching career, she had to create her own material for her classes. In later years, she found a resource that students enjoyed since there were a lot of visuals and the content in the textbook were interesting to the students.

John had difficulty finding resources that he could use in his classrooms without having to modify them in the beginning of his teaching career. During his years of teaching, he found a useful a few textbook resources that are accompanied by videotapes or CDs. He believes that by using audio resources found online, students will be exposed to the way that native French speakers speak and allows them to mimic the intonation and pronunciation.

There seems to have been a shift in goals in the Ontario curriculum. The focus is now on oral communication rather than grammar in earlier years. As the curriculum progresses, teachers are encouraged to use their professional judgement when making decisions on when to integrate reading and writing. Two goals that that curriculum highlights are that the students can use the target language to communicate and interact effectively in a variety of social settings and to learn about Canada, its’ two official languages and other cultures (FSL Ontario Curriculum, 2013).
The textbooks that John has been using during his years of teaching are accompanied by audiotapes or CDs so that student can become familiar with French pronunciation and vocabulary. This allows students to focus on the oral component of the program, further emphasizing the importance of oral communication. What John found is that the male students that were interested in sports is that they would be more interested when they listened to interviews with athletes that speak French. This allowed John to bring in more material that he found online so that students could listen to the way native French-speakers speak the target language.

4.3 Teaching strategies affecting student motivation

Both participants noticed that students who were motivated in their core French classrooms were willing to learn the target language because they were aware of the future benefits they may have. Many students understood that by being fluent in both official languages in Canada would be advantageous in looking for employment in the future. Out of those students, only some of them were motivated to attempt to become somewhat fluent.

John believed that native French speakers teachers in core French classrooms would motivate students to speak the target language. He observed that students took French more seriously when there was a native French speaker as a teacher or a teacher that also taught in French immersion classrooms. John found that the more the students are exposed to French, the more motivated they will be to learn the language. If students surrounded themselves with peers that were in the
French Immersion program, they would be encouraged to accept challenges in the French class.

On the contrary, Carmen believed that having a native French-speaker as a teacher in core French classrooms did not motivate the students to want to learn the target language.

“I think it makes it more difficult as the students need to be able to identify and relate to the teacher to feel comfortable in trying something new.”

Carmen believes that the students need to be able to relate to the teacher. If the teacher went through the same French program as their students then they will be able to empathize with the students and may be able to create a safer environment.

In order to increase motivation with students, Carmen found that a reward system works effectively with her students. She would observe the students’ work habits and behaviour during class throughout the week and if they were productive she would reward them with a period where students played French games. Carmen also found that by using praising techniques with her students. She felt that the more genuine praise she gave, the more the students wanted to participate and succeed in the French classroom.

John implemented a similar system in his classroom in rewarding students with music during their work periods. This gave him the opportunity to expose the students to French songs and this did not only include music from France. He believes that it is important to include music from any French-speaking country.
The result that he noticed is that students became interested in the songs that he played in the classroom and were exposed to different types of music that they would listen to on their own time.

In a situation that John describes, a male student told the class that he believed that girls are better than boys in French. This is a dangerous idea that some male students may have and it may be a reason that some boys will not try to be successful in French class. John quickly addressed the issue and told the student that this was not the case and that each individual has the capabilities to succeed in French. Kisau (2006) presents the idea that self-efficacy affects motivation in students. They need to believe that they are able to master the language in order to be motivated to pursue learning the language.

A decrease in male student enrolment in the FSL program is significant to teaching since it has a direct impact on the number of male French teachers that are teaching in schools. This, in Kissau and Wierzalis’ research (2008) perpetuates the notion that French is for girls and not for boys.

Throughout the interviews there were no indication that the participants noticed that boys were not engaged in class because they believed that French was for girls. Both participants agreed that boys were not motivated to learn the language but that it was not just in French class that they were disengaged. These were male students who were generally disengaged in all other classes at school. John confirms that both male and female students are dropping out of French classes and that they want to receive a passing grade so that they can discontinue their French studies.
4.4 Teachers’ thoughts on gender-based interests

During the interviews, both participants discussed the importance of integrating students’ interests in their lessons and activities. This included giving students the choice of what they wanted to research or explore. There seems to be a consensus between the two participants that using resources that include a variety of images and colours increases student interest.

In addition, John and Carmen both strongly believe that by giving students the choice to choose topics that they want to explore, they would be more motivated to take initiative of their own learning. An example that both participants gave is one where students were asked to do a presentation on an animal in French. Students were given the opportunity to choose any animal they liked. This allowed them to pick an animal that they like and as a result, they were more engaged in the research process. John allows students to choose topics and subjects that interest them and as a result, they are more encouraged to complete the assignment.

John believes that in order to engage and reach all of his students, he brings in French culture for both genders. The boys, he noticed, tend to be more interested in anything to do with sports. John always made a conscious effort to relate the lesson to sports for the boys or cooking and poetry for the girls in his class. What he found in doing that is that boys and girls can share interests and that it is not only girls who enjoy learning about traditional French foods.

Carmen used her humour in the classroom in order to engage all of her students. She reveals that throughout her teaching career, she tried to be more
involved in extracurricular activities at the school. One year, she decided to teach baseball in French and found that the students were much more engaged in learning. She successfully integrated the target language without disengaging the students. Throughout the interview, she stressed the importance of a positive attitude and how it increases student engagement in her classroom. Kissau (2006) emphasizes the importance of encouraging students in French class. A study conducted by MacGannon and Medeiros (1995) concluded that students who received encouragement from their French teachers were more likely to continue studying French.

This information that teachers can gather about their students is important when they are designing lessons for their classes. If teachers can understand and identify what interests their students then they will be better equipped in planning for their lessons. This will allow them to choose different approaches in order to meet the needs of their students.

Both participants agreed that as a CF teacher, the interactions between teachers and students are limited to the core French period. This presented a challenge in getting to know the students all of the classes that the teacher may have. One way that both participants suggest, as a CF teacher, is to be involved in extracurricular activities that are offered at the school in order to build relationships with the students. This may benefit the CF teacher tremendously if the are able to identify the various students’ interest in the class. This will allow teachers to cater the lesson to the learners in their classroom.
Callaghan (1998) looked at different topics that can be explored in a French class and determined whether girls are more interested and engaged in them. What was found is that the majority of these topics, which included personal information, house and home, family and daily routine, tourist information, travel and transport, food and drink, shopping, health and fitness, etc. are girl centered. Callaghan further discusses that since many teachers are female, it may be more likely that these female teachers will choose topics that they can relate to and that they enjoy teaching. Taking into account the experiences that John and Carmen described, this may no longer be the case as they feel it is important for them to reach all of their students and to encourage them to continue to learn both of the official languages in Canada.

As a CF teacher, it is crucial to know the strategies that can be used and implemented in order to identify students’ interest. By utilizing the awareness of students’ interest teachers are able to, in a way, customize the lesson so that at some point throughout the year, students’ needs and interests are met. John mentioned that at the end of the year, he found it useful to ask the students for feedback in order to improve for the next year. Professional development and continual learning were two very important aspects of the profession according to the participants.

4.5 Challenges participants faced in their core French classes

Both participants seem to agree that classroom management is the priority in their core French classrooms due to the fact that they don’t have their own
homeroom class. It is a bigger challenge to build meaningful relationships with students and their parents.

John noticed that there are significantly less visits from students’ parents about French grades during parent-teacher night. He believes that parents are less concerned with their child’s French grade as opposed to their math or science grades. John discussed the important of parental attitude toward the target language and the way it affects the attitude that the student will have towards French.

Carmen believes that CF teachers would be better set up for success if they have their own homeroom since they will get a chance to display students’ work on the walls of the classroom. This allows teachers to acknowledge student accomplishments and build relationships with the students. Core French teachers often do not have their own classrooms and as a consequence there is a lack of privacy and control over the organization of their classes (Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2010). This seems to support the suggestion that Carmen has made for CF teachers and the lack of resources available to them.

Some CF teachers feel marginalized and restricted to their own classrooms (Arnott & Mady, 2013). This can affect the way they teach and the way they view the subject that they are teaching. Due to this dissatisfaction with their teaching subject, many CF teachers will consider leaving core French teaching. This is not the case with the participants that were interviewed but they have faced some of the same issues that the teachers involved in that study have faced.
Student attitude towards the target language are affected by their parents’ attitude. In the research conducted by Lapkin, Mady & Arnott (2010), they concluded that parents believed that learning a second language is important but that it did not have to be French. This will have an impact on the effort the students choose to put in French class. Both participants noticed that students often have the same attitude that their parents do with regards to French.

4.6 Conclusion

The themes presented in this chapter have been identified through the analysis of the interviews that were conducted. These themes are important in understanding the strategies that the two participants use and have used in order to engage their students and encourage them to learn the target language.

The first theme that was identified was the students’ attitude towards government mandated French classes. It appears that through the interview the participants have revealed the struggles that teacher face with regards to students’ attitude towards CF classes. This directly affects the way CF teachers design and implement lessons for the classes.

Through the interviews, I have identified a secondary theme that directly affects the participants. When they first began to teach, they had difficulty finding resources that would help their students.

Many themes that were identified seem to relate to the attitudes that teachers have towards CF and its’ students. These are important in understanding the intricacies of what it means to teach a subject that many students dislike for a
variety of reasons. The interviews allowed for an understanding of the way teachers feel about the subject, the students and the interactions that they have with their colleagues.

The participants both agreed that it is important to get to know their students in order to cater to their needs. Many people have preconceived notions of what boys are girls are more interested in but by getting to know the students before making that assumption will help teachers to be more precise in their choice of material. John was able to incorporate an interest that is normally viewed as female and get many of his students, who were male, engaged in the lesson. This is a great illustration of how important it is to understand what the interests are of the students in the classroom since it will not always be the same and it cannot be predetermined.

What is important to understand is that the two participants had slightly different goals as they were teaching core French. Carmen taught CF at the elementary level and as such, her goal was to engage all of her students so that they are motivated to learn French in her classroom. John had the same goal in mind but he also wanted to encourage his students to continue their French studies past the mandatory grade 9 CF course.

Although there were two interviews conducted none of the participants noticed that there is a significant problem with boys’ engagement in the CF classroom. There seems to be a gap between the interviews and the research in the literature. John mentioned during the interview that there were a few male students that have mentioned in the past that they think that girls are better in
French than boys. He chose to address the issue immediately and attempt to stop that notion from becoming a reality in his classes.

Carmen believes that, in her experience, boys who are not engaged in school are also not engaged in French class. She did not notice that these boys were not engaged in French class but doing well in all of their other classes. In the research that has been conducted, the issue of boys being disengaged in their other classes as well as core French. This seems to be the case after having conducted the interviews.
Chapter 5

5.0 Introduction

Male enrolment in Core French classrooms is important and the research that addresses the issue of the declining numbers of boys in CF past grade 9 is crucial, especially in a bilingual country like Canada. In a study conducted by Kissau (2006), it was found that almost 70% of the students who planned to drop French (FSL) in grade 10 were male students. As the number of male students decrease, there seems to be less male CF teachers, thus perpetuating the notion that French is a female-dominated subject. This became apparent to me as a French student in university where there were only two or three male French students in a class of 27 students on average. The majority of the students in the French class were either in a concurrent program or considering the consecutive program of the Bachelor of Education.

An additional problem that is present is that there are many CF teachers that are discouraged to continue to teach the language since they feel marginalized in their own schools (Arnott and Mady, 2013). This extra stress that they feel in their workplace affects the way they teach the language and this in turn may affect student engagement.

This research is incredibly important since it affects future students’ perception and opinion on the target language. Moreover, it is crucial for students to understand the importance of learning the French language in Canada, since it allows for a discovery of a new culture but also because it gives students the opportunity to expand their employment options in the future.
In this chapter, we will be looking at what the implications are for the findings of the research. We will also be looking at some of the recommendations that I present in order to address the issue of the declining enrolment number for boys.

5.1 Key Findings

After reading the literature, I had the idea that the participants would have experienced the same obstacles that the research presented. I was certain that I would find teachers who felt that boys were not engaged and were dropping out at an alarming rate. The participants that were interviewed did not see a significant difference in engagement in French for boys or girls. Carmen noticed that the boys that were disengaged in the CF classroom were also disengaged in all other subjects in school. John's high school students seem to be engaged when he would allow the students to choose the topic they wanted to explore on their own. He did not notice that the boys in his classes were disengaged during the whole school year and he confirmed that both boys and girls would be disengaged at different points during the year.

The participants both stressed the importance of involving students in their own education. In other words, by using the knowledge of student interest to design and implement lessons catered to the students they may be more motivated to learn the target language. Both participants allowed students to choose their own topic for most assignments and projects since they believed that it engaged students and the language became, in some ways, less important than the subject they chose.
What is interesting to note is that both participants for the study agreed that it is crucial to know why the students believe French is important or why students believe the opposite. John made sure to be aware of the students’ interest in the language and what they thought made the language worth learning. If students had more negative thought towards the French, he believed it was equally as important to learn the reasons for this thinking. It was then his job to cater the lessons to the students that were present in his classroom in order to engage them in the tasks that he assigned. Carmen, built relationships with her students through humour and was able to motivate her students in the lessons that she planned.

The main concern that arises is that French, as a subject in school, is often not taken seriously. This may be due to the influences that parents, administration, peers and teachers have on the target language. In some cases, according to the participants, parents are not as concerned with the success of the child in French class as they are in other subjects like math, science or English. Without proper encouragement from parents and especially teachers, students may develop a more negative attitude towards the language. This is an area in which the literature and the participants seem to be in agreement.

In addition, the literature seems to support the idea that boys are avoiding French studies for fear of being seen as interested in a language that is seen as feminine (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008, Kissau, 2012, Kissau & Wierzalis, 2008). The participants interviewed did not notice this throughout their years of teaching and rarely heard students express that kind of attitude towards the target language.
5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Broad Implications

Throughout the research it has become clear that Core French teachers often feel marginalized in their own schools. This is due to the perception that others have on the language, which makes it more difficult for teacher in the classroom. As a result, teachers seem to want to discontinue teaching Core French due their unhappiness at the workplace (Arnott, Lapkin & Mady, 2010). CF teachers often do not have a classroom where they can display student work on the walls and therefore lack the means of acknowledging the work that the students produce in French class. This adds to the stress that teachers often face since they are left looking for different ways of motivating students to produce creative works.

In addition, through the interviews conducted, it has become clear that teachers need to get to know their students in order to engage with them in a meaningful way. CF teachers often do not have their own homeroom and do not always get the same opportunity as homeroom teachers, of interacting with their students and discovering what their interests are. This leaves teachers taking more time doing different activities that students are not engaging with.

All of the factors mentioned above impact the way students perceive the language and as a result, students are not motivated to continue to learn French. Kissau (2007) found that male students did not receive the same amount of encouragement from parents, peers and teachers as the female students. Furthermore, some students believe that CF classes are an opportunity for a free period where they can speak English and socialize with their friends. The
participants witnessed this first hand and both agree that classroom management skills are necessary in a CF classroom.

Furthermore, John, high school teacher, noticed that students were often more motivated to learn French when they had peers in the French Immersion program. These are peers that they would have met if they were originally in the French Immersion program and switched out, through mutual friends at school and most often through sports teams at school. John’s students often asked their peers for help on assignments and homework from French class. I believe it is important to note that some students feel a sense of initiative to complete homework or assignments with the help of their peers. John felt that it was advantageous for students to be surrounded by peers in the French Immersion program for motivation in learning the target language.

5.2.2 Narrow Implications

After these findings, as a teacher, I have learned how important it is to get to know the students that are in the classroom. What I have realized is that in order to engage students in any subject but specifically for French, you need to be aware of the various interests of the students and include it in the lesson design.

In addition, it is important to be flexible with teaching strategies. Carmen, one of the participants, gave an example of a lesson that she did where the students were engaged in the CF lesson since she brought in a sort that they were interested in. This inspired me to rethink the considerations that need to be taken into account when designing a lesson. Carmen made sure to take into account the various
students in her classroom so that she could engaged them in the limited time that she had with them.

Furthermore, it is essential to work together with the rest of the staff in the school that are involved in the education of the students. Core French teachers should be open to coordinating with other staff members in order to better support students. Mady presents this idea that CF teachers feel marginalized at their schools in 2010 after her research with her participants. This is an important to keep in mind when teaching students especially in a CF since there is limited time spent with the students. This, I believe, will help teachers in interacting with students and also building meaningful relationships with students and staff.

5.3 Recommendations

It is important for everyone involved in the students’ schooling to communicate. One participant commented on the lack of communication between teachers, making the CF teacher feel secluded and not supported in the school. The communication between teachers and support staff is important for the complete development of the student and to increase the chances of student success. This allows teachers, especially CF teachers to get to know the student and to understand what they are like in other classrooms. They will be able to determine what strategies work for the student and implement them in the CF classroom.

In addition, students seem to mimic their teachers’ attitudes in the classroom. It is therefor crucial for teachers to be self-aware inside and outside of the classroom. Both participants strongly support the idea of teachers getting
involved in schools in order to increase their presence within the school. This allows students to get to know the CF teacher outside of the classroom and to begin thinking of them as a teacher rather than just a CF teacher. This makes the teacher more accessible and more approachable. Through the participants’ experience with being involved in extracurricular activities at school, they have come to realize how important it is for teachers, especially CF teachers, to be more than simply a CF teacher.

Moreover, teachers are responsible for engaging their students and becoming familiar with certain aspects of their students’ lives can do this. By being aware of their students’ interest outside of the classroom, they will be able to cater their lessons to the variety of interests that exist within the classroom. The participants interviewed stress that it is important to allow students to interact orally in class in order to develop social skills in the target language. These social skills are vital when these students finish school and start using French in the workplace.

According to the participants, they tend to agree that group work has become a great way of getting students to participate and to practise using the target language. The participants were open to the idea of students choosing their own groups. This practice allowed students to be responsible in selecting classmates that work well together as teachers encourage their students to not select their groups based on friendship.

The participants agreed that it is crucial to encourage all students to have an appreciation for the French language. Students are in a better position in French
classes if they understand why they are being mandated to be there. This means that it should be more than just expanding their future employment opportunities. It is the teachers’ responsibility to provide engaging activities in order to obtain student interest and to keep classroom management at a minimal.

Additionally, the participants both agreed that one of the best strategies of engaging students is to give them variety and options. They would assign an activity or an assignment and allow the students to choose the topic on which they wanted to focus their research or presentation. This proved to be a success when they saw their students engaged in the activities since they were responsible for selecting their topic. This is often a topic that interests them prior to adding a French context. Teachers frequently have preconceived ideas of what the different genders tend to gravitate towards when selecting their topic for a project. It is important to allow them to choose without bias influence from teachers. Students should only select topics, when given the option that interests them in order for the process to be more engaging.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

From the research that I conducted, I found that what was missing was a study about the differences in motivation and student engagement in English and French Immersion schools. John seemed to believe that there are many benefits for CF students in a French Immersion school. He noticed this throughout his years of teaching in a French Immersion high school. The question then is whether or not
students would be more motivated and engaged in Core French in a French Immersion school rather than an English stream school.

The teaching profession is an ever-changing one and therefore I feel it is important to have research that is current. There seems to be research done that addresses boys and literacy in but there is a lack of research when it comes to boys and literacy in French. The question arises for me, is whether or not boys are disengaged in all subjects at school or just French? Through her experience, Carmen has seen that the boys who are disengaged in French are students who appear to be the same way with other subjects. Extra research needs to be done in regards to this area to first identify if boys are not connecting with the French language or if they are disengaged in all other subjects. In identifying the issue, we may be able to better support our students, boys in particular, in French.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to hear from the students in grade 7-9 to understand why they want to learn the target language or why they would want to discontinue French classes. In most of the research, the participants are CF teachers but students’ voices seem to be absent. In order to understand how to support students, it is important to be aware of the reasons why they are not interested in the language. As teachers, we can only assume the reasons why some students are not engaged or motivated.

Additionally, it will be useful to research the different ways of incorporating technology in a Core French classroom with the aim of enhancing and encouraging learning for all but especially for boys. Through technology, students may be better
able to understand why it is important to learn French other than for employment opportunities.

5.5 Concluding Comments

While enrolment numbers are decreasing for Core French courses past the grade 9 level, it is important to understand that perception may be changed through education. Students need to be encouraged by their teachers in order to succeed and to want to succeed. This may have significant influence on the students’ decision on whether or not they would want to continue their French language study. It is important for students to believe that they can succeed before they will take a chance and enrol in CF courses past grade 9.

It is known that French is a female-dominated subject area but the more male French teachers there are, the more this idea may be diluted. It may be influential to have a male CF teacher in front of the class teaching to show students that French is not only for girls and that boys can succeed in the language. It is therefore crucial for teachers to encourage boys to continue their study in the French language.

This research is significant to all French teachers and even those who do not teach French. If a student is struggling with French, they may also be struggling with other subject areas at school. It is therefore important for teachers within the school to collaborate and support the student in all subjects. Teachers who attempt to get to know their students and to be aware of their various interests in order to cater their lessons towards those interests are in a better position to succeed. Teachers
need to be approachable in order to connect with their students. This can be achieved by being involved in extracurricular activities outside of the classroom. In doing so, students are given the chance to speak to CF teachers and as a result, build meaningful relationships with their teachers. This may be a window of opportunity for the student to develop an interest in the teacher and may allow them to be more engaged in the CF classroom.

This study matters to teachers and students in French classes. It is useful to learn French in a bilingual country not only for employment opportunities but to learn about a different culture. Not only should teachers be teaching about the French language, it is important to incorporate the culture and the history of the language. Many teachers have been bringing in culture and allowing students to explore the different cultures within the French world (i.e. Africa, France, Quebec, New Orleans, New Brunswick, etc.). By incorporating the culture within the different parts of Canada, some believe that the French language will become more accessible to students.

What I believe is important to keep in mind when teaching French in any grade is student interest. There will be a variety of interests in any classroom but as a teacher, it will always be beneficial to get to know students and incorporate their interests in any lesson plan.
References


Sandra. M. (1983) Classroom observation and sex differentiated behaviour in the mixed classroom, in The English Curriculum: Gender, material for Discussion, ILEA.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview (TEMPLATE ONLY)

Date:

Dear ____________________________,

My Name is Jessica Chan and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how intermediate teachers foster learning engagement for male students in core French classrooms to enhance their interest in continuing their French language education in the (non-mandatory) senior years of schooling. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have 5 or more experience in teaching Core French and who have developed and implemented a Core French program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor __________________. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript 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: ________________________________
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: __________________________
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The aim of this research is to learn different strategies that you have used in order to encourage students, males in particular, to continue their French studies past the mandatory grade 9 level. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you a series of questions about your teaching practices. I want to remind you that you may choose to not answer any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Background information

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. What grades and subjects do you teach, and which have you previously taught?
3. Can you tell me more about your school and the community it resides in? (i.e. size, demographics, diversity, socioeconomic status, program priorities)?
4. For how long have you been teaching core French? What is your own background in French language learning? (e.g. native language, studied French immersion or studies French in undergrad, French as teachable, French AQs etc.)
5. Can you describe your experiences as a student in Ontario with the French program?

Section C: Beliefs/values- Why?

6. In your view, why is it important that students have the opportunity to learn French? What are the benefits of French language learning for students?
7. In your experience as a core French teacher, how would you describe students’ attitude toward core French, generally speaking? What do you believe are some of the causes of their attitude?
8. From the perspective of a core French teacher, what are some of the primary challenges you face in your efforts to increase student engagement?
9. In your experience, have what have you observed about the differences, if any, between male versus female engagement in the core French classroom?
10. One criteria of participation that brought you here today is that you have demonstrated commitment to the area of improving boys’ engagement in core French language learning. What do you believe are some reasons why boys may not be as engaged in core French language learning?
11. Do you notice any common factors amongst boys who are disengaged in French studies?
12. Do you notice any common factors amongst boys who are engaged in French studies?
13. There has been increasing attention to the topic of boys and literacy practices over the years, given that boys tend to underperform when compared to their female counterparts. In your view, is there a relationship between this data and your observations about boys’ engagement in core French language learning? If yes, what do you think that is? If no, why not?

Section B: Teacher Practices- What/How?

14. Can you tell me about the Core French program in your current school?
15. What are your primary learning goals when teaching core French?
16. Generally speaking, what are some of your favourite instructional strategies and learning resources to support engagement and academic achievement in the core French class? Why are these your favourite? How do students respond to these?
17. More specifically, what are some of the instructional strategies and learning resources that you use to increase boys’ engagement in the core French classroom? Why do you use these strategies? What outcomes have you observed from boys when you use these strategies?
18. Can you tell me about a specific lesson or unit you have taught in which you had a special focus on engaging boys?
   1. What grade were you teaching?
   2. What were your learning goals?
   3. What opportunities for learning did you create?
   4. How did your male students respond? What outcomes did you observe from them?

Section D: Barriers/Next Steps

19. What challenges do you encounter trying to foster boys’ engagement in the core French classroom? How do you respond to these challenges? What would further help you respond to these challenges?
20. What are your goals for the development of your school’s Core French program?
21. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to supporting boys’ engagement in the core French classroom?