Effective Strategies for Enhancing the Language Learning Experience in the FSL Classroom

By

Sevan Mnknjian

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ENHANCING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN AN FSL CLASSROOM

Abstract

In the province of Ontario, French education maintains an important part of a student’s life as it is mandated by the Ministry of Education that all individuals learn French in either a Core, Extended or Immersion setting from Grades 4-9. Based on recent statistics from the Ontario Ministry of Education, the number of students enrolled in the Core French programs in the 2012-2013 school year is more than 3 times the amount of students following the French Immersion stream. This study focuses on FSL education in Ontario, examining student motivation in French Language Learning, and effective teaching strategies aimed at enhancing student motivation. A lack of student engagement in French language learning is detrimental to a student’s success, and is commonly influenced by the linguistic and academic situations students find themselves in, both inside and outside the classroom. The data from this qualitative study has been derived from a review of existing literature on second language acquisition and FSL education, as well as semi-structured interviews with 3 Junior/Intermediate French teachers in Toronto schools. The findings confirm the role of the teacher as key motivator in the French classroom, and favour the use of student-centered learning and peer interaction in the classroom to enhance the language learning process.

Key Words: French, second language acquisition, motivation, effective strategies
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Background and Purpose of Study

1.0.1 FSL Learning

In today’s school system, students constantly require stimulating and engaging learning experiences, where the teacher presents their lessons in a way that incorporates a rich variety of teaching styles, lessons and activities. This level of commitment is vital in a French Language Learning (FLL) classroom as a student’s full attention and motivation are required to learn a new language. As outlined in the Ontario French as a Second Language (FSL) Curriculum (2013), it is imperative that all students learn French until Grade 9, either in a core, extended or immersion setting; as such, the French language maintains an active part in an Ontario student’s education. In my experience living in Toronto, and having pursued my elementary and secondary education in the public, Catholic and independent streams, I have perceived and personally experienced the multiplicity of student engagement levels in the FLL classroom.

Recent statistics from the Ontario Ministry of Education show that enrollment in the extended French and French immersion programs at the elementary level are low, and retentions rates after Grade 9 when French is no longer a requirement are even more staggering (OME, 2014). Similarly, a 2008 study stated that core French students in Ontario accounted for 90% of all FSL students, and of them, only 3% study French until Grade 12 (Canadian Parents for French, 2008). Of the 3 FSL programs offered in Ontario, French immersion provides the greatest exposure to French as the target language is used as the primary medium of communication in teaching almost all academic courses, yet the majority of Ontario students choose to follow the core French stream. A look at these
current trends draws out the challenge faced by FSL education in Ontario today and leads to question why students are increasingly making the decision to follow the English stream.

A number of reasons can be attributed to this choice, encompassing a variety of social, linguistic and academic factors, which will be further explored in Chapter 2. Availability of the programs can play a significant role in a student’s decision as extended French and French immersion are not readily available in all schools. Additionally, the marginalization of French education in schools and society in general contribute to negative perceptions of the programs. Many students also experience difficulty in learning the language as a result of a learning disability and, as a result, these students tend to get discouraged and feel that the program is not suited for them. Students can also be basing their decision on negative past experiences in French classes, including low achievement levels or poor teacher-student relationships. The significance of these factors to the effectiveness of FSL programs in Ontario is immense, and each one can independently be further dissected; a common underlying influence of each of these cases, however, is the lack of motivation and importance to study the French language.

This study begins with a look at FSL education in Ontario, considering societal perspectives and current practices in the educational system, followed by an in-depth analysis of student motivation as a contributing factor to low retention rates in FSL programs in Ontario. The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies carried out by French teachers in motivating their students and, effectively, enhancing their language learning experience.
1.0.2 Motivation

A lack of student motivation in learning French is detrimental to their success in either of the programs, more significantly in extended French and French immersion. This is commonly influenced by the linguistic and academic situations students find themselves in, both inside and outside the classroom (Makropoulos, 2010). The difference between an engaged and a disengaged student relies heavily on their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and this concept remains a key ingredient for success in second language acquisition. Motivation is what determines or orients a student towards particular learning goals and remains at the forefront of their success in a language class. This concept was popularized by Robert Gardner in the mid-1900s, leading to the development of his “Socio-Educational Model”. According to Gardner, a motivated individual exemplifies an amalgam of cognitive, behavioural and affective characteristics. A student who is motivated in a language classroom is one who has positive attitudes towards the target language and will benefit from the learning experience (Gardner, 2006). In the Ontario context, it is important to consider theories on motivation and second language acquisition in an effort to enhance the FSL programs and motivate more students to pursue their education in French. This substantiates the need for research dedicated to French language learning and the effective strategies that can be applied in French classrooms that work to increase student motivation and, effectively, student success.

1.1 The Research Problem

The objective of this research is to answer a key question: What are the ways in which junior/intermediate French teachers can enhance their students’ language learning experience in order to foster their success? I intend to answer this question by paying
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particular attention to motivation as a tool for success in French education. In considering motivation as key to a student’s success in the French classroom, I will be looking particularly at the teacher’s role in increasing motivation in their students and the effective strategies that French teachers should implement to enhance the language learning experience of their students, including the use of peer interaction and cooperative learning. In doing so, I will make specific reference to Stephen Krashen’s “Second Language Acquisition Theory” and Robert Gardner’s “Socio-Educational Model”.

1.1.1 Second Language Acquisition Theory

In his extensive research on second language learning, Stephen Krashen developed what he calls the Second Language Acquisition Theory, through which he makes a clear distinction between language learning and language acquisition (Krashen, 1989). Language learning, he argues, is a conscious process, where a language is being learned simply as a linguistic system comprised of grammatical rules. Language acquisition, on the other hand, is a subconscious process, similar to the processing that goes on when learning a first language. The contrast between learning and acquiring in a FSL context could be seen in doing laborious grammar exercises versus engaging in conversations in the target language. While both experiences contribute—in varying capacities—to linguistic proficiency, the engagement of conversations is more active in developing language skills and is, therefore, considered to be a form of language acquisition. It is important to acknowledge the contrast between language learning and language acquisition in order to understand what type of input is necessary for students to succeed in an FSL program. In an effort to give students effective French language learning instruction, teachers must implement an approach that promotes language acquisition through authentic learning.
experiences. In the following chapter, I elaborate on this idea of language acquisition and provide examples of authentic learning opportunities.

### 1.1.2 Motivation Theory

With more than 45 years of research, Gardner and his colleagues have collected a considerable amount of data to develop the Socio-Educational model of Second Language development, which links attitudes and motivation to success in the target language. Over the years, this model has been praised and contested, leading to significant modifications and to his most recent version of the theory. According to the model, motivation in a second language student is influenced by a number of factors, the most significant of which being “integrativeness” and “attitudes toward the learning situation” (Gardner, 2010). The former refers to the learner’s desire to learn the language in an effort to ‘integrate’ into the linguistic community, whereas the latter refers to the learner’s direct sentiment towards the classroom and the language class in general. Both of these ‘constructs’ of motivation are connected to affective responses from the student. Much of the research done on the Socio-Educational model has been in a Canadian context, on English speaking Canadians learning French, and French speaking Canadians learning English, contributing to the relevancy of this model to this research.

### 1.2 Relevance of the Research

While the acquisition of any language is valuable, knowledge of the French language is especially important in a Canadian context as it is both an international language, as well as one of the official languages of the nation and, thus, a fundamental part of the Canadian identity. Language learning goes beyond strengthening a student’s communication skills as it also allows a student to develop an understanding for sociocultural relations and the
interconnectedness of language and culture, effectively increasing their awareness of and appreciation for the diversity of Canadian and other societies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). This sociocultural connection to the French language may not always be so attainable for students in FSL programs in Ontario as French is not the primary language of communication in most Ontario regions. In this sense, students tend to feel that their French classes are out of context and effectively feel disconnected to the language itself, which can be seen as yet another contributor to low retention rates in FSL programs. It is fundamental for teachers to make this sociocultural connection apparent to their students to allow them to apply meaning and importance to the learning situation. This is where motivation becomes a key player in student’s success and an important area of study.

1.3 Background of the Researcher

My research interests stem primarily from my personal experiences with languages. Language acquisition has been an important aspect of my personal identity, coming from a bilingual home environment, where both Armenian and English were spoken. I was introduced to the French language in the first grade, which I to study only until grade 9, returning back to it a number of years later. Though my experiences as a learner of the French language were not always positive, there were significant moments throughout my learning experience that have led me to dedicate my teaching career to French education and have sparked my motivation for this research project.

I attended an Armenian independent school in Toronto until Grade 6, where I began learning French in a relatively core setting in Grade 1. Throughout my years in this school, my motivation for learning the French language was quite high, and this was brought largely by my high level of achievement in French classes. I then continued on to middle
school in the Toronto Catholic school system, in the Extended French program. In my initial experiences with the program, I was faced with severe confusion and difficulty in keeping up with the class. From the very beginning, my motivation level decreased significantly, due to my decreased attitude towards the learning situation. Firstly, I did not understand why I was learning French in such a concentrated setting. In other words, I was never taught the sociocultural implications of learning the French language in a Canadian context and, therefore, was not able to apply any meaning to it. Secondly, throughout my two years in this program with the same teacher, the learning material and teaching methods were simply disengaging, which did not spark an appreciation for the language. As a result, I was unable to experience the same success I once had in the preceding years. This situation improved slightly as my proficiency increased, though it came at a relatively slow rate. The fact that I was extremely immersed in the French language within the classroom- with my teacher being a native French speaker and the language of instruction and communication in the classroom always being French- contributed to an increased proficiency level, however, my proficiency emerged at a relatively slow rate as a result of low motivation levels. The situation, unfortunately, did not change and, as a result, I decided to halt my French language education after grade 9.

It was not until my college years, followed by my undergraduate pursuits, where I began to grow an interest and a passion in learning the French language. The ‘French Language Learning’ program at the University of Toronto provided an eye opening experience as it presented varied and dynamic approaches to learning the French Language and introduced me to the diversity of the Francophone world. Through this experience, I noticed that my achievements in the program were directly correlated with my level of
motivation for improving and perfecting my proficiency in the French language. My increasing motivation was largely due to the fact that the learning material was presented in an interesting way, from a variety of sociocultural perspectives and with a heavy reliance on digital technology.

My learning experiences have led me to firmly believe in the powerful role of teachers as key motivators for their students. For this reason, this research project is dedicated to determining effective teaching strategies for FSL teachers that work to increase student motivation in their classroom. As a French teacher, my goal is to offer my students a dynamic learning experience, where French language learning is an enjoyable and desirable endeavor, and this research paper will allow me, as well as other FSL teachers, to fulfill that objective.
Chapter 2- Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Where in the preceding chapter I presented an introduction into this research project, my background with French as a Second Language (FSL) and the purpose of this study, this chapter will discuss current trends in FSL programs in Ontario, as well as unpack the existing research in the field of French language learning. As noted in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research paper is to determine effective strategies for enhancing the language learning experience in the Ontario Elementary FSL classroom, looking at all 3 of the FSL programs offered in Ontario (French immersion, extended French and core French), focusing heavily on the language learning aspect of the programs. In doing so, I will pay particular attention to motivation as a strategy for success, including the teacher’s role in fostering motivation in their students, and the importance of peer interaction in the classroom, among other effective strategies as revealed by the interviews. This chapter will combine both theoretical and applied evidence to answer my ultimate research question. I will frame my research around the existing theories of Second Language Learning and Second Language Acquisition, focusing primarily on the work of Stephen Krashen, linguist and educational theorist, and his “Language Acquisition Theory”. I will also be looking at theories on motivation and second language acquisition, paying particular attention to Robert C. Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model, among other theorists who discuss motivation in relation to FSL learning. I will then consider the role of the teacher as a key motivator for students, as well as their need to encourage peer interaction in the French classroom. It is important, however, to first situate ourselves in the context of French
education in Ontario, familiarizing ourselves with the FSL curriculum, and the available programs as mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

2.1 FSL Education in Ontario

The Ontario Ministry of Education is strongly committed to maintaining the ideals set forth by Canada’s Official Languages Act, which gives equal status to both English and French as official languages. This level of commitment is evident in the three programs it offers—core French, extended French and French immersion—each program having its own set of curriculum expectations for the elementary and secondary levels. According to the Ontario Curriculum for French as a Second Language, last released in 2013, the primary intention of the three FSL programs is “to increase, within realistic and well-defined parameters, a student’s ability to communicate in French” (p. 15). This is ultimately the main goal of French education in Ontario, with each program offering language instruction at varying levels, and a focus on the 4 language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

2.1.1 Core French

The core French program is the least accelerated of the three, where English is often used as the primary language of instruction, although this does vary based on the teacher. This program is mandatory for all students from Grades 4 to 8 who are in English-language elementary schools. The Curriculum dictates that core French students must have accumulated a minimum of 600 hours of instruction in French by the end of Grade 8. Much research has been dedicated to the status of core French across the country, alluding to marginalization of the program in schools, and negative experiences by both teachers and students, which is further explored later in this chapter.
2.1.2 Extended French

The extended French program is slightly more advanced, with French being the language of instruction for a minimum of 25 percent of the instruction time and the students accumulating a minimum of 1260 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8. In addition to the study of FSL, students in this program must have at least one additional subject taught in French. In most extended French programs, English and French instruction are often distributed equally, with the morning dedicated to the core subjects in one language, and the afternoon dedicated to instruction in the other.

2.1.3 French Immersion

The French immersion program provides students the greatest opportunity for proficiency in the French language. According to the Ontario Curriculum, French is required to be the language of instruction for a minimum of 50 percent of the class, averaging a minimum of 3800 hours. French immersion involves the study of French as a Second language, in addition to a minimum of two other subjects taught in French. Most often, French immersion programs include the study of math, science and social science in French during the lower grades. Students receive instruction in French until Grades 3 or 4, when English is first introduced as a subject. By Grade 8, a minimum of 50 percent of the instruction is done in the French language.

The French immersion program has been well received by researchers in the field. According to Stephen Krashen, the immersion program is not just another successful language teaching program; "it may be the most successful language teaching program ever recorded in the professional language teaching program" (1989, p. 57). He has argued that immersion works simply because of the focus on instruction in the target language. The fact
that subject matter is taught in the target language means that the subject class is the language class; however, the input must be understandable to the student in order for them to learn both the subject matter, as well as the language. Merrill Swain, alongside a number of other language theorists, has concluded that, in considering the linguistic outcomes of each of these programs, student performance on French proficiency tests tend to show a correlation between linguistic proficiency and the amount of exposure to the target language within the classroom (1987). In this sense, the more intense exposure to French provided by an immersion classroom allows the student to achieve a much greater level of French language proficiency than do the other two FSL programs.

2.1.4 Increasing Interest, Low Retention

Statistics from the Government of Ontario show that there is, on average, an increasing interest in FSL programs in recent years (OME, 2014). Despite the growth, dropout rates in FSL programs across the province are quite high, with students switching to the core French stream in high school, and suspending FSL studies entirely after Grade 9, when it is no longer mandatory. In Figure 2.1, a significant difference in enrollment numbers is evident, with a steady decline from Kindergarten until Grade 12 throughout all three of the FSL programs. Figure 2.2 shows a similar trend, with a significant variance between the number of students enrolled in core French versus students enrolled in the extended and immersion programs. The number of students enrolled in the core French programs in the 2012-2013 school year is more than 3 times the amount of students following the French immersion stream. Similarly, a 2008 study stated that core French students in Ontario accounted for 90% of all FSL students, and of them, only 3% study French until Grade 12 (Canadian Parents for French, 2008). Additionally, only 27% of
students who complete the French immersion program until Grade 8 continue the program until the end of secondary school (CPF, 2008). These statistics are staggering and raise concerns about the future of FSL in Ontario. They are also important to consider as they substantiate the necessity for research focusing on engagement, motivation and achievement in FSL students and raise questions around the reasons why students are increasingly choosing to follow the English stream.

**Elementary**

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<th>French Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>8,617</td>
<td>127,049</td>
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<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>125,717</td>
<td>8,799</td>
<td>134,516</td>
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<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>129,875</td>
<td>8,554</td>
<td>138,429</td>
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<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>128,177</td>
<td>8,366</td>
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<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>127,253</td>
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<td>135,119</td>
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<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>128,382</td>
<td>7,533</td>
<td>135,915</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td>128,236</td>
<td>7,149</td>
<td>135,385</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
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<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>131,660</td>
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**Secondary**

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</thead>
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<td>139,329</td>
<td>6,052</td>
<td>145,381</td>
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<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>144,144</td>
<td>5,825</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>148,424</td>
<td>5,884</td>
<td>154,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>206,335</td>
<td>6,465</td>
<td>212,800</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>638,232</td>
<td>24,226</td>
<td>662,458</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.1:*

Total number of students enrolled in English Language and French Language schools, by grade, as of 2013-2014

*This data includes Ontario schools from both public and Roman Catholic boards and excludes private schools, publicly funded hospital and provincial schools, summer schools, night schools and adult continuing education day schools.*
**Figure 2.2:**
Total number of students enrolled in elementary and secondary FSL programs in both the Public and the Catholic sectors during the 2012-2013 school year

2.1.5 Perceptions of FSL Education in Ontario

Despite ongoing support by provincial governments to promote bilingualism across Canada, a number of contextual factors have led to widespread dissatisfaction with FSL programs among students and teachers, contributing to high drop-out rates after the mandatory grade-level. In a 2009 study on perspectives of the core French program in Canada, Lapkin et al. outline 3 key factors that play a role in the effectiveness of this program: (1) negative societal attitudes towards French; (2) widespread dissatisfaction with the outcomes of core French programs; (3) and dissatisfaction of core French teachers with their assigned classes. The researchers allude to the marginalization of FSL programs in both the school environment and in communities across the nation. Although the Ontario Ministry of Education promotes bilingualism across the province, research shows that
French education is often marginalized in schools. In this context, French language classes are often considered secondary to other core curriculum subjects (i.e. mathematics, science, history and geography). This leads to the dissatisfaction of French teachers with their current placements, and overall dissatisfaction with the FSL programs by the teachers themselves as well as other members of the school community.

Similarly, in a 2002 study, Marshall examined community perspectives towards second language learning, FSL education and Francophones in a rural, North-Ontario community. The findings of this research exposed that, while most parents and students found it important to learn a second language, it was not necessary for this language to be French. Marshall suggests that these attitudes could be attributed to the status of the core French program in schools. The impression that parents hold towards French education can heavily impact a students’ motivation to learn the language. In chapter 4, a discussion of the data collected from the interviews will reveal that a part of students’ attitudes towards their French classes come from their home environment.

2.2 Theories on Second Language

2.2.1 Language Acquisition Theory

Second language learning, often in contrast to foreign language learning, is the study of a language taught in a context where this target language is primarily spoken (Oxford, 1996). In Ontario, French is considered a second language, likely as a result of French being one of the official languages. However, it is important to note that most regions in Ontario are primarily Anglophone, and consequently, students have few opportunities to speak French outside of the classroom. In these contexts, prevalence of the English language could contribute to the lack of important placed on French education.
The work of Stephen Krashen is a good place to start when looking at second language learning. The terms second language learning and second language acquisition are commonly used interchangeably. However, in his “Second Language Acquisition Theory”, Krashen makes an important distinction between acquisition and learning, both being key components in developing second language skills. Acquisition, he argues, is a “subconscious process that is identical to the process used in first language acquisition in all important ways” (Krashen, 1989; p. 8). In this instance, the individual is not always aware that the acquisition is taking place. It refers to a deeper, more natural grasp of the language. Learning, on the other hand, is “conscious knowledge”, referring specifically to language as a series of rules and exceptions. For example, when one is learning about French grammar rules and exceptions in isolation, they are engaging in language learning. On the other hand, when one is engaging in conversation in French, they are actually acquiring the language as different aspects of the language are being used interchangeably. Krashen and many other theorists alike have showed that acquisition is far more active in second language performance than learning. Our learned language skills act as ‘monitors’, which simply scan our output from our acquired processor and make corrections based on the rules we have learned (Krashen, 1985; pg. 8). The learned language skills, however, take time and practice to use effectively and efficiently.

Understanding the difference between language learning and language acquisition is vital in fostering student success in a FSL program as it ensures that students are not only learning French as a language system, but that they also internalize it and are able to effectively communicate in the language. Moreover, a teacher being fully conscious of the difference between learning and acquisition can play an important role in ensuring that the
French language is effectively being used as the language of instruction. Vast research in the field of second language learning suggests that high levels of second language skills come primarily from what we have acquired and not from what we have learned. This last point correlates with the findings regarding high proficiency levels of French immersion students in comparison to the other two FSL programs in Ontario.

The FSL programs available in Ontario offer a variety of acquisitional and learning experiences through their various intensities of study in the target language. In a traditional core French class, teachers often provide an environment where French is being learned, with a heavy reliance on language textbooks and grammar worksheets. Both the extended French and French immersion programs tend to combine both learning and acquisition to provide a more well-rounded language learning experience. The Ontario Curriculum appears to take on a Krashenian perspective as it states “The [FSL] programs also enable students to better understand the stages of language learning and the use of language learning strategies to acquire the language” (p. 15). In this quote taken from the “Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools” document, a clear distinction is made, as is done by Krashen, between learning and acquisition. Here, the Ministry is positing that language learning is just one part of a multifaceted process of second language competency, facilitating a student’s acquisition of a language in order to meet the ultimate goal of linguistic proficiency.

Given that the evidence strongly favours acquisition of second language skills, arguably the best way to acquire a language is through what Krashen refers to as “comprehensible input”, through messages that we can understand and identify with a rule of a pattern. It is one thing to learn the rule for a particular grammatical structure; however
one requires context in order to fully comprehend its application. Moreover, this context must be understandable and interactive. This would be the difference, for example, between talking to one’s self in French and watching a French talk show. If the learner is simply talking on their own or completing a grammar exercise, the input is extremely low. If the talk show is comprehensible, one will gain far more from it than they would by talking to themselves. The value comes in the comprehensible input, not in what they are saying. For this reason, a child will experience a period of silence before beginning to speak a new language. During this period, the child tries to make the input comprehensible, before he or she has built enough competence in the language to begin speaking. This concept of comprehensible input is what defines Krashen’s “Input Hypothesis”.

**2.2.2 The Affective-Filter Hypothesis**

Comprehensible input, however, is not all that must be considered in language acquisition; we must also be aware of what Dulay and Burt (1977) have referred to as an “Affective Filter”, a barrier to language acquisition. The Affective Filter is an imaginary wall influenced by emotions that can prevent language acquisition. On this issue, Krashen writes: “I have hypothesized, on the basis of research on affective variables that a high filter, one that prevents input from reaching the LAD, is caused by low motivation, high student anxiety, and low student self-esteem” (1989, p. 10). Other researchers have argued the same point: that motivation, anxiety and self-confidence are what determine the success or failure of a language learner. The first element, motivation, is one that I would like to consider further as it has commonly been argued as the most important factor in language learning.
2.2.3 Motivation and Second Language Learning

Research on language acquisition has continuously found a cause and effect relationship between motivation and second language proficiency. The research of Robert C. Gardner on motivation and second language acquisition is of the most important and referenced work in this field. Motivation is not simply about wanting to learn a language; it is a far more complex phenomenon than that. It is a concept which cannot be defined in simple terms, although we can list many characteristics of a motivated individual. In Gardner’s words, “the motivated individual is goal directed, expends effort, is persistent, is attentive, has desires (wants), exhibits positive affects, is aroused, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence (self-efficacy), and has reasons(motives)” (2006, p. 2). There are quite a few characteristics that make up a motivated individual, which encompass cognitive, behavioural and affective responses. How, then, does one get motivated, and more importantly, how can this information help us get our students motivated to learn the French language?

With more than 45 years of research, Gardner and his colleagues have collected a considerable amount of data to develop the Socio-Educational model of Second Language development, which links attitudes and motivations to success in the target language. Over the years, this model has been praised and contested, leading to significant modifications and to his most recent version of the theory. The most significant constructs of the socio-educational model are “integrativeness” and “attitudes toward the learning situation” (Gardner, 2010), both dealing with affective responses. Integrativeness refers to the individual’s interest in learning the language for the purpose of communicating with members of the language community. The integrative orientation of the learner will result
in an accepting attitude to the language community. This is problematic when considering the Ontario context as the official language in the province is English and the region is predominantly encompassed by Anglophone communities. The student’s attitudes toward the learning situation refer to their attitudes towards any part of the environment in which the language learning is taking place. If we consider a school context, the student’s attitudes can be directed towards a teacher, the class materials, a classmate or the subject in general. With school aged students, as in the context of my research, Gardner and his colleagues have also considered three additional constructs: Language Anxiety, Instrumental Orientation and Parental Encouragement.

As Lightbown and Spada (1993) have indicated, this research- and similar work on language learning motivation- cannot explain precisely how motivation affects success in second language acquisition. In other words, it is unknown whether the motivation to learn the language produces success in language learning, or whether the success in language learning increases the learner’s motivation. As such, this relationship has proven to be of a circular nature as greater success leads to higher motivation, and higher motivation leads to greater success.

The correlation between motivation and success suggests that teachers can increase motivation in their students if they make the classroom environment one which fosters success (Lightbown and Spada, 1993). This means that if students achieve high results in the classroom- not only in teacher assessment, but in linguistic proficiency as well-, they will have a positive attitude towards learning the language, affecting the amount of effort they put into learning the language, their behaviour in the classroom, and their participation in various activities, among many other facets of the language learning class.
This relationship between motivation and success is key in considering the enhancement of the learning experience in a French language classroom. For the purposes of this paper, it will be important to consider what teachers are doing to create a positive relationship between motivation and success in achieving the ultimate goal of student learning.

2.3 Teaching Practices

2.3.1 The Teacher as Motivator

The Ontario Curriculum for French as a Second Language characterizes the FSL teacher as the following:

... Teachers provide numerous opportunities for students to develop and refine their knowledge of and skills in communicating in French in authentic contexts. These learning experiences should enable students to make meaningful connections between what they already know and what they are learning...

Teachers also need to expose students to the many social and geographical varieties of French through a range of authentic material. (p. 12-13)

There are a number of important elements in this description. Firstly, the use of a variety of teaching, evaluation and assessment strategies will offer students a dynamic classroom experience, contributing to their engagement in what is being taught. The classroom and learning experiences created by the teacher should allow students to make “meaningful connections”. Without giving meaning to what they are learning, it is easy for students to have a lack of interest. Thus, it is important for students to understand why it is that they are learning the French language in the first place in order to enable an interest and engagement in their learning experiences.
Meaning can also be attached to the learning experience through the incorporation of culture into the language experience, promoting cultural and communicative competence, as well as a respect for the language community. It has long been understood that language and culture are entwined. One cannot learn a new language unless they understand the cultural setting of the target language (Trivedi, 1978). The learning in both the French immersion and extended French programs should be an authentic language experience. This means that the French language is not simply taught as a subject, but is rather used as a medium to teach other subjects. Without the appropriate language skills, students will experience difficulty in communication, and will have a limited amount of the comprehensible input that we have seen is necessary for a positive and successful language experience.

As we have already seen above, a learning environment which fosters success in a student has the potential to motivate them, making the language learning more enjoyable and engaging, in turn creating a greater amount of success for the student. As such, one of the most important motivating factors in Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model is the student’s attitude towards the learning situation. On this topic he stated, “These attitudes could be directed toward the teacher, the course in general, one’s classmates, the course materials, extra-curricular activities associated with the course, etc.” (2001, p. 8). In a 2009 study examining the motivation to learn French among sixth grade French immersion students who attended the program from K-Grade 5, students emphasized the importance of their teachers and their peers in enhancing their learning experience in the French immersion program. During interviews with the students, all participants spoke about the influence of their teachers, most of them being positive (Wesley, 2009). The overall ideas
from the students were that their teachers were patient, helpful and knowledgeable. One student even expressed that their teacher made them want to be in a French environment, exposing their teacher as a major motivating factor in the language learning process. When students critiqued their teachers, it was primarily for being unhelpful or confusing. The latter further elucidates the importance of providing comprehensible input for students within the classroom environment. The students’ peer groups also appeared to be a major motivating factor. Peer influence proved to be a means of support in addition to their teacher, as students expressed that their peers could help them improve on their language skills. Additional studies have reported consistent findings supporting the influential power of peer relationship in motivating students to continue in the program.

2.3.2 Peer Interaction

It is important for teachers to provide a classroom environment in which peer interaction is a constant occurrence. Peer interaction can be defined as “any communicative activity carried out between learners, where there is minimal or no participation from the teacher” (Philp, Adams, & Iwashita, 2014, p. 3). This interaction involves cooperative learning, an umbrella term characterizing students working together towards a common goal (Philp et al, 2014). Cooperative learning can be practiced through a number of strategies. One example is the use of a jigsaw task, in which a group of students contribute individually to complete a particular task. This involves students working independently on a particular topic they have been assigned, and then coming back to the larger group to piece everything together.

Cooperative learning can also involve group work in which the learners work together in a joint effort to complete the task at hand. This approach, known as
collaborative learning is more mutual in the sense that students are working together the entire time and depend on one another to complete the particular assignment. The regular inclusion of cooperative learning within the classroom can allow for a much richer language learning experience. Through peer interaction, students can achieve different aspects of learning that they would not otherwise receive through interactions with the teacher or through individual study. Additionally, in an environment where students are consistently communicating with one another, the level comprehensible input is considerably high, as the students are at a similar level of linguistic competence compared to the classroom teacher. Through cooperative learning, and an activity such as the Jigsaw, students are working on all four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This strategy, then, is consistent with Krashen’s Second Language Acquisition Theory and presents students with an opportunity to actively and authentically make use of the language they are learning.
Chapter 3: Methodologies

3.0 Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I presented an introduction into the research project, including the purpose of this study and my background with French as a Second Language. I also provided an in-depth analysis of current trends and perspectives of FSL education in Canada and particularly in Ontario, theories on second language acquisition, and teaching approaches in French language learning. As noted in chapter 1, the purpose of this research was to determine effective strategies for enhancing the language learning experience in the elementary FSL classroom. This research was primarily prompted by my personal experiences with FSL education, in addition to the concerning statistics on enrollment and retention rates in FSL programs in Ontario, as seen in Chapter 2. This chapter will introduce the research methodology, with a description of the general approach, including procedures and instruments of data collection, participant samples and recruitment methods. Ethical review procedures are also considered in this chapter, as well limitations to this research study.

3.1 Research Approaches and Procedure

This qualitative study involved an in-depth literature review and semi-structured face-to-face interviews with French teachers at the junior/intermediate level as a means of data collection. Creswell (2013) notes that a qualitative study starts with assumptions on a particular topic and the application of interpretive/theoretical frameworks to inform the research (Creswell, 53). This research paper combines both theoretical and applied evidence to answer my ultimate question. The preceding 2 chapters positioned the
researcher within the context of the study, and framed the research around a particular set of theories, namely second language acquisition theory and motivation theory. In considering the former, this paper has primarily focused on the work of Stephen Krashen, and his “Language Acquisition Theory”. With the latter, I have paid particular attention to Robert C. Gardner’s Socio-Educational Model, amongst other theorists who discuss motivation in relation to FSL learning.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

An important facet of qualitative research is the “researcher as key instrument” (Creswell, 54). In this research process, the qualitative researcher collects their own data by examining documents, as well as observing their participants. Following the literature review, data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews. My primary instrument of data collection in the interviews included a series of open and close-ended interview questions, addressing the participants’ experiences with teaching in a FSL program in Ontario and alluding to motivation levels of their students and their roles as motivators. I met face-to-face with each of the 3 participants, Tamara, Aida, and Jenny, and conducted a 40-60 minute interview. During the interview, the participants were asked 20 questions about their experiences with teaching French, including students’ perceptions on French language education, student motivation levels, the amount of support for French teachers, and effective strategies they use to enhance their students’ language learning experiences. The questions were divided into four sections: Background Information, Teacher Practices, Beliefs/Values, and Next Steps/Challenges. The interviews were recorded using a voice recorder and later transcribed in order to facilitate the data analysis.
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process. A copy of this transcription was made available to each of the designated participants.

The interview questions included the following (see Appendix B for a full list of the interview questions):

- Why do you think it is important for students to learn French? (What can students gain from French instruction)?
- What is your overall approach to teaching French?
- How would one of your typical French lessons be structured?

3.3 Participants

My participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Participants must have been teaching in one or more of the French programs at the junior or intermediate level for a minimum of 5 years.
2. Participants must be ready to share personal experiences and effective strategies currently used in their teaching practice.
3. Participants are recommended as exemplary teachers.

For the purposes of data collection, I recruited three participants who were all teachers in elementary FSL programs in Toronto schools, in varying school boards. 2 of the participants had extensive experience with teaching in a core French setting, and 1 had been teaching in both extended French and French immersion classrooms for over 15 years. Each participant was readily available to meet, and actively discussed their experiences with teaching French and the various strategies they use in order to engage and motivate their students.
3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, the data analysis involved a transcription of the audio recording, a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organization of the data, and finally, analysis and interpretation of the organized data. Creswell refers to the data analysis process as a ‘spiral’. He writes: “...the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (157). This spiral consists of organizing the data, continuous review and note-taking, organizing the data into codes and themes, interpreting the data, and finally, representing the data. This spiral Creswell referred to was evident throughout my data collection and analysis. The process outlined above was repeated for each interview, and all of the data was then analyzed collectively.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

The ethical review procedures for the Master of Teaching program were vigorously followed throughout the duration of this research project. All research participants were provided a written consent letter to sign prior to the interviews, which outlines the research project and the interview process, including information about consent and confidentiality (see Appendix A). While interview questions were not given ahead of time in order ensure authenticity of the answers, a thorough summary of the research subject was provided. Every effort was made to ensure the comfort of the participants, and the location and time of the interviews were negotiated based on the convenience of the participants. After conducting the interviews, participants were offered a recording and/or a transcription of the interview, and were invited to retract or add to their responses. A
pseudonym was created for each of the participants and all personal data was omitted in order to maintain anonymity of their identities.

3.6 Limitations

This research involved some limitations, particularly relating to the data collection process. Firstly, given the scope of the Master of Teaching research project, time was a limiting factor. As a result, the sample size was small, and I was limited in what I could do with my participants. While only 3 participants were interviewed, each had extensive experience with working in an FSL program in Ontario and the interview questions were structured in a way as to ensure that the teachers’ experiences and perspectives throughout their years of teaching were addressed.

Another limitation to this research was that there was no opportunity to observe my participants throughout the school day, which would have provided empirical evidence to support their answers. Additionally, I was unable to hear from students about their first-hand experiences. Nevertheless, the interview process was beneficial in achieving my ultimate goal of determining teacher’s effective strategies of enhancing the language learning experience in the French classroom.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews with my participants, Tamara, Aida and Jenny. Each of the interviewees discussed their experiences with teaching in Ontario French programs, focusing on varying motivation levels of their students, their roles as motivators, and the strategies they have implemented to increase motivation and engagement in their students. Through a process of transcription and coding, the data collected has been organized into two themes, Motivation and Teaching Strategies, and each section has been further broken down into various sub-categories. Each of these themes is explored in detail below, with specific mention to commonalities, as well as discrepancies in the data collected by the three participants.

4.1 Motivation

4.1.1 Student Motivation

As established in the previous chapters, motivation is what directs a student towards particular learning goals and remains a fundamental constituent of their success in a language classroom, a concept elucidated by the Socio-Educational Model. Recall that a motivated student is one who expresses a combination of cognitive, behavioural and affective characteristics, positing a positive attitude towards learning the target language. The collected data appeared to present a direct correlation between student motivation and success in the language classroom, consistent to the existing literature. Firstly, all three interviewees attested to having perceived a variation in motivation levels of their students in the past, as well as in the present school year, as could be the case with any other
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curriculum subject. Additionally, they all agreed that the level of motivation of their students has heavily impacted their success in the language learning process, as it often meant that the student lacked a desire to learn the language, to complete the assigned work or activities, or to participate in class. Each interviewee, however, stressed that student motivation is necessary at the beginning of the school year; without it, students would be less inclined to eventually become interested in learning the language.

When asked whether there is a perceived difference in the motivation levels of students from the beginning of the school year towards the end, Jenny, an Elementary Core French, teacher stated: “If they start unmotivated, it’s harder to get them to start learning”. Similarly, Aida, who is a Primary French Immersion teacher with experience teaching Extended French in the junior grades, expressed that there is no difference in the motivation levels of students throughout the year, however, “…you have to catch the students from the beginning”. Although the literature review did not reveal the impact of student motivation levels in the beginning of the academic year, the correlation of this phenomenon to success in the classroom is evident. According to the literature and the participants, lack of motivation in learning French results in low retention of language skills and effectively low success in class. It is, therefore, important for teachers to implement various strategies at the beginning of the school year in order to welcome their students, get to know them, and, eventually, motivate them to learn the language. One participant mentioned the use of the TRIBES method as an effective tool for engaging students at the beginning of the year. Through this approach, teachers create a safe learning environment through community building activities. Students learn a set of collaborative skills that allow them to effectively work together. In a language learning
classroom, community building activities are not only important to creating a sense of belonging and a linguistic community, but also provide authentic opportunities for utilizing the target language.

The beginning of a language class is also the most crucial time for a student's Affective Filter to be activated. As Krashen (1989) pointed out, low-motivation is among the most significant stimulants of the Affective Filter, which will effectively hinder or, in more drastic cases, entirely prevent a student's language acquisition. Aida illustrated this very phenomenon: “Some get the motivation as they go, for whatever reasons. Some who really have no motivation, it’s hard to keep them because they’re not learning, they don’t want to be there, and if a child doesn’t want to be there and if there’s no connection to the classroom, to the school, it’s really hard to get learning”. This last point is extremely crucial for teachers to keep in mind, elucidating the idea that students will not want to be in the classroom if they have no connection to it. Teachers must, then, consider ways to connect their students to their classroom by creating an open and safe space. A good way to start to create this type of environment at the beginning of the school year is by engaging in formative assessment practices to determine the motivation and engagement levels of their students, as well as the things they are interested in. This could come in the form of a questionnaire or survey. This assessment tool will gauge the learning for the entire school year. This will essentially help teachers understand their roles as student motivators, and consider what they can do to help their students. This last point will be further explored in the subsequent section.
When one considers the natural progression of the school year, the reason it is especially important for students to start motivated becomes clearer. As the year advances, the linguistic concepts explored in the language classroom become increasingly more complex and often require prior knowledge in order to understand them. As such, if a student has difficulty acquiring initial language skills, there is a high risk that their proficiency levels will remain stagnant. With motivation and determination, students can overcome this challenge. One of the interviewees cited: “I have seen certain kids who are very slow out of the gate and then all of a sudden, in January, February, all of a sudden the grammar kicks in, the grammar leads to knowing the vocab, leads to being able to communicate in complete sentences, or being able to listen to me speaking or anyone else speaking”. This “kicking in” of certain language skills will not occur unless the student is motivated. Without motivation, again, the student’s Affective Filter will not allow the student to learn or acquire language skills. All of the interviewees commonly believed that lack of motivation will hinder language learning and shared similar experiences to that quoted above, where they noticed progress in the proficiency levels of certain students.

**4.1.2 Teacher as Motivator**

Through the Socio-Education Model, we have seen that student motivation can be influenced by a number of factors, including the student’s attitudes towards the learning situation. This refers to a student’s attitudes towards any part of the environment where the learning is taking place, such as the classroom, the class materials, or the teacher. The latter was given the most precedence in that data collected through this research. The three participants shared the common understanding that it is part of the teacher’s responsibility to motivate their students to learn French. As motivators, teachers are to focus on two
fundamental aspects: firstly, their relationship with each of their students; and secondly, the interests of the students. Jenny expressed that “...student engagement is not just with the subject but it is also with the teacher”. That is, the students need to be engaged by the teacher in order to be engaged with the subject. In Wesley’s research, as seen in Chapter 2, interviews with students exposed the impact of teacher relationships with their students on the students’ overall motivation and success. Another participant mentioned that, as a French teacher, one must prepare lessons that meet the needs and interests of their students. In order to do this, the teacher has to get to know their students and learn how to interact with them. “The more you get to know them, the easier it is to motivate them”, one participant argued. This stresses the important of formative assessment practices as those outlined earlier in this chapter. As the teacher finds out more about the interests of their students, it will become especially important to use this information to inform the teaching approach, as well as the lessons that will be taught.

As previously established through the literature review and in the current data, the correlation between motivation and success suggests that teachers can increase student motivation if they make the classroom environment one which fosters success. This means that if students experience high levels of achievement in the language classroom, either through teacher assessments or in achieving linguistic proficiency, they will have a positive attitude towards learning the language. This positive outlook will, in turn, affect the amount of effort they put into learning the language, their behaviour in the classroom, and their participation in various activities, among many other facets of the language learning class. Teachers, then, must ensure to set their students up for success. As the students are learning a language that is new to them, they often don’t have all of the tools they need to
complete certain tasks. As one interviewee put it, "...you have to give the kids the knowledge to do what they are supposed to do". This is especially important when the students are asked to exercise any of the skills of language learning (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking). The teacher must ask themselves: Have I given my students what they need in order to be able to use this skill? Finally, in a French classroom, the students must be able to apply meaning to what they are learning; without the meaningful connections, students will easily lose interest and motivation. One of the participants stresses: “Giving meaning to what you are teaching, showing the kids a connection to their world, that to me is number one”. Students will be able to apply meaning when the learning material is relevant to their own lives. As such, getting to know the students is fundamental in a teacher’s effectivity in the classroom. Additionally, the teacher must incorporate authentic, real-life documents and experiences in the classroom to allow students to connect with what they are learning on a deeper level.

4.1.3 External Influences on Motivation Levels

The participants all touched on students’ motivation levels being affected by certain factors outside of the classroom. In the literature review, I touched on the marginalization of the core French classroom in both the school environment, as well as at home and in society in general. These significant external factors touched on by the participants included important stakeholders, such as parents, administrators and school boards, as well as common societal perceptions. The common understanding was that the importance of learning French must be instilled from home and other stakeholders. One of the Core French teachers stated the following:
The reaction of students learning French does not only come from them, it comes from home because learning French is politicized. It comes from the reactions of the parents, as well as the classroom teacher. French is often seen as classroom prep time. If the teacher sees it as classroom prep time, and makes that known, the students will pick up on that. The value of the learning for the subject is not instilled. It’s a spare for the teacher; it’s a spare for the kids. That’s the key point. The importance of the subject has to be instilled from administrators.

This participant addressed an important issue faced by many core French teachers today, as elucidated by Lapkin et al. (2009). It is not enough for the importance of French to be instilled by the French teacher, but also the homeroom teacher, as well as the administrators. As young students are easily influenced by those around them, and especially adults, they can recognize the perceptions of their teachers and administrators. In the school where participant quoted above taught, Core French was taught every day in order to provide an additional daily prep time for teachers. As such, it has become a common trend for these teachers to project an impression that the time allotted for French is "prep time", which illustrates the frustration expressed by this participant.

The phenomenon of learning French as a second language is spoken about in schools and at home. We all recognize that, as an official language of Canada, French plays a role in the Canadian identity. How significant this role is differs from one person to another, and there appears to have been a change in societal perspectives of French language learning over time. "... As a society, we don't really value language learning as
Europeans do, where they’re taking like 2/3 languages... and it’s not a big deal...” This quote presents the opinion of one of the participants when asked to consider why motivation levels have changed over time. Here, the participant made a comparison to her experience as a French student over 20 years ago, when almost all of her peers took French—whether in a Core, Extended or Immersion setting—until the end of secondary school, a trend that, as current statistics suggest, has not continued to the present day. In Chapter 2, we saw that the retention rate of students continuing French language education until secondary school is low, and is on a steady decline. All of the participants attributed this reality to changing societal perspectives on French education. In addition to this, the participants quoted students prioritizing other subjects over French as a large contributing factor to halting their French language education.

4.2 Teaching Strategies

4.2.1 Well-Balanced Program

In describing their approach to teaching French, all of the participants stressed the importance of having a well-balanced program, referring to either the balancing of the 4 strands or language skills (Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing) or a balance between implicit and explicit learning. The former involves efficiently working on all of the language skills, ensuring that students are supported along the way. According to the participants, this doesn’t necessarily mean that lessons should equally focus on each of the learning skills at all times; rather, in one lesson, there may be a greater focus on one skill over the other, and in another, perhaps students would be working on only 2 language skills. Teachers’ perceptions on which language skill is the most important can vary. One participant states:
I focus on 70/80% listening and speaking, and then you divide the rest between reading and writing. If they don’t have the vocabulary base, if they don’t have the comprehension, how can they read, how can they write? That needs to be acquired. The oral French is my number one.

While it is important to focus on each of the language skills, teachers must also consider which skill the students need to work on in order to improve their proficiency levels. The participant quoted above makes an important distinction between the 4 skills, and places precedence on oral language for providing students with the necessary tools for aural, written, and reading comprehension.

Another essential component of a French language class is a balance between explicit and implicit learning. If we recall Krashen’s Language Acquisition Theory outlined in Chapter 2, the difference between explicit and implicit learning is parallel to the difference between language learning and language acquisition. When students learn explicitly in a language classroom, often they are engaging in isolated lessons on language constructs, such as grammar and syntax, and completing vigorous grammar exercises. While these exercises are intended to facilitate the development of important language skills, these skills cannot simply be learned and eventually acquired through explicit learning alone. Rather, teachers must discover ways for students to learn implicitly, almost as if they don’t realize they are doing it. By doing so, students will achieve a deeper, more natural grasp of the language. Through Krashen and other second language theorists, we have seen that high levels of second language skills come primarily from implicit learning rather than explicit learning. However, evidence from existing research as well as the
current data for this research also suggests that explicit learning should not be entirely dismissed; rather, there is a role for both types of learning. Above all, the French program must be structured in a way that supports students’ development of the language, which is ultimately done by finding a good balance. “... It’s like when you talk about having a well-balanced meal, trying to have a well-balanced program in a real world”.

4.2.2 Student-Centered Learning

The data suggested that an effective way to enable implicit learning in the French classroom is through student-centered learning, in which teacher-led instruction is limited. Through this approach, students are actively involved in the learning process and are simultaneously using, building on and reinforcing their language skills. One participant sums up this approach with the following: “...the more senses you’re employing, the better it’s going to be, so if you’re looking at something, that’s one, if you’re looking and use it and you’re speaking about something, that’s two right... So it’s... full engagement, not just being on the receiving end”. An important component of this approach stressed by this participant was having students make deductions about what they are learning. She states:

Instead of saying “today we’re learning the passé compose”, write it in a hangman thing... So having them, you know, doing some oral, going over the alphabet or whatever and then coming up with that, and then having them reflect on what it is... But always trying to have them deduct, you know not giving them anything like "we are doing this today"... But starting with a couple of activities to get them to say, “What are we doing”?
It becomes clear, then, that the favoured approach by these participants, as well as their students, is far more student-centered than the traditional French language class that we have seen in the past. An example of this type of learning is seen with the inquiry-based approach. 2 of the participants quoted inquiry-based learning as an effective way to engage students, contributing to an increase in student participation and learning. As students partake in the exploration of a particular concept, teachers are able to make creative connections to the French language curriculum as opposed to resorting to laborious grammar exercises that students cannot engage with. Through this type of learning, as Aida suggests, “...everything just melts together”.

### 4.2.3 Peer Interaction

The use of peer interaction has appeared to be an effective teaching strategy in the French language learning classroom. This approach involves cooperative learning, where students work together and collaborate in achieving a common goal. Research has shown that cooperative learning offers students an additional source of support in addition to the classroom teacher. All of the students in the classroom are language learners. While they may have started learning at different times, they may all be at different stages in their language development. Regardless of which stage they are at, they all have something important to offer to each other. Whether it is through engaging in discussions, presenting plays or presentations, playing a game, or conducting research together, through peer interaction, students can help one another improve on their language skills as they learn together. By making the classroom environment more collaborative, students effectively become more engaged and often more motivated to learn. The participants’ responses were consistent with the current literature regarding peer interaction in the language
classroom. All three interviewees have experienced positive results when engaging in co-operative learning. One participant states: “... the more they're involved, the easier the learning is going to be for them”.

4.2.4 Language of Instruction

One area where the data showed discrepancies was in regards to the language of instruction. While one participant agreed that English has an important place in the French classroom, another completely dismissed it. “If you want to talk about cross curricular, you can’t get any better than the marriage of French and English”. This interviewee agreed that using English in the French classroom offers extra support to the students who have difficulty understanding what is being said. Another participant, however, shared a different view. She stressed that a French teacher should avoid using English and translating what was said because students will rely on the English translation as opposed to focusing on the French words being used. While it is challenging at first, students’ comprehension levels will slowly begin to increase and the input will become more comprehensible. This participant has had extensive experience in teaching French immersion in the primary grades, which has contributed to her views on this issue. In a core French classroom, it is difficult to keep the instruction entirely in French as the language is the subject- in contrast to French immersion, where French is the language of instruction for other core curriculum subjects. In either context, it is important, above all, for the use of French to be prioritized by both the teacher and the students, and for the use of English to be limited.
4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented my findings from the semi-structured interviews, reflecting the personal experiences of 3 teachers with experience teaching in all three of the Ontario FSL programs. The implications for this research stemmed largely from current statistics showing low retention rates of student enrollment in French programs across the province, a reality brought largely by changing societal perspectives on French education and lack of motivation. Overall, each of the participants attested to perceiving variation in the motivation levels of their students, and agreed that a student’s motivation level directly correlated with their success in the language classroom. Most importantly, the participants stressed that it is crucial for students to be motivated at the beginning of the school year, or else it will be harder to get them engaged and to facilitate the learning process. All interviewees acknowledged their role as motivators and elaborated on ways they fulfill this role. As such, the data, in conjunction with the reviewed literature, exposed a number of effective teaching strategies to increase student motivation. Firstly, a French language program must have a balance between explicit and implicit learning, ensuring that students are engaged and motivated, and engage not only in language learning, but also in language acquisition. The implicit learning is most easily facilitated through student-centered learning practices, such as the inquiry-based approach. In a student-centered framework, teachers should have students make deductions and employ as many senses as possible in order to allow for full student engagement. Additionally, teachers must encourage peer-interaction and/or cooperative learning in the classroom in an effort to increase student engagement as students collaborate together to complete a task at hand. Finally, as there was disagreement by the participants about the role of English in the French language
classroom, this phenomenon can vary based on the context, however an effective French language class requires the prioritization of the use of the French language over English.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

This research project provided insight on the experiences of 3 French teachers in all three of the FSL programs, and their views on student motivation levels and how to motivate their students. The following question framed the basis for my research: What strategies do FSL teachers use in order to enhance the language learning experience of their students? In answering this question, I considered the factors that affect motivation in French language learning, as well as the teacher’s role in motivating their students in the French classroom. In this final chapter, I provide a brief overview of the key findings in this research. I then discuss the implications that the findings hold for the educational community as a whole, including teachers and school boards. This chapter will also provide recommendations for teachers, specifically outlining effective teaching strategies informed by findings from this research and in relation to student motivation in French Language Learning. Moreover, I discuss possible opportunities for further research to expand on the findings for this study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

In the previous chapter, the data collected through semi-structured interviews with my 3 participants were analyzed. Each of the interviewees discussed their experiences with teaching in Ontario FSL programs, focusing on varying motivation levels of their students, their roles as motivators, and the strategies they have implemented to increase motivation and engagement in their students. The teacher participants took their roles as student-motivators seriously and readily explained the teaching strategies they have collected throughout their years as educators. All 3 participants attested to perceiving variation in
the motivation levels of their students, and agreed that a student’s motivation level directly correlated with their success in the language classroom. The data was presented in two primary themes, the first one focusing on student motivation, and the second providing effective teaching strategies to increase motivation in the French classroom. The findings showed a strong correlation between the existing literature and the realities of FSL classes in Toronto. The following section will further outline these parallels, with a discussion on the implications that have come out of this qualitative research.

5.2 Implications

In this two-year research study, I have had the opportunity to explore existing literature in the field of French language education, as well as learn from French teachers who have provided their insights and strategies on teaching elementary students in the various FSL programs in Ontario. I have come to realize that the motivation levels of students learning French are varied and fluctuating, largely depending on the learning situation. This realization has had great implications for understanding the current realities of FSL programs in Ontario. As outlined in previous chapters, statistics from the Government of Ontario show that drop-out rates in FSL programs across the province are quite high, with students switching to the Core French stream in high school, and suspending FSL studies entirely after Grade 9, when it is no longer mandatory (MOE, 2014). Additionally, a 2008 study found that Core French students in Ontario accounted for 90% of all FSL students, and of them, only 3% study French until Grade 12 (Canadian Parents for French, 2008). Low motivation for learning French can be seen as one of the significant reasons students decide to end their studies in French. The intent of this research study was to determine whether there is a perceived correlation between motivation and
success, and to outline the strategies that teachers use to effectively motivate their students and create a learning environment that fosters success. The Ontario Curriculum for French as a Second Language (2013) strongly articulates motivation and student-engagement as key to success in the French classroom, yet student interest in pursuing studies in French until receiving their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) is low, based on statistics. The practical evidence gathered in this research, juxtaposed with the existing literature on Second Language Acquisition theories, and more specifically, French language learning, can bring us closer to understanding the reasons behind the decisions of Ontario students.

5.2.1 The Educational Research Community

The findings presented in this research study, along with the literature review, offer important insight for various members of the educational community, including teachers, school boards, and the government. Firstly, the information provided in this research can provide teachers a chance to think critically about their effectiveness as French educators, and the impact they make on their students. It is in the best interest of Ontario French teachers to be aware of current trends in FSL programs across the province, teaching approaches as well as effective strategies in French language learning in order to provide a positive learning environment for their students. Moreover, they must be conscious of their role as motivators in the classroom, and implement effective strategies to motivate their students to learn French.

Secondly, school boards can use the information gathered through this research to develop policies and initiatives to ensure that teachers are implementing these effective teaching strategies in their French classroom, whether it is in a core, extended or
immersion setting. The initiatives should also ensure that teachers are consistently looking for ways to foster the success of their students, not only in terms of academics, but also in terms of linguistic proficiency. School boards can also provide additional professional development opportunities for their French teachers, either through workshops or the development of resources, which will provide insights on strategies and techniques for motivating and engaging their students in the French classroom.

Finally, the research is helpful for the Ministry of Ontario in an effort to put the current statistics of FSL enrollment and retentions rates into perspective, and to determine whether the Ontario French as a Second Language Curriculum (2013) is effectively guiding teachers to implement impactful teaching practices. The existing research as well as my findings are consistent with the ideologies presented in the curriculum, as there is a great focus on motivation as a tool for success in the French classroom, as well as the importance of student-centered learning and meaningful learning tasks in order to increase student motivation and engagement. The MOE should continue to collect data on current enrollment and retention trends in FSL programs across the province, and should consider where the gaps lie between curriculum guidelines and expectations, and teacher practices, and contrast them with students’ perceptions towards learning French and the quality of their French education.

5.2.2 My Professional Identity and Practice

This research project has also had great implications on my forming identity and future practice as an Elementary French teacher. My inspiration to pursue a research project on the topic of motivation and success in the French Language classroom stemmed
from my personal experiences with learning French, and came in an effort to inform my future teaching practice. As an aspiring French teacher, I am now coming into the field with a conscious mind on the realities of student perceptions towards learning French. Current statistics show that retention rates in the 3 Ontario FSL programs are low, and findings suggests that varying factors can be affecting those numbers. As such, in this two-year process, I have collected a number of effective teaching strategies as outlined in the subsequent section that will inform my own teaching practice, as well as that of other French language teachers.

5.3 Recommendations

Through semi-structured interviews with my 3 participants, alongside a thorough analysis of the literature, I have determined the best effective strategies that teachers can adopt in order to increase motivation in their students and to provide a learning environment that fosters academic and linguistic success.

- Recognize the role of the teacher as motivator.
- Ensure to grab the attention of students from the very first day, which will be a determining factor of students’ motivation levels throughout the remainder of the school year.
- Start the academic year by instilling in the students the importance of learning French in a Canadian context.
- Ensure the classroom is a safe and equitable space for learning.
ENHANCING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE IN AN FSL CLASSROOM

- Provide students a connection to the learning environment by acknowledging the classroom as a linguistic community where all students share a common goal of learning the French language.
- Offer a well-balanced program, with a balance of all four language skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking), and a harmony between implicit and explicit learning.
- Encourage peer-interaction and cooperative learning in the classroom.
- Provide authentic learning opportunities through the use of authentic documents and the incorporation of cultural elements.
- Prioritize the use of French to communicate in the French classroom.
- Appeal to the interests of the students.

5.4 Areas for further research

Given the parameters of this research study, I encountered a number of limitations that would be important to consider for future research in this field. Firstly, the research was focused on teacher perspectives, and, due to time constraints and ethical considerations, my interviewees were limited to teacher participants only. As such, I was unable to interview students and gather first-hand evidence with regards to their motivation to learn French and the factors that influence their decision to either continue or terminate studies in French. Therefore, a recommendation for further study would be to interview students in order to get their perspectives on French education throughout the province, and to determine what students feel would best contribute to an increased motivation and an interest in learning French and continuing to do so throughout their academic endeavours. Unfortunately, I was unable to find research that included the perceptions of students in an Ontario context. Additionally, as my participants were
limited, future research may gather more data by interviewing teachers across the province in order to uncover a stronger correlation between declining retention rates in FSL programs and low motivation levels of students to pursue studies in French. Such research could aim to further answer the following questions:

- What factors are affecting Ontario students’ decisions to terminate their studies in FSL programs?
- How could teachers further improve their practice in order to prevent low motivation levels in their students and inspire them to continue studies in French?
- What can school boards do to better support their French teachers to providing motivating learning environments for their students?

5.5 Concluding Comments

As French language education is a requirement for Ontario students until Grade 9, research in the field of French Language Learning and on current trends in FSL programs in Ontario is extremely vital. Teachers must prioritize the implementation of effective teaching strategies and determine what works best for each of their students in order to foster their academic and linguistic success. I am deeply grateful for my participants’ readiness to discuss their strategies and approaches to teaching French, and feel positively impacted by their insight. In my future practice as a French teacher, I aim to offer the type of dynamic, student-centered learning environment that this research has favored, and, in doing so, will provide my students a greater opportunity to succeed in their classes and in their linguistic proficiency.
References


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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ________________

Dear ________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying middle school French Immersion teachers for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor, as well as research supervisor, who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Arlo Kempf. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 60 minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

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

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

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Sevan Mnknjian

Phone number, email: (647) 688-9525, sevan.mnknjian@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor and Research Supervisor Name: Arlo Kempf
Phone number: __________  Email: arlo.kempf@utoronto.ca

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 _Sevan Mnknjian_ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions/Protocols

Background information

1. In which French programs and grade levels have you taught?
2. How many years have you been teaching?
3. What is your background in French?
4. Based on your experiences, what are students’ general level of interest in the French language?

Teacher Practices

5. What would you say is your overall approach to teaching French?
6. How do you start planning a lesson?
   a. How is a typical lesson structured?
7. Is instruction normally in English or in French?
8. Do you normally encourage your students to speak French in the classroom? How so?
9. Do you notice a shift from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in terms of student motivation levels?
10. Have you noticed a shift in the attitudes of your students towards French throughout the years?
11. Do your past experiences as a French student influence your teaching practices?

Beliefs/Values

12. Why do you think it is important for students to learn French? (What can students gain from French instruction)?
13. How important is student engagement for student success?
   a. How detrimental is a lack of student engagement to their success in French?
14. Why do you think the retention rate of FSL programs is so low?
   a. How have you come across this personally?

Influencing Factors (Who?)

15. In the past, how much support was offered by your school to ensure that you are able to efficiently teach your students French?
a. Were French resources readily available and what was the quality of these resources?

Next Steps

16. What advice would you give to a French teacher candidate?