CORE FRENCH LANGUAGE RETENTION BEYOND GRADE 9 IN ONTARIO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By

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CORE FRENCH LANGUAGE RETENTION

Abstract

In the province of Ontario, French education is offered to students through three different options: Core, extended and Immersion. In Core French, all students are required to take French classes from Grade 4 to Grade 9. However, due to declining rates in students pursuing Core French education beyond Grade 9, the purpose of this study is to learn how teachers are responding to the issue of retention in Core French programs beyond the mandatory years and what range of practices they enact to enhance students’ interest in Core French education. The data from this qualitative research study has been gathered through reviewing existing literature from renowned researchers and from conducting and analyzing semi-structured interviews with two experienced Core French teachers. The findings of this study indicate that the increase in drop-out rates is caused by a lack of student interest in Core French education and by challenges faced by Core French teachers. This study has also observed key practices and strategies that Core French teachers are enacting to enhance retention rates and engagement in Core French education. The implications of this study suggest that the lack of support and funding to Core French programs is driving Core French teachers to feel overwhelmed and marginalized, which negatively impacts the quality of their instruction.

Key Concepts: Core French, teachers, students, retention strategies
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Context

As French is one of Canada’s two official languages, it is imperative that all Canadians should be able to communicate in English and in French languages effectively. In Ontario, all publicly funded English-language schools offer a variety of French as a Second Language (FSL) programs including Core, Extended and French Immersion programs based on local demand and financial resources (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). According to a Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, learning FSL has many benefits to students. For example, acquiring a second language improves overall literacy and communication skills. Further, people who master a second language report having an increased self-esteem and higher problem solving and critical thinking skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Andre Obadia (1995) claims that by learning French as a second language “Canadian children should be prepared for economic realities” especially with the way the world is shrinking and becoming more and more connected. The author also highlights the importance of French language acquisition as it is a spoken language for over 120 million people (Obadia, 1995). In addition, being fluent in English and in French languages enhances students’ chances of finding employment opportunities in an already competitive job market in Canada (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The Connecticut State Department of Education conducted a study that emphasized the importance of acquiring a second language for students (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007). The research findings claimed that when students learn a second language, they progress academically in all subjects; decrease the achievement gaps, develop higher thinking skills; improve their cultural awareness and increase their chances of getting jobs (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2007).
1.2 Research Problem

Current teaching methods that aim at retaining students in Core French programs such as translating and memorizing foreign words, and studying the grammatical forms of the language have not been very effective in achieving their goal (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education introduced a Framework for FSL students from k-12 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The framework aims at enhancing French language programs by introducing new instructional approaches and teaching strategies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The strategies include raising awareness over the benefits of learning FSL, increasing leadership and accountability in the programs, strengthening the content of the FSL programs to make it more appealing to students, supporting all learners, implementing effective teaching practices and authentic assessment methods and encouraging students to be more engaged in the learning process strategies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). However, the results of a 2015 survey by Canadian Parents for French (CPF) showed that only 36% of students who pursued middle or late immersion programs graduated with a Grade 12 French immersion credit (Canadian Parents for French, 2015). Furthermore, only 3% of Core French students pursued French language education beyond Grade 9 (Lapkin, Mady & Arnett, 2009). In their report, Canadian Parents for French concluded that low FSL retention rates are affected by negative attitudes of teachers, students and parents and by the lack of unification in program requirements among Canadian provinces (CPF, 2015). For instance, FSL teachers, and more specifically Core French teachers, are not treated equitably in their school boards. In addition, Core French teachers reported not having access to their own classrooms and having to supply in one or two schools in the same day. Further, unlike their English language teachers, French language teachers reported not receiving professional development days for Core French language (CPF, 2015). Research has also
acknowledged that motivation was an important factor that affected students’ perspectives towards learning French. According to Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002), students’ motivation to learn French decreased with older ages. The researchers also found that girls demonstrated a higher interest in learning French than boys. In addition, the researchers found that boys expressed a higher level of motivation to learn German than French because they believed that French was feminine and that the work was too boring and tedious (Williams et al., 2002). Additionally, students and parents experience different kinds of struggles; students feel that the material being taught is too difficult and uninteresting to them, while parents feel unsupported by the school’s community to enroll their children in FSL programs (CPF, 2015). In many cases, parents reported that they were not able to place their children in FSL programs because the children did not meet the tough and specific criteria posed by their province. Also, some parents reported that the competition over limited spots in French classes have denied their children from having an equal access to French education (CPF, 2015).

Moreover, research has shown that low achievement in FSL programs has been linked to the general underappreciation of French language in Ontario (Cummins, 1998). Students in French programs are suffering from having limited opportunities to communicate in French, especially in Core French classrooms where English remains the dominant language of instruction and communication between students and their teachers (Cummins, 1998). The research also shows that the type of pedagogy used in Core French classrooms is not as engaging or creative as English language pedagogies. At the same time, FSL students receive less critical literacy activities than students in English language programs (Cummins, 1998). It is important that students receive critical literacy activities in French as this helps create independent thinkers who are able to analyze and fully understand the content (Cummins, 1998). Therefore, as a result of the negative
attitudes towards learning and teaching Core French, more and more teachers are feeling discouraged from wanting to teach Core French which has a direct impact on achievement rates among students (Lapkin et al, 2009).

1.3 Research Purpose

In light of this problem, I would like to learn how a small sample of teachers are dealing with the issue of retaining students in Core French programs beyond Grade 9. As one contribution toward that end, I am interested in hearing Core French teachers’ perspectives on how they respond through their teaching practices to the issue of retention. My intention is to share my findings with the educational community and to engage in finding solutions that would reduce FSL low achievement and dropout rates in English language schools.

1.4 Research Question

The main question guiding this research study is: What are FSL teachers’ perspectives on student retention in Core French programs, and what range of practices do they enact to enhance student engagement in Core French language learning? Sub questions that would further guide this research topic include:

- What do these teachers believe are the key barriers to retaining students in Core French programs beyond Grade 9?
- What do these teachers believe are key practices and responses for retaining students in Core French programming beyond Grade 9?
- What instructional strategies and approaches do these teachers use to enhance student interest and engagement in learning Core French?
- What factors and resources support these teachers in their work, and what specific challenges do they encounter?
1.5 Reflexive Positioning Statement

Although some people may disagree, I personally believe that in a bilingual country like Canada, being fluent in French and in English should be a given for all people. In my experience, being able to communicate in several languages has opened several doors for me in my personal and professional life. Therefore, as a multilingual individual, I realized the importance of learning French language at a younger age. I started learning Core French as a third language in Grade 5 in Syria until Grade 12. Though it is important to note that for Syrians, French is not perceived as an important language. Even more, French language is associated with a lower social status, and thus it receives less support and funding from the government and society. Because my teachers did not care about teaching the language, and they did not have many resources to work with, French was perceived as one of the worse and most boring subjects to take. Though I really wanted to learn French because my parents taught me that being able to speak several languages would help expand my horizons, and would help me become a global citizen. As a result, I decided to take French classes in a private language center.

When I decided to immigrate to Canada, I was very excited because I thought that everyone would be able to communicate in English and in French. Though to my surprise, I found that, with the exception of a few provinces where French is mainly spoken, most Canadians could not speak French language. I was very puzzled by that new discovery, and could not understand why so many people could not communicate effectively in both of their official languages. Still determined to continue learning French, I pursued a French degree at the University of Waterloo. But even then I found that most Canadian students in my classes were not able to communicate in French, and if they did, they were not able to read or write.
While pursuing my degree, I learned more and more about the depreciated status of French language and French culture in Canada. I also learned about discriminatory practices against French people in Canadian history and about their struggle to have a unique identity. Though what shocked me the most was the realization that French language, was also not valued in most Canadian provinces, and that most people had negative attitudes towards learning French. As I started pursuing a Masters of Teaching at OISE, I knew that although most people agree that learning French is very important in Canada, the majority of them were not able to communicate in French. Therefore, as a teacher candidate who aspires to becoming a French teacher, I became very weary of the idea, because I did not want to be treated with less respect and with less support from the teaching community. Therefore, as I further develop my research topic, I hope that I would be able to find new and effective approaches to increase the public’s confidence in French language and to be able to retain students in French language programs.

1.6 Preview of the Whole

To respond to the research questions I conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview 3 teachers about their instructional strategies for enhancing student engagement and retention in Core French language learning. In Chapter 2, I reviewed the literature in the areas of Core French instruction, barriers to retention and instructional strategies. Next, in Chapter 3 I elaborated on the factors and causes of low achievement rates in elementary schools and high dropout rates in high schools. In Chapter 4 I reported my research findings and discussed their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in Chapter 5 I identified the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulated a series of questions raised by the research findings, and pointed to areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I reviewed the literature in the area of student retention in Core French programming beyond Grade 9. More specifically I reviewed themes related to retention barriers and the strategies that are being used by educators to keep students interested in learning French. First, I started by giving a glance over the history of French language education in Canada and its current strands. Then I reviewed the literature in the area of Core French education status which includes stakeholders’ attitudes towards Core French education, government policies and funding. Next, I gave an overview over different instructional approaches and strategies currently used by educators. Finally, I provided an analysis on the outcomes of these approaches and if they were effective methods in retaining students in Core French language programs.

2.1 French Language Education in Canada

In this section I will be discussing a brief history of bilingualism in Canada and will explain the three different strands in French education in Ontario. Then I will analyze the status of French and Core French education in Canada. Finally, I will cite the stakeholders’ attitudes towards Core French education including teachers, students, schoolboards and the government.

2.1.1 Bilingualism in Canada

In 1867, the Constitution Act declared that English and French were both the languages of the Canadian Parliament (Burnaby, 2015). However, in 1963, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism found that French language was being perceived as inferior to English language in public, social and political aspects (Burnaby, 2015). Therefore, in order to protect French Canadian identity, the Royal Commission has made several recommendations which lead to the creation of the Official Languages Act in 1969. The act declared “French and
English to be the official languages of Canada, and under which all federal institutions must provide their services in English or French at the customer's choice” (Burnaby, 2015).

2.1.2 French strands in Ontario

As French became one of Canada’s official languages, French as a Second Language programs (FSL) are taught in Ontario in French and in English school boards. In English school boards students are streamed in three stands: Core French, extended French and French immersion (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). The following is a breakdown of these three strands:

Core French

Core French is the most basic form of French instruction, where French language is taught as a subject. Students at the elementary level are expected to complete 600 hours of French instruction between Grades 4 to 8. Further academic and applied courses are offered to secondary level students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Extended French

In this strand, French language is taught as a subject and as the language of instruction for one other subject. In extended French, students are required to complete 4 French subject credits and 3 other credits in which French is the language of instruction. Similar to Core French, further academic and applied courses are offered to secondary level students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

French Immersion

In French immersion, French language is taught as a subject and as the language of instruction for two or more different subjects. At the elementary level, French serves as 50% of the language of instruction. In order to complete French immersion program, students are required to complete 4 French subject credits and 6 other credits in which French is the language of
instruction. Also, similar to Core and extended French, further academic and applied courses are offered to secondary level students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

### 2.2 Status of French Education

According to a report produced by Canadian Parents for French (CPF) in 2015, FSL programs were getting higher enrollment rates for the first time since the beginning of the century. Some provinces such as British Columbia and Yukon reported an increase in the number of French immersion students in the K to 12 population (CFP, 2015). Carr (2010) claimed that in provinces like British Columbia, Core French teachers sometimes teach Core French without having an adequate knowledge of French language. Also, the researcher pointed out that French education is declining in quality due to lack of contact time in French, lack of intensity and creativity in the program and lack of qualified teachers (Carr, 2010). However, the report also highlighted that when it comes to Core French programs, the situation is much worse in terms of enrollment and retention rates beyond Grade 9 (CPF, 2015). In addition there are several factors that affect the status of Core French education in Ontario such as the attitudes of all stakeholders, government funding and policies.

#### 2.2.1 Status of Core French in Ontario

Unfortunately, Core French program in Ontario is not yielding much success in retaining students beyond Grade 9. According to research, enrollment numbers continue to decrease when Core French is not a mandatory subject. For example, only 4.6% of the students who are enrolled in Core French program, will take a French credit in Grade 12 (CPF, 2015). According to survey results conducted by Arnett, Mady & Muilenburg (2014), teachers’ beliefs and perspectives over students with learning disabilities have affected the teachers’ expectations of those students. The researchers claimed that many of these teachers believe that students with learning disabilities may
not be able to acquire a second language or that it might be too challenging for them to learn which affects the quality of their instruction (Arnett et al., 2014). In order to increase success in Core French, there have been several initiatives to introduce pilot intensive French programs, or change some of the strategies that are currently being used by some educators and replace them with more engaging strategies (CPF, 2015). On the other hand, funding remains an issue for Core French programs. Since school boards are not obligated to disclose how they spend their funds, many claim that funding for FSL programs is not being spent on these programs (CPF, 2015). Arnett (2010), argued that lately French instruction has been seen as the language of the elite, and that many students from lower socio-economic status may not be able to attain the language. In addition, Arnett (2010) added that many students in Core French classes are leaving the program due to challenges in the curriculum and predominance of English communication during French classes.

2.3 Stakeholders’ Attitudes

In this section the focus will be on addressing the concerns of certain stakeholders that are contributing to the issue of low retention and low achievement rates in Core French education. First, I addressed on the depreciated status of Core French teachers, then I explained students’ perspectives on Core French education. Then, I addressed the role of the government in widening the gap between FSL programs and English programs through inconsistent unified curriculums and the lack of funding to French programs.

2.3.1 Deprecated status of Core French teachers

In 2002, Elizabeth M. Richards interviewed 21 elementary Core French teachers in Ontario and found that the majority of the teachers she has interviewed felt marginalized by the school’s administration and the teaching community. She reported in her findings that most Core French
teachers were feeling burnout due to having to teach hundreds of students in one or in several schools in a single day. Further, Richards reported that Core French teachers felt that they were not being taken seriously by the school’s community because they often do not have their own classrooms; they drag their teaching carts around the school; are excluded from meetings and could get cancelled to meet the schools’ other priorities; and have multiple supervision duties in one or all of the schools they teach in (Richards, 2002). And even when Core French teachers had their own classrooms, they were located in inappropriate locations like in gymnasiums, libraries, and broom closets. In fact, the researcher even found one French class being held in a kitchen (Richards, 2002). One teacher reflects on these findings in Kissau’s research:

One of the number one reasons why I didn’t ever want to teach Grade school French is because walking around as a professional with a cart or a big basket is insulting. The French teacher isn’t appreciated as a professional. There is like a hierarchy. “Who is the French teacher? Oh, she’s the one who gives our teacher her prep.” Or if a kid has to make up a test, that’s okay. “We’ll take him out of French class to do it.” I think the teacher and the subject is demeaned, and the kids get this message (Kissau, 2005, pg. 18).

Therefore, when surveying 387 Ontario Core French teachers Lapkin and Barkaoui (2006) found that one fifth of them and one third of Grade 7 to 9 teachers reported that they were leaving French teaching within 3 years of completing the survey (Lapkin, Mady, & Arnett, 2009). Further, most teachers surveyed by Richards (2002) reported that they felt that principals did not believe that French was an important subject, and therefore, they did not provide Core French teachers with the same amount of support and financial and professional resources (Macfarlane & Hart, 2002). In addition Carr (2010) claimed that the issue of attaining qualified teachers is affecting the issue of retention. The researcher found that although general teachers are required to teach Core
French from Grades 5-8 in British Columbia, they are not required to take the FSL methodology course which would qualify them to teach the language (Carr, 2010).

2.3.2 Students

In the following section I will start by discussing students’ attitudes towards Core French. Then I address the issue of English Language Learners’ attitudes towards learning Core French.

2.3.2.1 Quality of Core French education

In recent years there has been a decline in student enrollment in Core French programs (Cashman, 2004). For example, in 2001, Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF) found that only 16% of students who were eligible to take Core French courses in Grade 11 were enrolled in such programs (Cashman, 2004). Therefore, in efforts to discover the reasons behind students’ lack of interest in pursuing Core French education, APEF held a study in 2002 and surveyed close to 3000 students who have opted out of studying Core French in Grade 11 (Cashman, 2004). The results of the survey indicated the students decided to discontinue studying Core French because they were not feeling that they were improving their communication skills and that they were unable of expressing themselves in French. Further, they felt that their teachers put a lot of emphasize on grammar and conjugation and that the work was too hard which caused them to get lower Grades and thus drop out of Core French programs (Cashman, 2004). Though, students also reported that they would be more interested in taking Core French courses if they had more hands on and fun projects, group work and field trips to French speaking areas. One of the participants in that survey stated that if French language was more interesting and relevant to students, there would not be an issue of retention because students will feel that they are learning meaningful material that are designed in a way that would motivate them to succeed (Cashman, 2004). Carr
(2010) also found that half of those who have completed Grade 12 French could not communicate effectively in French.

### 2.3.2.2 English Language Learners

On the other side of the spectrum, studies have shown that English Language Learners (ELL) excel in Core French and even outperform their Canadian peers whom English is their first language, or other students who are bilingual or multilingual but born in Canada (Lapkin et al., 2009). In 2007 Callie Mady conducted a study on French language proficiency where she compared two groups of secondary student levels. The first group was the ELL group who have studied introductory French for five months and the second group was the Canadian born students who have studied Core French for five years. Mady found that ELLs have outperformed their Canadian born peers in listening and writing sections (Lapkin et al., 2009). According to Mady, one reason for ELL’s strong performance in French could be linked to the positive attitudes of ELLs and their parents over learning French as a second language (Lapkin et al., 2009). In her interview with the parents, Mady found that ELL parents and their children value learning French as a second language and that they believe that ELLs are able to learn an additional language beside their language of origin. Further, both the ELLs and their parents valued learning French because they believe that learning French reflects a true Canadian identity, could help the ELLs with future employment opportunities and would mean that they are receiving a better quality education (Lapkin et al., 2009). Although research have shown that ELLs are able to succeed in learning French as a second language, there was a policy loophole that allowed ELL students to be exempt from French programs until their English has improved (Lapkin et al., 2009). Loopholes like these are denying ELLs from having an equal access to Core French program.
2.3.3 **Schoolboards**

In this section, I address the issue of retention from the perspective of the school boards. I start by talking about the curriculum expectations in Ontario. Then I address the issue of equitable access to resources and support and finally, I address some of the challenges school boards suffer from in terms of allocating enough support and instructional time to Core French teachers.

2.3.3.1 **Curriculum expectations**

According to Ontario French as a second language curriculum (2013) by the end of Grade 8, students should be able to demonstrate strengths in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, the overall expectations for Grade 8 Core French students in the speaking strand: B2. Speaking to interact, are laid out as follow: By the end of Grade 8 students will “participate in spoken interactions in French for a variety of purposes and with diverse audiences” (Ontario French Language curriculum, 2013). Though in 2004, CPF have interviewed university students who have received their French education in Core French programs. The survey found that “almost half reported that they could not understand spoken French, one-third expressed little confidence about their ability to function in a francophone environment, and most said they would not be able to carry on a conversation in French beyond a few set phrases” (Lapkin et al., 2009, p. 4). According to the findings of the study, Ontario French language curriculum’s overall excitations for Core French are not being met by half of the students who are taking Core French classes which indicate a gap between the curriculum’s expectations and students’ performance. Moreover, there is a growing concern with the lack of emphasis on oral communication in the curriculum. According to Ontario Public School Boards’ Association OPSBA, Ontario curriculum focuses on a grammar based approach rather than a communicative one. Especially in Grade 7, engaging and communicative aspects of the French language are being replaced by grammar
activities which produce students who are insecure about speaking French (Cook, 2007). By the same token, there has been little research in the area of judging the efficiency of the expectations of the Ontario Core French curriculum and if these expectations are too difficult for students to achieve by the end of Grade 8.

2.3.3.2 Equitable access

Because FSL programs rely mainly on school board administrators’ support, Ontario school boards have been criticized for demonstrating a lack of commitment to French instruction. Further, reports are suggesting that school boards are failing to support their Core French educators and Core French students (Kissau, 2005). In the same survey held by CPF in 2004, the majority of students reported that did not receive any form of support from their school counsellors and administrators to encourage them to continue studying Core French (CFP, 2004). What is even more disturbing, is that there has been reports that school boards are far from encouraging male students to study Core French after Grade 9 (Kissau, 2005). According to Kissau (2005), due to scheduling procedures, Grade 10 students, after receiving their mandatory courses, they have very few time slots available to fill with extra courses. Therefore, when courses that are popular among males such as Physical Education PD is offered at the same time as Core French, most males decide to take PD courses instead. In addition to making Core French inaccessible to all students equitably, some school boards are making it increasingly more difficult for secondary level students to study Core French (Kissau, 2005). Since in Ontario Grade 10 students have a small number of optional credits, many students drop out of French because they consider it to be as an inferior subject due to the way it is perceived in their schools (Kissau, 2005).
2.3.3.3 Schoolboards’ challenges

However, although school boards have acknowledged the gaps in Core French education, they also argue that these gaps are a result of several challenges they meet in their schools (Cook, 2007). In 2007 Ontario Public School Boards’ Association OPSBA surveyed 18 school boards and 3 school authorities in order to discuss the challenges faced by Ontario School Boards in what concerns Core French programs. The findings of the survey have been consistent and have indicated concerns over the time allocated to teaching Core French programs. Currently in Ontario, the ministry of education have set at total number of 600 hours designated to Core French instruction in the elementary level. However, the ministry did not indicate how these hours are to be distributed. Therefore, in most school boards, students receive daily 40 minutes long French lessons (Lapkin et al., 2009). However, it is argued by educators that 40 minutes a day is not enough to allow for effective instruction or individualized feedback (Cook, 2007, p.4). Further, survey respondents have also reported a lack of French resources in their schools. They indicated that they do not have up to date French reading material aimed at increasing students’ proficiency. Also respondents mentioned a lack of engaging resources such as work/study and travel to French communities programs, and a lack of French art and entertainment programs (Cook, 2007). Another challenge faced by teachers on a board level is the lack of professional development offered to Core French teachers. Lapkin (2009) mentioned that Core French teachers felt unprepared to teach Core French because while some schools offer unpaid, after school workshops, other boards do not offer Core French workshops at all. These findings have been supported by OPSBA survey respondents who have reported similar challenges combined with the lack of having the support of a French consultant for teachers (Cook, 2007).
2.3.4 Government

In this section, I provide a glimpse over the lack of consistency in Core French instruction across provinces and the lack of funding allocated to Core French programs.

2.3.4.1 Lack of consistency in Core French instruction

In Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction, therefore, it is difficult for the federal government to have unifying rules in what concerns Core French instructions because sometimes provincial and federal goals may be different (Kissau, 2005). According to Kissau (2005), the study of Core French is not a national priority due to the lack of consistency in Core French programming around Canada. The researcher further explains that “there is no consistency in French programs across Canada, French is mandatory in New Brunswick till Grade 10, it is completely optional throughout elementary and secondary schooling in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and compulsory at only a few Grade levels in the other provinces and territories” (Kissau, 2005). According to the Ministry of Education (2015), in Ontario, Core French is mandatory between Grades 4 – 8 which causes great variations in Core French students across all Canadian provinces. For instance, when examining provincial Core French enrolment rates it was found that there were provincial variations between all Canadian provinces. The highest percentages of students enrolled in Core French programs were in Quebec 64.2%, followed by Newfoundland and Labrador 47.1%, Yukon 42.8%, Ontario 42.1% and New Brunswick 41.3% (CPF, 2013). However, although these provincial differences might indicate that Core French instruction is perceived more positively in certain provinces, a second survey by CPF in 2012 - 2013 have shown different provincial enrolment rates based on students’ Grades. The survey found that Core French enrolment rates varied depending on having Core French as a compulsory subject or not. For example, enrolment rates start increasing gradually from Grade one 27,000 students, to
Grade two 28,000 students and Grade three 29,000 students. Then once Core French becomes a compulsory topic in Ontario, rates jump to 108,000 students in Grades four and five, and to 114,000 students in Grades six and seven and they peak in Grade eight at 118,000 students. Though, it is interesting to note how Core French rates decline dramatically when Core French becomes an optional subject, starting with Grade nine at 82,000 students, then Grade ten with 24,000 students, followed by 15,000 students in Grade 11 and 11,000 students in Grade 12 (CPF, 2013).

2.3.4.2 Funding

There is a lot of skepticism and grey areas in what concerns how and where funds are allocated for language programs in publically funded schools in Canada (Kissau, 2005). The Official Languages Education Program (OLEP) is a federally funded program that provides financial resources to provinces and territories in order to help with the costs of second language programs (Kissau, 2005). However, although Core French programs offer French exposure to 90% of non-French speaking students around Canada, OLEP has been undergoing several financial cuts since 1993. For example, the federal budget of 1998-2003 that targets FSL instruction has been decreased by over 30% in comparison to 1988-1993 which have impacted the quality of French programs being offered in Canada (Kissau, 2005). Also, due to the financial cuts to French programs, the Ministry of Education in Ontario have decided that they will not be funding Core and extended French programs which introduce students from K to 3 to french language instruction (Kissau, 2005). Therefore, as a result of that, many elementary schools stopped offering Core French programs to primary Grade students, others eliminated the role of an FSL consultant, and the Ontario Ministry of Education has now only one education officer who is in charge of FSL curriculum, overlooking the policies and other duties as well, all because publically funded schools
cannot afford to provide these services anymore (Kissau, 2005). On the other hand, Canadian Parents for French (CPF) (2004) argued that even if additional funding was received by schools, the funds will not be dispersed equally due to the depreciated status of Core French language in schools. Further, they claim that French programs will not receive their rightful share because FSL funding is combined with the general revenue of the school board. Therefore, according to CPF (2004) since there is no system for tracking the schools’ funds and how or where they are located, there is no accurate way to find out if the funds are in fact reaching FSL classrooms or not.

2.4 Effective Instructional Approaches and Strategies

In the following sections I will be discussing several strategies that are currently used in Core French instruction in Ontario. The focus of the strategies aims at retaining students’ interest in Core French education.

Current effective strategies

There has been several initiatives made by school educators in order to retain students beyond Grade 9 in Core French programs. For example, some boards have implemented motivation programs aimed at students in Grades 7 to 9, to encourage them to stay in Core French programs (Cook, 2007). While other boards awarded students who have completed Grade 12 Core French a certificate of achievement. Other schools are implementing pilot programs aimed at allowing students to progress at their own pace, and are reviewing assessment goals to reflect students’ needs. Also schools are incorporating the use of technology as a way to allow for individualized learning, and more fun and interactive activities (Cook, 2007). Further, research shows that longer instructional time for Core French would enhance French language learning (Lapkin et al., 2009). In other words, it is suggested that instead of assigning short daily learning blocks of 40 minutes, teachers could teach 80 minutes long classes a few times a week. This way,
teachers could use the extra time to focus on more practical aspects of the curriculum like adding novels, journal logs, and other interactive activities (Lapkin et al., 2009). The following will highlight a few instructional approaches used by educators in order to enhance students’ performance and interest in French:

2.4.1 Collaborative project-based approach

In this approach, students and teachers together on collaborative activities such as collaborative dictation where students can share their texts with their peers, group presentations with a focus on drama, and more hands on activities. Teachers who have used this approach reported an increase of student interest in the material, an increase of oral comprehension and proficiency, and an increase of vocabulary acquisition because students had to scaffold the information in French through interactive activities (Lapkin et al., 2009).

2.4.2 Multidimensional project-based approach

This is a student-centered, project-based approach that focuses on improving communication skills in students. It improves oral and literacy strategies among students because it highlights grammar activities that focus on facilitating fluency and communication skills (Lapkin et al., 2009). However, this approach works best when teachers have more time to implement the strategies. For example, it is difficult for teachers to implement this approach in their usual 40 minutes blocks because of the setup time, and because of the time wasted on reviewing the previous day material. Teachers expressed that they needed more time, like two compacted lesson of 80 minutes, in order to implement these communicative strategies (Lapkin et al., 2009).

2.4.3 Accelerated Integrated Method (AIM)

One of the most popular approaches, AIM is used by 33% of Canadian elementary Core French programs. AIM, is a language teaching method that “combines target language use with
gestures, high-frequency vocabulary and drama to accelerate the development of fluency from the onset of classroom instruction” (Lapkin et al., 2009, pg. 15). Through AIM, specific words are associated with certain gestures that help the students establish a connection between the words and the action (Snyder, 2015). For example, for the French word “manger” that means to eat in English, the teacher will gesture the motion of eating. Also, because it is not a Grade based approach, teachers can teach AIM approach in units of years starting in the in elementary level as in Grades 1 -3. This way, learning would become more individualized and more student-centered (Lapkin et al., 2009). Using this approach increases students’ confidence in listening and speaking skills thanks to the use of gestures and because AIM students receive longer hours of instruction. Though some researchers argue that AIM may not be the most effective way for Core French instruction. AIM requires 100% participation from students and teachers which could be exhausting. Further, research could not prove that using AIM was the only reason for an increased French fluency. That is why, researchers are calling for more research to examine the effects of AIM approach (Lapkin et al., 2009).

### 2.4.4 Teaching Adaptations in the Language Classroom (TALC)

An approach that was developed by a French teacher to help her special needs students succeed, was also proven to be beneficial to all students equally. In her approach, the teacher uses strategies that are student-centred, different modes of lesson delivery, she monitors and checks for comprehension, provides positive and constructive feedback through oral cues, she focuses in her approach on communication and simplifies the language to make it easier for her students to understand and use the language (Lapkin et al., 2009).
2.4.5 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

CEFR, a framework of reference developed in Europe to provide common basis of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines designed for foreign language proficiency. It also gives references on the teaching design, the material that is taught and assessments and evaluation of the foreign language. The framework scales language proficiency over six levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. It is important to note, that CEFR does not offer any specific teaching strategies, but rather it offers professional guidelines for planning, teaching and evaluation (CEFR, 2001). The province of Ontario has adopted CEFR in 2008 and has explored it in a Canadian context. For example, CEFR focuses on assessment for learning but also assessment as learning where students and teachers would assess the process and the results on ongoing basis (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2010). Further, CEFR is an action-oriented approach where students’ goal is to develop communication skills, and to make grammatical mistakes and learn from them. Therefore, the focus is on fluency, rather than on grammar (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2010).

2.4.6 A Framework for FSL in Ontario schools

The framework has been developed in Ontario in 2013 in order to help school boards in Ontario improve FSL programs, and increase student achievement and public confidence in French instruction (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). The following approaches were recognized in the framework as being some of the most prominent approaches in learning a foreign language:

2.4.7 The Grammar Translation Approach

This approach conveys the ability of translating foreign texts into the native language by introducing the students to foreign texts, then providing them with translated vocabulary lists and explicit grammar rules. Through the study of these foreign words and their meaning, students
would be able to form reading and writing skilling but not oral communication skills because they are not communicating with other or with the teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

**Audiolingual instruction**

The audiolingual approach places greater attention to oral communication. It provides the students with opportunities to speak and hear the foreign language. An example of a learning strategy is memorizing and reciting a skit, or a short paragraph in the foreign language. However, it is believed that because of the lack of attention on grammar, that student do pick bad habits and are unable to communicate effectively in the foreign language because they lack accuracy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

**The communicative approach**

This approach provides students with opportunities to use the foreign language in meaningful ways. Errors are a natural part of learning the language, and therefore, form and grammar is not highly emphasized. Fluency is encouraged over accuracy, and students are invited to communicate in the foreign language as much as possible. Students can also use different prompts to assist them in their dialogue such as gestures, and contextual cues (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

**The action oriented approach**

This approach focuses on connecting language learning to real life tasks. Students learn the language through purposeful action, where they create and analyze written and oral texts using a range of strategies. And teachers would present the students with activities that mimic real life tasks, therefore they are tasks that requires oral and written interaction between the students. For example, students can work in groups in order to do a presentation that addresses a certain issue.
Further, although grammar is not in the center of this approach, but it is taught in order to enhance oral and written skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

2.5 Conclusion

According to research data, FSL programs, especially Core French, are suffering from several drawbacks related to stakeholders’ attitudes who regard Core French language as inferior to other subjects. Students are also feeling the pressure from not being able to communicate effectively in French and having to leave French education due to scheduling conflicts. In addition, school boards are contributing to the issue of marginalization of Core French programs which is due to the lack of funding and support from the government. And although there have been several initiatives to increase the public’s confidence in Core French language instruction, more and more students are showing less interest in pursuing French language education in the secondary level. On the other hand, there have been several initiatives placed by the government to enhance students’ motivation and engagement in Core French education. The most common goal of these initiatives is to shift the focus from the language to the students. They emphasize a communicative approach to the language with a lot more practical and hands on projects and activities. This focus of this research is to find key practices and strategies in addition to those mentioned in the literature review, in hopes of reducing the dropout rates from Core French programs beyond the mandatory years.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the research methodology that was used. I began by reviewing the research approach, the procedure followed, and the instruments of data collection, before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. The participants of the semi-structured interviews are elementary school educators, who have taught French language in the Core French stream. Once I have collected information from the participants, I will explain and analyze the data and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. Relatedly, I identified a range of methodological limitations, but I also spoke to the strengths of the methodology. Finally, I concluded the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

This research study will be conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with elementary school Core French teachers. According to Qualitative Research Consultants Association (QRCA), qualitative research combines in depth interviews of small groups of people; small group discussions; historical research and participant observations in order to explain and analyze the causes and effects of specific topics and issues (2015).

In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which allowed the participants to engage in the topic and provide more insightful feedback on the issue of Core French retention. Also, because qualitative research seeks a deep understanding of the issue, interview questions could be used to dive in beyond initial responses and to open up the conversation over specific issues such as dropout rates, and retention strategies. The findings of qualitative research studies
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could vary depending on the gathered data. According to Griffin (2004), the use of qualitative research methods could challenge the researchers’ assumptions over specific topics which could ultimately change the direction of the research. This is why it is important for me as a researcher to use qualitative research methods in order to formulate a hypothesis and seek an analysis for it.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The main instrument used for data collection in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer and the participant are engaged in a formal interview where the interviewer is following a predetermined list of questions. The questions are designed to open up the conversation through asking open ended questions, probing and prompting the participant to expand and elaborate on the topic (Cohen & Crabtree, 2004). The interviewer’s personal and interpersonal skills play a big role in gaging the interview and in facilitating the discussion. Face to face discussions allow for gaining an in depth understanding of the meaning through reading body language and active listening (Newton, 2010). Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity to gather richer data through elaborating on certain issues and probing on a deeper level. When participants feel valued and safe enough, they would share deep insights that could guide the research in a different direction or give a deeper understanding of the causes and the effects of the issue (Newton, 2010).

For the purposes of my research, conducting semi-structured interviews has allowed me to explore the perspective of Core French teachers using their own voice and experiences. The research has found that Core French teachers were not satisfied with their profession, and that they were trying to leave Core French teaching once they could (Lapkin, Mady, & Arnett, 2009). Through open ended questions, I was able to understand what it is like being a Core French teacher and what their struggles and demands are. Further, through my interviews, I was able to get a
clearer understanding of where Core French teachers stand on the issue of Core French retention and how they are dealing with it.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria that I established in order to recruit the participants in this study. Then I explain the sampling procedure and the wide range of possible avenues for participants’ recruitment. Finally, I included a section where I will be introducing each of the participants that have participated in my interviews.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

As I will be interviewing three participants, I carefully selected the following criteria to guide my decision:

- All participants must be teachers who currently or have taught Core French language to elementary level students. The reason for that is because I want to find out what Core French teachers’ challenges and what are their demands.
- In addition, all participants must be teachers who currently or have resided in Ontario, because I want to know what are the teachers’ perspectives on Core French education in Ontario.
- Also, all participants must be teachers who have taught Core French language for a minimum of 5 years. That is because I believe that teachers who have dealt with the system longer, would have a deeper understanding of how the system really works. Further, they would have been at the point where most Core French teachers decide to leave Core French instruction.
- Finally, all teachers must be informed on at least one Core French teaching approach and have demonstrated leadership in the area of FSL education and commitment to retaining students beyond the mandatory years. My rational is that all teachers should be able to provide valuable insights on potential strategies to retaining students in Core French programs.
3.3.2 Sampling procedures

There are several methods of sampling that are used in quantitative and qualitative research studies and I will be using two of them. The first which is known as convenience sampling is a method that is generally used in quantitative research studies. When using convenience sampling, researchers seek participants who are more accessible to them. By doing so, researchers could ignore eligible participants who are less accessible (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014).

The second method is known as purposeful sampling which is more commonly used in qualitative research studies. In purposeful sampling, researchers carefully select their participants based on the study’s topic. Also the researcher seeks participants who are able to provide valuable and unique insights that would enrich and add value to the study (Suen et al., 2014).

Since this research study is following the guidelines of a qualitative research study, and since I am looking for experienced teachers who can add value to my research I will be conducting purposeful sampling. In order not to pressure any teachers to participate in my research study I will be distributing my contact information, my sampling criteria and an overview over my research study to school boards and teachers association. In an effort to connect with associate teachers I relied on academic and professional networks and contacted previous teachers who met my sampling criteria. I also joined several French teachers blogs and contacted the teachers through social media and telephone conversations. In addition, I attended a French circle group and communicated with prospective teachers. Eventually when I found qualified participants, I was granted an ethical approval from Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) to ask the teachers formally to be interviewed. As per the ethical protocol, all the participants received a consent letter (Appendix A) that identified who I am as a student researcher, the topic of my research study and my sampling criteria. Also in the consent letter (Appendix B), the participants
were made aware of the interview process and how I will be respecting and protecting their privacy. By doing so, the participants felt comfortable with the interview process and agreed to be interviewed by me.

3.3.3 Participant bios

For my interviews I carefully selected two teachers who have demonstrated a commitment towards retaining students’ interest in French language learning, and who have a minimum of 5 year of experience teaching core French in Ontario. I will be using pseudonyms to protect the identities of my participants and I will refer to the first participant as Shannon and the second participant as Lisa.

Shannon has been a French teacher for the past 6 years. Currently she is teaching extended French to a Grade 4/5 split and also teaching rotary core French where she Core French students come to her from another class for 40 minutes once a day. In addition, she has taught Core French in her previous years to Grades 5, 7 and 8. Shannon completed her undergraduate degree in French and later on took an Additional Qualification course in FSL part one. She teaches in TDSB and currently is helping run an afterschool French language program. Shannon understands the importance of being a bilingual person in Canada because speaking French will help the students develop their communication skills and cultural understanding of French Canadians and because it will help them find jobs in a competitive job market.

My second participant Lisa, has been a teacher in TDSB for 8 years and she has taught classes ranging from Grade 4 to Grade 8. She is currently teaching rotary core French for Grades 4 – 8 where she would visit different classes each day. Lisa, moved to Ontario from Quebec when she was in Grade 1, and she speaks French as her first language. When she moved here, Lisa
continued her education in French immersion and later on completed her undergraduate degree in French and did an Additional Qualification course in FSL part one.

3.4 Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2009), data analysis consists of analyzing and making sense of the text and the data found in the research. In order to collect and analyze the data, I recorded the interviews with all the participants using 3 different mediums of recording technology: Phone, laptop and voice recorder. Then after transcribing the recordings, word by word, I created a second copy of the transcript and decoded it based on the research and the interview questions. Creswell also suggested that in order to analyse the data, the researcher must dive into the research and conduct different analysis of the text in order to move deeper into understanding the text (2009). Therefore, once I have decoded the transcript, I categorized the data and found themes within the categories. Creswell (2009) stated that once a clear understanding of the data has been established, the researcher then must start interpreting the data and reflect upon it. After having categorized the data into themes, I synthesized the themes and connected them to issues I addressed in my research question. After synthesizing the data, I addressed null data, which are issues that my participants did not address. It is important to report on null data, because it is data that was highlighted in the literature review as current issues that are causing students to drop out of Core French programs, which ultimately speaks to my main research question.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

As a Masters of Teaching student, I obtained an ethical consent letter that is endorsed by OISE, explaining the purposes of my interview, the ethical implications, the participants’ rights and expectations and how the information will be used and shared. This letter was sent out to each participant prior to the interviews where each teacher was made aware of the process of the
interview. Also, due to having to speak about sensitive topics like inequality and discrimination against Core French teachers, there is a risk of jeopardizing the teachers’ jobs and credibility. Therefore, protecting participants’ confidentiality must be given a top priority. In addressing this issue, I used pseudonyms and refraining from using any markers that may reveal the true identity of the participants. In addition, all data gathered was stored on a password protected laptop and will be destroyed after 5 years. Further, I granted my participants the right to review the transcripts, and the right to withdraw any statements they do not want to share. Moreover, although there are no known risks involved with participation in this study, all participants had the right to pass on answering any question they do not feel comfortable with and they were reminded that they have the right to withdraw their participation from the study at any time.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

According to Creswell (2009), the strength of conducting semi-formal interviews is that the interviewer can control the line of questioning and that the participants can provide valuable information on certain topics. Although, I was fortunate to be able to control the line of questioning, the biggest drawback to this study was the sample size, criteria, and the time allocated for the interviews. Creswell (2009) claimed that one known limitation to conducting interviews is that some participants might either provide irrelevant information or biased responses. Given that I was granted permission to only interview a small number of teachers, I excluded a lot of eligible and valuable participants i.e. students, principals and parents. Therefore, it was challenging for me to try and get a holistic perspective on the issue of Core French retention. Also, the specific sampling criteria listed above, limited my options and made it more difficult to find eligible participants. My topic is a sensitive one, and many could be deterred by the nature of the questions and therefore, might refuse to participate in my study. On the other hand, it is very difficult to
elaborate on the different issues I’ve posed during the short time that is allocated for the interviews. It is nearly impossible to get a teacher’s entire perspective on Core French retention, inequality in the workplace, strategies and next steps within 60 minutes. However, it is because I interviewed more than one teacher, I received different views and found common themes to elaborate on. Additionally, since I used an audio recorder in the interviews, some participants might feel uncomfortable being recorded, however, that discomfort was alleviated when the participants knew that they have the right to listen to the recordings and withdraw the permission to let me use them at any time. Creswell (2009) argues that although the use of audio-visual material could make some participants feel uncomfortable, it is still a method of data collection that allows the participants to share their stories directly with the audience.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology I used to support my research. I began by identifying the qualitative research approach, the procedure and the instruments I used in data collection. I chose a qualitative research approach as it allowed me to get a better understanding of the teachers’ lived and professional experiences. I then elaborated on the importance of using semi-structured interviews as they functioned as a window to the participants’ minds. Through the interviews, I was able to ask questions pertaining to the issue of Core French retention and gather important data that was essential to the research topic. Later in the chapter, I identified my participants and the sampling criteria I used when searching for participants. I used purposeful sampling because it helped me get a more in depth view through talking to different teachers who had different perspectives on the topic of my study. Finally, I analyzed the methodological limitation to conducting a qualitative research study which was trying to interview a controlled
sample of teachers during a short period of time. In my next chapter, I will report on the findings of the semi-structured interviews with the study participants.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the data collected from my semi-structured interviews with two Core French teachers. The first participant was Shannon, an extended French teacher who teaches her own Grade 4/5 split along with Core French to a different classroom once a day. The second participant was Lisa, a rotary Core French teacher for Grades 4-8. The main focus guiding my research study is how a sample of Core French teachers are responding to the issue of retention of students in Core French programs and what range of practices do they enact to enhance student engagement in Core French language learning. After having transcribed and coded my interviews, I incorporated the voices of my participants with existing research to organize the data into four main themes and several sub-themes that relate directly to my main research question.

The first theme addresses the barriers to retaining students in Core French programs due to limitations in curriculum expectations, scheduling conflicts and a negative outlook on the French language. The second theme relates to the challenges that encounter Core French teachers in their instruction such as marginalization of Core French teachers and the depreciated status of the Core French language. The third theme suggest that holistic teaching approach and authentic assessment are key practices Core French teachers can use to enhance students’ interest and engagement in Core French language. Finally, the fourth theme explains that the increase of funding to Core French programs will provide Core French teachers with the resources they need to support them in their work.
4.1 There are Barriers to Retaining Students in Core French Programs Due to Limitations in Curriculum Expectations, Scheduling Conflicts and a Negative Outlook on the French Language

In this section, participants have elaborated on the barriers they face when teaching the Core French language program. For instance both participants expressed struggling with keeping students engaged while having to teach a heavily grammar-based curriculum. Further, the participants addressed the issue of having to deal with scheduling conflicts that limit students from taking Core French courses beyond Grade 9. And finally, both participants expressed that junior students have a negative outlook on Core French language program due to lack of interest in the language and not believing that they can improve their communication skills. These findings are important because the participants’ voices were in line with the research data that emphasized the barriers to retaining students beyond the mandatory years.

4.1.1 Students find it difficult to stay engaged in a grammar-based curriculum

The participants expressed struggling with teaching the curriculum because they found it focused too much on grammar and not on communication. This created anxiety for the students who felt that the language was too difficult or boring and for the teachers who had to teach the dry topics. When speaking about her experience with teaching Grade 5 students Shannon said:
I think that many students are dropping out after the mandatory years because French is not an easy language to learn […] sure when we begin with it is simple, but then it becomes complex and there are lots of verbs and tenses to remember and many students struggle with that.

Lisa had a similar experience, because as a rotary Core French teachers she gets to work with students in different Grades and she said that her older students, Grades 5 and up, struggled
with the grammar because they did not like conjugating the verbs and all the complex grammar rules.

The research findings were consistent with the participants’ observations as a survey performed by the Ontario Public School Association has indicated that the Core French curriculum is grammar based and not very engaging which is causing the students to lose their interest in learning French (Cook, 2007).

4.1.2 Teachers find it difficult to retain students due to scheduling conflicts

The participants also indicated that they found it challenging to retain students in Core French programs due to scheduling conflicts. Shannon mentioned how she noticed that in many cases, physical education or drama classes would be offered at the same time as Core French electives and the students would choose those more popular classes over Core French. Lisa confirmed that as well because she said that in her school, high school students have a very limited number of electives and “many students feel pressured because even if they wanted to take Core French courses, sometimes they can’t because they have to take other courses they need to graduate.”

Kissau (2005) confirmed the limitations to retaining students in Core French programs as he stated that since Grade 10 students have a limited number of electives, they opt out of learning Core French for something more interesting and less challenging for them.

4.1.3 Students have a negative outlook on the Core French language

When asked about the challenges they faced, both participants indicated that students’ lack of interest and engagement in Core French education was one of the biggest challenges they face on a daily basis. Shannon expressed that in her experience, students demonstrate a high level of interest in learning French until they get into higher Grades. She said:
When I taught Grade 4, [the students] were completely into it and interested, eager to go through all of it. But when I went with higher Grades, it was a lot more difficult for them to get interested in French.

Lisa reported similar views on how French learning anxiety appears among her students around Grade 5. She said: “I guess with my juniors, they have a negative outlook on the language because they think that they’re bad at French which causes them to feel anxious and be less interested in learning the language.” Lisa added that the negative reactions towards learning the French language is causing the students to develop what is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy, where students believe that they are bad at French, and so they start acting like they are bad at French which further increases their negative outlook on French.

The research supports Shannon and Lisa’s claims where students reported wanting to discontinue learning French because they did not think that they were improving their communication skills because the language was too difficult and not engaging (Cashman, 2004).

**4.2 Challenges that Encounter Core French Teachers in their Instruction are Linked to Marginalization of Core French Teachers and the Depreciated Status of the Core French Language**

This section addresses challenges that Core French teachers encounter in their school boards. The participants had some differences in the way they reacted to certain issues such as how they were treated by their school community and by the amount of funding they received to update their existing materials and resources. On the other hand, both participants agreed that in general, negative outlook on the Core French language starts around Grade 5 and that it is a factor to developing French learning anxiety in students. In addition, both participants acknowledged the need for having a structural guide for Core French teachers to use and modify as they see fit.
4.2.1 Lack of funding causes a challenge for Core French teachers

When speaking about their school boards, both participants acknowledged that funding is a big factor to either having a positive or a negative experience in their school. Shannon expressed that funding is well allocated in her school and that her principle would support her and the other French teachers whenever they needed to buy new resources or teaching materials. She said:

When I entered the board and started teaching French, I wanted to update our resources for core French and looking into other resources, the admin were always with us on that. We weren’t held back in any way. If we needed any programs or technology or order new resources, they were supportive about that. I don’t feel that there was anything lacking from the program at that time.

Lisa painted a different picture when she expressed her dissatisfaction with the way the funding is allocated in her school. She expressed feeling that due to the negative outlook on Core French that her administrators held back funding from the program. She mentioned that she had to work with outdated resources and without much visuals or technology because her cart does not support carrying such material. Lisa also expressed that when she went to talk to her administrator about updating their French resources and purchasing new DVDs, she was told that she has to work with whatever material available at the school. Lisa expressed that: “There were many instances where I had to use my own money to purchase books and supplies for my lessons.”

Despite having varied levels of funding support, both participants indicated a lack of professional development days and workshops for Core French teachers in their schools. This was because the Core French program was placed as a low priority in their schools. They also both acknowledged the importance of having these professional development days and workshops and they recognized their effectiveness in providing new resources and teaching materials. However, both participants also indicated that they have not had any professional development days for Core French teachers.
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yet. Shannon said: “most of the professional development days in my school were offered in subjects I don’t teach like math or literacy so there was no point in me going to them.” In addition, both teachers acknowledged that there is a lack of educational counselors and a structural guide for them to teach Core French language which is making their job a lot more demanding and challenging. Shannon expressed that although the curriculum is considered a guide for the teachers, many find it too big and overwhelming. Therefore, she was hoping that the ministry would come up with a teaching guide that contains units that the teachers could modify based on their students’ needs. She said: “if we had a program like that for the francophone it will allow us to modify the structure to engage the students. This way teachers would be developing the guide rather than trying to create it on their own.”

The research supports the claim that there is a lot of inconsistency in terms of how funds are allocated for language programs in Ontario publically funded school boards. Canadian Parents for French indicated that since there is no accurate way to track how funding is allocated, many school boards are holding funds back from Core French programs due to the marginalization and the negative outlook of the language and the teachers (CPF, 2004). In addition, the participants’ statements were aligned with the research findings regarding the lack of professional training for Core French teachers. As Lapkin, Mady & Arnott (2009) indicated, many teachers stated that they did not have many opportunities to attend professional days at their schools because they were either offered as unpaid workshops or were not offered at all. And in terms of not having enough educational resources for Core French teachers to use, the participants’ voices were in line with Cook’s survey (2007). The survey indicated that teachers reported a lack of French resources in their schools, and a lack of engaging and practical resources such as work/study programs, local and international trips to French communities and a lack of French art and entertainment programs.
4.2.2 Teachers reported feeling challenged by a stressful work environment

According to the participants, working as a Core French teacher could be very challenging due to the stressful environment they work in. For example, not having teaching resources, combined with having to teach a heavy grammar based curriculum could be very stressful for certain teachers. While Shannon expressed feeling overwhelmed by the amount of material she had to cover in a short time, Lisa added that not having enough resources and teaching guides made her job much more stressful and challenging and that she was constantly concerned about what to teach her students. Also, Lisa expressed being constantly stressed out over having to teach her lesson in 40 minutes long increments. She mentioned that due to time restrictions, she has no time to do everything she planned for her students because she often loses about 10 minutes a class setting up for the lesson and then wrapping everything up and packing her cart. She said: They give you only 40 minutes per class and they expect you to teach a wonderful lesson, but I barely have time for that when I also have to worry about trying to set-up for the lesson, deliver the content, monitor my students’ progress and then take everything down before the class is over.

In their research, Lapkin et al. (2009) pointed out that Core French teachers work in stressful environments which causes one fifth of them to leave the profession within 3 years. Although Shannon and Lisa both have been working for more than 3 years, Lisa did mention that she was considering to leave the profession several times but stayed because she loves teaching. Moreover, the participants confirmed Elizabeth M. Richards’ findings regarding the marginalization of Core French teachers who expressed feeling overwhelmed and stressed out because they do not have their own teaching space or the support of their administrators (2002). Lisa who have had a more negative experience than Shannon, expressed feeling letdown by her school’s administrators as they let her face these challenges on daily basis.
4.2.3 There are challenges that are linked to the lack of support of the school community

Both participants expressed the importance of having the support of their school community, which includes caring for their teachers’ wellbeing and providing them with their own teaching space. Shannon reported being satisfied with her school community because she has a good relationship with her principal and because she has another Core French teacher who acts as a mentor to Shannon and who provides her with lots of useful resources and teaching materials. Lisa, however, reported feeling extremely overwhelmed and unsatisfied with the way she is treated in her school by the administration and other staff members. When speaking with both teachers about whether or not they felt supported by their school community, they both addressed the issue of teaching space which affected their experiences in different ways. Shannon, who reported a more positive reaction to her school community, has her own classroom and she receives Core French students from a different class once a day. She said: “I am lucky because my principal gave me my own class and Core French kids come to me every day which is not a common thing for Core French teachers.” Whereas Lisa, expressed a much more negative reaction to her school community, she expressed that as a rotary Core French teacher she visits on average 4 to 6 different classes a day while dragging her teaching cart with her. She said: “The other teachers and the principal don’t see you as a real teacher because for them you are the prep teacher and your subject isn’t a real subject.” Lisa also indicated that she knew other teachers who were forced to teach in two schools where they would spend the first half of the day in one school and the second half in a different school. Lisa expressed that not having her own classroom causes her to have anxiety because it makes it difficult for the students to take her seriously when they see her dragging her cart around the school. She stated:
It is very difficult to focus on teaching when you are constantly dragging your cart from one classroom to the other, especially when you have less than 40 minutes to set-up for your lesson and then take it all down and rush to your second class.

Lisa’s experience reflected feeling marginalized and unsupported by her school community which is ultimately affecting how she feels about teaching Core French. The findings of a survey by Macfarlane & Hart (2002) indicated that many Core French teachers felt that their principals did not think that Core French was an important subject and therefore did not provide as much support to Core French teachers. These findings combined with Lisa’s experience demonstrate how lack of teaching space is causing a lot of tension between Core French teachers and their school administrators.

4.3 Holistic Teaching Approach and Authentic Assessment are Key Practices Core French Teachers Can Use to Enhance Students’ Interest and Engagement in Core French Language

In this section, the participants highlight key strategies and practices they use in their instruction in order to enhance students’ engagement in the lessons and to encourage them to speak more of the French language. Both participants recognized the importance of using a holistic approach to teaching the French language as it reflects the students’ various learning styles. They also both acknowledged the importance of using authentic assessment and having a growth mindset which encourages students’ motivation to learn and speak the French language.

4.3.1 Using a holistic approach to teaching Core French language enhances student motivation

As it has been reported by students and teachers that French grammar could get too difficult and overwhelming, both participants agreed that one way to support students is by getting into
grammar gradually. Also, Shannon explained that, in her experience, students started developing French learning anxiety in Grade 5 when the grammar was getting too complex for them. Therefore, one solution she suggested is to teach Core French language through a holistic approach that emphasizes teaching the language using a variety of focuses and strategies. She said that in her French classes, she pays attention to different learning styles. Therefore, she always starts her classes with a video, a song or a story so students can develop their oral and comprehension skills, then she would do either a grammar or a reading component which builds her students’ reading and comprehension skills. When asked about how they enhance their students’ interest in learning Core French, both participants acknowledged using several methods in their own classrooms. The first method was trying to find material that is interesting to the students. Shannon said that “you need to talk to your students and see what they want to learn about.” Once, her students wanted to do a project about the Olympics, so they designed a mascot and presented it to their classmates. The second method used by the participants was the use of small group work. This method was strongly advised by both participants for its effectiveness in building oral communication skills and eliminating French learning anxiety. Lisa expressed that she noticed that the students would communicate more in French when working in small groups than when working alone. Shannon also supported that claim when she confirmed that she uses a lot of small group work in her classroom. In addition, Shannon added that she believes strongly in peer support. She said that she had a group of volunteers from higher Grades come to her classroom and provide literacy support to her students. She mentioned that this helped the older students feel more confident with the language because they felt that they could use French for meaningful purposes. And for her younger students, she mentioned that “the students felt more comfortable and less intimidated to ask for clarification or questions from students like them.” Another method Lisa used to raise her
students’ interest in French was integrating French with art and drama. She mentioned how she organized a carnival with her older students where they would, in small groups, chose a country and do a cultural presentation on it using art, music, fashion and dance. She said that the carnival was received very well by the students who felt that they were working on a meaningful project and also because they were involved in the planning, implementing and the evaluating of the project.

Both Shannon and Lisa have tried using a holistic approach to teaching Core French language in order to increase their students’ interest in learning French. However, the teachers’ efforts to retain students in Core French programs must be supported and encouraged by the school administrators. The data collected in the literature review confirm that several boards are recognizing the issue of Core French retention and are implementing several strategies such as encouraging students’ motivation, providing completion certificates and working on building a more student-centered education model (Cook, 2007). Therefore, according to Cook’s findings (2007), school administrators are also recognizing the need to using a holistic approach to teaching Core French language as they see the need to retain students in these programs. Moreover, the need to using a holistic approach to teaching Core French corresponds with the findings of the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation’s (APEF) survey of 3000 students who reported wanting more hands on, fun projects, group work and field trips to French communities (Cashman, 2004). Research also suggests that empowering students and including them in the decision making and the evaluation process is a big factor in building their motivation to learn the language (Cook, 2007). Although Shannon and Lisa have had different experiences teaching Core French, they both agree that in order to reduce dropout rates from Core French; teachers and administrators should
combine their efforts by implementing a student-centered, holistic approach to teaching the language.

4.3.2 Using authentic assessment techniques and a growth mindset help build up student confidence in being able to learn French

Lisa highlighted the importance of using authentic assessment methods in measuring the success of her students as it helps create a positive growth mindset where the students know and understand that making mistakes is a part of the learning process. The participant expressed that many students drop out of Core French because they think that they will never be able to speak the language or pass the classes. However, by using a growth mindset, the students are encouraged to speak and take risks which will ultimately increase their confidence to speak French. Lisa added that as different students have different learning styles, they also have different evaluation preferences and she tries to accommodate those differences as much as possible. She explained that since she sees many different students and many different Grades every day, she tries to be creative in how she evaluates the progress of her students. She said that one method she uses to assess students’ speaking and comprehension skills is through incorporating French with the arts and drama. For example, she mentioned working with Grade 4 students on “all about me” skits where students would fill out a template which would contain information about their age, family, friends, favorite food, colors and hobbies. Then every student would be paired up with a partner and they would create a skit where they would ask each other questions using information drawn from their templates. She mentioned that “through these skits, students are practicing their reading, writing, listening, speaking and comprehension skills which are all components of the French language curriculum.” In addition, Shannon supported the claims of Lisa and added that it is important to use a growth mindset with the students were mistakes are welcomed because they are
considered a natural part of the learning process. Shannon said: “when students understand that it’s okay to make mistakes, it helps increase their confidence and they try to speak more French, and even if they made a mistake, they would take it, correct it and learn from it.”

According to research, both participants are using a communicative approach to the language were the focus is on fluency rather than on accuracy and where mistakes are encouraged and are seen as part of the learning process (Ministry of Education, 2013). This communicative approach could be translated into a growth mindset approach that both Lisa and Shannon reported using in their classroom. Through shifting the focus from the curriculum to the students and encouraging them to speak and make mistakes, students will feel more confident to speak French and stay in Core French classes.

4.4 The Increase of Funding to Core French Programs Will Provide Core French Teachers with the Resources they Need to Support them in their Work

In this section, participants expand on the resources they need in order to combat the challenges they face in their school boards. Funding was at the center of the discussion as it will allow revising outdated teaching resources and an increase in professional development days for Core French teachers. In addition to funding, participants highlighted the value of increasing instructional time as it helps teachers deliver wholesome lessons and pay attention to individualized assessment and provide more interactive activities. Finally, participants emphasized the importance of providing adequate teaching space for all teachers which would reduce teachers’ anxiety and improve their overall performance in their schools.
4.4.1 Funding helps purchase updated teaching material and add more professional development days for Core French teachers

When asked to elaborate on the resources that teachers need to support them as Core French teachers, both Shannon and Lisa expressed that funding is the leading factor to enhancing the conditions of their work. Shannon said: “it makes all the difference when you know that your principal is supportive of you and your work and that they are willing to provide you with the resources and the support you need to improve your teaching.” She also added that she really appreciated it when her principal approved to update the outdated resources in her school and purchase new teaching material. Lisa, who had a much more negative experience, expressed that she believes that funding is not allocated equitably in her school. She mentioned how most of the funding in her school is designed towards literacy and math programs and that Core French remains a low priority program and that it does not receive much funding at all. She explained, “We definitely need more funding allocated to Core French programs because we need to update our resources and buy new material and technology to make French more appealing and interesting for the students.” Likewise, Shannon believed that more funding meant having more access to updated resources and more access to professional development days and teaching counsellors. She said: “we desperately need more professional development days designed specifically for Core French teachers so we could learn about new teaching strategies and how to integrate technology, art and drama with French.” Lastly, both participants acknowledged the need to hire more educational counsellors so they could support Core French teachers in their work and so they could facilitate communication and collaboration between teachers and administrators.

The research in the literature review acknowledged the gap in the funding and how it affected the quality of the French instruction. As Kissau (2005) mentioned that although French programs rely
heavily on the support of their administrators, some of those administrators are failing to provide adequate support to their Core French teachers. While Shannon expressed feeling content with the support she received from her school administrators, Lisa complained about the lack of support. Therefore, it is evident that the distribution of funding is not unified among Ontario public schoolboards which is impacting the degree of satisfaction of Core French teachers across the boards.

4.4.2 Increase the length of instructional time to reduce stress in the workplace

Both Shannon and Lisa teach Core French in increments of 40 minutes per class. Lisa who works as a rotary Core French teacher expressed that 40 minutes of instructional time is not a sufficient amount of time to teach a French lesson through a holistic approach. Then she added: Instead of seeing the students 5 times a week for 40 minutes, I would rather see them for 60-70 minutes 3 times a week, this way I would be able to fit more content into my lessons and do more fun activities with my students.

Shannon, who has her own classroom, also receives Core French students from another class for 40 minutes a day. Shannon mentioned that it was much easier for her to have the students come to her instead of having to go to them and set-up for her lesson in their classroom where she does not have any material or teaching resources. She also expressed: “with all that we are expected to do nowadays, we could always do with more time.”

In fact, the research supported the claims of the participants, indicating that 40 minute teaching blocks are not enough to teach wholesome lessons; rather, teachers should have 80 minute teaching blocks where they can have more opportunities for differentiated instruction, individualized evaluations and interactive activities (Lapkin et al., 2009). Both Shannon and Lisa suggested that the quality of instruction could be enhanced with longer instructional periods. They
also both stated that they could use the additional time to work on more interesting and interactive activities with the students in order to raise their interest in Core French education.

4.4.3 Increase support from the teaching community by providing teaching space for all Core French teachers

According to the participants, they reported that they knew several Core French teachers who complained about the lack of teaching space. Lisa who does not have her own classroom expressed feeling frustration and anger towards not having her own classroom. She expressed: I don’t believe that we have an equitable teaching environment in my school. I’ve seen Core French teachers being treated with a lack of respect because they don’t have their own classrooms. I am just very frustrated with the system because I feel that our rights and responsibilities are not proportionate at all.

On the other hand, Shannon, who has her own classroom expressed feeling very privileged for not having to teach rotary Core French to different classes. She mentioned how she got lucky that she has her own classroom and that she might have not been able to do it if she had to go from one classroom to the other each day. She said: I believe that all teachers should have their own classroom where they can set it up the way they want and not feel constantly stressed out over having to drag their teaching cart and not having enough time or material to teach in the short time we have to teach.

In her research, Richards (2002), found that most Core French teachers do not have their own classrooms and that even when they did, those classrooms were placed in inappropriate places like gymnasiums, libraries and even kitchens which caused the teachers feel stressed out and disrespected by the teaching community. While Shannon acknowledged that she feels fortunate for having her own classroom, she emphasized the importance of giving all Core French teachers
their own classrooms. Therefore, as seen through Lisa’s experience, having an appropriate teaching place increases teachers’ satisfaction and confidence to teach Core French while not having one will do just the opposite.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate that the issue of student retention in Core French programs affects students, teachers and administrators alike. Students are losing interest in Core French language due to systematic challenges caused by a grammar based curriculum and scheduling conflicts. Teachers and administrators who support Core French are faced by challenges related to a lack of funding and lack of collaboration in the teaching community. It was found, however, that teachers are responding to the issue of retention through using a holistic teaching approach that is student-centered, relies on authentic assessment and a growth mindset. However, as the study demonstrated, teachers need several resources to help them achieve their goal to retain students in Core French such as increasing funding to FSL programs, encouraging collaboration in the teaching community and empowering Core French teachers by providing them with the tools and the resources they need to create wholesome and interesting lessons for their students.

The findings of this study are significant as they demonstrate the lack of collaboration and communication among the teaching community and how it is contributing negatively to the issue of retention of Core French students beyond the mandatory years. The next chapter seeks to synthesize and illustrate the implications of this research study and suggests further recommendations for future research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I start by providing an overview of the key findings and their significance in the research study. The main question of this study seeks to understand how a sample of Core French teachers are responding to the issue of retention of Core French students beyond the mandatory years. Next, I discuss the broad implications over the educational community which include Core French teachers, schools’ administrators and students. Then I narrow down the implications and examine their impact on me as a student and as a teacher-researcher. Afterwards, I make recommendations for different stakeholders such as Core French teachers, schools’ administrators and policy makers in order to improve the quality of instruction for Core French programs. Finally, I identify important areas for further study and I raise several questions for future researchers in the field.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

After reviewing and analyzing the data collected from the interviews, several key findings emerged in relation to the themes of the research study.

One of the most significant key findings of this study was identifying the barriers to retaining students in Core French programs. Both participants explained that due to having to teach a heavy based curriculum, most students felt overwhelmed and did not want to continue learning Core French. In addition, the participants expressed that several students are dropping out of Core French due to scheduling conflicts with more popular courses (Kissau, 2005). Moreover, the participants stated that junior students expressed a negative outlook on French language and they develop learning anxiety that pushed them to leave Core French education beyond the mandatory years. This finding is directly related to the first theme that addresses the barriers to retaining
students in Core French programs due to limitations in curriculum expectations, scheduling conflicts and a negative outlook on the French language.

The second key finding is related to the challenges Core French teachers encounter in their instruction. This was also directly related to the second theme of the research study that examined the challenges that encounter Core French teachers in their instruction. The participants claimed that because Core French is seen as an inferior program, schoolboards are cutting back their funding which creates stressful work environments for Core French teachers (Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009). Additionally, one of the participant expressed that the stress increases when Core French teachers do not have their own teaching space or the resources they need to improve the quality of their instruction (Richards, 2002).

The third theme in the research study examined the instructional strategies and key practices that Core French teachers can use to enhance students’ interest and engagement in Core French language. The strategies include using a student-centered approach, using authentic assessment techniques, focusing on the communicative part of learning and having a growth mindset were student are encouraged to make mistake and learn from them. These practices were essential in raising students’ interest and engagement in Core French language.

Finally, the fourth theme focused on the resources that Core French teachers need to support them in their work. One finding of this study implied that Core French teachers are in a dire need for funding in order to get the resources and the training that they need to enhance the quality of their instruction. Teachers reported the need for having more professional development days, updating teaching guides, increasing instructional time and granting Core French teachers their own classrooms.

These findings are significant as they shine light on the barriers and the key factors that are
impacting students’ decision to take Core French courses beyond Grade 9.

5.2 Implications

In this section I discuss the implications of this research study. First, I explain the broader implications on the educational community which include Core French teachers, school administrators and students. Then I shift the focus to myself and I examine the implications of the findings on my own practice as a Core French teacher and as an academic researcher.

5.2.1 The Educational Community

Core French teachers, school administrators and Core French teachers are the main stakeholders who are affected by the results of this research study. Core French teachers have been impacted negatively and expressed feeling overwhelmed due to having to work in stressful environments and due to feeling marginalized by their administrators. The research findings suggested that Core French teachers are suffering from the lack of support and resources which is affecting their perceptions on Core French education and on the quality of their instruction (Cook, 2007). In terms of support, Core French teachers reported a lack of support from their school administrators. The research findings pointed out that the support of the schools’ administrators was one of the main factors in reducing or increasing teachers’ stress and anxiety. The research also maintained that in most cases, Core French teachers felt unsupported by their administrators and that they were treated as inferiors to their peers (Macfarlane & Hart, 2002). This implication does not take into consideration the principals’ perspectives, however, it hints to the lack of communication and cooperation between Core French teachers and their principals. Finally, there are several negative implications for the students as they are being affected the most by the degradation of Core French language. As long as the teachers are feeling overwhelmed and under-supported, the quality of their work is going to reflect poorly on the students who already have
negative outlooks on the language and on their ability to learn French. Additionally, Core French students will continue to drop out beyond the mandatory years as long as the situation remains unchanged. Finally, if Core French students fail to be able to attain French language in their schools, it will have serious ramifications on their future employment opportunities in a bilingual country like Canada.

5.2.2 My Professional Identity and Practice

As an aspiring French teacher this research study has had several implications on me and on my future practice. When I first started gathering data for this study, I was shocked to discover that although French language has a significant value in Canadian society, many people could not communicate effectively in French. Then, when I learned about the marginalization of the language and Core French teachers, I almost felt deterred from wanting to pursue a career as a Core French teacher in Ontario. However, through further research and study, I found out that although the situation may not be ideal for some, there are lots of initiatives to improve Core French programming. These discoveries have helped me deepen my understanding not only on the challenges and the barriers that Core French teachers face, but also on the practices and strategies they enact to increase students’ interest and motivation to learn French. As I move forward in my teaching career, I hope to incorporate these practices and strategies into my own practice. I will be seeking support and assistance from the school community as I learned that it could be a helpful tool, and I will try to develop my own resources as there is a lack of French resources available for French teachers. In addition, as a researcher, I will continue to develop my teaching practices and I will try to stay as informed on new teaching strategies and government initiatives that would help enhance Core French programming.
5.3 Recommendations

In order to increase retention rates in Core French programs beyond the mandatory years, I have made several recommendations concerning Core French teachers, school administrators and educational bodies.

The research suggested that Core French teachers were suffering from having to work in stressful environments caused by the lack of support from their administrators and the lack of educational guides and teaching spaces (Macfarlane & Hart, 2002). Therefore, I would first recommend that school administrators should take the necessary steps to insuring the satisfaction of Core French teachers across all boards by providing them with their own teaching space and by also providing them with additional funding to update their teaching material and resources. In addition, as Kissau (2005) expressed how the lack of development days is increasing teachers’ stress and anxiety, I would recommend that all schoolboards unify their efforts into providing more professional development days for Core French teachers and work with them on fixing scheduling conflicts. Cook (2007) examined the lack of educational resources and the need to implementing a holistic learning approach that focuses on communication. Therefore, in regards to educational bodies such as the Ontario Ministry of Education, I recommend that they start implementing changes to the existing Core French curriculum by switching the focus to communication instead of heavy grammar and by making it more student-centered and engaging. Further, I suggest that the ministry should start developing new teaching guides and resources for Core French teachers to use. Additionally, as the research findings by Lapkin, Mady and Arnott (2009) supported that 40 minutes learning blocks are not sufficient to implementing holistic lessons, educational bodies must collaborate with schoolboards in order to come up with a policy that regulates the length of instructional time and increase it to a minimum of 60 - 80 minutes of teaching blocks. In what
CONCERNS ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN CORE FRENCH CLASSES, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2013) DEVELOPED THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH WHERE STUDENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO SPEAK IN FRENCH AND MAKE MISTAKES AND LEARN FROM THEM. THEREFORE, I RECOMMEND THAT TEACHERS START ADOPTING NEW TEACHING TECHNIQUES THAT ARE BASED ON A GROWTH MINDSET TO ALLEViate STUDENT ANXIETY. FURTHER, I WOULD RECOMMEND THAT TEACHERS START INCORPORATING THE ARTS, DRAMA AND TECHNOLOGY INTO FRENCH AND MAKING THE TOPICS MORE RELEVANT AND MORE INTERESTING FOR THE STUDENTS. FINALLY, BASED ON RESEARCH AND THE DATA COLLECTED FROM THE PARTICIPANTS, STUDENTS REPORTED FEELING MORE ENGAGED WHEN THEY WERE DOING MORE HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES LIKE PLAYS, GROUP PROJECTS AND FIELD TRIPS (CASHMAN, 2004). THEREFORE, TEACHERS MUST USE THEIR SKILLS AS RESEARCHERS AND ALWAYS SEARCH FOR NEW TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES IN ORDER TO KEEP THEIR STUDENTS ENGAGED AND MOTIVATED TO LEARN FRENCH.

5.4 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

AS A MASTERS OF TEACHING STUDENT, I WAS LIMITED IN TERMS OF THE SAMPLE SIZE AND LOCATION CHOSEN FOR THIS STUDY. I CHOSE TO INTERVIEW TWO ONTARIO ELEMENTARY CORE FRENCH TEACHERS WHICH EXCLUDE A WIDE VARIETY OF OTHER TEACHERS IN DIFFERENT DIVISIONS AND PROVINCES. DUE TO THOSE LIMITATIONS, I STILL HAVE SEVERAL QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCHERS:

- WHAT ARE RETENTION TRENDS OF STUDENTS IN CORE FRENCH PROGRAMS BEYOND THE MANDATORY YEARS ALL ACROSS THE CANADIAN PROVINCES?
- WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES THESE TEACHERS ENACTING IN ORDER TO INCREASE STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT IN CORE FRENCH PROGRAMS?
- HOW COULD CORE FRENCH TEACHERS IN ONTARIO COORDINATE AND COOPERATE WITH OTHER CORE FRENCH TEACHERS ACROSS THE BOARDS IN CANADIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLBOARDS?
- ARE THERE ANY POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF AN INCREASED STUDENTS’ INTEREST ENGAGEMENT IN CORE FRENCH ACROSS THE PROVINCES? WHAT ARE THEY? AND HOW CAN ALL PROVINCES GET SIMILAR RESULTS?
I, therefore, suggest that it would be beneficial for future research to conduct a similar study on a wider scale of participants in order to get more consistent data and to get a wider variety of responses. In addition, I would suggest that another area of research could focus on experiences of Core French teachers across all provinces. The research of my study focused primarily on data pertaining to Ontario, however, it would be helpful if future research would focus on different provinces and see if teachers and administrators are struggling to retain students in Core French programs beyond the mandatory years. It also would be important to find out what range of practices and strategies teachers use across all provinces to increase students’ engagement in Core French programs beyond the mandatory years.

5.5 Concluding Comments

During this research study, I have identified key findings that are relevant to the main research question that addresses the key practices and strategies that Core French teachers enact in order to retain students in Core French programs beyond the mandatory years. As many stakeholders are involved in the issue of retention, I identified that although there are some strategies and supports available for Core French teachers, the main issue was in the amount of support and funding they received from their schoolboards. Essentially, the more funding the teachers received, the more resources they had to improve the quality of their instruction. Additionally, I identified the negative outlook that Core French students have on the language and on the teachers and how this impacted their decisions in remaining in Core French programs, especially when scheduling conflicts existed. Then finally, I identified certain instructional strategies and practices Core French teachers can use to increase students’ interest and engagement in Core French education.

To conclude, this research study has demonstrated the reasons that caused students to drop out
CORE FRENCH LANGUAGE RETENTION

of Core French programming and later on it suggested specific recommendations and strategies to reduce the retention gap. This is significant because as English and French remain the official languages in Canada, all students nationwide, must be able to communicate effectively in both languages and use them for their future personal gains.
References


CORE FRENCH LANGUAGE RETENTION


**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview**

![University of Toronto OISE | Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](image)
Date: March 23rd, 2016
Dear _______________________________,

My Name is Rozana Al-Rawas and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on teachers’ perspectives and strategies on retaining students in Core French programs beyond Grade 9. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have demonstrated a commitment to retaining students’ interest in French language learning, and who have a minimum of 5 years of experience teaching core French. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Rozana Al-Rawas

Course Instructor’s Name: Angela MacDonald
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Rozana Al-Rawas and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.
CORE FRENCH LANGUAGE RETENTION

Signature: ________________________________
Name: (printed) ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

Appendix B: Interview Protocol
Thank you for participating in my research study. The aim of this research is to learn how a sample of Core French teachers are responding to the issue of retention of Core French students beyond Grade 9 in Ontario. This interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes, and is comprised of 20 questions. The interview protocol has been divided into 5 sections including attention to your background experience, beliefs, practices, challenges and supports, and next steps. I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question, and can remove yourself from participation at any time. As outlined in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin? To begin can you state your name for the recording?

Section 1 - Background Information
1. How long have you been a teacher? And have you always taught in Ontario?
2. What is your academic and professional background? (e.g. undergraduate studies, graduate studies, employment positions held related to teaching)
   a. When did you start teaching?
   b. What subject areas and Grades have you taught?
3. What is your current position?
   a. Grade/subject?
   b. How long have you been in this position?
   c. Do you fulfill any other roles in the school? (e.g. coach, advisor, counsellor)
4. What can you tell me about the school you teach in? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)
   a. Can you tell me more about what French language programming looks like in your school (core, extended, immersion; whether there are any French coaches)
5. How did you develop your interest in French language education? What experiences contributed to preparing you to teach French?
   a. Personal experiences? (e.g. is French your first language?)
   b. Educational experiences? (e.g. university course work, teachers college, French language school courses, additional qualifications, professional development)
   c. Professional experiences? (e.g. employment positions, teaching experience)

Section 2 - Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs
6. What role do you believe French language learning has to play in Ontario schools?
7. In your view, what are the benefits of French language education?
8. What is your perspective on the status of Core French education in Ontario?
   a. What are the strengths and limitations of the Core French program?
   b. How do you interpret the goals and priorities of this program?
9. How do you think the Core French program and Framework for FSL in Ontario schools could be improved in order to achieve its goal in raising students’ interest in French education?
10. Do you believe that Core French programs receive equal support and funding from different stakeholders such as parents, administrators, school boards and the government?
11. In your view, what is the public perception of Core French programming in Ontario?
12. In your experience, how would you describe student interest in Core French language programming (generally speaking)?
13. What specific barriers do you think get in the way of student engagement in Core French programming? How do you think those barriers could be further addressed?
14. In your view, why do such a high number of students opt out of Core French programming after Grade 9? What do you believe are some key considerations for retaining their interest in French language learning?
Section 3 - Teacher Practices
15. Can you tell me more about how you teach Core French?
   a. What is your general approach?
   b. What instructional strategies do you prioritize and why?
   c. What resources do you use and how? (e.g. materials, technology, particular programs, guest speakers, field trips)
16. How do students typically respond to your approach? What outcomes do you observe from them?
17. How, if at all, do you think that your approach to teaching core French impacts student engagement in French language learning?
18. What forms of assessment and evaluation do you use to measure student outcomes? How, if at all, do you think that the forms of assessment you use impacts student engagement?
19. What do you do beyond the parameters of a typical Core French program through your teaching and/or leadership to try to engage students in Core French learning so that they want to pursue it beyond Grade 9?
   a. Can you provide me with some examples of how you have worked with students to develop their engagement and interest in French language learning?
   b. What opportunities for learning and engagement do you create, and how do your students respond?
   c. What evidence have you seen that your approach has positive outcomes? Can you provide me with some examples of students that you have worked with?
Section 4 - Supports and Challenges
20. What range of factors and resources support you in your commitment to enhancing student interest in French language learning? (e.g. supportive school culture, leadership from admin, demographics of students, work with parents, budgets for field trips and materials etc.)
21. What challenges have you experienced in your work fostering engagement in Core French programming?
   a. How have you responded to these challenges?
   b. How could the education system further support you, and other Core French teachers, in meeting the range of challenges involved with teaching Core French?
Section 5 - Next Steps
22. What goals, if any, do you have for your professional practice in this area?
23. What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to french language education in Ontario and to playing a role in fostering student engagement in Core French learning?
   Thank you, sincerely, for participating in this research study and for your insightful responses.