

**HIBERNIA
COLLEGE**

**Student Motivation Towards French
and Motivational Strategies - Teachers'
Perspectives in an Irish Post-Primary Context**

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Item Type | Thesis |
| Authors | Letourmy, Sophie |
| Download date | 2025-04-27 20:42:56 |
| Link to Item | http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.13012/190 |



EST.MM

HIBERNIA COLLEGE

Student Motivation Towards French and Motivational Strategies - Teachers' Perspectives in an Irish Post-Primary Context

Sophie Letourmy

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of Professional Masters
of Education in Post-Primary

June 2023

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Figures | 4 |
| Table of Tables | 4 |
| Acknowledgements | 5 |
| Abstract | 6 |
| 1. Introduction..... | 7 |
| 1.1 Origin of the Dissertation..... | 7 |
| 1.2 Background to the Project | 7 |
| 1.3 Rationale and Research Questions | 7 |
| 1.4 Dissertation Layout and Conclusion..... | 8 |
| 2. Literature Review | 9 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 9 |
| 2.2 MFL in the Post-Primary Education System | 9 |
| 2.2.1 Junior Cycle | 10 |
| 2.2.2 Senior Cycle..... | 10 |
| 2.3 Uptake of MFL at Post-Primary Level..... | 11 |
| 2.4 Motivation for Modern Foreign Languages | 12 |
| 2.5 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation..... | 13 |
| 2.6 Socio-economic Background | 13 |
| 2.7 Motivational Strategies | 14 |
| 2.8 Conclusion..... | 16 |
| 3. Methodology..... | 17 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 17 |
| 3.2 Research Paradigm..... | 17 |
| 3.3 Methodology and Research Methods..... | 17 |
| 3.3.1 Quantitative research | 17 |
| 3.3.2 Qualitative research | 18 |
| 3.3 Questionnaire design and distribution..... | 18 |
| 3.5 Sample and participants..... | 19 |
| 3.6 Data analysis | 20 |
| 3.7 Limitations..... | 20 |
| 3.8 Ethical Considerations..... | 21 |
| 3.9 Conclusion..... | 22 |
| 4. Findings | 23 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 23 |
| 4.2 Participant demographic..... | 23 |
| 4.2.1 Teaching experience | 23 |
| 4.2.2 Type of school..... | 23 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 4.2.3 Class levels taught | 24 |
| 4.3 Teachers' perceptions of student motivation to learn French..... | 24 |
| 4.4 Additional reasons teachers believe influence student motivation to learn French..... | 26 |
| 4.5 Overall interest in French among student population in participants' current school | 27 |
| 4.6 Factors influencing student's subject choice for Senior Cycle | 27 |
| 4.7 Motivational strategies | 29 |
| 4.8 Conclusion..... | 30 |
| 5. Discussion..... | 32 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 32 |
| 5.2 Summary of Findings..... | 32 |
| 5.2.1 Introduction..... | 32 |
| 5.2.2 Research question 1: What factors influence student motivation to learn French?..... | 33 |
| 5.2.3 Research question 2: What factors influence the uptake of French at Senior Cycle?..... | 34 |
| 5.2.4 Research question 3: What strategies do you use to motivate students in your own classroom? | 36 |
| 5.3 Additional Factors | 37 |
| 5.4 Conclusion..... | 37 |
| 6. Conclusion | 39 |
| 6.1 Concluding remarks | 39 |
| 6.2 Limitations..... | 40 |
| 6.3 Recommendations, Potential for Future Research | 40 |
| 6.4 Implications for Future Practice | 41 |
| 7. References..... | 42 |
| 8. Appendices..... | 45 |
| Appendix A - Research Information Sheet | 45 |
| Appendix B - Consent Form | 46 |
| Appendix C - Questionnaire Questions | 47 |

Table of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1 - The Components of a Motivational L2 Teaching Practice (adapted from Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008)..... | 16 |
| Figure 4-1 – Class levels taught by participants | 24 |
| Figure 4-2 – Teacher’s perception of student motivation to learn French..... | 25 |
| Figure 4-3 – Factors that teachers believe may effect students motivation to learn French | 26 |
| Figure 4-4 – Overall interest in French in current school | 27 |
| Figure 4-5 - Factors teachers believe may influence student's subject choice for Senior Cycle | 28 |
| Figure 4- 6 - Frequency of use of motivational strategies | 30 |

Table of Tables

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1 - Ten commandements for motivating language learners (adapted from Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998)..... | 15 |
| Table 4-1 - Teaching experience of participants..... | 23 |
| Table 4-2 - Type of school | 24 |

Acknowledgements

I would like to express thanks to my supervisor for his guidance, support and patience throughout writing this dissertation.

To the teachers who participated in the questionnaire, thank you for volunteering your time, sharing your insights and enriching this research. Without you, this research would not have been possible.

To my boyfriend for his unwavering support over this past year, your belief in me and constant encouragement have sustained me throughout this challenging year.

And lastly, to my cohort of fellow prospective teachers, wishing you a prosperous and fulfilling future in your teaching careers.

Abstract

This study examined students' motivation to learn French, uptake of French at Senior Cycle, and motivational strategies from teachers' perspectives in an Irish post-primary context. Data was collected using a mixed-methods approach through a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. Teachers reported that students are moderately motivated to learn French (57.5%). The apparent disparity between students' interests and strengths and the perceived insignificance of speaking French as a native English speaker demotivated students. Senior Cycle subject choice was primarily influenced by Higher Entry matriculation requirements and teachers' main motivational strategy emerged as technology.

1. Introduction

1.1 Origin of the Dissertation

The objective of this research study is to research "Student Motivation Towards French and Motivational Strategies - Teachers' Perspectives in an Irish Post-Primary Context". This thesis statement was formulated subsequent to the observation of a significant decline in the uptake of French as a subject for the Leaving Certificate examinations in Ireland. The objective of this study is to ascertain the factors that impact students' motivation towards French. The study will employ a mixed-methods approach using teachers as participants. They will be used to gain insight into the factors that teachers perceive to impact student motivation towards French, as well as to investigate the motivational pedagogical strategies they utilise to attempt to enhance student motivation.

1.2 Background to the Project

In recent years, Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) are reaching a “crisis point” in the UK and other anglophone countries, such as Ireland (Kelly, 2019). Printer (2022) highlights that macro-societal issues are out of our control as educators; however, what we can control is the approaches we take within our classroom. Provisional statistics from the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in the last 10 years exhibit a considerable decrease in uptake for French at Senior Cycle level for the Leaving Certificate examinations. In 2012, the provisional number of students who sat the French Leaving Certificate examination, at either Higher or Ordinary level, was 28,977, with this decreasing to 21,150 by 2022 (State Examinations Commission, 2023). Numerous studies on MFL motivation show that students are generally poorly motivated and enjoy MFL lessons less than other subjects (Parrish & Lanvers 2018).

1.3 Rationale and Research Questions

This study aims to determine the factors that influence student motivation to learn French, according to teachers. Furthermore, an analysis will be conducted of the factors that influence the uptake of the French subject at Senior Cycle. Finally, motivational strategies used by

teachers to increase student motivation will be examined. Therefore, the following are the research questions:

- What factors influence student motivation to learn French?
- What factors influence the uptake of French at Senior Cycle?
- What strategies do you use to motivate students in your own classroom?

1.4 Dissertation Layout and Conclusion

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter one functions as an introductory section to the research, highlighting the rationale behind the study. Chapter two offers a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature pertaining to motivation towards MFLs, alongside background information regarding the Irish post-primary education system. Chapter three will provide a description and justification for the methodological methods chosen, while Chapter four will present the findings derived from the questionnaire distributed to teachers to gather their perspectives. The fifth chapter provides a summary of the research findings in relation to the primary research questions outlined above. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of suggestions for advancing the current research and enhancing the quality of the investigation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The mindset around language learning needs to change (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a), according to the former Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton TD, at the time of the publication of the Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026. This strategy is an initiative in Ireland aimed at improving language education within the country. A recognised strength of this strategy includes the high uptake of foreign languages at post-primary level (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). The challenges, on the other hand, includes the global dominance of the English language (Lanvers, 2020; Parrish and Lanvers, 2019), the perceived difficulty of language learning, the traditional dominance of the French language as opposed to other MFLs, and the low uptake of foreign languages in higher and further education (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). With the recent increase in the choice of MFL subjects in post-primary schools across the country, which includes Spanish, German and Italian, consequently, there has been a notable decrease in the number of students sitting the Leaving Certificate French paper. Provisional statistics from the State Examinations Commission (State Examinations Commission, 2023) over the last 10 years suggest a considerable decrease in uptake at both Higher or Ordinary level, with 28,977 students registered for the exam in 2012, compared to 21,150 in 2022 (State Examinations Commission, 2023). Ireland, along with the United Kingdom, is performing the worst in Europe in language competencies among the general population (Lanvers, 2020; Bruen, 2021). Complacency regarding foreign language learning has emanated, not dissimilar in other English-speaking countries (Gallagher, 2021). In order to provide context regarding this issue, it is essential to examine the position of MFLs within the post-primary education system in Ireland. Additionally, it is important to provide context for the concept of motivation and its impact on language acquisition.

2.2 MFL in the Post-Primary Education System

Post-primary education in Ireland can be categorised into two stages: Junior Cycle, which encompasses the age group of 12 to 15 year olds, and Senior Cycle, which pertains to students aged approximately 16 to 18 years old. Upon completion of each cycle, students are required to sit examinations which are administered by the State Examinations Commission.

2.2.1 Junior Cycle

The MFLs available for study are subject to variation depending on school, but may include, among others, French, Spanish, German and Italian for the Junior Cycle. The official position of MFL learning in Ireland is unclear, as highlighted by Gallagher (2021). It appears from the Twenty-four Statements of Learning in the Framework, which encompasses the new Junior Cycle, that foreign language learning is compulsory for students in Junior Cycle (Gallagher, 2021). Nonetheless, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) publication *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle* (NCCA, 2015, p.34) specifies that only “evidence of learning must be presented in the subjects English, Irish and Mathematics” (Gallagher, 2021). Additionally, it is reported that numerous students do not study a language at Junior Cycle level. This may be due to special educational needs or other reasons. Given the above, in 2017, language learning was recorded as optional in 14% of post-primary schools in Junior Cycle (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a).

2.2.2 Senior Cycle

At Senior Cycle, a broader range of MFLs may be offered as curricular subjects, including Japanese, Russian and Arabic. In addition, four more languages were added as curricular languages in 2020, and those are Chinese, Lithuanian, Polish and Portuguese. Non-curricular EU languages may also be sat by students if they meet certain criteria. These languages include Latvian, Romanian, Slovenian, Modern Greek, Finnish, Estonian, Slovakian, Swedish, Czech, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Danish, Dutch, Croatian and Maltese (Languages Connect, 2021). At present, all National University of Ireland (NUI) universities (University College Dublin (UCD), University College Cork (UCC), National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG) and Maynooth University (MU)) require a pass in English, Irish and another language in order to matriculate (Gallagher, 2021). The decrease in language learning continues up until examination day, with approximately 70% of the cohort actually presenting for the examination (Gallagher, 2021).

2.3 Uptake of MFL at Post-Primary Level

In Anglophone countries, there are efforts being made to encourage language education in the midst of the widespread adoption of English as a global language, which has resulted in various endeavours and initiatives to promote foreign language learning (Coffey, 2018). In the Irish context, this can mainly be seen through the implementation of the Languages Connect Strategy (2017-2026) and the Implementation Plan (2017-2022) (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a; 2017b). This is a strategy published by the Department of Education and Skills, which aims to improve foreign language learning within the Irish education system by the year 2026 and diversify the allocation of languages within schools through the implementation of a range of targets (Department of Education, 2017a). Although Ireland can be regarded as having strong uptake of MFLs (Batardière et al. 2022), largely led by the learning of French, followed by Spanish, German and Italian, despite these efforts, approximately 30% of students are leaving post-primary education without an MFL in their qualification, and a further 10% finishing their Junior Cycle studies without having studied a language (Bruen, 2020) (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). Additionally, provisional statistics from the State Examinations Commission over the last 10 years suggest a considerable decrease in uptake at either Higher or Ordinary level, with 28,977 students registered for the exam in 2012, compared to 21,150 in 2022 (State Examinations Commission, 2023). There has been a notable decrease in the number of students sitting French at Ordinary Level for the Leaving Certificate in the last 10 years, with 12,257 students sitting the examination in 2012 and just 5,696 sitting in 2022. Moreover, the number of students sitting the Higher Level paper has remained quite steady over the last 10 years with the maximum number of students sitting the Higher Level paper in 2020 at 16,519, the lowest being 13,720 in 2012 and the most recent figure being 15,454 in 2022 (State Examinations Commission, 2023). This figure becomes increasingly concerning when examining students studying languages at Higher Education. According to research conducted in 2012/2013, approximately only 4% of undergraduate students were enrolled in foreign language courses, be that as a single core subject or as an accredited part of other undergraduate disciplines (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a).

2.4 Motivation for Modern Foreign Languages

The framework proposed by Gardner (1985) posits a spectrum of motivation for MFLs, which spans from instrumental motivation (i.e., learning a language due to its practical usefulness) to integrative motivation (i.e., learning a language out of an appreciation for the culture and people associated with that language). Dörnyei's research has made a noteworthy contribution to the field of motivation studies in relation to MFLs. His research has revealed that motivation is not a fixed construct but rather a dynamic phenomenon that varies across languages and evolves over time (Dörnyei, 2001). This concept integrates external factors, individual factors and the learning experience. Furthermore, Dörnyei has disseminated a motivational teaching practice model for MFLs, which includes instructional methods pertaining to both the learning environment and the teacher's pedagogical approach.

Further research in this field by Dörnyei has resulted in the proposition of the L2 Motivational Self System (2009). According to this system, the motivation of language learners is derived from their perception of their "ideal self" (such as the desire to become multilingual) and their "ought-to-self" (such as the belief that they must learn languages). The notion of the "ought-to-self" encompasses unfavourable elements, such as avoiding adverse outcomes and responding to external types of motivation (Dörnyei, 2009).

The idea of self-efficacy in learning is closely associated with the concept of motivational "selves". Self-efficacy is a fundamental concept of Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), which relates to an individual's ability to regular their behaviour based on their personal beliefs regarding their capabilities (Lanvers, 2013). Although the correlation between self-efficacy and actual competencies or learning outcomes may be uncertain, as noted by Williams, Burden, and Lanvers (2002), it is ultimately widely recognised as a critical element in shaping learner behaviour and strategies (Lanvers, 2013).

Motivation is commonly acknowledged as the fundamental factor that contributes to the achievement of proficiency in second and foreign language learning, as supported by Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) (Hapsari, 2013). The attainment of successful language learning is dependent on the presence of motivation. As highlighted by Hapsari (2013), Deniz (2010) argues that possessing a certain level of motivation can instil the belief in a learner that they are capable of overcoming an obstacle and achieving success in language learning. Due to this rationale, teachers hold a pivotal position in constructing and augmenting the learner's drive

to acquire proficiency in the language learner. This implies that the role of the teacher in the process of learning must be considered (Hapsari, 2013).

2.5 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Language learning is significantly influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The concept of intrinsic motivation pertains to an individual's inherent desire to acquire a foreign language, whereas extrinsic motivation encompasses any external stimuli that may incentivise language learners to pursue language learning. The impact of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on a learner's language learning experience is noteworthy. Self-determination theory (SDT), as posited by Ryan and Deci (2000), has emerged as a progressively influential paradigm in comprehending the motivation of learners (Lanvers, 2013). Self-determination theory proposes that the presence of three inherent psychological needs, namely competence, autonomy and relatedness, result in improved self-motivation, while the absence of them leads to reduced motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The concept of autonomy pertains to the ability to make choices, exercise self-direction, and take ownership of one's learning. Relatedness, on the other hand, involves the feeling of belonging, being supported, included and having meaningful relationships. Lastly, competence refers to students' perceptions of their ability to attain success (Printer, 2020). Scholars have posited that motivation plays a significant role in shaping various learner-internal and learner-external factors that are implicated in the process of language learning. These factors include but are not limited to attitudes, aptitude, self-confidence, language anxiety, intelligence, learning strategies and communication strategies (Moskovsky et al. 2013). Furthermore, motivation has the capacity to determine the extent to which the factors are actualised, as suggested by Gardner (2001) (Moskovsky et al. 2013).

2.6 Socio-economic Background

Socio-economic background is a major element influencing the uptake of MFL subjects within Irish post-primary schools. In Ireland, the availability of MFL can vary across schools, with some schools offering a wide range of MFL including French, Spanish, Italian, German (include more here), while others may struggle to only offer one. Turkkaharaman (2015, p.384) describes schools as "social systems" where there is "a close relationship between the aims of the school and the expectations and values of the society". This resonates with the theories

of cultural reproduction as set forth by Bourdieu (1930-2002) and the notion of language codes as outlined by Bernstein (1924-2000). These theories suggest that students from diverse social backgrounds may face marginalisation within the education system due to their cultural capital or their language proficiency (Lynch and Baker, 2005).

It is essential to note that the provision of MFL subjects in Irish post-primary schools is heavily contingent on school resources and teacher availability and experience. Lanvers (2020) notes that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to have more of a fixed mindset rather than a growth mindset, which further hinders their levels of achievement in an underrepresented learner group. Additionally, in a study conducted by Nazir and Naz (2020) it was found that the socio-economic status of the learners played a vital role in language learning and in essence, it was found that the socio-economic status of the children would yield more substantial and favourable implications on their language learning (Nazir and Naz, 2020). A study conducted by Gayton (2010) amongst teachers in Scotland aimed to explore potential connections between learners' socio-economic status and their attitude towards language learning. The findings suggested a positive correlation between low socio-economic status and diminished motivation, as well as a positive correlation between high socio-economic status and heightened motivation. Comments from the study expressed agreement with Ausubel's (1968) assertion, which posits that parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to place less emphasis on their children's education, which results in these students being less inclined towards academic pursuits compared to those whose parents prioritise education more significantly (Gayton, 2010).

2.7 Motivational Strategies

Motivational strategies are defined by Dörnyei (2001) as "the motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect" (p.28) (Moskovsky et. al, 2013). Furthermore, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) distinguish that motivational strategies can be broken into two categories: "(a) instructional interventions applied by the teacher to elicit and stimulate student motivation and (b) self-regulated strategies that are used purposefully by individual students to manage the level of their own motivation" (Moskovsky et al., 2013).

An empirical study carried out by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) aimed to obtain classroom data on motivational strategies amongst two hundred Hungarian teachers of English from a variety

of language teaching institutions. The question posed was how important they considered a selection of 51 strategies and how often they used these strategies in their own practice. The top ten strategies or “commandments” were the ones that teachers considered most important from a motivational point of view (Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998).

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) and Dörnyei (1994; 2001) have formulated a set of motivational strategies for teachers based on discussions with teachers and personal experience. Through empirical research, these strategies were refined to form the "10 commandments of language teachers", which have been shown to sustain students' motivation (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008; Noels et al. 2019). These ten commandments can be outlined as follows:

1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalise the learning process.
9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarise learners with the target language culture.

Table 1 - Ten commandments for motivating language learners (adapted from Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998).

More recently, the motivation orientation of language teaching (MOLT) has been formulated, drawing from Dörnyei's (2001) motivational strategies framework for foreign language classrooms to categorise observable teacher behaviours (Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008). The components of this model are outlined as follows:

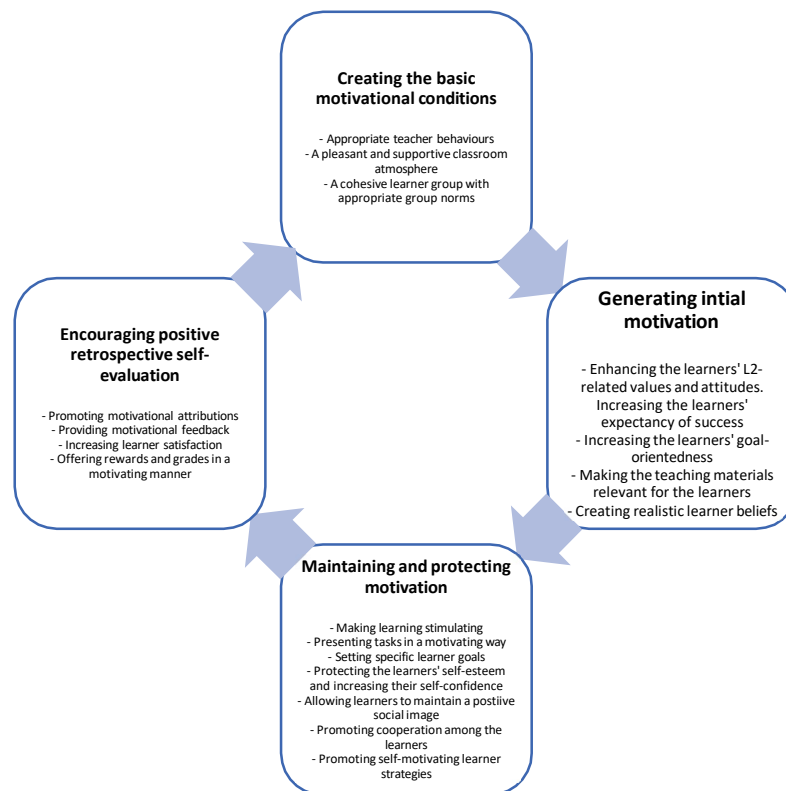


Figure 1 - The Components of a Motivational L2 Teaching Practice (adapted from Guilloteaux and Dörnyei, 2008)

2.8 Conclusion

The process of conducting a literature review has outlined the position of MFL learning in an Irish post-primary context. It has revealed the significance that motivation plays in MFL learning, as well as other factors which may influence motivation such as socio-economic background and the rise of Global English. The evolution of motivational strategies in the language classroom was also highlighted. The research domains considered in this chapter are focused mainly on the UK with little research carried out in the context of the Irish post-primary education system. Consequently, the researcher aims to examine factors underpinning students' motivation to learn French, as well as the factors implicating in the choice of French language at Senior Cycle in the post-primary context and the motivational strategies used by teachers to enhance motivation.

In consideration of the ethical implications of the research study, the involvement of students in the data collection process is ruled out. Therefore, the perspectives on this topic will be evaluated utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods, which will be outlined in Chapter 3.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological decisions made throughout this research study and the justification for the selection methods. This chapter will clarify the research paradigm, methodology and the research methods chosen. Moreover, the survey approach and the sampling method of participants will be outlined. The limitations of the study will also be highlighted. Lastly, the ethical considerations will also be presented in this chapter as outlined by both Hibernia College and the British Educational Research Association (2018).

3.2 Research Paradigm

For the purpose of this study, a positivist research paradigm was adopted. Park, Konge and Artino (2020) outline that the primary goal of positivist research is to develop explanatory associations or relationships that lead to the prediction of the phenomena in question through quantitative approaches. Furthermore, in the case of positivist research, it is essential that the researcher does not engage with the study participants to minimise any chance of bias (Park, Konge and Artino, 2020).

3.3 Methodology and Research Methods

A mixed-methods approach was selected for this study based on Creswell's (2015) perspective, which defines mixed-methods research as the gathering of both quantitative (close-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data. This method combines both types of data, and then draws interpretations based on the strengths of both sets of data to answer research questions (Creswell, 2015, p.2). Additionally, the collection of both forms of data can lead to a better understanding of a research problem than either one individual form (Creswell, 2015, p. 3). The primary research conducted for this project collected primarily quantitative data, with some qualitative data.

3.3.1 Quantitative research

Quantitative research can be defined as a "formal, objective, systematic process used to describe variables, test relationships between them, and examine cause and effect

associations between variables" (Burns et al., 2015, p.510). There are numerous types of quantitative research: surveys, experimental research and correlational research, each with its advantages and disadvantages (Sukamolson, 2007). The quantitative approach allows for standardised data to be collected, in the case of this study, it allowed for the collection of teachers' perception of student motivation to learn French. This approach permitted gathering data from a wide range of participants, using numerical data to inform a positivist paradigm, underpinned by various assumptions (Bloomfield and Fisher, 2019). Sukamolson (2007) argues that quantitative research is helpful for quantifying options, attitudes and behaviours to establish what a whole population feels about a particular issue. This can be referred to as "descriptive research" (Sukamolson, 2007). It is also suitable for explaining certain phenomena, such as attitudes, learning habits and motivation (Sukamolson, 2007). This is known as inferential research as it is used to explain rather than describe.

3.3.2 Qualitative research

By contrast, qualitative research is a strategy which usually "emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Bryman, 2012, p.36-7). Qualitative research can offer a rich source of data to the researcher, which can be both analysed and interpreted in various ways and can provide the researcher with a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" at hand (Creswell, 2007, p.40).

3.3 Questionnaire design and distribution

For the purpose of the study, a questionnaire was devised. The questionnaire was comprised of both closed questions and open-ended questions to allow for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. This method of data collection was selected as surveys are most applicable when the researcher wants factual information relating to specific groups of people, including information such as what they do, why they think and who they are (Denscombe, 2010). The use of questionnaires, according to Walliman (2011) is a "particularly suitable tool for gaining quantitative data but can also be used for qualitative data" (Walliman, 2011, p.65).

As stated, the questionnaire was devised to include closed questions, which required participants to answer yes or no and tick boxes based on their teaching experience. The

'Likert' scale was used in specific questions to determine how participants (teachers) felt about students' general motivation to learn French and students overall interest in French in their current school. Where the 'Likert' scale was applied, it was done so according to a 5-point scale. The final question of the questionnaire was open-ended. Walliman (2011) states that open questions allow participants to "answer in their own content and style" and give participants "freedom of expression and allow the respondents to qualify their responses" (Walliman, 2011, p.98). Open-ended questions were also included to allow participants to enter free text and avoid the limiting factors of pre-set response categories (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

When the questionnaire objective was established, the questions were carefully written to ensure that they were as straightforward as possible and that there was no room for misinterpretation on the part of the participant. This was done by using clear and concise language, which was easy to understand, avoiding any technical terms. The questions were reviewed by external sources to ensure that all questions were comprehensible and flowed well.

3.5 Sample and participants

The research population of this study was teachers of French in Ireland at the post-primary level who are registered to teach the subject with the Teaching Council of Ireland. As the total population of registered teachers to teach French with the Teaching Council of Ireland is too large, it would only be possible to include some members of the population in the study. Therefore, a sample was required to represent the population. This was done by acquiring participants by distributing the questionnaire on French teaching Facebook pages online. Attached to the post was the web-link to the questionnaire, along with the information and consent forms. The participant was required to give their consent in the first question of the questionnaire. As the web-link to an online questionnaire was posted on these pages, and it was the decision of the participant browsing through the page to decide whether they wanted to partake or not. This can be referred to as a non-probability sample or a convenience sample. This type of sampling method can be defined as when it is left up to the individual to choose to participate in the survey (Fricker, 2008, p.199). However, this type of sampling has

its limitations, which will be explored later in the chapter. A total of 40 questionnaires were completed and therefore resulted in a research sample of 40 participants for the study.

3.6 Data analysis

The research study aimed to gather teachers' perceptions of student motivation for French within an Irish post-primary context and also to gain insight into the motivational strategies used in their classrooms to motivate students.

The questionnaire was conducted using the online platform Microsoft Forms. The web-based questionnaire was chosen as the data can be transferred easily into an encrypted Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which has the benefits of speed and accuracy in terms of data collection (Denscombe, 2010). From this data, descriptive analysis was undertaken using the Microsoft Excel platform to categorise data and create charts and graphs to represent the data visually.

3.7 Limitations

As this is a small-scale investigation, many limitations to the study can be identified. Firstly, questionnaires often yield a low response rate as a result, may only provide a snapshot into the area being researched (Patten, 2014). This was proven to be accurate as the sample acquired accounted for just 1.18% of all post-primary registered teachers of French with the Teaching Council of Ireland. This is explained in more detail in the following chapter. Patten (2014) also highlights that through conducting semi-structured interviews, follow-up questions can be posed as they arise, and there is more scope to change the focus of the interview if required. Although open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to collect qualitative data, the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews could have allowed the researcher to gain a greater understanding of why the participants considered student motivation to be low for French and to explore the strategies used to motivate students in the classroom in greater depth.

Another limitation identified concerning the Internet questionnaire was that respondents might need to be more familiar with the platform or Internet, which may cause them to not engage with the questionnaire resulting in fewer responses (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007).

Lastly, the final limitation of the study identified is the use of non-probability and volunteer sampling, as this may affect the generalisability of the findings of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Non-probability sampling has the potential to have a much more significant bias as it is likely that those who choose to participate are not representative of the general population (Fricker, 2008, p.199).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Before the commencement of this research study and the collection of any data was undertaken, a research proposal was submitted and subsequently approved by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee.

The British Educational Research Association Guidelines (British Educational Research Association, 2018) were heavily consulted throughout the study. The main areas conferred included "Consent", "Right to withdraw", and "Privacy and data storage".

The research study was voluntary. Participants were provided with an information letter (Appendix A), which outlined the purpose and nature of the research study, the objectives of the study and a clear outline of the duties of the participant. It was highlighted that participants had the right to withdraw from the completion of the questionnaire at any time. Anonymity and privacy were ensured as participants were not required to provide any personal information, such as name or contact details, for the completion of the questionnaire. However, contact details for the researcher were provided in the case where a participant wanted to withdraw from their study.

The data collected by the researcher was securely stored in an encrypted folder, which is password protected and is solely available to the researcher, with access to be given to the research supervisor on request if required. This data includes the questionnaire results on the Microsoft Forms platform, the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and any visual representations of data. The data will not be used for any purpose outside of this study. All data will be stored for one year after data collection in line with Hibernia College's privacy policy after it will be safely and securely destroyed in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

3.9 Conclusion

In summary, in this chapter, the nature of the research has been determined. A mixed-methods approach was undertaken for this study through the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data through means of a questionnaire. The design and distribution of the questionnaire was outlined and a description of the sample and participants was given. It also outlined the way in which the data was collected and analysed. All of the above steps were taken to ensure that all elements of the research study conform with the Hibernia College data protection and GDPR guidelines. The data and findings of the questionnaire will be now presented in the following chapter.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the findings from the questionnaire will be presented. Both quantitative data and qualitative data will be set forth. This will include a presentation of the participant demographic, teacher's perceptions of student motivation to learn French, which includes their beliefs about how motivated and interested students are to learn French, factors which influence student's subject choice at Senior Cycle and the motivational strategies which they implement in their classrooms.

4.2 Participant demographic

4.2.1 Teaching experience

Participants for the questionnaire consisted of teachers of French in post-primary schools in Ireland. A total of 40 individuals (n=40, 100%) responded to the questionnaire. The only inclusion criteria for participation in the questionnaire was that participants were registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland to teach French. The sample acquired accounts for 1.18% of all post-primary teachers registered to teach French with the Teaching Council of Ireland (total number 3,375 as of January 2021). It is important to note that this is the total number of registered French teachers with the Teaching Council and does not imply that all teachers are practising or employed as language teachers in schools. The breakdown of experience from participants be seen in *Table 4-2 - Teaching experience of participants*.

| Years of experience | Number of participants | % of participants |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 0-4 years | 9 | 22.5% |
| 5-14 years | 6 | 15% |
| 15+ years | 25 | 62.5% |

Table 4-2 - Teaching experience of participants

4.2.2 Type of school

Participants were asked to indicate the type of school in which they are currently teaching in. The breakdown of schools where participants are currently teaching in is outlined in *Table 4-3 - Type of school*.

| Type of school | Number of participants | % of participants |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Voluntary secondary school | 21 | 52.5% |
| Vocational/community school | 9 | 22.5% |
| Community/comprehensive school | 10 | 25% |

Table 4-3 - Type of school

4.2.3 Class levels taught

Participants were asked to indicate what class levels they taught. Options were broken down into Junior Cycle, Senior Cycle and an option was given for participants who teach both levels. This information is displayed in *Figure 4-2 – Class levels taught by participants*. 34 participants (85%) teach both Junior and Senior cycle classes, whereas only 5 teach Junior Cycle only (12.5%) and 1 teaches Senior Cycle only (2.5%).

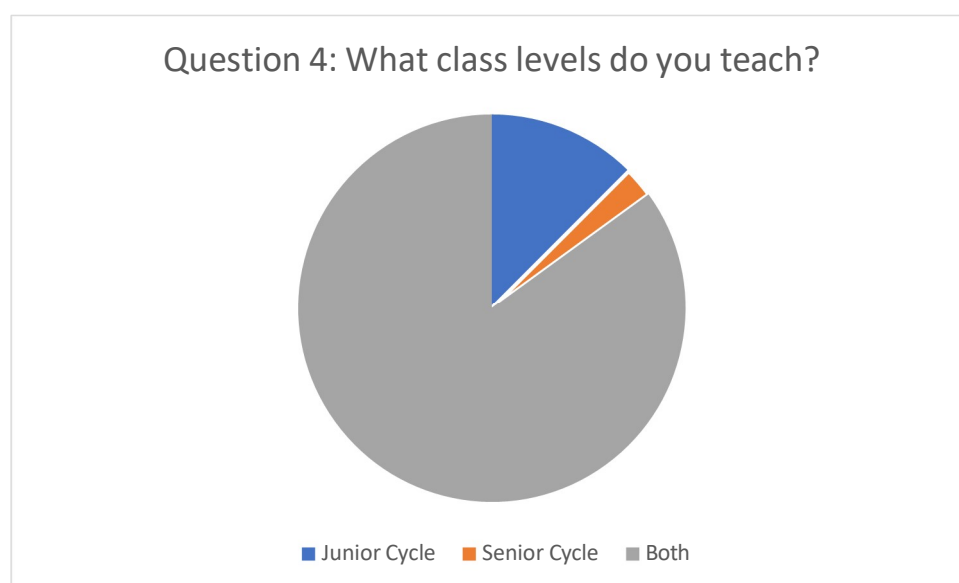


Figure 4-2 – Class levels taught by participants

4.3 Teachers' perceptions of student motivation to learn French

The following question asked teachers to rate, in their experience, how they would generally perceive students' motivation to learn French. A Likert scale was applied to this question with the following options; *Not at all motivated, Slightly motivated, Moderately motivated, Very*

motivated and Extremely motivated. The results are presented in *Figure 4-3 – Teacher’s perception of student motivation to learn French.*

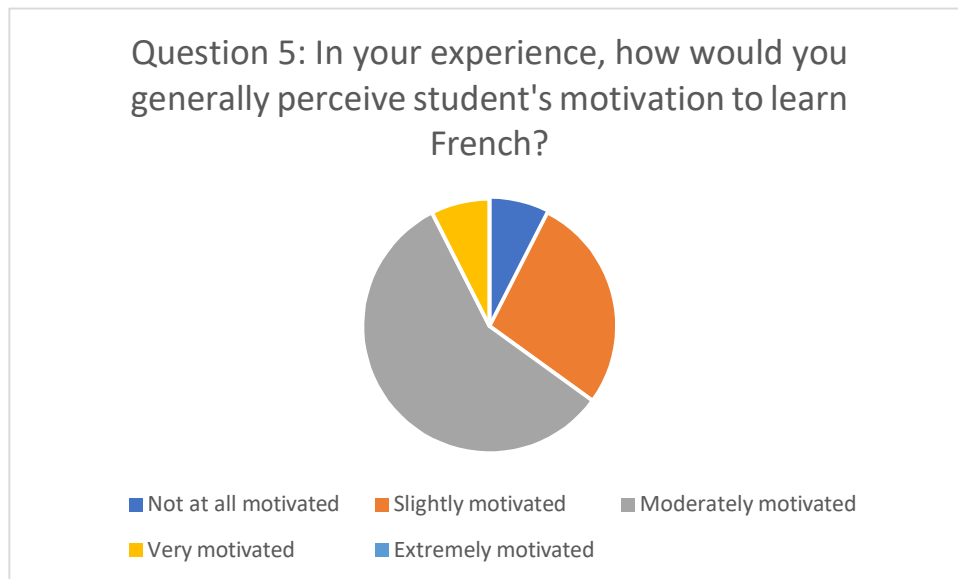


Figure 4-3 – Teacher’s perception of student motivation to learn French

In the majority of teacher’s experience, students are perceived to be *moderately motivated* to learn French (n=23, 57.5%), followed by *slightly motivated* (n=11, 27.5%). The same number of teachers perceived students to be *very motivated* and *not all motivated* (n=3, 7.5%). Lastly, the *very motivated option* was not selected by any participant.

If participants answered either *Slightly motivated*, or, *Not at all motivated*, they were asked to indicated the reasons they believe may effect student’s motivation to learn French. Participants were allowed to select more than one reason for this question and the frequency of responses can be seen graphically in *Figure 4-4 – Factors that teachers believe may effect students motivation to learn French.* “Does not align with interests” was the most frequent occurring reason and was selected 15 times, closely followed by “Does not align with their strengths” answered 13 times. “Does not feel it is necessary as a Native English speaker” was the next most frequently occurring answer with 12 participants selecting this reason, followed by “Not relevant for career prospects” at 11. “Already speak another language” amounted to only 2 answers. “Other” was answered 8 times and the reasons to which will be presented next.

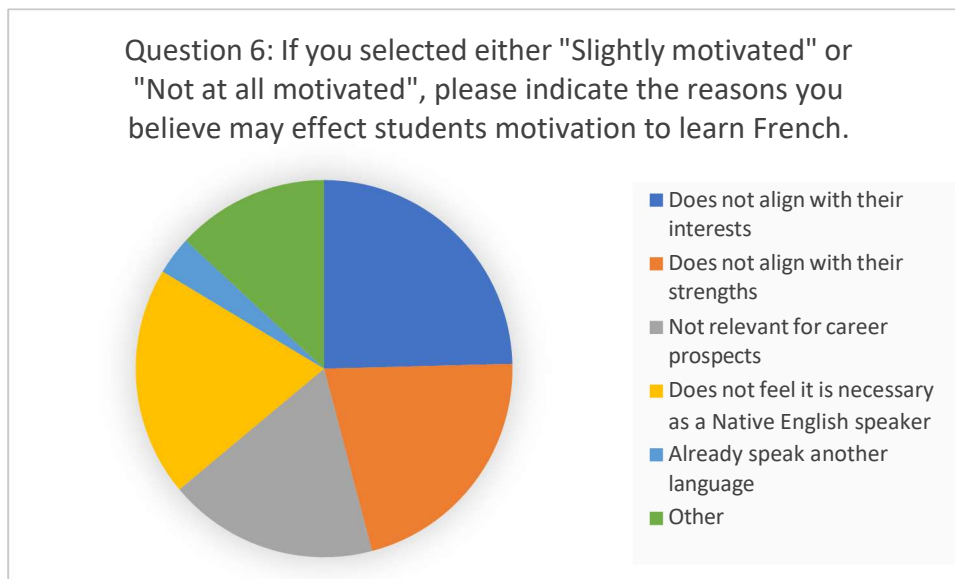


Figure 4-4 – Factors that teachers believe may effect students motivation to learn French

4.4 Additional reasons teachers believe influence student motivation to learn French

Participants who answered *Slightly motivated* or *Not at all motivated* to question 5: in your experience how would you generally perceive student’s motivation to learn French were required indicate the reasons which they believe may effect student’s motivation to learn French. The option other was given for participants to propose other reasons which were not listed and gave participants the opportunity to elaborate on their answers. Other reasons given by participants included;

“Some students select French as it is an entry requirement for college courses”,

“General impact, either positive or negative of past teacher of French”,

“more interested in doing better in maths”,

“Irish exemptions. Also parents decide on the subject choice and the student is not interested”,

“Parents saying I can’t go languages so you probably can’t!”,

“MFL compulsory in my school, not all pupils want to study a MFL”

“Depends on the year group. Many are either eager first years/exam years wanting to do well”,

“Students no longer prioritise French as a subject”

4.5 Overall interest in French among student population in participants' current school

Participants were required to rate the overall interest in French among the student population in the school in which they are currently teaching. A Likert-scale was applied to this question with the following options; *Extremely interested, Very interested, Moderately interested, Slightly interested, Not at all interested*. Over half of participants rate students to be *Moderately interested* at 62.5% (n=25). This was followed by 30% (n=12) stating that students are *Slightly interested* in their current school. Next, 5% (n=2) of participants ranked students to be *Very interested*, lastly followed by 2.5% (n=1) of participants stating that students are *Not at all interested* in French in their current school. No participant selected the option *Extremely interested*.

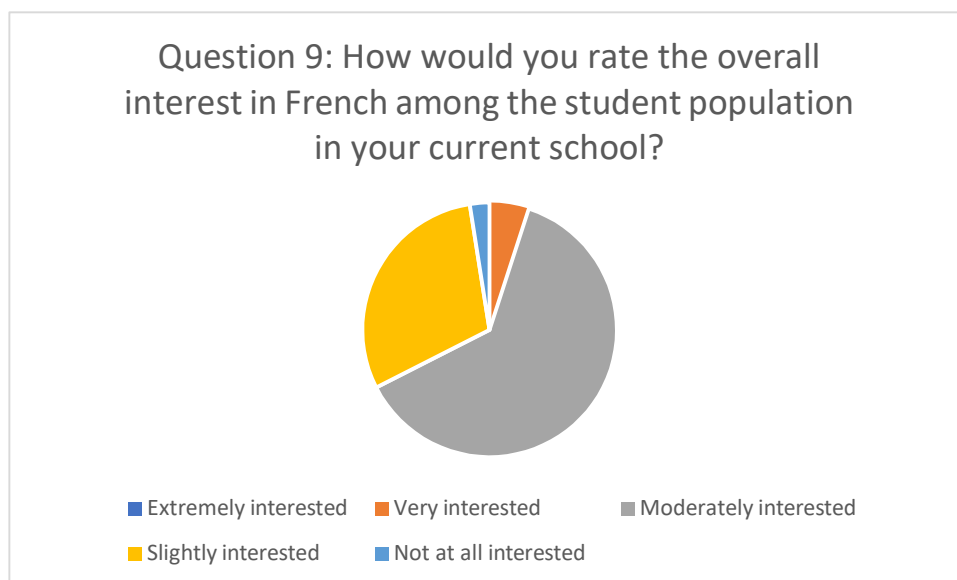


Figure 4-5 – Overall interest in French in current school

4.6 Factors influencing student's subject choice for Senior Cycle

Participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree that the following factors may have an impact on students' choice to learn French at Senior Cycle. Participants were required to rate the following factors; *Career choice, Interest in subject, Subject availability, Perception of subject difficulty, Perception of subject teacher, Parental/guardian influence, Peer influence, and Higher Education entry requirements*. Similar to previous questions, a Likert-Scale was applied to this question with the following options; *Strongly agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree*. Teachers believe Higher Education entry requirements to be the most influential factor when it comes to

students' choice to study a MFL at Senior Cycle, with 31 (77.5%) participants selecting the *Strongly agree* option, 7 (17.5%) selecting the *Agree* option, and the remaining 2 (5%) participants stating they neither agreed nor disagreed that it has an impact. The second most influential factor according to teachers is the perception of subject difficulty. 24 (60%) participants strongly agreed that students' perception of subject difficulty of French influences their choice at Senior Cycle, while 8 (20%) participants agree, 2 (5%) neither agree nor disagree, 4 (10%) disagree and 2 (5%) strongly disagree. The third most influential factor indicated by participants was career choice, with 21 (52.5%) participants strongly agreeing that it influences students' subject choice, 8 (20%) agreeing, 6 (15%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing and 5 (12.5) participants disagreed that career choice influences students subject choice. Interest in the subject and perception of the subject teacher closely followed as the fourth most influential factor, followed by parental/guardian influence in fifth, peer influence in sixth and lastly, subject availability. A visual representation of this data can be seen in *Figure 4-6 - Factors teachers believe may influence student's subject choice for Senior Cycle.*

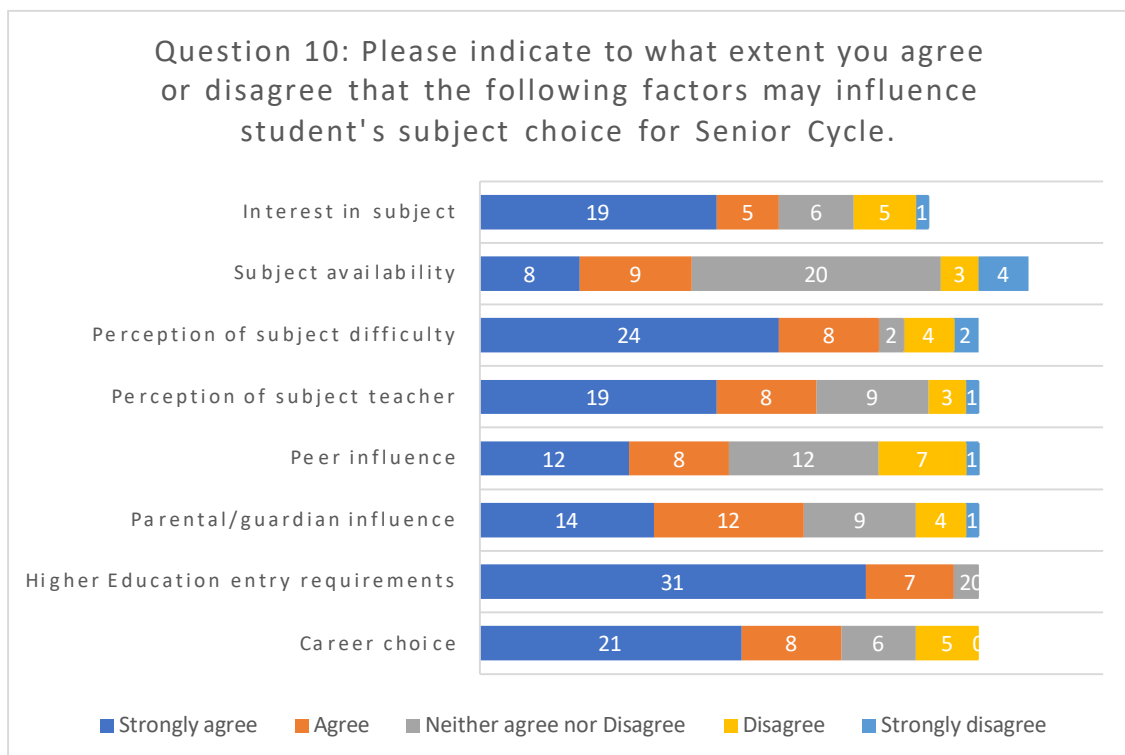


Figure 4-6 - Factors teachers believe may influence student's subject choice for Senior Cycle

4.7 Motivational strategies

Participants were asked to give examples of the strategies that use to motivate students in their own classrooms. Below is a table of the most frequently mentioned motivational strategies highlighted by teachers.

| | |
|---|----|
| Use of technology (Kahoot, Quizlet, etc.) | 21 |
| Games | 17 |
| Pair work / Group work | 14 |
| Authentic materials | 12 |
| Positive reinforcement / Praise | 8 |
| Incorporating students' interests | 7 |
| Active learning methodologies | 6 |
| Cultural exposure | 6 |
| Projects | 6 |
| Variety of activities | 5 |
| Emphasising relevance | 4 |
| Role play | 4 |
| Rewards | 3 |
| Real-life situations | 3 |

The findings indicate that the use of technology, such as Kahoot and Quizlet, was the most prevalent strategy used, as mentioned by 21 respondents. Games were another popular option, with 17 teachers incorporating them into their lessons to boost motivation. Pair work and group work were utilised by 14 participants, while authentic materials were emphasised as a way to increase motivation by 12 teachers. Positive reinforcement and praise were mentioned by 8 participants. Incorporating students' interests, active learning methodologies, cultural exposure and projects were mentioned by 6 teachers. Other strategies included using a variety of activities emphasising the relevance of the language, role plays, rewards and incorporating the language into real-life situations with varying frequencies.

Subsequently, participants were asked to identify with what year groups they use these strategies most, Junior Cycle classes, Senior Cycle classes, or both. 15 participants (n=15, 38%) stated that they use motivational strategies more frequently with Junior Cycle classes. 5 participants (n=5, 13%) stated that they use motivational strategies more frequently with

Senior Cycle classes, and lastly, 20 participants (n=20, 50%) highlighted that they use motivational strategies more frequently with both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle classes. This data is visually represented in *Figure 4- 7 - Frequency of use of motivational strategies*.

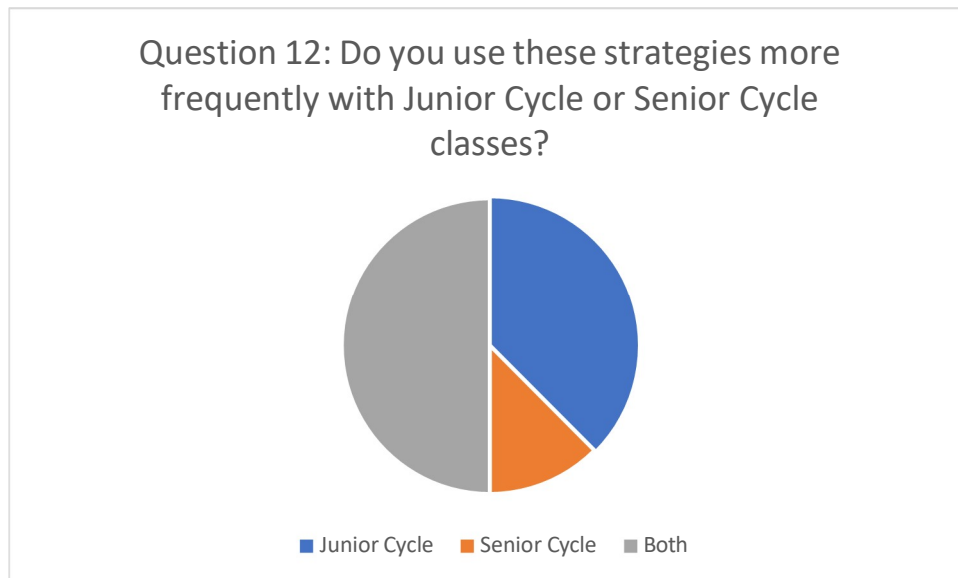


Figure 4- 7 - Frequency of use of motivational strategies

4.8 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter presented the data that was collected from the questionnaire distributed to French teachers to investigate their perceptions of students' motivation to learn French. This included the presentation of the participant demographic, teachers' perceptions of student motivation to learn French, which included their beliefs about how motivated and interested students are to learn French, factors which influence students' subject choice at Senior Cycle and the motivational strategies which they implement in their classrooms.

Some of the main findings are as follows:

- 62.5% of teachers who took part in the questionnaire have 15+ years of teaching experience.
- Over half (52.5%) of teachers who took part in the questionnaire are currently working in voluntary secondary schools.
- 85% of teachers teach both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle classes.

- Students are perceived to be *Moderately motivated* to learn French by 57.5% of teachers.
- The top three reasons for students lacking motivation in French, according to teachers, were “Does not align with interests”, “Does not align with strengths”, and “Does not feel it is necessary as a Native English speaker”.
- Higher Entry requirements are deemed to be the most influential factor when it comes to students' subject choice at Senior Cycle.
- The use of technology emerged as the prevailing motivational strategy used in classrooms of participants.
- 50% of participants indicated that they employ motivational strategies with equal frequency in both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle classes.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of a questionnaire administered to post-primary teachers of French, with the aim of investigating their perceptions of student motivation to learn French, their perceptions of factors which influence student uptake for French, as well as the motivational strategies employed in their classroom to enhance student motivation. This was investigated employing a mixed-methods approach using teachers as participants through the distribution of a questionnaire, including both closed and open-ended questions. This chapter will build upon the findings presented, offering an in-depth discussion and analysis of the findings, drawing on connections to existing literature and providing insights into the implications for both theory and practice.

The current small-scale study aimed to shed light on the complex construct of student motivation in the context of French language learning, recognising the crucial role of teachers as facilitators of motivation in the classroom. By examining teachers' perceptions and practices, this study sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on student motivation and inform pedagogical approaches aimed at fostering a more motivating learning environment.

In this discussion chapter, the key findings will be explored, addressing the research questions set forth in Chapter 1. The objective of this chapter is to offer a comprehensive analysis of teacher perceptions, motivational strategies and student motivation in the context of French language learning in a post-primary context by examining the implications of the questionnaire results.

5.2 Summary of Findings

5.2.1 Introduction

According to Kelly (2019), there is a growing concern regarding the state of MFLs in the UK and other anglophone countries, such as Ireland, as they appear to be approaching a critical juncture (Kelly, 2019). Printer (2022) asserts that while macro-societal issues may be beyond the jurisdiction of teachers, they can still exercise control over the pedagogical strategies they employ within their classrooms. Hence, the choice of the researcher to investigate the motivational strategies used by teachers to increase motivation in their French classrooms in

an Irish post-primary context. The State Examinations Commission (SEC) has reported statistics indicating a significant decline in the number of students opting for French for the Leaving Certificate examinations over the past decade. According to the SEC, the number of students who sat the French Leaving Certificate examination at either Higher Level or Ordinary Level was 28,977 in 2012. This figure decreased to 21,150 in 2022. According to Parrish and Lanvers (2018), a considerable body of research on motivation in MFL education indicates that students tend to exhibit low levels of motivation and derive less pleasure from MFL classes compared to other disciplines. This is consistent with the study's findings, as none of the participants reported that in their experience, students were extremely motivated to learn French, and only 7.5% stated that they were very motivated.

5.2.2 Research question 1: What factors influence student motivation to learn French?

The determination of students to learn a new language is influenced by a multifaceted combination of factors, including student achievement and perceived ability, the attitudes of their parents and family towards language learning and its perceived usefulness and their personal motivation (Parrish and Lanvers, 2018). The findings highlighted, according to teachers, that the main factors which influence student motivation to learn French are a lack of alignment with their interests, a lack of alignment with their strengths and a perceived lack of necessity for learning French as a native English speaker. These findings resonate with the observations of Davies (2004) who stated that for some students MFLs "lacks relevance and usefulness, and is more difficult than most subjects to get to grips with" (Martin, 2020). In addition, Gayton (2010) posits that students who use English as a first language are more prone to neglect language learning if they lack a genuine interest in the subject or fail to acknowledge the value of language skills. Similarly, Lanvers (2013) asserts that use of Global English could potentially discourage native English speakers from acquiring proficiency in additional languages and highlights the concept that the prevalence of Global English may act as a "demotivator" for the acquisition of languages other than English. The aforementioned statements pertain to the results obtained from the findings gathered on the factors that impact student motivation, as perceived by teachers in Ireland. This was highlighted by a participant as they described the attitude among students to be:

"the whole world speaks English so why would you learn another language?"

5.2.3 Research question 2: What factors influence the uptake of French at Senior Cycle?

The findings highlighted that Higher Education entry requirements, perception of subject difficulty and career choice are the most influential factors in the uptake of French at Senior Cycle. The following will now be discussed.

5.2.3.1 Higher Education entry requirements

As discussed in Chapter 2, all National University of Ireland (NUI) universities require English, Irish and another language in order to matriculate (Gallagher, 2021). However, Gallagher (2021) notes that sustained proficiency in MFL learning cannot be solely dependent on the NUI matriculation requirement to ensure adequate progression in students' language learning abilities. The Languages Connect strategy highlights that sustaining the matriculation requirement is favourable, particularly in the medium term, to facilitate the uptake of foreign languages at post-primary level (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). However, during the consultation process, it was observed that concerns emerged regarding the motivation behind students taking languages up to Leaving Certificate level. It was noted that a considerable number of students only pursue MFL subjects primarily because of the matriculation requirements of Higher Education Institutions. Bruen (2021) also highlights that the elimination of these requirements poses an inherent risk. As the decline in language learning persists, as was noted with the decline in students sitting the French Leaving Certificate paper over the last decade, will the enactment of this matriculation requirement suffice as a means of maintaining the uptake of MFLs in the country? The removal of matriculation requirements for MFLs for many third-level courses is likely to be a factor in the cause of the declining trend. In the event that an MFL was not a requirement for entry into any Higher Education institution, would the number of students taking n subjects to Leaving Certificate level experience a further decline?

5.2.3.2 Perception of subject difficulty

Perception of subject difficulty was highly regarded as a factor that influences the uptake of French at Senior Cycle. In a study carried out by Graham (2004), where attitudes of English students aged 16 to 19 towards French were investigated, it was found that numerous students cited the perceived level of difficulty associated with the French language as a

primary reason for discontinuing their studies after reaching the age of 16. Additionally, a lack of personal interest was reported to be a contributing factor (Graham, 2004). This finding may be a sign that unrealistic demands are being made of these learners, and the language course is too difficult for them. One could argue that with the implementation of the new Common Level exam for MFLs at Junior Cycle has resulted in increased accessibility of course material for all students. Nevertheless, it is imperative to take into account the potential disparity in content knowledge that this could cause between the Junior and Senior Cycle. This may contribute to the perception that French is a challenging language, potentially surpassing other MFLs, such as Spanish, as was noted by a participant in the questionnaire. They stated:

"Perception that Spanish is easier, French written paper is much harder... and there's a MASSIVE gap between language skills expected at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle."

Perception of subject difficulty is also relevant when students are making subject choices. Many subjects at Senior Cycle involve practical elements or coursework elements, such as Technology, Agricultural Science, Construction, Economics and Geography to name a few. Students may indeed opt for these subjects as they may be perceived to be less difficult than an MFL with the bonus of having some of the examination complete before the formal assessment weeks in June. This is highlighted by another participant from the questionnaire:

"Because of the foreign language requirement being dropped in many colleges and universities, students choose other subjects that are perceived to be easier. Technology has 50 per cent practical. So have other practical subjects. Huge variety of subjects available now in schools and French and German are losing out. They are perceived to be difficult subjects."

5.2.3.3 Career choice

Career choice was the third most influential factor that influences the uptake of French at Senior Cycle. The Languages Connect Strategy (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a) recognises that one of the challenges to establishing a multilingual society include the lack of awareness of the potential career and mobility benefits that foreign languages can provide (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). Comparable to the influence exerted by matriculation requirements, students may not perceive the necessity of studying foreign

languages throughout their post-primary academic journey unless it is directly aligned to their prospective career paths, such as pursuing language teaching as a profession or studying languages as a degree.

5.2.4 Research question 3: What strategies do you use to motivate students in your own classroom?

Lamb (2017) outlines that teachers' pedagogical ideas are influenced by both their classroom experiences and by ideals and values stemming from their educational culture. Therefore, one must take into account if differences are found throughout cultures and education systems. The use of technology emerged as the most commonly cited motivational strategy among participants, with a total of 21 mentions. Games obtained the second-highest number of mentions with a total of 17. Ryan and Deci (2020) observe that teachers are increasingly utilising gamification strategies to boost motivation by leveraging the appealing potential of games for educational purposes. Significant research of self-determination theory has established that the motivational appeal of video games can be attributed to the presence of features that fulfil the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, to heighten student motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2020).

It is interesting to remark that differentiation was not listed as a motivational strategy by any of the participants. Differentiation, as defined by Martin (2020) is a way of "providing students with other approaches to grasp the more challenging concepts that are presented to them". In these circumstances, differentiation plays a pivotal role as it provides focused assistance to learners, and scaffolded approaches facilitate their task comprehension (Martin, 2020). This can indeed be considered as a motivational strategy as Dörnyei (2001) defines a motivational strategy as deliberate factors that are employed to attain a beneficial outcome. This links in again with the notion of competence within the self-determination theory of Ryan and Deci (2000, 2020). By using differentiation, it is possible to adapt activities so that learners can achieve according to their abilities. Results from studies from Courtney (2017) and Courtney et. al (2015) show that there is a significant degree of variation in learner outcomes, therefore highlighting the need for increased individualisation of language instruction to accommodate learners' varying proficiency levels. However, with the implementation of the new Common Level examination for the Junior Cycle MFL, one may question are students being adequately

catered for when it comes to competency to sit the final examination at Leaving Certificate level?

5.3 Additional Factors

"We need to work on promoting language learning in Ireland" according to a questionnaire participant. Is there sufficient effort being made to promote languages in Ireland? The validity of this claim is debatable, as there has been a significant reduction in the number of students sitting the Leaving Certificate French exam since the implementation of the Languages Connect Strategy. The "Say Yes to Languages" primary languages sampler module has shown promise in recent years, with more than 800 primary schools participating since 2021, according to Languages Connect (Department of Education and Skills, 2017a). The development offers a glimmer of hope for the future. However, the impact of this on students' language learning motivations remains to be discovered.

The teacher shortage crisis prevalent in the country is certainly a contributing factor which is widely acknowledged. Numerous schools face the risk of discontinuing or downsizing their foreign language offerings due to inadequate staffing, thereby making some languages optional. Given this narrative in the media, what are the anticipated means by which students may be encouraged to engage in language learning? A common occurrence is that substitute teachers are required to occupy teaching positions where they lack sufficient qualifications or expertise in the language. How can the outcomes of this discourse be anticipated to be any different?

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the results of a questionnaire distributed to post-primary teachers of French. The study examined student motivation to learn French and the factors which influence this. The investigation yielded several notable findings, The findings show that students' motivation to learn French is affected by the perceived disconnect between their interests and abilities and the language, as well as a perceived lack of urgency due to English's global use. The study found Higher Entry requirements, subject difficulty and career choice to affect Senior Cycle uptake of French. The study found that teachers use technology and gamification most frequently to heighten student motivation. The discussion also included

additional factors, such as the need for greater language advocacy and the ongoing teacher shortage. The results improve understanding of student motivation in French and offer theoretical and practical insights. To increase language uptake in French and increase motivation, more research and interventions are required.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Concluding remarks

This small-scale study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of student motivation towards learning French within the Irish post-primary context. The findings shed light on key aspects such as teachers' experience, school types, class groups taught, be that Junior Cycle or Senior Cycle, student motivation levels in their current school, reasons they believe students may lack motivation, influential factors for subject choice at Senior Cycle, motivational strategies employed in their classrooms and their frequency of use in different class levels.

One notable finding was that a significant portion (62.5%) of the participating teachers had over 15 years of teaching experience. This suggests that the teachers involved in the study possess substantial professional expertise and were likely well-acquainted with the nuances of teaching French as a foreign language. It is a matter of concern to note that these teachers are encountering such a lack in motivation among their students. One participant emphasised that in their 23 years of teaching experience, the level of motivation has never been as low as it currently is.

Regarding student motivation, the findings indicated that teachers perceived students' motivation to learn French as moderate, according to 57.5% of participants. While this suggests that there is room for improvement, it is noteworthy that a significant proportion of students demonstrated at least some level of motivation towards learning French, according to their teachers.

Furthermore, the study identified three main reasons for students' lack of motivation to learn French, as reported by participants: a perceived lack of alignment with students' interests and strengths and the notion that learning French is not necessary for native English speakers. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating meaningful and relevant content into the instruction of the language, as well as addressing students' individual strengths and interests to enhance their motivation.

In terms of subject choice, the study revealed that Higher Entry requirements exerted the most significant influence on students' decision to choose French at Senior Cycle. This finding emphasises how matriculation requirements influence students' subject choice at Senior Cycle.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into teachers' perceptions of student motivation towards learning French and the motivational strategies they employ in order to heighten student motivation in the Irish post-primary context. The findings shed light on the experiences and perspectives of teachers of French in Ireland.

6.2 Limitations

Several limitations were identified during the course of this research. Firstly, the research study employed a non-probability sampling method, which yielded a limited sample size. The study revealed a significant underrepresentation of newly qualified teachers, as the majority of participants (62.5%) had 15 years or more of teaching experience and were well-established in the field. This factor could have possible implications for results. The use of this sampling method may also introduce bias, thereby potentially impacting the findings. A further constraint of the research was the absence of student voice. The inclusion of the viewpoints of students who are presently studying French would have constituted a valuable contribution to the study, given that their perspectives may diverge from those of teachers. An additional limitation pertained to the insufficient exploration of the schools that the participants taught in. Gathering information such as the gender of the school, the school's location, whether it was rural or urban, and the school's DEIS status may also have an impact on the degree to which students are motivated to learn languages.

6.3 Recommendations, Potential for Future Research

Future research could explore the impact of specific interventions or pedagogical approaches on student motivation and achievements in MFL education in Ireland.

In relation to motivational strategies, it would be interesting to carry out further research into how far teachers actually implement the motivational strategies they mentioned and claim to use. For instance, many of the commandments in Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) study among Hungarian teachers of English did not exhibit a clear trend in the frequency of their classroom implementation (Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998, p.222). Moreover, conducting research exploring similar research questions as identified in this study could provide enlightenment into the underlying reasons for students' low motivation towards language learning from their own perspective. This may offer valuable insights into the factors contributing to their low

motivation, their perception of language learning difficulties, and the extent to which Higher Education entry requirements influence their decision-making process when selecting subjects for Senior Cycle, and in the event that this requirement was to be removed, would students still opt to pursue language studies?

6.4 Implications for Future Practice

Following the completion of this research, the researcher has gained a deeper understanding of the intricate nature of motivation and the various factors that impact motivation for learning MFLs, according to teachers. Additionally, the study has shed light on the factors that influence the uptake of French language at Senior Cycle, as well as the motivational strategies employed by teachers in their classrooms to enhance language learning outcomes. Consequently, the researcher endeavours to promote the study of MFLs while concurrently emphasising the significance of employing motivational strategies in the classroom in their own practice. The results from this study have highlighted the significant impact on the perception of subject teacher and the parental or guardian influence can exert on the uptake of French at Senior Cycle also. This is highlighted by Martin (2020) who asserts that parental support is crucial, and facilitating a productive discourse with parents regarding the significance of studying languages may potentially mitigate the disparity in parental engagement and enhance the motivational goals of their children (Martin, 2020). Given these considerations, the researcher can exhibit greater awareness of the impact they themselves have as a promotional factor for MFLs and engage in the promotion of the language during open evening and parent teacher meetings. Additionally, it will incentivise the researcher to emphasise practical illustrations and implementations of MFLs for students on a regular basis.

7. References

- Batardière, M.-T., Berthaud, S., Čatibušić, B., and Flynn, C. (2022) 'Language teaching and learning in Ireland: 2012-2021', *Language Teaching*, 53, pp.41-72. doi:10.1017/S0261444822000374
- Bell, J. (2010) *Doing Your Research Project A guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science*. 5th edn. Open University Press.
- Burns, N., Grove, S. K., and Gray, J. (2015) *Understanding nursing research: Building on evidence-based practice*, 6th edn.
- British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*.
- Bruen, J. (2021) 'The Place of Foreign Languages in the Irish Education System: Towards a More Strategic Approach', *Language Learning in Anglophone Countries*, pp.37-52. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56654-8_3
- Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*, 4th edn. Oxford University Press.
- Coffey, S. (2018) 'Choosing to study modern foreign languages: Discourses of value as forms of cultural capital.', *Applied Linguistics*, 39(4), pp.462-480. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amw019>.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*. 6th edn. Routledge.
- Courtney, L., Graham, S., Tonkyn, A., and Marinis, T. (2015) 'Individual Differences in Early Language Learning: A Study of English Learners of French', *Applied Linguistics*, 38, pp.824-847. doi: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv071>
- Courtney, L. (2017) 'Transition in modern foreign languages: a longitudinal study of motivation for language learning and second language proficiency', *Oxford Review of Education*, 43(4), pp.462-481. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2017.1329721>
- Creswell, J. (2007) *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 2nd edn. Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. (2015) *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. New York: Pearson.
- Csizér, K. and Dörnyei, Z. (2005) 'Language Learners' Motivational Profiles and Their Motivated Learning Behaviour', *Language Learning*, 55(4), pp.613-659. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0023-8333.2005.00319.x>
- Denscombe, M. (2010) *The Good Research Guide for small-scale social research projects*. 4th edn. Open University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001) *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). 'The L2 Motivational Self System' in Dörnyei, Z. and Ushioda, E. *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691293-003>
- Fricke, R. D. (2008) 'Sampling methods for web and e-mail surveys' in Fielding, N., Lee, R. M., and Black, G. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, London: SAGE Publications, pp.195-216.
- Gallagher, A. (2021) 'Twenty-Five Years of Language Policies in Ireland', *TEANGA, the Journal of the Irish Association for Applied Linguistics*, 28, pp.6-55. doi: <https://doi.org/10.35903/teanga.v28i.1891>

- Gardner, R. (1985) *Social psychology and second language learning. The role of attitudes and motivation*. London.
- Gardner, R. (2001) 'Integrative Motivation and Second Language Acquisition' in Dörnyei, Z., and Schmidt, R. (eds.) *Motivation and Second Language Acquisition*, Honolulu: Publishing Company, Ltd. [Online] (Available at: https://books.google.ie/books?hl=en&lr=&id=7MELVJorM6AC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=gardner+2001&ots=4I91GhhaFY&sig=dTKzF_zIDXC9xV1tbmTYnWtz0-w&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=gardner%202001&f=false).
- Gayton, A. (2010) 'Socioeconomic Status and Language-Learning Motivation: to what extent does the former influence the latter?', *Scottish Languages Review*, 22, pp.17-28.
- Graham, S. (2004) 'Giving Up on Modern Foreign Languages? Students' Perceptions of Learning French', *Modern Language Journal*, 88(2), pp.171-191. doi: 10.1111/j.0026-7902.2004.00224.x
- Guilloteaux, M. J., and Dörnyei, Z. (2008) 'Motivating Language Learners: A Classroom-Oriented Investigation of the Effects of Motivational Strategies on Student Motivation', *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(1), pp.55-77.
- Hapsari, W. (2013) 'Teacher's perceived characteristics and preferences of motivational strategies in the language classroom', *TEFLIN (Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia) Journal*, 24(2), pp.113-134. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v24i2/113-134>
- Ireland. Department of Education and Skills. (2017a) *Languages Connect Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026*. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/79116/5a5cb48b-09e1-464e-9a2e-4ff231cb090b.pdf#page=null> (Accessed: 15 March 2023).
- Ireland. Department of Education and Skills. (2017b) *Languages Connect Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026 Implementation plan 2017-2022*. Available at: 15 March 2023). <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/47795/96d80f5eced24e09a8906983a7b4b4d2.pdf#page=null> (Accessed: 15 March 2023).
- Kelly, M. (2019) 'Is the UK in a Language Crisis?' *British Council*, 5 March. Available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/uk-language-learning-crisis> (Accessed: 16 February 2023).
- Languages Connect (2021) *Senior Cycle*. Available at: <https://languagesconnect.ie/senior-cycle/> (Accessed: 15 March 2023)
- Lanvers, U. (2013) 'Language learning motivation, global English and study modes: a comparative study', *The Language Learning Journal*, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2013.834376>
- Lanvers, U. (2020) 'Changing language mindsets about modern languages: a school intervention', *The Language Learning Journal*, 48(5), pp.571-597. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2020.1802771>
- Lynch, K. and Baker, J. (2005) 'Equality in education: an equality of condition perspective', *Theory and Research in Education*, 3(2), pp.131-164. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1477878505053298>
- Martin, C. (2020) 'Response to 'The motivational dimension of language teaching' (Lamb, 2017)', *Language Teaching*, 53(2), pp.233-236. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000508>

- Moskovsky, C., Alrabai, F., Paolini, S., and Ratcheva, S. (2013) 'The Effects of Teachers' Motivational Strategies on Learners' Motivation: A Controlled Investigation of Second Language Acquisition', *Language Learning*, 63(1), pp.34-62 doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9922.2012.00717.x
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2011) *Towards a Framework for Junior Cycle*. [Online] Available at: https://ncca.ie/media/2466/towards_aframework_juniorcycle.pdf (Accessed: 22 February 2023).
- Nazir, S., and Naz, F. (2020) 'Demographic factors in language learning: What matters in the language learning of children?', *Competitive Education Research Journal (CERJ)*, 1(1), pp.53-67.
- Noels, K. A., Adrian-Taylor, S., Saumure, K., and Katz, J. W. (2019) 'Motivation and the Support of Significant Others across Language Learning Contexts', *International Association for the Psychology of Language Learning (IAPLL)*, 1, pp.106-141.
- Parrish, A. and Lanvers, U. (2019) 'Student motivation, school policy choices and modern language study in England', *The Language Learning Journal*, 47(3), pp.281-298. doi <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1508305>
- Patten, M. (2017) *Questionnaire Research A Practical Guide*. 4th edn. Routledge.
- Park, Y. S., Konge, L., and Artino, A. R. (2020) 'The Positivism Paradigm of Research', *Academic medicine journal of the Association of American Medical Colleges*, 95(5) doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003093>
- printerPrinter, L. (2022) *The Motivated Classroom Podcast*. Available at: <https://www.liamprinter.com/podcast.html> (Accessed: 31 October 2022).
- Ryan, R. and Deci, E. (2000) 'Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being', *American Psychologist*, 55(1) pp.68-78. doi: 10.1037/10003-066X.55.1.68
- Ryan, R. and Deci, E. (2020) 'Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future implications', *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- State Examinations Commission. (2023) *Statistics*. Available at: <https://www.examinations.ie/statistics/> (Accessed: 18 February 2023).
- Sukamolson, S. (2007) 'Fundamentals of quantitative research'. [Online] (Available at: <http://carinadizonmaellt.com/LANGRES/pdf/30.pdf>) (Accessed: 19 May 2023).
- Turkkahraman, M. (2014) 'Education, Teaching and School as A Social Organization', *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 186, pp.381-387. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.044
- Walliman, N. (2011) *Research Methods the Basics*. Routledge. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203836071>
- Williams, M., Burden, R., and Lanvers, U. (2002) 'French is the language of love and stuff: Students perceptions of issues related to motivation in learning a foreign language', *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(4), pp.503-528. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192022000005805>

8. Appendices

Appendix A - Research Information Sheet

| Research Information Sheet | |
|--|---|
| Researcher: | |
| Organisation: | Hibernia College Dublin |
| Supervisor: | |
| Title of study: | Student Motivation Towards French and Motivational Strategies – Teachers' Perspectives in an Irish Post-Primary Context |
| <p>Outline of research study: In recent years, Modern Foreign Languages are reaching a 'crisis point' in the UK and other anglophone countries such as Ireland (Kelly, 2019). Printer (2022) highlights that macro-societal issues are out of our control, however, what we can control is the approaches we take within our classroom. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to gain an insight into why teachers of French in Ireland believe there is low student motivation for French and to what strategies they employ in their classroom to increase student motivation.</p> <p>Objectives of the project: The objectives of this research are to: investigate the reasons which may influence student motivation to learn French, from teacher's perspectives and to examine motivational strategies used by teachers in their classrooms to increase student motivation.</p> <p>What would I need you to do? Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate you will participate in a short online questionnaire. The questionnaire will ensure your anonymity. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. It may also be used in conference proceedings or used in academic articles. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.</p> <p>What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Masters of Education (Post-Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.</p> | |

Appendix B - Consent Form

| Consent Form | |
|--|---|
| Researcher's name: | |
| Organisation: | Hibernia College Dublin |
| Title of study: | Student Motivation Towards French and Motivational Strategies - Teachers' Perspectives in an Irish Post-Primary Context |
| Consent (to be completed by the participant) | |
| <p>Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No</p> <p>Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No</p> <p>Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No</p> <p>Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you? Yes/No</p> <p>Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No</p> <p>Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher? Yes/No</p> <p>Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential? Yes/No</p> | |
| Participant's name: (printed) | |
| (signature) | Date |
| Researcher's signature: | Date 29/11/22 |

Appendix C - Questionnaire Questions

1. Do you consent to take part in this questionnaire which forms part of the final year of the Professional Masters of Education (Post-Primary) with Hibernia College of Dublin? *

Yes

No

2. Are you currently a post-primary teacher of French in Ireland who is registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland? *

Yes

No

3. How many years teaching experience do you have? *

0-4 years

5-14 years

15+ years

4. What class levels do you teach? *

Junior Cycle

Senior Cycle

Both

5. In your experience, how would you generally perceive student's motivation to learn French? *

Extremely
motivated

Very
motivated

Moderately
motivated

Slightly
motivated

Not at all
motivated

6. If you selected either "Slightly motivated" or "Not at all motivated", please indicate the reasons you believe may effect students motivation to learn French.

- Does not align with their interests
- Does not align with their strengths
- Not relevant for career prospects
- Do not feel it is necessary as a Native English speaker
- Already speak another language
- Other

7. If answered other in the previous question, please specify.

Enter your answer

8. What type of school are you currently teaching in? *

- Voluntary secondary school
- Vocational/community school
- Community/comprehensive school

9. How would you rate the overall interest in French among the student population in your current school? *

Extremely interested Very interested Moderately interested Slightly interested Not at all interested

-
-
-
-
-

10. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree that the following factors may influence a student's subject choice for Senior Cycle. *

| | Strongly agree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Strongly disagree | Agree |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Career choice | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Higher Education entry requirement | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Parental/guardian influence | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Peer influence | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Perception of subject teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Perception of subject difficulty | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Subject availability | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Interest in subject | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

11. What strategies do you use to motivate students in your own classroom? *

Enter your answer

12. Do you use these strategies more frequently with Junior Cycle classes or Senior Cycle? *

Junior Cycle

Senior Cycle

Both

13. If you have any additional comments, please feel free to leave them below.

Enter your answer