

Engaging Low Performing High School French Students

Amy Leopold

[leopold@oswego.edu](mailto:leopold@oswego.edu)

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## **Abstract**

*Acquiring a second language in the United States is not something that many American citizens accomplish. Research has attributed an array of factors to student motivation, engagement, and success with learning a foreign language. However, low performing and struggling students that take foreign language and the strategies used to motivate them are overlooked in this research. My research examined the factors that affect student motivation in low level French classes, and different strategies that can be implemented to reach low performing students.*

## **1. Introduction**

Acquiring a second language is a challenge for many students in the United States of America. In a country that relies heavily on the English language, it may seem odd to promote and institute foreign language as a mandatory subject to be taught throughout the country. However, research has shown that there are many benefits that come from learning a second language that go beyond the acquisition of a new language. They range from cultural understanding, job opportunities, traveling abroad opportunities, national security, and communication in the business world. Through my own research, I have found that studying and knowing a foreign language can provide a competitive edge in the workplace, enhance flexibility of thinking, improve cognitive ability in other subject areas, strengthen national security and prosperity, help to learn about new cultures, and advantages of communication while abroad.

Because of these benefits, foreign language is a subject that every person should have the opportunity to experience. However, the statistics on the acquisition of foreign languages in the United States are quite startling compared to other countries. A current government supported national initiative (National Security Language Initiative) on the teaching of critical foreign languages states the following statistics:

- According to the Center for Applied Linguistics, only 31% of American elementary schools (and 24% of public elementary schools) report teaching foreign languages.
  - 79% of those schools focus on giving introductory exposure to a language rather than achieving overall

proficiency.

- Only 44% of American high school students are enrolled in foreign language classes as reported by the 2002 Digest of Education Statistics. Of those students, 69% are enrolled in Spanish and 18% in French.
- Less than 8% of United States undergraduates take foreign language courses, and less than 2% study abroad in any given year. Foreign language degrees account for only 1% of undergraduate degrees conferred in the United States. (p. 10)

The above statistics support the fact that few Americans actually take a foreign language, and from those that choose to, fewer continue it in undergraduate studies.

Research has also shown that there are advantages to taking foreign languages at young ages (cognitive development and strengths in other subjects). However, only 31% of all American elementary schools “teach” foreign languages. This number is negligible considering the number of public and private schools in this nation. I believe that by implementing foreign language instruction at the primary levels, more emphasis would be put on the study of foreign languages because it is something that would be a part of the lives of Americans instead of a subject that is not even mandated in some educational systems.

As a current high school French teacher, I have seen the decline in the interest of acquiring a second language among students. They see little to no importance in taking French or, for that matter, any foreign language. I believe that a second language is a subject that every student should be exposed to. From my experiences of working with an array of students, I have found that most students are disengaged and disinterested in learning French no matter what strategies are implemented in the classroom. It does not help that these students are mostly lower level struggling students.

I have come to several realizations about students and language instruction. First, students in higher levels of French class seem to be more engaged and show more enthusiasm.

Second, students who are taking French for the second and third time in the same class and are taking it because they have to are disengaged and highly unmotivated. The question therefore is what can be done to engage and motivate low level and struggling students in the French language classroom.

## **2. Literature Review**

In reviewing literature for this study, I found several factors that can be attributed to student motivation and engagement in the foreign language classroom. These factors include intrinsic motivators, integrative motivators, relationships with teachers and peers, attitude towards learning a language, anxiety, and teaching and learning strategies.

### *2.1 Intrinsic Motivation*

Intrinsic motivation is the tendency to search for “novelty and challenges,” to expand one’s capacities, to discover and to learn (Bonney, Cortina & Smith-Darden 2007, p.8). This type of motivation is always followed by a goal such as helping one secure a job or aiding one in travel. This type of motivation is exclusive with mastery of tasks. In some cases, bad grades and lack of engagement may affect motivation and the way in which students choose to study the language, These low levels of motivation can in turn, lead to lower grades, and low levels of “self-perceived proficiency” in the language (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009, p.638). This in turn can lead to dissatisfaction in language studies.

At the same time, the level of the language being taken can affect motivation. For example, students may take honors language classes because they are more actively engaged and devoted to learning another language, but, on the other hand, some students may take a language because of college requirements that mandate language study as a condition for admission or because they want to take classes with their friends (Morris, 2008). In addition, college aged

students who are enrolled in language courses by choice exhibit intrinsic motivation and engage in activity outside of the classroom like watching foreign films and reading in the foreign language (Bonney et al., 2007).

## *2.2 Integrative Motivation*

Integrative motivation is when students show an interest in the studied language group and a willingness to identify with that group. Students who started language instruction in a French immersion school starting from kindergarten and are currently in the sixth grade gave integrative reasons to learn a language such as wanting to communicate with people in the culture (Wesely, 2009). In addition, students may feel the desire to be socially accepted by native speakers, which is another form of integrative motivation (Bonney et al., 2007). In most cases integrative and intrinsic motivation are mutually exclusive. For example, a student that is learning a foreign language not only to communicate with others, but also for a job, is motivated both intrinsically and in integrative forms. He (2009) states that the perceived purpose that students have for learning another language should be considered when teachers make their curricula. This form of motivation is apparent in high achieving students. The problem lies with the students that struggle and do not find importance in a foreign language as it relates to his or her life, job or future travel.

## *2.3 Relationships with Teacher and Peers*

There is substantial evidence that positive relationships between students and their teachers foster a safe and comfortable learning environment. This factor attributes to student engagement. A myriad of positive adjectives were used such as patient, kind, understanding, available and nurturing by students that found success and delight in foreign language (Wesely, 2009). In addition, the teacher can play a key role in creating an encouraging environment. The teacher can discuss and model positive attributions (Graham, 2004). An effective teacher will

create a “positive, caring, and exciting emotional environment in which learners can experiment with a new language without fear of ridicule” (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009, p. 640).

The relationships that students form with peers are important factors in student motivation. In a study of a French immersion program conducted by Wesely (2009) every student stated that they wanted to continue the immersion program because of the relationships they had formed with their peers. Many adolescents are highly influenced by their peers, and this could be a key factor to why a student may or may not choose to continue with a foreign language.

#### *2.4 Attitudes*

The perspective that one gains towards the culture of another country, the benefits that one can attain from learning a second language, and the success in the second language are all affected by attitude. Many research studies about attitude shows a correlation with student achievement (grades) and anxiety (speaking and participating). Attitude can be directed toward the teacher, the class, the classmates, the materials from the course, and extra-curricular activities associated with the course (Wesely, 2009). Student’s that do not find success in a foreign language may have a negative attitude towards taking a foreign language. The low levels of effort may show an unwillingness to accept responsibility for one’s own lack of success (Graham, 2004).

#### *2.5 Anxiety*

Anxiety is caused when the student is put in situation in which he or she is forced to communicate in the target language. The learner’s self concept as a competent communicator will be challenged (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). In a case study conducted by Wesely (2009), a young student who went to France said, “ I didn’t wanna say something weird, something they



wouldn't understand" (p. 281). This feeling is something that many students are faced with when they must speak in a second language. They fear that they will not be comprehensible. These levels of anxiety provoke negative attitudes and discourage students from continuing their language study (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). Anxiety is also caused by a lack of comfort and self-esteem. According to teachers of honors classes, students choose to be in non-honors sections because they do not get the grades they think they should and feel they are the only ones who do not understand (Morris, 2008). These feelings create more anxiety for the learner. The higher level of anxiety for the student, the more likely they are unwilling to communicate in the target language, to not complete assignments, to earn poor grades (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009).

### *2.6 Teaching and Learning Strategies*

Both teachers and students can employ techniques to improve foreign language instruction and learning. However, the research presented many methods for both teachers and students in affluent schools and with students in higher levels of language instruction. It is the teacher's role to model and demonstrate strategies that students can use to succeed (Graham, 2004). However, factors in the classroom can take away from the time the teacher has with the students. In a study by Morris (2008), the main goal of a non-honors language teacher was to "see that they've done their homework" and to teach them "...how to behave. They interrupt, they talk out, and they are constantly off-task" (p. 1083). Strategies to motivate and engage these students need to be implemented and researched. In order to eliminate anxiety in the classroom, teachers were able to develop a strong bond between themselves, the individual learner, and the whole class (Dewaele & Thirtle, 2009). This is something that would have a positive impact on all types of learners. In a study fielded by Wesely (2009), a sixth grade student said, "stuff that is boring, I forget about. Stuff that is really fun, I can just remember for such a long time" (p.

280). Making instruction engaging and authentic is something that may help struggling learners enjoy language instruction. Bernaus and Gardner's study on student motivation stated that

Students might not be able to appreciate the strategies used by the teacher simply because they are not interested in the subject. In such cases, probably, the lessons are not aimed at the students' needs or interests and consequently, the students do not pay attention to the strategies used by the teacher. ((2008, p. 399)

This shows the importance of creating an engaging and meaningful environment in the classroom. This research sought to understand factors that affect student engagement in the language classroom.

### **3. Methodology**

The population for my study was both students of French and foreign language teachers in a medium sized rural school in Central New York. There were five foreign language teachers of both Spanish and French sharing their experiences teaching different levels of foreign language classes. The rationale for their participation was that they have varying years of classroom experience that includes contact with all the levels of language instruction. In addition, every teacher uses different instructional strategies with different types of learners. Thus, they may see and use different motivators in their classroom.

A total of 60 in four different levels of French language students (9,2, 2 honors, and 3) participated in an anonymous on-line survey about their foreign language instruction and experiences. In addition, three of those students one who struggled and two who excelled in different levels about their experiences participated in an interview. The rationale behind this was to see if these students had different motivators, future plans or experiences with foreign languages.

In order to participate in this research both teachers and students filled out a consent form. Because many of the students were minors, their parents also filled out the form that

outlined the nature of the study and assured confidentiality. Participation was completely voluntary and all participants could withdraw from the study without penalty.

### *3.1 Participants*

The high school that was sampled has an enrollment of approximately 1500 students. The majority of students are white (93%), while there are nearly 100 minority students. In addition, 27% of the total student population receives free or reduced-price lunch. It is evident that there is a wide range of students that attend this school. As I only teach 111 of the 1500 students, I decided to use my students as my sample base.

#### a) Students interviewed:

Three students were interviewed for this study. The three students were in two different levels of French, French 9 (this level is required in order to receive the language credit to graduate) and French 3 (this level is a continuation in the language program and is only required if students want to graduate with an advanced regents diploma). Of the three students, only one of them had an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The averages of the three students ranged from 80%-92%. In order to maintain the identity of these students, their names have been changed.

Pam was the first student that I interviewed. She was a 9th Caucasian student in level 9 French. Her class consisted of students with varying levels. Pam was very hardworking and turned in all of her assignments. Her overall average was in the low 90s. Pam is apt to participate, but loses interest when other students act up in class

Michael was a 9th Caucasian student in French 9. Michael struggled with French because he lacked focus and did not hand in assignments. He also was a student with Asperger's syndrome and an IEP. He also shied away from group and hands on activities

James was the final student that was interviewed. He was a 10<sup>th</sup> grade Caucasian student in French 3. He was very apt to participate and he succeeded in French with an average in the high 80s.

b) Teachers interviewed:

Five female language teachers participated in the interview. They were all middle class, Caucasian, and their ages ranged from 23-45. However, their teaching experience ranged from 2-15 years. Also, they have all had different traveling experiences from living in different countries in South America, Mexico, Europe and Canada. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, the name of the following participants have been changed

Mrs. Smith was a 45-year-old female Spanish teacher. She has taught Spanish for 14 years. She has also taught every level of Spanish throughout her career. She has traveled and studied throughout Mexico and other Spanish speaking countries.

Ms. Brown was 45-year-old female Spanish teacher. She has taught lower levels of French and Spanish throughout her 7-year career. She has also had the opportunity to travel abroad.

Ms. White was a 43-year-old female French teacher. She has been teaching for 16 years. She has taught every level of French in the high school. She has also traveled in many French-speaking countries (Canada, France, Belgium etc.)

Mrs. Jones is a 25-year-old teacher with 4 years of experience. She has taught every level of Spanish at the high school. She also spent a summer living and studying in Mexico.

Ms. Black was a 23-year-old French teacher with 2 years of experience. Most of her experience is with lower level students. She has never traveled or studied abroad.

### *3.2 Instruments*

#### a) Questionnaire:

For the questionnaire, I utilized an online survey (<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/395878/French-Learning-Experience>) that students were able to access easily (Appendix A). The questions were easy to view and answer. The students took the survey at the school computer lab. The types of questions included, categorical questions, rating scale questions, multiple choice questions, and optional open-ended questions.

#### b) Interview:

For both the interviews with students (Appendix B) and teachers (Appendix C), open-ended questions that referred to their foreign language experiences, future plans, motivators (students) and instructional practices (teachers) were used.

#### c) Archival data

Lastly, I wanted to find out if there was a link between success in the classroom and completing work outside of the classroom. I therefore made my own observations by comparing the student's average to completed homework assignments. In order to do this, I inputted the number of assignments students were missing versus their average.

### *3.3 Procedure*

During the first and second week of research, I received permission to conduct research from both SUNY Oswego human subject committee and administrators of my building (Appendix D). During the third week, I planned a day in the library and took my students down to the computer lab during class to give them the opportunity to take the online survey at a convenient time and location. Those students who did not have parental consent to participate (Appendix E) in the survey immediately worked on an online scavenger hunt that the other

students received following the survey. If a student was absent or gave me their consent form at a later date, I e-mailed them the link to the survey so that they could still have the opportunity to participate in the research.

During the fourth week, students who participated in the interview were pulled out of study halls during my planning period and lunchtime. I asked them questions based on their foreign language experience. In terms of teachers, I was only able to interview one of the five teachers face to face. Due to lack of common planning periods, I had to give the other four teachers the questions and wait for their responses. Although, this method was different than an actual interview, I feel that the answer provided were bountiful.

## 4 Data Analysis

### 4.1 Online Student Survey

Sixty out 111 students took the online survey including 24 students from French 2 Honors, 18 students from French 9, 10 students from French 3 and eight students from French 2 (see table 1).

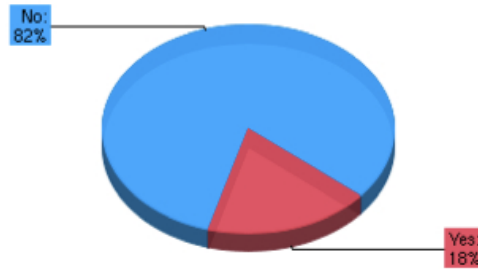
Table 1	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2 Honors</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>16.7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
	18	8	24	10	60

The grade averages were broken into six categories were as follows: One student 61%-64 (failing), 14 students 71%-80%, 7 students 81%-85%, 16 student 86%-90% and 22 students 91%-100% (see table 2)

	<b>Value</b>	<b>Count</b>
Table 2	61%-64%	1
	71%-80%	14
	81%-85%	7
	86%-90%	16
	91%-100%	22

Forty-nine students did not study a second language in elementary school while eleven did (see figure 1).

Figure 1



Students were then asked to rank in order from least important to most important what they believed were the benefits of taking French. Students felt that giving benefits to communication while traveling abroad was least important while providing a competitive edge in the workplace was the most important. The following chart is a full representation of the data collected from this question.

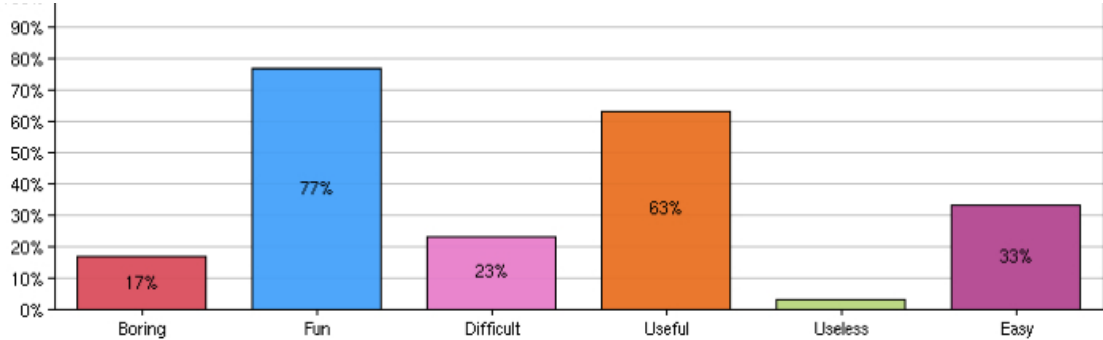
**Which of the following do you believe are benefits of taking French? Rank them in order of importance with 1 being the least important and 6 being the most important.**

Item	Total Score <sup>1</sup>	Overall Rank
Benefits to communication while traveling abroad	240	1
Enhances flexibility of thinking	230	2
Helps you learn about new cultures	230	3
Strengthens national security	192	4
Helps you with the English language	188	5
Provides competitive edge in the workplace	180	6

The students were also asked if they thought it was important to study French. Only two students answered that it was not important. Six students responded that it did not matter. However, 41 students answered that it was somewhat important to study French, while 11 stated that it was very important.

In addition, students were asked to use the words boring, fun, difficult, useful, useless, and easy to describe their French class. They could choose more than one adjective. Only two students chose the word useless, ten boring, and 14 difficult. On the other hand, 20 students found the class easy, 38 found it useful, and 46 found it fun. (see figure 2)

Figure 2



The next question of the survey asked if students thought that they would use French in the future. Forty-nine students said yes and 11 stated no. Although there were several responses that were not very serious, many were intelligent and well thought out. The following is an example of why a student would use French in the future, “I will want to go to Normandy to see the D-Day landing site.” This shows that the student wants to use French for travel. However, the following is a quote from a student who feels that French would not be useful in the future, “...I don't plan on having a career where I will need to use French.” Because there were so many responses for this question, I coded the responses in the following chart:

YES	NO
Travel/communication- 37	Does not apply to study/career- 5
Career- 4	Not used in USA-2
It will be useful-2	Will not travel
Hockey	“ Hi my name is...”
Interest in the language	
Will become president	
French will end a war	

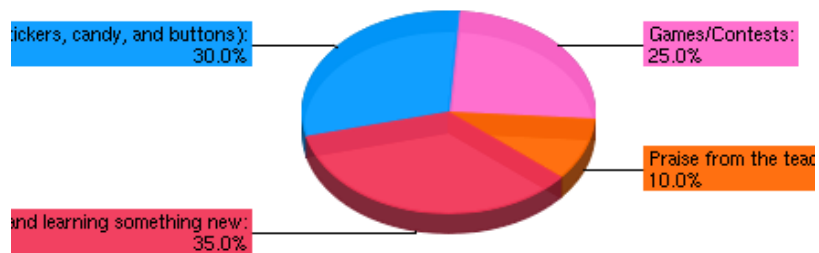
This chart shows that the main reasons students thought they would use French in the future were for communication, travel, and benefits in the workplace (this was a total of 41 responses).



The next question asked how much time students spent on French work outside of class. Thirty-one students said they spent 10-15 minutes working outside of class, 14 students said they spent 15-30 minutes working outside, 10 students said they spent 30-45 minutes working outside of class and five students said they do not do work outside of class

Students were then asked what motivates them most to participate in French class. They were only allowed to choose one response for this question. Six students expressed that praise from the teacher motivates them to participate, 15 students stated that games and contests motivate participation, 18 students stated that prizes such as candy, stickers, and buttons encourage participation and 21 students selected knowing that they were learning and achieving something new as a motivator (figure 3).

Figure 3



Students were then asked what activities they liked the most and least in class. The following charts break down the activities that the students liked and disliked. Many of the activities are broken up by their names in order to clearly see what students preferred to do in class.

<b>Favorite Activities</b>
Voila/ Bingo-24
Games/Hands on Activities- 13
Smart Board Activities-4
Partnered/Group activities- 4
Flyswatter- 4
Pictionary- 4
Worksheets/Bookwork/Essays- 4
Memory- 3
Learning something new-3
Eggspert -2
Dice Game- 2
Battleship
Sleeping
None
Passing around the ball

### **Least Favorite Activities**

Tests/Quizzes- 12
Speaking- 11
None-7
Notes/worksheets- 7
Voila/Bingo- 5
Writing- 5
Flyswatter- 3
Homework- 3
Eggspert- 3
Smart Board Activities
Working
Listening
Dice Game
Drawing
Vocabulary

These activities ranged from kinesthetic and hands on activities, to speaking and writing tasks.

The common themes presented with favorite activities were technology, hands-on activities games, and group work.

Lastly, students were asked to comment on whether or not they felt it was important to learn and study French (Appendix F). This question was optional and 14 students chose not to respond to this question. One comment from a student was “it isn't important at all because I will never use it again...and I never understand what anyone is saying. Therefore, I lose interest. Which leads me to not like at all.” This shows that not every student can be motivated. On the other hand, another student commented that “it is important because it helps you think more about where English came from and helps learn about another culture and would help with traveling.” This shows that some students see the long-term importance of taking a second of

language for the future. Because there were so many responses, it was easiest to code them into categories, which can be seen in the following chart:

<b>Why</b>	<b>Why Not</b>
<b>Broadens job opportunities/useful in future- 15</b>	Will not be used again
<b>Opportunities for communication/travel- 14</b>	Should not be required
<b>Helps broaden perspectives on culture- 10</b>	
<b>Helps you think differently- 2</b>	
<b>Unique language in USA</b>	
<b>National Security</b>	

The common themes were travel, career advancement, fulfill graduation requirements, and understanding other cultures.

#### *4.2 Student Interviews*

In order to get a deep understanding of the student classroom experience, I interviewed three students. Most of the information was very insightful. The following are responses that I received from the three students.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Student Responses</b>
<b>Classroom Environment</b>	<p>“I’m not much of a group person, I like to work by myself.”</p> <p>“I like French class, next quarter, I want to be moved away from Joe and Jim and moved near Adam.”</p> <p>“It’s sometimes distracting when other students who don’t have the same learning capabilities or needs act up.”</p>
<b>Relevance</b>	<p>“I would like to learn more about the country itself...culture.”</p> <p>“ I would like to learn about vocabulary that interests me (music).”</p>

Again, these quotes show the importance of using a variety of engaging activities in the classroom.

#### 4.3 Teacher Interviews

The information compiled from teacher interviews gave insight into student learning. The common themes on how teachers can support student learning were work ethic, increasing technology, teaching about culture and making material relevant.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Teacher Responses</b>
<b>Work Ethic</b>	<p>“Student’s who try their best succeed more often. They seek extra help, complete assignments, and participate in class.”</p> <p>“Those that do work outside of class succeed, those that don’t, don’t.”</p>
<b>Increasing Technology</b>	<p>“I think that incorporating technology, videos and games make students interested.”</p>
<b>Teaching About Culture</b>	<p>“Incorporating culture into the classroom (picture, realia, stories, re: good/bad memories of things that happened while traveling in the country.”</p>
<b>Making Material Relevant</b>	<p>“Give them ‘ownership’- what do they want to learn and why- ask them if they think its important-why, why not”</p> <p>“If you can make it relevant to them, they may understand the advantage of a LOTE for their future.”</p>

These quotes show that students need to be able to make connections to the work that they are doing. The activities need to be authentic. It also shows that students need to put an effort into their studies in and out of class.

#### 4.4 Homework Completed vs. Average

In order to find out if there was a relationship between success and work done outside of class, I input the number of missing assignments each student had versus their average. Three students had an average of 55-60 percent and they were all missing 1-10 assignments. Six students had an average of 61-65 and they were all missing assignments, four of which were

missing seven to more than ten. Four students had an average of 66-70 percent and all of those students were missing at most 6 assignments. Thirty-one students earned an average of 71-80 percent. Of these 31 students, only six were not missing any assignments. The rest were missing 1-10 assignments. Fourteen students received an average of 81-85 percent. Only four of these students were not missing any assignments and nine of them were missing 1-3 assignments. Twenty-five students earned an 86-90 percent in French class. Sixteen of these students were not missing assignments while only eight were missing 1-3 assignments. Twenty-three students earned a 91-95 percent. Eighteen of these students were not missing any assignments while only five were missing 1-3 assignments. Lastly, five students received a grade average of 96-100 percent in French class and all five of these students turned in all of their assignments.

**What is the student's average?**

	55-60		61-65		66-70		71-80		81-85		86-90		91-95		96-100		Totals	
What is the student's average?	3	2.7%	6	5.4%	4	3.6%	31	27.9%	14	12.6%	25	22.5%	23	20.7%	5	4.5%	111	100%

**What level French is the student taking?**

	9		2		2H		3		Totals	
What level French is the student taking?	40	36.0%	17	15.3%	31	27.9%	23	20.7%	111	100%

**How many homework assignments is the student missing?**

	0		1-3		4-6		7-10		More than 10		Totals	
How many homework assignments is the student missing?	49	44.1%	42	37.8%	12	10.8%	5	4.5%	3	2.7%	111	100%

**5. Discussion and Interpretation**

*5.1 Summary*

The purpose of this study was to investigate strategies to engage low performing French Students in high school and the factors that effect student motivation. Using student questionnaires, student interviews, and teacher interviews on experiences in the foreign language classroom, I have concluded that: there is a relationship between success in

the classroom and work completed outside of the classroom, students need to be engaged in the lesson, and lessons need to be authentic in nature

## *5.2 Discussion*

Sixty out of 111 students took the online survey. My data showed that I had the most participation from my honors level class. I believe this is due to the fact that they are the most driven to succeed and noted to bring back the consent form from their parent/guardians in their planner. I would have liked to see more participation from the lower levels that I teach, but it was difficult to collect those students consent forms.

### a) Relationship between performance and homework completion

The students were asked to indicate their current average in French class. This question was relevant because I believe that there are relationships between success and motivational factors. There was only one student that was failing who took the survey. I believe this is due to the fact that there were not many lower level students who took the survey.

Because current research shows that students need to find a purpose in what they are studying, students were also asked to rank in order from least important to most important what they believed were the benefits of taking French. In current studies it is stated that the perceived purpose that students have for learning another language should be considered when teachers make their curricula (He, 2009). A majority of students chose communication as the least important. This is interesting because that is the main attribute of a language. I believe it is because students do not see themselves traveling outside of their hometown and do not see the world perspective or if they misunderstood the question and placed it on the top of the list as most important instead of the least important. However, many of the students thought that taking French provided a competitive edge in the work place. I believe that these students are finding a purpose for taking French.

An important question in this study was whether students felt it was important to study French. Because 52 of the 60 students said that it was somewhat important or very important, students are finding meaning in what they are studying in class. Students also described their experience in French class. Over half of the students found French class useful and fun. This shows that a majority of the students are engaged and enjoy their experiences in the French classroom.

Students were also questioned about whether or not they thought that they would use French in the future for a career or travel. Forty-nine students answered in the affirmative while 11 were negative. The responses showed that the students want to use French for travel. However, some students were looking at French in terms of their career and did not see any use for it. The main reasons students thought they would use French in the future were for communication, travel, and benefits in the workplace. On the other hand there were very few students who felt that they would not use French, and it was mostly because it did not apply to their area of study (five responses). This goes along with what He's (2009) study which stated that "it is important to be aware of what students' needs and learning goals are in order to provide a better understanding for teachers, making this an effective way to motivate students who learn a foreign language" (p. 33). Through my study I was able to get a better grasp of why students were studying French.

The next question examined how much work students put into French outside of the classroom. I was surprised to see that a majority of students stated that they do work outside of class. I believe that there is a relationship between success and work done outside of class. This can also be seen in the part of the study in which average and homework are compared. It is clear that there is a huge connection between success in class and the completion of work outside of class. Many of the students with averages in the 80s and 90s were only missing one assignment.

A majority of the students who were failing or earned grades in the 70s had more than three missing assignments.

Students were then asked what motivates them most to participate in French class. A study by Bernaus and Gardner on student motivation found that

Students might not be able to appreciate the strategies used by the teacher simply because they are not interested in the subject. In such cases, probably, the lessons are not aimed at the students' needs or interests and consequently, the students do not pay attention to the strategies used by the teacher. (2008 p. 399)

In my study, students were only allowed to choose one response for this question. It is interesting that half of the students chose intrinsic motivators as forms of engagement. I believe that is because they are more interested in learning about real life experiences and applications. The results show that the most effective way to motivate students is using a mix of motivators.

#### b) Student engagement

Students were then asked about classroom activities. Many students responded that they liked hands on and kinesthetic activities. Most of the students enjoyed participating in hands on activities while tests and quizzes that are of the pen and pencil were least favored. However, speaking was also highly ranked as an unfavorable activity. Speaking is an important component of a language, and students need to speak in order to use and acquire the language. However, through many of the activities that the students favored they are indirectly speaking and using the language, as they are all communicative.

Lastly, students stated whether or not studying French was important. Some of the comments showed that not every student can be motivated due to lack of understanding and interest. If students do not understand the purpose on the actual activity, they lose interest. In order to learn the language, it must be taught in the target language. On the other hand, other



students commented on the importance of learning French in the future. It is easy to see that many students saw that a second language may bring job opportunities in the future as well as travel and communication opportunities.

c) Authentic learning

Students wanted to learn concepts that were relevant to them in terms of culture and the language. The data collected showed that giving options to students when doing work such as not working in partners made them feel more comfortable. Lastly, the classroom environment such as seating made students feel safe and apt to participate. In a study focusing on why students drop foreign language Dewaele and Thirtle (2009) stated, the higher level of anxiety for the student, the more likely they are unwilling to communicate in the target language, to not complete assignments, to earn poor grades (p. 641). This shows that an environment that encourages students will make them feel more comfortable and in turn may help them to succeed.

Also, I found that it is hard for students to work in a classroom that was filled with different learning levels. Students stated that they got bored when “people talked.” It is hard for students that achieve to work with students who are not at the same level because they are ahead and are ready to move on. Again, this shows the importance of using a variety of engaging activities in the classroom. This can also be seen in other studies. In a study conducted by He (2009) on motivational strategies, found that students are mostly motivated by goal-oriented motivational strategies. This supports my finding that students are more motivated when there is a purpose to the assignment, and it is authentic

He’s (2009) study, suggested that a variety of stimulating and challenging activities would be apt to be a magnet for catching and holding the student's interest in a task. This statement concurs with my finding that students need to be able to make connections to the work

that they are doing. The activities need to be authentic. It also shows that students need to put an effort into their studies in and out of class.

### *5.3 Limitations*

As my research was conducted over 4-week period, there were many time constraints. It took almost two weeks to get parental/guardian permissions slips for student participation. This limited overall participation. In addition I wanted to focus on lower performing French students, but many of the students who chose to participate in the survey were those in higher levels of French. Despite incentives for participation, it was difficult to collect the consent forms in a timely manner. We must look at the population that took the survey and remember that over 56% of the participants earned an 86% average or better. However, I did have about 60% of my students participate, which was a large number in retrospect.

In addition, because of lack of time, I had to give some of the teachers the interviews to fill out on their own instead of talking face to face. However, I believe that the information provided was rich and insightful as my colleagues are passionate about what they do.

### *5.4 Implications*

Overall, there is a relationship between success in the classroom and work completed outside of the classroom. In order to succeed, students have to complete assignments. If they completed just half of the assignments they were missing, they would probably be passing. However, in order to have more students complete this work, it needs to be relevant. The students need to understand the importance in why they are completing an assignment.

In terms of motivation, students need to be engaged in the lesson. In the future, I will need to make lessons relevant and authentic in nature. This can be done by teaching culture, students can see how the language can be used in today's society. Also, teaching vocabulary that is relevant to student's lives may capture their interest. In addition, teaching students new information motivates them intrinsically and gives them the sense that they are learning new material. Although some students may be motivated intrinsically, some students need to see tangible results. Therefore it is imperative to have a mixture of intrinsic (praise, new information) and extrinsic (games, prizes, candy) motivators in the class. I also believe that incorporating technology into the classroom and the above activities would make lessons more engaging to students in a society that is extremely technologically advanced.

#### *5.5 Recommendations for Further Research*

In order for all students to succeed especially low performing students, they need to be connected to the material they are learning. There needs to be meaning and purpose to the work being assigned. Students need to be able to make connections with the work that they are doing and the outside world. I believe that if there were classes set up for low performing students that were project based and focused more on the culture than the language, it would be more motivating for those students that are not successful in an environment immersed in the language. The more research that is done on these types of programs and strategies will help those struggling students. This is why more research is necessary in the motivation of these students.

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## **Appendices**

<b>Appendix A</b>	Survey/Questionnaire for Students
<b>Appendix B</b>	Interview for Students
<b>Appendix C</b>	Interview for Teachers
<b>Appendix D</b>	Letter Requesting Permission of Oswego High School
<b>Appendix E</b>	Letter Requesting Permission of Students and Parents
<b>Appendix F</b>	Survey Responses from Students

## Appendix A

### Survey/Questionnaire for Students

1. What level French are you in?
  - A. 9
  - B. 2
  - C. 2H
  - D. 3
2. What is your sex?
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
3. What is your average in French class?
  - A. Below 50%
  - B. 50%- 60%
  - C. 61%-64%
  - D. 65%-70%
  - E. 71%-80%
  - F. 81%-85%
  - G. 86%-90%
  - H. 91%-100%
4. Did you study a foreign language in primary school (k-6)?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
5. Which of the following do you believe are benefits of taking French.
  - \_\_\_a. Provides competitive edge in the workplace
  - \_\_\_b. Enhances flexibility of thinking
  - \_\_\_c. Strengthens national security
  - \_\_\_d. Helps you learn about new cultures
  - \_\_\_e. Benefits to communication while traveling abroad
  - \_\_\_f. Helps you with the English language

6. On a scale of 1-5, how important do you think it is important to study French?

<b>1-Not Important</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3-Doesn't Matter</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5-Very Important</b>
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7. Which of the following words describe your French learning experience.
  - \_\_\_a. Boring
  - \_\_\_b. Fun
  - \_\_\_c. Difficult
  - \_\_\_d. Useful
  - \_\_\_e. Useless
  - \_\_\_f. Easy
7. Do you plan to go to college?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
8. Do you think you will use French in the future?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No

9. Why or why not?
10. How much time do you spend on French work outside of class?
- A. 10-15 minutes
  - B. 15-30 minutes
  - C. 30-45 minutes
  - D. 45-60 minutes
  - E. I don't do work outside of class
11. What motivates you the most to participate in French class?
- A. Prizes (stickers, candy, and buttons)
  - B. Praise from the teacher
  - C. Knowing that you are achieving and learning something new
  - D. Games/Contests
12. What are your favorite activities in French class?
13. What are your least favorite activities in French class?
14. If you would like to comment, why or why not is it important to learn and take French?

**Appendix B**  
Interview for Students

Tell me a little about your French language class

Probe: Do you remember what grade you got in the last quarter?

What was it?

Were you happy with that grade?

What do you think you would have done to improve your grade?

How do you think the teacher would have helped you to improve your grade?

What activities do you enjoy doing in the French language classroom?

Probe: Do you find those engaging? In which ways?

What activities do you least enjoy?

Probe: what do you do when you get bored?

What would you like to learn more in French class that would make the class more interesting that is not currently been taught?

What should your teacher do to make the class engaging?

Is there anything else you would like to add about your French language classroom?



**Appendix C**  
Interview for Teachers

What language and levels do you and have you taught?

Throughout your career, what difference in work ethic do you see between students who succeed and do not?

What types of activities do you do in the classroom to engage all students?

What are some strategies you use to individually reach those students who struggle in the language classroom?

What are some techniques to make learning a language meaningful to students?

**Appendix D**  
Letter Requesting Permission

Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_,

In order to complete my Master's Degree from SUNY Oswego, I must conduct research in the classroom. I am interested in finding new methods and techniques to engage low performing French students.

I would like your permission to conduct at \_\_\_\_\_ High. I will be conducting some research on student's experiences in the foreign language classroom. I am doing this to find the best strategies to practice in the classroom and to provide my students with the best possible teaching.

Both students and teachers will be used in this research. Interviews will be conducted with one or two of the foreign language teachers in the language department. In terms of students, they will be given an anonymous on-line survey about their foreign language instruction and experiences. In addition, 3-5 students that struggle and excel in different levels will be interviewed about their experiences.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Any minor that participates in this research will have consent from their parents or guardians. In addition, all of the surveys will be anonymous. Lastly, if a student chooses not to participate in this survey, there will be no repercussions towards their grade in the course. They are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any further question about this study, please contact me, Amy Leopold at 341-2262 or Dr. Faith Maina at 312-2641 (my academic advisor). If you have any question about your rights as a research participant, please contact, Dr. Friedman, Chari of SUNY Oswego Human Subjects Committee at 312-6381.

Sincerely,

Amy Leopold

**Appendix E**  
Letter Requesting Permission of Students and Parents

Dear Parent and Student,

This year I will be conducting some research on student's experiences in the foreign language classroom. I am doing this to find the best strategies to practice in the classroom and to provide my students with the best possible teaching.

As part of the data for my research is student based, I would like your permission to use your child's opinion and work in my study.

I assure you confidentiality will be maintained and your child will not be identified by me in any way. Your child's participation is complete voluntary, and they are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty. In addition, your child will not be denied any instruction or any benefits because of my inquiry. If you have any further question about this study, please contact me, Amy Leopold at 341-2262 or Dr. Faith Maina at 312-2641 (my academic advisor). If you have any question about your rights as a research participant, please contact, Dr. Friedman, Chari of SUNY Oswego Human Subjects Committee at 312-6381.

Sincerely,

Amy Leopold

If I have your permission to use \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) work in my research, please return this form with your approval.

I have read the above statement about the purpose and nature of the study, and I freely consent to allow my child to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix F

### Survey Responses from Students

#### If you would like to comment, why or why not is it important to learn and take French?

Because it's useful for your future and your life its always good to know some foreign languages  
Broadens your opportunities  
FRENCH is cool  
I don't think you should be required to take a language if you don't want to.  
I think it is important because it encourages listening skills and cultural interest  
I think it is important because learning about another language teaches about others' cultures  
It is important because you might need to use it someday.  
It is not important to take French because not many people speak French in America.  
It's a good thing to know, but I don't find the need for it.  
Knowing another language is actually very useful in the long run  
To me French is more useful than Spanish  
Because if you want to travel to places like France  
Because it helps your brain think in a different language  
If you move to some were different you have the ability to speak the language  
It is important to take French because you might want to travel to France one day.  
It is important to take French because it could be used later in life  
Its important because u need to be able to communicate with the Canadian people  
It's important, because it helps us learn another language.  
Its is important to take French because you might need it for later on in future  
joooo whats good  
No comment  
So I know two languages and if I ever come upon a French person  
So you can no another language  
You may use it in the future.  
I think it is important to learn new things about other cultures you would have never learned about if u didn't get a  
Special culture in school.  
I believe it is important because French is a business language, which will help when trying to get hired.  
Also, learning another language is helpful to understand your first language.  
I think it is important to take a foreign language because it can help you on your résumé to college and  
Also if you want to go into law, you would have to take French anyways.  
I think it is very important to learn French because of the benefit of trying something new and learning about  
Other cultures other than your own  
I think it is some what important to learn/take French because it teaches you about a new culture you otherwise  
know almost nothing about and it helps expand your knowledge on the world.  
I plan to travel and if I travel to somewhere were there is French speaking people I can speak French with them  
I think its important because if you ever traveled somewhere when your older and they speak French,  
You would need to speak their language to comminute with them.  
It is important because it helps you think more about where English came from and helps learn about another  
Culture and would help with traveling  
It is important to learn any language. Learning French is beneficial for people who have contact with people  
Who speak French?  
Kevin thinks that French is an important asset to have in your inventory in case something comes up, like a job.  
It is important to take French if you want to graduate from high school with a foreign language credit  
It's important because I think it makes you a more culture experienced person and if you meet a  
French speaking person someday you may be able to talk to them.  
I think it is important because you get to learn about different cultures and what they do not just the American one  
It is important to learn French because it exposes you to other cultures, which broadens your view on the world.

It isn't important at all because I will never use it again...and I never understand what anyone is saying. Therefore, I lose interest. Which leads me to not like at all.

It's important because if you go to another a French speaking country then you would need to know how To read & speak the language.

It is important because you could understand what other countries are saying, so you could strengthen your defenses.

It is important because if you are ever in a business that travels you will be able to talk easily in France And in some parts of Canada.

It's important to learn a second language, not necessarily French but that happens to be the language imp learning

It is important to take a foreign language because it will help you in the future if you ever get in trouble And they only speak French.

I think it important because it helps you learn about other people who don't speak your language.

It is important to take French because it will give you a good chance at college and later in life.

It is important to learn French parce que you get to say things like caca. And seal (in French) and

I like saying apple (in French). And other words that I will not write cuz I think there is a character limit on this box.

Thank you for reading this. Yours truly <3

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