

## **Factors that Motivate High School Students to Continue Studying French in College**

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### **Abstract**

*This article is part of a large-scale project on the study of French in high school that reports on the students' decisions to continue studying French or not as they transition to college. An online questionnaire was administered to 220 students studying French, and findings indicated that although 96% of them were planning to attend college, only 46% of them intended to continue studying French in college. A comparison of ranks revealed that the most important factors influencing the students' decisions to study French in college were extrinsic and affective: the possibility of getting good grades, the possibility of enjoying classroom activities, and clear signs of progress in French. Differences based on gender, ethnicity, year of study, graduation plan, and grade level were also evidenced by means of a descriptive analysis from SPSS.*

**Key words:** foreign language teaching and learning, high school French, German, individual differences, motivations to study French, second language learning motivations, Spanish

### **1. Introduction**

One of the major factors leading to the severe challenges faced by foreign languages in English-speaking countries such as the United States (US), Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and Ireland, has been the increasing dominance of English as a world language (Busse and Walter 2013; Coleman 2005; Worton 2009). According to Busse and Walter (2013) and Worton (2009), this makes it hard for educational institutions in these countries to entice students to study these languages. As a result, a substantial part of the population remains monolingual, and most native speakers of English do not reach working proficiency in another language. A comparison of the UK with the rest of Europe, for instance, shows that while a majority of students in other countries study a foreign language in upper secondary education, in the UK, about half of them do not continue foreign language study to this level (Mejer et al. 2010). While the situation in the UK appears stagnant, the US, in contrast, is experiencing a slowly changing linguistic landscape due to the growth of Spanish as a first or second language (Busse and Walter 2013). However, while Spanish is undergoing this rise in status in the US, other commonly taught languages such as French and German continue to face a downward trend similar to what has been reported in the UK, where there has been a constant decrease in applications for French and German (Kelly et al. 2006; Worton 2009).

Statistics from a Modern Language Association (MLA) Report on US college foreign language enrollments in 2002 showed that French accounted for 201,979 students, which was 14.5% of the total number of foreign language enrollments of 1,397,253 students (Welles 2004). A comparison of 1998 and 2002 enrollments revealed that French had the lowest percentage change (1.5%) among the commonly taught languages (Spanish, 13.7%; German, 2.3%; Italian, 29.6%; and Portuguese, 21.1%). The *Digest of Educational Statistics 2001* (U.S. Department of Education 2002) also reported a sharp decline in Bachelor's degrees earned in French from a high point in 1969-70 with 7,624 degrees to a low of 2,514 in 2001, while fewer college students are entering the French teaching field.

In 2013, foreign language enrollments tallied 1,562,179, showing a decrease of 6.7% from 2009, which ended a steady rise in enrollments since 1980, with the exception of a slight dip in 1995 (Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin 2013). The drop fell in line with a decrease in the overall number of enrollments in higher education for a second consecutive year.

Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin (2013) reported that over the fifty-three year span between 1960 and 2013, there was a drop in enrollments for several traditionally studied European languages including French, Russian and German, while in contrast, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Korean experienced growth, with Spanish being in a class of its own. Percentage drops for French, Russian and German were -13.9%, -29.4%, and -41%, respectively, while percentage increases for Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, and Korean were 339.6%, 543.1%, 1,100.7% and 7,179.2%, respectively. As Newbill (2010) reported, a foreign language program coordinator in Iowa noted national trends at her university's teacher certification event. She pointed out that out of 22 students who received master's degrees in teaching foreign languages, 14 specialized in Spanish, 5 were in Japanese, 2 in Chinese, 1 in Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and Russian, and 3 in English as a Second Language (ESL). Noticeably absent from the graduating class were future teachers of French or German, heralding a national trend. In addition to this trend, as fewer French teachers are entering the field, teachers that are more French are retiring, and therefore fewer classes are offered. Survey results are therefore predicting a bleak future for French.

Also of concern is the lower level/upper level ratio among all language learners. Even if enrollments were to increase, the very low percentage of students continuing foreign language studies to the advanced level reduces drastically the number that actually major or minor in the language. This has implications about the level of proficiency that is attained and also indicates a shortage of lifelong learners. This pyramidal uptake is described by Lambert (2001) as "broad at the base but narrowing quickly as [students] progress toward upper-level courses" (350). According to Goldberg, Looney, and Lusin (2013), the ratio of introductory to advance enrollment in all languages at all universities and colleges is 5:1. The ratios are high for all the commonly taught languages, including 5:1 for French, Spanish, and German and 3:1 for Portuguese and Russian. Italian has the highest ratio of 11:1. A 2007 study conducted by Howard reported a ratio of 4:1 for French, so the gap has widened further since then.

If the situation is to be improved, it is important to hear from the students themselves about what factors are influencing their decisions to study French in college. This study investigated this issue with a focus on the high school-college transition of students already studying the language. The study also explored the influence of individual differences on the students' decisions. Although this study was conducted with participants from one school district in West Texas and the results cannot be generalized to the entire country due to factors such as regional differences, the findings provide valuable insight into the issue and offer useful information for educators. This article is a follow-up to another article that reported on an investigation into the factors that motivate high-school students' decisions to study French (Pratt 2016). The research questions for this study were:

1. What factors motivate high school students to continue studying French in college?
2. What differences are there in their decisions to continue studying French in college based on gender, ethnicity, grade level, year of study, and graduation plan?

Dörnyei (1998) defined motivation as a process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action, or until the planned outcome has been reached. He followed it up with the explanation that what motivation theories attempt to do is explain three interrelated aspects of human behavior, which are, the choice of a particular action, persistence with it, and effort expended on it (Dörnyei 2000). Studies on second language (L2) learning motivations have discovered different types of motivation including instrumental, integrative, intrinsic, extrinsic, self-determination, resultative, expectancy-value, and affective.

Pratt, Agnello, and Santos (2009) provided a detailed discussion of these concepts. According to Gardner and Lambert's (1959) instrumental/integrative theory, the former refers to when the reasons reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement while the latter corresponds to when the aim in language study is to learn more about the language group. They postulated that learners with an integrative orientation achieved more competence as they demonstrated more motivation to learn the L2, a position which was opposed by other researchers whose findings demonstrated that it was rather instrumental motivation that correlated better with L2 achievement (Chihara & Oller 1978; Ely 1986).

Others like Clément and Kruidinier (1983) also appended the fact that orientations are determined by who learns what in which milieu, thus stressing the importance of the social context. In support of this position, Peirce (1995), also called for a more comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language context and considers the socio cultural realm.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) alternative model, the self-determination theory, presented a continuum of intrinsic/extrinsic motivations. While the former is based on the learner's internal interest in the activity and stems from innate needs of the learner for competence and self-determination, extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is based on rewards that are external to the activity, such as monetary gains. Another model, the resultative hypothesis, which was put forward by Hermann (1980), posited that success leads to motivation and not vice versa, a stance which was supported by researchers such as McDonough (1986), who deemed this the strongest motivation of all. Dickinson (1995) later added that the model is complemented by the attribution theory, and therefore success leads to motivation only for the learners who can attribute the success to their efforts. Eccles and Wigfield's (1995) expectancy-value theory also asserted that expectancy for success in a given task and the value associated with success in that task are the determining factors of motivation.

Regarding the continued study of L2, Dörnyei (2000) suggested a more thorough understanding of student motivation as a process-oriented conception of student motivation that includes a temporal dimension. Shedivy (2004) expanded on this by explaining that "during the lengthy process of mastering certain subject matters, motivation does not remain constant but is associated with a dynamically changing and evolving mental process, characterized by constant appraisal and reappraisal of various internal and external influences" (105). She also expounded that learner's experience a fluctuation of their enthusiasm and commitment that may be described as a daily ebb and flow of motivation. In addition to fluctuating motivations among continuing L2 learners, the very limited number of studies on continuation from high school to college reveal a huge loss of momentum resulting in a very low percentage of the students wanting to continue to learn the language. Both Andress et al. (2002) and Pratt (2010) reported significant loss of momentum among high school learners of German and Spanish, respectively. Additionally, they pointed to language-specific differences as well as differentiation involving gender, ethnicity, grade level, year of study, and graduation plan. Details of these studies will be discussed further on in this article in comparison with the results of this study.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

Two hundred and twenty students enrolled in French classes in a racially-diverse school district in West Texas participated in this study. The classes ranged from first through fifth year, Regular through Advanced Placement, where students can receive college credits, and Minimum Plan through Distinguished Achievement, which requires advanced schoolwork that reflects college or professional level skills. There were 85 freshmen, 65 sophomores, 51 juniors, and 19 seniors. There were 91 students in first year French, 79 in second years, 44 in third year, 5 in fourth year, and 1 in fifth year. There were 13 in Minimum Plan, 129 in Recommended, and 78 in Distinguished Achievement. There were 127 females and 93 males. There were also 42 Hispanics, 121 White Americans, 32 African Americans, 8 Asian/Pacific Islanders, 5 Native Americans, 1 native French speaker, 1 heritage French speaker, and 10 of other ethnicities.

### **2.2. Procedure**

An online survey questionnaire was administered to the participants (see appendix). The questionnaire was based on the instrument used by Pratt, Agnello & Santos (2009), which was developed for an investigation on the study of Spanish in high school. Items 1 to 9 dealt with demographic data. Items 10 to 27 inquired about the decision to take the first French class and were presented on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = not important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = important, 4 = very important, and N/A = not applicable. Items 28 to 50 inquired into the decision to continue studying French after the first year and were also presented on the same five-point Likert scale. Items 51 and 52 inquired about what they enjoy most in class and what helps them learn French the most, and required the students to score the importance on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being the most enjoyable, or the most helpful. Items 53 and 54 required a yes/no answer and polled students about their intentions to attend college and whether or not they intend to study French in college. Item 55 polled them about whether or not they plan to become French teachers. Finally, items 56 to 73 covered what influences their decisions to study or not study French in college and were scored on a five-point Likert scale.

The data were tabulated with the SPSS statistics program and comparison of ranks was used to determine the results. The responses “very important” and “important” were grouped together to calculate the numerical value of the preference for each item as the two together provided the actual percentage value of unequivocal importance. Also, whenever more than one item received the same score, the rankings were determined by comparing first the score for “very important” and then, when necessary, the score for “somewhat important.” Finally, descriptive statistics using frequencies were also conducted to determine the significance of individual differences.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. What factors motivate high school students to continue studying French in college?

As shown in Table 1, the most influential factors in the students’ decisions whether or not to study French in college are: (1) “Possibility of good grades” (67%), (2) “Possibility of enjoying classroom activities” (52%), (3) “Clear signs of progress in French, for instance, greater fluency” (50%), (4) “Just want to continue what I have started” (49%), (5) “Possibility of contact with native speakers” (47%), (6) “Possibility of career benefits” (47%), (7) “Love of French” (46%), (8) “Knowing I would feel comfortable in the French class” (45%), (9) “Being able to use French in my everyday life” (45%), and (10) “Opportunities to live, work, visit, or study in a French-speaking country” (43%).

**Table 1: Motivational Factors Influencing Students’ Decision Whether or Not to Study French in College**

Item	Content	Percentage of Responses
58	Possibility of good grades	67%
56	Possibility of enjoying classroom activities	52%
71	Clear signs of progress in French, for instance, greater fluency	50%
67	Just want to continue what I have started	49%
72	Possibility of contact with native speakers	47%
73	Possibility of career benefits	47%
65	Love of French	46%
66	Knowing I would feel comfortable in the French class	45%
57	Being able to use French in my everyday life	45%
69	Opportunities to live, work, visit, or study in a French-speaking country	43%
61	Encouragement of high school teacher	41%
64	French-related scholarships	40%
63	Possibility of extra-curricular activities in French	39%
60	Difficulty of French	39%
59	Reputation of college/university French programs	38%
70	Relevance to other academic subjects	34%
68	Relevance to my major	28%
62	Encouragement of (grand)parents	26%

Extrinsic factors were prominent in the students’ responses. The fact that they ranked “Possibility of good grades” and “Clear signs of progress in French, for instance, greater fluency” 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, respectively, demonstrates their keen interest in the successful outcome of their efforts and the goal to do well. They need the reassurance that their efforts are producing positive results and are therefore worthwhile. Affective, utilitarian, integrative, and instrumental variables are also important factors in the students’ decision whether or not to study French in college. The affective variables “Possibility of enjoying classroom activities,” “Love of French,” and “Knowing I would feel comfortable in the French class” further confirm the students’ need to feel comfortable in the French class, while the importance of the class is evidenced by the students’ need to be able to use the language in their everyday life. The high ranking of “Possibility of contact with native speakers,” while signaling a utilitarian motivation, could also be an indication that the students are also integratively motivated. Also of utilitarian implications are “Being able to use French in my everyday life” and “Opportunities to live, work, visit, or study in a French-speaking country,” ranked 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, respectively, which imply that the students have intentions of becoming communicatively competent.

The instrumental variable “Possibility of career benefits” signifies the students’ awareness of the usefulness of the language for career purposes, which needs to be emphasized. It is worth noting that the students’ liking for the French language wanes as they advance in their study of the language. “Liking for the French language” was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the students’ motivations for starting to study the language, 4<sup>th</sup> in their motivations for continuing to study it, and then 7<sup>th</sup> under motivations for continuing to study it in college (see Pratt 2016 for complete report on the students’ motivations for starting and continuing to study French). There seems to be a consistent drop in the students’ liking for the language, which could be attributed to such reasons as instructional practices and lack of appropriate counseling and support. This intrinsic motivation should be nurtured because if students experience the learning of a language as pleasurable and rewarding, they will continue (Andress et al., 2002). When asked what they enjoyed most about their French class and what helped them learn the most, the students overwhelmingly selected games, music, culture, and communicative activities. This is very useful information that must be taken into account when planning lessons.

A close look at the responses of the Spanish and German students’ top responses reveals similar responses. The top ten responses for Spanish were “Possibility of good grades” (73%), “Being able to use Spanish in my everyday life” (61%), “Possibility of career benefits” (60%), “Possibility of enjoying classroom activities” (60%), “Just want to continue what I have started” (55%), “Clear signs of progress in Spanish, for instance, greater fluency” (54%), “Encouragement of high school teacher” (53%), “Knowing I would feel comfortable in the Spanish class” (52%), “Reputation of college/university Spanish programs” (49%), and “Possibility of contact with native speakers” (47%). The top ten responses for German were: “Possibility of good grades” (54.6%), “Clear signs of progress in German, e.g. fluency” (50.3%), “Love of German” (45.4%), “Opportunities to live, study, or work in a German-speaking country” (45.3%), “Possibility of enjoyable classroom activities” (44.3%), “Just want to keep going” (43.3%), “Knowing I would feel comfortable in German class” (43%), and “Possibility of contact with native speakers” (40%). Just like the French students, both the Spanish and German students are mostly influenced by extrinsic, affective, and utilitarian factors, with clear evidence of concern for successful use of the language, and career preparedness.

### **3.1.1. Factor Analysis**

Exploratory factor analysis was used to examine the inter-correlations among items to see if there was a meaningful pattern of correlation among the variables. The dimensionality of the items was analyzed using principal axis factor analysis through SPSS 17. Parallel Analysis (O’Connor, 2000) was performed to determine the number of factors to extract, which involves extracting eigenvalues from random data sets that parallel the actual data set with regard to the number of cases and variables. All the 18 items loaded on one common factor, and this factor accounted for 54.62% of the total item variance. Therefore, a structure matrix and a factor correlation matrix are not available.

**Table 2: Students Who Plan to Attend College**

	Frequency	Percentage of Respondents	Total Number in Study	Percentage of Total Number in Study
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	124	58%	127	98%
Male	90	42%	93	97%
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Hispanic	40	19%	42	95%
White American	121	56%	121	100%
African American	30	14%	32	94%
Native American	5	2%	5	100%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7	3%	8	88%
Native French Speaker	1	0.5%	1	100%
Heritage French Speaker	1	0.5%	1	100%
Other	10	5%	10	100%
<b>Grade Level</b>				
Freshman	81	39%	85	98%
Sophomore	64	30%	65	98%
Junior	48	23%	51	94%
Senior	17	8%	19	89%
<b>Year of Study of French</b>				
First	87	41%	91	96%
Second	74	35%	79	94%
Third	44	21%	44	100%
Fourth	5	2%	5	100%
Fifth	1	0.5%	1	100%
<b>Graduation Plan</b>				
Minimum Plan	10	5%	13	77%
Recommended Plan	123	58%	129	95%
Distinguished Achievement	78	37%	78	100%

### 3.2. What differences are there in their decisions to continue studying French in college based on gender, ethnicity, grade level, year of study, and graduation plan?

Table 2 shows the very high percentages of the different groups of participants corresponding to their intention to attend college. The overall percentage was 96% (n=211). Although almost all the participants indicated that they plan to attend college, only 46% intended to study French in college. The huge difference between these two percentages indicates a significant loss of momentum from high school to college with regard to the study of French. The difference can be appreciated very clearly by comparing the last columns of Tables 2 and 3. Furthermore, only 2% planned to become French teachers. These data further confirm the bleakness explained earlier regarding the future of the language. Very similar results were obtained by Andress et al. (2002) and Pratt (2010) as well. Spanish students indicated that 97% planned to go to college, but only 39% intended to study Spanish in college, and only 3% wanted to become Spanish teachers (Pratt 2010). Findings from the German study also indicated that although 93.9% expected to go to college, only 40.5% wanted to continue studying German in college (Andress et al. 2002). Therefore, there is sufficient cause for concern in all three cases as it is obvious that for the most part the students do not study the languages long enough to achieve high levels of proficiency in spite of the very high percentage that attends college, and so many of them are lost during the high school-college transition. Based on a descriptive analysis of the data in SPSS, there were differences based on gender, ethnicity, grade level, year of study, and graduation plan.

**Table 3: Students Who Plan to Study French in College**

	Frequency	Percentage of Respondents	Total Number in Study	Percentage of Total Number in Study
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	62	63%	127	49%
Male	36	37%	93	39%
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Hispanic	18	18%	42	43%
White American	57	57%	121	47%
African American	13	13%	32	41%
Native American	0	0%	5	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	6%	8	75%
Native French Speaker	1	1%	1	100%
Heritage French Speaker	0	0%	1	0%
Other	5	5%	10	50%
<b>Grade Level</b>				
Freshman	41	42%	85	48%
Sophomore	27	28%	65	42%
Junior	22	22%	51	43%
Senior	8	8%	19	42%
<b>Year of Study of French</b>				
First				
Second	39	39%	91	43%
Third	36	36%	79	66%
Fourth	22	22%	44	50%
Fifth	4	4%	5	67%
	0	0%	1	0%
<b>Graduation Plan</b>				
Minimum Plan	1	1%	13	8%
Recommended Plan	50	52%	129	39%
Distinguished Achievement	46	47%	78	59%

Pratt (2010) explains that the literature has established a clear gender gap with regard to L2 learning which indicates that among high school students, females are more likely to continue to study languages than males (Andress et al. 2002; Csz  r and D  rnyei 2005; Kissau 2006; Moore 2005). This, she explained, is due to various factors, including the fact that females have a tendency to be more affectively motivated as they get more easily emotionally attached to the language; they express a significantly higher degree of desire to learn the language; they display a higher sense of integrative orientation, as well as a higher motivational intensity.

Additionally, a higher number of females enroll in senior courses, a higher number teach languages, and societal (macro) factors, such as traditional views of what is appropriate for a female as compared to what is appropriate for a male, encourage females to learn another language while males are encouraged to go into fields such as math and engineering (678). The results of this study supported this gender gap (see Table 3). Of the 46% of the participants that planned to study French in college, 63% were female while 37% were male. That constituted 49% of the total number of females and 39% of the total number of males. Pratt (2010) reported that of the 39% of students who planned to study Spanish in college, 60% were female and 40% were male, also constituting 42% and 32% of the total number of females and males, respectively. Andress et al. (2002) also reported similar percentages of females and males, 42% and 35% of the total numbers, respectively. Due to the nature of males' reactions, Andress et al. (2002) suggested that more attention must be paid to increasing male participation by means of specific motivational strategies, such as friend-centered environments where interactions and collaborations among students are promoted. This proposal was supported by Pratt (2010) for Spanish students and is the recommendation of this author also.

Of the 46% who planned to study French in college, 57% were Whites, constituting 47% of the total number of Whites who participated in the study. The percentages for Hispanics were 18% and 43% while those for African Americans were 13% and 41% (Table 2). Due to the low numbers of Native Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, native French speakers and heritage French speakers, the percentages for those were not significant. Findings from Pratt (2010) revealed a different trend – 46% of the Hispanics, 34% of the Whites, and 26% of the African Americans – which was expected as Hispanics are more likely to study Spanish. What is noteworthy is that, unlike in the case of the students of Spanish, the percentage of African Americans who intended to study French in college was very similar to the percentages of Hispanics and Whites (41%, 43%, and 47%, respectively). There is evidence in the limited literature on ethnicity in L2 learning to support the fact that African American enrollments in second language programs are lower than those of other ethnic groups (Moore 2005; Moore and English 1997; Pratt 2010; Pratt 2011).

As Pratt (2011) explained, some of the reasons given for the low enrollments were based on social and cultural distance theories, such as the failure to include an Afrocentric perspective in instruction and to teach languages spoken in Africa. Other reasons originated from the traditional historical view that foreign languages were spoken by White Europeans, as well as cultural discontinuity between African American homes and school cultures and structural inequality. In this study, the percentage of African Americans in the participant pool to begin with was 14.5%, while the percentages of Hispanics and Whites were 19% and 55%, respectively. While the African American percentage is much lower than the percentage for Whites, it is very close to the percentage for Hispanics. Therefore, both in terms of the total number in the pool of students and the percentage of those groups who indicated that they would continue to study French in college, this study did not reveal any significant difference between the African Americans and the other ethnic groups.

The data on year of study indicated an early onset of attrition which continues throughout high school. As shown in column 3 of Table 3, there is a drastic reduction in the number of students as the years increase -- 91 in first year, 79 in second, 44 in third, 5 in fourth, and 1 in fifth. Pratt (2010) obtained a slightly different trend with regard to students of Spanish as the largest group corresponded to second year and indicated an increase in second year from 114 to 300 followed by a downward trend to 140 and then 61 in year 3 and year 4. With regard to studying French in college, of the 46% who indicated that they intended to do so, 39% were in their first year of study, 36% were in their second year, 22% were in their third year, 4% were in their fourth year, and there were none in the fifth year (Table 3). This percentage also decreases consistently as the students advance in their study of the language. The corresponding numbers for the students of Spanish were 114, 300, 140, and 61, respectively, and their percentages were 19%, 38%, 29% and 14%, respectively.

Notwithstanding the difference between the two groups, it is clear that the numbers and percentages dwindle as the students advance in the study of both languages, signaling a problem within the high school even before the transition to college. The results of this study are therefore not encouraging as they indicate a loss of momentum even while in high school, demonstrating that the more the students study French, the lower their inclination toward studying it. This calls for an early intervention to help students maintain the momentum while still in high school, in order to turn the tide. Of course other issues could factor into the decrease in numbers and percentages, such as the fact that the students are only required to take two years of a foreign language and once they satisfy that requirement, it takes more effort to motivate them to continue studying the language, especially in the case of French, which they do not consider as important as Spanish for everyday interactions and careers. Nevertheless, if the conditions under which they are studying the language motivate them sufficiently, they will decide to continue.

There was a similar trend with regard to grade level. Of the 46% who intend to study French in college, 42% of them were freshmen, 27% were sophomores, 22% were juniors, and 8% were seniors. This is a very clear indication that by the time the students are ready to enter college, most of them have already abandoned the study of French, which is similar to what Pratt (2010) discovered among Spanish students, whose percentages were 39%, 32%, 16% and 13%. An early intervention would not only ensure that all the 46% do complete high school with the intention of going on to study French in college but would also ensure that some of the remaining 54% also study French in college.

The attrition can be attributed to a number of issues including the fact that the students become aware of other career options they prefer as they advance through the grades, and also become aware of the fact that the language is probably not used as much as Spanish and may not have much value in terms of career opportunities.

Therefore, in addition to the early intervention, counselors need to be given access to information regarding the usefulness of the language so that they can advise the students appropriately. With regard to the graduation plan, the percentage of students who want to study French in college rises in concordance with the level of difficulty. Therefore, of the 46% who want to study French in college, only 1% was taking the Minimum Plan, but 52% were taking the Recommended Plan while 47% were taking Distinguished Achievement (Table 3). This result is expected as the graduation plan matches, for the most part, students' aptitude levels, which is a determining factor in foreign language continuance as confirmed by Speiller (1988) and Ramage (1990).

Another factor to take into account is the fact that the higher the aptitude, the more likely the students are to experience extrinsic motivation in the form of good grades. This is an important factor in successful second language learning as it motivates further effort, which leads to high competency and longer periods of study (Ellis 1994; Skehan 1989). The Eccles and Wigfield expectancy-value theory (1995) also supports this finding as it affirms that if there is a high likelihood that an action will be followed by success, the motivation is high. Therefore, motivational strategies must be differentiated for students in different graduation plans. Students in the Minimum Plan must be deliberately guided and supported in order that they are able to experience the validation of effort that will lead to extrinsic motivation. Scaffolding and frequent positive feedback could be useful tools for this purpose in accordance with what the literature affirms about student-teacher relationships influencing students' academic decisions (Moore 2005; Wei, den Brok, and Zhou 2009).

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following conclusions and recommendations are based on the findings of this study. See Pratt (2016) for more recommendations regarding motivations for studying French in high school.

1. Given that the most influential factors motivating the students' decisions to continue studying French in college are extrinsic and affective, there is a clear indication that they do want to become proficient. Teachers' ability to teach in a way that leads to validation of effort is therefore indispensable. Grammar-based programs must be replaced with communicative approaches, which have proven to lead to communicative competence and provide clear indications of progress as they afford the students many opportunities to function with the language (Littlewood 1981; Omaggio Hadley 2001; Pratt 2008).
2. There is a huge difference between the percentage of students who intend to attend college (96%) and the percentage who plan to study French in college (46%). There is also a consistent reduction in the percentage of students interested in continuing to study the language in college as they advance in their study of the language in high school (from 39% to 36% to 22% to 4%). Therefore, there seems to be an indication of a mismatch between what the students' desire to achieve by studying the language and what they are receiving. This calls for instructional adjustments and a need to reconcile the curriculum and the desires of the students.
3. Considering that the attrition starts very early in their study of the language and not only during the transition from high school to college, it behooves high school teachers to rethink their instructional practices in order to ensure outcomes that include progress towards fluency and success early in their study of the language. Emphasis must be placed on how well they can carry out different functions with the language and not how much they can memorize or how much grammar they can understand, especially considering that they may not know that much grammar even about their own first language.
4. Assessment of student progress should be done along the same lines, that is, evaluating the students' ability to function with the language rather than testing how much grammar they are able to produce. Teachers and district coordinators should advocate for beneficial testing procedures and content which will motivate rather than demotivate students, instead of trying to fit their instruction into what they already know is not beneficial and turns away many students from the language.
5. Taking into consideration what the students view as the most enjoyable and beneficial aspects of their classes -- music, games, culture, and communicative activities--, it is important that adjustments are made in order to include these aspects in classroom practices no matter what the curriculum entails.
6. Effective instructional practices appear to be questionable. In order for true change to occur, it is crucial to invest in in-service training conducted by experts in effective instructional strategies informed by research and proven outcomes. Pre-service training must also include the development of the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge and skills that will enable prospective teachers to acquire the tools they need, in order to be able to effectively maintain the interest of their students in learning the language. Collaboration between colleges and K-12 administrators and teachers will help identify the areas of concern.

7. Given that students may decide to stop studying the language due to other options available to them, which might seem more useful for their future careers, it is important to consistently provide them with evidence of the usefulness and relevance of the language, as well as an understanding of how it helps them stay connected with the rest of the global world even as they follow careers in other areas. This can be achieved by means of invited speakers and excursions.
8. Collaboration between high schools and colleges should be encouraged, so that high schools can make their students and their curriculum available for research, and colleges can share their research findings with high schools to help them gain knowledge about pertinent findings, the latest advances in the teaching of the language, as well as the most successful motivational strategies.
9. School districts should provide stipends to teachers to enable them to attend conferences where they can gain knowledge that will enhance their instructional practices. Membership in professional organizations such as the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the Modern Language Association, among others, will also be very beneficial to the teachers, and the districts can help pay for them. The districts can also subscribe to journals such as *The French Review*, *Foreign Language Annals*, and other international journals, and make them available to the teachers.

Clearly, most of the students who study French in high school do not continue to learn the language long enough and that is crippling French programs in both high schools and colleges. The data gathered from this project provides useful insight into what the students say are the most important factors that motivate their decisions to study French in college. Therefore, in order to be able to increase retention and maintain the momentum that the students clearly have at the beginning of the study of the language in high school, through college, and beyond, it is imperative that the students' views are taken seriously and acted on. The investigator is fully aware that for some schools and teachers, these recommendations are purely a reconfirmation of what they already practice. Notwithstanding that, they are being provided with the hope that they will also provide the impetus and guidelines needed for others to be able to take action. Colleges can also utilize this information in their recruitment practices in order to effectively attract students to their French programs.

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**Appendix**

**Student Survey Questionnaire**

**Who is Studying French in High School and Why?**

This questionnaire is being used to determine what motivates high school students to learn French. The results will help enhance French programs in the high schools in this region. It is for research purposes only. It is anonymous, and your responses are completely confidential. It will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. It is voluntary, and you can stop taking it at any time. For more information about the project, please contact Dr. Comfort Pratt at [c.pratt@ttu.edu](mailto:c.pratt@ttu.edu). Thank you very much.

**Biographical Data**

1. I am a            freshman sophomore    junior    senior
2. I am                            female                            male
3. I am Hispanic    African American    White American    Native American    Asian/Pacific Islander    Native French Speaker    Heritage French Speaker    Other
4. I am enrolled in an AP course
5. I am enrolled in a  
 First year French course  
 Second year French course  
 Third year French course  
 Fourth year French course  
 Fifth year French course
6. I am enrolled in a Pre-AP French course.
7. I am enrolled in an AP French course.
8. I have been taking French in high school for \_\_\_\_\_ years, including this year. 1    2    3    4    5
9. What graduation plan are you on?  
 Minimum Plan    Recommended    Distinguished Achievement

**Decision to Study French**

To what extent did the following factors motivate your decision to take your first French class? Please rate the importance of each item by marking the response that corresponds most closely with your opinion.

- 1= not important    2=somewhat important    3=important    4=very important    NA=not applicable
10. Family background.....1                            2                            3                            4                            NA
  11. Brother or sister took French
  12. Seemed like fun
  13. Seemed interesting
  14. Previous visit(s) to a French-speaking country
  15. French satisfies a college entrance requirement

16. Friends were planning to take French
17. My (grand)parents spoke/speak French
18. My (grand)parents recommended it
19. My (grand)parents' attitude towards the French-speaking community
20. How my cultural community views the French language
21. Reputation of French Program.
22. Reputation of French teachers
23. Liking for the French language
24. Possibility of career benefits
25. Recommendation of counselor
26. Upcoming humanitarian trip to a French-speaking country
27. Upcoming personal visit to a French-speaking country

***To What Extent Did/Will the Following Factors Motivate your Decision to Continue Learning French after the First Year?***

28. Teacher's knowledge of the language
29. Teacher's positive remarks and support
30. Class was fun
31. Class was mostly communicative (the class was taught in French or mostly in French and the students had the opportunity to speak French, write it, listen to it and use it in life-like activities)
32. Class was mostly grammar-based (the class was taught in English or French and consisted of the teaching of French Grammar)
33. Class was 50% communicative and 50% grammar-based (see 31 and 32 above for definitions of "communicative" and "grammar-based")
34. The teacher used technology
35. Variety in activities
36. Small group activities and projects
37. Grammar exercises
38. My (grand) parents' attitude towards the French speaking community
39. How my cultural community views the French language
40. My grades in French
41. Encouragement of (grand) parents
42. Satisfying a college entrance requirement
43. Wanted to continue what I started
44. Enjoyed learning about another culture
45. Liking for the French language
46. Friends were continuing with French
47. Possibility of career benefits
48. Trip(s) to French-speaking countries
49. Exchanges with French-speaking schools
50. Extra-curricular activities (field trips, French club etc.)
51. What I enjoy most about my French class is:  
Music and Games  
Culture  
Grammar  
Communicative activities (see 31 above for the definition of "communicative")  
The textbook
52. What helps me learn French the most is:  
Music and Games  
Culture  
Grammar  
Communicative activities (see 31 above for the definition of "communicative")  
The textbook

- 53. Do you plan to attend college/university?
- 54. Do you plan to study French in college?
- 55. Do you plan to become a French teacher?

***What Influences Your Decision to Take or Not Take French in College/University?***

- 56. Possibility of enjoying classroom activities
- 57. Being able to use French in my everyday life
- 58. Possibility of good grades
- 59. Reputation of college/university French programs
- 60. Difficulty of French
- 61. Encouragement by high school teacher
- 62. Encouragement of grand (parents)
- 63. Possibility of extra-curricular activities in French
- 64. French-related scholarships
- 65. Love of French
- 66. Knowing I would feel comfortable in the French class
- 67. Just want to continue what I have started
- 68. Relevance to my major
- 69. Opportunities to live, work, visit or study in a French-speaking country
- 70. Relevance to other academic subjects
- 71. Clear signs of progress in French, for instance, greater fluency
- 72. Possibility of contact with native speakers
- 73. Possibility of career benefits