

## INNOVATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING FRENCH IN MODERN EDUCATION

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### ANNOTATION

This article reports on an investigation into the motivation of secondary school students in the South-west of England to learn foreign languages. A questionnaire was constructed based on a model derived from the motivation literature to examine students' responses on 16 constructs related to motivation. The analysis revealed a decrease in motivation with age, and higher level of motivation among girls than boys. It also revealed a strikingly higher motivation to learn German than French, which was even more marked when the boys only, were considered. These findings were further investigated using interviews. Both girls and boys were able to provide clear explanations for differences between the genders, as well as for the language differences. These included such aspects as French being considered feminine, it not being 'cool' for boys to be seen to make an effort at French, and the tendency for boys not to try at anything that appears to be tedious.

**Key words:** French language, examiner and student, methods of teaching, CEFR.

### АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье рассказывается об исследовании мотивации учащихся средних школ на юго-западе Англии к изучению иностранных языков. Анкета была построена на основе модели, полученной из литературы по мотивации, для изучения ответов студентов на 16 конструкций, связанных с мотивацией. Анализ выявил снижение мотивации с возрастом и более высокий уровень мотивации у девочек, чем у мальчиков. Это также выявило поразительно более высокую мотивацию к изучению немецкого языка, чем французского, которая была еще более заметной, когда учитывались только мальчики. Эти результаты были дополнительно исследованы с помощью интервью. И девочки, и мальчики смогли дать четкие объяснения различий между полами, а также языковых различий. К ним относятся такие аспекты, как французский, который считается женским, для мальчиков не "круто" быть замеченным, чтобы они старались на французском, и тенденция мальчиков не пробовать ничего, что кажется утомительным.

**Ключевые слова:** французский язык, экзаменатор и студент, методика обучения, CEFR.

### INTRODUCTION

The teaching of foreign languages educational system has given rise to a number of concerns over the years. These have been related to such issues as the most appropriate age for commencement of language learning, the most appropriate teaching methodologies, and the relative achievements of girls and boys. However, the major concern has undoubtedly been the apparent reluctance of the students to learn a foreign language at all, and the

declining level of achievement in this domain . As we move into an era where our future will need to be based on multilingualism, such a situation has serious consequences.

As far as teachers of French as a foreign language are concerned, some of them have been trained in Switzerland and others in France. For our part, we are both French and have therefore followed the school curriculum of one country, France, where teaching is highly centralized and standardized. Moreover, by chance, we are of the same generation and studied at the same university, Paris X Nanterre. We both studied language and civilization, in English for Rosalie and Spanish for Françoise, before specializing in French as a foreign language. We have experience of teaching in a multicultural or homogeneous context. We therefore come from the same educational culture and the same stream of European didactics. The Teaching of French as a Foreign Language at University is largely part of the movement to teach languages in a European context, i.e. a context where the most widespread didactic approach is the communicative method: one learns a language by speaking and performing tasks, by communicating. This approach is also reinforced by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the action approach, which advocates an intercultural pedagogy in which "speakers are considered as social actors performing tasks". Much more centred on learners and their language needs, the teacher gives them tools to be used in everyday situations. Depending on the objective of the course, (general French, specialised French, French for specific purposes), the teacher delivers a course according to the CEFR levels (A1 to C2) but it is not uncommon for the audience to be resistant.

In this perspective, interculturality has its place. Thus, foreign language teachers are faced with a twofold challenge: interculturality is not only a concept to be taken into account in the language classroom (the multicultural public) but is also part of the knowledge and learning to be transmitted to students (Pretceille, 1999). The intercultural approach, which is a notion of the European framework, therefore has every interest in existing in our courses. The future entrepreneurs/managers/employees that our learners are can only benefit from learning how to communicate through the culture of the other.

Different strategies in our didactic repertoire:

- We advocate individualisation. Indeed, we have "an approach which consists in taking into account the specificities of each learner in the definition of teaching practices, in order to ensure a better adaptation of the teaching to its addressee, in terms of efficiency and motivation".
- In our small classes, we can have a privileged and individual relationship with the students who wish to do so. We can accompany them in their learning and we do not hesitate to work with them in pairs during role-playing, for example. We also organize coaching sessions according to the needs of the class.
- Furthermore, given the distant educational cultures of some students, we moderate our expectations of spontaneous speaking as the only ideal behavior and as a reflection of student motivation and learning. We understand that, as Robert says, the expectations of learners from distant cultures are not "attracted to the acquisition of communicative competence. They are looking for linguistic knowledge and have little interest in 'living the language'". In this context, the professional language taught at University corresponds to linguistic knowledge rather than communicative competence.

- Students who are familiar with their own educational system will automatically transpose their cultural habits into the FLE class. To remedy this, we formulate our expectations as clearly as possible. Getting to know the values and attitudes that are valued in a classroom allows for better movement and learning. The student will also, in return, be able to measure the relativity of his or her own system.
- We are also moving towards "didactic flexibility" (Robert, 2009, p.135) by adopting teaching practices from distant cultures. For example, the library should have acquired several French-Mandarin illustrated dictionaries which students can borrow. Some students use the same textbooks as those requested in class but in bilingual editions.
- However, we do not forget our students from similar educational cultures and value their communicative skills. Finally, in a multicultural, heterogeneous and caring class, everyone can find their place and an answer to their expectations/needs.

From an intercultural point of view, it is important that students take steps towards each other. For example, we have already done an exchange of cultural presentations between the beginner French and the beginner Mandarin classes. During the end of year celebrations, Mandarin and French students exchanged greeting cards written in Mandarin or French. These exchanges could be conversation between students in the languages they are learning: for example, Russian speakers learning French meet French speakers learning Russian. The excellent textbook *L'interculturel en classe* (Chavez, 2012) proposes more than thirty approaches for use in class which allow students to open up to encounters with other cultures.

At the heart of our teaching we place a more didactic flexibility as well as a focus on the learner, advocating didactic eclecticism. This is reflected in the implementation of all the teaching "best practices" that will enable the learner to achieve his or her own objectives and to one day become an employee open to the differences of his or her colleagues, a manager aware of the particularities of each person, and a curious and attentive person to others.

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