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Facing The Phobia:
Examining why French is an Unpopular Choice Among Undergraduate Students in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.

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Abstract

The French have played a major role in Trinidadian culture and language. Over the years, the influence that they had has waned and little importance is placed on any aspect of French including the language. Surveys and interviews carried out for the purpose of this study reveal stereotypes and misconceptions about the French language, that have surfaced or have always been present, that affect the inflow of students at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus for the French programme. This research paper examines factors that contribute to the unpopularity of the French language among undergraduate students, notably in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (DMLL) and factors impacting upon the status of French in the wider Trinidadian society. The findings of this study conclude that the French language is perceived as difficult within the Trinidadian society, however French cultural events are often well received and may aid in changing students’ perspectives. Therefore, this research paper provides possible suggestions to make French language and culture more prevalent on the UWI campus, as well as in the Trinidadian society.

Keywords: external factors, internal factors, language learning, critical mass
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Introduction

French language and culture have always been held in high esteem in society on a global scale. For many years, it has been associated with various spectrums of life, from politics and philosophy to gastronomy, displays of romantic sentiments and demonstrations of class, finesse and refined living. With over 274 million speakers, French has achieved top places in worldwide rankings as the fifth most spoken language, the third language of business and even the fourth language for number of Internet users.\(^1\) According to *The Telegraph*, French is the second best language to learn as it is a highly sought after proficiency especially in hegemonic territories\(^2\) due to its prevalence in renowned international organisations such as the United Nations.

However, despite all these advantages, this versatile language seems to be on the decline in several countries around the world and has equally affected Trinidad. Internationally, students are choosing other languages like Spanish, Portuguese and German, which far surpass the numbers of French learners.\(^3\)

In Trinidad, second language learning is not a prevalent field, with the emphasis mainly on Medicine, Engineering or Politics. An article in *The Trinidad Express* newspapers confirmed this by stating that, “Unfortunately the overwhelming view in T&T remains that if your child is not doctor, lawyer, engineer and recently, an accountant, they are nothing.”\(^4\)

Throughout the years many schools have made it mandatory to learn a second language from Form 1 to 3 but in most cases, the only language available is Spanish. After Form 3, the majority of students opt out of learning a second language and for those in

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2 “Graduate Jobs: Best languages to study.” *The Telegraph*.
3 Kassteen, Jacqueline. “Global Trends in Foreign Language Demand and Proficiency.” *Student Travel Planning Guide*.
4 “I don’t want to be a doctor.” *The Trinidad Express*, December 3, 2010.
schools where second language learning is compulsory up until Form 5, French is barely ever included. Consequently, French remains neglected with regards to the amount of language students, which is warranted by the fact that the government of Trinidad and Tobago only awards four open and nine additional scholarships to language students at the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) at the secondary level, compared to 32 open and 221 additional for Sciences, or even 20 open and 41 additional for the field of Mathematics.\(^5\) Undoubtedly, these elements greatly affect language learning at the tertiary level.

In recent years, the quantity of people pursuing a French degree at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus has dwindled and is considerably low compared to other degrees in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (DMLL). In 2009, the number of first year students pursuing a French degree was 36, however the following year this number dropped by 15 since there were only 21 students. From then, the number has remained at approximately 20, and for the academic year 2016-2017 the enrolments in first year were 19 students. Additionally, there is a high failure rate/dropout rate for this field of study as well, given that in 2009, where there were 36 students in first year, only 21 of them went onto second year. Similarly in 2014-2015, 26 students started pursuing a French degree and only 16 students continued into the second year.\(^6\) Thus, this attitudinal change among students within the department raises an important question: why is the French language an unpopular choice?

This study will analyse the reasons behind the disinclination of studying the French language and will attempt to provide solutions to this problem. The first chapter will explore external factors within the society that influence students’ choices and perspectives regarding whether they should study the French language at the UWI, St. Augustine campus. The

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\(^{6}\) Information received from Eric Maitrejean, Coordinator of the French Undergraduate Programme at the UWI, St. Augustine.
second chapter will focus on internal factors that impact upon students’ decisions to study or to continue with the French programme at the UWI with careful attention to students within the DMLL. Finally, the last chapter will offer possible recommendations with the aim of resolving this situation at both the macro and micro levels.
Rationale

As an undergraduate student pursuing a degree in French, I have always been amazed at the small quantity of students within the French programme compared to other courses within the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at the University of the West Indies. Many claim that it is a difficult program with more contact hours than the majority of courses. Yet, the Spanish program, which is quite similar to it, has never seemed to face the struggle of a small student population within their classes.

I adore the French language for its euphony and elegance. It has been a main contributor to the culture as well as the local dialect present in Trinidad and I recognize its advantages in the borderless world we live in today. With globalization ever present in our societies, the benefits are never ending and range from countless study abroad opportunities in France, Belgium, Canada, and the French speaking Caribbean, to occupational positions in established and well known organisations with French as one of its official languages. Therefore, whenever students state that they have a distaste for the language or that they prefer to discontinue with it immediately after high school, I am always shocked, and this remark has been made by several individuals on occasions far too numerous to count.

I intend, therefore, to find the root cause of this problem by examining general attitudes towards the French language within the wider Trinidadian society. I will also examine particular issues at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus with the hopes of rectifying the situation and giving a new and positive outlook to French language and culture.
Literature Review

After English, French is the only other language that is taught in each and every country around the world.\(^7\) Thus, it is evident that previous studies about the French language, especially concerning any notable positive or negative fluctuations in the number of students that pursue it, have been carried.

In Trinidad, the French language played a crucial role during the post-colonial period where names of places were taken from French, such as *Champs Fleurs* or *Blanchisseuse*, and the language was ever present in the local Patois which was considered a ‘broken’ form of French. In her article entitled “Patois in Trinidad and Tobago: From John Jacob Thomas to Lawrence D. Carrington,” Jo-anne Ferreira describes Patois as the *lingua franca* of the country at the time:

> Although Tobago was claimed by the French, little or no trace of French or French Creole remained in Tobago […] Trinidad, on the other hand, was never claimed by the French. Although under Spanish control for some 300 years […] Trinidad became similar to former French colonies in many ways. The island was socially and culturally ‘colonised’ by the French from 1783. As historian Pierre-Gustave Louis Borde put it, “Trinidad at that time seemed like a French colony which Spain had recently acquired” (Ferreira, 68).

Since then, there has been a reversal of fortune as the importance of the French language has depleted with groups of Patois speakers found only in isolated pockets of Trinidad and Tobago.\(^8\) Today, French is overshadowed by other areas of study and even other languages, seeing that Spanish was given the status of official second language in Trinidad

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\(^8\) “Paramin keeping patois alive.” *The Trinidad Express*, July 31, 2011.
and Tobago because of trade relations and the close proximity to Venezuela.\textsuperscript{9} This situation has clearly taken a toll on the inflow of students desirous of studying French in educational establishments.

Consequently, this leads to an important question: what are the factors that account for the DMLL at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus? The literature available for this specific context is limited. However Beverly-Anne Carter examines French with a particular focus on the UWI students in Trinidad and Tobago in her book \textit{Teacher/Student Responsibility in Foreign Language Learning}. She asserts several reasons for the lack of interest in French as a second language, including the facts that only select high schools teach French (while Spanish is a compulsory language in state-owned secondary level institutions), that Trinidad’s proximity to Venezuela influences trade and social links compared to the geographic distance to French Caribbean islands, and also the perceived difficulty of the French language. These factors adversely affect the choices that students make with regards to language learning. An indicative example of such is the fact that Carter makes mention of a rumoured proposal in favour of the removal of French from the secondary school curriculum in 2003 due to a decline in the number of examination candidates.

Moreover, the apparent assumption that languages are useless in Trinidad is evident in Carter’s findings. In response to the statement, “People in Trinidad and Tobago place a lot of importance on learning foreign languages”, the majority of the respondents indicated ‘disagree’. Similarly, to, “If students learn to speak French very well it will help them get a job”, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ was the most selected option. These responses demonstrate

\textsuperscript{9} Carter, Beverly-Anne. \textit{Teacher/Student Responsibility in Foreign Language Learning}, 2006.
that people are unaware of the opportunities that the ability to speak French brings and they neglect its importance. It is thus seen as an indulgence rather than a necessity.

Generally, on the international front, French has experienced growth, from 220 million speakers in 2010 to 274 million speakers in 2014\textsuperscript{10} according to the International Organisation of La Francophonie. Likewise, statistics from Duolingo, an online language-learning site, illustrates that French is the second most learnt language on the site. However they do make mention of Spanish as its high competitor taking the lead namely in North America and English speaking Caribbean countries, “In Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, about 60\% of Duolingo users are learning Spanish.”\textsuperscript{11}

Just like Trinidad and Tobago, North America also struggles to maintain a certain level of interest in the French language. The study carried out by David Goldberg, Dennis Looney and Natalia Lusin, “Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institution of Higher Education,” indicates that there had been a noticeable fall in 2013 with regards to French language programmes enrolments “French […] undergraduate enrollments fell precipitously in 1995 and have yet to recover. In 2009, there were small increases in undergraduate enrollments […], but these gains have been lost in 2013. French enrollments fell by 10.2\% in two-year colleges and by 7.3\% in four-year undergraduate programs […] Between 2009 and 2013, French graduate enrollments continued this trend, falling by 24.7\%” (6).

Richard Garner of the United Kingdom’s The Independent notes that Spanish has beaten French already in popularity among entrants for the sixth successive year in the GCSE examination, “In the past eight years, Spanish has seen a rise in take-up of just over 30,000


\textsuperscript{11} Pajak, Bozena. “Which countries study which languages and what we can learn from it.” Duolingo, May 5, 2016.
(50 per cent) while French has dropped by 70,000 to 168,042." Garner goes on to state that the number of candidates for French that particular year fell by 3 041 - a substantial diminution of students. These results and choices at the GCSE level evidently affect the amount of university entrants for foreign languages, which The Daily Mail claims is in a state of ‘free fall’ with the enrolment for French courses down by 25%.  

What accounts for this decline in the amount of students pursuing French language programmes? Some British teachers link it to the fact that students simply do not recognise the importance of it in their daily lives given that English is now widespread and readily available in any part of the world, a case very similar to that of the UWI students. The Guardian’s article entitled, “Why has there been a drop in students taking language GCSEs? Teachers’ views” presents some noteworthy reasons for the ostensible aversion towards foreign language learning:

1. It’s not seen as an essential subject in primary school and most teachers lack the necessary qualifications.

2. Poor results nationally at GCSE [CAPE] makes it unattractive to students since it shows the level of difficulty.

3. The courses are boring because controlled assessments favour memorisation, which may pose a challenge for average learners.

4. English and Maths are the key markers of a school’s progress, so devoting time and resources away from them is not worth it.

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13 “Young say ‘non’ to languages: Number of students studying French, Italian and German falls as fewer universities offer courses.” The Daily Mail, February 13, 2015.
5. Language lessons are not regularly scheduled in the school timetable and learning a language takes time.¹⁴

Some of these aforementioned reasons may be applicable to the Trinidadian society. However, *The Guardian* only presents internal factors within their context and overlooks external factors. These two elements cannot be examined in isolation, given that circumstances influencing general perspectives and attitudes towards the French language in society (external factors) largely affect students’ inflow and choices at the university level (internal factors) owing to dominating perspectives and attitudes that infiltrate foreign language learning at the tertiary level. Internal factors are also comprised of circumstances within the University of the West Indies context that encourage students, specifically those from the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics, to choose the French programme offered.

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Methodology

A triangulation of methodologies was used in the data collection process comprising of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This took the form of a survey obtaining open-ended and close-ended questions in order to gather quantitative data and interviews with the purpose of collecting qualitative data.

From the beginning of February, questionnaires were sent online via the social networking site, Facebook, to undergraduate students in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (DMLL) mainly in their final year at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus. This group accounted for approximately 30 participants in the survey. The email addresses of students within the DMLL in the first and second year of their degrees were also collected and thus questionnaires were distributed to them. The convenience of this method was evident as participants had the ease of responding on their own time in the comfort of their homes. However, in order to have a larger sample size for more accurate answers, there was a need for printed surveys to be physically administered to students. In total, 55 questionnaires were administered and 50 were collected.

![Languages Studied by Respondents]

Figure 1.0
Pie chart showing respondents’ areas of study.
The questionnaire was designed for all students currently pursuing a degree under the DMLL who have or have not chosen French as their area of study. It examines their perception of the French language and their reasons for pursuing or not pursuing a French degree.

During the course of February, interviews were carried out with students and lecturers of the French language at the UWI. These interviews, which lasted for approximately 10 to 30 minutes, were mainly carried out on a one-to-one basis in person and over the phone. They were recorded and afterwards transcribed. This qualitative method of data collection was preferred due to its facility of information as speakers had the liberty to address issues that were not initially covered. The details given during an interview always provide more in-depth analysis of the current situation and the perspectives were insightful. Nevertheless, this method does have its disadvantages since the personal interaction may intimidate others into giving false responses and questions may not be directly answered.
Chapter One:

External Factors Affecting Language Students vis-à-vis the French Language

The decreasing role of the French language in Trinidad can be portrayed by several determinants existing within the society. For many years now, Patois has been on the decline with only remote groups of people practising this language that has strong ties to French. Trinidadians seem oblivious to the potent influence that the French held in the country. Carnival, for example, is an annual celebration with many of its terminologies taken from the French language. Though this spectacular event inspired by the French and their language is the focal point of Trinidadian culture, the French language remains at the periphery. Ergo, symptomatic expressions of the seemingly inconsequential role that the French language plays in the country are evident on all fronts of the society.

On the economic front, French occupies an inferior position to Spanish in trade relations. The proximity of Latin America to Trinidad acts as the impulsion for these commercial agreements. The National Export Facilitation Organization of Trinidad and Tobago notes that trade agreements have been made with The Dominican Republic, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Venezuela, Panama, El Salvador and Guatemala while only three French speaking countries (Belgium, Luxembourg, France) are mentioned. Furthermore, the top export destinations of Trinidad and Tobago are the United States ($5.45B), Argentina ($1.7B), Brazil ($1.14B), Chile ($1.12) and the Dominican Republic ($774M). These trade relations demonstrate that in the Trinidadian economy, Spanish may be a more lucrative area of study since there are more business opportunities with hispanophone countries. Consequently, this affects students’ choices concerning their study areas given that, “students aren’t passionate about their subjects any more […] All they care

15 “Trinidad and Tobago.” OEC.
about are job prospects.” Therefore it can be clearly derived that economic factors impact language learning.

Another economic occurrence, though recent, which has rendered French a language lower in rank in the Trinidadian society is the Venezuelan crisis. Venezuela’s economic collapse has incited the influx of Hispanics to the island. *The Trinidad Express* reported in 2016 that 14 000 Venezuelans flocked to Trinidad to escape the current crisis. Such factors play a key role in Trinidadians’ views concerning the importance of the French language because Spanish then takes up a dominant role while French is barely recognized nationally. Hence, French is considered to be a field with very low interest and few speakers in society. These perceptions are diffused in the society and subsequently affect the choices made by individuals in the tertiary education system with regards to learning French.

The responses to the questionnaire handed out to students within the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics is an indicative example of these perceptions. Findings were reminiscent to Carter’s work as French was mostly seen as neither very important in the Trinidadian society nor at the international level (See Table 1.1).

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17 Ramdass, Anna. “14,000 Venezuelans flock to T&T.” *The Trinidad Express*, May 12, 2016.
**How important do you think the French language is in Trinidad and Tobago?**

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*Table 1.1: Table displaying the perceived importance of the French language in Trinidad and Tobago.*

The majority of students were somewhat neutral in their assessment of the importance of the French language with 48.5% indicating that it was neither unimportant nor very important. Closely following behind was the 36.4% who answered that it held a less significant place in society. While this may be true, students assumed the same perspective and applied it to the international stage. In the question “How would you rate these languages from most spoken to least spoken worldwide?” the French language dominated the fourth position in a list of five languages, while Spanish was considered to be second right after English. Ironically, Spanish outranked Mandarin, which is usually considered the most spoken language internationally. Students were also unaware of the fact that according to a study carried out by the investment bank *Natixis*, French is expected to be the most spoken language internationally by the year 2050.  

This proves that the DMLL students overestimate the importance of the Spanish language to the detriment of other languages due to the reality in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Socially, stereotypes surrounding French language learning are numerous. The most common of them is that French is a difficult language to learn. In her book Young Language Learners’ Motivation and Attitudes: Longitudinal, Comparative and Explanatory Perspectives, Sybille Heinzmann explains that “the majority of French learners do not think that French is particularly easy” and the adjective commonly matched with this language is ‘difficult’ (Heinzmann, 213). Students of the DMLL share this standpoint. One participant in this department states in the questionnaire that when they think about the French language they automatically think “strict structure and difficult pronunciation”. Another explains in their survey response that the French language is a challenge with “a bunch of rules matched with a bunch of exceptions”. An interesting yet pertinent statement was that the words that come to mind in relation to the French language are, “difficult, elitist, sophisticated and
cultured” which is reminiscent of an article from *The Guardian* that mentions that French is “a discipline which is usually perceived to be posh, elitist and pointless”. This stigma attached to French can sometimes dissuade people from learning it and would be a plausible explanation for the small quantity of students reading for a French degree.

On the political stage, the government declared Spanish as the first foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago in 2004 despite the influential strength that French maintains over cultural practices and the local dialect within the country. This was done in order to facilitate trade relations with Latin America with the emphasis on geographic location (proximity to hispanophone territories) rather than cultural impact. Subsequently, French continues to be overlooked in this sphere where politicians seem rather oblivious of the role of foreign languages (Carter, 73). Spanish has also been mandated to be in every public secondary school while French is only taught in a select few. Additionally, some primary schools and even kindergartens have implemented Spanish language learning like Arbor kindergarten located in St. Clair, Trinidad and Rosewood Girls kindergarten that states on their website, “because of our close proximity to Latin America and the global nature of our world, we believe that our students will have the competitive edge by giving them the benefit of fluency in Spanish.” Meanwhile French can barely be found in secondary schools and is completely non-existent below that level. Thus, it can be derived that the state is not fulfilling its role as a “driving force in determining language policy” (Carter, 75). The inequality between these two languages, and not to mention the impetus to pursue studies in the fields of Engineering, Medicine and Law instead of Languages (in particular French), are making French an unpopular choice among students. These findings are similar to

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19 Hussey, Andrew. “French is too important to be left to middle-class Francophiles.” *The Guardian*, February 6, 2011.
22 “Our Bilingual Programme.” *Rosewood Girls*. 
*Trinidad Express*’ aforementioned article “I don’t want to be a doctor…” explaining the perceived insignificance of foreign languages in the Trinidadian society and demonstrates that French has a very minor role to play in Trinidad’s education system.

Eric Maitrejean, coordinator of the French language programme at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, describes the unpopularity simply as a matter of critical mass:

> When you have like 12 000 secondary school students, you have about 10 000 who do Spanish in Form 1, you have about 3 000 who do French in Form 1. After the 3 000, you reach about 500 at CXC and then you reach with 200 at CAPE. If you get 20 or 25 here, that’s good! (Interview 1).

Therefore, external influences, even though indirectly linked to the average student in the DMLL, considerably impact upon choices made by students to pursue the French language.
Chapter Two:

The Role of Internal Factors Critiqued

Undoubtedly, external factors are intrinsically linked to internal ones, given that the inflow of students is already a limited stream for the abovementioned reasons within the Trinidadian society. This rapport between external and internal elements becomes manifest in one student’s remarks about the French courses at the UWI. She states that for her, it’s: [a]

Nightmare. Depression. Well maybe I'm over-reacting, but it is a difficult language.
Wait no, it’s not a difficult language it's just that the level the University expects us to have is too high given the fact that secondary schools (mine) did not give me the basic foundation of the language. We had no language labs and sometimes, Spanish teachers came to teach French. That’s just ridiculous! (Survey response).

Nevertheless, an analysis of the internal factors that act upon the students’ preferences to pursue or not to pursue the French language would be beneficial to this study.

At the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, the French programme requires six contact hours. With Literature, which is a necessary component for the major, the total hours add up to nine. Nine hours are three times the amount of contact hours needed for numerous degrees available on campus (three contact hours). This alone can serve as a dissuasive tool for students since they will be expected to commit more time to classes and dedicate less time towards extracurricular activities and revision of schoolwork. Yet, it is unjust not to mention that language learning, in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, requires 500 to 600 hours to reach an advanced intermediate level (B2), and 1 000 to 1 200 hours to be fluent (C1).23 This means that less than six to nine contact hours a week would be ineffective in the language learning process given that to attain fluency approximately nine hours per week is the minimum requirement.

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However, the course structure is not the only factor that discourages students, but also the evaluation methods within the course. This is apparent in the response given by an interviewee whose major is French, “This course is supposed to be a 100% coursework course yet it does not feel that way because of the fact that our grades are based on two major exams,” they also remark that in addition to this, “[the lecturers’] marking is super harsh.”

With regards to the questionnaire handed out to the DMLL students, most responses to the question “If you are studying French, what do you like least about it?” mainly expressed how difficult the course itself is as well as its strict evaluation methods. It is possible that these reasons account for the failure and dropout rates in the French programme displayed in Figure 2.1.

![Failure/Dropout Rates](image)

This then acts as a reminder of the reasons put forward by Marsh, because even though the French classes, within the context of the UWI, St. Augustine campus, are scheduled regularly on students’ timetables and native teachers coming from francophone

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24 See Interview 2 in Appendix.
territories are indisputably great assets in the language learning process, factors that diminish the popularity of the French language are still present. These include assessments perceived as controlled and rigid with a high level of difficulty that makes the programme seem unattractive to students.

After the academic year 2009-2010, where an unusual spike in the number of year one students pursuing a French degree occurred, there was a drastic decrease in year 2 the following year by 14 students. For a programme with a small pool of students, 14 dropouts or failures is a considerable amount. However, the findings of Figure 2.1 cannot be examined in isolation, as it is important to note that in 2014 a new marking scheme was implemented by the University of the West Indies requiring higher marks to obtain a pass in any course. In addition to that, many students take the opportunity to go on student exchanges in order to have hands on experience with the language. Figures from year two to year three will also experience fluctuations due to students leaving for both student exchanges abroad and teaching assistant programmes. Such initiatives increase the attractiveness of the French undergraduate degree as students and prospective students are made aware of the opportunities before them:

*From the August before the first class we have this orientation session [where we have] all the department students and [...] present all the offerings, the stuff about life on campus, and it goes as far as student exchange, immersion abroad [...] the French assistantship, the exchanges with Bordeaux, Montreal. So from before the first class, they know already all that is available to them* (E. Maitrejean).

These programmes improve the quality of language that students have and help in eradicating misconceptions of French being a difficult language since they are offered the opportunity to utilize the language for daily and practical activities. The teaching assistant
programme has also gained popularity not only among students pursuing French as a course of study at the UWI but also other students within the DMLL and even outside of the Faculty of Humanities and Education. The teaching assistant programme allows students to teach English to French pupils in high schools or primary schools in France or other francophone territories. It requires applicants to have basic understanding of the French language and to be recommended by French language teachers, which aids in the popularity of French in the DMLL and in Trinidad to a larger extent.

Cultural activities within the campus to promote the language and degree have also experienced hard times. The UWI French Society faces some challenges that they believe are linked to the French programme at the UWI. The president of the Society, Shannae Charles, explains that their numbers usually remain around 11 persons per meeting. She continues to expound on the previously mentioned issue of critical mass:

*One of the factors could be as well that there are less students who have chosen to do the French programme at UWI as opposed to Linguistics where you could find up to 50 persons in a class [...] for French it’s usually between 20-30, maybe even less than 20. So immediately off the bat, you have a smaller audience that you’re catering to (Interview 3).*

It is clearly seen that this is another instance of external factors impacting internal ones since French is not taught in most schools around Trinidad. However, internally, the promotion of French cultural events can be realised. Charles stated that many of their cultural events were well attended by French and non-French students alike:

*I think we started a good initiative by having a wine and cheese event because it wasn’t just an event where people came to lime, taste different wines and eat, they also learned a bit about France and francophone territories from a trivia game [...].*
I would like to call it ‘edutainment’ a mix of education and entertainment because they came to a nice event and they ended up learning something in the process.

Even though the students of the French programme remain small in number, the initiatives of the UWI French Society were “well patronised”. According to Charles, even the Society’s executive committee agreed that there was a general consensus that students enjoyed the bake sales where crêpes and éclairs were sold, the wine and cheese soirée where they tasted a variety of French delicacies and the French movie screenings of award winning films. She even reported on the students’ demands for more of these types of activities because of the lack of accessible French cultural events in Trinidad.

Therefore it is plausible that within the immediate university context the willingness to learn French and engage in French culture is present, however with the lack of previous knowledge that would have been gained in high school, students feel intimidated to embark upon learning the French language. Additionally, with the stereotypes surrounding the French language in the Trinidadian society, encouraging students to go into this field proves to be a challenge.
Chapter Three:

Propositions for Fixing the Fear

Ultimately, it is inevitable that external and internal factors will continuously impact upon the place of French in society. However, one can change whether the impact is positive or negative. In order to increase the popularity of the French language programme at the UWI and to regain its place in the Trinidadian society, a number of alterations and initiatives need to be immediately carried out.

Externally, the need for the presence of the French language in high schools is imperative. As it stands, the lack of French poses the problem of reduced critical mass at the university level since the pool of individuals that French is accessible to and available to remains very limited. Ideally, starting from primary school or even at kindergarten would be the best option because studies have shown that even children as young as three years old can greatly benefit from foreign language learning. At this level, strict grammar structures may not be understood, however the fact of simply being exposed to another language will be a promising start. At the primary school level, basic memorisation rules and vocabulary can be taught along with the links that Trinidad has with French culture as well as locally used words that stem from French.

It is imperative to see past geographic location and recognize the global borderless world we live in. Through this, people can be made aware of the significant standing of French around the world and the numerous opportunities that come with it, such as internships in the United Nations and in the Association of Caribbean States, the teaching assistant programme in France and even study abroad options in prestigious universities like McGill University or University of Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3.

26 International Office. “Current Partner Institutions.” The University of the West Indies at St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago.
Internally, the amount of hours for language learning cannot be changed and if they are reduced it may negatively impact the level of language learning. However, courses can become more interactive with group discussions and forums about current themes in the class and in society. Coursework should also be applied instead of two fixed exams since diversity instead of uniformity aids in student learning considering that each student learns differently. All students must be catered to using the VARK spectrum (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, Kinesthetic). According to The Telegraph, “measuring students through examination is, inevitably, as limited as the examination itself,” and “too many ‘intelligent’ children [are] often bored by conventional learning.” Accordingly, activities should be varied to adapt to all learning styles. Incorporating activities like a short film, where specific vocabulary and grammar requirements of the current semester will be tested, is essential to catering to all types of learning styles. A research topic or assignment to do at home where students can display their competence and creativity is also recommended. This is already done in the French programme with a first year project of a tourism brochure and handbook and in the final year with a mini thesis. Students welcome these activities as they have more flexibility in terms of choice and research. Nevertheless, in addition to this students demand more coursework with smaller tasks to prove themselves outside of the examination setting.

Clubs within the UWI, like the UWI French Society, can institute more cultural activities. This can kick start dormant groups based on French culture in Trinidad to play an active role in carrying out initiatives. Many people have expressed their desire for more French activities on campus. Therefore the Society needs to be effective in their marketing

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29 Tait, Peter. “Intelligence cannot be defined by exams.” The Telegraph, June 17, 2015.
strategies and hold annual events that people look forward to with great anticipation like their bake sale, book sale, movie screenings and wine and cheese event. With a prevalence of these activities, stereotypes surrounding the French language in Trinidad will incrementally change as it becomes more accessible to the average individual. If these events continue to be a sort of ‘edutainment’, Trinidadians may even be sensitised to the cultural influence of French in their society and begin to take a greater interest in terms of foreign language learning recognizing that nearly half of their local vocabulary stem from the French language.
Conclusion

The findings of this study were very interesting in relation to the information from both the primary and secondary sources. Contrary to what the ruling perception of French is, it is clear that the desire for French culture is prevalent but cannot be matched due to lack of initiatives in both the educational and societal contexts.

The Trinidadian society must undergo self-analysis and examine the importance of the French influence instead of disregarding it because of geographic location. From a very young age it is important to learn a foreign language and students must not be robbed of this experience. According to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” As such, equal importance must be given to French and Spanish so that students have the opportunity to expand their horizons beyond Latin America, which in the long run will greatly benefit Trinidad with a meaningful presence on the international stage.

This would encourage an influx of students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus for the French programme. To maintain this inflow, the French section should adjust its methods of evaluation by catering to all learning styles while still persevering the high quality of teaching. Furthermore, it is plausible that the French language will gain greater demand once cultural events are frequently advertised and its benefits are made known.

With the knowledge that Trinidad is constantly evolving in all dimensions with greater connectivity to the world we live in, it is inevitable that French will regain its ground in the society. French is at the heart of Trinidadian culture. As a society, we need to remember our historical past with French and see how it can now improve our future.
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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Questionnaire

Are you?
O Male    O Female

How old are you?

Which language(s) are you currently studying?
O English    O French    O Spanish    O Portuguese
O Other

Why this particular language?

When you think of the French language, what comes to mind?

If you aren’t currently studying French, what are your reasons? (Select all that apply)
O It is a difficult language
O I did not like it in high school
O It’s useless in Trinidad and Tobago
O The classes are boring
O Other

If you are studying French, what do you like most about it?

What do you like least about it?

Do you think the French language is beneficial to your future career?
O Yes    O No    O Maybe

How important do you think the French language is in Trinidad and Tobago?
(Not important) O 1    O 2    O 3    O 4    O 5 (Very important)
Do you think the French language plays a crucial role in the business world?
O Yes  O No  O Maybe

Have you ever considered studying in a French speaking country?
O Yes  O No  O Maybe

How would you rate these languages from most spoken to least spoken?
German, English, Spanish, French, Mandarin
(Most Spoken) 1  2  3  4  5 (Least Spoken)
Appendix 2:

*Summary Responses*

**If you aren't currently studying French, what are you reasons? (Select all that apply)**

- It's a difficult language (42%)
- I did not like it in high school (25%)
- It’s useless in Trinidad and Tobago (17%)
- The classes are boring (12%)
- Other (4%)

**If you are studying French, what do you like least about it?**

- The exams are difficult
- It’s difficulty level
- I hate the grading system. I feel like a very competent French student but the grade sometimes brings me down
- Grammar is difficult to apply
- UWI French is difficult
- Its complicated language, particularly grammar
- The evaluation techniques
- The lack of opportunities to use the language in Trinidad
Do you think French plays a crucial role in the business world?

- Yes: 79%
- No: 18%
- Maybe: 3%

Have you ever considered studying in a French speaking country?

- Yes: 79%
- No: 18%
- Maybe: 3%
Appendix 3:

Interviews

Interview 1

Eric Maitrejean

Coordinator of the French Language Undergraduate Programme

Alisha Brown (AB): Interviewing Mr. Eric Maitrejean for the thesis Facing the Phobia: Examining why French is an Unpopular Choice among students in the DMLL department UWI St. Augustine Campus. So how long have you been teaching French at the University?

Eric Maitrejean (EM): At UWI? Maybe 26 or 27 years. My 27th is not complete.

AB: And would you say that the course has changed or improved in the past few years, concerning…

EM: From my first arrival here, definitely. It was very prehistoric.

AB: And would you say that about the teaching methods as well?

EM: Yeah, teaching methods, interactivity of the program, the courses, the modules, everything. It’s unrecognizable.

AB: And with the variation would you say that the numbers stayed constant, or they grew, they fell?

EM: It fluctuates. And it fluctuates even more since now we have the exchanges and the assistantship. Before there were no exchanges and the assistantship was at the end of year 3.

AB: So you think that the students are fully aware of the opportunities, even concerning the Study Abroad and the…

EM: From the August before the first class we have this orientation session now which is like a whole half day, 3 or 4 hours where we get all the language students together, French, Spanish. Portuguese. Actually all the department students, linguistics as well, and that’s where we present all the offerings, the stuff about life on campus, and it goes as far as student exchange, immersion abroad which is the Colombia program, the French assistantship, the
exchanges with Bordeaux, Montreal. So from before the first class, they know already all that is available to them.

**AB:** And are there a lot of students who don’t necessarily study French who do these programmes?

**EM:** Yes. I saw people decide to apply. Not necessarily through our department. It could be through CLL or through whatever. Actually no, now we have people from other faculties who apply as well. Not so much to the exchange but to the assistantship.

**AB:** And the cultural activities on campus, do you think there are a lot to encourage interest in the French language and if they are marketed effectively?

**EM:** This is something we want to leave up to the students. So the French Society has been very active for the past, I would say, 2 years. Before that it was dormant. There were years where it was barely non-existent. It all depends on the personalities of the committee. If it’s people who are very active who love to do things. Like in the past we’ve had a slew of activities every month, or every week sometimes there’s something going on. So I think it’s something we insist it has to be driven by the students so that they could live the French language in a different setting a different environment. The theatre festival, we’ve always believed in it, we made it grow, it started in 2000, I think 2001 was the first year. Trinidad and Tobago had it here and we never missed, we have it here in 04, 07, 10, 13 … we have always had it. Even when the other campuses cancelled for whatever reason, we’ve always maintained the festival every three years in Trinidad. Even this year, we’re not going to Jamaica, we’re still having one here for us. Just for us. And for us I mean UTT, the secondary schools, wherever and whoever is interested. So is it enough? I mean I remember years ago when I had a Ciné club every Friday. Can you imagine a language lab, packed to capacity, with people standing in the back because that was the only outlet. Cable TV came, Internet came. Last time I did it, I did it very snazzy you know with the posters up in CLL, and 3 people. What am I gonna do that for? All this preparation, all this incentive to integrate it, ask my colleagues to do a little resume or the movie, 3 people. So I know technology in that case is against us cause everybody is like, “Why would I watch this on campus when I can download it?” I can watch it tonight. I can watch it this weekend. But for me, watching a
movie is something to do as a group. You know you discuss it after. You exchange what you like, what you didn’t like. So it’s another activity. I stopped because there was nobody.

**AB:** So do you think technology is also at fault for the number of students that usually come to do the French degree?

**EM:** No, that’s a plus for them. It takes off the congeniality of the activity but what happened to the Citron Vert? They translated ‘lime’ and the Citron Vert used to meet once a month in Kayonna. Used to be people from campus, from outside campus. You never heard of le Citron Vert?

**AB:** Never

**EM:** Ever heard of *On va citronner* “we will lime”. So check it online, I’m sure they have pictures of events. They used to do organise limes for the citron vert. So that was very very nice. What about Tandem? That still exists?

**AB:** I think I heard about Tandem

**EM:** Tandem they have these tables where you have a little flag of a country and you go to their table if you want Spanish, Italian, German. That was cool. That was organized by a guy from CLL, Kevon Swift. So I don’t know if he’s busy with other things but he was very active in Tandem. So there are a lot of things but as I say it has to be popular …

**AB:** So compared to Spanish where numbers are big, what do you think is the reason why the French classes may not be as big as Spanish.

**EM:** It’s normal, it’s critical mass. When you have like 12000 secondary schools students, you have about 10000 who do Spanish in form 1, you have about 3000 who do French in Form 1. After the 3000, you reach about 500 at CXC and then you reach with 200 at CAPE. If you get 20/25 here, that’s good! So Spanish is the same. From 10, they get maybe 6 going to CXC they get 4 going to CAPE, they’re bound to get 80/100 which is about the numbers they have. They have 80-100 in year 1, 70-80 in year 2, 40-60 in year 3. You don’t know your group in Spanish?
**AB:** No idea

**EM:** If you ask the teachers, I’m pretty sure it’s that. For us its, 20 to… well I gave you the stats. There was a freak year where we had 37. That’s never happened since then. That was like 12 years ago or 8 years ago. When we get 20 – 25 in year 1, the importance for us is the attrition rate. We cannot let the attrition rate, that’s people who leave and retention is people who stay, so if the retention rate is high, like this year we lost 3 people out of 20. That’s good, it’s less than 20%. Perfect. If this 16 who are left now, if they continue all the way, that’s perfect, we get between 16 and 20, no between 15 and 20 in final year, you achieve your thing. You are supposed to have at all times, regardless of who is on internship like assistant regardless of who is in exchange program, somewhere between 50 or 60 or 70 people in the French program, year 1, 2 and 3. So right now we have 50 plus 2 in Bordeaux plus 1 in Martinique, plus 2 in Colombia who went on the exchange. That means we have 55. Like you saw one year it was 8 people, why? Because there were 7 assistants. And people say “Oh my god, you only have 8 people in French, that’s the end of French” I say well “No because there are people coming back next year to finish.” “Oh ok” So you see all these, the numbers cannot speak in isolation. You have to inform the numbers and say what do they mean. What do they say? If they say that, of course I’m not lying to you, if 3 years in a row we have 12 in year 1, 10 in the following year, 11 in the following year…
Interview 2
Year Two Student in the French Programme

Alisha Brown (AB): What are your views on the French Programme in UWI?

Student (S): This course is supposed to be a 100% coursework course yet it does not feel that way because of the fact that our grades are based on two major exams.

AB: Have there been any efforts or suggestions put forward to help change this?

S: It may feel as though the lecturers do not care at times because I know at SSLC meetings (that are supposed to give students a voice and help to improve the programme), they shoot down a large majority of the suggestions before even discussing them with the department.

AB: That doesn’t go to show that they don’t discuss with the department, and they do make mention of the technicalities surrounding suggestions…

S: Yes but they get to choose which is good and which isn't. Example that you may already know, they said that making a bunch of assignments that contribute little by little to make up the grade is too much work and time and papers to correct to do so. What the hell, Spanish does it and they have like 5 times as many students. On top of that their marking is super harsh. Saying that 12/20 is good does nothing for students and is not seen as good to the world. That's promoting mediocrity.

AB: Ok, what about teaching methods rather than evaluation methods?

S: This course is not eco-friendly. For a course that spends so much time discussing ways to curb global warming and carbon footprint they sure seem to not care, and print or copy a whole lot of documents. One or two pages are fine on occasions but these thick docs need to stop especially on such a regular basis. We are in the age of technology, which is another topic they have spent time on and don't seem to use a lot of. I believe they really need to rethink their methods to cater to all students. Some of us like paper, some of us prefer screens, but more coursework is a must.

AB: I’d like to go from general to specific. Are there any specific things in the course that you don’t like?
S: The way info is presented in components like grammar and written expression can be drastically improved. This is not the 90s where the education system follows the initial design of the education system to produce factory workers for the industrial revolution. Find more interesting, effective and efficient ways of presenting info. Let us do forums, presentations, things that aren’t just typically traditional.

AB: I know you’ve been pretty passionate about the things you don’t like about the curse, can you express some of the aspects that you do like?

S: The classes are small so it's easier to get attention but I can’t help but state that this is only like this because of A) all the above unlikable reasons and B) French is not culturally attractive in this country and not taught in many schools so most students don’t even reach here. Secondly, components are divided into one-hour components that do not test our attention spans, so I like that.

Interview 3
Shannae Charles
President of the UWI French Society

Alisha Brown (AB): What is the Society about?

Shannae Charles (SC): We’re a UWI based club that organizes different cultural activities that relates to French culture and language as well because most of us who are members are students, French student at UWI or at CLL. We have activities such as our recently held Wine & Cheese event and during meetings we play games, have different activities, sometimes we give members prizes, the winners, as a sort of incentive. We also organize fundraising events because we are a non-profit organization. We need money to source and fund all our activities.

AB: So what are your numbers like?
SC: In terms of the members who regularly come out almost every week or every week for meetings, we have about 5 faithful members in addition to the executive (6). So really the numbers aren’t great. We have challenges.

AB: And what reason do you think that is?

SC: Well there are many factors that contribute to this problem. Firstly all UWI clubs meeting take place between 1 and 4 on a Thursday afternoon. So sometimes members have other engagements with other clubs that they want to be a part of as well. There are also no classes between 1 and 4 on a Thursday so if you don’t have classes during that time or at all, students generally don’t want to stick around for a club meeting. They will stick around for class because yeah they have to go to class but they’re not really willing to make commitment to a club.

AB: So how would you explain the commitment made to other clubs like the Linguistics club, I know they have a big number, as well as the Spanish club?

SC: I really can’t explain that. One of the factors could be as well that there are less students who have chosen to do the French program at UWI as opposed to Linguistics where you could find up to 50 persons in a class who are taking the major and even more sometimes, for French its usually between 20-30, maybe even less that 20. So immediately off the bat, you have a smaller audience that you’re catering to.

AB: So you’re establishing a link between the French Society and the French language programme?

SC: Definitely, they affect each other.

AB: Ok so you mentioned events, would you say they were a success, the bake sale, the wine and cheese, movie days?

SC: Well the wine and cheese was well attended, everyone enjoyed themselves. They were really impressed with the high calibre of the event planning that went into it. The activities and games we had planned for them. Even some of them admitted it wasn’t their thing but still enjoyed it. I guess they weren’t expecting to enjoy it that much. Even before the wine
and cheese event, we had a crêpe and book sale, it was well patronized. The students I can definitely say love crepes. Even our executive committee were of the general consensus that students loved it. We got feedback and so many positive responses saying “we want more” and “there aren’t many initiatives like these” and “keep up the good work.” So that was fun.

**AB:** Given that you may be the only source or outlet of French culture besides of course French movies and other things readily available online- you can’t get crêpes online, you can’t get a wine and cheese online- how do you think French language and culture should be further promoted in UWI and by extension in Trinidad?

**SC:** I think we started a good initiative by having the wine and cheese because it wasn’t just an event where people just came to lime, taste different wines and eat, they also learned a bit about France, the francophone countries from the trivia game which also allowed them to test their knowledge of things mainly in France and even the language by having them guess about certain things about French culture and of course eventually they would have learned something at the end of the night. I would like to call it ‘edutainment’ a mix of education and entertainment because they came to a nice event and they ended up learning something in the process.

**AB:** So do you think events like that might help with the numbers of people not just in the French Society but who want to study French even at high school level, university and after that?

**SC:** I think so, yes. Because of course they would have found out about the French Society. We also try to encourage our members to apply for different opportunities like the assistantship program in France and we make it a point to encourage it, try to inform them in terms of what options there are available to study French. In January I believe, we also had an InterBloc Cultural Fair in the JFK quadrangle. There we actually got to meet the wider UWI population, staff as well as students, the children of members of staff, just anybody who was in the quad at that time we got to chat and talk with them, engage them in some games, and quite a few people came up to us asking us about the Assistantship Program and how they could go on to study in France. So we told them the little facts we know. Of course some of our members having gone to France already would be able to help them in terms of getting information about that.
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

Undergraduate Coursework Accountability Statement (To be completed by student)

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COURSE CODE: HUMN 3099      TITLE: Caribbean Studies Project

NAME: ALISHA BROWN      ID: 813000238

1. I hereby certify that I am the author of the attached item of coursework and that all materials from reference sources have been properly acknowledged.

2. I understand what plagiarism is and what penalties may be imposed on students found guilty of plagiarism.

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5. I certify that this paper has not previously been submitted either in its entirety or in part within the UWI system or to any other educational institution.

6. In the case of group work:

   a. I certify that the individual work of each member of the group has been clearly indicated;

   b. that where no such indication has been given, I take the responsibility for the work as if it were the section of the paper for which I am solely responsible; and

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