



**The University of the West Indies**  
**St. Augustine Campus**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Education**  
**Caribbean Studies Project**  
**HUMN 3099**

Student name: Alyssa Ali

Student ID no. :816008697

Degree Program: BA: French Minors: Spanish and International Relations.

Supervisor: Romulo Guedez-Fernandez.

Title of Thesis:

Foreign Language Learners' Transition to University: Examining the Challenges Faced by  
First Year French, Spanish Majors and Minors at the UWI St. Augustine Campus.

Due Date: 8 May 2020.

**Declaration**

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
2. I authorise The University of the West Indies to make a physical or digital copy of my thesis/research paper/project report for its preservation, for public reference, and for the purpose of inter-library loan.
3. I consent to have my attached thesis used in any publication comprising Caribbean Studies Projects by The University of the West Indies. I understand that I will receive no compensation. I hereby assign publishing rights for the contribution to The University of the West Indies, including all copyrights.

Signature of Student: ALYSSA ALI Date: 08/05/20

**THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES**

The Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies

**INDIVIDUAL PLAGIARISM DECLARATION**

This declaration is being made in accordance with the University Regulations on Plagiarism (First Degrees, Diplomas and Certificate) and should be attached to all work submitted by a student to be assessed as part of or/the entire requirement of the course, other than work submitted in an invigilated examination.

**Statement**

1. I have read the Plagiarism Regulations as set out in the Faculty Handbook and University websites related to the submission of coursework for assessment.
2. I declare that I understand that plagiarism is the use of another's work pretending that it is one's own and that it is a serious academic offence for which the University may impose severe penalties.
3. I declare that the submitted work indicated below is my own work, except where duly acknowledged and referenced.
4. I also declare that this paper has not been previously submitted for credit either in its entirety or in part within the UWI or elsewhere.
5. I understand that I may be required to submit the work in electronic form and accept that the University may check the originality of the work using a computer-based plagiarism detection service.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT – Foreign Language Learners' Transition to University:

Examining the Challenges Faced by First Year French, Spanish Majors and Minors at the UWI St. Augustine Campus.

COURSE CODE – HUMN 3099

COURSE TITLE - CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT

STUDENT ID - 816008697

By signing this declaration, you are confirming that the work you are submitting is original and does not contain any plagiarised material.

I confirm that this assignment is my own work, and that the work of other persons has been fully acknowledged.

SIGNATURE - Alyssa Ali

DATE – 8 May 2020.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would firstly like to express sincere gratitude to the Almighty Lord for giving me the courage and strength to complete this task. Secondly, sincerest thanks to my lecturer Mr. Romulo Guedez-Fernandez who was always readily available when I requested his assistance and who greatly supported and guided me in this final-year project ensuring that I was on the right path throughout the entire research and compilation process. Finally, a great thank you to our moderator Dr. Debbie Mc Collin for her guidance and well-organised seminars that facilitated clarity in the comprehension of the expectations of the task at hand.

## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the challenges faced by the first-year undergraduate foreign language learners on their transition from secondary to tertiary level education. The research explores the non-linguistic or personal challenges and the linguistic or academic challenges students encountered during the transition to university level foreign language learning in addition to the extent to which the period of transition may have impacted on their foreign language learning process. Primary research was done through interviews and questionnaires while secondary research was done through the consultation of peer reviewed articles and journals. The primary research took form of sequential exploratory mixed methods design which required the completion of interviews before the distribution of questionnaires. A total of eleven students were interviewed via semi-structured interviews consisting of both French and Spanish students, thus providing a representative sample. On the other hand, twenty-nine students were surveyed via questionnaires, sixteen Spanish students and thirteen French students. The data collected were quantified into graphs and tables and further analysed in order to make conclusions. Findings demonstrated that the transition period was indeed challenging for both French and Spanish students with respect to the transition from secondary school academics to that of university given the workload and the proficiency anticipated by lecturers. However, students did not allow this period to affect their academic performance by dealing with it gradually. Also, non-linguistic challenges were just as significant as linguistic challenges. Linguistic challenges recurrent in both languages are grammar, conversation and literature. Non-linguistic challenges include anxiety, transitional issues in adapting to university, increased independence and lack of confidence. On completing the study, common recommendations indicated by all students to curb challenges encountered were increased grammatical practice, better time management and working with the language assistants.

**Keywords:** challenges, transition, foreign language, linguistic, non-linguistic.

## **Table of Contents**

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| LIST OF FIGURES .....              | 1  |
| LIST OF APPENDICES.....            | 2  |
| INTRODUCTION .....                 | 3  |
| CHAPTER ONE-LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 11 |
| CHAPTER TWO- FINDINGS .....        | 20 |
| CHAPTER THREE- DISCUSSION.....     | 31 |
| CHAPTER FOUR- RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 37 |
| CONCLUSION.....                    | 39 |
| WORKS CITED .....                  | 40 |
| APPENDIX 1.....                    | 42 |
| APPENDIX 2.....                    | 44 |
| APPENDIX 3.....                    | 48 |

## **List of Figures**

### **Figures:**

Figure 1 Diagram showing the process of the sequential exploratory mixed methods design.

Figure 2 Bar chart representing the most challenging exam faced in French and Spanish.

Figure 3 Bar chart representing the perspectives of French and Spanish year one students on transition to university from secondary school.

Figure 4 Percentages of Spanish students' perspectives on the result of the teaching methods used at secondary school versus university (UWI).

Figure 5 Percentages of French students' perspectives on the result of the teaching methods used at secondary school versus university (UWI).

Figure 6 Challenges encountered throughout the French course by year one students.

Figure 7 Challenges encountered throughout the Spanish course by year one students.

### **Tables:**

Table 1 Rating of the level of challenge faced in each French and Spanish component.

Table 2 Level of Anxiety faced in Classroom.

Table 3 Level of Anxiety faced in the Examination context.

Table 4 Students' recommendations to limit foreign language learning challenges and ensure an easy transition from secondary school to university.

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1- Interview conducted to both French and Spanish year one students.

Appendix 2- Questionnaire via hardcopy to French year one students.

Appendix 3- Questionnaire distributed online to year one Spanish students.

## **Introduction**

### **Statement of Problem**

Foreign language learning has become increasingly popular in the world and there has been a greater appreciation for acquiring this skill owing to globalization and the interconnectedness of countries. Foreign language learning brings with it many advantages such as career opportunities, cultural exchanges and trade among many others. However, the process of learning a foreign language involves certain challenges, namely academic or linguistic challenges and personal or non-linguistic challenges which both make the process difficult. Many researchers have attempted to analyse the challenges of foreign language learning, but majority has focused on either the academic challenges or personal challenges and they have rarely combined both genres of challenges experienced by learners. Also, secondary school language learners progressing towards an advanced level of foreign language learning at university may experience additional challenges given the transition period which is heavily underexplored in existing literature and previous research. Thus, further research is essential as it relates to foreign language learning in order to include an examination of the extent to which the transition period to university impacts on the foreign language learning process, as well as to highlight both the linguistic and non-linguistic challenges encountered within the process. Consequently, an in-depth study will ensure the revision of language learning strategies used by students, as well as the teaching strategies employed by teachers, in order to facilitate a welcoming foreign language learning process. Also, the recommendations proposed in the present study will assist those individuals facing difficulties while studying foreign languages.

## **Rationale**

As a passionate Spanish and French foreign language learner aiming to communicate with individuals of diverse cultures and to broaden career opportunities, there are numerous challenges that are incurred daily regarding the learning process of foreign languages. These challenges are rooted both within and outside of the subject matter, thus contributing to the complexity of the language learning process. Furthermore, it is highly observed that the academic study of foreign languages and the challenges that emerge are often given minimal attention in academic studies and are vaguely analysed. Thus, it is indeed necessary to bring awareness to the multitude of challenges that language learners may face hindering their learning process. In so doing, this study is like no other and focuses primarily on first year undergraduate foreign language students at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine in order to enhance some of the previous scholarly investigations that focused on language learning difficulties with the objective of providing a broader and in-depth analysis that does not limit the study to academic or linguistic challenges but also includes concentration on personal or non-linguistic challenges which disturb the process of foreign language learning. Furthermore, the study seeks to highlight the rarely analysed period of transition, particularly, from secondary school level to tertiary level which may act as an additional challenge to learning foreign languages. Finally, this study on completion aims to influence foreign language teachers, lecturers and coordinators of language programmes at UWI St. Augustine as well as other academics in various academic institutions to consider the challenges faced by foreign language students and to reflect upon the proposed solutions in order to establish and coordinate programs that are more accommodating and which facilitate the foreign language learning process.

## **Objectives**

1. To evaluate the impact of the transition period on the year 1 French and Spanish students from secondary school level to university within the foreign language learning process.
2. To analyse the academic or linguistic challenges regarding the subject matter that hinder the language learning process of year 1 French and Spanish Majors and Minors.
3. To analyse the non-linguistic or personal challenges encountered by year 1 students during the foreign language learning process.
4. To derive measures that can help language learners eradicate the challenges encountered.
5. To develop existing scholarship regarding language learning via bringing awareness to the difficulties faced during the process while focusing on first year students.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are some transitional issues faced by foreign language learners on transition from secondary level to university?
2. What are challenges encountered while learning a language, be it French or Spanish? (linguistic or academic and non-linguistic or personal challenges)
3. What are the recommendations given by foreign language learners to limit foreign language learning challenges?

## **Parameters for this study**

The research aims to ascertain the individual and academic challenges encountered by students within the foreign language learning process after the completion of one semester on

transitioning from secondary school to university in order to decipher if the transition period contributed to their difficulties. In so doing, this study closely surveys a cohort of 2019/2020 first year undergraduates, French and Spanish students at the UWI St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago, through conducting interviews and questionnaires.

## **Methodology**

This study that seeks to conduct an in-depth research regarding the challenges faced by foreign language learners on transition from secondary to tertiary level, took the form of two phases. In particular, the method of research used progressed from a qualitative method, that is, from conducting interviews, to a quantitative method, namely questionnaire distribution, which categorises the study as sequential exploratory mixed methods design. This type of mixed method approach sought to test the qualitative findings and took place in sequential timing, that is, the qualitative data were first collected and analysed before quantitative data were collected. It therefore connected from the qualitative findings to shape the quantitative data collection (fig.1). Therefore, the first phase of research, qualitative in nature, took the form of semi-structured interviews and were conducted on eleven students randomly chosen, particularly seven females and four-males. In so doing, there was a mixture of both male and female French and Spanish majors and minors in order to create a representative sample indicating the views of a small proportion of the entire sample population.

The interviews placed focus on the challenges the participants faced while learning a foreign language at university during their transition period from secondary school. Additionally, these interviews examined the foreign language learners' recommendations regarding the facilitation of an easy foreign language learning process. Some of the questions posed in the interviews were "Studying languages here at UWI, what are some of the struggles you face with the subject matter in French/ Spanish?", also, "What would you say are three

major academic challenges you have in French/ Spanish?,” “What would you say are the three major personal issues or challenges out of the academics that make it more difficult for you to study French/Spanish?” and “What are some ways you think can help you solve your academic challenges?”(Refer to Appendix 1). After the interviews were carried out, thematic coding was performed by extracting themes, particularly, through the technique of template analysis. Specifically, the data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and further analysed. Furthermore, the linguistic as well as non-linguistic or personal challenges faced by foreign language learners indicated in the interviews guided the formation of questionnaires. Particularly, as gathered from the interviews, generally, the transition period from secondary level academics to tertiary level academics was difficult as expressed by majority of the interviewees. Also, many of them expressed challenges regarding the grammar, conversation and listening components in both French and Spanish. They all highlighted the way in which university life leads to more autonomy and they are responsible to manage their own time and deal with the heavy workload at UWI which can sometimes be quite challenging. Additionally, most of the students when asked their personal challenges highlighted anxiety, lack of energy to do work as well as lack of motivation and self-confidence. Finally, there was a plethora of recommendations made by the respondents such as listening to audios in the language, speaking with the language assistants, working together with peers and working with the language assistants, among many others. Thus, the interviews were highly beneficial and aided in the second phase of research which was the formation and distribution of questionnaires in order to facilitate the collection of quantitative data to complement and enumerate the qualitative data obtained in the interviews. The questionnaires were concise and concentrated on the specific issues that most of the interviewees disclosed. Twenty-nine questionnaires were distributed which included all thirteen French students and sixteen Spanish students of year one. The questionnaires surveyed twenty-three females and six males in total. On the last day

of the semester, the French year one students received and completed their questionnaires and due to the time constraints, the remaining questionnaires were sent to the Spanish first year students via *Survey Monkey*, an online questionnaire application. The questionnaires were then analysed, and the data tallied. Furthermore, the two types of research conducted were of equal priority, that is, the qualitative and quantitative research were both equally important in fulfilling the research's aims as the findings of both the interviews and the questionnaires were merged to determine conclusions of the study.

Additionally, the primary sources facilitated the ease of data collection as the interviews permitted face to face communication and further questions were possible thus clarifying any misunderstandings regarding the responses. Also, there was the ability to develop the issues that the interviewees indicated, unlike the questionnaires. On the other hand, the questionnaires through its anonymity allowed participants to be more forthcoming with information, ensuring the validity of the research. Also, in order to ensure sufficient, quality information was obtained, several types of questions were included in the questionnaire, notably, open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, multiple choices and rating scales.

Apart from primary data, namely interviews and questionnaires, secondary sources of data, particularly, pre-existing research was consulted in order to broaden the understanding of the subject matter. Several internet articles, scholarly works, peer reviewed journals, book chapters and even past theses were read, enhancing the outlook and perspectives on the matter and led to the identification of gaps in the research to be filled by the study at hand.

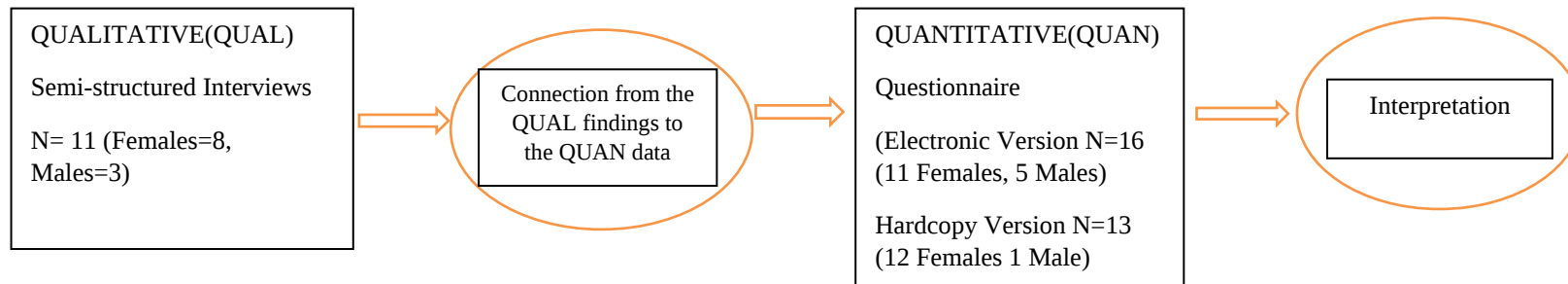


Fig. 1. Diagram showing the process of the sequential exploratory mixed methods design.

**Thesis Statement**

It is evident that the foreign language learning process consists of linguistic and non-linguistic challenges and the transition period from secondary school to university having been examined, is not a major cause of linguistic challenges to majority within the learning process, but it is indeed one that is difficult and must be gradually overcome.

**Chapter Outline**

This study contains four major chapters which come together to provide an analysis into the subject matter of the challenges faced by foreign language learners on transition to university. The first chapter is the Literature Review which gives an insight into several subtopics of this research via exploring the existing literature and research on the topic while highlighting its efficiency and inefficiency. The second chapter takes the form of the Findings which include quantitative data obtained from the primary sources namely, the interviews and questionnaires. The third chapter is the Discussion which seeks to give a qualitative analysis of the findings, thus, determining the conclusions of the study. Finally, the fourth chapter manifests the Recommendations which are the proposed solutions aiming to resolve the issues that emerge within the foreign language learning process.

## 1. Literature Review

Cambridge dictionary defines a challenge as the situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person's ability. This definition correlates to the topic at study as it coincides with the manner in which foreign language learners and in particular, year one foreign language students at university, often encounter challenges during the process of foreign language learning together with their transitional period of adjusting to university from secondary school. There are numerous secondary sources exploring the multiple challenges faced by foreign language learners, notably, the academic and personal challenges. The secondary sources reviewed below reflect the different challenges faced by students, the causes of these challenges as well as the solutions proposed to minimize these challenges in order to facilitate an easy language learning process. Even though a broad and in-depth scope of analysis was present in most of the sources reviewed, there was a failure to analyse the period of transition to university as a possible contributor to the challenges experienced.

Firstly, academic challenges are often experienced within the process of foreign language learning. Wagaba analyses the factors that constitute academic barriers to foreign language learning while highlighting several recommendations to counterattack these challenges and facilitate a successful foreign language process in the Ugandan University. Foreign languages can be used as a form of communication, for tourism, for political and economic empowerment and for media among others (Wagaba 96). Moreover, with regards to the challenges encountered by students in the foreign language domain, the focus is placed on third year students. The first cause of challenge presented was majorly administrative issues such as the lack of effective teaching methods, particularly, the frontal teaching method, the size of classes, irrelevant textbooks and few contact hours which all impede a student's foreign language learning process. Furthermore, in Wagaba's article, the challenges posed as academic

issues within the subject matter of particularly German as a foreign language, namely, struggles in pronunciation, speaking, writing and reading. While the study examined the manner in which persons may face problems in learning languages as a result of the university's administrative downfalls or even the subject matter, there was a negation of the challenges an individual may face as a result of his or her personal matters and emotions. Moreover, major analysis was done regarding solely German as a foreign language as opposed to an in-depth analysis into different foreign languages to provide a holistic approach to foreign language learning as well as to highlight challenges that are common to multiple languages in order to convey its prevalence and importance. Also, there was a gap in the study in that the focus was placed on third year students and therefore there was no analysis or heed given to the effects of the transition period from secondary school to university which can also contribute to additional difficulties when learning languages.

Hence, the present study aims to fill the gaps and shortcomings of this analysis by enhancing the data already presented regarding the academic challenges but also by providing an intricate examination of the period of transition and the individual challenges which act as factors that impede the smoothness of the foreign language process such as anxiety.

Additionally, an article written by Saito et al. considers both the academic and individual challenges faced within the language learning process, specifically, foreign language reading anxiety. Anxiety with regards to foreign language reading exists and differs from the highly studied oral component (Saito et al. 203). According to Horwitz and Cope, "Foreign language anxiety is defined as a distinct complex of behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (qtd. in Saito et al. 202). Furthermore, according to the journal article, despite the differences between general anxiety and foreign language reading anxiety, the both types of anxiety can affect the learning process as well as the receival of good grades. The study concentrated on the first-year Spanish, French,

Japanese and Russian students while analysing their anxiety through a general Foreign Language Anxiety Scale and a more specific Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale. After much research, the findings proved that the both types of anxiety were able to influence each other, notably, anxiety provoked reading anxiety and vice versa. To add, the study highlighted that together with the unfamiliar cultural material as well as writing systems in conjunction with preconceived perceptions and students' expectations towards the language, when not fulfilled all provoked anxious feelings. The study proved effective as there were some anticipated recommendations with specific concentration on pedagogical implications whereby the language teacher needs to provide assistance to the students to help them cope with their anxiety, make the content less complicated and less stressful, employ certain anxiety reduction measures such as deep breathing and positive self-talk while paying attention to not only the reading anxiety but anxiety as it pertains to listening and speaking components. This secondary source was useful for this study being conducted as it analysed one of the difficulties encountered by first year foreign language students while focusing on a non-academic challenge of anxiety as it related to foreign language learning. Also, indirectly this study mentioned the transition period from secondary school to university via

Still, in the case of beginning students confronted with unfamiliar phonology and scripts, the anxiety might be more immediate whereas in the case of advanced readers dealing with the nuances and conflicting meanings of literary texts, the anxiety might appear at some point after the reading was actually accomplished or when the student encounters the teacher's or other students' interpretations of the text (Saito et al. 215).

However, the study lacked an extensive approach into the foreign language challenges encountered by the first-year students on transition. Thus, the present study seeks to provide a broader analysis into not only foreign language reading anxiety or anxiety as a challenge, but the relation that the transition period has on first-year foreign language learners with the subject

matter together with their personal and individualised challenges faced on entering the new university environment. Thus, the study carried out by Saito et al. will be complemented with the present study as it seeks to merge both the academic challenges and the non-academic challenges which impede the foreign language learning process.

Furthermore, Sarah Pettit's article, "The Challenges of Learning A Second Language," explores the challenges faced by foreign language learners. This article gives a more personalised stance on principally the academic challenges of a foreign language learner. Sarah Pettit expresses the many academic challenges that she faces with the subject matter such as vocabulary issues regarding Spanish vocabulary in that many words are similar to English, however, there are also false cognates, words that are similar to English but do not have the same meaning, therefore, vocabulary stands as a major contributing challenge in foreign language learning. Also, grammar and listening were considered Pettit's major challenges given the quantity of grammatical rules and for listening, the fast rate at which the native speaks. Thus, this article gives a direct analysis into areas of language learning that make the process quite hard. However, the article did not describe any personal challenges that may be experienced by the student outside of simply the subject matter and no reference was made to particular areas of study such as the secondary school setting or the university setting and therefore lacks specificity as to which stage of the learning process the challenges are experienced.

Moreover, apart from the consultation of articles focusing on the challenges faced within the foreign language learning process which readily coincides with the study at hand, another aspect of this study to be explored is the transition period from secondary school to tertiary level education. A case study done by Tabitha Wangeri, "Transitional Challenges Facing University First Year Students in Kenyan Public Universities: A Case of Kenyatta University," examines the transition period as a major challenge affecting students which is a theme being

considered under this study together with other challenges faced within the foreign language learning process. The study had several focal points while demonstrating sources of transitional issues, namely, autonomy, social adjustment, compatibility among roommates, feeding habits, access to support services and adjustment to academic programs. Many of the students found transitional challenges in all the areas investigated. Individual challenges related to the transition period included anxiety, intimidation, the state of being overwhelmed, unexplained fears, stress, alienation, loneliness, cultural shock, competition and a life of individualism. Also, Abdullah, Elias and Uli highlight that students who fail to adjust well to the new campus environment display lower academic performance than those who adjust well (qtd. in Wangeri 42). Thus, the transition period is seen to provoke undesirable effects that hinder the functioning of human beings within the study environment thus, it is of worth to be examined within any academic domain as a contributor to the challenges faced. Moreover, the issues faced while transitioning to university include problems in the areas of personal autonomy, social relationships, compatibility among roommates, accessing support services, feeding habits and adjustment to the academic programme (Wangeri 48). Several recommendations to ease the transition period include the development of a good orientation program, a collaborative effort among librarians, lecturers, non-academic staff, ICT experts and mentors to help those new university students experiencing difficulties adjusting. Also, households and high schools need to ensure that the autonomy of males and females are encouraged and finally high schools and universities need to develop programs that will equip the students with the skills for social adjustments as well as an ability to make socio-cultural and psychological adaptations (Wangeri 49). Hence, the transition period is quite significant and will be applied to the present study which attempts to examine challenges facing foreign language learners during this transition period.

In relation to a research article written by Nataliya M. Belenkova et al., “Language for students without interest in languages: Challenges of foreign language grammar,” grammatical difficulties emerge when studying a foreign language. The article places focus on English, Spanish and German as the foreign languages. Several challenges as it pertains to grammar are highlighted such as interlinguistic interference. Taken from the article, Yalçın, and Spada analyse “the major part of the difficulties are connected with the grammar of the second language and its syntactic structures: passive constructions and progressive forms in English, for Famularsih, the construction of interrogative sentences; for Ellis et al., the correct perception of -ed forms; according to Alvarez, dative clitics in clitic doubling structures in Spanish and for Ayoun the issues of grammatical gender in French” (qtd. in Belenkova et al. 285). Moreover, in attempting to ascertain the way in which individuals faced challenges in grammar, legal texts were given to be translated into the target language in forty five minutes and the participant of the survey was supposed to mention what grammatical phenomena in English as the first foreign language and the specific grammatical phenomena in the second they consider as most difficult to understand (Belenkova et al. 286). The study proved that syntactical structures of sentences, the numerous transformations and verbal conjugations, indirect object pronouns, reflexive verbs, voice and mood such as the Subjunctive were the most difficult aspects of grammar for all the languages examined. The recommendation made was ensuring the use of a particular student’s grammatical book and proper grammatical training in various institutions to ensure maximum practice. However, one weakness of this study was that students surveyed were not university language students, and thus may have additional problems in the subject area than students who may have been immersed in the language learning process constantly from secondary school all the way to tertiary level education. However, the article directly correlated with one of the most profound challenges in foreign language learning which is being examined and developed in the study at hand. Also,

it is of worth to note that both Sarah Pettit's article and Belenkova's article highlight grammar as a challenge of foreign language learning.

Moreover, Mc Donald states "Students of all levels of academic achievement and intellectual abilities are believed to be affected by anxiety in language learning. This anxiety occurs in varying degrees and is characterized by emotional feelings of worry, fear, and apprehension. It can be exhibited differently by individuals" (qtd. in ÇUBUKÇU 149). The study seeks to examine the relation between foreign language learning anxiety and self-efficacy to investigate whether low self-efficacy increases anxiety or high self-perceptions lower the anxiety level. The participants under research were one hundred junior level students from the English teacher training program at the University of Turkey. Their ages ranged from twenty to twenty-two years old. As it pertained to foreign language learning and anxiety, one emerging aspect was that students do not feel comfortable when they speak and hence, they do not volunteer in the classes, and the striking point for the discomfort faced was feeling anxious when speaking in class but not when they speak with native speakers. Also, the anxiety felt was at the same level for both males and females. Furthermore, teacher trainees pointed out that they felt more tense and nervous in language classes than in any other classes as they are embarrassed to talk in the class, and they feel that their friends speak better than them. Thus, speaking is seen to be the problem and the anxiety provoker. The results of the study stated that those with low level of self-efficacy have higher levels of anxiety than students with high self-efficacy. Hence, this study correlates with the study at hand giving an insight into anxiety and conversation as major challenges in foreign language learning. Also, ÇUBUKÇU's article directly coincided with the article produced by Saito et al. as they both examined anxiety as being provoked within the foreign language learning process.

Furthermore, Tsiplakides et al. shaped the article entitled, "Helping Students Overcome Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in the English Classroom: Theoretical Issues and

Practical Recommendations,” which looks at foreign language speaking anxiety while aiming to provide teachers with strategies for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety stemming from students’ fear of being judged by their peers. Three major sources of foreign language anxiety were highlighted such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. All these factors may lead to students’ hesitation to speaking and participating in the target language. The study highlighted that some students may not consider language errors as a natural part of the learning process but as a threat to their image and a source of negative evaluation. Finally, the article presented several recommendations such as project work, establishing learning communities and a supportive classroom atmosphere, establishing teacher-student relations, providing indirect rather than direct correction, accepting the need for self-worth protection, teacher immediacy and the provision of praise.

Finally, directly coinciding with foreign language learning difficulties and the root of these challenges, Tiffini Banks’, “Foreign Language Learning Difficulties and Teaching Strategies,” analyses foreign language difficulties in order to determine effective strategies that can reduce the challenges. The chapter of the research paper most pertinent to this research in progress is the chapter of Discussions of the major findings. This chapter presents the explanations for foreign language difficulties among students such as English deficiencies, the disability to develop strategies to become successful, having a negative attitude and wanting to give up, low motivation, high anxiety and lack of clarity concerning classroom procedures. Moreover, academic challenges are analysed concerning the difficulty of the subject matter within the language learning process such as grammar, phonology, listening and other areas. Consequently, many solutions were proposed such as the need for teachers to ensure that the students enrolling in foreign languages are academically inclined in English or their native language. Also, students at the onset of class should assess their strengths and weaknesses at the start of foreign language classes. Finally, teachers need to explicitly teach sounds and letters

of alphabets in the foreign language classes. Thus, the paper was quite useful and well balanced with academic and individual challenges, however, just as most of the other secondary sources no heed was paid to the transitioning period.

In conclusion, there are various secondary sources alluding to the study being conducted. However, even though they are quite informative, there still exist certain weaknesses that impede the studies' extensiveness leading to a limited analysis of the subject matter.

## **2. Findings**

This study examines the challenges faced by first-year French and Spanish students at The University of the West Indies and particularly their transition period to university from secondary school. Throughout the study, linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges have been assessed. In so doing, students were surveyed via interviews and questionnaires, then, the information was quantified to present the conclusions drawn from the study.

### **2.1 Interview Findings**

Having interviewed French and Spanish year one students, particularly four French and seven Spanish students, qualitative data were obtained and quantified given the manner by which majority of the students expressed similar challenges and perspectives regarding their transitioning from secondary level French and Spanish to tertiary level. Firstly, concerning the transition from secondary school academics to that of university, 63.6%, specifically, seven of the eleven interviewees declared the transition being very difficult considering the workload and the need to speak in the language constantly in comparison to secondary school. However, 36.4%, specifically, four of the eleven interviewees stated the transition being relatively easy as the content was familiar to form four up to CAPE level Spanish and French. Nevertheless, findings from majority of the interviews prove that the transition period, specifically the transition from secondary school academics to that of university is difficult.

Additionally, when interviewees were asked if the transition period worsened their academic challenges, 54.5% of them stated “No” because the majority highlighted that they acknowledged the transition period and perceived it as a natural part of life and a process to overcome. However, 36.3% of the interviewees stated that the transition period worsened their academic challenges. Thus, most students prevented the transition period from worsening their

academic challenges in acknowledging it as a challenging period to be dealt with gradually. However, some students were linguistically or academically affected by this period.

Furthermore, regarding the struggles faced within the subject matter, 54.5% of interviewees highlighted grammar, 45.5% vocabulary, 18.2% listening and conversation, respectively. Other struggles include the literature component, the assignments, the workload and the need to adjust to different teaching methods.

Moreover, when students were asked to indicate aspects of university life that hinder them in comparison to secondary school, predominantly personal challenges emerged. Particularly, 36.3%, four of the eleven interviewees, stated the increased level of independence and increased responsibility owing to the need to manage their own time, do assignments and everything on their own without follow up from lecturers. Other challenges were the size of classes, the length of classes and its times and the way persons dress and behave. Moreover, when asked their three major academic challenges, recurrent were grammar, vocabulary, conversation, literature, listening and the time to practice. On the contrary, the most common non-academic challenges highlighted were anxiety, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, tiredness, and nervousness.

Finally, the interviewees recommended working with the language assistants, listening to audios in the language, watching videos, practicing grammar, getting advice from lecturers and working with peers.

## **2.2 Questionnaire Findings**

Apart from interviews, having surveyed the target population through subsequent questionnaires, statistical data were obtained. However, only a few major questions posed which apply directly to the research questions will be analysed through tables and charts.

### 2.2.1 Linguistic or Academic Challenges

Table 1

Rating of the level of challenge faced in each French and Spanish component.

|              | French       |      |         |        | Spanish      |      |         |        |
|--------------|--------------|------|---------|--------|--------------|------|---------|--------|
|              | Participants | Mean | Std Dev | %      | Participants | Mean | Std Dev | %      |
| Conversation | 13           | 6.77 | 0.90    | 67.69% | 16           | 5.06 | 1.77    | 50.63% |
| Listening    | 13           | 6.08 | 0.74    | 60.77% | 16           | 4.75 | 1.51    | 47.50% |
| Grammar      | 13           | 5.69 | 1.21    | 56.92% | 16           | 5.44 | 1.11    | 54.38% |
| Reading      | 13           | 3.38 | 1.34    | 33.85% | 16           | 3.25 | 1.50    | 32.50% |
| Writing      | 13           | 4.54 | 1.60    | 45.38% | 16           | 4.31 | 1.86    | 43.13% |
| Literature   | 9            | 6.89 | 1.30    | 68.89% | 16           | 4.69 | 2.56    | 46.88% |

Students rated their level of challenge faced in each component of the language course and the literature course. According to 67.69%, French conversation was mostly challenging, whereas for the Spanish language component, 54.38% indicated grammar as mostly challenging. However, grammar also posed a great challenge in French despite not being the primal challenge as it differs from Spanish by solely 2.55%. Also, a considerable difference of 17.06% was seen regarding how students rated their challenge in the conversation component of the respective languages. French conversation was deemed more challenging than Spanish for first year students. Additionally, a similarity is observed between the level of challenge faced regarding the reading component. That is, merely 1.35% differentiated French and Spanish statistics, indicating that reading challenges are on par in both languages. Finally, regarding literature, a significant difference of 22.01% was noticed as 68.89% indicated French literature as extremely challenging versus 46.88% for Spanish Literature. (See table 1).

## Spanish and French Most Challenging Exam

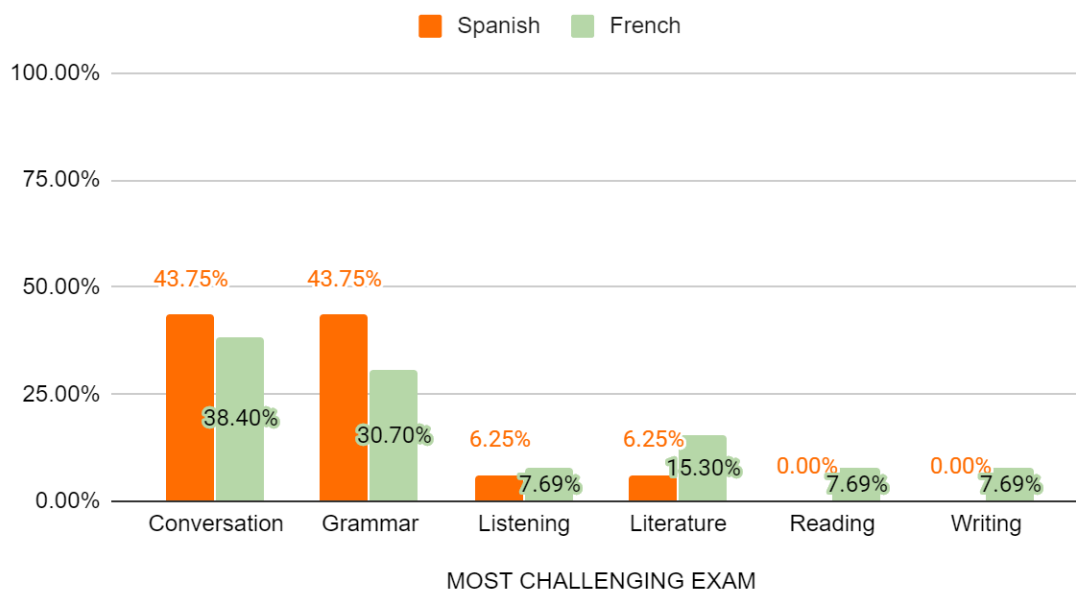


Fig. 2. Bar chart representing most challenging exam faced in French and Spanish.

Also, assessed was the most challenging exam faced. For the first-year students, the Spanish conversation and the grammar exam were the most challenging. Reasons given for the conversation exam being difficult were nervousness and fear of making mistakes and for grammar, the large quantity of explanations and rules to be learnt. However, majority of French students indicated the conversation exam as the most challenging followed by grammar. Reasons include nervousness, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, ambiguity in the exams and misunderstanding the instructions. Hence, conversation and grammar were the top two components recurrent as the most challenging exam in both languages. (See fig.2).

Furthermore, students compared the difficulty between the language and literature courses. 80% of Spanish students indicated literature as more challenging because of the level of analysis required and the context to be familiarised with. Similarly, 69% of French students indicated literature as tougher given the extra readings required, the books' length and the level

of vocabulary. Thus, literature was more challenging than the language course at year one for French and Spanish students.

### 2.2.2 Examining the transition period through comparing secondary school and university.

Students after one semester in university had to compare their secondary level experience and prior expectations to university to analyse the transitional period. 53.8% stated French being harder than expected while solely 19% stated this for Spanish. Also, 44% indicated Spanish easier than expected versus 23.1% highlighting this for French. (See fig. 3). Thus, transitioning to university level French from secondary school was more challenging than that of Spanish.

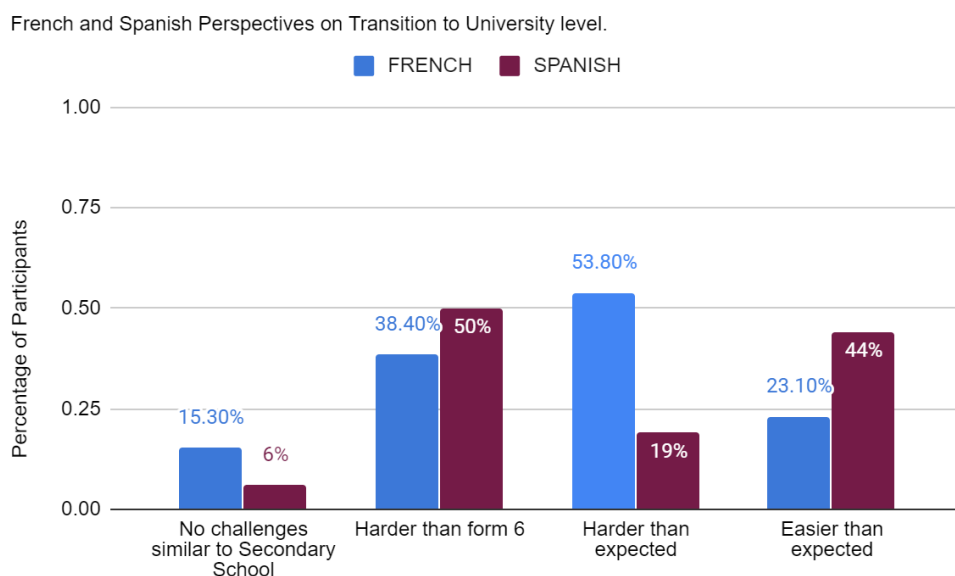


Fig. 3. Bar chart representing the perspectives of French and Spanish year one students on transition to university from secondary school.

Furthermore, to analyse the transition period in detail and to decipher why it is challenging, students had to compare the result of the teaching methods used at secondary school and UWI concerning the development of foreign language skills. (See fig. 4 and fig. 5). The statistics

presented prove secondary school's teaching methods as insufficient regarding the development of numerous foreign language skills. More than 50% of both the French and Spanish students indicated UWI's teaching methods as capable of equipping students with numerous foreign language skills such as the preparation for at least seven of them, ranging from being totally immersed in the language to being fluent in the language. Similarities were found as 100% of the participants for both French and Spanish respectively believed that UWI prepared them to be fluent in the language and to interact in the language. One major difference observed was that 100% of Spanish students perceived secondary school as preparing them to pass exams versus 23.01% of French students indicating this, while 100% of the French students perceived UWI as preparing them to pass exams.

UWI and Secondary School according to Spanish Participants

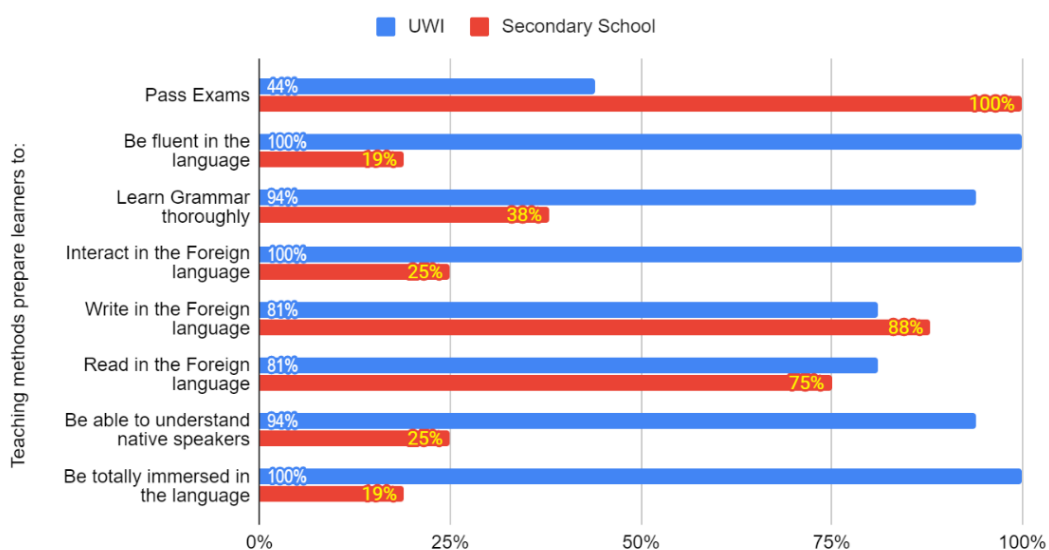


Fig. 4. Percentages of Spanish students' perspectives on the result of the teaching methods used at secondary school versus university (UWI).

### UWI and Secondary School according to French participants.

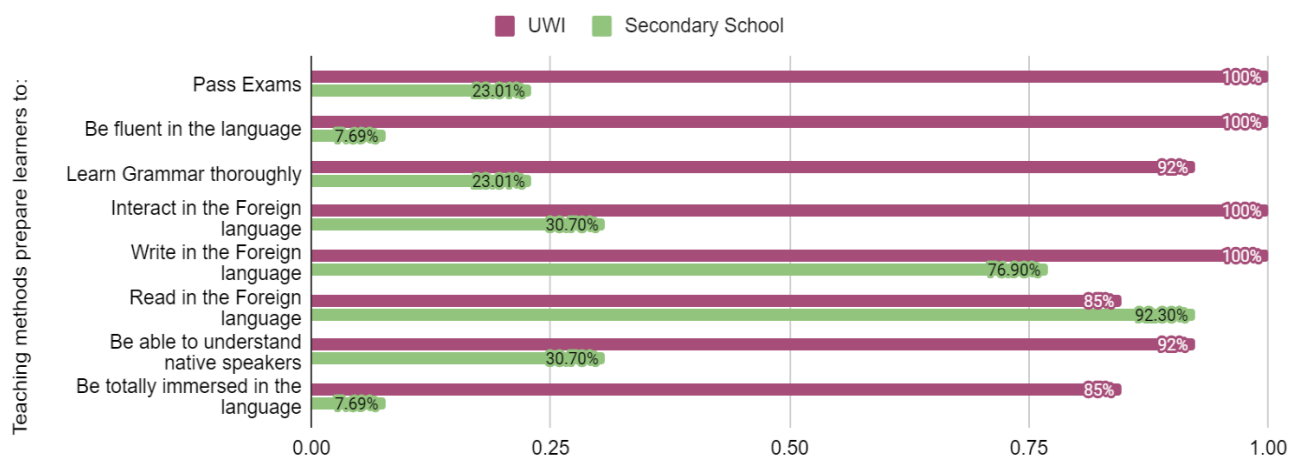


Fig. 5. Percentages of French students' perspectives on the result of the teaching methods used at secondary school versus university (UWI).

### 2.2.3 Non-linguistic or personal challenges encountered in the foreign language learning process.

Anxiety represents one major non-linguistic challenge. Regarding the French classroom and examination contexts, conversation provoked the greatest level of anxiety according to 76.92% and 94.87% of the participants, respectively. In the Spanish classroom, grammar provoked the most anxiety with 62.50% indicating this whereas in the examination context, 85.42% indicated conversation as the greatest anxiety provoker. Consequently, in the French classroom, conversation was the source of the greatest anxiety whereas for Spanish students, grammar. However, in the examination context, the conversation component provoked the greatest level of anxiety for both French (94.87%) and Spanish (85.42%) students.

Moreover, literature in the classroom and examination context is a considerable source of anxiety just as the language component. A huge 74.07% highlighted French literature as provoking anxiety in the classroom and an even higher percentage (81.48%) highlighted this

regarding the examination setting. 45.83% indicated Spanish literature as anxiety provoking in the classroom whereas 58.33% indicated this regarding the examination setting. A notable difference of 28.24% is seen between French and Spanish literature in the classroom. Likewise, in the examination context, the gap represents 23.15%, proving that the level of anxiety incurred in French literature surpasses that of Spanish literature. (See tables 2 and 3).

Table 2

Level of Anxiety faced in Classroom.

|              | French       |      |         |        | Spanish      |      |         |        |
|--------------|--------------|------|---------|--------|--------------|------|---------|--------|
|              | Participants | Mean | Std Dev | %      | Participants | Mean | Std Dev | %      |
| Conversation | 13           | 2.31 | 2.31    | 76.92% | 16           | 1.81 | 1.53    | 60.42% |
| Listening    | 13           | 2.00 | 2.31    | 66.67% | 16           | 1.63 | 3.79    | 54.17% |
| Grammar      | 13           | 1.92 | 2.08    | 64.10% | 16           | 1.88 | 2.52    | 62.50% |
| Reading      | 13           | 1.46 | 3.51    | 48.72% | 16           | 1.56 | 3.51    | 52.08% |
| Writing      | 13           | 1.62 | 2.89    | 53.85% | 16           | 1.50 | 4.04    | 50.00% |
| Literature   | 9            | 2.22 | 2.00    | 74.07% | 16           | 1.38 | 2.83    | 45.83% |

Table 3

Level of Anxiety faced in the Examination context.

|              | French       |      |         |        | Spanish      |      |         |        |
|--------------|--------------|------|---------|--------|--------------|------|---------|--------|
|              | Participants | Mean | Std Dev | %      | Participants | Mean | Std Dev | %      |
| Conversation | 13           | 2.85 | 6.36    | 94.87% | 16           | 2.56 | 4.51    | 85.42% |
| Listening    | 13           | 2.23 | 2.08    | 74.36% | 16           | 1.69 | 4.04    | 56.25% |
| Grammar      | 13           | 2.46 | 3.21    | 82.05% | 16           | 2.00 | 2.31    | 66.67% |
| Reading      | 13           | 1.92 | 1.53    | 64.10% | 16           | 1.69 | 4.04    | 56.25% |
| Writing      | 13           | 1.69 | 2.08    | 56.41% | 16           | 1.75 | 4.51    | 58.33% |
| Literature   | 9            | 2.44 | 0.71    | 81.48% | 16           | 1.75 | 4.51    | 58.33% |

### 2.2.4 Mixture of challenges (linguistic and non-linguistic challenges) encountered by students during the language course.

An open-ended question interrogated the challenges students generally encountered while doing French or Spanish courses. Consequently, both linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges were indicated. The greatest challenge in Spanish relates to the subject matter as the largest percentage of students, 44% indicated the conversation component. However, the greatest challenge indicated by 31% of French students was non-linguistic, particularly transition-related issues, namely, the adaptation to a new environment as well as the transition from CAPE (Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination). Among other challenges for French and Spanish students were conversation, the ability to understand different accents, grammar, vocabulary, keeping abreast with all the components of the course and excessive homework. Thus, similarities were seen regarding the challenges faced within the language component, despite the question being open-ended. Also, statistics obtained from the French students demonstrated that the transition period affected them negatively which is under investigation in this study. (See below fig. 6 and fig. 7).

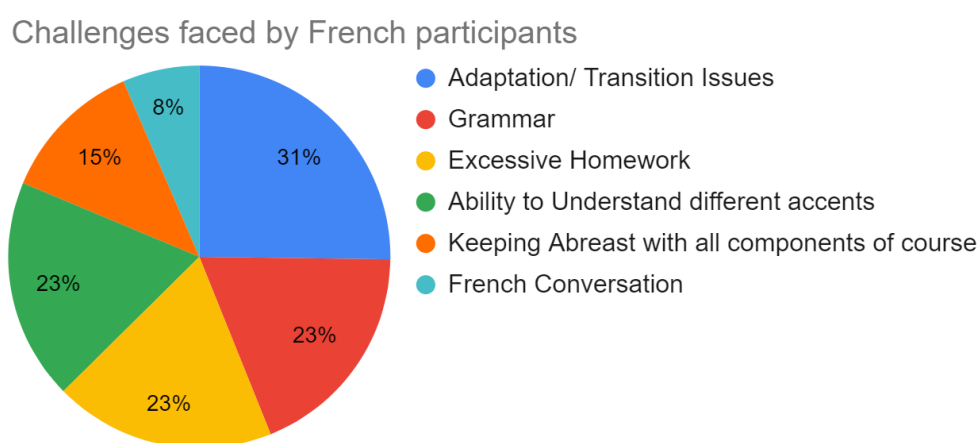


Fig. 6. Challenges encountered throughout the French course by year one students.

Challenges faced by Spanish participants

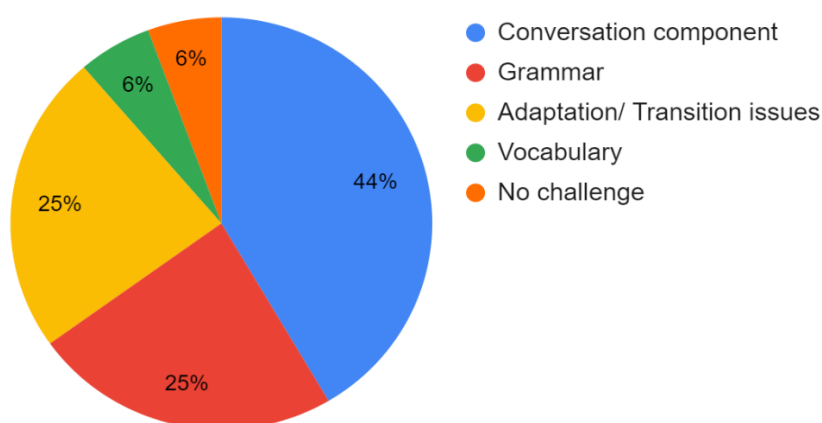


Fig.7. Challenges encountered throughout the Spanish course by year one students.

### 2.2.5 Recommendations made by year one students to limit challenges faced throughout the language learning process.

Table 4

Students' recommendations to limit foreign language learning challenges and ensure an easy transition from secondary school to university.

| Recommendations                   | French | Spanish |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|
| More Audio and Videos             | 46%    | 25%     |
| More Grammar practice             | 62%    | 25%     |
| Increased Reading in the Language | 38%    | 44%     |
| Working with Language Assistants  | 85%    | 44%     |
| Better Time Management            | 62%    | 56%     |
| Working together with peers       | 54%    | 50%     |

Majority of French students (85%) recommended working with the language assistants as fundamental to an easy transition to UWI. However, majority of Spanish students (56%) perceived time management as fundamental to limit challenges. The largest percentage gap of

27% was seen with grammar practice as a recommendation as 62% of French students indicated this versus 25% of Spanish students. Hence, French grammatical skills are more difficult to develop than Spanish at year one.

### 3. Discussion

The present study sought to conduct an in-depth research regarding both the linguistic and non-linguistic challenges faced by foreign language learners on transition from secondary to tertiary level. Also, the study aims to bring awareness to the presence of both types of challenges within the foreign language learning process as well to analyse them in order to derive measures to limit the challenges experienced. In this section, the findings arising from this study are discussed based on the three research questions which probed some of the transitional issues faced by foreign language learners on transition from secondary level to university, the linguistic and non-linguistic challenges encountered while learning a language, be it French or Spanish and foreign language learners' recommendations to limit foreign language learning challenges.

Firstly, as indicated from majority of the interviewees (63.6%), the transitional period, in terms of the transition from secondary school academics to tertiary level academics was indeed a challenge. Reasons for this difficulty, according to the participants, were the lack of complete exposure to the French and Spanish by teachers at secondary school and similarly, a lack of student engagement in the language during classes in secondary school. Consequently, it is inferred that students confronted a culture shock on their entry into university as the entire class is conducted in the foreign language together with all the assignments, explanations, readings, enquiries and interaction encouraged in the foreign language. In the same way, the workload also deemed a challenge given that more effort was required given the existence of numerous components, three for Spanish and five for French, in addition to the literature course which would have been overwhelming for these learners. These findings directly correlate to some of the focal points of Tabitha Wangeri's study on the transitional challenges experienced in university such as cultural shock, academic adjustment and environmental campus adjustment. Also, Wangeri refers to the role of secondary school as being capable to prepare

students for university and to ensure a smooth transitional period in the same manner that the participants of this present study highlighted. That is, UWI students referred to secondary school's role as integral in preparing them for university. Thus, the quantity of challenges they experience on transition may depend on the level of competency obtained from their secondary school formation in French and Spanish language learning. Hence, the present study prompts better work to be done by secondary schools in accordance to Brisset et al., "high schools and universities can also develop programmes to equip the students with skills for social adjustments as well as the ability to make socio-cultural and psychological adaptation" (qtd. in Wangeri 49).

Also, in examining the extent to which the transition period affected students' academic performance through increasing linguistic challenges, the majority, 54.5% stated that they looked at the period as one to be overcome gradually, however, 36.4% highlighted that they faced linguistic challenges due to the transition period. This hints that for some students this period is an additional source of difficulty during the foreign language learning process. This inference is further proved in accordance with Elias et al., "students who are able to adjust well in campus are found to display greater academic performance compared to those who have difficulty to adjust to university life" (qtd. in Wangeri 42). Finally, it is of essence that students' transition to French academics was more challenging than that of Spanish as indicated by 53.8% of the French participants who looked at French as being harder than that of secondary school in comparison to 19% of the Spanish students. This result is subjective and may be as a result of personal preferences of the students and the manner by which they manage the syntactical structures, pronunciation and conversational skills required to become adept in French as opposed to Spanish, as well as how equipped in the respective languages they left secondary school. Hence, despite the transitional issues not being the major challenge in terms of studying foreign languages, it was still acknowledged as a difficulty by the participants.

Thus, academic institutions must become aware of this and deal with this situation proactively through well-organized orientation programmes and teacher-student discussions both at the university and secondary level to assess transitional issues and suggest ways to deal with this period.

Apart from examining the transition period, on examining the linguistic challenges, French conversation is mostly challenging. This may be majorly as a result of the non-academic challenge of anxiety to speak in a foreign language due to a fear of making errors or being judged by peers or lecturers. This coincides with the findings that indicate conversation as majorly anxiety provoking by 76.92% of the participants. These participants highlighted their weakness as speaking due to their anxiety as well as being out of their comfort zone in conversing in the foreign language. This non-linguistic challenge of foreign language anxiety directly triggering linguistic challenges such as conversation difficulties further relates to several previously done studies. Particularly, “Foreign language (FL) educators have recognized the existence of FL anxiety and its’ potential for significant interference with language learning and production” (Saito et al. 202). Also, “High anxiety about the class may cause students to raise an affective filter, which blocks FL input, and impairs memory, organization, and spontaneous oral production” (Banks 62). Furthermore, conversation in French may be a challenge also due to lack of vocabulary, proper understanding of grammatical structures or even a lack of self-confidence in the foreign language which all lead to a lack of fluency and surety when speaking. Thus, it is necessary that teachers take into consideration the fact that conversation may be nerve-wrecking to foreign language learners and hence they must ensure the conversation class is less intimidating while providing motivation and constructive criticism to students.

On the other hand, grammar is mostly challenging for Spanish students as indicated by 54.38% of the participants. Grammar may be quite challenging in a foreign language given the

numerous rules to be learnt as well as the syntactics and semantics involved. Also, the different types of verbs in Spanish such as reflexive verbs, radical changing verbs and transitive and intransitive verbs can all be brain taxing. Not excluding the numerous tenses such as the Imperfect, Preterite, Future, Present as well as the three distinct moods to be learnt, namely, the Indicative, Subjunctive and Imperative together with explanations for each choice in a situation. Thus, the complexity of the grammar component in terms of syntactics and semantics may lead to challenges for students, in particular, the year one students who are transitioning from secondary school where grammar may have not been taught as in depth as in university. Thus, grammar is seen as one major linguistic challenge in the study at hand in being semantically and syntactically multifaceted. These grammatical challenges specific to syntactics encountered during foreign language learning are equally explored in Belenkova's article: "The current study proved that all issues related to the syntactic structure of a sentence, all kinds of transformations, conjugations of verbs in tense, voice and mood are among the most difficult grammar aspects mentioned by the experiment participants both teachers and students no matter what foreign language is examined" (290). Also, grammatical challenges specific to semantics encountered during foreign language learning are explored in Belenkova's article: "There are many grammar phenomena that cause misunderstanding or wrong comprehension of the original idea" (291).

Apart from conversation in French and grammar in Spanish as being significantly challenging in the language component, the literature component was also examined. An interesting aspect emerging in the present study, which was unexamined and disregarded by previous researchers, was the way that the literature component posed as an overwhelming linguistic challenge for the students in comparison to the language component. Particularly, 80% indicated literature as more challenging than the language in Spanish and for French, 69% indicated literature as tougher than the language component. This challenge can stem from the

need to situate oneself in the historical period and the context of the books, plays and even movies under study which can be quite time consuming, confusing as well as requiring a lot of additional research in addition to having to read and view the works. Also, the fact of having to study the literature works in the foreign language can be quite time consuming and frustrating as there is always the need to research unknown vocabulary as well as the manner in which university demands all literature studies done in the foreign language unlike CAPE in secondary school which permits all assignments done in the maternal language, English. Hence, having to suddenly adjust to a full immersion in literary works in the foreign language, a total contrast to secondary school, may be quite challenging. These literary works are sometimes not a source of literal translations but comprise of figurative language and jargon that are particular to the culture and require further research and can lead to ambiguity while reading. Hence, it is concluded that apart from linguistic challenges encountered within the language components, the literature components also provoke challenges.

Finally, as it pertains to the non-linguistic challenges experienced by the year one French and Spanish students, many challenges were highlighted, particularly in the interviews. Some were indeed anxiety as mentioned before, tiredness, procrastination, lack of motivation, underestimation of knowledge in certain components, nervousness and poor time management. Thus, it is evident that non-academic challenges were numerous and thus of equal importance as the challenges faced within the subject matter. These challenges may all have a link to the transition period from secondary school to university where the environment at secondary school is totally different in that teachers are constantly concerned with ensuring that students are on par with their work and they share a more personalized relation with the students. However, at university, there is a need for more self-autonomy and independence by the students themselves where lecturers keep their relationship at a distance and are solely there to guide students. Also, the increased workload may be a source of all these non-academic and

personal challenges aforementioned as students may become overwhelmed by the quantity of work and assignments to be done in such a small time frame and thus may not be able to function effortlessly.

#### **4. Recommendations**

As obtained from both the interviews and the questionnaires, there were several recommendations proposed aiming to reduce the challenges faced when learning a foreign language. Some of the proposals from the interviews were the need to listen to more audios and watch more videos in the foreign language outside the classroom, more grammar practice, better time management, increased reading in the language, working with the language assistants and working together with peers. Additionally, the most popular recommendations by the French participants were 62% indicating more grammar practice and better time management and likewise, for the Spanish participants, 56% indicated better time management. Thus the common recommendation both sets of participants gave was better time management which alludes to the fact that through proactive planning, allocation of time for each assignment as well as reduced time wastage can assist with foreign language learning and minimize the issues that emerge.

### **Limitations to Study**

In conducting this research study, there were several challenges faced in gathering the data as some students were reluctant to participate in the interviews and questionnaires, hence resulting in a small sample which may reduce the generalization of the data obtained. Another challenge faced was trying to manage all my other courses, assignments and exams while conducting the study which was time consuming and sometimes very difficult. However, the challenges were managed and dealt with, permitting the completion of the study.

## Conclusion

Given the increasing popularity of foreign language learning in the world today, this study aimed at examining the challenges faced by first-year French, Spanish majors and minors at the UWI St. Augustine Campus. In so doing, the linguistic challenges in addition to the non-linguistic challenges were analysed. Consequently, as it relates to linguistic challenges, many language components posed as challenging, however, conversation and grammar emerged as the two major components incrementally challenging in both languages and among others posing less challenges were listening, vocabulary, reading and writing. With reference to the non-linguistic challenges, recurrent in both languages were anxiety and transitional issues ranging from adjustment and adaptation to university from secondary school. Finally, the transition period was considered and even though it was not perceived as a major cause of academic disturbance, it was still acknowledged as being a difficult period to overcome. Following this study, foreign language learners themselves gave recommendations that may limit the challenges encountered which included listening to more audios and watching more videos in the foreign language outside the classroom, more grammar practice, better time management, increased reading in the language, working with the language assistants and working together with peers. More grammar practice was recommended by French students and better time management by the both French and Spanish students.

## Works Cited

- Association of Caribbean States. "The Importance of Language Learning to Regional Development and Tourism Competitiveness." ACS, Asociación De Estados Del Caribe, 2012, [www.acs-aec.org/index.php?q=es%2Fnode%2F4624](http://www.acs-aec.org/index.php?q=es%2Fnode%2F4624). Accessed 10 Dec. 2019.
- Banks, Tiffini. *Foreign Language Learning Difficulties and Teaching Strategies*. 2008. School of Education Dominican University of California San Rafael, CA, MA dissertation. ERIC, [files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501062.pdf](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501062.pdf).
- Belenkova, Nataliya M., et al. "Language for Students without Interest in Languages: Challenges of Foreign Language Grammar." *XLinguae*, vol. 11, no. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 284–293, DOI: 10.18355/XL.2018.11.01.23. Accessed 20 Feb. 2020.
- "Challenge." *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/challenge](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/challenge). Accessed 18 Dec. 2019.
- Creswell, John W., and Vicki L. Clark. *Understanding Research: A Consumer's Guide*. Second ed., Pearson, 2015.
- Çubukçu, Feryal. "A Study on the Correlation between Self Efficacy and Foreign Language Learning Anxiety." *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education*, vol.4, no.1, 2008, pp. 148-158. ERIC, [files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED502016.pdf](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED502016.pdf). Accessed 25 Feb. 2020.
- Horwitz, Elaine K., et al. "Foreign language classroom anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 70, no. 2, Summer 1986, pp. 125-132. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/327317](http://www.jstor.org/stable/327317). Accessed 12 Dec. 2019.

- Pettit, Sarah. "The Challenges Of Learning A Second Language." *The Odyssey Online*, 7 June 2016, [www.theodysseyonline.com/challenges-learning-language](http://www.theodysseyonline.com/challenges-learning-language). Accessed 14 Dec. 2019.
- Saito, Yoshiko, et al. "Foreign Language Reading Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 83, no. 2, 1999, pp. 202–218. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/330336](http://www.jstor.org/stable/330336). Accessed 14 Dec. 2019.
- Tsiplakides, Iakovos, et al. "Helping Students Overcome Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in the English Classroom: Theoretical Issues and Practical Recommendations." *International Education Studies*, vol.2, no.4, Nov. 2009, pp. 39-44. ERIC, [files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1065743.pdf](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1065743.pdf). Accessed 25 Feb. 2020.
- Wagaba, William. "Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Challenges and Opportunities at Makerere University." *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus*, vol. 40, 2011, pp. 95-109, DOI:10.5842/40-0-7. Accessed 16 Dec. 2019.
- Wangeri, Tabitha, et al. "Transitional Challenges Facing University First Year Students in Kenyan Public Universities: A Case of Kenyatta University." *Interdisciplinary Review of Economics and Management*, 2012, pp.41-50.  
[www.ku.ac.ke/schools/humanities/images/stories/docs/Research/transitional-challenges-facing-first-year-students.pdf](http://www.ku.ac.ke/schools/humanities/images/stories/docs/Research/transitional-challenges-facing-first-year-students.pdf). Accessed 16 Dec. 2019.

APPENDIX 1 – Interview conducted to both French and Spanish year one students.

Interview Record:

1. Interviewee A (Male) - November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019, done at CLL at 1:00pm
2. Interviewee B (Female)- November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019, done at CLL at 10:15 am
3. Interviewee C (Female)- November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019, done at CLL at 1:00pm
4. Interviewee D (Male)- November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 11:15 am
5. Interviewee E (Female)- November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 1:05pm
6. Interviewee F(Female)-November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 1:20pm
7. Interviewee G (Male)- November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 1:15pm
8. Interviewee H (Female)- November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 1:10pm
9. Interviewee I (Female)- November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 9:30am
10. Interviewee J (Male) -November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 10:00am
11. Interviewee K(Female)- November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019 done at CLL at 1:00pm

Interview

Hello good day, my name is Alyssa Ali and I am a third-year student of the faculties of Humanities and Education doing a BA: French with a double minor in Spanish and International Relations. Today I am requesting your help for my third year project which aims to focus on challenges you face as a first year student not only in the academics but in general that you face and you think it poses problems for you to grasp the languages.

1. Firstly, with regards to the academics/ the studies, how was your transition period from secondary school French/Spanish to tertiary level Spanish/ French? Tell me how was it?
2. Studying languages here at UWI what are some of the struggles you face with the subject matter either in French or Spanish? **(Grammar, Vocabulary, Conversation, Comprehension, Teaching Methods)**
3. Do you think being in a period of transition to UWI worsen these challenges named above? Explain.
4. At year 1, how was the results of your first set of midterms... Was it as good/ bad and why do you think?
5. What are some of the shocking or most disturbing aspects of university life thus far that bother you and are totally different to your high school experience?
6. What poses the greatest stumbling block for you in terms of learning and excelling in Spanish / French in year 1?
7. What would you say are the three major academic challenges you have in the French/ Spanish subject matter/ content?
8. What would you say are the three major personal issues/ challenges in general out of the academics that make it more difficult for you to study French and Spanish?
9. What are some ways you think can help solve your academic challenges?

## APPENDIX 2 – Questionnaire via hardcopy to French year one students.

### Questionnaire (French)

*Dear student of year 1, My name is Alyssa Ali and I am currently working on my final year project which seeks to analyse some of the challenges you face which affect your language learning process as you transition from Secondary school to Tertiary level education. This questionnaire is totally anonymous and is solely created for the purpose of conducting an investigation in this area. Please be as honest and sincere in your responses. Thank you in advance!*

Major(s) / Special:

Minor(s):

Age:

Male: ☐

Female: ☐

1. What posed the greatest challenge in this French language course?
  
  
  
  
  
2. In both contexts, secondary school and university (UWI), the teaching methods prepare learners to:

| (Tick as many boxes as appropriate)      | Secondary School         | UWI                      |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. pass exams                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. be fluent in the language             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. learn Grammar thoroughly              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. interact in the foreign language      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. write in the foreign language         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. read in the foreign language          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. be able to understand native speakers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. be totally immersed in the language   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. How challenging was the French language component thus far? (Tick as many boxes as it applies to you)

|                                            |                          |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No challenges, similar to secondary school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It was harder than Form 6                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It was harder than expected                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It was easier than expected                | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Rate on a scale of 1-10 the level of challenge faced in each component highlighted below (1 being least challenging and 10 the most challenging)

|              | Least Challenging        |                          |                          |                          |                          | Most Challenging         |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|              | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        | 6                        | 7                        | 8                        | 9                        | 10                       |
| Listening    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grammar      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conversation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reading      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Do you think that the way in which you used your time is a contributing factor to the challenges you faced in coping with your language learning thus far?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please give a reason:

6. What was your most challenging exam in French and state why?

7. What was tougher language or literature?

Why?

8. How would you assess the level of Anxiety you experienced thus far in the classroom and examination contexts for the following components?

|              | Classroom                |                          |                          | Examination              |                          |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|              | Low level Anxiety        | Moderate level Anxiety   | High level Anxiety       | Low level Anxiety        | Moderate level Anxiety   | High level Anxiety       |
| Conversation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Listening    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grammar      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reading      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. Do you think secondary school prepares you for university (UWI) level language courses? Tick the most suitable answer

Prepares me: Well: ☐ Very Well: ☐ Not well at all: ☐

10. Has the level of procrastination increase from secondary school to university (UWI)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what do you think led to this increase in procrastination?

- Tiredness ☐  
 Increase in workload ☐  
 Increase in level of independence ☐  
 Loss of passion for the language ☐

Other, please state:

11. What are your recommendations to facilitate the easy transition from secondary **level French to tertiary (UWI) level French**?

- More audio/video ☐  
 More grammar practice ☐  
 Increase reading in the language ☐  
 Work with language assistants ☐  
 Better time management ☐  
 Work together with peers ☐

Other, please state:

12. How motivated are you to learn the language? Has it increased or decreased having done 1 semester? (Circle your answer)

- |                             |                          |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| More motivated              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Much more motivated         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Equally motivated as before | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Less motivated              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Much less motivated         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

APPENDIX 3 – Questionnaire Distributed Online to year one Spanish students.

Questionnaire (Spanish)

*Dear student of year 1, My name is Alyssa Ali and I am currently working on my final year project which seeks to analyse some of the challenges you face which affect your language learning process as you transition from Secondary school to Tertiary level education. This questionnaire is totally anonymous and is solely created for the purpose of conducting an investigation in this area. Please be as honest and sincere in your responses. Thank you in advance!*

Major(s) / Special:

Minor(s):

Age:

Male: ☐

Female: ☐

1.What posed the greatest challenge in this Spanish language course?

2.In both contexts, secondary school and university (UWI), the teaching methods prepare learners to:

| (Tick as many boxes as appropriate)   | Secondary School         | UWI                      |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| pass exams                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| be fluent in the language             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| learn Grammar thoroughly              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| interact in the foreign language      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| write in the foreign language         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| read in the foreign language          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| be able to understand native speakers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| be totally immersed in the language   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3.How challenging was the Spanish language component thus far? (Tick as many boxes as it applies to you)

|                                            |                          |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No challenges, similar to secondary school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It was harder than Form 6                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It was harder than expected                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It was easier than expected                | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Rate on a scale of 1-10 the level of challenge faced in each component highlighted below (1 being least challenging and 10 the most challenging)

|              | Least Challenging        |                          |                          |                          |                          | Most Challenging         |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|              | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        | 6                        | 7                        | 8                        | 9                        | 10                       |
| Listening    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grammar      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Conversation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reading      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. Do you think that the way in which you used your time is a contributing factor to the challenges you faced in coping with your language learning thus far?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please give a reason:

6. What was your most challenging exam in Spanish and state why?

7. What was tougher language or literature?

Why?

8. How would you assess the level of Anxiety you experienced thus far in the classroom and examination contexts for the following components?

|              | Classroom                |                          |                          | Examination              |                          |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|              | Low level Anxiety        | Moderate level Anxiety   | High level Anxiety       | Low level Anxiety        | Moderate level Anxiety   | High level Anxiety       |
| Conversation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Listening    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Grammar      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reading      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9. Do you think secondary school prepares you for university (UWI) level language courses?  
**Circle** the most suitable answer

Prepares me:      Well: ☐      Very Well: ☐      Not well at all: ☐

10. Has the level of procrastination increase from secondary school to university (UWI)?

**Circle** either:      Yes ☐      No ☐

If yes, what do you think led to this increase in procrastination?

- Tiredness ☐
- Increase in workload ☐
- Increase in level of independence ☐
- Loss of passion for the language ☐

Other, please state:

11.What are your recommendations to facilitate the easy transition from secondary level Spanish to tertiary (UWI) level Spanish?

- More audio/video ☐
- More grammar practice ☐
- Increase reading in the language ☐
- Work with language assistants ☐
- Better time management ☐
- Work together with peers ☐

Other, please state:

12.How motivated are you to learn the language? Has it increased or decreased having done 1 semester? (**Circle** your answer)

- More motivated ☐
- Much more motivated ☐
- Equally motivated as before ☐
- Less motivated ☐
- Much less motivated ☐

THANK YOU!