



THE VALUE OF FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE



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Presentation Outline



- Introduction: Overarching theme of the RDIFUND project & its components
- Research questions
- Theoretical framework
- Description of participants
- Findings
- Conclusions

French Language, Culture and Competitiveness



- The French sub-project is one of 5 sub-projects under the overarching theme:

Language and Competitiveness: Positioning T&T for Sustainable Development.

Research Questions



1. How are French language skills valued in the workplace?
2. How is knowledge of French culture valued in the workplace?
3. How do individuals plan to develop their French language skills?
4. Why the need to develop French skills?
5. How can French language skills or cultural knowledge contribute to economic advancement?

THEORETICAL/METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK



- Phenomenology-a qualitative theoretical framework that emphasizes the understanding of lived experiences and how people make sense of those experiences and the world around them.
- Phenomenology allows us to perceive what is “unknown, known thinly, known uncertainly, or known wrongly” so as to “produce one or more of many imagined and as yet unimagined outcomes” (Peshkin, 1993, p. 23) such as the value placed on French language skills in the workplace.

Design of the Study



- A mixed design that combines quantitative survey data and qualitative personal interview data.

Why a mixed design?

- Quantitative data can inform qualitative studies as qualitative data can, during design, aid with conceptual development and instrumentation. At the level of analysis, qualitative information helps by validating, interpreting, clarifying, and illustrating quantitative findings, as well as through strengthening and revising theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Respondents



- N=97 (80% response rate)
- >80% = F
- >50% = aged between 18 and 34
- N =13 say French is the/an L1
- 65% belong to a professional occupation group (cf. NOCTT 2013)
- >50% respondents had a Bachelor's degree
- ≈40% had a Master's degree
- Qualitative interviews N=24 (75% response rate)

Quantitative findings

When asked to state whether their knowledge of Francophone culture is valued in the workplace:

- About 80% of the respondents said knowledge of Francophone culture is valued (great value=60, some value=27.5) in their career.
- Knowledge of Francophone culture is valued & recognized by employers via written and verbal recognition (80.4%) and Short term travel opportunities (66.7%).

Qualitative findings



Research Question 1:

How are your French language skills valued in the workplace? (1)

"My French language skills are viewed as a valuable asset to the work I do... one of the flagship initiatives that my organisation leads at the moment is an Internet-for-Development project in Haiti called Ayitic (www.ayitic.net)...the project relies on an institutionalised cooperation model involving three Haitian entities. My French skills are required to effectively communicate and give a sense of trust and confidence among the partners in the cooperation model as some of them can only communicate (or best communicate) in French."

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



French is valued by employers (2):

“I am currently working at a UN agency so to say that French language skills are useful would be an understatement...Because of my background in French I was able to translate the majority of the documents on my own and only had to resort to the dictionary for the intermittent phrase I was unfamiliar with. This definitely made the process easier and less time consuming than it would have been without my knowledge of French.”

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



French is valued by employers (3)

- "I work at the United Nations and French is one of the official languages of the UN making it quite useful for me on a professional level. The UN directly rewards persons who speak a second language by giving them financial compensation for the skill. Aside from this, it is also important because as an organization that works within the Caribbean Region, a region where there are French territories such as Martinique and Guadeloupe, I can use the language when working, with persons or issues relating to these countries. I can be a more dynamic employee."

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



French skills are valued by employers (4)

- I strongly believe that French skills are extremely critical for a global citizen. We live in a very small global village and developing one's French skills give you a whole new prospective on life. I've learned so much thanks to my understanding of the French language. It's a whole new world. Their way of thinking, their sens de la vie, and much more. This knowledge has helped me to become a more rounded individual with a better understanding of freedom, equality and brotherhood.

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



French Skills are NOT valued by employers (1)

- I honestly hold the view that my French language skills are not valued at my current workplace. I find this ironic and disappointing given that communication is a significant, if not the most crucial aspect of bilateral and multilateral negotiations. The ability to overcome this frontier could lead to favorable, economical and undoubtedly more speedily negotiated agreements. Yet, being someone who possesses this ability, I am yet to see it put to such use in this, or any other meaningful capacity.

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



French skills are NOT valued by employers

“Where I currently work at the Ministry of Trade, there is a lot more emphasis on the importance of the Spanish language and promoting business relationships with Latin America. There is a Spanish Club and free Spanish classes are offered to employees. Consequently, the French language is often sidelined and my language skills are rarely utilized...

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



...I did, however, attend one meeting with a Haitian representative interested in developing trade with Trinidad but the discussions were in English. I believe that there are many business opportunities to be had in the French Caribbean but this doesn't seem to be on the Ministry's radar at all at the moment. To keep the language alive in the workplace, I have to make a conscious effort myself by conversing with colleagues who wish to learn the language but my use of the language is not related to my work at the Ministry."

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



How can French facilitate economic development?
(1)

“In Trinidad and Tobago leaders are looking for ways for us to diversify our economy away from a heavy dependence on the oil and gas sector. If we really want to make our country viable for foreign investment or even as a contender in the tourist industry we should be working harder at making our country as multi-lingual as possible...

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



...Teaching French language skills and cultural knowledge gives us potential access to over 70 million people which greatly expands the market available to us and makes our small island nation more globally competitive. This in turn will lead to greater economic advancement and potentially a higher standard of living for our citizens."

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



French & Economic Development (2)

- The global economic downturn has led to countries being forced to seek new strategic alliances and partnerships. There is a greater thrust towards south-south cooperation and there is a great benefit to be derived in strengthening relations with the French-speaking Caribbean as well as France. Stronger diplomatic ties may result in exchange programmes between our countries and an increased access to superior-quality merchandise at more competitive rates.

Qualitative Findings *cont'd*



French & Economic Development (2)

- Learning about French business culture would make the business associate feel that there is an attempt to get to know them and their culture and they may be more inclined to do business with us. Increased access to business partners may also augur well for investment, and there would be a need for business professionals who are competent in various languages.

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



In your opinion why is there the need to develop your French skills?

“Learning a different language allows an individual to experience a new culture, make new friends and expand their business or employment opportunities. We live in a global village; barriers to movement are becoming more permeable...”

Qualitative findings *cont'd*



In your opinion why is there the need to develop your French skills?

...Now when I walk the streets of Port of Spain I can hear people interacting in non-English languages. If we invest the time in developing language skills, in this case French, we can improve our communication abilities which opens up doors of opportunities that we would never have been able to access without it."

Summary Conclusions



Based on the quantitative data gathered, it can be concluded that:

- An overwhelming majority of the participants who completed the survey (85%) are of the opinion that their French language skills are valuable in their careers.
- However, the above finding is supported by data from only four of the 18 who participated in the follow-up personal interviews.
- Overall, participants recognize the importance of French language and culture to them, although these are not appreciated in their workplaces.

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