

The DELF in Canada:

Stakeholder Perceptions

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Executive Summary

The *Diplôme d'études de langue française* (DELF) has recently gained attention in Canada for its potential as a national French-language proficiency test. There has been much anecdotal evidence about the benefits of the DELF; however, there is very little empirical evidence for the perceived incentives and real advantages of this test, nor any investigation of any potential barriers to participation and success of Canadian students.

This study documents the current state of affairs with regard to the DELF *Scolaire* in Canada by 1) gathering information about experiences with the DELF from students, teachers and parents from a number of school jurisdictions across Canada; 2) determining policy positions with regard to the DELF by university French departments; French-language universities and faculties; Ministries of Education in Canada; and, 3) discussing the implications of the findings for FSL proficiency testing in Canada.

Methodology

Students, parents and teachers in jurisdictions involved in the April 2012 sitting of the DELF were invited to participate, either by letter or e-mail. Those who accepted the invitation to participate were provided with an electronic link to the appropriate questionnaire. In the case of university French departments and ministries of education, appropriate contact people were identified and sent an e-mail invitation to participate, along with an electronic link to the appropriate questionnaire.

Student perceptions

A high percentage of the student respondents 1) judge the DELF to be a fair or very fair measure of FSL proficiency (over 94%); 2) report that the test has either some impact or a strong impact on their attitude to learning French (over 74%); and, 3) recommend the DELF test to other students (over 93%). Student comments mention not only the usual intrinsic motivators such as future job prospects, travel and reward; they also highlight motivators such as personal challenge and affirmation of their FSL proficiency against an external benchmark.

Students were also able to provide insight into some of the challenges of the DELF. Overall, they deemed reading and writing tasks to be the least difficult. Listening tasks were deemed to be most difficult. When asked about the degree to which classroom learning activities were similar to DELF tasks, the students rated reading and writing tasks to be most similar and listening as least similar. Approximately one-half of the respondents indicated some cultural interference, of which a large majority described this interference only as 'somewhat'. Students cited many strategies for overcoming any unknown references.

Teacher perceptions

Similar to the students, a very high percentage of the teacher respondents (over 93%) judge the DELF to be a fair and appropriate tool for measuring French-language proficiency, deem a DELF certificate to be helpful for future prospects and would recommend the DELF to their students.

Teachers also highlighted some challenges. They rated the DELF listening tasks as the most difficult compared to the other skill tasks which they rated about equal in difficulty. With regard to cultural references, a higher percentage of the teachers (compared to the students) indicated that these references may have interfered 'somewhat' with student success. Overall, teachers judge their classroom activities to be similar to the DELF tasks. Only listening activities are ranked as dissimilar at a noteworthy level.

Parent perceptions

An overwhelming 94.5% of the parent respondents recommended the DELF and many elaborated on their response with written comments. Parent comments reiterate many of the same benefits of an internationally-recognized test/diploma, as cited by the teachers and students. Some parents reported needing more information.

An important element of the parent questionnaire was to explore parent perspectives on the cost of the DELF and the relationship between DELF and provincial testing. On both counts, opinions appear to be mixed. Clearly, parents need more information on these questions before they can provide a more informed opinion.

University perceptions

The information provided by the university respondents showed that universities are just beginning to become aware of the DELF (and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and need more information on these tools and how to respond appropriately to students arriving at university with DELF certification.

Ministry of Education perceptions

The responses of the MOE representatives from the provinces/territories who completed the questionnaire indicate a divide between those jurisdictions that have taken a positive stance to the DELF and those who remain sceptical or resistant. The former group has decided to work with the DELF to certify student FSL proficiency using an internationally recognized benchmark, whereas the latter group is more focused on ensuring that provincial/territorial FSL outcomes have been met.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that the DELF holds a great deal of promise as an appropriate measure of FSL proficiency; however, there are some factors that will need attention in order for the DELF to realize that potential. The report concludes with a number of recommendations to advance use of the DELF as a national French-language proficiency test in Canada.

The *Diplôme d'études de langue française* (DELF) has recently gained attention in Canada for its potential as a national French-language proficiency test. In order to gain a better understanding of the test and its potential, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (CAIT) mandated a study of the perceptions of various stakeholders in Canada on the benefits and barriers to success of the DELF as a national proficiency test. This report offers a current understanding of the DELF in Canada by presenting and discussing the findings of this study and outlining recommendations on how to move forward.

1. Background on the DELF

1.1. The DELF test and diploma

The DELF is the official French-language diploma awarded by France's Ministry of National Education. The DELF is recognized in 165 countries around the world; that makes it valuable for certifying French-language proficiency on an international level. The French Ministry of National Education awards the DELF diploma on the basis of successful completion of the DELF test. Created in 1985, this diploma is under the pedagogical supervision of the *Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques de Sèvres* (CIEP) who administers the test each year for the Ministry of National Education.

The DELF tests the ability of students to use French in real-life situations. It assesses all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Although initially conceived for use in French second or foreign language contexts, the DELF is also increasingly used in France to assess and monitor the French-language development of immigrant children in the French school system (Mous, 2011).

Different versions of the DELF have been developed to meet a wide range of needs, such as different ages and different types of French-language learners around the world. The DELF *Tous Publics* and the DELF *Junior* target adults and adolescents respectively, who are learning French in language centres, such as an Alliance Française, for example. The DELF *Scolaire* is identical to the DELF *junior* except that it is administered in school settings, in partnership with local educational authorities. The DELF *Prim* targets young children and offers diplomas at beginner levels only. The template of the DELF tests is similar; however, the themes, documents and tasks of each test are appropriate to the age and life experience of the targeted language learner. The difference between the various versions of the DELF tests lies in the themes explored, documents chosen and types of tasks performed. For the very advanced levels, there is the *Diplôme approfondi de langue française* (DALF), which is mostly used in professional and advanced educational contexts. It is only available in a *Tous Publics* version.

DELF *Scolaire* testing is offered three times per year (November, April and June) at accredited centres around the world, of which there are currently 23 in Canada. Testing procedures are mandated in order to ensure security of the test and credibility of the diploma (e.g., a given version of the test at a specific time in a given country cannot be used again at a different time and place). Examiners and markers are trained by authorized instructors to ensure uniform standards of assessment around the world, based on evaluation grids that are congruent with the construct validity of the test (Riba & Mavel, 2008). The validity and reliability of test items are carefully monitored, ensuring that the DELF continues to be recognized by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE).

Based on successful test results, the French Ministry of National Education awards the DELF diploma. Each of the four language skills tested is worth 25 points, for a possible total of 100

points for each test. In order to succeed and obtain the diploma, students must obtain at least 50 points, with a minimum of 5/25 for each skill. The DELF test has different levels and, in contrast to another well-known proficiency test such as the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview),¹ students must decide beforehand (with or without the guidance of their instructor) the level they wish to challenge. Students may choose the entry level, but they do not have to start at the beginner level. They may continue to challenge higher levels when they feel ready to do so. Fees to write the DELF range from \$70 to \$130, depending on the level. The commission charged by the test producers (CIEP) amounts to 15% of the total fees, leaving 85% of the money within the local economy of the country where the test is written. DELF diplomas are valid for life.

1.2. DELF and the CEFR

In 2005, the DELF was restructured to align it more closely with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (COE, 2001). The CEFR defines language proficiency along six increasingly advanced global levels of language performance (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2), stated in terms of what the language learner ‘can do’ at each level. The CEFR was developed to provide a common basis for defining language proficiency among the member countries of the Council of Europe. Given the wide-based acceptance of the CEFR in Europe, the DELF diplomas were harmonized with the levels of the CEFR in 2005, including the addition of an A1 level test (Dupoux, 2004). The DELF tests language proficiency at the A and B levels and the DALF tests French-language proficiency at the C levels. The relationship between the six levels of the CEFR and the DELF/DALF diplomas is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship between CEFR proficiency levels and DELF/DALF diplomas

CEFR levels			DELF/DALF diplomas
A1	Basic user	Breakthrough	DELF A1
A2	Basic user	Waystage	DELF A2
B1	Independent user	Threshold	DELF B1
B2	Independent user	Vantage	DELF B2
C1	Proficient user	Effective operational	DALF C1
C2	Proficient user	Mastery	DALF C2

The DELF test, like the CEFR, is grounded in a communicative approach to language learning and use, more precisely defined by the CEFR as ‘une approche actionnelle.’ This ‘actional’ approach bases language teaching and use on tasks that language learners encounter in daily life, employment, or academic settings. It takes into account the full range of competencies (cognitive, psychological, and social) applied by learners in these contexts (Piccardo, et al., 2012).

1 The OPI, administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, establishes the level of language proficiency by ‘probing’ for and verifying a proficiency level according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (Liskin-Gasparro, 2003). In other words, instead of the student identifying a level to be challenged, the assessor determines the student’s current level of (oral) language proficiency.

Given this orientation, the DELF assesses authentic language use; that is, the exam places students in communicative situations that approximate real-life language use as much as possible. In order to assess comprehension, for example, students are required to listen to an answering machine message to find a precise piece of information, or read a number of short summaries in order to choose the best book, given certain criteria such as interests and age of the recipient. In order for students to demonstrate their ability to speak and interact with an interlocutor, they may be asked to do a role play (ask for something at a lost and found office, for example) or present and defend a point of view, based on an article they read. For oral production, students are also required to do an oral presentation (monologue), for example, describing which country one would like to visit and why. Finally, for written production, students may be asked to write a letter to an editor based on a newspaper article they read. In short, the DELF assesses the ability to use language in real-life contexts, for real-life purposes.

2. State of research on the DELF

2.1. Research on the DELF in Europe

A review of the current research literature in Europe reveals very little empirical research on the DELF test itself and its use with different language learner populations. On a broad scale, the extant literature appears to focus on the overall content of the *DELF* and its various forms, mostly in light of the modifications made to the test in 2005 to bring it in line with the CEFR (e.g., Jouette- Nagati, 2009; Riba, Lepage, Chevallier-Wixler, 2006) and its introduction into different European countries (e.g., Dupoux, 2004; Rönneper, 2008; Mistichelli & Salles, 2007). A closer examination of this literature reveals some themes worth highlighting: the motivational dimension of DELF diplomas, the washback effect of the test, and the cultural assumptions underlying the test.

A recurring theme in the literature is the capacity of a DELF diploma to enhance student motivation to continue language study. Although the evidence is only anecdotal, DELF diplomas appear to bolster self-confidence and foster a greater sense of accomplishment in students because their language achievement is certified by an external diploma that has international currency.

Given that a DELF diploma can be presented for purposes of employment or university studies in French, students are motivated to continue learning French, for example, in Germany (e.g., Rönneper, 2008), Sweden (Premat & Simon, 2010) and Italy (Mistichelli & Salles, 2007). Furthermore, Mistichelli and Salles (2007) suggest that increased visibility and transparency in testing and certification of language proficiency through external evaluation tools such as DELF further enhance student motivation. The certification of French-language proficiency by a DELF diploma was also noted by Mous (2011) as a motivating factor for immigrant students (and their families) in France.

The impact of the DELF on classroom teaching has also been noted (e.g., Jouette-Nagati, 2009; Premat & Simon, 2010; Riba & Mavel, 2008). This phenomenon, often referred to as washback, describes the impact of a test to affect the curriculum, teacher and learner actions and attitudes, resulting in behaviours that would not happen if it were not for the test (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Positive washback, for example, occurs when a test like the DELF, which requires students to perform real-life listening or speaking tasks, begins to shape classroom pedagogy and change learner attitudes to value practicing real-life language tasks in the classroom. This washback effect was also alluded to by Rönneper (2008), in a study of the impact of introducing the DELF and CEFR in Germany. He observed the following:

- speaking abilities were given greater prominence and developed more systematically; and,
- teachers introduced more stimulating authentic documents into their classrooms.

In short, implementation of the DELF in many European jurisdictions has compelled teachers to reorient and enrich their pedagogy.

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The DELF can also bring about change in attitudes to testing and diplomas, as pointed out by Premat & Simon (2010) in their case study of the DELF in Sweden. A growing acceptance of the CEFR in Europe and the concomitant need for certification for purposes of university study, via a DELF diploma, is even prompting countries like Sweden, with an overall non-testing culture, to make changes to classroom teaching.

The literature shows that the European experience with the DELF is very positive in general. There is some concern expressed with regard to cultural bias in the test. Sinitsa, Berzkina, and Breen (2010), for example, argue that the type of analytical reading and summarizing required to prepare for the oral presentation at advanced levels is biased against Russian students who generally prepare these types of tasks at home, write out the full text of their presentation and are permitted to read presentations.

In another study, Boubnova (2010) describes her work with CIEP to adapt the *All-Russian Olympiade in French* to conform more closely with the evaluation criteria of DELF. While this was done to strengthen one of the approved types of language certification in Russia, it demonstrates a growing desire to adapt locally approved assessment tools to a widely acknowledged European standard for certifying French-language proficiency.

Although DELF strives, in principle, to avoid cultural taboos in choice of task or document (Jouette-Nagati, 2009), sociocultural competence is not assessed due to the absence of appropriate tools (Riba & Mavel, 2008).

Finally, to ensure rigour of the DELF test, CIEP continues to evaluate test items to ensure their validity and reliability. A study by Riba and Mavel (2008), more empirical in nature, discusses some of the psychometrics of the DELF test items before approval for the item bank. This study explains the item analysis carried out to ensure a good fit with the construct underlying the test (internal reliability with cronbach alpha of at least .8) and the Rasch analysis used to determine the level of a test item and ensure a good fit with that level. The researchers also report on analyses with regard to content validity and any potential bias related to sex or item difficulty. Riba and Mavel (2008) conclude that reliability and validity of the test items are acceptable, but they suggest that further research is required on the face validity (the subjective judgment of the degree to which a test reflects what it is purported to assess) of the DELF with test takers and test administrators.

2.2. Research on DELF in Canada

Growing interest in a common national framework for describing and measuring language proficiency across Canada led to a concomitant search for a valid, reliable standardized test with international currency, such as the DELF. This development came in tandem with a greater interest in a national FSL proficiency test to track progress toward national policy goals, such as the commitment established in the Government of Canada's Action Plan to double the proportion of secondary school students graduating with a functional level of proficiency in their second official language by the year 2013 (PCO, 2003). Canadian Parents for French (CPF) has long advocated for national benchmarks and a national proficiency test. They argue that a national FSL proficiency test would do the following:

- 1) help parents and students make informed choices in FSL education decisions;
- 2) ensure that high school graduates are aware of their abilities in French and encourage them to pursue postsecondary studies in French;
- 3) help postsecondary institutions determine the appropriate placement of students in first-year French courses;
- 4) ensure that potential employers understand the French-language abilities of job candidates; and,
- 5) assist postsecondary institutions to determine which FSL programs might merit advanced standing in French studies (CPF, 2012).

At the same time, the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) was conducting a comprehensive review of its FSL programs. A renewal project was launched to increase student enrolments, achieve distinguished student results, increase student contact with Francophone communities, and form partnerships with agencies interested in improving the learning of French. With the dual goals of 1) aligning program objectives with provincial, national and international standards, and 2) demonstrating French-language proficiency outside of the classroom in real-life situations, the EPSB was the first Canadian school board to use the DELF *Scolaire* in Canada. In 2005, 89 students were awarded a DELF diploma.

Work on a proposal to adopt the CEFR as a framework of reference for languages in Canada (Vandergrift, 2006) added further momentum to examining the DELF as an external, objective tool for measuring and certifying French language proficiency. Given that the DELF is referenced against the CEFR, interest in this test and diploma has continued to grow across Canada. The number of participating school boards increases each year and the Ministry of Education in Nova Scotia has formally adopted the DELF as a provincial FSL proficiency test.

The success rate is very high: over 90% of the students who write the DELF test are successful at the level they choose to challenge.

The number of Canadian students awarded a DELF diploma increases each year. Whereas 89 diplomas were awarded in 2005, 2920 students received DELF diplomas in 2011 (Harlaux & Georges, 2012). As illustrated in Table 2, the number of diplomas awarded over the past three years continues to grow exponentially. The success rate is very high: over 90% of the students who write the DELF test are successful at the level they choose to challenge.

Table 2: Numbers of Canadian students who have written (W) and passed (P) the DELF *Scolaire* test from 2009 to 2011

	A1		A2		B1		B2		Total	
	W	P	W	P	W	P	W	P	W	P
2009	195	183	183	173	225	207	194	183	797	746 (93.6%)
2010	336	321	625	604	412	399	721	649	2094	1973 (94.2%)
2011	333	306	785	721	987	894	1074	999	3179	2920 (91.8%)
Total	864	810	1593	1498	1624	1500	1989	1831	5997	5496 (92.9%)

Very little has been written about the *DELF* in Canada. A special issue of *Le Journal de l'immersion* (ACPI, 2010) consists of mostly informative articles about the *DELF* for the journal's readership (e.g., Doell, 2010). This issue also reports on a small-scale trial of the *DELF* in British Columbia. A group of Grade 10 French immersion students succeeded in passing the B1 level with scores ranging from 67% to 83% (Tang, 2010). Test results confirmed that these students were performing at B1, the level targeted for Grade 10 French immersion. In the same issue, Logie (2010) reports that, of the more than 300 students in British Columbia who participated in *DELF* testing in 2010, almost all passed the level challenged, with an overall average of 75%. Levels challenged included A2, B1, and B2. Participants included students in French immersion (Grades 6 to 12) and core French (Grades 11 and 12), from six different school boards.

The most comprehensive studies on the *DELF* in Canada have been conducted by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) to determine the appropriateness of this test as a FLS proficiency measure. In the first study (OCDSB, 2010), 84 Grade 12 students were invited to take the *DELF* test and complete a questionnaire about their experience. These volunteers, assigned to a level based on their FSL program, included 18 core French students who challenged the A2 level, 22 extended French students who challenged the B1 level and 45 French immersion students who challenged the B2 level. All students were successful in obtaining the *DELF* level challenged and, furthermore, results from the questionnaires demonstrated that level of confidence correlated significantly with test scores. Thirteen examiners also completed questionnaires, commenting on the relationship between the *DELF* test tasks and their teaching strategies and tasks.

Overall, both students and examiners were positive about the test, although the examiners felt that the assigned level may have been too easy for some students. Examiners tended to rate *DELF* activities as more difficult than student ratings. Students, however, perceived listening activities to be much more difficult than the examiners did. Based on the results, the researchers observed that the students might benefit from more speaking and listening activities in class.

A follow-up study was conducted to determine if the 2010 study results could be more broadly generalized to the OCDSB FSL student population (OCDSB, 2011). In this study, a randomly selected group of Grade 12 FSL students were invited to participate. From the 228 returned consent forms, 171 students took the *DELF* (approximately 50% from French immersion and the other 50% almost equally divided between core and extended French). In this study, students chose the level of the *DELF* they wished to challenge and, as in the earlier study, completed a questionnaire on their experience. A total of 53 examiners also completed questionnaires. Results showed that 165 students (96.5%) were successful on the *DELF* test level chosen. Subsequent analyses determined that students who responded to the invitation to participate had significantly higher French achievement marks than those who chose not to respond to the invitation.

Many of the findings of the first study were confirmed in terms of attitudes to learning French, relationship between self-confidence and test scores, and perceived difficulty of *DELF* activities. Additional findings revealed that most students (94.7%) felt they had made the right choice with regard to level; two-thirds felt that taking the test had been a positive experience; and 93% of the students felt that a *DELF* diploma would help them in the future. In contrast to the first study, all examiners now felt that the *DELF* was a fair measure of Grade 12 French proficiency, likely

because the choice option had resulted in a better fit between actual student FSL proficiency and DELF level chosen. The researchers concluded that both studies provide convincing evidence for the DELF as a suitable French language proficiency test for OCDSB Grade 12 students.

A third study, building on changes implemented as a result of the earlier studies, was carried out in April 2012. Goals of this phase of DELF research included an examination of 1) growing student interest in the DELF; 2) how to encourage and facilitate the inclusion of a greater number of students; and, 3) the degree to which methodological changes are feasible, sustainable, and warranted for future implementations of the DELF in OCDSB schools (S. Pagan, personal communication, June 22, 2012). Results are not yet available to the public.

Finally, in an effort to determine perceptions of provincial Ministries of Education, Manuard, Chelali, Bergeron and Lazaruk (2011) conducted an informal inquiry into provincial policy positions with regard to DELF as an internationally recognized standard for FSL proficiency in Canada. The written responses or reports by Ministries of Education across the country are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: Summary of provincial government policy positions with regard to the DELF test as an internationally recognized standard for FSL proficiency in Canada

Prov/Region	Policy position
BC	Students who successfully complete DELF can obtain provincial high school credits ^a
AB	School jurisdictions have the freedom to make choices with regard to assessment of student language learning
SK	No commitment to official recognition of DELF
MB	No plans to formally implement DELF
ON	Administration of DELF is a board decision
QC	Preference to develop and use assessment tools that reflect French language and culture in Québec
Atlantic provinces	-Nova Scotia has an official provincial DELF-DALF examination centre; -Prince Edward Island has initiated a DELF pilot project; -Atlantic Canadian students who are successful in receiving a DELF diploma will receive '... provincial, regional, national and international recognition for their language competencies' (Manuard, et al., 2011, p. 4) ^b

^a Not clear whether this is in lieu of taking FSL courses, how many credits can be obtained and at which high school level(s);

^b Not clear how this will happen at provincial, regional and national levels.

Although this inquiry was informal, the findings show that current policy positions across Canada with regard to the DELF are varied.

3. The current study

3.1. Motivation for the study

The need for a common evaluation tool for FSL proficiency in Canada and the monumental task of creating a separate Canadian tool led CAIT to propose a closer examination of the *DELF Scolaire* as a potential national FSL proficiency measure. There has been much anecdotal evidence over the past few years (see, for example, ACPI [2010]) about the benefits of the DELF, its impact on student motivation, and consequent changes in attitudes to and retention of students in FSL programs. However, there is very little empirical evidence for the perceived incentives and real advantages of the *DELF* as a national FSL proficiency test. Neither has there been any investigation of any potential barriers to participation and success of Canadian students in DELF testing.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to document, in more concrete terms, the current state of affairs with regard to the *DELF Scolaire* in Canada.² More specifically, the goals are threefold:

- 1) to gather information about experiences with the DELF from students, teachers and parents in various school jurisdictions across Canada;
- 2) to determine policy positions with regard to the DELF by potential stakeholders such as university French departments; French-language universities and faculties; Ministries of Education in Canada; and,
- 3) to provide a state-of-the-art understanding of the *DELF Scolaire* in Canada that synthesizes the current literature, presents and reflects on the empirical evidence gathered, and discusses implications of the findings for FSL proficiency testing in Canada.

The need for a common evaluation tool for FSL proficiency in Canada and the monumental task of creating a separate Canadian tool led CAIT to propose a closer examination of the *DELF Scolaire* as a potential national FSL proficiency measure.

3.2. Methodology

The methodology comprised five steps: 1) a survey of extant literature on the DELF in Europe and in Canada; 2) designing questionnaires for parents, teachers and students; 3) requesting ethical approval and consent from participating school boards for permission to solicit participation by parents, students and teachers; 4) designing questionnaires for universities and ministries of education regarding policy positions related to DELF; 5) piloting, revision and administration of the questionnaires; and, finally, 6) analysis of questionnaire responses.

A search for relevant literature was conducted through a key word search of the most relevant data banks (e.g., Psych Info, Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts) using the key words *DELF* and *DALF*. CIEP staff (e.g., Sylvie Lepage, Bruno Mègre) and Canadian school boards

² This study was limited to the impact of the *DELF Scolaire* since the focus is on the use of DELF in school contexts.

who have worked with DELF were also consulted for any unpublished research reports available to the public.

Questionnaires were designed based on themes of interest pertinent to the different research populations: students, parents, and teachers. These themes include: perceptions of test difficulty, usefulness of the test/diploma, impact on teaching, relationship to school curriculum, test preparation and choice of level. Questionnaires designed for universities and ministries of education focused on policy questions related to acknowledgement and use of DELF accreditation and testing. The questionnaires were reviewed by knowledgeable colleagues to ensure question completeness, efficiency and relevance to study objectives.

All draft questionnaires were posted on Survey Monkey and piloted for purposes of clarity and technical functionality with selected members of the target population. Each questionnaire was revised, based on pertinent feedback. All questionnaires, except for the parent and student questionnaire, were available in English and in French. Respondents could choose their preferred language in the opening window of the questionnaire.

Research ethics application forms were completed for all pertinent school boards in order to obtain informed consent from students, parents and teachers to participate in the study. Letters of invitation and consent forms were tailored to the specific requirements of each board.

Students, parents and teachers were invited to participate, either by letter or e-mail. Those who accepted the invitation to participate were provided with an electronic link to the appropriate questionnaire. In the case of universities and ministries of education, appropriate contact people were identified and sent an e-mail invitation to participate, along with an electronic link to the appropriate questionnaire. A consent form was posted in the opening window of each questionnaire. All links were activated for data collection at the beginning of the April 2012 DELF testing session and closed at the end of May 2012.

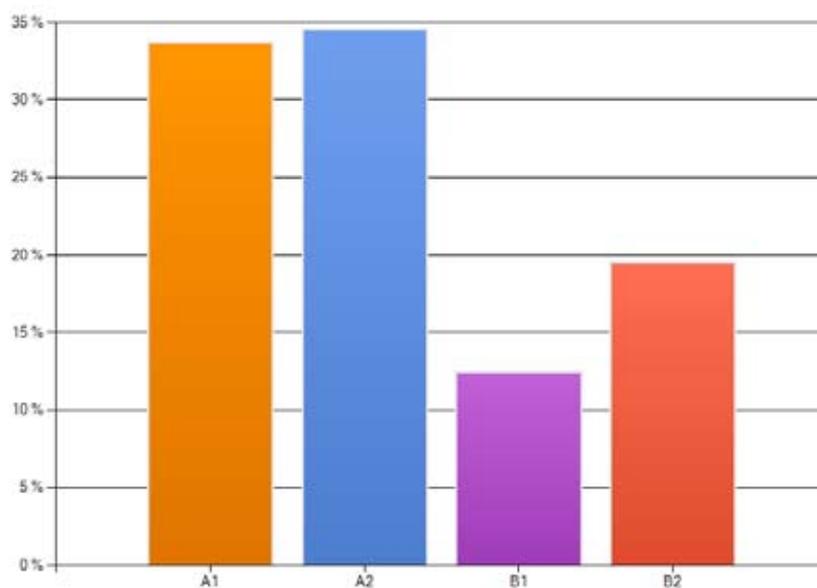
4. Findings

This section will report the findings from the data provided by the different participant groups: students, teachers, parents, universities and provincial/territorial ministries of education. Results will be reported in percentages and elucidated by participant comments when pertinent.

4.1. Student perceptions of the DELF

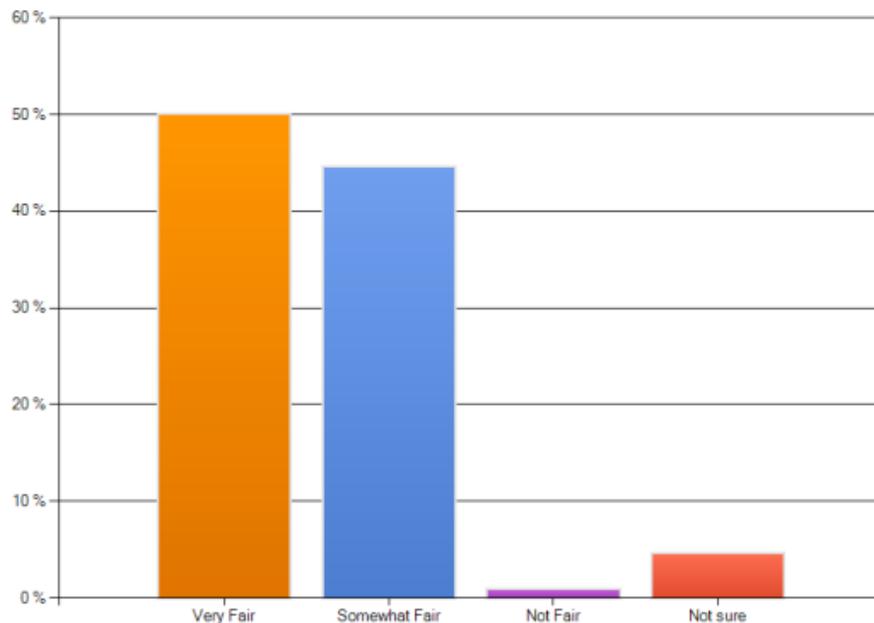
A total of 117 students completed the questionnaire. Of these students, most (47.8%) were enrolled in French immersion programs. Another 41.6% indicated that they were enrolled in a core French program and 4.4% indicated extended French. With regard to language spoken at home, 70.8% reported that they spoke English, 12.4% spoke French or a combination of French and English and, finally, 16.8% reported speaking another language.

Figure 1: Number of student participants by level of DELF taken



As can be seen in Figure 1, most of the participating students reported writing the A-level tests: 33.6% wrote A1 and 34.5% wrote A2. As for the B levels, 12.4% of the total number of respondents reported writing B1 and 19.5% wrote B2. Overall, students appeared to be confident about their success on the test: 34.5% indicated that they felt very confident and 58.2% confident. Only four students reported that they were not confident about their success, and four others were not sure. For most of the student respondents (70.6%) this was the first time they wrote a DELF test; the remainder had written an earlier level of the test.

Based on their experience, respondents believe that the DELF test is a fair measure of French-language proficiency. As illustrated in Figure 2, 50% deemed the test to be very fair, 44.5% considered the test to be fair. Only one student suggested that the test was unfair and five others were unsure.

Figure 2: Student perceptions of the DELF as a fair measure of French-language proficiency

4.1.1. Difficulty of the DELF

Student responses revealed an interesting pattern with regard to the difficulty level of the different activities in the test (Table 4). Overall, students deem speaking and listening to be the most difficult components of the test. In total, 60.9% of students indicated that speaking activities were either very difficult or difficult, whereas 59.1% of the students judged listening activities to be either difficult or very difficult. On the other hand, 68.2% reported that reading activities were not difficult and 70.9% found writing activities to be not difficult.

Of the students who had written a lower level of the DELF, 54.8% judged the levels of the test to be equally challenging, 21.4% did not agree and 23.8% were uncertain. The following comments give some insight into perceptions by students of increasing challenge:

- ♦ 'The level of difficulty increases as you progress through the tests. There was more on argumentation and explanation on the B2 than on the B1. There was less time to write the answers to the listening activities, which increased the difficulty as well. They are all challenging, but someone could not do all of the exams and find them all equally challenging as the level of difficulty increases'
- ♦ 'my first DELF test was quite easy and then got more and more challenging through the years. i believe ive done it three times (?) and in grade three i had no trouble at all but this year it was hard for me to comprehend many things. although i did fantastic on the DELF test, ...but please dont change! a challenge is good!

Table 4: Student perceptions of level of difficulty of DELF tasks

Activity	Very difficult	Difficult	Not difficult
Listening	23.6%	35.5%	40.9%
Speaking	10.9%	50.0%	39.1%
Reading	1.8%	30.0%	68.2%
Writing	3.6%	25.5%	70.9%

4.1.2. Relationship of the DELF to classroom learning

Students were also asked to assess the degree to which the DELF tasks were similar to the learning activities they experience in their FSL classes. As can be seen in Table 5, students judged their classroom reading and writing activities to be most similar to the DELF tasks. In fact, 49.5% of the students reported that reading activities were very similar and 40.4% similar. With regard to writing, 55.6% of the responding students indicated that classroom activities were very similar to DELF writing tasks and 34.3% reported they were similar. The DELF reading and writing tasks, deemed to be easier than the speaking and listening tasks, were also rated as more similar to regular French classroom learning activities.

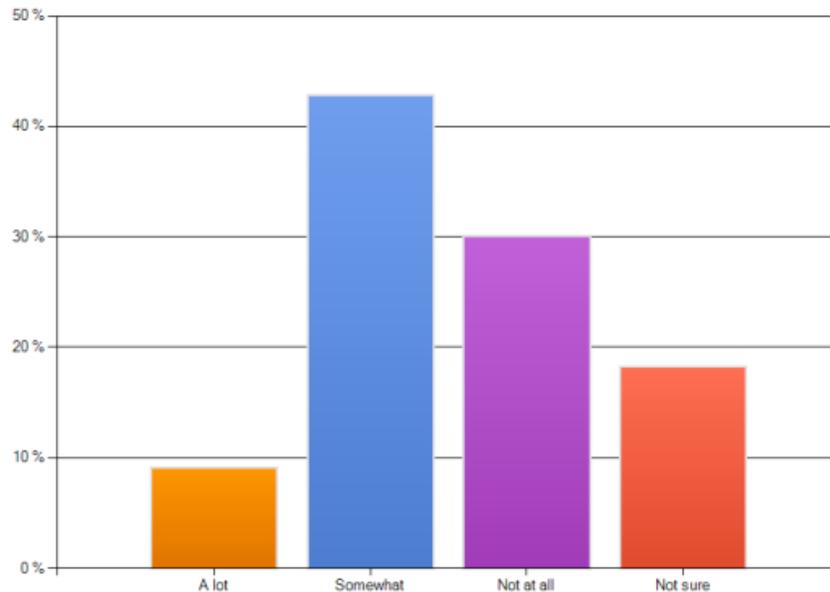
The congruence between classroom activities and the DELF tasks for listening and speaking was not as strong. With regard to listening, 42.2% of the students indicated that learning activities were similar and 36.7% indicated that these were very similar. As for speaking, 45% of the respondents stated that learning activities were similar and 36.7% indicated that these were very similar. These results echo student perceptions of the difficulty of DELF activities.

Table 5: Student perceptions of similarity between classroom learning activities and DELF tasks

Activity	Very similar	Similar	Not similar
Listening	36.7%	42.2%	21.1%
Speaking	36.7%	45.0%	10.1%
Reading	49.5%	40.4%	10.1%
Writing	55.6%	34.3%	10.2%

4.1.3. Cultural references in the DELF

The DELF is often criticized for a Eurocentric orientation that may make it unsuitable for the Canadian context. It is argued that success rates may be compromised because Canadian students do not have the cultural knowledge to understand some of the oral and written texts. In order to test this claim, students were asked to specify the degree to which they perceived that any unfamiliar cultural references may have interfered with their success. As can be seen in Figure 3, only 9.1% of respondents judged that these references interfered a lot and 42.7% judged that such references may have interfered somewhat with their success. 30% thought that cultural references did not interfere at all and 18.2% of respondents were uncertain.

Figure 3: Student perceptions of impact of any unfamiliar cultural references on their success

Students were asked, in an open-ended question, how they overcame the difficulty of unknown cultural references. An analysis of the responses revealed an overwhelming reference to unknown words (which may or may not have been cultural); however, there were occasional references to accent and speed of delivery. Students described a number of strategies which can be broadly grouped under categories such as inferencing, interactive listening, and word analysis. Almost all students described some form of inferencing, as illustrated in the following sample descriptions:

- 'I try to relate it to something we know here and then use that reference in the context of the story'
- 'Used background knowledge and known words to figure out or guess the word'
'relate it to my culture'
- 'I tried to imagine myself living in France and thought about what I would do in that situation'
- 'I tried to focusing on the main ideas and really understand the questions being asked and tried to ignore the cities or customs they were talking about that I was not familiar with'

For the oral interview, some students also described well-known interactive listening strategies such as confirmation checks and requests for further clarification, illustrated in the following comments:

- 'I asked to repeat the phrase or question in a different way'
- 'I had to ask to have things simplified'
- 'I asked for another sentence or another word/phrase'

Other respondents described word analysis strategies, likely used in reading where they had the luxury of time to do so:

- 'guessed or reasoned by breaking down the phrase'
- 'take part of the word to guess at its meaning'
- 'I would think of if this word is similar to any French words I know'

Many students also mentioned 'ignoring' or 'skipping' unknown words, ostensibly to focus on what they understood and not get sidetracked.

4.1.4. Motivation for writing the DELF

Respondents were also asked about motivation for taking the DELF and any guidance they were given. When asked who recommended they take the DELF (multiple responses allowed), 91.3% mentioned their French teacher, 12.8% mentioned friends or classmates and 23.3% mentioned family members.

As to their motivations for taking the DELF test, students mentioned the following (multiple responses possible):

- Teacher guidance (55.2%)
- Pressure from family or friends (10.5%)
- Future career advancement (52.4%)
- Post-secondary studies (25.7%)
- Opportunities for meaningful contact with French speakers (26.7%)
- Certification of language proficiency (56.2%)

When asked about guidance in choosing the appropriate level of the DELF test to write, 34.3% of the students indicated that they received no guidance. Of those who reported receiving guidance, 92.8% mentioned their French teacher. In the end, 78.3% of the respondents felt they had made the right choice on level but 16% were unsure.

4.1.5. Preparation for the DELF

Students were also asked a number of questions pertaining to preparation for the DELF test. A large majority (84.1%) of the respondents indicated that they had prepared for the test. They reported the following people as instrumental in helping them (multiple responses possible):

- Myself (58.7%)
- Tutor or other teachers (13%)
- French teacher at school (84.8%)
- Friends or classmates (34.8%)
- Family members (15.2%)

With regard to materials used for preparation, students reported the following (multiple responses possible):

- DELF website (28.3%)
- Other media (radio, television) (18.5%)
- Other on-line resources (16.3%)
- Books/dictionaries from classroom (37%)
- Resources provided by French teacher (84.8%)

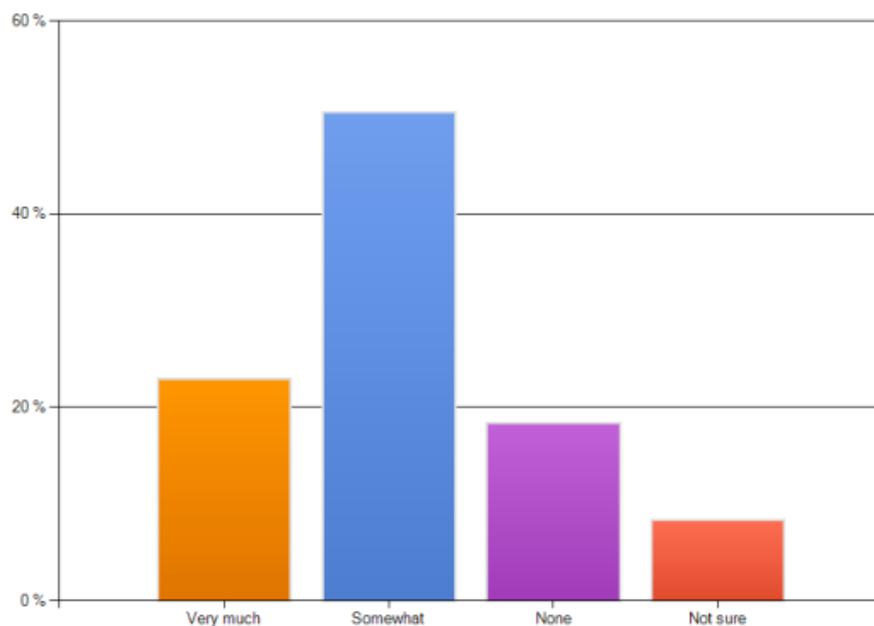
When asked to suggest specific materials, activities or strategies that would be effective for test preparation in the future, students mentioned practice tests; previous DELF tests; teacher worksheets; speaking activities; and, listening to radio, television and movies, as illustrated in the following sample comments:

- ♦ 'Learn new vocabulary words and speak in French with friends and teachers nonstop to get the hang of speaking fluently with no English words'
- ♦ 'practice tests provided by the teacher at school'
- ♦ 'Use resources that the teacher provided for you'
- ♦ 'The listening portion I found to be extremely difficult so I encourage students to listen to the french radio, watch french television or movies, etc.'
- ♦ 'Becoming familiar with the test format and practicing the activities is an excellent and effective method of preparation'
- ♦ 'By practicing listening to the radio and writing down key points for the listening activities. By practicing taking a strong point of view for the speaking activities.'
- ♦ 'listening to other students and then explaining what you understood back to them, reading comprehension of short stories, and writing essays'
- ♦ 'Recordings similar to those on the test in the weird accents that you never hear in Canada'

4.1.6. DELF and learning French

Finally, students were asked to comment on the DELF and its relationship to their learning French. As illustrated in Figure 4, 22.9% replied that the DELF had a strong impact on their attitude to learning French; 50.5% indicated some impact, 18.3% indicated no impact; and 8.3% were not sure of the impact of the DELF.

Figure 4: Student perceptions of the impact of DELF on attitude to learning French



An overwhelming 93.1% of the respondents recommended that students take this proficiency test. In addition to the often cited themes of future career opportunities (e.g., ‘it will help you in the future’) and certification (e.g., ‘the student gets a certificate’), students also made reference to personal challenge and affirmation of their abilities in French. The following comments testify to the personal challenge that the DELF presents to students:

- ‘It is a great opportunity to challenge yourself and experience something different’
- ‘I think that it’s a good way to challenge yourself, and it made me more confident in the French language’
- ‘It is a great way to assess what you have learned and proceed further into the French language to extend your skills’
- ‘I was stressed at first, but it was actually comforting and makes me feel proud of myself that I could accomplish an exam like that :)’

Many students also mentioned that a test such as the DELF affirms their growing proficiency in French, using a measurement tool different from regular classroom evaluation

Many students also mentioned that a test such as the DELF affirms their growing proficiency in French, using a measurement tool different from regular classroom evaluation:

- ‘it is a good marker to see your level of French, and a way to compare yourselves to a certain standard’
- ‘Taking a test not given by your teacher is a great way to see how well you’re doing in the course and it’s a great confidence booster...’
- ‘It provides an indication of French proficiency and encourages students to improve in areas where they struggle’

Many of the themes mentioned above can be summarized in the following student comment:

- ‘It is a really good test and makes you feel better about your French! It looks great when you are trying for a job... and really good bump up for future options. It really opens the door to new opportunities and doesn’t require much effort at all!’

4.1.7. Summary discussion of student perceptions of the DELF

Overall, student perceptions of the DELF are exceedingly positive. A high percentage of the respondents 1) judge the test to be a fair or very fair measure of FSL proficiency (over 94%); 2) report that the test has either some or a strong impact on their attitude to learning French (over 74%); and, 3) recommend the DELF test to other students (over 93%). This is a very positive endorsement. These findings corroborate those of the OCDSB studies. Not only do students cite the usual intrinsic motivators such as future job prospects, travel and reward (certificate), they also highlight motivators such as personal challenge and affirmation of their FSL proficiency against an external benchmark.

Students were also able to provide insight into some of the challenges of the DELF. Overall, they deemed reading and writing tasks to be the least difficult. Listening tasks were deemed to be most difficult; however, a *post hoc* more detailed analysis of these results showed that 62% of the respondents who judged listening to be very difficult were from B2 level, suggesting that the perceptions of this group may account for the finding that listening is most difficult. This same response pattern of difficulty of DELF tasks emerged in the OCDSB studies, although the OCDSB students tended to rank speaking activities as more difficult than the students in the current study.

When asked about the degree to which classroom learning activities were similar to DELF tasks, the students rated reading and writing tasks to be most similar and listening as least similar. Once again, the patterns of response closely resemble those of the OCDSB studies, particularly those for listening. It is noteworthy that the response pattern of perceived difficulty of DELF tasks parallels the response pattern of perceived similarity between DELF tasks and classroom learning activities: the greater the perceived difficulty level, the greater the divergence between DELF tasks and classroom learning activities.

The findings also provide insight into the perceived interference of any unknown cultural references. Approximately one-half of the respondents indicated some interference, of which a large majority described this inference only as 'somewhat.' Students cited many strategies for overcoming any unknown references; however, it is not clear whether unknown words to which students referred did indeed have a different cultural connotation. These may simply have been unfamiliar words. Furthermore, although students described widely-used strategies, we cannot claim that any cultural references did or did not interfere with student success. However, these responses do provide further insight into student perceptions of any cultural references and how students cope with them.

Based on student responses regarding guidance on writing the DELF and preparation for the test, it is clear that teachers play a huge role in consciousness-raising about the test and student success. We now turn to an analysis of the teacher perceptions of the DELF.

4.2. Teacher perceptions of the DELF

The vast majority of the teacher respondents consider the DELF to be a fair measure of student French proficiency

A total of 32 teachers chose to participate. Most participants reported teaching in French immersion programs (46.9%) with the remainder teaching in core French (25%), extended French (3.1%) or a combination of programs (21.9%). One respondent taught at a francophone school. Most respondents reported teaching at the senior high school level (60%), whereas 20% taught at a primary or middle school, 13.3% at the junior high level and 6.7% reported teaching at combined levels. When asked about their familiarity with the DELF, most respondents indicated that they were either correctors (54.8%) or trainers (12.9%). The remaining respondents considered themselves to be quite knowledgeable (29%) or having some knowledge of the DELF (3.3%).

4.2.1. Difficulty of the DELF

The vast majority of the teacher respondents consider the DELF to be a fair measure of student French proficiency: 64.5% judge it to be very fair and 29% judge it to be fair. The remaining 6.5% were uncertain. When asked if they considered all levels of the DELF to be equally difficult, 64.5% of these teachers agreed and the remainder either disagreed (25.8%) or were uncertain (9.7%). Of those who chose to comment, some suggested a notable increase in difficulty from A2 to B1 ('le niveau de difficulté d'un A2 à un B1 est assez important'). On the other hand, others suggested that the perceived increase in difficulty simply reflected the increased language knowledge required to meet the standard of the higher levels:

- 'le niveau B2 se doit d'être plus difficile car il exige une connaissance plus approfondie de la structure langagière. Toutefois je crois que chaque niveau représente un défi juste'
- 'c'est sûr que le test aux niveaux plus élevés sont plus exigeants à cause du niveau de français qu'ont les élèves'
- 'il y a des critères assez clairs pour chaque niveau. Les tâches que les élèves devront faire changent selon le niveau que l'élève choisit de faire'

'It gives me an idea of where my students should be, gives me some very concrete models of performance for each level.'

Similar to the student respondents, teachers were also asked to rate the difficulty level of the different DELF tasks. As can be seen in Table 6 below, teachers judged the listening tasks to be the most difficult, 36.7% of them rating these activities as very difficult and another 56.7% rating them as difficult. As for the speaking tasks, a total of 53.3% of the respondents rated these activities to be either difficult or very difficult, whereas 46.7% ranked speaking tasks as not difficult. Reading tasks were ranked very similarly to speaking tasks with most teachers (50%) ranking them as difficult and 46.7% ranking reading tasks as not difficult. Writing tasks were judged to be the least difficult with over one half of the respondents (53.3%) ranking these activities not difficult, 36.7% ranking writing tasks as difficult and 10% ranking them as very difficult.

Table 6: Teacher perceptions of level of difficulty of DELF tasks

Activity	Very Difficult	Difficult	Not difficult
Listening	36.7%	56.7%	6.6%
Speaking	10.0%	43.3%	46.7%
Reading	3.3%	50.0%	46.7%
Writing	10.0%	36.7%	53.3%

4.2.2. Relationship of DELF to teaching

Teacher responses indicate a fairly high congruence between the type of DELF tasks and learning activities in their classroom. Reading and writing tasks were rated as being more similar than listening and speaking activities. Table 7 shows that, for reading, 60% of respondents judged class reading activities to be very similar to DELF tasks and 36.7% judged them to be similar. As for writing, 56.7% indicated that class activities were very similar to DELF writing tasks and 33.3% indicated that these were similar. On the other hand, a smaller proportion of the respondents rated their class listening (30%) and speaking (33.3%) activities as very similar to DELF listening and speaking tasks. A remaining 50% judged their listening activities to be similar and 20% judged them to be not similar to DELF tasks. With regard to speaking, 53.4% of the teachers rated their class activities to be similar and 13.3% judged them to be not similar to DELF speaking tasks.

Table 7: Teacher perceptions of similarity between classroom learning activities and DELF tasks

Activity	Very similar	Similar	Not similar
Listening	30.0%	50.0 %	20.0%
Speaking	33.3%	53.4%	13.3%
Reading	60.0%	36.7%	3.3%
Writing	56.7%	33.3%	10.0%

Additional comments by the teacher respondents suggest that the DELF may have had an impact on their teaching:

- 'Ma compréhension du DELF et le concept du CECR m'ont fait changer mes méthodes d'enseignements qui sont maintenant beaucoup plus interactives, orales, incluent de la pensée critique et de l'instruction différenciée'
- 'Je fais maintenant plus de compréhension de l'orale'

Teachers were also asked about the relationship of external evaluation tools to regular classroom assessment of student performance. Responses to this open-ended question indicate the following:

1) a change in classroom assessment practice:

- 'J'ai changé mes évaluations pour la plupart - mes évaluations sont plus communicatives et invitent les élèves à penser de façon critique. Donc maintenant il y a plus un rapprochement que il y a 2 ans'
- 'I believe that the DELF adds that little extra bit of "pressure" on the students in a positive way. They begin to realize that they do need to be accurate, and put effort into their work, in order to be well understood in a real life situation. I have started to base my evaluation less and less on very specific grammatical rules, and more to broad contextual evaluations, with a grammatical component.'

2) the need to continue to work with provincial/territorial learning outcomes to demonstrate progress within the context of a particular FLS course:

- 'Les tests de classe sont alignés aux RAS établis par le ministère d'évaluation, et les élèves sont évalués après une pratique assez rigoureuse des objectifs. Le test DELF cherche à quantifier la connaissance de l'élève tandis que les tests de classe permettent aussi de suivre le progrès. (malgré que de prendre toute la série de tests DELF arrive à un but semblable)'

3) the usefulness of external benchmarks:

- 'It gives me an idea of where my students should be, gives me some very concrete models of performance for each level.'
- 'Useful in order to provide insight/ compare results across the stream of FSL education'

When asked about how often students should take a DELF test, most teachers (63.3%) indicated that students should take the test at each level, when they are ready. The remaining 33.3% indicated that students should only take the test as an exit exam (at the end of high school, for example) as an attestation of FSL proficiency attained. One person replied 'never.'

4.2.3. Cultural references and the DELF

In all, 86.7% of the teacher respondents judged the DELF to be an appropriate tool for assessing French language proficiency and the remaining 13.3% were not sure. When asked to rate the degree to which unfamiliar cultural references might interfere with student success, 65.4% of the respondents indicated 'somewhat,' 15.4% indicated 'a lot' and 19.2% indicated 'not at all.' The following comment may be representative of those teachers who like the DELF, but express some concern about its appropriacy for the Canadian context:

- 'Oui pour la plupart. Le seul problème est le côté euro centrique du test qui est un aspect que je ne trouve pas juste pour nos canadiens qui eux doivent communiquer et vivre dans un monde bilingue dans lequel le français n'est pas comme le français de France.'

Nevertheless, 96.6% of the responding teachers recommend that students take the DELF test. The justification for their recommendation echoes many of the often-cited benefits of a DELF diploma (increased opportunities, personal accomplishment, external validation of proficiency attained, international certification in an increasingly globalized world):

- ‘Because the DELF is widely accepted in Europe, students will have access to greater opportunity to educational/ professional opportunities’
- Because they get a sense of accomplishment. It is also a way to prove to them that they know a lot more than they think they know. The students are always telling me that they feel as though they do not know any French’
- Le test de compétence DELF indique aux parents que leurs enfants pourront se débrouiller rapidement dans un contexte autre que canadien. Cela rassure les parents qui depuis la maternelle ont misé sur l’apprentissage du français pour leurs enfants. Malheureusement, il y a peu d’institutions post-secondaires au Canada qui reconnaissent le DELF. Mais personne ne peut prédire l’avenir et un certificat DELF dans son portfolio pourrait donner un avantage au possesseur’
- ‘Je trouve que la globalisation l’impose déjà. S’obstiner c’est de manquer les chances ailleurs. C’est l’avenir de nos jeunes - ils doivent s’adapter et être capables à la concurrence’

The value of the oral interview was often mentioned as well:

- ‘Parce que je trouve l’entrevue orale est utile pour plusieurs raisons. Non, seulement pour communiquer en français, mais aussi pour passer l’expérience d’une entrevue. Pour les élèves qui n’ont jamais passé une entrevue afin de décrocher un emploi ceci est semblable. Aussi j’aime le fait que les résultats sont internationaux’

A number of teachers mentioned using the DELF as an exit exam only (‘But only at the end of High School to have proof of their language proficiency’).

Finally, with regard to the usefulness of DELF certification, 46.7% of the teacher respondents judged a DELF certificate to be very helpful and an identical percentage of respondents judged it to be helpful.

4.2.4. Preparation for the DELF

When asked to indicate the best resources to help students prepare for the DELF test, teachers mentioned the following (number of times each resource was mentioned):

- DELF website (22)
- Other media (radio, television) (16)
- Other on-line resources (22)
- Books/dictionaries from classroom (12)
- Resources provided by French teacher (19)
- Family members or friends (6)

The following comment was insightful with regard to use of previous DELF tests as a useful resource:

- ‘Practice DELF tests would be useful, just as if they were writing a provincial test. Students need to be comfortable with the format of the test as well. It would also be beneficial if the teachers could see the tests AFTER they have been completed. Otherwise, we are left in the dark. More knowledge helps teachers to better prepare their students’

4.2.5. DELF and CEFR

With regard to incorporation of the CEFR into their provincial curriculum, 76.7% of the teacher respondents would like to see this happen. The remainder either disagreed (6.6%) or were not adequately familiar with the CEFR to offer an informed opinion (16.7%).

4.2.6. Administration and marking of the DELF

Of the total number of teacher respondents, 23 indicated that they were either trainers or correctors; they are, in other words, a group highly familiar with the DELF test and its administration. This group was asked to respond to a number of questions pertaining to administration, marking and training.

When asked about the administration of the oral and written parts of the test, 56.5% of the respondents perceived it to be 'easy,' 26.1% to be manageable and 13% to be problematic. One respondent was uncertain. The few comments related to this question spoke mostly to how much the positive impact of the DELF made the effort worthwhile, even though it required a huge time commitment from the administrators. Comments that gave any insight into the problematic nature of the test referred to time away from class and travel.

Overall, the marking component of the DELF is perceived as being either easy (30.4%) or manageable (43.5%). Only 17.4% of the respondents deemed this to be problematic and 8.7% were not sure. Additional comments referred mostly to the time required to arrive at consensus (inter-rater reliability) and the importance of that process.

With regard to the training process, most respondents deemed this to be either helpful (34.8%) or adequate (47.8%). Only two respondents (8.7%) felt the training process to be inadequate and two others were not sure. Comments referred to the need for a quick refresher session before the correction process begins.

Almost all respondents deemed the quality control of the DELF training and administration to be satisfactory; 43.5% suggested it was strong and 52.2% suggested that it was adequate.

4.2.7. Additional teacher comments

Additional teacher comments reiterated much of what was stated earlier. The following sample comments reflect some of the themes: positive impact, potential cultural bias, efficiency in marking and need for greater access to more practice tests:

- 'Outil de motivation extraordinaire pour les élèves et ce fut un déclencheur important pour une réflexion des pratiques en FLS chez nous'
- 'J'aimerais voir dans le matériel de préparation des thèmes, idées ou contenu pour la jeunesse en tant que telle, autrement dit, que les textes ou documents soient plus en ligne avec l'aspect "universel" des expériences jeunesse; e.g.: éliminer les références à la politique française même en ce qui a trait à l'éducation; comparer les jeunes africaine, canadienne, belge ou française dans vos documents; employer des termes universellement compris...'
- 'The marking process needs to change to be more efficient. The bigger the DELF gets the better the organization needs to be'
- 'it would be helpful to have greater access to practice tests (I have found some online however) and it would also be helpful to have multiple examples of the oral assessment in video form'

4.2.8. Summary discussion of teacher perceptions of the DELF

The teacher participants, most of whom are highly knowledgeable about the DELF, were overwhelmingly positive about this test. Similar to the students, a very high percentage of the teachers judge the DELF to be a fair and appropriate tool for measuring French-language proficiency, deem a DELF certificate to be helpful and would recommend the DELF to their students. This very positive endorsement of the DELF is also consistent with the OCDSB teacher findings.

Teachers also highlighted some challenges. They rated the DELF listening tasks as the most difficult compared to the other skill tasks which they rated about equal in difficulty.

Teachers also highlighted some challenges. They rated the DELF listening tasks as the most difficult compared to the other skill tasks which they rated about equal in difficulty. This pattern of findings echoes the pattern of student perceptions. Compared to the perceptions of the OCDSB teachers, the teachers in the present study tended to rate the DELF tasks overall as less difficult. With regard to their perception of the impact of any cultural references, a higher percentage of the teachers in the present study (compared to the students) indicated that these references may have interfered 'somewhat' with student success. Indeed, teachers are more likely than students to identify any unfamiliar cultural references that may be problematic.

Overall, teachers judge their classroom learning activities to be similar to the DELF tasks. Only listening activities are ranked as dissimilar at a noteworthy level. Responses by the OCDSB teachers regarding similarity of teaching activities to DELF tasks tended to be ranked lower overall, particularly for speaking activities. DELF reading and writing tasks in the present study were deemed to be most similar to classroom activities related to these two skills. Based on these findings, it appears that classroom listening and speaking activities may need to change somewhat to align them better with the types of tasks found in the DELF test, an observation also made in the OCDSB studies.

On the whole, the administration, training, marking and quality control of the DELF are deemed to be satisfactory, with only a few respondents citing some problems.

4.3. Parent perceptions of the DELF

A total of 85 parents completed the questionnaire. Parental responses indicate that 68.8% of their children were enrolled in French immersion, 14.3% in core French and 6.9% in extended French. 2.5% of the students were enrolled in a francophone school and 7.5% of the parents were unsure of the program in which their children were enrolled. With regard to familiarity with the DELF, 13.9% of respondents reported that they were very familiar with the DELF, 58.4% were somewhat familiar and 27.7% were not familiar with the test. In total, 23.1% of the parents reported that their children had previously written a DELF test and were challenging a higher level at the April 2012 testing session.

4.3.1. Preparation for the DELF

When asked about student preparation for the test, a majority of the parents responded positively: 37.5% indicated a high degree of preparation and 29.2% reported that their child was somewhat prepared. Only 6.9% stated that their child was not prepared and 26.4% were uncertain. Written comments suggest that, overall, parents appreciated the support provided by the school in ensuring success, although not in all cases were teachers able to alleviate the stress experienced by some students.

- ‘we got exams on line, listened to voice samples on line, etc. X did a great job of doing practice tests, 2 teachers were involved. they practiced the oral part, and made the kids feel so confident’
- ‘my daughter mentioned a few times that she was given practice tests which she felt she did not do very well and they caused her some anxiety and made her fearful to do the actual test. In fact when she did the real test she said it was much easier than she thought it would be’

4.3.2. Motivation for writing the DELF

When asked why they would want their children to take the DELF, parents gave the following reasons (multiple responses allowed):

- Certification of language proficiency (59)
- Career advancement (52)
- Post-secondary studies (38)
- Opportunities for meaningful engagement with French-language speakers (29)
- Motivation to continue study French in high school (27)

Additional written comments overwhelmingly referred to confidence and motivation; parents felt that writing the DELF test built student confidence in French-language abilities, as illustrated in the comments in section 4.3.5 below.

4.3.3. DELF and provincial/territorial testing

When asked about the use of the DELF as an exit exam in their province, parent response was mixed. Of the 69 parents who answered this question, 40.1% responded affirmatively, 46.4% were uncertain and 12.5% disagreed. Written responses focused on observations such as: exam placing restrictions on teaching and inadequate information to make an informed response, as illustrated in the quotes below:

- ‘need more information before adequately addressing this question’
- ‘my only hesitation in recommending this is that I would not like to see French teachers feeling restricted by this exam. I would hope that the teachers see it as yet another tool to encourage them to emphasize oral and especially aural development of the language’

When asked about including FSL proficiency testing with Grade 12 provincial testing, 46.2% of the 78 parent respondents agreed, 17.9% disagreed and 35.9% were unsure. Written comments focused mostly on the importance of assessing oral proficiency, the need for the test to be optional and the constraints of testing in smaller jurisdictions. Only one parent indicated that accessibility to a DELF testing centre was a problem.

4.3.4. Costs associated with DELF testing

One-quarter of the parent respondents answered questions related to costs associated with DELF testing. Asked if they would be willing to assume costs of testing in the future, 42.3% responded negatively; 23.1% affirmatively, and 34.6% were uncertain. They were also asked how much of the DELF costs they would be willing to assume if full funding were not available. Of the 14 parents who answered this question, four would not pay anything and the 10 remaining respondents would be willing to pay a part of the costs up to \$100. In reply to an open-ended question asking parents to indicate who should assume the costs of a proficiency test such as the DELF, the 14 responses were divided equally between school board and federal/provincial governments. A few respondents suggested costs should be shared by the school board and the student/parent as long as the test is optional.

4.3.5. Additional parent comments

Finally, when asked about recommending the DELF, parents were overwhelmingly positive. 94.5% of the respondents recommended the test and many elaborated on their response with written comments. An analysis of these written comments, along with the additional comments provided at the end of the questionnaire, revealed five recurring themes: positive experience, validation of achievement through an external measurement instrument, international certification, feedback to teachers and need for more information to parents.

The DELF testing proved to be an excellent experience for many students as illustrated in the following parent comments:

- ‘I am grateful for the experience for our daughter and feel it will be an on-going encouragement for her to pursue her French studies further’
- ‘She was somewhat nervous going into the test but, overall, it was a positive experience’
- ‘This is a test that measures ability, not inability. The way it is set up is for practical success. The child only tries the test level that a teacher feels he/she can accomplish’

Many parents highlighted the capacity of the DELF to validate their son or daughter’s efforts and achievement in learning French by an external measurement tool, separate from classroom evaluation by the teacher:

- ‘I think it is appropriate to have a separate assessment of the progression students have made with French language skills, especially for those in French immersion’
- ‘...gives an independent evaluation of proficiency vs teacher rated’
- ‘It provides them an opportunity to be evaluated in a larger context than their own high school experience...’

Closely related to the external validation of French-language proficiency is international recognition of this acquired proficiency:

- ‘I believe it is a valuable test as it is recognized in many parts of the world’
- ‘I believe the international recognition of such proficiency testing is beneficial both for post secondary education and career advancement’
- ‘Good to know where you stand internationally’

Many parents highlighted the capacity of the DELF to validate their son or daughter’s efforts and achievement in learning French by an external measurement tool, separate from classroom evaluation by the teacher

Parents also commented on the usefulness of the DELF to provide feedback to teachers:

- ♦ 'It is a good chance to also 'grade' the teacher. If a class does not do well, they should look into why. On the other hand, if a class does well, the teacher should be rewarded'
- ♦ '...it will provide teachers with some data on the success of the students in their learning, and perhaps show some areas that could be improved upon'

Finally, a noteworthy number of comments pointed to the need for more information for parents:

- ♦ 'a parent's information meeting or package that informs us what the course entails...what it means...I really know nothing about it'
- ♦ '...perhaps if it was included in the school newsletter and stated the advantages of having this exam/diploma... would bring increased participation'
- ♦ 'not sure...there needs to be a parent meeting to address what this is all about'

4.3.6. Summary discussion of parent perceptions of the DELF

Clearly, the stakeholders closest to the DELF experience (students, teachers and parents) judge this test as an appropriate tool for measuring FSL proficiency

This is the first study to systematically document parent perceptions of the DELF. These findings echo the same strong endorsement of this test and diploma as revealed in the teacher and student findings. Clearly, the stakeholders closest to the DELF experience (students, teachers and parents) judge this test as an appropriate tool for measuring FSL proficiency. A high percentage of each stakeholder group recommends the test to others. Parent comments reiterate many of the same benefits of an internationally-recognized test/diploma, as cited by the teachers and students. Nevertheless, some of the parents report needing more information about the DELF.

An important element of the parent questionnaire was to explore parent opinions regarding the cost of the DELF and the relationship between DELF and provincial/territorial testing. On both counts, opinions appear to be mixed. With regard to costs, responses were about equally divided between parents who would be willing, not willing, or uncertain about assuming the cost of testing. The cost question will have to be addressed to ensure that all students have access to DELF testing, if desired, not only those with parents who have the means to pay for this. With regard to use of the DELF as a high school exit exam to certify the level of FSL proficiency by including the test in the Grade 12 testing program, most parents either disagree or are uncertain. Clearly, parents need more information on these questions before they can provide a more informed opinion.

4.4. Perceptions of university stakeholders

The university questionnaire was sent to 24 French departments at Canadian universities and seven admission offices of French-language faculties (e.g., Campus St. Jean) and universities (e.g., Laval). A total of 21 different respondents opened the on-line questionnaire, representing 12 French departments, three undergraduate admissions offices and one language and translation department. Five respondents did not answer any of the questions.

4.4.1. Familiarity with DELF

With regard to level of familiarity with DELF/DALF,³ nine respondents considered themselves to be quite knowledgeable, six claimed to have some knowledge, and one respondent indicated no knowledge of the test.

4.4.2. Acknowledgement of DELF/DALF certification

Although there appears to be some familiarity with the DELF/DALF by those who responded, few universities acknowledge DELF/DALF certification or use the test internally as a measure of French-language proficiency. Two respondents indicated that they acknowledge DELF/DALF certification in some way; 11 do not; and one respondent was uncertain. In the written comments, one respondent indicated that a one-course credit was awarded for a B2 diploma obtained as part of the International Baccalaureate program. Of those who currently do not acknowledge certification, five universities indicated they would consider DELF/DALF in place of current placement tests; four specified that this was not currently under consideration; and three indicated they were uncertain. Of the nine respondents who answered the question about possibly using DELF/DALF as entrance or exit exam, one replied affirmatively, three indicated they would use it as an admission tool only, three others indicated they would not use the test at all, and two respondents were uncertain.

4.4.3. Familiarity with CEFR

With regard to familiarity with the CEFR, seven respondents indicated they were quite knowledgeable, one was somewhat knowledgeable, and one was uncertain. Of these nine respondents, one indicated that French courses at their university were aligned with the CEFR, four indicated that they were planning to do so, and four others had no plans to align their FSL courses with this framework. Among these same respondents, five indicated a need for more information regarding the CEFR, three indicated no need, and one respondent was uncertain.

4.4.4. Additional comments from university participants

An analysis of written comments by respondents revealed an increased interest in DELF/ DALF, as well as some resistance. A growing awareness is evident in the following comments from respondents:

- ♦ '...this is very much part of our growing conversation about revitalizing our [French] program'
- ♦ 'Nous avons commencé à familiariser nos professeurs avec les critères du DELF...afin d'uniformiser nos attentes'

This growing awareness of DELF/DALF and the CEFR is prompting respondents to consider more seriously these movements in FSL teaching in Canada, particularly in response to the students arriving at university with DELF certification:

3 The university questionnaire included reference to both the DELF and the DALF because universities should be positioned to offer continued certification opportunities to students who arrive with B2 DELF certification and continue their study of French at the C level.

- ‘on y pense pour l’avenir’
- ‘éventuellement’

In sum, there is a growing awareness of DELF/DALF and CEFR, but a clear need for more information to identify the benefits for universities and to respond to any resistance prompted by misinformation and apprehension.

Growing awareness about DELF/DALF certification is also prompting a greater interest in and a need to know more about the CEFR since this framework is now an integral component of many provincial FSL programs (e.g., British Columbia and the Atlantic provinces) and is used in many school boards in other provinces (e.g., Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Ottawa). More and more graduates from these provinces and school boards are coming to university identifying their level of French-language proficiency with reference to the CEFR levels. University French departments want to know more, as evidenced in the following comments:

- ‘la plupart des enseignants en ont entendu parler mais n’en possèdent pas une connaissance approfondie’
- ‘Il serait bon d’intervenir dans les universités de l’ouest canadien pour expliquer mieux l’intérêt et les limites du CECR (et les limites)...’

However, there is still some resistance among professors, as illustrated in the following comment:

- ‘Nous travaillons en équipe et il y a beaucoup de résistance’
- ‘...la plupart des collègues canadiens sont résistants et préfèrent le CLB’

In sum, there is a growing awareness of DELF/DALF and CEFR, but a clear need for more information to identify the benefits for universities and to respond to any resistance prompted by misinformation and apprehension.

4.4.5. Summary discussion of university perceptions of the DELF/DALF

As a greater number of Canadian high school and university students present DELF/DALF certification or speak to university admissions offices and French departments about their FSL proficiency in terms of CEFR levels, universities need to become more informed and more prepared. The information provided by the respondents shows that universities are just beginning to become aware of CEFR and DELF/DALF and need more information about the advantages of these tools. This may mean that they will have to place a greater emphasis on language outcomes, in addition to the current emphasis in most French departments on literature knowledge outcomes.

An increased interest in the DELF/DALF and the CEFR dovetails well with the results of a recent study on second (official) language education in Canadian universities by the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL, 2009). This study revealed a strong demand for improved second-language learning beyond the current overemphasis on literature and for different models for second-language learning. The report recommended, first of all, that universities improve opportunities for intensive second-language learning. Recognition of linguistic proficiency, including special certificates, was also mentioned.

4.5. Perceptions of provincial/territorial ministries of education

Provincial and territorial ministries of education (MOE) were also consulted. Of the 12 letters of invitation sent out, six MOE representatives responded by completing the on-line questionnaire. Five identified their province/territory and one chose to remain anonymous. Areas of responsibility of the respondents in their MOE ranged from Director of Program Implementation, Director of FLS programs, to Program Specialist for Evaluation and Research. All rated themselves as quite knowledgeable with regard to the DELF. With regard to administration of the DELF in their province/territory, two indicated that this was done by school boards; two others indicated the MOE; one indicated the Alliance française; and one indicated that it was not currently administered in their province/territory.

4.5.1. DELF as national proficiency test

Respondents were asked a number of questions regarding the use of DELF in the Canadian context. When asked about the need for a national FSL proficiency test, two respondents agreed that there was a need, two disagreed, and two were uncertain. The following comments elaborate on their responses:

- ‘Il ne semble pas y avoir une très grande demande chez les élèves, les parents ou les écoles pour un test de compétences au niveau national. Au xx, le ministère de l'Éducation évalue les habiletés et connaissances des élèves à la sortie de la 12^e année par des tests basés sur les normes établis en fonction des programmes d'études de la province’
- ‘Chaque province ou territoire est responsable de déterminer le contenu de ses programmes d'études et plusieurs instances ont leurs propres outils d'évaluation qui sont alignés avec les attentes de leurs programmes d'études. Si les provinces et territoires décident qu'un outil national a à être développé, le Conseil des Ministres de l'Éducation, Canada est le groupe qui doit entériner cette décision. De plus, si un outil d'évaluation national canadien a à être développé, il doit refléter des normes nationales canadiennes sur lesquelles toutes les instances, incluant le Québec, doivent s'accorder. Comme le temps alloué et la programmation dans le français de base et l'immersion diffèrent d'une juridiction à l'autre, les résultats des élèves qui utilisent un outil normalisé risquent de différer grandement; ce qui ne voudrait pas dire que les programmes d'études ne répondent pas aux besoins des élèves de la juridiction’
- ‘sera étudié par un comité en 2012-2013’
- ‘a standard that is recognized provincially, nationally and internationally is certainly an excellent idea’

Furthermore, when asked about the appropriateness of the DELF as a national FSL proficiency test, three respondents agreed that it was, one disagreed, and two were uncertain. The following comments provide some of the reasoning underlying their responses:

- ‘This is a tool that has been developed based on the Common European Framework by experts in the field of second language education and that has been used for some time now. As such, it has been modified to ensure validity and appropriateness’
- ‘Le DELF est un outil qui est développé par la France avec des normes qui ne reflètent pas nécessairement la réalité canadienne à ce point-ci. De plus, les ministères des provinces et territoires n'ont pas accès à cet outil pour analyser en profondeur et vérifier si ses normes correspondent à la réalité de leur juridiction et à celle du Canada. Un autre facteur est que les provinces ou territoires n'ont pas le droit de participer au développement ni d'influencer le contenu de ce test. Ceci pose plusieurs défis, car l'éducation est une responsabilité qui relève des provinces et territoires au Canada. Deux questions sont : Quels seraient les buts d'un tel outil et comment les résultats obtenus par les élèves seront-ils employés?’

- 'Le DELF est un outil qui sert à évaluer la compétence en langue française de l'élève qui a appris le français comme langue seconde. Ceci dit, tout test du genre doit être adapté au contexte canadien dans lequel le jeune évolue. De plus, le coût d'administration du DELF assez élevé est un obstacle important'

Some of the uncertainty with regard to the DELF appears to be related to its perceived Euro-centric bias.

4.5.2. Relationship of the DELF to classroom teaching

MOE representatives were also asked an open-ended question regarding the role of an external evaluation tool such as the DELF in relation to the regular classroom evaluation of student performance in FSL programs. The responses were the following:

- 'the DELF is a common standard that is recognized internationally. Furthermore, it goes through the various stages of the test building process to ensure validity'
- 'Il semble que le DELF peut donner une certaine assurance sur la standardisation des normes (et de la langue française) reconnue (et acceptée) sur une scène autre que locale. Le DELF permet peut-être la visée de mesures/buts communs et la mise en commun de ressources de toutes sortes. Par contre, comme toute évaluation ponctuelle assez courte, le DELF donne une vision superficielle des compétences car il s'agit d'une situation de test qui ne représente pas toutes les capacités nécessaires pour fonctionner dans des contextes authentiques'
- 'les examens du ministère et le certificat de fin d'études'
- 'Puisque nous n'avons pas d'évaluation officielle en français langue seconde au niveau provincial, le DELF nous offre un outil approprié afin d'évaluer enfin toutes les compétences langagières de nos apprenants. De plus, l'analyse des résultats nous sera des plus utiles afin de guider le meilleur enseignement et formation des enseignants ainsi que le meilleur apprentissage de la langue française chez nos élèves'
- 'Le rôle n'est pas clair ni défini. Si un élève peut présenter un diplôme d'études secondaires ou postsecondaire d'une autorité reconnue, accompagné d'un relevé de notes, a-t-il besoin d'autres preuves de ses compétences?'

It appears that most of the respondents acknowledge the importance of a test that evaluates all language skills referenced against an external benchmark, as opposed to regular classroom evaluation which is often based on more limited learning objectives, subject to teacher bias, and referenced against the overall performance of a given group of students. Some of the comments, however, also suggest a rather naive understanding of the opportunities and limitations of externally referenced evaluation tools.

4.5.3. DELF and international accreditation

With regard to the perceived usefulness of the international accreditation afforded by a DELF diploma, three respondents judged a DELF diploma to be useful or very useful for future pursuits such as employment or post-secondary education. The remaining three respondents were uncertain. The following comments were offered in support of their stated opinions:

- 'Pas certain. Ne revient-il pas aux ministères de communiquer la valeur du diplôme d'études secondaire et des cours de langues au milieu afin d'en privilégier leur reconnaissance plutôt que de promouvoir un autre instrument?'
- 'Employers, for example, will know with certainty the level of proficiency of candidates thanks to this evaluation tool'

- ‘La reconnaissance au Canada par les employeurs et institutions n’est pas très répandue, alors la reconnaissance accordé par ce test a probablement une durée limitée. De plus, à ce point on dirait que les attraits majeurs sont la reconnaissance extérieure donnée par France à ceux et celles qui ont réussi ce test et l’envoi par ce pays d’un certificat de compétences. Les bénéfices d’avoir une telle reconnaissance ne sont pas encore très bien mesurés par des études solides. Il s’agit plus d’une accumulation d’anecdotes individuelles que de faits’

4.5.4. Administration of the DELF

MOE representatives also answered questions related to details of DELF testing. When asked how often students should take the DELF test, of the four respondents, two indicated that the DELF should be used as an exit exam only and two were uncertain. The following comments elaborate on their responses:

- ‘On devrait répondre à cette question seulement une fois que le rôle du DELF aura été clairement défini’
- ‘En xx, la décision d’utiliser ou non ce test revient aux conseils scolaires. C’est eux qui sont en meilleure mesure de déterminer l’utilité pour leurs élèves d’une telle évaluation externe. C’est donc à eux de déterminer quand son utilisation est la plus appropriée’
- ‘Au comité de se pencher sur la question’
- ‘Nous faisons passer le DELF aux élèves de 12e année depuis 4 ans et nous en sommes maintenant à évaluer la possibilité d’utiliser le DELF scolaire en fin de cycles, possiblement en 9e année. Les discussions se poursuivent intensément dans notre province à ce sujet’
- ‘Due to the preparation needed to reach the various levels, I would suggest taking the test in the fall or spring of one’s final year’

With regard to the administration and time demanded by the testing structure of the DELF, two MOE representatives replied that it was worth the effort and four were uncertain. The following comments explain their uncertainty:

- ‘Le choix d’investir l’effort et le temps requis pour administrer le test dépend ultimement de l’objectif de celui qui administre. L’investissement de temps pour passer le test dépend ultimement du besoin de l’individu qui le prend’
- ‘Encore une fois, c’est aux conseils scolaires qui l’utilisent de répondre à cette question’
- ‘Aurait une valeur s’il était obligatoire pour tous les élèves pour qu’il puisse d’outil pour un enseignant dans sa classe pour offrir un enseignement sur mesure’

When asked if their MOE should administer the DELF, two representatives agreed and four were uncertain.

- ‘Un test donné par le Ministère pour évaluer les compétences langagières des élèves doit s’arrimer aux programmes d’études de la juridiction en question. Un test exigé par le Ministère doit répondre aux buts et objectifs de celui-ci et devrait avoir pour but de fournir de l’information pertinente sur les connaissances et les habiletés des élèves par rapport aux résultats d’apprentissage énoncés dans les programmes d’études provinciaux’
- ‘Le DELF appartient à la France. De plus, plusieurs juridictions ont leurs propres évaluations provinciales et je ne crois pas qu’elles voudraient prendre la responsabilité d’une autre évaluation qui ne leur appartiendrait pas. En xx, un facteur important est la liberté donnée aux conseils scolaires de choisir les outils d’évaluation qui répondent aux besoins de leurs élèves. Nous n’exigerons pas que les conseils scolaires adoptent un seul outil d’évaluation externe pour tous leurs élèves’
- ‘Yes, I think it would be a good idea for the Ministry to oversee its administration in conjunction with the school districts. I feel the Departments of Education could surely facilitate the administration of the DELF since it has direct contact with the various districts and the Alliance française’

When asked about the importance of a Canadian coordinator to manage DELF testing in Canada, one representative deemed this to be important, three thought this was unimportant, and two were uncertain. One respondent offered the following explanation:

- 'L'utilisation de cette évaluation qui provient de la France est une décision qui revient à chacune des instances provinciales et territoriales. Un coordonnateur national d'un examen qui n'est pas utilisé de la même façon partout au Canada n'est pas justifiable à ce point. De plus, compte tenu des responsabilités individuelles de chacune des juridictions en matière d'éducation, on peut se demander à qui se rapporterait ce coordonnateur et qui paierait pour lui. Si les provinces et territoires décident qu'un outil national a à être développé, le Conseil des Ministres de l'Éducation, Canada est le groupe qui devrait coordonner toute initiative d'évaluation nationale'

4.5.5. Funding for the DELF

A number of questions related to funding for the DELF as a high school exit exam. Three respondents indicated that no funding would be made available and three others were uncertain. When asked about obstacles to funding, the following comments were offered:

- 'Du point de vue de xx, les conseils scolaires qui choisissent d'utiliser cet examen reçoivent des fonds annuels qui leur permettent de faire ce choix, tout en visant de répondre aux besoins de leurs élèves. La province n'est donc pas en mesure de spéculer sur les raisons qui motivent les conseils de financer ce test. Alors, la province ne s'ingère pas dans leur décision d'offrir ou non ce test'
- 'test optionnel'
'Nous ne sommes pas encore en mesure d'offrir l'examen à tous nos élèves de 12e année. De plus, utiliser le DELF comme examen final pour l'ensemble de la province exigerait une restructuration majeure de notre centre, de nos budgets et des politiques d'évaluation de notre ministère'
- 'Il faut avant tout répondre à la question de pertinence, de besoin, et de « créneau » pour le DELF'
- The costs associated with the administration and correcting could be problematic. I'm not sure if we could expect candidates to pay the cost themselves if it is a program administered by the Ministry.

4.5.6. DELF and CEFR

One final question asked the MOE representatives if they would like to see the CEFR incorporated into their FSL programs. Three respondents indicated that this was already the case in their province/territory. The following comments give some of the reasons provided by those who did not indicate a choice:

- 'Le CEFR est utilisé en xx comme outil de référence (un parmi de nombreux autres). Compte tenu de ceci, il est difficile de répondre à cette question à cause de la façon dont elle est posée et du choix de réponse offert'
- 'à l'étude'
- 'Le cadre européen commun de référence est utilisé comme ressource, parmi d'autres, pour inspirer l'élaboration des programmes d'études au Manitoba'

4.5.7. Summary discussion of provincial/territorial ministries of education perceptions of the DELF

The responses of the MOE representatives from the provinces/territories that chose to complete the questionnaire indicate a divide between those jurisdictions that have taken a positive stance to the DELF and those who remain skeptical or resistant. The former group has decided to work with the DELF to certify student FSL proficiency using an internationally recognized benchmark. On the other hand, the latter group has been more reticent, justifying their position in the light of provincial/territorial autonomy with regard to education. Each province/territory sets its own educational priorities and establishes its own policies with regard to language learning. As a consequence, there is no common Canadian policy or curriculum for second language learning. There is, therefore, little appetite by some provinces/territories to work collaboratively together with the Ministry of Canadian Heritage (PCH) to develop and promote common policies on second-language learning in Canada. In the latter case, DELF and the CEFR are currently recommended as resources available to school boards if they wish to make use of them.

This situation is common in the history of the development of language policy and educational policy in Canada. However, there is a growing use of national benchmarks in other areas of educational policy, as long as they respect provincial/territorial jurisdiction over educational programming. The situation of the DELF is similar in that regard to recent developments in other areas of education. Different provincial/territorial positions require more attention, but they are not an insurmountable barrier for use of the DELF on a national scale.

In the case of provinces/territories with a Grade 12 testing program, the main priority appears to be verifying whether provincial/territorial FSL outcomes have been met. The responses documented above suggest that these provinces/territories have not investigated the degree to which the DELF could verify provincial/territorial outcomes and, at the same time, attain outcomes that offer students language certification with international currency.

The MOE responses provide a somewhat fuller understanding of some of the provincial policy positions documented by Manuard, et al (2009) and summarized earlier in Table 3.

The responses of the MOE representatives from the provinces/territories that chose to complete the questionnaire indicate a divide between those jurisdictions that have taken a positive stance to the DELF and those who remain skeptical or resistant.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This section will combine the findings from various stakeholders to draw some conclusions about experience with the DELF in Canada. Based on these conclusions, recommendations are made for next steps to develop the potential of the DELF test and diploma in Canada.

5.1. Conclusions

5.1.1. Appropriate measure of FSL proficiency

There is an overwhelmingly high level of agreement among students, parents, and teachers that the DELF is an appropriate instrument to serve as a national FSL proficiency test. A high percentage of the students, parents and teachers deem the DELF to be a fair and appropriate measure of FSL proficiency and would recommend the test to others. This finding is reinforced by findings of the two OCDSB studies which are based on feedback from a greater number of teachers and students, particularly students at the B levels.

There is an overwhelmingly high level of agreement among students, parents, and teachers that the DELF is an appropriate instrument to serve as a national FSL proficiency test.

This finding also provides evidence for the face validity of the DELF. Face validity is the judgment by learners and teachers of the degree to which a test reflects what it is purported to assess. If a test does not meet this criterion, primary stakeholders, such as students and teachers, may perceive the test as unfair and that may affect performance and how much the test (and results) are valued. Responses indicate the DELF is considered a fair, valid test of language proficiency.

5.1.2. Teacher role in promoting certification

Both students and parents highlight the important role that teachers play in raising student awareness of the DELF and preparing students for success. Question responses and comments showed that teachers make students aware of the benefits of DELF certification, guide students in choosing the appropriate level to challenge, and provide the resources students can use to prepare for the test.

5.1.3. Listening tasks

Both teachers and students acknowledge the greater challenge of the DELF listening tasks, particularly at the B level. This finding is also consistent with the OCDSB findings. It is not clear, however, whether this difficulty is due to text characteristics, task characteristics or a combination of both. This finding is paralleled by the finding that the greatest gap in congruence between test tasks and classroom activities is in listening. This likely contributes to students finding this portion of the test more challenging. This perception is validated by the actual mean score in listening comprehension for the B1 level; however, at the B2 level the mean scores for reading and listening are not substantially different (Harlaux & Georges, 2012).

5.1.4. Unfamiliar cultural references

Unfamiliar cultural references are perceived as problematic, more so by the teachers than the students and especially so by the MOE representatives. These are perceptions only. Further research is needed to determine whether unfamiliar cultural references do actually interfere in student success and the degree to which the strategies cited by the students help them to cope with the unfamiliar.

FSL classes become more communicative in orientation through increased practice of speaking skills and more emphasis on authentic documents for listening and reading.

5.1.5. Positive washback on teaching

Teacher comments point to the washback effects of the DELF on their teaching. In other words, the DELF can and does change pedagogy. FSL classes become more communicative in orientation through increased practice of speaking skills and more emphasis on authentic documents for listening and reading.

5.1.6. Growing awareness by universities

Universities are only now beginning to become aware of developments in FSL programs in high schools (such as CEFR and DELF) that will have impacts for admissions and placements, as students include DELF certification in their applications. Although there is evidence of some resistance, there is greater interest in learning more.

5.1.7. Division between provinces/territories on policy positions

Currently, there appears to be a distinction between those provinces/territories who have decided to move forward in working collaboratively with other provinces/territories on FSL policy issues and those who are not yet ready to do so. Differing views on the relationship between testing global proficiency outcomes and testing provincial/territorial FSL outcomes may be one factor underlying this divide.

5.1.8. Need for more information

There is a clear need for information on a number of fronts. Parents are not always adequately informed about what the DELF is and its benefits. They are also uncertain about the relationship between DELF testing and the assessment of provincial/territorial FLS learning outcomes. Universities need more information about the DELF, the CEFR, and the implications of DELF certification for placement purposes.

5.2. Recommendations

The findings of this study, complemented by similar findings from the OCDSB studies, suggest that the DELF holds a great deal of promise as an appropriate measure of FSL proficiency in Canada. A national proficiency test with international currency, such as the DELF, can help 1) high school graduates describe their abilities in French and establish more concrete goals; 2) employers better understand the French-language abilities of job candidates; and, 3) universities determine the appropriate placement of students.

This report confirms potential; it also indicates factors that will need attention to realize that potential. The following actions will be necessary to advance use of the DELF as a national French-language proficiency test in Canada.

5.2.1. Develop and implement an active information campaign

5.2.1.1. Inform FSL teachers about the DELF

This report confirms potential; it also indicates factors that will need attention to realize that potential.

Teachers are key actors to inform students and school boards about the professional and personal benefits of DELF certification for students. CAIT should work with the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), provincial/territorial second language teacher associations and other national organizations (e.g., Canadian Parents for French) to offer symposiums and workshops on DELF, virtual or face-to-face.

More teachers need to be informed about the benefits, supported by the findings of this study, to create greater awareness in schools and school boards, particularly at the secondary level. Momentum from parents, teachers and students for adopting the DELF as a national proficiency test can grow in each province/territory when teachers are aware of the benefits and can inspire students to seek DELF certification.

5.2.1.2. Lobbying of provincial/territorial Ministries of Education

CAIT should continue lobbying provincial/territorial MOE to explore options for the use of DELF by school boards in their jurisdiction. As new information becomes available (see section 5.2.4. below), the MOE must continue to be informed so that pertinent findings are shared and potential barriers overcome.

In their lobbying efforts, CAIT should work with the Ministry of Canadian Heritage and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages in as much as the mandates of these federal institutions allow.

5.2.1.3. Better inform parents

Distribution of copies of this report to all branches of CPF will provide a basis of information for dissemination through newsletters, information bulletins, websites, and brochures.

Schools and school boards should review their promotional materials and procedures to ensure that parents are adequately informed and do receive the information. Findings in this report and the OCDSB studies can be used to flesh out information brochures for parents by outlining the benefits of the DELF.

5.2.1.4. Inform university French departments and admission offices

University French departments have been primed to examine the role and implications of DELF/DALF certification and the CEFR for their programs. Distribution of this report to all university French departments in Canada, as well as admission offices of all French-language post-secondary institutions, will enhance the information base for decision-making. In addition, information sessions with representatives from each post-secondary institution should be organized to ensure that the implications of the information are understood, to dispel myths about the DELF, and to discuss opportunities for the university community to benefit from the DELF.

This recommendation complements a recommendation of the university study conducted by the office of the Commissioner of Official Languages encouraging further research on the second-language learning experience and proficiency of students arriving at university and proficiency levels on graduation (OCOL, 2009).

5.2.2. Seek endorsement of CMEC

Intergovernmental bodies are best positioned to advance knowledge about the DELF within the provincial/territorial ministries of education. Attention by the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education could help bring the issue of the DELF on to the agenda of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) in the same way that the CEFR began to receive more concerted national attention in 2006. Leadership by one province is helpful. Since Nova Scotia has already adopted a provincial policy with regard to the DELF, representatives from this province may be in a good position to raise this matter in the inter-governmental arena. Once the issue has been brought to the table of CMEC, provincial/territorial governments can work together to develop an overall policy statement with regard to the benefits and possibilities of the DELF as a national French-language proficiency test.

CMEC should also discuss funding options for provinces/territories to work collaboratively with school boards and parents, so that equity is not an issue. Cost options should also be discussed with CIEP.

5.2.3. Open more DELF testing centres

All students across Canada will need to have access to testing centres that administer the DELF *Scolaire*, if it is going to become the national FSL proficiency test of choice. Centres should be opened in all provinces, at either major school boards or universities, with appropriate satellite centres in the territories or other regions of the province as required.

As more testing centres are opened, the need for a Canadian centre to administer the DELF becomes more vital. With an increase in testing centres, there will be need for more information and collaboration between jurisdictions. The viability of such a centre needs to be explored.⁴

All students across Canada will need to have access to testing centres that administer the DELF *Scolaire*, if it is going to become the national FSL proficiency test of choice.

⁴ CAIT has recently received funding to explore the viability of such a centre and will embark on this project during the 2012-13 funding year.

5.2.4. Further research

Although the findings of this study and the OCDSB studies provide compelling evidence for moving forward with the DELF as a national French-language proficiency test, some potential barriers to greater success merit further research.

5.2.4.1. Difficulty of listening tasks

Further investigation of the impact of unfamiliar references in the DELF is warranted because of the lack of consensus in this study on the extent of cultural interference.

Listening appears to be the most difficult of the skills tested by the DELF, particularly at the B levels. Further research should determine if this difficulty is related to the types of documents used, the nature of the listening tasks or the type of listening pedagogy used in the classroom.

Another area for further research is the apparent difference between listening tasks in the DELF and listening tasks in the classroom, identified by both students and teachers. Factors to be explored include the curriculum materials, the activities, and the pedagogy for teaching listening skills. Based on how these relate to the DELF listening tasks, adjustments in classroom instruction may be able to make the level of difficulty in listening similar to that for the other skills. More detailed exploration should address this matter, given the important role of teachers and pedagogy.

5.2.4.2. Nature and extent of cultural interference

Further investigation of the impact of unfamiliar references in the DELF is warranted because of the lack of consensus in this study on the extent of cultural interference. A small-scale study of participants from various areas of the country at each of the four levels should clarify this matter. Students could be interviewed immediately after a DELF test session and asked to respond to/reflect on potentially confusing cultural references that had been earlier identified by a team of Canadian teachers. This process could verify whether the particular item/phenomenon actually interfered with success and, if not, how students were able to cope with the unfamiliar.

In order to assure that the DELF remains international in scope (not just content from France), a team of Canadian writers was recently trained by CIEP to develop and provide Canadian material to be included in future versions of the *DELF Scolaire*. This is the first time CIEP has trained a test development team outside of France, an initiative which bodes well for future Canadian participation.

5.2.4.3. Cost of DELF as potential barrier

Further study of who will pay for DELF should happen. Should the DELF become a required test, it is clear that the jurisdiction requiring the test would pay. However, if the DELF becomes a provincial/territorial opportunity for Grade 12 students to certify their French-language competence at graduation, a number of different funding options might need to be explored. This may need to be done on an individual basis by province/territory based on targeted outcomes by FSL program (e.g., B2 for Grade 12 French immersion).

5.2.4.4. DELF and provincial/territorial FSL learning outcomes

Given the often-cited concern about the capacity of the DELF to assess all learning outcomes targeted by different provincial/territorial FSL programs of studies, these outcomes should be mapped against the test specifications of the DELF, which are essentially the CEFR descriptors of a given level. Once a province/territory targets a specific level of the CEFR as the (Grade 12) exit level for a given FSL program (e.g., B1 for core French or B2 for French immersion) the program outcomes should be mapped against the CEFR level descriptors to document the degree to which given provincial/territorial FSL outcomes can be met in DELF which, in addition, offers international certification of French-language proficiency for that level.

5.2.4.5. DELF promotion in other countries

As it gains greater acceptance in Canada, further information on the use and governance of the DELF *Scolaire* in countries with a high participation rate, such as Germany and Italy, should be investigated. More information on the policy positions and DELF governance models in these countries may be helpful in overcoming resistance in Canada.

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