

Implications of basic literacy skills in French as a foreign language

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This paper presents results from an ESRC-funded, England-wide survey conducted in 2006 of 1,735 Key Stage 3 students' attitudes towards learning French alongside their ability to handle pre-lexical tasks in the language. The stratified sample and the high return rate were deemed adequate for proposing generalisations about the whole population based on these survey findings. The paper will describe the methodology for achieving generalisability and will detail the theoretical constructs behind the survey. Elsewhere I have proposed from my research with Year 7 students (2003, 2004, AFLS paper 2004) that low levels of FL literacy, virtually equivalent to phonological dyslexia, may give rise to negative feelings in students when they are dealing with written French. The purpose of the 2006 survey was to see whether this might contribute toward the widely-recognised problems of disaffection in French classrooms in England (Ofsted 1999, Nuffield 2000, Dearing & King 2007). Proposed causes for de-motivation have included learners' lack of progress with the language, lack of control over the process of learning it, a lack of self-efficacy as language learners, and problems with the "inherent" nature of French (e.g. Williams, Burden and Lanvers 2002). The present paper demonstrates links between learners' ability to decode French (using rhyme and syllable segmentation tests) and all these "causes" as well as others and learners' decisions to continue with French post-compulsory age 14.

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