



THE DELF IN CANADA: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTION

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With the growing interest for the DELF in Canada, the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers asked Dr. Larry Vandergrift to research the perceptions of stakeholders of the DELF in Canada. Here is a summary of the research. You can find the full version of the research paper at www.acpi.ca.

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 potential barriers to participation and success of Canadian students.

This study documented 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

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DELF and DALF, French reference diplomas in Canada and around the world

The DELF (*Diplôme d'études en langue française* – Diploma in French Language Studies) and the DALF (*Diplôme approfondi de langue française* – Advanced French Language Diploma) are diplomas issued by the French Ministry of National Education to certify the qualifications of individuals whose first language is not French. They have been developed by the *Centre International d'Études Pédagogiques* (CIEP), a public institution located in Sèvres, near Paris.

There are six versions for various publics:

- The DELF Prim (for primary schools)
- The DELF Scholastic (for high school students, in a school setting)
- The DELF Junior (for adolescents, outside a school setting)
- The DELF for everyone (for all adults)
- The DELF Pro (for professional integration or promotion in a Francophone setting)
- The DALF (for advanced learners).

They are harmonized with the six levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the result of joint work by all European countries in the 1990s and 2000s, with a view of adopting a common tool for evaluating language skills. The CEFR is associated with education based on communication, situational exercises and action. The principle is that learners are actors in their own learning through real or realistic activities anchored in everyday life. In preparing the DELF/DALF, there is necessarily contact with this type of education, and this is a feature that students and their teachers at the schools particularly appreciate.

As part of the DELF/DALF, all qualifications are evaluated: oral and written understanding and expression. As with any diploma, receipt of a DELF or DALF improves an individual's résumé and highlights their proficiency in French on an international scale (there are DELF/DALF examination centres in 167 countries). The DALF gives access to French universities and to a growing number of universities around the world, and a DELF B2 eliminates the need to pass pre-admission language tests at French universities.

In Canada, the DELF/DALF is becoming increasingly popular, with registrations rising from 80 in 2007 to 5,300 in 2012 (85% of which are DELF Scholastic, which has been adopted by several school boards or

departments of education). It is anticipated that there will be more than 6,000 candidates in 2013.

There are currently 26 examination centres open in Canada:

- 6 universities (3 in Alberta, 2 in Ontario, 1 in Quebec)
- 2 departments of education (Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island)
- 8 French alliances (2 in Ontario, 2 in Alberta, and 1 in British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia)
- And 10 centres totalling dozens of school boards in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador

The last two centres to open are located in Yellowknife (NWT) and in northwestern Ontario.

As well, an increasing number of Canadian universities (particularly faculties of education and French departments) are beginning to take them into consideration and include them in some way in the assessment of students' French language skills on registration, mid-way through their studies, and upon graduating from University, or by attributing credits. The situation varies from one university to another, but six Canadian universities are already DELF/DALF examination centres (McGill, Ottawa, Western Ontario, Lethbridge, University of Alberta, University of Calgary). Other universities are naturally familiar with the DELF/DALF, and many are considering how to take it into consideration in their curricula.

For more information:

CIEP site:

www.ciep.fr/en/delfdalf/index.php and
www.ciep.fr/delfdalf/index.php

French Embassy in Canada site:

www.ambafrance-ca.org/delfdalf-en and
www.ambafrance-ca.org/delfdalf-fr

CAIT (Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers) site:

www.acpi.ca/ressources/delf-c-est-quoi



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 (MOE) 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 skeptical 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* (DELFF) 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. ■