



EXPLORING TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT IN LANGUAGES: THE FRENCH LEARNING PROGRESSION FRAMEWORK K-10

Camille Bookerⁱ

Sydney School of Education and Social Work,
University of Sydney,
Sydney, Australia

Abstract:

The issues in languages education identified in all major languages reports suggest that too much ‘chopping and changing’ of program goals and assessment outcomes have deeply impacted languages education in Australia (Liddicoat, Curnow, Kohler, Scrimgeour and Morgan, 2007). This has resulted in levels of language proficiency that could be considered useful for students (LoBianco and Slaughter, 2009). By working from the notion of a language progression framework, the study draws on proficiency models developed for TESOL in Australia and the CEFR in Europe, in order to analyse current assessment practices in French language education. Then, through an exploration of teacher perceptions of the usefulness of a K-10 French Learning Progression Framework, the study found that teachers agreed on the ability of such an assessment tool to reveal students’ levels of language proficiency, and that this would help to increase learner motivation. The findings revealed that considerable differences exist in the approaches to assessment between primary and secondary programs and that this significantly impacts the implementation of such a framework. The study exposed pedagogical implications for assessment, such as the need for clearer assessment outcome descriptions and the need to assist teachers in their assessment of intercultural competence.

Keywords: language; French language; bilingual; assessment outcomes; language progression; language proficiency; teacher perceptions; assessment; intercultural competence

1. Introduction

Currently, although assessment seems to be the ‘driving force’ in curriculum design (Liddicoat, Scarino, Curnow, Kohler, Scrimgeour and Morgan, 2007), assessment of

ⁱ Correspondence: email camillebooker0730@gmail.com

languages in Australian schools is based on the diverse programs and assessment outcomes stated in the various syllabus documents and curricula of the states and territories. This is reported as problematic because the outcomes themselves tend to be vague, discursive, and do not reflect second-language acquisition (SLA) (Liddicoat et al., 2007). Additionally, with categories of learners labelled in the various syllabus documents as 'beginner', 'continuer', 'background', 'heritage' or 'second language' learners, those documents do not capture the complexity of the Australian student context. In other words, contemporary language assessment is criticised for not being able to provide descriptions of typical levels of student learning in general, or in specific languages (Liddicoat et al., 2007). Current assessment practices have also been reported as failing to describe what students are actually achieving in terms of language *proficiency* (Lo Bianco and Slaughter, 2009).

This study was guided by an open-ended question which was intended to provide the research with a specific focus. The guiding question was: What are teacher perceptions of the usefulness of a K-10 French learning progression framework?

The main aim of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of an alternative assessment tool, one that is normally associated with centralised or external standardised assessment; namely, a language learning progression framework. The study developed the French Learning Progression Framework following a 'scale of scales' approach. This process is outlined in previous research, such as for the CEFR (Council of Europe, 1996; 2001) and the EAL/D Learning Progression (ACARA, 2016). The more recent developments of the National Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016), with its strong focus on intercultural language learning, also played a pivotal role in the design process of the French Learning Progression Framework.

1.1 Context

Internationally, several existing frameworks are currently being used to measure student achievement and levels of language proficiency. Some of the most recognised include the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Europe), DIALANG (Europe), USA Standards for Foreign Language Learning (USA), ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (USA), Toronto Board of Education Benchmarks (Canada) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2012) (International).

It appears likely, however, that limitations are associated with such frameworks which could have limited their being taken up in an Australian context. Three main reasons exist why, in their current state, this is may be so. First, Australia is presently one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with more than 200 languages being spoken on a daily basis, and thus, Australian students bring a range of language levels with them to the classroom. The existing frameworks mentioned above do not relate to any specific context, nor do they claim to be transferrable (Hulstijn, 2007). Second, the transfer of such proficiency frameworks to the Australian context is problematic because of the lack of any alignment with local curriculum or Australian syllabus documents. While the existing proficiency frameworks do focus on the four modes of language (reading, listening, speaking and writing), Australian academics in

the field of languages education have claimed they are not capable of dealing with the more recent developments of the Australian curriculum, with its strong focus on intercultural learning outcomes (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler, 2003; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2010; Alderson, 2007; Arrowsmith and Ravibabu Mandla, 2017). The existing international frameworks were not designed for, and so are insufficient to use for measuring young learners (Little, 2009; Hasselgreen, 2013). Third and finally, there are criticisms of the existing frameworks because they fail to provide a comprehensive description of second-language acquisition (SLA), and thus do not reflect how learners actually acquire language or communicative abilities (Meisel, 1980). Therefore, using such existing international frameworks as those mentioned above in an Australian context would not adequately diagnose student proficiency levels and stages of learning.

2. Materials and Methods

The project was organised into two stages, with the first stage informing the actual research and data collection during the second stage. Stage 1 laid the basis for the study and was the preparation of the K-10 French Learning Progression Framework. It involved the collection, synthesis and analysis of the main proficiency rating scales for relevant, language-specific tests. It also drew on the research on alignment around the existing proficiency scales and involved an analysis of key policy/assessment regimes, both across Australia and linking Australia to international studies.

Stage 1 also included an analysis of existing assessment frameworks, examinations and tests, using a 'scale of scales' approach. It is described as a 'scale of scales', because it is a proficiency scale derived from analysis of a range of documents used in various countries. For example, this approach was used to develop such frameworks as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in Europe. The next step was to apply a content analysis of existing frameworks in relation to defined categories. This laid the basis for developing common learning outcome standards. The documents that were analysed fell mainly into four groups:

- 1) Scales from the English sphere of influence derived from or related to the English Language Testing System (ELTS) and its international successor IELTS (EAL/D and ESL scales, NLLIA bandscales, TOEFL, the Asset Languages and the Languages Ladder developed by IELTS and Cambridge in the UK, the Assessment of Language Competence (ALC) in Australia).
- 2) North American scales such as USA Standards for Foreign Language Learning, ACTFL, and the Toronto Board of Education Benchmarks (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1993).
- 3) Scales produced in relation to the proposed unit-credit scheme (Trim, 1978) or created by members of the Modern Languages Project network.
- 4) International tests, many of which are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), DIALANG, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA, 2012), the European educational

frameworks of objectives and assessment criteria such as the Eurocentres Scale of Language Proficiency and the British National Language Standards.

2.1 Analysis Matrix

An analysis matrix was used as a form of qualitative research, whereby all documents were interpreted by the researcher to give meaning. The documents were selected for the matrix by considering each one's purpose and their relevance to the project. They were then described with reference to three major themes, drawn from Mislevy's framework (1995). The themes were: the *claims made about what learners can do* (as well as the basis for these claims); the *type of evidence used to support these claims*; and *how learner achievement is reported*.

The relevant frameworks, scales, and progressions of learning were further categorised into the analysis matrix according to the type language, its origin, the target audience, whether the assessment instrument is validated, whether it is based on particular research, the model or type of assessment it represents, whether it is aligned with other instruments, syllabus frameworks, tests or curricula, and the key features of second-language development that it assesses. Differences and similarities of these documents with the ACARA EAL/D progressions were then identified.

After this, there was a review of Australian research into the diversity of learners and how they progress through their language learning. National and international studies of SLA, and the establishment of theories and models (such as Pienemann's processability model) to account for this, were also analysed. Key features and stages of SLA were organised to provide a template for analysis. The extent to which the chosen documents could accurately reflect stages of SLA and also the research into the diversity of learners in the Australian context were taken into account. This stage also investigated factors such as the *approach* taken to assessing the various macroskills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), the conceptualisation and assessment of linguistic (grammatical) and sociocultural and intercultural knowledge, and provisions made for differences in learner ability and opportunity to learn. Therefore, using this 'scale of scales' approach, the development of the draft version of the French Learning Progression Framework took place.

Once the analysis of key documents from Stage 1 was complete, then reaching a conclusion of the priorities for the content to include in the French Learning Progression Framework took place. As is outlined in more detail below, the French Learning Progression Framework was organised in stages, as reflected in the Stages of Australian Education System (that is, Stage 1, Stage 2, 3, 4 and 5), and levels: breakthrough, developing and proficient. Finally, using the selected content, the organisation of language outcome descriptors took place. The outcome descriptors were placed under the headings listening, speaking, and reading, writing, systems of language, and intercultural.

2.2 Alignment with Australian Syllabus and Curriculum Documents

This step involved expanding the draft version of the French Learning Progression Framework by aligning it with national/state curricula. The framework's descriptors were linked to outcomes in the National Australian Curriculum documents, so that it could be aligned with the stages of the Australian education system. Documents from each state and territory were analysed to establish commonalities across jurisdictions.

These included:

- ACARA;
- ACT Department of Education and Training;
- NSW Board of Studies;
- Northern Territory Department of Education;
- Queensland School Curriculum Council;
- Department of Education, Training and Employment;
- Tasmanian Secondary Assessment Board;
- Victorian Board of Studies;
- Curriculum Council, WA Curriculum Council, Western Australia.

The documents varied in terms of their title, from a curriculum framework (in WA, NT) to a curriculum framework and standards (in Vic), a curriculum, standards and accountability framework (in SA) through to language specific syllabuses in NSW and Qld; however, they each showed high degrees of commonality in the statements they made about language learning and use over the years of schooling. A description of knowledge, skills and understanding, and expected performance was generally available in the documents from all states and territories.

The method of how documents were pulled apart and applied appears below. The relevant documents were dissected with the definition for each level from each scale assigned to a provisional level according to the curriculum outcomes. Each definition was then split up into sentences, which were each allocated to a provisional level of the French Learning Progression Framework. These are known as descriptors. The descriptors were then developed into categories which relate to the students' level of proficiency (labelled as breakthrough, developing, and proficient in the framework), but which are still intelligible, relevant and user-friendly for teachers. A selection of the best descriptors (that is, ones that are consistently stated to be clear and useful) were chosen and sorted into each category. The product of this synthesis and analysis was a vertical scale of descriptors.

The next step was to determine how this vertical list of statements related to universal levels of proficiency. For example, each descriptor has a *score* on the scale. It was important to note how these scores related to proficiency levels. In other words, at what *score* does one level (that is, developing) stop and the next level (that is, proficient) start? That point tended to be a subjective decision. As Wright and Grosse (1993) state: "*No measuring system can decide for us at what point short becomes tall*" (Wright and Grosse; 1993, p. 316). For this reason, progression up the scale may take the form of a series of steps rather than a simple continuum.

2.3 Stage 2 – Draft French Learning Progression Framework and elaboration process

Once the French Learning Progression Framework was developed, the research adopted a qualitative approach. The French Learning Progression Framework was sent to a selection of teachers, academics and experts in French second-language acquisition for critical evaluation and review. The critical evaluation and review process involved participants with various backgrounds and experience in the selection, ranking and elaboration of the descriptors of the French Learning Progression Framework.

2.2.1 The Data Collection and Analysis Process

This section reports the process of conducting the round of interviews during in July–August 2017. Teacher perceptions on how teaching, learning and assessment is currently constructed in their learning environments was also explored in order to investigate ways to support teachers as they develop teaching and learning programs using the National Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016). This research provided an important data source and included face-to-face interviews, ultimately serving as the data collection of the study. The interviews—semi-structured and in-depth—ranged from 45 minutes to over one hour.

2.2.2 Interviews—the Sample

Four teachers were selected through the researcher’s own contacts within the French teaching community. Although the sample who participated in these interviews comprises all female teachers, they were very diverse, reflecting a range of language and teaching experience and backgrounds. All the respondents have had contact with the teaching and assessing of French language and culture through various channels. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants’ privacy.

Nadine is a native French speaker and was born in France. She has been in Australia for one year teaching French. Before that, she was a primary school teacher in Tahiti, a territory of France where the metropolitan French syllabus is followed. She has also taught in Tahitian secondary schools as an economics teacher where French is taught through the subject content. Nadine presently teaches Stage 1 at a bilingual school where French is taught alongside English in a ‘shared’ classroom environment.

Emilie is a native English speaker and was born in Australia. She has extensive experience teaching both primary and secondary school French, and has taught in a range of school settings from ‘posh private schools’ to the Catholic system. She also has experience with mentoring new teachers who are placed in rural teaching positions. She has assessed French in the primary school through informal class activities (which she liked) and through very formal assessment (which she disliked).

Justine is a native English speaker and was born in Australia. She is a secondary French teacher, but also currently teaches Japanese and Latin to junior secondary students at an independent boys high school. She studied French as a student herself for the HSC, and had also lived in France for a short time as an exchange student. She has experience teaching languages in academically selective high schools as well as in the public system.

Brianna is a native English speaker and a secondary and tertiary teacher of French and ESL. She had lived in France for an extended time and had taught high school French (Year 7 to Year 12) in both NSW and Victoria. The first school she taught at was a public high school, during the 1980s. The second was a Catholic School (from 2008 to 2010) and the third was a private school in 2015. She currently teaches ESL and French at university level and is pursuing her own studies exploring the motivational reasons behind university students studying French.

2.2.3 Coding

The approach that was taken in order to analytically code the data involved the five-step method by McCracken (1988). The first step of the analytic process was familiarisation with the data and the kinds of responses the participants were giving. This involved carefully reading and reviewing each interview transcript.

Step 2 involved the software program *Nvivo*, the theory building software used to handle, organise and help analyse data. Observations were input into preliminary descriptive and interpretive categories—or nodes—based on the evidence from the transcripts. This involved a ‘bottom-up’ or interpretive approach; for example, reading the transcripts line by line and observing the common references across the participants. The commonalities across participants were noted and assigned the different responses to the corresponding categories. 24 preliminary categories, or nodes were created. These were:

- 1) The Idea of the Project;
- 2) The Headings and Categorisation of the Four Skills;
- 3) The Use of Descriptors as Proficiency Levels;
- 4) Parents’ Responses and Reactions;
- 5) Reference to the Syllabus or Australian Curriculum;
- 6) Schools’ Varied Teaching Styles;
- 7) The Broader use of Proficiency Scales to Measure Achievement;
- 8) The Use of the EAL/D to Inform the Study;
- 9) Time;
- 10) Suggested Other Documents for the Project;
- 11) Suggested Changes to the Framework;
- 12) Teachers’ Ideas on Assessment;
- 13) Student Motivation;
- 14) Focus on Intercultural Skills;
- 15) The Use of Grammar in L2 Pedagogy;
- 16) The Use of Examples in the Framework;
- 17) The Logical Progression of the Descriptors;
- 18) The Declining Enrolment Rates in Languages;
- 19) Attitudes Towards Languages as a Subject;
- 20) The Practicality and Readability of the Document;
- 21) Diversity of Students;
- 22) Teacher Proficiency;

23) Textbooks;

24) Leap from Primary to Secondary School.

Once several concepts were identified in the data, 'pattern level' analysis commenced (LeComte and Schensul, 1999, p. 8) This involved thorough examination of the categories in order to identify connections and develop patterns across the participants. During this stage, the related items were organised into patterns. These patterns emerged in several ways; for example, through frequency (where a theme occurred or was missing in a participant's interview), through similarity (where a theme occurred across participants) and as sequences (where temporal patterns showed that one theme led to another).

Next, themes were merged under larger, top-level headings, or nodes. This involved determining basic themes by examining clusters of comments made by participants and memos made by the researcher. According to Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner and McCormack-Steinmetz (1991), a theme is "*a statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact*" (Ely et al., 1991, p. 150). The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies. It was essential to be consistent throughout the process of determining themes. As Bazeley (2009, p. 6) states, themes only attain full significance when they are linked to form a coordinated picture or an explanatory model: 'Describe, compare, relate' is a simple three-step formula when reporting the results. Focus was placed on developing observations about the framework and its use. The following three overarching themes were revealed:

- issues with practicality;
- issues with attitudes;
- issues with assessment.

Step 4 involved reorganising and aggregating the responses at the 'child' level to connect to the corresponding 'parent' level node. This involved the coding on and coding up, or refining of nodes and general themes, regrouping these and then structuring the ideas and findings.

The analysis revealed three major themes, which were labelled *Issues with Practicality*, *Issues with Attitudes* and *Issues with Assessment*, encapsulating the experiences of the French teachers as reported by the participants. The tables below show the responses at the child level and how they correspond to the parent level nodes of Practicality, Attitudes and Assessment.

Table 1: Themes referred to the constructs of practicality

	Sources	References
Issues with practicality	4	37
The use of proficiency scales to measure language achievement	4	8
Time and the impact of variable programs in the primary school setting	4	16
The categorisation of the four language skills: CLT and the separation of teaching and assessment	3	5
The use of examples in the framework	4	6
The logical progression of the descriptors	2	2

Table 2: Themes referred to the constructs of attitudes

	Sources	References
Issues with attitudes	3	13
Impact of the framework on student motivation	3	3
Attitudes towards French: parental and teacher impacts on students	2	4
A hierarchy of timetabling	1	2
Teacher attitudes towards grammar and the place of grammar in L2 pedagogy	3	3
Accuracy vs acquisition	1	1

Table 3: Themes referred to the constructs of assessment

	Sources	References
Issues with assessment	4	12
Intercultural skills, teacher proficiency and reliance on textbooks	4	5
The lack of mandated assessment across schools and jurisdictions	2	3
The varied goals for language learning	3	4

Finally, during Step 5, the themes were examined from all the interviews in order to delineate predominant themes contained in the data. The predominant themes then served as answers to the interview questions, and formed the basis for writing up the data. The results broadly read as follows: an effective tool needs to be practical, current in terms of how it assesses students, and accepted by the broader school community.

3. Results

3.1 Issues with Practicality

Under the first theme, *Issues with Practicality*, the findings revealed that the use of proficiency scales to measure language achievement received mixed responses from the participants. Compared to the secondary teachers, the primary school teachers were more hesitant to the idea of using the framework. However, three of four participants thought that it could work with their style of teaching practice and assessment. All of the participants raised some concerns about applying it to students coming from very diverse language backgrounds. One teacher thought the framework was completely impractical.

While the majority of the participants thought the framework could effectively measure proficiency levels, all of the participants saw the value of being able to show

levels of achievement to students. They all believed this was important for student motivation levels. Three out of four participants expressed some concern about making correct judgments using the descriptors (that is, rater reliability). The primary school teachers were mostly concerned about the introduction of more formal types of assessment because of pressures on time. One secondary and tertiary teacher raised concerns about teachers' reactions to the framework. One secondary teacher suggested the framework could be used for diagnostic and differentiation purposes and that it could also be used to help new or less proficient teachers.

All four teachers agreed with the separation of the macroskills and the categorisation of the headings used in the framework: listening, speaking, reading, writing, all four teachers thought that the use of examples were helpful rather than restrictive, and half of the teachers believed the logical progression of the descriptors within each stage and level acquisition (SLA).

3.2 Issues with Attitudes

Within the second theme, *Issues with Attitudes*, all four teachers thought the framework would be beneficial to students' motivation levels because of the impact it could have on parents and teachers through the interconnectedness of language, learner and environment. Three out of four teachers reported having a negative experience with the hierarchy of the curriculum, with languages often being viewed at the bottom. All of the teachers commented on the role of grammar in the classroom. Three out of four teachers expressed dislike for the explicit grammar column (also referred to as systems of language), which is used in the framework. Despite this, the majority of the teachers believed that accuracy is a central focus of L2 learning.

3.3 Issues with Assessment

With regard to the final theme, *Issues with Assessment*, all of the teachers involved in the study believed that intercultural competence is often left out of the teaching and learning process, and therefore it is extremely difficult to assess. Teacher proficiency was found to be a key aspect in the ability to effectively teach intercultural competence. A final common finding among the teachers was the frustration felt at the lack of mandating of assessment across schools. All of the teachers believed that this is a key issue affecting languages education in Australia today.

4. Discussion

The findings show that the differences between assessment in primary and secondary contexts and the gap between Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA) observation and high stakes assessment were key concerns. For example, Emilie and Nadine, although having slightly different teaching backgrounds and experience, both shared similar reactions to the notion of assessing proficiency. This relates to the fact that existing assessment frameworks measure proficiency in Australian EAL/D education, but this concept is not as common in languages education.

Comments about the notion of assessing proficiency seemed unusual to teachers, indicating that Emilie and Nadine may not have encountered such assessment in languages. This notion is also reflected in the literature. For example, in primary schools, assessment is conducted by the class teacher, with little if any moderation or central reporting of 'proficiency' (Scarino, 2012; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2010; Board of Studies, 2013). On the other hand, at secondary school, assessment is usually designed by teachers, and in many cases, no measures of student proficiency exist (Liddicoat, 2007). This confirms other research findings that assessment remains based on no data or research (Liddicoat, 2007); nor is it based on any levels of language proficiency.

At present, the main way to monitor students' proficiency levels is based on Year 12 enrolments and reports on candidates' achievement standards from the Boards of Studies (BOS, 2013), which suggests that teachers may have little support in how to assess students' levels of language proficiency. Australian studies also show that unregulated curricular and assessment regimes increase the variability of practice across schools, the likelihood of inconsistency in approaches across languages and, therefore, the standards of performance (LoBianco, 2009; 2013; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2010; Liddicoat et al., 2007). This is a problem because it impacts on data collection and policy/program development, monitoring and evaluation and has significant implications for the French Learning Progression Framework. Teachers who are incapable of measuring student proficiency levels may find the framework difficult to implement, and therefore they may reject it.

Teachers who participated in the study all disagreed with the inclusion of 'intercultural competence' in the French Learning Progression Framework, something which has been a focus of recent curriculum and teaching approaches (ACARA, 2016). Only one of the participants commented on the intercultural aspects of teaching without being prompted. When asked about the inclusion of intercultural competence as a separate, assessable skill, all four of the teachers believed this should be assessed integrated, as part of the four macro skills. This issue was raised a number of times as the teachers believed that they touched on intercultural language learning (ILL) only if it was brought up in the resources they were using, such as their prescribed textbooks.

This omission of Intercultural Competence in teachers' practice could be for several reasons. First, they may lack confidence or knowledge in terms of their own cultural knowledge of the target language. Second, they may perceive culture as being taught in context within the other four macro skills. Third, teachers may not relate the teaching of culture to the term 'intercultural'. All three of these reasons can be summarised into two main points: all of the participants lack a complete understanding of the definition of 'intercultural' intercultural language learning does not relate to their practice.

With the rise in the perceived importance of effectively measuring such competencies as students' ability to express empathy, demonstrate respect for other cultures or take responsibility for learning (Hulstijn, 2007; Little, 2007; Scarino, 2014), teachers are seeing this as a problem because currently, support is insufficient to teach and assess such concepts. This shows a gap between the teachers and the shift in focus

from traditional, grammar-based teaching towards the intercultural language approach, which is the focus of the new National Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016).

Lack of time emerged as a significant issue in using any assessment, especially for primary teachers who were opposed to using the framework because of the lack of time. This was because teachers reported having to implement assessment of achievement under strict time constraints. This was a key concern mentioned by all participants in the study, and exists as a major barrier to implementing the French Learning Progression Framework. This notion is in line with the current body of Australian literature. In their review of the Australian Curriculum, Donnelley and Wiltshire report that evidence exists of assessment overload for language teachers (Donnelley and Wiltshire, 2014). This overload is exacerbated at the primary level, where teachers may be responsible for all the students in a school, during periods that are often held at the end of the day. This indicates the problem could be in the structure of the teaching. In other words, manageable teaching practices would need to be addressed before effective assessment approaches can be implemented. Teachers in this study saw this as the real problem, because, with assessment taking up so much time, little time is left to teach the content properly.

The constant changing expectations of language teaching and learning, and the variation of goals for languages study emerged as an issue. In other words, too many imposed syllabus and curriculum documents exist that teachers are obliged to use, and this has led to challenges for funding, resources and training of language teachers. This conflict emphasises a common finding of unregulated, inconsistent and ineffective approaches to assessment, and the inability to appropriately credit student achievement. This has led to vague, discursive, and over-simplified assessment outcomes in syllabus documents that are confusing to teachers, and serve as ineffective for providing students with any idea of their achievement. Again, this calls for the establishment of very clear assessment outcomes that can be helpful to both teachers and students.

Currently, no reporting of proficiency levels exists, and no general measures of student achievement are being used anywhere in Australia. The conflicting goals of community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, traditional modern languages and languages for trade and external purposes has led to a situation where consensus is lacking over whether to prioritise certain languages (LoBianco and Slaughter, 2009; 2013; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2010; Liddicoat et al., 2007; Djité 1994; Ozolins, 1993). The results of this study relate to those found in other studies (Scarino, 2012; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2010; Board of Studies, 2013; Liddicoat, 2007), and the core problem is the fact that the government at state level is currently responsible for education—both the curriculum and teaching and the federal government is responsible for programs and initiatives. Therefore, assessment at the federal level is really program evaluation, and at the state level it is curriculum achievement. This means that the notion of assessment in and for learning is ignored and notions of proficiency are thus unimportant. In addition, the differences in the way languages are taught and assessed in different states and in government, independent and Catholic

systems in each jurisdiction creates significant challenges for accrediting student achievement. In Australia, unregulated curricular and assessment regimes increase the variability of practice across schools, the likelihood of inconsistency in approaches across languages, and therefore, the standards of performance. These issues are significant because teachers are becoming resistant to change and it also implies that implementation of the French Learning Progression Framework may become just another external imposition.

As discussed in the previous section, the findings of this study suggest that while intercultural language learning is the pedagogy promoted in the curriculum (ACARA, 2016), intercultural competence is often left out of assessment. This may constitute a problem because it is now the central focus of the Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2016), and consequently, teachers are lacking confidence in the assessment of intercultural competence.

In conclusion, this study has explored the perceptions of a French Learning Progression Framework from a sample of four teachers of French. This was done in order to determine how current practices meet the needs of teachers and students. There were two main aims of the French Learning Progression Framework: first, to credit student learning and give them and their families clear information about what they have achieved in the language. Second, to provide teachers with a valid instrument to assess student progression throughout their language learning and to assist with the writing of programs. While Australian languages education is moving towards a more transparent educational system, more research is needed to develop a reliable and valid progression instrument that is capable of reporting on and crediting student achievement in specific languages. Validating the framework in Australian schools and in particular, a focus on teacher professional development is needed, as this is a critical step in the process of effectively assessing student levels of language proficiency and intercultural competence.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the University of Sydney. I am grateful to four dedicated French language teachers for their participation in this study. My appreciation as well goes to my supervisors for their assistance and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article. I also appreciate the helpful comments made by reviewers.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The author whose name is listed certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement with any financial interest, or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

About the author

Camille Booker is a PhD student from Sydney, Australia. She is trained as a languages teacher and she recently completed her MPhil thesis, exploring assessment outcomes in

French languages education. Her current research interests include French bilingual education.

References

- Alderson, J.C. (2007). The CEFR and the Need for More Research. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91: 4.
- Arrowsmith, C. and Ravibabu Mandla, V. (2017). Institutional approaches for building intercultural understanding into the curriculum: an Australian perspective. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 41(4): 475–487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098265.2017.1337733>
- Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2016). Foundation to Year 10 Curriculum: Language, Language for Interaction (ACELA1428). Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/Curriculum/F10?y=F&y=7&y=8&y=9&y=10&s=LA&s=LT&s=LY&layout=1>
- Bazeley, P. (2009). Analysing Qualitative Data: More Than ‘Identifying Themes’. *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research*, 2, pp.6-22.
- Board of Studies (BOS). (2013). *Languages K-6: Syllabus and support documents*. Sydney: Board of Studies.
- Council of Europe (1996). *Modern languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference*. Draft 2 of a framework proposal. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Council of Europe (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching and assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Djité, P.G. and Australian National Languages and Literacy Inst., Deakin. (1994). *From Language Policy to Language Planning an Overview of Languages Other Than English in Australian Education*. Washington, D.C.: Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse,. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED381001>
- Donnelly, K. and Wiltshire, K. (2014). *Review of the Australian Curriculum*. Australian Government Department of Education
- Ely, M., Anzul, M., Friedman, T., Garner, D. and McCormack-Steinmetz, A. (1991). *Doing Qualitative Research: Circles within Circles*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Hasselgreen, A. (2013). Adapting the CEFR for the classroom assessment of young learners' writing. *The Canadian Modern Language Review / La Revue Canadienne Des Langues Vivantes*, 69(4): 415–435. DOI: 10.3138/cmlr.1705.415. <http://e-publications.une.edu.au/1959.11/15374>
- Hulstijn, J.H. (2007). The shaky ground beneath the CEFR: Quantitative and qualitative dimensions of language proficiency. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(4): 663–667. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.006275.x.

- LeCompte, M.D., and Schensul, J.J. (1999). *Analyzing and interpreting ethnographic data*. Book Five of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit*, J.J. Schensul & M.D. LeCompte (Eds.). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, a division of Sage Publications.
- Liddicoat A.J., Scarino A., Curnow T.J., Kohler M., Scrimgeour A. and Morgan A. (2007). *An Investigation of the State and Nature of Languages in Australian Schools* (190). Canberra, Australia: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Retrieved from
- Liddicoat, A.J. (2007). *Language Planning and Policy: Issues in Language Planning and Literacy*. Multilingual Matters, Buffalo, Toronto, 9781853599774.
- Liddicoat, A.J. and Scarino, A. (2010). Introduction: Languages in Australian Education. In Anthony J. Liddicoat and Angela Scarino (eds) *Languages in Australian Education: Problems, Prospects and Future Directions* (pp. 1–8). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Liddicoat, A.J., Papademetre, L., Scarino, A. and Kohler, M. (2003). *Report on intercultural language learning*. Retrieved 11 May 2015, from <http://www1.curriculum.edu.au/nalsas/pdf/intercultural.pdf> on
- Little, D. (2007). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Perspectives on the making of supranational language education policy. *Modern Language Journal*, 91(4): 645–653.
- LoBianco, J. (2013). Language Policy: At the Centre and the Margins of Australian Multiculturalism. In A Jakubowicz and C Ho (eds), *For those who've come across the seas... Australian multicultural theory, policy and practice* (pp. 198–209). Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne.
- LoBianco, J. and Slaughter, Y. (2009). Australian Council for Educational Research, *Second languages and Australian schooling*. Camberwell, Victoria: ACER.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *Qualitative Research Methods: The long interview*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412986229
- Meisel J.M. (1980). Linguistic simplification. In S. Felix (ed.), *Second language development: Trends and issues* (pp. 13–40). Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
- Mislevy, R.J. (1995). Test Theory and Language-Learning Assessment. *Language Testing*, 12(3): 341–369.
- Ozolins, U. (1993). *The Politics of Language in Australia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Melbourne, 1993.
- PISA. (2012). *Programme for International Student Assessment*. OECD. Retrieved 4 October 2015, from <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>
- Scarino, A. (2012). A rationale for acknowledging the diversity of learner achievements in learning particular languages in school education in Australia. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35(3): 231–250.
- Scarino, A. (2014). Situating the challenges in current languages education policy in Australia—unlearning monolingualism. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 11(3): 289–306. DOI: 10.1080/14790718.2014.921176.

- Trim, J.L.M. (1978). *Some Possible Lines of Development of an Overall Structure for a European Unit/Credit Scheme for Foreign Language Learning by Adults*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Appendix B.
- Wright, B.D., and Grosse, M. (1993). How to set standards. *Rasch Measurement Transactions*, 7(3), 315-316.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).