

## SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS AFFECTING FRENCH TEACHING-LEARNING IN INDIA: NEW DIDACTICS TO SUIT THE NEEDS OF REGIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF FRENCH

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**Abstract.** India is a multilingual land of more than 25 languages of its own. Additionally, there are several foreign languages taught here like German, Chinese, Italian etc., out of which French has a popular place. “*French as a foreign language is learnt by more than 1,00,000 Indian students in Delhi alone*”, stated the database of Institut Francais en Inde this year. Given the 25 years of Indo-French strategic partnership, we have multiple job openings within and outside the country for French learners. Hence, there is a constant increase in the number of students enrolling each year for French learning in India. So, it is imperative to delve into the specific problems that the students face to master the French language and to provide solutions to them.

The paper wishes to deal with problems that arise when a Hindi speaker or a Punjabi speaker or any other regional language speaker, who lacks the knowledge of English, enrolls for French classes. Secondly, it aims to explore the goals of Faculty Development Programs (FDPs) for teachers who teach French to regional language speakers given the fact that the FDPs by French native officials do not often meet the needs of the Indian FLE teachers. Thus, the paper aims to comprehend whether the FDPs render specific strategies and tools to French teachers for teaching French to regional language speakers who do not speak English.

**keywords:** French language teaching, regional language learner, Socio-cultural factors, FDPs

### INTRODUCTION

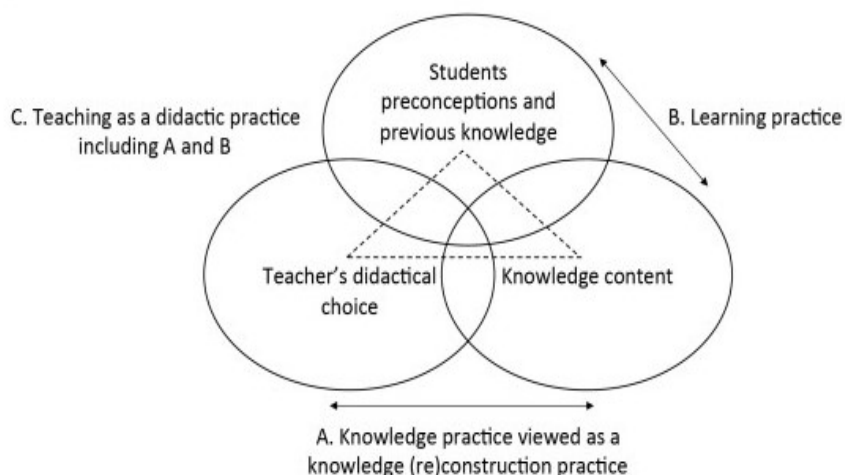
This study aims to review the socio-cultural factors that affect French teaching- learning in India. The French native teachers and the French official run organisations often fail to take cognizance of the needs of the Indian French language learners. In consequence, when the Indian FLE teachers attend the FDPs in France or even in India, although qualitatively rich, the take aways from the same do not cater to the needs of the Indian French Classrooms. The article wishes to bring to the fore, in particular, the needs of the regional language speakers who aspire to master the French language without having knowledge of English as a pre-requisite. It is necessary to tell here that both English and French share some common syntactic structures (Gledhill, 2021) for instance, English and French language, linguistically speaking are languages with verb median (Subject, Verb, Complement) whereas our regional languages are verb final (Subject, Complement, Verb). Hence, knowledge of English implies here familiarity with a given syntax that is common to French language which facilitates French language acquisition.

In India, French as a foreign language is taught at schools, colleges and universities. Initially, it is introduced at grade 5 and/or at grade 9 as per CBSE, ICSE or IB Boards of Secondary Education and in schools under Delhi state Board, Karnataka state Board schools start with French learning from 1<sup>st</sup> standard onwards till 12<sup>th</sup> standard. Based on the 3-language formula of National Education Policy 2020 (Somani, 2024), the students of these boards opt for French as their third language and sometimes as

their fourth language, after having opted English as their medium of instruction, followed by 1 regional language (Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujrati, Bengali etc.), and lastly French. However, French being the option out of other languages like German, Spanish, Sanskrit etc., it is not compulsory for all the school students. Sometimes, the schools do not have the option of foreign languages as well. At the college or university level, the students can opt for various courses like a Bachelor of Arts Program in French language, or a diploma course in French language. The three years of learning French makes them eligible for pursuing a post-graduation in French language. Besides, there are many learners of French language at the Alliance Françaises, Institut Français en Inde, Le Frehindi, Indo-French Hub etc. In fact, the database of Institut Français en Inde this year stated (IFI, 2022) “French as a foreign language is learnt by more than 1,00,000 Indian students in Delhi alone”.

Undoubtedly, the curriculum of any language is designed according to various factors, wherein the ‘needs of the learners’ play the most dominant role in any pedagogy. According to a paper published in International Journal of Education by Imam Alkhalidi (Alkhalidi, 2020) “teachers need to take into consideration their students’ views and attitudes along with needs analysis. [...] The new shift in pedagogy and curriculum design emphasizes the idea of involving students into the process of teaching and course design.” The curriculum for French as an optional subject at the school or university is way different from what someone learns for cracking DELF international certifications. Not just the curriculum, didactics too equally depend on the needs of the learners, and it is unarguably the only factor that the teachers keep in mind while preparing for a class, and no amount of preparation is enough; since every student differs from the other given their social and economic differences, and their prior knowledge. The students come to a foreign language class with a socio-cultural baggage from their pre-existing knowledge.

As stated by Bladh (Gabriel Bladh, 2018): “Curriculum making can be understood as merging the conceptually distinct categories of curriculum and pedagogy. This again underlines our point that stresses the importance of the relational perspective in the didactic tradition, which puts teachers’ didactical choices and their didactic practice in focus.”



**FIGURE 1.** *Model of the teacher's didactic practices: Selection of the content of the classroom level*  
Source: (Gabriel Bladh, 2018)

The entire Didactic process depends on the students’ preconceptions and previous knowledge’, as it is evident from Fig 1. Dwelling on the preconceptions and previous knowledge of a language student

would simply mean trying to teach the foreign language with the comprehension of already known language(s) by the learner: its grammar, its semantics, its syntax, its structures and cultural nuances. This pre-conceived knowledge of the learner can be a barrier for the student to learn a new language, specifically a foreign language if the teacher is indifferent to it. This knowledge originates from ethnicity, culture, and society and hence, make the didactic process even more challenging for a teacher.

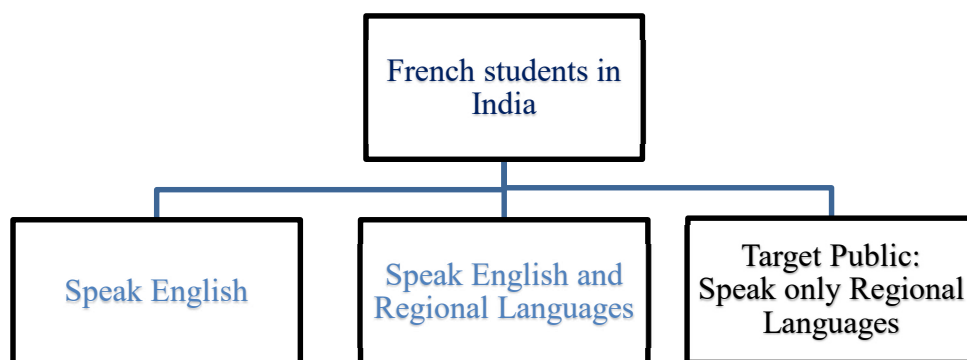
### PROBLEM STATEMENT

There are, indeed, various Teachers' training programs for French teachers in India conducted by international and national bodies such as Institut Français en Inde, Alliance Française on the one hand and central, state and private universities in India on the other. However, the fact that the Indian students start learning French after learning a few languages makes it a challenge for the teachers. So, the paper intends to explore three research questions:

1. What are the socio-cultural factors that affect the learning of French by a regional language speaker?
2. Are the objectives of the French Teachers' Training Programme (FTTP) in India in line with the needs of the Indian teachers?
3. Whether teaching can be Indian learner centric?

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study involves review analysis of the objectives of FTTP done in India. The researcher wished to authenticate the teachers' training programs conducted by French Embassy in hence, received a list of FDPs from the concerned to review the goals of the same. Below is the tabular representation of the objective of the study. The research will not take into account the whole scenario of teaching-learning of French but only so far teaching-learning of French by the regional language speakers are concerned, as illustrated in Fig 2:



**FIGURE 2.** *Target Public: French students in India who only speak regional languages.*

Moreover, an oral interview is done with the French learners who are also regional language speakers from different states in India namely, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Pondicherry, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. They were contacted online through various French language groups on social media platforms, about which we came to know through the students enrolled for French course (level A1 to B2) at School of Foreign Languages (SFL), Panipat. Most of the respondents are students at SFL Panipat, which is a privately owned institute, in-partnership with Le Frehindi - Paris', located in Panipat (Haryana). The students interviewed were from the online programme of different levels (A1 to B2 levels as per the European Framework). It is important to note that they hailed from various parts of the

country and were selected through interview, based on their knowledge of regional languages, and a lack of English communicative skill. A total of 30 students (21 years and above) were asked the following questions:

1. Which regional language do you speak?
2. Does the knowledge of your regional language help the learning of French? If so, how?
3. Does the knowledge of your regional language hinder the learning of French? If so, how?

As per norms, the respondents are kept anonymous giving them sufficient space for honest declaration.

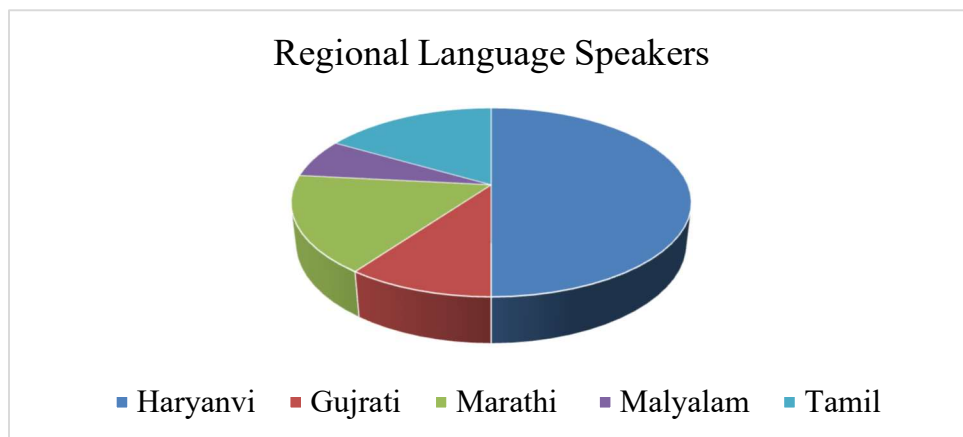
### QUESTION ON SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS: AN ANALYSIS OF ORAL INTERVIEW OF 30 RESPONDENTS

Before we commence with the findings of our analysis, it is indeed pertinent to note that our respondents have been chosen on 2 criteria, i.e., they should be French language learners and they lack proficiency in English. After having analysed the responses, 5 categories were found that have been found out:

1. Pre-conceived language(s) and/or dialect(s)
2. Major Occupation(s)
3. Social and cultural insecurities of Foreign Languages Learners
4. Rural and Urban needs
5. Lack of identification with the target language culture

#### Pre-Learnt Language(s) and/ or Dialects(s):

Undoubtedly, the preponderant socio-cultural factor is the already known languages that can affect another language learning. It is rightly put by Montero, (Rosebery Lopez Montero, 2014) “[...] when both languages present similar characteristics, it might be viewed as advantageous in the learning process since it permits students to make associations that will facilitate the development of linguistic structures whereas different language patterns will have the opposite effect, interfering in the acquisition process this is known as the Native Language Effect.”



Out of 30 respondents, 15 spoke Haryanvi - a dialect of Hindi, spoken in the state of Haryana and the regions bordering Haryana, 3 spoke Gujarati which is the dominant language of Gujarat, 5 spoke Marathi which is spoken in the state of Maharashtra, 2 were speakers of Malayalam which is the language of Kerala, 5 speakers were from Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu who spoke Tamil and Tamil dialects. Since, all these Indian languages have a few grammatical concepts common with French like the system of Number and Gender which makes the understanding of Nouns and their relationship with

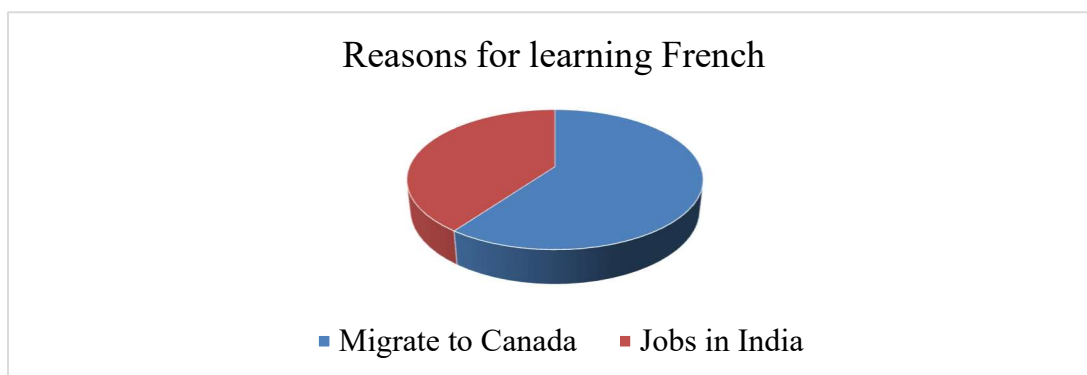
Adjectives easier, the students had a little help in understanding the grammar.

However, the phonetics became a major hindrance as their own regional accents clouded the comprehension of speech. Montero further added that “the native language of learners exerts a strong influence on the acquisition of the target language system.” This is to say that the pre-conceived languages will drive both helpful and hindering consequences on the comprehension and production of the new language, nonetheless the hindering consequences are likely to be the most dominant.

One important finding is that the knowledge of the dominant language or dialect is unquestionably present during the introductory stage of the learning process and diminishes as the learner reaches the intermediate and later the advanced level, wherein he or she has reached a competent level of internalization of the language and at this point the degree of interference has lowered. Hence, the initial stage of French learning is the most affected one where the French teacher should be trained enough to deal with the problem.

### Major Occupation(s)

The second most important socio-cultural factor affecting French learning is the occupation practiced in different regions. A candidate is interested in learning French only because of its later use in the future. Hence, the kind of job opportunities or work done in a region is the most motivating factor in the choice of learning French. In fact, it is because of the existing occupations of that region and the involvement of French in work life that the families ensure that their children start learning French at an early age. Gettie expresses her view on occupation as a major factor for French learning (Gettie, 2020), “Language learning is easy when it is whole, real and relevant; when it makes sense and is functional; when it is encouraged in the context of its use; when the learner chooses to use it.”



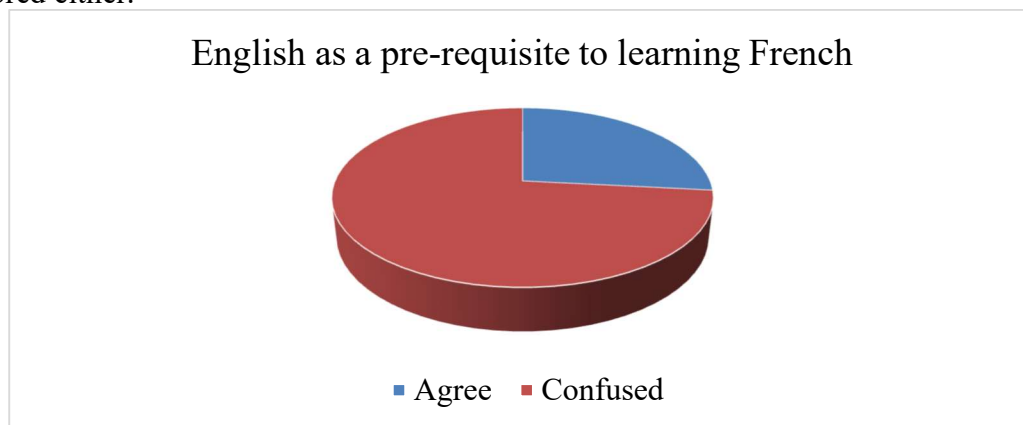
Out of 30 respondents, 4 from Tamil Nadu, along with 2 from Gujarat and 10 from Haryana- a total of 16 respondents out of 30 agreed that their purpose of learning French was to migrate to Quebec, Canada for higher studies or work. In fact, “*the Express Entry for Canada PR is one of the salient reasons for the enrolment in French classes*”, states one of the respondents. Nonetheless, when asked about the occupation practiced by the family members, 18 out of 30 respondents had ‘Agriculture and Farming’ as their major occupation, because of which they reside in the countryside, and not in the centre of the city. Attending online French classes is advantageous to them. Besides, they were involved in the farming practices from morning till noon and then again in the evening, catering to the livestock on their farms. The remaining 12 respondents hailing from Mumbai, Pune, Vapi, and Pondicherry had parents working in MNCs because of which they were learning French as they wanted to pursue a similar field of profession as their parents.

So, the major occupation practiced in the family is a pertinent factor that affects the motivation level of

a French language learner. Every region offers employment opportunities, like the respondents of Haryana majorly practiced agriculture, while the families of respondents of coastal areas like Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, and Maharashtra had pisciculture as their main occupation. It is important to remember that our respondents are the people who lack English communicative skill and practice regional language daily even at work. Hence, the responses received pointed to the lack of motivation amongst the respondents hailing from the villages in Haryana as compared to the students from other regions. It is because the major occupation in their region is not demanding the need of French communicative skill. They are all learning it for either settling down in Canada or Europe. And in such a situation, a French teacher needs training to deal with a public undergoing some dilemma about their choice of learning French.

### Social and Cultural Insecurities of Foreign Language Learners

The third factor is the driving force that adversely affects the Foreign Language Learner with lack of English competency the most – it is the insecurity of not being accepted by the fellowmen outside the cocoon. In simpler words, the social and cultural insecurity is a common phenomenon found with candidates lacking English knowledge, given the huge sense of pride attached to English in India. India being the British colony for more than a century resulted in having completely adopted English as its official language, even after India's Independence in 1947. Of course, there are umpteen reasons of it happening, yet the fact that people who lack English skills are judged by their peers in this country cannot be ignored either.



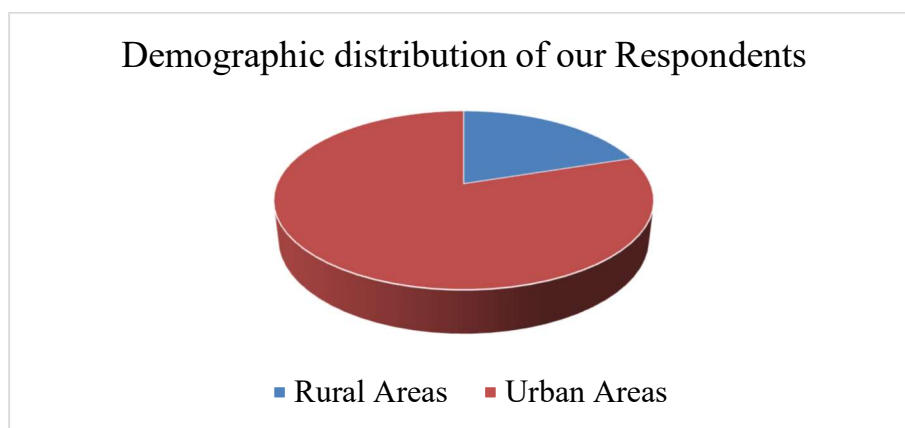
To enunciate, 22 out of 30 respondents had enquired about English as a pre-requisite to learning French during their admission. The remaining 8 respondents did not deny that they believed English to be a pre-requisite for learning a foreign language like French, however, with time they understood that if their teachers can explain the grammatical concepts in their native tongue, then it is no longer a problem. One of the students from Haryana stated, “The first class was quite relieving when you explained the concept of Possessive Adjectives as a similar concept in Hindi, and not English, given the number and gender rules of the two languages- it is because of that class I felt confident that I can learn it too.”

Hence, **the important finding** that drives us towards our problematic is the social and cultural insecurities that candidates speaking regional languages face while learning French because of not having a good command on the English language. The French language institutes and their course counsellors should definitely ensure that the students coming to take admission must not feel out of place due to their lack of English Communicative Skill. Moreover, English is not a pre-requisite to learning French - this must be a compulsorily conveyed information to the candidates in order to make them feel at home. Additionally, there needs to be a trained team of French teachers who are competent

enough to teach French as a foreign language without using English as the medium of instructions, instead their initial classes should draw similarities between the regional tongue with French.

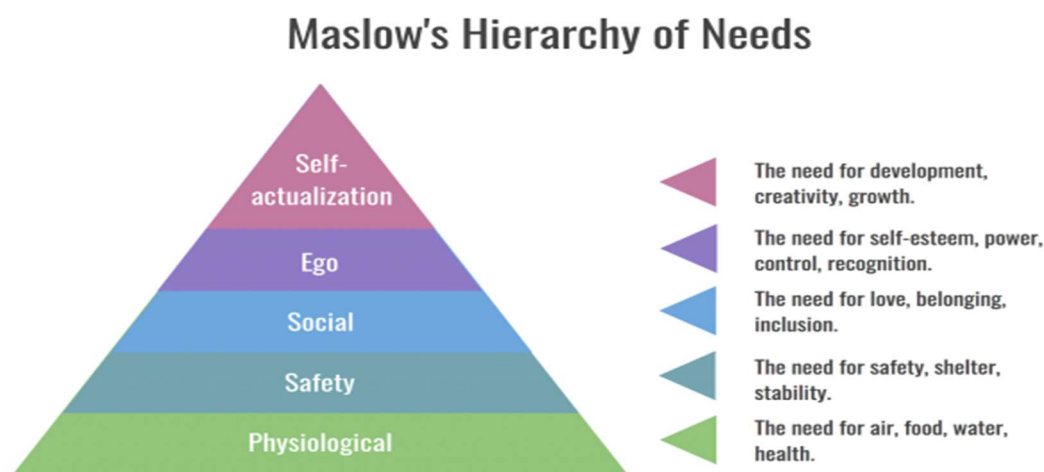
### Rural and Urban Needs

The fourth most significant factor which affects the French learning are the varied needs or expectations of candidates hailing from rural and urban areas. It is undeniable that a language learner's needs are in direct relation with the occupational opportunities at hand, which we had already discussed above, however, apart from the economical aspect both geographical and social dimensions play a humongous role in defining the candidate's expectations from the language courses, and it's surprisingly a positive effect sometimes.



First and foremost, when it comes to the geographical distribution of a place, the rural landscapes involve less industries and hence, lesser population, while the demography in urban areas is comparatively higher. Secondly, there is more social involvement with people in urban areas as compared to rural areas, given the self-sufficiency of the latter. As per our respondents, 6 out of 30 are from rural area, and the remaining 24 respondents belong to urban area. Upon being asked about their expectations from French learning, the candidates from the rural sector denied any social needs, as they were only learning it because they had applied for Canada study or work visa. On the contrary, the candidates hailing from urban areas were trying to get placed in companies like Tech Mahindra, Amazon, and Flipkart. One of the candidates from Panipat, Haryana stated, “My father runs a textile factory wherein they have buyers from Europe and Africa for rugs and carpets, hence I wish to become a translator/ interpreter so I can get more business for my father’s firm.” The economical needs motivating the candidates to learn still felt justifiable till one of them said, “It is cool to learn a new language, nobody in my family speaks English, let alone French. So, when my peers see me enjoying French music, I can sense the pride in their eyes, and which is why I am learning it. I will also learn English after completing French levels.” This respondent is a 17-year-old wealthy kid whose family is into trading of cattle fodder for generations, and they have never sent their children to an English-medium public school. This respondent is the first from his family’s three generations to ever come across a foreign language, that too for a social need.



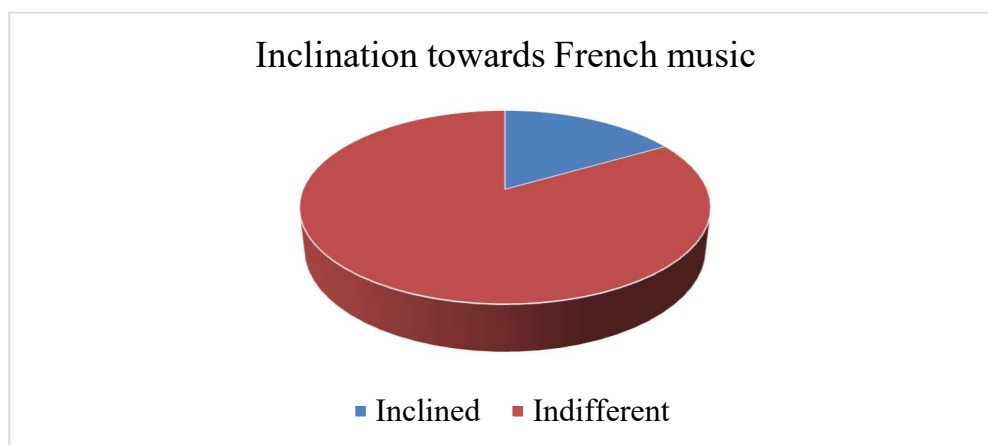


**FIGURE 3.** *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs - Source: (Peachy, 2024)*

This brings us to an important realisation- apart from economic opportunities that the language brings to the candidate, it brings with it social recognition too, similar to what Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory suggests, as shown in the Fig 3, the French teacher who comprehends the mindset of the learners can come out successful. According to an article by Nida Demir entitled 'Application of Maslow's theory on education' (Demir, 2024), "Learners increase their effort when motivated by a need, an interest, or a desire to learn. They are also motivated by the relevance of the material to be addressed and learn better when material is related to their own needs and interests. For learners to be fully engaged in learning their attention must be fully focused on the material presented."

### **Lack of Identification with the Target Culture**

The last factor influencing the French learning is unquestionably the sole reason for candidates dropping out in the mid-session of their courses, i.e., lack of identification or relatability with the French culture. In the beginning of the learning process everyone has a high motivational level as their needs obscure the reality, but gradually when the French language learning demands immersion in French culture through podcasts and films- the students start to lose interest out of sheer lack of identification and relatability with the French culture. French literature and culture have always been the precursor of the modernism in the West, their art and their artists are avant-garde. But the target learners have never been exposed to even English movies or songs so, French culture might produce a cultural shock which drives them away being too intimidating.





Out of 30 respondents from A1 to B2 levels, only 5 respondents developed a taste for French music after it was introduced during their French classes. The remaining 25 respondents dismissed the idea of watching French movies as they struggled with the language, and even if they surpassed the linguistic barrier the plot of these movies was hardly relatable. As far as French songs were concerned, they had their own reasons for not developing a taste. One of them stated, “We like our own folk songs and their beats. We listen to French songs for the vocabulary but never comprehended the music nor the beats.” Additionally, another respondent told. “Some of the French music videos are bizarre and make no sense to us, for instance there is a video wherein a girl keeps walking on the streets with nowhere to go.” (Reference: ‘Tournez dans le vide’ by Indila)

It is understandable as to why these candidates do not relate to the French culture. However, the idea here is not to analyze the reasons, but to highlight **the important finding** that if they have a teacher who could draw parallels between the Indian culture and its art with the French culture and their art, these candidates would feel forever motivated to know and learn more. Ergo, we are back to our problematic that the training programs must include objectives catering to train the French teachers whose students lack English skills and are reliant completely on regional languages and/or dialects.

### OBJECTIVES OF FTTP: A REVIEW ANALYSIS

The short-term teacher training workshops aim to provide teachers with intensive training in various aspects of teaching French, such as grammar, pronunciation, French literature and culture. These programs are offered by universities and higher schools of teaching and education (ESPE). Linguistic and Educational Cooperation of the French Embassy in India (Linguistic and Educational Cooperation, 2024) offers to conduct programmes for learning and teaching French: teachers’ training programmes, French language promotion actions. Hence, one of the most relevant organizations is the Alliance Française (AF) in India and the French Institutes in India (IFI) of the French Embassy in India. The Alliance Française is an international organization that promotes French language and culture throughout the world. In India, there are 14 Alliances Françaises. Both organizations, AF and IFI, organize training programs for French teachers to help them improve their teaching skills and their teaching of the French language.

Being a foreign language, the use of French is confined to classrooms even for French teachers. So, short term workshops and French teacher training programs in India are the best way for teachers to improve their teaching skills and French language teaching. They can benefit from the expertise of its qualified trainers to improve their teaching and their interaction with students.

Additionally, it is during these programs and workshops that French teachers have the opportunity to connect with other teachers and share their experiences and knowledge. (BELC, 2017) These training courses are designed for French teachers in India, whether beginners or experienced. The programs are tailored to the needs of teachers and are delivered by experienced trainers from relevant organizations such as Alliance Française, L’Institut Français en Inde (IFI), state and private universities. These programs focus on teaching the French language, grammar, pronunciation, French culture, and literature. Teachers also learn cutting-edge teaching techniques and tools to improve their teaching and interaction with learners.

According to the website of the French Institute in India (IFI) (Teachers' training, n.d.), the types of training for French teachers along with their objectives are:

#### In-Service Training

Audience: School and university teachers

Organization: Organized either jointly in collaboration with Indian partner institutions, or directly by

the French Institute in India

Duration: 2 days to 5 days.

**Themes/ Objectives**

Training can have different dimensions such as:

- Language skills and practice
- Teaching pedagogy
- Use of digital technologies and communication in class
- Literature in the university classroom

Mode: Face-to-face or online

**IFI Rendez-Vous**

Audience: School and university teachers

Organization: Jointly organized in collaboration with Indian professors

Duration: 2 hours

Mode: Online

Registration fees: None (limited number of places)

**Themes/ Objectives**

Training can have different dimensions such as:

- Language skills and practice
- Teaching pedagogy
- Use of digital and communication technologies in the classroom
- Literature in the university classroom

**Pro FLE+**

The CNED and France Education International have combined their expertise to build PROFLE +, a distance training program intended for teachers to improve their skills in teaching French as a foreign language (FLE).

It includes an intuitive and ergonomic interface adapted to computers or laptops (smartphones, tablets), 3 self-learning programs (with a free session), and a certification course based on the completion of a presented end-of-study project before the CIEP jury.

This program can be used as part of a continuing education plan, with an individual approach or an institutional approach. It offers organizations and institutions – in France and abroad – an alternative or association to regular training activities. PROFLE+ offers 4 modules focused on the professional tasks essential to successfully carrying out the teaching mission:

**Objectives**

- To develop teaching skills
- Build a teaching unit
- Manage an educational sequence
- To assess learning

After having reviewed the types of trainings available along with their objectives mentioned, it is important to highlight the fact that these trainings focus on teaching the teachers how to teach the French language (grammar, syntax, rules, structures) rather than focusing on the learning need of the learners and customize their teachings as per the needs. Most of these trainings are done by French native teachers, which is another major reason why the practical problems of French teachers in India remain

unresolved even after attending multiple trainings. This brings us to the final findings, i.e., the shortcomings of FTTP in India, specifically answering to our problem statement.

### SHORTCOMINGS OF FTTP: THE FINAL FINDINGS

Undoubtedly, the French teachers learn a lot from these training programs, nonetheless the practical problems faced by teachers in India are never dealt in singularity. The major objective of this paper is to review the status of French Teachers' Training in India in relation to helping the teachers deal with regional language speakers. Additionally, this paper aimed to analyse the socio-cultural factors that affected the French language learning in India. The final findings are the answers to the 3 problematics mentioned above are as follows:

There are 5 socio-cultural factors, namely, pre-conceived language(s) and/or dialect(s), major occupation(s), social and cultural insecurities, rural and urban needs, and lack of identification with the target language culture. These factors have both positive and negative effects on the language learners. As far as the objectives of FTTP are concerned, they are very general and language learning oriented. They lack inclusion of making the teachers understand their public and train them as per their needs. These trainings hardly take into consideration the objective of training teachers as to how to teach French without using English as a medium of instruction for regional language speakers.

Lastly, there are several shortcomings of FTTP in India, and the major shortcoming which is the final answer of our problematic is the non-existence of trainings that are oriented towards training teachers for handling the non-English speaking public while learning French. In fact, most of the times in these trainings, the trainers themselves are native Francophones, hence leaving the practical problems faced by Indian teachers at bay.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, Indian students are polyglots and their penchant for learning new languages is well known. It is imperative to have trained French teachers for such learners. The socio-cultural factors affecting the French learning should indeed be well managed by the French teachers so that these students stay motivated irrespective of the linguistic barriers they face given their dominant native tongue. Hence, the FTTP in India should be more specific in their objectives keeping in mind the practical needs of the Indian students and their teachers. This paper's final findings demand further research on the FTTP in India and their objectives that are not in sync with the Indian needs.

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