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Learning Modern Foreign Languages in the Republic of Ireland: A study of the learning experiences of upper-secondary level students.

Patricia Minton

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Ph.D., Trinity College Dublin

February 2012

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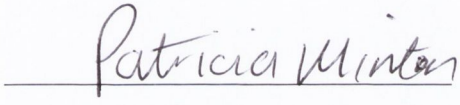

Patricia A. Minton
February, 2012

Learning Modern Foreign Languages in the Republic of Ireland: A study of the learning experiences of upper-secondary level students.

Patricia A. Minton

Abstract

This study investigates the learning experiences of upper-secondary level students in the Republic of Ireland whilst learning modern foreign languages at school. Essentially this study has sought to capture the students' voice. It is a snapshot in time of the learning experiences of upper-secondary level students. An initial analysis of European educational policy in modern foreign languages education has shown how the period from the European White Paper on Education in 1995 marked a time of greater consultation and investment in modern foreign languages in European education. Thus, in the evaluation phase of this project, questionnaire data from 732 non-sixth year senior cycle students were obtained to provide an understanding of government commitment to the realisation of the Council of Europe policy of '*mother tongue plus two foreign languages*' before the end of compulsory schooling in Ireland - determined in this study by (i) the provision, uptake and retention of modern foreign language subjects in secondary education; (ii) the current situation regarding grade achievement in state examinations in modern foreign language subjects at school; (iii) the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages at school; (iv) provision for 'prior knowledge' and 'language and linguistic awareness' in modern foreign language study at school; and (v) student motivation and learning strategies in the pursuit of learning modern foreign languages at school.

It was concluded that (i) following the introduction of a Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative and a Post-Primary Languages Initiative French language remains as most popular language with slight increases in recent years in the uptake of Italian and Spanish languages; (ii) there was an apparent lack of language crossover in the taking up of an additional and/or alternative modern foreign language subjects; (iii) Grade achievement in modern foreign language subjects have remained relatively constant in recent years with approximately 10% of students obtaining '*A*' grades and average grades being an almost universal '*C*' grade across certain language subjects at higher level in state examinations; (iv) examples of good language learning practices to develop fluency, motivation and language learning strategies were linked to examination performance and reported increased target language use; (v) a majority of students reported being guided by the National University of Ireland's matriculation requirements in their choice of a modern foreign language at school. Recommendations included (i) continued diversity of language subjects with increased target language use and student mobility for exposure to the target language abroad; (ii) a more holistic approach to all language subjects and associated learning supports at school; (iii) the introduction of a new post of language support teacher to support all languages in schools; (iv) reversal of the decision not to participate in the European Indicator of language competence study.

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SUMMARY

Setting this study in context in *Chapter 1* involved a re-tracing of how current educational policy in modern foreign languages education at upper-secondary level has evolved. My intention was to take an initial broad-based approach to the educational policy context of this study. Thus, the chapter begins with an outline of modern foreign language educational policy at European level and continues with an analysis of the implementation of that policy. Given the wealth of European policy developments in education in the past decades I decided to adopt a chronological approach to modern foreign language policy implementation in Europe. The European White Paper on Education in 1995 '*Teaching & Learning: towards a Learning Society*' marked the commencement of a more co-operative and innovative period in European education so provided a very suitable starting point for this study. Hence, chapter 1 includes an initial synopsis of modern languages in education and related policy developments in Europe in the period 1975 to 1995 i.e. the time preceding the European White Paper on Education. The chapter continues with 'Modern Languages in European Education from 1995' detailing the policies and *Actions* in education that inform modern foreign languages education in Europe and contribute to improving the overall proficiency levels in modern foreign languages and language diversity at school. The UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED is included as a suitable standard of comparison of education levels across member states.

Chapter 2, Section 1 continues with Modern Foreign Languages in Secondary Education in Ireland commencing with an historic overview of the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign languages in secondary education and continuing with an analysis of current grade achievement in modern foreign language subjects. The development of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school is also considered. A number of particularly innovative European policy initiatives in modern foreign languages education are examined in the context of their application *or* potential application to modern foreign languages education curricula in Ireland with

conclusions drawn on the likely impacts of such policy implementation on the future of modern foreign languages learning at school in Ireland.

Chapter 2, Section 2 considers the current situation regarding the provision in schools for 'prior knowledge' and' language and linguistic awareness' in the learning of modern foreign language subjects. Student motivation and student learning strategies in pursuit of becoming effective learners of modern foreign languages at school are also examined.

Chapter 3 'Methodology' details the primary research component of the current study including research questions; rationale for design; rationale for the overall approach to the primary research; rationale for the choice of the specific research tools; rationale for & explanation of the chosen statistical treatment; participants; materials; procedures; ethical considerations; and reflection on methodology.

Chapter 4 'Findings' details the main findings of the study under the various strands including the provision and uptake of modern foreign languages at school; retention of MFL's in Lower-Secondary education; grade achievement in modern foreign language studies; development of fluency & proficiency in MFL learning; motivation in the pursuit of MFL Learning; and learning strategies in the MFL Classroom.

Chapter 5 'Discussion' considers the combined findings of the initial literature review chapters 1 and 2 and Chapters 3 and 4 with key inferences and conclusions developed for each of the appropriate research strands i.e. Development of Modern foreign languages education policy in Europe; the provision and uptake of modern foreign language subjects at school in Ireland; the retention of modern foreign language subjects in secondary education; grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects; consideration at member state level to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school; prior knowledge and students language and linguistic awareness; motivation in modern foreign language learning; strategies in modern foreign language learning. Recommendations for future language study are also presented.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ab initio	[Lat., *from the beginning*]
AILA	International Association of Applied Linguistics
ALTE	Association of Language Testers in Europe
APA	American Psychological Associaton
CEDEFOP	Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Learning, Teaching & Assessment
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CILT	Centre for Language Teaching
CLCS	Centre for Language and Communications Studies
CLIL	Content & Language Integrated Learning
CSPE	Civil Social & Political Education
DES	Department of Education & Skills
DETE	Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment
DVD	Digital Video Disc
EAL	European Award for Languages
EALTA	European Association for Language Teaching & Assessment
EC	European Community
ECML	European Centre for Modern Languages
ECN	Education Centre Network
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Company

ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EEC	European Economic Community
EFLUSL	Evaluation of Foreign Languages at Upper-Secondary Level
e.g.	exempli gratia [Lat., *for example*]
ELP	European Language Portfolio
ENIC	European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Recognition & Mobility
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESOL	English as a Second/ Other Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESPRIT	European Strategic Programme for Research & Development in Information Technology
et al.	et alili [Lat., *and others*]
etc.	et cetera [Lat., *and other things*]
EU	European Union
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
i.e.	*id est* [Lat., *that is*]
INRA	International Research Associates
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
L2	Second Language after Mother Tongue
MLPSI	Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative
NARIC	European Network of National Academic Recognition Centres

NCCA	National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
NCTE	National Centre for Technology in Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NEC	National Europass Centre
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NUI	National University of Ireland
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development
op.cit	opere citato [Lat., *in the work quoted*]
PPLI	Post-Primary Languages Initiative
SEC	State Examinations Commission
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLSS	Second Level Support Service
SPHE	Social Personal & Health Education
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TL	Target Language
TY	Transition Year
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organisation
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
vice versa	[Lat., *the order being reversed*]

LEARNING MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: A STUDY OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF UPPER-SECONDARY LEVEL STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the learning experiences of upper-secondary level students in the Republic of Ireland whilst learning modern foreign languages at school. The term Ireland is used throughout the study to denote the twenty-six counties that form the Republic, and whose education system is administered by the Department of Education & Skills (see DES, 2010a). Essentially, this research has sought to capture the students' voice. It is a snapshot in time of the learning experience of upper-secondary level students, i.e., students' self-reporting of *their* learning experiences in modern foreign languages at secondary level. My decision to undertake this study developed over a number of years whilst teaching Business Studies and French to undergraduate students in the first year of a Business degree programme who were required to study a modern foreign language. The overall approach of these students to the study of their modern foreign language motivated me to retrace their foreign language learning experiences by taking a step back to secondary education in Ireland, and to investigate student approaches to modern foreign languages learning at upper-secondary level.

This study contributes to the on-going debate on the position of modern foreign languages in secondary education in Ireland. From a theoretical perspective, the study takes a top-down approach to education policy, i.e., policy development in Europe; its implementation or otherwise at member state level in Ireland; and, its subsequent impact in the classrooms in which modern foreign language students learn. Hence, the research is developed around European policy in education (chapter 1); education policy implementation at member state level in Ireland (chapter 2 part 1); and, learning theory relating to students learning in the classroom (chapter 2 part 2). My enquiry commenced with an analysis of recent literature on the development of European policy in modern foreign languages education. This was intended to set the study in context by considering European policy developments in modern foreign languages education (Chapter 1) and the subsequent implementation or otherwise of that policy at member state level in Ireland (Chapter 2, part 1).

Emerging from the European educational policy analysis in Chapter 1, the Council of Europe policy aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages for European citizens before the end of compulsory schooling was particularly pertinent to the development of the initial research questions of this study, i.e.: How is this policy interpreted at member-state level in Ireland, in terms of how it influences the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign language school subjects amongst learners in secondary education? What is the current situation regarding grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects? What consideration is given at member state level in Ireland to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school? Once these particular questions are addressed through a review of the pertinent literature and analyses of national statistics in Chapter 2 part 1, which considered the general Ireland context, the same questions are further probed in the primary research component of this thesis in the context of particular students learning in the classroom (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire'; and upcoming Chapter 3, 'Methodology' and Chapter 4, 'Findings').

The study continues in Chapter 2, part 2 with further analyses of the learner's experience in the modern foreign language classroom, at which point a review of the pertinent literature considers whether there is prior knowledge that the learner brings to the language classroom from former study or other school subjects including language and linguistic awareness, gained in the course of such study or in other language subjects at school. The study further addresses the questions: what is the extent of student motivation and learning goals in the pursuit of modern foreign language learning? What are the learning strategies that students use in the course of modern foreign language learning? (Chapter 2, part 2). In addressing these further research questions, theoretical perspectives of student learning in modern foreign languages education are analyzed together with other relevant theories which have been drawn from Applied Linguistics, Psychology and Second Language Acquisition, in cases where such theories have been *specifically* applied to students learning modern foreign languages at school. Once these further questions are addressed through a review of the pertinent literature in Chapter 2 part 2, the same questions are further probed in the primary research component of this thesis in the context of particular students learning in the classroom (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire' and upcoming Chapter 3, 'Methodology' and Chapter 4, 'Findings').

In terms of establishing a framework for the presentation of this study, I developed my thesis around five chapters: an initial literature review chapter incorporating the European context in modern foreign language policy development (Chapter 1); followed by a further literature review chapter considering firstly, the Ireland context in modern foreign language policy development and implementation (Chapter 2, part 1); and secondly, the learner in the classroom (Chapter 2, part 2). The reviews of the literature were followed by a methodology chapter detailing the methodology of the primary research component of the study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire' and Chapter 3, 'Methodology'); and a findings chapter detailing the findings of the primary research component of the study (see Chapter 4). A final discussion chapter provides an analysis of the main findings of the study and suggests what may be inferred from the study findings in terms of the recommendations for the future development of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland (see Chapter 5).

CHAPTER ONE - EUROPEAN EDUCATION POLICY IN MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Introduction

We will recall that the intention of this study is to examine modern foreign languages education policy at the wider European level; to narrow the focus to the national level in Ireland by considering how policy has been interpreted and implemented at member state level; and to examine how such policy ultimately informs learning in the foreign language classroom. We have noted above that this study has adopted a top-down approach to education policy development at European level and subsequent implementation at member state level. We have also noted that our main focus of this study is the learner in the classroom. We will now consider how the two relate to each other and to the various associated disciplines which underlie the questions addressed in this study.

1.1 Connecting the various research disciplines of this study

Chapter 1 sets this study in context by examining European policy in modern foreign language education. At the very broadest level, '*a policy is a plan of action adopted by a person, group or state'* (Gillmour et al., 2007:621). In the context of this study policy comes to the fore as the central drive in language planning – advising and influencing governments of member states in adapting recommended policy to national policy in education systems: '*All language planning takes place within a language policy and is the result of political choices which attempt to regulate the relationships between languages and societies*' (Byram, 2000: 335- 336). Thus, '*language education policies always play a central role in language policies. The school is one of the main means of implementing planning measures in teaching mother tongue or first language, the use of languages as media of instruction, and the teaching of foreign or second languages'* (Byram, 2000: 337). Additionally, language policy '*....includes political measures aimed at introducing, implementing and defining the regional use of languages, such as the use of individual languages in multilingual states the acceptance of official languages and working languages in international organisations and agreements about foreign language instruction i.e. education language policy'* (Bussmann, 1996: 264).

By what means is *European policy* in modern foreign languages education decided upon at a European level and implemented at member state level? The answer to this question is relatively straight forward. At European level, through Article 2 of the European Cultural Convention, member states of the European Union who are party to the convention are committed to two key principles. Firstly, to *'....encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other contracting parties and grant facilities to those parties to promote such studies in its territory'*. Secondly, to *'....endeavour to promote the study of its languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other contracting parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those parties to pursue such studies in its territory'* (Council of Europe, 1954: 2). At member state level, Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty of Europe state that community action in education and training is to complement and support action taken at national level with member states having *total responsibility* for the content and organization of their own education and vocational training systems. As such, individual governments are responsible for their own national education policy, including languages education. What the European Union *seeks to do* is to facilitate links between countries via joint projects that focus on active promotion and support of modern foreign languages teaching and learning (European Union, 2010a).

Moving forward to European modern foreign languages policy implementation at member state level in Ireland (Chapter 2, part 1), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (see NCCA, 2010a), formerly the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB), (see CEB, 1987) is a statutory body since 2001, whose role is to advise the minister of Education on curriculum matters in early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools. Thus, in collaboration with the government's Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2010a) the NCCA considers policy developments in the wider European context and periodically adapts all school curricula and syllabuses accordingly where there is approval by the Minister of Education to implement *favoured* European policy changes to the national education system. By what means does this process impact the learner in the modern foreign languages classroom? In addition to advising on modern foreign languages education policy implementation the NCCA collaborates with a number of national academic advisors to consider and apply the most pertinent teaching and learning theories to national education curricula. Thus, the learner in the classroom is challenged by subject curricula which incorporate particular interpretations of European education policy combined with

interpretations of the most pertinent of applied teaching and learning theories in foreign language learning. From a national perspective this study determines what is the provision of modern foreign languages in schools in Ireland?; what are the current uptake levels of modern foreign languages subjects at school?; what are the current retention levels of modern foreign languages subjects towards upper-secondary level?; what is current grade achievement in modern foreign language subjects at school?; and which considerations are given at national level in Ireland to developing fluency and proficiency in foreign language learning at school? (see Chapter 2, part 1).

Moving on to the learner in the classroom (Chapter 2, part 2): naturally, in considering the learner in the modern foreign language classroom in the context of this study, it would have been possible to include any number of applied theoretical perspectives in classroom learning in addressing the main research questions. In continuing the top-down approach in education policy implementation, this study considered the contribution students' prior knowledge and students language and linguistic awareness make to the foreign language learning process. *All* language subjects at school both at primary and post-primary levels are determined by national education policy and impact directly on students' potential levels of development of language and linguistic awareness *gained* in the study of mother-tongue languages and *applied* in the learning of one or more modern foreign languages at school. We will see in Chapter 2, Section 2 that one theoretical view considers that:

'*Foreign language learning provides a comparative perspective on languages, and thus helps to enhance language awareness in relation to both mother tongue and L2 learning*'. Thus, from a range of starting points, the teacher must establish an environment in which '*....all learners can develop genre awareness, linguistic and metalinguistic skills, aesthetic awareness, interpretation skills and understanding of texts and contexts'* (Aase, 2003: 187).

The facilitation of prior knowledge is considered to greatly enhance the language learning experience particularly at the initial stages of learning so that students can make valid connections between languages that will help them in their study of a new language

'Prior knowledge is one of the factors that determine whether or not the input is meaningful. This can include knowledge of the native language, knowledge of other languages, existing knowledge of the second language, world knowledge, language universals etc. All play a role in a learner's success or lack of success in interpreting language data' (Gass, 1997:18).

It is further considered in Chapter 2, part 2 that '*....knowledge of the way language acquisition takes place does not necessarily provide definitive guidelines about classrooms but rather provides information about how we might think about the learners in our classrooms'* (Gass, 1997: 150).

Following a review of pertinent literature and in consideration of the study's focus on the learner in the classroom, it was considered that student motivation and student learning strategies in the learning of modern foreign languages would be particular relevant to the development of this study, i.e., Is there evidence of student motivation in the learning of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland? Is there evidence of students' use of learning strategies in the learning of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland? The possibility of inferring from students' self-reporting of learning experiences and approaches to learning modern foreign languages could elicit the likely presence of student motivation and student use of learning strategies in the learning process. Thus, both theoretical concepts could be effectively addressed through a review of the literature *and* their subsequent application to the primary research component of the study. Anticipated responses to questionnaire items in the primary research component of the study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire') would likely provide extensive possibilities to make inferences on both student motivation and learning strategies used by students both inside and outside the language classroom and this was indeed found to be the case (see Chapter 4, 'Findings', and Chapter 5, 'Discussion').

As we will see in Chapter 2, part 2:

'*Motivation refers to the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and the degree of effort they will exert in this respect'* (Keller, 1983:389; in Crookes & Schmidt, 1991:481). Furthermore, '*....the motivated individual is goal-directed, expends effort, is persistent and attentive, wants to succeed, exhibits positive affect, is stimulated, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence and has reasons (motives) to learn and/or succeed'* (Gardner, 2007: 10).

Moreover, strategy instruction provides a structure for effective learning in a classroom environment whilst instructing for strategy use in classroom learning has developed in line with changes in instructional methods in foreign language teaching and learning. (Lightbown & Spada, 1996: 110).

Learner strategies refer to:

'*language learning behaviours learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language....what they know about the strategies they use....what they know about aspects of their language learning other than the strategies they use*' (Wenden, 1987:6; in Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

Second language learner strategies encompass both second language learning and second language use strategies. Taken together:

'*....they constitute the steps or actions consciously selected by learning either for the learning of a second language, the use of it, or both*' (Cohen, 1998:5).

Anna Ul Chamot concedes with the findings of Grenfell and Harris (1999) in her assertion that learning strategies are important in second language learning and teaching for two major reasons:

Firstly, '*....by examining the strategies used by second language learners during the language learning process we gain insight into the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective processes involved in language learning*' and secondly, '*....less successful language learners can be taught new strategies thus helping them become better language learners*' (Grenfell & Harris, 1999; cited in Chamot, 2005:112).

Government policy decisions on provision of *certain* foreign languages in education in member states directly impacts on the learner at school. Students must make study choices from the subjects provided. In Ireland, school autonomy on decisions on which subjects to make available to students at individual schools adds a further challenging dimension driven by particular school policies and teacher availability to teach all of the curricular foreign language subjects. Once the languages and the teachers are in place decisions on *how* to teach and learn foreign languages at school are again reached at member state level by individual governments following continuous consultation with the practices of other member states at the wider European level. The *content of* and *approach to* foreign languages teaching and learning in the classroom have been traditionally framed around evolving teaching and learning methods at particular times with significant developments in foreign language learning approaches in more recent decades (see Appendix 1). In the case of Ireland, we will see in the course of this study (Chapter 2, part 2) that the 'communicative approach' to language teaching and learning is currently favoured in secondary education. This approach emphasises students' use of the foreign language in a range of applied contexts. Whilst this

study focuses on the experiences of the *learner* rather than the *teacher* it is not possible to consider the learner in isolation. The teacher will always impact upon the learner and the learning experience. Thus, Chapter 2, part 1 also considers teacher education; continued professional development of teachers; teacher availability to teach the full range of curricular foreign language subjects available nationally; and teacher mobility in undertaking periods of modern foreign language training abroad.

There are no generic modern foreign language education curricula implemented across member states. Learners in modern foreign language classrooms in other member states will be similarly challenged by subject curricula which incorporate their *own governments* particular interpretations of European education policy combined with their *own governments* interpretations of the most pertinent of applied teaching and learning theories in foreign language learning. Starting from the wider policy perspective to set this study in context we will now consider European developments in modern foreign languages policy in education from 1995.

1.2 European Developments in Modern Foreign Languages Education from 1995

This first chapter of this study focuses on policy developments in modern foreign languages education in Europe from the 1995 European White Paper '*Teaching and Learning: Towards the learning society*'. To provide a context for key developments to that period, a synopsis from 1975 outlines those modern foreign languages education initiatives which, amongst others, informed the 1995 White Paper and are therefore worthy of mention (see Appendix 1). The UNESCO International Standard of Classification in Education (ISCED) facilitates comparisons of educational systems across countries throughout this study (see Appendix 2). As outlined in the introduction of the thesis it is intended through this European Policy chapter to provide a context for educational policy at the wider European level that may be subsequently applied at member state level to the Ireland context. Thus, this chapter considers the European dimension of policy developments in education with particular emphasis on 'Developments in Modern Foreign Languages Education from 1995' and 'The implementation of European Policy towards multilingualism in member states'. To further set this chapter in context I will briefly outline the member states of the European Union and identify the official languages and institutions of the Union.

The current member states of the Union in the order of their accession to the Union are: Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania. Three further countries, Croatia, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are candidate countries which have applied for membership (European Union, 2007:4). There are 23 Official Languages of the European Union; Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish (Ertl, 2006a). Catalan, Basque and Galician have official language status within Spain, requiring that some E.U. texts are translated from and into these languages by the Spanish National Government. Within the E.U. there are fewer official languages than member states as some countries share common languages, hence 23 official languages for 27 countries (European Union, 2008: 6).

The EU's institutional set-up is now based on its three main bodies: European Parliament, Council and European Commission. However, in total, there are now seven EU institutions: (i) the European Parliament; (ii) European Council; (iii) Council; (iv) European Commission; (v) European Court of Justice; (vi) European Central Bank; and (vii) European Court of Auditors (European Commission, 2010a).

This first part of the study outlines the policy developments which I have identified as key initiatives in European foreign language education from 1995. The latter section 1.2 includes an analysis of those key policies which I consider to underpin the drive towards multilingualism in a European context. As we have seen from the earlier synopsis of policy developments (see Appendix 1) in 1985 the Adonnino report on a *Citizens' Europe* placed particular emphasis on strategies towards enabling as many young people as possible to acquire a practical knowledge of two languages in addition to their mother tongue before the end of compulsory schooling. This policy has been continually highlighted in later policy objectives and remains a key ambition of European modern languages education policy with continued emphasis on learning modern languages at *all* levels of compulsory education:

'*It is desirable for foreign language learning to start at pre-school level. It seems essential for such teaching to be placed on a systematic footing in primary education' in addition to* the '*learning of a second community foreign language starting in secondary education*' (European Commission, 1995a: 45).

This drive towards increased multilingualism in education and in wider society in member states in many ways germinated from the development of what was termed 'a notional-functional approach' to language teaching and learning decades earlier and applied in the1970s to Threshold level in English. The significance of this approach centered very much on the fact that we now had an explanation *in operational terms* of what a language learner *should be able to do* when using a language independently at an initial stage of study. Specifications were also developed for French language (Un Niveau-Seuil). These studies are central to later developments in language policy in Europe as they established the basic models which are still considered to be '*influential in the planning of new national curricula, textbooks, multimedia courses and varying forms of assessment. An intermediate objective (Waystage) and a higher level objective (Vantage) were developed in the 1990s*' (Pepin, 2006:122).

Once a framework had been established on which to determine language ability the next step was to encourage more European citizens to recognize the value of languages both in education and in wider society. It was for this exact purpose that 'Lingua', a specific educational *Action* programme on language teaching and learning was launched in 1989, its main aim being to bring about a quantitative and qualitative improvement of European citizens' *knowledge of* and *proficiency in* foreign languages (European Commission, 1995b). Through *Lingua* support to member states was to be provided from the European Commission for the promotion of language learning through transnational projects & awareness raising partnerships; and 'the development of tools', to ensure presence on the market of an appropriate range of language learning materials to promote multilingualism (European Commission, 2002a).

'*The Commission's objective is a truly multilingual European society. A society in which the rate of individual multilingualism steadily increases until every citizen has practical skills in at least 2 languages in addition to their mother tongue'* (European Commission, 2004a:3).

So what exactly was meant by the term *multilingualism*? One definition of multilingualism in its application to European policy is that it refers to '*....the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one 'variety of language',* i.e., the mode of speaking of a social group whether it is formally recognised as a language or not. In such an area individuals may also be '*monolingual*', i.e. speaking only one language (Council of Europe, 2009). At a broader level, '*plurilingualism*' is defined as '*the repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use, including the language variety referred to as 'mother tongue' or 'first language' and any number of other languages or varieties*'. Thus, a plurilingual person is considered to have '*a repertoire of languages and language varieties which includes competences of different kinds and levels within the repertoire*'. Plurilingual education is therefore considered to '*promote an awareness of why and how one learns the languages one has chosen as well as an awareness of and the ability to use transferable skills in language learning including a respect for the plurilingualism of others and the value of languages and varieties irrespective of their perceived status in society'* (Council of Europe, 2009).

Just how were these multilingual and plurilingual ambitions at a wider European level going to impact upon the learning of modern foreign languages at school and ultimately the potential realization of '*mother tongue plus two'* foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling? The first part of the process started with a European Commission policy for multilingualism which sought to encourage language learning and promote linguistic diversity in society; to promote a healthy multilingual economy; and to give citizens access to EU legislation in addition to procedures and information in their own languages. However, the implementation of European multilingual policy at national levels was to remain with the member states and as such it was understood from the outset that the pace of progress was likely to vary widely from country to country depending on the level of commitment of individual national governments to these wider European multilingual and plurilingual ambitions. '*It is re-iterated that the responsibility for making progress mainly rests with member states'* (European Commission, 2005a: 3).

This situation of varying degrees of progress at member state level frustrated the extent of any discernable level of success at this time in realizing European multilingual aspirations. This considered, I am now going to jump forward a little to 2007 when it was decided that a separate portfolio for multilingualism should be created and a specific mandate set for the

realization of European multilingual objectives. I will then work back and delineate how these multilingual policy objectives were established at European level. Acknowledging the stalled level of success at member state level in realizing the ambition of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages by the end of compulsory schooling, it was decided that from 2007 quite a range of ambitions would underpin a renewed drive towards multilingualism in member states. These ambitions included defining the contribution of multilingualism to economic competitiveness, growth & better jobs; encouraging life-long learning and intercultural dialogue; nurturing a space for European political dialogue through multilingual communication with citizens; and working towards a better understanding of the potential of new technologies to attract and train language learners (European Commission, 2007a and 2007b). It was acknowledged at this point that progress at member state level towards multilingualism was going to involve quite an overhaul starting with national education systems. Whilst some European countries did not start from the same baseline and certainly had not taken action at the same speed of progress initial reforms of national education systems generally focused on government reviews of their own educational set-up.

From this point multilingual policy implementation would include the introduction of early language learning in primary and sometimes in pre-primary education; the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning in curricula (by which other school subjects are taught through the target modern foreign language) (see European Commission, 2010e); and an increased offer of languages at secondary level which it was hoped would consequently encourage language diversity in schools (European Commission, 2007c). Multilingualism was placed front and centre even amongst the aims for the new generation of *Action* programmes in education for 2007-2013 which '*set language learning and linguistic diversity as a general objective and increase the budget devoted to linguistic actions*' (European Commission, 2007c: 21). A further European Commission Agenda from 2008 set out a renewed approach to participation in a multilingual European Union, emphasizing that:

'....everybody should have the opportunity to communicate appropriately in order to realise his or her potential and make the most of the opportunities offered within the EU; everybody should have access to appropriate language training or to other means of facilitating communication so that there is no undue linguistic obstacle to living, working or communicating in the EU' (European Commission, 2008a:3).

Innovative as all of these policy revisions and renewals may seem, it is interesting at this point to move back in time a little and learn that there was nothing particularly *new* about these European multilingual objectives. Similar objectives had been outlined a decade earlier when during a Strasbourg conference in 1997 Recommendation No. R (98) 6 of the Committee of Ministers emphasised *intercultural communication* and *plurilingualism* as key policy goals in Europe. The broad aims of these initial approaches to European multilingual ambitions had included the encouragement of language learning at *all* educational levels and by *all* citizens both in education and in professional working life. Essentially, '*raising awareness of the importance of multilingualism as a key economic and social asset of the E.U*' (European Union, 2008:12). Almost a decade earlier, the Lisbon Council in 2000 had identified five challenges for European education: (i) '*a knowledge challenge*'; (ii) '*a challenge of decentralisation'*; (iii) '*a resource challenge'*; (iv) '*a challenge of social inclusion'*; and (v) '*a challenge of data and comparability'*. These challenges had further identified sixteen indicators which were integrated into broad educational categories including: attainment; success and transition; monitoring of school education; and resources and structures. Languages education was included in the 'attainment' strand which related to pupils knowledge in mathematics, reading, science, information and communications technologies, foreign languages, learning to learn, and civics; (European Commission, 2002b).

In 2001 the Stockholm European Council had further devised 13 Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe (Ertl, 2006b). This 2001 report mapped out a coherent approach to national education policies in the context of the E.U. including improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the European Union; making life-long learning accessible to everyone; and making education and training systems more outward-looking as regards the rest of the world (European Council, 2001). The Barcelona European Council of March 2002 had concluded that *'....education was one of the bases of the European social model and that Europe's education systems should become a world quality reference by 2010'* (European Council, 2002). Considering the overall pace of education policy implementation at member state level in the period in question the Barcelona declaration had been quite an ambitious undertaking. However, most importantly in the context of this study is that irrespective of what can be said about the *rate of progress* it was clear that languages remained central to the drive towards improved educational provision at European level with a European Year of Languages established in 2001 to raise

awareness of the linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe (see European Commission, 2002c), and a European Day of Languages, established on 26th September 2001, and continuing annually thereafter (European Centre for Modern Languages, 2010b). Additional focus on the *quality* of teaching and learning concluded that the best quality learning could take place '*where class sizes are small enough for language learning to be effective; where appropriate training materials are available and where enough curriculum time is devoted to languages*' (European Commission, 2003a: 7).

It was also re-iterated at that time that learning other languages is considered to contribute to the improvement of cognitive skills and the strengthening of learners' mother tongue skills including reading and writing (European Commission, 2003a; 2003b). Whilst this was merely echoing the findings of the 1995 White Paper, the 2003 report further emphasised that language teaching and learning which emphasised *effective communicative ability* and *active skills* rather than *passive knowledge* was now recommended at European level. This was an important juncture in policy development as it looked beyond the uptake and diversity of language provision in member states to the *actual* quality of language teaching and learning *'Native speaker fluency is not the objective but appropriate levels of skill in reading, listening, writing and speaking in two foreign languages are required, together with intercultural competencies and the ability to learn language whether with a teacher or alone'* (European Commission, 2003a: 8).

National governments of member states were now requested not only to provide means by which *languages could be learned* but to ensure that those languages were *learned effectively* (European Commission, 2004a: 5). In 2004 a group of '*national experts'* on languages had been established and member states were requested to draw up plans at national level that would give *coherence* and *direction* to their actions to promote multilingualism in education systems and in their respective wider societies. (European Commission, 2005a:5). A further Report *'Education and training 2010 – the success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms'* highlighted that the pace of development of European multilingual ambitions was still moving too slowly at member state level. Hence, subsequent intervention at European level came in the form of three priority recommendations to national governments of member states: firstly, to focus reform and investment on the key areas for the knowledge-based society; secondly, to make life-long learning a reality; and thirdly, to establish a Europe of

education and training. It was concluded that '*the pace of reforms on education and training systems should be accelerated in all member states*' (European Council, 2004: 6).

Although the pace of European policy integration at member state level was slow, the period from 1995 was nonetheless a very significant one in which successive educational policies had re-iterated a need to improve educational systems throughout Europe. Such policies had identified ways by which overall educational policies at member state level could be implemented in tandem with modern foreign language policy objectives which encouraged both the uptake *and* retention of modern foreign languages in national education systems. Policies also supported a drive towards a greater level of multilingualism in societies in member states. Ongoing frustration at European level concerning rates of progress towards any discernable degree of multilingualism represented quite a considerable challenge given that much of the policy at European level is presented to member states in the form of non-binding resolutions. Hence, the situation remained that the potential realisation of *'mother tongue plus two foreign languages'* before the end of compulsory schooling varied considerably from member state to member state (European Commission, 2004a:3). Changes in national policies could not be imposed at a European level but had to take the form of recommendations to national governments. Thus, in 2005 a European Commission request for each member state to develop a *Country Report* on the implementation and proposed implementation of European policies in modern foreign languages education represented what could historically be regarded as a more 'significant nudge' to member states towards multilingualism:

'*Member States have been invited to establish national plans to give structure, coherence and direction to actions to promote multilingualism, including increasing the use and presence of a variety of languages in daily life; review their current arrangements for foreign language teacher-training; review current arrangements for early language learning; raise awareness of Content and Language Integrated Learning*' [involving the teaching of other curricular subjects at school through the medium of the modern language] (European Commission, 2005a: 9).

Despite the slow pace of policy implementation at member state level European commitment to improving education for citizens was never in doubt. A substantial increase in the funding allocated to the developments of education in member states was evident. Between 1990 and 1994 funding for *all* of the European educational programmes accounted for €1 billion compared to 10 years earlier, when only €14 million had been allocated to the first *Action*

programme in education in the period 1980 to 1984. This emphasis on educational development had similarly been highlighted when the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 gave education legal status and made the European Parliament and Council jointly responsible for co-operation in education and training (European Commission, 2010b). Moreover, in 1995 a separate Directorate General of the European Commission had been set up for Education and Culture and the then six main educational *Actions* were merged into two 'umbrella' programmes consisting of Socrates for education and Leonardo da Vinci for vocational training. A third 'Youth for Europe' strand was added later. European educational *Actions* proposed for the period 2007-2013 reflected the need at a European level to better measure the effects at member state level of such substantial *investment in* and *development of* policy initiatives in education. Consequently, for the first time *participatory targets* were set out for each programme. The four sector targets of school education (Comenius), higher education (Erasmus), vocational training (Leonardo da Vinci), and adult education (Grundtvig) included projections of at least one pupil in 20 in the Union to take part in Comenius, to reach, by 2011, the target of 3 million Erasmus students since the establishment of the programme; 150,000 placements in companies each year under Leonardo da Vinci in 2013; and, 25,000 adults each year benefiting from training / mobility under Grundtvig in 2013 (European Commission, 2004b and 2004c).

The Barcelona Council had set quite a tall order in outlining the objective of making European education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010. In terms of the project in multilingualism the range of foreign languages spoken by Europeans was still regarded as narrow. More positively, the Bologna process, launched in 1999 by thirty countries to create convergence between higher education systems and achieve a European higher education area by 2010, continued to gain ground (Bologna, 2009). The Copenhagen process, signed in 2002, had enhanced co-operation in vocational education and training across Europe (Copenhagen, 2009). Although the pace of educational policy implementation had moved more slowly than anticipated the decision to continue co-operation at EU level was taken in May 2009 when a new basis for policy co-operation was established, under the *'Education and Training 2010 Work Programme'* which established the basis for all subsequent education and training actions including the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – ET 2020. Again, European commitment from the various policy bodies was apparent. Funding allocated to education and training increased

substantially. In the 2007-13 period the total should exceed over 1% of the Community budget, compared to only 0.1% in 1986 (European Union, 2010b).

All considered the period to 2005 was one of growth and development in establishing European policy initiatives towards improvements in modern foreign languages provision & diversity in schools and improved levels of multilingualism for citizens of member states. Despite a disappointing pace of policy implementation by national governments European commitment to multilingual and plurilingual ambitions for member states had been well established. However, the question remained as to how national governments of member states could be convinced to increase the pace of policy implementation in their education systems and societies. Since 2007 the main *Actions* in education have been put under the general umbrella of The European Union's '*Life-long Learning Programme*'. The EU aims to highlight personal growth; participation in the democratic decision-making process; recreational learning; and, active ageing (European Commission, 2010c). However, the situation remains that the presenting of policy initiatives and reports as non-binding resolutions to member states gives *very limited* power to the various institutions at European level to ensure *any improvement* in national educational systems despite considerable financial and consultative investment. That considered, Section 1.2 will now continue with an analysis of how European multilingual and plurilingual ambitions have been further developed in the ensuing period to 2010.

1.3 The implementation of European Policy towards multilingualism in member states

Continuing the European drive towards multilingualism, the European Commission's second communication on multilingualism of September 2008 centred on the objective of raising awareness of the value and opportunities of the EU's linguistic diversity and to giving all citizens real opportunities to learn to communicate in two languages plus their mother tongue. The indicators contained in this second multilingualism report of 2008 included language diversity within schools; the position of foreign languages in the curriculum; the range of different languages taught; and the initial education of teachers and their qualifications (European Commission, 2008a and 2008b).

It was decided at European level that the period up to 2020 would be divided into a series of cycles, with the first covering the three years from 2009 to 2011. At the end of each period (no earlier than the beginning of 2012), a joint Council-Commission report will be drawn up '*to evaluate the overall progress in achieving the objectives under this framework*'. These proposed *joint reports* will be based on national reports drawn up by the Member States, as well as on existing information and statistical data and will also serve as the basis for establishing a fresh set of priority areas for the following cycle (European Council, 2009: 8-9). Despite the already noted slow pace of policy implementation at member state level there were a number of particularly significant and innovative policy initiatives in this time that I consider to represent considerable achievements at European level and which I further consider will be central to the future of the European drive towards *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling in member states.

The first of these achievements is the implementation of the European Indicator of Language Competence which was originally outlined in Barcelona in 2002 as a means by which member states could effectively measure levels of competence in modern foreign languages in their national education systems:

'*In view of the importance of learning two foreign languages from an early age, as highlighted in the March 2002 Barcelona European Council conclusions, the Commission is invited to submit to the Council, by the end of 2012, a proposal for a possible benchmark in this area, based on the ongoing work on language competences*' (European Council, 2009:7).

Before detailing the development of the European Indicator study it is necessary to highlight that the facilitation of the study has been made possible due to an earlier European policy initiative which effectively devised a measurement tool for comparison of modern foreign language competence across member states. Arguably the most innovative of policy developments in the 1990s, the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment (CEFR) comes into focus in this study not in its application to modern foreign languages in secondary education (the current modern foreign language syllabus at secondary level in Ireland pre-dates the CEFR and as such the framework has not been adopted at school level), but for its relevance as the framework on which the currently underway *European Indicator of Language Competence* is built. Principles for a Common European Framework of reference for language learning, teaching

and assessment (CEFR) were outlined in 1991 by the Intergovernmental Symposium held in Ruschlikon, Switzerland and initiated by the Swiss Federal Government which highlighted:

'....the need for further growth and intensification of language learning and teaching in member countries', a process it concluded as being *'necessary for greater mobility of students and teachers, and one which would encourage and promote international communications whilst respecting cultural identity and diversity'* (Council of Europe, 2010a).

Devised following decades of collaboration of educational experts in member states, the framework did not set out to provide policy guidelines but rather to encourage discussion and co-operation amongst member states concerning all aspects of language learning, teaching and assessment and facilitate comparisons between existing systems of qualifications through a Descriptive Scheme and Common Reference Levels (Bailly et al., 2002). An outline framework of six broad levels is defined under the Framework as '*giving the adequate coverage of the learning space relevant to European language learners'* (see Appendix 3). Accordingly, *Threshold Level* seeks to comprehensively detail what is considered the minimum level of language efficiency necessary to enable a language learner to *'act as an independent agent in transacting the business of everyday living as well as exchanging information and ideas with other people'*. Thus, the CEFR document provides a practical tool for outlining comprehensive standards to be reached at successive stages of learning and for evaluating outcomes in a manner that allows for international comparison of educational attainment. The Framework describes the competences necessary for communication; the related knowledge and skills; and, the situations and domains of communication. The Framework has become a key reference document and valuable tool for both educational and professional mobility (Council of Europe, 2010a).

The six levels of the Global Scale are an interpretation of the classic division in language learning of basic, intermediate and advanced. The Framework adopts a 'Hypertext' branching principle, starting from an initial division into three broad levels: Basic User: A1 and A2; Independent User: B1 and B2; Proficient User: C1 and C2. Such a *Global Scale* is considered to make it easier to communicate the system to non-specialist users and will also provide teachers and curriculum planners with orientation points (see Appendix 3). An accompanying Self-Assessment Grid further defines the categories of language use at each of the six levels (see Appendix 4). It is intended to help learners to profile their main language skills, and decide at which level they might look at a checklist of more detailed descriptors in

order to self-assess their level of proficiency e.g. in the use of the European Language Portfolio in the classroom (Discussed below) (Council of Europe, 2004a; 2004b). An inventory of language certification systems in Europe has been undertaken since 2003 and a forum established to devise suitable mechanisms to ensure competent and transparent use of the scales of the Common European Framework in language testing and certification in the Member States (European Commission, 2003b). As outlined earlier in this chapter, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has not yet been applied to the modern foreign languages syllabus in secondary level education in Ireland as the current subject syllabus for modern languages pre-dates the Common European Framework (DES, 2009a).

The development of the Common European Framework essentially paved the way for the realisation of a Europe-wide study of language competence. We now had a common framework on which to measure competence across the range of European languages taught at school in member states. Heads of State and Government in Barcelona in March 2002 had noted a lack of data on citizens' *actual* language skills and had called for the establishment of a '*European Indicator of Language Competence*' (European Commission, 2005b). Successful collaboration across member states in the ensuing period continued to support this objective and the resultant Indicator of Language Competence survey is now due to be undertaken in all participating countries in the first quarter of 2011 with final results to be published in February 2012 and a European benchmark developed by the end of 2012:

'*The European survey aims to provide Member States policy makers, teachers and practitioners with reliable and comparable data on foreign language competence in the European Union. It will provide knowledge of the multilingual capacities of young people, on where good practice and performance can be found, and on progress towards the objective of improving foreign language learning*' (European Council, 2007: 3).

Language skills to be tested in the first round of the study are just three of the four broad skill language areas, i.e., reading comprehension, listening comprehension and writing. Testing of oral skills has not been included due to the difficulties envisaged in scheduling and undertaking oral examinations in member states. In the Irish context, the absence of an oral component in the survey is perhaps more significant than other member states. As we will see in the upcoming Chapter 2 Section 1 of this study, the current Junior Certificate Examination (ISCED, Level 2) includes an *optional* oral component which only a minimal number of schools offer to their students. Thus, in the majority of cases students' oral skills in their modern foreign languages are officially tested only once (outside of internal class tests) for

terminal examinations i.e. at Leaving Certificate Examination Level (ISCED, Level 3) at the very end of their studies. Thus, an oral component of the European Indicator of Language Competence Study may have been particularly useful to measure levels of oral competence currently being achieved by students in Ireland. This particular topic will be further discussed in the upcoming Chapter 2, Section 1 of this study.

Languages to be tested as part of the Indicator of Language Competence study include the first- and second-most taught official EU languages, i.e. English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Participating countries are free to test other languages in addition to those recommended using the framework of the study. The Common European Framework of Reference (outlined above) has been implemented as the measurement tool of the European Indicator of Language Competence study. The assessment levels to be used are based on the continuum of increasing levels of competence from level A1 to level B2 on the scales of the Common European Framework (see Appendix 3). It was considered that very few students would have the ability to perform at a higher level than B2 at lower secondary level (ISCED Level 2) or at upper secondary level (ISCED level 3) if a second foreign language is introduced at that level. Accordingly, tests have been developed to cover the four levels from A1 to B2 of the CEFR. See ISCED levels (Appendix 2), and CEFR levels (Appendix 3).

The information to be collected will include a questionnaire for students, teachers, head teachers and governments which will allow analysis of possible factors which might impact on pupils' language competences. The population to be tested will include a sample of lower and upper secondary pupils, and the technical preparation work started in 2007 (European Commission, 2008c). Testing will be in association with the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE, 2010), and the European Association for Language Testing and Assessment (EALTA, 2010). The International costs of the survey are foreseen to be covered by the European Union within the framework of the *Life-long Learning Programme* 2007-2013. Professor David Little of the Centre for Languages and Communications Studies, Trinity College, Dublin, is Ireland's representative on the European Indicator of Language Competence Advisory Board. Allowing for disparities in access to ICT resources in education between member states the testing instruments will include both computer-based and pencil and paper based surveys (European Council, 2007: 6-8). The findings of the Indicator of Language Competence study will be central to the continued drive towards multilingualism in Europe and will *for the first time* provide the possibility of comparing

extensive data on modern foreign languages provision in education across member states creating possibilities for the recognition and sharing of best practice in languages education. The implementation of the European Indicator of Language Competence study in Ireland will be further addressed in the upcoming Chapter 2, Section 1 of this study.

Having already detailed the Common European Framework of Reference and the European Indicator of Language Competence a further significant achievement in policy implementation at European level at this time is that of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) which was developed by the Council of Europe to encourage the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages in education in member states. The portfolio is designed to encourage the lifelong learning of languages, to any level of proficiency (Council of Europe, 2004a and 2004b):

'*It is considered that the project will facilitate mobility within Europe by providing a clear profile of the owner's language skills and assist in motivating learners to become self-managing thus providing a means by which learners can demonstrate language skills already gained when they move from one educational level or institution to another*'(Council of Europe, 2010b).

The Portfolio has three obligatory components: a language *passport* which summarises a student's linguistic identity in terms of language learning achievement and intercultural experience; a language *biography* which is used to set intermediate learning goals, to review progress and to record any significant language learning and intercultural experiences; and, a *dossier* in which the owner collects samples of his/her work and evidence of his/her achievements in second/foreign language learning. Essentially, the European Language Portfolio is a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language, whether at school or outside school, can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences (Council of Europe, 2010b). One of the aims of the ELP is to promote 'plurilingualism' which we can further define as the development of competencies in a number of languages at a number of levels gained over a lifetime of learning (see Glaser, 2005; Eaton, 2010). The dossier offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport. The portfolio is defined as:

'*....a purposeful, selective collection of language work and reflective self-assessment that is used to document progress and achievement over time with regard to specific criteria*' (Council of Europe, 2010c).

The European Language Portfolio is the property of the learner and is linked to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (see above). The European Language Portfolio is *'aimed at motivating people to learn languages both in and out of formal education, the portfolio will also contribute to mobility in Europe as it provides a clear record of a person's language skills which could support their job applications, entry into education establishments etc'* (Trim, in Bailly et al., 2002: 42):

'*The European Language Portfolio makes it possible for learners to document their progress towards plurilingual competence by recording learning experiences of all kinds over a wide range of languages, much of which would be unattested and unrecognised. The Portfolio encourages learners to include a regularly updated statement of their self-assessed proficiency in each language. It is of great importance for the credibility of the document for entries to be made responsibly and transparently. Here, the reference to CEF is particularly valuable'* (Trim, in Bailly et al., 2002:42).

Current issues relating to the widespread use of the ELP between member states include: the flexibility of school curricula; the regulations governing the employment of teachers from abroad; the annual per capita investment in promoting and teaching foreign language learning and linguistic diversity; and, teacher training, as well as the structures available for the regular training and mentoring of current teachers of a foreign language. In support of continually recommended increased portfolio use in schools at European level member states are required to report on the actions they have undertaken with regard to overcoming the aforementioned areas of concern by 2011 (Council of Europe, 2010d). The implementation of the European Language Portfolio in Ireland will be further addressed in the upcoming Chapter 2, Section 1 of this study.

A final policy initiative in European education which I consider to be particularly important in current and future education is the recognition and development of eight competences in learning which have been recommended as necessary for the education and training of young people and adults. The main objective of this policy initiative is for member states national educational systems to provide means via learning paths by which students of all ages have the opportunity to learn, maintain, and update defined competences in the course of life-long learning. The eight competences include communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence & basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative & entrepreneurship; and, cultural awareness and expression.

'The Key competences approach combines the acquisition of relevant knowledge, the development of skills and positive attitudes towards further learning, added to creativity, critical thinking and problem solving' (European Commission, 2008c: 35).

Common approaches to competence development across member states have included the development of learning objectives for *learning to learn* as part of a cross-curricular framework; the development of '*a framework in personal learning and thinking skills'* to support '*learning to learn'* and a further approach of the devising of programmes and modules in aspects of *learning to learn;* as well as the approach of portfolio building and general use of portfolios for learning, e.g., the use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in the classroom:

'It has been identified in a European context that some cognitive aspects of 'learning to learn' (such as learning strategies and methods) may be addressed through specific learning content. Though most European countries give little information on how this competence is integrated into their education curricula'. (European Commission, 2008c: 57).

The European Framework of Key Competences is considered to define the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for a successful life in a knowledge society. It is deemed a basis for a coherent approach to competence development in school and in vocational training. Proposed approaches to the implementation of the key competences to educational curricula at member state level have included the development of new pedagogies, cross-curricular approaches to supplement single-subject teaching and greater involvement of students in the design of their own learning (European Commission, 2008d). Priority Areas in continuing European Co-operation in Education and Training for the period 2009-2011 are developed under four strategic objectives including making life-long learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion & active citizenship; and, enhancing innovation and creativity (European Commission, 2009a). Member states are requested '*to strengthen preventive approaches, build closer cooperation between general and vocational education sectors and remove barriers for drop-outs to return to education and training'* (European Council, 2009:8-9). The implementation of the Key Competences to learning in education in Ireland will be addressed in the upcoming Chapter 2, Section 1 of this study.

All things considered, the period 1995 to present has marked a time of major innovation in education in Europe particularly in the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages. However, as member states consider the implementation of multilingual policies to their various education curricula at least two particular challenges have emerged relating firstly, to the prevalence of English as a first language or first foreign language throughout Europe and the ensuing challenge of maintaining language diversity; and secondly, relating to the motivation of 'English mother tongue' learners to continue to take up modern foreign languages where such subjects remain optional in their country's secondary level education curricula:

'Since 1989, English has rapidly gained status in the new democracies of central and eastern Europe..... In many continental European countries English is part of daily life—via satellite television, pop culture, computer games, etc.—in a way that French and German are not part of daily life in Ireland' (Little, 2003:20).

These challenges noted what emerges in the further development of this study (Chapter 2, Section 1) is a level of diversification in language teaching and learning in Ireland in the past decade which *at the very least* provides an excellent starting point for differentiated multilingual and plurilingual learning paths. That considered, what are the main conclusions which may be drawn from this period of sustained growth in European multilingual and plurilingual policy development? Certainly, a constant *investment in* and *re-focussing of* successive policies towards the realization of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling is apparent. Moreover, the implementation of the European Indicator of Language Competence, the wider use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning (CEFR); increased use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) in schools; and the implementation of the eight key learning competences to curricula across member states represent notably successful examples of European policy implementation in education in the period outlined. However, it is equally important to qualify that despite presenting these initiatives *on their merits* there are still a number of important information gaps relating to these policies which need to be addressed at member state level. An example here could include the fact that the Common European Framework has not yet been applied to school curricula in Ireland. Given that the European Indicator of Language Competence uses the scales of the CEFR it may be difficult for teachers in Ireland to interpret the results of the European Indicator since the CEFR is not widely known. It is also useful when drawing conclusions on the apparent successes of the

overall European multilingual project to question just how European citizens regard this renewed drive towards multilingualism? Interestingly, a 2006 Eurobarometer survey of European citizens indicated that '*44% of Europeans admit not knowing any other language other than their mother tongue. In six Member States the majority of the population indicated that they do not know any foreign languages*' – this included Ireland (66%) and the U.K. (62%) (INRA, 2006: 8-9). Furthermore, the level of motivation of E.U. citizens to learn languages was reported in the study to be *moderate* with the factors mentioned most often for discouraging language learning reported as lack of time 34%; motivation 30%; and, expense of language classes 22% (INRA, 2006). Interestingly, the European target of *mother tongue plus two* received *cautious support* from Europeans at 50% (44% were actually against this option), whilst 77% of those surveyed consider that children should learn English as a first foreign language, with English also rated first in all countries polled except Ireland, the U.K. and the Netherlands. The 2006 study indicated that 83% of Europeans reported that knowing foreign languages is *useful* compared to 72% in an equivalent study reported in 2001 (INRA, 2006: 63-65; INRA, 2001).

A broad European commitment to the realization of multilingual and plurilingual learning paths is certainly clearly evidenced from the wealth of policy initiatives developed in the period 1995 to 2010. The *further implementation of* the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the European Language Portfolio (ELP), the results of the European Indicator of Language Competence and the integration of the eight 'Key Competences' in learning to national education systems of member states will further enhance the quality of languages education by providing possibilities for comparative analysis and sharing of best practice across Europe. The creation of opportunities for increased mobility of both language learners and trainee language teachers is also important for the possible development of an enhanced level of intercultural awareness and better fluency levels for both teachers and learners. Having considered this wider European context the study will now narrow its focus in Chapter Two by addressing the current situation in Ireland determining how the European policy aspiration of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling has influenced the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign language subjects at school; the current situation regarding grade achievement in language subjects in secondary education; and the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language subjects at school.

CHAPTER TWO: PART ONE - MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Introduction

Having considered policy developments in modern foreign languages education in Europe from the 1995 European White Paper '*Teaching and Learning: Towards the learning society*' to 2010 which has set this study in context, I will now narrow the focus of the study to deal specifically with the case of Ireland as a member state of the European union addressing modern foreign languages education policy in Ireland from the 1987 Curriculum and Examinations Board' study of foreign languages provision in education *to present* (CEB, 1987). Hence, following from the analyses of modern languages education initiatives at a European level in Chapter 1, this first Section of Chapter 2 will now consider those initiatives in modern foreign languages education which specifically address three of the key research questions of this study: firstly, how the European policy of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages has been interpreted at member state level in Ireland in terms of the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign languages at school; secondly, the current situation in terms of grade attainment in modern foreign language subjects; and thirdly, the level of consideration given at national government level to achieving standards of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages learning at school. Once these questions have been addressed in a review of the literature they are further probed in the primary research component of this study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', and the upcoming Chapter 3, 'Methodology', and Chapter 4, 'Findings').

2.1 Modern Foreign Languages in Secondary Education in Ireland

I will begin by briefly setting the historical development of languages in Irish education in context. Modern foreign language subjects have been historically linked to the traditional management of schools by the religious in Irish education in the early 1900's and thereafter. Educators who had travelled to other religious orders in Europe returned with proficiencies in languages and these were introduced to the education curriculum alongside the traditional classic languages of Latin and Greek of which the study of Latin was most prevalent. French was the most widely studied modern foreign language to the 1950's whilst the 1960's

marked a period of major transition with the publication of the Investment in Education Report in 1966, the introduction of Free Education in 1967/68 and the raising of the school leaving age to 15 in 1972. Subsequently the number of schools offering the language subjects of German, Italian and Spanish increased in the post-1960's period (DES, 2007a).

The 1987 Curriculum and Examinations Board '*Report of the Board of Studies for Languages*' marked the start of a very significant period in the role of modern foreign languages in education in Ireland. The report identified that '*language*' in a school context was a key curriculum area which needed to be regarded more holistically within the school curriculum so that language subjects at school did not have to compete with other subjects or with one another in terms of subject timetabling, etc. The 1987 report further recommended that the relation between first, second and foreign language learning needed to be made explicit by allowing for the possibility of common pedagogical practices across languages and amongst teachers (CEB,1987). The findings of this 1987 report were central to the initiation of a process of curriculum development and renewal in Ireland. Consequently, at the end of the 1980s, new syllabuses were introduced for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Irish, and a common syllabus framework was later adopted for French, German, Spanish and Italian subjects in the school curriculum. In 2003, a comprehensive review of languages at school was initiated via a discussion paper undertaken by the National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in consultation with Professor David Little of the Centre for Languages and Communications Studies (CLCS) Trinity College Dublin. The review echoed the findings of the 1987 CEB study on the absence of a language policy, whilst further questioning the sustainability of modern foreign languages in schools as well as *actual* levels of communicative proficiency in modern languages achieved by school leavers (Little, 2003).

The 2003 review of languages undertaken by the NCCA is evidence - following the initial CEB study in 1987 - of the implementation of modern foreign languages policy generated at European level and applied at Member State level in Ireland. We can recall from Chapter 1 that European policy at that time focused on language teaching and learning which emphasised *effective communicative ability* and *active skills* rather than *passive knowledge. Member States were required to* look beyond the uptake and diversity of language provision in their national education systems to the *actual* quality of language teaching and learning (see European Commission, 2003a; 2003b). A further NCCA review in 2005 once again

recommended the need for an explicit policy on languages in education in Ireland as well as developments in assessments of current language syllabuses and the introduction of a second syllabus for native speakers of Irish. Pilot studies in the areas of integration, language awareness, and attainment of proficiency in languages were further recommended. Co-ordination of European policy implementation in languages in schools in Ireland with parallel developments at a wider European level were recognised as a means by which best practice could be shared to provide mutual benefits to member states' educational policies (NCCA, 2005).

Importantly, the 2005 study included a survey of languages in the Post Primary Curriculum which surveyed principals, language teachers and the wider school community and was made available online via the NCCA website. However, there were only 280 respondents to the survey, the majority of whom (44%) were teachers. Consequently, the survey was followed up by a consultative seminar in September 2004. Whilst the undertaking of both the 2003 and 2005 NCCA studies suggest a more co-ordinated approach to European language policy implementation in education at member state level in Ireland it is interesting to find that during this period the Department of Education and Science (DES), now the Department of Education and Skills, also undertook an extensive study of foreign language provision in secondary schools during this period culminating in 2004 with the publication of an Inspectorate report on the teaching and learning of modern languages. The report '*Inspection of Foreign Languages: Observations and Issues*' strongly encouraged schools to provide for at least one modern foreign language as a subject option for students. In line with the recommendations of the 2004 report the Inspectorate of the DES recruited additional inspectors of modern foreign languages and greatly increased the number of language inspections at second level schools (DES, 2004).

Whilst the undertaking of these studies have contributed greatly to modern foreign languages education in Ireland in the period concerned there is certainly a case to be made for an inevitable degree of duplicity at national level in the overall findings of the 2003 and 2005 NCCA studies and the 2004 DES study. That said, the subsequent publication of the *Language Policy Profile: Country Report Ireland* (DES, 2007a) provided a comprehensive account of the position of modern foreign languages in education in Ireland *to that point* and as such superseded the previous studies. We will remember from Chapter 1 that member states were requested to draw up plans at national level that would give *coherence* and

direction to their actions to promote multilingualism in education systems and in their respective wider societies (European Commission, 2005a:5). We also noted that in 2005 the European Commission requested that each member state develop a *Country Report* on the implementation and proposed implementation of European policies in modern foreign languages education. Thus, we can conclude that the subsequent undertaking of the national report for Ireland from 2005 to 2006 was in direct response to this request from Europe and is a further example of *co-operation with* and *implementation of* European policy at member state level in Ireland (DES, 2007a).

The most recent Department of Education and Skills study of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland was undertaken in the period 2004 to 2009 in association with the European Network of Policy-makers for the Evaluation of Educational Systems. The report *Evaluating Languages: Report of the Evaluation of Foreign Languages at Upper Secondary Level (EFLUSL) Project* was published in 2009 (see DES, 2009a). The Evaluation of Foreign Languages at Upper Secondary level (EFLUSL) project was initiated to develop, test and refine a set of instruments for the evaluation of the teaching and learning of foreign languages at upper-secondary level. The project has developed a framework of indicators that can be used in evaluating the teaching and learning of foreign languages whilst recognising that '*the whole school context plays a significant role in facilitating effective language learning and teaching'* (DES, 2009a: 20). The seven participant countries included Belgium (Flemish Community), France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. Interestingly, the period of the EFLUSL study mirrors that of this study and a number of parallels can be drawn from the findings of both studies. The EFLUSL study indentified 15 indicators which were grouped into four broad areas. In the context of this study, I am going to consider just one of these areas in terms of their relevance to this thesis, i.e., '*student learning and achievement*' including student engagement in learning; students' ability to assess own progress and to reflect on learning; and, students' communicative use of language and level of linguistic competence (DES, 2009a:18-19). Given that these factors are most relevant in the context of this study to *the learner in the classroom* a comparative analysis of the findings of the EFLUSL Report and the findings of this study will be included in the upcoming chapter on that subject (Chapter 2, Section 2) as well as later in the 'Discussion' of the overall findings of this thesis in Chapter 5.

Other studies considered, I will now outline the current situation of languages in Ireland. According to Article 8 of the Irish Constitution the Irish language as the national language is the first official language. The English language, which is the mother tongue of the majority of people in Ireland, has the place of second official language. The Official Languages Act was signed into law in 2003 and provides for any future developments in language education policy in Ireland. Under the Act, the Office of the Language Commission was set up to ensure compliance with the Act. At present, Ireland does not have an explicit national languages in education policy, and the only language subject which is compulsory to Leaving Certificate level (ISCED, Level 3) is Irish, with English being compulsory only to Junior Certificate level (ISCED, Level 2) (see Appendix 2). However, secondary schools have a great deal of autonomy in the subjects offered to students and as such are free to establish a school policy of compulsory uptake of English as a subject to Leaving Certificate level for state examinations. Likewise, the study of modern foreign languages is not currently compulsory at secondary level but again internal school policies at individual schools may promote the uptake of modern foreign languages for terminal examinations.

In recent years, an increase in immigration to Ireland for work or the purpose of asylum etc. has significantly increased the range of languages spoken nationally. From a very narrow base of predominantly Irish and English, languages spoken in Ireland now include '*Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian, Romanian, Vietnamese, Yoruba, Albanian, Moldovan, Arabic and Russian*'. Thus, in a school context there are now increasing numbers of students whose mother tongue language (s) don't include English or Irish (DES, 2007a: 6). The secondary schools curricula now include syllabuses in seven modern foreign languages, i.e., French, Spanish, German, Italian, Arabic, Japanese and Russian (PPLI, 2010). In addition, the State Examinations Commission (set up in 2003) provides examinations in a range of subjects in the language area referred to as the non-curricular EU languages. These are languages which are not part of the normal school curriculum but which students may opt to be examined in if they meet certain criteria. Chief among these conditions are the requirements that:

'*....candidates for these examinations : Be from a member state of the European Union; speak the language in which they opt to be examined in as a mother tongue; have followed a programme of study leading to the Leaving Certificate; be taking Leaving Certificate English'*. A further condition is *'....that candidates may undertake examinations in one non-curricular language subject only'* (SEC, 2010).

In view of the scale of immigration to Ireland as well as economic and employment mobility in the past decade schools have had to embrace considerably more diverse teaching and learning communities. Support for non-national pupils is provided in European schools in accordance with two main integrated models. The first model involves the direct allocation of immigrant students to classes consisting of children of the same age (or younger if appropriate) in mainstream education whereby language support is managed on an individual or small group basis for immigrant students during normal school hours. The second model involves grouping immigrant students together, keeping the group apart from mainstream classes for a limited period during which time students generally attend *some* lessons in the corresponding mainstream classes with all other students (European Commission, 2005b: 289). Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Scotland provide *solely* for the first model, i.e., direct integration within mainstream classes with additional language support for pupils in small withdrawal groups where appropriate (European Commission, 2009b).

The inclusion in this study of the situation of migrants in the education system is necessarily brief in its function to set the current situation for modern foreign language learners in context. However, a considerable body of research on the integration of non-nationals into the education system in Ireland has been undertaken by Barbara Lazenby Simpson together with her colleagues at the Centre for Language and Communications Studies at Trinity College Dublin and is available on the Centre's web pages (See CLCS, 2010). Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) was established in 1999 to provide language support to non-nationals within Irish education. However, in 2008 IILT disbanded and teachers are now provided solely with access to the resources developed by IILT via the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2010a). This situation remains a considerable challenge for teachers particularly those who have large numbers of non-national students attending their schools (see European Commission, 2009c; 2009d).

'*Education Authorities in Ireland recommend that pupils receive additional language support teaching in the classroom or in small withdrawal groups in addition to the support they receive from the class teacher. In order for a school to provide separate, initiation/immersion classes over 20% of its pupils must be of immigrant origin. Only a small number of schools are in this category*' (European Commission, 2008d: 104).

In terms of the administrative set-up of education in Ireland the Education Act 1998 legislates for the provision of school education whilst The Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2010a) works with the European Union and the Council of Europe on education issues as well as the OECD and UNESCO (European Commission, 2010d). UNESCO supports mother tongue instruction, national language instruction and the uptake of one or more modern foreign languages as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of both learners and teachers (UNESCO, 1953):

'*Communication, expression and the capacity to listen and dialogue (should be encouraged), first of all in the mother tongue, then, (if the mother tongue is different from the official or national language) in the official (or national) language in the country, as well as in one or more foreign languages'.* (UNESCO, 2003:32).

The role of the Minister for Education and Skills in Ireland includes prescribing curricula and establishing regulations for the staffing, resourcing and management of schools. An Inspectorate within the Department evaluates the quality and effectiveness of educational provision. A State Examinations Commission (SEC) established in 2003 oversees the State examinations, i.e., the Junior Certificate (ISCED, Level 2) and Leaving Certificate (ISCED, Level 3) examinations (DES, 2007a: 9-10). An Education Centre Network (ECN), with community representation throughout Ireland manages the Department of Education and Skills in-service delivery infrastructure for teachers. The Second Level Support Service (SLSS) is a national support service funded by the Department of Education and Skills and organised regionally in collaboration with local education centres. It provides support for continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers who are involved in the facilitation of particular programmes and aspects of the curriculum (DES, 2007a)

2.1.1 The Provision of Modern Foreign Language Subjects in Primary Education

Administrative set-up established, I will now determine the point at which students commence the study of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland. In line with the implementation of European multilingual objectives in member states much has been achieved in recent years in providing for the uptake of modern foreign languages at primary level education in Ireland. A Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative (MLPSI) began in 1998 and *at the time of writing* close to 500 primary schools are part of this initiative of teaching French, German, Spanish and Italian (MLPSI, 2010a; 2010b). The scheme was

initially funded by the European Social Fund and was later incorporated into the National Development Plan (2000-2006) and more recently the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP, 2007-13). Tuition in the modern language comprises one and a half hours of lessons per week for pupils in fifth and sixth class in primary school for a maximum of 36 weeks in the school year. A national coordinator co-ordinates the work of a team of project leaders who provide in-service training, visit schools and support teachers by sourcing teaching resources.

Modern Languages Draft Curriculum Guidelines were developed by the NCCA in 1999 and disseminated to schools involved in the initiative (NCCA, 1999). The Initiative is administered by a Director at the Kildare Education Centre. Project Leaders were appointed in 1998 to develop and support the programme. Seven Regional Project Leaders currently work in the four target language areas, one representing Italian, one representing Spanish, two representing German and three representing French (MLPSI, 2010a; 2010b). The role of the leaders is to facilitate and support Initiative teachers in practice by designing and delivering in-career development days and arranging individual school visits in order to evaluate language-teaching resources for the primary language class and develop materials: '*The Initiative aims to foster positive attitudes towards language learning, to encourage communication in the four target languages and to promote diversification in the range of languages taught*' (MLPSI, 2010a).

At present the initiative in Ireland continues to build on the numbers of participating schools and any such increase in participation is to be welcomed. However, the range of languages on offer in some regions remains limited with greater provision for French language in the majority of regions e.g. in the Galway region there are 15 schools offering French, 6 schools offering German, 4 Schools offering Spanish and 1 school offering Italian. In the Mayo region there are currently 17 schools offering French, 1 school offering Italian and no schools offering either German or Spanish. In Sligo there are 9 schools offering French, 2 schools offering German, 1 school offering Spanish and no schools offering Italian. There is better representation of the four available modern languages in the Cork region. However, despite this diversity the predominant language available is still French. Similarly, in the Clare region there are 15 schools offering French, 5 schools offering German, 2 offering Spanish and no schools offering Italian. In Limerick there is better diversity of language provision with 6 schools offering French, 8 offering Spanish and 10 offering German. However, there are no

schools offering Italian in the Limerick region. Similarly, the Kerry region, too, is very well represented in terms of language diversity in three of the initiative languages but has no schools offering Italian language. In Dublin schools, all four of the initiative languages of French, German, Italian and Spanish are well represented (MLPSI, 2010b).

It must be noted at this point that it is not my intention to present the study of the French language in any way negatively. Study at primary level and beyond of any of the four available modern foreign languages is a sign of progress and is to be welcomed. Highlighting the wider availability of French is a means by which this study can emphasise the challenges for language diversity in providing equally for all of the four MLPSI languages and ensuring adequate supply of trained teachers throughout Ireland to facilitate this diversity. The introduction and development of the MLPSI has also highlighted the important issue of study levels in modern foreign languages study. In what could be considered a significant oversight in the development of the initiative in Ireland we need to question the means by which a student who has undertaken two years of language study at primary level is subsequently assessed for continuing to study that language at a suitably challenging level at post-primary. This particular issue was highlighted in a 2006 report of the Royal Irish Academy which concluded that, *'....thought must be given to a strategy for continuation of language learning into secondary level, so that students are not faced with the prospect of beginning again from scratch a language in which they have already achieved significant learning outcomes'* (Ó'Dochartaigh & Broderick, 2006: 4).

It is unlikely that any curriculum changes at primary level, related to modern foreign language provision, will be practicable until such time as *all* primary school pupils have an opportunity to study a modern foreign language at school. As we have seen in Chapter 1it is an ambition of the Council of Europe '*mother tongue plus two'* initiative that the study of a first foreign language will commence at primary level and continue to the completion of lower secondary level education, whilst the study of a second modern foreign language will commence at upper secondary level. In terms of European policy implementation there is a very important opportunity being missed at national level in Ireland concerning the use of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in language curricula in schools. Implementation of the CEFR would provide an excellent means of measuring student advancement in languages as they progress through the school system. Used in tandem with effective use of the European Language Portfolio in the classroom it is possible to better

measure language competency levels at *every* point of school advancement i.e. form primary to post-primary (lower secondary); from lower secondary to upper-secondary; from upper-secondary to tertiary level. Not implementing such policy instruments at national level is quite an oversight. As we have noted in Chapter 1 these instruments exist at European level following over a decade of investment and collaboration. Thus, they need to be more extensively applied across our education system in Ireland to address language issues such as progressive language competence measurement as students move from primary to secondary level. After all it was for exactly this purpose that such policy instruments were developed at European level in the first place. Further discussion on these issues is included in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

Once students complete primary education they are admitted to the junior cycle of secondary level schooling. The core curriculum for the junior cycle in all second level schools includes English, Irish, Mathematics, Civil, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) (NCCA, 2010a). Physical education should also form part of the curriculum. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has developed factsheets on all subjects to assist students in making their final subject choices for study at lower-secondary level. In all, there are twenty six subjects approved for the junior cycle curriculum from which schools offer a selection to students (NCCA, 2010b). Many schools determine the selection of a modern foreign language as a Junior Certificate examination subject as compulsory from first year in secondary school, particularly amongst better able students where there will be an expectation of a higher level of progression to third level study. This position is mainly influenced by The National University of Ireland (NUI) Minimum Academic Entry and Registration (Matriculation) Requirements which stipulate an Irish Language and Third Language requirement for entry to third level study. The basic requirement with regard to Irish is that '*Candidates born in Ireland (26 Counties) must pass Irish in the Leaving Certificate or GCE/GCSE examination*' unless the candidate fulfills one of five stated conditions of exemption (NUI, 2010: 16-17). The further requirement with regard to a third language stipulates that '*all candidates are required to present, in addition to Irish and English, a third language accepted for matriculation registration purposes*' (NUI, 2010: 18).

Conditions of exemption from this third language requirement include: an alternative subject may be selected for entry to faculties of Engineering and Science; an alternative subject may

be selected for entry to Nursing; the subject of Art may be substituted for entry to the National College of Art and Design; students from outside the European Union presenting non-E.U. qualifications are exempt; the subject of Irish can be presented by students from Northern Ireland or countries outside Ireland; hearing impaired students are exempt; students with dyslexia are exempt; students from outside the European Union who present the Leaving Certificate for matriculation and have studied a non-E.U. language may present their results in the language provided that they also present English as a subject for matriculation (NUI, 2010).

Given the extent of policy developments discussed in this chapter thus far it is useful at this point to synopsize a little before addressing the national data at Junior Certificate level. In this first section of Chapter 2 it has been established that in the Irish context it is possible to study a modern foreign language in *some* schools at primary level and that the most popular language in terms of provision and uptake is French. We have considered the administrative make-up of the education system in Ireland and determined that school autonomy in the provision of subjects at secondary level coupled with the National University of Ireland's matriculation requirements currently drive the uptake of modern foreign language subjects in secondary schools. This study will now examine the extent at national level of support for European policy objectives in modern foreign languages by questioning firstly, what is the *the provision*, *the uptake* and *the retention* of modern foreign language subjects at secondary level? Secondly, what is the current situation in terms of grade attainment in modern foreign language subjects? And thirdly what is the level of consideration given to achieving standards of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school? These questions will be addressed via analyses of national data in modern foreign languages in secondary education in Ireland in this part of the study and later applied to particular students at school (see 'Student Questionnaire' Appendix 8) in Chapter 3, 'Methodology', and Chapter 4, 'Findings' of the study. We will initially address the first two of these questions, i.e., what is the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign language subjects at secondary level? and, what is the current situation in terms of grade attainment in modern foreign language subjects at school? The third question relating to what is the consideration given to achieving standards of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school? will be addressed later in this chapter.

2.1.2 The Provision of Modern Foreign Languages in Secondary Education

We have already determined the role of languages at Primary level and the implementation of the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative (see above Section 2.1.1). Thus, we will now consider the provision of language subjects at secondary level and the implementation of the Post-Primary Languages Initiative. As we have seen in Chapter 1 successive European policies throughout the 1990s and early 2000s encouraged a greater level of diversity in modern foreign languages provision at school in member states. The implementation of a Post-Primary Modern Languages Initiative from September 2000 has sought, in accordance with policy recommendation at a wider European level, to diversify the range of modern languages subjects available in secondary level schools in Ireland, consequently, the post-primary curriculum now offers syllabuses in seven modern foreign languages: French, Spanish, German, Italian, Arabic, Japanese and Russian (PPLI, 2010).

The initial languages targeted by the initiative were Spanish, Italian and Japanese with Russian added a few years later. The subjects of Russian and Japanese continue to be offered to students *only* at Senior-Cycle (PPLI, 2010). The Post-Primary Modern Languages Initiative has encouraged schools to offer a wider range of languages by providing additional teaching hours, additional funding, and supports for training and materials development. A teacher supply issue to facilitate the provision of the wider range of languages was identified and courses in language and teaching methodology for serving teachers who wished to teach Italian or Spanish were provided. In the case of Japanese, a special corps of teachers was recruited and deployed among participating schools. A new phase of the initiative continues to be developed under the new National Development Plan 2007-2013 (PPLI, 2010; NDP, 2007-2013). The development of a new Italian textbook, the first of its kind in Ireland, has been supported as part of the initiative and was published in November 2010 following collaboration between the Dublin based *Authentik* language learning resources and the Department of Education and Skills (See Authentik, 2010). However, maintaining this level of language diversity in schools is an ever-growing challenge. Teacher hours in schools offering Spanish and Italian are no longer provided under the initiative so schools must now independently fund their staffing requirements in order to offer these language subject options.

2.1.3 The Uptake & Retention of Modern Foreign Languages in Secondary Education

Moving from the provision of language subjects to the *uptake* and *retention* of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland I will now outline the situation of languages at lower-secondary level, i.e., preparation for Junior Certificate examinations ISCED, Level 2 and continue later in the chapter with the situation of languages at upper-secondary i.e. preparation for Leaving Certificate examinations ISCED, Level 3 (See Appendix 2). Interestingly, the uptake of modern foreign languages at lower-secondary level in Ireland has remained relatively constant in the period 2005 to 2010. The total number of candidates who completed the Junior Certificate examinations in 2010 in the available language options of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Ancient Greek was *48,767*. In the 2010 session no candidates presented for the examination in the subject of Ancient Greek (see Table 1a, below). When compared to the total number of candidates who completed the Junior Certificate examinations in 2005 of *50,732* (Table 1b, below) we can see a relatively similar pattern in terms of the total number of students opting for languages study at Junior Certificate level in the 2005 and 2010 examination sessions. This *total* figure in both cases does not include the subjects of English and Irish which are both compulsory subjects for Junior Certificate examinations. Notably, in terms of the four most studied languages of French, German, Italian and Spanish, the language subject selection has also remained similar when comparing the 2005 and 2010 Junior Certificate examination results in terms of numbers of candidates opting for particular languages, i.e., French remains the most popular language followed by German, Spanish and Italian respectively.

In the 2010 session (Table 1a, below), of the total language subject candidates (other than English and Irish), i.e. *48,767* candidates, 68.17% studied French: *28.40%* at ordinary level; *71.59%* at higher level. 18.53% studied German: *26.9%* at ordinary level; *73.01%* at higher level. 0.717% studied Italian: *29.14%* at ordinary level; *70.85%* at higher level, and 11.66% studied Spanish: *31.10%* at ordinary level; *68.89%* at higher level. It is encouraging to note here that the majority of students who sat for examination in modern foreign language subjects opted to complete examinations at the optional *higher level* for Junior Certificate examinations in 2010.

In the 2005 session, (see Table 1b, below), of the total language subject candidates (other than English and Irish), i.e. 50,732 candidates, 71.34% studied French: *30.35%* at ordinary

level; *69.64%* at higher level. 20.4% studied German: *31.03%* at ordinary level; *68.96%* at higher level. 0.593% studied Italian: *49.5%* at ordinary level; *50.49%* at higher level, and 6.617% studied Spanish: *29.9%* at ordinary level; *70.09%* at higher level. Again, it is encouraging to note that the majority of students who sat for examination in modern foreign language subjects opted to complete examinations at the optional *higher level* for Junior Certificate examinations in 2005.

Comparing the results for 2005 and 2010 respectively in terms of language subject options one can see a slight decrease in 2010 in the numbers studying French and German; a slight increase in Italian, more notable in the number of candidates opting for higher level Italian, and a more significant increase in the number of candidates studying Spanish language at Junior Certificate level. Thus, whilst the numbers of candidates in the 2005 and 2010 examination session remained quite constant there is certainly empirical evidence at a national level of an emerging switch from the more traditional German language to Italian and Spanish languages with a majority opting for Spanish. As language educators we must be enthused by these emerging 'seeds of language diversity' in school education in Ireland and we must build on this degree of progress by ensuring continued provision for these wider range of modern foreign language subjects in schools. These important factors will be further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

Table One (a): Junior Certificate Examination Candidates 2010

Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English	1,957	15,549	37,940	55,446
Irish	2,048	22,388	23,111	47,547
French		9,443	23,804	33,247
German		2,440	6,601	9,041
Italian		102	248	350
Spanish		1,770	3,920	5,690
Latin		25	414	439
Ancient Greek	No candidates	No candidates	No candidates	

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (State Examinations Commission, 2010).

Table One (b): Junior Certificate Examination Candidates 2005				
Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English	2,302	17,551	36,172	56,025
Irish	3,592	24,990	21,736	50,318
French		10,986	25,208	36,194
German		3,212	7,138	10,350
Italian		149	152	301
Spanish		1,004	2,353	3,357
Latin		57	454	511
Ancient Greek			19	19

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (State Examinations Commission, 2010).

2.1.4 Grade Achievement in Modern Foreign Languages at Lower-Secondary Level

Provision and uptake of modern foreign language subjects at *lower-secondary level* considered I will now determine actual grade achievement in language subjects in Junior Certificate examinations. If we look at the grades achieved in Junior Certificate 2010 examinations in the compulsory subjects of English and Irish and the optional *most frequently selected* languages of French and German (see SEC, 2010), it can be seen that in the subject of Irish 10.9% of students obtained a grade A at higher level whilst the average grade was C obtained by 38.3% of the higher level candidates; 4% obtained a grade A at ordinary level where once again the average grade was C obtained by 42.2% of the ordinary level candidates. In the subject of English 10.8% of students obtained a grade A at higher level whilst the average grade was C obtained by 38.7% of the higher level candidates; 7.5% obtained a grade A at ordinary level where once again the average grade was C obtained by 41.4% of the ordinary level candidates. In the subject of French 10.7% of students obtained a grade A at higher level whilst the average grade was C obtained by 31.6% of the higher level candidates; 3.5% obtained a grade A at ordinary level where once again the average grade was C obtained by 34% of the ordinary level candidates. In the subject of German 12.4% of students obtained a grade A at higher level whilst the average grade was C obtained by 32.6% of the higher level candidates; 6.8% obtained a grade A at ordinary level where the average grade was B obtained by 38.3% of the ordinary level candidates (see SEC, 2010).

An interesting point that becomes apparent on considering these grades is that there has not been any significant change in recent years in the award of *'A'* grades across all language subjects at Junior Certificate examinations. It is in fact 'C' grades which are more frequent across all of the language subjects i.e. English, Irish and Modern Foreign Languages. This is quite a worry in terms of overall levels of grade achievement in language study, not just in modern foreign languages but also in the national languages of English and Irish.

If we take a second brief look at the 2010 Junior Certificate results (see SEC, 2010) we can see that amongst Higher Level candidates in Irish, English, French, and German over 10% of those candidates achieved an A grade, increasing to over 12% for A grades in Higher level German in that year. These students are of particular interest in the context of this study as they exemplify the fact that *it is possible* to excel in language subject grade attainment in the current education system in Ireland. As educators we need to consider what exactly these students are doing as learners to achieve these high grades as well as other factors the students themselves may attribute to their success. These factors will be addressed later in this study in the context of learning in the classroom in Chapter 2 part 2. For now, we must consider the broader question of whether it is necessary for our national government to identify and publish trends in grade achievement in modern foreign languages at school, identifying both the successful students *and* their schools and providing opportunities for better collaboration and sharing of good-practice amongst language educators. These considerations will be further probed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5. A particularly worrying trend evident from the 2010 Junior Certificate examinations in terms of grades is that 9.2% of candidates obtained an E Grade in ordinary level French, whilst a quite staggering 40.% received an E grade in ordinary level Latin (see SEC, 2010).

Whilst the Junior Certificate examination marks the end of lower-secondary education and consequently the end of compulsory schooling there is a strong cultural emphasis in Ireland for students to remain at school to the completion of upper-secondary level examinations. Hence, the numbers of students completing upper-secondary level education and seeking to progress to third level study is relatively high when compared with other European countries and this in turn is amongst the influences that drive the selection of modern foreign languages for study at both lower secondary level for Junior Certificate examinations and upper secondary levels for Leaving Certificate examinations, i.e., for the purpose of meeting the National University of Ireland's third-level study matriculation requirements. Across a

number of decades progression to higher education in Ireland has increased significantly '*Ireland's Higher Education participation rate has grown from 20% in 1980 to 55% in 2001*' (European Commission, 2010d: 100). In 2009 the Minister for Education and Science, (now Education and Skills), announced the launch of a process to develop a new national strategy for higher education for further development of the tertiary education sector over the next two decades with a view to further increasing levels of progression to third level study (DES, 2009b). The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, i.e., The Hunt Report, was published in January 2011 (DES, 2011).

In line with this national emphasis on high levels of study progression to third level education a recent study of languages in education concluded that students with higher grades in language subjects at Junior Certificate were amongst those most likely to continue to study modern foreign language to Leaving Certificate due to two distinct factors, firstly, the NUI matriculation requirement of a third language; and secondly, a high level of interest in modern foreign languages study at school (Mulderrig, 2008). Thus, where a modern language subject is not selected for study it follows that the subject is not part of what *a particular school* determines its compulsory core curriculum for *all* lower secondary level students which could include students with special learning needs who are exempted from the modern languages study requirement (NUI, 2010). Thus, where students do not opt to study a modern foreign language for Junior Certificate examinations they will already have established that a language subject is not a requirement for their future career or third-level study programme.

The current subject selection criteria at lower secondary level requires students to make subject selections *without any experience* of the subject and this situation is causing concern amongst those educators who believe that students are simply too young and lack the necessary maturity to make decision regarding career/further study choices at that point of their academic lives (NCCA, 2007). To address this issue some secondary schools offer 'taster courses' to allow students to experience a range of subjects during their first year of secondary education *before* making their final selection, usually towards the end of that school year (NCCA, 2004). Other schools recognise that in many ways the current National University of Ireland third level matriculation requirements dictate modern foreign language uptake in first year and in turn make the selection of a modern language compulsory as a cautionary measure, to ensure that students do not regret a decision made so early in their secondary school lives later when they are preparing to progress to third-level (NUI, 2010).

This situation of placing modern foreign languages subjects amongst compulsory subjects in a majority of schools certainly contributes to a comparatively high rate of uptake in modern foreign languages at lower-secondary level in Ireland.

As the final statistics for the 2010 Junior Certificate examinations regarding *total candidates* who sat the exam have not been published *at the time of writing* one can consider the 2009 results in order to give some indication of the percentage uptake of modern foreign language subjects at Junior Certificate level in secondary schools i.e. expressed as a percentage of *all* candidates for *all* subjects (see Table 2, below). Of all languages (excluding English and Irish) in the 2009 session the total number of candidates was 48,321. Expressed as a percentage of *all* candidates who completed the Junior Certificate in *all* subjects in the 2009 session totalling 55,557 candidates, one can qualify that *86.97%* of 2009 Junior Certificate examinees studied a modern foreign language (DES, 2010b). This percentage uptake at lower secondary level is encouraging both in terms of the European multilingual project and the position of modern foreign language learning in Ireland. However, we must consider that this high level of uptake of language subjects is comprised of students who are happily opting for modern foreign languages *and* students who feel that they are having language subjects imposed on them by school and university matriculation policies. If in the future such policies were eased the real picture will emerge as to *actual* interest levels amongst students in studying modern foreign languages at lower-secondary level. This situation will be further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

Table Two: Junior Certificate Examination Candidates 2009				
Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English	2,074	16,214	36,574	54,862
Irish	2,688	22,033	22,592	47,313
French		10,448	22,687	33,135
German		2,855	6,475	9,330
Italian		141	296	437
Spanish		1,753	3,214	4,967
Latin		22	401	423
Ancient Greek		4	25	29

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (State Examinations Commission, 2010).

Having considered the *provision* and *uptake* of modern foreign languages to Junior Certificate examinations, I will now consider the situation regarding the *retention* of modern foreign language subjects from lower-secondary level to upper-secondary level. Firstly, it is possible in the Irish context to identify particular learners who opt out of modern foreign languages subjects after completing Junior Certificate exams. This situation emerges wherein a student only chooses a modern language subject in the first place because it is considered amongst the *useful subjects* or is compulsory at their particular school or the experience of learning a language has been particularly negative. By way of an attempt to quantify this group of students who do not continue the study of modern foreign languages from Junior Certificate level to Leaving Certificate level we can consider the number of candidates for Junior Certificate language examinations in the 2007 and 2008 sessions (see Table 3 and Table 4, below) and subsequently the candidates for the 2010 Leaving Certificate examination, the majority of whom would have completed the Junior Certificate in either 2007 or 2008 depending on whether they availed of a 4th year / transition year option (see Table 5a, Appendix 5). Further analysis of the availability of the Transition Year at upper secondary level is included in the following section of this chapter.

If one considers the Junior Certificate candidates for all languages (excluding English and Irish which are compulsory subjects for Junior Certificate examinations) there were a total of *50,295* candidates for the *2007* session and 48,979 candidates for the 2008 session

respectively. Amongst the 2007 candidates a total of 35,039 candidates completed the examination in French, representing 69.66% of the overall candidates for languages, whilst the number of French candidates for the 2008 session was 34,147 representing 69.71% of the overall candidates for languages showing a relatively constant number of candidates who opted for the subject in both years. Candidates for German in 2007 totalled 10,135, representing 20.15% of the overall candidates for languages, whilst the number of German candidates for the 2008 session was 9,507, representing 19.41% of the overall candidates for languages, once again representing a relatively constant student uptake in both years. Candidates for Italian in 2007 totalled 347 representing 0.689% of the overall candidates for languages, whilst the number of Italian candidates for the 2008 session was 391 representing 0.798% of the overall candidates for languages showing a slight increase in candidates but again relatively constant. Candidates for Spanish in 2007 totalled 4,251 representing 8.45% of the overall candidates for languages whilst the number of Spanish candidates for the 2008 session was 4,485 representing 9.15% of the overall candidates for languages in this case representing a slight increase in uptake. Candidates for Latin in 2007 totalled 497 representing 0.988% of the overall candidates for languages, whilst the number of Latin candidates for 2008 totalled 418 representing 0.853% of the overall candidates for languages thus there was a slight decrease in uptake. Candidates for Ancient Greek in 2007 included 27 higher level candidates representing 0.053% of the overall candidates whilst the 2008 session totalled 31 candidates for Ancient Greek in all representing 0.063% of the overall candidates for languages (excluding English and Irish).

Table Three: Junior Certificate Examination Candidates 2007

Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English	2,339	16,592	37,740	56,671
Irish	3,156	24,188	22,493	49,837
French		11,032	24,007	35,039
German		2,999	7,136	10,135
Italian		147	200	347
Spanish		1,385	2,866	4,251
Latin		28	469	497
Ancient Greek			26	26

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (State Examinations Commission, 2010).

Table Four: Junior Certificate Examination Candidates 2008				
Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English	2,048	16,309	36,938	55,295
Irish	2,932	22,817	22,210	47,959
French		10,562	23,585	34,147
German		2,802	6,705	9,507
Italian		150	241	391
Spanish		1,413	3,072	4,485
Latin		27	391	418
Ancient Greek		2	29	31

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (State Examinations Commission, 2010).

The Leaving Certificate examination candidates for 2010 (see Table 5a, Appendix 5) indicate a total of 40,504 candidates who completed examinations in languages (other than English and Irish) (DES, 2010c). Whilst Irish is compulsory for Leaving Certificate examinations, English is not. However, English is studied by a majority of students to Leaving Certificate due to individual schools' criteria for subject selection for Leaving Certificate examinations and also to meet the National University of Ireland requirements for third level matriculation (NUI, 2010). Of the 40,504 candidates a total of 27,574 completed the examination in *French*, representing *68.07%* of candidates for all languages. 7,305 candidates completed the examination in *German*, representing *18.03% of* candidates for all languages. 292 candidates studied Italian, representing 0.72% of candidates for all languages. 3,645 candidates studied Spanish, representing 8.99% of candidates for all languages. 170 candidates completed the examination in Japanese, representing 0.41% of candidates for all languages. 138 candidates studied Latin, representing 0.34% of candidates for all languages. 29 candidates completed the examination in Dutch, representing 0.07% of candidates for all languages. 49 candidates studied Portuguese, representing 0.12% of candidates for all languages. 121 candidates studied Arabic, representing 0.29% of candidates for all languages. 272 candidates studied Russian, representing 0.67% of candidates for all languages. 451 candidates studied Polish, representing 1.11% of candidates for all languages. 96 candidates studied Latvian, representing 0.23% of candidates for all languages. 207 candidates studied Lithuanian, representing 0.51% of candidates for all languages. 121 candidates studied Romanian,

representing 0.29% of candidates for all languages. 34 candidates studied Slovakian, representing 0.08% of candidates for all languages.

If we present the total number of candidates in *all* subjects in the 2010 Leaving Certificate examination session, i.e., 54,481 candidates (DES, 2010c), and the total number of candidates for all language subjects (excluding English and the compulsory subject of Irish) i.e. 40,504, (Table 5a, Appendix 5), it is possible to estimate that *74.34%* of the *total* candidates for the 2010 Leaving Certificate studied a language (other than English and Irish). It is also interesting to compare this figure to the 2007 and 2008 Junior Certificate candidates (see Table 3 and Table 4 above) by applying the same criteria. Hence, if one considers the Junior Certificate candidates for all languages (excluding English and Irish) there were a total of 50,295 candidates for the 2007 session with a total number of candidates studying *all* subjects in that session of 57,287 (DES, 2010b). Thus, it is possible to estimate that *87.79%* of the total candidates for the 2007 Junior Certificate studied a language (other than English and Irish).

In the 2008 Junior Certificate session there were 48,979 candidates for all languages (other than English and Irish) with the total number of candidates for *all* subjects in that session of 55,940. Hence, *87.55%* of the total candidates for the 2008 Junior Certificate examination also studied a language (other than English and Irish). Whilst this tabulation is by no means being presented here as an '*exact science*' it does go some way in highlighting a decrease in the number of students studying languages (other than English and Irish) at Leaving Certificate level i.e. from *87.79%* for Junior Certificate 2007 and *87.55%* for Junior Certificate 2008 to *74.34 %* for Leaving Certificate in 2010 i.e. *over 13 %* fall off in candidates from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate in successive years (DES, 2010b). This group of students who *opt out* of languages following ISCED level 2 (see Appendix 2) have been the focus of a number of studies both in Ireland and the United Kingdom with research emphasising firstly, the importance of continued student motivation to study modern languages and secondly, the likely impact of removing the compulsory requirement of modern foreign languages as school, i.e., would such a move at national government level herald a mass exodus from modern languages study in secondary education? This consideration will be further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

In support of the European aspiration of '*Mother tongue plus two foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling*' it is particularly important for national governments to identify and reverse any declining trend in the uptake and retention of modern foreign languages at school. Much of the research around students' reasons for not continuing the study of modern foreign languages after Junior Certificate examinations focuses on two aspects of students' learning experiences. Firstly, students' perceived usefulness of the language for their future, e.g., they may consider having English as a first language to be sufficient to work, travel etc., and /or have already decided to study a subject at college/university that does not have a modern foreign language matriculation requirement. Secondly, students who simply do not enjoy the study of the language and would prefer not to have opted for a foreign language subject at lower secondary level as they find the language too difficult (NCCA, 2007; Graham, 2002; 2004).

In the Irish context a longitudinal study undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in consultation with the Dublin based Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) from 2003 to 2006 reported on the experiences of Junior Cycle students across *all* of their subjects over the entire Junior Certificate Cycle. Whilst results were reported at the end of the study there were also reports of students' experiences of each year of study at the end of first year, second year and third year respectively. The first year study, undertaken in 2003 and published in 2004 highlighted students' preferences for trying out different subjects for a period in the first year of secondary school before final subject selections were made. Many schools accommodated this by offering a wide range of subject choices or by offering 'tasters' of subjects for a set time. Students particularly noted the usefulness of this system in terms of final subject selection. Modern foreign languages were mentioned in the context that 'taster' courses allowed students to experience all of the modern foreign language subjects on offer and later select their preferred language. However, the report also noted that *overall* students had a lower level of interest in the subjects of Irish, English, Maths and Modern Languages when compared with other subject options (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004).

In terms of modern foreign language subjects students' insights during the second year of the study were certainly more worrying as a more negative picture of their experiences of learning modern languages emerged. Languages were reported as *the least liked* subject, the *most difficult* subjects, and the subject that students' *most wished they hadn't taken* for study

towards the Junior Certificate (Smyth, Dunne, McCoy & Darmody, 2006). The third year study *Gearing Up for the Exam* published in 2007 (Smyth, Dunne & Darmody, 2007) and the subsequent NCCA Summary and Commentary on the findings (NCCA, 2007), indicated that students had included French, German and Irish amongst their *most difficult* subjects and English amongst their *least difficult*. The *most interesting* category of subjects did not include any languages whilst the *least interesting* did include Irish, French and German. English was included as one of *the most useful* subjects whilst Irish was included in *the least useful* (NCCA, 2007:19-20).

When considering these findings it is of interest that the same situation regarding the uptake and retention of modern foreign languages in secondary education is also widely debated in England. Research carried out by Professor Andrew Stables and colleagues at the University of Bath presented empirical evidence from ten West of England Comprehensive schools in 1984 - 1985 and again in 1996 - 1997. Students completed a short questionnaire responding to all their school subjects in terms of liking and perceived importance. The study concluded that attitudes to modern foreign languages as school subjects were worrying in the 1984 - 1985 study but had improved in *some* of the schools in the 1996 - 1997 study. It was considered that a reason for this improvement may have been due to the fact that modern languages became compulsory for study to GCSE level (ISCED Level 2) in 1992 (Stables & Stables (1996); Stables & Wikeley, (1997); Wikeley & Stables, (1999)). The situation has since changed and modern foreign languages are once again amongst the options available to students rather than compulsory subjects at national level. However, in common with the situation in Ireland policies around particular subject selection including languages may still vary considerably from school to school.

Studies by Bell & Forster (2001) and Fisher (2001) concluded that students in England and Wales felt insecure about their abilities in modern foreign languages after completing GCSE examinations and this had an adverse affect on uptake of modern foreign languages subjects' post-16. A 2002 study by Professor Suzanne Graham of the University of Reading concluded that students in England did not perceive modern foreign languages in the 16-19 Curriculum in a positive light and found them *difficult* (Graham, 2002), a finding that mirrors those of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in Ireland in a 2007 study (NCCA,2007). Graham's further study in 2004 highlighted that '*....in the 10 years since 1992 the number of A Level French candidates has approximately halved. This decline is in spite of the fact that the number*

of students studying a modern foreign language up to GCSE examinations increased steadily between 1992 and 2003, most likely due to curriculum reform that has made modern languages compulsory to GCSE level' (Graham, 2004: 172). The current situation in the U.K. is that since 2004 the selection of Modern Language subject options at second level are no longer statutory and this changed position has resulted in a reduction of uptake of modern language subject for GCSE level (ISCED Level 2) from 61% in 2005 to 44% in 2010 (Department of Education, U.K., 2010).

Interestingly, a 1999 study conducted by the Scottish Council for Research in Education also concluded that French language was dominant in the Curriculum and that students reported language learning to be *difficult* and *tedious* which is again in line with the findings of the respective studies undertaken in the U.K. and Ireland. It was also found in the Scottish study that students considered the Higher Examinations (ISCED, Level 3, See Appendix 2) in modern foreign languages subjects were unpredictable and therefore deemed one of the *most difficult of all available subjects* in terms of study and preparation for the final examination. There is no requirement of a modern foreign language for university progression in Scotland, therefore languages are only chosen at upper-secondary by those students who determine the language to be necessary for their future career. '*Between 1995 and 2000 there was a huge increase in all A level subjects (i.e. numbers of students progressing to A level studies), against a decrease in A level foreign language entries*' (McPake et al., 1999: 70-71).

In the Irish context the percentage reduction of students studying modern foreign languages from completion of lower secondary (ISCED Level 2) to upper secondary (ISCED Level 3) is considerably lower than the percentages experienced in the United Kingdom as a whole. This is most likely due to the fact that modern languages are compulsory to Leaving Certificate in Ireland for third-level matriculation but not in Northern Ireland (see McKendry & Neill, (2006), Pritchard, (1993)); England & Wales (see Graham (2004), Wikeley and Stables, (1999)) and Scotland (see McPake et al., (1999)). In the case of Wales, in common with the Irish language in Ireland, the position of the Welsh language as a national language in addition to English serves as a second language in society.

All considered, it is possible to identify some commonalities in the positions of modern foreign languages at school in Ireland and the U.K. Nonetheless, it is difficult to make any concrete *direct* comparisons between what we can reasonably acknowledge to be

considerably varied education systems. Interestingly, in the case of Ireland, successive studies have particularly noted the requirement for students to continue to study a modern language from lower-secondary level to upper-secondary level irrespective of their *interest in* or *motivation to learn* the language, e.g., the National University of Ireland requirement of a modern foreign language has been identified as one of the key factors driving the uptake and continuation to senior cycle of modern foreign languages subjects. A recent study of student motivation in foreign language learning in Ireland concluded that '*Students are motivated by a number of factors, but most commonly by the requirement to gain entrance to third level colleges and universities*' (Mulderrig, 2008: 98), a situation that had previously been highlighted in studies by Ushioda (1995), Balfe (1997) and Little (2005) who concluded that '*Arguably, most Irish teenagers learn a foreign language because the National University of Ireland requires students to have a school leaving qualification in Irish and a foreign language*' (Little, 2005:1).

Once Junior Certificate examinations have been completed traditionally over 80% of students transfer from Junior to Senior Cycle in public sector second level schools (European Commission, 2010d: 89) with the senior cycle scheduled over two or three years. Students can complete upper secondary in two years or take an optional Transition Year immediately following completion of lower-secondary level studies. A *Transition Year* is offered in 72 % of schools and provides a school-designed curriculum over one academic year. The programme is not formally examined, however, the *Transition Year Programme*: *Guidelines for Schools,* recommends that participants should be assessed on all aspects of study as a part of the internal evaluation procedures in place in each school (DES, 1993; 2010a). There are three possible programmes at upper-secondary level leading pupils to Leaving Certificate examinations: the established Leaving Certificate; the Leaving Certificate Applied; and, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The established Leaving Certificate programme is the most academically-oriented of the three Leaving Certificate options. Students study not less than five approved subjects, one of which one must be Irish. Generally, students select seven subjects from a range of thirty three subjects approved for the senior cycle curriculum (European Commission, 2009a; 2009b). Most examinable subjects are offered at two levels – ordinary and higher. One subject (Civic, Social and Political Education) is offered at a common level. Two subjects (Mathematics and Irish) are offered at three levels – higher, ordinary and foundation. Assessment of Modern Foreign Languages at Leaving Certificate

has three components: a written examination, listening comprehension, and an oral examination.

The three initial research questions of this study which we have already considered in the context of lower-secondary education, i.e., towards Junior Certificate Examinations (above) will now be applied to the context of upper-secondary level study, i.e., towards Leaving Certificate Examinations. We will recall that the research questions include firstly, how the European policy of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages has been interpreted at member state level in Ireland in terms of what is the *provision*, the *uptake* and the *retention* of modern foreign languages at school? Secondly, what is the current situation in terms of grade attainment in modern foreign language subjects? and thirdly, what is the level of consideration given to achieving standards of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school. As we have already considered the general situation in Ireland regarding the provision of modern foreign languages in secondary education in the initial part of this chapter including at upper-secondary level (See PPLI, 2010) we will now continue with student *uptake* of languages at upper-secondary level.

2.1.5 The Uptake of modern foreign language subjects at Upper-Secondary level

In terms of uptake of languages we can see from the 2010 Leaving Certificate candidates (Table 5a, Appendix 5) that the total number of candidates who sat the 2010 examinations in *all* languages (other than English and Irish) was 40,504. Of that total 68.07% studied French; 18.03% studied German; 0.720% studied Italian; 8.99% studied Spanish; 0.419% studied Japanese and 0.671% studied Russian. When the 2009 Leaving Certificate candidates are considered (Table 5b, Appendix 6) it can be seen that the total number of candidates who sat the 2009 examinations in all languages (other than English and Irish) was 40,422. Of that total 68.46% studied French; 18.73% studied German; 0.786% studied Italian; 8.10% studied Spanish; 0.616% studied Japanese and 0.576% studied Russian. In the 2008 Leaving Certificate (Table 5c Appendix 7) it can be seen that the total number of candidates who sat the 2008 examinations in all languages (other than English and Irish) was 39,556. Of that total 70.01% studied French; 18.87% studied German; 0.649% studied Italian; 7.49% studied Spanish; 0.321% studied Japanese; 0.619% studied Russian.

As noted above study and uptake of examinations in modern foreign language subjects has remained relatively constant in the period 2008 to 2010 with numbers of students presenting for examinations in successive years also relatively constant. Although there is a slight emergent trend towards selecting Spanish and Italian languages the continued majority uptake of firstly French followed by German languages shows that language diversity remains quite minimal overall. These trends will be further analyzed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5. Having already addressed retention of modern foreign language subjects from lower-secondary to upper-secondary level we will now move forward and consider grade attainment by students at upper-secondary.

2.1.6 Grade Achievement in Modern Foreign Languages at upper-secondary level

Of those presenting in the 2010 Leaving Certificate examination session, 6.2% of candidates taking higher level French obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was C2 obtained by 11.6% of the higher level French cohort; 0.3% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C1 was obtained by 13.6% of the ordinary level French cohort in that year. Amongst the higher level candidates for German 6.9% obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was C2 obtained by 13.1% of the higher level German cohort; 0.6% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C1 was obtained by 14.3% of the ordinary level German cohort in that year. Of the higher level candidates completing examinations in Spanish 8.6% obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was B3 obtained by 12.4% of candidates; 1.6% of ordinary candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C2 was obtained by 13.5% of the ordinary level Spanish cohort in that year. Whilst 7.6% of candidates taking higher level Italian obtained an A1 grade, the average grade was C1 obtained by 14.7% of the higher level Italian cohort; 1.1% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of D2 was obtained by 16.8% of the ordinary level Italian cohort in that year. Amongst the higher level candidates for Japanese 33.6% obtained an A1 grade which represented the average grade at higher level. Although the national government examination statistics do not separate mother-tongue and non-mother tongue candidates this situation is most likely reflective of the number of 'mother-tongue' Japanese candidates who presented for the examination. There were no A1 grades awarded at ordinary level where the average grade is C1 obtained by 25.9% of the ordinary level Japanese cohort in that year. The same situation is evident for Russian in which 57.7% of higher level candidates obtained an A1, also most

likely reflective of the number of 'mother-tongue Russian' candidates who presented for the examination. There were no candidates for ordinary level Russian in 2010. This situation will be further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

Generally, in terms of grade attainment in 2010 we see less than 10% of students achieving A1 grades across foreign language subjects with the average grade being a rather disappointing C in the most frequently studied French, German and Italian languages and a slightly better B3 average at higher level in Spanish. The introduction of the languages of Japanese and Russian through the Post-Primary languages initiative is certainly to be welcomed however grades awarded in these subjects need to be more transparent by stating the exact extent to which the achievement of such high numbers of A1 grades at higher level in both Japanese and Russian may be attributed to mother-tongue candidates rather than students who are studying the languages for the first time in upper-secondary. (see Table 5a Appendix 5; SEC, 2010).

If we consider the 2009 Leaving Certificate (see Table 5b Appendix 6; SEC, 2010) whilst 4.9% of candidates taking higher level French obtained an A1 grade, the average grade was C2 obtained by 12% of the higher level French cohort; 0.2% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C1 was obtained by 13.2% of the ordinary level French cohort in that year. Amongst the higher level candidates for German 8.1% obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was C2 obtained by 12% of the higher level German cohort; 1% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of B3 was obtained by 15.5% of the ordinary level German cohort in that year. Of the higher level candidates completing examinations in Spanish 6.00% obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was C1 obtained by 13% of candidates; 1.1% of ordinary candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C2 was obtained by 14% of the ordinary level Spanish cohort in that year. Whilst 17% of candidates taking higher level Italian obtained an A1 grade, representing the average grade of the higher level Italian cohort; 3.2% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C3 was obtained by 17.9% of the ordinary level Italian cohort in that year.

Amongst the higher level candidates for Japanese 28.8% obtained an A1 grade which represented the average grade at higher level and is again most likely reflective of the number of 'mother-tongue' Japanese candidates who presented for the examination. There were no A1 grades awarded at ordinary level where the average grade is E obtained by 22.00% of the ordinary level Japanese cohort in that year and perhaps representative of Irish students who had studied the language for two years in upper-secondary. In the subject of Russian 71% of higher level candidates obtained an A1 which is again likely reflective of the number of 'mother-tongue Russian' candidates who presented for the examination. 31.6% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 which represented the average grade at that level for the 2009 cohort.

Thus, the outstanding aspects regarding grade achievement in modern foreign languages in 2009 were a decrease to less than 5% of the total number of candidates achieving an A1 grade in the most popular subject of French at higher level; once again a disappointing average C grade at both higher and ordinary levels in French and Spanish and at higher level in German with a slightly better B3 average in ordinary level German. Italian language was the surprise of 2009 with 17% of higher level candidates achieving an A1. However, as we have seen in the 2010 session above disappointingly this level of achievement of top grades in Italian regresses by almost 10% in the 2010 examination session to just over 7% of candidates.

Moving to 2008 (see Table 5c Appendix 7; SEC, 2010) whilst 6.80% of candidates taking higher level French obtained an A1 grade, the average grade was C2 obtained by 11% of the higher level French cohort; 0.3% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C3 was obtained by 14.3% of the ordinary level French cohort in that year. Amongst the higher level candidates for German 8.5% obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was C2 obtained by 13.2% of the higher level German cohort; 0.40 % of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C1 was obtained by 15.6% of the ordinary level German cohort in that year. Of the higher level candidates completing examinations in Spanish 7.3% obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade was B2 obtained by 12.6% of candidates; 0.9% of ordinary candidates obtained an A1 grade

whilst the average grade of B3 was obtained by 12.2% of the ordinary level Spanish cohort in that year. Whilst 15.9% of candidates taking higher level Italian obtained an A1 grade, representing the average grade of the higher level Italian cohort; no ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 grade whilst the average grade of C1 was obtained by 13.4% of the ordinary level Italian cohort in that year.

Amongst the higher level candidates for Japanese 30.3% obtained an A1 grade which represented the average grade at higher level and is again likely reflective of the number of 'mother-tongue' Japanese candidates who presented for the examination. There were no A1, A2 or B1 grades awarded at ordinary level where the average grade is C2 obtained by 17.9% of the ordinary level Japanese cohort in that year. The same situation is once again evident for Russian in which 68.7% of higher level candidates obtained an A1 which is also likely reflective of the number of 'mother-tongue Russian' candidates who presented for the examination. 33.3% of ordinary level candidates obtained an A1 and 33.30% of candidates obtained an A2 which represented the average grades at that level for the 2008 cohort.

Thus, the outstanding features of the 2008 session were again a disappointing average C grade across the most popular languages with a better average of B2 at higher level Spanish. As we can see in the 2009 session above this average grade increase was to be short-lived as the average higher level grade in Spanish reverts to a C in the following year. Grade achievement in Italian at higher level is once again high with 15.9% of students achieving an A1 grade which we have seen increases to over 17% in 2009 only to fall back significantly in 2010 to less than 7%, the reasons for this sudden decrease will need to be examined in the wider national context.

All considered of particular note in the 2010 Leaving Certificate examinations at ordinary level the results indicate that 11.1% of candidates obtained an E grade in ordinary level Japanese and 9.5% of candidates obtained an E grade in Italian whilst at higher level the 2010 results indicate that although language performance was relatively high overall 10.3% of

candidates obtained an E grade in higher level Dutch and 14.3% obtained an E grade in higher level Portuguese (SEC, 2010).

A further concern is the increasing numbers of students studying Irish language who opt for ordinary level study rather than higher level. In 2010 14,650 students presented for higher level Irish whilst 25,906 opted for ordinary level; French was somewhat more equally divided with 14,359 presenting for higher level and 13,215 opting for ordinary level. When one considers the overall uptake of language subjects it is encouraging that with the exception of French language and Irish language all other language subjects (including English) in the 2010 Leaving Certificate session indicate a quite significantly greater proportion of students completing the examinations at higher level and this is to be welcomed. However, when considering grade achievement from 2008 to 2010 it is worrying that an average grade of C is evident across foreign languages at school for terminal examinations.

Of course the subjects of Japanese and Russian which we have already qualified will need to report grades which indicate both from mother-tongue and non-mother tongue candidates at present show better levels of grade achievement. From a national and comparative perspective across member states there is certainly work to be done in Ireland at national level to increase average grade achievement from a fairly mediocre C average. Certainly any positive impacts in terms of grade achievement of the post-primary languages initiative are still to be seen. The imminent undertaking of the European Indicator of language competence study in Ireland should further highlight the need for better grades at terminal examinations as well as providing an instrument for comprehensive comparison of foreign language grade achievement by language students in schools across member states.

Now that we have considered how the European policy of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages has been interpreted at member state level in Ireland in terms of *the provision* of modern foreign languages in education; *the uptake* of modern foreign languages at both junior-cycle and senior-cycle; and *the retention* of modern foreign languages towards senior cycle after completion of Junior Certificate exams; as well as the current situation in terms of *grade attainment* in modern foreign language subjects at both junior cycle and senior cycle the final part of this chapter will now determine the level of consideration at national

government level in Ireland given to achieving standards of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages learning at school.

2.2 Encouraging Fluency and Proficiency in Modern Foreign Languages

This section of the study addresses the third research question of this part of the thesis relating to what level of consideration is given to achieving standards of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school? We have already seen how the European policy of *mother tongue plus two* foreign languages has been interpreted at member state level in Ireland in terms of the *provision* of modern foreign languages in education; the *uptake* of modern foreign languages at both junior-cycle and senior-cycle; the *retention* of modern foreign languages towards senior cycle after completion of Junior Certificate exams; and the current situation in terms of *grade attainment* in modern foreign language subjects at both junior cycle and senior cycle. This section will now address my final policy implementation question before we move to the learner in the classroom in Chapter 2 part 2 of the study.

In March 2007, the Minister for Education and Science (now Education and Skills) increased the marks allocation for the Modern Languages Leaving Certificate oral examination from 25% to 40%, and from 20% to 40% in the Junior Certificate in order to promote an emphasis on using the language for communication (DES, 2010a). Whilst this is a very important progression I must straight away re-iterate a point previously raised in this Chapter 1, i.e. in practice many students are currently tested on their oral language skills in modern languages at Leaving Certificate level but *not* at Junior Certificate level, in which the oral component of the language examination is optional and only offered by a minority of schools. Similarly noted in Chapter 1the European Indicator of Language Competence study (currently underway in member states) will *not* include an oral examination component. Whilst the 2007 introduction of a greater examination weighting for the oral component in foreign language subjects is widely welcomed there is also concern that this change will not necessarily result in an increased proficiency in target language use amongst school-leavers. Thus, it remains vital that individual schools' employ innovative pedagogical practices to encourage the use of the modern language for all communications in class as well as putting measures in place to encourage opportunities for target language use outside of the classroom in study groups and

study abroad, etc. It may also be useful for grades achieved in language subjects at terminal examinations to include a report of the percentage breakdown of the overall grade attributable to the written, aural and oral component of the examination. That considered it is intended that this concluding part of Chapter 2 Section 1 will provide an overview of the current situation regarding the encouragement of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages at member state level in Ireland with issues raised here to be further probed in Chapter 2, section 2 in their application to the learner in the modern foreign languages classroom; and further addressed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

The general aims of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) with regard to the development of modern foreign languages in education are: 'to enable students to use communication skills in the Target Language to take full part in the class conducted in the Target Language'; 'to achieve normal everyday transactions use of target language both spoken and written'; 'to be capable of information extraction and comprehension in the target language'; 'to understand the future use of target language in practical everyday life and to give pupils a critical awareness of how meaning is organised and conveyed and thus contribute to their understanding of the workings of human language in general whilst helping learners to develop strategies for effective language learning and develop an awareness of cultural, social and political diversity'. Thus, the current syllabus aims to lead every pupil towards four basic outcomes in modern foreign languages: a communicative competence in the target language; an awareness of language and communications; an awareness of how to go about learning a foreign language; and a level of cultural awareness (NCCA, 2009; DES, 2010a).

The Basic Communicative Proficiency component of the modern languages syllabus includes aspects of experiential learning i.e. *learning-through-use activities* as well as a *language awareness* component to develop the learner's knowledge of how the target language linguistic system works, i.e. *analytical learning* focusing on language performance including: learning about language from target language material; exploring target language literary texts as sources of linguistic information and illustration, i.e., exploring in the sense of '*....guessing intelligently at the meaning of target language forms on the basis of related forms in the target language Exploring the workings of the target language through (specified) activities. Consulting reference materials (dictionaries and grammars) relating to the vocabulary and grammar of the target language Learning to cope with simple*

grammatical terminology....Using target language forms correctly on the basis of explanations in grammars' (NCCA, 2005: 41-42).

Whilst ability to communicate in the target language is essential it is emphasized that language and linguistic awareness must also be integral to teaching of modern languages. Approaches to implementing the modern languages syllabus are outlined in the *Leaving Certificate* Modern Language Teacher Guidelines (DES, 2010a).

The issue of students' increased target language use is central to developments in Post-primary teacher education in which the language competence and intercultural experiences of teachers has come into question. Teaching practice hours, adequacy of current qualifications in comparison with those in other member states and internationally and limited teaching hours for language teaching methodology during periods of training are currently under review. (DES, 2007a). In Ireland in-service teacher education is provided by Secondary Level Support Services (SLSS) and the Education Centre Network (ECN). There is currently no obligation on teachers to engage in continuous professional development except where this is provided by the Department of Education and Skills during usual working hours. The last in-service training for language teachers took place in the mid-1990s in the context of curricular revision. Whilst courses are also offered to teachers by the relevant subject Teacher Associations with support from the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills teacher participation remains on a voluntary basis.

In the promotion of mobility of language teachers for the purpose of continuing fluency and intercultural training relevant to their particular language subjects Léargas continues to work as Ireland's national agency for the management of national, European and international co-operation programmes (Léargas, 2009). The Education Service of Léargas manages many actions of the Socrates programme, mainly Comenius which is involved with primary and secondary education. Funding is provided for summer study abroad for teachers for linguistic and intercultural development as well as a teacher exchange scheme currently operating in France and Germany. At present, issues surrounding secondment of teachers in schools greatly limits teachers availability to participate in teacher exchange outside of scheduled school holiday periods. In order to further promote international student and teacher mobility in association with the national European agencies such as Léargas in Ireland a *Europass* initiative was implemented in 2005 and each member state developed a

designated National *Europass* Centre (NEC) with responsibility for coordination of European educational mobility at national level (Europass, 2010a; 2010b). The centres provide information on learning opportunities throughout Europe through liaison with community and national services. A further initiative entitled Europass-Mobility, (more recently titled 'Mobili-Pass'), records periods of learning attended abroad. A *Europass-Diploma Supplement* provides information on educational achievements at higher education level' whilst a *Certificate Supplement* details the competences and qualifications corresponding to a vocational training certificate. In 2008, the first evaluation of the *Europass* initiative was carried out. The main conclusions were that documents developed in member states that had a clear competence-based approach to education were the most effective; and that the potential of such an approach to encouraging European mobility could be further exploited'. (Europass, 2010c). The European Commission adopted a Green Paper in July 2009 on how to promote learning mobility. Additionally the development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) (see NQAI, 2010) linking national qualifications levels to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) has been undertaken as a further step to increasing mobility levels of both students and teachers across Europe. This is another example of policy implementation which has been successfully adopted at member state level in Ireland '*Ireland and Malta are already completing the process of referencing their NQFs to the EQF'* (European Commission, 2008d: 127).

The policies and systems certainly exist to encourage and enable student and teacher mobility for increased levels of proficiency development in target languages at school. It is up to individual member states to decide how to run their educational systems and to establish the degree of autonomy available to schools in the provision of language subjects at school and the encouragement of both teacher and student mobility to improve proficiency levels achievable in target language study. The role of the European Commission is to help member states tackle the challenges of linguistic diversity by supporting and co-ordinating action via joint projects (see European Commission, 2007d) the national agencies (Léargas,2009) and *Europass* Centres (Europass,(2010a); (2010b); (2010c)) working together to encourage a European dimension to learning (see European Commission (2008e; 2009c; 2009d).

'In recent years the language environment in the European union has become more complex. The EU now has 500m citizens, 27 member states, 3 alphabets and 23 official languages as well as some 60 other regional and minority languages' (European Commission, 2009e:5).

The *Key Data on Education in Europe* Report (2009) highlights that there is evidence of some levels of success in language teaching and learning across Europe in recent years. Compulsory subjects at secondary level schooling and the time dedicated to teaching them in nearly all of 31 countries involved in the Eurydice Network under the *Lifelong Learning Programme* (2007-2013) indicates that teaching time is *increasing* in natural and social sciences *as well as* in foreign languages. The Report also concludes that the qualification levels of young people have mostly improved between 2002 and 2007 in Belgium, *Ireland*, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom (European Commission, 2009d: 112). In the Irish context the European Language Portfolio (see Chapter 1) and the Common European Framework of Reference (see Chapter 1) are becoming more widely known to teachers and researchers. However, the uptake of two ELP models devised for use in secondary schools (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002: *Authentik*, 2010) and for immigrant learners studying English (CLCS, 2010) has been limited. It is however anticipated that this situation will improve in line with any future revision of the current syllabus in modern foreign languages in Ireland (Little, 2009). At a wider European level in December 2010, the European Language Portfolio Validation Committee ceased to exist. From April 2011 portfolio validation will be replaced by online registration based on self-declaration. Piloting of the European Language Portfolio models in Ireland to date have mainly focussed on: getting learners to accept responsibility for their learning; fostering use of TL in class; helping teachers to develop planning skills; and looking for a new way of teaching for the exams. Teachers' reported reflections on portfolio use in the classroom included seeing:

'....an overall picture of pupils learning with a plan we work on rather than just going through the motions. I am more aware of the learner having needs and looking at teaching from the learners' point of view' (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002:29). 'It is encouraging to see them think about any of their learning. Evaluating their own and each other's work is fantastic and I want to do a lot more of this' (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002:32).

As outlined in Chapter 1, increased portfolio use in the classroom and implementing the key skills to school curricula are extremely important European policy projects that have the possibility of heralding real and positive change in the way we approach the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages in Ireland. It is also important that European

collaboration in education such as the recent Evaluation of Foreign Languages at Upper Secondary level project in Ireland continue to share best practice. (DES, 2009a). Additionally, the eight competences which we will recall from Chapter 1 as necessary for the education and training of young people and adults to provide paths through which students of all ages have the opportunity to learn; maintain; and update specific competences, in the course of life-long learning include: (i) communication in the mother tongue; (ii) communication in foreign languages; (iii) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; (iv) digital competence; (v) learning to learn; (vi) social and civic competences; (vii) sense of initiative & entrepreneurship; and, (viii) cultural awareness and expression. The integration of the 'Competences' at member state level in Ireland has been facilitated via the *Key Skills Project* which is designed to support teaching and learning across the curriculum in upper secondary schools and also to promote success in school and full participation in society including family life, the world of work and lifelong learning (NCCA, 2009). In Ireland the eight European competences have been interpreted as five 'Key Skills', i.e., (i) information processing; (ii) critical and creative thinking; (iii) communicating; (iv) working with others; and, (v) being personally effective; with each element broken down into essential elements and learning outcomes:

'These skills are being included in all subjects in upper secondary schools as part of an ongoing syllabus reform. A network of eighteen schools was founded in 2006. Practicing teachers write units, develop sample learning activities, and try out the materials and tools. Critical reflection is an important feature of the project, for both teachers and learners. Much of the support material is designed to support this. Self-assessment has also been recognized as an important tool in fostering these competences' (European Commission, 2008d: 59).

There is ongoing review of curricula in both the lower and upper cycles of secondary education. The NCCA is currently working on curricular reforms to ensure that senior cycle subjects are designed to include the *key skills*. The result will be to embed these *key skills* in all senior cycle subjects including modern languages by 2012 (NCCA, 2009).

The Department of Education and Skills continually aims to limit class sizes at secondary level to a maximum of 26 students per class and we will see in the upcoming 'Findings' chapter that respondents to the primary research component of this study 'see Student Questionnaire, Appendix 8) report an average class size that is in keeping with these DES aspirations. However, we must acknowledge that class sizes still vary widely from school to school. The amount of time recommended for language learning averages 90 hours per

school year at upper-secondary level (reaching 200 hours in Denmark, Germany and Malta) with the DES recommending a minimum of 90 teaching hours per school year for modern foreign language subjects at upper-secondary (European Commission, 2008e; 2009c). Thus Ireland remains at the lower end of the scale in terms of recommended annual teaching hours allocated to modern foreign language subjects in secondary education. To further encourage exposure to target language study at school the European Commission has contributed to developing a network, 'Euroclic', of practitioners, researchers, teacher trainers and other parties interested in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the learning of other educational subjects through the use of a foreign language. The development of a website has also been undertaken for the development and exchange of information in this area. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is considered to be a means by which schools can provide effective opportunities for pupils to use their new language skills *now*, rather than learn them now for use later. It provides exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum. It can be further facilitated by the presence even for an initial *piloting period* in a school of trained teachers who are native speakers of the vehicular language (European Commission, 2010e).

In terms of efforts towards any notable increase in language diversity a situation still remains in secondary education throughout Europe in which English, French, German and Russian account for 95% of all language learning in the majority of countries whilst English is also the most popular language for European in-service training grants for teachers highlighting lower participation rates from countries where English exists as a mother tongue e.g. Ireland and the U.K. (European Commission, 2005b:259). As we have seen through the implementation of the Post-Primary Languages Initiative, there is an emergent increase in students opting for Spanish and Italian languages and this change is similarly reflected in a very recent '*National Languages Strategy'* study undertaken by the Royal Irish Academy (see RIA, 2011). In addition to the work of Royal Irish Academy and the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland the National Development Plan (2007-2013) recommends the strengthening of language learning '*by for example increasing emphasis on oral competence in syllabuses and in the certificate examinations and diversifying language learning where appropriate*' (NDP 2007-2013): 198). Following *implementation of* and *initiation of the implementation process* of a range of innovative educational policies in modern foreign languages education in Ireland over the past decade a very real sense of moving in the right direction towards wider European *multilingual* and *plurilingual* ambitions for member states

both in wider society and in education in Ireland became apparent. Documenting these levels of progress over a number of years of this study emphasized that Ireland was amongst the member states which had shown a consistent level of commitment to supporting European *multilingual* and *plurilingual* ambitions. Hence, the discovery in August 2011 that there had been a number of very surprising setbacks in the European project in languages at member state level in Ireland in recent months were not at all expected. Essentially, the national government has decided *not to* extend the modern languages in primary school initiative in the medium term. This decision has been taken for three reasons: continued availability of language support in mother-tongue languages; consideration for special educational needs; and, emphasis of literacy and numeracy in schools. Whilst acknowledging the challenges that all three of these factors present they are not insurmountable challenges. If we consider '*language*' more holistically in line with the recommendations of the 1987 Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB, 1987) study and successive studies outlined in Chapter 2 part 1, we must acknowledge that there will *always* be a need *at all levels of education* for language support for non-nationals and for support of special educational needs. Government funding *must* adequately provide for these requirements at all levels of education. That considered, in the context of continuing and extended provision of the MLPSI it is the third stated reason not to extend the initiative, i.e., 'emphasis on literacy and numeracy in schools' that is most bewildering. Any emphasis on literacy and numeracy does not have to be at a cost of reduced provision of foreign language subjects at primary school. A more holistic approach to 'language' at primary level allows for provision of *all language needs* be that literacy (and by association in the Irish context 'numeracy'), mother-tongue support and English language support; in addition to modern foreign language education. These particular challenges will be further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

In a Dail debate on the 17th May 2011, Deputy Ciaran Lynch, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, confirmed on behalf of the current Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn that:

'The Minister's top priority is to advance a national literacy and numeracy strategy in schools and to ensure more time is spent each day on developing literacy and numeracy skills. Given the difficult budgetary position and in the context of advice from the NCCA there will be no expansion of the modern languages initiative at primary level in the near term' (Lynch, 2011).

It has been further stated at national government level that:

'The Government is prioritising an agenda of curriculum reform in science and mathematics and improving innovation capacity in second level schools. The funds available in this difficult budgetary context do not allow for the inclusion of additional languages in the curriculum at present'..... 'to the extent that it is possible to expand provision into new languages, consideration will also have to be given to discontinuing some existing languages and re-orienting provision towards the languages of more strategically and economically important countries' (Lynch, 2011).

Furthermore, Ireland will now *not participate* in the on-going European Indicator of Language Competence:

'In 2012 the Commission will review the progress made by member countries and when examined Ireland may well be one of the member states scrutinised for non-implementation of the objectives set out by the Commission' (Lynch, 2011).

Even in consideration of the current economic climate in Ireland this decision is hugely surprising particularly given that the costs of participation in the European Indicator of Language Competence study are to be covered at a European level. From the outset of this study it was intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of foreign language education at upper-secondary level focusing particularly on the experiences of learners. It was a further consideration in recent times that the completion of this study would coincide with the publication of the results of the European Indicator of language competence study in Ireland providing possibilities for wide-ranging debate on modern foreign languages in secondary education. Recent studies including this study; the 2009 DES Evaluation of foreign languages study; in addition to the studies outlined in Chapter 1, part 2 combined with the results of the European Indicator of Language Competence study; (in which Ireland will now not participate) *could* have provided an excellent range of indications of *where we are now* both nationally and *comparatively* across member states in terms of foreign language provision in education. Ireland's non-participation in such an important and wide-ranging study excludes us from any upcoming European analysis and debate on languages education across member states at least in the short term and as such will most certainly represent a missed opportunity in a national, regional and individual school context. This situation will be further analyzed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER TWO: PART TWO - THE LEARNER IN THE MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Introduction

To this point, I have considered the wider context by examining educational policy objectives in modern foreign languages education at a European level (Chapter 1), narrowing that context to policy at a national member state level in Ireland (Chapter 2, part 1). The study will now narrow further still to consider the everyday reality of learning modern foreign languages at school by considering the learner in the classroom. Addressing the further research questions of this study a review of pertinent literature will now determine the importance of knowledge which the foreign language learner brings to the classroom from previous study and other school subjects, i.e., prior knowledge and language and linguistic awareness. Essentially, what is the extent of student motivation in the pursuit of modern foreign language learning? What are the learning strategies that students use in the course of learning? Further to this review of pertinent literature analyses of the data from the primary research component of this study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', and Chapter 4, 'Findings') presents both quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to students learning foreign languages in the classroom in Ireland.

Naturally, in considering the learner in the modern foreign language classroom it would have been possible to include any number of applied theoretical perspectives in classroom learning. Following consideration I decided to focus this part of the study around four key questions, two of which I considered would be suitably addressed through a review of the literature, i.e., students' prior knowledge and students' language and linguistic awareness; and a further two which could be addressed through a review of the literature *and* their subsequent application to the primary research component of the study, i.e., student motivation and student learning strategies in their learning of modern foreign languages, both inside and outside of the classroom. It is my consideration that the initial questions relating to students' prior knowledge and students' language and linguistic awareness could certainly have been tested through the primary research component of this study. I would, in fact, consider it an oversight that whilst the primary research component focuses on upper-secondary level study in Ireland, I did not take the opportunity to include a questionnaire item which allowed students to report on their prior knowledge of foreign languages *to that point*

of their studies, e.g., through their study of foreign languages at primary level via the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative *or* previous periods of living abroad *or* visits to target language communities on holidays during their primary and lower-secondary education (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire' and upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5). Regarding students' language and linguistic awareness the noted lack of cohesion between language subjects at school in Ireland together with the predominantly literature based syllabus in the subject of English noted in Chapter 2, part 1 led me to believe that including questionnaire items in the primary research component on *language and linguistic awareness* would have firstly considerably lengthened an already detailed questionnaire; and secondly, may have resulted in such varied responses as to not provide any discernable level of opportunity for analyses and discussion, i.e., it would not have contributed very effectively to the overall study to include data on the number of students who *could* or *could not* define or identify specific features of language, etc. It was my further consideration that the two latter questions *could* be effectively addressed through a review of the literature *and* their subsequent application to the primary research component of the study, i.e., student motivation and student learning strategies in the learning of modern foreign languages. Anticipated responses to questionnaire items in the primary research component of the study (see Appendix 8,'Student Questionnaire') would likely provide extensive possibilities to make inferences on both student motivation and learning strategies used by students both inside and outside the language classroom and this has indeed proven to be the case with such 'Findings' reported in Chapter 4 of this study and further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

2.3 Consideration of prior knowledge in modern foreign languages at post-primary level

It is useful at this point in order to set this part of the study in context to re-cap on the situation of modern foreign language learners at school in Ireland. As we have seen in Chapter 2, part 1, in Ireland the current place of modern foreign languages at school at upper-secondary level is that of a compulsory subject requirement for university matriculation for the majority of courses at third level. Thus, many students who have ambitions to proceed to university level are currently studying a modern language (s) because they *have to* (NUI, 2010). We have also seen in Chapter 2, part 1 that secondary schools are largely autonomous in their range of subjects offered. Some schools operate a policy of compulsory modern language uptake from lower secondary level whilst others do not require students to select a

modern foreign language for study at any point of their secondary level education (NCCA, 2005, 2007). Consequently, students are currently guided by NUI matriculation requirements rather than any national educational policy requirement to study modern foreign languages at secondary school (Little, 2005, 2007; Mulderrig, 2008). We have similarly noted (Chapter 2, part 1) that for a student undertaking the study of a modern language at school in Ireland they are generally commencing the language for the first time at lower-secondary level. Although the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative (MLPSI) provides for two years of language study in the subjects of French, German, Italian and Spanish at those primary schools which have voluntarily signed up to the initiative (See Chapter 2, Part 1) we currently have a situation whereby only *some* students progressing to secondary level will have already studied a modern foreign language for two years whilst *others* will have no prior experience of foreign language learning. We will now consider the challenges posed by this varying degree of modern foreign language experience as students commence lower-secondary level education.

In Ireland, secondary schools typically draw students from a number of primary schools in their local area, thus it is possible to straight away identify at least two emergent concerns relating to acknowledgment of prior learning of modern foreign languages as students progress to post-primary study. The first of these concerns relates to those students who have had an opportunity to study a modern language subject at primary school. As we have noted in Chapter 2, part 1 the MLPSI offers the possibility of studying French, German, Italian and Spanish at primary level where individual schools have autonomy in deciding which language subjects to offer. The wider availability of French and German subjects and teachers at secondary level means that some students who have studied Spanish or Italian as part of the MLPSI may not be able to continue to study those subjects at their local secondary school. Thus, they will have to select an alternate language from those available and effectively *'start from scratch'* with a new language at post-primary level. The language subjects of Japanese and Russian continue to be offered at upper-secondary level only.

The second concern is that there is currently no provision at secondary level for those students who have completed two years of modern language study through the MLPSI initiative. These students simply join the same modern language class as those students who have no language experience. Consequently, there is very little linking of language provision at primary and post-primary levels and minimal *if any* facilitation of prior learning (Ó'

Dochartaigh & Broderick, 2006). This situation very much raises the question as to why to allow students to take language subjects at primary level *at all*. If the MLPSI exists simply to implement European education policy the entire experience may become futile for students. The frustration of studying grammatical features, etc., of a foreign language for two years at primary level only to repeat the same study at lower-secondary or to have to study a new language due to limited subject availability at a particular secondary school is de-motivating in the extreme. The situation as it currently stands essentially renders the primary languages initiative ineffective if we are to consider its role to include the promotion of *progressive* modern foreign languages education with seamless transition in language study between primary and post-primary level *including* facilitation of prior learning in lower secondary education; and if we are to further consider its role as an important component of a national government policy agenda towards multilingualism in Ireland. These particular challenges will be further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

A further interesting point to note here relates to the study of the Irish Language as a school subject which as we have also seen in Chapter 2 part 1 is compulsory to the completion of upper secondary education with exemptions for students in particular circumstances determined by the Department of Education and Skills (Harris & Murtagh, 1999; Murtagh, 2006; NUI, 2010). There is a growing perception amongst non-Irish mother tongue students that Irish is a difficult subject to study at upper-secondary level and there is evidence in the past number of years of an emergent trend of a majority of students opting to sit terminal examinations in Irish language at *ordinary level* rather than *higher level* for Leaving Certificate examinations. A cursory glance at the Junior Certificate candidates' tables in Chapter 2, part 1 and Leaving Certificate candidates' tables (Appendices 5 – 7) shows a significant fall-off in higher level Irish candidates between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Consequently, successive studies have recommended the introduction of a second syllabus for Irish language for those who do not use Irish in the course of their everyday lives (Little, 2003; NCCA 2005). As we have seen in Chapter 2, part 1, a further situation which arises in the European context is that despite Ireland's two national languages - with Irish language in the place of official language and English as effectively a second official language - the majority of Irish schoolchildren are amongst those who Zobl terms *unilinguals* (Zobl, 1992; in Gass, 1997) speaking predominantly English *or* Irish language on a daily basis rather than multilinguals speaking both English and Irish. Consequently, students' levels of language and linguistic awareness in Ireland gained from

exposure to two national languages from the commencement of state education may be *considerably less* than that generally perceived at a European level, especially when compared with *other* European countries in which there are two official national languages (European Commission, 2008d, 2008e).

In Ireland the reality is that for the majority of students the commencement of study of a modern foreign language usually begins at lower secondary level when it is considered that in many ways '*language performance has already become established and when many aspects and processes of maturation are complete*' (Swarbrick, 2002a; 2002b). We have already noted that there is little if any linking of language subjects at school in Ireland. The subject of English at the Junior Cycle aims to develop the art and skill of language through what is termed '*personal literacy*', '*social literacy*' and '*cultural literacy*' (DES, 2010a). The syllabus makes no mention of grammar but does highlight language awareness skills emphasising students' ability to use the conventions of sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. The *Junior Certificate* English examination (ISCED, Level 2) is comprised of solely written components with no testing of students' oral or aural abilities. Similarly, the *Leaving Certificate syllabus* for English (ISCED, Level 3) emphasises the teaching of literature rather than linguistic analysis. The subject syllabus (currently a common syllabus) for French, German, Spanish and Italian languages at both lower-secondary and upper-secondary level highlight the development of effective communicative language underpinned by language and grammatical awareness.

As noted in Chapter 2, part 1, schools are autonomous in whether they wish to opt into an oral component of foreign language examinations for *Junior Certificate* examinations with only a minority of schools currently doing so. The *Leaving Certificate* examination in foreign languages includes written, aural and a compulsory oral component. The Irish language syllabus occupies a position that could be considered as mid-way between English and foreign languages in that reading, writing and literature are included in addition to the development of communicative proficiency, including speaking which is largely based on fluency and grammatical accuracy (DES, 2010a). The situation remains that there is non-cohesion of language subjects and a lack of any discernable association between language subjects at school and subsequently for state examinations despite the situation outlined in Chapter 2 part 1, in which a 1987 Curriculum and Examinations board study recommended a more cohesive language policy across the curriculum in schools in Ireland. The non-

implementation of such a recommendation which has been continually emphasised in later studies (see Chapter 2, part 1) continues to represent a lost opportunity in language education across all languages in Ireland in terms of providing for the possibilities for students to make valid connections between all of their language subjects, e.g., English, Irish and foreign or other languages for effective development of language and linguistic awareness *and* better quality learning.

As we have noted the subject syllabus in English is primarily literature based thus students have relatively little experience of explicit teaching or learning of grammatical structures etc. in their mother tongue languages and they will inevitably have difficulty in making valid connections between their mother tongue and the target language under study. Students may also have difficulty in attaching any level of discernable appreciation to the subject content in the foreign language if they are ambivalent about engaging with the subject in the first place:

'*Prior knowledge is one of the factors that determine whether or not the input is meaningful. This can include knowledge of the native language, knowledge of other languages, existing knowledge of the second language, world knowledge, language universals etc. All play a role in a learner's success or lack of success in interpreting language data*'(Gass, (1997):18).

It is, however, considered that, '*Foreign language learning provides a comparative perspective on languages, and thus helps to enhance language awareness in relation to both mother tongue and L2 learning*' (Aase, 2003: 187), and that modern foreign language learning offers a unique opportunity '*to enrich learners knowledge of how language works, not just grammar learning but the possibility of reflective comparative analysis'*. Exposure to foreign languages is thus considered to be extremely useful for language students to gain '*a fuller understanding of English and to the target language'*, a concept which has been termed '*language awareness'* (Lawes, 2000: 88). This study will now discuss the development of students' language and linguistic awareness in the modern foreign language classroom.

2.4 Students' Language & Linguistic Awareness

As we have noted in chapter 2 part 1, in Ireland, the provision of teaching hours for modern foreign languages subjects at school is currently recommended by the Department of Education and Skills as 60 hours per school year for Junior Certificate study, usually offered as 3-4 class periods of 40 to 45 minutes per week, and increasing to 90 teaching hours per year with 4-5 class periods per week for Senior Cycle. We have similarly noted that this is on the lower end of recommended modern foreign language provision in education across member states, with 200 hours being the upper limit at upper secondary level (DES, 2007b: 24; European Commission, 2008e; 2009c). The Department of Education and Skills recommends the timetabling of at least five class sessions per week in the core subjects of English and Irish from first year of secondary education with subject options such a modern foreign languages having fewer class periods. However, recent studies by the DES Inspectorate have shown that there is considerable variance between schools (DES, 2006; 2007b).

We have already acknowledged that there is currently no facilitation of prior learning for those students taking modern foreign language subject options at lower-secondary level. We may also recall that there is currently no association or cohesion between language subject study options at school. This situation is not sustainable in the long term given that in order to effectively learn a modern foreign language at school students need to understand, *develop* and *use* a range of competences for effective learning which they may have very little or no previous experience of from other subjects at school. Such competences will include 'linguistic competence' which embraces lexical competence '*knowledge of and ability to use the vocabulary of a language*'; and grammatical competence '*knowledge of and ability to use the grammatical resources of a language*'; An understanding of morphology – '*the internal organisation of words*', and syntax – '*the organisation of words into sentences in terms of categories, elements, classes, structures, processes and relations involved'* are also essential (Crystal, 1997; 2007). Moreover, the content of initial instruction is extremely important in setting the pace of study and guiding the student in their 'new' subject. Careful planning of lesson content by a teacher establishes a positive environment for learning and will go some way in alleviating initial learning anxieties.

From the learner's perspective any level of comprehension in target language study particularly at the initial stage of learning is quite likely to be based around the linguistic similarities that the student will perceive when comparing mother tongue languages and the language being studied. These perceived similarities, most often referred to as '*cross-linguistic similarities*' or '*cross-linguistic influences*' (Corder, 1967; Odlin, 1989; Selinker, 1992), include similarities in spelling or sound of words, sentence structures, and functions of L1 and L2. Quite often, these inferred or perceived meanings are merely based on superficial resemblances between the forms of words and in linguistic terms are quite incorrect inferences or perceptions. Nonetheless, if the establishment of such influences aid learning and comprehension, as they often do when learning a language closely related to one's mother tongue, we must consider their usefulness in the classroom in the learning process. If we want language learners to make progress we cannot emphasise enough their awareness of the importance of their mother tongue as the linguistic system that will best serve them in their target language development. We must again highlight the point that an essentially literature based syllabus in English language in secondary education presents students in Ireland with *an even greater challenge* than their European peers in terms of the overall level of language and linguistic awareness which they bring to their modern foreign language study as they commence lower secondary education.

'*It is useful to know the parts of speech, for example, so that teacher and learners share a vocabulary for talking about the language. It may also be useful to have some rudimentary knowledge of the sound system of the target language – accent, intonation, patterns and rhythm all affect how the language sounds when it is spoken. And it may be useful to know how the vocabulary of the target language is organised.... Language awareness is necessary in order to refer to grammar books, understand parts of some course books, understand explanations, and analyze and understand one's own errors*' (Little, Ridley, & Ushioda, 2003: 37).

It is only once '*language awareness*' has been established to some degree (Hawkins, 1984; Lawes, 2000), that it is possible to guide learners through the grammatical, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences necessary for the further development of their language skills (Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Harris, 1997). From a range of starting points the teacher must establish an environment in which '*all learners can develop genre awareness, linguistic and metalinguistic skills, aesthetic awareness, interpretation skills and understanding of texts and contexts*' (Aase, 2003: 187). Although linguistics is not a formal school subject, a student beginning foreign language studies as part of his secondary school subject options has inevitably been exposed to linguistics having undertaken years of instruction in reading,

writing and composition. To both assist and accelerate the language learning process Hawkins (1984) proposed a method of graded teaching and development of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, pronunciation and idiom with the teacher ensuring that, as far as practicable, all new learning material is related to what has already been presented and learnt. Later studies emphasised that the task of modern foreign language learning, introduced as a school subject is essentially to cultivate the skill components already mastered for the first language so that they can be applied effectively to the building of a new language (Hawkins, 1987; 1999). These essential skill components include *cognitive mechanisms* for learning, *skills* of organising information, and *ability* for solving problems, the main focus being to make as much use as possible of what is known about mother tongue language in order to assemble and organise a new language system that the learner is attempting to master, what Phillipson et al., term *'analysis of linguistic knowledge'* and *'control of linguistic processing'* (1990: 63).

'*Particular content requires thinking in* ***certain*** *ways and this thinking in certain ways involves language of a* ***certain*** *sort. Some content involves ways of thinking which require specific cognitive processes which in turn call upon particular concepts and ideas and the language to express them*' (Grenfell, 2002:41)

All considered are there some students who are simply better at learning languages? Corson (1990) identified certain personality traits as being integral to effective language learning. Amongst these he included '*empathy; adaptability; assertiveness; independence; drive and application; in addition to a good memory; good articulation; and skill in seeing patterns in data and patterns in sound sequences'* (1990: 208). Alderson, Clapham & Steel (1997) also noted the importance of '*language awareness'* emphasising students' knowledge and structure of their own language, i.e., sounds of their own language; alphabet contrasted with other languages; words as meanings and descriptions; uses of words; use of grammatical tenses; and sentence order. Farnen (1997) opined that we must not dismiss the fact that earlier generations of foreign language teachers were able to promote a good deal of high level linguistic competence at school by dividing language into the broad skill areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing and by then instructing for *'carefully measured development, within each area, in the sub-skill of phonology, lexicon, semantics and syntax'* (Farnen, 1997: 239) ensuring the development of a level of linguistic competence in the target language that was at times *superior* to students' abilities in their mother tongue.

Whilst studies by Stephen Krashen also acknowledge the importance of language and linguistic awareness he added to these the importance of setting the study level of language subject content just slightly above the students' ability levels as they progress through the language learning process. In this way students continue to be challenged and motivated by the subject matter rather than de-motivated and frustrated by tasks that prove too complex for them to enjoy the learning experience (Krashen, 1981, 2003). Once these aspects of language and linguistic awareness have been considered Rubin (1987) suggests that students themselves are the best judges of how they will proceed *'Once learners have a clear idea of how they go about learning a second language, they can become the best judges as to how they learn more effectively - both in and out of class'* (Rubin, 1987; in Phillipson, et al., 1990: 108). This considered, in the initial stages of learning it cannot be emphasised strongly enough that teachers need to clearly and in the simplest and most comprehensible terms explain the organisation of the target language as a system in which some features of language are better learned before others and that effective learning of those features is essential in order to provide a strong bases for the more complex linguistic structures that will inevitably follow:

'*Effective teaching of the various components of linguistic knowledge and skill is at the heart of the teacher's responsibilities. All language systems are of necessity highly complex, further complicated by the fact that they have evolved by organic processes in social environments'* (Trim; in Bailly et al., 2002:36).

Challenges for classroom learning include time pressure, frequency, affect and prior knowledge. We must also consider that without understanding no learning can be effective. Of course *understanding* does not guarantee *learning* but it does *facilitate potential learning*:

'*Knowledge of the way language acquisition takes place does not necessarily provide definitive guidelines about classrooms but rather provides information about how we might think about the learners in our classrooms'*. (Gass, 1997: 150).

Devitt (2002) recommends that teachers can assist learners by making as much as possible of what the learner is already capable of inferring/predicting even in the initial stages of target language learning:

'*We can predict words one fifth of a second after hearing the beginning. We can predict a lot of what is to be said or written about something before we even start listening or reading, because we are probably familiar*

with about 80% of the contents. In fact, much of the information we get in reading and listening comes not from the words or from the sound waves, but from the scenarios we already have in our head which these symbols activate. (Devitt; in Bailly et al., 2002: 84).

This type of teaching supports the communicative functions of language wherein language classes are more directly focussed on the use of authentic texts so that students can increasingly be exposed to what are considered more meaningful tasks (see Brumfit, 1984, 1986; Mitchell, 1988; Mitchell & Myles, 1998). This communicative approach to language teaching is far removed from the initially favoured Grammar-Translation approach by which classes were taught predominantly in the mother tongue with little use of lead-in learning strategies to provide any level of context for tasks but instead direct translation of isolated sentences from the target language into the mother tongue (Nunan, 1985, 1988). The more recent communicative approach to language teaching and learning is now the predominant means by which students at school in Ireland learn a second language. Thus, classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence including grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic:

'*Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes; organizational language forms are not the central focus, ...fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use*' (Brown, 2001: 43).

Recent concern with this communicative approach to foreign language learning centres on the possibility that on completion of their target language studies some students will *only* be able to apply the rules which they have studied to the very specific types of scenarios they have been taught in language class through the communicative method thus relying on a relatively small number of carefully studied phrases and essentially producing learners who, '*given the appropriate situation, will produce, with considerable and commendable fluency, the exact phrases dealt with in the classrooms*' (Towell & Hawkins, 1994: 257). Such classroom reliance on '*explicit instruction and illustrative examples produces learners who may turn the grammatical rules and examples they have been given in class into productions*' (Towell and Hawkins, 1994: 257) leading to the inevitable possibility that whenever learners are presented with language which *varies in any way* from that which they have practiced at length in the

classroom there will be a total incapacity on the part of the student to generalise language and communicate effectively in the course of normal conversation:

'*Knowing a language involves two distinct components: the mental representation of systematic, organised information about the target language and the procedures for effectively and efficiently retrieving that knowledge in appropriate situations'* (Bialystok & Sharwood Smith, 1985:106).

If we are going to embrace the challenge of encouraging the retention of target language skills once the requisite secondary level examinations have been completed we need to address this mismatch between *perceived* and *actual* language and linguistic understanding and ability:

'In the real world, learners need to act pragmatically in order to survive linguistically, not simply learn to perform adequately to pass some standard in a classroom situation' (Mc Donough, (1995):30).

Explicit language knowledge is the conscious facts that a learner has about the language whereas implicit language knowledge is the intuitive information upon which the language learner operates in order to produce responses in the target language. Just as important is what Bialystok (1990, 2001) terms 'other knowledge' including knowledge of the mother tongue, knowledge of other languages, knowledge of the world, etc. Our current individualistic view of education in Ireland fosters rehearsed communication for self-display in modern language study without the appropriate depth of understanding necessary to use the language effectively in a target language community. We must emphasise therefore that when we are teaching a second language what we are trying to develop in the learner is not just *grammatical competence* in the Chomskyan sense, but *communicative competence*. We are teaching not only what we call 'the formation rules' of the language, but in addition what Hymes (1964) has called the 'speaking rules'. By competence, Chomsky is referring to '*the abstract and hidden representation of language knowledge held inside our heads with its potential to create and understand original utterances in a given language'* (Mitchell & Myles, 1998: 6). A learner with lots of time can carefully select and plan what they are going to say/respond, however in real-time conversation a learner is required to produce language quickly with some level of fluency to make himself / herself understood in the initial contact and to keep conversation going at an appropriate pace.

'Some approaches to language teaching have concentrated the classroom effort on mastery of the structures of the target language – by exposition and practice in the grammar-translation tradition, by drilling structure in the audio-lingual and audio-visual methods. .. have tended to assume that learners will convert their classroom knowledge into communicative competence principally through subsequent contact with the target language community' (Little, 1991: 28).

It is here that perhaps the greatest dilemma in foreign language pedagogy in Ireland emerges. We must ask ourselves with absolute honesty whether we as educators are actually teaching with a mind to students *ever* using the language outside of the classroom other than for the purpose of terminal examinations. Are learners actually learning with a mind to any future intention to visit/live in a target language community? Do students consider that modern foreign languages learned at school are necessary for the future? These are just two of the questions addressed in the primary research component of this study in the context of students learning modern foreign languages in Ireland (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', and Chapter 4, 'Findings'). While some schools put time and effort into promoting exchange visits and other forms of contact with target language communities such contacts are traditionally for short periods of time and by design tend to be rather *episodic*. If an experience of a period abroad in a target language community has been positive there is an opportunity for a teacher to draw on that positivity and motivate students to continue to use the language for all communication in the foreign language classroom (Pachler & Field, 1997; Pachler & Redono, 2007). However, where study visits or exchange trips are not available in a particular school or local community foreign language students must gain the majority *if not all* of their experience of the target language in the classroom. It is therefore extremely important where practicable that the target language is the main language of the majority if not *all* teacher and pupil communication and interaction in the classroom *including* in the teacher's instructions for participation in the lesson and student interaction during group work. Here, the use of more simplified target language structures rather than resorting to English when students experience difficulties in understanding is key:

'Learners should increase their exposure to their new language. If we count up the number of hours of contact our learners have with the target language in the classroom, we will find that it will be very little compared to what they would get if they were in the country where it is spoken. Learning language in many classrooms is still like being drip-fed; learners get only a small amount of nourishment. They will need to increase their exposure to the new language by every means at their disposal outside of the language classroom' (Devitt, in Bailly et al., 2002: 100).

Certainly, there is an argument to be made as to whether *any learning at all* will take place if it is predominantly the target language which is used in class. The classroom in which *every* student follows *all* instruction without difficulty is *rare* if it exists at all. As language educators we must acknowledge varying ability levels in the classroom whilst concurring that the use of mother-tongue translation should only be called upon *after* every other innovative pedagogical means has been exhausted in our attempts to facilitate student comprehension. We must further acknowledge that translating back and forth in parrot-fashion between student and teacher in the language classroom is certainly not an example of creative pedagogy. Furthermore, students need to develop a level of language and linguistic awareness which engages them with their learning environment and allows them to participate effectively in every lesson whilst taking an appropriate amount of responsibility for their own learning. After all, a good language learner is one who takes '*personal decision in an implicit or explicit manner*' regarding what to do to facilitate learning in the context in which they find themselves (Grenfell & Harris, 1999: 39).

'*A skilled language learner possesses skill in coping not only with problems of language but with the context of learning. For large numbers of learners this context is the classroom*'. (McDonough,1995: 122).

Macaro (2001) considers that due to the complexity of strategy instruction in the target language for beginner and weaker students it may be necessary to use the native language for instruction (Macaro, 2001). Chamot et al. (1999a, 1999b) suggest that it is not necessary to resort to target language use but that using simplified language structures in the target language in addition to the teacher modelling the strategy repeatedly in the target language would be more suited to the target language classroom, an approach further recommended by Cohen (1998, 2003). Grenfell & Harris (1999) advocate the use of both English and the TL where appropriate, particularly whilst working with weaker students in the initial stages of learning. If there is no obligation to avoid the L1, which is sometimes dictated by a foreign language subject curriculum, use of the mother tongue and the target language where appropriate can each be considered on their own merit (Canale & Swain, 1980). That considered it is important to allow students to produce target language utterances *when they are ready* supplying communicative and comprehensible input rather than encouraging forced and constantly corrected production (Krashen, 1981; 2003).

Thus, a key challenge in the classroom lies in the need for teachers to make judgements about the content, difficulty, variety and rate of delivery of all target language communication (Liddicoat, 2000; 2002). The use of English mother tongue where the target language could be used denies students the experience of regular contact or in some cases the *only* contact with the communicative language. Students who are motivated to develop as proficient learners of the target language will have great difficulty in their attempts to do so if there is an established classroom practice of continually swapping from the target language to English mother tongue or a classroom norm of translating each utterance. If students learn to anticipate that *target language use* will be followed at a later point *by translation* they will inevitably learn to switch off and wait for the translation. Thus, changeover from target language to English mother tongue in the classroom needs to be continually monitored and to be continually made explicit. This considered the learning environment must also wherever possible be a permanent foreign language classroom with a range of learning resources e.g. posters, maps, grammar synopses, etc., helping to give students a better sense of association with the classroom environment and the language under study i.e. a recognition that *something different happens in this particular classroom* and participation requires *at the very least* a concerted effort to use the foreign language here. (Canale & Swain, 1980; Krashen, 1981).

Of course the big issue in the classroom as any programme of language study unfolds remains that of whether or not *explicit knowledge* transmitted through instruction can become *implicit knowledge* (Ellis, 2004a; 2004b):

'Is there or can there be, unconscious induction and abstraction? This is the heart of the acquisition versus learning distinction in the foreign language field and the heart of the controversy over implicit learning in psychology' (Ellis, 1994; in Schmidt, 1995: 2).

We can certainly acknowledge that language development is not just '*adding rule after rule but integrating new rules into an existing system of rules, re-adjusting and re-structuring until all the pieces fit'* (Lightbown & Spada, 1996:166). One aspect of implicit cognitive processes on which language learning critically depends is intuitive thinking. Once a certain level of language and linguistic awareness has been developed - '*the learner may feel intuitively that something is right'* (Ridley, 1997: 5).

'Successful language learners do start to break down the chunks of language given to them, to analyze component parts and to begin to generate their own language as a result. However, this is painfully slow for most pupils, given the amount of the (school) timetable devoted to languages and for the opportunities for encounter with the people and culture of the second language outside of lessons' (Grenfell, 2000: 24).

Moreover, we can concur that learning a modern foreign language requires that the student applies themselves to learning and developing knowledge of the new linguistic system if they are ever to become effective language learners:

'Offering pupils insights into the learning process and how best they as individuals learn allows them to take a more equal role in their own education and to develop as confident, independent learners. It can equip them with tools that they will be able to use long after they leave school' (Harris, 1997: 12).

Naiman et al. (1996) define effective language learners as those students who have an *'active approach'* to *'imitate, practice, identify and deal with problems'*; those who recognize the language as a system, i.e., *'to analyse, infer, guess, translate, compare to build up systematic knowledge'*; those who see language as a means of communication and interaction, i.e., to *'seek out opportunities to use it, develop fluency, and develop awareness of social and cultural meanings'* those who *'take responsibility for managing learning and meeting personal challenges'* in addition to monitoring language performance i.e. to *'verify, correct, look for new information and examples, and ask for feedback'* (Naiman, et al. 1996: 142). Michael Byram identified and defined five basic knowledge requirements for learning (later widely referred to as Byram's 'savoirs' (Byram, 1989)) including *'savoir être'* (knowledge, self-awareness), *'savoir comprendre'*, (knowledge, ability to understand), *'savoir apprendre'* (knowledge, ability to learn), *'savoir faire'* (skills and know-how) and *'savoir s'engager'* (ability to communicate, interact with others). Byram considered the 'savoirs' to be essential for successful learning to be achieved. Jones (2000), in considering Byram's work, advocated that a teacher or instructor's efforts towards developing the 'savoirs' in learners did not refer to teaching in the sense of imparting knowledge, but referred to a type of instruction underpinned by a development of understanding and awareness in the learner *'fostering curiosity; encouraging openness; challenging attitudes; and, making beliefs explicit'*. For Jones, modern language learning is more comprehensively unique than other subjects owing to the interplay between the learner's *'communicative competence, linguistic competence, cultural awareness, identity and personality, all operating simultaneously'* (Jones, 2000:167).

Spolsky (1989) determined that language educators need to clarify '*Who learns how much of what language under what conditions*?' in order to best plan for teaching and learning within a particular group. In this case *Who*? represents different learners in terms of age, ability, intelligence, special aptitudes, motivation, learning strategies and personality; *learns* considers the process itself including what is already there (what we have termed prior-knowledge earlier in this study), what differences there are between conscious (explicit) knowledge and unconscious (implicit) knowledge? How does language transfer work? How does learning vary individually and culturally? '*How much of*' questions what is the criterion for having learned? How different is the development of functional proficiency? What languages to learn, i.e., which variety, mode, dialect and culture? *Under what conditions*? considers is it amount or kind of exposure that makes the difference? How does exposure lead to learning? Who is the best person to learn from? For Spolsky, the focus of any learning has to clarify the ultimate aims of the entire learning task *from the beginning* of the learning process, e.g., what are the teacher expectations and responsibilities and what are the learner expectations and responsibilities in the realisation of the aims of *the complete* learning task (Spolsky, 1989: 3).

When considering *learning* per se we can also consider four particular models of learners' minds. The first model sees children as '*imitative learners*', i.e., learning to do by observing the expert and developing '*procedural knowledge*'. A further model sees children as '*learning from didactic exposure*' and developing '*propositional knowledge*' (also termed declarative knowledge). Such knowledge can be learned and later applied. The third model sees children as *thinkers*, i.e., having awareness that other people have opinions. The final model sees children as *knowledgeable and capable of management of objective knowledge* (Bruner, 2006: 165). In Ireland, terminal examinations predominantly test declarative knowledge, i.e., '*knowing that*' (Mc Laughlin, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) and this situation creates a learning environment *early on* in the course of secondary education in which an examination focus dominates at lower-secondary level for Junior Certificate examinations.

Similarly, an examination and university matriculation focus become central at upper-secondary level for Leaving Certificate examination preparation and subsequent conversion of terminal examination grades to *points* for university entry. This examination focus creates a learning environment in Ireland in which students have little time to reflect on the content

of learning and their own engagement with the learning process and learning resources. These features of learning are particularly important in the foreign language classroom as students are presented with the challenge of understanding curriculum material that is unfamiliar to them and *currently* not linked in any way to their other school subjects. Consequently, the language teacher plays a central role in directing effective language learning at a range of ability levels whilst facilitating individual difference in motivation, learning styles and learning strategies. We must also acknowledge here that no group of students is ever homogenous. Other differences in ability, gender, self concept, self-esteem, social class, ethnic background or creativity can also determine students' degree of progress, achievement and participation in language learning (Griffiths, 2008; Naiman et al., 1996).

The quality of instruction and the curriculum are also central to maximising student participation, attainment and enjoyment in the classroom (Ridley, 1997, 2003). Traditional lesson planning incorporating presentation, drilling, and practice are not deemed in themselves to guarantee levels of success in learning as it is recognised that one has to allow for the time-lag between *teaching* and genuine *use* of the target language which in turn *varies* enormously from student to student and from one target language aspect to another:

'*Language learning is not simply linear in its development. 'Learners may use a particular form correctly at stage X in their development (suggesting that they have learned that form), fail to produce that form at stage Y and produce it accurately again at stage Z'* (Lightbown & Spada 1996:165).

This developmental model is more common as learners incorporate additional or new material into their own internal system of language rules:

'*It is always the case that some individuals are more successful than others in mastering the language even though the language experience has in all cases been ostensibly identical*'. (Bialystok, 1978:69; in Spolsky, 1989: 2).

Whole school goals, policies, and procedures have always influenced classroom climate and in many ways formulated students' learning-related attitudes and beliefs. Development of student motivation within a particular school environment will determine why learning a particular school subject is important whilst instilling a level of curiosity in the subject matter by providing a wide range of activities and sensory stimulations e.g. oral and aural work as well as comprehension and written exercises that engage the learner (see Ushioda, 1997;

Wenden, 2000). Developing strategies i.e. *plans of action* for learning in the modern languages class can also be applied to learning in all school subjects (Schunk, Pintrich & Meece, 2008; Thorkildsen & Nicholls, 2002). Thus, teacher skills in *motivating* learners are particularly important:

'*Classrooms and students can differ in dramatic ways; they do not all have to look the same in terms of how they attempt to motivate students or how they facilitate cognition and learning through instruction just as there are multiple pathways for the design of motivating classrooms and schools. There should be some underlying foundations and principles that are followed but how they are developed and implemented are up to educators*' (Pintrich, 2003: 683).

We can acknowledge as educators that motivating students is certainly a considerable challenge perhaps surpassed only by the vagaries of classroom discipline (Dörnyei, 2001a). Teaching a class with reluctant, lethargic or uncooperative students is an experience that all teachers including modern foreign language teachers are likely to encounter at many points of their professional careers. Creating the basic motivational conditions for learning will include generating initial student motivation, maintaining and protecting that motivation and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation, i.e., making the teaching materials relevant to the learners, setting specific learner oriented goals and encouraging learner satisfaction (Dörnyei, 2001a). This study will now examine the important role of such student motivation in the pursuit of learning in the modern foreign language classroom.

2.5 Motivation in the pursuit of modern foreign language learning

We have noted in Chapter 2, part 1, that secondary schools are largely autonomous in their range of subjects offered thus some schools operate a policy of compulsory modern language uptake from lower secondary level whilst others do not require students to select a modern foreign language for study at any point of their secondary level education (NCCA, 2005; 2007). We have similarly noted that students are currently guided by NUI matriculation requirements rather than any national educational policy requirement to study modern foreign languages at secondary school (Little, 2005, 2007; Mulderrig, 2008). This situation makes it very difficult to gage the role *if any* of student motivation in the selection of a modern foreign language for study at secondary level in Ireland. Recent reports in the national media suggest that the current Minister for Education Ruairí Quinn is at present reconsidering the NUI matriculation requirement of a modern language subject for progression to third-level and has

recently commented that 'the foreign language requirement '*may need reconsideration in the light of the economic imperative to encourage more students to study the physical sciences in senior cycle*' (Flynn, 2011). If the current situation were to change it may be possible to better qualify the role of student motivation in the selection of a modern language subject i.e. as a subject chosen freely from amongst all other subject options. However, we must also consider that the very fact that students' attendance at school is *compulsory to the completion of lower-secondary level* means that student motivation to choose French rather than e.g. Geography may represent no more complex a thought process than choosing the same subjects as ones friends. Students *must* select a number of subjects consequently there will be a number of motivating factors at play in terms of what ultimately influences their final subject choices.

Whilst we have already considered that students in Ireland are not necessarily motivated to choose a modern language due to school and NUI policies on compulsory modern language uptake for progression to tertiary level study we must consider that once a student commences the study of a modern language a level of motivation must be established for any learning to be successful. Motivation to learn is required to ignite initial interest in the subject material and to sustain that interest throughout the learning process. So how do we define motivation? Maehr & Meyer consider that *'....motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, persistence, and quality of behaviour, especially goal-directed behaviour'* (1997; cited in Brophy, 2004: 6). For Crookes & Schmidt, '*....motivation refers to the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and the degree of effort they will exert in this respect'* (Keller, 1983: 389, in Crookes & Schmidt, 1991:481). Thrash & Elliot define motives as *'....hypothetical constructs used to explain why people are doing what they are doing. Motives are distinguished from related constructs such as goals, the immediate objectives of particular sequences of behaviour, and strategies, the methods used to achieve goals and thus to satisfy motives'* (2001; in Brophy, (2004):6).

Based on Keller's motivational system, Crookes and Schmidt further outline four major motivational factors which Zoltán Dörnyei considers particularly apt to classroom learning. These include *interest*, which is centred around individuals' inherent curiosity and desire to know more about him/her self and his/her environment; *relevance*, which considers the extent to which the student feels that the instruction is connected to important personal needs, values

or goals i.e. the extent to which the classroom instruction and course content are seen to be conducive to achieving the goal of mastering the L2; and *expectancy*, which refers to the perceived likelihood of success and relating to learners self-confidence and self-efficacy at a general level i.e. at the level of the learning situation including perceived task difficulties, the amount of effort required the amount of available assistance and guidance, the teacher's presentation of the task and the familiarity with the task type. The fourth motivational factor, *satisfaction*, concerns the outcome of an activity referring to the combination of extrinsic rewards such as praise or good marks and to intrinsic rewards such as enjoyment or pride (Dörnyei, 1994: 278 - 279).

In many contexts *including learning* motivated action may be either *self-determined* or *controlled*. To the extent that actions are self determined, motivation is experienced as *'freely chosen and emanating from one's self, not done under pressure from some internal need or external force'*. Action is intrinsically motivated, i.e., we engage in it because we want to. Intrinsically motivated actions require no separate motivating consequences outside of the spontaneous interest and enjoyment that students experience as they do them. Such actions often feature *'curiosity, exploration, spontaneity and interest in our surroundings'* (Brophy, 2004: 10). Social settings promote intrinsic motivation in the satisfaction of three particular psychological needs: *autonomy*, involving self-determinaton in deciding what to do and how to do it; *competence*, in developing and exercising skills for manipulation and controlling the environment, and *relatedness*, determining affiliation with others through pro-social relationships (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002).

Students are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation in classrooms that consider and encourage the fulfillment of these autonomy, competence and relatedness needs. In the absence of this level of support students may feel controlled rather than self-determined. Thus, intrinsic motivation implies engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity (Deci, (1975; Deci & Ryan, (1985). '*Students doing their homework because they enjoy it and find that learning new things is interesting and satisfying are said to be intrinsically motivated'* (Deci & Ryan, (1995):42).

'Many of the negative experiences that language learners encounter will not relate specifically to personal learning difficulties or poor performance outcomes. Instead learners may, for example, simply feel under too much pressure because of examinations or a heavy workload, or they may find a particular pedagogical

approach very tedious, the materials used not very stimulating, or the lack of opportunity to speak the target language in class quite frustrating....classroom language learning, for one reason or another, is failing to engage their intrinsic motivation' (Ushioda, (1996a: 60; see also Ushioda, 1996b).

On the other hand extrinsic motivation includes behaviours undertaken to attain an end state that is separate from the actual behaviour, what is termed *external regulation.* In this process acts are performed *to attain a positive end state* or to *avoid a negative end state*. Included here are *introjected regulation* in which *individuals take prompts from their environment and bring them inside themselves,* i.e., a person starts to internalize the reasons for their behaviour acting out of obligation to avoid feeling shame and internal pressure; *identified regulation*: whereby activity is internally judged by the person as valuable, e.g., doing extra study; and, *integrated regulation*, which is the most self-determined type of extrinsic motivation. This type of behaviour would include a decision to study for exam the next day instead of going out (Deci & Ryan, 1995: 43). Individuals are said to be driven to act for extrinsic reasons when they anticipate some kind of tangible pay off such as good grades, recognition, or gold stars. These rewards are said to be extrinsic because they are unrelated to the action. In effect the activity itself becomes a means to an end (Covington, 1998; Covington & Müeller, (2001).

Development of extrinsic motivation will ensure that students are continually aware of the parameters that guide their participation and achievement in the school environment by teachers outlining clear expectations and giving continuous and appropriate corrective feedback. This may include providing appropriate rewards and marking particular incidents of individual achievements in the overall learning context. However, it is important to note that extrinsic motivational aspects are highly likely to be more effective whilst the student is under the control of the teacher. Once the student leaves that environment it is up to that individual student to regulate their *own* behaviour according to their *own* internal motivations (Ames, 1992). Motivation to learn is vitally important in any educational context but particularly so for foreign language learning. Dörnyei has identified student motivation as '*one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning*'. Dörnyei further considers that motivation is essential to undertake and engage in the *'long and often tedious process of second language learning'* purporting that even the most able learners will not succeed without motivation, while '*high motivation on the other hand, can make up for deficiencies in aptitude and learning conditions*' (Dörnyei, 1998:117).

That considered, even the most motivated students will rely on the teacher to guide them through the more difficult aspects of modern language learning including the more complex aspects of grammar; difficulties in comprehension in reading; lack of understanding of instructions related in the target language for participation in the lesson; deficiencies in the range of vocabulary or linguistic knowledge for written exercises; frustrations when extensive use of the course textbook is uninspiring and de-motivating; or the ever present stress of upcoming examinations (Clément et al., 1994). In proposing a general framework for L2 motivation, Dörnyei (1994) considers a number of levels. For the purpose of this study, I am going to consider just two of those levels, i.e., the learner level and the learning situation level. At the *learner level* we consider: a need for achievement; self-confidence – encompassing various aspects of language anxiety; perceived L2 competence; attributions about past experiences; and self-efficacy. *At the learning situation level* we consider course specific motivational components, i.e., the syllabus; the teaching materials; the teaching method; and the learning tasks (Dörnyei, 1994: 279). Hence, the development in the learner of a level of subject matter appreciation will have the purpose of improving the enjoyment of the learning experience *and* the quality of learning that is taking place. *'Students who learn content with understanding not only learn the content itself but appreciate the reasons for learning it and retain it in a form that makes it usable when needed'* (Brophy, (2004): 40).

Studies undertaken by Stephen Krashen emphasise the importance of setting the study level of subject content just slightly above the students' ability levels as they progress through the language learning process so that students continue to be challenged and motivated by the subject matter rather than de-motivated and frustrated by tasks that prove too complex for them to experience any enjoyment in their attempts to learn (Krashen, 1981, 2003). Whilst such perceived task difficulty is very important we must also consider that individuals are said to be intrinsically motivated when they are able to engage with the subject content *and* when they engage in activities for their own sake i.e. the satisfaction derived from overcoming a personal challenge, learning something new or discovering things of personal interest.

Covington (2000) shows that by offering tangible rewards in education we may actually increase learning. The important factor to be considered here is whether offering such rewards *'focuses undue attention on the tangible pay-offs thereby decreasing students' appreciation of what they are learning...once these awards are no longer available students*

will show little or no inclination to continue in their studies'. This could include students having an interest in retaining foreign language skills beyond terminal examinations. In Ireland, in common with other European countries and indeed internationally in the school context '*Grades stand as a mark of worthiness because it is widely assumed in our society (s) that one is only as worthy as one's ability to achieve competitively*' (Covington, 2000: 23).

A common scenario in terms of students' appreciation of the content of learning or subject matter appreciation is presented by Covington (1999) ' *Teacher: What did you get out of the class? Student: I got an A!*' Whilst describing learning in some contexts as abrasive, Covington further clarifies '*that learning is only abrasive and undercuts caring (about subject matter) when it becomes a measure of one' worth'* and that this scenario is all too common in the contemporary classroom (Covington, 1999: 134). Although a grade focus dominates most students, it is the various means by which individual students '*define success and perceive the functional role of ability in achieving success that is the main factor by which self-esteem mechanisms operate to affect achievement*' (Covington & Müeller, 2001: 165).

When students do not perceive *'....a contingency between their behaviours and outcomes, they do not act with the attention to attain the outcome'* (Deci & Ryan, 1995: 43). Such *amotivated* individuals feel incompetent and act like they have little or no control whilst their behaviours are perceived to be *caused by forces outside themselves*. They feel helpless and may question the usefulness of engaging in the activities in the first place (Vallerand, 1997). A concept of *learned helplessness* coined by (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978) shows the ways in which past negative learning experiences or accepting of a particular circumstance/grade *as ones fate* determines an expectation of a particular outcome. This situation will evolve irrespective of learner input and thus could also be considered to be a factor which contributes to amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 1995). Similarly, self-related cognitions are of considerable importance in their relation to motivation as self-efficacy levels can enhance or impede motivation:

'*Self-efficacy is concerned with judgements about how well one can organize and execute courses of actions required to deal with prospective situations containing many ambiguous, unpredictable and often stressful elements. Self-percepts of efficacy can effect people's choice of activities how much effort they expend and how long they will resist in the face of difficulties'* (Bandura & Schunk, 1981: 587).

Self-efficacy expectancies refer to personal action control or agency. A person who believes that he/she has the ability to shape the outcome of an event can gravitate towards a more active and self-determined life course. This *'can do'* cognition reflects the person's individual belief of being in control of the challenging environmental demands that they encounter by means of taking adaptive action where necessary. The construct of self-efficacy represents one core aspect of Albert Bandura's social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy, amongst other factors, determines how people feel, think and act in certain situations. A low sense of self-efficacy is often associated with depression, anxiety, and helplessness in addition to low self-esteem and pessimism regarding personal accomplishments and development. People with high self-efficacy often choose to perform more challenging tasks (Bandura, 1995). They set themselves higher goals and stick to them. Once an action has been taken, high self-efficacious persons invest more effort and persist longer than those who are low in self-efficacy. When setbacks occur, they recover more quickly from such setbacks, in some cases changing their course of action in order to maintain the commitment to their goals. Research has shown that a strong sense of personal efficacy is related to better health, higher achievement, and more social integration and thus the concept has been applied to a range of diverse areas amongst which is the study of factors related to school achievement (Bandura, 1997).

Success-oriented (approach) students define success in terms of becoming the best they can be, irrespective of the accomplishment of others by setting their own goals for success and planning for future achievements (Malka & Covington, 2005). In any learning environment teachers and students set goals for learning and will embark on any course of study with some level of expectation in terms of learning outcomes. This study will how consider how students establish such learning goals in the pursuit of successful learning in the classroom.

2.5.1 Setting Learning Goals

Achievement motivation relating to goal-theory identifies three distinct types of goals: *mastery goals* (also called learning goals) which focus on gaining competence or mastering a new set of knowledge or skills; *performance goals* (also called ego-involvement goals) which focus on achieving normative-based standards, doing better than others, or doing well without a lot of effort; and *social goals* which 'focus on relationships among people' (Ames, 1992;

Dweck, 1986; Maehr & Meyer, 1997). In the context of school learning, which involves operating in a relatively structured environment students with mastery goals outperform students with either performance or social goals. Individuals are motivated to either avoid failure, more often associated with performance goals, or achieve success, more often associated with mastery goals (Mc Clelland, 1961; 1985).

'*The motivated individual is goal-directed, expends effort, is persistent and attentive, wants to succeed, exhibits positive affect, is stimulated, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence and has reasons (motives) to learn and/or succeed'* (Gardner, 2007: 10).

Performance goals are considered to be linked to a negative set of processes and outcomes i.e. *withdrawal of effort in the face of failure, surface processing of study material, decreased task enjoyment* whilst mastery goals are considered to be linked to a positive set of processes and outcomes i.e. *persistence in the face of failure, deep processing of study material, enhanced task enjoyment* (Ames, 1992). Nicholls (1984; in Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) identified two motivationally relevant goal patterns or orientations, i.e., *ego-involved goals* and *task-involved goals*. Individuals with ego-involved goals seek to maximize favourable evaluations of their competence and minimize negative evaluations of competence. Can I out-perform others? - reflects an ego-involved goal. Task involved goals are those in which individuals focus on mastering tasks and increasing their competence. How can I do this task? What will I learn? - are task involved goals. Dweck (1999; in Eccles and Wigfield, 2002) termed these *performance goals* (like ego-involved goals) and *learning goals* (like task-involved goals):

'*Children try to outperform others and are more likely to perform tasks they know they can do have ego-involved or performance goals. For task-involved (or mastery-oriented goals) children choose challenging tasks and are more concerned with their own progress than with outperforming others'* (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002: 116). '*When goals are proximal, specific and challenging they are more effective in motivating children's behaviour and increasing their sense of self-efficacy'* (Schunk, 1990; in Eccles & Wigfield, 2002: 124).

Striving for good grades and caring for learning are not necessarily incomparable goals. Their degree of compatability is also influenced by students' reasons for learning (Covington, 1999; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Students' understanding and beliefs about motivation become more differentiated over time with '*more complex meanings and understandings of ability, effort, intelligence, interest and value emerging with age'* (Pintrich, 2003: 680).

Students who develop an awareness of the importance of a particular goal in reaching the next milestone in their own personal or academic development are conscious of how that knowledge may determine their own successes, e.g., if a particular strategy adopted for an earlier learning task did not prove successful they may consider alternative paths to reaching their goals to ensure success. Students' personal involvement in learning is inherent to their efficacy beliefs about their capability to perform learning tasks which they consider to be both interesting and worth learning. However, these motivational beliefs are not considered in themselves to be adequate for successful academic performance (Dweck, 1999). Students need to have both the 'will' and the 'skill' to be successful in classrooms. Pintrich and deGroot (1990) have found that:

'Students' achievement values determined initial engagement decisions and that their self-efficacy facilitated both engagement and performance in conjunction with cognitive and self-regulation strategies i.e. the value the student places on achieving the task' (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990:39).

Although not developed around students experiences in the classroom I would like to consider *in the context of this study* how the work of Abraham Maslow can be applied to the task of meeting the needs of different students in the context of the classroom environment particularly in view of the development of opportunities for '*peak experiences in learning*'. In his familiar hierarchy of needs explanation of motivation, Maslow posits that prior to meeting his or her higher level needs (of which education and learning may be considered a part), a person invariably satisfies his or her lower level needs (Maslow, 1962). Considered in order of priority, the hierarchy of needs includes: (i) Physiological needs (sleep, thirst); (ii) Safety needs (freedom from danger, anxiety or psychological threat); (iii) Love needs (acceptance from parents, teachers, peers); (iv) Esteem needs (mastery experiences, confidence in one's ability); and (iv) Needs for self-actualisation (creative self-expression, satisfaction of curiosity). The highest level, i.e., '*self-actualisation*' is not presented by Maslow as a level that can be reached by everyone in every experience but by those most motivated and enthused by a particular task or challenge. This highest level of Maslow's hierarchy is of particular interest to researchers who have identified self-actualisation as a concept that is possible to demonstrate through theories of *peak experiences*. It was from this and related work (Maslow, 1970, 1971) that a concept of *flow* was developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to demonstrate how peak experiences of intrinsic motivation may be realised.

Flow Theory claims that as a result of the intrinsically rewarding experience associated with *flow*, people push themselves to '*higher levels of performance*' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 74); thus, flow represents '*optimal experience*' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Flow theory involves the complex interplay of a number of variables. The following conditions are said to occur during flow experiences: *'(i) a perceived balance of skills and challenge; (ii) opportunities for intense concentration; (iii) clear task goals; (iv) feedback that one is succeeding at the task; (v) a sense of control; (vi) a lack of self-consciousness; (vii) the perception that time passes more quickly'* (Egbert, 2003: 499). Dörnyei identified that individuals tend to experience flow when they become absorbed in doing something challenging and the experience becomes 'autotelic' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), i.e., when something becomes worth doing for its own sake. Observations of the learning process have shown that some students develop a flow personality and seek out challenges that will inevitably stretch their limits. However, in the context of the classroom student *anxiety* has been identified *as the* chief threat to flow potential. (Horwitz, 1987; Horwitz & Young, 1991). If students are routinely faced with overly challenging situations that are beyond their capabilities, they may come to prefer '*the boredom of safe routines*' to the *'flow opportunities of challenging activities*' (Dörnyei, 2001b). An important consideration to be noted is that such an experience i.e. the development of flow personality types predominantly relates to more motivated high-achieving students '*Both the challenges and skills must be relatively high before a flow experience becomes possible*' (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002: 124). ,Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen (1993) suggest that teachers can encourage flow experiences in three ways:

'*....by being knowledgeable about their subject, teaching enthusiastically and acting as models pursuing the intrinsic rewards of learning*'; '*by maintaining an optimal match between what is demanded and what students are prepared to accomplish (urging but also helping students to achieve challenging but reasonable goals)*'; and *'by providing a combination of instructional and emotional support that enables students to approach learning tasks confidently and without anxiety*' (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde and Whalen, 1993; in Egbert, 2003: 502).

This level of learning and achievement currently represents around 10% of modern foreign language learners in secondary education in Ireland in the most frequently studied modern languages of French and German (DES, 2010c). Thus, we can acknowledge that people with different needs are motivated differently. Where there is a high need for achievement students should be given challenging projects with reachable goals. They should be provided with

frequent feedback. In the school context this could take the form of regular acknowledgement of students' successes in the language class. People with a high need for affiliation perform best in a cooperative environment and will be more motivated by tasks involving group work or those conducted in co-operation with their teacher. People with a high need for power may be encouraged in the classroom context to work with groups of lower ability students (Mc Clelland, 1985).

One would wish that all language learners came to the very first lesson already with the knowledge of how they best learn a language, the motivation to do so effectively and an innate understanding of learning strategies to maintain and develop modern foreign language proficiency. '*It is highly unlikely that this will ever be so*' (Macaro, 2001: 265). What we can do as educators is strive to achieve the best possible conditions for effective teaching and learning in the foreign language classroom. As we have already considered students language and linguistic awareness and their learner motivation and goals we will now examine the learning strategies that can best assist learners in maintaining motivation and realising their goals in the course of their modern foreign language studies.

2.6 Learning Strategies in the Modern Foreign Languages Classroom

To provide the best learning supports for students it has been considered that a way forward in addressing the needs of *all* learners may be best placed in the integration of a strategy instruction component into the syllabus of each school subject, effectively a blueprint or framework by which students could '*learn to learn*'. Initial development of learning competences at a European level and applied to school curriculum at member state level in Ireland can be considered a first step in this direction (See Chapter 1). Such strategy instruction is defined by Harris and Grenfell as *'any process which seeks to develop intentionally the use of learning strategies on the part of the learner'*. A sequence of steps for strategy instruction is proposed including: '*awareness raising*' of the strategies the learners are already using; '*modelling*' of any new strategies introduced by the teacher and '*persuasion*' of the value of expanding one's repertoire of strategies. 'General practice' of new strategies is recommended through whole class, pair and group work. 'Action planning' considers identifying personal difficulties and goals and determining the most useful strategies to address them. 'Focused practice' and 'fading out of reminders' includes gradual withdrawal of the scaffolding to the point that learners are able to select and operationalise

appropriate strategies for themselves. Then evaluating strategy acquisition and learning allows us to review progress and identify further goals (Harris & Grenfell, 2004: 122).

Over the course of school education individual students will have built up a range of approaches to learning which they will not necessarily recognise as strategies. One effective way to find out what strategies students are already using is to ask them. Harris (1997) suggests that the best way for any teacher to establish which learning strategies are known is to initiate a class discussion about learning – allowing students to describe their special techniques for learning, listing their suggestions and naming the individual strategies. I would further suggest that this process also contributes to student motivation in learning, i.e., rather than students being put off by new learning strategy terminology the teacher can focus lessons in strategy instruction on praising students for their independent use of strategies and convincing them that they are simply learning new ways of talking about their existing learning techniques:

'*We might predict that strategy modelling would be more effective during initial learning when individuals ability to construct strategies is limited but as students develop competence they are better able to construct self-regulatory sequences. There may also be developmental differences such that younger students benefit more from modelled demonstrations but older students are able to formulate their own methods*' (Schunk & Ertimer, 2000: 643).

Instructing for strategy use in classroom learning has developed in line with changes in instructional methods in foreign language teaching and learning. Strategy instruction provides a structure for effective learning in a classroom environment (Lightbown & Spada, 1996: 110). In a naturalistic setting a learner is exposed to a variety of language, vocabulary and structures in their everyday lives i.e. the learner is surrounded by language and is constantly exposed to it through multiple encounters with proficient speakers using the language. Reading, writing, speaking and listening to the language are everyday naturalistic occurrences. The learner *must* use the language, irrespective of their proficiency levels in the course of their daily routine. In structure-based instructional settings e.g. the grammar-translation method (outlined earlier in this chapter) '*Linguistic items are presented and practiced in isolation, usually one item at a time in a sequence from what teachers or textbook writers believe is simple to that which is complex... Errors are frequently corrected and accuracy tends to be given priority over meaningful interaction.... learning is often limited to a few hours a week*' (Lightbown & Spada, 1996: 111). In this approach the teacher

is often the *only* proficient speaker the student comes in contact with in situations of foreign language use. Students study a prescribed range of language discourse predominantly in an Initiation, Response, Evaluation (IRE) exchange i.e. the teacher asks a question, a student answers the question and the teacher evaluates the response. Instructions for classroom participation are often in the mother-tongue or in what could be considered a modified or simplified version of the target language.

Communicative instructional settings, which are currently the favoured method of teaching foreign languages at school in Ireland, present target language input in a way that is '*simplified and made comprehensible by the use of contextual cues, props and gestures rather than through structural grading. Students provide each other with simplified and sometimes erroneous input. Error-correction is limited and meaning is emphasised over form. Learners have limited time for learning*' (Lightbown & Spada, 1996: 112). As we have noted earlier in this chapter there is a concern that through this *communicative approach* to language teaching and learning individual students get limited opportunities to produce language and this significantly limits the possibilities for communicative proficiency in the target language. Opportunities to speak in the classroom are usually in the form of short responses to teachers' questions. Opportunities for group work and study abroad i.e. to experience the language in a naturalistic setting are limited. Whilst there are more opportunities for communication than would be the case in structure-based instruction, exposure to the target language is considerably less than that of a naturalistic setting. Whilst a range of text materials may include both those modified for second language learners and those intended for native speakers the native speaker texts are likely to require 'instructional strategies' to assist learning for the majority of students in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 1996).

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) define the strategies necessary for effective language learning as *Metacognitive* strategies, *Cognitive* strategies and *Socio affective* strategies. Cognitive Learning Strategies are generally considered to include: clarification / verification; guessing / inductive inferencing; deductive reasoning; practice; memorization; and monitoring. *Metacognitive Learning Strategies* include: planning; prioritizing; setting goals; and self-management. *Socio Affective Strategies* include communication strategies and social strategies. Metacognition is believed to involve both declarative (self-knowledge, world knowledge, task knowledge, strategy knowledge) and procedural knowledge (planning for

learning, monitoring a learning task while it is in progress, and evaluating learning once a task has been completed). Metacognitive strategies includes aspects of planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluating (Chamot et al., 1999a, 1999b; Oxford et al., 2004; Rubin, 1987).

Anna Uhl Chamot, in her 2005 study, concedes with the findings of Grenfell and Harris (1999) in her assertion that learning strategies are important in second language learning and teaching for two major reasons:

'First, by examining the strategies used by second language learners during the language learning process we gain insight into the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective processes involved in language learning' and secondly, '*less successful language learners can be taught new strategies thus helping them become better language learners'* (Grenfell & Harris, 1999; in Chamot, 2005: 112).

Successive studies have shown that good language learners are skilled at matching strategies to the task they are working on (Naiman et al, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al. (2004)):

'*Less successful language learners apparently do not have the metacognitive knowledge about task requirements needed to select appropriate strategies whereas more proficient L2 learners use sequences of strategies to complete a task effectively*' (Chamot, 2005: 116; see also Lehtonen, 2000).

Thus, learning strategies are:

'*....techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information*' (Chamot, 1987: 71 in Macaro, 2001: 17).

Learner strategies also refer to:

'*Language learning behaviours learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language.. what they know about the strategies they use.. what they know about aspects of their language learning other than the strategies they use'*. (Wenden, 1987: 6; in Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

Second language learner strategies encompass both second language learning and second language use strategies. Taken together:

'*....they constitute the steps or actions consciously selected by learning either for the learning of a second language, the use of it, or both'* (Cohen, 1998: 5).

Learners will learn better if '*they are helped to indentify the strategies they use, if they come into contact with other possible strategies and if ways of deploying them in combination are successful'* (Macaro, 2001: 43). Thus, learning strategies are '*....specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations*' (Oxford, 1990: 8).

Stern (1975) identified ten strategies for good language learners including: (i) Planning Strategy; (ii) Active strategy; (iii) Empathetic strategy; (iv) Formal strategy; (v) Experimental strategy; (vi) Semantic strategy; (vii) Practice strategy; (viii) Communicative strategy; (ix) Monitoring strategy; and, (x) Internalisation strategy (cited in Grenfell & Harris, 1999:37).

Naiman et al. (1978, 1996) following Stern (1975), defined '*Good language learners'* as those students who actively involve themselves in the language learning process by identifying and seeking preferred learning environments and exploring them. Such students develop an awareness of language as a system; a means of communication and interaction; they accept and code with the affective demands of the target language and are capable of extending and revising the target language system by inferencing and monitoring (Rubin, 1987: 20). Strategies that contribute to language learning include clarification/verification; guessing / inductive inferencing; deductive reasoning; practice; memorization; and monitoring (Rubin, 1987:20). Cohen (1987) further suggests that as educators we must also consider other factors in the learning process such as:

'*....how learners attend to language input; how learners arrive at spoken utterances; how readers process a text; how writers generate text; how vocabulary is learned initially and retrieved subsequently'* (Cohen, 1987: 31; see also Cohen & Macaro, 2007).

Many of the difficulties experienced by students in learning are influenced by their own contributions to learning *and* the way the learning/teaching process in the classroom is set up:

'*In a traditional scholastic context learning episodes tend to be fragmented, indirect experiences steered by teacher-set goals.... most students consider it to be the teachers role to provide relevant resources and to*

motivate them to engage in the learning activities' (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; cited in Boekaerts & Niemivirta, 2000: 419).

Students learn to rely on their teacher for guidance and direction in learning which hinders them in developing any significant level of insight into their individual contribution to their own learning (Carnell & Lodge, 2002; Watkins, Carnell & Lodge, 2007). Teachers convey declarative and procedural knowledge which students must find their own way to understand, retain and activate (Breen, 2001). The reality for most students learning a modern foreign language at school in Ireland is the absence of sufficient opportunities to organise and regulate their own learning due to time pressures, class sizes, pressure of examinations, subject overload, etc. Where language learning resources are available to students outside of scheduled class time they are of little use if the access to those resources is limited by internal school policies regarding student supervision for access to school libraries, resource rooms and/or ICT facilities. Moreover, any commitment to strategy instruction for improved learning must be considered in tandem with the practical reality that few teachers will have sufficient time to consider *individual* learner motivation, goals and strategies for learning on a regular basis. By necessity approaches to learning will have to be generalised to all students in the class:

'*Knowledge of strategy variables includes all the knowledge individuals can acquire about various procedures and strategies for cognition, including memorizing, thinking, reasoning, problem solving, planning, studying, reading, writing and so forth*' (Pintrich, 2000: 458).

Teacher preparedness thus becomes essential to effective use of class time. A foreign language teacher needs to find the time and the means of developing an appropriate level of awareness of his/her students and the varying ability levels which exist in particular student groups so that learning tasks can be suitably challenging and that lead-in or pre-task activities are set at the appropriate ability range to suit a particular class group. As we have seen in Chapter 2, part 1, currently one of the greatest challenges in the foreign language class in Ireland is the motivation of students with a range of language and linguistic abilities and limited time i.e. 40-45 minute class periods. Whilst, teacher preparedness sets the scene for the learning possibilities in the classroom likewise student co-operation and preparedness to learn is equally central to the pedagogic process:

'*Learners' immediate motivation in the task-based classroom derives from 'the intellectual pleasure of solving problems in addition to such traditional sources as a desire to do well at school, to win the approval of the teacher or to gain the admiration of one's peers.... what is important for learners is engagement in the task'* (Prabhu, 1987: 55).

Eccles (1993) has proposed that three components of task value are important in achievement dynamics: (i) '*the individual's perception of the importance of the task; (ii) their personal interest in the task; and (iii) their perception of the utility value of the task for future goals*' (Eccles, 1993; in Pintrich, 1999: 465).

'*It is important for the teacher to regulate the challenge offered in the task and operate generally with some notion of what represents reasonable challenge for a given class. The concept of reasonable challenge implies that learners should not be able to meet the challenge too easily but should be able to meet it with some effort.... The effort learners put into a given task may also be influenced by such additional factors as comparison or rivalry with their peers and whether or not they feel that their teacher feels them capable of success'* (Prabhu, 1987: 55-56).

There is little point in a teacher taking the time and effort to teach strategies for learning if a student regards these as just another few pages of notes to add to an ever-expanding folder of yet un-learnt materials and resources:

'*A good language learner is one who takes personal decisions in an implicit or explicit manner regarding what to do to facilitate learning in whatever context they find themselves. They know what to focus on and which strategies might apply at any particular stage of the learning experience. They actively seek information, opportunities to practice and assistance from resources including people around them and from printed documentation*' (Harris, 2000: 227).

We have already seen that knowledge can be declarative and procedural. Monique Boekaerts suggests a third possibility i.e. 'conditional knowledge' the knowledge of *when* and *why* to use the various cognitive strategies (Boekaerts, 1998a, 1998b). As educators, one factor that is apparent year in year out, is that across learning contexts '*those learners who are proactive in their pursuit of their language learning appear to learn best'* (Macaro, 2001: 264). Effective learning and achievement strategies are governed by achievement behaviour (Gardner, 2007). Thus, *'strategy instruction can contribute to development of learner mastery*' (Chamot, 2005: 126). Teachers' knowledge of context includes the ecology of learning in the classroom, i.e., '*the context-specific knowledge*' that teachers *must* use to

adapt their instruction to the demands of the specific school setting and/or the needs of individual students within the unique context of their classrooms (Johnson, 1995: 32):

'*This concept includes a combination of knowledge related to the purposes for teaching a particular topic, students' understandings or misunderstandings of the topic, a host of curricular materials available to teach the topic, and specific strategies and representations that teachers use to make the topic comprehensible to students'* (Johnson, 1995: 31).

As educators how do we establish the balance necessary to consider the learning needs of all of our students? Even the less successful learners who in some cases may form the majority of any given class group. How can we help those learners who do not quite manage to become proactive learners? How do we rise to the challenge of developing language and linguistic awareness, motivating, setting goals, encouraging strategies towards greater autonomy in learning? Anderson, (2002) proposes '*planning, selecting and using learning strategies, monitoring strategy use, orchestrating various strategies, and evaluating the strategy used'* (Anderson, 2002; in Chamot, 2005:125). Cohen (2007) suggests that on the one hand there is the view that strategies need to be specific, small and most likely combined with other strategies for completing a given task, there is on the other hand the view that strategies need to be kept at a more global, flexible and general level '*the use of learner strategies can lead to enhanced autonomy*' ... '*being an autonomous learner does not necessarily imply that the learner is drawing selectively and effectively from a refined repertoire of strategies'* (Cohen, 2007:43- 44). Success in learning includes awareness, motivation, goal setting *and* strategies which support autonomy and learner responsibility:

'Students who attribute success to ability, skill, effort and effective use of strategies, should experience higher self-efficacy and maintain motivation' (Schunk, 1994; in Schunk & Ertimer, 2000: 636).

Strategy instruction is thus a means by which students can adopt a process of learning that improves their experiences of learning foreign languages as well as their competence in developing as individuals. Students who are more self-regulating or metacognitively active can search their memory for relevant prior knowledge before they actually begin performing any classroom tasks. As we have seen prior knowledge can include content knowledge as well as metacognitive knowledge about the task and strategies (Pintrich & Schunk, (2002)).

Strategy instruction is also a means by which we can encourage students to develop a level of autonomy and self-regulation in their learning and become less and less dependent on their teacher. Randi & Corno (2000) suggest that teachers can develop self-regulatory aptitude for classroom learning purposefully by:

'*Identifying ways to make these regularities and action patterns connect inherently with their curriculum and their classroom teaching environment. Principles, strategies and modes of behaviour regarding self-regulated learning can be brought front and centre in students' thinking as they work'* (Randi & Corno, (2000): 653).

A further important point to consider in all educational settings - including the Irish context - is that attempts to develop levels of self regulation and autonomy may not herald any particularly notable levels of success in learning situations in which terminal examinations examine students *solely* on the basis of declarative knowledge i.e. factually driven materials to be committed to memory, rather than the procedural knowledge of teaching skills and strategies that encourage learner autonomy and self-directed learning (Ushioda, (1996a; 1997)).

'*A general working definition of self-regulated learning is that it is an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate and control their cognition, motivation and behaviour guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment'* (Pintrich, 2000: 453) .

David Little (1991) cites Thomas and Harri-Augstein in identifying three stages by which a learner moves from the unconscious performance of a task to fully self-organized learning:

'*The first stage is characterized by dogged practice and repetition, some level of competence is achieved but the learner remains totally content-or task-bound. The second stage is characterized by detachment from the task and reflection on it, but the task remains the total focus of attention. In the third stage the focus of attention shifts to the process of learning itself and this is what provides the 'crucial trigger to total self-organisation in learning'* (Little, 1991: 21).

Thomas and Harri-Augstein assert that most learners find it difficult to attain this third stage on their own (in Little, 1991: 21), a concern which has also been voiced by Deci & Flaste (1996):

'*Effective self-regulators form attributions that sustain self-efficacy, effort, persistence and learning'* (Schunk, 1994, 1996; in Schunk & Ertimer, 2000: 636). Motivation comes into play during performance control through goals and self-efficacy (Meece, (1994)), '....a*s a result of a diverse and changing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and contextual conditions self-regulated individuals must continuously adjust their goals and choices of strategies'* (Zimmerman, 2000: 17). Self-regulatory skills are of little value if a person cannot motivate themselves to use them. Aptitude for self-regulated learning is dependent fundamentally on the learning activities that initiate self-regulatory responses from students within the learning environments to which they are exposed:

'*Self-regulated learning logically comes about through models of self-regulation to which both teachers and students can relate and be made to emulate'* (Randi & Corno, (2000): 682).

Any notable level of self-regulation developed by any particular student depends very much on how their own teachers '*elect to launch them towards these kind of experiences'* (Randi & Corno, 2000: 683):

'Optimal conditions for the development of self-regulated learning exist when students are given the chance to establish and pursue, personal non-trivial goals. Goals are viewed as guiding principles that people consciously and intentionally set to effectively steer their behaviour' (Austin & Vancouver, (1996)) cited in (Boekaerts & Niemivirta , (2000):419).

As we have seen, self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about having the means to learn or perform effectively e.g. getting an *A* in a particular examination, giving the best performance at any given task. Self-regulating students who learn with a level of autonomy are capable of seeing the bigger picture, i.e., what Bandura (1997) terms 'outcome expectations' referring to beliefs about the ultimate ends of performance i.e. getting an *A* grade in order to progress to college and ultimately get a good job as a graduate. As we have also seen self-efficacy is a very important aspect in student learning.

Schunk & Zimmerman (1998) consider that there are 4 distinctive types of criteria that people use to evaluate themselves. The first is the development of '*mastery*' ranging from novice to expert e.g. school learning performance, sports performance etc ; the second is the influence of 'previous performance' self-criteria on previous performance and expectations according to past success/failure; the third is 'normative evaluation' focussing on social comparisons

and the performance of others, e.g., classmates or any population that was tested by the same means, i.e., how someone measures up against ones' peers; the fourth is collaborative, i.e., how did I perform as part of a whole? This will be influenced by a range of group and individual dynamics. Students' normative and collaborative evaluations may emphasise negative aspects rather than positive depending on how individuals rate performance:

'*Learners who focus on outcome goals are predisposed to using normative criteria for self-evaluative judgements because outcomes are often competitively awarded and socially visible such as grades in schools*' (Zimmerman, 2000: 22).

Boekaerts (1998a) differentiated between 5 basic reactions to learning strategy failure namely: mindful effort i.e. to do all possible to improve or avoid failure again; disengagement i.e. to withdraw from the process entirely and become 'amotivated' by the experience of failure; danger control (following Leventhal, 1980) in which a student (in its application to this study) avoids any situation which may result in failure or an undesired outcome; self-handicapping to avoid having to prove oneself at a task that the student has already pre-empted will result in failure, e.g., feigning injury etc.:

'*Students may experience a feeling of disconnection, incoherence or a conflict between goals, when they are asked to accomplish a goal that they find unappealing, uninteresting, too difficult or too easy, threatening or boring*' (Boekaerts, Pintrich & Zeidner, 2000: 440).

Ridley (1997) advocates that as an alternative to adopting general learning strategy terminology teachers could utilise; 'language processing strategies', associated with '*perception, comprehension or production*'; '*compensatory problem-solving strategies*' to compensate for the learner's lack of target language knowledge'; and, '*study-related strategies*', which are 'part of the learner's overall plan to gain mastery of the language' (Ridley, 1997: 32; see also Ridley, 2003).

'*Only through a better understanding of the learning and teaching process can more language learners achieve the level of success that currently characterizes only a small proportion of all students studying a foreign or second language*'. (Chamot, (2005): 126).

The most important consideration is the encouragement of motivated and self-directed learning, with clearly defined parameters of learning to give learners a sense of ownership

and control of their learning. Students must be continually informed of their progress to support their efforts in all learning tasks:

'*Knowledge of Independent strategies allows teachers to set tasks for their learners that foster the ability to improve language competence beyond the classroom, without the explicit guidance of the teacher. Independent language learning strategies help to foster the practice of life-long language learning'* (Kelly & Grenfell, 2005: 26).

Shulman (1987) characterises a component of teachers' professional knowledge as '*pedagogical content knowledge*' i.e. the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction:

'*A majority of teachers and learners alike have tended to think that the learners responsibility should be limited to being the beneficiary so to speak of the process, its active manager being the teacher. Good learners are learners who are capable of assuming the role of manager of their learning. They know how to make decisions around their learning*' (Holec, 1987: 147).

Many of the characteristics of the good language learner are discouraged rather than promoted in the teacher centred classroom (Grenfell & Harris, 1999). Students must be given a sense of having a say in directing their own learning. Strategy instruction must become a means by which we can engage *all* students and convince them that they are capable of establishing their own learner goals and strategies in learning and even more importantly capable of reaching those goals:

'Pupils are not genuinely engaged both because they neither have a real 'say' in their learning nor any sense of responsibility for it. Autonomy implies freedom to choose. Choice implies the ability to make sensible decisions' (Harris, 2000: 225).

Dam (1998) raises the question of what differences can be established between a teacher-directed teaching/learning environment and a teacher/learner-directed learning environment?' Five differences are proposed: *(i) 'a shift in focus from teaching to learning'* in which the content of learning and how to go about learning are central to the process for the teacher *and* the learner. This process includes selection of materials for learning, activities for learning and the creation of learning opportunities for the development of communicative competence in the target language; (ii)' *a change in the learner's role'* i.e. the development of learner

awareness of their own contribution to the learning process and their ability to influence learning outcomes through effort and application in learning as well as the knowledge of when to seek the advice/assistance of the teacher for clarification and correction of specific language and linguistic features of particular learning tasks; *(iii) 'a change in the teacher's role'* where the focus is on students actively learning rather than simply being taught and following instructions i.e. developing ways of evaluating student progress in collaboration with the learners, *'be as consultant as well as a participant and a co. learner in the learning process'; (iv) 'the role of evaluation'* with evaluation as the *pivot* of the learning process; *(v) 'A view of the language classroom as a rich learning environment'* in which effective communicative ability in the target language can be realised through target language use in the classroom and the grasping of all opportunities outside of the classroom to use the target language towards the development of fluency and proficiency for the learner. (Dam, 1998: 53).

Dam's study posits that even the initial stages of commitment in the classroom towards the development of learning autonomy will result in more '*interested, motivated, happy, engaged, and satisfied learners'*. Dam further concludes that this level of involvement in the learning process will create learning environments of co-operation and joint participation in which there is a shared responsibility for learning exercised via negotiation and discussion of learning tasks, effectively *a changed teacher role* (Dam, 1998:75). An interesting insight that can be considered from Dam's work is that teacher and learner responsibility for learning do not exist in isolation but are inextricably linked, so that any positive change in the teacher role will ultimately foster improvements in learning i.e. what could ultimately be considered *a changed learner role* in which the learner acknowledges both the ability and the desire to direct their own learning:

'*A teachers relationship with his/her class is based on constant and continuing contact. It needs stability and this stability is provided by classroom routines which support shared expectations of behaviour. Patterns of classroom activity are not just teaching and learning procedures they are forms of routine with roles for teachers and learners*' (Prabhu, 1987: 103).

Rebecca Oxford (1990) using her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) emphasizes the use of strategies towards the realization of communicative competence in the

language classroom. Oxford further defines such strategies as being either *direct* or *indirect* learning strategies where direct strategies relate to *memory,* i.e., creating mental linkages; applying images and sounds; reviewing well; employing action; *cognition,* i.e., practicing; receiving and sending messages strategies; analysing and reasoning; creating structure for input and output; *compensation strategies,* i.e., guessing intelligently; and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. Indirect strategies include *metacognitive strategies,* i.e., centering your learning; arranging and planning your learning; evaluating your learning; *affective strategies,* i.e., lowering your anxiety; encouraging yourself; and taking your emotional temperature; *social strategies,* i.e., asking questions; cooperating with others; and empathising with others (Oxford, 1990, 1996).

In an empirical study of over 500 students learning English in Taiwan Yang Nae-Dong adopted the Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) proposed by Horwitz, (1987) and undertook to assess students' beliefs about language learning in five major areas: foreign language aptitude; the difficulty of language learning; the nature of language learning; learning and communication strategies; motivations and expectations. Amongst other factors the study concluded that '*By encouraging appropriate beliefs, teachers may enhance effective use of learning strategies and therefore further contribute to students continuing motivation to learn a second language*' (Nae-Dong, (1999):533).

As foreign language educators, we must emphasise to students that language and linguistic skills acquired through the study of a modern foreign language at school have a value beyond that of a certain grade at terminal examinations. In the primary research component of this study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', and Chapter 4, 'Findings'), students were asked about the ways they would use the communication strategies that they had learned to help them if using their target language in a target language community. Whilst students did not identify strategies by name they articulated the use of the strategies very well. A strategy of *avoidance* of particular topics was reported, i.e., finding ways of getting around rules or forms in the target language through topic avoidance or side-stepping communication about topics which require the use of target language rules or forms which the student may not have studied or doesn't remember. Students also reported attempting to change the subject in the hope of redirecting communication to a better known topic (semantic avoidance) *or* simply

providing no verbal response at all, communicating a lack of understanding/ ability to deal with the topic by remaining silent. Students also reported *appeal to authority* where difficulties in communication were encountered i.e. requests to translate, referring to a dictionary as well as requesting that the interlocutor 'paraphrase' by re-wording the message in an alternate target language construction and/or repeating what has been said speaking more slowly/clearly. The use of hand gestures, facial expressions or images were also suggested whilst changing their tone of voice to attempt to provide a context for the dialogue that is taking place was also recommended (see Crystal, 1997); Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire'; Chapter 4, 'Findings').

Bachman defines communicative language ability as both *'knowledge or competence and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualised communicative language use*' (Bachman, 1990: 84). Graham (1997) emphasises the best means of developing target language fluency is by '*Creating practice opportunities and naturalistic practice'* (Graham, 1997:70).

Macaro (2001) suggests that:

'*Learners use of the L2 is conductive to successful learning. Oral L2 use particularly leads to the internalisation of the rule system, an awareness of how language is linked to its speech community, how discourse operated between speaker and hearer. Only through the learner using the L2 can she/he achieve strategic communicative competence. The overarching pedagogical tool should therefore be learners use of the target language not teacher use of the TL'* (Macaro, 2000:184).

There is general consensus amongst researchers in modern foreign languages that increased opportunities of contact with target language communities would inevitably improve students' use of communication strategies and oral competence in the target language under study (Byram, 1989, 1997; Hinkel, 1999). Despite decades of research it can be considered that the majority of students are still learning a modern foreign language at secondary level *without any contact at all with what could be considered a target language community*. As we have seen in Chapter 2, part 1we can suggest that a very important opportunity is being missed here in terms of maintaining students' interest and motivation to use the target language. It is of course possible to concede that many students learn a modern foreign language without any intention and/or interest in integrating into a community in which the target language is spoken. Pavenklo asserts that:

'A related problem is the assumption that, in the process of learning a second, or any additional language, L2 learners aspire to acculturate to or to join a particular group. While this may work for particular immigrant settings, in the global picture nothing could be further from the truth, as millions of people learn and use additional languages without giving a thought to those who could be considered a TL group' (Pavlenko, 2002: 279).

Nonetheless, there have been attempts to increase students' interest in target language communities by means of the integration into the modern languages syllabus of what is generally termed '*a cultural component*' in which students gain some level of insight into the food, eating habits, customs, traditions, education, government etc. of a target language population. However, this process has not been considered to be very successful in convincing students that their contemporaries in such target language communities are not as far removed from their own 'teenage' lives as they may think:

'The integration of culture and language has now become a generally accepted explicit objective of foreign language education. However, language and literature still dominate the Curriculum with culture in a secondary role supplying contextual tidbits. Culture is rarely integrated into the Curriculum in a coherent systematic fashion. 'Such presentation of culture as isolated facts which are neither related to the overarching context of the foreign culture nor contrasted with the learner's culture, feeds into the learner's preconception of the foreign culture as strange and bizarre. It does not encourage the learner to compare the two cultures' (Steele, 1996: 75).

Learning a foreign language involves learning to communicate with others in that language and such communication should involve some level of engagement with culture. It also involves knowing some of the common cultural conventions which are used by speakers of the language. Because a learner can only ever acquire *some* of the cultural conventions, an important part of intercultural competence is having strategies for learning more about the culture during interaction with a target language community. Some teachers may worry that as non-native speakers, they do not have enough insight into the other culture to teach it. However, being a native speaker is not a necessity, i.e., an intercultural approach to language teaching and learning considers that the teacher needs to know something about both cultures. Some materials designed specifically for language learners in the classroom may 'edit out' or 'nativise' cultural information in order to focus on the language. Thus, students are given a distorted picture of the culture (Kramsch, 1987). Communicative competence is developed in the classroom through role plays, preferably unscripted role plays appropriate to the level of students' target language proficiency. Through role plays students have an opportunity to

study cultural and linguistic content that they have already practiced i.e. practicing at being a native speaker of the language (Kramsch, 1987).

A compulsory annual study visit for modern foreign language students could go some way in igniting an interest in both establishing and maintaining contact with a target language community. This would also provide opportunities for increased motivation to actually use the target language for all communications in the classroom and would in turn potentially result in improved levels of fluency for modern languages' students. Michael Byram suggests an emphasis on '*encounters between individuals with their own meaning and cultural capital*' (1997: 40). It is necessary that learners have first hand contact and interaction with foreign language speakers. '*Language and culture learning which enables learners to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings as expressed in a foreign language'* (Byram, 1997:12).

Increased teacher training focussing on communication skills, cultural awareness, and a study abroad component can allow student teachers to pass on their experiences to the learner through sharing cultural experiences and authentic resources from the target language community with the student in the classroom (Kelly & Grenfell, 2005: 11). As we have emphasised in Chapter 2 part 1 in the Ireland context there is a need for' accessibility and mobility' in language teacher training in Europe which can be further developed and shared through electronic knowledge systems via Internet. Languages not only help learners to acquire knowledge but also to develop transferable learning skills (Kelly & Grenfell, 2005: 44). The Internet provides excellent learning resources for modern foreign language learners but is not as yet used to its full potential either inside or outside the classroom. In the European context Lingua action 2 funded the development of the 'DIALANG' assessment system for diagnosing foreign language skills via the Internet. DIALANG consists of self-assessment language tests and feedback in fourteen European languages: Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Icelandic, Irish, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish. The system provides learners with advice about how to improve their language skills. Self-Assessment (SA) statements are used to encourage autonomous learning, to give learners greater control over their learning and to enhance learner awareness of their language learning process. The system uses the Vocabulary Size Placement Test and self-assessment results (SA) to pre-estimate the learners' ability and then directs them to the test whose difficulty level best suits. DIALANG was developed as a partnership of

European universities with assistance from Europe. At the end of the project the prototype DIALANG software was made public and this is the system available today. There is no cost to use DIALANG. See (Dialang, 2010).

Similarly, Lingu@net Europa, managed by CILT National Centre for languages in London also provides online resources for assessing language levels based on the Common European Framework of Reference, (CEFR), proficiency scales (see Appendix 3). A range of resources for language learning and a Meeting Point are also provided so that language learners can share their experiences (see Lingu@net Europa, 2010). Additionally, 'eTwinning' is a project which seeks to forge partnerships and work on projects with other schools in Europe using information and communication technology (ICT). It aims to help schools to bring a European dimension to their activities and to integrate ICT into the classroom. eTwinning is part of the Comenius partnership in European schools (eTwinning, 2010).

In the context of students learning in a modern foreign language classroom 'action research' may be a very effective way for language teachers to investigate their own practice, identifying an area of interest or inquiry in his/her classroom environment and undertaking to engage in a process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Through this process teachers can also share their results with other teachers through collaboration and educational conferences as well as by publishing their work in language teaching journals and sharing findings (Richards & Farrell, 2005: 185). Concurring with the Richards & Farrell study, Kelly & Grenfell also consider that qualified teachers should be given the opportunity to develop their skills in a number of areas '*including action research, reflective practice, the creative use of materials, ICT and mentoring*' (Kelly & Grenfell, 2005:14).

Skehan (1998) considers that teacher experiences associated with learning at school are inextricably linked to a curriculum design processes which focuses on how classes of learners may be organised efficiently i.e. in Skehan's view a '*conspiracy of uniformity*'. As with other school subjects modern foreign language curricula assume that *all* learners are similar and recommendations in effective teaching and learning predominantly as well as *by necessity* focus on how entire classes can be organised efficiently. Hence, there is little emphasis in teacher training courses on the development of techniques which serve to '*adapt materials to the individual learner or on ways of fostering individuality in learning*'. '*The teacher is equally equipped to be a pawn within a larger structure, rather than a mediator*

between materials, syllabuses, and the learners themselves i.e. a conspiracy of sameness' (Skehan, 1998: 260-261).

We thus have the paradoxical position that those with most influence over educational policy implementation at national member state level may lack sufficient interest in learner differences and those with least power in the policy process i.e. in most cases teachers themselves have to confront mixed ability classes with a wide range of ability levels on a daily basis (see Skehan & Foster, 1997, 2001). Thus, any possible way forward in the implementation of European educational policies at national member state level *must* be in collaboration with practicing teachers of modern foreign languages in schools. Taking the example of the most recent Evaluation of Foreign languages at upper-secondary level study in Ireland in which we have seen in Chapter 2, part 1 developed, tested and refined a set of instruments for the evaluation of foreign languages at upper secondary level in Ireland it was found that it is not just the teacher but 'the whole school context which plays a significant role in facilitating effective language learning and teaching' (DES, 2009a: 20). While the main focus of the EFLUSL project was external evaluation it was concluded that '*....making the evaluation instrument available to schools' could enhance the capacity of school communities as a whole to engage in self-evaluation and self-review*', whilst focussing on the teacher as a *reflective practitioner* who has '*....an awareness of what makes a good language teacher and who continues to develop his or her own professional profile throughout a lifetime in teaching*' (DES, 2009a: 46). In the context of Ireland any such development could only be possible where there is a more centralised implementation of modern foreign language education policies in place of individual school autonomy and where policies to establish required levels of teachers continuing professional development (CPD) were introduced. These issues, together with comparison of this study with the findings of the EFLUSL project relating to the learner in the classroom, will be further discussed and analyzed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

To this point, we have examined Modern Foreign Language policy development in education in Europe (Chapter 1) and subsequent policy implementation at member state level in Ireland (Chapter 2, part 1). Through review of pertinent literature and analysis of national statistics in modern foreign language learning at school in Ireland we have established the extent of the provision of modern foreign languages at school at primary; lower secondary; and upper secondary levels; we have quantified the uptake of modern foreign language subjects at

school; we have considered the retention of modern foreign languages to upper-secondary level; we have established current levels of grade achievement at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations; and, we have questioned commitment to developing any discernable levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages learning at school (Chapter 1, part 2). Narrowing our focus from the European and national perspectives, we have examined the learner in the classroom in the context of their prior knowledge and language and linguistic awareness; their motivations to learn in the modern foreign language classroom and the learning goals and strategies they need in order to become successful language learners. The same analyses will now be applied in the context of particular students learning modern foreign languages in the classroom in Ireland (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire'; Chapter 3, 'Methodology', and Chapter 4, 'Findings') and further discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5. This process of analyses of the findings of the initial literature review chapters (Chapters 1 and 2) and those of the upcoming primary research chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) will firstly, provide a comprehensive insight into learning modern foreign languages at member state level in Ireland; secondly, will allow us to make a number of key inferences in modern foreign language learning from the findings of the modern foreign languages survey; and thirdly, will provide a very strong platform from which to make timely recommendations on the future of modern foreign languages in secondary education in Ireland.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology of the primary research component of the current project is outlined. The research was conducted to capture the voices of modern foreign languages students at a point in their upper-secondary education in the Republic of Ireland. From the outset it was considered that a study of modern foreign language learning which included *only* students rather than, e.g., students and teachers or students and their schools etc. would be favourable for two main reasons: firstly, whilst modern foreign language education research has been widely pursued in Ireland (see Chapter 2, Section 1) little of this research has focussed on the experiences of a *wide range* of students *learning* foreign languages; secondly, much of the research has tended to focus on foreign language teaching with learning as a lesser component of some of the studies. (see Chapter 2, Section 1). Thus, the primary research component of this study comprises students' self-reporting of *their grade attainment in language subjects at Junior Certificate* examinations; *their grade expectations at Leaving Certificate examinations*; *their experiences* in modern foreign language learning both inside and outside of the classroom including *their study motivations and language learning strategies* in foreign language uptake and retention at school (see 'Student Questionnaire' – Appendix 8). Students anticipated future use of modern foreign language skills beyond terminal examinations and their recommendations for future learners of modern foreign languages at school are also reported.

The sections of this chapter are:

3.1 Research Questions
3.2 Rationale for Design
3.3 Participants
3.4 Materials
3.5 Procedure
3.6 Ethical Concerns
3.7 Reflection on Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

Following a review of the pertinent literature in European Policy in Modern Foreign Languages education in Chapter 1this study sought to examine the impact of the Council of Europe Policy of seeking to attain '*mother tongue plus 2 foreign languages'* before the end of compulsory schooling by students at member state level in Ireland. Five main research questions were devised which could be answered through a combination of further review of associated literature; analyses of national examination statistics; and the design and implementation of a student questionnaire (see Appendix 8). In terms of the policy of '*mother tongue plus two foreign languages'* the research enquiry first considered How is this policy interpreted at member-state level in Ireland, in terms of how it influences the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign language school subjects amongst learners in secondary education? What is the current situation regarding grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects? What consideration is given at member state level in Ireland to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school?

Once these particular questions were addressed through a review of the pertinent literature and analyses of national statistics in Chapter 2 part 1, which considered the general Ireland context, the same questions are now further probed in the primary research component of this thesis in the context of particular students learning in the classroom (see 'Student Questionnaire', Appendix 8). The study continues in Chapter 2, part 2 with further analyses of the learner's experience in the modern foreign language classroom, at which point a review of the pertinent literature considers whether there is prior knowledge that the learner brings to the language classroom from former study, or other school subjects including language and linguistic awareness, gained in the course of such study or in other language subjects at school.

The study further considers the questions, What is the extent of student motivation and learning goals in the pursuit of modern foreign language learning?; and, What are the learning strategies that students use in the course of modern foreign language learning? (Chapter 2, part 2). Once these particular questions were addressed through a review of the pertinent literature in Chapter 2 part 2, the same questions are now further probed in the primary research component of this thesis in the context of particular students learning in the

classroom (see 'Student Questionnaire, 'Appendix 8). Students' recommendations for future learners of modern foreign languages at school are also reported in addition to their anticipated future use of modern foreign language skills beyond terminal examinations.

3.2 Rationale for Design

3.2.1 Rationale for the overall approach to the primary research

This section is comprised of three parts. Firstly, a rationale for the overall approach to the primary research (Section 3.2.1); secondly, a rationale for the choice of the specific research tools (Section 3.2.2); and thirdly, a rationale for, and an explanation of, the chosen statistical treatment (Section 3.2.3). In terms of providing a rationale for the overall approach to the primary research the focus of the primary research aspect of this study was a broad one; essentially, and in partial fulfilment of addressing the questions of this study (see Section 3.1 above), it was attempted to capture, directly, data pertaining to a range of aspects of the experiences of learning modern foreign languages amongst upper secondary-level students. An innovative aspect of this study is that this 'encouraging of voices' was applied to the students themselves, rather than their teachers. So, the overall intention behind the design of this study was to gather data on a broad range of issues from a broad range of student participants.

Given, then, the purposes of this study, and the fact that a relatively large participant population was to be involved, a survey approach was decided upon, which Bell (2005) cited in Burton et al. 2008, defines as where '*....all respondents will be asked the same questions in, as far as possible, the same circumstances*' (Bell, 2005: 79). There is always a need, as Burton et al. argue, to balance '*....what is necessary to produce reliable results against what is practical and feasible for the researcher'* (Burton et al., 2008: 78-79). Hence, although, as far as time constraints allow, it would have been *almost possible* to undertake a *longitudinal* survey a *cross-sectional* survey design was employed here. Thomas (2009) states that '*....certainly a doctoral degree may provide sufficient time to sample enough points in time to provide meaningful data*', whilst both '*....longitudinal and cross-sectional studies make use of data relating to large numbers of individuals or groups'* (2009: 130). However, longitudinal surveys involve *'....the study of a group of individuals or cases over an extended period, regularly examining them for the effect of time on the variable or variables of*

interest' (2009: 130) and in terms of the primary research questions of this study, the effects of time on measured variables were not an explicit focus.

That considered it must be acknowledged that it may have been just about possible to undertake a longitudinal study and to have sought, for example, to examine how students' accounts of their experiences of learning modern foreign languages changed and developed over time. However, as Thomas (2009) notes, one of the chief problems with longitudinal surveys in general is '*attrition*', the loss of participants over time from the group that is being studied. This would have been particularly acute in a study that sought to include upper secondary students as not all students transfer from the Junior Cycle to Senior Cycle in schools in Ireland and schools vary as to whether they offer a Transition Year programme. There is also the challenge, in longitudinal surveys in schools, of varying rates of absenteeism from school on the days at which measurements are taken. The only way to safeguard against these effects of attrition and absenteeism would be to accurately and consistently identify the students who were involved in the research across all phases of measurement, in other words, to record their names at all stages of the study. However, were this system to be implemented, the ethical precept of ensuring confidential and anonymous participation in the research would be completely invalidated (see Section 3.6 below).

A cross-sectional survey approach such as that employed for this study, is where:

'*....a group or group are studies at the same time – as a snapshot*' ...'*One variable may be looked at, providing a descriptive picture, or two or more variables offering the possibility of seeing a relationship among them....The key thing is that the observations are all made at the same moment in time, with a group whose members share some characteristic'* (Thomas, 2009: 133):

The participants that were to be involved in the primary research of this study did 'share some characteristic' – they were all senior cycle (more specifically, Transition and fifth-year) students in post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Balancing the need of ensuring that sufficient numbers were involved in the primary research to address the queries of the current study with a degree of confidence with that of ensuring that '*....the observations [were] all made at the same moment in time*' (Thomas, 2009:133) necessitated the use of multiple sites of data collection. Hence, participating students at a number of schools in Ireland, some by necessity remote from the researcher, were to be involved near-

simultaneously in the primary research. As we shall see, the requirement of involving multiple data collection sites had important ramifications for the sampling frame (i.e. the location of the participating schools) and the careful design of data collection procedures (see Sections 3.3 and 3.5 below). Having decided upon a cross-sectional survey *approach* to this research, noting that Burton et al. (2008) argue that surveys are an approach, rather than a methodology and cite Denscombe (2003) in asserting that *'....questionnaires and interviews are methodologies (among others) that are often associated with the survey approach*' (2003: 78).

3.2.2 Rationale for the Choice of the Specific Research Tools

As we have seen (see Section 3.2.1 above), it had been decided to use a cross-sectional survey design to gather data from a large number of student participants, at multiple remote sites, at a single point in time. For these reasons, a study-specific questionnaire was chosen as the primary (indeed, sole) data-gathering instrument. So how was this decision made?
In terms of choosing what Thomas refers to as '*the right tools for the job'* (2009: 157), he divides data-gathering tools into those that are '*....mainly for use with words*' (2009: 160) (accounts, diaries, document interrogation, interviews); those that are *'....for use with words and / or numbers*' (2009: 173) (questionnaires, observation); and, those that are '*mainly for use with numbers*' (2009: 189) (measurements and tests, official statistics). Given the stated questions of the present study, according to Thomas's scheme, a method that one could use for gathering 'words and numbers' was required (I have nonetheless considered that interviews can also be a 'words and numbers' tool), but that the large numbers sought and multiple, remote sites location of the participants ruled out observational methods. Burton et al. note that both questionnaires and interviews are '*....based around asking questions of respondents'*, but '*....whereas interviews, due to logistical constrains, are really only appropriate for small populations but do, given the interactive nature, allow for a richer and more probing question format'*, '....questionnaires are more suitable for larger populations, which are being asked to respond in short and simplified ways' (2008: 80).

Burton et al. posit that two of the 'pros' of interview methods are that they are '*useful for obtaining sensitive or in-depth information from a knowledgeable respondent*', and are '*....most effective when there is a positive relationship and trust between the interviewer and interviewee'* (2008:74). The nature of the questions of this study did not require an expert

audience of respondents, only that the respondents should be senior cycle second-level students. Thus, there was an attempt to 'spread the net wide', and to obtain information from a larger population of respondents, at multiple remote sites, at a single measurement point in time. Hence, there was no possibility of a 'trust' relationship existing between the researcher and the respondents. The 'cons' of the interview method, as identified by Burton et al. include being '*....very time-consuming, both to perform, record and collate'*, and '*....may be difficult to arrange'* (2008: 74). Hence, given the questions of this study, the 'logistical constrains' that Burton et al. (2008) identified clearly ruled out the use of interview-based data collection methods.

In contrast, the 'pros' of the questionnaire data collection method, identified by Burton et al. (2008: 74) seem, given the stated questions of this study, to argue for its employment in this case: A questionnaire 'Can generate a lot of information very quickly and easily'; 'Can be structured to provide comparable information in an easily collectable form'; and, 'Allows remote access to respondents'. However, Burton et al. (2008: 74) also identify some 'cons' which raise some notes of caution: 'Must be very carefully checked and trialled prior to use to ensure that instructions are unambiguous, responses are in the form expected and that it is manageable for the respondent'; 'Response rate can be very low'; and, 'Unlikely to obtain detailed or profound information this way' (Burton et al., 2008: 74)

Having chosen the questionnaire method as the primary data gathering tool, then, the questions remained as to: the careful checking and trialling of the questionnaire, all the more relevant here, being as an original questionnaire, specific to the purposes of this study, was to be designed and implemented (on a reasonably large scale) for the first time; whether the danger of low response rates could be avoided; and, whether this method needs necessarily be confined to gathering '*short and simplified'* data, (Burton et al., 2008) or whether some of the '*richer*' type of data that is obtained in interviews could also be gathered using a questionnaire. Need one accept Burton et al.'s (2008: 74) caution that one is '....unlikely to obtain detailed or profound information this way'?

The first of these questions could certainly be addressed by the careful piloting of draft versions of the questionnaire, and this was in fact the case (see Section 3.4.8 below). It was attempted to address the second of the questions above by paying careful attention to the administration, distribution and collection procedures concerning the use of the

questionnaires in the participating schools (see Section 3.5 below). However, meeting the third of the questions above was an issue for the initial and final design of the study-specific questionnaire itself. Thomas (2009) refers to different ways in which questionnaire items can be constructed. The chief difference he notes is that which exists between open-ended and closed questions:

'*An open-ended question is one that allows respondents to reply in whatever way they wish.....they can give vent to whatever opinions or prejudices they wish....it is your [i.e., the researcher's] job then to record this information as accurately as you can (or need to) ready for subsequent analysis. Closed questions are those that demand a particular response....respondents have to respond in the way that the closed question format demands*' (Thomas, 2009: 162).

Closed questions, according to Thomas (2009: 175), '*....can be organised in a number of ways*'. He refers to '*dichotomous questions*' ('two-way', usually requiring a 'yes' or 'no' answer), '*multiple-choice questions*', '*rank order questions*', '*rating scale questions*' and '*Likert scale*' questions (used for measuring attitudes). Given the aims for this study, a combination of dichotomous and multiple choice closed questions were used, along with some open-ended questions, which were subject to subsequent content analysis (see 'Student Questionnaire', Appendix 8, and Chapter 4 'Findings'). Hence, the study-specific questionnaire was constructed to gather both 'words and numbers'; or, alternatively, both quantitative and quantifiable qualitative data.

Naturally, in using questionnaires as a technique of data gathering, information is elicited from participants by means of *self-report*, which potentiates a number of confounding factors, the most obvious of which is that the researcher is reliant on the participant's honest response. Such 'honesty' can be compromised in the existence of social desirability effects (i.e., the participant responding as he or she perceives that the researcher, or even broader society, would like him or her to respond) or malicious responses motivated by what experimental psychologists have sometimes termed the 'screw you effect' (i.e., the participant attempting to frustrate what he or she perceives to be the researcher's aims) (Burton et al., 2008; Thomas, 2009). This study made use of techniques that are commonly applied (outside formal psychometric testing, where so-called 'lie scale' items have sometimes been built into inventories) such as (i) ensuring that the participant sample is sufficiently large so as to minimise the influence of such confounding effects; and, (ii) the manual removal of obvious 'spoils' during the data entry process.

3.2.3 Rationale for and an Explanation of the Chosen Statistical Treatment

Given the data that emerged from the primary research component of the study, it was possible to engage in inferential statistical treatment – that is to say, to ascertain its statistical significance, or otherwise. Inferential statistics are used as one cannot say, simply by looking at sets of data, whether significant relationships exist or not – sets of test scores, for example, may *look* different, but whether these differences are due to the consistent exertion of an effect (in experimental terms, a variable), or down to purely random variation. Miller (1991) puts it:

'The problem for statistical inference is to decide whether the actual differences are caused by chance, or whether these differences are so large that we can ascribe them, at least in part, to the effects of [a] variable' (Miller, 1991: 50).

'How can we judge whether the difference....is real (reliable) or a fluke? Inferential statistics are used to answer this question' (Elmes et al.(1992):329).

Hence, it was both possible and desirable to calculate some measures of inferential statistical significance in order to consider whether the data that was obtained supported or refuted the questions that had been generated in the course of this study. An array of inferential statistical procedures is available to the educational researcher. Many of these procedures are shared by social scientists; they are perhaps used most extensively use in the field of experimental psychology (see Elmes et al., (1992), and Miller, (1991)). Elmes et al. (1992) explain the process behind statistical testing this:

'*In actual practice, answering this question is not too complicated. We choose an appropriate statistical test for the situation, perform a few straightforward calculations on a calculator (or computer), and then consult a special table. The table informs us of the probability that the difference we have found is a result of chance factors. If it is sufficiently unlikely to have occurred by chance, we conclude that the difference is statistically significant, or reliable' (1992: 329).*

The '*straightforward calculations*' to which Elmes et al. refer (1992, see above) are easily accomplished via software packages (in this case, the familiar SPSS programme was used), once the more lengthy task of entering the data into the programme's spreadsheets has been accomplished. The 'data tables' will be explained in the upcoming Section 3.5; so for now, we shall turn our attention to the first task; that is, choosing the appropriate statistical test.

This choice is based, first of all, on the *type of data* which is to be tested. The data that results from research in education and the social sciences come in three broad types: *nominal data, ordinal data*, and *interval* data (Gleitman, (2007)). Scales in which differences between scores can be treated as equal units, or intervals, are called *interval data* (Gleitman, (2007)) and may include measurements such as height, weight, reaction time, IQ – i.e., any standardised scale (e.g., the difference between a height of 155 cm and 158 cm, and the difference between a height of 203 cm and 206 cm, is the same in each case – 3 cm). *Ordinal data* scales cannot be similarly added or subtracted, although they are systematic in as much as they refer to the ordering (e.g., of preferences – one's favourite school subjects) (Gleitman, (2007)). Due to the design of the questionnaire items that were used in the research instrument that was applied in this study, (see 'Student Questionnaire' Appendix 8) the type of data that emerged was *nominal data* – named categories, or groups of responses, which are not immediately operable in terms of arithmetic (Gleitman, (2007)). As Miller (1991) notes, with nominal data:

'Quite often we are interested in some non-quantitative aspect of behaviour, for example does [a participant] 'think aloud' or not?....we cannot compare average performance on such variables – what is the average score of two [participants], one of whom thinks aloud and one doesn't? All we can say is whether the groups differ in the proportion of [participants] who come into one category rather than another' (1991: 91).

For nominal data, the *only* widely used inferential statistical test of significance that is available for *nominal* data types is the *chi-squared test*:

'Whenever our data consists of frequency counts of the number of times different events occur, the chi-squared test can be used to compare the proportions of these events....Our task, as with all statistical tests, is to compute the probability that the difference could have arisen purely by chance' (Miller, (1991): 91).

As Miller (1991) notes, we can never prove beyond any doubt that chance was not responsible' (1991: 50), but '....by conducting a statistical test on the data....we shall be able to say *how likely it is that any given difference is due to chance*' (1991:51, italics in the original). As Miller (1991) notes, judging exactly how unlikely the chance explanation must be before rejecting it in favour of an explanation via reference to a key variable is '....a matter of convention rather than basic principle' (1991:51), but most researchers use a significance level of 0.05, or 1/20 – an 'alpha probability level' that means that the results could only arise by chance one time in twenty, or less frequently (Miller, 1991). Sometimes, even more

stringent levels of probability are set – 0.01, or 0.01, meaning that the results could only arise by chance one time in a hundred or one time in a thousand respectively, or less frequently. Results from chi-squared analyses are typically compared to critical values at the 0.05, 0.01 and 0.001 levels in the sorts of 'special tables' (in this case, chi-squared significance tables, see Miller, 1991: 175) that Elmes et al. (1992) refer to. If the observed value of chi-squared is greater than the equivalent value in the table, then the finding is significant at that level of probability.

When calculating the value of chi-squared, one also refers to the existence of what are called degrees of freedom (part of the internal mathematics of the test; see Elmes et al., 1992, Miller, 1991, for a full explanation) – when two groups are compared at a time (a so-called 2 x 2 design), as is the case in *all* chi-squared calculations used in this study, the number of degrees of freedom is equal to one. Hence, when citing chi-squared results in statistical shorthand, which is usually the case in results sections, the observed chi-squared value is given the symbol χ^2 (e.g., χ^2 = (insert numerical value, calculated to two decimal places, here)); degrees of freedom are expressed as df = (insert value here), and probability levels are noted thus: p , 0.05, $p < 0.01$, and $p < 0.001$. Hence, the statistical shorthand $\chi^2 = 4.12$, df = 1, $p < 0.05$, is a significant result, because 4.12 is larger than 3.84, which is the critical value of χ^2 in a chi-squared significance table (e.g., Miller, 1991:175), at one degree of freedom, and the alpha probability level of 0.05 – in other words, there is one chance in twenty, or less, of the difference being due purely to chance. This is the format that is used when expressing measures of statistical significance in this study.

3.3 Participants

In addition to the collection of data from secondary school students it would have been possible to collect primary data from (say) principals or teachers as participants. However, surely a clear sign of a top-down (i.e., European-driven) educational policy objective being successfully mainstreamed at member state level in Ireland is the extent to which it informs the everyday learning experiences of students learning modern foreign languages in the classroom. Students undertaking the transition year and fifth year of post-primary school were targeted for pragmatic reasons. In the first place, these students would have completed the lower secondary education phase, and have already undertaken their Junior Certificate examinations. Secondly, these students would have been, or would have had the opportunity

to have been, undertaking modern foreign languages at the 'advanced' or upper secondary education level. Finally, within the Irish education system, State examinations are undertaken in the third and sixth years – therefore, the transition and the fifth years are 'non-exam' years, and such students are more easily accessible to the educational researcher.

732 non-sixth class Senior Cycle students (266 male, 466 female) took part in the survey; 377 of these (104 males, 273 females) responded that they were in fifth year, and 355 (162 males, 193 males) responded that they were in transition year. In terms of school type, 406 (141 males, 265 females) responded that they attended secondary schools; 237 (89 males, 148 females) responded that they attended community schools; and 89 (36 males, 53 females) responded that they attended VEC schools. None of these schools were identified by the students as being fee-paying. In terms of enrolment numbers, 106 students (42 males, 64 females) responded that they attended schools that enrolled between 1 and 300 students; 108 students (42 males, 66 females) responded that they attended schools that enrolled between 301 and 499 students; and 518 students (182 males, 336 females) responded that they attended schools that enrolled over 500 students. Whilst gender was not a variable in the present analysis of the research data male and female responses were recorded as such simply for possible further analysis of this data in the future.

The 732 students were drawn from 11 schools in the Republic of Ireland: 2 schools in Ulster; 2 schools in Munster; 3 schools in Leinster (not Dublin); 2 schools in Connaught; and 2 schools in Dublin. Of these participant schools there were: 4 Community schools; 5 Secondary schools; and 2 VEC schools. In terms of school type: 8 were co-educational; 2 were girls' schools; and 1 was a boys' school. In terms of school size by registered students, according to the Department of Education and Science register of Post-Primary schools for 2008/09: 2 of the participant schools had between 1 and 300 registered students; 2 schools had between 301 and 499 registered students; and 7 schools had over 500 registered students.

3.4 Materials

3.4.1 Design of the Student Questionnaire

Once the study was set in context through a review of the pertinent literature on the development of European policy in modern foreign languages education in Chapter 1 the first of the research questions for the current project (see above, Section 3.1) was to examine the implementation of the Council of Europe objective of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling in member states, in this case – Ireland. This was measured in terms of the provision; the uptake; and the retention of modern foreign languages subjects by students at school (see Chapter 2, part 1).

3.4.2 The Provision and uptake of Modern foreign language subjects at school

The first step in addressing this question was to set a questionnaire item that related to the participants' Junior Certificate studies in modern foreign languages (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 7), which related to reports of having sat examinations in different languages at the Junior Certificate level (see Chapter 4, 'Findings', Table Six). Further to this, a questionnaire item was set on participants Leaving Certificate choices in modern foreign languages (see Appendix 8 'Student Questionnaire', item 9) which related to reports of intentions to sit examinations in different languages at the Leaving Certificate level (see Chapter 4, 'Findings', Table Seven).

3.4.3 The retention of Modern Foreign Language Subjects at school

A questionnaire item was set on the reasons participants gave (if applicable) for discontinuing at Leaving Certificate level a language they had sat an examination in at Junior Certificate level (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 11; see also Chapter 4 'Findings', Table Eight). Subsequently, by selecting the participants who had indicated that they had discontinued at Leaving Certificate level a language they had sat an examination in at Junior Certificate level, it was possible to ascertain this group's modern foreign language choices at Junior Certificate level (see 'Findings', Table Nine). *On reflection Questionnaire item 11 would have been better placed as Questionnaire item 9. However, the question ordering does not seem to have caused any confusion to respondents.* Students also reported on continuing at Leaving

Certificate level a language they had sat an examination in at Junior Certificate level (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 12; Chapter 4, 'Findings', Table Ten). In connection with this research question there was also a questionnaire item (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', items 46 and 47) on languages which the participants considered to be necessary for their futures and why (see 'Findings', Chapter 4, Table 11).

3.4.4 Grade achievement in modern foreign language studies

There was also a questionnaire item (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 8) on the grades which the participants reported obtaining at Junior Certificate level (see 'Findings', Chapter 4, Tables 12 & 13). There was also a questionnaire item (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 10) on the grades which the participants reported aiming for at Leaving Certificate level (see 'Findings', Chapter 4, Tables 14(a) and 14(b)). The results of a series of four cross-tabulations of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of the grades they aim to achieve in (i) Leaving Certificate French, Ordinary level (Table Fourteen (c)); (ii) Leaving Certificate French, Higher level (Table Fourteen (d)); (iii) Leaving Certificate German, Ordinary level (Table Fourteen (e)); and, (iv) Leaving Certificate German, Higher level (Table Fourteen (f)) (see Findings, Chapter 4, Tables Fourteen (e) to Fourteen (f)).

The findings on grades attained in different languages at the Junior Certificate level as reported by students who reported that they were *not* continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level in are presented in Table 15 (see 'Findings', Chapter 4, Table 15). The Results of a Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reasons for continuing French at Leaving Certificate level are presented in Table 16(a) (See 'Findings', Chapter 4, Table 16(a)). The Results of a Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reasons for continuing German at Leaving Certificate level are presented in Table 16(b) (See 'Findings', Chapter 4, Table 16(b)). The results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether they indicated that they considered the French and German languages to be necessary for their futures are presented in Table 17 (See Findings, Chapter 4, Table 17).

3.4.5 What consideration is given at member state level to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school?

There was a series of questionnaire items relating to students' reports of the modern foreign language classroom environment: numbers of students in their modern foreign languages classes (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 13; see also 'Findings', Table Eighteen); numbers of modern foreign languages classes they have per week (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 14; see also 'Findings', Table Nineteen; the duration in minutes of their modern foreign languages classes (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 15; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty; and, participants reports of whether they felt that the duration of their modern foreign languages classes was sufficient or not (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 16; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-One (a) and Twenty-One (b)).

Questionnaire items were also set on the language of instruction used in their modern foreign language classes. These included items on reports of the language of instruction / communication used most often in their modern foreign languages classes (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 32; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-Two (a)); Questionnaire items on the Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they can follow the class when the modern foreign language is being used for instruction / communication (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', items 33 & 34; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-Two (b)); Questionnaire items on the Percentages of students reporting on the language used by the students when group work is being conducted in their modern foreign language classes (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 35; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-Two (c)).

Tables Twenty-Two (d) to Twenty-Two (h) inclusive document the results of a series of cross-tabulations regarding the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of various aspects concerning the languages that are used in undertaking classroom work in their modern foreign language classrooms. These comprise a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports on the language of instruction / communication used most often is their modern foreign languages classes (Table Twenty-Two (d)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the

students' reports on the language of instruction / communication used most often is their modern foreign languages classes (Table Twenty-Two (e)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German and the students' reports of the extent to which they can follow the class when the modern foreign language is used as the language of instruction / communication in their modern foreign languages classes (Table Twenty-Two (f)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports of the languages used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern foreign language classes (Table Twenty-Two (g)); and finally, a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports of the languages used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern foreign language classes (Table Twenty-Two (h)).

Questionnaire items were also set on the Percentages of students reporting on the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign languages class. (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 36; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-Three (a); Twenty-Three (b); Twenty-Three (c). Questionnaire items were also set on the percentages of students reporting on whether or not they consider their current modern foreign language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken (See Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 44; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-Four (a); Twenty-Four (b)).

3.4.6 Student Motivation in the pursuit of learning in modern foreign languages

Students' motivation in modern foreign language learning was pursued via a set of questionnaire items regarding the level at which participants reported that they were studying modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate examination. Who set the level of study i.e. Ordinary or Higher level? (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 29; see also 'Findings', Table 25(a); reports on whether or not participants discussed their level of study with their modern foreign languages teacher before the level was assigned for the Leaving Certificate (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 30; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Five (b); and reports on whether or not participants were happy with the level of study they had been assigned (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 31; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Five (c).

The reported *most enjoyable* parts of their modern foreign language class (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 39 (i); see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Six (a). The reported *least enjoyable* parts of their modern foreign language class (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 39 (ii); see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Six (b). There were also questionnaire items on the availability of school libraries (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 24; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Seven (a) and the availability of and their own use of school library resources (course books, novels, audio tapes, videos, DVDs and CDs at a range of language levels, copies of past examinations and project work) in their study of modern foreign languages (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 25; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Seven (b)).

There were also questionnaire items on the participants use, or otherwise, of the Internet for modern foreign language study and reports on whether or not participants had access to the Internet at school or at home (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 26; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Eight (a) on whether or not participants had used the Internet for modern foreign language study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 27; see also 'Findings', Tables Twenty-Eight (b) and (c); which web-sites participants reported having used for the purposes of studying modern foreign languages (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 28 ; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Eight (d)).

3.4.7 Learning Strategies used in students' pursuit of learning in foreign languages

Regarding the strategies that students used in pursuit of learning, there was a set of questionnaire items that sought to establish details of the students' participation (if any) in modern foreign language exchange programmes (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', items 37 and 38). These included participants' reports of whether or not they have participated in any student exchange / language (other than Irish) (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 37; see also 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (a) and Twenty-Nine (b)). For those who reported that they had participated in such programmes, a further questionnaire item (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 38) was designed to elucidate further details. The included participants reports of who organized the student language exchange (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (c)); participants' reports on whether the exchange was compulsory or not (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (d)); participants' reports on the duration of the exchange (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (e)); participants' reports on the

number of students who participated in the exchange (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (f)); participants' reports of the language of communication used in the exchange (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (g)); participants' reports of whether the students who participated in the exchange were of a similar age or not (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (h)); and, participants' reports on whether their modern language level improved as a result of the exchange (see 'Findings', Table Twenty-Nine (i)).

The various communication strategies that students had learned to resolve problems in communication in a modern foreign language (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 45; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty); Whether or not they were planning to study modern foreign languages in the future (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 40; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-One (a) and Thirty-One (c); how they planned to study modern foreign languages in the future (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 41; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-One (b)).

Whether or not their studies of modern languages had increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 42; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Two (a) and Thirty-Two (b)) and what specific things they had learnt about those cultures ((see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 43).

There was a set of questionnaire items that sought to establish details of the students' participation (if any) in extra-curricular modern foreign language study groups (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', items 17 – 21 inclusively). These include participants' reports of whether they have the opportunity to study or practice modern foreign language skills with other students outside normal class time (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 17; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Three (a) and Thirty-Three (b)); participants' reports of who organizes the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 18; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Three (c)); participants' reports of the number of students in the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 19; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Three (d)); participants' reports of the frequency with which in the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate meets (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 20; see also 'Findings',

Table Thirty-Three (e)); participants' reports of the activities of the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 21; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Three (f)); participants' reports of details of modern foreign languages clubs / societies that they would like to have available to them for extra study (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 22; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Three (g)); and, participants' reports of whether or not they knew of modern foreign language study groups / societies in their schools or in their local communities (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 23; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Three (h)). An invitation to list various recommendations which they considered useful regarding modern language learning in schools (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 48; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Four); and the reasons why they considered having English as a first or second language to be an advantage to them (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', item 49; see also 'Findings', Table Thirty-Five).

As indicated additional data analyses which did not have a direct bearing on the main study are included in Appendix 10.

3.4.8 Piloting of the Student Questionnaire

An initial questionnaire was designed in 2005 and this was piloted in secondary level schools in Dublin with the assistance of the postgraduate students completing their Higher Diploma in Education in the School of Education, Trinity College in the academic year 2005-2006. 300 Upper secondary level students completed the questionnaire. A comments page was included with the questionnaire in order to gather feedback on participants' recommendations for any changes to the questionnaire design etc. Changes to the final survey were applied to the design of specific questions following participant recommendations and the recommendations of the examiners at the transfer interview for transfer to the Ph.D. register in June 2006. Participants' recommendations pertained to the length of the survey and the wording and phraseology of specific questions. Examiner recommendations pertained to an analysis of participant responses to specific questionnaire items which for the most part were very brief in the piloting phase, i.e., question designs that would possibly elicit more elaborate responses in the main survey was recommended. There was general consensus at that time that due to the length of the questionnaire it would be better to publish the study online for faster completion and to cast a wide net for participants. Changes to the

questionnaire were made in accordance with recommendations of participants and examiners. A revised online survey was designed and published online via *surveymonkey* in September 2006 (Section 3.5 below). This did not ultimately prove to be a successful method of gathering data in schools. (See 3.5 below). However, subsequent reversion to the printed version of the revised questionnaire permitted progression with the data gathering phase of this study in schools. Student responses to the final research questionnaire items were much more detailed and elaborate than those recorded during the piloting phase of the study, therefore despite delays, the quality of the data gathered in the main study was far superior than that of the initial piloting phase study.

3.5 Procedure

Following the piloting of the questionnaire (3.4.8 above), the recommendations of participants in the pilot study, and the recommendations of the examiners in the process of transferring to the Ph.D. register a revised questionnaire was drafted and approved. The questionnaire was published online See (Surveymonkey, 2006). A representative sample of 50 Post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland was devised counterbalanced on 5 measures:

1. Fee Paying / Non–Fee Paying
2. School Type – Secondary, VEC, Community & Comprehensive
3. Gender – Co. Educational, Boys only, Girls only
4. Size (no. of students registered) – Department figures for the period 2006-2007
5. Location – Dublin / Non-Dublin by Province

The sample of the 50 schools was finalised and letters were drafted and forwarded to the school principals from the 50 schools included in the sample in October 2006. Contact information was obtained on the Department of Education and Science (now the Department of Education and Skills) official list of Post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (see DES, 2010a). The letter detailed the focus of the study and requested principals to encourage participation in the project amongst 5th year and transition year students in their school. See (Appendix 9). It was highlighted that participation in the project would be confidential and all statistics etc. would be expressed as a participant group rather than identifying any particular school or student (see section 3.6, below).

As the pilot of the survey had been successfully carried out with the help of postgraduate students completing the Higher Diploma in Education (now the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education) in the School of Education Trinity College (see above Section 3.4.8) it was decided that this strategy could be implemented once again and extended to other geographical areas based on the locations of the 50 schools that had been included in the final sample. Thus, the co-ordinators of the Higher Diploma in Education in the National University of Ireland colleges in Co. Cork and Co. Galway were contacted to seek the assistance of their post-graduate students in raising awareness of the survey in the schools where they were completing their teaching practice. The co-ordinators did not consider deploying the postgraduate students for this purpose to be 'ethical' and thus did not follow up on the request. The postgraduate students in the School of Education, Trinity College, agreed to promote the research project in their schools. However, as many of the students were assigned to lower secondary level classes (from 1st years to 3rd years) for their teaching practice they did not have a lot of contact with Senior-cycle students.

In November 2006, follow up telephone calls to schools were made to verify receipt of the letters of request to participate in the survey and emails forwarded to principals. A number of principals had already responded to the letter / email and provided permission for direct contact with the modern foreign languages teacher or year head/tutor for 5th year / transition year. These contacts were followed up by emails and telephone calls. Agreement was reached with some of the teachers to advertise the study on the shared area notice boards for 5th years and transition year students.

In December 2006 contact was once again made with the school principals and teachers who had responded positively to the inclusion of their students in the research as although they had agreed to have their students participate in the research there had not been any direct participation by the students in the online survey. It was agreed that the presence of the online survey would once again be brought to the attention of the students in advance of the Christmas holiday period.

By January 2007 there had been no responses to the online survey. Once again the school principals and teachers who had responded positively to the inclusion of their students in the research were contacted. On this occasion it was suggested that visits to the schools could be

arranged so that selected groups of 5th year and transition year students could be permitted to use the schools' computer facilities under the researchers' supervision to complete the online survey. However, none of the school principals/teachers who were in support of the research agreed to a school visit to supervise students completing the online questionnaire citing a lack of adequate resources in terms of computer availability and internet connectivity as well as school internal procedure concerning student supervision whilst using the school's ICT facilities. Thus, completion of the survey online in groups could not be accommodated. It was agreed at that point that the schools would continue to raise awareness of the online survey amongst their 5th year and transition year students so that the students could complete the survey online in their free time using their own Internet resources or those available in their local communities.

By March 2007 there had been no responses to the online survey. Principals and teachers from the sample schools who had responded positively were contacted and it was explained that the strategy of encouraging students to complete the online survey individually in their free time outside school was not generating responses to the research project. However, the participant schools did not consider it appropriate to waive their regulations regarding use of ICT facilities in their school in order to arrange to have the online survey conducted during school hours with class groups. It was considered in some cases that support of this strategy would set a precedent whereby they would have to support this means of the data gathering for future research projects and school timetabling and ICT resources could not support an increase in such requests. At this point contact with schools had been ongoing for six months and there had been no uptake *at all* of the online survey by students.

In the interest of the timely and effective gathering of data as well as the maintaining of positive links with the principals/teachers who were supportive of the research project it was decided to revert to the printed version of the questionnaire. In doing so, it was possible to get commitment from the school principals/teachers already on board to allow the research to be conducted in their schools using a printed version of the questionnaire during the academic year 2007 - 2008. Commitment was given to schedule the inclusion of the project amongst a limited number of postgraduate research projects that the schools were planning to commit to during the 2007 - 2008 academic year. Principals / teachers were contacted in September 2007 and the majority recommended that the second school term would be a more suitable time to conduct the survey in their schools as it was considered that students needed the first

term to acclimatise to a new school year, etc. Agreement on the number of students who would participate in the survey was reached in advance and a number of modern foreign languages teachers who had been appointed to the supervision of the data gathering process in their particular schools were contacted to make final arrangements.

In order to provide for a suitable return rate of completed questionnaires (see Section 3.3, above) the following options were offered to schools in terms of delivery and administration of the printed questionnaires in their individual schools:

(i) postage of an agreed number of questionnaires to the school for completion (with the researcher covering the cost of the return postage);

(ii) delivery of the printed questionnaires to a particular teacher in the school at the beginning of a pre-arranged week and collection of the completed questionnaires from that teacher at the end of that same week; and,

(iii) visit to the school by the researcher to supervise and oversee the administration of the survey in the school on an assigned day with assigned group/groups of 5th year and transition year students.

The implementation of the data gathering process *using the printed version of the questionnaire* was successful on this occasion and data was gathered in schools between March 2008 and June 2008. 1, 000 questionnaires in total were requested by participant schools. Of the eleven schools in the sample, the two Dublin schools opted to have the printed questionnaires delivered to a specific teacher at the beginning of an assigned school week and the completed questionnaires collected from that teacher / school at the end of that week. Seven of the schools opted to have an agreed number of printed questionnaires posted to them during an assigned week with the cost of return postage reimbursed to the school by the researcher. Two of the schools opted for a visit to the school by the researcher to supervise and oversee the administration of the survey in the school on an assigned day with assigned transition year and 5th year groups/classes. Although the agreed dates for completion of the survey were re-assigned by the schools to facilitate other school activities on a number of occasions, all completed questionnaires from participant schools were collected / returned by the end of the school term in June 2008. A database was set up on SPSS and the data was

input between June 2008 and February 2009. Given the three procedures adopted for gathering the data, (see (i) to (iii) above), the rate of return of completed questionnaires was high i.e. 732 completed questionnaires, from the 1,000 questionnaires that were requested and issued.

Given the size of the cohort (732 respondents) and the nature of the emergent data (see above, section 3.5), it was practical to utilise a statistical software package in the analysis of the bulk of the data; hence, the readily available SPSS programme was used in this study. Some questionnaire items, of course, yielded qualitative data, which was processed separately in order that none of the 'richness' of this data should be lost (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire', items 22, 23, 39, 43, 45, 47, 48 and 49). However, the remainder – i.e., the bulk - of the data output was either quantitative or quantifiable in type. Nevertheless, because of the type of information that was being sought via the use of the questionnaire, the quantitative or quantifiable data was nominal in type. Consequently, when inferential statistical procedures were applied in subsequent data analysis, those non-parametric procedures were used that may be validly employed in treating nominal data – cross-tabulations and chi-squared analyses.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

In general, much of the original impetus around contemporary ethical research procedures stems from the Nuremberg Code, drawn up in 1946 following the Doctors' Trial at the Nuremberg Trials of Nazi war criminals. It was then that the grotesque medical and genetic experiments conducted by Nazi physicians on concentration camp prisoners was revealed; since that point, with the declassification of various military and government documents, the actions of the Japanese Imperial Army's Unit 731 (who experimented with prisoner vivisection in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1932 – 1945)) and the British Army's experiments with mustard gas on their own British and British Indian armies during the Second World war have come to light (Annas & Grodin, 1992).

The Nuremberg Code of 1946 was applied by the World Medical Association when it adopted a set of ethical guidelines, commonly known as the 'Declaration of Helsinki' in 1964 (Levine, 1993). As far as the educational and social sciences are concerned, a detailed and

prescriptive application of the principles of the Nuremberg Code first informed and was applied within the American Psychological Association's publication of Code of Ethics in 1974. In its most recent update (American Psychological Association, 2010) outlines five general principles (beneficence and non-maleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, respect for people's rights and dignity) and ten specific ethical standards (resolving ethical issues, competence, human relations, privacy and confidentiality, advertising and other public statements, record keeping and fees, education and training, research and publication, assessment, therapy) which apply to and guide its members (in their research and psychological treatment) and institutions. Since the APA's 1974 guidelines, researchers and practitioners in the social sciences – i.e., where human participation in experimental and survey research is key – increasingly operate within the ethical guidelines of the professional bodies and institutions to which they belong, and require their trainees and candidates to do so too. This is true for researchers and practitioners in the social sciences in Ireland (see, for example, Psychological Association of Ireland, (2010); Sociological Association of Ireland, (2010) as elsewhere.

An important part of conducting ethical research within education and the social sciences, and one which has particular relevance to the current research project is that of respecting and ensuring *confidentiality* around participation, and dealing with and storing personal data. The design of the primary research strategy, therefore, was based around participation in an *anonymous* questionnaire – students' names were not requested; there was no room for students to write their name (see Appendix 8) on top of the questionnaire (as they may be used to doing in other 'test-type' situations). Furthermore, for the purposes of handling of the data by the primary researcher, student questionnaires were allocated an arbitrary number. So at no point would it be possible to identify an individual student in the questionnaire survey by his or her participation.

Additionally, when questionnaires were collected (either by the researcher, if the school had opted to have the researcher visit the school to supervise and oversee the survey administration, or the teacher, in the case that the school had either opted to have their required questionnaires posted to them, or to have their questionnaires delivered to a particular teacher in the school), they were transferred immediately into sealed envelopes or boxes, without any further reference being made to the information on the questionnaires –

until, of course, the subsequent entry of data into the SPSS database by the researcher. So at no point would it be possible to identify an individual student in the questionnaire survey by his or her data. Regarding arrangements around the confidential participation of the schools themselves – whilst necessary (in terms of the undertaking of the primary research process) postal and other communication (see above, section 3.5, 'Procedure') took place between participating schools and the researcher, this was done on a one-to-one individual basis – as small a number as possible of key staff within each school knew that their schools' transition year and fifth year students were taking part, but they were not informed of the participation or otherwise of students at any other schools. Again, for the purposes of handling of the data by the primary researcher, schools were allocated an arbitrary number, the key to which was known only by the researcher, and stored in a place to which no other person had access. So at no point would it be possible to identify an individual school in the questionnaire survey by its own or its students' participation or data.

Another important part of conducting ethical research within education and the social sciences, and again one which has particular relevance to the current research is that of respecting and operating according to the notion of *informed consent.* Any form of deception, or indeed the collection of data pertaining to categories not explicitly relating to those outlined to participants (or, if juveniles, their caregivers or other adults acting in a *locus parentis* relationship at the time of the collection of the data), contravenes most codes of ethical guidelines that exist and to which professional researchers must adhere. According to these principles, in terms of the design of the primary research aspect of the current project, when schools were invited to participate, as well as a letter of introduction / invitation to participate being sent to the schools' principals (see Appendix 9), a blank copy of the questionnaire (see Appendix 8) was also forwarded, as well as an explicit invitation to contact the researcher should any questions regarding any aspects of participation or data collection arise (again, see Appendix 8: final page of questionnaire).

3.7 Reflection on Methodology

Reflecting on the methodology adopted for this study the following three aspects; (3.7.1 to 3.7.3 below); were considered as worthy of highlighting. Whilst it was possible to change data gathering strategies in line with restrictions that arose in order to successfully implement

the data gathering process for the purpose of completing this project the situations which came up served to considerably lengthen the original schedule for completion of the project.

3.7.1 Implementation of an online survey in a school environment

In line with the limitations encountered in gathering student data in schools it was considered that it may have been useful to have completed a more comprehensive review of the recent educational research that had incorporated online surveys for data gathering in schools in the Republic of Ireland in advance of undertaking the main study. The limitations were not pre-empted as the pilot of the study had been very successful and the problems in terms of student access to ICT facilities in schools were not encountered during the piloting of the project. It should be noted that *none* of the schools that participated in the pilot agreed to participate in the main study. There were two main reasons given for this: (i) a school practice of commitment to *past students of their school only* in the conducing of undergraduate and postgraduate research in education; (ii) a school practice of prioritising school participation in research in particular subject areas that were not focussed on modern foreign languages at the particular time of this study. A lack of adequate ICT and Internet resources was cited by a number of the principals from the selected sample of 50 schools as their reasons for not participating in the study. This was an unexpected development as in line with the Department of Education and Science (DES), (now the Department of Education and Skills) most recent ICT strategy for schools all students in the secondary sector should have access to ICT resources and the Internet (NCTE, 2010a, 2010b). The recent report *Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2008-2013: The Report of the Minister's Strategy Group* provides a comprehensive strategy for the updating and/or replacement of ICT resources in school to ensure more widespread availability of quality ICT resources including Internet access for teaching and learning (DES, 2008).

3.7.2 'Gate-keeping'

Once the 50 schools in the research sample were finalised a letter of introduction detailing the project was forwarded to principals in October 2006 (see Appendix 9). In only a very small number of cases principals responded directly to the letters. Hence, follow-up telephone calls

were made in November 2006 by way of a reminder that a response had not been forthcoming. It was very difficult to establish direct contact with principals to ascertain whether they had received the communication. School administrators responded to telephone communications and reported that the principals would respond to communications in the order in which they had been received. In some cases the letter of request with questionnaire attached was returned with a school compliments slip noting. 'This study cannot be considered by the school at this time' or 'This study cannot be facilitated in the school at this time'. A number of emails were forwarded by principals outlining the reasons already cited above from those schools who had participated in the pilot of the study i.e. (i) a school practice of commitment to past students of their school *only* in the conducing of undergraduate and postgraduate research in education; (ii) a school practice of prioritising school participation in research in particular subject areas that were not focussed on modern languages at the particular time of this study.

Difficulties were experienced when the researcher called to schools at a pre-arranged and pre-verified time to find that the group who were scheduled to participate in the research project were away from the school on an extra-curricular activity or teacher absence etc. meant that the data gathering would have to be re-scheduled. Whilst this is a frustration for a researcher it is 'a practical reality' in the process of conducting research in schools.

3.7.3 Practical considerations

The main practical consideration of this project was the lengthening of the anticipated timeframe for completion of the research following issues relating to data collection. This may have been avoided by establishing direct contact with principals and teachers through professional networks and societies in advance of the commencement of this study and such contact would be highly recommended to students currently conducting or planning to conduct research in schools in the Republic of Ireland.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

Introduction

Emerging from the European educational policy analysis in Chapter 1 the Council of Europe aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling was particularly pertinent to the development of the initial questions of this thesis when applied to the national context in Ireland, i.e., how is this policy interpreted at member-state level in Ireland in terms of how it influences the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign language school subjects amongst learners in secondary education? What is the current situation regarding grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects? What consideration is given at member state level to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school? Once these questions were addressed two further questions determined whether there is evidence of student motivation in language learning, and whether there is evidence of students' application of learning strategies in modern foreign language learning. Following a review of the pertinent literature in Chapters 1 and 2 and analyses of the national statistics in Chapter 2 the research questions devised in this thesis were applied in the primary research component of the study making it possible to establish a number of inferences in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5 that make a significant contribution to the on-going debate on the current situation of modern foreign languages in secondary education in Ireland.

Thus, this 'Findings' chapter presents data derived from the survey of transition year and fifth year students involved in the primary research task of this study. The data is presented in a series of annotated tables (see Tables Six to Thirty-Five inclusive, below with the main findings presented below under their appropriate research question strands and additional findings that are not central to the research questions included in Appendix 10). The main findings are then further discussed and analyzed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

4.1 The provision and uptake of modern foreign language subjects in secondary education

In terms of the provision of modern foreign language subjects at school this study found that in line with the review of current educational policy literature in Ireland in Chapter 2 French

was the most popular language, followed by German with considerably less provision of other languages amongst the general cohort of this study. Participant students were requested to report on the languages *selected by them* at school rather than to document all of the language options available to them for study. Thus, the uptake of particular languages for Junior Certificate Examinations (see Table Six below) and the uptake of particular languages towards Leaving Certificate Examinations (see Table Seven below) are presented. I have expressed the findings in terms of male/female participants. During the data entry phase I decided that although this study was not focussed on differentiating between male and female participants it may be useful for future further analysis of the data to express the findings in terms of gender of participants.

Considering the uptake of language subjects at secondary level for Junior Certificate examinations Table 6 (below) shows that French was the most frequently studied foreign language (68.9 per cent of the sample; 66.7 per cent of males, 70.1 per cent of females). English was the most studied of all languages (92.1 per cent of the sample; 95.1 per cent of males, 90.5 per cent of females) followed by Irish (87.3 per cent of the sample; 90.9 per cent of males, 85.3 per cent of females). In fact of modern foreign languages, the proportion of students reporting that they had sat examinations at the Junior Certificate level in French was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 248.25$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than it was for the next most frequently studied language, German (27.5 per cent of the sample; 23.5 per cent of males, 29.9 per cent of females). However, the proportion of the sample who reported having been examined at the Junior Certificate level in other modern foreign languages (Spanish or Italian) or an 'other' language, were negligible.

Table Six: Percentages of students' reporting that they had sat examinations in different languages at the Junior Certificate level.

Subject	*Studied*	*Males* (n = 264)	*Females* (n = 462)	*Total* (n = 726)
French	Yes	66.7	70.1	68.9
	No	33.3	29.9	31.1
German	Yes	23.5	29.9	27.5
	No	76.5	70.1	72.5
Spanish	Yes	1.9	1.9	1.9
	No	98.1	98.1	98.1
Italian	Yes	0.0	0.6	0.4
	No	100.0	99.4	99.6
Irish	Yes	90.9	85.3	87.3
	No	9.1	14.7	12.7
English	Yes	95.1	90.5	92.1
	No	4.9	9.5	7.9
Other	Yes	0.4	0.2	0.3
	No	99.6	99.8	99.7

From Table Seven (below), it can be seen that the most frequently cited modern foreign language that students were intending to be examined in at Leaving Certificate level was French (62.9 per cent of the sample; 56.4 per cent of males, 66.7 per cent of females); however, French was cited by a statistically significantly smaller proportion of the sample than existed for either English ($\chi^2 = 242.59$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) or Irish ($\chi^2 = 138.29$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$). Of all languages that the sample intended to sit examinations in at Leaving Certificate level English was most frequent (96.3 per cent of the sample; 96.1 per cent of males, 96.5 per cent of females); representing a statistically significantly greater total proportion than was the case for Irish (89.5 per cent of the sample; 91.5 per cent of males, 88.3 per cent of females) ($\chi^2 = 24.33$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$).

Table Seven: Percentages of students' reporting that they intended to sit examinations in different languages at the Leaving Certificate level.

Subject	*Intended to Study*	*Males* (n = 259)	*Females* (n = 453)	*Total* (n = 712)
French	Yes	56.4	66.7	62.9
	No	43.6	33.3	37.1
German	Yes	22.8	27.4	25.7
	No	77.2	72.6	74.3
Spanish	Yes	1.9	1.1	1.4
	No	98.1	98.9	98.6
Italian	Yes	0.0	0.4	0.3
	No	100.0	99.6	99.7
Irish	Yes	91.5	88.3	89.5
	No	8.5	11.7	10.5
English	Yes	96.1	96.5	96.3
	No	3.9	3.5	3.7
Other	Yes	1.9*	1.1**	1.4
	No	98.1	98.9	98.6

* = Comprises five males who reported that the intended to study unspecified 'other' languages. ** = Comprises four females, two of whom reported that they intended to study Russian, one of whom reported that she intended to study Romanian, and one of whom reported that she intended to study Japanese.

The findings of this study in terms of uptake of modern foreign language subjects at both Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle are largely in keeping with the national statistics issued by the Department of Education and Skills which have been discussed in Chapter 2 part 1 of this study. Further comparison of the findings of this study and the national statistics will be included in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5.

4.2 The retention of modern foreign language subjects in secondary education

The second question of this study focussed on the retention of modern foreign language subjects at school following completion of Junior Certificate examinations. Table Eight (below) documents data derived from the whole sample regarding students' reports of their reasons for discontinuing at Leaving Certificate level a modern foreign language they had studied at Junior Certificate level.

Table Eight: Percentages of students reporting their reasons for discontinuing at Leaving Certificate level a language they had sat an examination in at Junior Certificate level.				
Reason	*Applies or Not*	*Males* (n = 38)	*Females* (n = 8)	*Total* (n = 46)
I do not enjoy studying modern languages	Yes	57.9	37.5	54.3
	No	42.1	62.5	45.7
I have decided to study another modern language for the Leaving Certificate	Yes	0.0	0.0	0.0
	No	100.0	100.0	100.0
I do not need a modern language for my intended career / future studies	Yes	42.1	25.0	39.1
	No	57.9	75.0	60.9
*I have **other reasons** for not continuing to study a modern language*	Yes	13.2	37.5	17.4
	No	86.8	62.5	82.6

Table Eight (above) reveals that the most frequently cited reason for discontinuing a language studied at Junior Certificate level for the Leaving Certificate was not enjoying studying modern languages (54.3 per cent of such responses; 57.9 per cent of such responses by males, and 37.5 per cent of such responses by females). The proportion indicating this reason, i.e. a lack of enjoyment, was greater than the proportion who indicated the next most frequent reason, i.e. that they did not need a modern foreign language for their career or further studies (42.1 per cent of such responses by males, and 25.0 per cent of such responses by females), but *not* statistically significantly so ($\chi^2 = 2.13$ (1 df)), which was *not* greater than the critical value of χ^2 at the 'alpha' probability ($p < 0.05$) level of 3.84.

Other reasons for discontinuing a language studied at Junior Certificate level for the Leaving Certificate (17.4 per cent of such responses overall; 13.2 per cent of such responses by males, and 37.5 per cent of such responses by females) included the *timetabling of subject choices* for Leaving Certificate at their school (five mentions); not wanting to continue studying languages as they are *too difficult* (three mentions); being a Foundation Level student, and therefore *not being permitted* to study modern foreign languages (two mentions); and *not wanting to study two modern foreign languages* for the Leaving Certificate; opting for a different language as I *did not enjoy* French, and there being *too many verbs* (!) received one mention each.

Table Nine (below) documents data derived from the population sample who reported that they were *not* continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level regarding their particular subject choices in modern foreign languages at Junior Certificate level.

Table Nine: Percentages of students who reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level reporting that they had studied different languages at the Junior Certificate level.

Subject	*Studied*	*Males* (n = 48)	*Females* (n = 29)	*Total* (n = 77)
French	Yes	54.2	48.3	51.9
	No	45.8	51.7	48.1
German	Yes	8.3	37.9	19.5
	No	91.7	62.1	80.5
Spanish	Yes	2.1	0	1.3
	No	97.9	100.0	98.7
Italian	Yes	0	3.4	1.3
	No	100.0	96.6	98.7
Irish	Yes	97.9	62.1	84.4
	No	2.1	37.9	15.6
English	Yes	93.8	65.5	83.1
	No	6.2	34.5	16.9
Other	Yes	0	0	0
	No	100.0	100.0	100.0

From Table Nine (above), it may be seen that the most frequently studied modern foreign language at the Junior Certificate level by those who were *not* continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level was French (51.9 per cent of the sample; 54.2 per cent of males, 48.3 per cent of females), a statistically significantly greater proportion ($\chi^2 = 17.67$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than, and followed by, German (19.5 per cent of the sample; 8.3 per cent of males, 37.9 per cent of females). Again, English (83.1 per cent of the sample; 93.8 per cent of males, 65.5 per cent of females) and Irish (84.4 per cent of the sample; 97.9 per cent of males, 62.1 per cent of females) had been studied far more frequently at Junior Certificate level by those who were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level. These proportions were statistically significantly greater than for French, the best placed of the modern foreign languages ($\chi^2 = 42.06$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$, and $\chi^2 = 33.52$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$, for Irish and English respectively). Once again, the proportions of the sample who reported having studied other modern foreign languages (Spanish or Italian) or an 'other' language were negligible.

Trends relating to how different language subjects may be ranked in terms of popularity at the Junior Certificate level by students who were *not* continuing to study modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate reflected the findings for this study's cohort as a whole (see Table Six & Table Seven above). However, the study of a modern foreign language for

the Junior Certificate in itself was less frequent amongst those students who were not continuing to study modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate than it was in this study's cohort as a whole (see Table Six above) – for example, 51.9 per cent of those who were not continuing to study modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate had studied French for the Junior Certificate, compared to 68.9 per cent of this study's cohort as a whole. These incidence rates were 19.5 per cent versus 27.5 per cent; 83.1 per cent versus 92.1 per cent and 84.4 per cent versus 87.3 per cent for German, English and Irish respectively.

Table Ten (below) documents data derived from the whole sample regarding students' reports of their reasons for continuing at Leaving Certificate level a modern foreign language they had studied at Junior Certificate level. Table Ten (below) reveals that the most frequently cited reason for continuing a language studied at Junior Certificate level for the Leaving Certificate was the requirement of a modern language for university or college entry (68.2 per cent of such responses; 59.4 per cent of such responses by males, and 72.6 per cent of such responses by females).

Table Ten: Percentages of students reporting their reasons for continuing at Leaving Certificate level a modern foreign language they had studied at Junior Certificate level.

Reason	*Applies or Not*	*Males* (n = 202)	*Females* (n = 412)	*Total* (n = 614)
I enjoy studying modern languages	Yes	29.2	39.3	36.0
	No	70.8	60.7	64.0
Study a modern language for the Leaving Certificate is compulsory at my school	Yes	36.6	22.3	27.0
	No	63.4	77.7	73.0
I need to study a modern language for entry to college / university	Yes	59.4	72.6	68.2
	No	40.6	27.4	31.8
I need to study a modern language for my chosen career	Yes	15.3	14.1	14.5
	No	84.7	85.9	85.5
*I have **other reasons** for continuing to study a modern language*	Yes	2.5	4.6	3.9
	No	97.5	95.4	96.1

This proportion was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 127.93$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion who indicated the next most frequently cited reason for continuing a language – enjoying the subject (36.0 per cent of such responses overall; 29.2 per cent of such responses by males, and 39.3 per cent of such responses by females). Continuing a language because it was compulsory at school ((27.0 per cent of such responses overall; 36.6 per cent of such responses by males, and 22.3 per cent of such responses by females) or because a student felt

it was needed for his / her chosen career (14.5 per cent of such responses overall; 15.3 per cent of such responses by males, and 14.1 per cent of such responses by females) were less frequently cited reasons. Least frequently cited of all, *other* reasons for continuing a language at Leaving Certificate level (3.9 per cent of such responses overall; 2.5 per cent of such responses by males, and 4.6 per cent of such responses by females included *importance for travel and careers* (ten mentions); *liking the language* and wishing to study it in college, it being *good to have a language*, *wishing to live in France* one day, and hating French but *subject options* meaning that one had to study it (two mentions); having to do French as the student *would have no other languages as the student does not study Irish*, modern foreign languages being *compulsory* in one's school unless one has a learning disability, *wanting to learn Russian*, finding *languages easy to learn*, and *not wanting to study history* (one mention each). There were also two more lengthy explanations that are noteworthy: (i) '*My Dad encourages me that languages are important as I want to travel. I enjoy studying languages and I need it for college*', and, (ii) '*I do not want to be complacent and rely on speaking English just because I come from a country in which English is spoken*'.

Table Eleven (below) documents data derived from the whole sample regarding the languages that students indicated that they considered to be necessary for their futures. From Table Eleven it can be seen that in terms of the languages that students in the sample considered to be necessary for their futures, English came out on top, reported by a near-universal 95.9 per cent of the students in the sample (95.5 per cent of males, and 96.2 per cent of males). This proportion was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 335.95$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the second-placed Irish, where just over half (51.9 per cent overall; 44.7 per cent of males, and 55.3 per cent of females) reporting that it was a language that they considered to be necessary for their futures.

Table Eleven: Percentages of students indicating the languages that they consider to be necessary for their futures.

Language	*Males* (n = 199)	*Females* (n = 418)	*Total* (n = 617)
French	41.7	43.5	42.9
German	18.1	15.6	16.4
Spanish	15.6	9.1	11.2
Italian	4.5	3.3	3.7
Irish	44.7	55.3	51.9
English	95.5	96.2	95.9
Other	7.5	3.4	5.0

The proportions reporting that English and Irish were necessary for their futures was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 434.17$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$, and $\chi^2 = 9.83$ (1 df), $p < 0.01$, respectively) than that which existed for even the best placed of the modern foreign languages, French (reported by 42.9 per cent of students in the sample overall; 41.7 per cent of males, and 43.5 per cent of females). However, the proportion indicating that French was necessary for their futures was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 104.47$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion who indicated German was necessary for their futures (16.4 per cent of students in the sample overall; 18.1 per cent of males, and 15.6 per cent of females), Spanish was necessary for their futures (reported by 11.2 per cent of students in the sample overall; 15.6 per cent of males, and 9.1 per cent of females), and finally Italian (reported by 3.7 per cent of students in the sample overall; 4.5 per cent of males, and 3.3 per cent of females) although the proportion indicating Spanish as necessary was statistically significantly greater than that indicating Italian ($\chi^2 = 30.59$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$).

A relatively small proportion - 5.0 per cent of students in the sample overall (7.5 per cent of males, and 3.4 per cent of females) - selected an 'other' language as being necessary for their futures. Twelve 'other' languages were mentioned; these were *Arabic* (0.3 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females); *Afrikaans* (0.2 per cent of sample; 0.0 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females); *Chinese* (1.5 per cent of sample; 3.0 per cent of males, 0.7 per cent of females); *Dutch* (0.3 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females); *Finnish* (0.2 per cent of sample; 0.0 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females); *Flemish* (0.2 per cent of sample; 0.0 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females); *Greek* (0.2 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.0 per cent of females); *Japanese* (0.6 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.7 per cent of females); *Norwegian* (0.2 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.0 per cent of females); *Polish* (0.5 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.5 per cent of females); *Portuguese* (0.5 per cent of sample; 0.5 per cent of males, 0.5 per cent of females); and, *Russian* (0.3 per cent of sample; 1.0 per cent of males, 0.0 per cent of females).

The reasons why students indicated that certain languages would be necessary for their futures included *English and modern languages are interesting and necessary for my future career* (mentioned 159 times); *English is spoken in most countries and is our main language* (mentioned 127 times); *modern foreign languages are useful if travelling in the future* and *need to study languages to get into a third level course* (mentioned 111 times each); *I think a*

student should know their native language (Irish) (mentioned 95 times); *Irish is compulsory for membership of An Garda Síochana / Army/ Fire Services / teaching / law* (mentioned 69 times); *I do not think I will need the modern foreign language or Irish in the future* (mentioned 50 times); *need languages to work abroad* (mentioned 33 times); *languages increase job prospects* (mentioned 12 times); *everyone is learning English so there is no point in us learning other languages when everyone already understands us* (mentioned 11 times); *I like languages* (mentioned ten times); *I would like to learn Spanish as it is spoken in many places* and *I intend to live in an English-speaking country* (mentioned 8 times each); *I would like to speak Spanish in the future* (mentioned 7 times each); *English for travel, German important in the world of business,* and *I have to study MFL because I intend to live in the country* (mentioned five times each); *Chinese is very important for future as China is fast becoming a world superpower, good to have a third language,* and *having a high standard of English will definitely be beneficial* (mentioned four times each); *'I would like to live in Germany' and 'I am continuing the languages I studied for Junior Certificate'* (mentioned three times each); *'English because I'd like to teach it', German would be necessary for working abroad, 'I am an exchange student from Germany and live near the French border so French is also important', 'I hate modern foreign languages', 'I may be working with Polish people in the future and therefore it would be useful', 'I would like to study Italian in the future'* and *'English is widely spoken and is useful for travel and business communications'* (mentioned twice each); and, *'Arabic is my mother tongue', 'German for education', 'German for improving it with my German partner', 'I enjoy speaking Dutch', 'Irish and English are the languages that I use every day', 'I need German if I want to go to college and I think English and Irish are important to have', 'I need Irish to visit the Gaeltaecht', 'I want to study Japanese in College', 'I would like to learn Dutch', 'I would like to study Welsh for my own interest', 'online translations will replace the need for modern foreign languages', 'I am planning on going to a London Performing Arts College, so although I would like to know another language, it won't appeal to my future',* and, *'most likely I will be working with Irish people'* (mentioned once each).

In common with the findings of other studies undertaken in Ireland in recent years discussed in Chapter 2 part 1 of this study the uptake and retention of modern foreign language subjects is largely driven by the requirement of a modern foreign language for university matriculation. What is interesting in terms of the findings of this study is the extent to which this is the case amongst the population sample. Language diversity at school in terms of

uptake of particular foreign languages remains a challenge with French remaining as most popular language in terms of both provision and uptake of foreign language subjects. English is reported as the most important language for the future in addition to Irish and followed by the most popular modern foreign languages of French and German with Spanish, Italian and 'other' languages reported less frequently. These findings and what we may infer in terms of their significance in the future uptake of modern foreign language subjects at school in Ireland will be further analyzed in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5 of this study.

4.3 Grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects

The next question of this study determined grade achievement in modern foreign language subjects at secondary level in terms of reported grades achieved at Junior Certificate level in language subjects and grades 'aimed for' at Leaving Certificate level. We will recall that the population sample is comprised of Transition Year and 5th Year students i.e. those who have completed Junior Certificate examinations and are currently studying towards Leaving Certificate examinations.

4.3.1 Grade achievement at Junior Certificate Examinations

From Table Twelve (below), and in terms of the very highest grades, it can be seen that although 10.3 per cent of those who studied higher level Irish, 11.2 per cent of those who studied ordinary level English, and 10.7 per cent of those who studied higher level English reported achieving a grade 'A' in their Junior Certificate examination, this was true of just 9.2 per cent of those who had studied French and 6.9 per cent of those who had studied German (with French and German being the most frequently studied modern foreign languages amongst the sample for the Junior Certificate (see Table Six above). This situation is broadly in line with the national statistics for grade achievement in modern foreign languages (see Chapter 2, part 1) which will be further analyzed and discussed in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5.

Table Twelve: Percentages of grades attained as reported by those students who reported having sat examinations in different languages at the Junior Certificate level (n = 702; males = 255, females = 447).

	Gender	*Studied subject*	*A*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*Unspecified*
French	Males	63.9	14.7	28.8	34.4	17.8	1.8	0.0	2.4
	Females	70.7	6.3	26.6	43.4	19.0	2.2	0.3	2.2
	Total	68.2	9.2	27.3	40.3	18.6	2.1	0.2	2.3
German	Males	23.5	6.7	43.3	28.3	13.3	5.0	1.7	1.7
	Females	28.6	7.0	33.6	26.6	27.3	3.9	0.0	1.6
	Total	26.8	6.9	36.7	27.1	22.9	4.3	0.5	1.6
Spanish	Males	1.6	25.0	25.0	0.0	25.0	25.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	1.3	33.3	0.0	16.7	16.7	33.3	0.0	0.0
	Total	1.4	30.0	10.0	10.0	20.0	30	0.0	0.0
Italian	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	0.2	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.1	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Irish (Ordinary)	Males	46.3	5.1	33.0	33.0	10.2	3.4	0.0	15.3
	Females	32.9	4.8	42.2	25.2	8.8	1.4	0.7	17.0
	Total	37.7	4.9	38.1	28.7	9.4	2.3	0.4	16.2
Irish (Higher)	Males	46.4	14.3	24.4	29.4	21.0	1.7	0.0	9.2
	Females	58.4	8.4	30.3	36.4	17.6	1.5	0.4	5.4
	Total	54.1	10.3	28.4	34.2	18.7	1.6	0.3	6.6
English (Ordinary)	Males	25.5	9.2	36.9	26.2	4.6	1.5	0.0	21.5
	Females	15.4	13.0	24.6	37.6	1.4	0.0	0.0	23.2
	Total	19.1	11.2	30.6	32.1	3.0	0.7	0.0	22.4
English (Higher)	Males	70.2	6.7	26.8	38.0	17.9	1.1	0.0	9.5
	Females	80.7	12.6	37.5	33.4	7.9	0.0	0.0	8.5
	Total	77.5	10.7	34.0	34.9	11.2	0.4	0.0	8.8
Other	Males	0.4	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	0.2	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.3	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table Thirteen (below) documents the results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of their intentions to study French and German at Leaving Certificate level. It was seen above (in Table Six) that the proportion of the sample who had sat examinations at the Junior Certificate level in French was statistically significantly greater than those who had sat Junior Certificate examinations in German. Table Thirteen (below) shows that this held true for the sample's expression of intentions to sit examinations in the two languages at the Leaving Certificate level, with 62.8 per cent indicating that they intended to undertake Leaving Certificate French, but just 25.6 per cent indicating that they intended to undertake Leaving Certificate German ($\chi^2 = 196.05$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$). It may

also be seen from Table Twelve (above) that the higher the grade (from grade 'A' down to grade 'E') that one has reported one has achieved in French, and, with one exception (the outlying 'B' grade), in German, at the Junior Certificate level, the more likely one is to continue the study of that language at the Leaving Certificate level. However, the likelihood of 'crossing over' in one's modern foreign language studies – that is, having studied French for the Junior Certificate, and subsequently studying German for the Leaving Certificate, or vice versa – seems unpredictable by reference to grade attained at the Junior Certificate. Indeed, the chief finding regarding 'crossing over' is how statistically infrequent it is – raising the question as to how frequent (or infrequent) studying both French and German simultaneously is at the Leaving Certificate level, even for the most capable (by reported Junior Certificate grades) language students. The prime example would seem to be the finding that not a single student who reported attaining a grade '*A*' in Junior Certificate German reported that they were studying French for the Leaving Certificate, and vice versa.

Table Thirteen: Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in examinations in French and German at Junior Certificate level and their reported intentions to sit examinations in French and German at Leaving Certificate level

Junior Certificate Subject	*Reported grade attained in Junior Certificate*	*Intend to Study French at Leaving Certificate Level*		*Intend to Study German at Leaving Certificate Level*	
		Yes (n = 439)	No (n = 260)	Yes (n = 179)	No (n = 520)
French	*Did not study subject*	4.5	95.5	76.6	23.4
	A	97.7	2.3	0	100.0
	B	91.6	8.4	2.3	97.7
	C	90.6	9.4	2.1	97.9
	D	83.0	17.0	1.1	98.9
	E	80.0	20.0	10.0	90.0
	F	100.0	0	0	100.0
	Unspecified	90.9	9.1	0	100.0
German	*Did not study subject*	84.7	15.3	0.6	99.4
	A	0	100.0	100.0	0
	B	2.9	97.1	92.8	7.2
	C	0	100.0	98.0	2.0
	D	9.3	90.7	90.7	9.3
	E	0	100.0	87.5	12.5
	F	0	100.0	0	100.0
	Unspecified	0	100.0	100.0	0

4.3.2 Grade expectation/anticipation at Leaving Certificate examinations

Tables Fourteen (a) and Fourteen (b) (below) together document students aims (in terms of grades) for language subject choices in the Leaving Certificate examination. If for the present we concern ourselves with the highest grades that are aimed for in the most frequently studied modern foreign languages subjects – that is to say, those aiming for an 'A' grade in Higher Level French and German – the data of Table Fourteen (a) may be profitably compared with that of Table Twelve (the results that the students reported they had obtained in the Junior Certificate examination). For example, 34.0 per cent (36.9 per cent of males, and 32.8 per cent of females) of the students who are sitting Higher Level French for the Leaving Certificate examination are aiming for some sort of an 'A' – be that an 'A1', 'A2', 'A3' or unspecified 'A' grade. However, just 9.2 per cent of the students in this sample (14.7 of males, and 6.3 per cent of females), a statistically significantly smaller total proportion ($\chi^2 = 79.63$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) who had studied French for the Junior Certificate achieved a grade 'A'. Similarly, 25.5 per cent (25.0 per cent of males, and 25.9 per cent of females) of the students who are sitting Higher Level German for the Leaving Certificate examination are aiming for some sort of an 'A', and again, just 6.9 per cent of the students in this sample (6.7 of males, and 7.0 per cent of females), a statistically significantly smaller proportion ($\chi^2 = 15.55$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) who had studied German for the Junior Certificate achieved a grade 'A'.

Furthermore, even a quick comparison of the data displayed in Table Fourteen (a) (the proportion of students reporting aiming for grade 'A's and 'B's in language subjects in the Leaving Certificate examination) and Table Fourteen (b) (the proportion of students reporting aiming for grade 'C's and below, or 'unspecified') show that the majority of students are, in fact, aiming high. In terms of '*other*' languages, five students reported '*Japanese*', two '*Arabic*', and one each '*Portuguese*' and '*Foundation Level Irish*'.

Again, to continue with the most frequently studied modern foreign languages (French and German) – of those studying Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate French, 74.8 per cent reported aiming for 'A' or 'B' grades (see Table Fourteen (a), above), 12.6 per cent reported aiming for grade 'C' or below', and a further 12.6 per cent did not specify (see Table Fourteen (b), above). Of those studying Higher Level Leaving Certificate French, 79.0 per cent reported aiming for 'A' or 'B' grades (see Table Fourteen (a), above), 17.2 per cent

reported aiming for grade 'C' or below', and a further 3.8 per cent did not specify (see Table Fourteen (b), above). Yet the data of Table Twelve (above) indicates that in the Junior Certificate French examination, just 36.5 per cent of the students in the sample recorded achieving a grade 'A' or 'B', 61.2 per cent reported having achieved a grade 'C' or below', with a further 2.3 per cent not specifying the grade they achieved.

Of those studying Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate German, 71.1 per cent reported aiming for 'A' or 'B' grades (see Table Fourteen (a), above), 17.0 per cent reported aiming for grade 'C' or below', and a further 11.9 per cent did not specify (see Table Fourteen (b), above). Of those studying Higher Level Leaving Certificate German, 77.5 per cent reported aiming for 'A' or 'B' grades (see Table Fourteen (a), above), 17.5 per cent reported aiming for grade 'C' or below', and a further 5.0 per cent did not specify (see Table Fourteen (b), above). Again, the data of Table Twelve (above) indicates that in the Junior Certificate German examination, just 43.6 per cent of the students in the sample recorded achieving a grade 'A' or 'B', 54.8 per cent reported having achieved a grade 'C' or below', with a further 1.6 per cent not specifying the grade they achieved.

Table Fourteen (a): Percentages of students aiming for different grades by those intending to sit examinations in different languages at the Leaving Certificate level (n = 704; males = 258, females = 446).

Subject	*Gender*	*Will study*	*A (U/S)*	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*B (U/S)*	*B1*	*B2*	*B3*
French (Ordinary)	Males	11.6	10.0	3.3	0.0	6.7	36.7	10.0	0.0	3.3
	Females	16.4	15.1	5.5	1.4	2.7	37.0	9.6	4.1	1.4
	Total	14.6	13.6	4.9	1.0	3.9	36.9	9.7	2.9	1.9
French (Higher)	Males	44.2	15.8	16.7	3.5	0.9	23.7	15.8	3.5	6.1
	Females	50.4	13.8	11.1	7.6	0.0	21.3	11.6	5.3	4.9
	Total	48.2	14.5	13.0	6.2	0.3	22.1	13.0	4.7	5.3
German (Ordinary)	Males	8.5	18.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.7	22.7	4.5	0.0
	Females	8.3	18.9	2.7	10.8	0.0	21.6	13.5	0.0	5.4
	Total	8.4	18.6	1.7	6.8	0.0	22.0	16.9	1.7	3.4
German (Higher)	Males	13.9	13.9	8.3	2.8	0.0	25.0	22.2	8.3	5.6
	Females	19.1	9.4	11.8	3.5	1.2	15.3	20.0	8.2	4.7
	Total	17.2	10.7	10.7	3.3	0.8	18.2	20.7	8.3	5.0
Spanish (Ordinary)	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	0.7	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.4	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0
Spanish (Higher)	Males	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3	33.3	0.0	0.0
	Females	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	50.0	0.0	0.0
Italian	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

(Ordinary)	Females	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Italian (Higher)	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	0.4	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.3	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Irish (Ordinary)	Males	47.7	18.7	8.1	3.3	0.0	24.4	13.0	2.4	1.6
	Females	34.1	17.8	6.6	5.9	1.3	34.2	10.5	1.3	1.3
	Total	39.1	18.2	7.3	4.7	0.7	29.8	11.6	1.8	1.4
Irish (Higher)	Males	40.7	11.4	12.4	10.5	2.9	20.9	12.4	3.8	1.9
	Females	52.9	12.7	10.6	3.8	3.0	25.0	10.6	7.6	3.8
	Total	48.4	12.3	11.1	5.9	2.9	23.7	11.1	6.4	3.2
English (Ordinary)	Males	27.9	20.8	5.5	4.2	1.4	31.9	8.3	1.4	1.4
	Females	16.4	26.0	10.9	2.7	2.7	23.3	9.6	2.7	0.0
	Total	20.6	23.4	8.3	3.4	2.1	27.6	9.0	2.1	0.7
English (Higher)	Males	65.5	14.8	14.8	2.9	1.2	26.6	13.6	3.6	2.4
	Females	78.5	16.3	11.1	5.7	1.1	26.6	12.3	5.1	2.9
	Total	73.7	15.8	12.3	4.8	1.1	26.6	12.7	4.6	2.7
Other (Ordinary)	Males	0.4	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.1	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other (Higher)	Males	1.9	80.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Females	1.1	20.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	1.4	50.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table Fourteen (b): Percentages of students aiming for different grades by those intending to sit examinations in different languages at the Leaving Certificate level (n = 704; males = 258, females = 446) (cont'd).

Subject	*Gender*	*Will study*	*C (unspecified)*	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*D*	*E*	*Unspecified*
French Ordinary	Males	11.6	0.0	3.3	3.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	23.3
	Female	16.4	12.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.7	0.0	8.2
	Total	14.6	8.7	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.9	0.0	12.6
French (Higher)	Males	44.2	8.8	0.0	1.8	0.9	0.0	0.0	2.6
	Female	50.4	14.7	2.2	1.3	0.9	0.9	0.0	4.4
	Total	48.2	12.7	1.5	1.5	0.9	0.6	0.0	3.8
German Ordinary	Males	8.5	18.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.6
	Female	8.3	8.1	2.7	0.0	5.4	0.0	0.0	10.8
	Total	8.4	11.9	1.7	0.0	3.4	0.0	0.0	11.9
German (Higher)	Males	13.9	11.1	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Female	19.1	11.8	1.2	2.4	1.2	2.4	0.0	7.1
	Total	17.2	11.6	1.7	1.7	0.8	1.7	0.0	5.0
Spanish Ordinary	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Female	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Spanish (Higher)	Males	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.3
	Female	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0

Italian Ordinary	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Italian (Higher)	Males	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Female	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Irish Ordinary	Males	47.7	11.4	4.9	0.8	0.0	1.6	0.8	0.0
	Female	34.1	8.6	1.3	2.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0
	Total	39.1	9.8	2.9	1.4	0.0	1.4	0.4	0.0
Irish (Higher)	Males	40.7	12.4	1.9	0.9	0.9	3.8	0.0	3.8
	Female	52.9	9.7	4.2	1.7	2.1	1.3	0.0	3.8
	Total	48.4	10.6	3.5	1.5	1.8	2.1	0.0	3.8
English Ordinary	Males	27.9	6.9	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.7
	Female	16.4	6.8	0	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	13.7
	Total	20.6	6.9	0.7	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.2
English (Higher)	Males	65.5	7.7	5.3	2.4	0.0	0.6	0.0	4.1
	Female	78.5	10.3	2.0	0.6	0.6	0.3	0.0	5.1
	Total	73.7	9.4	3.1	1.2	0.4	0.4	0.0	4.8
Other Ordinary	Males	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other (Higher)	Males	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Female	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0
	Total	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0

Tables Fourteen (c) to Fourteen (f) inclusive (see below) document the results of a series of four cross-tabulations of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of the grades they aim to achieve in (i) Leaving Certificate French, Ordinary level (Table Fourteen (c)); (ii) Leaving Certificate French, Higher level (Table Fourteen (d)); (iii) Leaving Certificate German, Ordinary level (Table Fourteen (e)); and, (iv) Leaving Certificate German, Higher level (Table Fourteen (f)).

Table Fourteen (c): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and the grades they aim to achieve in French at Leaving Certificate Level (Ordinary).

Reported grade attained at Junior Certificate Level French	*Grades aimed for in French at Leaving Certificate Level (Ordinary)*														
	Will not study this subj.	*A (unspec.)*	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*B (unspec.)*	*B1*	*B2*	*B3*	*C (unspec.)*	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*D*	*Unspec.*
Did not study subject (n = 221)	98.6	0	0	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0
A (n = 44)	97.7	0	2.3	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B (n = 130)	79.2	3.8	0	0	1.5	8.5	3.1	2.3	0.8	0	0.8	0	0	0	0
C (n = 191)	80.6	1.0	1.6	0.5	1.0	7.3	0	0	0.5	3.7	0	0	0	1.0	2.6
D (n = 87)	73.6	6.9	1.1	0	0	11.5	4.6	0	0	1.1	0	0	0	0	1.1
E (n = 10)	60.0	10.0	0	0	0	10.0	0	0	0	0	0	10.0	0	0	10.0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unspec. (n = 10)	30.0	0	0	0	0	10.0	10.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50

Table Fourteen (d): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and the grades they aim to achieve in French at Leaving Certificate Level (Higher).

Reported grade attained at Junior Certificate Level French	*Grades aimed for in French at Leaving Certificate Level (Higher)*														
	Will not study this subj.	*A (unsp.)*	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*B unsp.*	*B1*	*B2*	*B3*	*C unsp.*	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*D*	*Unsp.*
Did not study subject (n = 221)	96.8	0	0.5	0	0	0	1.8	0	0	0.5	0.5	0	0	0	0
A (n = 44)	4.5	15.9	50.0	13.6	0	4.5	6.8	2.3	0	0	0	2.3	0	0	0
B (n = 130)	29.2	19.2	6.9	5.4	0	16.4	7.7	4.6	3.8	3.1	0	0	0.8	0	2.3
C (n = 191)	28.8	6.8	5.2	1.6	0.5	20.4	12.0	4.2	5.2	11.1	0	1.0	0.5	0.5	2.1
D (n = 87)	42.5	4.6	1.1	4.6	0	11.5	3.4	0	3.4	18.4	4.6	2.3	1.1	0	2.3
E (n = 10)	60.0	0	0	0	0	20.0	0	0	0	10.0	0	0	0	0	10.0
F (n = 1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0
Unspec. (n = 10)	80.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20.0

Table Fourteen (e): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and the grades they aim to achieve in German at Leaving Certificate Level (Ordinary).

Reported grade attained at Junior Certificate Level German	*Grades aimed for in German at Leaving Certificate Level (Ordinary)*														
	Will not study this subject	*A (unspec.)*	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*B (unspec.)*	*B1*	*B2*	*B3*	*C (unspec.)*	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*D*	*Unspec.*
Did not study subject (n = 507)	99.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2
A (n = 13)	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B (n = 69)	72.5	5.8	0	4.3	0	7.2	5.8	0	1.4	1.4	0	0	0	0	1.4
C (n = 50)	68.0	8.0	2.0	0	0	4.0	8.0	0	2.0	4.0	2.0	0	0	0	2.0
D (n = 43)	67.4	7.0	0	2.3	0	9.3	4.7	0	0	4.7	0	0	2.3	0	2.3
E (n = 8)	25.0	0	0	0	0	25.0	0	12.5	0	12.5	0	0	12.5	0	12.5
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unspec. (n = 3)	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33.3	0	0	0	0	33.3

Table Fourteen (f): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and the grades they aim to achieve in German at Leaving Certificate Level (Higher).

Reported grade attained at Junior Certificate Level German	*Grades aimed for in German at Leaving Certificate Level (Higher)*														
	Will not study this subject	*A (unspec.)*	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*B (unspec.)*	*B1*	*B2*	*B3*	*C (unspec.)*	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*D*	*Unspec.*
Did not study subject (n = 507)	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
A (n = 13)	0	38.5	38.5	23.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
B (n = 69)	33.3	4.3	5.8	0	1.4	18.8	26.1	2.9	1.4	1.4	0	0	0	0	4.3
C (n = 50)	34.0	4.0	8.0	2.0	0	8.0	10.0	6.0	6.0	12.0	4.0	0	0	0	6.0
D (n = 43)	41.9	2.3	0	0	0	11.6	4.7	11.6	2.3	14.0	0	4.7	2.3	4.7	0
E (n = 8)	87.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12.5	0	0	0	0	0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unspec. (n = 3)	66.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0

From Tables Fourteen (c) and Fourteen (d) (above), it may be seen that very few of the students who reported attaining 'A' grades in modern foreign languages at the Junior Certificate level intended to study modern foreign languages at the Ordinary level for the

Leaving Certificate: 97.7 per cent of those who reported attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French reported that they *would not be* studying French at the Ordinary level for the Leaving Certificate, and 100 per cent of those who reported attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German reported that they *would not be* studying German at the Ordinary level for the Leaving Certificate. The grades aimed for in terms of Leaving Certificate grades amongst those who reported attaining 'A' grades in modern foreign languages at the Junior Certificate level were high: 79.5 per cent of those who reported attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French reported they were aiming for some sort of an 'A' (comprising the 'A unspecified', 'A1', 'A2' and 'A3' categories), and all of those who reported attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German reported they were aiming for some sort of an 'A'.

From Table Fifteen (below), it may be seen that in terms of the very highest grades, that although 6.2 per cent of those students who were not continuing to study modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate reported achieving a grade 'A' in their Junior Certificate higher level Irish examination, in no other gender or total category did incidences of reported 'A' grades exceed 5 per cent. The modal grades for this cohort in the most frequently studied modern foreign languages at the Junior Certificate level was 'C' (20.0 per cent; 13.6 per cent of males, and 33.3 per cent of females in French, and 16.2 per cent; 0 per cent of males, and 19.0 per cent of females in German (see Table Fifteen, below). However, this does not compare that unfavourably with the modal grades obtained by this study's entire cohort (see Table Twelve, above). For the sample as a whole, the modal grade reported at the Junior Certificate level was 'C' in French (40.3 per cent; 34.4 per cent of males, and 43.4 per cent of females), and 'B' in German (36.7 per cent; 43.3 per cent of males, and 33.6 per cent of females) (see Table Twelve, above).

Table Fifteen: Percentages of grades attained in different languages at the Junior Certificate level as reported by students who reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level (n = 65; males = 44, females = 21).

Subject	*Gender*	*Studied subject*	*Reported grade attained*						
			A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*Unspecified*
French	Males	50.0	4.5	11.4	13.6	18.2	2.3	0	0
	Females	57.1	4.8	4.8	33.3	14.3	0	0	0
	Total	52.3	4.6	9.2	20.0	16.9	1.5	0	0
German	Males	9.1	0	6.8	0	2.3	0	0	0
	Females	23.8	0	4.8	19.0	0	0	0	0
	Total	13.8	0	6.2	16.2	1.5	0	0	0
Spanish	Males	2.3	0	2.3	0	0	0	0	0
	Females	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	1.5	0	1.5	0	0	0	0	0
Italian	Males	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Females	4.8	4.8	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	1.5	1.5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Irish (Ordinary)	Males	68.2	4.5	20.5	25.0	9.1	4.5	0	4.5
	Females	57.1	0	23.8	23.8	4.8	0	0	4.8
	Total	64.6	3.1	21.5	24.6	7.7	3.1	0	4.6
Irish (Higher)	Males	31.8	4.5	6.8	4.5	9.1	4.5	0	2.3
	Females	38.1	9.5	4.8	23.8	0	0	0	0
	Total	33.8	6.2	6.2	10.8	6.2	3.1	0	1.5
English (Ordinary)	Males	52.3	6.8	22.7	15.9	2.3	2.3	0	2.3
	Females	23.8	0	4.8	14.3	0	0	0	4.8
	Total	43.1	4.6	16.9	15.4	1.5	1.5	0	3.1
English (Higher)	Males	47.7	2.3	9.1	25.0	4.5	2.3	0	4.5
	Females	76.2	4.8	38.1	28.6	0	0	0	4.8
	Total	56.9	3.1	18.5	26.2	3.1	1.5	0	4.6
Other	Males	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Females	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Tables Sixteen (a) and Sixteen (b) (below) document the results of a pair of cross-tabulations of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and their reasons for continuing to study French at Leaving Certificate level (Table Sixteen (a)), and the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in German and their reasons for continuing to study German at Leaving Certificate level (Table Sixteen (b)).

Table Sixteen (a): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reasons for continuing French at Leaving Certificate level.

Reason	*Reported grade attained at Junior Certificate Level French*								
	Applies or not	*Did not study subject (n= 178)*	*A (n = 41)*	*B (n = 121)*	*C (n = 169)*	*D (n = 73)*	*E (n = 9)*	*F (n = 1)*	*Unspec (n = 9)*
I enjoy studying modern languages	Yes	29.2	58.5	50.4	34.3	12.3	44.4	100.0	44.4
	No	70.8	41.5	49.6	65.7	87.7	55.6	0	55.6
Studying a modern language for Leaving Cert is compulsory at my school	Yes	25.3	46.3	28.1	23.1	24.7	11.1	0	44.4
	No	74.7	53.7	71.9	76.9	75.3	88.9	100.0	55.6
I need to study a modern language for entry to college / university	Yes	73.0	65.9	66.1	64.5	75.3	66.7	0	66.7
	No	27.0	34.1	33.9	35.5	24.7	33.3	100.0	33.3
I need to study a modern language for my chosen career	Yes	12.9	9.8	14.0	16.0	13.7	22.2	0	0
	No	87.1	90.2	86.0	84.0	86.3	77.8	100.0	100.0
*I have **other reasons** for continuing to study a modern language*	Yes	5.6	7.3	2.5	3.6	2.7	0	0	0
	No	94.4	92.7	97.5	96.4	97.3	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table Sixteen (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reasons for continuing German at Leaving Certificate level.

Reason	*Reported grade attained at Junior Certificate Level French*								
	Applies or not	*Did not study subject (n= 426)*	*A (n = 13)*	*B (n = 65)*	*C (n = 47)*	*D (n = 40)*	*E (n = 6)*	*F (n = 1)*	*Unspec (n = 3)*
I enjoy studying modern languages	Yes	36.2	61.5	40.0	34.0	20.0	0	0	33.3
	No	63.8	38.5	60.0	66.0	80.0	100.0	100.0	66.7
Studying a modern language for Leaving Cert is compulsory at my school	Yes	27.2	38.5	30.8	19.1	22.5	16.7	0	0
	No	72.8	61.5	69.2	80.9	77.5	83.3	100.0	100.0
I need to study a modern language for entry to college / university	Yes	67.6	92.3	66.2	76.6	70.0	66.7	0	66.7
	No	32.4	7.7	33.8	23.4	30.0	33.3	100.0	33.3
I need to study a modern language for my chosen career	Yes	14.1	23.1	13.8	10.6	12.5	16.7	0	0
	No	85.9	76.9	86.2	89.4	87.5	83.3	100.0	100.0
*I have **other reasons** for continuing to study a modern language*	Yes	3.1	7.7	4.6	4.3	10.0	0	100.0	0
	No	96.9	92.3	95.4	95.7	90.0	100.0	0	100.0

From Tables Sixteen (a) and Sixteen (b) (above), it may be seen that the reasons why students reported that they were continuing to study a modern foreign language at the Leaving Certificate level differed according to grade in some cases. It may be recalled (see Table

Twelve, above) that when all reported Junior Certificate grades are included, the most frequently cited reason for continuing a language for the Leaving Certificate was the requirement of a modern language for university or college entry (68.2 per cent of such responses), followed by enjoying the subject (36.0 per cent of such responses). When reported Junior Certificate grades are taken into account (see Tables Sixteen (a) and Sixteen (b), above), these two factors remain the most frequently cited (for example, by 65.9 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French and 92.3 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German, and 58.5 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French and 61.5 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German, respectively). However, whereas the proportion of students reporting that they are continuing to study a modern foreign language for the Leaving Certificate because they enjoy studying modern foreign languages falls step-by-step with descending grades (from 58.5 per cent of those reporting 'A's in Junior Certificate French, to 12.3 per cent of those with 'D's; and from 61.5 per cent of those reporting 'A's in Junior Certificate German, to 20.0 per cent of those with 'D's), no such grade-related pattern is discernible when reports of continuing a language for reasons of university or college entry is examined.

Table Seventeen (below) documents the results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether they indicated that they considered the French and German languages to be necessary for their futures.

Table Seventeen: Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate level and their reports of whether they indicated that they considered the French and German languages to be necessary for their futures.

Junior Certificate Subject Studied	*Reported grade attained in Junior Certificate*	*Indicated that French was necessary for their futures or not*		*Indicated that German was necessary for their futures or not*	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
French	*Did not study subject* (n = 188)	8.5	91.5	41.5	58.5
	A (n = 41)	73.2	26.8	4.9	95.1
	B (n = 124)	66.1	33.9	6.5	93.5
	C (n = 168)	54.2	45.8	3.6	96.4
	D (n = 68)	42.6	57.4	1.5	98.5
	E (n = 9)	55.6	44.4	11.1	88.9
	F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	100.0
	Unspecified (n = 7)	57.1	42.9	14.3	85.7
German	Did not study subject (n = 424)	56.0	44.0	4.0	96.0
	A (n = 13)	15.4	84.6	69.2	30.8
	B (n = 64)	12.5	87.5	50.0	50.0
	C (n = 46)	4.3	85.7	47.8	52.2
	D (n = 39)	9.8	90.2	34.1	65.9
	E (n = 8)	12.5	87.5	12.5	87.5
	F (n = 1)	0	100.0	0	100.0
	Unspecified (n = 3)	0	100.0	66.7	33.3

From Table Seventeen (above), it may be seen that the students indicated that the higher the grade (from grade 'A' down to grade 'D' in French, and from 'A' down to 'F' in German, that one reports one has obtained at the Junior Certificate level, the more likely one is to report considering that language to be necessary for one's future. The proportion of students 'crossing over' in their consideration that a modern foreign language other than the one they studied for the Junior Certificate was necessary to their futures was negligible (see Tables Twelve and Seventeen above). Further analyses of these findings is included in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5.

4.4 What consideration is given at member state level to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school?

In terms of measuring the consideration towards promoting fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning in education students' reports on their physical classroom environment and individual school policies supporting effective foreign language study were examined. Thus, tables Eighteen to Twenty-one inclusively (below) document data derived from the student sample regarding the physical aspects of their modern foreign language studies in the classroom and at school – class sizes (i.e. student numbers) in their modern foreign language classes (Table Eighteen), number of modern foreign language classes they have per week (Table Nineteen), the duration of their modern foreign language classes (Table Twenty), and their feelings of whether the duration of their modern foreign language classes is sufficient or not (Tables Twenty-one (a) and Twenty-one (b)).

Table Eighteen: Percentages of students reporting numbers of students in their modern foreign languages classes (n = 633).

Numbers of students in the class	*Males* (n = 208)	*Females* (n = 425)	*Total* (n = 633)
1 – 10	1.4	9.9	7.1
11 – 15	12.5	12.0	12.2
16 – 20	15.9	20.5	19.0
21 – 25	52.9	38.6	43.3
26 – 30	17.3	19.1	18.5

Table Nineteen: Percentages of students reporting numbers of modern foreign languages classes they have per week.

Number of classes per week	*Males* (n = 206)	*Females* (n = 426)	*Total* (n = 632)
2	8.3	6.3	7.0
3	13.6	19.5	17.6
4	52.9	34.3	40.3
5	9.2	13.4	12.0
6	16.0	26.5	23.1

Table Twenty: Percentages of students reporting the duration in minutes of their modern foreign languages classes.

Duration	*Males* (n = 208)	*Females* (n = 427)	*Total* (n = 635)
35 minutes	33.2	30.0	31.0
40 minutes	31.7	68.1	56.1
45 minutes	35.1	1.9	12.8

Table Twenty-one (a): Percentages of students reporting whether they feel that the duration of their modern foreign languages classes is sufficient or not.

Sufficient or not	*Males* (n = 207)	*Females* (n = 427)	*Total* (n = 634)
Yes	94.7	93.9	94.2
No	5.3	6.1	5.8

Table Twenty-one (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of whether they feel that the duration of their modern language classes is sufficient or not.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Yes*	*No*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 186)	93.5	6.5	Did not study subject (n = 445)	94.8	5.2
A (n = 41)	97.6	2.4	A (n = 13)	92.3	7.7
B (n = 124)	93.5	6.5	B (n = 64)	95.3	4.7
C (n = 178)	94.9	5.1	C (n = 47)	93.7	6.3
D (n = 73)	95.9	4.1	D (n = 41)	90.2	9.8
E (n = 9)	88.9	11.1	E (n = 8)	87.5	12.5
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	100.0	0
Unspecified (n = 10)	100.0	0	Unspecified (n = 3)	100.0	0

It may be seen from Table Eighteen (above) that the class size for modern foreign languages classes most frequently reported by the students in the sample was 21 – 25 (43.3 per cent overall; 52.9 per cent of males, and 38.6 per cent of females), and that whilst just under one-fifth of students recorded being in larger classes (26 – 30 students) (18.5 per cent overall; 17.3 per cent of males, and 19.1 per cent of females), small classes (1 – 10 students) were very infrequently recorded (7.1 per cent overall; 1.4 per cent of males, and 9.9 per cent of females).

It may be seen from Table Nineteen (above) that the number of modern language classes per week most frequently reported by the students (by around two-fifths) in the sample was four (40.3 per cent overall; 52.9 per cent of males, and 34.3 per cent of females), and that whilst just over one-third of students recorded having five or six modern language classes per week (35.1 per cent overall; 25.2 per cent of males, and 39.9 per cent of females), having fewer than four modern language classes per week (two or three) was recorded by just under one-

quarter of the students (24.6 per cent overall; 21.9 per cent of males, and 25.8 per cent of females).

It may be seen from Table Twenty (above) that the duration of the modern language classes most frequently reported by the students (by over one-half) in the sample was forty minutes (56.1 per cent overall; 31.7 per cent of males, and 68.1 per cent of females). Thirty-five minute modern language classes were reported by 31.0 per cent overall (33.2 per cent of males, and 30.0 per cent of females) and, least frequently of all, forty-five minute modern language classes were reported by (12.8 per cent overall; 35.1 per cent of males, and 1.9 per cent of females).

Irrespective of the reported duration of the modern language classes (see Table Twenty and its accompanying text, above), Table Twenty-one (a) shows that the vast majority of the students in the sample believed that the duration of modern language classes was sufficient (94.2 per cent overall; 94.7 per cent of males, and 93.9 per cent of females). Table Twenty-one (b) (above) documents the results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether they feel that the duration of their modern language classes is sufficient or not.

From Table Twenty-one (b) (above), it may be seen that although the highest proportion of all who indicated that the duration of their modern foreign language classes was sufficient was observed amongst those who reported having attained an 'A' in Junior Certificate French (when the single individuals who reported Fails in French and German are discounted), and the lowest proportions were recorded amongst those who reported having attained 'E's in Junior Certificate French (88.9 per cent) and German (87.5 per cent), no clear grade-related patterns are discernible. The outstanding feature concerning this factor is that the majority of students reported that they find the duration of their modern foreign language classes to be sufficient – as we have already seen, this amounted to 94.2 per cent of the sample as a whole (94.7 per cent of males, and 93.9 per cent of females) (see Table Twenty-one (a), above).

Tables Twenty-Two (a) to Twenty-Two (c) (below) inclusively document sample data relating to the use of the languages in the modern language classroom - the language of

instruction (Table Twenty-Two (a)), whether students can follow the class or not when the modern language itself is being used for instruction or communication (Table Twenty-Two (b)), and the language used by students when conducting group work (Table Twenty-Two (c)).

Table Twenty-Two (a): Percentages of students reporting on the language of instruction / communication used most in their modern foreign languages classes.

Language	*Males* (n = 206)	*Females* (n = 422)	*Total* (n = 628)
The modern language	26.7	31.8	30.1
English	66.5	61.1	62.9
Irish	1.9	1.4	1.6

Table Twenty-Two (b): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they can follow the class when the modern foreign language is being used for instruction / communication.

Can follow?	*Males* (n = 204)	*Females* (n = 420)	*Total* (n = 624)
Sometimes	41.2	43.8	42.9
Most of the time	46.1	46.7	46.5
Always	12.7	8.6	9.9
Never	0.0	1.0	0.6

Table Twenty-Two (c): Percentages of students reporting on the language used by the students when group work is being conducted in their modern foreign language classes.

Language	*Males* (n = 204)	*Females* (n = 422)	*Total* (n = 626)
The modern language	14.2	9.7	11.2
English	81.9	84.4	83.5
Irish	0.0	0.5	0.3
English and the modern language	2.9	5.0	4.3
English and Irish	1.0	0.5	0.6

It can be seen from Table Twenty-Two (a) that the language of instruction and communication that the majority of students in the sample (over three-fifths) report being used in modern languages classes is English (62.9 per cent overall; 66.5 per cent of males, and 61.1 per cent of females). This proportion was statistically significantly greater (χ^2 = 135.81 (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion reporting that the modern language itself was the language of instruction and communication in modern language classes (less than one-third; 30.1 per cent overall; 26.7 per cent of males, and 31.8 per cent of females). There was also a small proportion of students in the sample reporting that Irish was the language of

instruction and communication in modern language classes (1.6 per cent overall; 1.9 per cent of males, and 1.4 per cent of females). As none of the participating schools were Gaelscoileanna, this seems to be likely to be attributable to participant error – perhaps they referred to the use of the Irish language in Irish classes.

When the modern language itself is being used for instruction or communication, Table Twenty-Two (b) shows that the majority of students report they can follow the class either sometimes or most of the time (89.4 per cent overall; 87.3 per cent of males, 90.5 per cent of females); this is a statistically significantly greater proportion behalf ($\chi^2 = 788.54$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the 9.9 per cent of the sample overall (12.7 per cent of males, and 8.6 per cent of females) reported that they could 'always' follow the class when the modern language itself is being used for instruction or communication. The proportion who reported that they could 'never' follow the class in such circumstances was negligible (0.6 per cent of the sample overall; 0.0 per cent of males, and 1.0 per cent of females).

It can be seen from Table Twenty-Two (c) that the majority of students in the sample (over four-fifths) reported that the language that was used by students when conducting group work in the modern language class was English alone (83.5 per cent overall; 81.9 per cent of males, and 84.4 per cent of females). This proportion was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 657.45$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion reporting the next most frequently cited category, that is, that the modern foreign language was used by students when conducting group work in the modern language class (11.2 per cent overall for the modern language alone (14.2 per cent of males, and 9.7 per cent of females) with a further 4.3 per cent overall reporting a combination of the modern language with English in such circumstances (2.9 per cent of males, and 5.0 per cent of females). Once again, the proportion of students reporting that Irish was used by students when conducting group work in the modern language class was negligible (0.3 per cent overall for Irish alone (0.0 per cent of males, and 0.5 per cent of females) with a further 0.6 per cent overall reporting a combination of Irish and English in such circumstances (1.0 per cent of males, and 0.5 per cent of females). Again (see the accompanying text to Table Twenty-Three (a), above), as none of the participating schools were Gaelscoileanna, the use of the Irish language could either reflect an error made by the participants in confusing Irish classes with modern foreign languages classes, or the private use of the Irish language between students.

Tables Twenty-Two (d) to Twenty-Two (h) inclusive (below) document the results of a series of cross-tabulations regarding the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of various aspects concerning the languages that are used in undertaking classroom work in their modern foreign language classrooms. These comprise a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports on the language of instruction / communication used most often is their modern foreign languages classes (Table Twenty-Two (d)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports on the language of instruction / communication used most often is their modern foreign languages classes (Table Twenty-Two (e)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German and the students' reports of the extent to which they can follow the class when the modern foreign language is used as the language of instruction / communication in their modern foreign languages classes (Table Twenty-Two (f)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports of the languages used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern foreign language classes (Table Twenty-Two (g)); and finally, a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports of the languages used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern foreign language classes (Table Twenty-Two (h)).

Table Twenty-Two (d): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on the language of instruction / communication used most often in their modern foreign languages classes.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in French	*Language of instruction / communication in modern languages class*				
	The modern language	*English*	*Irish*	*English and the modern language*	*English, Irish and the modern language*
Did not study subject (n = 184)	35.3	57.6	1.1	4.9	1.1
A (n = 41)	31.7	61.0	0	4.9	2.4
B (n = 125)	27.2	68.8	0.8	3.2	0
C (n = 175)	31.2	59.5	2.9	5.2	1.2
D (n = 74)	20.3	73.0	1.4	5.4	0
E (n = 9)	11.1	88.9	0	0	0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	11.1	77.8	11.1	0	0

Table Twenty-Two (e): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on the language of instruction / communication used most often in their modern foreign languages classes.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in German	*Language of instruction / communication in modern languages class*				
	The modern language	*English*	*Irish*	*English and the modern language*	*English, Irish and the modern language*
Did not study subject (n = 440)	27.7	65.2	1.8	4.3	0.9
A (n = 13)	46.2	46.2	0	7.7	0
B (n = 64)	29.7	60.9	3.1	6.2	0
C (n = 47)	36.2	59.6	0	2.1	2.1
D (n = 40)	42.5	52.5	0	5.0	0
E (n = 8)	25.0	75.0	0	0	0
F (n = 1)	0	100.0	0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 3)	33.3	33.3	0	33.3	0

Table Twenty-Two(f): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on whether they can follow the class when the modern foreign language is being used for instruction / communication.

French					*German*				
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Can follow class*				*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Can follow class*			
	Sometimes	*Most of the time*	*Always*	*Never*		*Sometimes*	*Most of the time*	*Always*	*Never*
Did not study subject (n = 183)	44.8	45.9	7.7	1.6	Did not study subject (n = 438)	44.3	45.0	10.0	0.7
A (n = 41)	7.3	56.1	36.6	0	A (n = 13)	15.4	61.5	23.1	0
B (n = 124)	37.1	58.0	11.3	0.8	B (n = 64)	35.9	53.1	10.9	0
C (n = 173)	44.5	47.4	8.1	0	C (n = 47)	31.9	61.7	6.4	0
D (n = 73)	60.3	37.0	2.7	0	D (n = 40)	67.5	27.5	5.0	0
E (n = 9)	66.7	33.3	0	0	E (n = 7)	42.9	57.1	0	0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	0	F (n = 1)	0	100.0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	55.6	44.4	0	0	Unspecified (n = 3)	0	66.7	0	33.3

Table Twenty-Two (g): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of the language used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern foreign language class.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in French	*Language used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern language class*				
	The modern language	*English*	*Irish*	*English and the modern language*	*English and Irish*
Did not study subject (n = 183)	12.0	82.5	0.5	4.4	0.5
A (n = 41)	17.1	73.2	0	7.3	2.4
B (n = 125)	9.6	87.2	0	3.2	0
C (n = 173)	11.0	82.7	0.6	5.2	0.6
D (n = 73)	11.0	84.9	0	2.7	1.4
E (n = 9)	0	88.9	0	11.1	0
F (n = 1)	0	100.0	0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	0	100.0	0	0	0

Table Twenty-Two (h): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of the language used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern foreign language class.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in German	*Language used by the students when group work is being conducted in the modern language class*				
	The modern language	*English*	*Irish*	*English and the modern language*	*English and Irish*
Did not study subject (n = 440)	10.2	84.3	0.2	4.3	0.9
A (n = 12)	33.3	66.7	0	0	0
B (n = 64)	7.8	87.5	1.6	3.1	0
C (n = 47)	8.5	85.1	0	6.4	0
D (n = 40)	22.5	70.0	0	7.5	0
E (n = 7)	0	100.0	0	0	0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 3)	0	100.0	0	0	0

From Tables Twenty-Two (d) and Twenty-Two (e) above, it may be seen that the proportions of students who reported on the differing languages of instruction / communication used most often in their modern foreign languages classes did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level. From Tables Twenty-Two (f) above, it may be seen that there was a clear relationship between the proportions of students who reported that they could 'always' follow the class when the modern foreign language

was being used for instruction / communication and reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German. The highest proportions of reporting that this was the case were found in those who reported having attained grade 'A's (36.6 per cent in French, 23.2 per cent in German), with a step-by-step decline being observed in each language down to grades 'E' and 'F' (where no-one reported that this was true for them). The proportion of students in the sample as a whole who reported that they could 'always' follow the class when the modern foreign language was being used for instruction / communication was 9.9 per cent (see Table Twenty-Two (b), above); this was exceeded by those who reported having attained grades 'A' and 'B' in French and in German (36.6 per cent and 11.3 percent, and 23.1 and 10.9 per cent, respectively) (see Table Twenty-Two (f) above). From Tables Twenty-Two (g) and Twenty-Two (h) above, it may be seen that the proportions of students who reported on the different languages used by students when conducting group work in their modern foreign language classes did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level.

Tables Twenty-Three (a) to Twenty-Three (c) (below) inclusively document sample data relating to the reports by students of the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign language classroom.

Table Twenty-Three (a): Percentages of students reporting on the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign languages class.

Language	*Males* (n = 205)	*Females* (n = 424)	*Total* (n = 629)
The modern language	13.7	14.4	14.1
English	79.0	77.8	78.2
Irish	0.5	0.5	0.5
English and the modern language	6.3	6.6	6.5
English and Irish	0.5	0.2	0.3
English, Irish and the modern language	0.0	0.5	0.3

Table Twenty-Three (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign languages class.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in French	*Language used when asking questions in the modern language class*					
	The modern language	*English*	*Irish*	*English and the modern language*	*English and Irish*	*English, Irish and the modern language*
Did not study subject (n = 185)	18.9	73.0	1.1	5.4	0.5	1.1
A (n = 41)	9.8	87.8	0	2.4	0	0
B (n = 125)	12.8	83.2	0	4.0	0	0
C (n = 174)	11.5	78.2	0	9.8	0.6	0
D (n = 73)	13.7	79.5	1.4	5.5	0	0
E (n = 9)	11.1	88.9	0	0	0	0
F (n = 1)	0	0	0	100.0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	0	88.9	0	11.1	0	0

Table Twenty-Three (c): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign languages class.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in German	*Language used when asking questions in the modern language class*					
	The modern language	*English*	*Irish*	*English and the modern language*	*English and Irish*	*English, Irish and the modern language*
Did not study subject (n = 440)	12.5	80.0	0.2	6.8	0.5	0
A (n = 13)	15.4	76.9	0	7.7	0	0
B (n = 65)	10.8	76.9	3.1	7.7	0	1.5
C (n = 47)	27.7	70.2	0	2.1	0	0
D (n = 40)	20.0	77.5	0	0	0	2.5
E (n = 8)	0	87.5	0	12.5	0	0
F (n = 1)	0	100.0	0	0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 3)	33.3	33.3	0	33.3	0	0

Table Twenty-Three (a) shows that the majority of students in the sample (this time, just under four-fifths) reported that the language that was used by students when asking questions in the modern language class was English alone (78.2 per cent overall; 79.0 per cent of males, and 77.8 per cent of females). This proportion was statistically significantly greater (χ^2 = 519.43 (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion reporting the next most frequently cited

category, that is, the modern foreign language was used by students when asking questions in the modern language class (14.1 per cent overall for the modern language alone (13.7 per cent of males, and 14.4 per cent of females) with a further 6.5 per cent overall reporting a combination of the modern language with English in such circumstances (6.3 per cent of males, and 6.6 per cent of females). Once again, the proportion of students reporting that Irish was used by students when conducting group work in the modern language class was negligible (0.5 per cent overall for Irish alone (0.5 per cent of males, and 0.5 per cent of females) with a further 0.3 per cent overall reporting a combination of Irish and English (0.5 per cent of males, and 0.2 per cent of females), and a further 0.3 per cent overall reporting a combination of Irish, English and the modern foreign language (0.0 per cent of males, and 0.5 per cent of females) being used in such circumstances. Again, as none of the participating schools were Gaelscoileanna, this seems to be likely to be attributable to participant error – perhaps they referred to the use of the Irish language in Irish classes.

Tables Twenty-Three (b) and Twenty-Three (c) (above) document the results of a cross-tabulations of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports of the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign languages class (Table Twenty-Three (b) and a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports of the language they use when asking questions in the modern foreign languages class (Table Twenty-Three (c)). From Tables Twenty-Three (b) and Twenty-Three (c) above, it may be seen that the proportions of students who reported on the different languages they used when asking questions in their modern foreign language classes did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level.

Asked whether or not they considered their current modern foreign language skills to be sufficient to study or work abroad and keeping in mind that these students have completed Junior Certificate examinations and are preparing for Leaving Certificate examinations Table Twenty-Four (a) (below), reports that only around one-third of the students in the sample indicated that their current modern language skills would be sufficient to study or work where that language is spoken (reported by 33.1 per cent overall; 30.8 per cent of males, and 34.1 per cent of females). This proportion, added to the small proportion who were 'unsure' (0.2 per cent overall; 0.0 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females), was statistically significantly smaller ($\chi^2 = 136.89$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion of those who indicated that their

current modern language skills would not be sufficient to study or work where that language is spoken. Table Twenty-Four (b) (below) documents the results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether or not they consider their current modern language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken.

Table Twenty-Four (a): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they consider their current modern foreign language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken.

Current skills sufficient?	*Males* (n = 195)	*Females* (n = 413)	*Total* (n = 608)
Yes	30.8	34.1	33.1
No	69.2	65.6	66.8
Unsure	0.0	0.2	0.2

From Table Twenty-Four (b) (below), it may be seen that the proportion of students who reported whether or not they consider their current modern language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level.

Table Twenty-Four (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of whether or not they consider their current modern foreign language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Yes*	*No*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 183)	35.0	65.0	Did not study subject (n = 424)	31.6	68.4
A (n = 41)	29.3	70.7	A (n = 13)	38.5	61.5
B (n = 122)	27.9	72.1	B (n = 64)	45.3	54.7
C (n = 169)	33.1	66.9	C (n = 46)	32.6	67.4
D (n = 67)	32.8	67.2	D (n = 39)	23.1	76.9
E (n = 9)	22.2	77.8	E (n = 8)	25.0	75.0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	0	100.0
Unspecified (n = 6)	66.7	33.3	Unspecified (n = 3)	33.3	66.7

However, the proportion of students who indicated that they considered their current modern language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken exceeded the whole sample finding of 33.1 per cent in students who reported having attained grades 'A' or 'B' in Junior Certificate German (38.5 per cent and 45.3 per cent respectively), although this was not the case for students who reported attaining similar grades in Junior

Certificate French (29.3 per cent and 27.9 per cent respectively) (see Tables Twenty-Four (a) and Twenty-Four (b), above).

Other aspects of students communicative use and/or attempted communicative use of their modern foreign language are reported in the upcoming 'Language Learning Strategies' component of this study. It is however acknowledged that these findings on student participation in study-abroad programmes and extra-curricular language classes/programmes outside normal class time and in their local communities could equally have been included under the current '*development of fluency and proficiency*' strand.

4.5 Student Motivation in modern foreign language learning

In terms of attempting to measure likely levels of motivation in learning modern foreign languages a number of questions were set which requested students to report on their entire approach to the learning process. Analyses of student responses to these questionnaire items together with analyses of the pertinent literature on motivation (see Chapter 2 part 2) provides opportunities to make a number of inferences on student *approaches to* and *motivation in* learning in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5.

Hence, tables Twenty-Five (a) to Twenty-Five (c) inclusively document sample data relating to the setting of the level (i.e., 'Ordinary' or 'Higher') at which students will study their modern language for the Leaving Certificate examination – who set that level (Table Twenty-Five(a)), whether the students had discussed the level at which they would study the modern foreign language with the language teacher prior to it being set (Table Twenty-Five (b)), and whether they were happy or not with the level at which they were studying the modern foreign language for the Leaving Certificate examination (Table Twenty-Five (c)).

Table Twenty-Five (a): Percentages of students reporting on who set the level (i.e., Ordinary or Higher) at which they study modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate.

Who set the level?	*Males* (n = 210)	*Females* (n = 427)	*Total* (n = 627)
Myself	41.9	39.3	40.2
Parents	1.4	0.2	0.6
Teacher	12.9	5.4	7.8
Myself and my parents	15.2	8.7	10.8
Myself and my teacher	11.4	26.0	21.2
Myself, my parents and my teacher	17.1	20.4	19.3

Table Twenty-Five (b): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they discussed their level of study (i.e. Ordinary or Higher) with their modern foreign languages teacher before the level was assigned for the Leaving Certificate.			
Discussed?	*Males* (n = 207)	*Females* (n = 422)	*Total* (n = 629)
Yes	36.7	44.5	42.0
No	63.3	55.5	58.0

Table Twenty-Five (c): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they are happy with the level of study (i.e. Ordinary or Higher) they have been assigned for modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level.			
Happy with level?	*Males* (n = 206)	*Females* (n = 422)	*Total* (n = 628)
Yes	88.3	88.9	88.7
No	11.7	11.1	11.3

It can be seen from Table Twenty-Five (a) that most students who reported that they themselves had chosen the level at which they would study modern languages for the Leaving Certificate – 40.2 per cent (41.9 per cent of males, 39.3 per cent of females) reported having done this alone, with a further 10.8 per cent (15.2 per cent of males, 8.7 per cent of females) reporting that they had done so with their parents, a further 21.2 per cent (11.4 per cent of males, 26.0 per cent of females) reporting that they had done so with their teachers, and a further 19.3 per cent (17.1 per cent of males, 20.4 per cent of females) reporting that they had done so with their parents and their teachers.

Citing that teachers alone (7.8 per cent overall; 12.9 per cent of males, 5.4 per cent of females), or especially that parents alone had set the level (0.6 per cent overall; 1.4 per cent of males, 0.2 per cent of females) was far less frequent. All of this amounted to some 91.6 per cent of students reporting that they had chosen their level (in at least a combination with others); a statistically significantly greater proportion than the 8.4 per cent who reported that others had done so on their behalf ($\chi^2 = 865.64$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$).

However, Table Twenty-Five (b) shows that fewer than half of the students in the sample reported having discussed their level of study with their modern languages teacher before the level was assigned for the Leaving Certificate (42.0 per cent overall; 36.7 per cent of males, 44.5 per cent of females). Accordingly, Table Twenty-Five (c) shows that the overwhelming majority (almost nine-tenths) of the students in the sample reported being happy with the

level of study with which they have been assigned for the modern foreign language at the Leaving Certificate (88.7 per cent overall; 88.3 per cent of males, 88.9 per cent of females).

Tables Twenty-Six (a) and Twenty-Six (b) (below) document data derived from the students in the sample based on their own reports of which aspects of the modern foreign language classes they found to be most and least enjoyable respectively.

Table Twenty-Six (a): Numbers of students reporting on the parts of the modern foreign language class they find to be **most** enjoyable.

Parts of the class mentioned by the students	*Count*
Oral work	179
Listening AND aural work	144
Watching films / DVDs	107
Doing worksheets / exercises / projects / essays	85
Games	80
New topics / vocabulary / phrases	73
Doing group work / role-play	67
The learning experience	61
Reading comprehension	52
Understanding what is going on, and being able to speak the language easily	34
Quizzes	31
Writing stories / letters / poetry / postcards / diaries	28
Experiencing the language and the culture	26
Discussing the activities you are doing as a class	23
Going to the computer room for language work	20
Grammar, although the course is huge	20
Positive teacher-student communication	16
Writing	14

Table Twenty-Six (b): Numbers of students reporting on the parts of the modern foreign language class they find to be **least** enjoyable.

Parts of the class mentioned by the students	*Count*
Grammar	160
Listening AND aural work	120
Reading comprehensions	91
Tests	68
Oral work – speaking and pronunciation / reading aloud	61
Homework	57
Written work	55
Verbs	47
Vocabulary	40
When I can't understand or follow the language	36
When the teacher gives instructions in the modern foreign language and gets angry or frustrated when the students don't understand	19

Letters	18
Essays	18
The feeling that one does not have sufficient vocabulary for written work	17
When I can't do exercises	13
Note-taking	12

It is noteworthy that many of the categories that were mentioned in Table Twenty-Six (a) (above) (which is based on a content analysis of the students' responses, and includes response types that occurred more than ten times) as being the *most* enjoyable aspects of modern foreign language classes relate to non-writing language tasks (e.g., oral work (179 mentions), listening / aural work (144 mentions)), or specific (often, those which might be considered 'creative') classroom activities (e.g., watching films / DVDs (107 mentions), doing worksheets / exercises / projects / essays (85 mentions), games (80 mentions) and doing group work / role-play (67 mentions). Despite being cited amongst the least enjoyable aspects of modern foreign language classes (see Table Twenty-Six (b), below), at least some students mentioned that they enjoyed grammar (20 mentions, although note the qualification that 'the course is huge') and writing (14 mentions).

Outside of the Table Twenty-Six (a) (above), *other* things that were mentioned as being the most enjoyable parts of class time ten times or less frequently were '*verbs*' (mentioned ten times); '*picture stories*' (mentioned nine times); *'doing well in class and / or exams'* (mentioned six times); '*learning about culture'*, '*learning new topics'* and *'songs'* (mentioned five times each); *'pair work'*, *'working on past exam papers'*, and *'correcting homework'* (mentioned three times each); *'newspapers'*, *'questions'*, *'watching German films'*, *'using the language lab'*, and *'watching the Simpsons in French'* (mentioned twice each); *'when we are not doing anything and chatting'*, *'translating words and phrases'*, *'revision'*, *'role plays'*, *'people in the class'*, *'German Day – only speaking German in class'*, and *'brainstorming'* (mentioned once each). Finally, two students reported that, '*I do not enjoy anything about the class'*.

It is noteworthy that many of the things that were mentioned in Table Twenty-Six (b) (above) (which is based on a content analysis of the students' responses, and includes response types that occurred more than ten times) as being the *least* enjoyable aspects of modern foreign language classes relate to grammar (160 mentions, with a further 47 mentions for 'verbs'), listening / aural work (120 mentions – coincidentally, also the second most enjoyable aspect

of modern foreign language classes (see Table Twenty-Eight (a), above)), and assessments / written work (e.g., reading comprehensions (91 mentions), tests (68 mentions), homework (57 mentions) and written work (55 mentions)). Competence and teaching issues also arose (e.g., 'when I can't understand or follow the language' (36 mentions), 'when the teacher gives instructions in the modern foreign language and gets angry or frustrated when the students don't understand' (19 mentions), 'the feeling that one does not have sufficient vocabulary for written work (17 mentions), and 'when I can't do exercises' (13 mentions). Outside of Table Twenty-Six (b) (above), *other* things that were mentioned as being the least enjoyable parts of class time ten times or less frequently were *'group activities'* (mentioned ten times); *'I find learning the language hard and don't enjoy language study'* and *'when you learn about grammar it can be confusing'* (mentioned eight times each); *'working from the course book'* and *'it is a large group and a very noisy class - there is too much talking, so it's too distracting, and nobody cares about learning the modern foreign language well'* (mentioned seven times each); *'worksheets'* (mentioned five times); *'questions'*, *'getting in trouble'* and *'lack of opportunity to speak'* (mentioned three times each); *'when I fail'*, *'the other students in the class'*, *'too many films / DVDs'*, *'lack of variety in the curriculum'* and *'the stress of exams'* (mentioned twice each); and *'unhelpful grammar books'*, *'word order'*, *'picture stories'* and *'when the teacher constantly uses English'* (mentioned once each).

Table Twenty-Seven (a) (below) documents data from the student sample relating to their reports of whether or not a library exists at school which is available for them to use.

Table Twenty-Seven (a): Percentages of students reporting whether they have a library at school that is available for them to use.

Library available	*Males* (n = 205)	*Females* (n = 421)	*Total* (n = 626)
Yes	52.2	72.4	65.8
No	47.8	27.6	34.2

It may be seen from Table Twenty-Seven (a) (above) that around two-thirds (65.8 per cent) of the total sample – almost three-quarters of females (72.4 per cent), but, curiously, only just over one-half of males (52.2 per cent) reported that there was a library at their school which was available for their use. One student commented that there was, '*a library in school, but we are not permitted to use it*', and another that the school library was '*not available during lunch breaks*'.

The data presented in Table Twenty-Seven (b) (below) shows students' reports of both the availability and their own use of resources in the school library for modern foreign language learning.

Table Twenty-Seven (b): Percentages of students reporting on the availability and their own use of modern foreign language study resources in the school library.

Resources	*Reported that yes, the resources are available*			*Reported that yes, they actually use the resources for study*		
	Males (n = 96)	*Females* (n = 262)	*Total* (n = 358)	*Males* (n = 96)	*Females* (n = 262)	*Total* (n = 358)
A range of course books at different language levels	64.6	62.6	63.1	24.0	18.7	20.1
Novels at different language levels	64.6	58.4	60.1	18.8	22.9	21.8
Audio tapes at a range of language levels	41.7	30.9	33.8	25.0	11.1	14.8
Videos at a range of language levels	29.2	26.0	26.8	28.1	12.6	16.8
DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels	36.5	32.8	33.8	29.2	16.4	19.8
Copies of past examination papers for modern languages	32.3	22.1	24.9	28.1	24.0	25.1
Copies of project work completed by former students	54.2	46.9	48.9	13.5	9.2	10.3
*Other**	3.1	1.9	2.2	1.0	0.0	0.3

* = For this resource category, n = 361 (males = 96, females = 265).

Table Twenty-Seven (b) (above) shows that in terms of their awareness of resource availability, most frequent were 'course books at different language levels' (reported by 63.1 per cent overall; 64.6 per cent of males, and 62.6 per cent of females); however, although aware of their availability, a statistically significantly smaller proportion ($\chi^2 = 136.32$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) of the students actually used them (reported by 20.1 per cent overall; 24.0 per cent of males, and 18.7 per cent of females). This pattern of statistical significance was common for each of the other types of resources; whereas 60.1 per cent of students overall were aware of the availability of novels at different language levels, only 21.8 per cent of students overall actually used them ($\chi^2 = 108.43$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$); whereas 33.8 per cent of students overall were aware of the availability of audio tapes at a range of different language levels, only 14.8

per cent of students overall actually used them ($\chi^2 = 35.11$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$); whereas 26.8 per cent of students overall were aware of the availability of videos at a range of different language levels, only 16.8 per cent of students overall actually used them ($\chi^2 = 10.62$ (1 df), $p < 0.01$); whereas 33.8 per cent of students overall were aware of the availability of DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels, only 19.8 per cent of students overall actually used them ($\chi^2 = 17.79$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$); and, whereas 48.9 per cent of students overall were aware of the availability of copies of project work completed by former students of modern foreign languages, only 10.3 per cent of students overall actually used them ($\chi^2 = 124.09$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$).

An exception to this general trend came where past examination papers for modern foreign languages were concerned - 24.9 per cent of students overall (32.3 per cent of males, 22.1 per cent of females) reported that were aware of the availability of these; curiously, a slightly greater (although not statistically significantly so) proportion of students reported using them (!) (25.1 per cent overall; 28.1 per cent of males, and 24.0 per cent of females) ($\chi^2 = 0.007$ (1 df), with the critical value of χ^2 at the 'alpha' ($p < 0.05$) probability level being 3.84). The 'other' resources included *'French magazines'* (where one student mentioned using these for the purposes of modern language study).

Tables Thirty-Twenty-Eight (a) to Twenty-Eight (d) inclusively (below) document data derived from the students in the sample regarding their access to the Internet (Table Twenty-Eight (a)); their use or otherwise of the Internet for the purposes of modern foreign language study (Table Twenty-Eight (b)); cross-tabulations of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether they have access to the Internet either at school or at home, and whether they had used the Internet for modern foreign language study (Table Twenty-Eight (c); and, the web-sites that students in the sample reported they had used for the purposes of modern foreign language study (Table Twenty-Eight (d)).

Table Twenty-Eight (a): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they had access to the Internet at school or at home.

Have access to the Internet	*Males* (n = 203)	*Females* (n = 415)	*Total* (n = 618)
Yes	96.1	99.0	98.1
No	3.9	1.0	1.9

Table Twenty-Eight (b): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they had used the Internet for modern foreign language study.

Used the Internet for modern language study	*Males* (n = 209)	*Females* (n = 424)	*Total* (n = 633)
Yes	67.5	68.2	67.9
No	32.5	31.8	32.1

Table Twenty-Eight (c): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on whether they have access to the Internet at school or at home and whether or not they had used the Internet for modern foreign language study.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Had access to Internet*	*Had used Internet for modern language study*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Had access to Internet*	*Had used Internet for modern language study*
Did not study subject (n = 186)	98.4	72.3	Did not study subject (n = 432)	98.1	66.1
A (n = 38)	92.1	78.0	A (n = 13)	100.0	69.2
B (n = 120)	99.2	63.7	B (n = 64)	100.0	71.9
C (n = 171)	98.2	64.2	C (n = 47)	97.9	78.7
D (n = 74)	98.6	65.8	D (n = 41)	97.6	70.0
E (n = 9)	100.0	77.8	E (n = 7)	85.7	42.9
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	100.0	100.0
Unspecified (n = 9)	100.0	66.7	Unspecified (n = 3)	100.0	66.7

From Table Twenty-Eight (a) (above), it may be seen that the overwhelming majority of students in the sample reported that they had access to the Internet (reported by 98.1 per cent of the sample overall; 96.1 per cent of males, and 99.0 per cent of females). From Table Twenty-Eight (b) (above), it may be seen that just over two-thirds of the students in the sample reported that they had used the Internet for purposes of studying modern foreign languages (reported by 67.9 per cent of the sample overall; 67.5 per cent of males, and 68.2 per cent of females).

From Table Twenty-Eight (c) (above), it may be seen that the proportions of students who indicated that they had access to the Internet either at school or at home did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level, largely due, as we have seen previously, that access to the Internet was near universal in this sample (98.1 per cent overall; 96.1 per cent of males, and 99.0 per cent of females – see Table Twenty-

Eight (a) (above)). Neither did the proportion of students who reported that they had used the Internet for the purposes of studying modern foreign languages reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level (see Table Twenty-Eight (c), above), although the proportions of students who reported having used the Internet for the purposes of studying modern foreign languages who having attained an 'A' grade in Junior Certificate French (72.3 per cent) or German (69.2 per cent) (see Table Twenty-Eight (a), above), slightly exceeded the proportion of students who reported that they had used the Internet for the purposes of studying modern foreign languages in the sample overall (see Table Twenty-Eight (b) (above)). The websites that the students reported they had used in modern language study are documented in Table Twenty-Eight (d) and its accompanying text, below:

Table Twenty-Eight (d): Numbers of students reporting the web-sites they had used for the purposes of studying modern foreign languages.

Name of web-site as reported by students	*Count*
Google Translator	100
www.french.ie	53
Google dictionary	43
www.skool.ie	38
Babelfish	35
Languages Online	33
Frenchteacher.net	28
Wikipedia	26
Scoilnet.ie	24
www.bonjourdefrance.com	18
Linguascope.com	18
Leo.org	15
Sunderlandschools.org	15
www.examinations.ie	11
Eurotalk	6
BBC Bitesize	5
Translation.paralink2.com	4
www.bbc.co.uk/languages	4
www.onlinetranslation.com	4
Beo.ie	3

In addition to the web-sites that were mentioned in Table Twenty-Eight (d) (above), which is based on a content analysis of the students' responses, web-sites that were mentioned fewer than three times included *focal.ie, Linguastar, novelguide.com, Redtube.com, revisewise.ie, sparknotes.com, TG4.ie, www.etest.ie* and *Youtube.com* (mentioned twice each), and

Allhonours.ie, Ask.com, Deutschlern.net, E-test.com, Eurotalk, Examinations.ie, Failte.ie, 'French holiday home websites and train station/time websites', Germanlanguage.com, LivinginFinland.com, Sandbox.com, Studdiebuddie.com, teach-ict.com, Translation.paralink.com, 'Tourist websites', www.frenchtranslation.com, www.gradesaver.com, www.lepointdufle.com, and *www.translationhelp.com* (mentioned once each). Further analyses and discussion of these findings are included in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5.

4.6 Students Learning Strategies in language learning

In terms of attempting to identify likely use of learning strategies in learning modern foreign languages a number of questions were set which requested students to report on their entire approach to the learning process. Analyses of student responses to these questionnaire items together with analyses of the pertinent literature on learning strategies in modern foreign language learning (see Chapter 2 part 2) provides opportunities to make a number of inferences on student *approaches to* and use of learning strategies *in* learning in the upcoming Discussion in Chapter 5.

Tables Twenty-Nine (a) – Twenty-Nine (i) inclusively (below) document data from the student sample relating to their reports of engagement or otherwise in modern foreign language exchange programmes – whether or not they had participated (Table Twenty-Nine (a); a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether or not they had participated (Table Twenty-Nine (b); who organised the exchange (Table Twenty-Nine (c)); whether the exchange was compulsory or not (Table Twenty-Nine (d)); the duration of the exchange (Table Twenty-Nine (e)); the number of students who participated in the exchange (Table Twenty-Nine (f)); the language of communication used in the exchange (Table Twenty-Nine (g)); whether the overseas students who participated in the exchange were of a similar age to the students in the sample (Table Twenty-Nine (h)); and finally, whether the students' modern foreign language abilities had improved as a result of taking part in the exchange or not (Table Twenty-Nine (i)).

Table Twenty-Nine (a): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they have participated in any student exchange / language (other than Irish).

Participated?	*Males* (n = 205)	*Females* (n = 422)	*Total* (n = 627)
Yes	11.7	20.1	17.4
No	88.3	79.9	82.6

Table Twenty-Nine (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on whether or not they have participated in any student language exchange / visits (other than Irish).

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Had participated*	*Had not participated*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Had participated*	*Had not participated*
Did not study subject (n = 184)	19.6	80.4	Did not study subject (n = 440)	14.8	85.2
A (n = 41)	12.2	87.8	A (n = 12)	33.3	66.7
B (n = 125)	14.4	85.6	B (n = 65)	30.8	69.2
C (n = 173)	16.8	83.2	C (n = 47)	21.3	78.7
D (n = 74)	13.5	86.5	D (n = 40)	7.5	92.5
E (n = 9)	22.2	77.8	E (n = 8)	12.5	87.5
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	0	100.0
Unspecified (n = 9)	22.2	77.8	Unspecified (n = 3)	0	100.0

Table Twenty-Nine (c): Percentages of students reporting on who organized the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they participated.

Who organized the exchange?	*Males* (n = 18)	*Females* (n = 70)	*Total* (n = 87)
The teacher	94.4	90.9	91.6
My family	5.6	5.2	5.3
Euro Languages Colleges	0.0	3.9	3.2

Table Twenty-Nine (d): Percentages of students reporting on whether the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they participated was compulsory or not.

Optional or compulsory?	*Males* (n = 17)	*Females* (n = 77)	*Total* (n = 94)
Optional	88.2	87.0	87.2
Compulsory	11.8	13.0	12.8

Table Twenty-Nine (e): Percentages of students reporting on the duration of the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they participated.

Duration	*Males* (n = 10)	*Females* (n = 52)	*Total* (n = 62)
One week	58.8	68.4	66.7
Two weeks	17.6	7.9	9.7
Three weeks	5.9	13.2	11.8
One to several months	17.7	5.2	7.6
One year	0.0	5.3	4.3

Table Twenty-Nine (f): Percentages of students reporting on the number of students who participated in the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they themselves participated.

Number of participating students	*Males* (n = 17)	*Females* (n = 76)	*Total* (n = 93)
1 – 5	17.7	15.6	16.2
6 – 10	0.0	5.2	4.3
11 – 20	11.8	36.8	32.4
21 – 30	29.5	22.3	23.8
31 – 50	35.3	5.3	10.8
51 – 100	5.9	11.8	10.8
Over 100	0.0	2.6	2.2

Table Twenty-Nine (g): Percentages of students reporting on the language of communication used in the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they participated.

Language used	*Males* (n = 17)	*Females* (n = 77)	*Total* (n = 94)
The modern language	47.1	61.0	58.5
English	52.9	32.5	36.2
The modern language and English	0.0	6.5	5.3

Table Twenty-Nine (h): Percentages of students reporting on whether the students who participated in the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they themselves participated were of a similar age or not.

Similar age?	*Males* (n = 16)	*Females* (n = 75)	*Total* (n = 91)
Yes	100.0	100.0	100.0
No	0	0	0

Table Twenty-Nine (i): Percentages of students reporting on whether their modern language level improved as a result of the student language exchange (other than Irish) in which they participated.

Improved?	*Males* (n = 15)	*Females* (n = 74)	*Total* (n = 89)
Yes	66.7	74.3	73.0
No	33.3	25.7	27.0

It may be seen from Table Twenty-Nine (a) (above) that around one-sixth (17.4 per cent) of the students in the sample overall (11.7 per cent of males, 20.1 per cent of females) reported that they had participated in a modern foreign language student exchange. From Table Twenty-Nine (b) (above), it may be seen that the proportion of students who reported having taken part in a student language exchange visit / programme did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level. It may be seen from Table Twenty-Nine (c) (above) that the modern foreign language exchanges that the students had participated in were usually organized by their teachers (reported by 91.6 per cent of the sample overall; 94.4 per cent of males, and 90.9 per cent of females). This was a statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 122.51$ (1 df), $p < 0.01$) proportion than reported 'my family' and 'Euro Languages Colleges' being reported as the organizers of modern foreign language exchanges (5.3 per cent overall (5.6 per cent of males, 5.2 per cent of females) and 3.2 per cent overall (0.0 per cent of males, and 3.9 per cent of females) respectively) put together. It may be seen from Table Twenty-Nine (d) (above) that in very few cases were the modern foreign language exchanges in which the students had participated were compulsory – around seven-eighths (87.2 per cent of the sample; 88.2 per cent of males, and 87.0 per cent of females) reported that their participation had been voluntary. It may be seen from Table Twenty-Nine (e)) above that the most typical duration of a modern language exchange programme in which students from the sample reported that they had participated was one week (66.7 per cent overall; 58.8 per cent of males, 68.4 per cent of females).

According to the data presented in Table Twenty-Nine (f) (above), the number of students involved in the modern foreign language exchange programmes varied quite considerably (from 1 – 5 students (reported by 16.2 per cent overall; 17.7 per cent of males, and 15.6 per cent of females) to over 100 students (reported by 2.2 per cent overall; 0.0 per cent of males, and 2.6 per cent of females). However, the most frequently reported ranges were 11 – 20 students (by 32.4 per cent overall; 11.8 per cent of males, and 36.8 per cent of females) and 21 – 30 students (by 23.8 per cent overall; 29.5 per cent of males, and 22.3 per cent of females).

It may be seen from Table Twenty-Nine (g) (above) that the language of communication that students most frequently reported as being used in modern foreign language exchange programmes was the modern foreign language itself (reported by 58.5 per cent overall; 47.1

per cent of males, 61.0 per cent of females). This proportion was statistically significantly larger ($\chi^2 = 15.24$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than that reporting English (36.2 per cent overall; 52.9 per cent of males, 32.5 per cent of females). A combination of the modern foreign language and English was reported by 5.3 per cent overall (0.0 per cent of males, 6.5 per cent of females). The data presented in Table Twenty-Nine (h) above shows that the students in the sample who had participated in modern foreign language exchange programmes reported that in all cases that the students who were involved in such programmes were of a similar age to themselves. The data presented in Table Twenty-Nine (i) above shows that in around three-quarters of cases (73.0 per cent overall; 66.7 per cent of males, 74.3 per cent of females), the students in the sample who had participated in modern foreign language exchange programmes reported their modern foreign language competency had improved as a result of having been so involved. Specific areas of improvement as a result of participating in a student language exchange that were mentioned by students included having *more confidence / fluency speaking the language all the time* (mentioned fifteen times); *speaking* (mentioned twelve times); being *more able to read and understand the language* (mentioned six times); *improved pronunciation* (mentioned four times); *grammar and spelling* (mentioned three times); *listening* and *'yes for speaking, but no for writing and grammar'* (mentioned twice each); and, *vocabulary* and *written work* (mentioned once each). Finally, four students commented that *they have an Italian exchange, but they don't have Italian language available to them as a subject in their school.*

Table Thirty (below) is derived from the content analysis of students' responses to an open-ended questionnaire item, in which they were asked to note the communication strategies they had learned to help resolve communication difficulties in modern foreign language use.

Table Thirty: Number of students reporting various communication strategies they had learned to resolve problems in communication in a modern foreign language.

Response type	*Count*
Asking person to repeat what they have said	118
Asking the person to speak more slowly / clearly	97
Hand gestures	77
Breaking down sentence so that it is more easily understood	48
Asking the person to translate	43
Use a dictionary / phrase book	41
Once repeated write down meaning or ask to rephrase	38
Facial expressions	15
Asking the person how to say a word	10

The most frequently mentioned (i.e., more than fifty times) were asking person to repeat what they have said (mentioned 118 times), asking the person to speak more slowly / clearly (mentioned 97 times), and the use of hand gestures (mentioned 77 times). In addition to the response types noted in Table Thirty (above), response types that were mentioned fewer than ten times each were using pictures / posters / symbols or images (mentioned eight times); avoidance of unknown phrases / vocabulary and using tone of voice (mentioned seven times each); reading over and asking people in my class to question me (mentioned five times); looking up information online (mentioned three times); reporting that '...we haven't learned any communication strategies', and watching television and listening to radio / audio tapes in the modern foreign language (mentioned twice each); and, 'I try to see what the word sounds like', 'restrict the amount of people to small groups for better comprehension', speaking bits of English and German and using broken German (mentioned once each). Finally, one student suggested 'useing the wright tence, how to start the question off' *[sic]*.
From Table Thirty-One (a) (below), it can be seen that slightly over one-half of the students in the sample did not intend to study modern foreign languages in the future (reported by 55.7 per cent overall; 54.2 per cent of males, and 56.4 per cent of females). This proportion was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 21.14$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) than the proportion of the sample who indicated that they did intend to study modern foreign languages in the future (42.7 per cent overall; 45.3 per cent of males, and 41.4 per cent of females), with the small remainder being 'undecided' (reported by 1.6 per cent overall; 0.5 per cent of males, and 2.1 per cent of females).

From Table Thirty-One (b) (below), it can be seen that of those who did plan to study modern foreign languages in future, the most popular means of doing so was via travel (reported by 58.4 per cent overall; 47.4 per cent of males, and 63.8 per cent of females). The proportion who indicated these means was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 55.96$ (1 df), $p < 0.001$) who indicated that they would study modern foreign languages independently in the future (reported 36.6 by per cent overall; 44.3 per cent of males, and 32.9 per cent of females). Rather fewer reported that they would attend a refresher course (reported by 7.2 per cent overall; 6.2 per cent of males, and 7.6 per cent of females). Around one-tenth reported that they would use 'other' means to study modern foreign languages in the future (reported by 9.5 per cent overall; 9.9 per cent of males, and 9.4 per cent of females). These 'other' ways

included thinking of *studying European languages in college* with another subject (mentioned fourteen times), planning to *live in the country in the future* (mentioned five times), trying to learn more and understand the language by *travelling and making friends with speakers of the language* (mentioned four times); *speaking with one's family* (mentioned twice); and, going to the *Gaelteacht*, *watching movies in the language*, and *private tuition / grinds* (mentioned once each). One student commented that, '*I would like a career in Tourism so having a modern foreign language is crucial*'. Finally, however, twenty-one students commented that they *do not plan to use languages other than English when they leave school.*

Table Thirty-One (c) to Thirty-One (d) inclusive (below) document the results of a series of three cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether or not, and how, they are planning to study modern foreign languages in the future. These comprise a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether or not they are planning to study modern foreign languages in the future (Table Thirty-One (c)); a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of how they are planning to study modern foreign languages in the future (Table Thirty-One (d)); and, a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of how they are planning to study modern foreign languages in the future (Table Thirty-One (e)).

From Table Thirty-One (c) (below), it may be seen that the proportions of students who report that they plan to study modern foreign languages in the future decreases with descending reported grades attained in the Junior Certificate from 'B' to 'D' in French, and from 'A' to 'E' in German. The proportion of the sample as a whole reporting that they plan to study modern foreign languages in the future (see Tables Thirty-One (a) and Thirty-One (b), below), 42.7 per cent, was exceeded by that of those who reported having attained either an 'A' or a 'B' grade in Junior Certificate French and German (47.5 per cent and 54.8 per cent, and 53.8 per cent and 45.3 per cent, respectively) (see Table Thirty-One (c), below).

Table Thirty-One (a): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they are planning to study modern foreign languages in the future.

Intend to study modern languages in the future	*Males* (n = 201)	*Females* (n = 420)	*Total* (n = 621)
Yes	45.3	41.4	42.7
No	54.2	56.4	55.7
Undecided	0.5	2.1	1.6

Table Thirty-One (b): Percentages of students reporting on how they plan to study modern foreign languages in the future.

Methods	*Males* (n = 192)	*Females* (n = 395)	*Total* (n = 587)
Study independently	44.3	32.9	36.6
Attend a refresher course	6.2	7.6	7.2
Travel to use the language	47.4	63.8	58.4
Other	9.9	9.4	9.5

Table Thirty-One (c): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on whether or not they are planning to study modern foreign languages in the future.

French				*German*			
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Yes*	*No*	*Undecided*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Yes*	*No*	*Undecided*
Did not study subject (n = 185)	37.8	60.0	2.2	Did not study subject (n = 445)	43.1	55.1	1.8
A (n = 40)	47.5	52.5	0	A (n = 13)	53.8	46.2	0
B (n = 124)	54.8	44.4	0.8	B (n = 64)	45.3	53.1	1.6
C (n = 174)	39.7	58.0	2.3	C (n = 47)	38.3	59.6	2.1
D (n = 71)	32.4	67.6	0	D (n = 41)	27.5	72.5	0
E (n = 9)	33.3	66.7	0	E (n = 8)	12.5	87.5	0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0	F (n = 1)	100.0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 6)	50.0	33.3	16.7	Unspecified (n = 3)	66.7	33.3	0

Table Thirty-One (d): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of how they plan to study modern foreign languages in the future.

Methods	*Reported Junior Certificate grade in French*							
	Did not study subject (n = 172)	A (n = 39)	B (n = 119)	C (n = 171)	D (n = 62)	E (n = 7)	F (n = 1)	Unspecified (n = 6)
Study independently	35.5	41.0	32.8	35.7	43.5	57.1	0	66.6
Attend a refresher course	6.1	5.1	4.2	8.8	8.1	14.3	0	16.7
Travel to use the language	59.3	69.2	62.2	56.7	46.8	42.9	100.0	50.0
Other	9.3	15.4	10.1	9.9	8.1	0	0	0

Table Thirty-One (e): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of how they plan to study modern foreign languages in the future.

Methods	*Reported Junior Certificate grade in German*							
	Did not study subject (n = 412)	A (n = 13)	B (n = 64)	C (n = 40)	D (n = 37)	E (n = 7)	F (n = 1)	Unspecified (n = 3)
Study independently	37.9	30.8	31.2	45.0	29.7	42.9	0	0
Attend a refresher course	7.0	0	3.1	5.0	8.1	28.6	0	66.7
Travel to use the language	56.8	84.6	62.5	57.5	62.2	42.9	100.0	33.3
Other	9.5	7.7	10.9	7.5	13.5	14.3	0	0

From Tables Thirty-One (d) and Thirty-One (e) (above), it may be seen that the most popular means of planning to study modern foreign languages in the future for those who had studied Junior Certificate French and German were travelling to use the language, followed by independent study. In the case of the proportion of students who reported that they would travel to use the language as a means to study a modern foreign language in the future, this decreased with descending grades, from 69.2 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate French to 42.9 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E', and 84.6 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate German to 42.9 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E'. The proportion of the sample as a whole reporting that they plan to travel to use the language as a means of studying a modern foreign language in the future (see Table Thirty-One (b), above), 58.4 per cent, was exceeded by that of those who reported having attained either an 'A' or a 'B' grade in Junior Certificate French and German (69.2

per cent and 62.2 per cent, and 84.6 per cent and 62.5 per cent, respectively) (see Tables Thirty-One (d) and Thirty-One (e), above).

The proportion of students who indicated that they would attend a refresher course as a means to study a modern foreign language in the future was small, but increased with decreasing grades – from 5.1 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate French to 14.3 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E', and 0 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate German to 28.6 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E'.

From Table Thirty-Two (a) (below), it can be seen that around two-thirds of the students in the sample indicated that through studying a modern foreign language they had increased their awareness of or interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language (reported by 66.3 per cent overall; 60.4 per cent of males, and 69.2 per cent of females).

Table Thirty-Two (a): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not their studies of modern languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language.

Response	*Males* (n = 197)	*Females* (n = 415)	*Total* (n = 612)
Yes	60.4	69.2	66.3
No	39.6	30.8	33.7

Specific examples of what the students reported they had learned about the cultures of speakers in their studies of modern languages included *food and eating habits* (mentioned 216 times), *the culture and everyday lives and living standards* (mentioned 173 times), *traditions* (mentioned 97 times), *education and school* (mentioned 96 times), *festivals* (mentioned 72 times), *dialects in the language* (mentioned 59 times), *history and geography* (mentioned 46 times), *hobbies and pastimes* (mentioned 32 times), *fashion and clothes* (mentioned 23 times), *that their cultures is very different to our own* (mentioned 27 times), *architecture and historic sights* (mentioned 24 times), *different towns, villages and cities* (mentioned 20 times), *different government systems, political life and law* (mentioned 18 times), *sport* (mentioned 17 times), *social life and music* (mentioned 13 times), *etiquette and what offends in other cultures* (mentioned 12 times), *famous celebrities from the country* (mentioned 9 times), *religion* (mentioned 6 times), *travel and transport* (mentioned five times), *wine* (mentioned 4 times), *famous artists from the country* (mentioned 3 times),

marriage customs and *nuclear power* (mentioned twice each), and *animals, manufacturing and the country's produce, the Metro, that the modern foreign language is similar to English is some ways, movies, skiing in the French Alps, the social divide in Paris between rich and poor in suburbs,* and *TGV* (mentioned once each). Finally, one student t commented that, '*Cultural studies would definitely be a high interest, however it isn't on the curriculum'*, and another that he or she had *'....visited the country and adapted to food and customs whilst there as I had learned about them in class'.*

Table Thirty-Two (b) (below) documents the results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether or not their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language.

Table Thirty-Two (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of whether or not their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Yes*	*No*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 183)	63.9	36.1	Did not study subject (n = 426)	66.0	34.0
A (n = 41)	75.6	24.4	A (n = 13)	84.6	15.4
B (n = 124)	70.2	29.8	B (n = 63)	71.4	28.6
C (n = 170)	68.2	31.8	C (n = 47)	63.8	36.2
D (n = 67)	56.7	43.3	D (n = 40)	62.5	37.5
E (n = 9)	66.7	33.3	E (n = 8)	62.5	37.5
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	100.0	0
Unspecified (n = 6)	50.0	50.0	Unspecified (n = 3)	33.3	66.7

From Table Thirty-Two (b) (above), it may be seen that the proportion of students who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language related to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level. The proportion of students who indicated that this was the case fell with grades decreasing from 'A' to 'D' in both French and German. The proportion of students who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language exceeded the whole sample finding of 66.3

per cent in students who reported having attained grades 'A' to 'C' in Junior Certificate French (75.6 per cent, 70.2 per cent and 68.2 per cent respectively) and grades 'A' and 'B' in Junior Certificate German (84.6 per cent and 71.4 per cent respectively) (see Table Thirty-Two (b), above).

The proportion of students who achieved grades 'A' to 'C' inclusively in Junior Certificate French who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language was greater, but not statistically significantly so ($\chi^2 = 3.73$ (1 df), with the critical value of χ^2 at the 'alpha' ($p < 0.05$) probability level being 3.84) than the proportion of those who achieved grades 'D' to 'F' inclusively in Junior Certificate French who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language. Similarly, the proportion of students who achieved grades 'A' to 'C' inclusively in Junior Certificate German who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language was greater, but not statistically significantly so ($\chi^2 = 0.71$ (1 df), with the critical value of χ^2 at the 'alpha' ($p < 0.05$) probability level being 3.84) than than the proportion of those who achieved grades 'D' to 'F' inclusively in Junior Certificate German who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language.

Tables Thirty-Three (a) to Thirty-Three (h) inclusively (below) document data from the student sample relating to any language skills study / practice groups in which they may participate. This includes their reports of whether or not they have the opportunity to practice language skills with other students outside of class time (Table Thirty-Three (a)); a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether they have the opportunity to study or practice language skills with other students outside normal class time (Table Thirty-Three (b)); who organises any such groups (Table Thirty-Three (c)); the number of students in such groups (Table Thirty-Three (d)); the frequency with which such groups meet (Table Thirty-Three (e)); the language activities of such groups (Table Thirty-Three (f)); the types of modern foreign languages clubs / societies they would like to have available to them (Table

Thirty-Three (g)); and finally, whether or not they know of such clubs / societies existing in their local communities (Table Thirty-Three (h)).

Table Thirty-Three (a): Percentages of students reporting whether they have the opportunity to study or practice modern foreign language skills with other students outside normal class time.

Have such an opportunity?	*Males* (n = 211)	*Females* (n = 427)	*Total* (n = 638)
Yes	13.3	13.6	13.5
No	86.7	86.4	86.5

In Table Thirty-Three (a), it may be seen that only a small proportion of the sample (just over one-eighth) reported that they had the opportunity to study or practice language skills with other students outside of normal class time (reported by 13.5 per cent of the sample overall; 13.3 per cent of males, and 13.6 per cent of females).

Table Thirty-Three (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of whether they have the opportunity to study or practice modern foreign language skills with other students outside normal class time.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Yes*	*No*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 186)	10.1	89.9	Did not study subject (n = 445)	14.5	85.5
A (n = 41)	14.6	85.4	A (n = 13)	23.1	76.9
B (n = 124)	20.0	80.0	B (n = 64)	10.8	89.2
C (n = 178)	10.7	89.3	C (n = 47)	8.5	91.5
D (n = 73)	15.1	84.9	D (n = 41)	4.9	95.1
E (n = 9)	0	100.0	E (n = 8)	0	100.0
F (n = 1)	0	100.0	F (n = 1)	N / A	N / A
Unspecified (n = 10)	30.0	70.0	Unspecified (n = 3)	66.7	33.3

From Table Thirty-Three (b), it may be seen that the highest proportions of those who reported that they had the opportunity to study or practice language skills outside normal class time were to be found amongst those who reported achieving the highest grades in modern foreign languages at Junior Certificate level – 14.6 per cent and 20.0 per cent who reported attaining 'A's and 'B's in French respectively, and 23.1 per cent and 10.8 per cent who reported attaining 'A's and 'B's in German respectively. However, it may be recalled that when grades are overlooked, this amounts only to a small proportion of the sample (just

over one-eighth) reporting that they had the opportunity to study or practice language skills with other students outside of normal class time (13.5 per cent of the sample overall; 13.3 per cent of males, and 13.6 per cent of females) (see Table Thirty-Three (a)). These mean proportions are exceeded, but not to any great extent, by the students who reported attaining the highest grades in modern foreign languages at the Junior Certificate level.

Table Thirty-Three (c): Percentages of students reporting who organizes the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate.

Who organizes the group?	*Males* (n = 31)	*Females* (n = 60)	*Total* (n = 91)
Students	48.4	40.0	42.9
School	29.0	25.0	26.4
Students and school	9.7	16.7	14.3
Other	12.9	18.3	16.5

In instances where students did participate in language skills study / practice groups outside of class time (see also Table Thirty-Three (a) and its accompanying text, above), Table Thirty-Three (c) (above) shows that such groups were most frequently organised by the students themselves (reported 42.9 per cent overall; 48.4 per cent of males, 40.0 per cent of females). This proportion was statistically significantly greater ($\chi^2 = 5.46$ (1 df), $p < 0.05$); than the proportion reporting that schools had organized such groups (reported by 26.4 per cent overall; 29.0 per cent of males, 25.0 per cent of females). A combination of students and schools was reported by 14.3 per cent overall (9.7 per cent of males, and 16.7 per cent of females); however, slightly more frequently reported than this latter was the '*other*' category (reported by 16.5 per cent overall; 12.9 per cent of males, 18.3 per cent of females). The 'other' people who organized the language skills study / practice groups in which students took part included '*my family*' (three mentions); '*outside grinds*' (two mentions); '*my German Teacher*', '*my cousin from Switzerland and my Austrian cousins*', '*an agency arranged a host family*', and '*Euro Languages College*' (one mention each). There were also more detailed explanations given by two students: '*a friend and I study Finnish*', and, (ii) '*I speak Spanish to my Spanish friends. It's not really a study group, but it helps me to improve*'.

Table Thirty-Three (d): Percentages of students reporting the number of students in the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate.			
Number of students in group	*Males* (n = 24)	*Females* (n = 45)	*Total* (n = 69)
1 – 5	25.1	17.7	20.1
6 – 10	4.2	15.5	11.5
11 – 20	33.3	35.5	33.3
Over 20	34.7	32.3	35.1

Table Thirty-Three (d) (above) shows that the language skills study / practice groups in which the students reported participating outside of school tended towards the large in size – around one third reported that the group size was ten or less (reported by 31.6 per cent overall; 29.3 per cent of males, and 33.2 per cent of females), whereas another third reported their group size as being between 11 and 20 (reported by 33.3 per cent overall; 33.3 per cent of males, and 35.5 per cent of females), and around a final third as being over 20 (reported 35.1 per cent overall; 34.7 per cent of males, and 32.3 per cent of females).

Table Thirty-Three (e): Percentages of students reporting the frequency with which in the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate meets.			
Frequency	*Males* (n = 24)	*Females* (n = 50)	*Total* (n = 74)
1 hour per week	41.7	54.0	50.0
2 hours per week	8.3	4.0	5.4
Other	50.0	42.0	44.6

It may be seen from Table Thirty-Three (e) (above) that one-half of the students who participated in language skills study / practice groups (reported by 50.0 per cent overall; 41.7 per cent of males, and 54.0 per cent of females) reported that these groups met for one hour per week. Reports by participants in such groups of meeting for two hours per week were far less frequent (reported by 5.4 per cent overall; 8.3 per cent of males, 4.0 per cent of females). However, reports of *'other'* frequencies / durations were relatively common, accounting for almost one-half of such responses (reported by 44.6 per cent overall; 50.0 per cent of males, and 42.0 per cent of females). These 'other' frequencies / durations included '*30 minutes per week'* (reported twenty-two times); '*from 4 – 6 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays*' (reported three times); '*with friends from other European countries who I meet up with a few times per year*' (reported twice); '*when a teacher / instructor is available', 'when it's possible for a small group to meet', 'we communicate on Facebook', 'every year during the summer holidays'* and *'every day after school'* (reported once each).

Table Thirty-Three (f): Percentages of students reporting the activities of the modern foreign language skills study / practice group in which they participate.			
Modern language activities	*Males* (n = 31)	*Females* (n = 72)	*Total* (n = 103)
Speaking the language only	16.1	11.1	12.6
Speaking, reading and writing the language	32.3	33.3	33.3
Lots of language activities including grammar practice	25.8	26.4	26.2
Work on language studies projects individually and as a group	3.2	0.0	1.0
Other language activities	0.0	1.4	1.0
A combination of two or more of the above	22.6	27.8	26.6

Table Thirty-Three (f) (above), based on a content analysis of open-ended student responses to a questionnaire item, documents reports from students in the sample who participated in language skills study / practice groups outside of normal class time regarding the language activities of those groups. It can be seen the most frequently cited description of such groups' activities was the general language task-orientated '*speaking, reading and writing the language*' (reported by one-third, or 33.3 per cent overall; 32.3 per cent of males, and 33.3 per cent of females), followed by the equally general but method-orientated '*lots of language activities including grammar practice*' (reported by just over one-quarter, or 26.2 per cent overall; 25.8 per cent of males, and 26.4 per cent of females). It is perhaps noteworthy that around one-eighth (12.6 per cent overall; 16.1 per cent of males, and 11.1 per cent of females) reported that their language skills study / practice group met purely to practice speaking the modern foreign language.

Table Thirty-Three (g): Percentages of students reporting details of the modern foreign languages club / society that they would like to have available to them for extra study.			
Details of club / society desired	*Males* (n = 71)	*Females* (n = 234)	*Total* (n = 305)
Study group / club	67.6	56.8	59.3
Private grinds	4.2	7.3	6.6
Study group / club AND private grinds	0.0	2.1	1.6
Study trip	7.0	0.9	2.3
Modern foreign languages class with better books	0.0	0.4	0.3
Speaking practice class	12.7	28.2	24.6
Film society in the modern foreign language	8.5	4.3	5.2

It may be seen from Thirty-Three (g) (above), which is itself based on a content analysis of open-ended student responses to a questionnaire item, that for those students in the sample who would like a modern languages club / society available to them, the most popular choice was the rather general *'study group / club'* (reported by 59.3 per cent overall; 67.6 per cent of males, and 56.8 per cent of females). Perhaps significantly, a more specific choice of activity was also cited by almost one-quarter of students in the sample who would like a modern languages club / society available to them – a 'speaking practice class' (reported by 24.6 per cent overall; 12.7 per cent of males, and 28.2 per cent of females). In additional to the categories mentioned in Table Eighteen (above), *other* suggestions included '*Spanish*' (mentioned nine times); '*a drama / film club in the language*', '*to have an exchange / exchange student*', '*I would not have enough time to attend with my other subject study commitments even if an extra class / club existed*' (mentioned four times each); '*Japanese', 'Chinese', 'Latin' 'Italian'* and *'more computer study'* (mentioned twice each); *'an understandable teacher in a small group for one hour per week', 'learn about the culture of the language with videos and tapes for correct accent', 'trips to German history attractions available in Ireland', 'more films'* and *'Gaeltacht-style courses throughout the school year'* (mentioned once each).

Table Thirty-three (h): Percentages of students reporting on whether or not they knew of modern foreign language study groups / societies in their schools or in their local communities.

Response type	*Males* (n = 81)	*Females* (n = 189)	*Total* (n = 270)
Yes	8.6	8.5	8.5
No	87.7	84.1	85.2
Modern foreign language group in school	1.2	0.5	0.7
Modern foreign language group in local community	2.5	6.9	5.6

It may be seen from Table Thirty-Three (h) (above) most (around five-sixths) of the students in the sample reported that they did not know of any language study groups / societies within their schools or local communities (reported by 85.2 per cent overall; 87.7 per cent of males, and 84.1 per cent of females). 8.5 per cent indicated that yes, they knew of a language study group / society within their school or local communities (8.6 per cent of males, 8.5 per cent of females); 5.6 per cent (2.5 per cent of males, and 6.9 per cent of females) and 0.7 per cent

(1.2 per cent of males, and 0.5 per cent of females) said they knew of language study groups / societies within their local communities and schools respectively. Details of language study groups / societies that students knew about in their local communities included *'language club in local library'* (nine mentions); *'Irish conversation classes at the youth club'* (five mentions); *'student exchange during summer in local community'* (mentioned twice); and, *'member of European Youth Club which organises travel exchanges', 'only for Junior students', 'native French speaker spoke to students in preparation for oral exam', 'homework club', 'evening classes available in adult education locally', 'Goethe Institute', 'German Culture Institute and Language Department', 'Summer Schools at Old Bawn Community School available', 'I know of a class but don't have time to participate',* and *'school class three days per week for ninety minutes for free in Templeogue'* (mentioned once each).
On examining the data presented in Table Thirty-Four (below), which is based on a content analysis of the students' responses to an open-ended questionnaire item, and documents the various recommendations that students in the sample made regarding modern language learning in schools, it is noticeable that whereas some chose to make recommendations seemingly directed towards schools and teachers, there were others who seemed to direct their recommendations towards students of modern foreign languages.

Table Thirty-Four: Number of students listing various recommendations that they considered useful regarding modern language learning in schools.

Recommendation	*Count*
More opportunities to use and speak the language in class	114
Go on trips / exchanges	85
Grasp any opportunities for learning the language	78
Make sure you want to learn it and enjoy it	64
Pay attention – the more work you put in the more you get out	50
Practice speaking with friends	47
Make sure you communicate with the teacher and ask for help	43
Learn the grammar and vocabulary as you go along	42
More fun activities to learn the basics	30
Languages are enjoyable when they are well taught	30
It is very important to study independently	29
Pick a language that you find interesting and would use	19
Nightly study and revision of work completed that day	19
DVDs / audio books / on-line study/ novels in classroom	17
Always write down grammar and ask questions	17
More variety would be more enjoyable, i.e. not solely concentrating on the Leaving Certificate Exam and points etc.	11
Study and do homework well	11

Amongst the suggestions directed towards schools and teachers, the most popular piece of advice was to have more opportunities to use and speak the language in class (114 mentions), with other requests for 'creative' pedagogy also being featured (e.g., 85 students advised 'go on trips and exchanges', 30 students advised 'more fun activities to learn the basics', and 17 requested 'DVDs / audio books / on-line study / novels in the classroom'), in addition to 11 students advising 'more variety would be enjoyable'. Amongst the suggestions seemingly directed towards fellow modern language students, foremost were *grasp any opportunities for learning the language* (78 mentions); *make sure you want to learn it and enjoy it* (64 mentions); *pay attention – the more work you put in the more you get out* (50 mentions); *practice speaking the modern foreign language with friends* (47 mentions); *make sure you communicate with the teacher and ask for help* (43 mentions); and, *learn the grammar and vocabulary as you go along* (42 mentions).

Outside of Table Thirty-Four (above), *other* recommendations that were mentioned ten times or less frequently were, *'have good teachers'* (mentioned ten times); *'having a language and culture day'* and *'use films and games to practice'* (mentioned eight times each); *'cultural studies / more about history of country itself'*, and *'have a language classroom with posters / flashcards'* (mentioned six times each); *'more opportunities for listening to the languages'* (mentioned five times); *'have Spanish available as a subject'* and *'study a language from a younger age'* (mentioned four times each); *'have a permanent teacher so that the teacher doesn't change'*, *'use computer time'*, *'have computers available for every student'*, *'have native speakers teaching the language or at least some input from a native speaker as a classroom assistant'*, *'get rid of Irish as a subject and do an additional modern language'*, and *'have a language week'* (mentioned three times each); *'have fewer students in class'*, *'learn a language before secondary school'*, *'have more frequent exchanges'*, *'have a good dictionary / phrase book'*, *'have smaller classes by dividing Ordinary and Higher level'*, *'have spot tests and quizzes in the modern language'*, *'practice reading and do lots of listening comprehensions'*, and *'have better books – more reading variety'* (mentioned twice each). Other suggestions were mentioned on just one occasion: *'using the language lab games is really helpful'*, *'be confident in understanding and using the language'*, *'language weeks in school help to improve language skills'*, *'think how languages are taught, it can be very hard when the teacher isn't that good'*, *'language teachers should have a culture day'*, *'better timetabling to give students a choice of languages'*, *'pay attention from the start and*

always take notes', *'visual contact with other students from other schools'*, *'on an exchange make an effort to speak and understand the language'*, *'letter writing to exchange students'*, *'have a copy [book] for vocabulary'*, *'have a copy [book] for grammar'*, *'have Italian available as a subject'*, *'really revise past exam papers'*, *'use "Less Stress, More Success" study notes'*, and *'have topics that are more relevant to teenagers'*. One other student opined that *'modern languages shouldn't be compulsory'*, and another that *'if we don't need to study and know grammatical tenses in English, then we don't need to know them in another language'*.

Table Thirty-Five (below) is again based on a content analysis of the students' responses to an open-ended questionnaire item, and documents the various reasons that students in the sample gave for why having English as a first or second language was advantageous to them.

Table Thirty-Five: Number of students indicating the reasons why they consider having English as a first or second language is an advantage to them.

Reason	*Count*
English is the international language of communication	477
Travel and travel for education	133
Career	86
English is spoken in the places I want to go (e.g. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United States)	6
I think that English would be a difficult language to learn as a second language	3
English is the business language	3
One of the most common / widely spoken languages after Chinese which will be useful for studying abroad in the future	2

The most frequently mentioned reasons were that English is the international language of communication (477 times); for travel and travel for education (133 times) and for one's career (86 times). Outside of Table Thirty-Four (above), *other* reasons that were mentioned as to why having English as a first or second language was advantageous on only one occasion were *'for journalism and for improving imagination'*, and *'travelling to countries doesn't frighten me as I feel I will be able to communicate using English'*. Other individual students commented that, *'I wish I could speak Irish fluently because it should be part of me'*, *'it's easier to learn when you are younger so it sticks in your head more'*, and *'other countries have shown that having a modern foreign language from a young age is very beneficial in terms of the level of fluency achievable by the end of secondary school'*.

To this point, we have examined Modern Foreign Language policy development in education in Europe (Chapter 1) and subsequent policy implementation at member state level in Ireland (Chapter 2, part 1). Through review of pertinent literature and analysis of national statistics in modern foreign language learning at school in Ireland we have established the provision of modern foreign languages at school at primary; lower secondary; and upper secondary levels; we have quantified the uptake of modern foreign language subjects at school; we have considered the retention of modern foreign languages to upper-secondary level; we have established current levels of grade achievement at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations; and, we have questioned commitment to developing any discernable levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages learning at school (Chapter 1, part 2). Narrowing our focus from the European and national perspectives, we have examined the learner in the classroom in the context of their prior knowledge and language and linguistic awareness; their motivations to learn in the modern foreign language classroom and the learning goals and strategies they need in order to become successful language learners. The same analyses were then applied in the context of particular students learning modern foreign languages in the classroom in Ireland (see Appendix 8, 'Student Questionnaire'; Chapter 3, 'Methodology', and Chapter 4, 'Findings'). What remains to be done to complete this study is to marry the findings of the various chapters together in the upcoming 'Discussion' in Chapter 5. It is anticipated that this process of analyses of the complete findings of the study will have three inherent outcomes. Firstly, it will provide a comprehensive insight into learning modern foreign languages at member state level in Ireland; secondly, it will allow us to make a number of key inferences in modern foreign language learning in Irish classrooms from the findings of the modern foreign languages survey; and thirdly, it will provide a very strong platform from which to make timely recommendations on the future of modern foreign languages in secondary education in Ireland.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

Chapter 1 of this study has presented a comprehensive analysis of modern foreign languages education policy in Europe in recent times. Following analyses of modern foreign languages education policy development at the wider European level the Council of Europe policy aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling was particularly central to this study's approach to the analysis of modern foreign languages education in Ireland, i.e., how has this particular European policy has informed the provision, the uptake and the retention of modern foreign language subjects at school; whether this European drive in modern foreign languages education in recent years is resulting in any discernable improvement in grade achievement in modern foreign language subjects at school; the current situation regarding the national government position in achieving levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language study at school; possible inferences regarding student motivation when we consider the national position of languages in Chapter 2 and the reported approaches to language study amongst respondents to the primary research questionnaire in Chapter 4 (see Appendix 8); possible inferences regarding student learning strategies when we consider the national position of languages in Chapter 2; and, the reported approaches to language study amongst respondents to the primary research questionnaire in Chapter 4 (see Appendix 8). We will now merge the findings of the initial and later chapters with a view to devising a number of key recommendations for modern foreign language learning in Ireland into the future. Main findings and potential inferences will then be discussed under the appropriate research question headings with recommendations made at the end of each strand and further discussion of the main recommendations and study conclusions.

5.1 The Development of Modern foreign languages education policy in Europe

As we have seen, 'policy' development at the wider European level has been extensive in recent decades (see Appendix 1), with evidence of an emergent drive towards greater policy implementation at member state levels in more recent times (see Chapter 1). We have noted that continued presentation of education policies to member states in the form of non-binding resolutions essentially creates a situation where the application of European policies to

education curricula at a national level remains at considerable variance across member states despite continued financial and consultative investment in European education in the period 1995-2010. National governments hold firm to the position of choosing to implement *certain* educational policies depending on a particular national focus in education at any given time. Hence, it is difficult to envisage any *significant improvements* in modern foreign language education or *inter and intra member state collaboration* on student and teacher mobility in Europe in the short-term or at least until such time as there is a greater degree of influence on education policy implementation across member states. It is time to examine ways in which certain education policy implementation requirements may become compulsory at member state level particularly with regard to modern foreign languages provision, uptake and retention at school. Whilst this is a firm recommendation of this study it is nonetheless acknowledged that any such change to the current system of European policy presented as non-binding resolutions to member state governments would have enormous implications for the current *modus operandi* of the European Union Institutions. However such changes will need to be considered if any degree of success in education policy implementation is to be maintained and built upon.

We will recall from Chapter 1 that the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 gave education legal status within Europe and that successive educational actions have acknowledged the difficulties of encouraging increased participation in educational initiatives and sought to addressed these shortfalls in the period 2007-2013 by setting *participatory targets* for each educational action (see European Commission, 2004b; 2004c). This process acknowledges that decades of financial investment and collaboration in modern foreign languages education policy across member states has largely *not resulted* in any discernable level of progression towards '*mother tongue plus two'* foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling.
We will similarly recall from Chapter 1 that in the 2007 to 2013 period, funding for education and training should exceed over 1% of the community budget compared to only 0.1% in 1986 (European Commission, 2010b). We also noted in Chapter 1 that a 2003 report which considered the quality of language learning in education called on member states to encourage language learning '*which emphasised effective communicative ability and active skills rather than passive knowledge*' (European Commission, 2003a; 2003b). We identified this emphasis on the quality of learning as a very important juncture in Europe as it looked beyond the uptake and diversity of languages at school and emphasised the *quality* of the language teaching and learning that was actually being realised. Moreover, member states

were encouraged to provide means by which languages could be learned but 'to *ensure that they were learned effectively*' (European Commission, 2004a:5).

We have similarly noted that a 2008 Report on Multilingualism developed as part of the '*Life-long learning programme'* (see Chapter 1) considered language diversity within schools whilst also focussing on the position of foreign languages in the curriculum; the range of different languages taught; and the initial education of teachers. It was considered that greater uniformity of teacher-training across Europe was one means by which both student and teacher mobility across member states could be increased allowing greater opportunities to engage with the target language and the target language culture (see European Commission, 2010c; Kelly & Grenfell, 2005). This particular policy initiative is hugely important to the continued development of modern foreign languages in education across Europe. Such an initiative has the dual advantage of firstly increasing teacher and student mobility, making effective use of the functions of the National agencies (see Léargas, (2009); Europass, (2010(b); (2010(c)) and secondly, potentially improving fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages education at school to levels that are not currently being achieved. We have acknowledged in Chapter 2, part 2 that

'In the real world, learners need to act pragmatically in order to survive linguistically, not simply learn to perform adequately to pass some standard in a classroom situation' (Mc Donough, 1995: 30).

We have further considered that current timetabling of modern foreign language subjects in school does not provide adequate exposure to the target language for the development of discernable levels of fluency in target language use thus students and teachers must be convinced to make effective use of all available learning resources including potential periods of study mobility abroad.

'*Learners should increase their exposure to their new language. If we count up the number of hours of contact our learners have with the target language in the classroom, we will find that it will be very little compared to what they would get if they were in the country where it is spoken. Learning language in many classrooms is still like being drip-fed; learners get only a small amount of nourishment. They will need to increase their exposure to the new language by every means at their disposal outside of the language classroom*' (Devitt, in Bailly et al., 2002: 100).

A number of policy initiates have been identified in the context of this study as being particularly innovative and wholly applicable to the improvements of modern foreign language teaching and learning at school at member state level. These included the Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning (CEFR) see (Council of Europe, 2010a); The European Language Portfolio (ELP) see (Council of Europe, 2004a; 2004b; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d); The European Indicator of Language Competence, see (European Commission, 2005b; European Council, 2007; European Commission, 2008c; European Council, 2009); and the European Framework of Key Competences for learning (European Commission, 2008c; 2008d). It was duly recognised that these initiatives, analyzed and discussed in Chapter 1 and applied at member state level to the Ireland context in Chapter 2 part 1 provided an excellent starting point for *differentiated multilingual and plurilingual learning paths* in modern foreign language education which are not currently pursued or implemented to their full potential in Ireland (see 5.2 and 5.3 below).

We must also consider in terms of the Council of Europe aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling that successive 'Eurobarometer' surveys outlined in Chapter 1 showed that in 2001 and 2006 aspirations towards the development of multilingual societies across Europe received cautious support from member state respondents with 44% of respondents reporting that they were actually *against the option* of promoting such a measure in European schools. (INRA, (2001); INRA (2006): 63-65). This raises a very interesting finding in the context of this study. We have noted commitment to the 'multilingual' project by the various European Institutions (see Chapter 1), we have similarly noted the situation of policy development at member state level in Ireland (see Chapter 2, part 1). This certainly shows a certain level of commitment to the project in multilingualism at the higher administrative levels of our societies but is the message actually reaching citizens? If there is limited knowledge of major European policy initiatives in modern language education in our schools (see chapter 2 part 1) there would appear to be an entirely missing link associated with the question of whether or not Europeans *actively seek* to develop as multilingual member state citizens? The answer to this question, certainly in the context of Ireland, given the findings of this study (see Chapter 2 part 1; Chapter 3 'Methodology'; Chapter 4 'Findings' would most certainly be a resounding 'No'!

5.2 The provision and uptake of modern foreign language subjects at school in Ireland

From a European policy implementation perspective this study has echoed the findings of recent studies in Modern Foreign Languages in education in chapter 2 part 1. A common thread through all of the studies, including the present one, alludes to the significance of a 1987 Curriculum and Examinations Board report which emphasised the need for '*language*' to be considered more holistically within the school curriculum in Ireland with better cohesion amongst language subjects including mother tongue and foreign languages (CEB, 1987). The CEB study together with successive studies to date (see DES, 2004; 2009a; Little, 2003; NCCA, 2005) together with the most recent Royal Irish Academy study (see RIA, 2011) further identified that this more integrated approach to languages at school would create a situation where languages were no longer competing with each other across school timetables and where more explicit links between first, second and foreign languages at school would allow for common pedagogical practice across languages and amongst teachers. Similarly, consideration of the national context and the findings of this study show us that the subjects of English & Irish continue to be mostly offered as compulsory subjects in the curriculum and this situation continues to upper-secondary level in the policies of particular schools. Modern foreign language subjects remain *optional* for those students who do not wish to proceed to certain courses at third level study and *compulsory* for those who do as well as for students attending schools who set modern foreign languages amongst the core compulsory subjects in their school curricula (see NUI, 2010).

This provision for two national languages at school which are allocated a considerably greater weighting of class sessions on school timetables than modern foreign language (see DES, 2006; 2007b) raises the issue that whilst Ireland has two official languages English *and* Irish the majority of citizens speak English *or* Irish in the course of everyday life. As such Ireland would not be considered a bi-lingual country nationally, particularly in view of recent trends in the fall off in higher level Irish candidates at terminal examinations (see Appendix 5 to 8) but may well be regarded as bi-lingual at a wider European level. Interestingly, despite these declining trends of uptake of terminal examinations in Irish at higher level the findings of this study show that over 50% of respondents to the primary research questionnaire (see Appendix 8) indicated that *Irish was amongst the languages necessary for their futures* exceeded only by English at a near universal 95.9 % and the best represented of the modern foreign languages French at 42.9% (see Table 11, and analyses in Chapter 4).

The Language Policy Profile Country Report for Ireland (DES, 2007a) detailed plans for European modern foreign language policy implementation at national level. One particular feature of the study was its finding that a notable change had occurred in Irish society resulting from a historically high level of immigration and this situation in turn increased the number of languages spoken in Irish society. We will recall from Chapter 2, part 1 that a State Examinations Commission had been set up in 2003 (see SEC, 2003) and this commission was charged with the task of providing for examinations in non-curricular languages for international students enrolling in the Irish education system. Facilitating this situation of increased immigration to Ireland within the education system also required the provision of English Language support for non-nationals attending schools and having varying degrees of competence in English. Such support was provided by a specialist body Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) up until 2008 when the organisation was disbanded and no replacement support-service has been developed to date. This situation presents a considerable and unacceptable challenge in terms of English language support in schools where there is a greater enrolment of international students and thus an ever greater need for language support. As we have seen in Chapter 2, part 1teachers are now required to facilitate individual students English language support needs by using the resources developed by IILT which continue to be made available to schools through the NCCA website (see NCCA, 2010a). This situation is unsustainable. Investment in English language support urgently needs to be re-instated at some level in government. We have seen in Chapter 2 part 1 that there is recent emphasis on Science and Maths at school, however, this does not have to be to the detriment of language subjects and supports. It is possible to provide for all subjects equally in schools. Promoting mutual exclusivity of certain subjects with an eye to potential foreign direct investment and potential future employment is not a suitable long-term strategy in the education system as a whole.

Staying with the school context, if we are to implement European policy in *multilingualism* at any discernable level we must re-consider two very important administrative aspects of current school organisation in Ireland. The first administrative aspect requiring change is that of individual school *autonomy*, particularly in decisions around potentially offering restricted access to the entire range of modern foreign language subjects available on the curriculum. A more centralised approach to national educational policy implementation in schools will need to be considered with adequate provision in all geographical areas of fully-qualified teachers

to teach the entire range of curricular subjects available to students in the national curriculum. The second administrative aspect requiring change is that of current teacher autonomy in participating in continuous professional development (CPD). We have seen in Appendix 1 and in Chapter 1 of this study that in the period 1995 to present there were a number of changes to the approaches and methods in teaching modern foreign languages, with the communicative approach currently favoured in Ireland (see Chapter 2 part 1). Whilst we can reflect these changes by continually including emergent trends in teaching methods in initial teacher training and education programmes we must also ensure that qualified teachers are keeping up-to-date with the most recent pedagogies in modern foreign languages education. We will recall from the concluding part of chapter 2 part 2 that the recent EFLUSL project emphasised the benefit of a '*whole school*' commitment to modern foreign languages in the curriculum (see DES, 2009a). Nonetheless, the situation remains in secondary education in Ireland in which more senior teachers may not even be using the same teaching methods as newly-qualified teachers in modern foreign languages. This situation very much needs to be addressed in the short term as it has the effect of firstly, potentially creating confusion for students who may for example be taught French in the Grammar-Translation Approach by one teacher and the Communicative Approach by another; and secondly, inhibiting the possibilities for the more senior teacher to act as a mentor to the newly qualified teachers in their school and generally hindering collaboration amongst teachers in modern foreign languages education in schools.

In the past decades in Ireland, French language has retained its place as most popular modern foreign language at school and it remains significantly so with a near 70% uptake of French for terminal examinations at a national level compared with other modern foreign language options (see Appendix 5 to 7). Despite current curtailment of the further development of the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative noted in the concluding part of Chapter 2 part 2 (see Lynch, 2011) the MLPSI, through which students could learn French, German, Italian and Spanish for the final two years of primary education by schools 'opting-in' to participate in the initiative, has grown to over 500 schools nationally to date and has had some positive effects of extending the diversity of uptake of languages from the more traditional French and German subjects to the less traditional Spanish and Italian languages (see MLPSI, 2010a; 2010b). Whilst the primary research component of this study focussed on upper-secondary level students reporting on their studies (see Appendix 8) in the event of the entire picture of modern foreign languages in education emerging from this study it

became apparent that it would have been interesting to question students on their participation in the MLPSI as this could have provided some insight into any challenges that students had encountered in applying language skills gained at primary level through the MLPSI to their post-primary foreign language studies. In the context of this study I have identified this 'oversight' as *an opportunity* to conduct further research in the future particularly when examined alongside the findings of Chapter 2, part 1 that there is currently no provision at secondary level for those who have studied a foreign language through the MLPSI in terms of level of study. We will recall that the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) were identified in Chapter 2, part 1as wholly suitable policy initiatives at the wider European level which could be applied to foreign language education in Ireland to measure students' progress in language study. There is certainly a current need to provide for foreign language study at a range of appropriate ability levels from the commencement of post-primary studies and/or the further need for the introduction of a terminal examination in modern foreign language subjects at the end of primary school. We will similarly recall from chapter 2 part 1 that a limited availability of teachers and provision for certain foreign language subjects at secondary level has resulted in some students who have studied a particular foreign language through the MLPSI having to take up a completely new language at secondary level and in most cases this is happening in the subjects of Spanish and Italian (see Ó'Dochartaigh & Broderick, 2006).

We have noted in Chapter 2 part 1 that if the MLPSI exists simply to implement European education policy in schools the entire experience may become futile for students in the short to medium term owing to the frustration of studying grammatical features etc. of a foreign language for two years at primary level only to repeat the same study at lower-secondary or to have to study a new language due to limited subject availability at a particular secondary school. If we are to consider the MLPSI's role as an important component of a national government policy agenda towards multilingualism in Ireland and potentially the realization of the Council of Europe aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two'* foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling we can further acknowledge that the initiative as it stands is not currently serving this purpose. Furthermore, in view of the national economic position and the recent withdrawal of funding announcements by Government (see Lynch, 2011) this may well be an area of education that will continue to be inhibited by funding curtailment particularly when viewed in the context of an emergent national government drive in the

uptake and grade attainment in the subjects of Maths and the Sciences. Any reduction in such funding and by association teacher supply to teach all four MLPSI languages may well result in a reversion to the more traditional French & German subjects although there is emergent evidence from national statistics (but interestingly not from the findings of this study) to suggest that uptake of Spanish may be favoured in the future to German language (see Appendices 5 to 7 incl.). If the Council of Europe policy aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' is ever going to be realised in Ireland the MLPSI must be prioritised even in light of the current economic restrictions in education.

The Post-Primary Languages Initiative (see PPLI, 2010) provides for foreign language study in French, Spanish, German, Italian and Arabic in lower and upper-secondary level. The subjects of Japanese and Russian continue to be available at upper-secondary level (PPLI, 2010). We will recall in chapter 2 part 1 that this study has identified the necessity for national examination statistics to be reported by the State Examinations Commission (SEC, 2010) in a way that highlights mother-tongue and non mother-tongue candidates so that a clearer picture emerges of levels of grade attainment in these subjects at a national level. This recommendation is in line with a disproportionally high level of students achieving '*A*' grades at higher level study in both Japanese and Russian languages than is the case for other foreign language subjects (see Chapter 2, part 1).

The uptake of modern foreign language subjects in secondary level education in Ireland in terms of student numbers opting for foreign language subjects has remained relatively constant in recent years. At Junior Certificate level amongst the available subjects of French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin and Ancient Greek, French remains most popular language with over 68% of students opting to study French towards Junior Certificate exams followed by German at over 18%, Spanish at over 11% and 0.7% opting for Italian (see Table 1a, Chapter 2, part 1). Interestingly in the context of this study near 70% of students opted to study their modern foreign language at higher level in the 2010 examination session and this level of motivation to choose the higher study option is to be welcomed. A comparison of the national statistics for the 2010 and the 2005 national Junior Certificate examinations shows an emerging switch to Italian and Spanish Languages with the more significant increase in the uptake of Spanish against a slight decrease in uptake of German language (see Table 1b, Chapter 2, part 1). We will recall from Chapter 2 that this study has recommended that we be enthused as language educators by these 'seeds of diversity' and do all we can to support

continued foreign languages subject provision and diversity at school. If we compare these national statistics (see tables 1a and 1b Chapter 2, part 1) to the findings of this study outlined in Table 6, Chapter 4, we find that uptake of languages for Junior Certificate examinations indicate a similarly strong preference for French and German languages with French at 68.9% uptake and German at 27.5% with far lower uptake of Spanish at only 1.9% and a reasonably comparable uptake of Italian at 0.4%.

In the 2009 examination session near 87% of Junior Certificate Examinees studied a modern foreign language (DES, 2010). However, we must recall from Chapter 2, part 1 that current National University of Ireland (see NUI, 2010) and individual school policies require that students study a foreign language for university matriculation consequently high uptake of foreign language subjects is to be expected. We must qualify however that this figure will be made up of students who are happily studying a foreign language and others who feel they are having the language subjects *imposed on them* by individual school and NUI requirements. In fact the findings of the primary research questionnaire of this study (see Appendix 8) is that 68.2% of students reported continuing a modern foreign language subject after Junior Certificate examinations as they needed the subject for University entry (See Table 10, Chapter 4) and this was the most frequently cited reason for continuing a language studied at Junior Certificate level for the Leaving Certificate reported in this study.

It became apparent as the broader picture emerged in the course of analyses of the findings of this study that it may have been useful to enquire of the principals in the schools who completed the primary research questionnaire (see Appendix 8) as to the *provision* of modern foreign language subjects for study at their school. Students reported on their *uptake* of modern foreign language subjects only (see Tables 7 & 8, Chapter 4). It would have been interesting to have tested if the findings of this study reflected any level of restricted foreign language provision at the schools included in the study. We can however, at best suggest anecdotally that the findings of this study particularly relating to the low uptake of Spanish at 1.9% compared with a national average of over 11% (see above) *may* highlight a *lower provision of Spanish* language for study at the schools who participated in the primary research questionnaire (see Appendix 8) of this study.

5.3 The retention of modern foreign language subjects in secondary education

This study has addressed the retention of foreign languages subjects between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Currently, over 80% of students in Ireland transfer from lower-secondary to upper-secondary education (see European Commission, 2010d: 89). We have noted, in Chapter 2 part 1 that whilst the completion of Junior Certificate Examinations marks the end of compulsory schooling there is a strong cultural emphasis in Ireland on completion of secondary school to upper-secondary level. A comparison of the 2007 and 2008 Junior Certificate candidates in foreign language subjects (see Tables 3 & 4, Chapter 2, part 1) and the Leaving Certificate candidates in 2010 (see Appendix 5) showed an average of 13% fall off in candidates opting to be examined in foreign language subjects at upper-secondary level. As qualified in Chapter 2, part 1 this percentage is considered 'a rough calculation' but nonetheless reflect a greater retention of modern foreign language subjects to upper-secondary level than is the case in a number of studies presented in Chapter 2, part 1 in the context of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. As we have seen 68.2% of students reported continuing a modern foreign language subject after Junior Certificate examinations as they needed the subject for University entry (See Table 10, Chapter 4) and this was the most frequently cited reason for continuing a language studied at Junior Certificate level for the Leaving Certificate reported in this study. Hence, in view of any likely future change in the position of foreign language subjects at school as a result of easing of NUI university matriculation requirements the findings of an NCCA longitudinal study reported in Chapter 2, part 1 (see Smyth, Dunne & Darmody, 2007; Smyth, Dunne, Mc Coy & Darmody 2006; Smyth, Mc Coy, & Darmody, 2004) are likely to become more worrying. Respondents to the studies reported languages as amongst *the least liked subjects* at school in addition to *the most difficult subjects* and the subjects that students most wished they *had not taken* for study towards Junior Certificate. French, German and Irish were reported in the studies as amongst the *most difficult* school subjects with English reported as *least difficult*. A 'most interesting subject' category did not include any language subjects at school whilst the 'least interesting subject' category included Irish, French and German. These findings would certainly suggest a likely decrease in students opting for modern foreign language subjects in school in the future should current university matriculation requirements be changed. There are currently no reported plans for any changes to university matriculation requirements of a modern foreign language subject at

least in the short-term. Hence, as language educators we can breathe easily in terms of our employment prospects in the short to medium term!

Uptake levels of modern foreign language subjects for Leaving Certificate Examinations show that in the 2010 examination session over 68% of students studied French; over 18% studied German; 0.7% studied Italian; 8.99% studied Spanish; 0.41 % studied Japanese; and 0.67 % studied Russian (see Table 5a, Appendix 5). By comparison in the 2009 examination session over 68% of students studied French; over 18% studies German; 0.78% studied Italian; 8.10 % studied Spanish; 0.61% studied Japanese; and 0.57% studied Russian (see Table 5b, Appendix 6). In the 2008 examination session 70% of students studied French; over 18% studied German; 0.64% studied Italian; 7.49% studied Spanish; 0.32% studied Japanese; and 0.61% studied Russian (see Table 5c, Appendix 7).

By comparison the findings of this study in terms of students' reported intentions to sit certain foreign language subjects at Leaving Certificate examinations have shown that 62.9% of students reported intending to take French language; 25.7% German; 1.4% Spanish; 0.3% Italian; and 1.4% other languages. Thus, in line with the findings for Junior Certificate examinations (above) a comparison of national statistics and the findings of this study indicate that there is a reported significantly lower uptake of Spanish and a significantly higher uptake of German for Leaving Certificate (see Table 7, Chapter 4). This study also reported on the reasons that students gave for not continuing a language studied for Junior Certificate towards Leaving Certificate study. In this case, 54.3% of students reported *not enjoying modern foreign languages*; 39% reported already having established that they do not need a modern foreign language subject for future study or career. Interestingly, none of the respondents reported changing to another foreign language subject at upper-secondary level. However, 17.4% reported *other reasons* for discontinuing a language subject including subject timetabling; being a foundation level student and thus not being permitted to study a foreign language and in just one case opting for a different foreign language (see Table 8, Chapter 4). The overall findings of this study was that in terms of modern foreign language retention students reported not having studied a modern foreign language subject *at all* at secondary level rather than discounting a language between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations (see Table 9: Chapter 4).

As we have seen in terms of students' reported reasons for continuing a modern foreign language subject towards Leaving Certificate, the most frequency cited reason for doing so were the current NUI matriculation requirements reported by 68.2% of respondents. Interestingly, this was followed by students' reports of 'enjoying modern foreign language subjects' reported by 36% of respondents and 'modern foreign language subjects are compulsory at my school' reported by 27% of respondents. Whilst the reported 36% who are enjoying foreign language subjects bodes well for the future of modern foreign languages at school the other two factors of NUI matriculation requirements and individual school policies of compulsory requirements for uptake of modern foreign language subjects will most certainly be subject to change should these NUI policies and internal school policies change in the future.

In the context of students' overall views on the importance of modern foreign languages beyond terminal examinations, this study sought students' opinions on the languages which they considered necessary for their futures and the reasons for their choices. English was reported by a near universal 95.9% of respondents; followed by Irish reported by 51.9% of respondents. French was reported by 42.9% of respondents; German by 16.4%; Spanish by 11.1%; and Italian by 3.7%. 'Other' languages totalled 5% and included Arabic, Afrikaans, Chinese, Dutch, Finnish, Flemish, Greek, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese and Russian. (see Table 11, Chapter 4). What emerged from students' reported reasons for considering certain languages as necessary for their futures generally alluded to a near universal consideration that English is the most widely spoken language throughout the world; Irish should be retained as it is a national language and is also necessary for certain semi-state careers; and modern foreign languages are useful for travelling. Hence, there were no reports that suggested that the modern foreign language had any value beyond terminal examinations other than that of occasional use during period of work or travel abroad and this is in line with a number of the theoretical reflections in Chapter 2 part 2 as well as being a central theme in the work of Professor David Little of the Centre for Languages and Communications Studies Trinity College Dublin who has published widely on the subject of languages in education in Ireland including the value which students themselves place on the modern foreign language skills gained in secondary education (see Little, 2003; 2005; 2007; 2009).

5.4 Grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects

In terms of grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects, this study firstly considered grade achievement at lower secondary level (see Chapter 2, part 1, Section 2.1.4) in the most frequently studied subjects of French and German. National statistics indicate that in 2010 a total of 10.7 % of students who opted for French achieved a grade 'A' at higher level with the average grade in higher level French being 'C' which was achieved by 31.6% of candidates. In terms of ordinary level French, 3.5% of students achieved a grade 'A' whilst the average grade was 'C' achieved by 34% of candidates. In the subject of German 12.4% of students achieved a Grade 'A' at higher level with the average grade being 'C' reported by 32.6% of candidates. At ordinary level 6.8% of German candidates achieved an 'A' grade whilst the average grade was a slightly better 'B' achieved by 38.3% of students. In fact in 2010 'C' grades were most frequent at Junior Certificate level across all language subjects with the exception of ordinary level German (see SEC, 2010).

By comparison, reported Junior Certificate grades *in this study* indicated that in French 9.2% of students reported achieving 'A' grades with an average of 'C' grades reported by 40.3% of respondents. For German 6.9% of students reported achieving 'A' grades with an average of 'B' reported by 36.7% of respondents. (see Table 12, Chapter 4). Students were not asked to qualify whether grades at Junior Certificate were at higher level or ordinary level study (see 'Student Questionnaire' Appendix 8). Further analyses of the findings of this study (see Table 13, Chapter 4) indicate that the higher the grade achieved at Junior Certificate in French or German languages the more likely the student is to continue the study of that language subject towards Leaving Certificate examinations. However, there is no evidence of 'crossing over' between either French or German with students reporting continuing the language already studied. These findings are certainly interesting in the context of the Council of Europe aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling. There is certainly little if any evidence at a national level (see Chapter 2 part 1) or in the case of the findings of this study (see 'Findings' chapter 4) of students studying a first foreign language in lower secondary and taking up the study of a further foreign language at upper-secondary. Again, this situation takes us back to the limitations posed by individual school autonomy and the earlier recommendations of this study of a more centralized approach to European modern foreign languages policy implementation in schools.

If we consider grades achieved at Leaving Certificate 2010 at a national level, we can see that amongst higher level candidates in French 6.2% achieved an 'A1', whilst the average grade was 'C2' achieved by 11.6% of candidates. In ordinary level French 0.3% of candidates achieved an 'A1' grade whilst the average grade was a 'C1' achieved by 13.6% of ordinary level candidates. In German 6.9% of higher level candidates achieved an 'A1' whilst the average grade was a 'C2' achieved by 13.1% of candidates. At ordinary level 0.6% of students achieved an 'A1' grade whilst the average grade was 'C1' achieved by 14.3% of candidates. In Spanish 8.6% of higher level students achieved an 'A1' whilst the average grade was 'B3' achieved by 12.4% of candidates. At ordinary level 1.6% of students achieved an 'A1' in Spanish whilst the average was 'C2' achieved by 13.5% of ordinary level candidates. In Italian 7.6% of students achieved an 'A1' at higher level whilst the average grade was 'C1' achieved by 14.7% of candidates. In ordinary level Italian 1.1% of candidates achieved an 'A1' with an average grade of 'D2' achieved by 16.8% of candidates. In Japanese a surprising 33.6% of candidates at higher level achieved an 'A1' grade which also represented the average grade at higher level. There were no 'A1' grades awarded at ordinary level with 25.9% of candidates achieving a 'C1' grade which was the average grade amongst ordinary level candidates. In Russian and even more surprising 57.7% of candidates achieved an 'A1' at higher level and there were no candidates for the ordinary level examination in Russian language (see SEC, 2010).

Thus, in terms of grade attainment in 2010 we see less than 10% of students achieving 'A1' grades across foreign language subjects with the average grade being a rather disappointing C in the most frequently studied French, German and Italian languages and a slightly better 'B3' average at higher level in Spanish. The introduction of the languages of Japanese and Russian through the Post-Primary languages initiative (PPLI) is certainly to be welcomed. However, as noted above grades awarded in these subjects need to be more transparent by stating the exact extent to which the achievement of such high numbers of 'A1' grades at higher level in both Japanese and Russian may be attributed to mother-tongue candidates rather than students who are studying the languages for the first time at upper-secondary level for just two years before terminal examinations.

National Statistics are also provided for 2008 and 2009 Leaving Certificate examination sessions in Chapter 2 part 1 for comparison so that we may identify trends in current grade

achievement in Leaving Certificate at a national level and compare these findings with the findings of this study in terms of students' reported anticipated grades at Leaving Certificate examinations. The complete set of results for 2009 are already documented in Chapter 2 part 1 thus for current purposes we will consider the outstanding aspects regarding grade achievement in modern foreign languages in 2009. These included a decrease to less than 5% of the total number of candidates achieving an 'A1' grade in the most popular subject of French at higher level. There was once again by comparison with the 2010 results a disappointing average 'C' grade at both higher and ordinary levels in French and Spanish and at higher level in German with a slightly better B3 average in ordinary level German. Italian language was the surprise of 2009 with 17% of higher level candidates achieving an 'A1'grade. This success is short lived as we have seen in the 2010 session above disappointingly this level of achievement of top grades in Italian regresses by almost 10% in the 2010 examination session to just over 7% of candidates (see SEC, 2010).

The outstanding features of the 2008 session were again a disappointing average 'C' grade across the most popular languages with a better average of 'B2' at higher level Spanish. As we can see in the 2009 session above this average grade increase was to be short-lived as the average higher level grade in Spanish reverts to a 'C' in the following year. Grade achievement in Italian at higher level is once again high with 15.9% of students achieving an 'A1' grade which we have seen increases to over 17% in 2009 only to fall back significantly in 2010 to less than 7%. It is a recommendation of this study that the reasons for this sudden decrease in grade achievement in Italian will need to be investigated in the wider national context (see SEC, 2010) particularly in view of any future commitment to continued modern foreign language diversity at school.

We will recall from the primary research questionnaire (see Appendix 8) that in the context of this study respondents reported *grades achieved* at Junior Certificate discussed above (see Table 12, Chapter 4) and *grades anticipated* at Leaving Certificate (see Tables 14 (a) and 14 (b)). In terms of Leaving Certificate examination grades *aimed for* this study has found that 14.5% of respondents anticipated an unspecified 'A' grade at higher level French with a further 13% anticipating an 'A1' grade. The average grade anticipated is an unspecified 'B' grade reported by 22.1% of respondents. For ordinary level French 13.6% of respondents reported 'A' unspecified whilst a further 4.9% anticipated an 'A1'. The average grade

reported is an unspecified 'B' grade which represented the average grade anticipated at ordinary level (see Tables 14 (a) and 14 (b), Chapter 4).

In German, 10.7% of respondents anticipated an unspecified 'A' grade at higher level with a further 10.7% anticipating an 'A1' grade. The average grade anticipated is 'B1' reported by 20.7% of respondents and very closely followed by an unspecified 'B' grade at 18.2%. At ordinary level 18.6% of respondents reported aiming for an unspecified 'A' whilst the average anticipated grade is an unspecified 'B' reported by 22% of respondents and closely followed by 'B1' reported by 16.9% of respondents. In Spanish, 33.3% of respondents anticipated an unspecified 'A' at higher level, a further 33.3% an unspecified 'B' and a further 33.3% a 'B1'. This was the same for ordinary level Spanish save for an anticipated 'A1' which was reported by 33.3% of respondents. It is important to point out that amongst the respondents to this study just 0.4% of the general cohort reported studying Spanish. In Italian 50% of higher level candidates anticipated an 'A1' grade whilst a further 50% anticipated an unspecified 'A'. Again, amongst the respondents to this study just 0.3% of the general cohort reported studying Italian. Other languages reported included Japanese, Arabic and Portuguese which collectively represented 1.4% of the general study cohort with 50% aiming for an unspecified 'A' at higher level; a further 10% anticipating an 'A1' and 40% aiming for an unspecified 'B'. (see tables 14(a) and 14 (b) Chapter 4).

Comparisons of the national statistics (above) and the findings of this study indicate that across all modern foreign languages students are aiming high and their expectations of such high grades is not in keeping with the national averages of grades awarded at Leaving Certificate level in subsequent examination sessions in 2008, 2009 and 2010 (see SEC, 2010). Students reporting achieving 'A' grades at Junior Certificate level were almost universally studying the same foreign language towards leaving certificate at higher level (see Tables, 14(c) to 14(f) Chapter 4). 79.5 per cent of those who reported attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French reported they were aiming for some sort of an 'A' at Leaving Certificate (comprising the 'A unspecified', 'A1', 'A2' and 'A3' categories), and all of those who reported attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German reported they were aiming for some sort of an 'A' at Leaving Certificate. Of those who reported not continuing language study at Leaving Certificate their average grade was 'C' in French (see Table 15, Chapter 4).

As we have seen, the most frequently cited reason for continuing a language for the Leaving Certificate was the requirement of a modern language for university or college entry (68.2 per cent of such responses), followed by enjoying the subject (36.0 per cent of such responses). When reported Junior Certificate grades are taken into account (see Tables Sixteen (a) and Sixteen (b), Chapter 4), these two factors remain the most frequently cited (for example, by 65.9 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French and 92.3 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German, and 58.5 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate French and 61.5 per cent of those reporting attaining an 'A' in Junior Certificate German, respectively).

Interestingly, the proportion of students reporting that they are continuing to study a modern foreign language for the Leaving Certificate because they enjoy studying modern foreign languages falls step-by-step with descending grades (from 58.5 per cent of those reporting 'A's in Junior Certificate French, to 12.3 per cent of those with 'D's; and from 61.5 per cent of those reporting 'A's in Junior Certificate German, to 20.0 per cent of those with 'D's). However, no such grade-related pattern is discernible when students' reports of continuing a language for university or college entry is examined. In terms of students' reports of grades attained at Junior Certificate examinations (see table 12, Chapter 4) and reporting of languages which respondents considered to be necessary for their future (see table 11, Chapter 4) this study has shown that the higher the grade achieved in a foreign language subject at Junior Certificate level the more necessary the student considered that language for the future (see Table 17, Chapter 4). Once again the proportion of students 'crossing over' in their consideration that a modern foreign language other than the one they studied for the Junior Certificate was necessary to their futures was negligible (see Tables 12 and 17, Chapter 4).

A recommendation of this study on the basis of comparison of the national statistics and the findings of this study is that we need to encourage universal uptake of a modern foreign language at primary level, to continue to study that modern foreign language subject towards examinations to Junior Certificate (ISCED, Level 2) and to take up the study of an additional modern foreign language to Leaving Certificate (ISCED, Level 3) (See Appendix 2). Whilst we note that the Council of Europe '*mother tongue plus two*' policy aspiration recommends mother tongue plus two foreign languages to the end of compulsory education (ISCED, Level 2) we have already noted that the strong cultural emphasis in Ireland to remain at school to

completion of Leaving Certificate Examinations (ISCED, Level 3) provides an even greater opportunity for the national government in Ireland to facilitate '*a mother tongue plus two*' initiative in schools than would generally be the case in other European countries where much lower percentages of students remain at school to the completion of upper-secondary level. A further recommendation to be made here in terms of grade achievement is that there is evidence from the national statistics in Chapter 2 part 1 and from the findings of this study (see 'Findings' chapter 4) that there is an average achievement rate of Grade 'C' in modern foreign language subjects in successive state examinations. This is not an acceptable position. As recommended in Chapter 2 part 1 the State Examinations Commission needs to issue examination results in modern foreign languages with a breakdown in grades into the associated examination component strands of oral; aural and written so that weaknesses in particular examination components can be identified and reversed. We have similarly noted in Chapter 2 part 1 that there is an average 10% of students achieving top grade i.e. A1, A etc at terminal examinations. There is a need for the national government Department of Education and Skills (DES, 2010a) to identify the schools that are preparing these high achieving students and to question the students themselves on their learning experiences so that national strategies towards *best practice in teaching and learning modern foreign languages* can be devised and shared amongst school communities and their students. 'C' grades are not an acceptable standard of achievement in modern foreign languages at school year on year particularly in view of the investment in and focus on modern foreign languages education development in schools in recent years.

5.5 What consideration is given at member state level to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school?

We have noted in Chapter 2 part 1 that in In March 2007, the Minister for Education and Science (now Education and Skills) increased the marks allocation for the Modern Languages Leaving Certificate oral examination from 25% to 40%, and from 20% to 40% in the Junior Certificate in order to promote an emphasis on using the language for communication. In the interim period there is growing concern amongst language educators that this change has not particularly resulted in an increased proficiency in target language use amongst school-leavers. As such it remains vital that practices to encourage the use of the modern language for all communications in class as well as measures to encourage opportunities for target

language use outside of the classroom in study groups and study abroad etc. are prioritised. Similarly noted in Chapter 2, part 1, the current syllabus aims to lead every pupil towards four basic outcomes in modern foreign languages: a communicative competence in the target language; an awareness of language and communications; an awareness of how to go about learning a foreign language; and a level of cultural awareness (see DES, 2010a; NCCA, 2009) none of which are being fully emphasised and promoted in schools.

In examining the encouragement of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages education, this study firstly considered students reports of the physical aspects of their modern foreign language studies in the classroom and at school including class sizes (i.e. student numbers) in their modern foreign language classes (see Table Eighteen, Chapter 4); the number of modern foreign language classes they have per week (see Table Nineteen, Chapter 4); the duration of their modern foreign language classes (see Table Twenty, Chapter 4); and their feelings of whether the duration of their modern foreign language classes is sufficient or not (see Tables Twenty-one (a) and Twenty-one (b), Chapter 4). It was found that an average class size of 21-25 students is reported by 43.3% of respondents which meets the current national government aspirations to retaining class sizes at secondary level at a maximum of 26 students per class (see DES, 2010a; Table 18, Chapter 4). In terms of the number of modern foreign language classes per week the average number was 4 classes per week reported by 40.3% of respondents (see Table 19, Chapter 4). In terms of allocation of time to foreign language subjects in the school curriculum in Ireland this average of 4 classes per week currently only meets minimal European requirements of between 90 and 200 teaching hours dedicated to modern foreign languages per school year at secondary level (see European Commission, 2010d), and there needs to be increased number of hours dedicated to modern foreign languages in the school curriculum. The average reported duration of individual foreign language classes is 40 minutes reported by 56.1% of respondents (see Table 20, Chapter 4) with a near universal reporting by respondents that they feel the class time to be sufficient for their foreign language studies representing 94.2% or respondents to this study (see Table 21(a), Chapter 4). This finding is interesting particularly in view of recent debate at European level favouring the increasing of time dedicated to foreign language teaching across member states (see European Commission, 2010d).

Interestingly, this near universal reporting of students' finding class time in foreign languages to be sufficient held true for this study's cohort even when compared with grades achieved at

Junior Certificate examinations (see Table 21(b), Chapter 4). Potential implementation of the European Initiative on Content and Languages Integrated Learning (CLIL) by which students study other curricular subjects through the medium of the target language e.g. geography taught in French language for students of French, would allow for greater exposure to the target language without necessarily requiring any additional curricular time. This would also be a very interesting pedagogical method that students may enjoy as it has the potential of allowing them to *use* their target language in a productive way and increase fluency and proficiency (see European Commission, 2010e). There is little to no reported evidence of successful use of the Content and Language Integrated Learning Initiative in Irish schools. However, it is a consideration that it has most likely been implemented at some schools and as such this study recommends that this is a further potential research opportunity in modern foreign languages education in Ireland.

In terms of the use of target languages in the classroom in the promotion of fluency and proficiency in foreign languages this study found that the language of instruction and communication that the majority of students report being used in modern languages classes is English which was reported by 62.9 per cent of respondents to this study overall (see Table 22(a), Chapter 4). When the modern language itself is used for instruction or communication in class the majority of respondents report they can follow the class either sometimes or most of the time which represents 89.4 per cent of respondents. Interestingly, the proportion who reported that they could 'never' follow the class when the target language is used was negligible reported by a mere 0.6 per cent of respondents (see Table 22(b), Chapter 4). When reporting on the language used during group work with their peers in foreign language class respondents reported English alone reported by 83.5 per cent of respondents. The proportion reporting the next most frequently cited category, that is, that the modern foreign language was used by students when conducting group work in the modern language class represented 11.2 per cent of respondents (see Table 22 (c), Chapter 4).

In terms of the promotion of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school these findings are not particularly inspiring. Whilst the use of the target language in the classroom will vary widely from school to school, depending on individual school and teacher practices, continued use of English is not an acceptable 'status quo'. We have noted in Chapter 2 part 2 that students exposure to the target language may be limited to time spent in class with the target language teacher for the entire duration of the target language study.

Therefore, it is vital that where possible and practicable the target language remains as the main language in class. The findings of the Department of Education and Skills recent reporting on the evaluation of languages at upper-secondary level reported more positive findings regarding target language use in class. However, when considering these findings we must also quality that visits to schools for observation of language classes was notified in advance in the EFLUSL study so there may have been more target language use by teachers and students than would normally be the case in the course of a lesson whilst they were under observation in the EFLUSL study (see DES, 2009a). Whilst there was reported use of the target language in the observed classrooms in the EFLUSL study, it was noted that students did not use the target language very much for *meaningful communication* in the classroom with one of the classroom reports indicating that '*students were apprehensive about target language use in public but were willing to try it in pair work and in group work*' (DES, 2009a: 37) and another reporting that '*students used the target language for responses but not for interaction'*. There was no uninterrupted speech and consequently '*few possibilities for students to use the target language in a communicative way*' due to exercises and lesson task being closed and not offering '*opportunities for spontaneous communication*' (DES, 2009a:38).

As language educators, we must acknowledge varying ability levels in the classroom, whilst concurring that the use of the target language is nonetheless essential to the development of fluency and proficiency in its use. Thus, in all modern foreign language classrooms mother-tongue translation should only be called upon *after* every other innovative pedagogical means has been exhausted in our attempts to facilitate student comprehension. *Immediate* translation by a class teacher when introducing potentially complex target language tasks will simply hinder students in applying themselves to any attempt to understand the target language task under study. Consequently, when a task becomes too difficult students simply learn to sit back and wait for the teacher's explanation and/or translation. As noted previously:

'*Effective use of the target language in the classroom is complex. Students need to be supported with additional linguistic scaffolding in their use of the target language in their use of the target language for certain tasks. They need coping strategies for use in the case of (communication) breakdown and teachers may have to recognize that a lower level of proficiency in complex tasks is to be expected'* (DES, 2009a: 39).

The proportions of students who reported on the differing languages of instruction / communication used most often in their modern foreign languages classes did not reliably

relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level (see Tables 22(d) and 22 (e), Chapter 4). However, there was a clear relationship between the proportions of students who reported that they could 'always' follow the class when the modern foreign language was being used for instruction / communication and reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German. The highest proportions of reporting that this was the case were found in those who reported having attained grade 'A's (36.6 per cent in French, 23.2 per cent in German), with a step-by-step decline being observed in each language down to grades 'E' and 'F' where no-student reported that this was true for them (see Table 22 (f), Chapter 4).

The proportions of students who reported on the different languages used by them when conducting group work in their modern foreign language classes did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level (see Tables 22(g) and 22(h), Chapter 4). This study has shown that that the majority of students in the sample reported that the language that was used by students when asking questions in the modern language class was English alone reported by 78.2 per cent of respondents (see Table 23 (a), Chapter 4). The proportions of students who reported on the different languages they used when asking questions in their modern foreign language classes did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level (see Table 23 (b) and 23 (c), Chapter 4). Asked whether or not they considered their current modern foreign language skills to be sufficient to study or work abroad and keeping in mind that these students have completed Junior Certificate examinations and are preparing for Leaving Certificate examinations this study has found that only around one-third of respondents indicated that their current modern language skills would be sufficient to study or work where that language is spoken which was reported by 33.1 per cent of respondents which could be considered as higher than expected at this level of study (see Table 24 (a), Chapter 4). The proportion of students who reported whether or not they consider their current modern language skills to be sufficient to study / work in a country where that language is spoken did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level (see Table (24(b), Chapter 4).

As noted in Chapter 2 part 1 it would be helpful if future Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Grades included a breakdown of the marks awarded in each examination component, i.e., the aural component; the oral component; and the written component as this

would provide greater insight into individual students performance in each examination task and also provide a measure of oral competence in the target language amongst students at school. Other findings on respondents' communicative use and/or attempted communicative use of their modern foreign language are reported in the upcoming 'Strategies in language learning' strand in section 5.7 below. It is, however, acknowledged that these findings on student participation in study-abroad programmes and extra-curricular language classes/programmes outside normal class time and in their local communities could equally have been included under the current '*development of fluency and proficiency*' strand.

As we have noted in Chapter 2, part 1, European policies and systems certainly exist to encourage and enable student and teacher mobility for increased levels of proficiency development in target languages at school. It is up to individual member states to decide how to run their educational systems and to establish the degree of autonomy available to schools in the provision of language subjects at school and the encouragement of both teacher and student mobility to improve proficiency levels achievable in target language study. The role of the European Commission is to help member states tackle the challenges of linguistic diversity by supporting and co-ordinating action via the national agencies such as Léargas and *Europass* Centres (see European Commission, 2007d) working together with schools to encourage a European dimension to learning. Similarly noted in Chapter 2 part 1 piloting of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) models in Ireland to date have mainly focussed on: getting learners to accept responsibility for their learning; fostering use of TL in class; helping teachers to develop planning skills; and looking for a new way of teaching for the exams. Teachers' reported reflections on portfolio use in the classroom included seeing: *'an overall picture of pupils learning with a plan we work on rather than just going through the motions. I am more aware of the learner having needs and looking at teaching from the learners' point of view' (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002:29). 'It is encouraging to see them think about any of their learning. Evaluating their own and each other's work is fantastic and I want to do a lot more of this' (Ushioda & Ridley, 2002:32).*

The most recent evaluation of foreign languages at secondary level in Ireland report noted that:

'*There was clear evidence in one of the classroom observed in the study of students reflecting on their own learning 'because the teacher happened to be working with the ELP getting students to reflect on past and future target language learning…..Where students were encouraged to formulate their own learning goals and*

otherwise take responsibility for their own language learning, the level of linguistic competence seemed quite high for the class level' (DES, 2009a: 41).

A major setback in potential European collaboration across member states on future modern foreign language initiatives is the very recent finding that Ireland will now *not participate* in the on-going European Indicator of Language Competence: '*In 2012 the Commission will review the progress made by member countries and when examined Ireland may well be one of the member states scrutinised for non-implementation of the objectives set out by the Commission*' (Lynch, 2011).

In spite of the current economic climate in Ireland, this decision is hugely surprising, particularly given that the costs of participation in the European Indicator of Language Competence study are to be covered at a European level. For the national government to withdraw from the European Indicator study is short-sighted and one has to question the reasons for this decision. The challenges of the '*current economic climate'* is starting to emerge as a '*veil to cover all ills'* in terms of its potential opportunity for member state governments to side-step the implementation of European policies that are likely to be both administratively challenging and potentially exposing of a certain level of mediocrity in education in Ireland. Our analysis of grades at a national level (see Chapter 2 part 1) and in the appropriate strand of this study have shown an emergent average 'C' grade across modern foreign language subjects (see 'Findings' chapter 4) and this would certainly indicate that Ireland would likely not have compared very favourably with other member states partaking in the European Indicator of Language Competence study. This finding may well be amongst the reasons for the government decision to withdraw entirely from the study.

We will recall the points made in the concluding part of section 5.1 above as to whether there is an actual interest by Europeans themselves to develop as multilingual citizens? (see INRA, 2001, 2006). Any such interest has to be developed and driven by national governments. Hence, withdrawal from the European Indicator study serves the purpose of communicating to Irish people that developing as multilingual European citizens is currently '*on hold'* until the economic climate improves and as such the European drive towards multilingualism is not a priority in Ireland at this time.

5.6 Prior Knowledge and Students' language and linguistic awareness

As outlined in Chapter 2 part 2, in considering the learner in the modern foreign language classroom it would have been possible to include any number of applied theoretical perspectives in classroom learning. Ultimately this part of the study focussed around four key questions, two of which were addressed through a review of the literature, i.e., students' prior knowledge and students' language & linguistic awareness; and a further two which were addressed through a review of the literature *and* their subsequent application to the primary research component of the study i.e. student motivation and student learning strategies in their learning of modern foreign languages both inside and outside of the classroom.

We have already acknowledged in the context of the MLPSI (above) that the initial questions relating to students' prior knowledge and students' language and linguistic awareness could certainly have been tested through the primary research component of this study had a questionnaire item been included which allowed students to report on their prior knowledge of foreign languages *to that point* of their studies e.g. through their study of foreign languages at primary level via the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative *or* previous periods of living abroad *or* visits to target language communities on holidays during their primary and lower-secondary education (see 'Student Questionnaire' Appendix 8). We have further acknowledged that this regrettable omission nonetheless identifies a potential area of further research beyond this study which will most certainly be followed up i.e. a potential national study on provisions for modern foreign language students' prior knowledge of foreign languages upon entry to lower-secondary education.

It was further identified in Chapter 2, part 2 that including questionnaire items in the primary research component on *language and linguistic awareness* would have firstly considerably lengthened an already detailed questionnaire (see 'Student Questionnaire' Appendix 8); and secondly, may have resulted in such varied responses as to not provide any discernable level of opportunity for analyses and discussion. We will similarly recall from Chapter 2 part 2 that in Ireland the current place of modern foreign languages at school at upper- secondary level is that of a compulsory subject requirement for university matriculation for the majority of courses at third level. Thus, this study has found that many students who have ambitions to proceed to university level are currently studying a modern language (s) because they *have to*. (see NUI, 2010). When respondents to this study were questioned on their reasons for

continuing modern foreign language subjects to Leaving Certificate level the most reported reason was 'requiring a foreign language for university/college entry' reported by 68.2% of respondents (see Table 10, Chapter 4).

A more holistic approach to 'language' at primary level allows for provision of *all language needs* be that literacy (and by association in the Irish context 'numeracy'), mother-tongue support and English language support; in addition to modern foreign language education. There is nothing new about this holistic approach to 'language' in education and again it is necessary to stress the findings of the 1987 Curriculum and Examinations Board study of languages in education (see CEB, 1987) and successive studies (see Chapter 2, part 1) which have continually called for a changed approach to the position of languages in education in our schools. The situation remains that there is little *if any* linking of language subjects at school in Ireland. A further concern in the promotion of fluency and proficiency in foreign languages education is that schools are autonomous in whether they wish to *opt into* an oral component of foreign language examinations for *Junior Certificate* examinations with only a minority of schools currently doing so. Thus many students of foreign languages may be *formally* tested in their oral proficiency of the language for the first time at terminal examinations for Leaving Certificate.

As noted in Chapter 2 part 2 the subject syllabus in English is primarily literature based thus students have relatively little experience of explicit teaching or learning of grammatical structures etc. in their mother tongue languages. Consequently, students may have difficulty in attaching any level of discernable appreciation to the subject content of the foreign language if they are ambivalent about engaging with the subject in the first place. We have acknowledged in Chapter 2 part 2 that although linguistics is not a formal school subject, a student beginning foreign language studies as part of his secondary school subject options has inevitably been exposed to linguistics having undertaken years of instruction in reading, writing & composition and that the task of modern foreign language learning, introduced as a school subject is essentially to cultivate the skill components already mastered for the first language so that they can be applied effectively to the building of a new language. (Hawkins, 1987, 1999). Whilst studies by Stephen Krashen also acknowledge the importance of language and linguistic awareness he added to these the importance of setting the study level of language subject content just slightly above the students' ability levels as they progress through the language learning process. In this way, students continue to be challenged and

motivated by the subject matter rather than de-motivated and frustrated by tasks that prove too complex for them to enjoy the learning experience (Krashen, 1981; 2003).

We have similarly acknowledged in Chapter 2 part 2 that Devitt (2002) recommends that teachers can assist learners by making as much as possible of what the learner is already capable of inferring/predicting even in the initial stages of target language learning:

'*We can predict words one fifth of a second after hearing the beginning. We can predict a lot of what is to be said or written about something before we even start listening or reading, because we are probably familiar with about 80% of the contents. In fact, much of the information we get in reading and listening comes not from the words or from the sound waves, but from the scenarios we already have in our head which these symbols activate*' (Devitt, in Bailly et al., 2002: 84).

This type of teaching supports the communicative functions of language wherein language classes are more directly focussed on the use of authentic texts so that students can increasingly be exposed to what are considered more meaningful tasks (see Brumfit, 1984, 1986; Mitchell, 1988; Mitchell & Myles, 1998). The more recent communicative approach to language teaching and learning is now the predominant means by which students at school in Ireland learn a second language. Thus, classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence including grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic. Recent concern with this communicative approach to foreign language learning centres on the possibility that on completion of their target language studies some students will *only* be able to apply the rules which they have studied to the very specific types of scenarios they have been taught in language class through the communicative method thus relying on a relatively small number of carefully studied phrases and essentially producing learners who, '*given the appropriate situation, will produce, with considerable and commendable fluency, the exact phrases dealt with in the classrooms*' (Towell & Hawkins, 1994: 257).

As noted in the 'Development of fluency and proficiency' strand in section 5.5 (above) if we are going to embrace the challenge of encouraging the retention of target language skills once the requisite secondary level examinations have been completed we need to address this mismatch between *perceived* and *actual* language and linguistic understanding and ability:

'In the real world, learners need to act pragmatically in order to survive linguistically, not simply learn to perform adequately to pass some standard in a classroom situation' (Mc Donough, 1995: 30).

Our current individualistic view of education in Ireland fosters rehearsed communication for self-display in modern language study without the appropriate depth of understanding necessary to use the language effectively in a target language community. We will recall from students responses to this study (above) that when asked whether or not they considered their current modern foreign language skills to be sufficient to study or work abroad and keeping in mind that these students have completed Junior Certificate examinations and are preparing for Leaving Certificate examinations it was found that around one-third of respondents indicated that their current modern language skills would be sufficient to study or work where that language is spoken which was reported by 33.1 per cent of respondents (see Table 24 (a), Chapter 4). In the context of this study I am presenting this finding as positive for the simple reason that if we have almost one third of upper-secondary level candidates who are confident of their ability to use their target language in an associated community then there is the possibility to build on this and encourage more students to develop as confident and competent users of the target language under study.

Similarly noted in Chapter 2 part 2, it is here that perhaps the greatest dilemma in foreign language pedagogy in Ireland emerges. We must ask ourselves with absolute honesty whether we as educators are actually teaching with a mind to students *ever* using the language outside of the classroom other than for the purpose of terminal examinations. We will recall from the findings of this study that students were asked to report on the languages which they considered to be necessary for the future and why. English came out on top, reported by a near-universal 95.9 per cent of respondents, followed by Irish reported by 51.9 per cent of respondents. The best placed of the modern foreign languages were French reported by 42.9 per cent of respondents and German reported by 16.4 per cent of respondents. Spanish was reported by 11.2 per cent whilst Italian was reported by 3.7 per cent or respondents (see Table 11, Chapter 4). A qualitative analysis of respondents' reasons for considering particular languages as being necessary for their futures included a combination of English and Foreign languages necessary for career; foreign language useful for travel; Irish necessary for entry to semi-state employment and we should speak our national language; and English most widely spoken language (see analysis following Table 11, Chapter 4).

As we have noted in Chapter 2 part 2, in Ireland terminal examinations predominantly test declarative knowledge, i.e., '*knowing that*' (Mc Laughlin, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) and this situation creates a learning environment *early on* in the course of secondary education in which an examination focus dominates at lower-secondary level for Junior Certificate examinations. Similarly, an examination and university matriculation focus become central at upper-secondary level for Leaving Certificate examination preparation and subsequent conversion of terminal examination grades to *points* for university entry. This examination focus creates a learning environment in Ireland in which students have little time to reflect on the content of learning and their own engagement with the learning process and learning resources. These features of learning are particularly important in the foreign language classroom as students are presented with the challenge of understanding curriculum material that is unfamiliar to them and *currently* not linked in any way to their other school subjects (see section 5.5 above). Consequently, the language teacher plays a central role in directing effective language learning at a range of ability levels whilst juggling the challenges of individual difference in motivation, learning styles and learning strategies. School and by association teacher commitment to student motivation in the modern foreign language classroom will continue to involve 'creating the basic motivational conditions for learning which will include generating initial student motivation, maintaining and protecting that motivation and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation i.e. making the teaching materials relevant to the learners, setting specific learner oriented goals and encouraging learner satisfaction' (Grenfell, 2003:4).

5.7 Motivation in modern foreign language learning

As we have noted in Chapter 2 part 2 recent reports in the national media suggest that the current Minister for Education Ruairí Quinn is at present reconsidering the NUI matriculation requirement of a modern language subject for progression to third-level study and has recently commented that the foreign language requirement '*....may need reconsideration in the light of the economic imperative to encourage more students to study the physical sciences in senior cycle*' (Flynn, 2011). We have further acknowledged in Chapter 2 part 2 that if the current situation were to change it may be possible to better qualify the role of student motivation in the selection of a modern language subject, i.e., as a subject chosen freely from amongst all other subject options rather than a compulsory subject due to national

university matriculation requirements (see NUI, 2010). Similarly noted in Chapter 2 part 2 we must consider that once a student commences the study of a modern language some level of motivation *must* be established for any learning to be successful. Motivation to learn is required to ignite initial interest in the subject material and to sustain that interest throughout the learning process.

We have further learned in Chapter 2 part 2 that *intrinsic motivation* implies engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985):

'Students doing their homework because they enjoy it and find that learning new things is interesting and satisfying are said to be intrinsically motivated' (Deci & Ryan, 1995:42).

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation includes behaviours undertaken to attain an end state that is separate from the actual behaviour, what is termed *external regulation.* We have noted in Chapter 2 part 2 that development of extrinsic motivation will ensure that students are continually aware of the parameters that guide their participation and achievement in the school environment by teachers outlining clear expectations and giving continuous and appropriate corrective feedback. However, we further highlighted that there was a need to qualify that these extrinsic motivational aspects are highly likely to be more effective whilst the student is under the control of the teacher. Hence, once the student leaves that environment it is up to that individual student to regulate their *own* behaviour according to their *own* internal motivations (Ames, 1992). Even the most motivated students will rely on the teacher to guide them through the more difficult aspects of modern language learning. However, the development in the learner of a level of subject matter appreciation by themselves is considered to have the purpose of improving the enjoyment of the learning experience *and* the quality of learning that is taking place: *'Students who learn content with understanding not only learn the content itself but appreciate the reasons for learning it and retain it in a form that makes it usable when needed'* (Brophy, 2004: 40).

This could include, for example, students recognizing the value of a foreign language skill gained at school and having an interest in retaining foreign language skills beyond terminal examinations. However, in Ireland, in common with other European countries and indeed internationally in the school context '*Grades stand as a mark of worthiness because it is*

widely assumed in our society (s) that one is only as worthy as one's ability to achieve competitively' (Covington, 2000: 23). In a school environment as in other environments when students do not perceive *'a contingency between their behaviours and outcomes they do not act with the attention to attain the outcome'* (Deci & Ryan, 1995:43). Hence, we can qualify based on our analysis of the literature in Chapter 2 part 2 that initial and continued motivation is central to the achievement of any discernable level of success in modern foreign language learning. Inhibited by limited 'prior knowledge' and 'language and linguistic awareness' as discussed in Chapter 2 part 2 due to non-linking of language subjects in the Curriculum Irish students face quite a degree of difficulty, particularly at the initial stages of learning and it is important that these challenges are overcome so that they can become successful learners. Recent studies of all subjects at Junior Certificate level do not present students experiences' of learning modern foreign languages to Junior Certificate level in Ireland in a particularly positive light (see Smyth, Dunne and Darmody, 2007; Smyth, Dunne, McCoy & Darmody, 2006; Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004). However, in the context of this study a more positive picture has emerged in terms of students overall reporting of their experiences of learning modern foreign languages and what we may infer from these findings.

To investigate student motivation in the context of this study a number of questions were set in the primary research questionnaire (see Appendix 8) to elicit information from which inferences could be made on likely levels of student motivation evident in respondents' approaches to their modern foreign language study. The investigation started with who set the level of study, i.e., ordinary level or higher level in modern foreign language learning? Most students who reported that they themselves had chosen the level at which they would study modern languages for the Leaving Certificate representing 40.2 per cent of respondents reported having done this alone, with a further 10.8 per cent reporting that they had done so with their parents, a further 21.2 per cent reporting that they had done so with their teachers, and a further 19.3 per cent reporting that they had done so with their parents and their teachers (see Table 25(a), Chapter 4).

However, fewer than half of the students in the sample reported having discussed their level of study with their modern languages teacher before the level was assigned for the Leaving Certificate 42.0 per cent of respondents (see Table 25(b), Chapter 4). Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority (almost nine-tenths) of the respondents reported being happy with the

level of study with which they have been assigned for the modern foreign language at the Leaving Certificate reported by 88.7 per cent of participants (see Table 25(c), Chapter 4). The study further questioned which aspects of the modern foreign language classes' respondents found to be *most* and *least* enjoyable. It is noteworthy that many of the categories that were mentioned based on a content analysis of the students' responses, and including all student response types that were reported more than ten times as being the *most* enjoyable aspects of modern foreign language classes relate to non-writing language tasks (e.g., oral work (179 mentions), listening / aural work (144 mentions)), or specific (often, those which might be considered 'creative') classroom activities (e.g., watching films / DVDs (107 mentions), doing worksheets / exercises / projects / essays (85 mentions), games (80 mentions) and doing group work / role-play (67 mentions) (see Table Twenty-Six (a), Chapter 4). Despite being largely included amongst *the least enjoyable aspects* of modern foreign language classes at least some students mentioned that they enjoyed grammar (20 mentions, although some note the qualification that 'the course is huge') (see Table Twenty-Six (b), Chapter 4).

Outside of Table Twenty-Six (a) (Chapter 4), reports on the most enjoyable aspects of modern language learning *other* things that were mentioned as being the most enjoyable parts of class time reported ten times or less frequently were '*verbs*' (mentioned ten times); '*picture stories*' (mentioned nine times); *'doing well in class and / or exams'* (mentioned six times); '*learning about culture'*, '*learning new topics'* and *'songs'* (mentioned five times each); *'pair work'*, *'working on past exam papers'*, and *'correcting homework'* (mentioned three times each); *'newspapers'*, *'questions'*, *'watching German films'*, *'using the language lab'*, and *'watching the Simpsons in French'* (mentioned twice each); *'when we are not doing anything and chatting'*, *'translating words and phrases'*, *'revision'*, *'role plays'*, *'people in the class'*, *'German Day – only speaking German in class'*, and *'brainstorming'* (mentioned once each). Interestingly only two students reported that, '*I do not enjoy anything about the class'* from the entire sample who responded to this question.

Many of the aspects of learning that were mentioned (which is based on a content analysis of the students' responses, and includes response types that occurred more than ten times) as being the *least* enjoyable aspects of modern foreign language classes relate to grammar (160 mentions, with a further 47 mentions for 'verbs') (see Table Twenty-Six (b), Chapter 4)

Listening / aural work with 120 mentions was coincidentally, also the second *most enjoyable* aspect of modern foreign language classes (see Table Twenty-Six (a), Chapter 4)), continuing with the *least* enjoyable were assessments / written work (e.g., reading comprehensions had (91 mentions), tests (68 mentions), homework (57 mentions) and written work (55 mentions)). Competence and teaching issues also arose (e.g., 'when I can't understand or follow the language' (36 mentions), 'when the teacher gives instructions in the modern foreign language and gets angry or frustrated when the students don't understand' (19 mentions), 'the feeling that one does not have sufficient vocabulary for written work (17 mentions), and 'when I can't do exercises' (13 mentions). (See Table Twenty-Six (b) (Chapter 4), *other* things that were mentioned as being the *least* enjoyable parts of class time ten times or less frequently were *'group activities'* (mentioned ten times); *'I find learning the language hard and don't enjoy language study'* and *'when you learn about grammar it can be confusing'* (mentioned eight times each); *'working from the course book'* and *'it is a large group and a very noisy class - there is too much talking, so it's too distracting, and nobody cares about learning the modern foreign language well'* (mentioned seven times each); *'worksheets'* (mentioned five times); *'questions', 'getting in trouble'* and *'lack of opportunity to speak'* (mentioned three times each); *'when I fail', 'the other students in the class', 'too many films / DVDs', 'lack of variety in the curriculum'* and *'the stress of exams'* (mentioned twice each); and *'unhelpful grammar books', 'word order', 'picture stories'* and *'when the teacher constantly uses English'* (mentioned once each).

When we further consider that this particular questionnaire item i.e. reporting on the *most* and *least* enjoyable aspects of language class was specifically devised as an open-ended question and allocated an entire page in the 'student questionnaire' to allow students to provide their own responses at length (see 'student questionnaire' Appendix 8, item 39) and as such students had freedom to report however they wished on their language learning experiences it is encouraging to find that for the most part reported experiences are positive and by association motivation to learn modern foreign languages could be considered to be relatively high in the case of the findings of this study.

Competence and teaching issues noted above which had been reported in the least enjoyable strand, e.g., 'when I can't understand or follow the language' (36 mentions), 'when the teacher gives instructions in the modern foreign language and gets angry or frustrated when the students don't understand' (19 mentions), 'the feeling that one does not have sufficient

vocabulary for written work (17 mentions), and 'when I can't do exercises' (13 mentions) relate directly to the findings of this study on development of fluency and proficiency for comprehension in target language use (see section 5.5 above). However, a further positive to emerge in terms of student motivation in the findings of this study discussed in section 5.5 above was that there was a clear relationship between the proportions of students who reported that they could 'always' follow the class when the modern foreign language was being used for instruction / communication and reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German. The highest proportions of reporting that this was the case were found in those who reported having attained grade 'A's (36.6 per cent in French, 23.2 per cent in German), with a step-by-step decline being observed in each language down to grades 'E' and 'F' where no-student reported that this was true for them (see Table 22 (f), Chapter 4). These findings suggest higher level of motivation by better-able students in engaging with the lesson content and the learning process in the modern foreign language classroom and again there are opportunities being missed in more effective use of these students in group work etc. to assist other learners and to help them become more competent learners.

Considering the literature reviews in Chapter 2 part 2 together with the findings of this study, we can conclude that there is a very important need for students of modern foreign languages to use every means possible to increase their exposure to the target language to promote increased proficiency (see Devitt, 2002) and a further need for teachers to become more reflective practitioners (see Kelly & Grenfell, 2005) constantly providing suitable lead-in and scaffolding to students for more complex tasks in language learning (see Prabhu (1987); Shulman, (1987); Johnson (1995); Skehan (1998); DES, 2009a).

The motivation of students to use the resources available to them outside of the classroom in the school and home communities was also examined in this study. Around two-thirds (65.8 per cent) of respondents reported the existence of a library at their school which is available for their use (see Table 27(a), Chapter 4). Respondents were then required to report on both *the availability of* and *their own use of* resources in the school library for modern foreign language learning. In terms of their awareness of resource availability, most frequently reported were 'course books at different language levels' which was reported by 63.1 per cent of respondents (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4). However, although aware of their availability only 20.1 per cent of respondents actually used them (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4). Whilst 60.1 per cent of respondents were aware of the availability of novels at different language

levels only 21.8 per cent of students actually used them (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4). Whilst 33.8 per cent of respondents were aware of the availability of audio tapes at a range of different language levels only 14.8 per cent of students actually used them (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4). Whilst 26.8 per cent of respondents were aware of the availability of videos at a range of different language levels, only 16.8 per cent of students actually used them (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4). Whilst 33.8 per cent of respondents overall were aware of the availability of DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels, only 19.8 per cent of students actually used them (see Table 27(b): Chapter 4). Whilst 48.9 per cent of respondents overall were aware of the availability of copies of project work completed by former students of modern foreign languages, only 10.3 per cent of students actually used them. (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4).

An exception to this general trend came where past examination papers for modern foreign languages were concerned as 24.9 per cent of respondents overall reported they were aware of the availability of these and curiously a slightly greater proportion of students reported using them (!), i.e., 25.1 per cent of respondents overall (see Table 27(b), Chapter 4). This situation of a finding of greater use of past examination papers reflects the study finding in Chapter 2 part 1 that an examination focus dominates in all school subjects including modern foreign languages. Students are coping with time pressures in all their school subjects which do not provide time for them to reflect on their learning and this is an aspect that certainly needs to be addressed in terms of the necessity for students to study so many subjects for examinations when fewer subjects would allow more time to reflect on learning and by association potentially improve the quality of learning for all school subjects. The Department of Education and Skills have recently announced plans to reduce the number of subjects required for study to Junior Certificate examinations (ISCED, Level 2) with a view to helping students to develop as more reflective learners at school (see DES, 2010a). Combined with an emphasis on teachers becoming more reflective practitioners (see Kelly & Grenfell, (2005); Richards & Farrell, (2005)) these changes bode well for improved learning environments and potentially greater subject matter appreciation in all subjects.

Continuing with availability of resources an overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they had access to the Internet reported by 98.1 per cent of students overall (see Table 28(a) Chapter 4). However, just over two-thirds of respondents reported that they had used the Internet for purposes of studying modern foreign languages reported by 67.9 per cent of

students (see Table 28(b) Chapter 4). Interestingly, no grade related pattern was evident in comparing use of the Internet for study of foreign languages and grade achieved in Junior Certificate language subjects (see Tables 28(a) to 28 (c), Chapter 4).

A qualitative analysis of students' responses to which particular websites they used in the course of foreign language learning (see Table 28(d), Chapter 4) provided some interesting findings with *google* translator reported most frequently, one would hope for translating occasional words rather than for entire reading comprehension passages! French.ie was reported by 43 students. There was no reporting of use of the DIALANG internet resource; *Authentik* language learning resources online; or any of the e-learning programmes available to students online via the European Commission internet portal. Hence, teachers need to be continually informed of such resources which are for the most part available to students without charge. In turn teachers need to keep all students informed of the potential of the Internet and online resources for extra-curricular study encouraging students to take advantage of such a vast range of resources for language study via the Internet. Where time is a constraint for students, teachers can set homework tasks which require the use of the Internet for individual research, group tasks, and fluency practice. It would be very interesting if one were to conduct a study into the near 10% of high achieving students in modern foreign languages in Ireland to examine their individual approach to the use of Internet resources for additional study and whether this learning strategy could be considered to be a contributing factor to their success in modern foreign language learning. Increased use of ICT in language classrooms could ensure better student knowledge of resources. We will recall from the reports of attempts to present the primary research questionnaire of this study to students to complete online that computer use in schools and classrooms remains limited despite reported significant government investment in ICT's in schools in recent years (see NCTE, 2010a; 2010b).

Continuing the theme of motivation to learn this study has acknowledged that Success-oriented (approach) students define success in terms of becoming the best they can be, irrespective of the accomplishment of others by setting their own goals for success and planning for future achievements (Malka & Covington, 2005). In any learning environment teachers and students set goals for learning and will embark on a course of study with some level of expectation in terms of learning outcomes which is usually in the current view

'grade-driven'. As we have seen in chapter 2 part 2 Mastery goals (also called learning goals) focus on gaining competence or mastering a new set of knowledge or skills; *performance goals* (also called ego-involvement goals) focus on achieving normative-based standards, doing better than others, or doing well without a lot of effort; and *social goals* 'focus on relationships among people' (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986; Maehr & Meyer, 1997). In the context of school learning, which we have acknowledged involves operating in a relatively structured environment students with mastery goals outperform students with either performance or social goals. Individuals are motivated to either avoid failure, more often associated with performance goals, or achieve success, more often associated with mastery goals (Mc Clelland, 1961; 1985). Individuals with ego-involved goals seek to maximize favourable evaluations of their competence and minimize negative evaluations of competence. Can I out-perform others? - reflects an ego-involved goal. Task involved goals are those in which individuals focus on mastering tasks and increasing their competence. How can I do this task? What will I learn? - are task involved goals. Dweck, (1999) cited in Eccles and Wigfield, (2002) termed these *performance goals* (like ego-involved goals) and *learning goals* (like task-involved goals).

Regarding grade achievement in modern foreign language learning in Ireland this study considered theories of peak experiences and how it was from this and related work (Maslow, 1970, 1971) that a concept of Flow was developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi to demonstrate how peak experiences of intrinsic motivation may be realised. We learned in Chapter 2, part 2 that flow Theory claims that as a result of the intrinsically rewarding experience associated with *flow*, people push themselves to '*higher levels of performance'* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 74) thus, flow represents '*optimal experience'* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). We also learned in Chapter 2 that Dörnyei identified that individuals tend to experience flow when they become absorbed in doing something challenging and the experience becomes 'autotelic' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) i.e. when something becomes worth doing for its own sake. However, we also learned that in the context of the classroom student *anxiety* has been identified *as the* chief threat to flow potential. (Horwitz, 1987; Horwitz & Young, 1991). If students are routinely faced with overly challenging situations that are beyond their capabilities they may come to prefer '*the boredom of safe routines'* to the *'flow opportunities of challenging activities*' (Dörnyei, 2001b). We further concluded in Chapter 2 part 2 that an important consideration to be noted is that such an experience i.e. the development of flow personality types predominantly relates to the more motivated high-

achieving students '*Both the challenges and skills must be relatively high before a flow experience becomes possible'* (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002: 124).

We have acknowledged that in terms of grade achievement, i.e., the percentages of students achieving top grades of A1 and A at terminal examinations currently represents around 10% of modern foreign language learners in secondary education in Ireland in the most frequently studied modern languages of French and German (DES, 2010c). Thus, we can acknowledge that people with different needs are motivated differently. Where there is a high need for achievement students should be given challenging projects with reachable goals. We have noted above how the use of Internet resources for additional study in oral; aural and written tasks could provide a suitable challenge for such students. They should be provided with frequent feedback.

In an ideal learning environment in which teachers had a small number of motivated students, endless possibilities for access to pedagogical resources and more curricular time dedicated to modern foreign language subjects there would be an opportunity to reflect on the motivational needs of individual learners. However, the practical reality in the majority of schools is that teachers just do not have the time to do this and must try to adapt the needs of an entire group (see Spolsky, (1989). In the case of Ireland there is an even further constraint to teacher time in that as the school year progresses and students divide into those studying at ordinary and higher level for state examinations the teacher has the challenge of dividing class time, which we have already acknowledged is limited, between two groups in the same classroom. If we are ever to achieve suitable levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning and continue to motivate students and convince them that their success in learning is important to us as educators this practice of two levels of study in the same classroom will have to be addressed. One would wish that all language learners came to the very first lesson already with the knowledge of how they best learn a language, the motivation to do so effectively and an innate understanding of learning strategies to maintain and develop modern foreign language proficiency. '*It is highly unlikely that this will ever be so*' (Macaro, 2001: 265). We have noted in Chapter 2 part 2 that *action research* may be a way forward in overcoming some of the challenges faced by teachers, i.e., by which a teacher identifies an area of concern and follows it up him/herself (see Kelly & Grenfell, 2005; Richards & Farrell, 2005). There is certainly a lot to be gained in encouraging a greater level of such research in schools in Ireland in all subjects including modern foreign languages.

5.8 Strategies in modern foreign language learning

We have considered in Chapter 2 part 2 that in order to provide the best learning supports for students a possible way forward in addressing the needs of *all* learners may be best placed in the integration of a strategy instruction component into the syllabus of each school subject, effectively a blueprint or framework by which students could '*learn to learn*'.

'What learners feel about language learning does change according to anticipation, acute experience or retrospection of the process. Motivational factors and expressions involving them are then environmentally sensitive' (Grenfell, 2002:46).

Instructing for strategy use in classroom learning has developed in line with changes in instructional methods in foreign language teaching and learning. Strategy instruction provides a structure for effective learning in a classroom environment (Lightbown & Spada, 1996:110). Communicative instructional settings, which are currently the favoured method of teaching foreign languages at school in Ireland, present target language input in a way that is '*simplified and made comprehensible by the use of contextual cues, props and gestures rather than through structural grading. Students provide each other with simplified and sometimes erroneous input. Error-correction is limited and meaning is emphasised over form. Learners have limited time for learning'* (Lightbown & Spada, 1996:112). In the classroom exposure to the target language is considerably less than that of a naturalistic setting. Whilst a range of text materials may include both those modified for second language learners and those intended for native speakers the native speaker texts are likely to require 'instructional strategies' to assist learning for the majority of students in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 1996).

We have similarly seen in Chapter 2 part 2 that successive studies have shown that good language learners are skilled at matching strategies to the task they are working on (Naiman et al, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al. 2004).

'*Less successful language learners apparently do not have the metacognitive knowledge about task requirements needed to select appropriate strategies whereas more proficient L2 learners use sequences of strategies to complete a task effectively*' (Chamot, 2005: 116; see also Lehtonen, 2000).

We further concluded that learning strategies are:

'*Techniques, approaches or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information*' (Chamot, 1987:71; in Macaro, 2001:17).

And that learner strategies also refer to:

'*....language learning behaviours learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language.. what they know about the strategies they use.. what they know about aspects of their language learning other than the strategies they use'* (Wenden, 1987:6; in Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

We acknowledged that learners will learn better if: '*they are helped to indentify the strategies they use, if they come into contact with other possible strategies and if ways of deploying them in combination are successful'* (Macaro, 2001:43). Thus, learning strategies are: '*specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations*' (Oxford, 1990:8).

Whilst, teacher preparedness sets the scene for the learning possibilities in the classroom likewise student co-operation and preparedness to learn is equally central to the pedagogic process:

'*Learners' immediate motivation in the task-based classroom derives from 'the intellectual pleasure of solving problems in addition to such traditional sources as a desire to do well at school, to win the approval of the teacher or to gain the admiration of one's peers.... what is important for learners is engagement in the task'* (Prabhu, 1987:55)....*the effort learners put into a given task may also be influenced by such additional factors as comparison or rivalry with their peers and whether or not they feel that their teacher feels them capable of success'* (55-56).

We have seen in the course of this study that students' knowledge can be declarative and procedural. Monique Boekaerts suggests a third possibility, i.e., 'conditional knowledge' the knowledge of *when* and *why* to use the various cognitive strategies (Boekaerts,1998a, 1998b). As educators one factor that is apparent year in year out, is that across learning contexts '*those learners who are proactive in their pursuit of their language learning appear to learn best'* (Macaro, 2001:264).

Effective learning and achievement strategies are governed by achievement behaviour (Gardner, 2007). Thus,'*....strategy instruction can contribute to development of learner mastery*' (Chamot, 2005: 126). Teachers' knowledge of context includes the ecology of

learning in the classroom, i.e., '*the context-specific knowledge*' that teachers *must* use to adapt their instruction to the demands of the specific school setting and/or the needs of individual students within the unique context of their classrooms (Johnson, 1995: 32)

Success in learning includes awareness, motivation, goal setting *and* strategies which support autonomy and learner responsibility:

'Students who attribute success to ability, skill, effort and effective use of strategies, should experience higher self-efficacy and maintain motivation' (Schunk, 1994; in Schunk & Ertimer, 2000:636).

A further important point to consider in all educational settings - including the Irish context - is that attempts to develop levels of self regulation and autonomy may not herald any particularly notable levels of success in learning situations in which terminal examinations examine students *solely* on the basis of declarative knowledge, i.e., factually driven materials to be committed to memory, rather than the procedural knowledge of teaching skills and strategies that encourage learner autonomy and self-directed learning (Ushioda, 1996a; 1997):

'*A general working definition of self-regulated learning is that it is an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate and control their cognition, motivation and behaviour guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment'* (Pintrich, 2000: 453) .

'Optimal conditions for the development of self-regulated learning exist when students are given the chance to establish and pursue, personal non-trivial goals. Goals are viewed as guiding principles that people consciously and intentionally set to effectively steer their behaviour' (Austin & Vancouver, 1996) cited in (Boekaerts & Niemivirta , 2000:419).

There is general consensus amongst researchers in modern foreign languages that increased opportunities of contact with target language communities would inevitably improve students' use of communication strategies and oral competence in the target language under study (Byram, 1989, 1997; Hinkel, 1999). In the primary research component of this study (see 'Student Questionnaire', Appendix 8 and Chapter 4 'Findings') students were asked about the ways they would use communication strategies that they had learned to help them whilst using their target language in a target language community. Whilst students did not

identify strategies by name they articulated the use of the strategies very well. A strategy of *avoidance* of particular topics was reported, i.e., a means by which a student will find ways of getting around rules or forms in the target language through topic avoidance or side-stepping communication about topics which require the use of target language rules or forms which the student may not have studied or doesn't remember. Students reported attempting to change the subject in the hope of redirecting communication to a better known topic (semantic avoidance) *or* simply providing no verbal response at all, communicating a lack of understanding/ ability to deal with the topic by remaining silent. Students also reported *appeal to authority* where difficulties in communication were encountered, i.e., requests to translate, referring to a dictionary as well as requesting that the interlocutor 'paraphrase' by re-wording the message in an alternate target language construction and/or repeating what has been said speaking more slowly/clearly. The use of hand gestures, facial expressions or images were also suggested. Changing their tone of voice to attempt to provide a context for the dialogue that is taking place was also recommended. Better able students may apply themselves to continuing a dialogue by attempting to guess what the interlocutor is trying to communicate (see Crystal, 1997, 2007).

A content analysis of students' responses to an open-ended questionnaire item, in which they were asked to note the communication strategies they had learned to help resolve communication difficulties in modern foreign language use found that the most frequently strategies mentioned (i.e., more than fifty times) were asking person to repeat what they have said (mentioned 118 times), asking the person to speak more slowly / clearly (mentioned 97 times), and the use of hand gestures (mentioned 77 times). In addition to the response types noted in Table Thirty (above), response types that were mentioned fewer than ten times each were using pictures / posters / symbols or images (mentioned eight times); avoidance of unknown phrases / vocabulary and using tone of voice (mentioned seven times each); reading over and asking people in my class to question me (mentioned five times); looking up information online (mentioned three times); reporting that '…we haven't learned any communication strategies', and watching television and listening to radio / audio tapes in the modern foreign language (mentioned twice each); and, 'I try to see what the word sounds like', 'restrict the amount of people to small groups for better comprehension', speaking bits of English and German and using broken German (mentioned once each). Finally, one student suggested 'useing the wright tence, how to start the question off' *[sic]*.

This study has identified that such contact with target language communities is the best means of increasing students' exposure to the target language under study and that the introduction of a study abroad component to target language study at school could facilitate this. Some schools already have such exchanges available to students. Around one-sixth (17.4 per cent) of the students in the sample overall reported that they had participated in a modern foreign language student exchange (see Table 29(a), Chapter 4). However, the proportion of students who reported having taken part in a student language exchange visit / programme did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained at Junior Certificate level (see Table 29(b), Chapter 4). The modern foreign language exchanges that the students had participated in were usually organized by their teachers reported by 91.6 per cent of respondents (see Table 29(c), Chapter 4). In very few cases the modern foreign language exchanges in which the students had participated were compulsory around seven-eighths, 87.2 per cent of respondents reported that their participation had been voluntary. (see Table 29(d), Chapter 4). The most typical duration of a modern language exchange programme in which respondents reported that they had participated was one week, 66.7 per cent overall (see Table 29(e), Chapter 4). The number of students involved in the modern foreign language exchange programmes varied quite considerably (from 1 – 5 students (reported by 16.2 per cent overall to over 100 students reported by 2.2 per cent overall. However, the most frequently reported ranges were 11 – 20 students reported by 32.4 per cent overall (see Table 29(f), Chapter 4).

Respondents who had participated in modern foreign language exchange programmes reported that in all cases that the students who were involved in such programmes were of a similar age to themselves (see Table 29 (h), Chapter 4). The reported use of the target language rather than mother tongue during such exchanges is an interesting finding of this study, particularly when viewed alongside the reports of a predominant use of English for the majority of communications in modern foreign language class (see Tables 22(a)-(h), 23(a)-(c), Chapter 4). In around three-quarters of cases (73.0 per cent overall) respondents who had participated in modern foreign language exchange programmes reported their modern foreign language competency had improved as a result of having been so involved (see Table 29 (i), Chapter 4). In a qualitative analysis of student responses to particular improvements in their language specific areas of improvement as a result of participating in a student language exchange that were mentioned by students included having *more confidence / fluency*

speaking the language all the time (mentioned fifteen times); *speaking* (mentioned twelve times); being *more able to read and understand the language* (mentioned six times); *improved pronunciation* (mentioned four times); *grammar and spelling* (mentioned three times); *listening* and *'yes for speaking, but no for writing and grammar'* (mentioned twice each); and, *vocabulary* and *written work* (mentioned once each). Finally, four students commented that *they have an Italian exchange, but they don't have Italian language available to them as a subject in their school.* These responses regarding Italian prompted me to further investigate this matter with the particular school and it was indeed found that rather bizzarely the school offered French, German, Spanish and Japanese for study but had only one well established student exchange programme with a school in Italy!

In terms of the strategies reported to retain modern foreign language skills gained at school beyond terminal exams slightly over one-half of respondents did not intend to study modern foreign languages in the future reported by 55.7 per cent of students (see Table 31(a), Chapter 4). Of those who did plan to study modern foreign languages in future, the most popular means of doing so was via travel reported by 58.4 per cent of respondents. Those who reported that they would study their modern foreign language independently in the future totalled 36.6 per cent, whilst those who reported that they would attend a refresher course represented just 7.2 per cent overall (see Table 31(b), Chapter 4). Twenty-one students commented that they *do not plan to use languages other than English when they leave school.* Interestingly the proportions of respondents reporting that they plan to study modern foreign languages in the future decreases with descending reported grades attained in the Junior Certificate from 'B' to 'D' in French, and from 'A' to 'E' in German (see Table 31(c), Chapter 4) so the study found that there was in fact a grade connection to students' intentions to study their language in the future.

As we have noted the most popular means of planning to study modern foreign languages in the future for those who had studied Junior Certificate French and German was travelling to use the language, followed by independent study. In the case of the proportion of students who reported that they would travel to use the language as a means to study a modern foreign language in the future, this decreased with descending grades, from 69.2 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate French to 42.9 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E', and 84.6 per cent of students who reported

having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate German to 42.9 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E'. The proportion of students who indicated that they would attend a refresher course as a means to study a modern foreign language in the future was small, but increased with decreasing grades – from 5.1 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate French to 14.3 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E', and 0 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'A' in Junior Certificate German to 28.6 per cent of students who reported having attained a grade 'E'. (see Table 31(d) and 31(e), Chapter 4).

In terms of the possibilities for target language study to introduce students to important features of the target language culture approximately two-thirds of respondents indicated that through studying a modern foreign language they had increased their awareness of or interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language which was reported by 66.3 per cent of students overall (see Table 32(a), Chapter 4). We have noted in Chapter 2 part 2 that:

'*Language courses require that the individual incorporates elements from another culture... the material is not merely an extension of the students own cultural heritage, the dynamics of the classroom and the methodology assume greater importance than they do in other school topics*'. (Gardner, 1985:8).

Specific examples of what the students reported they had learned about the cultures of speakers in their studies of modern languages included *food and eating habits* (mentioned 216 times), *the culture and everyday lives and living standards* (mentioned 173 times), *traditions* (mentioned 97 times), *education and school* (mentioned 96 times), *festivals* (mentioned 72 times), *dialects in the language* (mentioned 59 times), *history and geography* (mentioned 46 times), *hobbies and pastimes* (mentioned 32 times), *fashion and clothes* (mentioned 23 times), *that their cultures is very different to our own* (mentioned 27 times), *architecture and historic sights* (mentioned 24 times), *different towns, villages and cities* (mentioned 20 times), *different government systems, political life and law* (mentioned 18 times), *sport* (mentioned 17 times), *social life and music* (mentioned 13 times), *etiquette and what offends in other cultures* (mentioned 12 times), *famous celebrities from the country* (mentioned 9 times), *religion* (mentioned 6 times), *travel and transport* (mentioned five times), *wine* (mentioned 4 times), *famous artists from the country* (mentioned 3 times), *marriage customs* and *nuclear power* (mentioned twice each), and *animals, manufacturing*

and the country's produce, the Metro, that the modern foreign language is similar to English is some ways, movies, skiing in the French Alps, the social divide in Paris between rich and poor in suburbs, and *TGV* (mentioned once each). Finally, one student t commented that, '*Cultural studies would definitely be a high interest, however it isn't on the curriculum'*, and another that he or she had *'....visited the country and adapted to food and customs whilst there as I had learned about them in class'.*

Interestingly, the proportion of students who indicated that their studies of modern foreign languages has increased their awareness of / interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language related to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level. The proportion of students who indicated that this was the case fell with grades decreasing from 'A' to 'D' in both French and German (see Table 32(b), Chapter 4). The importance of a cultural component in language study was highlighted in Chapter 2 part 2 whilst a study abroad programme in schools recommended in section 5.5. (above) would have the dual purpose of increasing fluency and proficiency in the target language whilst encouraging an interest in the culture/cultures where the language is spoken

'The integration of culture and language has now become a generally accepted explicit objective of foreign language education. However, language and literature still dominate the Curriculum with culture in a secondary role supplying contextual tidbits. Culture is rarely integrated into the Curriculum in a coherent systematic fashion. 'Such presentation of culture as isolated facts which are neither related to the overarching context of the foreign culture nor contrasted with the learner's culture, feeds into the learner's preconception of the foreign culture as strange and bizarre. It does not encourage the learner to compare the two cultures'. (Steele, 1996: 75).

In terms of other reported means of extra-curricular study of modern foreign languages only a small proportion of respondents (just over one-eighth) reported that they had the opportunity to study or practice language skills with other students outside of normal class time which was reported by 13.5 per cent of students overall (see Table 33(a), Chapter 4). Interestingly, the highest proportions of respondents who reported that they had the opportunity to study or practice language skills outside normal class time were to be found amongst those students who reported achieving the highest grades in modern foreign languages at Junior Certificate level – 14.6 per cent and 20.0 per cent who reported attaining 'A's and 'B's in French respectively, and 23.1 per cent and 10.8 per cent who reported attaining 'A's and 'B's in German respectively (see Table 33(b), Chapter 4). In instances where students did

participate in language skills study / practice groups outside of class time such groups were most frequently organised by the students themselves reported by 42.9 per cent of students overall. The proportion reporting that schools had organized such groups was reported by 26.4 per cent of students overall. A combination of students and schools was reported by 14.3 per cent overall (see Table 33(c), Chapter 4). The language skills study / practice groups in which the students reported participating outside of school tended towards the large in size. Whilst around one third indicated that the group size was ten or less reported by 31.6 per cent of students, another third reported their group size as being between 11 and 20 students which was reported by 33.3 per cent of respondents and a further approximate third indicated group size of over 20 which was reported by 35.1 per cent of students (see Table 33(d), Chapter 4).

For those students in the sample who would like a modern languages club / society available to them, the most popular choice was the rather general *'study group / club'* (reported by 59.3 per cent overall;). Perhaps significantly, a more specific choice of activity was also cited by almost one-quarter of students in the sample who would like a modern languages club / society available to them – a 'speaking practice class' (reported by 24.6 per cent overall). Further less frequent responses are provided in (Table 33(g), Chapter 4). Around five-sixths of respondents reported that they did not know of any language study groups / societies within their schools or local communities reported by 85.2 per cent of students overall. 8.5 per cent of respondents indicated that yes, they knew of a language study group / society within their school or local communities.

In terms of the study findings in relation to learning strategies for the most part students who were motivated to seek out learning opportunities outside of the school curriculum were also the highest achieving students in terms of grade and these students similarly showed a greater degree of interest in learning about culture associated with the target language under study. That considered we can concur that strategy instruction in the classroom must become a means by which we can engage *all* students and assist them in devising their own learner goals and strategies in learning and even more importantly convince them that they are capable of reaching those goals. (Grenfell, 2003). We currently have the paradoxical position that those with most influence over educational policy implementation at national member state level may lack sufficient interest in learner differences and those with least power in the policy process i.e. in most cases teachers themselves are often totally left out of the policy

development process. Thus, any possible way forward in the implementation of European educational policies at national member state level *must* be in collaboration with practicing teachers of modern foreign languages in schools across a range of professional experiences and modern foreign language subjects.

5.9 Reported Student Recommendations for future language students and perceptions of English as an international language of communication for the future

Amongst the recommendations directed towards schools and teachers, the most popular piece of advice was to have more opportunities to use and speak the language in class (114 mentions), with other requests for 'creative' pedagogy also being featured (e.g., 85 students advised 'go on trips and exchanges', 30 students advised 'more fun activities to learn the basics', and 17 requested 'DVDs / audio books / on-line study / novels in the classroom'), in addition to 11 students advising 'more variety would be enjoyable'. Amongst the suggestions seemingly directed towards fellow modern language students, foremost were *grasp any opportunities for learning the language* (78 mentions); *make sure you want to learn it and enjoy it* (64 mentions); *pay attention – the more work you put in the more you get out* (50 mentions); *practice speaking the modern foreign language with friends* (47 mentions); *make sure you communicate with the teacher and ask for help* (43 mentions); and, *learn the grammar and vocabulary as you go along* (42 mentions) (see Table 34, Chapter 4).

Interestingly many of the responses reflect students' likely needs to grasp any opportunities to learn the language particularly opportunities for speaking practice and development of oral proficiency which was reported as limited in class. In devising a more holistic approach to language education in Ireland we need to consider the benefits of introducing a new languages resource teacher post to support the teaching and learning of all languages in schools. The role of this language resources teacher could include English language support as well as modern foreign language support by introducing extra-curricular language activities in school as well as providing support and collaboration with modern foreign language teachers in a similar way to the role played the now largely defunct 'language assistant' in earlier decades.

Given the near universal reporting of English as the most important language for the future (see 'Student Questionnaire' table 11) a content analysis further reports on students' responses to an open-ended questionnaire item documenting the various reasons that respondents gave for why having English as a first or second language was advantageous to them. The most frequently mentioned reasons were that English is the international language of communication (477 times); for travel and travel for education (133 times) and for one's career (86 times) with a number of other categories reported (see Chapter 4 'Findings'). All considered the findings of this study as a whole indicate that students' perceptions of English is that of an International language of communication spoken worldwide and this is somewhat misguided. Hence, we must continue to engage creative pedagogies which encourage greater subject matter appreciation and by association greater acknowledgement by students at school that their modern foreign language competence has a significant use beyond terminal exams. Whilst traditional migratory patterns from Ireland have tended to favour countries in which English is widely spoken e.g. North America and Canada, and more recently Australia and New Zealand students must be convinced that modern foreign language skills gained at school form part of a skill-set that is becoming increasingly necessary for a life-time of learning and professional development. Until such time as this level of appreciation of foreign language subjects at school is achieved in Ireland any European policy aspirations towards '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages before the end of compulsory schooling will only be realisable by higher ability students in schools which extol the life-long benefits of early modern foreign language learning. The recent situation of withdrawal from the European Indicator of Language Competence study suggests that we are moving further away from rather than nearer to any opportunity to develop as a multilingual society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Development of Modern foreign languages education policy in Europe

The findings of this study suggest that following considerable consultative and financial investment in modern foreign languages education in Europe in the period 1995 to present the current presentation of policy to member state governments in the form of non-binding resolutions is not sustainable. Hence, we need to examine ways in which certain education policy implementation requirements become compulsory at member state level. Establishment of participatory targets for the period 2007-2013 in the various *Actions* in education suggest a more results-driven approach to policy implementation in member states and such an approach needs to be developed even more.

Greater uniformity of teacher-training across Europe is a means by which both student and teacher mobility across member states could be increased allowing greater opportunities to engage with the target language and the target language culture. Making effective use of the functions of the National agencies could potentially improve fluency and proficiency in modern foreign languages education at school to levels that are not currently being achieved. Students and teachers must be convinced to make effective use of all available learning resources both inside and outside the classroom and a recommendation here would include the introduction of a potential compulsory period of study abroad in target language communities. This process could build upon potentially excellent starting points for *differentiated multilingual and plurilingual learning paths* in modern foreign language education that are currently not being implemented to their full potential in Ireland.

When considering the European and national commitment to the ambition *of 'mother tongue plus two'* and noting that this study took the form of investigating this top-down approach an entirely missing link associated with whether Europeans *actively seek* to develop as multilingual citizens has emerged. Without the support of European citizens no policy aspirations can be achieved thus communication links from European Institutions to member state governments and citizens need to have strong links to ensure that the message is reaching those for whom it is intended i.e. the citizens themselves.

As we have shown the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB) study together with successive studies to date (see DES, 2004; 2009a; Little, 2003; NCCA, 2005) identified that a more integrated approach to languages at school would create a situation where languages were no longer competing with each other across school timetables and where more explicit links between first, second and foreign languages at school would allow for common pedagogical practice across languages and amongst teachers. It is imperative that such a development in education be achieved in the short to medium term to provide for an ever-expanding range of language and learning support requirements in schools.

Despite declining trends of uptake of terminal examinations in Irish at higher level the findings of this study indicated that over 50% of respondents to the primary research questionnaire indicated that Irish was necessary for their futures. There has been much debate of late on the continued role of Irish as a second language in education particularly questioning whether students who are not motivated to study Irish should not have to do so. Given the extensive curricular time allocated to the subject of Irish as a national language it is recommended that those students who are entirely de-motivated by lack of progress in Irish at school are at the very least *given the option* of studying a second modern foreign language in place of Irish.

If we are to implement European policy in *multilingualism* at any discernable level we must re-consider two very important administrative aspects of current school organisation in Ireland. The first administrative aspect requiring change is that of individual school *autonomy*, particularly in the context of this study in decisions around potentially offering restricted access to the entire range of modern foreign language subjects available on the curriculum. The second administrative aspect requiring change is that of current teacher autonomy in participating in continuous professional development (CPD). We must ensure that qualified teachers are keeping up-to-date with the most recent pedagogies in modern foreign languages education. We will recall from the concluding part of chapter 2 part 2 that the recent EFLUSL project identified the benefits of a '*whole school*' emphasis on modern foreign languages in the curriculum recommending the development of internal school mentoring programmes for newly qualified teachers.

There is currently no provision at secondary level for those who have studied a foreign language through the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative in terms of level of study. There is certainly a current need to provide for foreign language study at a range of appropriate ability levels from the commencement of post-primary studies and/or the further need for the introduction of a terminal examination in modern foreign language subjects at the end of primary school. We have noted in Chapter 2 part 2 of this study that if the MLPSI exists simply to implement European education policy in schools the entire experience may become futile for students in the short to medium term. The frustration of studying grammatical features etc. of a foreign language for two years only to repeat the same study at lower-secondary or to have to study a new language due to limited subject availability at a particular secondary school is not an acceptable '*status-quo*'. If we are to consider the MLPSI's role as an important component of a national government policy agenda towards multilingualism in Ireland and potentially the realization of the Council of Europe aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' languages before the end of compulsory schooling we can acknowledge that the initiative as it stands is not currently serving this purpose.

National examination statistics need to be reported by the State Examinations Commission (SEC, 2010) highlighting mother-tongue and non mother-tongue candidates so that a clear picture emerges of levels of grade attainment in all modern foreign language subjects at a national level. This recommendation is in line with a disproportionally high level of students achieving '*A*' grades at higher level study in both Japanese and Russian languages than is the case for other foreign language subjects.

The findings of the primary research questionnaire of this study is that 68.2% of students reported continuing a modern foreign language subject after Junior Certificate examinations as they needed the subject for University entry and this was also the most frequently cited reason for continuing a language studied at Junior Certificate level for the Leaving Certificate reported in this study. We need to ensure that any future changes to this situation need to be very carefully managed so that we don't have a sudden mass exodus from modern foreign language subjects at school and consequently even greater reductions in modern foreign language teaching posts for newly qualified teachers.

We can suggest anecdotally that the findings of this study relating to the low uptake of Spanish at 1.9% compared with a national average of over 11% (see above) *may* highlight a *lower provision of Spanish* language for study at the schools who participated in the primary research questionnaire of this study. The first stage in any potential change to school autonomy should be a requirement of all schools to report to the Department of Education and Skills on all curricular subjects in modern foreign languages *offered* to students for study each year. A more centralised approach to subject provision in the future would ensure equal access to the full range of modern foreign languages for all students and provide a better means of increasing language diversity in schools.

The retention of modern foreign language subjects in secondary education

Whilst there was a high level of retention of modern foreign languages to upper-secondary level this study has qualified that this was predominantly due to NUI matriculation requirements. There was no reported changing to another foreign language subject at upper-secondary level or uptake of an additional subject as should be the case if the European policy aspiration of '*mother tongue plus two*' foreign languages is to be actively pursued. The MLPSI needs to be nationalised so that modern foreign language study can commence at primary school and include the study of two modern foreign languages by the completion of secondary school. Introducing such a policy is acknowledged in this study as relatively easy given the high levels of students who remain at school to completion of terminal examinations at Leaving Certificate level.

What emerged from students' reported reasons for considering certain languages as necessary for their futures generally alluded to a near universal consideration that English is the most widely spoken language throughout the world; Irish should be retained as it is a national language and is also necessary for certain semi-state careers; and modern foreign languages are useful for travelling. More emphasis needs to be placed on the development of better levels of subject matter appreciation in modern foreign language subjects if we are to encourage students to value modern foreign language competence for use beyond terminal exams.

Grade achievement in schools in modern foreign language subjects

In terms of grade attainment in 2010 we see less than 10% of students achieving 'A1' grades across foreign language subjects with the average grade being a rather disappointing C. Interestingly in higher level Italian high achievement of A1 grades at higher level included 15.9% of examination candidates in 2008 increasing to over 17% in 2009 but disappointingly falling back significantly in 2010 to less than 7%. It is a recommendation of this study that the reasons for this sudden decrease in grade achievement in Italian will need to be investigated in the wider national context particularly in view of any future commitment to continued modern foreign language diversity at school. A grade 'C' average across language subjects is comparatively low must be addressed. A potential starting point could be for examination results to be issued with an accumulative grade together with a breakdown of how a student performed at each individual examination component. We have also acknowledged that for those students who are achieving the near 10% highest grades we need to be able to identify those schools and potentially the students so that best practice can be shared between students and schools with a view to an overall grade improvement.

What consideration is given at member state level to the development of levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning at school?

We have noted in Chapter 2 part 1 that in In March 2007, the Minister for Education and Science (now Education and Skills) increased the marks allocation for the Modern Languages Leaving Certificate oral examination from 25% to 40%, and from 20% to 40% in the Junior Certificate in order to promote an emphasis on using the language for communication. Nonetheless, it remains vital that individual schools' employ innovative pedagogical practices to encourage the use of the modern language for all communications in class as well as putting measures in place to encourage opportunities for target language use outside of the classroom in study groups and study abroad etc. Average class sizes remain at the upper recommendation at a European level at 21-25 students whilst provision of teaching hours in modern foreign language subjects remain at the lower recommendation at a European level at 90 hours per school year in upper-secondary with up to 200 hours in some European countries. This study found that students considered this class time to be sufficient and did not express any need for additional class time. However, we have acknowledged in light of a

need to improve target language fluency and proficiency levels that the potential implementation of the European Initiative on Content and Languages Integrated Learning (CLIL) by which students study other curricular subjects through the medium of the target language e.g. geography taught in French language for students of French, would allow for greater exposure to the target language without necessarily requiring any additional curricular time. This would also be a very interesting pedagogical method that students may enjoy as it has the potential of allowing them to *use* their target language in a productive way and increase fluency and proficiency.

It is vital that where possible and practicable the target language remains as the main language in class. The findings of the Department of Education and Skills recent reporting on the evaluation of languages at upper-secondary level reported more positive findings regarding target language use in class than was the case in this study in which students reported near-universal use of English in foreign language classroom communications. However, when considering these findings we must also quality that visits to schools for observation of language classes was notified in advance in the EFLUSL study so there may have been more target language use by teachers and students than would normally be the case in the course of a lesson whilst they were under observation in the EFLUSL study.

In a classroom mother-tongue translation should only be called upon *after* every other innovative pedagogical means has been exhausted in our attempts to facilitate student comprehension. *Immediate* translation by a class teacher will hinder students in applying themselves to comprehension in target language study. When a task becomes difficult they will simply sit back and wait for the teacher's explanation and/or translation.

The role of the European Commission is to help member states tackle the challenges of linguistic diversity by supporting and co-ordinating action via the national agencies such as Léargas and *Europass* Centres in Ireland. These institutions need to work more closely with schools to encourage a European dimension to learning. Withdrawal from the European Indicator of language competence study serves the purpose of communicating to Irish people that developing as multilingual European citizens is currently '*on hold*'. A recommendation here would be for the government to re-consider its position and participate in the Indicator of Language Competence study so that we are not excluded from the likely wide ranging debate that is likely to result from the findings of the study.

Prior Knowledge and Students language and linguistic awareness

In light of the current situation regarding lack of provision for prior knowledge of modern foreign language skills gained at primary school upon entry to secondary school this study recommends that a system of measurement needs to be put in place e.g. use of the CEFR scales etc. or introduction of a terminal examination at the end of primary school with the introduction of a number of competence levels at which a student can continue their modern foreign language study un-interrupted at lower secondary.

In terms of language and linguistic awareness the situation remains that there is little *if any* linking of language subjects at school in Ireland. As noted in Chapter 2 part 2 the subject syllabus in English is primarily literature based thus students have relatively little experience of explicit teaching or learning of grammatical structures etc. in their mother tongue languages and they will inevitably have difficulty in making connections between their mother tongue and the target language under study.

Interestingly, this study found that over one third of participating students reported that they would be confident using their target language in a community in which it is spoken. There is a real possibility to build on this confidence and encourage more students to develop as confident and competent users of the target language under study using all means available to them to increase their exposure to the language.

An examination focus in Ireland creates learning environments in Ireland in which students have little time to reflect on the content of learning and their own engagement with the learning process. The current situation in which subjects only have value by associated grade in terminal exams for conversion to points for university entry does not provide for any level of subject matter appreciation so alternative provision of subjects needs to be examined.

Motivation in modern foreign language learning

If the current NUI situation were to change it may be possible to better qualify the role of student motivation in the selection of a modern language subject. Inhibited by limited 'prior knowledge' and 'language and linguistic awareness' due to non-linking of language subjects

in the Curriculum Irish students face quite a degree of difficulty, particularly at the initial stages of learning and it is important that these challenges are overcome so that they can become successful learners. Students need to have both the 'will' and the 'skill' to be successful in classrooms.

Hence, teachers need to be continually informed about learning resources including ICT's. Where time is a constraint for students, teachers can set homework tasks which require the use of the Internet for individual research, group tasks, and fluency practice. A recommendation of this study that a further study be conducted into the near 10% of high achieving students in modern foreign languages in Ireland to examine their individual approach to the use of Internet resources for additional study. Increased use of ICTs in language classrooms could ensure better student knowledge and awareness of resources. If we are ever to achieve suitable levels of fluency and proficiency in modern foreign language learning and continue to motivate students and convince them that their success in learning is important to us as educators this practice of two levels of study in the same classroom i.e. ordinary level and higher level students will have to be addressed. In this case *action research* may be a way forward in overcoming some of the challenges faced by teachers.

Strategies in modern foreign language learning

The Key Skills Project developed following implementation of the European Key Competences Initiative is an excellent example of effective policy implementation and this work should be continued. However, a learning situation in which terminal examinations examine students *solely* on the basis of declarative knowledge will need to be re-considered in light of an emphasis on target language use and potential introduction of compulsory periods of study abroad for both students and teachers. As we have noted the most popular means of planning to study modern foreign languages in the future was travelling to use the language, followed by independent study. Students reported that they had increased their awareness of or interest in the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language during their language study. Thus, any possible way forward in the implementation of European educational policies at member state level in Ireland *must* consider the

recommendations of this study and most importantly must be in collaboration with practicing teachers and students of modern foreign languages in schools.

A new languages resource teacher post to support the teaching and learning of all languages in schools needs to be developed. The role of this language resources teacher could include English language support, mother tongue support and modern foreign language support by introducing extra-curricular language activities in school as well as providing support and collaboration with modern foreign language teachers in a similar way to the role played the now largely defunct 'language assistant' in earlier decades.

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Appendix 1

POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION 1975 – 1995

December 1975: Approval by the European Council and ministers for education of the first Community Action Progamme in Education.

February 1976: The first programme formally adopted by the Council through a resolution (a non-binding legal instrument), which highlighted co-operation between member states. The resolution included six priority areas for action:

(i) education of the children of migrant workers;
(ii) closer relations between education systems in Europe;
(iii) compilation of documentation and statistics;
(iv) higher education;
(v) teaching of foreign languages;
(vi) equal opportunities.

1978 – 1980: The Arion Action commenced with the development of study visits for education specialists to inform administrative staff in education (primary and secondary) about other education systems. In 1987 the programme became Arion Study Visits which were generally of one-week duration. An equivalent action managed by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) was developed for Vocational Training, commencing in 1985 and later integrated into the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The Arion action was integrated into the Socrates Programme in 1995.

1978 – 1980: The lack of a legal basis in European co-operation in education hindered developments for three years from 1978 to 1980. Four Commission communications were affected:

(i) the European dimension in secondary education;
(ii) teaching of foreign languages;
(iii) admission of students from other Member States to higher education;
(iv) equal opportunities in education and training for girls.

1980: The 'Eurydice' network established in 1980 to research European education structures. 'Eurostat' had been publishing statistical data on education since 1978 relating to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) & the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) revised International Standard Classifications of Education (ISCED) (See Appendix 2).

1982: The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages established to represent regional and minority language communities of the E.U. via a network of national committees.

1984: European Network of National Academic Recognition Centres (NARIC), established to provide advice and information on the academic recognition of diplomas and study periods undertaken in other countries. NARIC was integrated into Erasmus in 1987. In June 1994 the Council of Europe and UNESCO assumed joint responsibility for the secretariat of the European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility (ENIC). As their missions are now similar the NARIC and ENIC networks work together using a joint website (ENIC-NARIC, 2010).

1984: European Strategic Programme for Research & Development in Information Technology (ESPRIT), adopted for a period of five years (1985-89). This was followed in 1988 by The Delta Programme on learning in Europe through the use of advanced technologies. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) integrated into all education and training systems from the 1990s.

1985: From 1981 departments associated with education and vocational training incorporated

	for the first time into the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Education. European Council of Milan in 1985 approved the '*Adonnio Report on the People's Europe'* which further emphasised the roles of education and culture in Europe.
1989:	Following events in Central and Eastern Europe the Commission proposed the TEMPUS Programme for the development and re-form of higher education.
1989:	The Delors Commission set up a new structure 'The Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth'.
1990:	Incorporation into the Erasmus Programme of a European Credit Transfer System (European Union, 2009) to enhance educational mobility within Europe. Applied to higher education with the launch of the Jean Monnet Action in 1990.
1993:	Jacques Delor's White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment emphasised education and training systems promoting 'individual development and the values of citizenship whilst supporting employment-intensive growth.
1994:	Austria, France, Greece, Liechtenstein, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Switzerland founded the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) on 8th April as an 'enlarged partial agreement' of the Council of Europe (*not* supported by *all* member states). Resolution (94) 10 established the ECML until December 1997 Resolution (98) 11 made the ECML a permanent institution in July 1998. (European Centre for Modern Languages, 2010a).
1995:	The White Paper entitled '*Teaching and learning – towards the learning society*' was adopted in 1995 outlining 'factors of upheaval' including internationalisation; the information society; and the scientific and technological world. It stressed the need for lifelong learning and the development of skills but perhaps most notably broke with the traditional divisions between *education* and *training*.

Adapted from Pépin, (2006); The European Commission, (2010a; 2010b).

Appendix 2

International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED (UNESCO, 2010)

UNESCO developed the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) to facilitate comparisons of education statistics and indicators of different countries on the basis of uniform and internationally agreed definitions. First developed in the 1970s, the current version, known as ISCED 1997, was formally adopted in November 1997. However, classification issues continue to arise, especially as education systems expand and diversify. In response, Member States requested that the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) propose a revised ISCED to the UNESCO General Conference in 2011. The revisions will be based on the conclusions of regional consultations with experts in 2009 and 2010.

ISCED 97 Levels

ISCED 0: Pre-primary education: defined as the initial stage of organized instruction. It is school or centre-based and is designed for children aged at least three years.

ISCED 1: Primary education: beginning between four and seven years of age, it is compulsory in all countries and generally lasts from five to six years.

ISCED 2: Lower secondary education: It continues the basic programmes of the primary level, although teaching is more subject-focused. Usually the end of this level coincides with the end of compulsory education.

ISCED 3: Upper secondary education: This level generally begins at the end of compulsory education. The entrance age is typically 15 or 16 years. Entrance qualifications (end of compulsory education) and other minimum entry requirements are usually needed. Instruction is often more subject-oriented than at ISCED Level 2. The typical duration of ISCED level 3 varies from two to five years.

ISCED 4: Post-secondary non-tertiary education: These programmes straddle the boundary between upper secondary and tertiary education. They serve to broaden the knowledge of ISCED level 3 graduates. Typical examples are programmes designed to prepare pupils for studies at level 5 or programmes designed to prepare pupils for direct labour market entry.

ISCED 5: Tertiary Education (first stage): Entry to these programmes normally requires the successful completion of ISCED level 3 or 4. This level includes tertiary programmes with academic orientation (referred to as Type A) which are largely theoretically based and tertiary programmes with occupation orientation (referred to as Type B) which are typically shorter than type A programmes and geared for entry into the labour market.

ISCED 6: Tertiary Education (second stage): This level is reserved for tertiary studies that lead to an advanced research qualification (Doctorate of Philosophy or Doctorate).

http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/isced/ISCED_A.pdf

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Appendix 3: Common European Framework of Reference: Global Scale

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/levels.html

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Appendix 4

Student Self-Assessment Grid

http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/LanguageSelfAssessmentGrid/en

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		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
UNDERSTANDING	Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided. I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
SPEAKING	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
WRITING	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

Appendix 5: Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates 2010

Table Five (a): Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates 2010				
Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English		18,492	33,007	51,499
Irish	4,387	25,906	14,650	44,943
French		13,215	14,359	27,574
German		2,909	4,396	7,305
Italian		95	197	292
Spanish		1,586	2,059	3,645
Japanese		27	143	170
Latin			138	138
Dutch			29	29
Portuguese			49	49
Arabic			121	121
Russian			272	272
Polish			451	451
Latvian			96	96
Lithuanian			207	207
Romanian			121	121
Slovakian			34	34

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (State Examinations Commission, 2010).

Appendix 6: Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates 2009

Table Five (b): Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates 2009				
Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English		18,169	32,864	51,033
Irish	4,831	26,016	14,796	45,643
French		13,999	13,676	27,675
German		3,218	4,356	7,574
Italian		95	223	318
Spanish		1,419	1,858	3,277
Japanese		41	208	249
Latin		5	127	132
Ancient Greek			7	7
Modern Greek			3	3
Dutch			31	31
Portuguese			55	55
Arabic		23	120	143
Russian		19	214	233
Swedish			16	16
Finnish			4	4
Polish			328	328
Latvian			48	48
Lithuanian			176	176
Romanian			92	92
Slovakian			15	15
Czech			9	9
Hungarian			19	19
Bulgarian			12	12
Estonian			6	6

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (SEC, 2010).

Appendix 7: Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates 2008

Table Five (c): Leaving Certificate Examination Candidates 2008				
Language	*Level of Study*			*Total*
	Foundation Level	*Ordinary Level*	*Higher Level*	
English		17,590	31,793	49,383
Irish	4,846	25,820	13,994	44,660
French		13,472	14,225	27,697
German		3,026	4,440	7,466
Italian		112	145	257
Spanish		1,373	1,592	2,965
Japanese		28	99	127
Latin		5	117	122
Ancient Greek			6	6
Modern Greek			5	5
Dutch			28	28
Portuguese			29	29
Arabic		7	119	126
Russian		15	230	245
Swedish			10	10
Finnish			4	4
Polish			171	171
Latvian			50	50
Lithuanian			131	131
Romanian			67	67
Slovakian			17	17
Czech			5	5
Hungarian			8	8
Bulgarian			6	6
Estonian			8	8
German Lang + Lit			6	6

Adapted from State Examinations Commission statistics. See (SEC, 2010).

Appendix 8

Student Questionnaire

Modern Languages Questionnaire

The following questionnaire forms part of a research project being conducted by Patricia Minton of The School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, under the professional supervision of Dr. Sean Devitt. We hereby respectfully request your assistance in conducting this research. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions concerning your language learning. Please respond to these questionnaire items as fully and as honestly as you can. Your participation is both anonymous and confidential; the results of this research will be expressed in the form of group statistics only.

SECTION A – LANGUAGE EDUCATION: GENERAL

1. Please *write* the location of your school in the Republic of Ireland:

Town: _____

County: _____

2. Please *tick* the type of Second Level school that you attend:

Secondary School ☐

Comprehensive School ☐

Community School ☐

VEC School ☐

3. Please *tick* whether your school is fee-paying or non fee-paying:

Fee Paying: I have to pay an annual tuition fee to attend ☐

Non Fee-Paying: I don't have to pay an annual tuition fee to attend ☐

4. How many pupils attend your school (approximately):

001 - 300 ☐

301 - 499 ☐

500 + ☐

5. Please *tick* your year of study:

Fifth Year ☐

Transition Year ☐

6. Please *tick* whether you are male or female:

Male ☐

Female ☐

7. Please *tick* the languages that you have studied for Junior Certificate exams:

French ☐

German ☐

Spanish ☐

Italian ☐

Irish ☐

English ☐

Other Language (Please *write*): _____

8. Please *write* your **grade(s)** i.e. A1, B1 etc. achieved in Junior Certificate exams:

French ☐

German ☐

Spanish ☐

Italian ☐

Irish (Ordinary Level) ☐ (Higher Level) ☐

English (Ordinary Level) ☐ (Higher Level) ☐

Other (Please *write* language & grade): _____

9. Please *tick* the languages that you plan to study for Leaving Certificate:

French ☐

German ☐

Spanish ☐

Italian ☐

Irish ☐

English ☐

Other (Please *write* language): _____

10. Which grade (s) i.e. A1, B1 etc. are you aiming for at Leaving Certificate level?

	Ordinary Level	Higher Level
French	☐	☐
German	☐	☐
Spanish	☐	☐
Italian	☐	☐
Irish	☐	☐
English	☐	☐
Other (Please *write* language): _____	☐	☐

11. If you have studied a modern language for your Junior Certificate and have decided **not to continue** to study the language for Leaving Certificate please indicate your reasons for this choice:

(i) I do not enjoy studying modern languages ☐

(ii) I have decided to study another modern language for Leaving Certificate ☐
(i.e. I studied French but now want to study Spanish instead for Leaving Certificate etc.)

(iii) I do not need a modern language for my intended career/ future studies ☐

(iv) I have **other reasons** for not continuing to study a modern language ☐

(Please explain your **other reasons**):

Please continue *only* if you have opted to study modern languages for Leaving Certificate

SECTION B – SENIOR CYCLE STUDIES - SCHOOL

12. Please *tick* your reasons for continuing to study the modern foreign language (s):

(i) I enjoy studying modern languages ☐

(ii) Studying a modern language for Leaving Cert is compulsory at my school ☐
(i.e *I have to study* a modern language for Leaving Certificate at my school)

(iii) I need to study a modern language for entry to college/university ☐

(iv) I need to study a modern language for my chosen career ☐

(v) I have **other reasons** for continuing to study a modern language ☐
(Please explain your **other reasons** in the box below):

13. How many pupils are in your modern language class? (Please *tick*):

1 – 10 ☐

11 – 15 ☐

16 – 20 ☐

21 – 25 ☐

26 – 30 ☐

14. How many class sessions per week do you study modern languages? (Please *tick*):

2 ☐

3 ☐

4 ☐

15. What is the length of each class (in minutes)? (Please *tick*):

35 ☐

40 ☐

45 ☐

16. Do you consider the class time to be enough? (Please *tick*): Yes ☐

No ☐

17. Do you have an opportunity to study / practice language skills with other pupils outside normal class time? (Please *tick*):

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you responded **Yes** to *Question 17* please give details of the study group
If you responded **No** to *Question17* please move forward to *Question 22*

18. Who organises/manages the group? (Please *tick*):

Pupils ☐

School ☐

Other ☐

If you responded *Other* please give details of the person/organisation:

19. How many students take part in the group? ☐

20. How often does the group meet up / get together?

1 hour per week ☐

2 hours per week ☐

Other ☐

If you responded *Other* please give details:

21. Please give details of the modern language activities that you participate in within the group: (Please *tick*):

(i) We practice speaking the language only ☐

(ii) We practice speaking, reading and writing the language ☐

(iii) We practice lots of language activities including grammar practice ☐

(iv) We are able to work on language studies projects individually and as a group ☐

(v) Other language activities ☐

If you responded *Other* language activities please give details:

SECTION C – SENIOR CYCLE STUDIES – EXTRA CURRICULAR

22. Please *write* details of the type of modern languages club/society that **you would like to have available to you** for extra study?

23. Do you know about any language study groups / societies in other secondary schools in your area that you could join or any community groups encouraging language study or exchange i.e. at your local youth club or public library etc.? If yes please *write* details of the group:

24. Do you have a library at your school that is available for you to use? (Please *tick*):

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you responded **No** to *Question 24* please move forward to *Question 26*

25. If **yes** please indicate the range of language resources available by ticking boxes **(A)** and further indicate the resources that you actually use for study by ticking boxes **(B)**:

	A Available	**B** Use for study
A range of course books at different language levels	☐	☐
Novels at different language levels	☐	☐
Audio Tapes in a range of language levels	☐	☐
Videos in a range of language levels	☐	☐
DVDs/ CDs in a range of language levels	☐	☐
Copies of past examination papers for modern languages	☐	☐
Copies of project work completed by former students	☐	☐

Other (Please specify): _____

26. Do you have access to the Internet in your school or home? (Please *tick*):

Yes ☐

No ☐

27. Have you ever used the internet for language study? (Please *tick*): Yes ☐

No ☐

28. If **yes**, which particular websites have you accessed?

SECTION D – PUPIL PERSPECTIVES – LANGUAGE STUDIES

29. Who set the level of your study in modern languages i.e. Ordinary or Higher level?

Myself ☐

Parents ☐

Teacher ☐

Myself & My Parents ☐

Myself & My Teacher ☐

Myself, Parents & Teacher ☐

30. Did you discuss your level of study i.e. ordinary or higher level with your modern languages teacher *before* assigning your language level for Leaving Certificate study?

Yes ☐

No ☐

31. Are you happy with the level at which you are studying the modern language (s)?

Yes ☐

No ☐

32. Which language is used most during instruction / communication during your class in modern languages? (Please *tick*):

The modern language ☐

English ☐

Irish ☐

33. When the modern language is used are you able to follow the class?

Sometimes ☐

Most of the time ☐

Always ☐

34. Please give a *short explanation* for your response to *Question 33*:

35. During group work in class what language do pupils generally use?

The modern language ☐

English ☐

Irish ☐

36. When asking questions during class which language do you use? (Please *tick*):

The modern language ☐

English ☐

Irish ☐

37. Have you ever participated in any student exchange/language projects **in a modern language** *(other than Irish)*?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If you responded **No** to *Question 37* please move forward to *Question 39*

38. If you responded **Yes** to *Question 37* please *write* details of the exchange:

(i) Who organised the project/exchange?

(ii) Was participation optional or compulsory?

(iii) What was the duration of the project/exchange?

(iv) Approximately how many pupils participated?

(v) What was the main language of communication?

(vi) Were the pupils the same age or of a similar age to you?

(vii) Has your modern language level improved due to your participation in the project? *(Please give details of the particular improvements i.e. grammar, speaking etc.)*

SECTION E – PUPIL PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

39. In your experience of language learning in the classroom please list the most enjoyable parts of class time AND the least enjoyable parts of class time:

(i) THE MOST ENJOYABLE PARTS OF CLASS:

(ii) THE LEAST ENJOYABLE PARTS OF CLASS:

40. Are you planning to study modern languages in the future? Yes ☐

No ☐

41. How do you plan to maintain your language skills? (Please *tick*):

Study independently ☐

Attend a refreshers course ☐

Travel to use the language ☐

Other ☐

If you responded *Other* please give details:

42. Has the study of your modern language (s) increased your interest / awareness of the culture and everyday lives of the speakers of that language? (Please *tick*):

Yes ☐

No ☐

43. Please *write* examples of specific things that you have learned about those cultures during your language studies:

44. Do you consider your current language skills in your modern language (s) to be sufficient to study /work in a country in which that language is spoken?

Yes ☐

No ☐

45. If you encounter problems using your modern language (s) please *write* any communication strategies that you have learned that may help you to communicate e.g. asking the other person to repeat what has been said etc.

46. Please indicate the languages below which you would consider to be necessary for your future: (Please *tick*):

French ☐

German ☐

Spanish ☐

Italian ☐

Irish ☐

English ☐

Other (Please *write* language): _____

47. Please *write* a brief explanation for your responses to Question 46:

48. Please *list* any recommendations that you consider useful for future language students learning languages in secondary schools i.e. how languages are taught, opportunities to use the language etc.

49. In what way do you consider having English as a first/second language to be an advantage to you i.e. for travel, communications, education, future career etc.?

Thank you for your participation in this questionnaire

If you have any questions concerning this research project, or concerning your participation herein, please address enquires to:

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APPENDIX 9

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02nd October 2006

Dear ,

I am a currently conducting an online survey relating to my research towards a Ph.D. in the School of Education Trinity College, under the supervision of Dr. Sean Devitt. The research will examine the perspectives of 5th year and transition year pupils in relation to their study of modern foreign languages in the Republic of Ireland. To gather the data I will be using a representative sample of 50 schools counterbalanced on 5 measures: fee paying/non fee paying; school type (secondary, VEC, Community and Comprehensive); gender; size (in terms of total number of pupils registered); and location in the Republic of Ireland. My research title is '*European-led plurilingualism and modern language learning in the Republic of Ireland: A study of 5th year and Transition year pupils' perspectives in language learning'*.

I am writing to enquire as to whether you would be willing to have your school included in the survey? Pupil participation is anonymous and the school will not be identified as the results of the survey will be expressed in group statistics only. Post-primary schools have been selected on a representative geographical basis for the Republic of Ireland. Fifth Year and Transition Year pupils have been selected on the basis that their participation will not interfere with preparation for State Exams. In order to make the online questionnaire available to 5th year and transition year pupils it will be necessary to either publish a link to the questionnaire on your school website whereby pupils may be advised of the presence of the survey by the modern languages class teachers. (If you would prefer that I liaise with your school website manager that is also possible) or I could forward the web-link by Email to a nominated modern languages or computer studies teacher to be forwarded to the pupils. Naturally, if you have any further suggestions for the effective distribution of questionnaire in your school they would be most welcome. Please find a copy of the online questionnaire by clicking on the link below. I would be most grateful if you would advise me of your decision as to whether your school will be participating in the research.

Many thanks for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

_____

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http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=1aZDeGstCR_2fEDk_2bunGiH_2bg_3d_3d

Appendix 10: Additional Findings to main study

From Table Thirty-Six (below), it may be seen that the majority of those students who reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level reported that they were intending to study Irish (95.4 per cent; 97.7 per cent of males, and 90.5 per cent of females) and English (93.8 per cent; 93.2 per cent of males, and 95.2 per cent of females) for the Leaving Certificate.

Table Thirty-Six: Percentages of students who reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level reporting that they intended to sit examinations in Irish and English at the Leaving Certificate level.

Subject	*Intended to Study*	*Males* (n = 44)	*Females* (n = 21)	*Total* (n = 65)
Irish	Yes	97.7	90.5	95.4
	No	2.3	9.5	4.6
English	Yes	93.2	95.2	93.8
	No	6.8	4.8	6.2

These findings were broadly similar to findings obtained for this study's cohort as a whole, where 89.5 per cent (91.5 per cent of males, 88.3 per cent of females) reported that they intended to study Irish for the Leaving Certificate, and 96.3 per cent of the sample (96.1 per cent of males, 96.5 per cent of females) reported that they intended to study English for the Leaving Certificate (see Table Thirty-Six, above).

Table Thirty-Seven (a): Percentages of students reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level aiming for different grades in Irish and English at the Leaving Certificate level (n = 65; males = 45, females = 20).

Subject	*Gender*	*Will study*	*Leaving Certificate grade aimed for*							
			A (U/S)	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*B (U/S)*	*B1*	*B2*	*B3*
Irish (Ordinary)	Males	73.3	20.0	4.4	6.7	0	20.0	2.2	2.2	0
	Females	60.0	10.0	0	0	0	30.0	10.0	0	5.0
	Total	69.2	16.9	3.1	4.6	0	23.1	4.6	1.5	1.5
Irish (Higher)	Males	24.4	4.4	2.2	2.2	2.2	6.7	0	0	0
	Females	35.0	0	5.0	5.0	0	10.0	5.0	5.0	0
	Total	27.7	3.1	3.1	3.1	1.5	7.7	1.5	1.5	0
English (Ordinary)	Males	64.4	20.0	4.4	6.7	0	20.0	0	2.2	0
	Females	25.0	0	0	5.0	0	10.0	10	0	0
	Total	52.3	13.8	3.1	6.2	0	16.9	3.1	1.5	0
English (Higher)	Males	31.1	4.4	4.4	0	2.2	11.1	4.4	2.2	0
	Females	75.0	10.0	5.0	0	10.0	20.0	10.0	10.0	0
	Total	44.6	6.2	4.6	0	4.6	13.8	6.2	4.6	0

Table Thirty-Seven (b): Percentages of students reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level aiming for different grades in Irish and English at the Leaving Certificate level (n = 65; males = 45, females = 20) (cont'd).

Subject	*Gender*	*Will study*	*Leaving Certificate grade aimed for*						
			C (unspecified)	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*D*	*E*	*Unspecified*
Irish (Ordinary)	Males	73.3	4.4	2.2	0	0	2.2	2.2	6.7
	Females	60.0	0	0	5.0	0	0	0	0
	Total	69.2	3.1	1.5	1.5	0	1.5	1.5	4.6
Irish (Higher)	Males	24.4	2.2	2.2	0	0	2.2	0	0
	Females	35.0	0	5.0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	27.7	1.5	3.1	0	0	1.5	0	0
English (Ordinary)	Males	64.4	4.4	0	0	0	0	0	6.7
	Females	25.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	52.3	3.1	0	0	0	0	0	4.6
English (Higher)	Males	31.1	2.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Females	75.0	5.0	5.0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	44.6	3.1	1.5	0	0	0	0	0

From a comparison of Tables Thirty-Seven (a) and Thirty-Seven (b) above, a smaller proportion of those who reported that they were not continuing to study modern foreign languages for the Leaving Certificate reported aiming for 'A' grades in Irish and English in the Leaving Certificate than was true for this study's cohort as a whole. Tables Thirty-Seven (d) to Twenty-Seven (g) inclusive (below) document the results of a series of four cross-tabulations of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of various aspects concerning the level (i.e., Ordinary or Higher) at which they were studying modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level. These comprise a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports of who set the level at which they study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level (Table Thirty- Seven (d)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports of who set the level at which they study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level (Table Thirty-Seven (e)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German and the students' reports of whether they discussed the level at which they study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level with their teachers prior to that level being set (Table Thirty-Seven (f)); and, a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and German and the students' reports of whether they are happy with the level at which they study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate level (Table Thirty-Seven (g)).

Table Thirty-Seven (d): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of on who set the level (i.e., Ordinary or Higher) at which they study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in French	*Who set the level?*					
	Myself	*Parents*	*Teacher*	*Myself and my parents*	*Myself and my teacher*	*Myself, my parents and my teacher*
Did not study subject (n = 186)	39.8	0.5	10.8	13.4	23.7	11.8
A (n = 41)	43.9	0	7.3	17.1	7.3	24.4
B (n = 125)	51.2	0	4.8	7.2	16.8	20.0
C (n = 177)	34.5	0.6	5.1	10.2	24.9	24.9
D (n = 77)	40.3	2.6	10.4	10.4	18.2	18.2
E (n = 9)	11.1	0	22.2	0	11.1	55.6
F (n = 1)	0	0	0	0	100.0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	11.1	0	0	11.1	55.6	22.2

Table Thirty-Seven (e): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of on who set the level (i.e., Ordinary or Higher) at which they study modern foreign languages at Leaving Certificate Level.

Reported Junior Certificate grade in German	*Who set the level?*					
	Myself	*Parents*	*Teacher*	*Myself and my parents*	*Myself and my teacher*	*Myself, my parents and my teacher*
Did not study subject (n = 448)	40.0	0.9	6.5	10.0	20.3	22.3
A (n = 13)	38.5	0	7.7	7.7	30.8	15.4
B (n = 65)	40.0	0	10.8	7.7	23.1	18.5
C (n = 47)	44.7	0	8.5	23.4	17.0	6.4
D (n = 40)	45.0	0	7.5	10.0	30.0	7.5
E (n = 8)	12.5	0	25.0	12.5	37.5	12.5
F (n = 1)	0	0	100.0	0	0	0
Unspecified (n = 3)	0	0	33.3	0	33.3	33.3

From Tables Thirty-Seven (d) and Thirty-Seven (e) above, it may be seen that the proportions of students who indicated that various people set the level at which they study modern languages at Leaving Certificate level did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level.

From Table Thirty-Seven (f) below, it may be seen that those students who reported attaining the highest grades in French and German in the Junior Certificate were least likely to have discussed their level of study with their modern languages teacher before the level was assigned for the Leaving Certificate. As might have been expected, given that 'middle' grades may fall somewhat between an obvious 'Ordinary' or 'Higher' allocation, the modal grades for French, in terms of having discussed their level of study, were 'C' (48 per cent) and 'E' (55.6 per cent), and for German, was 'C' (52.3 per cent).

Table Thirty-Seven (f): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on whether or not they discussed their level of study (i.e. Ordinary or Higher) with their modern foreign languages teacher before the level was assigned for the Leaving Certificate.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Discussed?*		*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Discussed?*	
	Yes	*No*		*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 183)	39.9	60.1	Did not study subject (n = 448)	42.1	57.9
A (n = 41)	14.6	85.4	A (n = 13)	23.1	76.9
B (n = 125)	42.4	87.6	B (n = 65)	35.4	64.6
C (n = 175)	48.0	52.0	C (n = 47)	52.3	47.7
D (n = 75)	41.3	58.7	D (n = 40)	38.5	61.5
E (n = 9)	55.6	44.4	E (n = 8)	37.5	62.5
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	100.0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	55.6	44.4	Unspecified (n = 3)	66.7	33.3

From Table Thirty-Seven (g) below, it may be seen that the proportions of students who indicated that they were happy with the level at which they study modern languages at Leaving Certificate level did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level.

Table Thirty-Seven (g): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports on whether or not they are happy with the level of study (i.e. Ordinary or Higher) they have been assigned for modern foreign languages at the Leaving Certificate.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Happy with level?*		*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Happy with level?*	
	Yes	*No*		*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 185)	89.2	10.8	Did not study subject (n = 440)	88.9	11.1
A (n = 41)	100.0	0	A (n = 13)	92.3	7.7
B (n = 125)	88.0	12.0	B (n = 64)	93.8	6.2
C (n = 173)	88.4	11.6	C (n = 47)	93.6	6.4
D (n = 73)	82.2	17.8	D (n = 40)	80.0	20.0
E (n = 9)	100.0	0	E (n = 8)	62.5	37.5
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	100.0	0
Unspecified (n = 9)	88.9	11.1	Unspecified (n = 3)	66.7	33.3

Table Thirty-Eight (below) documents the results of a cross-tabulation of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of whether they have a library at school that is available for them to use.

Table Thirty-Eight : Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French and German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of whether they have a library at school that is available for them to use.

French			*German*		
Reported Junior Certificate grade	*Yes*	*No*	*Reported Junior Certificate grade*	*Yes*	*No*
Did not study subject (n = 186)	71.9	28.1	Did not study subject (n = 445)	63.1	36.9
A (n = 41)	43.9	56.1	A (n = 13)	69.2	30.8
B (n = 124)	65.3	34.7	B (n = 64)	76.6	23.4
C (n = 178)	67.8	32.2	C (n = 47)	71.1	28.9
D (n = 73)	59.2	40.8	D (n = 41)	72.5	27.5
E (n = 9)	77.8	22.2	E (n = 8)	75.0	25.0
F (n = 1)	100.0	0	F (n = 1)	0	100.0
Unspecified (n = 10)	55.6	44.4	Unspecified (n = 3)	66.7	33.3

From Table Thirty-Eight (above), it may be seen that the proportions of students who indicated that they had a school library available for their use did not reliably relate to reports of grades attained in French and German at the Junior Certificate level.

Tables Thirty-Nine (a) to Thirty-Nine (d) inclusive (below) document the results of a series of four cross-tabulations of the percentage of students who reported attaining different grades in French and German at Junior Certificate level, and their reports of the availability and their own use of modern foreign language resources in the school library. These comprise a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports of the availability of modern language resources in the school library (Table Thirty-Nine (a)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports of the availability of modern language resources in the school library (Table Thirty-Nine (b)); a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate French and the students' reports of their own use of modern language resources in the school library (Table Thirty-Nine (c)); and, a cross-tabulation of reports of grades attained in Junior Certificate German and the students' reports of their own use of modern language resources in the school library (Table Thirty-Nine (d)).

Table Thirty-Nine (a): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of the availability of modern foreign language study resources in the school library.

Study Resource	*Reported Junior Certificate grade in French*							
	Did not study this subject (n = 112)	A (n = 16)	B (n = 71)	C (n = 103)	D (n = 39)	E (n = 7)	F (n = 1)	Unspecified (n = 4)
A range of course books at different language levels	58.9	62.5	60.6	71.8	56.4	57.1	100.0	50.0
Novels at different language levels	58.0	68.8	71.8	53.4	66.7	28.6	0	75.0
Audio tapes at a range of language levels	30.4	50.0	38.0	35.0	28.2	28.6	0	50.0
Videos at a range of language levels	23.2	31.2	31.0	30.1	17.9	14.3	0	50.0
DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels	30.4	37.5	38.0	38.8	20.5	28.6	0	50.0
Copies of past examination papers for modern languages	51.8	62.5	43.7	52.4	46.2	14.3	0	75.0
Copies of project work completed by former students	32.1	25.0	18.3	24.3	15.4	28.6	0	50.0
Other	2.7	11.8	0	1.9	2.6	0	0	0

Table Thirty-Nine (b): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of the availability of modern foreign language study resources in the school library.

Study Resource	Reported Junior Certificate grade in German							
	Did not study this subject (n = 247)	A (n = 6)	B (n = 45)	C (n = 24)	D (n = 25)	E (n = 5)	F (n = 0)	Unspecified (n = 1)
A range of course books at different language levels	64.4	66.7	51.1	70.8	56.0	80.0	N / A	100.0
Novels at different language levels	62.3	100.0	53.3	45.8	60.0	60.0	N / A	0
Audio tapes at a range of language levels	36.0	16.7	31.1	29.2	28.0	40.0	N / A	0
Videos at a range of language levels	28.3	33.3	26.7	20.8	20.0	0	N / A	0
DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels							N / A	
Copies of past examination papers for modern languages	48.6	33.3	55.6	62.5	40.0	40.0	N / A	100.0
Copies of project work completed by former students	21.5	66.7	31.1	41.7	20.0	40.0	N / A	0
Other	2.0	0	0	4.2	8.0	0	N / A	0

From Tables Thirty-Nine (a) and Thirty-Nine (b) (above) it may be seen that the proportion of students reporting the availability of various resources in the school library fell successively with descending grades amongst those who had studied Junior Certificate French as far as tapes and videos were concerned, and fell less clearly but still overall as far as DVDs, past examination papers and past projects were concerned. As far as the availability of books and novels were concerned, there was no clear relationship to reports of grades attained in French at the Junior Certificate level (see Table Thirty-Nine (a), above). Somewhat similarly, reports of the availability of resources in the school library were not related to reported grades amongst those who had studied Junior Certificate German (see Table Thirty-Nine (b), above). It is to be recalled, however, that far fewer students reported having studied French than German for the Junior Certificate (see Tables Thirty-Nine (c) and

(d) below), and consequently, the findings related to the former Junior Certificate French students are to be preferred when findings related to French and German fail to coincide.

Table Thirty-Nine (c): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in French at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of their own use of modern foreign language study resources in the school library.

Study Resource	Reported Junior Certificate grade in French							
	Did not study this subject (n = 112)	A (n = 16)	B (n = 71)	C (n = 103)	D (n = 39)	E (n = 7)	F (n = 1)	Unspecified (n = 4)
A range of course books at different language levels	23.2	37.5	15.5	20.4	15.4	0	0	25.0
Novels at different language levels	27.7	18.8	22.5	17.5	15.4	28.6	0	25.0
Audio tapes at a range of language levels	22.3	6.2	9.9	10.7	10.3	14.3	0	50.0
Videos at a range of language levels	23.2	25.0	7.0	15.5	15.4	14.3	0	50.0
DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels	24.1	31.2	21.1	15.5	15.4	0	0	50.0
Copies of past examination papers for modern languages	29.5	25.0	21.1	20.4	28.2	42.9	0	25.0
Copies of project work completed by former students	15.2	0	5.6	9.7	7.7	14.3	0	25.0
Other	0.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table Thirty-Nine (d): Cross-tabulation (percentages) of students' reports of grades attained in German at Junior Certificate Level and their reports of their own use of modern foreign language study resources in the school library.

Study Resource	Reported Junior Certificate grade in German							
	Did not study this subject (n = 247)	A (n = 6)	B (n = 45)	C (n = 24)	D (n = 25)	E (n = 5)	F (n = 0)	Unspecified (n = 1)
A range of course books at different language levels	16.6	33.3	37.8	12.5	28.0	20.0	N / A	0
Novels at different language levels	19.4	0	28.9	25.0	36.0	0	N / A	100.0
Audio tapes at a range of language levels	12.6	33.3	17.8	12.5	16.0	40.0	N / A	100.0
Videos at a range of language levels	15.0	16.7	20.0	20.8	20.0	40.0	N / A	100.0
DVDs / CDs at a range of language levels	19.8	16.7	20.0	20.8	16.0	40.0	N / A	100.0
Copies of past examination papers for modern languages							N / A	
Copies of project work completed by former students	8.5	16.7	8.9	8.3	20.0	40.0	N / A	100.0
Other	0	16.7	0	0	0	0	N / A	0

From a comparison of the data in Tables Thirty-Nine (c) and Thirty-Nine (d) those who reported achieving the highest grades in modern foreign languages at the Junior Certificate level were more likely to report using modern language resources in the school library than were students in the general sample – for example, 20.1 per cent of the general sample of students reported having used 'course books at different language levels', compared with 37.5 per cent of those who reported having attained an 'A' in Junior Certificate French, and 33.3 per cent who reported having attained an 'A' in Junior Certificate German (see Tables Thirty-Nine (a), Thirty-Nine (c) and Thirty-Nine (d) above. From Tables Thirty-Nine (c) and Thirty-Nine (d) (above) it may be seen that the proportion of students reporting their own use of various resources in the school library fell successively with descending grades amongst those who had studied Junior Certificate French as far as books were concerned, and fell less clearly but still overall as far as videos and DVDs were concerned. As far as the use of

novels, tapes, past examination papers and past projects was concerned, there was no clear relationship to reports of grades attained in French at the Junior Certificate level (see Table Thirty-Nine (c), above). Whether the relatively high proportion of those who reported having attained an 'E' grade in Junior Certificate French who reported having used past examination papers and past projects is a significant finding, or down to the low incidence rate of students falling into this category (n = 7), is a potential matter of interest. That aside, once again, reports of the use of resources in the school library were not related to reported grades amongst those who had studied Junior Certificate German (see Table Thirty-Nine (d), above), although the caution regarding the relative proportions of those who reported having studied French than German for the Junior Certificate and the interpretation of this date is to be recalled (see text accompanying Tables Thirty-Nine (a) and Thirty-Nine (b) above).