# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT**  
2

**INTRODUCTION**  
3

**CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW**  
5

**METHODOLOGY**  
12

**CHAPTER TWO: RESULTS**  
14

**DISCUSSION**  
25

**CONCLUSION**  
32

**RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS**  
33

**WORKS CITED**  
35

**APPENDIX**  
36
ABSTRACT

This study researches the issues encountered in learning Spanish as a foreign language in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite Spanish being declared as the first foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago and the major efforts put forth by the Ministry of Education in incorporating Spanish into the secondary school and primary school curriculums, students lack interest and motivation in studying Spanish, parents have minor inputs in foreign language learning, the workload and preference of other subjects occupy most of the time of the students and the curriculum content fails to capture the approval of students. This study focuses on the opinions of the students with regards to the aforementioned issues as the research is conducted through self-administered questionnaires. The study found that majority of the students are not interested in learning Spanish due to the dislike of the topics taught and also due to the importance placed on learning Science subjects and French and Japanese. The study also depicted that most of the parents do not speak Spanish and therefore do not help their children with schoolwork. The study also highlighted that a small amount of the students uses extra methods outside of school to improve their Spanish skills and that very few students possess the ability to excel in all four components involved in foreign language learning. It is hoped that through the exposing of the aforesaid issues, greater efforts would be made in influencing students’ interest in learning Spanish as a foreign language in Trinidad and Tobago.

KEY WORDS

Spanish, Foreign language learning, curriculum.
INTRODUCTION

Learning Spanish as a foreign language has become increasingly beneficial in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad and Tobago. The Secretariat for the Implementation of Spanish was formed by the Ministry of Education in 2004 and the initiative was officially launched in 2005 as part of an attempt to promote the interest of learning Spanish as a foreign language. Moreover, for decades, Spanish has been incorporated into the secondary school curriculum and is a compulsory subject at the lower secondary school levels. Spanish is also offered as an elective subject for CSEC and CAPE level examinations.

Although the subject is given importance by the government in the education system, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have not adopted a positive attitude towards the learning of Spanish as a foreign language. Furthermore, extra importance is placed on the learning of Science subjects; Biology, Chemistry and Physics. This is evident in the vast difference in the amount of national scholarships given to Science students at the CAPE level. The field of Modern Languages and Studies receives a small percentage of the scholarships distributed which results in less students choosing to pursue languages at the CAPE level.

Secondly, students in schools pay little attention to Spanish schoolwork as they are not motivated to learn the language and do not think it necessary to study the language. This is affected by different factors such as parental influence, workload of numerous subjects studied and the disinterest in the topics included in the Spanish curriculum.

Furthermore, there are challenging issues experienced when learning a second language especially when it comes to mastering all the different components. This is due to the major distinction in the structures of English and Spanish. Students are expected to be able to cope with
these differences through the teaching methods of the teacher. However, foreign language learning is subjective and some students may learn more effectively with alternative teaching methods than other students.

The aim of this study is to conduct a research on the following issues; the attitude of the students and its effect on learning Spanish as a foreign language, the impact of parental influence on foreign language learning, the difficulties and criticisms of the curriculum and workload and the challenges experienced in learning the different components involved in foreign language learning.

**OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The general objective of the study is to evaluate and analyze the obstacles encountered when learning Spanish as a foreign language in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The study also plans to suggest various solutions to the aforementioned problems.
CHAPTER ONE

Trinidad and Tobago belongs to the Anglophone Caribbean whose neighboring countries such as Venezuela, Columbia and Ecuador belong to Latin America where Spanish is spoken. Spanish is known as the first official foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago and is incorporated in the landmarks and street signs throughout the twin island.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Importance of Spanish language learning in Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago is connected to Latin America not only through geographical location but also in a business sense. Various institutions and agreements that join the two exist in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) which belongs to the United Nations has a branch in Port-of- Spain, Trinidad. Throughout the years, Trinidad and Tobago has maintained a relationship with its Spanish neighbors. (Morris 2004) discusses that learning Spanish as a foreign language in Trinidad and Tobago is a major necessity “based on the need for closer relations with our Spanish speaking neighbors, especially in the area of trade relations.” (Morris 2004).

Incorporation of Spanish into the Secondary and Primary School Curriculums

In an outline of whether Trinidadians possess the ability to become fluent in Spanish, (Morris 2004) points out that “modern languages have been taught in the secondary schools of Trinidad and Tobago since the late 19th and early 20th centuries”. This has facilitated candidates with the prerequisites to obtain a degree in Spanish as a foreign language and pursue a career in the field especially since “Spanish was a compulsory subject on the curriculum for all students.” (Morris
However, the field continues to remain small as many students do not choose to further studies in the language which (Morris 2004) highlights by stating that “only a minority of students, however continued on to university education.” This was also a result of the inability of students to perform well in the language which forced major changes in the inclusion of Spanish as a compulsory subject causing the language to become “an elective subject” (Morris 2004). Many issues were uprooted through a close look at Spanish learning in secondary schools. “Some teachers complain of students’ lack of interest in the language” (Morris 2004). The attitude of the students towards learning Spanish also negatively affected the successful learning of Spanish. (Morris 2004) pointed out that “students complain that the study of Spanish is boring, difficult and irrelevant to their needs” This was influenced by the fact that “the persistence of the grammatical approach demotivates students, particularly those of average ability” (Morris 2004). However, Spanish remained a compulsory subject in the lower secondary school forms and in order to avoid future repetitions of the issue “the Spanish curriculum for lower secondary students has been through a number of revisions, with the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) curriculum being the most recent.” (Morris 2004). This attempt was adopted in order “to ensure that the most appropriate curriculum is being used in schools” (Morris 2004)

The Ministry of Education continues to work towards the “aim of developing learners’ ability to communicate effectively in Spanish.” (Wilson 2016). In an attempt to ensure the prosperity and success of the relationship with Latin America, the Ministry of Education initialized the introduction of Spanish in the Primary school curriculum. In order to avoid the outcomes as mentioned before, the Ministry of Education decided to take extra measures to promote the success of the students in learning the language. This is explained in (Wilson 2016) study of the
implementation of Spanish in the Primary school curriculum which mentioned “the MoE’s plan to assist teachers with the resources necessary to implement the Spanish curriculum” (Wilson 2016). The role of the teacher and the principal is thoroughly examined in the study conducted by (Wilson 2016) which explains that “the training and competence in the Spanish language is essential for an effective learning process”. (Wilson 2016) depicted that due to the efforts of some of the teachers positive opinions were being made. He suggests that “reflective of individual attitudes, interpretations of the curriculum and distinctive linguistic and pedagogic competencies, some examples of good practices have emerged” (Wilson 2016).

However, like the secondary school curriculum, the primary school curriculum met many criticisms. In Trinidad and Tobago, great emphasis is placed on science related subjects. Due to this attitude, many people “foster a greater emphasis on core, examinable subjects that educators may deem more important” (Wilson 2016).

**Learning a second language and the difficulties presented by the different components.**

The concept of learning a foreign language can be referred to as second language acquisition. (VanPatten and Williams 2014) points out that “language is made up of a number of components that interact in different ways.” Second language acquisition involves learning the foreign language in the key components: reading, writing, listening and speaking. In Trinidad and Tobago, English is the official language, however, Standard English is not normally used by adolescents in everyday interactions. This can have an effect on foreign language learning. Most teenagers are introduced to foreign language learning in secondary school after years of Standard English instruction. “Learners who begin foreign language study in high school will be less
likely to approach a native-like standard of pronunciation than those learners who have access to significant amounts of target-language input much earlier in life” (VanPatten and Williams 2014)

Furthermore, students may be stronger in some components but weak in another area. (VanPatten and Williams 2014) focuses on the necessity of exposure to input for SLA.

(VanPatten and Williams 2014) states that “input is defined as language the learner hears (or reads) and attends to for its meaning” (VanPatten and Williams 2014) further explores the impact of input of SLA by highlighting that “various aspects of language enter learners’ minds when they are focused on communicative interaction (including reading)”

Moreover, “Second language learning is variable across linguistic subsystems” (VanPatten and Williams 2014). Linguistic subsystems include the sound system, syntax, lexicon etc. Due to the differing rules in all of the subsystems, students may perform higher in a few and have a weaker performance in others. (VanPatten and Williams 2014) suggests that “learners may vary in whether the syntax is more developed compared with the sound system for example.”

Moreover, theories and stereotypes associated with learning any subject may not apply to foreign language learning. (VanPatten and Williams 2014) point out that “Although it may seem like common sense that ‘practice makes perfect’ this adage is not entirely true when it comes to SLA.”

The attitude of schools and students towards learning a foreign language

“Modern foreign language learning (MFLL) continues to be a controversial item on the educational agenda in many countries, particularly in parts of the world where English is spoken as the first language” (Bartram 2010). It is suggested that English speakers are lazy and have a negative attitude when it comes to learning a foreign language as compared to non-English
speakers. The importance given to the subject by the student is connected to the effective learning procedure. However, “beliefs about the importance of language learning may not, for example, translate into actual language learning behavior while a positive cognitive may belie a negative affective component” (Bartram 2010).

(Bartram 2010) looks at “Language learning context” and questions the correlation between whether the attitude towards modern foreign language learning “MFLL and its place in the education system is influenced more by the wider views of society on language learning or does the education system itself mold these social views through the status it grants languages via the school curriculum”

(Bartram 2010) suggests that the attitude of the Ministry of Education and the educational institutions greatly affect the successful learning of the language. (Bartram 2010) states that “a society which values foreign language learning may communicate it importance through the status accorded to foreign language learning in the school system” (Bartram 2010) highlights the impact the school system has on the curriculum by stating that “schools have the power to decide on whether a second language should be taught and how much time should be given to language learning” (Bartram 2010).

However, it is also observed that society and personal satisfaction plays an important role in the positive opinion of the student. (Bartram 2010) insinuates that “When confronted with perhaps unfamiliar language spoken by an unfamiliar culture, the individual’s attitude is more likely to be dominated by an emotional or affective evaluation, since knowledge…may be non-existent” (Bartram 2010).
Therefore, it is important that the society and environment in which students learn a foreign language is one that promotes positive learning and encouragement. “The learner will thus be socially motivated to continue through the language learning process.” (Bartram 2010)

**The influence of parents in foreign language learning**

“Sociocultural theory specifically emphasizes the role of parents in helping children clarify the meaning of concepts by adjusting to the current level of child development” (Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka 2015). In Trinidad and Tobago, parents control all academic decisions of students until the upper secondary school level. Parents who have a positive view of learning Spanish as a foreign language will therefore promote foreign language learning to their children. (Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka 2015) points out that “parental aspirations would be observed to have a similar impact on foreign language learning to that on other areas of child education.” Therefore parents who have a positive opinion about studying Spanish tend to motivate their children due to the fact that “Foreign language learning is perceived as a particular form of investment, a form of capital which is supposed to bring benefits” (Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka 2015).

Similarly, parents who have a background in the language and who have a passion for learning foreign languages will encourage children to further studies in the language. “Parents who already have a high level of foreign language competence may regard pluralism as an important element of professional and social life and in consequence may wish their children to obtain the same level of foreign language competence if not a higher level and to use languages in adulthood for the same social and vocational purposes.” (Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka 2015).

Parents who do not have a background in the language but who recognize that it is essential for the future of their children will also have a positive impact on the motivation of children to
pursue the language in the future.” Many parents may opt for a very early start in the foreign language with a view of obtaining native like fluency in the future.” (Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka 2015). While it would be easier for children to seek help from parents who have knowledge of the language, non-Spanish speaking parents also “believe that the development of language awareness is a goal which is both achievable and worthwhile” (Piechurska-Kuciel and Szyszka 2015).
METHODOLOGY

The previous sections have focused on the contextual aspect of the study. The following section will now focus on the method used to conduct the survey. The target population for this survey consisted of 50 students from two secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The focus of the survey involved getting the opinions of the students about studying Spanish as a foreign language, the input of their parents and the difficulties faced in the different components and the criticisms of the school curriculum. The nature of the study is quantitative and analytical methods have been adopted in order to assess the data collected.

Sample

When selecting the sample population for the survey, the two secondary schools were chosen. The first school, St Augustine Community College is a privately funded secondary school comprising of both boys and girls. The second school, St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain is a government assisted funding school which comprises of mainly girls with a few boys at the form six level.

Research Instrument

In order to conduct this survey, the research instrument used was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of both open ended and close ended questions. “’The use of self-administered questionnaires…is an efficient data collection procedure which achieves a high cooperation rate, especially from teenagers.’” (Sudman, Greeley and Pinto 1965). The use of a questionnaire that is self-completed allows for a quick and smooth data collection process. It can also be used to collect data at a cheap cost to conduct research on a large population and allows the sample population to provide easy to understand, straight forward responses.
Research Procedure

Fifty (50) questionnaires were administered among students of St Augustine Community College and St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain. The questionnaires were given to 20 male students from St Augustine Community College and 30 female students from St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain. This was due to the fact that the school population of St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain was larger in number than the population of St Augustine Community College. More students were also surveyed from St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain due to the fact that French is offered as another foreign language in the curriculum whereas French is not included in the curriculum of St Augustine Community College.
CHAPTER TWO

RESULTS

The chapter discusses the analysis of the data from responses of the questionnaire on a Survey of the difficulties encountered when learning Spanish as a Foreign Language in secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to Age, Gender and school of the respondents. (N=50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-13 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-15 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-17 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 and above years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Augustine Community College</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows that the respondents were between the ages of 11-17. 17 of the respondents belonged to the age group 11-13 years which consisted of 34% of the surveyed population. The number of respondents between the ages of 14-15 years was 13 which made up of 26% while those between the ages of 16-17 were 20 which constituted 40%. The data in the table also demonstrates that 20 respondents (40%) were male while 30 respondents (60%) were female. Table 1 also displays that 30 respondents attend St Joseph’s Convent Port of Spain while 20 respondents attend St Augustine Community College.

Table 2. Number of Years that the students have been studying Spanish.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1 year</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 and above years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were asked regarding the amount of time that Spanish has been studied thus far. Table 2 shows that 7 respondents have been studying Spanish for a year or less while 26 respondents have been studying Spanish for 1-2 years. The table also shows that 15 respondents have been studying Spanish for 2-3 years and 2 of the respondents have been studying Spanish for 3 and above years.
Table 3. Preference of respondents for studying another foreign language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Languages studied at school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference of studying other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other languages preferred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were questioned about preference of studying Spanish over other languages studied. The data in Table 3 exhibits that 50 respondents study both Spanish and English at school while 30 respondents also study French. The table also shows that 29 respondents prefer to study another language over studying Spanish while 21 respondents did not prefer another language to Spanish. It also depicts that 19 respondents prefer to study French while 3 prefer to study Japanese and 7 prefer to study English.
Table 4. Parents’ interest and input in learning Spanish as a foreign language for their children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Content</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent speaks Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents encouragement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents aid when studying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents were asked about the attitude and input of parents towards studying Spanish. Table 4 confirms that the parent of 12 respondents speak Spanish while the parents of 38 respondents do not speak Spanish. The table also shows that the parents of 27 respondents encourage the respondents to study Spanish while the parents of 23 respondents do not encourage the respondents to study Spanish. It also shows that the parents of 8 respondents help the respondents with Spanish schoolwork while the parents of 42 respondents are not helpful with Spanish schoolwork.
Table 5. Attitude of Students towards learning Spanish as a foreign language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Content</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Spanish</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion that Spanish is</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not difficult</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interest in Furthering Spanish</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion that Spanish Beneficial in Trinidad and Tobago</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents were then asked questions regarding the attitude of the students towards studying Spanish as a foreign language. On the question regarding the interest of the respondents in Spanish, 22 or 44% percent responded positively while 18 respondents or 36 percent responded negatively. 10 respondents or 20 percent gave neutral responses to the question. Table 5 highlighted that 16 respondents or 32 percent were of the opinion that studying Spanish is difficult whereas 26 respondents or 52 percent were of the opinion that Spanish is not difficult. 8 respondents or 16 percent have a neutral opinion regarding the difficulty of studying Spanish. The table also shows that 22 respondents or 44 percent are interested in furthering Spanish whereas 28 respondents are not interested in furthering Spanish.

Figure 1. Strengths and Weaknesses of respondents in different components.
Data given in Figure 1 depicts the strengths and weaknesses of the respondents in the four components involved in learning a language. 9 respondents or 18 percent of the population considered the reading component to be the weakest component whereas 15 respondents considered the component to be the strongest. 9 respondents or 18 percent found the reading component to be a weak area while 12 respondents or 24 percent responded to the reading component being a strong area. 5 respondents or 10 percent found the reading component to be an average skill. Figure 1 also shows that 7 respondents or 14 percent of the population responded to the writing component being the strongest whereas 2 respondents responded to being the weakest in the writing component. 8 respondents or 16 percent responded to being weak in the writing component whereas 15 respondents or 30 percent are strong in the writing component. 8 respondents or 16 percent of the population are average in the writing component. The figure also shows that 7 respondents or 14 percent consider the listening component to be the weakest whereas 10 respondents or 20 percent consider the listening component to be the strongest. 4 respondents responded to being weak in the listening component whereas 16 respondents responded to being strong. 3 respondents or 6 percent are average in listening. It also shows that 23 respondents responded to the speaking component being the weakest whereas 10 respondents found the speaking component to be the strongest. 5 respondents answered to being weak in the speaking component and 6 respondents answered to being strong in speaking Spanish. 6 respondents or 12 percent of the population are average in speaking Spanish.
Figure 2. Respondents who engage in extra studies.

Table 7. Extra work done in Spanish outside of school (N=16)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method used</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra lessons</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duo lingo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2 and Table 7 show that 16 respondents or 32 percent of the population do extra work in Spanish outside of school while 34 respondents or 68 percent do not engage in extra studies in Spanish outside of school. When asked about the method used for extra studying, 11 respondents out of 16 used lessons or after school classes while 3 or 18 percent use the app Duolingo. 2 respondents out of 16 converse with family members to practice Spanish outside of school.

Figure 3. Students who like and dislike the Spanish Curriculum.

**Percentage of respondents who like and dislike the Spanish curriculum**

![Pie chart showing the percentage of respondents who like and dislike the Spanish curriculum]

Figure 3 shows that 18 respondents responded positively when asked about their like of the Spanish curriculum whereas 32 respondents responded negatively.

Table 8. Opinion about the Spanish curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting topics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment of curriculum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondents were asked about the criticisms about the Spanish curriculum. 8 respondents or 16 percent of the population were of the opinion that the topics on the curriculum are interesting while 2 respondents responded that the curriculum provided a variety of topics. 5 respondents were of the opinion that the curriculum is enjoyable while 3 respondents responded that the Spanish curriculum included beneficial topics. Table 8 shows that 32 respondents responded negatively when asked about the Spanish curriculum. 12 respondents or 24 percent of the population found the topics to be boring while 5 respondents were of the opinion that the topics on the curriculum cannot be used in everyday life. 15 of the respondents would prefer if other topics are taught in the curriculum.
Table 9. Impact of workload of other subjects studied on time spent studying Spanish

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 9 depicts that the workload of other school subjects impact the time spent on studying Spanish. 14 respondents or 28 percent of the population responded positively while 32 respondents or 64 percent responded negatively. 4 respondents or 8 percent gave neutral responses.
DISCUSSION

Negative attitude of students towards learning Spanish as a foreign language.

Although majority of the respondents expressed a positive opinion about Spanish being a beneficial language skill in Trinidad and Tobago as shown in Table 5, only 22 respondents showed an interest in pursuing further studies in the language in the future. The same amount of respondents also responded to liking studying the foreign language. Similarly, 16 respondents found the subject to be difficult. This indicates that even though many students may not experience major difficulties when learning the language, the importance given to the subject by the students is very little. (Bartram 2010) attested to this when stating that the “beliefs about the importance of language learning may not, for example, translate into actual language learning behavior while a positive cognitive may belie a negative affective component”. Furthermore, the reasons given by the respondents for not liking the subject varied between the opinion that time is wasted on studying a language that would not be used in the future or for desired careers to the subject being boring and confusing at times. (Morris 2004) discovered these results and confirmed that students had the opinion that Spanish as a subject is “boring, difficult and irrelevant to their needs” A student’s attitude towards a subject will affect the effort made in learning the subject and therefore produce future difficulties in the learning process. Similarly, in Trinidad and Tobago, principal focus is given to science based subjects which would affect student’s decisions when deciding subjects to study in the future. As suggested by (Bartram 2010) “a society which values foreign language learning may communicate it importance through the status accorded to foreign language learning in the school system”. Students are aware that governmental rewards and scholarships are majorly given to science based fields. Therefore, by noticing that science students receive greater rewards, the students would opt to
maintain focus on excelling in science related subjects and neglect studying Spanish. (Wilson 2016) confirms this when highlighting that this may lead students to “foster a greater emphasis on core, examinable subjects that educators may deem more important” (Wilson 2016). Similarly, lack of interest is directly connected to lack of motivation. The lack of interest in learning Spanish affects the attention given in the classroom and on assignments. The negative attitude of the students promotes lack of effort when studying Spanish which would lead to less understanding of what is being taught in the classroom which would in turn affect the performance of the students in the subjects.

Preference of other languages over learning Spanish as a foreign language.

Both schools offer English and Spanish as core subjects on the school curriculum. St Joseph’ Convent Port of Spain also offers French as a core subject. 29 respondents agreed to preferring to study another language over Spanish. 19 respondents stated French as the preferred subject. This shows that due to a better liking for the French language, most of the respondents may put more effort into learning French than Spanish. 7 respondents stated a preference for learning English. This indicates that some students are unwilling and uninterested in learning a foreign language and would prefer to just learn Standard English which would be familiar to them. 3 respondents stated that learning Japanese was preferred to learning Spanish. This shows that interest in learning a foreign language may not only come from the school curriculum but also exterior mediums. Japanese is the language used in ‘anime’ which is a hobby of many young adolescents. Students put effort into learning subjects that are enjoyable. An important tool in learning is interest. The lack of interest displayed by the students for Spanish result in less students choosing
to pursue it. This is demonstrated by (Morris 2004) who points out that Spanish has become an
“elective subject” The existence of other languages therefore, negatively affects the students’
abilities by gearing the attention of the students towards other languages other than Spanish.
Although Spanish is considered the first foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago, the students
prefer to learn other foreign languages that to them are considered more interesting.

**Parental influence on the students learning Spanish as a foreign language.**

Parents have a major impact on the academic decisions of children. Many parents often guide
children in the direction of the desired career path. The results in Table 4 show that only 8
parents of the respondents aid the respondents in studying Spanish. The amount of time a parent
spends reviewing and helping with schoolwork has a huge effect of the success of a child.
Learning also takes place in the home and parents who pay attention to the performance of
children in all subjects have a more positive impact on the students than those who do not. Lack
of aid from parents may result in lower performance in the subject. The results shown in Table 4
reveal that 12 respondents responded to having a parent who speaks Spanish as a foreign
language. This can affect the performance of the child due to the fact that homework and out of
school activities may not always be understood by the child and the input and aid of the parent
would greatly affect the outcome of such activities. (Garrett 1997) attests to this by highlighting
the fact that “children with at least one parent who speaks Spanish have odds of speaking
Spanish that are 25 times as high as children with no parent who speaks Spanish”. However, the
results in Table 4 also depict that a majority of the parents of respondents encourage the learning
of a foreign language despite not having a background in the language themselves. This agrees
with the point explored by (Piechurska- Kuciel and Szyszka 2015) that parents “believe that the development of language awareness is a goal which is both achievable and worthwhile”

**Spanish Curriculum**

The curriculum is decided by the Ministry of Education of a country and in subjects such as foreign languages, specific topics are chosen to enhance the students’ knowledge in the language. (Morris 2004) substantiates this by stating that “the Spanish curriculum for lower secondary students has been through a number of revisions, with the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) curriculum being the most recent.” (Morris 2004). However, the topics chosen by the Ministry of Education include topics such as school, subjects, weather etc. Table 8 shows that 8 respondents found the topics to be interesting and 3 respondents found the topics to be beneficial. The topics that students would be interested in would consist of topics that are more enjoyable and that can be used in social settings. The results in Figure 3 shows that a majority of the respondents did not approve or enjoy the topics included in the Spanish curriculum. As mentioned before, interest plays an important role in successful learning. (Morris 2004) verifies this when pointing out that “some teachers complain of students’ lack of interest in the language” (Morris 2004). Therefore, the lack of interest in learning the topics taught on the Spanish syllabus would negatively affect the performance of the students and bring forth more difficulties. Table 8 shows that the percentage of respondents who had a negative view of the Spanish curriculum is greater than the percentage of respondents who had a positive view of the Spanish curriculum. Among the negative opinions given, most of the respondent expressed the desire for different topics in the curriculum while a large number of respondents found the topics to be boring.
Lack of extra effort made by students outside of school hours in studying Spanish.

Although most of the educational process takes place in school, it is necessary for students to do extra activities to boost learning especially when it comes to learning a foreign language. This contradicts (VanPatten and Williams 2014) who assumes that “although it may seem like common sense that ‘practice makes perfect’ this adage is not entirely true when it comes to SLA.” (VanPatten and Williams 2014). However, in Trinidad and Tobago, the concept of after school classes also referred to as “lessons” is very popular. When a student is struggling in a subject, lessons is usually the measure taken by the student and parents to improve the child’s performance in a specific subject area. (Bartram 2016) claimed that it is crucial that students be “socially motivated to continue through the language learning process.” Figure 2 shows that a minority of the students use extra methods to enhance performance in Spanish even though there are many options. Along with after school classes, the other options were a popular app called Duolingo which is promoted by teachers in both schools, and conversing with a family member were chosen as extra work made by students in studying Spanish outside of school. 3 respondents responded to using the app and 2 respondents converse with a family member. The results indicate that even though it is important to do work outside of school in order to improve foreign language learning, the lack of effort made by students will affect their performance in the subject.
Workload of other subjects affect the amount of effort made in studying Spanish.

In the Trinidad and Tobago school system, the lower secondary school timetable comprises of 10-13 subjects. This being spread over a 35-40 period week means that students are often overwhelmed with the workload of so many subjects per week. This would greatly affect a student’s performance in different subject areas because not all students would be able to exhibit an excellent performance in all of the subjects studied. Some students perform higher in certain fields than in others. Also, as mentioned before, the student’s interest in a subject would greatly affect the amount of work put into studying it. Therefore, students who are more focused on science subjects may spend more time studying and putting an effort into those subjects and therefore spend less time focusing on Spanish. This also agrees with (Wilson 2016) who assumes that students “foster a greater emphasis on core, examinable subjects that educators may deem more important” (Wilson 2016). This would therefore result in lower performance in Spanish. Table 9 highlights this fact by showing that 3 respondents had a negative opinion about the workload of so many subjects and admitted to spending less time on studying Spanish due to this. Other results showed that students also spent more time in subjects that presented more difficulties for the respondents.

Strengths and weaknesses of students in the different components in Spanish.

In any language, there are four main skills that make up the learning of the language. These are reading, writing, speaking and listening. A student may perform better in some components and be weak in others. (VanPatten and Williams 2014) attests to this by showing that “second language learning Is variable across linguistic subsystems” Figure 1 shows that the level of
students in each components varied across the board. The figure shows that a majority of the respondents considered the speaking component to be their weakest skill while the skill with the most amount of respondents viewing the component as the strongest is the reading component. Due to the fact that English and Spanish do not come from the same linguistic family, the pronunciation of words in the two languages would differ vastly. Similarly, the gender focus of the Spanish language poses to be a major challenge for English speakers when writing Spanish. Similarly, the grammar rules also differ as most of the English objects are gender neutral and therefore subject verb agreement would be a less confusing concept.
CONCLUSION

Therefore, it has been discussed that Spanish is an important language in Trinidad and Tobago. It was declared the first official foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago and has been incorporated into the secondary school and primary school curriculums. Learning Spanish as a foreign language is influenced by many factors such as influence of parents, attitude of students and school towards the language, the existence of other subjects in the curriculum and the topics included in the Spanish syllabus. Furthermore, many issues are encountered when learning Spanish as a second language in Trinidad and Tobago which are affected by the different levels of competence in the different components. The findings of this research indicate that students exhibit a negative attitude towards learning Spanish and prefer to spend time on learning other languages or other subjects that make up a heavy workload. Due to this, less time and effort is spent on studying Spanish especially after school hours which negatively affect the performance of the students. Furthermore, the students lack interest in the topics comprising of the Spanish curriculum and desire other topics which affects their enjoyment and interest in learning Spanish and results in poor performance. Similarly, even though parents encourage foreign language learning, the lack of experience in the language and inability to make time to help students with their schoolwork have a direct impact on the children’s interest in learning Spanish. It also highlights that every language is built up of four main components which are reading, writing, speaking and listening, while some students perform well in certain components, others struggle. Many students are unable to perform well in all four components, thus, negatively affect ting their interest in furthering the language in the future.

In order to keep up with the growing relationships with Spanish speaking countries, Trinidadian students must find ways to enjoy learning Spanish and pay more attention to the subject and
adopt a positive attitude. Furthermore, parents should spend more time reviewing Spanish schoolwork with their children and those who do not speak the Spanish should try to learn the language along with their children to motivate and encourage them. The Ministry of Education should also incorporate topics that would attract the interest of the students when learning Spanish.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to deal with the issues faced in learning Spanish as a foreign language in Trinidad and Tobago discussed in this survey, the following recommendations are being made.

The Ministry of Education should adjust the Spanish curriculum and incorporate other topics and activities that can capture the attention of the students to promote more interest studying the language.

Similarly, parents should attempt to play a bigger role in the schoolwork of the children. More attention should be given to helping children study languages in the home.

Schools should also offer programs helping the parents help their children in studying subjects that they may not have any background in.

Students should use extracurricular activities such as Modern Languages Clubs, Latin dancing, Duolingo and make friends with foreign speakers in order to practice learning Spanish out of school hours.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago should place more importance on foreign languages through the provision of more language scholarships which would encourage students to choose to study the language at higher levels.
Students should adopt a more positive attitude towards learning foreign languages especially Spanish and should try to balance the workload and give every subject equal importance. Spanish is the first foreign language of Trinidad and Tobago and would benefit every student in Trinidad and Tobago.

Students should look for patterns in each component and find ways to improve the weaker components. Each component goes hand in hand with the other, therefore it is important to maintain a balance in the performance in all the components when studying a foreign language.

**LIMITATIONS**

The research conducted in this survey was limited to two secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago. Due to this the results may be similar or different in other secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, a generalization cannot necessarily be made since research was conducted in all of the schools in the country.

**Suggestion to further studies.**

The two schools chosen belonged to the East-West corridor in Trinidad and Tobago. For future studies on this topic, research can be conducted in the Central and Southern regions of the country. This will ascertain whether the issue is across the country and great nationwide efforts can be made to promote the learning of Spanish as a foreign language.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX

1. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

2. What is your age?
   - 11-13
   - 14-15
   - 16-17
   - 18+

3. What school do you attend?

4. What languages are studied at your school?
   - Spanish
   - French

5. How many years have you studied Spanish?
   - 0-1
   - 1-2
   - 2-3
   - 3+

6. Do you like learning Spanish? Why?
7. Do you think learning Spanish is difficult? Why?

8. Do you think learning Spanish is beneficial? Why?

9. Are you interested in furthering Spanish?
10. Do your parents speak Spanish?

Yes       No

11. Do your parents encourage you to learn Spanish?

Yes       No

12. Do you prefer another language to Spanish? If yes what language?

Yes ..............................................     No

13. Based on your knowledge, rate your level in each component 1 being the weakest and 5 the strongest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Which component is your strongest? Why?
15. Which component is your weakest? Why?

16. Do you study Spanish outside of school?

Yes    No

17. If yes, choose which of the following you use.

- Extra Lessons
0 o Duo lingo

0 o Movies

0 o Foreign Friends

0 o Family member

0 o Other .................................

18. Do you enjoy the topics on the syllabus?

Yes  No

19. What are some other aspects of Spanish would you enjoy learning?

..........................................................................................................................

..........................................................................................................................

..........................................................................................................................

..........................................................................................................................

..........................................................................................................................

..........................................................................................................................
20. Does the workload of other subjects affect the time you can dedicate to learn Spanish?

How?