

Working Students in France

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Working a job and being a full time student can be very difficult to balance. That is why I decided to research the similarities and differences of American teenager jobs and French teenage jobs. I also researched how either having a job or not having a job, as a high school student, can affect their social, financial, and academic lives. In order to get accurate information, I conducted multiple interviews of both American and French students as well as forty five surveys for each high school. Surprisingly, the outcome of my research and my final conclusion was not exactly as I had predicted.

Before beginning my research process I made a personal prediction based off of information that I already knew about the French high school lifestyle. I had learned in my own French class that the French high school education system is not set up like a normal American high school system. The French system reflects the education set up of a university or college. I also knew that because of this way of schooling, the school work and classes are taken more seriously by the French. They have longer school days and they focus solely on learning more instead of school events and sports. It was understood that education was immensely important to French society. With this information, I made the prediction that with the long school days and the large amounts of work, French students would have a difficult time having a job during the school year. For American students, it is the complete opposite.

Prior to traveling overseas, I conducted the first stage of my study. The first stage consisted of forty five surveys that I distributed to three different classes. Each class was comprised of students whose age ranged anywhere from fifteen to eighteen. In addition to the surveys, I interviewed two students, a male and a female, who were currently employed during the school year. The second stage of my study was completed in France. I replicated the first stage but instead with French students. I gave out forty five surveys to two and a half classes that I attended while at the high school. The students' ages ranged from fifteen to eighteen as well as a twenty year old male who had been held back repeatedly. Two interviews were also conducted in order to get more information on what a working high school student had to overcome. Both students, one male and one female, had current jobs during the school year as well. I had to use a translator, who was just a fellow classmate who spoke English very well, for the interviews because my French was not perfect and the French students' English was also not particularly exceptional.

My findings after I completed stage one of my study did not surprise me. When I analyzed the surveys that I had distributed I got many answers that I had expected to receive. The majority of the students had either had jobs in the past or were currently employed. Only thirteen of the students surveyed had never had a job before. That is fairly close to the number that I had expected from the

American side of the study. I predicted that more than half of the American students that I surveyed would have experience in the work force; I was correct. However, many of these jobs that the students would hold are not always considered regular, hourly jobs. Many are babysitting gigs and mowing their neighbors' yards and so forth. A majority of the students with jobs were able to work an hourly employed job as well as smaller more informal jobs on the side. This seemed to be very common among the students who claimed that it was necessary for them to be employed because of financial instability reasons.

Out of the thirty students that have had, or currently have jobs, sixteen of them said that their reasoning for being employed was to earn money to pay for their own expenses. Many of the students mentioned that they pay for their own car insurance, gas, or cell phone bills. On top of these, another reason for employment was to help out at home with their family expenses. Therefore, the common reason was to pay for their own bills. These bills are privileges that they must work for in order to enjoy them. Unlike the French students, where the majority of them are too young to drive in the first place. However, the city that I resided in for the two weeks abroad was a very wealthy region because many of the parents worked in Paris which paid significantly more than most of the other regions in France.

Stillwater High School's hours go from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon with a fifty minute lunch. They also have the block schedule set in place

so each student only has to manage four classes a day. This schooling system seems to work extremely well for the students at SHS who have jobs after school because they only have to worry about homework for four classes rather than seven or eight like the French students in Chantilly. American students still struggle with time management when they have to work on top of their schooling. This problem is evident with a student that I interviewed named Britney. She is an eighteen year old senior this year who has a long history of past jobs. After school she works as a car hop at Sonic for four hours before finally getting home around ten in the evening. She explained to me how difficult it was to complete all her homework and get a good night's sleep for the next day. Some teachers would say that it is her own fault that she is working too late or that she is sleepy in class but they do not know that if she does not work then she can drive herself to school. Britney has to work as much as she does because she has to pay for her own gas and car insurance. Fortunately, this is not the case for every student that works. The second student that I interviewed, Luke, has a job that does not affect his scholastic performance. Luke works for a distributing company and he has hours that are very flexible. He never works too many hours in a day that could possibly jeopardize his GPA. But he is only capable of this because it is not necessary that he have this job. It is solely for pocket money and extra cash to spend on fun activities.

The French students that I interviewed had similar situations. Remazeilles was a seventeen year old student who babysat in her free time during the school year. She would baby sit most weekends and many different holidays so that way she could earn money. But she was like Luke, she had no real reason for the job other than wanting extra cash so she could go shopping with her friends. Her family was also fairly wealthy so she never had to worry about many expenses. All the money she earned would go straight to her pocket. Unfortunately, the male that I interviewed was not as lucky. Neves was a twenty year old who had been held back multiple times for reasons that I do not know. He worked in the kitchen of a restaurant from five in the evening until two in the morning every weekend. The student continued to explain that it was very necessary for him to have this job because it was the only way that he could pay for summer trips and activities with friends. His parents were not able to help out and pay for his other activities like the other parents could. Neves's situation mirrored Britney's in a way because of the financial instability and the parents being unable to help out as much as what is normally expected.

The surveys that I distributed in Chantilly were not as detailed as I had hoped when they were returned to me. But I was still able to get a lot of information off of all of them. There was a total of sixteen French students who had never been employed in their lives before. Their answers were always related

to their parents and how they had never been in need of having a job. The majority of these families were financially stable enough to where the student had virtually no money problems to deal with. Those problems belonged solely to the parents to solve. But it was surprising how many students actually did have jobs, even if they were very small. Some examples of small jobs would be tutors, sports trainers, babysitters, cashiers, and many of the students worked in the retirement homes. The majority of the students worked just the summers and every once in a while they would work their vacation or holiday breaks. This was because the students simply did not have the time during the school year or after school to have these jobs. But I was actually stunned by the number of responses that I got of how many of the students did work. The biggest factor that played into this was the law that the legal working age is eighteen in France; therefore, jobs can be very difficult to find at any younger age.

Over all, my prediction had been proven incorrect by the number of working French students. The life style of a French teenager is so much more different than that of an American teenager and it is interesting to see how jobs can affect the student and their family. The French students also always seemed to say that their schooling and homework came first. Yes, I do believe that American students put school above most of their other priorities but in comparison to the students of Stillwater High School, the French students worried about their classes and grades

a lot more than the Oklahoman students. Although there are many factors besides just that that play a huge role in a high school student's scholastic performance.

It is never easy being a high school student and no matter where you grow up in this big world of ours, there will always be hardships in every aspect of life. The only way to overcome them is to adapt, persevere, and never give up to achieve the end goal. For the American students, paying for their schooling and personal bills was the major obstacle in high school. And for the French students, focusing on school and getting a good score on their BAC was their hardship. No matter the problem, the solution will never come easily.