Inclusive Education for Recent Immigrants and/or Refugees
in the French as a Second Language Classroom in Ontario

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Abstract

In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Education updated the French as a Second Language curriculum. This qualitative research sought to understand strategies teachers use to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for English Language Learners and how the French as a Second Language (FSL) curriculum supports FSL teachers. Semi-structured interviews with three experienced teachers revealed teachers’ and researchers’ propensity to assume students’ needs, and the importance of students’ voices in research. Additionally, the findings highlighted the teacher’s capability to empower and build self-confidence in students to be advocates for their own learning as a means of providing students with self-reliance and resiliency when integrating in a new or unfamiliar environment. Furthermore, incorporating students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds strategically and intentionally in the FSL classroom can supplement their language acquisition in a positive manner and create a classroom atmosphere that is built on mutual respect, inclusivity, and understanding of differences.

Key Words: 2014 French as a Second Language Curriculum, English Language Learners, Inclusivity, Equity, Student Empowerment
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

With such a rich diversity of backgrounds, upbringings, and cultures in Toronto, Ontario, it is crucial to learn about how recent immigrants and/or refugees adapt to life in Canada. In the educational context, it is necessary to ask if teachers have the tools to address the needs of students and ensure that they are integrating with ease. In addition to being thrust into a new environment, some students may have to adapt to the language of instruction, English or French.

“Students in Ontario’s publicly funded English-language schools are required to study French as a Second Language from Grades 4 to 8” (Ontario Ministry of Education, French as a Second Language, 2014, p. 10). Students must also “earn at least one credit in French as a Second Language in secondary school to obtain the Ontario Secondary School Diploma” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 39).

Recently updated in 2014, the French as a Second Language (FSL) curriculum emphasizes intercultural awareness and competence, wherein teachers take into account other perspectives through various lenses. For example, instead of limiting French language education to France’s culture and reducing it to stereotypes such as baguettes, berets, and mimes in striped shirts, teachers are encouraged to be cognizant of the importance of inclusivity of various French-speaking cultures in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to include Francophone cultures through intercultural education, such as teaching awareness of other Francophone countries that exist and have distinctive cultures outside of France (Ontario Ministry of Education, French as a Second Language, 2014, p. 10).
1.1 Research Problem

An issue that is often overlooked is the assumption that learners of FSL are proficient English speakers, or will learn French through the English language. The curriculum targets teaching French to English-speaking students. For example, when the curriculum mentions translating a French word to English in order to explain its meaning, teachers cannot assume that all students will understand the English translation. Translating may be simple when teachers are merely tasked with translating the meaning of concrete objects. The act of gesturing or pointing to an object while saying the word in French may suffice to support a translation explaining that “crayon de couleur = pencil crayon.” However, translation issues arise when teachers choose to translate an abstract concept or idea from French to English, where a communication barrier may exist. This can lead to the instructional challenges teachers face when teaching FSL to recent immigrants and/or refugees.

1.2 Research Purpose

With the issues of teaching French through an English-dominant approach in mind, the goal of this research is to learn about the challenges FSL teachers face in teaching recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the Core French context. Additionally, the study will explore meaningful and inclusive strategies teachers employ to overcome these challenges, and the outcomes of using these strategies. Finally, the study will investigate potential changes and developments to the 2014 FSL curriculum, according to research participants. I aim to share these findings in order to further inform FSL teachers on how to better support all students who would benefit from intercultural awareness.
1.3 Research Questions

In order to explore this gap, I pose the following two research questions:

1. What challenges do teachers and recent immigrant and/or refugee students encounter in teaching and learning French?

2. What strategies do teachers employ to consider the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students?

I will investigate how the current curriculum meets their needs, how teachers measure the efficacy of strategies, as well as their opinions of necessary changes that need to be implemented in the FSL curriculum in order to further accommodate such students.

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

I have a strong interest in this topic because I have experienced first-hand the need for better support that meets the needs of new immigrants. A number of people immigrate in search of a better education, yet they may be affected by the very education system they have turned to – an education system that does not acknowledge or is unable to meet their needs. Ontario’s curriculum continues to place more emphasis on inclusion and equity. Therefore, ensuring that students from various backgrounds have the ability to succeed in the classroom and have a platform for future successes is crucial in Ontario and especially Toronto. While English is my first language, I am not immune to assumptions and discrimination once I disclose that three fourths of my education was completed outside of North America, and I certainly see the same towards a number of my peers with similar backgrounds, or from similar situations. Especially because English is sometimes deemed to be more important to learn first than French in Canada,
assumptions regarding students’ ability to succeed in French is dubious. As a result, in the hierarchy of languages in Canada, learning English is prioritized over French by some.

1.5 Overview

I am interested in learning more about the experiences of immigrant and refugee students in the French as a Second Language classroom. For this Master of Teaching Research Paper, I conducted a qualitative research study by interviewing three experienced educators about the types of needs recent immigrants and/or refugees have as well as the challenges teachers face in instructing French classes. In Chapter 2, I review literature in the areas of language acquisition, the merits of learning French, obstacles to integrating in Canada, obstacles to learning French in Canada, current inclusive practices in the curriculum, and further changes to the curriculum. Next, in Chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance, taking into consideration the existing research literature as well as the recently updated French as a Second Language curriculum from 2014. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community as a whole. I also explore various questions raised by the research findings, and propose areas for future research and development.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will bring various authors and research findings into conversation to demonstrate what is already known regarding this topic. I explore research on stakeholders’ attitudes towards learning French for recent immigrants and/or refugees in Canada and obstacles towards a smooth integration in Canada. I include existing research on obstacles towards obtaining French education. This encompasses societal attitudes towards French language learning, educators’ limited understanding of language acquisition and incorporating students’ full linguistic repertoire in the classroom, as well as learners’ attitudes towards language acquisition. Finally, I describe inclusionary and non-inclusionary practices in Ontario and the 2014 French as a Second Language curriculum.

2.1 Merits of French Language Education for Recent Immigrants and Refugees in Canada

It is common for schools in Ontario to have other options for students who have recently immigrated to Canada who cannot speak English yet. Schools often provide non-English speakers with the alternative to opt out of French classes.

While some English-language learners (ELL) may experience difficulties in other areas of the curriculum because it is being taught in English, having French may allow ELLs the ability to succeed and be on par with their peers much faster (Mady, 2006, p. 193). This is backed up by research which suggests that the French class is where ELL “students can function at or above the level of their English-speaking peers whereas they may struggle with academic achievement in other areas” (Simons & Connelly, 2000,
Mady demonstrates in her research that “students who meet with success are more likely to remain in the system” (2006, p. 193). Thus, by being on par with their peers, their prior successes may, in turn, likely motivate students to continue striving for academic success through positive reinforcement. Being in a French class may allow ELLs who face difficulties in obtaining the same grades as their peers succeed in French class. While ELLs may have knowledge of particular subject areas, their English language skills may put them at a disadvantage as they are unable to demonstrate their knowledge, and the teacher may be unaware that the student possesses the skills or knowledge of the subject.

Furthermore, the study of English and French language at the same time can enhance each other. Mady (2006) writes, “the similarity between languages can enhance positive transfer [and] the level of proficiency/literacy in the first language can influence [second language] proficiency” (p. 179). With regards to third language acquisition, Cenoz (2003) states that positive effects on language acquisition may “be explained as related to learning strategies, metalinguistic awareness and communicative ability, but it can also be linked to the fact that bilinguals have a wider linguistic repertoire that can be used as a basis in third language acquisition” (p. 83). The wide range of learning strategies and linguistic repertoires supports the idea that languages can enhance further language acquisition.

More importantly, “[first and second language] acquisition, including literacy, are interdependent” (Mady, 2006, p. 179). This point is important to note because this discredits the misconception that learning a new language, or learning multiple languages
can cause confusion and thus slow down the process of language acquisition. Mady’s claim is in tandem with García’s (1988) assertion that children are able to acquire languages concurrently. Language pedagogies have shifted away from the idea of stringent language compartmentalization where students must learn one language without mixing it with other languages, and we know that learning languages, even more than one at a time, may be beneficial to the learner and support the process of language acquisition (García & Menken, 2006).

2.2 Obstacles to Integration in Canada

The more immersed a person is within a particular culture or society, the easier it is for them to learn a language, since languages and cultures are strongly interlinked. If a newcomer spends a great deal of time in contact with a culture, it becomes an immersive experience wherein they absorb the language and begin to acquire it without necessarily having to learn the grammatical rules to the language. As a result, the importance of integration in Canada may be an obstacle to learning French. Young and Gardner (1990) indicate that attitudes and ethnic identification are linked to aspects of proficiency in the second language amongst ethnic minority groups. However, the authors emphasize that, “identification with the second language community (and proficiency in the second language) does not necessarily imply assimilation” (Young & Gardner, 1990, p. 70). While this may be true, it is important to note that successful integration into the community can have a positive impact on certain learners, depending on their goals within the community. Mehrabi, Rahmatian, Safa, and Armian (2014) suggest a similar idea in their research, stating, “how one acculturates may well influence how well one acquires the dominant language and vice-versa” (p. 59). Therefore, if students view
integration as something positive, the sooner they integrate, the more successfully they may be able to attain second-language proficiency.

An additional barrier to integration in Canada is the lack of empirical studies carried out in Canada. In their literature review, Yu, Ouellet, and Warmington (2007) found that “national-scale empirical studies on refugee integration in Canada are extremely scarce” (p. 26). The scarcity of these empirical studies may contribute to systemic difficulties in helping refugees integrate as soon as they move to Canada, potentially due to a lack of knowledge or awareness of how to integrate. For example, children of immigrant and/or refugee parents may face more hindrances towards integration at school especially if their parents are experiencing difficulties integrating, or negative experiences towards integrating, be it in learning the language, fitting in with the community, dealing with trauma, or being at ease in society.

With the previous barriers to integration in mind, in the next section, I will explore existing literature regarding obstacles to learning French in Canada that may make it more difficult for students to integrate in society.

2.3 Obstacles to Learning French in Canada

2.3.1 Societal attitudes towards French. A significant obstacle to successfully learning French in Canada is attitudes towards French, whether it comes from the teachers, parents, or the students’ peers. Someone who is deciding to move to Canada may believe that learning French will not be difficult to access due to French Canada’s official language. This person may even believe that everyone in Canada can speak French relatively fluently. However, data and statistics show a discrepancy in this belief. The 2011 Canadian census shows that, “[i]n 2011, close to 10 million people reported
being able to conduct a conversation in French,” which makes up 30.1% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2012, p. 1). Despite French being Canada’s official language, students in Ontario still struggle to speak French upon graduating from high school with one mandatory French credit. Along the same vein, despite the advantages of French proficiency in the professional world, Mady (2013) argues that many people in education deem it to be less important compared to other subjects such as mathematics or science. A clear indication of this is seen in the study, where, “parents revealed that some educators prioritise the learning of English for [immigrants who are learning English] and therefore do not recommend them for intensive [French as a second language] study where teacher recommendation is required” (Mady, 2013, p. 49). Yet another common barrier to French education is administrators and educators discouraging students from entering French courses because of difficulties in catching up, regardless of students’ interest in the subject. This is aggravated by parents choosing not to challenge this decision, because they “[opt] for efficiency over equality” (Mady, 2013, p. 49). Mijs and van de Werfhorst (2008) claim that educational systems frequently hierarchize one of these targets over the other: equality, efficiency, practicality, and allocation. As a result, this impacts the student’s access to French courses such as French immersion (Mady, 2013).

A noteworthy point from Mady’s (2013) research is that “French immersion respondents were less supportive of inclusion than their core French teaching counterparts” (p. 51). This is significant because it illustrates a great discrepancy in the learning of French. It lends to the widespread idea that French must be learned through English, otherwise, it cannot be learned easily. While it is natural that French is taught
through the English language, as English is Canada’s official language, it hints at the way in which French is taught in Canada, leaning towards English tendencies or falling back on the English language to teach another language. The curriculum requires teachers to speak the target language as much as possible inside and outside the classroom, stating that significant levels of meaningful communication and interactive feedback allows students to develop language and cultural proficiency (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). It would be a logistical feat to gather all students who speak particular languages and teach them French through their first language. While this is an issue that is prevalent, in which students who are learning English may struggle to learn French if it is taught through English, this is by no means an easy issue to solve. Many accommodations must be made for students, and it is even more difficult if the teacher is unable to make connections to French with the student’s first language.

With the previous idea in mind that there needs to be significant levels of meaningful communication in the target language, another obstacle to French learning could be in the French classroom itself. It could be due to the lack of French usage outside of the classroom. This ties in with the idea of attitudes towards the French language, in which it is deemed unimportant to parents, students, and guidance counsellors alike. Mady’s (2010) research shows that French usage inside and outside of the classroom were noteworthy predictors of higher French achievement. Coste, Moore, and Zarate (2009) extend this finding, stating that out of school contact with [French-speaking] communities “may help modify the hierarchy of languages and the cultural perceptions which have been established at school” (p. 23). If French is not being spoken inside and outside of the classroom, or the student experiences minimal access to the
French language, they have one more barrier to overcome in order to catch up or be on par with their peers, when instead they could have the opportunity to achieve results more easily.

Mady notes another obstacle to learning French in Canada:

Canada in general and Ontario specifically, like other “English-dominant” regions (…), remains committed to supporting the development of English to the detriment of students learning other languages and/or maintaining their language(s) or origin/heritage language. Therefore as the rest of the world becomes increasingly multilingual, with superior skills in English, there is potential for Canadian residents to become disadvantaged. (2014, p. 18).

This is more likely and especially the case for recent immigrants and/or refugees who face difficulties accessing French education in school. Mady states that it may be the provincial and Canadian context that influences students in “not automatically using their whole language repertoire as resource [for language] learning” (Mady, 2010d, p. 18).

Mady explains that because English and French are valued more highly than others due to their official status, the classroom replicates society by restricting language usage to those with official status. However, as stated by García and Menken (2006), learning or having knowledge of other languages can enhance language development for the students’ language repertoire.

2.3.2 Educators’ limited understanding of language acquisition. In a study of the evolution of Iranian French learners’ language, Mehrabi, Rahmatian, Safa, and Armium state:

Errors [in French] must be judged from a different point of view. Most often they
are creative gaps compared to the norms of the target language, indicate the learner’s exploratory behavior applying generative rules, and are part of the continuous process of differentiation which allows them to refine their knowledge of the language they learn. (Mehrabi et al., 2014, p. 126).

This is an important consideration as a potential barrier to learning French in the classroom when the instructor does not know the language let alone the intricacies of the students’ first language they are bringing into the classroom. The French teacher cannot be expected to know every language and understand if and when a student’s mistake is a creative error drawn from grammatical rules from their own language. The teacher does not know enough about the student’s language to know how best to help them succeed and catch them up to the appropriate level of French alongside their peers. Thus, the reality that the language instructor is unable to know every language needs to be considered when teaching ELLs.

2.3.3 Learners’ attitudes towards language acquisition. Anxiety, insecurity, and the inability to integrate in society play a role in one’s ability to learn languages. These are obstacles to learning French because the study by Mehrabi, Rahmatian, Safa, and Armian (2014) “[demonstrate] a link between ethnic and linguistic identification and two acculturation attitudes, namely, rejection and marginality” (p. 67). Students who do not feel marginal to either culture, nor reject the Canadian culture are the ones who consider themselves Canadian and are proficient in English, suggesting that they want to integrate in the Canadian society and “feel fairly secure in their identity” (Mehrabi et al., 2014, p. 67).

To expand on the notion of language-related anxiety, Young and Gardner (1990)
affirm that, “individuals who exhibit lower levels of language-related anxiety will be more successful at learning a second language than those who are more anxious” (p. 66). This may be an obstacle for recent immigrants and/or refugees who may be unfamiliar with the language of instruction, be it English or French. They may experience additional stress because of their desire to fit in or understand what is going on. The result of this added stress and anxiety hinders them from being able to learn successfully. Furthermore, learning French entails risk-taking, and this stress they experience can impede their willingness to take risks.

To emphasize the effects of language-related anxiety on language acquisition, we can consider another perspective. Lightbown and Spada examine Krashen’s affective filter hypothesis, which “is a metaphorical barrier that prevents learners from acquiring language,” even when appropriate methods of teaching are available to learners (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37). This affect refers to “feelings, motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37). They conclude that “[a] learner who is tense, anxious, or bored may ‘filter out’ input, making it unavailable for acquisition” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37). Krashen’s affective filter relates to Rovers’ idea that a student’s lack of engagement is an obstacle to learning French. She states from her research that students who were more engaged took more risks in their learning, which in turn affected their learning positively (Rovers, 2013).

2.4 Inclusive and Non-Inclusive Practices in Ontario and the New Curriculum

Some practices in Canada and specifically Ontario have helped students succeed in French classes. However, some of these practices and policies have also prevented certain students from achieving. Results from Mady’s research on inclusive French show
that, “teachers judged immersion as less appropriate for [immigrants] and necessarily less inclusive in general” (Mady, 2013, p. 52). This is a pivotal idea that others came to realize as well. The updated French curriculum, published in 2014, had a section dedicated to “Program considerations for English Language Learners,” which was one of the updates that showed a movement towards inclusivity, with tools to help students learn French. In answer to Mady’s results, perhaps the section on intercultural understanding in the updated curriculum will help stave off non-inclusive impressions that teachers have towards French immersion.

While at first, streaming may seem like the better option in order to introduce students to a language, this is not always the best option. Mady (2013) states that “[w]ithin segregation practices, the concern of the policy-makers is with ensuring that ‘the other’ obtains the support and help they need in a sheltered environment” (p. 52). Beyond the good intentions lies a form of streaming that may do more harm than help students. This is because “people in power often assume a patronising stance towards the minority and, while acting kindly, have a negative perception of the other’s potential and abilities” (Mady, 2013, p. 53).

It is noteworthy that results of a research on education equity by Parekh et al. (2011) show that “vocational-focused programs operate primarily in Toronto’s lowest income neighbourhoods whereas French Immersion programming is more likely to be offered in more affluent areas” (p. 258). Through this decision, opportunities are barred from certain demographics which limits students’ access to French language learning, whether intentional or not. While not all recent immigrants and refugees may live in low-income neighbourhoods, some newcomers may require time to find stability and
employment upon arrival. These students are at a disadvantage due to the opportunities that may not necessarily be available to them owing to their economic status.

Ang (2014) presents the idea of instantiation, which is “the meanings of words encountered in context” (p. 38). A multitude of cultures means that each culture has different ideas and perspectives. An example of this would be for the term, “container.” It could be a container for lunch, a metal box to transport goods on trains, or a container filled with orange juice. The idea of the container conjures various images in one’s mind, depending on their experiences, knowledge, culture, and upbringing. Ang (2014) further emphasizes the need for instantiation, stating that rote learning simply fortifies “the linking between form and meaning of a word without engaging in gap-filling” (p. 46). Second language acquisition for vocabulary requires teachers to navigate instantiation, which can be difficult for concrete objects or ideas, but especially challenging for abstract ideas. However, the updated FSL curriculum may provide flexibility for the addition of instantiation.

Some of the things that have been done in the updated curriculum for FSL in Ontario show a positive change that is happening. These changes include supporting ELLs’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds and incorporating it into their classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 41). However, there are few suggestions for how to do so in the curriculum. With this in mind, learning and teaching French, to both the student and teacher respectively, is a nebulous and challenging process to all parties involved.

2.5 Conclusion

With all these obstacles and barriers to French education in mind, a question that
arises is: On whom is the onus for the student to succeed? The existing literature has stated that student success involves many parties: the policy-makers, recent immigrant and/or refugee students, the student’s parents and teachers, and the school administration. Previous research covers the merits of French language education, obstacles to integration for recent immigrants and/or refugees in Canada, and obstacles to learning French in Canada. Moreover, societal attitudes towards French, educators’ limited understanding of language acquisition, and students’ attitudes towards languages play a role in how French language is acquired.

Authentic experiences and voices from teachers are largely missing in the existing research. Research needs to be carried out on how intercultural understanding is being implemented in the classroom by teachers and how it is helping students learn better. Obstacles stemming from the curriculum and policy-makers also need to be researched. Taking these questions into consideration, this research aims to shed light on recent immigrants and/or refugees in the French classroom in order to contribute to the amelioration of French language education in Ontario.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I delineate the research methodology with a review of the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments, preliminary to elaborating on participant sampling and recruitment. I describe data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. Next, I address several methodological limitations and strengths. Lastly, I conclude the chapter with a summary of key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions in view of the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review from relevant sources and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with three experienced French teachers. The value of qualitative research is in the results that quantitative research cannot obtain. According to Creswell (2007), “[q]ualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study. This involves reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges” (p. 39). This is not something that can be carried out using a quantitative study. When researching an issue, Creswell (2007) states that, “we need a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. This detail can only be established by […] allowing [people] to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (p. 40).

While quantitative research is valuable for data analysis, it does not necessarily
help researchers capture the larger picture or gain a rich understanding of the issues at hand. Creswell (2007) also states that the importance of qualitative research is “when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 40). The minimization of power relationships is debated, however, as Longhurst (2009) argues that “most research benefits the researcher far more than it does his or her interviewees” (p. 580). This is significant to research and the accuracy of data, when the participants’ answers or the researcher’s perceptions might be influenced by their relationship to each other.

Due to the nature of my research, qualitative research is more appropriate simply because there are many factors involved in helping recent immigrant and/or refugee students integrate in the French classroom. Each experience will involve different contexts and elements that cannot be summed up easily without losing a component of its meaning. Creswell (2007) expounds that when conducting qualitative research, we do it because “we want to understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (p. 40). It is for these reasons I find qualitative research to be more suitable and valuable to the purpose of my study.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

For my qualitative study, I collected data by conducting semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with participants. These interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. While “semi-structured interviews can be used as a stand-alone method or in conjunction with another method or several other methods” (Longhurst, 2009, p. 580), I have chosen to conduct data collection using a sole method.
“Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, in-depth, semi-structured interviews tend to unfold in a conversational manner” (Longhurst, 2009, p. 580). For this reason, semi-structured interviews are a suitable method for my research in order to allow the participants to address issues within my research that are significant to their experiences that I may not have known about. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow myself and the participant to explore areas of the research topic that might not have been considered previously, instead of strictly adhering to a list of questions that may hinder or stunt the growth and development of the research. With semi-structured interviews, “[t]he researcher needs to prepare questions, decide who to recruit to participate, contact potential participants, choose a location, carry out the interviews, and transcribe the data, all the while being cognizant of the ethical issues and power relations involved in the research” (Longhurst, 2009, pp. 580 - 581).

I organized my protocol (located in Appendix B) into four sections, beginning with the participants’ background information. This is followed by questions regarding their contact with recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the French classroom, and concluding with questions regarding issues that arose, challenges, support and resources available or necessary to implement, and the next steps for teachers facing similar challenges.

3.3 Participants

This section encompasses the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I consider a range of potential avenues for teacher recruitment. I include a section wherein I introduce the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria. I utilized the following four criteria to recruit teacher
participants:

1. Teachers will have taught French for at least five years in schools.

2. Teachers will have taught French to at least three recent immigrant and/or refugee students who have been in Canada for less than five years and whose first language is not English.

3. At least two participants will have experience teaching in a linguistically and culturally diverse school.

4. At least two participants will have experience teaching French using the new curriculum that was published in 2014 and implemented in September 2015.

In order to address the research question in a thorough and meaningful manner, the participants need to have taught for at least five years in order to have sufficient experience to compare and contrast issues they may have experienced. It is also necessary that they have taught recent immigrants and/or refugees whose first language is not English, in order to answer the research questions I have. Furthermore, at least two participants should have had experience teaching using the new French curriculum that was implemented in September 2015, in order to discuss the changes and improvements of the current curriculum.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures. Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that, “[i]f you are talking with one kind of informant, you need to consider why this kind of informant is important, and, from there, which other people should be interviewed. This is a good, bias-controlling exercise” (p. 41). Opportunistic sampling entails the researcher exploiting unexpected opportunities when they arise during the course of the research, assuming a flexible approach to the research (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). Convenience
sampling entails the researcher choosing the sample according to the ease of access; it is pressed for clear sampling strategy (Mason, 2002; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research because researchers can “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study,” and because “researchers need to decide if the sampling will be consistent with the information needed” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125).

Due to the small-scale nature of this research, I utilized convenience sampling, as I am immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers. Relying on my existing contacts and networks to recruit participants allowed me to choose participants who satisfied the conditions of my sampling criteria.

3.3.3 Participant biographies. In the interest of preserving the anonymity of the participants involved in this research, and in accordance with the ethical guidelines of this project, all three participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities.

The first participant, Sam, has taught in three different school boards across Ontario for 33 years and has had experience teaching students who are new to Canada. She has taught English as a Second Language and French to students who have not had formal education in either language. Sam’s experience with learning and teaching languages commences with her upbringing, where her parents both speak seven languages, and Sam grew up speaking Slovenian, German, English, and French. These languages were learned through formal education, immersion, and daily communication. Her experiences surrounded by many languages in various countries led to her interest in languages as well as her understanding of how languages can be acquired and taught.
The second participant, Haley, has had 10 years of teaching experience. In the past, Haley has taught all levels of French, from beginner French classes to Grade 12 Core French. She currently teaches Academic French to students in Grades 9, 10, and 11. Haley has taught at her current school for three years, and describes the school as “extremely diverse,” stating that many students are from Eastern and Western Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and South America.

The third participant, Alyson, has taught for 13 years. She has a Long-Term Occasional teaching position at the same school as Haley and currently teaches in a mixed level English as a Second Language class, English, beginner’s French for Grade 9 students, and Academic French in Grade 9. Alyson has been at this school for less than one year. Haley and Alyson work closely together by collaborating on lesson plans and observing each other teach.

3.4 Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. Using the research questions as a guiding tool, I analyzed and sorted each transcript individually by collecting and coding broad trends from all three interviews. The codes were subsequently synthesized into themes: the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students, strategies to adapt to their needs, measuring the efficacy of strategies, and the challenges and changes necessary to a successful and inclusive FSL curriculum.

The meaning-making process was carried out by reviewing the coded data several times. I analyzed the data by focusing on parallels and divergences amongst the interviews and existing research.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

It is significant to note that, “the in-depth, unstructured nature of qualitative research and the fact that it raises issues that are not always anticipated mean that ethical considerations have a particular resonance in qualitative research studies” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 66). In accordance with the institutional requirements of my graduate program, I informed participants of the study in person and through written documentation (Appendix A). While it was determined that there were no known risks to participation in this study, I acknowledged that certain questions may trigger emotional responses from a participant, thus making them feel vulnerable. I minimized this risk by reminding them throughout the interview and in the consent letter about their right to refrain from answering any questions that may cause discomfort. They were notified of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any stage of the research study. In order to maintain anonymity, all participants were assigned a pseudonym. I assured my participants that their identities and any identifying indicators would not be released, and that all audio recordings would be stored on a password protected computer and destroyed after five years.

I will ensure that I allow participants the opportunity to clarify or retract any statements before I conduct data analysis. Longhurst (2009) states the following:

Researchers […] need to think carefully about how to interview in different cultural contexts. […] During interviews the interviewer and interviewee are likely to keep repositioning themselves with respect to the multiple roles and fractured identities that they take up. How people position themselves in relation to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, age, and so on during interviews
has implications for the interview overall and for interpreting interview data.
(p. 583).

Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A), which documented their consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and specified expectations of participation.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The scope of the research given the ethical parameters of my graduate program has its limitations and strengths, as with all research. One such limitation to this research is that I was unable to interview students or parents to gain a broader understanding of the challenges regarding integrating in the French classroom. I was unable to see if the students’ and teachers’ perspectives align or are vastly different. Additionally, I was unable to make generalizations regarding the teachers’ opinions, since the sample size is small.

Conversely, these same limitations are also the strengths of my research. Interviewing solely teachers allowed for a richer, more in-depth discussion and research that is focused. The semi-structured interviews allowed for more depth than a survey could achieve, and permitted teachers to express what was most meaningful and noteworthy to the participants. Moreover, it was an opportunity for self-reflexivity. Oftentimes, techniques and solutions seem instinctual to teachers, but in allowing them to articulate these steps in this study, they had opportunities to better identify specific strategies they utilized that has helped them. While I may be unable to pinpoint major themes that teachers across Ontario may agree with, the purpose of this study is to hear
each individual’s lived experiences and make meaning out of their diverse contexts.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the research methodology beginning with an explanation of the research approach and procedure. I probed into the strengths of qualitative research and how it differs from and fills in the gaps of quantitative research. Next, I identified interviews as the primary source of data collection. I then looked at some of the advantages of semi-structured interviews and how they benefit my area of research. I listed the required criteria for all interview participants, and provided an introduction of each of the research participants. Additionally, I identified my choice of convenience sampling due to the scope of my research study and explained the data analysis procedure. I addressed ethical issues that might arise such as participant consent, risks of participation, the right to withdraw, and data storage. Finally, I discussed methodological limitations and strengths of this study. In the succeeding chapter, I report the research findings and data analysis.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the findings of my qualitative study. The purpose of my research is to learn how teachers ensure that the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students are met by focusing on the strategies they employ, the efficacy of the strategies, and the extent to which the 2014 French as a Second Language curriculum satisfies the needs of the students.

The foundation of my research is based on a literature review that examines barriers to language acquisition, barriers to integration in Canada, and obstacles to French language education. This literature review informed my interview protocol (Appendix B), which I then utilized to conduct semi-structured interviews with three experienced French teachers in Ontario. All interviews were transcribed and coded multiple times. I categorized the data from the interviews into three overarching themes.

As stated in Chapter 3, the participants have been appointed pseudonyms as a means to protect their identity. The three participants, Alyson, Haley, and Sam were recruited through convenience sampling. Through my network at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), I recruited participants and scheduled one-on-one interviews with them. The interview with Alyson and Haley was carried out simultaneously.

The themes I will report in this chapter are:

1. Strategies that help meet the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students;
2. How teachers determine the efficacy of strategies;
3. The needs, challenges, and changes related to the 2014 FSL curriculum.
The first theme studies strategies the research participants employ that have yielded successful results in their practice. These strategies are grouped into three areas, focusing on strategies for teachers, followed by strategies for students, and finally, strategies for community building. The second theme concerns measuring the effectiveness of the strategies, focusing first on how the effectiveness manifests in students’ behaviour, followed by assessments and evaluations that teachers may carry out. The third theme pertains to gaps in the 2014 curriculum, changes that may be necessary for a more inclusive curriculum, as well as how the curriculum is currently supporting recent immigrant and/or refugee students. Additionally, this third theme focuses on the challenges that some teachers encounter in either adhering to the curriculum or teaching students.

4.1 Strategies to Meet the Needs of Recent Immigrant and/or Refugee Students

In this section, I explore strategies that the three participants employ to meet the identified needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the French classroom. This strategy exploration is important because the curriculum pushes for many initiatives, yet some teachers find it challenging to implement these initiatives in the classroom due to circumstances such as a lack of experience with such students. Haley states that ultimately, the best strategy is to use as many strategies as possible. With many types of learners comprising disparate experiences and needs, it is impossible to find a strategy that works for all students. Being open and flexible to trying new strategies will aid teachers in finding a successful strategy. Thus, the strategies are divided into three sections: teacher strategies, strategies with which teachers can equip students, and finally, strategies that include the rest of the classroom and community to advocate and reinforce
intercultural understanding. I expand on each of these below.

4.1.1 Teacher strategies. This section examines strategies that all three participants identified as effective in their practice. The following strategies revolve around what the teacher can do to facilitate a smooth integration for students in the classroom.

It is especially common for students to feel anxious or embarrassed to speak in a second language classroom if the student feels as though he or she is unable to integrate well amongst their peers in class (Mehrabi et al., 2014). To facilitate a smooth integration for new students within the classroom, the three participants highlighted the importance of group work, partners, and collaboration. Haley believes that in groups, students have the opportunity to develop better friendships when they share ideas. She specifies that students can have fun and feel safe in their groups as they grow comfortable with each other. Haley claims that placing students in fixed groups throughout the semester or the year is a strong approach because students can carry out presentations in their small groups which helps them feel less nervous and self-conscious.

While research showed that French immersion programs were less inclusive towards recent immigrants (Mady, 2013), data from my participants reveals that there are various teacher strategies to help students feel included in the classroom. Haley and Alyson advocate for inclusivity by ensuring equity in the classroom and outside. For example, they ensure that recent immigrant and/or refugee students understand protocol and norms in the classrooms, from the type of binder and paper students use, to helping them understand cultural references, examples, and jokes in class. From a socioeconomic standpoint, they advocate for equity by ensuring that field trips are accessible, thus
extending inclusivity outside of the physical classroom.

Accessibility and availability to students is another strategy that teachers use to help students integrate. While this did not appear in the existing research, participants agreed that letting students know that their teacher is available for extra help sessions when students have concerns or questions eases their anxiety in their new environment. For example, Sam conveyed the positive impact that extra help during lunch or after school can have on a student’s learning.

Meanwhile, Alyson observed the effect that a teacher’s presence can have on students, contrasting the physical and metaphorical differences between a closed department office door and an open door, insisting that, “if [students see] the doors closed and it’s locked, they don’t feel like you’re there, [...] in the deeper sense.” The open door signifies that students are welcome and increases the feeling of inclusivity. The closed door insinuates that the teachers do not want to be disturbed; the student is required to knock on the door and ask to enter a space that is not “theirs,” further alienating them. The impression that the closed door creates generates a sense of discomfort that is enough to deter students. The same can be said for teachers who stand at the door of each class to greet students as they enter and leave the classroom, as opposed to teachers who continue working at their desks as students enter and leave the classroom, according to the research participants.

Lowering students’ affective filter demands appropriate responses from the teacher towards “feelings, motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37) that students exhibit. The findings align with the literature, in that the participants indirectly attribute a successful teaching repertoire to a responsive attitude.
Haley implied doing so by allowing her class to conduct presentations in front of a small group instead of the whole class, understanding that her students are apt to be shyer when speaking French. She also chooses to do this knowing that her students will likely stay more focused and engaged watching three presentations from the small group as opposed to sitting through presentations from all of their classmates. Alyson and Sam suggest that knowing students’ interest and bringing it up in class is a strategy that allows them to conduct more successful lessons. This is important to note because it is a reminder that it is not enough to connect with students by knowing their interests. It is when their interests are brought into the class that teachers are being responsive to their learners needs and interests, be it through sports, games, songs, or current affairs.

In theory, all participants agree that equity is crucial when teaching. Despite this, when probed, it was found that not all equitable measures free from problems. The participants advocate for speaking French exclusively, holding the same belief that this makes the classroom equitable for native English speakers and ELL students (Mady, 2006). Instead of using English to translate words, participants frequently use visuals and anchor charts to guide students in learning words and phrases. All participants agreed that differentiation is an important strategy to meet the students’ needs. Alyson shared various differentiation strategies for one student in particular, who she described as coming from a “super-disadvantaged background.” Among these strategies were flexibility and modifications to the expectations for particular assignments and projects. While such practices are well-intentioned, this strategy can be problematic in assuming the student’s inability to excel at the same or higher degree as other students. This practice is an example of Mady’s (2013) claims regarding the patronizing stance towards the minority
that is veiled by good intentions that teachers should avoid.

**4.1.2 Student strategies.** I highlight strategies with which teachers can equip students so that they will take ownership of their learning, gain independence, and develop self-advocacy in seeking out opportunities in their language development.

To teach students to gradually gain independence and to stop relying on the teacher for help, participants cited building up the students’ self-confidence as the key to teaching them independence. In this quote, Haley explains practical methods of empowering her students and building their self-identity:

> [G]iving […] newcomer students a chance to shine in something, whether it’s letting them say something about where they come from, their experience, or their hobby, where everybody’s listening and learning from them […] gives them […] pride for who they are and where they come from. So giving them a chance to shine, and praising them [for that is essential].

Consequently, students build their self-confidence by learning to be the expert in the class, and through the positive reinforcement of praise. The participants lay the foundation for independence by carrying out activities and projects in class that provide students with a sense of pride in their work. They also do so by providing students with ample positive reinforcement and praise when it is due. The participants’ methods of empowering students emphasize literature that states the link between positive experiences in integrating within society and language acquisition (Mehrabi et al., 2014).

Metacognition is another aspect of gaining independence and taking ownership of learning. The September 2014 curriculum heavily emphasizes metacognition as a learning strategy. When students piece information together by themselves, the new
knowledge that they learn is reinforced.

Ang (2014) highlights a strategy for learning vocabulary for new students by guiding students in a manner that encourages them to instantiate. An example of this is by “requesting learners to either give or select an example that illustrates the appropriate situation of use” (Ang, 2014, p. 47). This is effective as it results in the student being able to not only process, but also retain the scenario in which the new vocabulary was encountered, as opposed to developing the habit of memorizing translations (Ang, 2014, p. 47). This is especially useful for students when certain words in French do not exist in their language, and vice versa. The participants did not specifically state the act of instantiation, but they used examples pointing to its use in the classroom, as well as their prompting questions to build habits of thought with their students.

The three participants indicate co-constructing success criteria and using cognates to help students become accustomed to metacognition. For example, Sam specifically states that students can draw from their knowledge of other languages in order to find similarities and gain a deeper understanding of how grammar functions in French, which is supported by research (Mady 2006). Alyson expands on this by describing how cognates can help students decipher the meaning of words in French even though they may not have encountered the word before. Mady’s (2014) claim is that Ontario’s commitment to the development of English is stronger than the learning of other languages or maintaining students’ origin/heritage languages. Contrary to this claim, the research participants are committed to incorporating their students’ knowledge of other languages and transferring that knowledge – such as grammar, syntax, and sentence structure – to French-language acquisition.
The next strategy to encourage ownership in the classroom is by enriching the learning process by sharing ideas and collaboration. Taking ownership of one’s learning is concomitant with taking pride in one’s work. All of the participants frequently display their students’ work such as anchor charts, projects, and posters on the walls in class. Haley explains, “because [students] have a relationship with that piece of information [on the wall],” they take pride in making their work look good, and in learning the phrases on the anchor charts by heart, as it is their handiwork. Collaboration is a useful tool for encouraging students to take ownership of learning because when students go into groups, they are required to contribute with the knowledge they have learned.

In defence of group work and collaboration, Haley admits that occasionally, it is possible that students copy each others’ work. However, “more often than not, they’re sharing answers and they’re learning when they’re sharing.” Group settings require students to share information, help their peers and be helped by their peers, which, according to the three participants, is what makes grouping students a valuable strategy. These findings are significant for two reasons. Firstly, they support the ample literature addressing the advantages of group work and collaboration for students. Secondly, these findings expose an insufficiency in literature when it comes to making explicit connections between student collaboration and how it may cultivate ownership of learning.

4.1.3 Strategies to establish a stronger classroom community. Building relationships is key to feeling welcome in the classroom. This section focuses on community building and explores strategies participants use to help build stronger relationships with students and amongst students.
Alyson remarks, “Sometimes we are a little arrogant thinking we know what their needs are.” This is meaningful to this research, as it is important to avoid assuming the needs of new students, considering students’ voices are largely missing in the literature review. Instead, when teachers think about how they can meet the needs of students, it is necessary to begin by getting to know the student before making assumptions of their needs. Alyson sums up the methods in which teachers do this by “trying to find out in a nice way what they might need, and if they’re not doing well, why?” By asking questions and getting to know the students, teachers can gain insight on understanding their students’ home situation.

The participants stated that it is crucial for them to remember that not all students come from similar home situations; they may have moved to Canada from a different home situation than how they currently live, either in different conditions and separated from or now reunited with family members. Because of the variances in students’ experiences, it is of utmost importance that teachers are in contact with the student’s parents or guardian to gain a more complete understanding of the student. Alyson’s quote above sheds light on literature that is lacking in addressing student voices, and she calls attention to a point that is missing when discussing students’ needs.

Haley asserts that, “If [students are] not provided with the necessities of life, […] not even the basic necessities, but the things that are nice to have in life that parents often provide, it does affect their learning.” This is sometimes the case for some new immigrant and/or refugee students who may have been sent abroad to study and lack parental nurturing or affection. This can additionally be the case for parents who have recently moved with the student, but face difficulties in integrating into the community.
These parents’ struggles can affect the student’s home situation. Haley’s connection between the family’s difficulty in integrating and the student’s success at school did not appear in the literature review. Upon further research, it was found in a study that the idea Haley highlights is one that has been researched in adults:

There is also a slight drop in self-reported skills for those with high language proficiency at arrival that could be the result of a more realistic self-assessment of skills after living in Canada. This could also be a reflection of unsuccessful integration experiences that may affect one’s confidence in their ability to interact efficiently with society. Immigrants who report a decline in language proficiency appear to be less integrated socially. (Adamuti-Trache, 2013).

This reveals potential similarities between an adult language acquisition and a student’s language acquisition that may be affected by social integration from either the parents or the children.

Although it was not explicitly stated, the third strategy to community building that all participants alluded to employing frequently was cultural inclusion and representation of cultures in the French classroom. Ideas pertaining to cultural inclusion were an exiguo resource in existing research. The new curriculum addresses the need for incorporating students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the classroom. The lack of guidelines in the curriculum makes the inclusion of various cultural backgrounds a nebulous task for certain teachers who may not know how to do so. All three participants declare that students enjoy seeing “their country or their continent represented in the French class,” and students perk up when they see their country or culture in their French class. Sam and Alyson make it a point to learn basic phrases from
recent immigrant and/or refugee students who speak another language other than English or French. They state the importance of showing an interest in other languages as a way to lead by example in showing students to be open to learning French. Moreover, participants say that their students appreciate when teachers show an interest in their language or culture. Participants also ensure that they make their classes pertinent to current affairs in the world by reading or watching the news often, and bringing those topics into the classroom.

Ultimately, the participants’ insistence on establishing cultural inclusivity in the classroom is critical because it aligns with the idea that “students who do not feel marginal to either culture […] feel fairly secure in their identity (Mehrabi et al., 2014, p. 67). Haley identifies a strategy of cultural representation and inclusion by acknowledging, representing, and celebrating other cultures. She gave the example of Lunar New Year, saying that she might talk about it in the French classroom if she knows that there are students in her class who observe the celebration. This requires teachers to know their students well. Representing and celebrating diverse cultures not only serves to help the student feel included, but also fosters acceptance and community building amongst other students who are being exposed to and learning about other cultures, celebrations, perspectives, and ways of thinking. Helping students feel secure in their identity can thus help them integrate more easily, instead of feeling pressured to reject their culture and assimilate to the new country, as some adolescents navigating their search for identity are wont to do. Be that as it may, it is necessary for teachers to be wary of assuming that students who are Chinese celebrate the Lunar New Year, or students who are Indian celebrate Diwali, for example.
4.2 Ascertaining the Efficacy of Strategies

It is not enough for a teacher to be flexible and demonstrate openness to changing their teaching routine when implementing strategies for an improved classroom and to meet the needs of particular students. Teachers need to be able to identify whether the new strategies they employ are effective. This is not necessarily clear-cut, especially when the strategies do not employ formal tests and assessments. Most of the existing research measured the efficacy of strategies based on students’ written and oral proficiency skills through formal evaluations. Therefore, this section addresses other means of measuring strategies that are not necessarily dependent upon students’ language proficiency. The participants elucidate how they determine the efficacy of their strategies, which can manifest through changes in their students’ behaviour, or through assessment and evaluation.

4.2.1 Manifestations in student behaviour. The participants indicated that when implementing strategies towards teaching students to take ownership of the learning, they look for growth in terms of independence in learning and an overall improvement in satisfaction or enjoyment in class.

Alyson shares that her emphasis on metacognition and looking for cognates is successful when students think out loud when they encounter a new word. The process of thinking out loud demonstrates students’ growth and cognizance when they are able to decipher problems they encounter without necessitating the teacher’s assistance. Furthermore, Haley postulates that making connections on their own is crucial to students’ learning and is likely to make the knowledge they acquire endure, as students arrive at the understanding by themselves. The cognizance that Alyson and Haley speak
of is what provides students with pride in their work and an openness to learning that in due course demonstrates the students’ ownership of their learning.

Monitoring students’ behaviour in terms of their receptiveness in class helps participants determine whether to continue applying the same strategy. They take note of students’ enjoyment levels, interest levels, and focus in class. Students’ receptiveness to learning may be more challenging to discern due to the subjective nature of perceiving students’ mood and the class atmosphere. The participants have identified demonstrations of students’ enjoyment and interest levels; they can be ascertained through the excitement that they show when carrying out activities or in classroom discussions. This includes the students’ willingness to participate and respond to questions. Additionally, the participants have discovered students’ interest through changing classroom routines. For example, when Haley stopped writing the *verbe du jour* (verb of the day) on the board in class, students noticed the change and expressed their disappointment.

Strategies that help alleviate language-related anxiety (Young & Gardner, 1990) and lower the affective filter (Lightbown & Spada, 2006) can manifest positively in students’ focus in class. A student who is able to acquire a language best is a student who is engaged and focused. To all three participants, focused students are students who, when given a task in class, are deeply engaged with the material. This aligns with past research regarding the affective filter and student engagement (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Determining student improvement and integration in class is more straightforward compared to interpreting the atmosphere of the classroom and the students’ enjoyment. Haley and Alyson speak to an improvement in classroom behaviour,
highlighting that their students likely do not realize that some strategies affect their behaviour positively. For example, they shared strategies such as standing at the door before and after class to greet students and cultivating an alliance with them by becoming acquainted with the students. For all of these methods that the participants use to gauge the effectiveness of strategies, as one would expect, students demonstrating the opposite – disinterest, a lack of focus, and dissatisfaction in the course material – perhaps require different strategies, assuming that their needs are yet to be met, and there are no other underlying issues this student might be facing.

4.2.2 Assessment and evaluation. This section reports concrete processes of verifying the success of strategies with definitive responses. Collecting data in this manner is equally necessary when attempting to determine the success of a strategy, as one cannot rely solely on assumptions and intuition. Additionally, these methods can reinforce what we believe through evidence gathered, or conversely prove that our assumptions from the gathered evidence are fallacious.

The most straightforward manner Haley assesses the effectiveness of small groups as a strategy is by sitting down with each group and listening to each of them during presentations. She can justify that students feel more at ease and safe in their small groups by comparing their performance in small groups with their performance in front of the whole class, thus observing a change in students’ affective filter (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). She can corroborate that their learning has improved if they show improvement through their vocabulary, grammar, if they speak with ease, and through their French language comprehension. The limitation to this is that if the student’s native language is one with which the teacher is unfamiliar, the teacher is unable to tell if the
student is exhibiting experimental behaviour with generative rules (Mehrabi et. al, 2014) when communicating. In this instance, if the student were to attempt to explore a grammatical rule based on patterns they know in their native language and this emerges to be erroneous in French, Haley would only know that the student is incorrect, and not that they partook in exploratory risk-taking.

During the interviews with participants, the previously unanticipated topic of informal assessment emerged. It was found that through informal assessment, teachers can appraise the value of strategies that they have carried out. All three participants use verbal surveys for speedy feedback from the students. For example, immediately after executing a particular strategy, Alyson asks her students what they thought of the activity, to gather responses such as, “I liked it,” “It was boring,” or “I did not like it.” This assessment allows her to quickly note whether it was a successful or unsuccessful strategy. In spite of the fact that this information can be obtained quickly, a limitation of this method is that not every student’s voice will be heard, which may overlook the needs of some students. Some students may feel reticent about expressing their opinions out loud in front of the class. Other students may feel even less inclined to do so if their feelings towards an activity differ from the majority’s stance, or if their perception of their language proficiency causes them to hesitate before speaking out loud.

Another informal method of assessing the strength of a strategy is through using prompts. A specific example is when teachers prompt students in class. Referring back to the example of using cognates to decipher new words that students encounter, teachers can prompt students by asking them, “Is this a cognate? What does this word remind you of?” Students who are able to respond to similar prompts as this are
responding to the strategy that the teacher carried out.

4.3 Needs, Challenges, and Changes Related to the Curriculum

After having reported the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students as well as strategies participants implemented to meet those needs, it is fitting to elucidate the participants’ thoughts on how the September 2014 French as a Second Language curriculum suits the students’ needs. This is important because teachers are responsible for implementing and teaching based on the curriculum that the Ministry of Education has provided. Along with following the curriculum comes a multitude of challenges teachers face in meeting the students’ needs while simultaneously adhering to the curriculum. This section will also examine potential lacunae in the curriculum according to the participants.

4.3.1 How the 2014 FSL curriculum addresses recent immigrant and/or refugee students’ needs. This section outlines how the curriculum supports the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students.

According to the participants, the curriculum has helped them shape their teaching style to suit the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students as well as other students from diverse backgrounds in class. With regards to instructional approaches, they stated the action-oriented and communicative approach as vital to their teaching methodology. This is significant for all participants because they believe that it is important to focus the lessons on authentic activities, instead of teaching students grammar out of context.

As a learning strategy for students, metacognition was cited as being helpful for all participants in teaching students to gain ownership of their own learning. The
participants observe that their students eventually understand that activities such as co-construction of success criteria, or talking about learning strategies is teaching students how to learn and how to achieve the goals in each lesson, and as a result, become more receptive to metacognitive exercises.

The participants liked suggestions in the curriculum such as anchor charts and providing students with frequent opportunities for collaboration through group work. Furthermore, a connection can be made between the participants as they are in favour of group work, as well as their commitment to creating a classroom that is inclusive to all students. This is because group work and seating formation can allow collaboration and teamwork, which are essential to helping students feel included and successfully integrate within the classroom.

More specifically for the students, participants stated that the section in the curriculum titled “Interdependence of Language and Culture” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 10) was important for recent immigrant and/or refugee students. This is because it promotes intercultural awareness and diverse backgrounds in teaching French, instead of focusing solely on France and Quebec, with which some students may have no connection to whatsoever. In addition to that, the participants reiterate being mindful of the fact that students may come from many parts of the world.

Finally, the participants appreciate the flexibility of the curriculum. As Haley highlighted, “there’s so much openness and flexibility with the new curriculum, that […] it’s helpful when you have students of such diverse international backgrounds.” This allows the participants room to maneuver and experiment with strategies that can best meet the needs of students as and when necessary, as well as develop strategies to help
students integrate within the classroom.

**4.3.2 Challenges teachers face in adhering to the curriculum.** Abiding by the curriculum is exigent when teachers need to think about catering to the desiderata of new immigrant and/or refugee students without the lesson going awry. The hurdles that appear can emanate from students or the circumstances that teachers face.

The most common challenge that the participants cited is handling resistance from students. All of the participants shared the same sentiment as Haley, saying that “it is initially very challenging to have the students accept and not start rebelling because you’re only speaking in French.” They unanimously grapple with the need to make a case for studying French with their students, especially those who are resistant to learning French. Sam details the difficulty and importance of making a case for studying French:

“Why do I need to learn it?” is what the average Canadian student says. So the challenge to the new immigrant student will be to say, “Can we not give up too soon?” because they’ll give up on it too soon if they see [that others are] not interested. […] [O]utside the classroom, they won’t have the opportunity to really use [French].

Sam’s description of her interaction with students aligns with Mady’s (2014) claim that Ontario’s society in general remains committed to the development of English, which perpetuates the language hierarchy that exists. As a result, English is valued over other languages. In addition to describing the difficulty in making the case for French and speaking exclusively in French, Sam describes that it is not enough to speak exclusively in French within the classroom. Sam believes that speaking exclusively in French in the classroom is met with resistance from students, but even if she is successful in making
the case for studying French, it is not sufficient for language acquisition and French proficiency. According to Sam, students need to be motivated to learn French.

Furthermore, participants stated that a challenge they have is finding teaching resources for diverse needs and backgrounds. Their experiences are limited and they lack knowledge about other cultures and how to accommodate those students. The curriculum insists on expanding the discussion of French to include francophone countries as well. Haley states that her experience with French is in France, Quebec, and a few Caribbean countries, but she notes that this is insufficient to meet the standards of the updated curriculum, in addition to the needs and diversity of students in her classroom.

Moreover, the ability to locate resources outside of her cultural knowledge is further limited by her lack of time due to various commitments outside of work, to which all participants can attest. Haley states that “[f]inding the time to do the research necessary to teach a really good, well-rounded lesson is hard.” Added on top of that is Alyson’s perfectionist attitude. She grapples with worrying about whether every student carries out activities perfectly according to how she planned them to meet the curriculum expectations. This is juxtaposed with Sam’s endeavour to remind herself that the onus is also on the students in learning French, and not only herself: “if they don’t have that discipline to […] motivate themselves in the language outside the classroom, then it’s all in the classroom.” The participants are not strangers to these challenges that they face, albeit having experimented with strategies to overcome the obstacles they face at work.

4.3.3 Areas for change. It is necessary to think about the changes that can be implemented in practice and in the curriculum to suit the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students whose needs might not be accounted for in the curriculum. This
sub-theme outlines the teachers’ opinions on changes that can be implemented in the new curriculum.

Haley draws attention to teachers’ attitudes, which is closely associated with changes to the curriculum. She explains why being adaptable is important in the following quote:

If you’re not […] properly implementing this new curriculum, then it will be disadvantageous to the students. […] [T]here’s good things from the old [curriculum] too, [but] if you’re stuck in your old ways, and it’s hard to change, […] then it’s going to have a negative effect on the students.

The salient point is the need for teachers to start implementing the new curriculum in their practices. This is pertinent, not because the new curriculum is objectively “better” than the new, but because the ability to switch to the new curriculum and change teaching methods demonstrates flexibility and adaptability on the teacher’s part, which are two competences that are indispensable for teachers.

The participants did not think that there was much to add to the 2014 FSL curriculum, with Haley stating, “I don’t think there’s a lot missing, because it’s so open in the new curriculum.” The participants agree that the flexibility that the curriculum allows means that teachers are free to explore and try strategies as they see fit. Alyson specifies that, “by the time they’re teachers, [most people] have the creativity and compassion that’s required to fill those gaps [in the curriculum].” While this may be true, it also poses complications in expecting teachers to possess creativity and compassion to fill the gaps in the curriculum. It begs the question of why, if such gaps exist, we should not state explicitly or with thorough guidelines how to address the needs of students.
Reconciling the gaps in the curriculum and having the freedom and flexibility to experiment within the bounds of the curriculum requires a masterly finesse that teachers will constantly need to navigate.

4.4 Conclusion

While some strategies may not be explicitly stated in the curriculum, teachers have found ways to creatively fill in the gaps to meet the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students, which were described in detail and were predominantly supported by literature, or aligned with research that is in existence. This is in part attributable to the openness and flexibility of the curriculum. Furthermore, the strategies that the participants employ can be made more general and benefit the whole class as well, and not only the new students.

An important finding from the data is that many strategies that participants employ do more than solely benefit the recent immigrant and/or refugee student. The strategies can be adapted for other students as well. Many strategies work to develop the whole class, and not only the recent immigrant and/or refugee students. The next finding from the data is the indication that there is a lack of discussion surrounding students’ voices in research particular to their needs as recent immigrants and/or refugees. Lastly, the findings show a connection between ownership of learning and collaboration that is scarce in literature. The data is significant in providing insight into some strategies teachers use, for example, to develop inclusivity in the classroom, how to measure the efficacy of the strategies, and finally, the gaps in the research and curriculum to support teachers.

In the following chapter, I probe further implications of these findings, several
recommendations for the educational community, and areas in which future research may be conducted.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the key findings in this research and their significance. I discuss the implications of the findings for the stakeholders in the educational community and for my professional identity and practice. Subsequently, I provide some recommendations pertaining to those who are involved directly or indirectly in the educational community. Following this, I conclude by outlining possible academic extensions of this research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The key findings are vital in understanding how this research adds to past research. The results from the study reveal the importance of inclusivity in the classroom through strategies such as group work and collaboration with the aim of building strong relationships between students and teachers. These strategies also aid in empowering and building self-confidence in students to be advocates for their learning. The data reveals that teachers often make assumptions about the needs of their students. Furthermore, the data shows that there is an absence of student voices in research vis-à-vis the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the FSL classroom.

In many ways, the findings align with the literature review. One such alignment between the literature and this research is using other languages in the classroom to support French language acquisition. Participants emphasize the importance of incorporating students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the classroom, as the use of students’ language repertoires can indeed support their French language acquisition. This demonstrates that the findings further support and sustain past research findings.
Moreover, with regards to the 2014 French as a Second Language curriculum, the participants noted the advantages of the interdependence of languages and cultures in the classroom, which manifests in their classroom through formal and informal assessments.

While the idea of assessment was not addressed in the literature review, all participants attest to formal and informal assessments. Participants state that assessments are equally important to establishing the efficacy of strategies they put to use in the classroom. Although some participants highlighted challenges in finding adequate resources to support the diverse needs of students, it was concluded that being flexible is a necessary quality as a teacher.

The findings are important as they elucidate a shift in the understanding of how to provide equity for recent immigrant and/or refugee students from teacher-focused research to student-focused research. This is especially important in order to avoid the propensity to assume these students’ needs.

5.2 Implications

This section outlines the implications of the research on the educational community and my professional identity and practice. This is consequential in order to clearly understand how the research findings are relevant to other research and researchers.

5.2.1 The educational community. For policy makers, the research findings raise the question as to why access to French education is not as simple for recent immigrant and/or refugee students who are English Language Learners. This indicates a shift in the stigma towards beliefs surrounding language learning. Instead of viewing English as the most important language that newcomers must learn first, or French language learning as
education for the privileged, it can be advantageous to students to learn French as a second language simultaneously. This implication is further emphasized by the observation from participants that students who can speak more than one language are likely to be open to learning a new language. This shift in the stigma surrounding language learning begins with the policy makers, and the administration. Destigmatizing French language learning begins by creating easier access to entering the French class.

The lack of student voices from the research implies that there is a need for further research to be carried out in this area. This is with the aim of fine-tuning the provincial curriculum, especially for English Language Learners in the French classroom. The conundrum that is raised with the idea of fine-tuning the curriculum is that while teachers would like more inclusive strategies listed in the curriculum, incorporating these strategies betokens preconceived assumptions regarding students’ needs. The issue of a lack of student input implies a necessary shift from research that is teacher-focused to student-centred. Carrying out research on this gap will allow students’ needs – voiced by the students themselves – to be brought to light with the aim that focused strategies can be included in the curriculum.

The participants’ openness to students using their first language to support their French language acquisition provides an alternative perspective from that of some core French teachers. While some teachers choose to use solely the target language in the French classroom, there is a shift in perspectives for others who choose to allow students to use their first language to support their learning. The implication of this shift, despite prior research supporting the use of other languages to support language learning, is the need for dissemination of research findings by researchers.
The same finding extends its implications towards teachers with the idea that languages can support students’ knowledge in other classes as well. For example, terms that derive from Latin in the Science class might help students grasp its meaning easily if they have encountered those terms in French before. The participants included students’ linguistic and cultural repertoire in the classroom through experience but did not state that it was because they had read it in research. This further highlights the importance of the dissemination of research findings so that teachers can choose to implement research findings in their practice.

Additionally, the perspective of strategically using languages other than the target language in the French classroom is important because it suggests the noteworthiness of reflexive and responsive pedagogy on the part of the participants. The participants examined their use of strategies in the classroom and responded to students’ needs accordingly based on the efficacy and success of their practices. It demonstrates that shifts in their beliefs and presumptions of language acquisition, how they learned or were taught French, and how they continue to perpetuate or change beliefs through their practices in the classroom affects the students’ perspectives of French as well.

Furthermore, because teachers have the capability to empower and build self-confidence in their students, this means that the findings emphasize the crucial roles that teachers play in the development of each student within the classroom. They have the ability to play an important role in the newcomer student’s experience at school by providing support to them accordingly.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice. The participants’ strategy of using other languages to support French language learning was instrumental in helping me
decide what stance to take in my teaching philosophy. I can now better articulate my reasons for supporting the use of students’ other languages in the French classroom through research-based evidence, although it may be a controversial or unfavourable viewpoint. The findings that affect my practice additionally challenge the stigma and beliefs surrounding French language learning, as the students in my class will be affected by my teaching philosophy that shows through my practice.

The research findings are not solely for the French classroom. They can be applied to other classes as well. Allowing students to use their language repertoire to support their learning acts as a reminder to be linguistically and culturally inclusive in an intentional manner. In classrooms other than the French classroom, I can accommodate these students in similar ways. For example, I can begin fostering cultural inclusivity by encouraging students to bring their linguistic and cultural backgrounds into the classroom for in-class discussions, assignments and projects. In other words, many strategies are transferrable to other classrooms.

The findings from the data elucidating teachers’ and researchers’ propensity to assume the needs of students has increased my awareness, so that I can now avoid such tendencies. I can begin to work on this by setting up a platform or meeting space for newcomer and international students’ voices to be heard, for example, at an after-school club. This club can be a channel for students to begin exchanging ideas and self-advocate in school.

Overall, the implications of the key findings have strengthened my understanding of the details I should consider when accommodating students. Instead of assuming what their needs may be, it is of utmost importance to hear students’ input.
5.3 Recommendations

In this section, I draw upon the research data to provide recommendations that arose from the participants and the data analysis. An important point to consider for ministries of education, administrators, principals, and teachers is to make French education more accessible to recent immigrant and/or refugee students and to avoid discouraging English Language Learners from taking French courses. Additionally, it is important to combat the stigma or belief of language learning as a privilege. For example, the decision as to where French schools are built might affect the belief that language learning is only for those who are able to afford or gain access to French education. Hence, deciding where to situate new French schools should be taken into consideration. For teachers, while it may be challenging to plan lessons for recent immigrant or refugee students, it is important to remember not to discourage them from taking French courses because English should be the language they learn first. This sets a precedent and further enforces a hierarchy of languages that exists within the school, which can be detrimental to destigmatizing French, as well as being accepting of other languages in school.

Since the data placed an emphasis on avoiding assumptions of students’ needs, creating a platform specifically for newcomer students can be beneficial for teachers and students. It is necessary to encourage students’ voices to be heard. However, before teachers can begin encouraging their input, it is essential that students have a safe space to express them, and they have people with whom they can feel safe sharing their thoughts. Once again, this begins by fostering a strong relationship with students.

The data reported the use of other languages in the French classroom to help recent immigrant and/or refugee students as well as other students in the classroom to
strengthen relationships and to encourage multicultural understanding. Furthermore, we know from research that using students’ home language can support their language learning in positive ways (García & Menken, 2006). While sufficient time must be provided for students to communicate in the target language, it is also recommended that some time be allocated for the occasional use of students’ home languages as well.

An extension to this recommendation is to shift from being home language-tolerant to being intentional in bringing out students’ home language to support learning in class, for instance, through the use of cognates to understand new vocabulary. To further expand on this, an example of the difference between being tolerant and being intentional is by bringing in materials in students’ home language as resources they can use to support a presentation or research project they are preparing, as opposed to allowing students to use their home language in in-class discussions.

Because teachers have the capability of helping students to be empowered and learn to self-advocate, the teacher’s presence and support is important to students. Teachers can take advantage of this by playing an active role in supporting such students in school. This can manifest in many ways, such as by creating a safe environment for newcomer students and building strong relationships with them. Another way this can be done is by instilling a sense of mutual respect, understanding and welcome towards diverse cultures and creeds within the classroom and community through various strategies both from this research and others. While a safe space can be challenging to initiate, teachers might begin to create this classroom by encouraging a culture of collaboration, and establishing clear classroom rules and expectations for how to interact respectfully with others.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

Extensions of this research would serve well to expand on the research findings and the research topic. Due to the ethical limitations of this research, it was not possible to interview recent immigrant and/or refugee students currently in French. However, it was noted in the data that student input is crucial. Due to this, research on the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students from the students’ perspective is an area for further research that could begin to fill the gaps in the existing literature. This is important because my research in particular assumes that teachers understand the needs of students. The extension of this research will allow researchers to find patterns in students’ needs and thus more accurately discuss strategies to meet their needs.

The research findings also point to a gap in knowledge about the relationship between collaboration and how they connect to student empowerment and ownership of their learning. A quantitative study researching the link between collaboration and the sense of ownership students’ feel could be investigated. Further examination through a qualitative study in this area could be valuable to understanding collaboration, motivation, and self-advocacy in students.

It would also be useful to spend more time researching the stigma of language learning as a privilege, and the hierarchy of languages in Canada. This research could take the lens of social justice issues, which has a bearing on the socioeconomic and geographical locations in which French schools around Toronto are situated. This proposed future research would extend Parekh et al.’s (2011) work on educational opportunities accessible to secondary school students in Toronto.

5.5 Concluding Comments
In this chapter, I reviewed the key findings pulled from the data and described the significance of these findings to my research. The key findings were the importance of empowering students through inclusivity in the classroom, incorporating students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the classroom, and an absence of student voices in research regarding their needs.

I subsequently addressed the implications of the key findings, first at the broader level, with regards to the educational community, and more specifically with regards to the ministries of education, policy makers, and administrators. I narrowed down the implications of the findings specifically to teachers, and finally to my professional identity and practice. Within the implications, I stated how the findings raised a new question about access to French education for newcomer students and highlighted some gaps in the literature and in my knowledge.

From these implications, I suggested some recommendations for those in the educational community to look into so that they might put research into practice if they wish. Finally, I considered some areas for further research that might contribute to the existing research based on questions that were raised from this research.

While the participants have expressed positive opinions towards the 2014 FSL curriculum with regards to inclusive practices, much work to an inclusive and equitable education remains. Through discussions with the participants, it is evident that moving towards a more inclusive and equitable FSL classroom for recent immigrants and/or refugees is achievable with effort from everybody involved. The areas for potential research and the strategies demonstrated by the participants in this research provide avenues for prospective developments that we can make to foster inclusivity and equity.
when teaching French as a Second Language.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:
Dear _______________________________,

My name is Amanda Loo and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the challenges French as a Second Language teachers face in teaching recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the context of Core French, and the strategies teachers use to help students integrate in the classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have taught French as a Second Language to recent immigrant and/or refugee students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45- to 60-minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor, Dr. Arlo Kempf. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.
Please sign this consent form if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Amanda Loo

[Phone number], [Email address]

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Arlo Kempf

Contact Info: [Email address]

**Consent Form**

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Amanda Loo and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name: (printed) _____________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about the challenges that French as a Second Language teachers face in teaching recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the context of Core French for the purpose of helping these students better integrate in the French classroom. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions beginning with your professional background, your perspectives on recent immigrant and/or refugee students in the French classroom, your practices, the challenges you encounter, and the supports you rely on. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Background Information

1. How many years have you been working as a teacher in Canada?
2. What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
3. How long have you taught in this school?
4. Can you describe the context of the school you currently teach at? (i.e. diversity, socioeconomic status, school culture)?
5. I am interested in learning about the issues and challenges that arise in teaching recent immigrants and/or refugees whose first language is not English in the French classroom. What experience have you had teaching such students?

Section B: Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

6. What has your experience teaching French using the new curriculum implemented in September 2015 been like?
7. What kinds of changes did you like and/or dislike about the new curriculum?
8. Did these changes have a direct impact on your French classrooms, and if so, how?
9. How do you feel about recent immigrant and/or refugee students whose first language is not English in the French classroom?
10. How might learning only French, or French alongside with English benefit these students?
11. What kinds of obvious and imperceptible needs do recent immigrant students have in the FSL classroom?
12. How is the revised curriculum meeting their needs, if at all?
13. In what ways do these challenges impact the students’ learning?

Section C: Teacher Practices

14. How do you and other colleagues meet these students’ needs?
15. What kinds of strategies have you tried using to help students deal with these challenges?
16. Which strategies worked well, and which did not?
17. How do you measure the effectiveness and the success of these strategies in your classroom?
18. Can you explain why you think these strategies are effective or ineffective?

Section D: Supports and Challenges

19. How else can teachers help meet the needs of recent immigrants and/or refugee students?
20. What necessary changes need to be implemented in the 2014 French as a Second Language curriculum in order to accommodate such students?
21. What has been your biggest challenge in teaching French to a classroom with a mix of English Language Learners and native English speakers, if any? Or, what is your biggest challenge in teaching French to recent immigrant and/or refugee students?

Section E: Next Steps

22. How can teachers prepare themselves to meet the needs of recent immigrant and/or refugee students? What kinds of specific tools might help them develop essential skills?

Thank you for your participation in this research study.