Starting with the A, B, Cs: High School FSL Teachers’ Experiences of Integrating Allophone Students in the Open-Level French Course

By

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Abstract

In 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Education added a new Open-level French course at the high school level in order to accommodate the needs of Allophone students who had little or no exposure to French prior to their secondary education. This study explored FSL teachers’ experiences in integrating Allophone students into the French as a Second Language program through the Open-level French course. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted where experienced FSL teachers shared their perceptions about the course as well as the pedagogical approaches they believed to be effective for integrating Allophone students in French language learning. The results of this study show that FSL educators believe in the importance of making the language learning process dynamic through the integration of authentic cultural elements as well as the implementation of action-oriented activities. Moreover, having confidence in students’ ability to succeed and reflecting this belief through classroom practices is also key in engaging Allophone students in French language learning. Since it is highly possible that the Open-level French course is the first interaction that many Allophone students have in the FSL program, their experiences in this course will likely determine their future interactions with the French language. Through the interactions with various aspects of the Francophone culture and community, students should be given opportunities to discover that language learning is a dynamic process as well the practicality of being able to communicate in French through both a local and international lens.

Key Words: Allophone students, Open-level French course, Teachers’ experiences and perspectives, Secondary French
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Every day, immigrants from all over the world come to Canada with aspirations of creating a brighter future for themselves and their families. The influx of recent newcomers further enriches the cultural and language diversity of Canada as the majority comes from non-Anglophone and non-Francophone parts of the world (Statistics Canada, 2015). Many immigrants cite Canada’s linguistic duality as being one of the reasons why they chose to settle down in the country, and they also expect themselves and/or their children to learn both English and French through the education system (Berron & Dagenais, 2001). With Ontario being the most popular immigration destination in Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) aims to provide an inclusive curriculum, which creates opportunities for immigrant students to succeed despite their late start in the education system.

In response to Canada’s commitment to promote linguistic duality, the FSL program was developed in English-dominant areas in order to strengthen the bilingual presence in the nation (Hudon, 2011). Under the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Core French is one of the three FSL programs available, as well as the most common route that elementary and secondary students take in order to learn the French language (LeBlanc, 1990). Specifically in Ontario, Core French is a mandatory component in students’ academic program starting from Grade 4. They are expected to have received a minimum of 600 hours of instructions in the French language before entering Grade 9 (Turnbull, 2000). Secondary students are mandated to complete at least one French course in order to fulfill graduation requirements, and this credit is normally earned at the Grade 9 level after which Core French becomes optional (Mady, 2007; Marshall, 2011). The principle vision of the Core French program is to foster communicative
competence in learners so that they can develop the “knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to participate fully as citizens in Canada and in the world” (OME, 2015, p. 8).

As for the Open-level French course, it was added in 2014 in order to target the needs to immigrant students who “have little or no knowledge of French or who have not accumulated the minimum of 600 hours of elementary Core French” (OME, 2015, p. 88). Furthermore, the opportunity to allow immigrant students who are also learning English to enroll in French courses is based on research that the simultaneous acquisition of multiple languages does not create linguistic confusion for learners (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). Prior to this change, Allophone students who had limited or no knowledge of the French language before entering high school were often discouraged from starting or continuing their education in the FSL program because there was no course at the secondary level that accommodated for their late start (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). However, the implementation of this course is completely optional as it highly depends on the school’s priorities in terms of budget and the local demographics (OME, 2015). Moreover, despite the national commitment to promote linguistic duality in Canada, Allophone students’ access to learning both official languages are usually neglected in official federal acts pertaining to multiculturalism and linguistic rights (Mady & Turnbull, 2010).

In the 2014-2015 school year, the Ontario government provided $241.7 million to support the implementation of the provincial FSL program. Each school board received $291.40 per elementary student and $74.80 – 98.93 per secondary student enrolled in the Core French program (OME, 2015). However, it was not explained in the report why the funding for secondary students enrolled in the Core French program was three times less compared to their counterparts in the elementary program.
Despite the government’s efforts to promote French language learning, there continues to be a downwards trend in the enrollment number for students studying Core French at the secondary level (CPF, 2008). In the 2013-2014 report, there were 461,760 students enrolled in the Core French program at the elementary level across school boards in Ontario, and the figure dropped to 129,878 students by the end of secondary school (OME, 2015). A limited variety of course options, the lack of ability to travel to schools offering Core French courses, and poor teaching quality were cited as the most common reasons why students decide to discontinue their education in the Core French program (CPF, 2008).

As a result of experiencing constant struggles when trying to implement initiatives to enrich the learning experiences for their students, many Core French teachers expressed the need for more funding in the areas of resources and professional development (Lapkin, MacFarlane, Vandergrift, & Hart, 2006). In order to equip teachers with the much-needed resources as well as to better prepare students enrolled in the program, the provincial government has increased its funding allocation to support the FSL program to $249.9 million for the school year of 2015-2016 (OME, 2015). For many years, one of the main purpose for continuous increase in FSL funding has been to hire more qualified FSL teachers in order to combat the poor teaching quality provided by unqualified teachers that were hired to fill the position (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). However, at the time of this research, there was no clear explanation in neither the government documents nor the scholarly articles detailing how the OME plans to make use of the increased funding to attract more qualified FSL teachers to fill the existing provincial deficit.

1.1 Research Problem

In 2014, the Open-level French course was added to the FSL curriculum in order to accommodate for the late-start that many Allophone students experience as a result of their
immigrant backgrounds. For the purpose of this study, I used the term ‘Allophone’ to refer to immigrant students whose first language is neither English nor French. This term comes from the province of Quebec and it is widely used in the linguistic field to refer to learners whose native language is neither English nor French in the Canadian context (Canadian Parents for French, 2008). According to existing studies, Allophone students exhibit more favourable attitudes toward the mastery of both of Canada’s official languages, as many of them are more able to see the practical benefits of being multilingual (Berron & Dagenais, 2001; Mady, 2010). Due to its recent implementation, however, there has been no research on the experiences of Allophone students in the Open-level French course as the majority of research focused on Allophone students already immersed in the FSL program. By examining teachers’ practices in the new introductory course, I hope to gain a better understanding of the practicality of the Open-level French class and the impacts of teachers’ efforts on Allophone students’ decisions to continue learning French.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Ontario secondary French teachers are working to integrate Allophone students in French as a Second Language – Open level classes. This introductory course is the latest addition in the Ontario Curriculum as it is uniquely designed to address to the increasingly diverse student population in the province (OME, 2015). For the purpose of the study, I interviewed teachers about their perceptions of this new extension in the FSL program. I also examined the strategies as well as resources these teachers reportedly use in order to motivate Allophone students who are beginning to learn French. Lastly, I studied the perceived impacts that these instructional approaches have on
student engagement as a first step to considering the practicality of this new Open-level French course.

As Ontario continues to be the province that receives the most amount of immigrants from countries where neither English nor French is the native language (Statistics Canada, 2015), it is highly likely that Allophone students will continue to enter in large numbers into high schools across the province. It is important to recognize the increasingly diverse student population as well as give all learners equal opportunities to succeed in French language learning in order to reflect the government’s commitment to promote linguistic duality in current educational practices (Hudon, 2011). With the study, I aim to raise awareness as well as contribute to the educational research community by adding more strategies and resources to support the growing number of Canadian Allophone students entering the FSL program at the high school level.

1.3 Research Questions

The central question that guided the research is: how are Ontario secondary teachers working to integrate Allophone students in the Ontario French as a Second Language Program – Open level classrooms? Three sub-questions are created to further precise the aim of the research:

- What are teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of the Open level course?
- What are teachers’ reported strategies for supporting Allophone students in their French language learning?
  - What are some perceived outcomes of these strategies?
What resources do teachers reportedly employ in order to engage their Allophone students in French language learning inside and outside of the classroom?

1.4 Background of the Researcher/Reflexive Positioning Statement

The topic of Allophone students in French language learning interests me as a researcher because I myself am an Allophone student who started learning French at the high school level. In the educational community, there continues to be the belief that learning multiple languages at the same time would hinder linguistic development (Mady, 2008). However, my personal experiences as well as research studies have suggested that Allophone students can excel in French language learning despite starting later compared to their Anglophone peers (Carr, 2009; Mady, 2007).

I am interested in studying specifically the Core French – Open level course because this program is designed to target the Allophone students who received less than six hundred hours of French instruction prior to the start of high school (OME, 2015). As an Allophone student who had to take English as a Second Language classes in the place of French throughout my elementary education, I did not have the opportunity to take an introductory class when I initiated my education in French at the high school level. Instead, along with many other former ESL students, I was enrolled in the Applied-level French class, a course that was less academically demanding compared to its Academic-level counterpart as it had fewer grammar points to cover. From my experiences, I started my French language learning by being “inserted” in a class that required some French knowledge; therefore, I am very interested in studying the kinds of impact that a “fresh start” have on Allophone students as they begin to learn French at the secondary level.
Due to the fact that I began learning French at the high school level, I am keenly aware of the difficulties imposed by this late-start. However, I have noticed that the majority of the learners who continued to study French throughout their high school career are comprised of Allophone students. This composition may be associated with the already racially-diverse background of the community where I come from. Moreover, I was fortunate to be in a school where resources were heavily invested in the arts and languages courses; therefore, the French teachers had a high degree of flexibility when planning their courses to cater to the needs of “late-starters”. I experienced first-hand the positive effects of teachers putting in the extra effort to create an inclusive environment, making success in the FSL program a very real possibility for Allophone students who had started after the critical period of language acquisition (Krashen, 1973).

My positive experiences with the FSL courses motivated me to conduct this research. However, these experiences may also hinder me as a researcher because my biases may lead to the generalizations that success in French language learning are mostly attributed to positive classroom interactions. Moreover, the emphasis on “success stories” may also neglect the other side of reality where Allophone students become disengaged in the FSL program because they simply cannot situate themselves in the learning process. Nonetheless, by investigating an introductory French course designed to target the needs to late-starting Allophone students, I hope to develop the techniques necessary to integrate students coming from diverse backgrounds and provide them with the chance to use French as a tool to explore their emerging futures.

1.5 Overview of the MTRP

To respond to the research question, I conducted a qualitative research studying using purposeful sampling to interview two Ontario secondary FSL teachers who have experience
teaching Core French – Open level course. I focused on their perceptions, as well as instructional strategies and resources that they intentionally employ in order to integrate Allophone students in a meaningful way in their French language learning. In Chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of teaching FSL in Canada and the current situations of Allophone students in French language learning. Next, in Chapter 3, I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in Chapter 5, I identify the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and point to areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas of current instructional approaches in the Core French classrooms and Allophone students who engage in French language learning. First, I review the instructional approaches that guide current FSL teachers by considering the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the action-oriented approach, and the integration of culture into the classroom. I also explore the impacts of these approaches on student engagement across various Core French learning environments. Finally, I examine the enrollment opportunities for Allophone students to engage in French language learning, their motivation to learn this language, as well as the outcomes of their studies in the FSL program.

2.1 At-Service Teacher’s Instructional Approaches in Canadian Core French Classrooms

In this section, I review the literature that explains the three pedagogical approaches that the OME is encouraging FSL educators to integrate into their daily teaching practices. The Common European Frame of Reference for Language is a set of assessment guidelines that aims to foster learner autonomy and confidence in the language acquisition process. By engaging students in action-oriented tasks such as planning a vacation in French, FSL educators are creating opportunities for language learners to apply their knowledge in authentic contexts; thus, helping them discover the practicality of the language they are currently acquiring. The integration of culture is one of the dominant elements in language education today as it exposes learners to the dynamic facets of the language they are embedded in; bringing the learning process to life.
2.1.1 The Common European Frame of Reference for Languages.

According to the OME (2013), the Common European Frame of Reference for Languages (CEFR) “is recognized as a valuable asset for informing instruction and assessment practices in FSL education” (p. 4). The goal of the CEFR is to foster language proficiency as well as intercultural awareness and competency – the ability to understand the perspectives and contexts of various culture, so that learners can communicate confidently in the target language across various social settings (Little, 2006). Moreover, the CEFR advocates for learners to develop self-assessment skills by presenting “can-do” statements at each of the six levels (A1 to C2) based on five skills: oral production and interaction, listening comprehension, writing production, and reading comprehension (Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2010; Faez, Majhanovich, Taylor, & Crowley, 2011). The descriptive nature of the CEFR guidelines does not prescribe any specific strategies for teachers (Faez et al., 2011). In other words, FSL teachers have a high degree of flexibility in their instructional approaches when engaging students in their French language learning and helping them reach their linguistic potential.

Many FSL teachers in Ontario have expressed that the incorporation of CEFR guidelines in their classrooms has brought positive changes in the areas of student motivation and confidence - a constant challenge in the Core French program (Faez et al., 2011). By presenting concrete descriptions that focus on a learner’s accomplishments in the language, the CEFR guidelines allow students to assess their own linguistic progress as well as generate positive feelings toward their ability to communicate in French; this sense of competency is essential in promoting the continued study of Core French (Faez et al., 2011). The student-centred language also indicates that learners themselves are responsible for the results of their learning. A sense of
autonomy tends to have positive effects on students’ motivation, which consequently contribute to the increased success in learning French as an additional language (Little, 2006).

Despite the enthusiasm to include CEFR-informed practices in their teaching, a good number of FSL teachers have expressed that the general descriptions and flexible structure of the CEFR frameworks make it challenging to concretely incorporate the guidelines into their instruction and assessment (Faez et al., 2011; Moonen, Stoutjesdijk, Graaff, & Corda, 2013). Numerous teachers in Moonen et al.’s (2013) survey study stated that they would benefit from more professional training, especially in the area of correctly determining the satisfactory level of student performance in order to implement the CEFR framework with confidence.

2.1.2 The action-oriented approach.

According to the action-oriented approach, language learners are seen as social actors who have tasks to accomplish “in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment, and within a particular field of action” (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 9). Under this particular framework, students who engage in learning French as an additional language are not only fostering their linguistic skills, but are also developing cultural competencies and strategies to communicate effectively under the demands of diverse social settings (OME, 2015). By interacting and learning through simulations of real-life scenarios, students have to mobilize a full range of abilities (e.g.: linguistic, emotional, and cognitive) in order to accomplish the assigned tasks. The action-oriented tasks are tools that help make the learning of a language “tangible, palpable, and meaningful” (Piccardo, 2014, p. 7).

In Calvert and Sheen’s study (2014), they suggest that the use of authentic tasks in foreign language learning helps make the acquisition of a new language more enjoyable and
accessible as demonstrated by students’ increased engagement in classroom interactions. However, in the context of this particular study, it was unclear whether or not the action-oriented approach has any effects on student motivation to continue their education in foreign language learning. In another observation study (Turnbull, 1999), Grade 9 Core French teachers who incorporated authentic tasks in their instructional practices saw significant student improvement in the areas of linguistic fluency and accuracy. A number these teachers attributed student success to the multidimensional language learning as facilitated by engagement in an authentic task, as this strategy helped learners to concretely contextualize their learning of the French language by recognizing its practicality. However, the results of this study coincides with Calvert and Sheen (2014), as there is no clear evidence to indicate that the action-oriented approach leads to a change in students’ attitudes or motivation to further their studies in the French language.

2.1.3 The integration of culture.

One of the main goals of the FSL programs in Ontario is to foster intercultural awareness and competency, so that students can “interact with people in French-speaking cultures effectively and respectfully” (OME, 2015, p. 10). As language is one of the most direct manifestations of a culture, a number of scholars believe that educators should neither eliminate the cultural context nor treat culture as a separate item of study while engaging students in foreign language learning (Hendon, 1980; Moradi, 2014). One scholar even went as far as to argue that “studying a language without studying the culture of its native speakers is a lifeless endeavour” (Sellami, 2000, p. 4).

Starting in the 1980s, there has been a shift in the ways in which teachers incorporate cultural elements in their foreign language instruction. The new emphasis of cultural-education is to provide opportunities for students to interact with authentic culture in meaningful ways in
order to eliminate any pre-established stereotypes towards the target culture (OME, 2015; Wajnryb, 1988). Harrison (2009) suggest that the integration of diverse cultural elements in the foreign language learning classrooms makes the language learning process more sophisticated and situated as it allows learners to see the target language within concrete yet dynamic contexts. Furthermore, the exposure to and the ability to interact with rich cultural elements in the foreign language classrooms can foster the development of students’ “L2 selves” – the identity that learners construct for themselves as a result of being situated within the culture of the language they are currently learning (Regan & Chasaide, 2010).

When students find themselves to be embedded in authentic culture through classroom activities, the experience can help close the perceived distance between learners and the target culture, which consequently engages learners in the (re)configuration of an L2 identity that arises from their embeddedness in this not-so-foreign environment (Morita, 2004). However, the incorporation of culture through authentic documents and media has raised some concern for scholars in the field (Herron, Dubreil, Corrie, & Cole, 2002). It is possible that the presentation of authentic culture through unmediated materials may create additional obstacles for learners as the language used in these sources may be too difficult (Harper, Livley, & Williams, 1998, as cited in Herron et al., 2002). It is often recommended that teachers themselves take the responsibility to modify the original sources so that learners can benefit from the exposure to authentic culture and view “language as a vehicle instead of an obstacle” with regards to intercultural understanding (Harrison, 2009, p. 93).

In an experiment conducted by Doganay, Ashirimbetova, and Davis (2013), students in the experiment group who engaged in specifically-designed and culturally-oriented tasks exhibited increased motivation and interest in foreign language learning when compared to their
counterparts in the control-group, who continued their studies without culturally-oriented activities. Moreover, the analysis of the final multi-competency proficiency test showed that results from the experiment group were 6.45% higher than those from the control group. These findings may be attributed to the positive responses that students from the experiment group had towards the exposure to the culturally-invested activities (Doganay et al., 2013). However, the results from this particular experiment are not generalizable as the study was conducted comparing two classes within the same post-secondary institution.

The CEFR guidelines provide explicit statements from which the students can monitor their own development in language learning. Clicking off what they are able to do with the language serves as a confidence booster as learners have concrete evidence of their upward progression in their learning process. Through the engagement in action-oriented tasks that simulate real-life interactive contexts, students are given the opportunities to develop the necessary linguistic as well as cultural competencies required to navigate through the demands of diverse communicative situations. The integration of authentic culture into the language acquisition serves more than bringing the learning process to life. It is an essential element that fosters the development of learners’ L2 selves - an identity that arises from being able to situate oneself within the culture and the language that one is learning; creating a sense of embeddedness that further attaches the learners to their language learning.

Following the discussion on the pedagogical approaches that currently dominates the field of French language learning education, in the next section, I take a close look at the learners themselves and how they are situated within Ontario’s FSL system.
2.2 Allophone Students in French as a Second Language Courses

In this section, I review the literature that examines the position of Allophone students within the FSL education system in Ontario. Each year, Ontario welcomes a large number of Allophone students into the public education system. However, these young people are not placed on equal grounds with their Anglophone peers when it comes to opportunities in learning the French language within public school boards. Once given the opportunity to study French, Allophone students exhibit a range of motivations that drives their learning. Despite their late-start, many Allophone students do become successful in adding French to their linguistic repertoire, and the elements that attribute to this success will be further explained.

2.2.1: The OME’s orientation towards Allophone students and French language learning.

It is worth mentioning that Ontario, being the province that receives the highest number of Allophone immigrants, is also the region where schools in the province have the greatest leniency in terms of exempting Allophone students from the FSL program (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). This practice in reality contradicts the Ministry of Education’s continued efforts to promote linguistic duality in all students. Although there is no official policy to exempt Allophone students who are also learning English from taking FSL courses, school administrators are usually able to substitute another course to fulfill the French graduation requirement if they deem that learning two languages simultaneously is too challenging (Calman, 1988; Carr, 1999; OME, 2015; Wagner, 2003). However, several studies suggest that neither parents nor students from an Allophone background think that learning an additional language will create extra burden or confusion even when the student is simultaneously learning English (CPF, 2008; Dagenais & Berron, 1998, as cited in Mady, 2010). The ease to exemption in Anglophone provinces such as Ontario legitimates that Allophone students should only learn one
language at a time, a belief that continues to dominate the education field (Mady & Turnbull, 2010; Wagner, 2003). Interestingly, although there has always been national support for promoting bilingualism in Canada, Anglophones in general, have been less enthusiastic when supporting governmental efforts and resources that promote linguistic duality compared to Francophones and Allophones (Parkin & Turcotte, 2004).

2.2.2: Motivations to study French as an additional language.

As cited in multiple studies, one of the main reasons why Allophone students are motivated to enroll in the FSL program is because they see strong associations between learning the French language and the emergence of their Canadian identity (Carr, 2009; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Mady, 2010; Parkin & Turcotte, 2004). In contrast to their peers who are Canadian-born Anglophones or Francophones, or who immigrated some time ago (these peers may already have a Canadian identity), immigrant Allophone students usually have to consciously construct their own Canadian identity by integrating various elements that they perceive as pertinent and significant to the national culture (Mady, 2010). Since Canada is known for its bilingual and bicultural roots, in the eyes of many Allophone students, learning both the official languages means becoming a “true Canadian”, thus opening the doors to full participation and integration in the Canadian society (Dagenais & Berron, 2001). Moreover, a good number of Allophone students, along with their parents, believe that by engaging in Canadian bilingualism, they are also supporting as well as reinforcing the grand notion of multiculturalism and the Canadian cultural mosaic (Parkin & Turcotte, 2004).

The sense of competency that many students derive from success in FSL classes can also serve as a motivator for them to continue their studies in the program (Mady, 2010). Due to language barriers, it is likely that Allophone students may experience difficulties in classes
where they have to use an unfamiliar language to learn about potentially unfamiliar subjects (Mady, 2007; OME, 2015). By focusing their attention on learning a language, Allophone students in FSL classes can transfer their advanced linguistic skills from their native language(s) to facilitate and potentially ease their acquisition of the French language (Bild & Swain, 1989).

In comparison with their native-born peers, Allophone students seem to place a higher value in French as a future asset that will help them avoid the employment struggles that many of their parents had faced as first-generation immigrants (Mady, 2010). Essentially, by adding French to their language repertoire, Allophone students tend to feel confident that their multilingual competency will equip them with competitive advantage to “succeed in the global economy” (Dagenais & Berron, 2001, p. 12).

2.2.3: Outcomes of studying French as an additional language.

Although there continues to be the worry in the educational field that studying French alongside English may pose extra burdens for Allophone students, this is not the case in reality. Studies suggest that French is one of the subject areas where Allophone students, regardless of their English competency, tend to perform at par, and in some cases, excel compared to their native-born peers (Carr, 2009, Mady, 2007). It is interesting to note that in Mady’s (2007) study of a group of Grade 9 students enrolled in the Core French program, the Allophone students who had no previous knowledge of French before entering high school were able to outperform their native-born peers on a multi-facet proficiency test after only one semester of French instruction (2007). Their performance excelled particularly in the areas of reading and listening comprehension as receptive skills generally develop at a faster rate compared to production skills (Krashen, 1973; Mady, 2007). Results from this study cannot be generalized to all Allophone students due to singularity of the research setting being confined in only high school in Ontario.
However, one of the reasons that may attribute to Allophone student’s success in FSL programs is that these students are already highly literate in their native language(s) and they learned successful language-learning skills through their acquisition of English; therefore, they may feel at ease when learning an additional language because their brains are already accustomed to language acquisition (Bild & Swain, 1989; Mady, 2007).

Studies have also suggested that the acquisition of French may help facilitate English language learning due to positive language transfer – meaning the similarities between the two languages helps to reinforce accurate linguistic structures in each respective language (Bild & Swain, 1989; Carr, 2009). The same theory of positive language transfer can also be applied to explain the phenomenon that Allophone students whose native language fall under the categorization of Romance languages – the linguistic family that French belongs to - tend to demonstrate more rapid progress in the FSL courses compared to their peers whose native language does not belong to the Romance language family (Bild & Swain, 1989). However, none of the studies that examined Allophone students’ performance in the FSL program shed light on the teachers’ instructional strategies and whether or not these approaches had any effects on students’ educational outcomes.

The lack of opportunities for Allophone students to engage in French language learning at the secondary level clearly demonstrates that there is a clash between the OME’s orientation towards Allophone students’ language acquisition and the students’ own beliefs about adding French to their linguistic repertoire. Although each individual learner has their own unique reasons to pursue French language learning, what sets Allophone students apart from their native-born peers is that Allophone students are driven to learn the language because they see French as a tool for becoming a “true Canadian” (which is in itself a widely-disputed concept).
In contrary to the OME’s belief that learning an additional language will burden Allophone students, many who are given the opportunity to enroll in the FSL program come out as successful learners. It is interesting to note that the acquisition of both English and French help facilitate each other’s progress rather than serve as a site of confusion.

2.3 Conclusion

In this literature review, I examine the research in the areas of the Core French program in Ontario, the current instructional approaches in the Core French classrooms, and Allophone students who engage in French language learning. This review demonstrates that the Core French program in Ontario is taking steps to modify its structural framework and pedagogical approaches in order to make French language learning more inclusive and engaging for all students. The research also reveal that Allophone students are able to succeed in the FSL program despite the limited efforts available to accommodate for their late-start.

By investigating how current FSL teachers engage their Allophone students in the Open-level French course, I hope to learn more about what Allophone students experience at the beginning of their French language learning education. Due to the fact that this is a newly developed course, there has not been a study to examine its practicality and effectiveness. Previous studies have focused on FSL teachers’ instructional approaches and their effects on all students. It is possible that there may have been Allophone students embedded in this population, but through my study, I inquired more in-depth on how teachers’ instructional approaches are influencing Allophone students’ experiences in French language learning. To be more specific, I investigated how teachers are approaching their Allophone students in this learning environment that is specially designed to meet their unique needs. As an area for future research, I want to find out whether this initiative has been beneficial to Allophone students’ French language
learning experiences as well as the potential relationship between the teachers’ (differentiated) pedagogical decisions and the students’ learning outcomes.

This research study approaches the issue of Allophone students and French language learning using semi-structure interviews with secondary FSL educators in Ontario. The study addresses teachers’ perspectives of the Open-level French course, the instructional strategies and resources that support them in engaging students in French language learning, and the perceived outcomes of their efforts. By centring my study on the new entry-point into the FSL program that is now available to many Allophone students, I hope to provide additional resources to inform educators of their instructional practices so that they can better support the growing number of Allophone students who initiate their French language learning at the secondary level.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

The objective of my study is to investigate teachers’ experiences in integrating Allophone students in the Ontario French as a Second Language Program – Open-level classrooms. For the purpose of my study, I have chosen to employ qualitative research methods as they allow me to collect in-depth responses from respondents detailing “how they have constructed or understood their experience” (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 23). In this chapter, I further explain my rationale for my methodological approach as well as the details of the data collection. I then provide a description of the sampling criteria and procedures, follow by short biographies of the participants recruited for the study. Next, I proceed to outline the methods of data analysis. In addition, I discuss the ethical aspects of the study such as policies and potential issues that may arise as a result of the nature of this particular research project are addressed. The chapter ends with strengths and limitations of this specific research design and how these characteristics have influenced the findings that can be drawn from the study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

As explained by Walliman (2011), qualitative research methods aim to record data that can only be described in words such as people’s emotions, beliefs, and ideas. Through my research, I am interested in finding out the instructional approaches and resources that FSL teachers employ in order to engage Allophone students in the Open-level classroom as well their perceptions of the implementation of this particular course. When teachers described their pedagogical approaches, these data cannot be quantified as there was no standard way I can measure their experiences. Instead, by engaging in qualitative studies, the researcher is given the
opportunity to explore teachers’ interpretations of their own experiences as provided by the rich descriptive nature of this particular research approach (Elliot & Timulak, 2005; Rosaline, 2008).

The fluidity and flexibility that accompany many qualitative research design matched the purpose of my study as I looked at snippets of how different teachers were engaged in their teachings instead of deducting a definite pattern or answer through a fixed set of questions as suggested by certain quantitative research approaches (Fairbrother, 2014). There is no definite “correct” way that teachers should approach teaching as the social nature of this particular profession requires educators to constantly adapt their approaches based on the context of the course and the group of students they have. As argued by Thorne (2000), qualitative research tends to aim more at discovering how people situate themselves in their embedded environment rather than “making judgements about whether thoughts and feelings are valid” (p. 2). As mentioned before, the Open-level French course is a recent addition to the FSL curriculum. Therefore, I relied on the expertise of the teacher-respondents to guide my research as I was interested in looking at their experiences and through current instructional practices, providing potential tips on how can this particular course can be approached for future educators.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

For the purpose of my research, I have decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. It is the format that makes the best use of the “knowledge-producing potential of dialogues” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 287). The flexible structure of semi-structured interviews invites both the researcher and the respondents to co-construct knowledge through targeted conversations (Brinkmann, 2014; Elliot & Timulak, 2005). Through the use of open-ended questions and appropriate prompts, the fluid design of this particular format of qualitative research allows for a natural flow of dialogues that encourages respondents to elaborate on their experiences
Another feature of the semi-structured interview is that it gives respondents the opportunity to centre in aspects of the research topic that they deem to be critical, which may or may not have been anticipated by the researchers (Elliot & Timulak, 2005). Since the subject of my research focuses on educators’ instructional practices within the new Open-level FSL course, through the exchange of dialogues with the teacher-respondents, their experience led to new areas of discovery that I did not think of due to my status as an emerging teacher who is still in the process of developing my instructional repertoire. Due to the possibility of unforeseen topics arising during the interview process, I needed to be prepared to divert from the pre-developed interview guide yet also have a list of prompts that can direct the conversation back if it does trail too far from the original topic of research. It was crucial not to disturb the fluidity of the dialogues as it was only when the respondents feel at ease would they express themselves naturally; producing authentic and meaningful data (Corbetta, 2003).

My interview protocol is divided into the following sections. First, there are questions relating to the respondents’ background. I then transitioned into the core of the interview by asking questions about their perceptions of the new Open-level FSL course, their instructional strategies as well as resources used to engage students in the course, and finally, the perceived outcomes of their pedagogical approaches. Examples of questions include:

- What were your first reactions when you learned about the implementation of this Open-level French course?
- Since students who are taking this course had a later introduction to French compared to their peers, what are some of the specific techniques you rely on to motivate them in language learning?
• Can you describe which instructional strategies / resources you consider to be the most effective when engaging students in French language learning?

3.3 Participants

In this section, I discuss the participants I interviewed for the research. I also review the sampling procedures that I followed in order to recruit respondents who provided me with the best data.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria.

Here is the list of criteria that guided me when searching for teacher-respondents who were the most suitable for the purpose of my research:

• Teachers would have secondary French as a Second Language as their main teaching subject
• Teacher would have taught the Ontario Open-level FSL course (FSF10) at least once
• Teacher would be working at a secondary school within a public school board across the Greater Toronto Area with at least 50% non-native English speaking student body

First, it was important to interview teachers who teach French on a regular basis as I hoped that their rich experiences would contribute to my research by sharing pedagogical approaches that are specific to the field of teaching French as a Second Language. Moreover, due to the fact that my research centres on educators’ instructional practices within a specific course, it was essential to recruit respondents who have had experiences teaching this course at least once. Since the Open-level French course is a recent addition to the provincial curriculum, therefore, I could only rely on teachers working for the publicly funded school boards because
there is a high possibility that independent schools do not offer this course because they follow a different curriculum.

3.3.2 Participant recruitment.

Random sampling is a method often employed in quantitative research in order to ensure unbiased data that can be generalized (Walliman, 2011). However, since the purpose of my research does not aim to generalize findings and that I anticipate some challenges when recruiting, I chose to rely on non-probability sampling techniques. Contrary to random sampling techniques where every individual from a targeted population have the equal chance of being selected as participants, purposive sampling techniques allowed me to pinpoint the individuals that have the greatest chance of providing me with valuable sources of data (Corbetta, 2003). As a teacher candidate who completed two practicums in the Greater Toronto Area, I began my participant recruitment by taking advantage of both the convenience and snowballing sampling techniques. The combination of both methods reduced the difficulties that I anticipated when recruiting from a small pool of potential respondents. Through convenience sampling, I reached out to my personal network of French teachers and surveyed their interest in participating in the study (Corbetta, 2003).

Once I was able to secure at least one respondent who had taught this particular course, I relied on the snowball sampling technique and took advantage of their professional connections to ask to be referred to additional participants for my study (Rosaline, 2008). Due to the recent implementation of the Open-level French course and the fact that not every school offers this option due to lack of funding or interest (OME, 2015), there are only a few teachers who actually have experiences teaching this specific course. Therefore, I relied on my respondents’ network of FSL teachers to recruit potential participants.
3.3.3 Participant biographies.

Renée Rogers is a high school French teacher who has been in the education field for over thirty years. She has a rich background in second language education as she has taught a variety of course both in the Core French program and the English Language Learning program. She has been an advocate for the development of a high school level French course aimed to meet the needs of English Language Learners.

Taylor Turner is also a high school French teacher, and she has been in the education field for over ten years. She obtained the additional qualifications to teach French as a Second Language approximately five years ago and she has been teaching courses in the Core French program ever since. She has experience teaching Grade 9 and Open-level French, and these courses are currently the focus of her practice.

3.4 Data Analysis

Primary data was collected from face-to-face interviews with two secondary French as a Second Language teachers who currently works in a secondary school within the publicly funded school boards across the Greater Toronto Area. According to Solinas and Vernizzi (2012), qualitative methodology allows the research to “understand the essential characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 43). The main goal of my research is to learn more about in-service teachers’ perceptions as well as instructional experiences within the Open-level French course. These themes became the main points of references that guided my data analysis through the coding procedure.

In qualitative research, coding is process of combining ideas into categories for the purpose of discovering patterns (Rosaline, 2008). For my research, I employed the general
structure of thematic analysis to help me organize the data. Based on this approach, the researcher must be familiar with the data before the first attempt to create initial codes (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Although I did have a rough idea of the potential categories, it was essential that I examine the interview transcript thoroughly before I applied the codes and that I had to be mindful not to let my pre-determined impressions influence how I perceive the data. Once the data had been coded for the first time, the researcher would then search for trends or commonalities that may arise and make any adjustments to refine or broaden initial categories (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). After carefully re-examining the data, I then proceeded to develop names for these newly-defined categories in order to better describe the data.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

When conducting any type of research, it is essential that the participants are treated with respect as “the principle behind ethical research is to cause no harm, if possible to produce some gain for the participants in the project and in the wider world” (Walliman, 2011, p. 21). Moreover, the element of deception - a site of ethical controversy in the world of research (Walliman, 2011), was not necessarily for the purpose of my research as I was mainly interested in studying teachers’ experiences with the Open-level FSL course. In order to obtain the best quality data possible, it was critical that the teacher-respondents fully comprehended the overall aim of my research so that they could produce rich and authentic data. Although I had no intentions of deceiving my participants at any point of my study, ethical issues may arise as a result of misinterpretations of terms and concepts (Corti & Thompson, 2004). As a researcher, it was difficult to engage with the study completely clear of my own subjectivities. It was possible that I may have different interpretations of certain concepts compared to the teacher respondents, which was a site of potential conflict when analyzing the data. In order to mitigate the effects of
this issue on the validity of the data obtained, I asked for clarification throughout the interview process in order to avoid any confusions during data analysis. I was also conscious of my own biases and not to interpret the responses but rather, presented them as they were given during the stage of summarizing findings.

To ensure that my research was conducted in an ethical fashion, I strictly abided by the Ethical Review Protocol that has been approved by the University of Toronto. Before the interview, the respondents were given the opportunity to sign consent forms so that they were clear of their involvement in the research as well as the chance to learn that they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point. Moreover, to assure that students were not involved in the research in any way, the interview were conducted off school property and outside of instructional hours. As for the interview data, they were securely stored in my personal computer with a passcode, meaning I was the sole person who had access to the information. Finally, to honour the confidentiality clause in the Ethical Review Protocol, all participants received pseudonyms so that they would not be identifiable to the readers of this research project.

3.6 Methodological limitations and Strengths

In this section, I examine the various aspects of my research design and how they restrict and benefit my overall study. One area of potential limitation lied within the ethical consideration of the study, which inhibited the involvement of secondary students. According to the OME (2015), the Open-level FSL course was specifically designed to integrate Allophone students who had not had much exposure to the French language prior to high school. Although interviews with the teachers who have taught this course would offered me the instructional perspective, ultimately, the success of integration lies within how the students experience this course. However, since the topic of study is relatively new, this particular research on the
teachers’ perspectives and experiences within the Open-level FSL course can potentially serve as an introduction to future researchers who are also intrigued by the topic and wish to expand.

One of the biggest limitations of this particular research project and of many qualitative studies was the small sample size. Moreover, respondents were recruited through snowball sampling, and only those who were interested became a part of the study. It was possible that teachers who volunteered themselves to be respondents have stronger feelings towards the topic of study compared to the average member of the target population (Corbetta, 2003). With a small sample size constituting of participants that were not randomly selected, these two characteristics resulted in the inability to generalize the findings to apply to the population from which the sample was drawn (Creswell, Hanson, Plano-Clark, & Morales, 2007). However, as explained in previous sections, the goal of this research is not to generalize. For the purpose of my study, I am interested in investigating teacher-respondents’ perception as well as pedagogical approaches within the Open-level FSL course. By having a small sample of participants, I was able to closely analyze their responses, leading to a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that I am studying (Creswell et al., 2007). Moreover, since the interviews were not conducted under a strictly-controlled environment, respondents may be more inclined to produce authentic and valid responses when they were asked to speak about their instructional experiences. When the research environment resembled or was situated within a real-life setting, the influence of the Hawthorne effect can be significantly reduced, which is usually an advantage that the qualitative study has over the quantitative study (Corbetta, 2003).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented detailed explanations to justify my methodological decisions. First, I stated that the qualitative approach was suitable for the purpose of my study. The flexible
and descriptive nature of qualitative methods allows for the in-depth exploration of different teachers’ perceptions as well as instructional practices within the context of the Open-level French course. I then proceeded to describe the specific instruments of data collection. I justified how the semi-structured interview permitted a natural flow of conversation and how this fluidity created an inviting atmosphere that empowered the respondents to become “co-constructors” of knowledge. Sampling techniques were also covered in the chapter as I explained the difficulties that may arise during recruitment and my choice of snowball sampling to overcome this obstacle. After the data has been obtained, thematic analysis was employed so that raw data can be allocated to categories. For the next section, I explored the ethical aspects of the research project that outlined my commitments to the Ethical Review Protocol approved by OISE, ensuring that all participants would be treated with respect. Finally, I discussed some of the strengths and weakness particular to this study: – a small sample that does not allow for generalizability, but opens the possibility for extensive examination of teachers’ perspectives and practices in the Open-level FSL course. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the research.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to explore teachers’ experiences of and practices for integrating Allophone students whose native language is neither English nor French into the Ontario Open-level French course (FSF1O). Prior to conducting this study, I have reviewed literature in the areas of the French language learning program in the Canadian context as well as how Allophone students are situated within the FLL program in Canada. In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings derived from semi-structured interviews with two high school French teachers working in the GTA region who had taught FSF1O at least once. Moreover, I aim to integrate my own research into the scholarship that investigates the FSL program in Ontario as well as how Allophone students are embedded in this system by establishing connections with existing studies as well as highlighting missing perspectives.

Through the interviews, I was able to gain insights into teachers’ perspectives on this Open-level French course as well as the elements they believed were critical in terms of fostering an engaging learning environment where students can be successful. A total of four key themes emerged in the process of data analysis. First, teachers appreciated the new addition to the FSL curriculum as this course accommodated Allophone students who had a late start in terms of acquiring the French language. However, this course was not perfect as it reportedly created obstacles that complicated students’ future path in French language learning. Next, I examine teachers’ strong beliefs around students’ own attitudes as a criteria for success and engagement in the course, a theme that I did not anticipate prior to conducting the interviews. These next two themes explore the specific components that teachers felt were crucial for integrating Allophone students in French language learning. Both teachers believed that the incorporation of rich
authentic culture into the language acquisition process rendered the learning experience more
dynamic. Lastly, the establishment of a student-centred atmosphere fostered a culture of
confidence as well as collaboration amongst peers, thus, engaging the learners on both an
academic and social level to further immerse them into the co-construction of a learning
environment that was engaging and conducive to the success of all.

4.1: The Open-level French Course: A Double-Edged Sword

When asked about their perceptions towards the implementation of FSF1O, both teachers
reported conflicting feelings around FSF1O. On the one hand, the new Open-level course was an
accommodation for Allophone students who had a late-start in French language learning. On the
other hand, with FSF1O being a mandatory course for Allophone students who had little
exposure to French, they now had a longer path to take in order to complete their French
language studies at the high school level.

4.1.1 The Open-level French course: A gateway to French language learning.

Both teachers welcomed the addition of FSF1O to the FSL curriculum as this course
provided a fresh start for Allophone students who had limited exposure to French before high
school. Prior to this initiative, schools had two options in terms of handling Allophone students
with little knowledge of French: being sorted into either Academic or Applied FSL courses,
neither of which accommodated for their late start in language acquisition. Taylor stated that
since the school she works at usually received a large population of Allophone students, they
were always able to create a special “Applied” course that modified its expectations to better suit
the needs of Allophone students. However, she admitted that this particular session only existed
because her school was located in a relatively affluent neighbourhood where resources were not
seen as a problem. Moreover, the French department fought for this initiative, which sparked the school’s interest in creating a modified course for their large Allophone population. Unfortunately, she stated that this was not the reality across Ontario as the lack of resources and interests continued to act as obstacles to the development of a better FSL program.

The other option was to simply exempt Allophone students from taking FSL courses. Both teachers expressed frustration towards this particular approach because Allophone students were being deprived of the opportunity to explore their interests in French language and culture. This finding corresponded with Mady and Turnbull’s study (2010) as Ontario, being the province in Canada that receive the largest number of Allophone immigrants, also exempted the most Allophone students from the FSL program. Taylor stated that although the Open-level French course is only offered in a few schools, she was hopeful that more schools would participate in this initiative. From conversations with colleagues, she believed that the results from this course have been positive in providing a fresh start for previously deprived Allophone students to initiative their French language learning journey at the high school level.

In addition, both participants reported that the Open-level French course acted as a confidence-booster for Allophone students. As found in Mady’s study (2010), Allophone students tended to struggle with “non-language development” courses at the beginning of their academic journey as they were using an unfamiliar language to learn about new content. From Renée’s perspective, since students enrolled in the FSF1O were able to devote all their attention to language acquisition, the effects of language being an obstacle to comprehension had been reduced. She stated:

In FSF1O, since we begin at the very beginning, language acquisition is easily acquired…this course is one level for all and success is easily achievable by all. Students
are focusing all of their attention on learning the French language, they’re not using the language to understand anything extra. Language is content and content is language…Students are not faced with a double-burden in this class like many others, so again, success is easily achievable by all.

Moreover, in accordance with Bild and Swain’s findings (1989) that looked into Allophone and Anglophone students’ experiences in an elementary English-French immersion program, Renée briefly pointed out that advanced linguistic skills in their native language(s) played a significant role in helping Allophone students reach academic success in the Open-level French course. Furthermore, since Allophone students were also learning English as an additional language, both participants believed that when learners were able to positively transfer their language-learning techniques in FSF1O, the acquisition of the French language became easier because the two languages share many similarities.

4.1.2: The Open-level French course: Creating obstacles to further engage in French language learning.

Although the Open-level French course opened up a gateway to French language learning for many previously deprived Allophone students who were either exempted from taking French courses or placed in a course that did not cater to their late-start, in these teachers’ view, the structure of the course is far from perfect. With FSF1O now in place, Renée described the extra steps that Allophone students had to take in order to continue their journey in French language learning. She noted:

Overall, it is a necessary addition to the curriculum like I mentioned before…but students who previously continued from Grade 9 French to Grade 10 and then to 12 must now
take a convolutedly, ridiculously, circuitous, discouraging route. Basically, students who finish the Open-level French course have to first take Grade 9 Academic before going any further. Sometimes, they just don’t get to the end because of all sorts of complications along the way. As these students were fabulously successful throughout their French language learning, it is indeed a loss.

Due to the requirement of taking an extra French course, both teacher participants felt that many Allophone students who began their French language learning in FS1O were deprived of the opportunity to take the Grade 12 French course, the last piece of the bilingual certificate. Taylor spoke about the complications of scheduling higher-level French courses, a phenomenon she believed is common in most high schools in Ontario. According to a study conducted by the OME (2015), the number of students who enrolled in the Core French program at the secondary level was approximately a quarter of the number recorded for the elementary level. Due to the scarcity of high school students who continue their French language learning to Grade 12, many FSL courses beyond the Grade 9 level only offer one or two sessions per academic year. In the interview, Taylor believed that since Allophone students now have to take an extra course in order to pursue higher-level French courses, they often experienced more struggles trying to fit the French courses in their already-packed schedules. She observed that:

At the end of the course, I usually get a handful of students coming to me and say they’re interested in taking more French courses, and some even expressed the interest of taking it all the way through high school...[But] in reality, a lot of the times, only a few students who expressed interests in taking more French actually commit to this path. French becomes the sacrificial lamb because students often prioritize courses like Chemistry,
Physics, and all the scientific courses because they think that these courses will get them in a better university. So yeah, in times of conflict, French is the first to go.

Both teacher participants believe that the addition of the Open-level French course is beneficial to Allophone students who had not taken much French prior to high school. Allophone students are usually able to be successful in FSF1O because they have strong linguistic foundations in their native language(s) as well as language-learning techniques transferred from learning English as an additional language to support their acquisition of French. Unfortunately, due to systemic constraints, learners who wish to continue learning French beyond the Open-level French course are usually met with obstacles that are difficult to overcome. Both participants expressed frustration as well as regrets in the face of this challenge as it is a loss to see Allophone students being pushed out of the FSL program that they can be successful in.

4.2: Make or Break: Attitude is the Most Important Criteria for Student Engagement and Success in the Classroom

To my surprise, both participants identified students’ attitudes to be the biggest challenge in their practice as well as what makes the Open-level course a unique gift to teach. Since FSF1O is tailored to meet the needs of Allophone students who had a late start in French language learning, many of them come in with no pre-conceptions of what learning French would entail. Resonating with findings from a study conducted by Canadian Parents for French (2008), Taylor cited unpleasant experiences in the FSL program at the elementary level as the main reason why many Grade 9 students approached their high school level French courses with a negative attitude. Since the Open-level French course receives students who came in as “blank-slates”, both teachers treasured this gift. Renée reflected on her teaching experiences and interactions in the FSF1O by stating that:
Being the guide to [Allophone students’] first exposure to the language, what I do in the class will determine whether or not they have further interactions with the language, and it does not necessarily have to be restricted to learning in school….and ESL students’ attitudes are so much better than an applied student!…makes them much easier to teach. To be honest, some of the students who are in this course are not just in here to fill the credit, they show a passion for learning the language and the culture.

On the flip side, both participants clearly indicated that poor attitudes that led to poor work ethics can often resulted in undesirable academic outcomes. Since FSF1O is an introductory French course, Renée stated that “success is easily achievable by all” and implied that the only way students did poorly in the course would be their lack of effort to achieve. As teaching and learning is a reciprocal relationship, there is only so much a teacher can do. Fortunately, both participants were happy to report that the majority of students in the Open-level course were willing to engage in French language learning with passion. Their open attitudes combined with the efforts they put in the course reportedly resulted in positive transformations in terms of linguistic abilities. Both participants’ emphasis on students’ attitudes as the key indicator to success complimented studies conducted around Allophone learners’ motivation to engage in French language learning.

According to Dagenais and Berron (2001), Allophone students tend to exhibit a stronger interest in studying the French language and culture because they are more able to see French as a future asset that would increase their competitive advantage in the job market. Moreover, Allophone students as well as their families hold strong beliefs that supporting Canadian bilingualism, meaning genuinely wanting to integrate the French language and culture as a part of their emerging Canadian identities, acts as a step that reinforces the grand notion of
multiculturalism in this country (Carr, 2009; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Mady, 2010; Parkin & Turcotte, 2004). As a result of a combination of all the factors listed above, Allophone students tend to place higher value in French language learning. Both teachers were proud to describe how their students transitioned from knowing very little about the French language and culture to investing passion and enthusiasm in the learning process because they recognize that French is important in their lives. It was an emotional moment in the interview when Taylor described the progress of her students in the FSF1O course as follows: “moments like these literally bring tears to my eyes…especially when you get those students that come in with a not so positive attitude from the beginning, and they tell you they want more French in their lives…it’s just really rewarding!” As most students came in with no knowledge in French, both teachers expressed pride when they discussed the changes they observed. Students started in the course by learning about the A,B,Cs, and by the end, they were reportedly able to articulate themselves in French by conducting simple conversations in the language. The best part for both participants was watching their students having so much fun throughout the learning process.

4.3: The Presence of Culture: Making Language Learning More Relevant and Dynamic

Throughout the interview, it was interesting to note that resources reportedly did not pose a significant problem to the two teacher participants’ practices in the Open-level French course. Due to the fact of FSF1O being a recent addition to the FSL curriculum, I initially assumed that resources may be scarce because teachers have not had enough time to accumulate an inventory for the course. However, both teacher participants able to find an array of engaging material that allowed students the opportunity to interact with authentic Francophone culture in meaningful ways. At this point, I would like to note that both participants worked in schools that were situated in relatively affluent neighbourhoods in Ontario. Therefore, the geographic locations
may have given these schools an advantage in terms of having the means to access resources that were varied and updated. In addition, both participants have been in the teaching field for more than ten years. It was highly possible that they would be more familiar with what resources were available as well as how to access them. Choosing the types of resources also required a high degree of professional judgement. Through careful selection, both participants were able to successfully integrate authentic Francophone culture into the classroom, with the goal of making French language learning a more lively experience for Allophone students.

4.3.1: Bringing the world into the classroom: The place for online resources.

As Ontario is predominately an Anglophone province, in most cases, it is difficult to immerse learners in an environment where they are surrounded by the presence of rich Francophone culture. As a result, both participants cited the importance of going above and beyond to look for online resources that allow Allophone students to be exposed to, as well as interact with various French-speaking communities. Diversity was key when considering the types of online resources that made learning more engaging as digital tools cannot be simply used as fillers. When speaking about the variety of resources, not only did the types of resources need to be different (i.e. videos, short articles), it was critical to overcome the stereotype of Paris, or France, being the only focus when looking at Francophone culture.

In the latest revision of the FSL curriculum, the development of intercultural understanding is a reoccurring theme in all courses, including FSF1O (OME, 2015). To achieve this goal, teachers were mandated to give students the chance to learn about diverse French-speaking communities so that their understanding of Francophone culture could be constructed in a holistic manner. Taylor explained that one of the greatest accomplishments she felt in teaching this course was to bring Allophone students out of their “Paris-centric” perspective when looking
at Francophone culture. The steps towards learning about and developing understanding around
the idea of diversity reflected key concepts found in previous research on cultural integration in
the classroom. Not only does the guided exposure and interaction with multiple cultural
representations eliminate stereotypes, but the integration of a variety of cultural elements also
helps make the language learning process more situated as it allows learners to see the target
language within a dynamic yet concrete context (Harrison, 2009; Wajnryb, 1988).

Due to the introductory nature of FSF1O, students’ intellectual abilities continued to
exceed their French linguistic abilities even after their remarkable progress in the course.
However, Taylor shared that students, by the end of the course, were more willing to ask how to
express certain words in French so that their conversations included as much French as possible.
She expressed that:

It gets to a point when I just don’t stop answering the question “Madame, how do you say
this in French?” It’s exhausting sometimes because I mean, these kids all have phones
that give them access to online dictionaries, so they should be able to check whatever
they’re looking for online, but I guess me as their human dictionary can give them a
faster response compared to their devices. Still, it’s heart-warming to see the efforts that
these kids put into their learning.

Taylor cited students’ growing interests to learn more about the richness that Francophone
communities had to offer as one of the factors that attributed to their remarkable transformation
in the course. They frequently requested more videos to be played so that they were able to learn
more about French-speaking regions around the world. Most importantly, Taylor observed that
the enthusiasm around learning about the Francophone culture often acted as a trigger for
dynamic and engaging student-initiated conversations. Learners often pushed themselves to
include as much French in their dialogues as possible, a process that became increasingly natural as the semester went on.

4.3.2: Being sensitive towards students’ needs: Authentic cultural pieces as enrichment instead of burden.

Although online resources were reportedly a useful tool for integrating authentic culture into the classroom, the language presented in these materials usually went beyond the comprehension level of Allophone students in these teachers’ Open-level French class. In Harrison’s study (2009), the author emphasized the critical role that teachers play as a language-mediator when incorporating authentic cultural documents and media into the classroom. This extra effort will allow students to focus on establishing intercultural understanding without language putting too much weight on them. As reflected in her own practices, Renée mentioned that she often took the time to modify certain raw material before presenting these sources to her students. It was important for her to ensure that cultural pieces were appropriate for the Allophone students, both on a linguistic and cultural level.

On a cultural level, since FSF1O typically hosted a much more diverse student population, Taylor highlighted the importance of being mindful and sensitive when choosing the aspects of Francophone culture to be represented. She elaborated by stating that:

Most students in this class are ESL students, their backgrounds…tend to be more diverse compared to the general population. So when doing any kind of cultural piece with them because you know, culture is the big thing in FSL education right, you have to be careful with the material and type of Francophone culture you present, because some students may come from backgrounds that are in conflict with the Francophone region that we’re
talking about. So yeah, you have to be mindful and watch out for these little things that may escape your mind.

Although the purpose of exposing students to authentic and diverse culture was to help them foster a more open mindset, situations like these had to be handled with delicacy. It would be disastrous if the learning experience departed from its original intention of being an enrichment opportunity and turned itself into a moment laden with negative emotions and triggers.

4.3.3: Action-oriented activities: Where students interact with culture in meaningful ways.

In order to create a dynamic learning environment, for these teachers it is not enough to simply expose Allophone students to authentic cultural elements. By integrating action-oriented tasks into the language learning process, teachers reportedly gave students opportunities to practice their developing linguistic and cultural competencies through simulations of real-life scenarios (Piccardo, 2014). As both participants indicated that they implemented action-oriented activities whenever they could in their practice, it was evident that they were strong supporters of this pedagogical approach. Through the vivid descriptions of specific projects they presented to the class, action-oriented activities were an effective strategy that made French language learning more fun, tangible, and relevant for the Allophone students in both participants’ Open-level French course.

In her interview, Renée described in detail a “Carnival Project” as the highlight of action-oriented activities in her teachings. For this particular task, students worked in partners to create a poster promoting one of Quebec’s most celebrated cultural events – the Winter Carnival (Le Carnaval). Taking on the role of travel agents, students were required to do external online research so they were able to present on what was unique about the festival for that year. Sharing
their creation orally allowed the learners a chance to use the French language in an authentic context. The linguistic target of this assignment was for students to convince their peers that the Winter Carnival in Quebec was an important part of Canadian culture and that the event was definitely worth a visit. Through this activity, Renée felt it was important to create a platform for Allophone students to practice their persuasive speech so that they would be confident to expressing their ideas in French.

Many studies (Carr, 2009; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Mady, 2010; Parkin & Turcotte, 2004) have found that the construction of a Canadian identity is one of the strongest motivators for Allophone students to enroll in the FSL program. When asked about how this idea fitted in her own practice, Renée referred to the Carnival Project as evidence of how she contributed to the emergence of Allophone students’ Canadian identities as she was adding to their cultural repertoire. She explained that:

By learning about Le Carnaval, one of the most important cultural celebrations in Francophone Canada, students get to develop an appreciation of how and why the French language and culture is important in our country. With this new cultural piece, they can see other aspects of what it means to be Canadian that they don’t normally get exposed to from living in an Anglophone region. Also, doing an assignment around Le Carnaval encourages students to learn more about Quebec, which in a way, opens up the province as a potential place for future travels and work. This is the reason why some wish to continue as they note the benefits and practicality of French language learning in Canada.

Although the findings from one interview study cannot be generalized, the positive feedback that Renée reportedly received from her students filled a missing perspective in the literature of language learning pedagogies. From previous studies (Calvert & Sheen, 2014; Turnbull, 1999), it
seemed like action-oriented activities were only useful in terms of increasing student engagement and language proficiency. There is no evidence to support that action-oriented tasks motivated students to continue in language learning. In the case of Renée, however, she noted that on top of the Carnival assignment being fun and engaging, some students were motivated to continue in the FSL program as they were able to create associations between increased mobility opportunities in Canada and the knowledge of the French language through their engagement in this particular task.

4.4 Establishing a Sense of Community: Believing that We Can Achieve Together

Throughout the interview, the co-construction of a “culture of confidence” among students and teachers repeatedly emerged as a critical element in integrating Allophone students in the FSF1O classroom. As reflected in their daily practices, both teacher participants continued to stress the idea that students will be able to communicate in French by the end of the course, and that they should not see their late start as an impediment. Assistance was always available, from both teachers and peers. It was interesting to note teachers’ perception of the power that removing themselves as the centre of the support-network had on students. By trusting learners with the responsibility of helping each other, Renée believed that students were better able to appreciate and understand their progress in the class, and thus, becoming more confident in one’s ability to communicate in French.

4.4.1: Approaching success from a student-centred lens: immersing students in a culture of confidence.

In every FSF1O session she has taught, Renée adopted the habit of constantly reinforcing to her students, both through verbal comments and daily practices, that they will be able to express themselves in French by the end of the course. In order to build up students’ confidence
to articulate themselves, she developed a warm-up routine that slowly reduced the stress for Allophone students when asked to communicate in French. At the beginning of every class, there would be a period of time dedicated to open questions and answers. The purpose of this activity was to foster a low-risk environment in which students were encouraged to practice their developing linguistic skills without bearing the weight of searching for the right answer. Taking on the role of a facilitator, Renée initiated the conversation by posing questions relating to the content they have been studying, interesting events in students’ lives, or current events. As students became more comfortable, they then took on leadership roles by directing the discussions to an orientation of their choosing. Renée pointed to students’ visible increase in confidence as a result of this constant opportunity to share their ideas in French under a low-risk environment. She elaborated by stating that:

When I first started doing this activity, only a couple students…usually the keeners, were willing to give me some sort of answer. I mean…I get it. It’s a new environment, a new language and people are nervous about making mistakes. So usually, this activity only took about 2 to 3 minutes because interactions were very limited. But as we proceed further into the semester, students learn more and they get comfortable with me and their peers, they’re more willing to, and are better able to articulate themselves. It’s so nice to move from a rigid session of me asking the questions and students responding to a conversation where things actually flow. Another change that I’m able to see is that students no longer try to avoid eye contact with me during this activity…They’re eager to share what’s on their mind and I let them take it from there.

The change in learners’ enthusiasm around participating in the daily conversational activity supported Renée’s claim that her students’ confidence level increased as a result of their growing
familiarity with the French language. The emphasis that she placed on the natural flow of
students’ conversations by the end of the semester alluded to the possibility of students no longer
viewing masking mistakes as an impediment to their communication. It was suggested that
Renée’s students were able to focus more on the overall delivery of a message rather than being
stuck on the particularities of linguistic accuracy. This change contrasted with how students
initially engaged with the daily oral exercise as Renée had pointed out that making mistakes
made students nervous about communicating in French.

Both participants touched on the use of the Common European Framework for Language
Learning (CEFR) as a tool that reportedly helped students feel more accountable for their own
progress in the course. As stated in various studies, the goal of the CEFR guidelines is to help
learners develop self-assessment skills by presenting descriptive statements to be checked off
once a linguistic target has been reached (CMEC, 2010; Faez et al., 2011; OME, 2015). Teachers
often have a high degree of flexibility when designing the descriptors suited for their students’
progress because the CEFR guidelines does not prescribe a fixed set of assessment criteria. Both
participants indicated that they customized the “can-do” statements so that their students can
monitor their own progress in the course. These statements were presented to the students in
French, therefore, it was alluded in both teachers’ responses that just being able to understand
these sentences served as evidence of progress and confidence booster for both the student and
teacher. In addition, the student-centred language in the CEFR statements (e.g., I can / je peux)
shifted the focus of learning from what the teacher was able to deliver to students to what
learners were able to achieve in the course. Resonating with Faez et al.’s study (2011), both
participants reported that the Allophone students in their Open-level French course became more
confident in their linguistic competencies because they were able to visibly track their progress in French language learning.

4.4.2: Helping each other: the key to establishing a community of successful learners.

Allowing students to work under a variety of group settings was a strategy deeply ingrained in both participants’ pedagogical approach. From engagement in daily activities to commitment to summative projects, students in the Open-level French course had an abundance of opportunities to expand their social network through the collaboration with different peers. In order to establish a sense of community, Taylor pointed to the importance of fostering a positive class environment as a collective whole, rather than supporting the development of separate cliques that worked well within their own boundaries. She expressed that the use of strategic groupings by pushing students to work outside of their habitual friend-groups often created new dynamics that were conducive to learning, both on an academic and a social level. She then elaborated on the initial struggles of her initiative because most students expressed strong desires to work with their friends. In order for students to understand the reasonings behind her decision, Taylor emphasized the importance of explaining her actions to the students instead of simply telling them to follow her orders. In most cases, students accepted her rationale and they have adapted this practice as a part of what was expected of them in this course. Over the course of the semester, Taylor observed the forming of new friendships and bonds, which could potentially attribute to the decrease in students’ request for specific pairings because their growing familiarity with peers opened up the flexibility of working with any individual in the classroom community.

In times of difficulty, Renée referred to the establishment of a buddy-system to help struggling students get back on track. By removing herself as the sage figure in the support
network, Renée entrusted her students to take on the responsibilities of a mentor. She stressed the critical role of peer support by stating that:

When a student is struggling, I would sit them down with a buddy, usually someone that speaks the same native language, and provide general guidelines of how we can work together to support the particular student. For the most part, students are happy to accept this responsibility because I’m saying to them that I have trust in their linguistic abilities to provide support to someone else. A lot of the times, beginning French learners are quite passive because they don’t think they can do much with the language. For me, it’s important to make my students feel confident about their progress in the course so they can be more actively engaged, so by assigning them with a leadership role to supports others, their remarkable progress is validated and this is something that they should be very proud of.

Moreover, the roles of tutors were fluid, which meant that all students had a chance to be selected and offer support to others at some point of the course. This approach was made explicit to avoid the division between “good students” and “bad students” because as Renée has stated before, “success is easily achievable by all” if students were willing to put effort into the learning process. At the end of the discussion on group work, Renée stated that she was always available as a back-up if there were issues that the peer-to-peer support system could not resolve, both on an academic and social level.

4.5: Conclusion

As an increasing number of Allophone students are entering the Ontario education system, it is vital that there measures in place to accommodate their late-start in French language.
In response to this need, FSF1O was introduced as an addition to the FSL curriculum that was dedicated to integrate Allophone students into the FSL program. However, these teachers expressed frustration with the unnecessary steps it brought along, which in their view, discouraged a number of successful learners from continuing their journey in French language learning. Since the Open-level French course targeted beginning learners, many Allophone students reportedly came in with fresh perspectives as they did not carry the baggage of previous negative FSL experiences that many of their native-born peers have had. From the teachers’ perspectives, these students’ attitudes towards French language learning were more positive as a result, which ultimately became the number one indicator of their academic success. The integration of authentic and diverse Francophone culture was a dominant element in the teachers’ practices. By closely considering how students can interact with these cultural pieces in a meaningful way, teachers were able to foster a learning environment that allowed for contextualized intercultural understanding as well as an appreciation for diversity and the practical role French plays in both Canada and the international community. Lastly, the learner-centred atmosphere present in the teachers’ classroom worked successfully to further integrate Allophone students in a French language learning community that was conducive to the achievement of all.

In Chapter Five, I examine the significance of my findings by reviewing teachers’ perspectives on what makes the FSF1O a unique course to teach as well as their thoughts on pedagogical practices that successfully engages Allophone students in French language learning. In addition, I discuss the implications and recommendations derived from my study so that the educational community can develop more strategies to support Allophone students’ learning as well as teachers’ work in the Open-level French course. I then conclude the chapter by exploring
directions for future research so that educators can approach the FSF1O course with a more holistic understanding as well as my summative thoughts on the overall study.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the key findings and their significance around the central research topic: FSL teachers’ perceptions and experiences of integrating Allophone students in the Open-level French course. I then proceed onto a discussion regarding the implications of the findings on both the broader educational community as well as my professional identity as a pre-service educator. Next, I highlight some recommendations for teachers, specialist school staff, and teacher education program with the aim to improve students’ and educators’ experiences in the Open-level French. In the last section, I provide some directions for future research as well as some concluding comments about the study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

As the Open-level French (FSF1O) course was officially added into the Ontario French as a Second Language curriculum in 2013, this study examines in detail teachers’ experiences of this course. Four main themes were derived from the interviews with two high school FSL teachers who have had the experiences of teaching FSF1O. First, the teachers interviewed reported that FSF1O served as a necessary addition to the curriculum as it provided Allophone students who had limited exposure to French language learning prior to high school the opportunity to initiate their learning at a level appropriate to their needs. However, the participants were discontent with the circuitous route that successful learners from FSF1O had to take before they can continue their journey in French language learning. This finding highlighted the imperfections hidden in the structure of FSF1O. This new course was developed to respond to the needs of the increasing Allophone population in Ontario. Due to its recent development
and implementation, FSF1O continues to require further examination and development so that it can truly benefit the Allophone learners that it targets.

The second theme that emerged was teachers’ emphasis on students’ own attitudes being the factor that ultimately determined their learning experiences in FSF1O. According to the participants, Allophone students enrolled in the Open-level French course reportedly came in with fresh perspectives. This newness presumably allowed Allophone learners to engage with French language learning with positive attitudes because they did not carry the burden of previous negative learning experiences like many of their native-born peers (Mady, 2010). From the teachers’ perspectives, students’ enthusiasm and willingness to engage in the learning process allowed them to be successful in the course. On the other hand, poor work habits combined with poor attitudes always resulted in undesirable academic outcomes. This particular finding is significant because it drew attention to the reciprocity embedded in teaching-learning relationships. Although it is crucial for educators to establish a classroom environment aimed to promote all students’ success, learners themselves need to put in the efforts that they deem necessary to obtain desirable learning outcomes unique to each individual.

The integration of authentic culture through various mediums was identified as a key element in both participants’ practices as it makes the language learning process come to life. For example, by showing video clips of native French speakers from around the globe describe their favourite French cuisine, students are exposed to French culture as something that is vibrant rather than a static object fixed in the books. Through the incorporation rich cultural elements, teachers reported success in bringing Allophone students out of their Franco-centric perspective and broadening their perspectives regarding the diversity that Francophone communities had to offer. It was also important to note that teachers were aware of Allophone students’ diverse
backgrounds and were sensitive towards the cultural pieces introduced so that learners coming from backgrounds that may have conflicts with Francophone regions did not experience negative triggers in the process of establishing intercultural understanding. The significance of authentic culture being a dominant part of teachers’ practices lies in its convergence with the guidelines of the ministry expectations. According to the FSL curriculum in Ontario, the development of intercultural understanding is a reoccurring theme in all FSL courses at the high school level (OME, 2015). By committing to broadening Allophone students’ perspectives in regards to the Francophone communities around the globe, teachers’ daily practices reflect their efforts in tailoring the ministry’s guidelines to meet the needs of their group of students.

The last theme that emerged was the importance of fostering an atmosphere of confidence that immersed Allophone students in the belief that they can be successful learners despite their late start. By encouraging students to engage in self-assessment through the use of “can-do” statements as suggested by the CEFR guidelines, teachers reportedly observed an increase of confidence. As students were checking off what they were able to do in French, they were able to see a transparent display of their progress. Participants also described the powerful impact that the establishment of a peer-mediated support network can have on students’ confidence. By trusting students to help each other in times of difficulties, teachers observed that Allophone learners in FSF1O enjoyed these leadership roles as these positions acted as a validation of the progress they have made in the course. The findings in this section echoed with the second theme as both addressed the importance of students’ own agency in the learning process. Confirming the results in Faez et al’s study (2011), when students are given the opportunity to feel confident about their progress, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards the learning process, which can serve as a motivator for continued learning.
5.2 Implications

In this section, I explore the implications derived from the key findings of the research. I first describe the impact of the current study on the broad educational community, with specific focus on how Allophone students and high school FSL teachers may be affected. I then proceed to a narrower lens and discuss how this study has influenced my own professional identity and practices as a future FSL teacher.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational research community.

Since its addition to the FSL curriculum in 2013, the Open-level French course is slowly making its way into secondary schools across Ontario. According to Statistics Canada (2015), Ontario is projected to be the Canadian province that receives the highest number of Allophone immigrants in the next decade. With a continued flow of immigrant students entering the education system, it is likely that the FSF1O course will become more widespread in high schools across the province. As noted in previous chapters, the Open-level French course was specifically designed to accommodate for the needs of Allophone students who have had little exposure to French language learning prior to high school. Due to FSF1O’s potential to increase in availability by demand, Allophone students entering high school in the next decade may have a higher chance of being placed in an FSL course that suits their needs rather than being exempted from the FSL program or sorted into a course that does not take their late-start into consideration.

For many Allophone students who had little exposure to French prior to high school, FSF1O may be the first FSL course they take in order to initiate their French language learning. However, due to the discouraging path that successful learners from the Open-level French course are forced to take in order to continue their learning, FSF1O may well be both the first
and last course that many Allophone students take in the FSL program. Both teacher participants stated that after the completion of the Open-level French course, they usually had a number of students expressing interests in taking more FSL courses in the future. However, due to the fact that they had to take the Grade 9 Academic French before moving on, the sad reality is, many students ended up discontinuing their journey in the FSL program. In many cases, the decision to stop learning French may be the combined results of this discouraging route and the complications in adding FSL courses, especially those in higher levels, into students’ already tight schedules. If Allophone students continue to face tremendous amounts of obstacles after FSF1O to further their learning in French, it is highly likely that the Open-level French course will present itself as a one-time shot for Allophone students to learn French rather than its original intention of being a gateway to the FSL program.

As for FSL teachers at the secondary level, with the implementation of FSF1O now in place, it is possible that they may now be given the responsibilities of acting as the person who introduces Allophone students into the FSL program. In the interviews, both participants stressed the role that teachers play in the Open-level French course because students’ experiences in this particular course will likely determine their future interactions with the French language and Francophone culture. Although FSF1O is a beginner course that aims to develop foundational language skills, it does not have to present itself as juvenile or simplistic. According to the Ontario FSL curriculum for secondary students, intercultural understanding is a crucial element in all courses (OME, 2015). Based on the current practices of the teacher participants, Allophone students in the Open-level French course can have many opportunities to learn about as well as interact with authentic Francophone culture, which from their observations of students’ reactions, makes the learning process more sophisticated and dynamic. It is important to note
here that students in the FSF1O class tend to come from more diverse backgrounds compared to the general student population because most are new immigrants to Canada (OME, 2015). As a result of this diversity, it is possible that there may be students in the class who come from cultures that are currently in conflict with certain Francophone regions. It is critical for teachers teaching FSF1O to be aware of individual students’ backgrounds so that activities involving the interactions with Francophone culture can be planned with sensitivity, allowing all to develop intercultural understanding from these experiences.

5.2.2. Narrow: My professional identity and practice.

As more immigrant students continue to come into Ontario, it is our responsibility as educators to provide them with the support needed so that they do not see their late-start in the education system as an impediment to their learning. Thanks to this study, I was able to gain a more insightful understanding of what it means to be a teacher tasked to initiate Allophone students onto path of French language learning at a high school level. I was deeply touched by the idea that the types of experiences teachers provide for Allophone students in FSF1O will heavily influence how they perceive and interact with the French language and culture in the future. As the Open-level French course is likely to be many Allophone students’ first interaction with French, as an educator, it is vital for me to treasure their fresh perspectives as a gift rather than seeing their late-start as an impediment. Inspired by both teacher participants’ practices, I can now better appreciate the importance of fostering of an atmosphere of confidence under which both teachers and students believe that achievement is possible. In future practice, I can personalize “can-do” statements as suggested by the CEFR guidelines so that students, regardless of what course I teach, can visibly track their progress and be proud of what they have accomplished.
Coming back to FSF1O, after learning about the difficulties Allophone students have to face in order to continue their French language learning after the Open-level French course, I feel even more determined to ensure that learners’ experiences in this particular course would be positive and worthwhile. Due to the circuitous route ahead of Allophone students, FSF1O may be the first and last time these learners have to interact with the French language under a formal, academic setting in high school. Therefore, it is crucial for me as a FSL educator to provide students with an enriching learning experience in the course. Moreover, I believe that learning should not be confined within the walls of the classroom. Since it is a reality that Allophone students have to face extra obstacles on their path of continued French language learning, it is my responsibility as their teacher to help discover avenues for enrichment opportunities if they wish to pursue French any further.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the implications of this study, I want to propose the following recommendations for teachers, specialist school staff, and teacher education program with the hopes of improving both educators’ and students’ experiences in the Open-level French course. Due to the recent implementation of FSF1O, it is likely that many FSL teachers are unfamiliar with how to approach this course. I encourage teachers who have taught the Open-level French course as well as those who have taught a FSL class with predominately immigrant students to establish a network of collaborative communication so that resources and experiences can be shared. In addition, based on both teacher participants’ experiences, the integration of authentic culture seemed to be an element that worked effectively in stimulating students’ interests in French language learning. In order to add a local perspective in the integration of culture, I recommend FSL teachers to invite members of the community into the classroom so that students can better
appreciate the idea Francophone culture is not a distant concept. Moreover, by allowing learners to engage in real-life interactions with people who use French on a regular basis for their personal and/or professional lives, students may be able to better understand the practicality of learning this language in Canada. The last suggestion I want to make specifically for teachers who may be teaching the Open-level French course is to truly believe in students’ abilities to succeed despite their late start in French language learning. It is critical for teachers to engage in practice with this positive attitude in order for students to believe in the possibility of success for themselves. One concrete strategy to reflect teachers’ confidence in students is to give learners consistent opportunities to visibly track their progress as well as demonstrate their accomplishments so that everyone in the classroom community can be proud of how far each individual has come.

In both teacher participants’ interviews, it was mentioned that many students who were interested in pursuing their French language learning further after FSF10 were pushed out of this option due to complications in course selection. As students are faced with these obstacles, I propose there to be more communication between teachers, administrators, and the guidance department in regards to course selection so that a more feasible schedule can be developed. As high school is a time when students are encouraged to find their future paths, it would be regretful if they were deprived of the chance to further develop what interests them as a result of conflicts in course selection. Finally, I would like to make a recommendation to teacher education programs in regards to FSF1O. From my experiences as a teacher candidate, I do understand that the teacher education is already packed. However, the existence of the Open-level French course should at least be mentioned for those who are preparing to teach French as a second language so that future educators know that they can be tasked to teach this course. To
better prepare future FSL teachers, a specialist who works regularly with English language learners can also be invited into the class to discuss specific instructional strategies that would enrich Allophone students’ learning in the FSF1O.

5.4 Areas of Future Research

In this particular study, I was able to gain insights into FSL teachers’ perspectives and experiences in regards to the integration of Allophone students in the Open-level French course. In order to have a more holistic understanding of FSF1O, a course designed to accommodate for the specific needs of Allophone learners who had little exposure to French prior to high school, it would be interesting to look into students’ experiences as an area of future research. In terms of students’ actual experiences in the course, detailed examinations can be conducted around what students enjoyed in their learning process versus what challenges they faced. As an extension to the research, students’ reasons for continuing or discontinuing French language learning after FSF1O can be studied. Since FSF1O is a recent addition of the FSL curriculum, combining teachers’ perspectives, students’ reports of their lived experiences would be helpful in terms of improving all aspects of the course so that it can truly serve its intended audience. Another direction for future research can be directed at comparing students who started their French language learning in FSF1O versus those who were placed in Grade 9 French (Academic or Applied-level). The core of this potential study would be to evaluate whether or not the Open-level French course is truly benefitting Allophone learners who initiated their French language learning at high school. Questions relating to what students found interesting, challenging in their respective courses as well as their reasons for the continuation or discontinuation of their journey in the FSL program would be examined as the focus of this research is also on students’ perspectives and experiences.
5.5 Concluding Comments

As Canada presents both English and French as its official languages, all students living in predominately Anglophone regions should be given the opportunity to engage in the learning of the French language and culture in meaningful ways. I believe that regardless of when students begin their journey in the FSL program, they are entitled to an education that allows them to explore the diversity of Francophone presence both on a local and international scale as well as discover the practicality of French language learning in Canada. Specifically, in the context of FSF1O, opportunities for further studies should be made more flexible to encourage Allophone students who are interested to continue their pursuits. It would be unfortunate if the Open-level French course, the intended gateway into the FSL program for Allophone students who had a late start, turns itself as a one-time shot to learn French due to complications in designing a feasible pathway for continuation.

To extend the scoop further onto the FSL program at large, I found it interesting when both teacher participants mentioned it is easier to engage Allophone students who had little exposure to French language learning into the learning process. Their freshness in perspectives are treasured by FSL teachers as “gifts” because educators do not have to battle with negative attitudes about French that has accumulated from burdens of the past. It pains me to see that only a quarter of students decide to pursue French language learning after Grade 9, the last time they are required to learn French under an academic setting. Although the majority of students come into high school French with pre-conceptions of what French learning may be like, perceptions are always open to change. I think it is critical for teachers who will teach Grade 9 students in their French classes to think of their classroom as an opportunity to (re)-engage young learners. In accordance with the findings, I too believe that the integration of cultural elements to be an
effective strategy that makes learning more dynamic. To me as a future FSL educator, I want to deconstruct the idea that language learning is an experience centralized around memorizing grammar rules and spelling. By learning the French language through meaningful interactions with cultural elements, I hope to engage the whole classroom community onto a quest to discover the richness behind a language so we can better contextualize as well as establish significant connections to the knowledge.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date
Dear __________________________:

My name is Lucy (JiaYun) Liu 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 small component of this degree program involves conducting small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the integration of Allophone students into the Open-level FSL course (FSF10). I am interested in interviewing FSL teachers who have experiences teaching this particular course with the hopes of learning about their perceptions as well as pedagogical approaches within this new addition to the FSL curriculum. I think that your knowledge and experiences will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one approximately 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 that is convenient for you, outside of school time. The content 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 findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. Given the topic of the nature of your choices in instruction, a minute risk with participating in this study is that questions could cause the interviewee to feel vulnerable. To address this, 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 store on my password protected external hard-drive and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor __________________________.

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 questions 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 other known risks to you for assisting in the project.

Please sign the consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Lucy (JiaYun) Liu

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 Lucy (JiaYun) Liu 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

Thank-you for participating in this study. The goal of my research is to learn about teachers’ experiences of integrating Allophone students in the Open-level FSL classroom. This interview is approximately 60 minutes and will comprise of 18 questions. This interview protocol has been divided up into four sections beginning with the participant’s background information, followed by questions on teachers’ initial perception of this course, then the pedagogical practices as well as resources used to engage Allophone students in French language learning, and concluding by the perceived outcomes of instructional efforts. I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question, and can remove yourself from participation at any time. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin the interview?

Section A: Background Information

1. How many years have you been teaching French at the secondary level in Ontario?

2. What grades and courses are you currently teaching?

3. How many times have you taught the course FSF10?

4. Have you received any professional development or support to teach FSF10?

Section B: Initial Perception towards & general experiences with FSF10

I am now going to ask you about your perceptions and experiences in the Open course.

5. What were your first reactions when you learned about the implementation of this Open-level French course?

6. Can you briefly describe what a typical lesson in this class looks like? How about a unit?

7. In your experience of teaching both the Open and other French courses, what makes the Open course different?
8. What are some of the challenges you encounter when teaching this course?
   a. How did you respond to these challenges?

9. Overall, how would you describe the students’ engagement level in the course?
   a. Did you observe any changes towards the French Language from the beginning to the end of the course?
   b. Were there students who approached you stating that they will continue to study French after this course?
   c. Do you believe this course is an effective addition to the FSL program?

Section C: Instructional Strategies and Resources Used to Engage Allophone Students in French language learning

I am now going to ask you about your experience working with Allophone students in the Open course. Please note that I am only asking about the Open course.

10. In what ways do you think the implementation of this course influences the way in which Allophone students engage in French language learning?

11. How do you take Allophone students into consideration when you plan your lessons?

12. According to research, Allophone students emphasize the practicality of learning French and they use French as a medium to develop their emerging Canadian identities. How does this related to your own experiences of teaching this course?

13. How do your Allophone students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect their learning and your teaching in this course?

Section D: Ministry of Education guidelines & recommendations to teaching

I am now going to ask you for your opinions and experiences in relation to aspects of the new FSL curriculum document, including the Open course

14. Are you familiar with the Common European Framework for Reference of Language (CEFR)?
   a. If yes, the CEFR is a large part of the new FSL curriculum. Do you think it is effective?
      i. How does the CEFR fits into your own practice?

15. Are you familiar with the action-oriented approach in FSL?
   a. If yes, how does this approach fit into your teaching?
b. Can you give me an example of an action-oriented activity / project that you implemented in the classroom?

16. Can you give me an example of an activity or project where you created an opportunity for students to interact with authentic French culture?
   a. Do you think this activity or project was successful in engaging students? Why / Why not?

Conclusion

17. What advice do you have for me as a FSL teacher candidate on how to integrate Allophone students in the FSL classroom?
   a. What about on teaching the Open French course?

18. Do you have any final thoughts or questions?

Thank you for participating in this study.

Tape off.