Specific needs in literacy & language learning of refugee children: A comparison of
German and Canadian Syrian refugee families

by

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Abstract

Literacy and language development and wellbeing of Syrian refugee students are influenced by many factors including educational and refugee protection policies and socio-economic influences within schools and communities. The present study examined these factors contributing to the successes and challenges in language and literacy development, both in English, the second language (L2) and Arabic, the first language (L1), of Syrian refugee children as they settle in Canada. We employed a mixed measures design, five families participated in qualitative interviews, and nine children (5 girls; $M$ age = 134.67 months) also completed a short battery of quantitative language and literacy measures. The interviews uncovered the importance of L1 maintenance and L2 acquisition, and support systems; and results from the quantitative measures suggested that the sample was significantly behind in language and literacy development. When compared to the German sample, both samples showed L2 difficulties.
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1. Introduction

The Government of Canada has welcomed and resettled more than 50,000 Syrian refugees since 2015, with almost a quarter of them residing in the Greater Toronto Area (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2018). These families have resettled via two main pathways; government-assisted resettlement, and private citizen and community organization sponsored resettlement. Four in five Syrian refugees are women and children with over 58% of this population under the age of 25 (Citizenship Canada, 2017), therefore there is an urgent need for research on this vulnerable population in the hopes of creating effective government policies and practices, targeting the educational needs of the refugee children. The poor circumstances and immediate need for survival overshadowed the perceived value of education and therefore resulted in the children’s education falling by the wayside (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Interrupted education leads to many negative outcomes later on in life including literacy and academic outcomes, and future earning potential in their adult lives (Charles & Denman, 2013). The first step to tackling this issue is building a deeper understanding of their perspective, their living situation, and their needs.

It is imperative to ensure that refugee children acquire full language and literacy skills in both English, their second language (L2), and maintain Arabic, their first language (L1). English is necessary for academic achievement, social integration, and most importantly, full participation of these young people into Canadian society. Maintaining the Arabic language is necessary for family cohesion, preservation of culture, and a sense of belonging within the family and community-contexts (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000). In order to support these language goals, all factors of full integration of refugee children into Canadian schools must be considered. These factors include the child’s lived experience both back home in Syria and in Canada, acculturation, language skills in both L1 and L2 and children’s overall wellbeing. The present study examines the factors contributing to the successes and challenges in language and literacy development, both in the L2 and L1 of Syrian refugee children as they settle in Canada, and compare them with a German sample of Syrian refugees in Munich, Germany.

The follow section discusses important background information concerning Syrian refugees resettling in Canada. A total of sixty five diverse articles were used to inform this study. The literature has been divided into categories to adequately describe the factors affecting Syrian
refugee resettlement in Canada including acculturation, language development, and the resettlement process.

1.1 Syrian Civil War and Canada’s Involvement

The Syrian Civil War has immensely negatively impacted the lives of millions of people since it began in 2011. Currently, over 5.5 million Syrian refugees are living in neighboring countries including Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan (UNHRC, 2018). Another 6.1 million people are displaced from their homes within the country, and an additional 13.5 million people are in need within Syria (UNHCR, 2018). In 2015, the Canadian government made a promise to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees to across Canada, and as of July 2018, there are over 51,000 refugees successfully resettled in the country with over 11,000 living in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The Government of Canada has enacted support resources for this vulnerable population including resettlement workers and agencies, trauma counselling, employment and training services, accessible information sheets and websites translated into numerous language, and English language support programs to help in L2 language acquisition. These language programs are especially important for school-age children as English is necessary for their academic success, social integration and eventual full integration in to the host society (Citizenship Canada, 2018).

1.2 Government-Assisted Program versus Blended Visa Office-Referred Program

Syrian refugees that resettled in Canada have arrived in one of two ways, through the Government-Assisted Program or through the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program (Government of Canada, 2018). All refugees accepted into Canada are granted Permanent Residence immediately, but the support and resources provided greatly differ depending on which program they are associated with. Although, little research exists on the differences between these two groups, studies have found that privately sponsored refugees have successful resettlements largely attributed to the socio-emotional support of the sponsors, especially in regards to social development and education on Canadian culture (Kumin, 2015).

1.2a Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs)

Government-assisted refugees (GARs), also called government-sponsored refugees, are refugees welcomed into Canada and supported by the government of Canada or the province of Quebec (Government of Canada, 2016). Refugees accepted through this program have been referred by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on the basis of need, without
discrimination (Government of Canada, 2016). Upon arrival into Canada, these refugees are granted Permanent Residence status and their resettlement is entirely supported by the Government of Canada or the province of Quebec. Resources and support are delivered by non-governmental agencies funded by the IRCC. GARs are eligible for support for up to one year from date of arrival in Canada, or until they are able to be self-sufficient—whichever happens first (Government of Canada, 2016).

1.2b Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees (BVORs)

Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees (BVORs), more commonly known as privately sponsored refugees, are refugees that have also been identified by the UNHCR, as “in need” but are financially and emotionally supported by private sponsors (Government of Canada, 2018). These sponsors are groups of Canadian citizens or organizations that support the resettlement of refugees they sponsor. These groups are often faith-based, ethno-cultural groups, or settlement organizations (Government of Canada, 2018). Private sponsors are in charge of financially supporting their refugee(s)’s for up to six months from the date of arrival, and up to one year of socio-emotional support (Government of Canada, 2018).

1.3 L1 and L2 Importance

In bilingual populations, the research is clear in that both languages have benefits and drawbacks. However, there are no clear directions with regards to which language should be emphasized, or how to balance the two languages.

A study by Ying and Han (2008), explored the challenges and benefits of both L1 and L2 in bilingual households. A major finding was that there is a significant relationship between parent’s L2 proficiency and acculturation. They found that although the L2-proficiency acted as a barrier in the parents’ school involvement, maintaining the L1 allowed for better community engagement and integration resulting in positive outcomes for the children and better family relationships within families where parents had a low L2 proficiency (ie less parent-child conflict) (Ying & Han, 2008). They also noted that English language skill was directly proportional to community involvement, resulting in better child outcomes, and better dyad relationship within the family in families with parents with high English proficiency.

Another study by Birman (2006) showed that maintaining the L1 was critical to family relations. In families where the parents had poor L2 acquisition, but the children had strong L2 language skills and poor L1 proficiency, there was a significant language gap leading to increased familial conflict, and decreased school involvement for both the children and the
parents (Birman, 2006). An American study on Vietnamese refugees looked at this issue as well. In a study involving close to 200 Vietnamese refugee children in grades 6 to 12 in the US, Nguyen, Messé and Stollak (1999) observed that self-reported English skills were positively correlated with involvement with the American culture, whereas self-reported Vietnamese skills were positively correlated with involvement with the Vietnamese culture. Similar findings have been reported for other refugee groups, such as Soviet Jewish refugee children in the US (Birman, 2006; Birman et al., 2005).

Despite the scattered results from these research studies, it is clear that both languages are important for child development. There is a need for a higher availability of L2 language classes for parents as it would be beneficial in family relationships, school involvement and community engagement for the whole family.

1.4 Acculturation and L2 Development

Acculturation is the process of adapting to life in a new place by taking parts of your pre-existing culture and amalgamating them with parts of the new culture (Schwartz et al. 2010; Schumann, 1986). In this process, it is important for one to consider traditions, cultural identity, and heritage. The acculturation model proposed by John Schumann (1978) addresses L2 learning for newcomers including immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In this model, he argued that L2 acquisition relies on two major constructs: the sociology and psychology of the individual. Those that socially and psychologically accept the new country’s culture will have better L2 acquisition, and in turn their superior L2 acquisition allows the individual to further accept the host country’s culture (Schumann, 1978). This positive feedback loop allows for more and more successful integration into the new context. This theory of acculturation has been widely correlated with L2 competency using other models as well such as the Language, Identity and Behavioural Acculturation Scale (LIB, Birman & Trickett, 2001). This scale is used to measure a refugee’s acculturation. It reflects the subject’s ability to accommodate and successfully adapt to the new culture, and develop a deeper understanding of the new language-- consequently enhancing their L2 learning process (Dodds et al., 2010; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Bankston & Zhou, 1997; A. Portes & Schauffler, 1994). The implications of this model are apparent in familial, and societal factors.

Of course, there are other factors that must be considered in the process of acculturation. For children, parents are a huge factor. Their education level and English proficiency greatly predict the children’s future academic outcomes ((Ying & Han, 2008; Birman et al. 2005). Children whose parents have achieved a higher level of education and English proficiency tend
to encourage and invest in their children’s L2 acquisition more, and encourage their children to learn the new language. Moreover, the higher English proficiency allows parents to have communications in English in the home and to be more involved in the children’s school life and leads to better integration in general (Ying & Han, 2008; Birman et al. 2005).

1.5 Acculturation and School

Acculturation is not only important to L2 acquisition, but also to school adaptation, academic achievement and peer relations. Refugee children with a higher acculturation tend to have a higher L2 proficiency and better school outcomes (Hauck et al., 2014; Dodds et al., 2010; Birman et al., 2005; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Wood & Clay; 1996; Juang, 1997; Sanchez & Fernandez, 1993). As children adapt to the host culture, they can more easily learn the host language and use these skills with “everyday” language to create peer relationships, achieve their academic goals and become fully integrated into the Canadian society (Birman et al., 2005). This increased school involvement, better school adaptation, and higher academic achievement is especially seen in dispersed communities compared to concentrated communities. This evidence further proves the link between acculturation and L2 development.

1.6 Community Composition as a Function of Language Acquisition

As demonstrated in the previous section, family-level L2 learning is extremely important, however, it is also important to consider the community-level L2 language richness and how the community’s composition can affect L2 development. The ethnic diversity within the community can greatly impact L2 acquisition for newcomers to the host country (Logan et al., 2002). This topic is especially important to consider in a large metropolitan city like Toronto. Toronto exists as a cultural mosaic with its’ almost three million people, and extremely rich ethnic diversity (Statistics Canada, 2018). Generally, dispersed refugee populations, where there is a small number of refugees relative to the community population, in local communities contribute to better L2 acquisition and acculturation (Logan et al. 2002; Chiswick & Miller, 2001, 1996, 1992, Portes & Schauffler, 1994). In a community with a high concentration of refugees, the predominant spoken language may actually not be English among the people of the community, and therefore refugees may be less interested in learning English because they are able to easily communicate with their neighbors in their L1. On the other hand, in a dispersed neighborhood where the main language is English, refugees are much more eager to learn the L2 quickly, thus positively impacting the acculturation process. Research has shown that dispersed communities have better acculturation and L2 development and communities where there is a high concentration of refugees demonstrate lower L2 fluency with a high maintenance of their L1
because of their continued everyday use of it (Birman et al. 2005). Since L1 is still the minority language in the host communities, English language learning is still encouraged.

Acculturation is a necessary part of adapting to a new culture and demonstrates that it is important to maintain the personal culture while incorporating aspects of the new culture. As mentioned previously, learning the host language allows children to successfully adapt to school and have higher academic achievement. However, it is still important for these children to maintain their L1 for their familial relationships and sense of belonging. A balance must be achieved between L1 and L2 in order to ensure full integration of these Syrian refugee children and lead to the best child outcomes.

1.7 Factors Affecting Academic Performance

Refugee students typically come from non-English speaking countries, they are a large group of ELLs in Canadian schools with their numbers increasing quickly (Kaplan et al., 2015; Mallows, 2012; Brown et al., 2006; McBrien, 2005). With the growing population of ELLs in schools, it is important to explore factors related to their academic performance and create programming to help them succeed. Researchers in this area have identified age of schooling, cultural values, and parental experience are key indicators of academic success.

Other than future prosperity, academic performance is also a key indicator for school adaption (Birman et al., 2005; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Birman et al., 2002). Researchers define school adaptation as school involvement, academic performance, and cultural identification with the host country. Birman et al. (2005) found that children from dispersed communities have better school adaptation, adding further evidence of the importance of ethnic composition of refugee communities. Some researchers have examined mathematics and English score as a predictor of school adaptation. Results from a study conducted by Mitakidou (2008) show that refugee students who start schooling in the host country at a younger age out perform their older counterparts in mathematics and language scores (Mitakidou et al., 2008; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Rasanen, 1989). This difference can be explained by a better school integration partially attributed to higher language proficiency. One of the first studies on refugee children by Rasanen (1989) found a relationship between L2 language skills and future job prospects. Students with higher L2 literacy and fluency had higher academic performance and ended up being employed in higher positions upon entering the workforce. Those with lower proficiency had poorer academic performance and in turn, worse job prospects later on.

In addition, academic performance is affected by cultural and structural factors. Cultural factors typically refer to maintaining one’s values, traditions, and language, but within this
category education should be considered. Children from cultures that place a high importance on education within their communities have higher academic performance (Kim, 2002; Zhou & Bankston, 1998; Rutledge, 1992; Ogbu, 1991; Caplan et al., 1991; Gibson, 1989; Sung, 1987). Therefore, families that highly value education tend to have parents with higher education and in turn children with better academic performance. This education focus also leads to stronger parent-child relationships because the parents are invested in their children’s academic success. However, there is also research showing that parents’ education independent of cultural values can predict children’s education. Parents with a higher education level achieve a higher socio-economic status, and invest in their children’s education by encouraging school attachment, and providing external resources if necessary to ensure better outcomes (Kim, 2002; Birman et al., 2002; Kao, 1995; Ekstrom-p et al., 1986). A 2002 longitudinal study examined the academic performance of Cambodian refugees compared to Vietnamese immigrants. The math and reading scores in grades 8 and 9 were analysed and results showed that the Vietnamese immigrant students significant outperformed the Cambodian refugees in reading (Kim, 2002). This difference can be explained by socio-economic status, parental education, and community diversity. The Vietnamese children attended a majority English-speaking school and were located in a dispersed community (Kim, 2002).

Moreover, it is important to consider psychosocial factors as well when discussing academic performance. Many of refugee children suffer from anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress (Eruyar et al., 2018; Attanayake et al., 2009; Derluyn et al., 2008; Durakovic-Belko et al., 2003; Dura-Vila et al., 2013). These factors can have a large effect on the child’s ability to learn in school and on their job prospects later on. Therefore, education policy makers, teachers, and refugee workers must be aware of the mental wellbeing of this population and how it is intricately intertwined with their academic performance. There needs to be create assessment tools to learn about these children’s learning profiles and create a learning environment to help them succeed.

1.8 Cross-language Transfer of Literacy and Language Skills

There is a huge body of research concerning cross-language transfer of language and literacy skills in bilingual children. Findings in this field generally show an interdependence between languages. According to Abu-Rabia and Seigel (2002), children with poor reading skills in their L1 will have similar results in the L2, those with higher performance in L1, tend to have higher performance in their second language as well (Durgunglu, 2002). This trend has been observed across all languages in the metalinguistic skills necessary for reading and writing; phonological
awareness, orthographic processing, and morphological awareness. Therefore, metalinguistic skill level in one language tends to be reflected in another and this overlap is well captured by the *Interdependence Hypothesis* (Cummins, 1979, 1981). The “Interdependence hypothesis” states that skills in an L1 or L2 can transfer to the other language and act as a support. This hypothesis is important to keep in mind when studying resettled refugees—it is important to consider L1 and L2 language skills and how they can be transferred and be beneficial to overall language development. Conversely, it is also important to consider how a lack of skills in L1 could impact L2 acquisition. Being from a war-torn country, many children, especially those who have moved to Canada in their teens have experienced long interruptions in their education. Therefore, their L1 development may be stunted which could impact their L2 acquisition in Canada.

Although, the research on Arabic-English bilinguals is sparse, results have supported the interdependence hypothesis, specifically in phonological and morphological awareness (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2008; Abu-Rabia, Shakkour, & Siegel, 2013). The study by Saiegh-Haddad and Geva, explored L1 to L2 transfer, and found that there were significant metalinguistic transfers except for orthographic processing, highlighting the benefits of retaining and continuing to work on Arabic L1 proficiency because of the linguistic and familial benefits. In 2013, a study by Abu-Rabia, Shakkour, and Siegel looked at cross-language transfer in Arabic-English bilingual children in Northern Israel, who had Arabic as their L1 and were learning English as an L2. They found that when given a reading intervention in English, struggling readers improved significantly across all linguistic and metalinguistic skills in both English and Arabic—adding to the body of evidence confirming the interdependence hypothesis. These study results demonstrate the necessity of Arabic-English bilingualism. Unfortunately, since the literature has focused on middle-class Arabic speaking families with children learning English as a second language in both Arabic- and English- speaking countries, it is not clear yet whether these results can be generalized to Syrian refugee populations. Further research on cross-language transfer skills is needed, specifically among Syrian refugee populations to explore whether this relationship is still evident in a vastly different context for Arabic speakers in Canada.

### 1.9 English Language Supports

A major barrier for Syrian refugee families resettling in Canada is their lack of English proficiency. Refugees must learn the language in order to settle into their new Canadian communities and navigate in their new lives. Their children need English in order to make friends and participate in academic and extracurricular activities. The predominant English
language supports for immigrants and refugees are LINC (Language instruction for Newcomers to Canada) for parents and ESL classes (English Second Language classes) for children. Both of these programs have been specialized for their target audience. LINC provides parents with the language skills necessary to enter the workforce, and ESL classes help newcomer children transition into the classroom with their native English speaking peers. LINC, ESL, LEAP, and IEC will be discussed in the following section.

1.9a Language instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)

LINC is a free government-run program that is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It is an English language program designed to help immigrants with their L2 acquisition and to help them achieve English proficiency sufficient to allow them to enter the workforce and thrive in Canada (Citizenship Canada, 2018). Aside from the large language component, LINC also touches on topics regarding settling into Canada such as navigating necessary governmental structures, Canadian culture, transportation, and creating a social network (Citizenship Canada, 2017). Similar to many programs, the more time spent with the material yields better results. The Government of Canada conducted a study examining the efficacy of LINC and found that students who attended more than 1000 hours of LINC classes saw significant improvement in their language skills, with writing (1.7 levels) and listening (1.2 levels) showing the most improvement. Students also reported significant gains in settling into Canada, 74.4% reported “making new friends in Canada, and 96.1% reported that they were able to get their Social Insurance Number (Citizenship Canada, 2011).

Many adults, especially Syrian refugee parents, participate in the program initially when they arrive in Canada. Unfortunately, they often choose to forego the classes after several weeks in pursuit of employment to take care of their families. Therefore, most adults do not reach the 1000 hours of study, and there is a gap in research in terms of their language and acquisition, and how effective LINC was for them (Citizenship Canada, 2011).

1.9b English Second Language (ESL) Classes

Refugee children enter the public school system with little to no English language knowledge. Since the language of instruction in Canada is typically English, language learning support is necessary. Children split their time in school between their mainstream classroom, and ESL classes. ESL classes provide students with an opportunity to work on their language and literacy skills, specifically vocabulary, grammar, spelling and reading (Toronto District School Board, 2014). Students share their school time between their homeroom class and ESL until their literacy and language skills are to the point where they can be fully integrated in to the
mainstream classroom. These programs are designed to help students bridge the language gap in order to succeed academically.

Challenges with ESL support lie in program quality and the amount of time children spend away from the mainstream classroom. In school, children learn academic subjects like math, science, social studies, English, etc. They also acquire social and interpersonal skills that are critical for fully integrating into society. ESL classes support English language learning but take children out of the mainstream classroom, hindering their ability to create peer relationships with their native English-speaking peers. Research has shown that children who create peer relationships have better school adaptation because of a higher acculturation. In a study looking at Sudanese refugees in an Australian high school, researchers found that students put a high priority on social interaction (Brown et al., 2006). However, despite their intensive ESL classes their language and literacy proficiency were lacking and restricted their ability to engage with academic coursework and in creating peer networks (Brown et al., 2006). As children integrated into mainstream classrooms interact with their English-speaking peers, they become better English speakers, and learn more language skills including vocabulary and grammar. These augmented language skills allow for building stronger social networks, and the positive feedback loop continues, ultimately leading to better academic performance and integration into society. Although ESL programs are necessary to build language skills, there needs to be a balance between ESL and mainstream classroom time for these students.

ESL is an umbrella term given to classes that focus on English language development across age groups. This leads to a large variance in what ESL means in terms of program design, implementation, and effectiveness. Privately-run ESL courses exist for adults, but due to the high cost, are typically not a viable option for Syrian refugee adults. On the other hand, school-based ESL programs are readily available to Syrian refugee children and will be discussed in this section.

Syrian refugee children have been quickly enrolled in school upon resettling into Canada. Many schools, especially in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) have already existing ESL programs to help these children learn English so they can integrate into the classroom with their English-speaking peers, and obtain academic success. ESL classes are not specific for refugee students, all newcomer children are in the same class, separated by grade. Students in ESL participate in a mixture of ESL classes and classes with their English-speaking peers. At the beginning, children will spend most of their school day in ESL class, and have classes like art and gym with their peers. However, as their L2 proficiency increases, ESL class time decreases
until they are able to be fully integrated into the classroom and can successfully participate in all their classes.

**1.9c Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP)**

An ESL program, specific to younger students is the LEAP program (Literacy Enrichment Academic Program). LEAP is an intensive ESL class to help students’ L2 acquisition occur more rapidly, it is relatively common in the GTA’s elementary and middle schools (Toronto District School Board, 2014). Unlike regular ESL classes, LEAP offers students the chance to gain English language and literacy proficiency as well as mathematics skills (Toronto District School Board, 2014). Students must apply to get into this program with their schools. The intensive nature of this program allows students to integrate into their home classroom more quickly equipped with the language and math skills necessary to be comfortable in the classroom.

**1.9d IEC (Intensive English Courses)**

IEC is a program type under ESL that is used in Australia, and the UK for English instruction for children, but is not common in the GTA. In this type of ESL course, students are completely taken out of the classroom and do not interact with their English-speaking peers until they have English proficiency high enough for them to be in the English instruction classroom full time as demonstrated through assessments. A qualitative study by Brown (2006), looked at the experience of nine Sudanese refugee students’ experience in an IEC program in Australia. Their ages ranged from 15-20 years of age, and their duration within the IEC program ranged from four to twelve months. All of the students within the sample had some proficiency in more than one language, but were mostly illiterate. These students reported significant academic problems in grammar, spelling, and vocabulary especially related to science and social studies. They also noted that they were determined to engage with their native-English speaking peers and participate in all social activities, once they integrated into the mainstream school. However, they felt their preparation from the IEC was insufficient and their low language and literacy proficiency limited their engagement and overall integration into the mainstream classroom. Furthermore, they their academic success was also negatively impacted.

**1.10 Child’s Socioemotional Wellbeing and Language and Literacy**

Syrian refugee families face considerable socio-emotional challenges in the new host country. War-torn children are at especially high risk of mental health issues including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and a variety of behavioural problems (Eruyar et al., 2018). It is important to consider this when looking at language and literacy development
because of its’ impact on school adaptation and L2 learning. Perceived discrimination is highly associated with increased levels of mental health problems in the host country, and this construct is extremely important when considering the vulnerable Syrian refugee population (Buchanan et al., 2018). As mentioned previously, peer relationships and social networks are important to the process of acculturation, and with that, we must consider the child as a whole.

Although there are many obstacles that immigrant children face when moving to Canada, research has shown that they tend to have better socio-emotional and behavioural skills when compared to Canadian-born children (Beiser et al., 2002; Georgiades et al., 2007; Georgiades et al., 2011). This advantage dissipates over time and across generations and eventually immigrant children are virtually the same as the non-migrant population. This is termed “the immigrant paradox”. It is a well-documented phenomenon, but samples used in this research have neglected the potential differences between immigrant versus refugee populations (Beiser et al., 2002; Georgiades et al., 2007). Syrian refugee children are a particularly vulnerable population because of the pre-migration trauma and socio-emotional challenges they have experienced. On top of that the stressors that come with resettlement, such as language barriers, creating social networks, and learning culture can compound these risk factors and result in negative wellbeing outcomes.

1.10a Parent’s role in Syrian refugee children’s wellbeing

Since a lot of a child’s life is spent with or around their parents, it makes sense that they would be an important factor to consider when looking at children’s socioemotional wellbeing. Specifically, in this context, Syrian refugee children are a particularly vulnerable population because of direct exposure to war and seeing their parents’ responses. Eruyar, et al. (2018) looked at the parental contribution to mental health problems in Syrian refugee children in Turkey. Two hundred sixty-three children (134 girls, M= 11.7 years) completed the Stressful Life Events checklist (SLE) and parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and the General Health Questionnaire 12-item (GHQ-12). From these measures, the researchers found that almost all of the children had had a traumatic experience and 50% of them were suffering from PTSD. Statistical analysis demonstrated that parental psychopathology significantly contributed in predicting children’s general mental health, as well as emotional and conduct problems after controlling for trauma (Eruyar et al., 2018). This study shows that parents are a major factor in children’s socio-emotional wellbeing, especially after such trauma like experiencing the Syrian crisis. Trauma-focused interventions should be available to Syrian
refugee children in Canada to help children cope with previous trauma and limit children’s emotional and behavioural problems.

1.10b Migrant versus Non-Migrant Adaptation

As mentioned in previous sections, there are many obstacles and barriers that refugee children must face as they resettle especially in school. They are in a completely new environment where the language, customs, academic content, and traditions are different. However, despite these challenges, they experience many similar difficulties that non-migrant children experience.

When discussing Syrian refugee children, it is important to look at research concerning other migrant and non-migrant populations in order to better understand the socio-emotional and behavioral wellbeing of this vulnerable population. A recent study in Australia compared a sample of migrant and non-migrant children (M= 16 years of age) to explore school adaptation (Buchanan et al., 2018). This study found that generally, refugee students scored significantly lower on psychological adaptation and poorer socio-cultural adaptation. In addition, students who rated higher levels of perceived discrimination tended to experience more maladaptation. Furthermore, language proficiency was a significant factor for both groups, and increasing English language proficiency showed significant increases in socio-cultural and psychological especially in the refugee group (Buchanan et al., 2018).

A study in America examined how the wellbeing of English Language Learners (ELLs) living in poverty affected their English language acquisition (Winsler et al., 2014). They cited that children with more advanced socio-emotional and behavioral skills at the age of four were more successful in learning English by the end of kindergarten (Winsler et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2014). A similar study conducted in Hamilton, Ontario compared the English proficiency of migrant and non-migrant youth (Georgiades et al., 2017). The results suggest that ELLS are at a higher risk of socio-emotional and behavioral difficulties and that that risk is augmented when combined with barriers surrounding school given language (i.e. English language) and culture. About 15% of migrant youth were identified by teachers as having these wellbeing difficulties compared to only 5% in the non-migrant population (Georgiades et al., 2017). This difference can be attributed to a multitude of factors including high perceived discrimination and loneliness in school, and low sense of belonging with their classmates (Georgiades et al., 2017). The wellbeing of these children is a critical aspect when looking at the whole child and providing structures and supports to allow them to succeed in this new context.
1.11 Present Study

There is a significant gap in the research on Syrian refugees in Canada. Little is known about factors that affect integration into the new context, their language and literacy needs, and overall socio-emotional wellbeing. The present study examines these factors contributing to the successes and challenges in language and literacy development, both in L1 and L2, of Syrian refugee children as they settle in Canada. This study was conducted using a mixed-methods design. I carried out qualitative interviews with the Syrian families and administered a battery of quantitative measures to assess language and literacy skills in L1 and L2. The study aimed to gain understanding of refugee families’ migration and overall integration into Canada and the children’s language and literacy acquisition and socio-emotional development.

1. Methods

2.1 Participants

Five Syrian refugee families from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) participated in this study. Three families were government-sponsored, living in Scarborough, Ontario, and two families were privately-sponsored and lived in Toronto. All five families resettled in Canada within the past two years, and all resided in the GTA. All of the children (N=9, five girls) have been enrolled in public school, and they ranged in age from nine to fifteen. This age range was chosen because it is a critical period for language and literacy development as well as socio-emotional functioning. Within this sample, children completed quantitative literacy and language measures and participated in qualitative interviews, and parents (N=7, five mothers) participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews.

2.2 Measures

Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews with Parents and Older Children (aged 9 and above). Parents and older children were asked open-ended questions about pre-and post-migration experiences and perceptions, educational environments, and socio-emotional wellbeing using a standard question format with answers coded into previously established coding categories derived after pilot interviews with newcomer families (e.g., Fylan, 2005). All interviews were conducted at home, and an Arabic interpreter was present at all interviews to both make the family comfortable as well as translate when necessary. The interview also covered demographic and language environment information adapted from the ALEQ-4. In this section, families were asked about parental education level, languages spoken at home, and home
literacy activities. Parents were also asked to indicate whether their child had diagnosed or suspected difficulties in the areas of speech, language, hearing, ASD, learning, and/or behavior.

**Vocabulary.** The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-IV (PPVT-IV; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) was used to assess breadth of English receptive vocabulary. This test contains 228 test items of increasing difficulty that require children to select one of four pictures that depicts a stimulus word presented orally by the examiner. The test items are divided into 19 sets, each of which consist of 12 items. The discontinue criteria for this measure consisted of eight incorrect responses within a set. Cronbach’s alpha reliability rating was .96. A translated PPVT measure will be used in Arabic to test vocabulary proficiency in the L1.

**Word Reading.** The Letter-Word Identification subtest of the Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement (WJ-III; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001) was used to assess English word reading. This subtest consists of a total of 70 test items. The first 16 test items required children to identify letter names or to point to letters according to the letter name presented orally by the examiner. The remaining 54 test items required children to read aloud words that gradually increased in difficulty. The discontinue criteria for this measure consisted of six incorrect responses within a set. A similar task was administered to assess Arabic word reading from the ALAB.

**Test of Narrative Language (TNL).** English and Arabic oral narratives were elicited with Test of Narrative Language, which is a standardized measure (TNL; Gillam & Pearson, 2004). This test is widely used and has high reliability and validity. The TNL involves eliciting narratives using an “I tell-you tell” (Hadley, 1998) technique in which the examiner first demonstrates a story, asks comprehension questions, then the child produces a similar story. A single complex picture task was used. The “I tell-you tell” method allows collection of narrative comprehension data and provides a model for the child which may result in a longer narrative. An equivalent version for the TNL task was created in Arabic through translation.

**Reading Comprehension.** Reading comprehension was evaluated with the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery-Revised (Woodcock, 1991) in English. The measures was discontinued once the child gave six incorrect responses within a set. A similar reading comprehension test in the ALAB was administered to measure Arabic reading comprehension. For the Arabic version, students were given twenty-five minutes to complete as much of the measure as possible.

**Rapid Automatized Naming (Digits).** In English, the Rapid Automatized Naming—Digits subtest from the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (Wagner et al., 1999)
was administered. The child was presented with six rows of the same six digits arranged in different orders and was asked to name the 36 digits as quickly and accurately as possible. A practice example was given prior to testing to ensure that the child understood the instructions and was able to name the digits. The measure was timed in seconds and used as the raw score in analysis. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for this subtest was 0.75 for age six in the testing manual (Wagner et al., 1999).

Language Environment Questionnaire (ALEQ-4). Parents were given questions as an interview, rating scale answers. Questions touched on, e.g., family demographics, home language and literacy environment, parent language training, and child's premigration schooling. This questionnaire was used to explore the background factors that could influence language and literacy development (Paradis, 2010, 2011). This questionnaire was created from two pre-existing parent interview questionnaires, amalgamated and adapted for this refugee population.

2.3 Procedure

Five families in the GTA participated in home visits where they were interviewed, and the children completed additional quantitative language and literacy measures. Each family received two two-hour visits between March and May 2018. In the first visit, the study was explained and consent forms were distributed, and then all of the semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted. Typically the parents were interviewed first, followed by interviews with the children. During the second visit, quantitative language and literacy measures (oral narrative, receptive vocabulary depth, rapid automatized naming (digits), word reading, and reading comprehension) were administered to the children in both Arabic and English. To facilitate communication with families, an Arabic-speaking “cultural broker” was present at each visit and served as an interpreter for the qualitative interviews with the parents and older children if necessary, as well as administered Arabic measures to the children.

These five Toronto families along with five families in Germany with children ages 6-14 years old completed a subset of the language and literacy measures discussed above, as well as take part in qualitative interviews. This report focuses on the Canadian results.
2. Results

3.1 Quantitative Interview Results

Families’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family 1</th>
<th>Family 2</th>
<th>Family 3</th>
<th>Family 4</th>
<th>Family 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Size</strong></td>
<td>8 (6 children)</td>
<td>7 (5 children)</td>
<td>4 (2 children)</td>
<td>6 (4 children)</td>
<td>6 (4 children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children’s Age Range</strong></td>
<td>5-16 years</td>
<td>3-13 years</td>
<td>9, 12 years</td>
<td>0-10 years</td>
<td>3-15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ages of Children Interviewed</strong></td>
<td>15 (female)</td>
<td>9 (female), 12 (female)</td>
<td>9 (female), 12 (male)</td>
<td>9 (female), 10 (male)</td>
<td>10 (male), 15 (male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interrupted schooling (Years, Months)</strong></td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Place of Origin</strong></td>
<td>Idlib, Syria</td>
<td>Daraa, Syria</td>
<td>Homs, Syria</td>
<td>Halab, Syria</td>
<td>Afrin, Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Residence</strong></td>
<td>Scarborough, Canada</td>
<td>Scarborough, Canada</td>
<td>Scarborough, Canada</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrival to Canada</strong></td>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>February 2016</td>
<td>February 2016</td>
<td>June 2017</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sponsorship (GARs/ BVORs)</strong></td>
<td>GAR</td>
<td>GAR</td>
<td>GAR</td>
<td>BVOR</td>
<td>BVOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maternal Education</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>Grade 6</td>
<td>Grade 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religion</strong></td>
<td>Muslim (Sunni)</td>
<td>Muslim (Sunni)</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Muslim (Shia, Kurdish)</td>
<td>Christian (Kurdish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment (In Canada)</strong></td>
<td>M: n/a</td>
<td>M: n/a</td>
<td>M: baker</td>
<td>M: n/a</td>
<td>Dad: commercial painter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F: n/a</td>
<td>F: car washer</td>
<td>F: shoe repair</td>
<td>F: Furniture maker</td>
<td>Mom: n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: M= Mother, F= Father

Table 1. The table above includes a summary of demographic information for all five families included in this study.

The table above shows the demographics of the families included in this study. It also demonstrates the uniqueness of each refugee family that has resettled in Canada and why it is so important that they are further studied in order to both gain a better understanding of the population, but also to create well-informed programs to support refugees in their transition to Canada. Important differences to note are: type of sponsorship, maternal education, and religion.
These characteristics are important factors to consider when discussing child development and integration into Canada.

The qualitative findings are presented according to analytical categories: (i) L2-Language and Integration, (ii) L1-Preserving Culture and Tradition, and (iii) Support Systems and Sense of Belonging. Verbatim quotes from the study participants are labeled in terms of which family they are from (i.e. F1, F2, F3, F4, and F5), who within the family (i.e; Mother (M), Father (F), child (C)), and for the children, their age will be noted as well at the end of each quote. It is important to note that since parts of the interviews were conducted in Arabic to ensure comprehension of questions and ability to respond, some quotes have been translated from Arabic to English.

(i) L2-Language and Integration

English as a Vehicle of Integration for Children

Being the official language in Canada, English plays an important role in the lives of Syrian refugees. In refugee children, the importance can be seen in the children making friends and going to school. Throughout the child interviews, there was a common theme of having the goal of making friends. They saw learning English as their pathway to make friends and integrate into the classroom. It seems that in their eyes the other benefits of learning English such as academic success, and integrating into society were bonuses while the main goal was to create social circles and “fit in”. The children demonstrated these sentiments when they were asked about their teachers, and when they were asked to give advice for other Syrian refugee children.

The following quotes demonstrate the impact of teacher on children’s English language learning:

“… so my, that ESL teacher, she was a drama teacher. So she would actually, like if I don’t understand the answer, she would act it and like go around and find something to show me what it means.” (Age 12, C, F2)

“Yeah she, her name is [Teacher’s name]… she, she teaches ESL she does a lot of activities like running, she gives us chocolate, and I don’t know… yeah, first I thought it was boring, and she was a bad teacher she give me lots of extra stuff, but that was helpful because she gave me extra stuff.” (Age: 12, C, F3)

These teachers not only helped the children learn English by employing multiple methods of instructions, they also helped with friend-making:

“Yeah, it was easy because there was a lot of people listening to me when the ESL teacher was doing an interview, and I said “football” instead of soccer because in Syria, we say football instead of soccer, then she said, “Soccer? Like do you play with your foot? Or like you run with it” and I was like, “You play with your foot.” She was like, “It’s called
soccer” and I said, “Okay.” Then my other friends were listening to the interview and after that when it was recess time, he was like, “Do you want to play soccer?” and I was like “Yeah, I’ll play soccer!” and we all played soccer.” (Age: 12, C, F3)

“Yeah, she help me sometime when my friends be sad and they doesn’t go with me, the teacher [Teacher’s name], sometime they say you should go with him, he’s new to school, he just here like you, [he] came one year ago, he just came here, he just came to the school, you should go with him, and they just say okay, let’s go.” (Age 10, C, F4)

“One time I went to school and they [the teacher] say, [name] is good, he share food. He tell people to come play with me, every day, I like teachers” (Age 10, C, F4)

“She helps me to make more friends... she says whenever you want to be friend with a girl or a boy, but I will never be friends with a boy. Firs, say your name, Second, ask ‘What’s your name?’, and third, ask if you want to be friends.” (Age 9, C, F4)

When asked about useful advice for incoming Syrian refugee children, participants mentioned the importance of learning English for integration, and shows further evidence of friends as a critical support system to help children integrate into school in Canada.

"... maybe like read more or something? I don’t know, play with English friends... cause you gotta speak, they won’t understand the language that you speak, you gotta speak English, the more you speak English, the more you learn English more” (Age: 12, C, F3)

“So she’s saying that the best advice would be to make friends with native Canadians so they can pick up the language a lot easier.” (Age 15, C, F1; via Arabic Interpreter)

“I would say that don’t be scared, [kids in Canada] are friendly, never say bad words, um I don’t know.. It’s easier to make more friend when you know more English, it was hard cause we didn’t know how to speak that well.” (Age: 9, C, F4)

“Just so there was another boy coming from Syria? What you need is learn English.” (Age 16, C, F5)

Independent of their current English proficiency, all children noted that learning English was extremely important for them, and that anything that helped them with English was of high priority. As mentioned earlier, the children used English as a vehicle toward friendship. The following quotes demonstrate how important their friends were to them, particularly in helping with schoolwork, and in their overall school experience.

"I just ask my friends like ‘What does this mean’, but sometimes with like spelling a word, I don’t know what that means, so I just ask him and he tells me " (Age 15, C, F1; via Arabic Interpreter)

“Maybe like people being absent and not playing soccer with us or like wanting to play basketball, I’d be like ‘basketball sucks, let’s pay soccer!’” Referring to what makes a bad day at school (Age 12, C, F3)
English as a Barrier for Parents

On the other hand, English language acquisition has proven to be much more difficult for Syrian refugee parents. Despite having the opportunity to attend the LINC classes, most parents had only attended a month or so of classes because of the imminent need to find work to financially support their family. Therefore, the parents were not able to get the ESL instruction that they needed, leaving them with English as an obstacle for career advancement and for involvement in their children’s school lives. A prime example of the struggle with English is demonstrated by one of the parent participants. Although he understood the necessity of speaking English, he continued to struggle with learning the language. In spite of the difficulty, he expressed that he continues to try to learn English in the hopes of more employment opportunities and prosperity for his family in the future.

“...Why do you think I’m putting so much work and effort? All this for the sake of learning the language. I want to talk. I need to work and do other things. My profession is in construction.” (F, F1),

“[I work at a car] dealer, dealer, sales. It’s another kind of school...when someone use to speak to me in English, I would run away from him. Not we get into arguments [making a joke about talking too much with people in English]. Now there’s more confidence when speaking in English.” (F, F1)

"Once you learn the language, I can enter the construction program for 3 months or so...but English big barrier, you need to know the language." (F, F1)

A mother expressed similar sentiment with regards to how difficult English has been for her and her husband. At the same time, she realized that opportunities that would become available to her family when she reached a higher level of English proficiency.

“Sometimes, they speak in English and sometimes, they speak their own language. But his boss speaks English and my husband wants to become better in English because we feel like the better we are at it, the more opportunities we'll have.” (M, F4)

Another mother worked at a Lebanese sweets factory, and spoke about her experience with English in that setting. She sometimes felt comfortable to practice her English language skills depending on the person she spoke with.

"I work in a [an Arab supermarket] but I work in factory, not in store. I make just baklava, like sweets. I make more friend there, I teach a little more English. ..yes, somebody with me, English not very good. Like me but sometime different...yes, yes not Canadian but Albanian, somebody from German, different. somebody learn me, somebody teach me, it's okay. I don’t learn too much because there are too many Arabic people there, sometime I talk English sometime Arabic”. (M, F3)
“It is easier talking to Albanian, Sri Lankan friend English because when I talk with Arabic people English I feel I make mistake. When I talk with other people it’s okay, they help me. Sometime when I forget some word, right away she got it. She tell me this one. But Arabic people, sometime I make mistake, I don’t think.” (M, F3)

In the interview with the final family, the mother talked a lot about her eldest son’s struggles at school in Canada. Her lack of English proficiency impacted her ability to be involved in his schooling. Her eldest son would miss school for weeks at a time, and although the school continued to contact her about his son’s absences, she was unable to understand what they were saying. As a result, her son missed several months of school before she was able to get involved.

“...in the other school, after the end of the year, when the school year was coming to an end I didn't know, I would send my kids to school... When I thought he [eldest son] was going/attending school, it turned out that for 3 months he was not going to school. He would leave the house and come back at the end of the school day... For example, if he doesn't come to school for one day, they call me [at the current school]. In the big school [his previous school] they would call as well but we don't know how to speak English.” (M, F5 via Arabic interpreter).

(ii) L1- Preserving Culture and Tradition

For all migrants, acculturation is extremely important with language being a key factor in preserving culture (Schwartz et al. 2010; Schumann, 1986). The families interviewed in this study mentioned that their families maintained their Arabic roots through language, religion, media, and upbringing. All of the families mentioned the importance of speaking their L1 in the home. Among the five Syrian families, two were of Kurdish descent and spoke Kurdish in the home.

Speaking Arabic in the Home

"They offered to put her kids in daycare and she refused because she feels like if she puts them in daycare, she goes to work, then there won’t be any speaking Arabic at home". (M, F2 via Arabic interpreter)

"Depends, on weekends all Arabic except sometimes classes and then but in the regular day, Monday to Friday I’d say like 75% English... [I speak Arabic with] my dad and mom, that’s it, and like my uncle and yeah... I speak sometimes Arabic to my sister, because my mom's like talk Arabic" (Age 9, C, F3)

Speaking Kurdish in the Home

“If I speak to my kids in English, they will forget the Kurdish. And if they forget Kurdish, I'd would've lost those kids because I can't communicate the same way as my kids [meaning speak as fluently in English as her kids do], you know? ... most time, they speak less in Kurdish but I speak to them, tell me to change the topic, try to speak in Kurdish so you don't forget it.”’ (M, F4)
“No, no, no! I wish that they could learn Arabic and English. why? because with Arabic, they can get a job with that. Arabic is actually a lot more useful than Kurdish. Kurdish is only useful inside my home and amongst my family only.” (M, F4)

Another way that families preserve their culture is through religion---They maintained Arabic by reading the Quran. The three Muslim families, specifically the two Sunni Muslim families, mentioned enrolling their children in Quran classes as a way to maintain Arabic.

"After school, [the children] just go straight to the religion class, and after that they just come home and spend time with the family, just watching TV... and they visit their friends sometimes". (M, F2)

“Yes, a little [Arabic reading and writing]. Muhammad writes. In the Masjid, they learn to read and write. A little bit of Arabic though. [To the Mosque] they go, all five of them. [Oldest daughter] takes them and they go to Masjid Al Jannah. Two, two hours per week. Every Friday they go." (M, F1; via Arabic Interpreter)

“I go to the church, it's far away from me, it's in Victoria park. twice every month and she speaks in Arabic but my friends are all Arab, I have 3 friends, they're Kurdish but the rest are all Arab. Everything there in Arabic [at the church]. I go to a church for Arabs, they're mostly from Iraq, Syria, Egypt. We speak to each other in Arabic, there's no English.” (M, F5)

A third way that families preserve their Syrian culture is through Syrian and Arabic media. All of the families used media to maintain their Arabic, to foster closeness within the family, and stay connected to their past. In addition, each family specifically mentioned the television series, “Bab Al-Hara”, a Syrian drama placed in the medieval times. The follow quotes describe how television shows like “Bab Al-Hara”, Arabic cartoons, and movies help them feel connected to Syria and their home culture.

"They learn a lot of Arabic and English letters, so the cartoons are also in Arabic too... And something that she finds very helpful for the kids, is that a lot of these cartoons are in standard Arabic so it helps the 4 year old learn, and master the language." (M, F2 via Arabic Interpreter)

" ...Fortnite [very popular video game], until dad comes, and if he wants to play FIFA with me, I’ll play FIFA and then we eat, after we eat what do we do? After we eat, we sit down to watch some Arabic TV shows because I love Arabic tv shows..." (Age 12, C, F3)

" I just like the old ones Bab Al-Hara, Hatoon. They’re just about Arabic people fighting British people or Turkish people... it helps me imagine stuff more, and actually focus.” (Age 12, C, F3)

“I would tell my daughter to watch TV, watch Syrian dramas like Bab El Hara and there's another program that teaches Arabic, the letters. I don't want them to forget [the Arabic] because everything is useful, the Arabic, Kurdish. I want them to learn everything.” (M, F5 via Arabic Interpreter)
“I watch Bab Al-Hara” (Age 10, C, F4)

“Mostly, I like [TV, Youtube] in English but like my parents always put it in Arabic” (Age 12, C, F2)

(iii) Support Systems and Sense of Belonging

A third major category identified by the Syrian refugee families was the importance of support systems and a sense of belonging. Resettling to a new country is difficult for anyone, but especially for those forced to relocate and build a new home from scratch. Participants cited several different support systems including friends, family, sponsors, and religious communities. Each had a different experience, but all were confident in the importance to their sense of belonging.

“Yeah, well you know, when we first arrived, we were foreigners and being strangers [foreigners] in a country is very hard.” (F, F1)

Family as a Support System:

Most Syrian refugees in Canada have been sponsored by the government. This means that they have been randomly selected from the UNHRC list of most vulnerable refugees. One of the families that was government sponsored, was lucky that the extended family on the mother’s side was also chosen to come to Canada. This has served as huge support in the children’s schooling, health care, and overall wellbeing of the family. These sentiments are demonstrated in the following quotes.

“When I fell, for example when I sit like this now, I feel bad. I go straight away I go to my sister, also I go to my brother. I talk to my sister... Last month, before that 3 month, I was sick. Right away I talk with my sister, she go with me to the hospital. If I am alone, where I leave my kids. Very good.” (M, F3)

“Family support, this is life, you have to move along with it, I’m not going to isolate myself and my kids. I left Syria so I do not isolate myself. The motivation I get from my family and from my husband, that we left Syria we can start a life here.” (M, F3)

"[Starting school was hard in Canada because] I didn’t understand how to do stuff, my aunt helped me, she used to be an English teacher in Syria, she helped me.” (Age 12, C, F3)

Unfortunately, not all families were so lucky, and had to leave their family back in Syria.

“I miss my uncle, I miss my aunt, I have so many friend, I miss them, my grandma, my grandma is die.” (Age 15, C, F1)

Private Sponsors as a Support System:
Other refugees have been brought to Canada via private sponsors. There are Canadian citizens or groups that sponsor families to come to Canada. They also act as a support to the families once in Canada and help them in a variety of ways. Families in this study expressed huge amounts of gratitude to their private-sponsors because of their help in finding housing, enrolling in schools, being involved in the children’s education, finding work and many other aspects of their lives.

“We have sponsors. Last year, they told us if they wanted to put our kids in Arabic classes, I said no. I said no because I wanted my kids to learn English more…” (M, F4)

“When I first came, we stay at the sponsors for about 1 or 2 months.” (M, F4)

“She's saying [that] the one thing that helped integrate them into Canadian culture was the sponsors. They took them in, they helped their kids, they put them in schools, they showed them around, they showed them the stores, how life is like here.” (M, F4 via Arabic interpreter)

“She's saying that whenever they get papers from the governments they ask the sponsors, because they're always involved in our family.” (M, F4 via Arabic interpreter)

“To be honest, when we came we stayed at this place downtown, this street that I can't remember until the sponsors found us a place because when we came, there was no house. And when we came from Lebanon, no one told us there would not be a house. They just said that once you reach the airport, you'll have the keys and you can go and stay in your home. when we came, Wow! we didn't know what sponsors were. when we came we found the sponsor. they were holding up our names.” (M, F4)

“I have more control/supervision over him [her son] and his friends and the second thing is that whatever happens to him, the teacher informs me about it, for example if he did or didn't go to school, where he's going where he's coming from. The sponsor, the person who is sponsoring [Son's name] [informs them of what is happening with him], whatever happens with him at school, we would be notified… and the sponsors that brought us here.” (M, F5)

“[Sponsors helped us] with everything. They brought us here, they picked us up [from the airport], they gave us the home, they brought us things for the home, everything. They also helped us financially. They helped us with the schooling [of the kids].Everything, everything.” (M, F5)

Friends as a Support System:

Outside of sponsors, and family, participants noted friends as important support systems for both children and their parents. Children relied on their friendships with classmates to better their English, help them in class, and to spend their time at recess.

“I like mystery, and also my best friend, she also wants to be a detective too, so like we’ve decided that were going to get a house for ourselves and were going to be detectives together, and we’re going to live our life together.” (Age 12, C, F2)
“Like every recess, we go and play together basketball...” (Age 12, C, F2)

“I don’t think so, I just ask my friends like “what does this mean?” but sometimes with like spelling a word, I don’t know what that means, so I just ask him and he tells me.” (Age 9, C, F3)

When asked the question “What contributes to you having a bad day at school?”, all of the children talked about their classmates as having a huge part in their school satisfaction.

“Um, [if] none of my friends are in school, [or we have] bunch of homework, work, work, work [would be a bad day]” (Age 9, C, F4)

“Sometimes they playing sometimes, and with my friends, sometimes they are absent, they doesn’t play with me” (Age 10, C F4)

“Bad day? Like, no, like I’m not happy when my friend is not coming with me, like they not helping me with the reading.” (Age 10, C, F4)

Parents also mentioned relying on friends for several reasons including creating a sense of belonging, and English language learning.

“... a lot for them [Arabic friends] speak about that as the main problem and we share similar experiences. She has friends here in the building who are also Syrian, and they get together a lot of the things they share are like embarrassing moments where they couldn’t, weren’t able to articulate their thoughts or be able to express their ideas/concerns, or what they want from the other person for example. It’s the inability.” (M, F2 via Arabic Interpreter)

“I have a friend from Albania very good. Better than some Arabic people there. I also have one from Sri Lanka, it's very good yeah, no not bad” (M, F3)

Interviews with the families uncovered some key differences between Syrian refugees, namely Arabic Syrians versus Syrian Kurds, and religion. While living in an Arabic-speaking society, the Kurdish Syrian families lived in very liberal environments where women worked, and gender mixing was normal; both of which were not seen among the other Syrian families. They also expressed that this background has helped them in resettling to Canada, on the contrary the Syrian families found moving to Canada to be a huge culture shock because of the liberal society, lack of gender segregation, and ethnic diversity. These differences shape the migrant experience and suggest the integration supports needed by Kurdish Syrians differ. Religion was another separating factor, namely with respect to language. Muslim families put a high importance in L1 reading and writing maintenance specifically so that children could read the Quran and participate in their Islamic faith. Christian families maintained their L1 to preserve their culture, but were also more open to exposure to L2 in the form of extracurricular activities.
for the children (ie. sports, and dance). Therefore, religion could play an important role in acculturation and integration into Canada.

3.2 Quantitative Language and Literacy Measures

In the second part of this study, children completed a short battery of language and literacy measures in English and Arabic. The following tables summarize the Arabic language results for both the Canadian and German cohorts. The raw scores were converted into standard scores using the norm tables provided with each measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean (Standard Scores)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English RAN</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English PPVT</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Reading Comprehension (WJ-III)</td>
<td>63.67</td>
<td>44.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Word ID (WJ-III)</td>
<td>69.78</td>
<td>32.66</td>
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</table>

Table 2. Means and standard deviations in English measures of Toronto participants.

The table above shows that participants were significantly below the norm in the administered English measures. Raw scores were converted into standard scores in order to facilitate data analysis. Despite the small sample size, a few findings can be deduced from this data set. Across all measures, the mean standard score was more than two standard deviation below the norm their English measures. This suggests poor L2 proficiency among the refugee children.

3. Discussion

This study explored the language, literacy and wellbeing of five Syrian families through a series of interviews and quantitative measures administered to the children. In the qualitative interview portion, central themes included the importance of language in preserving culture and integrating into a new society, support systems and sense of belonging. The quantitative language and literacy measures demonstrated a clear deficit in languages in L2-- the Syrian refugee children were significantly below the norm of their English counterparts as demonstrated in Table 2. These findings provide us with a snapshot of the Syrian refugee perspective, and provide us with some insights on their needs while resettling in Canada.
4.1a Qualitative Interviews

Interviews with parents and children demonstrate that learning and maintaining both languages are important for preserving a home culture while also integrating into a new one. As mentioned in the literature review above, L2-acquisition is important for the integration and adaptation into the host country and imperative for children’s academic performance as well as future job prospects (Birman, 2006; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Nguyen et al., 1999; Bankston & Zhou, 1997; Portes & Schauffler, 1994, Zivkovic, 1994). L1-maintenance is important for maintaining home culture, and family dynamics (Birman, 2006; Trickett & Birman, 2005; Nguyen et al., 1999; Bankston & Zhou, 1997; Portes & Schauffler, 1994, Zivkovic, 1994). In addition, the tension between English and Arabic was very apparent across the interviews and showed a very clear child-parent divide.

Children expressed that learning English was a vehicle for integration into the classroom, making friends, and academic excellence; while parents stressed the importance of maintaining Arabic within the home to preserve their culture. Based on the interviews, these children’s principle priority was to create a social network and integrate into their new lives. The friendship-focus was demonstrated when the children were asked, “What would contribute to having a bad day at school?” All of the children answered either if their friends were not there, or if their friends were not playing with them. It is easy to think of school’s only function to be for learning academic content, but through these interviews, it is evident that for newly arrived Syrian children, the main focus is friendship—building connections. The child participants quickly realized that to make friends at school, they would need to acquire English as a L2 so that they would be able to communicate with their peers and teachers. Children spoke at length about how their favorite teachers were those who helped with their English acquisition, and about how the advice they would pass to incoming refugee children would be learning English beforehand and befriend native Canadians if possible. Even the older children who were having more difficulty with English expressed the importance of learning the L2, not only for school, but also for employment later on.

Conversely, parents were more invested in maintaining the L1, specifically in the interest of preserving their home culture and traditions. All of the parents were invested in maintaining their L1s, but variation in ethnicity and religion affects the method of L1 was maintained. Similar to Canada, Syria has a diverse population who practice various religions and speak different languages—as demonstrated by the sample demographics described in Table 1. For the
Syrian refugee families who participated in this study, religions included Sunni and Shia Muslims, and Christians, and backgrounds included Syrians and Syrian Kurds.

All of the Muslim families, especially the Sunni Muslims put a high emphasis on maintaining reading and writing in Arabic as it is important for reading the Quran. These families sent their children to Quran classes, Arabic music classes, and spoke about the potential of putting their children into Islamic schools when they were older. Their main focus of maintaining language seemed to be in the interest of the Islamic religion. These families also noted that their Mosque was not only a place of prayer but also a social gathering place. Therefore outside of school, children spent a lot of time with other Arabic-speaking children which could affect their L2 development, and potentially facilitate L1 development.

On the other hand, the Christian families maintained their Arabic language to preserve their culture and traditions, not religion. Since Christianity is based in Latin, Arabic is not needed to maintain the religion. Even so, families were still adamant on maintaining their L1 by speaking Arabic in the home, watching Arabic cartoons and television together, and speaking Arabic at family gatherings. One of the families also talked about how they attended a Christian mass, celebrated in Arabic, once a week to give the children increased Arabic exposure.

A surprising finding from this research was the stark differences between Syrians and Kurdish Syrian refugees. The Kurdish families lived in Kurdish areas of Syria, they described their lives in Syria as very liberal---families spoke Kurdish in the home, women worked, many adults had tattoos and genders mixed in everyday life. Coming from this norm, families experienced limited culture shock because other than the novel language, there are many similarities between their lives here in Canada and back home. Moreover, residing in Kurdish areas of Syria shaped their language exposure, Kurdish was spoken in the home, and Arabic was used in society. Therefore, this population’s language profile is markedly different from other Syrians because they are already bilingual. These families expressed how they speaking Kurdish in the home was extremely important for them to maintain the Kurdish language to preserve their culture. While the focus was on maintaining Kurdish, parents also noted the importance of Arabic in Canada, but it was a clear third on the priority of language acquisition/maintenance.

A last insight that was uncovered within the interviews was the necessity of a support system for learning and integration. All of the families expressed their appreciation for their support systems, and a feeling of alienation and “foreignness” without one. Three of the families were government-sponsored in their resettlement while two were privately sponsored. Upon arrival to Canada, all families received ‘Permanent Resident’ status but supports in terms of the
actual resettlement process differed greatly depending on their support systems. Families that were government-sponsored expressed a lack of support in basic resources, while the privately-sponsored families relied on their sponsors heavily. Private sponsors are Canadian citizens or communities that support Syrian refugees in their resettlement in Canada. Sponsors help in school enrollment, liaising with government resources, school teachers, and health care. One mother described how she relied on her sponsor to help with her child who was struggling in high school in Toronto. She would ask the sponsor to help with translating school messages into Arabic so that the mother would know what was going on and be able to help her son. The families also described how their sponsors picked them up at the airport, helped them find housing and schools for the children, and continue to be a constant support for the families, with regular meetings and phone calls.

The government-assisted families lacked this one-one support, but were able to find support systems in other ways. Two families found support from their mosques and the Syrian community around there. One family was fortunate in that their extended family on the mother’s side was also chosen to resettle in Toronto. In this case, the family relied on their extended family for support. The children explained how their aunt was a huge help at the beginning because of her English proficiency from being an English teacher in Syria. Their mother also expressed how her sister and brother were a huge support when she got sick several months before, and how with their help she was able to go to the hospital which she would not have felt comfortable to do otherwise. The children used the family supports, but also spoke about how they find support from their friends at school. Since they spent a lot of their time at school, their social networks greatly impacted their school lives. The Syrian children explained how they relied on their school friends for help in course work and academics, but also for their school experience. When asked about factors contributing to good and bad days at school, all of the children cited their school friends having a huge impact on their school day quality.

4.1b Quantitative Language and Literacy Measures

A small battery of measures were used to asses L1 and L2 language and literally skills, and provided meaningful insights despite the small sample size. Difficulties were apparent across both languages and could be contrasted to the German data. Participants scored several standard deviations below the norm, and some were unable to even complete Arabic literacy measures because of a lack of proficiency in reading and reading comprehension. Half of the participants were not able to complete the Arabic word reading or Arabic reading comprehension tasks.

Despite gaining some spoken-Arabic language proficiency in Syria and its neighboring countries
on their way to Canada, they lacked reading and writing proficiency. This is a huge red flag, especially for the Muslim Syrians since reading Arabic is critical for the Quran.

In the L2-English measures, participants were able to complete all measures, but the older participants experienced significant difficulties, specifically with word reading and reading comprehension. Additionally, all the students reached ceiling at around the same point in the receptive vocabulary measure—meaning they got similar raw scores. This is especially concerning for the other students. It shows that their vocabulary skills are significantly lower than the mean in the Toronto sample (Table 2). This finding was also found in the German cohort with the L2 German vocabulary measure (Table 3). Students were all two to three standard deviations below the mean. The interviews mirrored these findings, older students had limited spoken English abilities and relied on the Arabic interpreter to help them express themselves. This L2 acquisition deficit can be attributed to a number of factors including age—children over ten years old tend to have a much more difficult time with language learning, prior experience, and interrupted education (Mitakidou et al., 2008). Syrian refugee children who were unable to attend school for any period of time missed out on years of language development and academic education, and this interrupted education has put them at a disadvantage in their current Canadian schooling (Mitakidou et al., 2008). In their new context, they are not only trying to learning a new language, but they are also attempting to catch up on material that they missed during their years without education. In-school and in-classroom support would be extremely beneficial for these students in the form of extra homework focusing on vocabulary, Arabic-language support, and general reading could help bridge the gap in education. Teachers play a huge role in this because they are with the students the most, giving in-class support in the form of a teacher aid, or increased ESL time could have a positive impact on the development of middle and high school students especially.

A final interesting finding was the similar L1 deficits in both the Toronto and German cohorts. Despite resettling in two different continents, both samples showed clear deficits in Arabic language proficiency. Some students were unable to complete Arabic literacy measures, namely the Arabic reading comprehension and Arabic word reading tasks. This demonstrated the difficulty in L1 maintenance across refugee populations. This L1 difficulty would be an interesting topic to explore in future studies—exploring the L1 language supports and if they should differ depending on the host country.
4.2 Limitations

The present study makes several important contributions to the literature on Syrian refugees in Canada, however, there are limitations that must be acknowledged. First of all, since all five Syrian refugee families came from the Toronto area, claims are limited to the large metropolitan centers. However, results should be used to fuel future research on Syrian refugees to gain a better understanding of this vulnerable group. Another limitation to this study is the inclusion of an Arabic interpreter. The principle researcher did not have an Arabic background or know how to speak the Arabic language, therefore all interviews were completed with an interpreter present. Most of the children’s interviews were held in English, but the Arabic interpreter was heavily involved with the parent interviews, and with the two interviews with the fifteen-year old children. Working from translations added another layer of potential experimental error to the data, making it more subjective—especially in word choice. For example, in the interviews, when discussing ‘learning English’, the interpreter often translated from Arabic using words like “forced to learn”, and “had to know”. These phrases suggest a certain tone, and attitude from the interviewees. In order to mitigate any miscommunication, the principle researcher and interpreter worked closely together on data transcriptions and analysis. They went over transcriptions multiple times, and worked together on analyzing the themes and categories of the interviews. The teamwork and iterative process ensured that participants’ views were held as accurate as possible.

A final limitation of this study is the small sample size. Five families were involved in interviews, and nine children between the ages of nine and fifteen completed quantitative language and literacy measures. With such a small sample size across such a broad age range, it is impossible to conduct sophisticated statistical analyses or make broad claims about L1 and L2 language and literacy for the different age groups. Again, the purpose of this study was exploratory, to gain a deeper understanding of Syrian refugees in Canada. A mixed measures approach was taken in order to gain as much information as possible about the families included in this pilot study, and to use these results to guide future research on refugee populations.

4.3 Implications and Future Directions

This study explored the Syrian refugee perspective in Toronto. The goals were to explore factors that affect their L1 and L2 language and literacy skills, as well as to gain a deep understanding of their wellbeing with regards to resettlement in Toronto. As the body of knowledge on Syrian refugees is very small, these results can be used to inform future research in this area. Some key topics that require further research are the differences between Syrians
and Syrian Kurds and their implications, the role of religion in language learning, L1 and L2 language supports for Syrian refugees, and the effect of resettlement location (i.e., different regions of Canada, Canada vs Germany) on integration.

Interviews with the families uncovered some key differences between Syrian refugees, namely Arabic Syrians versus Syrian Kurds, and religion as mentioned in the Results section above. Future research should focus on contrasting these two cultures to gain a better understanding of them and their implications on development and integration. The cultural norms of gender segregation and gender mixing could have huge impacts on culture shock upon arrival to Canada, school integration with respect to mixed-gendered classrooms, and participation in extracurricular activities. With respect to religious differences, this study showed how religion (Islam versus Christianity) had a role in both L1 and L2 language development. Researchers could explore this phenomenon and determine religion as a factor of acculturation, development and integration Canada, and also other countries who have welcomed Syrian refugees.

Further research is needed on how resettlement location affects Syrian refugees. Since the civil war, Syrians have been relocated around the world. In this study, the differences between Canada and Germany were briefly discussed, and preliminary results showed that despite the different locations, refugee children were experiencing similar difficulties with respect to their L1 and L2 development. It would be interesting to explore how structural and social factors affect the wellbeing of Syrian refugees, not only between Canada and Germany, but also within Canada. Being such a large country in land size, Canada has seven vastly different climate zones, it would be interesting to explore the effect of climate on integrations through peripheral factors like transportation, access to resources, and ethnic diversity. These factors could greatly impact all aspects of their lives.

This study is a starting point in understanding the variation amongst incoming refugees, as well as their specific needs. It is already understood that specific supports and resources need to be put in place to aid in Syrian refugee integration, but future studies should look into the specific educational and wellbeing of Syrian refugee children, coming from a war-torn country where they have had traumatic experiences and interrupted education, special attention is needed.

Research-based language and academic supports are needed for these Syrian refugee children in order to help them succeed academically and socially in Canada. Questions surrounding curriculum additions, extracurricular needs, and mental health support must be explored to both better understand and support these children. Based on the findings from this
study and previous research, instruction support in the heritage language could be beneficial for this population, especially for the older students who experienced a long interruption in education. Recently, the Swedish government has included heritage language supports for newcomers to the country. Support in over forty different languages are available to students in the form of tutoring and classes in order to support learning, and aid in the L2 development (Cabau, 2014). A similar initiative adapted to the Canadian context could be extremely beneficial to Syrian refugees in the GTA. In terms of extracurricular activities and mental health resources, more resources like the H.appi Camper would help with the acculturation of these refugee children, and lessen the “Summer Slide” that they can experience. H.appi Camper is a Scarborough-based summer camp for Syrian refugees that focuses on helping children’s adjustment socially and culturally as they resettle in Canada. Since many of these families only speak Arabic in the home, an English language instruction component was added to the camp program in order facilitate children’s L2 development throughout the summer—thus minimizing the summer slide (H.appi Camper, 2016). H.appi also employs psychologists and counsellors to help with the mental health of the children. More resources like this, that incorporate acculturation, L2-acquisition, and well-being is crucial for successful integration of Syrian refugee children.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study aimed to examines the factors contributing to the successes and challenges in language and literacy development, both in English, the L2, and Arabic, the L1, of Syrian refugee children as they settle in Canada. The results demonstrate the importance of both L1 and L2 in these families’ lives. L1 and L2 are both necessary for successful development of these Syrian children-- L1 for preserving their home culture, L2 for integrating into Canadian society. Moreover, the results demonstrate the vast gaps in research with respect to this vulnerable population. Further research is necessary to first develop a deep understanding of Syrian refugees, and then to create programs and resources to support these children in their resettlement and future prosperity in their new homes.
References


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Appendix A

Qualitative Child Interview Protocol

Education until now
1. When did you first start school? (Prompt: In Syria? Etc)
   a. What was school like in Syria?
2. What did you learn about in school in Syria?
3. How about outside of school, did you do any other activities? (Prompt: sports, Qur’an, etc?)
4. When did you first start going to school in Canada?
   a. What was your first day of school like?
   b. What did you notice first at school in Canada?
   c. Is going to school here different from your old school? How so?
   d. Did people treat each other differently? How?
   e. Is the classroom different? Do you learn differently?
5. Things that you learned at school in ____, do you think they’re helpful for your schooling here? How so?
   a. Is the school content the same?
   b. How about school dynamics (ie class rooms, teachers, grades, etc)
6. In Canada, do you learn anywhere besides at school? (Prompt: extra curriculars, camps, community centers, sports, dance, Qur’an, etc)
   a. Have you made friends at these activities?
   b. Do you speak in English or Arabic? Why?

Typical School Day
1. Could you describe to me your typical school day? (Prompt: yesterday)
   a. What makes a day especially good?
   b. How about what makes a day at school bad?
   c. And so having a good or bad day, does it depend on your or also on other people?
2. How do you get along with your classmates?
   a. How about with your teacher?
3. Are there things that are easier here than in your home country?

Informal Schooling and Extracurricular activities
1. What do you do in your free time?
   a. What do you do when you get home from school?
   b. Follow up: Do you think you are learning something there?
2. Are there people that you would say helped you a lot, and that you have learned a lot from them? (Prompt: what about from the h.appi camp?)
   a. Follow up: Please tell me about this person/ people.
   b. What did you learn from them?
   c. Why have you learned a lot from them?
   d. What about the situation made it easier to learn?

Easy/Difficult Learning Situations
1. What is your easiest subject at school?
a. What makes that subject so easy?
b. Does it have to do with your teacher? Classmates?
c. How do they make it easier to learn?
2. What kind of thing do you find easy to learn?
   a. Can you describe why this is easy to learn?
   b. What is the situation surrounding this?
3. Are there times where it is really easy for you to learn and achieve something?
   a. Please describe that kind of situation.
4. Can you tell me something that you accomplished/achieved that you are really proud of?
   a. How did you achieve [whatever they said above]?
   b. What and who helped you?
5. What is your hardest subject in school?
   a. Why is it so difficult?
   b. What about it is difficult to learn?
   c. What would you need to make it easier to learn?
   d. Who could help you with this?
   e. How could they help you?
6. Do you think that other young people have this same difficulty with [answer to #5]?
   a. Why do you think that?

Future Questions
1. If tomorrow, another young person arrives here in “Canada”, what piece of advice would you give to that person?
2. If you were the leader of Canada, what would you change to make things better for you?
   a. What are one or two laws that you would make.
3. If you could be anything you wanted to be in the future, what would that be?
   a. What is easy about becoming that?
   b. What is going to be hard about becoming that?
   c. What do your parents think about that plan?
4. Is going back to your home country of origin something you think about?

Demographic Questions (if necessary)
1. Where are you from?
2. How old are you?
3. How long have you been in Canada?
   a. With what status? (ie. Refugee status, permanent resident)
4. Is your family here? (or somebody else that supports you)
5. How was it when you came to Canada?
   a. How long did it take you?

Concluding Questions
1. I think that is all the questions that I have for you, is there anything else that is important to you and that we haven’t talked about?
   a. Do you have any questions for me?
2. Can I contact you if I have some more questions about what you said during this interview?

Thank you
Appendix B

Qualitative Parent Interview Protocol

“Life back in Syria”
1. Could you tell me about your upbringing?
2. How was your schooling in Syria?
   a. What was the learning environment like?
   b. Did you get a lot of homework?
   c. What is your opinion on the school system there?
3. What did you want to be when you were in Syria?

Transition to Canada
1. What was the hardest part of coming to Canada?
2. What stood out to you about Canada?
3. What surprised/shocked/took you off guard about Canada when you got here?
4. How is life in Canada?
   a. English classes
   b. Working life/employment
      i. What have you learned? (from: coworkers, being at work, hard skills, soft skills)
      ii. What have you been able to teach/bring to this experience
   c. What do you want to be in the future?
   d. If you were the leader…
   e. If another Syrian came to Canada today, what advice would you give them?
5. Tell me about a typical day of yours. (Schedule of the day)
6. Could you tell me about the language environment in the home? (use the ALEQ-4 as a template for the questions)
   a. How much English/Arabic spoken with children?
      i. Religious events?
   b. What do you do with your family after school?
      i. On weekends?

Life in Canada and Children’s Schooling
1. Tell me about your new life in Canada.
   a. Friends?
   b. Family?
2. What is a typical day like for you?
3. What do you think about your children’s education?
   a. How are they doing in school?
   b. How is their language development?
      i. English?
      ii. Arabic?
   c. What is different about school here compared to Syria?

Future Questions
1. If tomorrow, another Syrian family arrived here in Canada, what piece of advice would you give them?
2. If you were the leader of Canada, what would you change to make things better for you and your family?
   a. What are one or two laws that you would make.
3. If you could be anything you wanted to be in the future, what would that be?
   a. What is easy about becoming that?
   b. What is going to be hard about becoming that?
   c. What do your parents think about that plan?
4. Is going back to your home country of origin something you think about?

**Demographic Questions (if necessary)**
1. Where are you from?
2. How old are you?
3. How long have you been in Canada?
   a. With what status? (ie. Refugee status, permanent resident)
4. Is your family here? (or somebody else that supports you)
5. How was it when you came to Canada?
   a. How long did it take you?

**End: Please tell me about your thoughts on Canadian culture.**
1. What do you find beneficial about this culture?
2. What is do you dislike about the culture?
3. What opportunities do you get here that you did not get back home?
4. What do is Canada “missing”?

*Finish with demographic questions that were missed.*

**Concluding Questions**
1. I think that is all the questions that I have for you, is there anything else that is important to you and that we haven’t talked about?
   a. Do you have any questions for me?
2. Can I contact you if I have some more questions about what you said during this interview?

Thank you
Appendix C

T-Scores for German PPVT in German Cohort

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Raw Score</th>
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</table>

Table 3. T-values for the PPVT-4 (German adaptation by Lenhard et al. 2015)

Note: values displayed above are t-values, where the bell curve is centered around M=50, with a standard deviation of 10.

The table above shows the t-values from the PPVT administered in the German cohort. The data shows that all but one participant obtained a value T ≤ 27, which is over two standard deviations below the norm. Therefore, the German cohort also appeared to be delayed in their German L2 development.