

Research Article

French Immersion Programs for Refugee-Background Students in Canada: Examining the Ideologies Shaping Policy, Inclusion, and Support

Stephen Davis * 
University of Regina

Received: November 23, 2023
Accepted: February 20, 2024
Published: October 14, 2024
doi: [10.5281/zenodo.13931929](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13931929)

Historically, French immersion (FI) programs have served predominantly English-speaking, Canadian-born students and families in their efforts to learn both of Canada's official languages, French and English. Nevertheless, student demographics are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse because of growing migration to Canada. Researchers have found that multilingual families and learners are often highly motivated to learn French in Canada (Davis et al., 2019, 2021; Dagenais & Jacquet, 2000; Dagenais & Moore, 2008) and that such students tend to develop strong language proficiency in FI programs (Bourgoin & Dicks, 2019; Knouzi & Mady, 2017; Mady, 2015). However, some educators believe that FI programs are inappropriate for multilingual learners (Davis, 2019; Mady & Masson, 2018; Roy, 2015). Furthermore, the experiences of refugee-background students in FI programs remain largely unexamined

(Davis, 2023). In the present transformative mixed-methods study, I examine the perspectives and ideologies of educators with respect to refugee-background students in FI programs in eight school divisions across the Canadian Prairies. Drawing from survey responses (N=126) and interviews (N=40), I focus on the ideologies of FI educators in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta pertaining to four key areas: 1) diversity in FI programs; 2) inclusion in FI programs; 3) gatekeeping practices in FI programs; and 4) FI policy. Adopting the critical theoretical perspective of sociolinguistics for change (Auger et al., 2007; Dalley & Roy, 2008; Roy, 2020), I advocate for school divisions to implement five recommendations to better include and support refugee-background students in FI programs across Canada.

Keywords: education; French immersion; inclusion; language ideology; language policy

1. INTRODUCTION

French immersion (FI) programs have traditionally served predominantly Canadian-born, English-speaking students in their efforts to learn Canada's two official languages, French and English. However, student demographics are changing rapidly because of increased migration to Canada, and many newcomer, multilingual families are interested in FI for their children. Researchers have found that newcomer, multilingual families are often highly motivated to learn both French and English in Canada and that multilingual learners tend to develop strong abilities in both languages in FI programs (Bourgoin & Dicks, 2019; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Dagenais & Jacquet, 2000; Dagenais & Moore, 2008; Davis et al., 2019, 2021; Knouzi & Mady, 2017; Mady, 2007, 2015). Notwithstanding the positive findings pertaining to motivation and language

* Stephen Davis, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, 3737 Wascana Parkway, Regina, SK S4S 0A2, Canada, stephen.davis@uregina.ca

learning, some educators believe that FI programs are inappropriate for multilingual learners and encourage such families to enroll their children in English programs, erroneously believing that such students must develop English language proficiency before learning French (Davis, 2019; Mady & Masson, 2018; Roy, 2015). Furthermore, school divisions often lack policies to ensure the inclusion of multilingual learners in FI programs; consequently, such students are often excluded from immersion programs as a result of the misguided perspectives of some educators across Canada. Therefore, the cognitive, social, and political benefits of learning French and English in immersion programs are disproportionately bestowed upon white, English-speaking, Canadian-born students, whereas racialized, newcomer, and multilingual learners sometimes do not have access to such benefits.

In this study, I examine the perspectives and the underlying ideologies of FI educators with respect to refugee-background learners in eight school divisions across three provinces that constitute the Canadian Prairies: Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. In this paper, I focus on the perspectives of educators on issues of inclusion and policy in FI programs. First, by way of introduction, I present important terms and definitions for this research. Second, I synthesize previous research regarding policy and the inclusion of multilingual learners in FI programs. Third, I contextualize this paper within the theoretical framework of sociolinguistics for change. Fourth, I discuss the research questions, methodological approach, school divisions, and participants in this study. Fifth, I present the findings of this research as they pertain to the themes of diversity, inclusion, gatekeeping, and policy. Sixth, I discuss the contributions of this study and the implications thereof for future inquiry. Finally, I advance recommendations for school divisions to implement more equitable and inclusive practices and policies for refugee-background students and multilingual learners more broadly in FI programs across Canada.

2. MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS AND REFUGEE-BACKGROUND STUDENTS: ILLUMINATING KEY TERMS

Throughout the history of FI research in Canada, several terms have been employed to represent students whose home languages are neither English nor French, such as *minority-language students*, *English language learners*, and *allophones*. Whereas such terms have been valuable for examining the experiences of students with diverse linguistic backgrounds, the above categories have also been problematic because they often lack clear definitions and reflect deficit ideologies. For instance, the term *English language learner* is widely used amongst educators and researchers, but I believe this term perpetuates a deficit framing of such learners, defining students by the language they are deemed to not speak proficiently and ignoring the wealth of linguistic knowledge and learning resources they bring to the classroom (Bale et al., 2023; Byrd Clark, 2008; Marshall & Moore, 2018). In the present study, I use *multilingual learners*

to represent all students, Canadian-born and newcomer alike, who speak multiple languages and language varieties in Canada. Multilingualism is itself a notoriously difficult concept to define (Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Marshall & Moore, 2018). In my estimation, *multilingual learners* is a valuable, albeit imperfect, term because it rejects deficit discourses by emphasizing the language learning experiences, abilities, assets, and resources of learners with diverse linguistic repertoires (Byrd Clark, 2008).

In terms of the definitions for *refugee*, the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner for Refugees defines refugees as follows: “A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular group” (UNHCR, 2001). Therefore, refugees represent a specific class of immigrants who are forced to migrate to new countries under urgent circumstances and are seldom able to select their destination countries. Recent examples of widespread migrations of refugee-background families arriving in Canada include asylum seekers fleeing from Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Ukraine (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2020, 2022). The term *refugee-background student* is increasingly widely used in refugee research to refer to students who have refugee experiences, recognizing that such experiences represent only part of the complex and multifaceted identities of the learners (Ghadi et al., 2019; Massing et al., 2023).

Finally, for the purposes of this paper, the term *perspective* represents an explicitly stated point of view or opinion of a FI educator. In contrast, *ideology* signifies an implicit, underlying, and often unexamined system of beliefs in which the perspective is rooted. Ideologies are socially and politically constructed, transmitted from generation to generation, and are often unquestioned and taken for granted by the dominant and privileged communities that benefit from the belief systems (Roy, 2015, 2020).

3. MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS IN FI: POLICY AND INCLUSION

Researchers have explored different areas of study with respect to multilingual learners in FI programs in Canada (Davis, 2023; Mady, 2007; Mady & Turnbull, 2012). For instance, multilingual families are often highly motivated to provide French-English bilingual education opportunities for their children, both because they believe that official-language bilingualism will offer employment opportunities in the future and because many multilingual families perceive French-English bilingualism as a key element of Canadian identity (Dagenais, 2003; Dagenais & Berron, 2001; Dagenais & Jacquet, 2000; Davis et al., 2019, 2021). Moreover, multilingual learners are often highly motivated to learn both French and English in FI programs (Dagenais, 2008; Dagenais & Moore, 2008; Moore, 2010; Prasad, 2015; Sabatier et al., 2013). Additionally, multilingual learners tend to learn both French and English effectively in

FI programs, developing strong reading abilities and literacy skills (Bourgoin & Dicks, 2019; Moore, 2010). Furthermore, newcomer, multilingual learners have been found to outperform Canadian-born, multilingual learners and Canadian-born, English-speaking students in FI programs across a variety of measures of French language learning proficiency (Knouzi & Mady, 2017; Mady, 2015). It is therefore deeply problematic that multilingual learners are often excluded from FI programs because of the perspectives and the underlying ideologies of educators, as well as the lack of equitable and inclusive policy (Arnett & Mady, 2018; Davis et al., 2019, 2021; Mady, 2016; Mady & Black, 2011; Mady & Masson, 2018; Mady & Turnbull, 2010; Roy, 2015, 2020). Researchers have found that educators in different educational programs in Canada are sometimes unaware of the challenges facing refugee-background students and sometimes hold assumptions and beliefs about such learners that are rooted in deficit ideologies (Gagné et al., 2017; Kanu, 2008; MacNevin, 2012; Stewart, 2012; Zaidi et al., 2021). While no known study has examined the perspectives of educators pertaining to refugee-background students specifically in FI programs, several researchers have explored the experiences of multilingual learners more broadly in such programs. In the literature review below, I synthesize research pertaining to French language education policy and the inclusion of multilingual learners in FI programs to demonstrate the extent to which such students and families are often excluded from FI programs across Canada.

3.1 French Language-in-Education Policy

The area of language education is shaped by a complex intersection of policy in Canada; notably, official language policy is created at the federal level, whereas educational policy is determined at the provincial and territorial level (Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008). First, as it pertains to federal language policy, the Government of Canada promotes bilingualism in the country's two official languages, French and English. To this end, several documents created by the Government of Canada discuss diverse initiatives to increase official-language bilingualism and the goal of doubling the number of citizens who are bilingual in French and English across Canada (Government of Canada, 2003, 2008, 2013). Notwithstanding this ambitious goal, such policy documents do not include planning for official-language bilingualism for multilingual learners; consequently, such learners are often encouraged to learn one, but not both, of Canada's official languages (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). In summary, the federal government has developed initiatives for French-English bilingualism but has effectively ignored multilingual learners in official-language policy and planning in Canada (Galiev, 2013; Mady & Turnbull, 2010).

As it pertains to provincial and territorial policy for official-language bilingual education, such policies vary significantly across Canada. Specifically, it is compulsory to learn French in the provinces of Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Quebec; alternatively, it is mandatory to learn an additional language, but not necessarily French, in British Columbia and the Yukon; finally, it is optional to learn French in

Alberta, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan (Mady & Turnbull, 2010). Thus, students do not necessarily have the right to learn French as an additional language across Canada (Mady & Black, 2011). Furthermore, even in provinces where learning French is ostensibly mandatory, multilingual learners are frequently exempted and excluded from French language programs (Arnett & Mady, 2018; Mady, 2007, 2012; Mady & Turnbull, 2007, 2010). Therefore, the existence of a policy pertaining to French language education does not necessarily guarantee the inclusion of multilingual learners.

For instance, in the Toronto District School Board, white, English-speaking, and Canadian-born students are overrepresented in FI programs (Sinay, 2010; Sinay et al., 2018). In the same context, Kunnas (2019) found that FI policy, curricular documents, and promotional materials “contribute to the construction of an English-speaking, White, middle-class, Torontonians/established resident as the typical FI student” (p. 85). Thus, although some provinces might have policies to ensure the provision of official-language bilingual education, the haphazard and often discriminatory implementation of such policies at the school board level (as exemplified in curricular documents and promotional materials) often results in the exclusion of newcomer, racialized, and multilingual learners from FI programs. While some educators might believe that they are acting in the best interests of multilingual learners by exempting them from FI programs, erroneously believing that learning two additional languages simultaneously is overly burdensome for such students and an obstacle to remove from their learning, this perspective is rooted in deficit ideologies about multilingual learners and results in the exclusion of such learners from bilingual learning opportunities.

3.2 Inclusion of Multilingual Learners in FI

In the absence of policies effectively ensuring the inclusion of multilingual learners in FI programs across Canada, the perspectives of educators play a critical role in whether such students are included. Mady and Masson (2018) examined the perspectives of FI principals in Ontario and observed contradictory beliefs with respect to the inclusion and language learning of multilingual students in FI programs. Additionally, principals cited a variety of gatekeeping practices with multilingual learners in FI programs, often basing such practices on personal experience, rather than policy or research. Thus, the perspectives and gatekeeping practices of FI principals can vary considerably, even within the same school boards.

Researchers have also explored the perspectives of FI teachers with respect to the inclusion of multilingual learners. Lapkin et al. (2006) found that many French language educators considered the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms across Canada to be their greatest teaching challenge. Moreover, Mady (2013) investigated the perspectives of educators in different French language programs in Ontario and concluded that FI teachers were generally less inclusive of multilingual

learners than were core French teachers, suggesting the existence of bias amongst some FI educators towards certain students. Bourgoin (2016) found that some teachers in New Brunswick espoused the view that FI would be overly challenging for multilingual learners, arguing that such learners should focus solely on learning English, rather than learning both official languages. Similarly, Mady (2016) reported that some FI kindergarten teachers in Ontario believed that multilingual learners should sometimes be excluded from FI programs because they believe that learning English and French simultaneously will be overly difficult for such students. Subsequently, Arnett and Mady (2018) found that some novice teachers in Ontario felt that FI programs were inappropriate for multilingual learners.

More recently, I explored the perspectives of FI educators in Saskatchewan and found that although most teachers and principals were inclusive of multilingual learners, some believed that such students should focus on learning English before studying in FI programs in the context of this English-dominant province (Davis, 2019). Moreover, some educators expressed that FI programs were inappropriate for refugee-background students who had recently migrated from Syria because of the diverse challenges, real or perceived, that they believed such learners were facing in Canada (Davis et al., 2019, 2021). In summary, FI educators across Canada espouse divergent perspectives pertaining to the inclusion of multilingual learners in FI programs, which are sometimes rooted in the widespread but unsubstantiated ideology that immersion programs are more appropriate for English-speaking students than for multilingual learners.

4. SOCIOLINGUISTICS FOR CHANGE

The present study is situated in the theoretical framework of sociolinguistics for change, rooted in the research paradigm of critical theory. Drawing inspiration from the perspective of critical sociolinguistics (Heller, 2003), Auger et al. (2007) first developed sociolinguistics for change as a critical framework that would merge theory and practice in educational contexts. More specifically, Auger et al. (2007) perceived critical sociolinguistics as valuable in some contexts yet lacking in practicality for working with educators to effect change in schools. Sociolinguistics for change seeks to facilitate collaboration between researchers and educators to critically investigate and challenge unexamined ideologies in order to promote social change in language education contexts (Dalley & Roy, 2008). In keeping with the tradition of critical theory as a research paradigm, sociolinguistics for change represents a valuable theoretical framework for contributing to the advancement of knowledge and to meaningful social change.

Sociolinguistics for change has also proven to be a valuable theoretical perspective for examining language ideologies in FI programs. For instance, Roy and Galiev (2011) investigated the discourses of FI students and educators in Alberta pertaining to language learning and bilingualism. Moreover, Roy (2010, 2012) adopted a

sociolinguistics for change perspective to examine the discourses of FI students with respect to their language learning, uncovering a widespread ideology amongst FI learners that their linguistic varieties are less legitimate than those of imagined ‘native speakers.’ Subsequently, Roy (2015) examined the discourses and ideologies of FI educators, students, and parents regarding language learning, bilingualism, and multilingualism. Roy (2015) found that some FI teachers believed that immersion programs would be overly difficult for multilingual learners and that such students should focus on learning English.

In the present study, I seek to build upon the groundbreaking work of Roy (2010, 2012, 2015, 2020) by adopting the theoretical framework of sociolinguistics for change to explore the perspectives and ideologies of educators with respect to refugee-background learners in FI programs across the Canadian Prairies and to advocate for systemic change in such programs across Canada. In my estimation, sociolinguistics for change is an especially valuable theoretical framework for this research because it merges the two objectives of examining the perspectives and ideologies of FI educators and of advocating for more inclusive and equitable FI programs in the future. Through this research, I strive to contribute not only to a greater understanding of the perspectives and ideologies of FI educators across the Canadian Prairies, but also to work alongside educators to advocate for systemic change to include and support refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs throughout Canada.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study examines the perspectives of educators across several themes pertaining to refugee-background students in FI programs across the Canadian Prairies and the ways in which these perspectives are shaped by deeper social and linguistic ideologies. To the best of my knowledge, no study has examined the perspectives and ideologies of educators with respect to refugee-background students specifically in Canadian FI programs (Davis, 2023). This represents an important gap in FI research, insofar as educators might perceive the suitability of FI programs differently for refugee-background students than for other newcomer and multilingual learners. As a former FI teacher and current French language teacher educator in Saskatchewan, I have encountered several divergent perspectives amongst educators regarding the suitability of FI programs for multilingual learners. In a previous study, I explored the perspectives of educators and newcomer parents with respect to multilingual learners in FI programs in Saskatchewan, including refugee-background students who had recently migrated to Canada from Syria (Davis et al., 2019, 2021).

In the present study, I focus more specifically on the perspectives and ideologies of educators pertaining to refugee-background students in order to advocate for the inclusion and support of such learners in FI programs. My reasons for conducting this study across the Canadian Prairies are twofold. First, this region of Canada is generally

underrepresented in FI research (Arnott et al., 2019). Second, the Canadian Prairies are an especially English-monolingual region of Canada with low levels of French-English bilingualism relative to other provinces and territories (Statistics Canada, 2021; Sterzuk & Shin, 2021); therefore, the perspectives of FI educators in this unique sociolinguistic context are particularly interesting. In the present paper, I focus on the perspectives and ideologies of educators regarding diversity, inclusion, gatekeeping, and policy in FI programs in order to illuminate and problematize the extent to which refugee-background students are excluded from FI programs. In light of this focus, two research questions are pertinent for the present article:

1. What are the perspectives of educators with respect to the inclusion, policy, and gatekeeping practices pertaining to refugee-background students in FI programs across the Canadian Prairies?
2. What are the underlying ideologies of educators that shape the above perspectives of FI educators across the Canadian Prairies?

5.1 Transformative Mixed-Methods Study

My research design for the present study is a transformative mixed-methods study (Creswell, 2014). Rooted in the paradigm of critical inquiry, transformative mixed-methods approaches generate qualitative and quantitative data with the goals of advancing intellectual knowledge and advocating for social change (Creswell, 2014). In terms of the present study, I draw from survey and interview data concurrently to contribute not only to a greater intellectual understanding of the perspectives and ideologies of FI educators, but also to advocate for meaningful and systemic changes to better include and support refugee-background students and all multilingual learners in FI programs. As it pertains to data analysis, I interpreted survey and interview data simultaneously, triangulating qualitative and quantitative data to identify common findings across both research methods. To summarize, the research approach for the present study represents a transformative mixed-methods design, situated in the critical theoretical framework of sociolinguistics for change and within the paradigm of critical research.

5.2 Participants

I invited FI educators from several school divisions in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta to participate in this research. More specifically, I applied for ethics approval and requested permission to conduct research within many school divisions across all three provinces. Subsequently, I invited individual educators from the eight consenting school divisions, both via email and through presentations in school staff meetings. Educators from eight school divisions across the three provinces participated in this

study, including four in Saskatchewan, two in Manitoba, and two in Alberta. In terms of eligibility to participate, I invited all FI elementary and secondary teachers, all FI principals and vice principals, and all central office staff members to complete the survey and participate in interviews. Furthermore, all interested and consenting educators were accepted as participants and could participate in the survey, in an interview, or in both research methods.

As it pertains to ethical considerations, FI educators were provided information about the research, were free to refrain from answering certain survey or interview questions and were free to withdraw participation from either or both research methods. In total, the survey was completed by 126 educators. Although not all survey respondents selected their home provinces, 54 participants indicated that they worked in Saskatchewan, 40 in Manitoba, and 23 in Alberta (Table 1). Furthermore, as it pertains to teaching positions, survey participants who indicated their positions included 94 FI elementary and secondary teachers, 19 FI principals and vice principals, and four central office staff members (Table 2).

In terms of interview participants, I interviewed 40 FI educators, including 26 from Saskatchewan, 10 from Manitoba, and four from Alberta (Table 3). As it pertains to the teaching positions of interview participants, 26 were FI elementary and secondary teachers, seven were FI principals and vice principals, and seven were central office staff (Table 4). In summary, the majority of survey and interview participants were FI teachers, but principals and central office staff were also represented in both research methods of this study.

Table 1. Survey participants by province

Province	Number	Percentage
Saskatchewan	54	46.15%
Manitoba	40	34.19%
Alberta	23	19.66%

Table 2. Survey participants by position

Position	Number	Percentage
Teachers	94	80.34%
Principals	19	16.24%
Central Office Staff	4	3.42%

Table 3. Interview participants by province

Province	Number	Percentage
Saskatchewan	26	65%
Manitoba	10	25%
Alberta	4	10%

Table 4. Interview participants by position

Position	Number	Percentage
Teachers	26	65%
Principals	7	17.5%
Central Office Staff	7	17.5%

5.3 Research Methods and Analysis

First, in terms of survey methods, I created a bilingual, online survey using Qualtrics software and distributed the link to participants via email. The survey included three demographic questions and 20 items using a Likert scale of measurement, assessing the degree to which participants agreed or disagreed with different statements. The survey items were organized into the following four categories: first, statements about the suitability of FI programs for refugee-background students; second, statements about different French language programs offered within the school division; third, statements about the language learning of refugee-background students in FI programs; and fourth, statements about inclusion, policy, and resources in FI programs. All statements were provided in both French and English, and participants were invited to add optional comments in either or both languages. The development of survey items was informed by my reading of previous survey-based research with FI educators pertaining to multilingual learners (Davis et al., 2019; Lapkin et al., 2006; Mady & Masson, 2018). Additionally, the survey was first piloted with a small number of educators who provided feedback on survey design and on the phrasing of certain items. As it pertains to data analysis, I performed descriptive statistical analysis to determine means and trends in survey responses.

Moreover, I also conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with FI educators in the same eight school divisions. Educators chose whether to be interviewed in French or in English, as well as whether to be interviewed in person or via Zoom. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 60 minutes. I created several interview questions, drawing from some of the same categories as the survey items, including introductory questions about participants, questions about student diversity in FI programs, questions about refugee-background students in FI programs, questions

about FI policy, and questions about supports and resources in FI programs. Nevertheless, the exact questions varied from one interview to another, depending on the interests and experiences of the individual educators, as is the nature of semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, I transcribed all 40 interviews in full, shared transcripts with participants for review and for member checking, assigned pseudonyms, and used Nvivo 12 software to code transcripts to identify trends in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gibbs, 2007). Throughout the interview transcription and coding process, I revised and collapsed several codes, which led to eight distinct codes. In this paper, I present the findings pertaining to four specific codes: diversity, inclusion, gatekeeping, and policy. Findings related to the remaining four codes – suitability of FI programs, language learning, challenges facing refugee-background students, and resources in FI programs – are presented elsewhere (Davis, 2024). Finally, I triangulated the various data by juxtaposing survey results with interview transcripts to identify common findings across quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). More specifically, I cross-referenced the coded interview transcripts to identify findings that aligned with specific survey items. In this way, the quantitative survey data provides a broad overview of the perspectives of a large number of educators, whereas the qualitative interview data enables a more nuanced exploration of the same findings in greater depth.

6. RESULTS

In the present transformative mixed-methods study (Creswell, 2014), I examine the perspectives and ideologies of educators as they pertain to refugee-background students in FI programs across the Canadian Prairies and the underlying ideologies that shape these perspectives. Through analysis and coding of interview transcripts, descriptive statistical analysis of survey responses, and data triangulation of both methods, I identified several common findings relating to FI policy and the inclusion of refugee-background learners. In this section, I draw from quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data to present the perspectives of FI educators with respect to four common areas across both research methods: 1) diversity in FI programs; 2) perspectives about the inclusion of refugee-background students in FI programs; 3) gatekeeping practices in FI; and 4) perspectives on policy for refugee-background learners in FI programs. In cases of excerpts of educator interviews that were conducted in French, I provide the original French interview transcription, followed by my own English translation.

6.1 Diversity in FI

The first findings from the present study pertain to the perspectives of educators with respect to student diversity in FI programs. All interview participants across the eight

school divisions espoused the view that FI programs were becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, discussing the growing number of racialized, multilingual, newcomer learners. Although some educators stated that they had not personally taught refugee-background learners, all participants expressed having taught newcomer students in FI programs. One teacher shared that at least half of her students were newcomer learners and that such students tended to learn multiple languages effectively in FI programs, as per the following:

Je dirais qu'au moins la moitié ou plus que cela était des nouveaux-arrivants dans la classe et parlaient plusieurs langues, en effet, et je pense que le programme d'immersion était fantastique pour eux parce qu'ils savaient déjà d'autres langues et ils pouvaient parler une langue à la maison, une autre langue avec leurs amis, et puis à l'école, c'était le français, et c'était juste génial de voir comment leurs cerveaux fonctionnaient et ils pouvaient changer de langues facilement. (Mallory, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

I would say that at least half or more than that were newcomers in the class and spoke many languages, actually, and I think that the immersion program was fantastic for them because they already knew other languages and they could speak one language at home, another language with friends, and then at school, it was French, and it was just awesome to see how their brains worked and they could change languages easily. (Mallory, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

Moreover, one survey item measured the extent to which educators perceived FI programs as suitable for newcomer learners; this question yielded mostly affirmative (76.1%) responses (Figure 1). Additionally, another survey item assessed the perceived suitability of FI for refugee-background learners; this item generated similar results, albeit slightly fewer positive responses (73.1%) and more neutral responses (20.4%) than for the previous survey item (Figure 2). Furthermore, some educators expressed that FI programs were not only becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse, but also more diverse in terms of special needs and abilities. One principal shared the following about changing student demographics in FI programs:

The face of French immersion has changed significantly, and that's a good thing. More culturally rich and diverse in ethnicity, culture, and religion ... And also, the needs... If they are special needs, if they are students who have autism, students who have cerebral palsy, these are all important things that every child should have the opportunity to learn in the language that they choose to learn in. We may not have seen as much diversity maybe a decade ago, whereas now, we absolutely see this, and this is a wonderful thing for the French immersion schools in our city. (Linda, Principal, Manitoba)

In summary, all interview participants expressed that FI programs were becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse as a result of the growing number of newcomer learners. Moreover, some participants also noted the growing diversity of special needs and learning abilities, suggesting that this form of student diversity is also increasing in FI programs.

Figure 1. I believe that French immersion is a suitable program for newcomer students

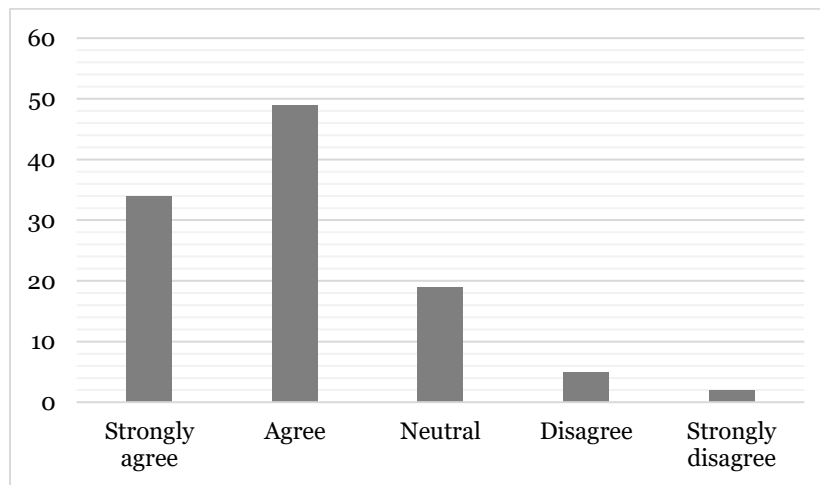
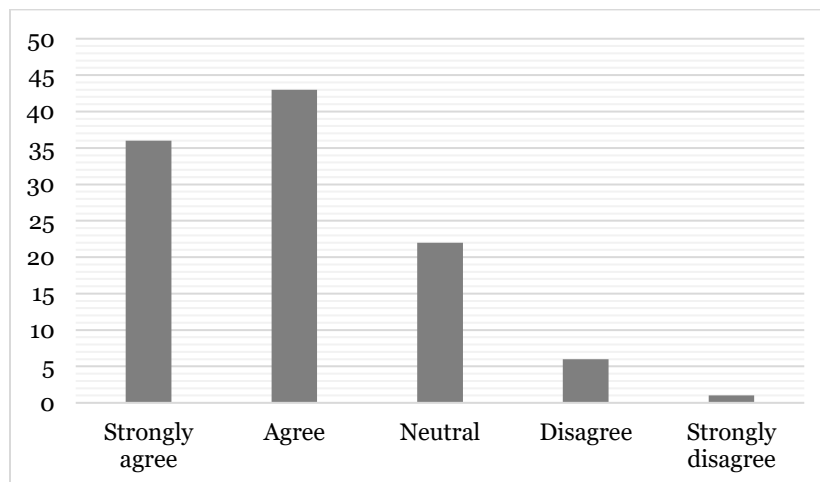


Figure 2. I believe that French immersion is a suitable program for refugee-background students



Whereas all interview participants shared that FI programs were becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, several participants also expressed more nuanced perspectives about student diversity in such programs. Notably, some educators stated that although the student demographics in FI programs were becoming more diverse, immersion programs remained less diverse than regular English programs in the same communities:

In my experience – I worked in dual-track schools in both circumstances – and it has seemed like the diversity of French programming is much less than that of the diversity of the English stream, even when we’re operating in the same neighbourhood and the

same building... I think that there's some work to be done ensuring access for all students in French immersion. (Miranda, Central Office Staff, Saskatchewan)

Indeed, some interview participants noted a consistent contrast between the diversity of students in FI programs and in English programs, even within the same schools. Moreover, the following teacher shared his perspective regarding diversity in FI programs, sharing that there were very few racialized students in his class and that he was the only Black teacher in the school:

Il n'y a pas assez de diversité. C'est mon point de vue personnel. Je regarde, par exemple, à ma classe. Dans ma classe, il y a juste une ou deux personnes qui sont autres que des personnes blanches, tu vois? Il y a une seule personne noire et il y a seule personne d'origine un peu asiatique. Alors, tu peux dire que la diversité, pas vraiment, même au niveau de l'effectif des enseignants ici. Je suis le seul enseignant noir à l'école. Alors, il y a un peu de diversité, mais pas vraiment. (Abrar, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

There isn't enough diversity. That's my personal point of view. I look, for example, at my class. In my class, there are only one or two people who are not white, you see? There's only one Black person and only one person of Asian origin. So, you could say that, diversity, not really, even in terms of teacher demographics here. I'm the only Black teacher at the school. So, there's a bit of diversity, but not really. (Abrar, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

Evidently, some interview participants expressed that although FI might be becoming increasingly diverse, such programs did not reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of their communities, neither in terms of student populations, nor with respect to teacher demographics.

6.2 Inclusion in FI

The present study also examined the perspectives of educators surrounding the inclusion of refugee-background learners in FI programs. Several survey items juxtaposed different French programs to measure whether educators believed that refugee-background learners should be included in some programs but not others. First, one survey question asked whether educators believed that FI was more suitable than core French for refugee-background learners; this item generated mixed responses, with several educators agreeing (38.1%), many responding neutrally (39.0%), and several disagreeing (22.9%) with the statement (Figure 3). However, when the two programs were inverted in a different question, many participants disagreed (47.6%) with the notion that core French was more suitable than FI (Figure 4). Subsequent survey items measured whether educators believed that Early French immersion (EFI) was more suitable than Late French Immersion (LFI) for refugee-background students, and most educators (58.1%) affirmed that EFI was indeed more appropriate (Figure 5). When the two programs were inverted in the following question, very few (7.8%) survey participants indicated that LFI programs were more appropriate for refugee-background students than EFI programs (Figure 6). In summary, survey participants

indicated that refugee-background students should be included in all programs, but that EFI was especially suitable for such learners compared to LFI and core French programs.

Figure 3. I believe that French immersion is a more suitable program than core French for refugee-background students

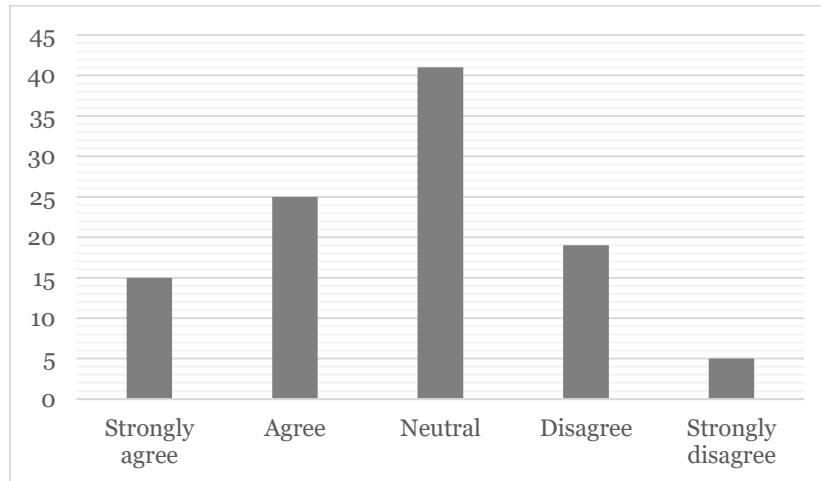


Figure 4. I believe that core French is a more suitable program than French immersion for refugee-background students

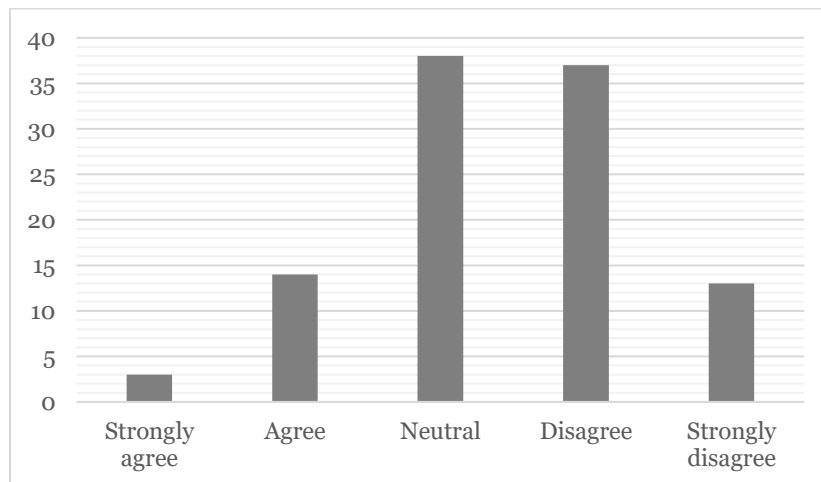


Figure 5. I believe that early French immersion (EFI) is a more suitable program than late French immersion (LFI) for refugee-background students

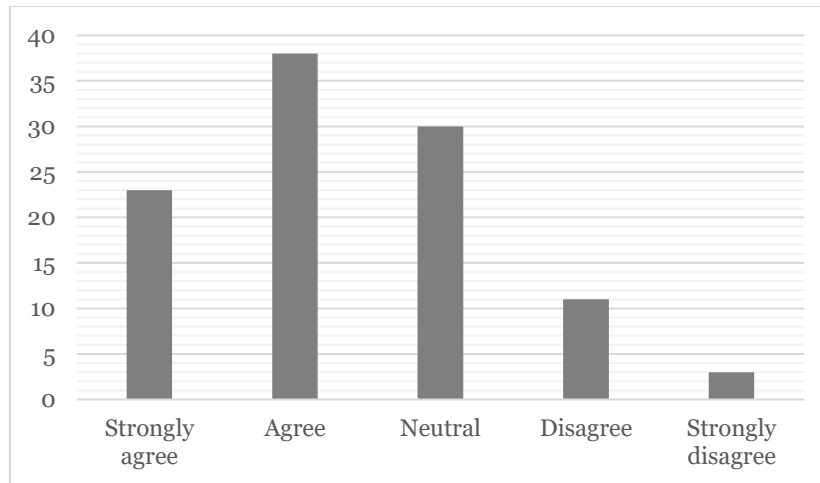
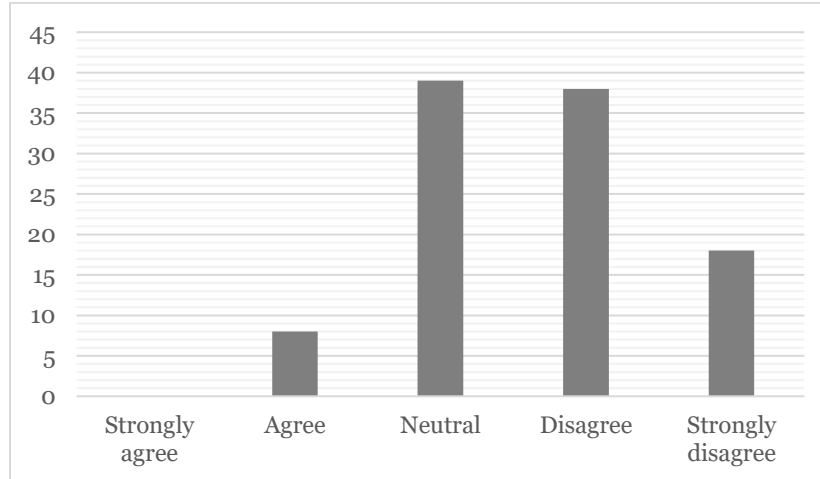


Figure 6. I believe that late French immersion (LFI) is a more suitable program than early French immersion (EFI) for refugee-background students



The belief that refugee-background students should be included in FI programs was also reflected in interviews with educators. To this end, one school principal shared her perspective that all students should be included in FI programs, including refugee-background learners:

I think French immersion should welcome all of our refugee students, especially those coming from refugee backgrounds, even if they're not French backgrounds... I don't think we should close our doors to anybody! (Tammy, Principal, Alberta)

Similarly, a consultant expressed his belief in including and supporting all newcomer students in FI programs, reflecting on his personal experience as a child of immigrants:

Well, I really believe in including everybody, and I'm a son of immigrants myself. So, I do believe in including everybody and just providing what they need to be successful. (Marco, Central Office Staff, Manitoba)

Although all interview participants agreed that refugee-background students should be included in FI programs, many participants shared examples of colleagues who disagree with this perspective. For instance, the following educator recounted conversations with teachers who believed that refugee-background learners with low English proficiency be excluded from FI programs:

J'ai entendu quelques enseignants et enseignantes qui se plaignaient de cela aujourd'hui: « Cet enfant vient d'arriver. Comment est-ce que je vais faire? C'est trop difficile. L'enfant devrait tout d'abord maîtriser l'anglais... Est-ce que cet enfant devrait être en immersion? On devrait le laisser en anglais. » (Omar, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

I heard some teachers complaining about this today: "This student just arrived. How am I going to do this? It's too difficult. The student should master English first... Should this student be in immersion? We should put him in English." (Omar, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

Likewise, a teacher who had studied in FI programs as a newcomer learner herself shared that she often hears exclusionary views about refugee-background students in staff meetings:

I hear that in staff meetings all the time and I get really mad. I feel like I was given that opportunity by someone who had a really good heart, you know? I feel like... I get frustrated when teachers just try to say this can't be done. No, it can be done... Why can't we assist them with French? Why are we so special that we get to pick who can come and who can't? (Ofelia, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

Finally, a superintendent expressed in her interview that she often encounters educators who believe that refugee-background students should sometimes be excluded from FI programs:

It drives me bananas! We're a public school system. How on earth would we presume that we have any right to decide who comes here, right? That's my Achilles heel, right? Those assumptions that we make, right? A lot of it comes from our own biases, and I don't want to get into that, but it comes from our own prejudices and biases that we carry about trauma and different groups, you know? (Stephanie, Central Office Staff, Manitoba)

In summary, all educators who were interviewed indicated that refugee-background students should be included in FI programs; however, many teachers, principals, and central office staff members across all eight school divisions emphasized that this was a critical point of contention among educators.

6.3 Gatekeeping in FI

The third common finding across both survey and interview data pertains to the gatekeeping practices of FI educators. While the notions of inclusion and gatekeeping are closely interrelated, the former represents the beliefs of educators with respect to the inclusion of refugee-background students and the latter pertains to the practices of educators that serve to include or exclude such learners from FI programs. To this end, one survey question asked whether educators believed that the parents of refugee-background students should be able to choose the program of study for their children, which nearly all participants (93.7%) affirmed (Figure 7). Conversely, another item measured whether educators believed that teachers and principals should be able to decide to include or exclude refugee-background learners from FI programs, and some participants (26.0%) agreed with this statement (Figure 8). Evidently, although most educators indicated that FI enrolment decisions should be made by parents, some believe that teachers and principals should sometimes serve as gatekeepers for refugee-background families.

Figure 7. I believe that the parents of refugee-background students should be able to choose the program of study for their children

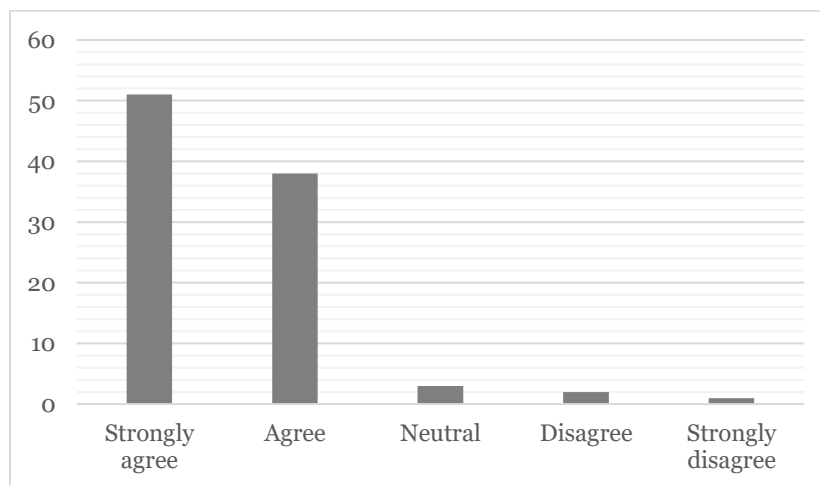
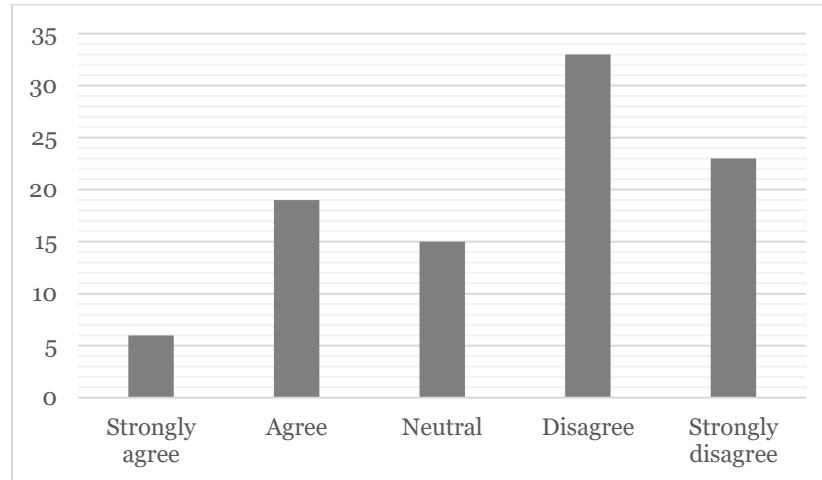


Figure 8. I believe that teachers and school administrators should be able to decide whether to include or exclude refugee-background students from French immersion programs



In interviews, many participants shared that the decision to enroll children in FI programs must be made by parents and that educators were not allowed to discourage or exclude such families. The following teachers expressed this perspective pertaining to FI enrolment decisions:

Parents are totally free to have that choice. I was always told as a new teacher that we're not allowed to steer people one way or the other (Marie, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

I have been told if a parent says they want to, we have to do it. I know people have, like, admin and things have tried to convince parents out of it for older grades. Like, maybe above Grade 3, they'll say it's not a good idea. But I have been told by admin that if a parent says, "We want our child in French immersion" and they cannot be swayed, then their child stays in French immersion (Alex, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

Indeed, several educators espoused the view that they were not allowed to influence enrolment decisions in FI programs, regardless of whether they personally believed that such programs were appropriate for the student. Nevertheless, some participants shared examples of educators attempting to counsel refugee-background students out of FI programs, as per the following:

I was just in a meeting a few weeks ago for a student that they're trying to counsel out of Grade 7 and he's been in our system since Grade 3. So, this is his fourth year in Canada. His first language is Swahili and his second language is French, so his spoken French is actually pretty good. He's got, like, a cognitive delay across the board. He's been assessed so we know there are a bunch of other things happening here. And when they were counselling him out of the program, I just thought, "That would be the worst thing for this kid." ...But it's like this automatic go-to, right? Like, if you're not seeing success in this, then just leave. (Elizabeth, Central Office Staff, Alberta)

In summary, many educators indicated through both surveys and interviews that they do not serve as gatekeepers in FI programs, some suggesting that they would not be allowed to do so; however, some interview participants noted that refugee-background learners are sometimes counselled out of FI, especially when additional challenges and special needs are present.

Furthermore, several educators shared that the gatekeepers excluding refugee-background students from FI programs were not necessarily FI educators, but rather administrators in different roles. Notably, some central office staff members explained that the administrative staff working in newcomer centers sometimes served as gatekeepers in FI programs. For instance, one superintendent shared that the consultant working in the newcomer center seldom presents FI programs as an option for refugee-background learners and families in the school division:

I did have a conversation with [the consultant] and I asked him, “Does French immersion ever come up?” and he said, “Not really!” That’s partially because he is maybe not aware or maybe has that bias that maybe French immersion is not for refugee students, or maybe it just never occurred to him. (Stella, Central Office Staff, Saskatchewan)

In this case, the superintendent suspected that the consultant might not present FI programs as a viable option for refugee-background families simply because the possibility had not occurred to him. However, a second superintendent expressed that the consultants in her school division’s welcome center were actively discouraging refugee-background families from considering FI programs, citing the recent example of several hundred asylum seekers arriving from Ukraine:

J’ai des directeurs qui m’appellent et qui disent: « Cette famille est intéressée en immersion, » mais le centre d’accueil suggère qu’ils apprennent l’anglais en premier... Je dirais que ce que je vois, depuis mes propres observations, c’est que les réfugiés sont découragés d’entrer dans nos écoles d’immersion. Alors, je peux dire qu’on a reçu 672 Ukrainiens depuis le mois de mars dernier dans nos écoles. Et je peux te dire que, bien que nous avons reçu beaucoup de réfugiés, il n’y a pas un Ukrainien qui s’est rendu dans une école d’immersion. Je dirais que les enfants réfugiés... C’est cette mentalité de « They’ve got enough on their plate. » On ne veut pas ajouter le français à cela. (Samantha, Central Office Staff, Alberta)

I’ve got principals who call me and say, “This family is interested in immersion,” but the welcome center suggests that they learn English first... I would say that what I see, from my own observations, is that refugees are discouraged from entering into our immersion schools. So, I can say that we’ve received 672 Ukrainians since last March in our schools. And I can tell you that, although we’ve received lots of refugees, there is not one Ukrainian who has ended up in an immersion school. I would say that refugee students... It’s that mentality of “They’ve got enough on their plate.” They don’t want to add French to that. (Samantha, Central Office Staff, Alberta)

Evidently, some superintendents believe that the administrative staff working in newcomer welcome centers act as gatekeepers in FI programs. More specifically, some educators express that the staff in newcomer centers actively discourage the enrolment

of refugee-background students in FI programs, whereas other educators believe that such staff members do not consistently provide information about FI programs for refugee-background families.

6.4 Policy in FI

The present study generated findings about the perspectives of educators with respect to policy in FI programs. One survey item asked whether educators believed that their school divisions had equitable policies concerning the inclusion of refugee-background students in FI programs (Figure 9).

Although several survey participants (67.4%) responded affirmatively to this question, most interview participants were unable to identify specific policies pertaining to inclusion in FI programs, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

No, there is no policy. There's nothing written. Really, the only way that a kid will end up in French immersion is because they live in the area... The option is never given to them from, like, the settlement agency or anything like that; they just get registered automatically at their neighbourhood school. (Elizabeth, Central Office Staff, Alberta)

Moreover, many educators expressed that although there was no official policy in their school divisions ensuring access to FI, they believed that there was a standard practice of inclusion:

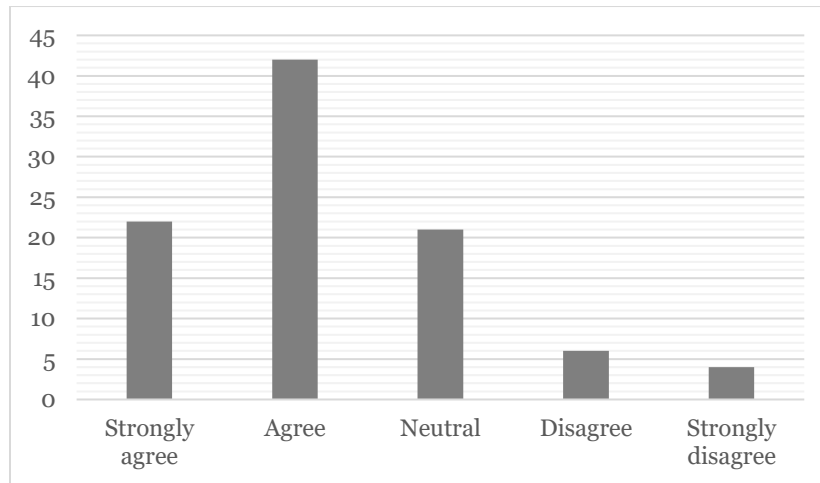
Je crois qu'il n'y a pas de politique spécifique. Tout le monde a le droit d'entrer. Je pense qu'il n'y a pas nécessairement de politique; c'est ouvert à tout le monde. (Mallory, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

I don't believe there is a specific policy. Everyone has the right to enter. I think there isn't necessarily a policy; it's open to everyone. (Mallory, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

You know, I always thought that it was a division policy, and I'm just figuring out now that I don't think it is! I think it's probably more of a standard practice. (Marie, Teacher, Saskatchewan)

In summary, although many survey participants indicated that their school divisions had equitable policies concerning the inclusion of refugee-background learners in FI programs, very few were unable to cite specific policies and instead described unofficial practices of inclusion.

Figure 9. I believe that my school division has an equitable policy regarding the inclusion of refugee-background students in French immersion programs



Whereas most participants in the present study were unable to name official policies regarding the inclusion of refugee-background students or newcomer learners in FI programs, educators in one school division in Manitoba did discuss such a policy. Specifically, several teachers, principals, and central office staff in this school division described a policy of accepting all interested students into FI programs, irrespective of grade level, through a special integration program called French as an Additional Language (FAL). The following interview excerpt with a superintendent highlights the rationale for this inclusive FI policy in the school division:

We're definitely the exception in the province. We go about it from a human rights and language rights perspective. Often, families arrive here and come to Canada and understand that French and English are our official languages, whether they come as refugees or not. And we look at it as a right for this family to pick what they want for their child. We have appropriate programming that will meet the needs of the child. It's not to say there aren't challenges, but we come about it from a perspective that every family has the right to do what's best for their child, and we firmly believe that it's a dialogue and relationship between the school and the family to best support those kids. (Stephanie, Central Office Staff, Manitoba)

Furthermore, a principal shared that although the FAL program is not specifically for refugee-background students or newcomer learners, the program has served several newcomer students over the years and contributed to the growing diversity in FI programs in the school division:

I would say that it has certainly positively impacted us. It has diversified us quite a bit at my school. And to be honest, as I'm reflecting on who I had as FAL students previously, I had a student from Palestine when I was a teacher, as well as one from the

Congo. So, those being my other previous experiences, they were both refugee families. And so, yeah, I would say that it does diversify our school. (Alana, Principal, Manitoba)

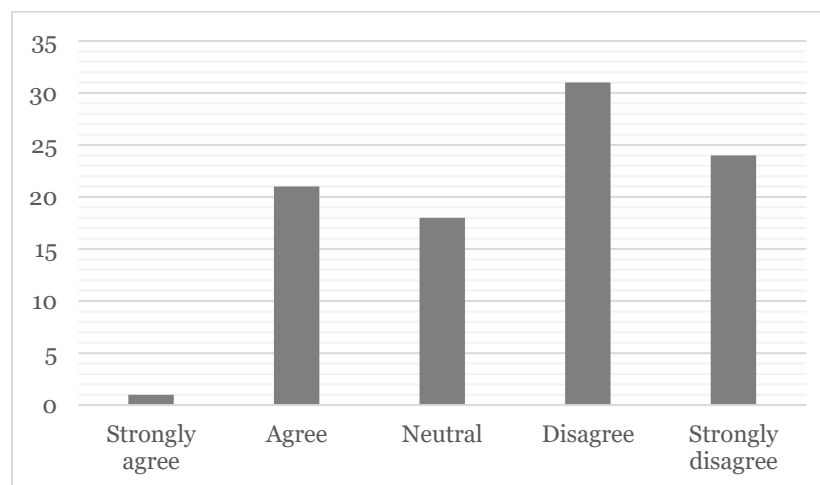
Notwithstanding such positive reflections on diversity and inclusion, some teachers discussed the challenges of accepting students into FI programs at all grade levels, as per the following:

J'ai l'impression que tu le vois comme une vraiment bonne chose qu'on peut rentrer dans le programme n'importe quand. Je pense aussi que c'est une bonne chose; cependant, on n'a pas de soutien pour ces élèves... Il n'y a aucun soutien supplémentaire dans la division. Alors, je pense que c'est une très belle chose qu'on peut rentrer n'importe quand, mais je pense qu'on a besoin de quelque chose pour soutenir ces élèves. (Miranda, Teacher, Manitoba)

I get the impression that you see this as a really good thing that one can enter the program whenever. I think it's a good thing, too; however, we don't have support for these students... There is no additional support in the division. So, I think it's a very nice thing that one can enter whenever, but I think we need something to support these students. (Miranda, Teacher, Manitoba)

Indeed, the belief that refugee-background students were offered insufficient supports in FI programs was expressed resoundingly by educators throughout all eight school divisions; indeed, few survey participants (23.2%) indicated that their school divisions were providing sufficient resources for refugee-background students, whereas many (57.9%) disagreed (Figure 10). To summarize, educators from one school division in Manitoba discussed the FAL program as an equitable approach to include learners in FI at all grade levels; however, there is a tension between the existence of an inclusive policy and the lack of additional supports in FI programs.

Figure 10. I believe that my school division offers sufficient supports and resources for refugee-background students in French immersion programs



7. DISCUSSION

In the present study, I examined the perspectives of FI educators with respect to refugee-background students in eight school divisions across the Canadian Prairies. For the purposes of this paper, I focused on findings pertaining to the areas of diversity in FI programs, perspectives about the inclusion of refugee-background learners in FI programs, gatekeeping practices, and policy in FI programs. In the discussion section, I will explore the underlying ideologies in which the perspectives of FI educators appear to be rooted.

First, educators espoused the view that FI programs were becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse. This perception has been documented in previous research (Lapkin et al., 2006). However, several educators expressed that FI programs were still less diverse than regular English programs. This finding corroborates research conducted in the Toronto District School Board, which found that white, English-speaking, Canadian-born students were overrepresented in FI programs relative to the broader student population (Sinay, 2010; Sinay et al., 2018). It was not possible in the present study to gather information about student demographics in FI programs; thus, future research must examine student diversity in FI programs across different regions of Canada to determine the extent to which such demographics have evolved over time. More importantly, if it is true that FI programs across Canada include disproportionately high numbers of white, English-speaking, Canadian-born students relative to other programs, future research must explore whether this discrepancy in cultural and linguistic diversity is due to lack of interest amongst some populations, discrimination and exclusion in FI programs, or a combination of these issues. The tension between the perspective that FI programs are becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse and the perspective that such programs are still less diverse than English programs appears to be rooted in a deeper ideology of immersion programs being perceived as most suitable for Canadian-born, English-speaking families (Kunnas, 2019, 2023).

Furthermore, some educators discussed the cultural and linguistic diversity of FI teachers, noting an overrepresentation of white, French-English bilingual, Canadian-born educators. Whereas the cultural and linguistic diversity and the migration history of participants was beyond the scope of this study, I found anecdotally that the FI educators who shared that they were racialized, multilingual, and immigrant-background themselves tended to espouse inclusive views toward refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs. Thus, it seems to follow that racialized, multilingual, and newcomer teachers might be especially inclusive of refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs because they might have similar cultural, linguistic, and newcomer backgrounds and experiences. However, refugee-background educators are not necessarily more inclusive or supportive of refugee-background students simply because of similar lived experiences (Feuerverger, 2011). It would be valuable for future research to explore the diversity of FI educators

and the extent to which the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of teachers shape perspectives on diversity and inclusion.

Additionally, most educators affirmed that refugee-background students and newcomer learners should be included in FI programs. This finding corroborates previous research demonstrating that most educators believe that newcomer and multilingual learners should be included in FI programs, whereas a minority believes that they should be excluded (Bourgoin, 2016; Davis et al., 2019, 2021; Mady, 2016). Moreover, many educators discussed colleagues who opposed the inclusion of refugee-background students in FI programs; this suggests a possible self-selection bias for participating in this study as a limitation in this research, as educators who would prefer to exclude refugee-background students from FI programs might have felt discouraged from participating. I believe that most educators support the inclusion of refugee-background students in FI programs, although some are more apprehensive about including refugee-background students than other multilingual learners. Educators also expressed a preference for FI programs instead of core French programs for refugee-background students, as well as a preference for EFI over LFI. I suspect that most FI educators perceive EFI as the most effective French program for all students, regardless of language and migration background, and would likely recommend EFI for all learners. In my estimation, the widespread perspective amongst educators that EFI is more suitable than LFI for refugee-background students is shaped by the ideology that additional languages must be learned from a young age (Roy, 2015, 2020). It is important to note, however, that none of the eight school divisions offered LFI programs at the time of the study; thus, future research might compare the perceived suitability of EFI and LFI in school divisions offering both programs.

Furthermore, participants described a variety of gatekeeping practices of FI educators, noting that principals often influenced the enrolment decisions of refugee-background families. The results of this study appear to reflect the findings of Mady and Masson (2018) with respect to the diverse gatekeeping practices of FI principals. Namely, in the absence of official FI policy at the school division level, principals have a considerable amount of power and autonomy to determine the inclusion and exclusion of refugee-background students and multilingual learners. Moreover, the present study also found that administrators working in newcomer centers sometimes serve as gatekeepers in FI programs, both by not presenting FI as a viable option for refugee-background students and by actively discouraging such families from enrolling their children in FI programs. This finding suggests that the inclusion of refugee-background students in FI programs is not only influenced by the perspectives and ideologies of FI educators, but also by educators and administrators working with refugee-background students and newcomer families. Further research is needed to explore the role of such centers in promoting FI programs for refugee-background students and multilingual learners.

Finally, the present study found that most educators believed that their school divisions had policies to ensure the inclusion of refugee-background students in FI programs but

were largely unable to identify such policies. Moreover, with the exception of educators in a single school division in Manitoba, teachers were often unsure of the existence of official FI policies for refugee-background students or multilingual learners and instead described unofficial practices of inclusion. This finding suggests that educators are largely unaware of policies pertaining to inclusion in FI programs and believe that they are required to include all learners, even if they are ideologically opposed to including refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs. Educators frequently expressed the perspective that they were not allowed to discourage or exclude certain learners from immersion programs, which appears to imply that there are cases where they might wish to exclude some students. In my assessment, many educators likely overestimate the existence of an inclusive policy related to FI programs and the implementation thereof and to underestimate the frequency with which refugee-background students and multilingual learners are excluded from such programs. I believe that the single school division in Manitoba should be commended for its groundbreaking approach to accepting learners into FI programs at all grade levels and should serve as an example of an inclusive policy, both for newcomer students and for Canadian-born learners. Nevertheless, teachers in this school division are also right to express concern over the lack of support and resources provided for students who enter FI programs at all grade levels. For a truly equitable policy pertaining to refugee-background students in FI programs, inclusion and support must go hand in hand. In the following subsection, I provide recommendations for school divisions to better include and support refugee-background students and multilingual learners more broadly in FI programs.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL DIVISIONS

The present study contributed to a greater understanding of the perspectives and underlying ideologies of educators with respect to refugee-background students in FI programs across the Canadian Prairies. Moreover, this research also had a second goal of advocating for change in school divisions to better include and support refugee-background students in FI programs. Drawing from the findings of this study, I advance five recommendations for school divisions seeking to better include and support refugee-background students in FI programs.

The recommendations are far from being my original ideas; rather, I consider these recommendations to be co-created between myself and several educator participants in this study, especially through critical discussions in interviews. In my estimation, the following recommendations would contribute to more equitable and inclusive policies and practices in FI programs, which would not only benefit refugee-background students, but also multilingual learners more broadly who have also been historically excluded from immersion programs. Finally, it is important to note that even white, English-speaking, Canadian-born students who already benefit from unquestioned

inclusion in FI programs would benefit from greater cultural and linguistic diversity, equity, and inclusion in such programs across Canada.

8.1 Create Inclusive Policy in FI

First and foremost, I recommend that all school divisions across Canada create and implement official, written, public-facing policies to ensure the inclusion of refugee-background students and all multilingual learners in FI programs. More specifically, I would encourage school divisions to advertise publicly and explicitly that newcomer students and multilingual learners are welcome in FI programs, irrespective of country of origin and language background. Moreover, I would encourage school divisions to welcome multilingual families explicitly via websites, promotional materials, and information sessions for FI programs. Refugee-background families and multilingual families might already be allowed to enroll in FI programs, but creating official, written, public-facing policy would make this inclusion more consistent, equitable, and transparent across the school division.

8.2 Create Multilingual FI Promotional Materials

My second recommendation for school divisions seeking to better include and support refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs is to create multilingual promotional materials for such programs. Promotional materials for FI programs have been found to reinforce the image of the FI student as white, Canadian-born, and English-speaking (Kunnas, 2019, 2023). While the analysis of promotional materials was beyond the scope of the present study, I have found that many school divisions offer information about regular English programs in multiple languages but only offer information about FI programs in English. I believe that this practice implicitly reinforces the widespread myth of FI programs being most suitable for English-speaking families. Therefore, I would encourage school divisions to translate FI materials into some of the more common home languages of multilingual families in their communities, as well as provide interpretation services at FI information sessions.

8.3 Provide Greater Support in FI

My third recommendation for school divisions is to provide greater support and resources for refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs. Many educators discussed the lack of supports offered for such learners in FI programs compared to those available in regular English programs, such as Resource support, English as an Additional Language (EAL) instruction, and counseling services. The disparity between the supports offered in FI programs and those offered in English

programs perpetuates issues of elitism and exclusion, insofar as students requiring such supports often withdraw from FI programs. Therefore, I recommend that school divisions provide supports and resources in FI programs that are equivalent to those offered in regular English programs, which would not only benefit refugee-background students and multilingual learners, but all students in FI programs.

8.4 Plan for Multiple Entry Points into FI

In terms of my fourth recommendation, I would encourage school divisions to plan for multiple entry points into FI programs. For instance, it would be valuable for school divisions to offer both Early French immersion (EFI) and Late French immersion (LFI) programs to better include refugee-background students and multilingual learners. Whereas most educators indicated that they believe EFI to be more suitable than LFI for refugee-background students, LFI programs are important for newcomer students who migrate to Canada at an age considered too old to enroll in EFI. In my estimation, offering both EFI and LFI programs would allow school divisions to include refugee-background students and newcomer learners in FI (in addition to Canadian-born students) at multiple grade levels and entry points. In this vein, it would be valuable for school divisions that do not currently offer both EFI and LFI programs to consult with those that do offer both programs to learn about their challenges and successes.

8.5 Provide Professional Learning Opportunities in FI

My final recommendation for school divisions is to provide opportunities for learning and professional development focusing on refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs. In my estimation, most educators wish to include and support refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs, but many are not familiar with the research concerning the positive language learning of such students (Bourgoin & Dicks, 2019; Knouzi & Mady, 2017; Mady, 2015). Therefore, I call for school divisions to develop professional learning opportunities pertaining to the inclusion of newcomer students in FI and the pedagogical practices that might empower multilingual learners in such programs. For instance, educators and researchers are beginning to examine the possibilities of cross-linguistic pedagogical (XLP) approaches (Ballinger et al., 2020; Lyster et al., 2009, 2013) and plurilingual approaches (Cormier, 2020; Prasad, 2015, 2018, 2020) in FI programs in Canada. Therefore, educators would likely benefit from professional learning opportunities exploring the impact and the implications of XLP and plurilingual pedagogical approaches for refugee-background students and multilingual learners in FI programs, both as leaders and as participants. Moreover, school divisions might consider offering professional development for educators and administrators working in newcomer student centers in order to dispel myths surrounding multilingual learners in FI programs. Providing professional

learning opportunities for educators in FI programs, as well as for those working with newcomer students and multilingual learners, would lead to more inclusive perspectives, policies, and pedagogical approaches in FI programs across Canada.

9. CONCLUSION

The present transformative mixed-methods study explored the perspectives of educators with respect to refugee-background students in FI programs in eight school divisions across the Canadian Prairies. In this paper, I examined the perspectives and the underlying ideologies of FI educators pertaining to the areas of diversity, inclusion, gatekeeping, and policy. Through the triangulation of survey and interview data, I found that most educators believed that refugee-background students should be included in FI programs, but that many participants were wary of the lack of supports and resources that such learners receive in FI. Adopting the theoretical framework of sociolinguistics for change, I advocate for school divisions to implement five key recommendations, which I believe would lead to greater support and inclusion for refugee-background students and for multilingual learners more broadly in FI programs.

The present study contributes to a greater understanding of the perspectives of FI educators with respect to refugee-background students, an important and often overlooked student population in Canada, across the underexamined region of the Canadian Prairies. However, the implications of this research extend beyond refugee-background students and beyond the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta. Indeed, the critical disconnect between the ideologies around inclusion and the misgivings about the supports in FI programs is deeply problematic for all students who have historically been excluded and unsupported in such programs, including newcomer students, multilingual learners, racialized students, and students with special needs. Inclusion and support are inextricably bound to one another, and educators and school divisions seeking to more equitably serve students who have been excluded from FI programs must create inclusive policy and provide greater support for such learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Andrea Sterzuk, for her encouragement, insight, and guidance throughout my research. Additionally, I thank the anonymous reviewers of my manuscript and the editors of the *Journal of Education, Language, and Ideology* for strengthening the present article. Moreover, I would like to acknowledge all the teachers, principals, and central office staff across the Canadian Prairies who participated in this research and who work tirelessly to make French immersion programs more equitable and inclusive. Finally, I appreciate the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for generously supporting my research.

THE AUTHOR

Stephen Davis is an Assistant Professor at the University of Regina. His research interests include French immersion programs, multilingualism, immigration, refugee studies, language education, language ideology, language policy, inclusive education, and plurilingual pedagogies. His work has been published in the *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*; *The Canadian Modern Language Review*; *in education*; *Journal of Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity*; and *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*.

REFERENCES

- Arnett, K., & Mady, C. (2018). Exemption and exclusion from French Second Language programs in Canada: Consideration of novice teachers' rationales. *Exceptionality Education International*, 28(1), 86–99. <https://doi.org/10.5206/eei.v28i1.7760>
- Arnott, S., Masson, M., & Lapkin, S. (2019). Exploring trends in 21st century Canadian K-12 French as second language research: A research synthesis. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 22(1), 60–84. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/28702>
- Auger, N., Dalley, P., & Roy, S. (2007). Stéréotypes et stéréotypages du bilinguisme en classe de français langue seconde et minoritaire. In H. Boyer (Ed.), *Colloque international "Stéréotypage, stéréotypes: fonctionnements ordinaires et mises en scène"*, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier, 21-23 juin 2006 (pp. 5–36). L'Harmattan.
- Bale, J., Rajendram, S., Brubacher, K., Owoo, M. A. N., Burton, J., Zhang, Y., Jean Larson, E., Gagné, A. & Kerekes, J. (2023). *Centering multilingual learners and countering raciolinguistic ideologies in teacher education: Principles, policies and practices*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800414150>
- Blommaert, J., & Backus, A. (2013). Superdiverse repertoires and the individual. In I. de Sait-Georges & J.-J. Weber (Eds.), *Multilingualism and multimodality: Current challenges for educational studies* (pp. 11–32). Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-266-2_2
- Bourgoin, R. C. (2016). French immersion “So why would you do something like that to a child?”: Issues of advocacy, accessibility, and inclusion. *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education (IJBIDE)*, 1(1), 42–58. <https://10.4018/IJBIDE.2016010104>
- Bourgoin, R., & Dicks, J. (2019). Learning to read in multiple languages: A study exploring allophone students' reading development in French immersion. *Language and Literacy*, 21(2), 10–28. <https://doi.org/10.20360/langandlit29466>

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>

Byrd Clark, J. (2008). So why do you want to teach French? Representations of multilingualism and language investment through a reflexive critical sociolinguistic ethnography. *Ethnography and Education*, 3(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820801899017>

Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

Dagenais, D. (2003). Accessing imagined communities through multilingualism and immersion education. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 2(4), 269–283. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0204_3

Dagenais, D. (2008). La prise en compte du plurilinguisme d'enfants issus de familles immigrantes en contexte scolaire: une analyse de cas 1. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, 34(2), 351–375. <https://doi.org/10.7202/019685ar>

Dagenais, D., & Berron, C. (2001). Promoting multilingualism through French immersion and language maintenance in three immigrant families. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 14(2), 142–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310108666618>

Dagenais, D., & Jacquet, M. (2000). Valorisation du multilinguisme et de l'éducation bilingue dans des familles immigrantes. *Journal of International Migration and Integration/Revue de l'intégration et de la migration internationale*, 1, 389–404. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-000-1021-5>

Dagenais, D., & Moore, D. (2008). Représentations des littératies plurilingues, de l'immersion en français et des dynamiques identitaires chez des parents chinois. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 65(1), 11–31. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.65.1.11>

Dalley, P., & Roy, S. (Eds.). (2008). *Francophonie, minorités et pédagogie*. University of Ottawa Press. <https://doi.org/10.7202/038739ar>

Davis, S. (2019). “How am I supposed to teach them French when they can't even speak English?": Unpacking the myth of English proficiency as a prerequisite for French immersion. *Journal of Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity*, 3(1), 5–22. https://bild-lida.ca/journal/volume-3_1-2019/how-am-i-supposed-to-teach-them-french-when-they-cant-even-speak-english-unpacking-the-myth-of-english-proficiency-as-a-prerequisite-for-french-immersion/

Davis, S. (2023). Multilingual learners in Canadian French immersion programs: Looking back and moving forward. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 79(3), 163–180. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr-2022-0051>

Davis, S. (2024). Refugee-background learners in Canadian French immersion programs: Exploring the perspectives and ideologies of educators. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. Advanced Online Publication.

Davis, S., Ballinger, S., & Sarkar, M. (2019). The suitability of French immersion for Allophone students in Saskatchewan: Exploring diverse perspectives on language learning and inclusion. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 22(2), 27–63.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1063773ar>

Davis, S., Ballinger, S., & Sarkar, M. (2021). “More languages means more lights in your house”: Illuminating the experiences of Allophone families in Saskatchewan French immersion. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, 9(2), 336–363. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.20015.dav>

Department of Canadian Heritage. (2018). *Roadmap for Canada's linguistic duality 2008-2013: Acting for the future*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/official-languages-action-plan/2008-2013.html>

Gagné, A., Schmidt, C., & Markus, P. (2017). Teaching about refugees: Developing culturally responsive educators in contexts of politicised transnationalism. In M. Catarci, M. Prata Gomes, & S. Siqueira (Eds.), *Refugees, interculturalism and education* (pp. 113–130). Routledge.

Galiev, A. (2013). *Official bilingualism and immigrants: Perceptions, experiences and practices*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Calgary.

Ghadi, N., Massing, C., Kikulwe, D., & Giesbrecht, C. (2019). Language and identity development among Syrian adult refugees in Canada: A Bourdieusian analysis. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, 14(1), 71–88.
<https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29358>

Gibbs, G. R. (2007). *Analyzing qualitative data*. Sage.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781849208574>

Government of Canada. (2003). *The next act: New momentum for Canada's linguistic duality, the action plan for official languages*.
<https://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/CP22-68-2003E.pdf>

Government of Canada. (2009). *Roadmap for Canada's linguistic duality, 2008-2013: Acting for the future*. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/pc-ch/CH14-23-2009-eng.pdf

Government of Canada. (2013). *Education, immigration, communities: Roadmap for Canada's official languages 2013-2018*.
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/pch/documents/services/official-languages-bilingualism/roadmap/roadmap2013-2018-eng.pdf>

- Heller, M. (2003). Globalization, the new economy, and the commodification of language and identity. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(4), 473–492.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2003.00238.x>
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. (2020). *Syrian outcomes report*.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/evaluations/syrian-outcomes-report-2019.html#s52>
- Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. (2022). *Canada's response to the situation in Afghanistan*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/afghanistan.html>
- Kanu, Y. (2008). Educational needs and barriers for African refugee students in Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 31(4), 915–939.
- Knouzi, I., & Mady, C. (2017). Indicators of an “immigrant advantage” in the writing of L3 French learners. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 73(3), 368–392.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.3818>
- Kunnas, M. (2023). Who Is Immersion for?: A Critical Analysis of French Immersion Policies. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 26(1), 46–68.
<https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2023.32817>
- Kunnas, R. M. (2019). *Inequities in Black et Blanc: Textual constructions of the French immersion student* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Toronto.
- Lapkin, S., MacFarlane, A., & Vandergrift, L. (2006). *Teaching French in Canada: FSL teachers' perspectives*. Canadian Teachers' Federation.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Baldauf Jr, R. B. (2008). *Language planning and policy: Language planning in local contexts*. Multilingual Matters.
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847690647>
- MacNevin, J. (2012). Learning the way: Teaching and learning with and for youth from refugee backgrounds on Prince Edward Island. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 35(3), 48–63. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/canajeducrevucan.35.3.48>
- Mady, C. (2007). The suitability of core French for recently arrived adolescent immigrants to Canada. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(2), 177–196.
<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/19741>
- Mady, C. (2012). Inclusion of English language learners in French as a second official language classes: Teacher knowledge and beliefs. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 9(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2011.565877>
- Mady, C. (2013). Moving towards inclusive French as a second official language education in Canada. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 17(1), 47–59.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2011.580463>

- Mady, C. (2015). Immigrants outperform Canadian-born groups in French immersion: Examining factors that influence their achievement. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 12(3), 298–311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2014.967252>
- Mady, C. (2016). French immersion for English language learners?: Kindergarten teachers' perspectives. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 62(3), 253–267. <https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v62i3.56180>
- Mady, C., & Black, G. (2011). Access to French as second official language programs in English-dominant Canada. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 57(4), 498–501. <https://doi.org/10.11575/ajer.v57i4.55531>
- Mady, C., & Masson, M. (2018). Principals' beliefs about language learning and inclusion of English language learners in Canadian elementary French immersion programs. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 21(1), 71–93. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050811ar>
- Mady, C., & Turnbull, M. (2007). Allophones in FSL programs: An untapped resource. In M. Turnbull (Ed.), *The socio-cultural and socio-political realities of French second language education in Canada* (pp. 1–29). Canadian Parents for French.
- Mady, C., & Turnbull, M. (2010). Learning French as a second official language: Reserved for anglophones? *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 2010(99), 1-23. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/42796>
- Mady, C., & Turnbull, M. (2012). Official language bilingualism for allophones in Canada: Exploring future research. *TESL Canada Journal*, 29(2), 131. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v29i2.1105>
- Marshall, S., & Moore, D. (2018). Plurilingualism amid the panoply of lingualisms: addressing critiques and misconceptions in education. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 15(1), 19–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2016.1253699>
- Massing, C., Ghadi, N., Kikulwe, D., & Nakutnyy, K. (2023). Elementary Schooling Across Borders: Refugee-Background Children's Pre-and Post-Migration Experiences. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 37(4), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2022.2155736>
- Moore, D. (2010). Multilingual literacies and third script acquisition: Young Chinese children in French immersion in Vancouver, Canada. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 7(4), 322–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2010.502231>
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2001) *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0000457/>

- Prasad, G. (2015). Beyond the mirror towards a plurilingual prism: Exploring the creation of plurilingual ‘identity texts’ in English and French classrooms in Toronto and Montpellier. *Intercultural Education*, 26(6), 497–514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2015.1109775>
- Roy, S. (2010). Not Truly, Not Entirely... “Pas comme les Francophones ». *Canadian Journal of Education*, 33(3), 541–563. <https://doi.org/10.2307/canajeducrevucan.33.3.541>
- Roy, S. (2012). Qui décide du meilleur français? Représentations des variétés linguistiques du français en immersion. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(1), 1–19. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/19944>
- Roy, S. (2015). Discours et idéologies en immersion française. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 18(2), 125–143. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/22926>
- Roy, S. (2020). *French immersion ideologies in Canada*. Lexington Books.
- Roy, S., & Galiev, A. (2011). Discourses on bilingualism in Canadian French immersion programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 67(3), 351–376. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.67.3.351>
- Sabatier, C., Moore, D., & Dagenais, D. (2013). Espaces urbains, compétences littératiées multimodales, identités citoyennes en immersion française au Canada. *Glottopol*, 21, 138–161. http://glottopol.univ-rouen.fr/telecharger/numero_21/gpl21_o9sabatier_moore_dagenais.pdf
- Sinay, E. (2010). *Programs of choice in the TDSB: Characteristics of students in French immersion, alternative schools, and other specialized schools and programs*. Toronto District School Board. <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1182171/programs-of-choice-in-the-tdsb/1735302/>
- Sinay, E., Presley, A., Armson, S., Tam, G., Ryan, T., Burchell, D., & Barron, C. (2018). Toronto District school board French as a second language program review: Summary of findings. *Toronto District School Board*.
- Sterzuk, A., & Shin, H. (2021). English monolingualism in Canada: A critical analysis of language ideologies. In U. Lanvers, A. S. Thompson & M East (Eds.), *Language learning in anglophone countries: Challenges, practices, ways forward* (pp. 53–70). Palgrave Macmillan. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-56654-8_4
- Zaidi, R., Oliver, C., Strong, T., & Alwarraq, H. (2021). Behind successful refugee parental engagement: The barriers and challenges. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 44(4), 907–937. <https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.v44i4.4537>