

Parent Perspectives of the French Immersion Enrolment Process

**by
Sabrina Hickey**

Bachelor of Education, University of British Columbia, 2016
Bachelor of Applied Psychology, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2010

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Education

in the
Educational Leadership Program
Faculty of Education

© Sabrina Hickey 2023
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2023

Copyright in this work is held by the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Declaration of Committee

Name: Sabrina Hickey

Degree: Master of Education

Title: Parent Perspectives of the French Immersion
Enrolment Process

Committee: **Chair: Beth Marshall**
Associate Professor, Education

Gillian Judson
Supervisor
Assistant Professor, Education

Rebecca D. Cox
Committee Member
Associate Professor, Education

Dan Laitsch
Examiner
Professor, Education

Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

- c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of parents' experiences of the French Immersion program enrolment process. I used a qualitative approach via one-on-one interviews with parents from a kindergarten French Immersion classroom in Richmond, British Columbia. I am exploring their perspectives, the reasons they choose to enrol their children, and determine what information is being shared with them. Results indicate that parents hold the common misconception that children in French Immersion have more positive personality traits and behaviours than the English stream. There also seems to be a lack of program information being received by parents. This has caused parents to feel unprepared and uncertain as to whether the program is a good fit for their children. More effort should be made by the school district to share program information and resources so that parents can make an informed educational decision for their families.

Keywords: French Immersion; parents; qualitative; perspective; information

Table of Contents

Declaration of Committee	ii
Ethics Statement	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
Introduction	1
Literature Review	2
Factors Influencing Program Choice	3
Reasons parents enrol their children in French Immersion	4
Parent perceptions about the program	4
Private School vs. French Immersion	5
Immigrant parents	6
Program Experience	6
Factors that help children succeed	7
School experience of those who struggle	7
Reasons parents remove their children from the program	8
Program Information	8
Information that is shared about the program	8
Information that is useful for parents	9
Methodology	9
The Research Questions	10
Research Site/Participants	11
Research Site	11
Recruitment	11
Participants	12
Researcher Role/Positionality	13
Data Collection	13
Data Analysis	15
Trustworthiness	16
Findings	17
Program perceptions	17
Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community	18
Uncertainty	19
Enrolment Factors	21
Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community	21
Cognitive development	22
Future opportunities	22
Special programs	23
Program Information	23

Lack of information	24
Uncertainty	25
Valuable Information	25
Lack of information	25
Discussion	27
Factors Influencing Program Choice	28
Reasons parents enrol their children in French Immersion	28
Parent perceptions about the program.....	28
Private School vs. French Immersion	29
Immigrant parents.....	30
Program Experience.....	31
Factors that help children succeed	31
School experience of those who struggle	31
Reasons parents remove their children from the program	32
Program Information	32
Information that is shared about the program	32
Information that is useful for parents.....	33
Conclusion	34
Limitations.....	35
Future research.....	36
References.....	37
Appendix A. Ethics Approval	41

Introduction

Each year when September rolls around I am curious about the parents that will be a part of my classroom. As a grade one and two teacher, I see my relationship with parents as being incredibly important. At this age, children need their parents' help with homework and their support when problems arise in the classroom. Parents' support, input and deep knowledge of their child allows me to do my job well. Without parents' support, the help I can give their children is limited. Within my educational practice I see myself, the student, and their parents as a triad, working together to achieve the child's learning goals. Given the important role that parents play in their child's education, I feel they need to be well-informed about the educational decisions they make for their children. For example, when enrolling in French Immersion, parents should understand the format of the program, the expectations of the child, as well as ways to support their child throughout this program. From my experience, the information and knowledge parents have, as well as their perception of the program differs greatly from parent to parent.

I notice this each September with the arrival of new students and parents in my classroom. "I'm sorry, I don't speak any French!" a parent will often say apologetically to me. "Don't worry, most parents don't speak any French in the program," I assure them. In fact, the French Immersion program is geared towards families that don't speak French. It doesn't make it easier, but it does make the program more accessible. "I'm just not sure how to help her," another parent will say, "All the homework she brings home is in French!" Some parents seem unaware that they can help their children, despite the language barrier. They seem lost at the beginning of their child's grade one year on what they can do to support their child. On the other hand, there are some parents that have no questions and seem to understand what is going on. Or perhaps... they also have questions that they're just not asking?

My curiosity about parent understanding progressed while speaking to other French Immersion teachers in the staff room at lunch. One kindergarten teacher spoke about how parents' perceptions of French Immersion sometimes seem questionable. "Her mom said she doesn't care as much about her daughter learning French. She said she put her in French Immersion because the kids are a better influence." Another

teacher agreed with this and talked about how this is a common misconception that parents seem to have.

This situation had me questioning what parents know about French Immersion. I began to wonder about the enrolment process they went through to sign up their child. Why do they decide to enrol their child in French Immersion? What is involved in the enrolment process? What information are parents given? Do they understand the information? It is these questions that led me to conduct this research and look further into parent perspectives of the French Immersion enrolment process. After some research, I noticed that numerous studies have investigated the experiences of children in French Immersion, however very few studies have researched the experiences of their parents. More specifically, there is little research on the communication given to parents during enrolment. This includes the information being communicated with parents, their understanding of the information and their perceptions of the program during the enrolment process.

My research looks at this aspect of the program in Richmond, British Columbia, with the overarching question *What are parents' perspectives of the French immersion program?* Through discussing this topic, other sub-questions emerge such as, *What factors influence their decision to enrol their child? What information is being provided to parents? What information is most valuable to parents? Do parents understand and use this information? Does this information help parents decide to enrol their child?* By conducting this research, I will explore parents' perspectives and expectations during the enrolment process. I will also determine the role that the information provided plays in their decision-making. I hope that this research will determine how to support parents in the decision to enrol their child so that they are better prepared to help their child succeed in the years ahead.

Literature Review

Each year, parents of children entering kindergarten in British Columbia are faced with the difficult decision of whether to place their child in French Immersion. In a French Immersion program, children whose first language is not French begin the program in kindergarten with the possibility of continuing through to Grade twelve. Throughout this time, they learn to speak, write, and learn primarily in French (Ministry of Education and

Child Care, 2020). There are no special requirements to be accepted into the program, other than the necessary space and parental choice to enrol (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2020). Since French Immersion is a popular program with a limited number of classes, parents who want to enrol their children are often put on a waiting list with the possibility that they may not have space in the program for their child. In this case, the child would have to go into the English stream. Alternatively, some parents will drive to a school further away if they are keen on their child being in a French Immersion class (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2020). The French Immersion program in British Columbia – and all over Canada – is just that, an immersion program. This means that where possible, all lessons, activities, and communication are conducted in French. This includes homework and reading for children, which is encouraged to be in French only, despite parents' understanding of the language. This does not mean that parents who do not speak French cannot help their children, but rather, the help they give might be limited compared to the help they can give a child reading a language they understand. English classes are given only once their child reaches their grade three year. By being fully immersed in a language program at a young age, children have a higher aptitude to learn languages (Smalle, 2017). For many children, the French Immersion program is a wonderful experience and an opportunity to speak a language they never would have otherwise been exposed to (Smalle, 2017). However, for some students, life is confusing, school is difficult, and parents question if they made the right decision (Ashman et al., 2016). Research suggests that understanding the program information, the medium through which the information is sent, as well as the accessibility to the program information are crucial aspects that help parents make school-related decisions (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). For this reason, I wonder: What are parents' perspectives of the French immersion program? To understand this issue further, I have investigated current research on this topic to better understand what factors influence parent choice, the child's school experience, the information shared with parents, and gaps in the research.

Factors Influencing Program Choice

According to the research, there are several common factors that influence a parent's choice to enrol their child in French Immersion. When looking through the research I found factors that would both encourage them towards enrolling their child, as well as

factors that might discourage them from enrolling their child. The common factors I will discuss include parents' interest in French Immersion, their perceptions of what the program will offer, and their interests in private school. These factors were all discussed throughout the literature as impacting parent choice in some way. I will also talk about immigrant parents, as their experience and understanding of school are sometimes different than that of people who grew up here in Canada. This group of parents is especially pertinent to this study, as many families in the city where the study took place have immigrant parents or grandparents.

Reasons parents enrol their children in French Immersion

Studies suggest that participation in a French Immersion program has various benefits for children. For some parents, the desire for their child to learn a second language is their main motivation for enrolling in the program (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020; Genesee, 2007; Lazaruk, 2007). In one study by Chen et al. (2022), parents claimed they felt bilingualism is important. Many studies suggest that parents see French immersion as an enrichment program with better academic opportunities for their child (Mannavarayan, 1993; Noel, 2003; Quiring, 2008). Other reasons include broadening their child's view of the world, increasing their cognitive development, and future work opportunities (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020; Genesee, 2007; Lazaruk, 2007). Some parents feel that it could help build community (Chen, X., DeSousa J., Kay-Raining Bird, E.; Selvachandran J., 2022). Seeing that the program is for a smaller group of students, parents feel that having their children participate in this program would help them feel more connected to other families in the program (Selvachandran, 2022).

Studies also suggest that French immersion includes students with learning disabilities and learning delays. These studies, however, specify that success is only possible with the necessary support in place for these students (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020; Bournot-Trites, 2005; Genesee, 1992, 2007, 2009; Lazaruk, 2007).

Parent perceptions about the program

I researched parent perceptions of the French Immersion program to understand the common thoughts and assumptions associated with it. This section was kept separate from the above-noted section on 'Reasons to enrol' because some of the perceptions found in the research are negative and might have deterred parents from enrolling their

children. For example, Nancy Wise (2011), a French immersion consultant based out of Ontario, speaks about the perception that French immersion is only suitable for bright children from English-speaking, high socioeconomic backgrounds. In her article, this view is called out to be false and debunked yet suggests that this is a perception held by many people (Wise, N.; Cummins, J.; Chen, X.; Mady, C.; Arnett, K., 2011). Arnett et al. (2009) found a similar perspective; that some parents viewed French Immersion as an elitist enrichment program, meant for students with high academic abilities (Mannavarayan, 1993; Noel, 2003; Quiring, 2008). Other parents felt that French immersion builds community by fostering connections with other parents and families in the program (Chen et al., 2022). Contrary to this, a study by Macphee et al. (2017) found that non-French speaking parents often felt disconnected from their child's French Immersion experience at school because they didn't understand the work their children were bringing home. Another study found that parents were worried that their lack of French might be an issue in helping their children (Chen et al., 2022). Several studies found that parents felt that bilingualism would cause a delay in a child's first language development, as well as their academic ability (Chen et al., 2022). Research supports that this is a misconception and that learning a second language can help with learning a first (Genesee, 1994, 2007; Sparks et al., 2006).

Private School vs. French Immersion

Parents who enrol their children in French Immersion might have similar motivations to those who enrol their children in private school. To better understand parent motivations, I consulted literature on the decision-making of parents around school choice. Within this research, several common themes were found. Many parents make their decisions based on academic achievement or whichever program they feel would give their child the best education (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, Wilson, 2014; Altrichter, Bacher, Beham, Nagy, Wetzelhütter, 2011). Research on the impact of social and ethnic segregation played a part in their decision, suggesting that some parents might make their choice based on whether other families in the program are of the same background or ethnicity (Burgess et al, 2014; Wilson et al., 2011). Information given to parents about the school program also played a part in their decision when the information markets the program as a good opportunity (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). This might be true for those enrolling their children in French Immersion as well.

Immigrant parents

In Richmond, B.C. there is a large population of families that are immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2017). These families do not typically speak English as a first language and sometimes their understanding of the English language is very limited. Immigrants who speak French as a first language will oftentimes enrol their children in a French as a first language program. This French program is different from French immersion and is not being studied in this research. Research suggests that immigrant parents have a greater need to feel welcomed by the school community, often struggle to communicate with the school, and have increased challenges with work, income, and transportation (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009). In considering parents' understanding of the French Immersion program, it is also important to consider whether parents will need some information translated, and if they can have their questions answered. Seeing as all communication regarding the French Immersion program is in English, there is a possibility that the information is not being understood (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009). This could be a factor that leads immigrant parents to enrol their children in the French Immersion program without fully understanding what the commitment entails. Alternatively, some parents might come from countries where it is disrespectful to question authority such as the teacher or school administration, thus they might choose to not ask questions regarding the program (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009).

Program Experience

What might influence a child's success in the program? According to statistics, 60% of children will continue their schooling in French immersion, while 40% will either drop out or be removed from the program upon parent or teacher recommendation (Eagle, 1996). In this section, I will talk about the child's experience in the French Immersion program. Seeing as the purpose of this study is to ultimately improve a child's experience in school, I want to understand the factors that might lead to a child's success, as well as factors that might cause them to struggle. This section talks about each of these scenarios and discusses reasons a child might leave the French Immersion program.

Factors that help children succeed

According to several studies, a solid understanding of a child's first language will often help with their understanding of a second language (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020; Demers, n.d.; Gibbons, 1991; Lightbown; Spada, 1993). Studies also show that parents who understand French increased the likelihood of their child having success in the program (Demers, n.d.; Noel, 2003). One study found that a child's confidence in their ability to learn French influenced their likelihood of remaining in the program, with children who had a high level of confidence continuing in the program and a low level of confidence often dropping out (Ashman, 2016; Quiring, 2008). As with many educational programs, the socio-economic factors of the family are also found to relate to a child's success in the program, with those from a higher socio-economic status being more successful than those who have a lower socio-economic status (Bournot-Trites et al., 2005).

School experience of those who struggle

According to a study by Mannavarayan (2021), children who are unsuccessful in the program sometimes "appeared to languish, agonize, and suffer" (p.1). According to teachers, these students showed signs of high-stress levels, unhappiness, social and emotional issues, classroom disengagement, misbehaving, and lowered sense of self-confidence (Boekaerts, 2010; Brown, 2000; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston; Benard, 2001; Swain, 2013; Ashman et al., 2016). The reasons why a child might struggle in the French immersion program include the presence of a second language being spoken at home other than English, difficulty in language acquisition and comprehension, a low understanding of English, low self-confidence (Ashman et al., 2016; Quiring, 2008) and bad listening skills (Ashman et al., 2016; Horwitz et al. 1986). According to one study, when children with social and emotional needs struggle in French immersion, they are often told to switch to the English stream, rather than being given the support they require (Arnett et al., 2009). Many studies address the fact that there is not enough support available for struggling students (Genesee, 2007; Arnett et al., 2009). Ashman et al. (2016) advise that acknowledging and addressing the needs of struggling learners will help their well-being and encourage the likelihood of them remaining in the program, thereby increasing retention rates. If the decision is made to move the child to the English program, life sometimes gets harder both academically and socially before it

gets easier. Once moved to the English stream, children are required to start speaking in English and be introduced to a whole new set of friends. This can be challenging for children whose first language is not English (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009). In dual-track schools, the French immersion side of the school is often smaller than the English side of the school, thus the children will have to socialize with new children. Some feel embarrassed or left behind (Ashman et al., 2016). More research is needed on how the family copes in this scenario.

Reasons parents remove their children from the program

Although most children continue the French immersion program, studies show that around 40% of children will leave at some point (Eagle, 1996). This number includes those that are moved based on teacher recommendation, as well as those that voluntarily move to the English stream. In many cases, leaving the French immersion program is due to difficulties in learning French (Eagle, 1996). Other reasons beyond learning difficulties include family relocation, social problems with friends, lack of progress in their English language development, parents' perceptions of their ability to help with homework, and the child's personal desire (Eagle, 1996; Ashman et al., 2016).

Program Information

Given the impact a positive or negative school experience can have on a child's development, it is important that parents are well-informed when deciding to enrol their child in French immersion. This section looks at current information that is available to parents, as well as information that might be useful to parents.

Information that is shared about the program

One study found that the information being given to parents plays a significant role in their decision-making (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). This study suggests that information sent to parents regarding school options is limited, difficult to understand, irrelevant, and focused on marketing as opposed to program information (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). There is little research on what information is shared with parents regarding the French Immersion program in British Columbia. As French Immersion is a government-funded program, some information (yet sparse) is publicly available online. Information on the

homepage of the French Immersion program for British Columbia includes the date the program was revised, the policy statement, the program rationale, the program content, pupil eligibility, the proportion of French to English instruction as well as information on late French immersion in English and French (French Immersion Program, 2022). This differs from the information shared on other government-run French Immersion province websites. On these provincial websites, the benefits of French Immersion can be found, as well as a comparison of the different programs offered, and links to parent resources (French Language Education Alberta – Overview, 2022).

Information that is useful for parents

Delale-O'Connor (2019) indicates that clear, relevant information that is easy to understand influences the choice of a school program. Arsenault (2008) suggests that there may be a lack of information for parents when making their decision. One study involving parents of children enrolled in the French Immersion program found that there was a desire for improved lines of communication between staff and parents (Jeynes, 2007). In looking at the provincial government website, it might be beneficial to have information for parents on supporting their children in the program, as well as more information on inclusivity and available support. According to a study by Ashman et al. (2016), parents seem unaware of the extra demands that learning a second language has on their children. This should be communicated with parents in some form, whether it be online or in an information session, so that they understand the school experience their child will be participating in.

Methodology

In this study I aim to understand the perspectives of kindergarten parents of children in French Immersion. To carry out my research I am using a qualitative research approach. I am using this approach because I want to focus on understanding the subjective experiences of the participants as spoken through their own points of view. In the following sections, I will go over the research questions, the researcher role/positionality, the data collection, the data analysis, and the trustworthiness of my methods.

The Research Questions

The over-arching research question is, *What perceptions do parents have of the French immersion program?* I will also be researching other sub-questions including, *What factors influence their decision to enrol their child? What information is being provided to parents? What information is most valuable to parents? Do parents understand and use this information? Does this information help parents decide to enrol their child in French Immersion?* By asking these questions and conducting this research, I hope that I will be able to understand parents' views of the program and gain insight as to how parents can be supported in this decision.

This research will use a qualitative approach to collect data. I chose this approach because my main research question; *What perceptions do parents have of the French immersion program?* asks about a person's thoughts and opinions (Freeman, 2017). Since this information can be quite complex, I believe that the answer to this question and the sub-questions mentioned above will be best answered by a conversation in a one-on-one interview. Since interviews can sometimes be unpredictable, I want to ensure my research approach allows me to be flexible in adding or changing questions depending on where the conversation goes. This will allow the participant to elaborate on their thoughts and ideas, with the hope that the data will be rich and meaningful (Freeman, 2017). I originally considered doing a mixed methods study involving a survey and long answer questions, however, after careful consideration of the data I wanted to collect, I realized that a survey would have too many limitations. For example, all answers would have to be typed into the survey. This could limit the participants to a certain word count and might deter them from expressing their true feelings. This would greatly limit the data I would receive as it will not allow me to question participants further if they say something I am either curious about or do not understand. The survey would also be anonymous; thus, follow-up questions would not be possible. A qualitative approach via interviews creates rich data in a much easier, straightforward manner. By using this approach, I can focus on common thoughts, opinions, and experiences among parents, while also highlighting specific thoughts and opinions that I feel are important; expected or unexpected (Roulston, 2010).

Research Site/Participants

This study took place at an elementary school in Richmond, British Columbia. The school itself is a dual-track school with both French and English classes. About 35% of children are in French Immersion and the remaining 65% are in the English stream (information from the school administration). In this section I will discuss the research site, the recruitment process, and the participants in the study.

Research Site

Seeing as the participants are all parents who lead busy lives, I wanted to choose a location that they were familiar with. I also wanted a space that would be easily accessible, that would allow them to bring their children, and would also allow us to have a conversation in private, where we would not be interrupted. The school allowed for all these factors to be present. On the day of the participant's interview, I told them to meet me by the office. This is a familiar location for them, and I knew it would be easily accessible as most parents come to the school to pick up their children daily. To allow for privacy, as well as the space to accommodate their children, I conducted the interview in a study room. This room has enough space for their children to play on the floor or draw on the table. The room is soundproof and has a sign that indicates when the room is being used which helped to maintain privacy. I also chose this room as it was a neutral location. Seeing as I am a teacher in the school, I did not want to conduct the study in my classroom as I felt like this would enhance my position as a teacher at the school, rather than my position as a researcher. By using a library study room, I hoped to minimize any bias or expectations that parents might have regarding my position as a teacher at the school.

Recruitment

To find participants, I first spoke to the school administration about my study. Of the three kindergarten classes, one class is part of the French Immersion program. The administration suggested that I speak to the teacher of this classroom and with her permission, she could introduce me via email to the potential participants for my study. Although I am a teacher at this school, I have no direct connection to these parents. The administration felt like this introduction by the kindergarten teacher might help to build

rapport and encourage more people to participate in my research. I followed their advice and spoke to this teacher. She was happy to help with my study and introduced me to the potential participants via email. To recognize participation, I offered a \$10.00 Starbucks gift card to those who agreed to participate. Of the eight families that were emailed, three families responded. They were all mothers and agreed to meet for an interview. The interviews took around 30-40 mins in length and took place throughout a two-week period.

Participants

The participants of this study are parents of children enrolled in the kindergarten French immersion program for the first time. I chose this population because these parents will have recently undergone the enrolment process at the school. Only parents whose first child is enrolled in French Immersion are included in the study. Parents with children already in French Immersion are not included. This is because they likely do not have as great a need for the enrolment information since they have already been a part of the program for a longer period. They may also have other ideas about French Immersion based on the experiences of their children that are already in the program. The school administration told me that the enrolment information changes from year to year, thus I wanted to ensure that the data I collected was specific to this year's enrolment process.

Being that the school is a small, dual-track school with both French and English classes, only one Kindergarten class fit the requirements of this study. Of the class of 20 children (or 20 families), a pool of eight families fit my participant requirements. Of the eight families the teacher emailed, three parents from three separate families responded to my request and consented to be a part of my study. All participants are the mothers of the family with their daughters in French Immersion. One of the three participants fit the participation requirements of having her first daughter in French Immersion, however I found out at the time of the interview that she had been in French Immersion herself growing up. This was a factor I had not considered, however, I thought that it might bring an interesting perspective to the data. I gave all participants pseudonyms to protect their privacy. One participant is Caucasian and was born and raised in Richmond (her pseudonym is Kara). The other two participants are immigrants; one is originally from Japan (her pseudonym is Marla) and the other is originally from China (her pseudonym is Sandra).

Researcher Role/Positionality

In this study, my researcher role and positionality may have impacted the study data in some way. I say this because I am the researcher, as well as their child's potential next year teacher. I teach grades one and two, and all the participants of this study have children that will be moving into grade one next year. This does not mean I will be their teacher, but rather that I *could* be their teacher. I should point out that throughout the interviews I found myself having a hard time drawing the line between 'researcher' and 'teacher' when speaking to parents. For example, in a conversation with Sandra, she stated that she was not sure how to help her child with reading. As a teacher, I had some ideas of how I could help her with this, which I said we could chat about after the interview. In retrospect, I believe that comments like this may have swayed parents into seeing me as more of a teacher than an interviewer. This might have influenced the participant's responses to something they felt they should say in front of a teacher, rather than something they could say in front of a researcher whom they didn't think they would see again.

Data Collection

In this study, participants talk about their perspectives on the French Immersion program, as well as their understanding and experience throughout the enrolment process. Seeing that this research focuses on the participants' thoughts, opinions, perspectives, and values, I learned that a qualitative approach would allow me to explore this topic in a rich and meaningful way (Freeman, 2017).

In consideration of my research questions, I decided that one-on-one interviews would be the best way to collect data (Roulston, 2010). This would allow parents to speak freely of their experiences, as well as offer them privacy to explain their perspectives (Roulston, 2010). In each interview I asked about their personal experiences in French Immersion, as well as their reasons for enrolling their children in the program. These questions speak to their personal values and beliefs, thus I thought they would be best understood through an interview. The school where the study took place has a high population of immigrants and English Language Learners (ELL). For this reason, I also wanted to ensure that the participants understood the questions I was asking. By holding a one-on-one interview, I was able to explain the questions clearly if I

noticed that the participant did not understand. I was also flexible with my questions, and could change them if necessary, depending on what was discussed in the interview (Roulston, 2010). To come up with the interview questions, I first started by analyzing my research questions. These questions were derived based upon the research I found on parents' experiences in French Immersion. The research questions are:

- What perceptions do parents have of the French immersion program?
- What factors influence their decision to enrol their child?
- What information is being provided to parents?
- What information is most valuable to parents?
- Do parents understand and use this information?
- Does this information help parents decide to enrol their child?

The first question is my main research question, with the following questions sub-questions that I feel are also important. When determining my interview questions, I tried to ask questions that were as close to my research questions as possible (Freeman, 2017). This allowed the answers to my research questions to be clearer. Only questions that would help in answering the above noted research questions were included, as I preferred that the interview would take around 30 to 40 minutes to complete. In total, I had around 10 interview questions I asked participants. Examples of the topics I asked about in the interview included:

- How they heard about the French Immersion program
- Their expectations and perceptions of the program before enrolling their child
- The medium through which the information on the French Immersion program was provided
- Information they found useful or hard to understand
- Their experiences in the enrolment process
- The reasons why they enrolled their child in French Immersion
- Factors that influenced their decisions about enrolling their child
- Information they feel should be included in the information session
- Their experience as a parent in the program so far

Before beginning the interviews, I ensured that all necessary approvals and requirements were in place. To do this, I applied and was approved for ethics through Simon Fraser University. The study was approved as low risk, as the probability of harm or discomfort anticipated in participating in this study is no more than what would be expected in daily life through other typical conversations. Before beginning the study, all participants gave written and verbal consent. During this time, they were told that the information they shared would be confidential. They were told that their names would be removed and replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identity. They were also told that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished, with their information removed from the study. No participants made this request.

During the interviews, I wanted to be fully present with the participants without needing to take notes. To make this possible, I audio-recorded the interviews using my phone. Once the interview was over, I uploaded the audio-recordings to my computer and into a program called 'Otter.ai'. This program transcribed the interview into a Word document for me. The transcriptions were an estimation of what was being said, therefore I edited the transcriptions to ensure they were correctly recorded.

Data Analysis

The over-arching research question is *What perceptions do parents have of the French immersion program?* with sub-questions including *What factors influence their decision to enrol their child? What information is being provided to parents? What information is most valuable to parents? Do parents understand and use this information? Does this information help parents decide to enrol their child?*

Once all the conversations were correctly transcribed, I conducted the data analysis. Before doing so, I decided what approach I would use to code the data. After some research, I decided to categorize the data thematically using both a deductive and an inductive approach (Saldaña, 2013). I used a deductive approach or an a priori approach because there were some specific themes that I expected to see in the data. This gave some structure to the analysis by allowing me to categorize the information under pre-determined themes that were derived from the interview questions and literature. (Saldaña, 2013). The themes I used included *Positive view of French Immersion children*, *Cognitive development*, and *Future opportunities*.

Before separating the data into themes, I coded the data. My coding process involved grouping the data into categories on relevant topics, repeated words, similar feelings, and responses to similar questions. I also looked for differences in the responses, as well as unexpected thoughts or responses. Once all the data was coded, I placed it under the pre-determined themes including *Positive view of French Immersion children*, *Cognitive development*, and *Future opportunities*. I kept track of the data codes that did not fit under these themes so that I could use them to determine new themes once the coding was complete (Saldaña, 2013). Using an inductive approach, I was able to look for new or unexpected themes that were missing and emerged naturally from the data (Saldaña, 2013). These themes included *Lack of information*, *Special programs* and *Uncertainty*. I also ended up adapting one of my pre-determined themes by changing it from *Positive view of French Immersion children* to *Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community*. Throughout this analysis I took note of any quotes that would help to support the themes. By adding this inductive approach, I was able to go in-depth in my analysis and discover these three themes that I had not originally anticipated.

Trustworthiness

According to Roulston (2010), trustworthiness in qualitative interviewing ensures the interview procedure and methods are well-thought-out, and the data analysis is as accurate as possible. This is especially important in a qualitative interview, given the subjectivity of the data being analyzed. To maintain trustworthiness in my interview procedure I ensured that the questions I asked the participants were clear and easy to understand. This ensured that the participant's responses varied based on their own thoughts and experience, and not because of their differing understanding of the questions. Before carrying out the interview I clarified with the participants that the study was confidential, therefore their name and identity would not be attached to anything they said. My hope in clarifying this was that they would feel comfortable in sharing their honest thoughts with me without feeling like they might be judged. Throughout each interview, I used reflexivity by member checking to clarify and repeat what each participant was saying to ensure that I was correctly understanding them (Saldaña, 2013). The participants were able to ask me any questions they had regarding the study and were able to follow up on the results of the study if they desired. To remain present

with the participants, I audio-recorded the interview on my phone, then I transcribed it once the interview was over. After this, I used a transcript verification process by listening to the recordings multiple times to determine that there were no errors or mistakes in my transcriptions. When conducting my data analysis, I carefully considered the approaches that would be appropriate for this study. By using a deductive and an inductive approach, my interpretations of the data remained clear and consistent, while holding my research questions at the forefront of my analysis.

Findings

This study was developed to better understand parents' experiences in relation to the French Immersion program. To properly explain the findings from the data analysis, I separated the findings into four sections. Section one talks about *What perceptions do parents have of the French immersion program?* Section two focuses on *What factors influence their decision to enrol their child?* Section three discusses the questions *What information is being provided to parents? Do parents understand and use this information? Does this information help parents decide to enrol their child?* Section four looks at *What information is most valuable to parents?* To explain the answers to these questions, the results of the study combine themes from the deductive and inductive analyses. The answers to the research questions are separated thematically and described in each section that applies. Some questions had repetitive themes that were brought up throughout the data.

Program perceptions

This section discusses the perceptions that parents have of the program. More specifically, it addresses the question *What perceptions do parents have of the French Immersion program?* When talking about the French Immersion program, parents echoed some of the common views of French Immersion children. They said that they typically have better behaviours and are more capable than children in the English stream. Parents in the current study also talked about the positive community within the French Immersion program. Uncertainty was expressed regarding the program in terms of parents not knowing how to help their children, as well as the suitability of the program for their child. To help explain each of these viewpoints, I categorized the information

based on the following two themes. These themes include *Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community*, and *Uncertainty*.

Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community

Both Kara and Marla spoke about children in French Immersion being a better influence on their own children. They both explained that the children, parents, and community in general seem to be more positive. Kara talked about how the children are better behaved, are more respectful, and get into less trouble. Marla talked about how their parents are more dedicated and involved in their children's learning, with the environment also feeling safer. Below is an excerpt from Kara regarding her perception of children's behaviors in French Immersion. It is important to note that Kara was in French Immersion herself as a child, thus she is referring to her personal experience from when she was in the program:

[French Immersion children] are just like, more into school, you know, kinder kids, less issues, get into less trouble.

Kara also spoke about the aptitude of French Immersion children to learn and be motivated:

You need to be able to work hard or be pretty clever. You're smarter, not smarter, but you're working, you're willing to work hard and learn, and that could only be good.

As noted above, this parent has a positive view of children in French Immersion, believing they are more engaged, kinder, have fewer issues, get into less trouble, are clever, and hard workers. I found it interesting that Kara even mentioned that French Immersion children are "smarter, not smarter, but...". Although she quickly corrected herself, this often seems to be a common view of children in French Immersion.

Marla explained that being around supportive, engaged parents is important for her. She said she feels that parents in the French Immersion program are more engaged and willing to be a part of their children's learning:

My mom, friends who bring their kids to French immersion [say that it] is good, the environment. Like the parents are more into their education.

Just as Kara has a positive view on the behaviours of children in French Immersion, Marla feels that parents' behaviours are also more positive. I was not expecting this connection, but I found that it fits well with the commonly held view on French Immersion as a whole. Marla also explained that the environment on the playground near the French Immersion classrooms feels safer:

I used to bring the kids to the other playground where they would be people [impolite and swearing]. But I don't hear it here. So I feel like, I feel safe.

These quotes support the idea that people tend to have views of French Immersion that are very positive. According to these participants, the children, parents, and environment are more positive and feel safer. These results are in line with what I had personally expected, based upon previous remarks from parents and teachers each year.

Uncertainty

The theme *Uncertainty* emerged naturally from the data. Throughout the study, there seems to be an underlying feeling of uncertainty that all parents feel toward various aspects of French Immersion. This includes knowing how to help their children when they first entered the program, as well as at present, nine months into the program. They feel uncertain about the structure of the program, and knowing if the program is a good fit for their child.

Two of the three parents spoke about not knowing how to help their children. Below is an excerpt from Sandra about this:

We don't know how to speak French or write. That's one of our worries that we don't know how to help [our child].

It is important to point out that this is now nine months into the program and this parent is still not aware of how to help her child. At this point I wish I had asked more about why Sandra didn't ask the teacher for more information about this. This supports the idea that parents might not always ask the teacher the questions they have. I did not find out the reason behind why this might be. Kara also spoke about not knowing how to help her child, despite being the one parent who is capable of speaking and writing in French:

And they did send a bag of stuff home on the kindergarten day. But there wasn't like an instruction of like, these are the things that are really good to know. Just like, you know, in a perfect world, it would be great if they spent

the summer practicing X Y, Z. And maybe they [told me] and I just wasn't paying attention or whatever. But that would be helpful to know.

In this quote, Kara talked about wishing she had known how to prepare her child throughout the summer for beginning French Immersion. She talked about wishing she had resources or things to practice with her child ahead of time. This was unexpected because Kara was the one participant who had already gone through French Immersion herself, so I expected her to not have as great a need for these resources.

Sandra spoke about her uncertainty about the French Immersion program being a good fit for her daughter. She works in a tutoring centre and finds that many former French Immersion students come in looking for help with their writing in English. She has significant worries about the French Immersion program not preparing children well enough in English. Sandra talked about how she is still unsure about whether the program is suitable for her daughter:

So that actually led me to [wondering if] French Immersion... I don't know... is suitable for [my daughter].

Sandra also expressed uncertainty about the structure of the program. She explained that the amount of English being spoken is a significant worry for her:

The kids will be learning French and then what I heard was by grade three it will be full-on French. Yeah. And then it will decrease a little bit yearly. I don't know if it's correct. But um, the percentage will be full on French and then hopefully will decrease a little bit by year. I'm a little bit confused. [Our daughter] has been in French immersion for a year already. We still don't know what's going on.

During our conversation, it became clear that Sandra misunderstood the program structure. She thought that the amount of English being spoken would increase from grade three to grade seven, when in reality, the amount of English will remain the same (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020). Throughout the interview, Sandra continually referenced her concern about the amount of English that her child would receive. In considering this information, I can't help but wonder if knowing this information upon enrolment would have impacted her decision. While uncertainty of the program information can be expected with any program, it also goes to show how easily information can be assumed when people are not properly informed.

Uncertainty is a common theme for parents in many aspects of this study. It came up regarding the program structure, as well as preparing kids for the program. It will also be mentioned later in the study regarding the program information. This uncertainty was present when the parents first enrolled their children in the program and it is present still, nine months into the program.

Enrolment Factors

This section addresses the question, *What factors influence the decision to enrol their child?* All parents had a variety of reasons for enrolling their children in French Immersion. These reasons included the positive influence of the children in French Immersion, help with their children's cognitive development, the potential future opportunities their children would have, the new skills they would learn, the fact that it is a special program and the positive community that French Immersion creates for both children and parents. Reasons for enrolling their children are categorized under four themes including *Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community, Brain development, Future opportunities, and Special programs.*

Positive view of French Immersion children, parents and community

As mentioned above, all parents feel like the children in French Immersion are better behaved, more respectful, and a better influence overall. This was one of the main reasons they wanted to enrol their children in French Immersion, aside from wanting their children to learn French. Below is an excerpt from Sandra on this:

Like I don't expect her to be French efficient, the purpose is not to learn new language [...]. The purpose is [to develop] good dedication in a good environment.

Marla talked a lot about the parent engagement and positive community that French Immersion has. She feels that parents in the French Immersion program are more engaged and willing to be a part of their children's learning. She also feels like the families have better behaviours that make her feel comfortable and 'safe'.

Cognitive development

Both Kara and Sandra spoke about how learning new languages can positively impact brain health and cognitive development. Both said it opens the mind to new ways of thinking and learning, it helps children learn new skills and that learning new languages is easier when children are young. Below is a quote from Kara regarding learning new languages:

It opens up your brain to different ways of thinking, new ways of learning different languages, and people who have multiple languages, it's just, like, easier for them to learn languages when they're younger.

Kara also said:

You learn to be more like more confident because you're actually trying a brand-new thing that you're not comfortable with regularly at school. You're like working that muscle.

Sandra referenced a similar point:

Kids are like a sponge. They can absorb all the languages when they're young. It's good for their brain development.

Future opportunities

Kara and Sandra talked about how learning new languages creates more future opportunities. Both spoke about these in relation to better job opportunities, as well as helping their children to learn skills that will help them in the future. Sandra spoke about how being bilingual will help her daughter's job opportunities in the future:

So that way it might be easier for you when you apply for a job in government. To be bilingual.

Kara talked about wanting her child to have more skills that will prepare her for the future:

I think it just helps you to have to learn that things are work younger. Yeah. Which I think helps you to be more determined and willing to put in the effort.

Throughout the study, the emphasis from parents was not so much on speaking French, but on the skills and the effort that come along with learning it.

Special programs

Two of the three parents, Sandra and Marla spoke about how they had registered their children in both French Immersion and Montessori. Below is a quote from Sandra, explaining the enrolment process she went through for the French Immersion program, as well as for Montessori:

We just selected the schools, and then you can apply for French Immersion and Montessori. We did both actually.

This suggests that these parents prefer a specialized program over the typical public system. I did not find out why both parents selected Montessori as well as French Immersion, nor did I find out why they ended up choosing French Immersion. More research is needed on whether there is a connection between the desire for a private school like Montessori with a program like French Immersion.

Program Information

This section addresses multiple questions. These include *What information is being provided to parents? Do parents understand and use this information? Does this information help parents decide to enrol their child?* Unfortunately, these questions could not be answered separately given that all parents reported receiving no information about the French Immersion program while deciding to enrol their children. For this reason, I decided to group these questions together. To dig deeper into these questions, I asked parents about what information they would like to receive if given the choice. We spoke about their experience so far in the program and how they decided to enrol their child without any information. Through these discussions, the parents talked about the lack of information they have received, and how this has impacted them. They referenced their uncertainty about the program, including the program structure, not knowing how to help their children and the suitability of the program for their children. Kara, the parent who was in French Immersion herself, talked about how this lack of information caused her to feel like she has failed her child. She says that her daughter is currently struggling in the program. She explained that had she known what the program expectations were, she would have practiced things like the letters at home with her child ahead of time. To understand these segments of data, they are separated into themes including *Lack of Information* and *Uncertainty*.

Lack of information

All parents reported receiving no information regarding the French Immersion program before enrolling their child. Two of the three parents talked about the information they received in the 'Welcome to Kindergarten' meeting in June – however this information is given once their child is already enrolled in the program. It is also not specific to French Immersion, but rather it is general information for all Kindergarteners starting school. Here is an excerpt from Kara talking about her desire for more information on how to help her child in the program:

But you know, it would have been helpful maybe at that session or maybe before to go like hey, this would be really helpful for your children to do well, like know to set up a time expect that they're going to need some help after school.

Sandra talked about the fact that when she received the email saying her daughter was accepted into the program, she needed to decide in a small amount of time with little information. She was hoping for more information on the program structure:

Overall [if we knew] the plan for the class, it would have been easier for us to make a decision, because it's actually kind of hard. Once you receive the email you need to reply within three days or even less than the week, otherwise you give your spot up.

Kara talked about how she felt unsure of what was expected from her as a parent, and that having more information on the expectations of the program might have helped prepare her child for kindergarten. As a parent that has gone through the program and speaks French, this caused her to feeling like she has failed her child:

I felt like I should have been more prepared when she started. And had her further along. [...] Because then I would be not feeling like, Oh, I failed her. You know, I should have had her more prepared, we should have done more things. And then also, I would have known this is the expectation going forward.

While speaking to Kara I could tell that this feeling of failure is still painful for her. Since she can speak French, she felt she could have done more to prepare her daughter for kindergarten, such as practicing the numbers and letters in French ahead of time. She talked about how she wishes she had been given more information on what the expectations were, both for her child entering the program for the first time, and as a parent on how to support her child. She explained that had she been given more

information about these expectations, her child might have had more success in French Immersion this year.

Uncertainty

Throughout the interviews, there were underlying feelings of uncertainty that all parents expressed in different ways. They explained that this uncertainty might have been relieved by receiving more information. For Kara and Marla, the uncertainty is caused by not knowing how to help their children. For Sandra, it is caused by not understanding the program structure. She explained that because she had not received any information, she assumed that the children would receive an increase in English classes. During the interview she found out that her understanding of the program structure was wrong, and that the amount of English will remain the same from grade three to grade seven (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2020). Sandra expressed that the amount of English her daughter will receive is a significant worry for her. Because of this I wonder, if she was given the correct information, would this have impacted her decision?

Valuable Information

This section addresses the question *What information is most valuable to parents?* All parents reported a feeling of uncertainty and confusion about how the program is structured and what is to come. When asked about what information would be most helpful, the theme *Lack of information* arose, with parents talking about what information was missing for them and what they specifically would have liked to know.

Lack of information

All parents talked about how they are uncertain about specific aspects in the program and would prefer more information. The information they requested includes reading and homework resources, information on expectations before entering kindergarten, resources on how to help kids continue their learning throughout the summer, information on the long-term plan and structure of the program, parent testimonials and information on how to support children learning multiple languages at home.

All parents talked about how they are unsure about how to help their child in the program, and how they would like more information on how to do this. The struggle with reading was a topic of discussion. Two of three parents spoke about their difficulty with helping their children read in a language they do not understand. Marla talked about her experience with this:

I was nervous because she expects me to read. So I said, I can read you an English book. [But if] you bring back a French book, you can just [look at] the pictures.

Both Marla and Sandra talked about how they constantly use Google Translate to help their children with their reading and homework. Sandra talked about how she will sometimes translate an entire book using Google Translate. Marla summed up her experiences well as a typical parent in French Immersion:

French Google. Yeah. Everyone's best friend.

These parents feel that resources on how to support their children with reading and homework would be valuable and save them time.

Kara spoke about wanting more direction on how to help her child prepare for French Immersion. She explained that she did not learn this soon enough and as a result, her daughter is behind in her learning:

So, [I'd like to them to tell me] "Here's some things you could do to help her", because I'm not gonna lie, that first time I went to the parent teacher conference, I got like, homework for her. I was like, "Oh, I should have been more prepared". Right? Like, I should have done something better. [...] That's kind of what my biggest takeaway has been. It's an adjustment to realize, oh yeah, this isn't just you, like, I have to help you. Especially because I felt maybe I should have done more.

She also talked about having resources on how to help her kids at home throughout the year and during the summer:

But as a parent, it's like, I want to be told that these are some things you should be prepared to help them with, like, you know, this part of the year we try and get ready this way, then we get ready for the next part of year that way. The kind of stuff to practice that at home for the summer, to help bridge that gap so that it's not as tough for them.

Sandra spoke about a desire for more information about the structure of the program and the long-term plan for the children as they move through elementary school:

If we can have some additional info on how the program is structured. And like, by year, great. That's a long-term plan. So, grade one to present in kindergarten to grade seven. [...] we have no idea. What does it look like?

Marla spoke about her desire to hear testimonials from other parents who are familiar with the program. She wants to connect with the other parents in her child's class:

I just wanted to hear more from the parents who come to bring kids to the school.

Marla also talked about how she is an immigrant parent and her child (like many children in the French Immersion program in Richmond) has a third language she is speaking at home. She wanted information on how to help her child when she is overwhelmed from learning French in the classroom, English on the playground, and Japanese at home:

I feel I have to be strong when my kid gets stressed out.

This data suggests that parents have a strong desire for more information in a variety of forms. They feel that valuable information of the French Immersion program includes reading and homework resources, information on expectations before entering kindergarten, resources to help kids continue their learning throughout the summer, information on the long-term plan and structure of the program, parent testimonials and information on how to support children learning multiple languages.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of parents' experiences in French immersion. This includes their perspectives on the program, the information they are given, how they make their decisions and understanding information that is most valuable to them. Parent perspectives are incredibly important due to the significant role parents play in their child's learning and education (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2020). It is the parent that typically understands their child's emotional needs and personality, the parent who decides what type of education to give their child and it is the parent that will typically support their child at home. Despite this, there seems to be a

lack of information that is being received by parents before enrolling in the program. To understand this further, the findings of this study will be compared to the research previously discussed in the literature review. The topics I will be discussing include the factors influencing the choice of French Immersion, the program experience and program information.

Factors Influencing Program Choice

Reasons parents enrol their children in French Immersion

French Immersion is typically a popular program with a limited class size; thus, parents must often enrol for the program without knowing if there will be space for their child (Ministry of Education and Child Care, 2020). This lines up with the information found in the present study, as one parent, Sandra, spoke about the enrolment process, saying that she enrolled her daughter in the program because it was a 'once in a lifetime chance' to learn French, and that the program was a lottery that allowed her daughter to be selected. According to Sandra, when enrolling her daughter in the program, she wasn't sure if she would have a spot.

When asking parents about the reasons they signed their children up for French Immersion, their explanations were similar to those found in the literature. Parents talked about the importance of learning another language, building on future opportunities, cognitive development and building community. These reasons were all noted in the literature as being common reasons for parents (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020; Chen, et al, 2022., Genesee, 2007; Lazaruk, 2007; Mannavarayan, 1993; Noel, 2003; Quiring, 2008). One difference in the present study is that parents also referenced the positive behaviours that the children in French Immersion typically have. This was not listed as a reason that parents typically enrol their children in French Immersion, according to the literature.

Parent perceptions about the program

Through a review of the literature, I found that a commonly held misconception of the French Immersion program is that it is only suitable for bright children from high socioeconomic backgrounds (Wise et al., 2011) and that French Immersion is an elitist

program, meant for students with high academic opportunities (Mannavarayan, 1993; Noel, 2003; Quiring, 2008). There was some crossover with these perceptions in the current study, with one parent referencing the children's capabilities and behaviours as being better overall in the French Immersion program. She said that children in the French Immersion program tend to be clever, hard-working, and more engaged. This same parent also talked about how kids in the program are kinder and get into less trouble. No parents I interviewed specifically referred to the socio-economic background of the children, although one parent talked about how she felt 'safer' around the families in the French Immersion program, as compared to the English side. Research suggests that some parents feel that French Immersion builds community (Chen et al., 2022). This was mentioned by one parent, Marla, who talked about wanting to speak to other parents in the program. She also feels like parents were more engaged in their children's learning than parents on the English side. Perhaps this desire for community is driven by non-French-speaking parents feeling disconnected from their child's experience at school (Macphee et al., 2017). This sentiment of disconnection was echoed by two of three parents, Sandra and Marla. They talked about how they do not know what their children do at school, and that they are not sure of how to help because the work is in French. This feeling of disconnection was not mentioned by the third parent, Kara, who speaks French herself.

Due to these strongly held beliefs about French Immersion that appear to be common among many parents, it is important that parents are given unbiased details about the program. This will hopefully allow them to make a decision that is best for their child's happiness and success at school.

Private School vs. French Immersion

Two of the three participants, Sandra and Marla, had enrolled their children in a private school (Montessori) as well as French Immersion. I did not determine the reasons behind this decision. Seeing that these parents ultimately chose French Immersion, however, suggests that they might view the French Immersion program in a similar light as they view a private school. According to the literature, parents often view French Immersion and private school as being similar. Reasons why parents view it as being similar include the impression that it is a better education (Burgess et al., 2011), as well as a desire to choose programs that include families of the same background or ethnicity

(Burgess et al, 2014; Wilson et al., 2011). When asked about why they chose the French Immersion program, all three parents in the present study talked about how they had either friends or family already in the program. This suggests that parents are motivated to choose programs based on knowing others from the same background or ethnicity. More research is needed on this aspect.

Immigrant parents

In the present study, two of the three participants identified as immigrants: one from China (Sandra) and one from Japan (Marla). As noted in the research, Richmond, British Columbia has a large population of immigrants that move to Canada for a better life (Statistics Canada, 2017). The children of immigrant parents will typically be learning English in tandem with French; thus, their understanding of English is limited. In the present study, both parents talked about how they hope their child is not too confused speaking one language at home, French in the classroom and English on the playground. Sandra talked about how she was worried that her child's understanding of English would be compromised from being in the program and that this would negatively impact her later in life.

The literature on French Immersion suggests that immigrant parents have a greater need to be welcomed and feel as though they are part of a community (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009). This was true for one of the parents, Marla, who talked about wanting to have more connection with the other parents in the class. The literature also suggests that immigrant parents might not always understand the school communication emails or memos when they are sent home in English (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009). This was an issue for Marla. She occasionally struggled to explain her ideas in English during the interview. She mentioned that she feels relieved that the school communication was in English, as she was worried that it might be in French. The literature also mentions that immigrant parents struggle with work challenges, income, and transportation, however none of these topics were discussed in the present study.

Previous literature suggests that parents who come from other countries might feel that it is disrespectful to question school authorities such as the administration and even the teacher (Hornby, 2011; Kao, 2009). This would lead them to not ask questions out of respect for the position of the person. This belief may have played a role in the

parents' behaviour in the current study. Both Sandra and Marla had questions about the program structure and homework. They could have asked the teacher these questions, yet nine months into the program it seemed as though they had not asked anything. When I (as the researcher) told them that they could ask the teacher their questions, they said they did not want to "bother" her. This makes me wonder if their behaviour is influenced by cultural norms that should be considered when talking with these populations.

Program Experience

Factors that help children succeed

All parents who sign their children up for an educational program do so hoping they will be successful. In the present study, two out of the three parents feel that their child is successful, while one parent feels that her child is struggling. This parent talked about her feelings of failure and stress as a result. According to the research, a factor that influences success in the program is having a parent that speaks French (Demers, n.d.; Noel, 2003). The findings in the present study were contrary to this, as the parent that spoke French, Kara, was the parent whose child was struggling. Another factor that typically influences success includes a solid understanding of the child's first language (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020; Demers, n.d.; Gibbons, 1991; Lightbown et al., 1993). Two of the children have parents that identify as immigrants; however, I am not sure about their level of understanding of their first language so I cannot speak on this. Two other factors that influence success include confidence (Ashman et al., 2016; Quiring, 2008) and socio-economic factors (Bournot-Trites et al., 2005), however neither of these topics were discussed in the interviews. In the next section I will discuss the experience of those who struggle.

School experience of those who struggle

All educational programs will have a certain percentage of students who struggle (Ashman et al., 2016; Quiring, 2008). In the current study, one of the three parents feels that her daughter is struggling in the program. Kara, a parent that had been in French Immersion herself, explained that had she been better informed on the program expectations, she might have been able to help her daughter prepare for the program.

Now she feels guilt at the thought that she may have ‘failed’ her child. Research suggests that several factors might influence the chances of a child struggling in the French Immersion program. One factor includes the presence of a third language at home (Ashman et al., 2016; Quiring, 2008). This factor was not in line with the current study as two of the three parents who feel that their child is successful are the two families that do speak a third language at home. Research suggests that other factors include a difficulty in language acquisition, low self-confidence, and bad listening skills (Ashman et al., 2016; Quiring, 2008). No parents reported these to be issues for their children. Given the heavy burden expressed by Kara in this study, I wonder if having more information ahead of time would have truly helped her daughter. More research is needed on the reasons children struggle in connection to their parent’s experience.

Reasons parents remove their children from the program

Although French Immersion is highly valued by parents, research suggests that around 40% of children will leave at some point (Eagle, 1996). The main reasons for this include teacher recommendation and difficulty to learn French (Eagle, 1996). Other reasons for this move include family relocation, social problems, a lack of progress in their English development and their parent’s ability to help with their homework (Eagle, 1996; Ashman et al., 2016). In the current study, the main issue that was discussed was the struggle that two parents, Sandra and Marla, had with helping their children with their homework. Sandra mentioned that she knew that these problems might arise but figured that her daughter could try out French Immersion anyways. She explained that if it didn’t work, she would take her daughter out of it. Although this move is possible, parents must view the program as a commitment, since leaving the program places stress on the children, and on the family as a whole.

Program Information

Information that is shared about the program

Parents have a strong desire for more information about the program structure, as well as how to prepare their kids and help them throughout the French Immersion program. Research suggests that the information shared about a program plays a significant role in the decision that parents make about that program (Delale-O’Connor, 2019). When

considering the significant impact that a child's school experience has over their life, it is important that parents are given the necessary information so that they can make an informed choice for their child. Research suggests that educational program information is often limited, hard to understand and attempts to market the program rather than explain it (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). These findings are in-line with what was found in the current study. All parents reported no information being shared with them before enrolling their children in French Immersion. One parent commented on the short time span between receiving a spot in the program and deciding to accept. She found that it was a hard choice to make, given the lack of information and the short time frame in which the decision had to be made. This same parent also found out that she misunderstood the program information regarding the amount of English her child would be learning. This suggests that without being given information, parents might make decisions based on false information or what they believe to be true.

Information that is useful for parents

According to the results of this study, there is a lack of information being received by parents. This is in-line with the current research which also suggests that there is a lack of information being given to parents when making an enrolment decision (Arsenault, 2008). Research shows that clear, relevant information that is easy to understand can influence a parent's choice about a school program (Delale-O'Connor, 2019). This is consistent with the present study as one parent, Sandra, talked about the decision to enrol her child being hard due to the lack of information she was given and the short time span to make her decision.

Research suggests that parents should have information on supporting their children, as well as information on inclusivity and available learning support in the French Immersion program (French Immersion Program, 2022). Results of the present study indicate that parents would appreciate reading and homework resources, information on expectations before entering kindergarten, resources to help kids continue their learning throughout the summer, information on the long-term plan and structure of the program, parent testimonials and information on how to support children learning multiple languages at home. A previous study noted that parents seemed unaware of the extra demands that learning a second language has on their children, thus it might also be beneficial to communicate this with parents in some form, whether it

be online or in an information session, so that they understand the school experience their child will be participating in. In the present study, parents do seem aware of these demands, however seeing as cities such as Richmond, British Columbia have children in the French immersion program that will be often learning two languages other than that which is spoken at home, this extra reminder of the experience children will have can only be helpful.

Conclusion

This study seeks to understand parent perspectives and experiences in the French Immersion program. Results indicate that:

1. Parent perspectives on the French Immersion program are very positive and might influence them to enrol their children without fully being aware of the commitment involved.
2. There is a lack of information being received by parents before enrolling and once a part of the French Immersion program.
3. More information regarding the program might help to ease negative feelings of uncertainty, prevent false information, and help parents to make an informed decision.
4. Three types of information regarding French Immersion would be useful to parents. These include information on the program structure, how to prepare their children for French Immersion and how to help their children while in the program.

According to the results of the current study, parents would appreciate resources on:

- How to help children with reading and homework
- Expectations before entering kindergarten
- How to help kids continue their learning throughout the summer
- The long-term plan and structure of the program
- Parent testimonials

- How to support children learning multiple languages at home

Seeing that much of this information is already available on the provincial website, the effort to implement and share it would likely not be a difficult task on schools. I believe that one easy step schools can take towards this is to hold information sessions about the program. These sessions would allow parents to hear about the program structure, receive resources on what to expect in the program and how to help their children, it would allow them to meet other parents that are curious about the program and perhaps hear testimonials from previous parents. At these sessions, there should also be a teacher present who can give an unbiased point of view on what the children and parents can expect throughout the program. By helping parents make an informed decision about French Immersion, it could help children feel happier, supported, and successful throughout their time in elementary school.

Limitations

In conducting my research there were several limitations in the data. In the introduction of this paper, I outlined some conversations with both parents and staff that suggest some common misconceptions and beliefs that parents hold regarding the French Immersion program. Given these conversations, I went into this study with the preconceived notion that new parents to the French Immersion program are not well-informed of the program's format, expectations, or ways to help their children. Although I tried to maintain a neutral stance on this belief and remind myself that this is unknown, my interview questions and comments might have been influenced by this belief. I am unsure as to how it specifically might have impacted the data; I can only admit that this bias existed before the study took place and it may have had an impact in some way, despite my efforts to control it.

There are other factors that might have limited the data I collected. For example, the sample size of three families was small, with a population of eight families to recruit from. I wonder how these results would compare with a bigger sample size that included other schools around the district of Richmond, or perhaps other schools around British Columbia. All the participants were also mothers, with their daughters in the program. I would be curious to hear other parent or guardian perspectives as well, or to speak with both parents together.

Future research

In considering the information about French Immersion on the provincial website, I wonder how much of this information is available, but not being shared with parents? How much of this information is being shared with them, but not actually being read? More research is needed on this. I am also curious about whether the information provided changes from year to year. I had heard from the administration that information sessions were previously held for parents enrolling in the French Immersion program, thus I am curious about whether this will be available to parents again in the future. I mentioned that two of the three parents had signed their children up for a private school, Montessori, as well as for French Immersion. More research is needed on whether there is a connection between the view of Montessori as a private school and French Immersion as being a public-school version of private school.

References

- Altrichter, J., Beham, M., Nagy, G. & Wetzelhütter, D. (2011). The effects of a free school choice policy on parents' school choice behaviour. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 37(4), 230–<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2011.12.003>
- Arnett, K. & Mady, C. (2009). Inclusion in French immersion in Canada: One parents' perspective. *Exceptionality Education International*, 19(2).
- Ashman, G., Hunt, C.N. & Short, M. (2016). *Early French Immersion in British Columbia*. In: Fan, S., Fielding-Wells, J. (eds) What is Next in Educational Research? Sense Publishers, Rotterdam. https://doi-org.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/10.1007/978-94-6300-524-1_9
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2020). Ensemble de ressources intégrées 1977. British Columbia, Canada. Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/teach/resources-for-teachers/curriculum>
- Boekaerts, M. (2010). The crucial role of motivation and emotion in classroom learning. *The nature of learning: Using research to inspire practice*, 91(111).
- Bournot-Trites, M. & Reeder, K. (2005). *French and English literacy in French immersion: Student performance and perceptions*. In ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism (pp. 364-376). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- Brown, J. H., D'Emidio-Caston, M. & Benard, B. (2001). *Resilience education*. Corwin Press.
- Burgess, S., Greaves, E., Vignoles, A. & Wilson, D. (2014) What parents want: School Preferences and School Choice. *The Economic Journal* (125) 1262-1289. Doi: 10.1111
- CBC News (2019). French immersion enrolment in B.C. reaches record high numbers: report. Released September 3, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-french-immersion-enrolment-record-1.5268865>
- Chen, X., DeSousa J., Kay-Raining Bird, E. & Selvachandran, J. (2022) Special education needs in French Immersion: a parental perspective of supports and challenges. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, (25:3), 1120-1136, DOI: 10.1080/13670050.2020.1742650

- Delale-O'Connor, L. (2019). Understanding Achilles' Heel: Information Dissemination, Readability, and Marketing in Urban School Choice. *Education and Urban Society*, 51(8):1007-1028. doi:10.1177/0013124518761565
- Demers, D. (n.d.). The successful and the unsuccessful student in French immersion. Alberta Regional Consortia. Retrieved from http://erlc.ca/resources/resources/support_french_immersion/documents/the_successful_and_the_unsuccessful.pdf
- Desforges, C., & Abouchar, A. (2003). The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review (Vol. 433). London: DfES.
- Duyck, W., Edwards, M., Page, M., Smalle, E. & Szmalec, A. (2017). Children retain implicitly learned phonological sequences better than adults: a longitudinal study. *Wiley Developmental Science*, 10.
- Eagle, P. L. (1996). A study of program-related perceptions among parents who remove their children from immersion French. *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 780. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/etd/780>
- Freeman, M. (2017). *Modes of thinking for qualitative data analysis*. New York, NY: Taylor; Francis.
- French Immersion Program (2022). Province of British – Columbia. Retrieved July 10, 2022, from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/french-immersion-program>
- French Language Education Alberta – Overview (2022). Province of Alberta. Retrieved July 14, 2022, from <https://www.alberta.ca/french-language-education-in-alberta.aspx>
- Genesee, F. (1992). Second Foreign language immersion and at-risk English-speaking children. *Foreign Language Annals*, 25(3), 199–213.
- Gibbons, P. (1991). *Learning to learn in a second language*. Marrickville, NSW: Southwood Press.
- Hornby, G. & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational review*, 63(1), 37-52.
- Horwitz, E., Horwitz, M., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Urban education*, 42(1), 82-110.

- Kao, G. & Turney, K. (2009). Barriers to school involvement: Are immigrant parents disadvantaged? *The Journal of Educational Research*, 102(4), 257-271.
- Lazaruk, W. (2007). Linguistic, academic, and cognitive benefits of French immersion. *The Canadian Modern Language Review [La revue canadienne des langues vivantes]*, 63(5), 605–627.
- Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (1993). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacPhee, M., Turnbull, M., Cormier, M., & Miller, T. (2017). The experience of non-Francophone parents in a French immigrant-language school. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 115-134.
- Mannavarayan, J. M. (2001). Revisiting why some students struggle in immersion: An expanded review of the literature (Unpublished master dissertation). Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC.
- Ministry of Education and Child Care. (2020, July 23). *Learn in French-kindergarten to grade 12*. Province of British Columbia.
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/french-programs/learn-in-french/kindergarten-to-grade-12>
- Noel, M. (2003). To stay or not to stay? Factors influencing parents of early French immersion students (Unpublished master dissertation). University of New Brunswick, New Brunswick, Canada.
- Quiring, S. (2008). Challenging the French immersion orthodoxy: Student stories and counterstories. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK.
- Roulston, K. (2010) Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research* 10(2), 199–228.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications.
- Sparks, R. L., Patton, J., Ganschow, L., Humbach, N. & Javorsky, J. (2008). Early first-language reading and spelling skills predict later second-language reading and spelling skills. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 100(1), 162.
- Statistics Canada (2017) Greater Vancouver, RD [Census division], British Columbia and British Columbia [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E;Geo1=CSD;Code1=5915015;Geo2=PR;Code2=59;SearchText=Richmond;SearchType=Begin;SearchPR=01;B1=All;GeoLevel=PR;GeoCode=5915015;TABID=1;type=0> (accessed November 24, 2022)

Swain, M. (2013). The inseparability of cognition and emotion in second language learning. *Language Teaching*, 46(2), 195-207.

Wise, N.; Cummins, J.; Chen, X.; Mady, C. & Arnett, K. (2011). Access to special education for exceptional students in French immersion programs: An equity issue. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 14.

Appendix A. Ethics Approval



Minimal Risk Approval – Delegated

Study Number: 30001529

Study Title: Parent Perspectives of the French Immersion Enrollment Process

Approval Date: January 30, 2023

Expiration Date: January 30, 2024

Principal Investigator: Gillian Judson

SFU Position: Faculty

Faculty/Department: Education

Student Lead: Sabrina Hickey

SFU Collaborator(s): N/A

Research Personnel: N/A

External Collaborator(s): N/A

Funder: N/A

Funding Title: N/A

Funding Number: N/A

Document(s) Approved in this Application:

- TCPS2 CORE – Sabrina Hickey – Dated July 27, 2022
- Consent Form – Sabrina Hickey – Dated January 24, 2022
- Interview Questions – Dated January 24, 2022
- Recruitment Email – Dated January 24, 2022
- Request for More Information Email – Dated January 24, 2022

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human participants.

The approval for this Study expires on the **Expiration Date**. **An Annual Renewal must be completed every year prior to the Expiration Date. Failure to submit an Annual Renewal will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.** The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the authorized delegated reviewer at its regular monthly meeting.

This letter is your official ethics approval documentation for this project. Please keep this document for reference purposes.

This study has been approved by an authorized delegated reviewer.