

## Challenges and Perspectives Related to the Integration of Immigrant Students in Francophone Minority Area Schools

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**Abstract:** This study addressed the challenges facing the integration of immigrant students in francophone minority area schools in the province of New Brunswick, Canada. Thirty-six respondents (school principals, teachers, resource teachers, a pedagogical advisor, and immigration experts) participated in the study. The challenges evoked pertain to the global issue of Frenchifying of new arrivals parallel to their integration into regular classes, with no specific programme or adequate human resources. The inadequate framework and the lack of specific policies regulating this practice are also discussed.

**Key words:** Immigrants; Adjustment (to environment); Cultural difference; Immigrants; Social integration; linguistic minorities

### 1. Introduction

From 1991 to 2000, 2.2 million immigrants entered Canada, the highest number ever observed in all the decades in the last century. In 2001, almost three-quarters of these immigrants lived solely in three metropolitan regions: Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal (Statistique Canada, 2004). If the issue is relatively under control in these large centres, such is not the case in the francophone regions of New Brunswick. In this minority setting, schools continuously face the challenge of meeting the needs of new immigrant students in a context where the primary focus is the promotion and affirmation of the French language and culture in an Anglophone-dominated setting. New Brunswick's francophone schools already have several important goals in sight, including improving academic achievement at every level (New-Brunswick Department of Education (NBDE), 2007) and promoting the French language and culture in minority areas. This study therefore examined the global issue regarding the immersion of immigrant students in a francophone minority setting and addressed the school's perspective with all of its human resources.

In the francophone context of New Brunswick, where the challenges related to immigration are relatively recent, what is the perception of school contributors regarding immigration in francophone minority setting (FMS)?

What are the main challenges emerging from their discussion when they are talking about new arrivals in schools? What are the consequences for students in the context of these challenges?

This study focus on the school contributors' opinions regarding the integration of immigrant students in

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francophone minority area schools (FMS). Our particular aim is to find the challenges facing the integration of immigrant students in francophone minority area schools (FMS) and the consequences of these challenges on immigrant students.

## **2. The Problem**

### **2.1 The Francophone Minority Reality**

The 2006 Census of Statistics Canada enumerated 6,186,950 foreign-born people in Canada. They accounted for virtually one in five (19.8%) of the total population, the highest proportion in 75 years (Crompton, 2008). New Brunswick is one of Canada's least visibly diversified provinces (one in 33) (Canadian Labour and Business Centre, 2005).

In New Brunswick, the Anglophone sector has developed a global view of the diversity which surpasses merely learning a second language to dealing with the particularities involved in the social integration of immigrant students in schools and in society in general by providing references on the steps toward cultural adaptation (Gallant, 2004). The francophone sector, on the other hand, straggles behind with several major challenges, including the promotion of the French language and culture and improving academic achievement, to which we add the Frenchifying of the new arrivals.

New Brunswick Francophones have felt the influence of an assimilatory ideology that supported uniformity by banning instruction in French (Martel and Villeneuve, 1995; Bouchamma, 2006). Much legislation has been introduced respecting this duality and equal opportunity (NBDE, 1997; Chapter E-1.12) as well as equality among linguistic communities between Anglophones and Francophones (Bill 88). In 1982, article 23 was added to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to give parents of these minorities the right to homogeneous francophone schools and to manage these schools (Foucher, 1999). In this context, New Brunswick's Education Act (NBDE, 1997) ensures equal opportunity for both of the province's official linguistic communities. Since 1967, the provincial government is solely responsible for funding public education and is committed to equal opportunity for all of its students. The Department of Education also dictates its education programs, norms, and objectives (Bouchamma, 2004).

In addition to their battle against assimilation, francophone minorities are also experiencing a low birth rate (Castonguay, 2001; Couture, 2001; Martel, 2001), which signifies a decrease in available resources in francophone schools. Immigration therefore provides an invaluable solution to meet staffing requirements which will be on the rise in the coming years (Clews, 2003). Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Strategic Plan to Foster Immigration in Francophone Minority Communities proposes to increase numbers to between 8,000 and 10,000 French-speaking immigrants per year in its francophone communities by 2020.

Even though francophone immigration in FMS does not involve big numbers (Belkhodja, 2008) and remains a small scale enterprise, there is a great deal of interest regarding this topic in the Acadian movement because it represents an opportunity to revitalize the francophone community in a minority setting (Trainsnel, 2008). This interest is relatively recent and it must be set in an historical context where the Canadian francophone society has constructed its own definition from an ideal of fallback position in order to preserve its own personal space (Belkhodja, 2008; p. 4). From that point of view, the challenges to immigration remain important for society in general and, in particular, for schools who must manage all the aspects of diversity.

## 2.2 Integrating Immigrant Students

Immigrant students experience difficulties because the new education system differs significantly from theirs. In fact, they must familiarise themselves not only with a new education program but also learn French (in the case of Allophones), not to mention learn the social codes and values of the welcoming society, which call for specific programmes and resources (Gallant, 2004).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In the FMS, schools are considered as the community promotion and development agents (Foucher 1999) to counter assimilation by promoting this particular environment (Martel, 2001; Landry Allard, 1996; 1997; 1999). In the FMS context, how are new immigrants integrated? According to Gallant (2004; p. 347), the francophone sector speaks in terms of “universality (thus, assimilating), whereby immigrant children are perceived and treated ‘as any other child’, with ‘the same rights and services’, ‘the same privileges’, ‘treated like the others’, and not benefiting from any ‘specific program’”. Regardless of the views regarding immigrant students, there is a definite lack of resources in the FM communities to help them recruit immigrants, introduce welcoming communities, and effectively integrate French-speaking immigrants (Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA), 2004). Moreover, the FM considers itself to be a minority that must protect itself rather than an assimilatory majority (Belkhodja and Gallant, 2004; pp. 79–94; Gallant, 2004).

Despite the fact that New Brunswick’s Acadian and francophone associations are sensitive to the immigration issue, its education system remains relatively unaffected in the matter (Gallant and Belkhodja, 2005). The province has begun a global reflection on diversity and immigration, yet its decisions with regard to education remain inexistent, despite the major role played by schools in integrating immigrants and in welcoming and including the latter in our society. On this issue, Bernard (1997) speaks of *fundamental contradiction* to demonstrate the paradox in which schools in minority settings find themselves, where the more minoritised the community, the greater the role of the school in countering the linguistic erosion. Unfortunately, it is in these very communities where material and human resources lack the most (Bouchamma, Lapointe & Richard, 2007). Thus, for integration to succeed, schools must work toward this social transformation by instilling the notion of inclusive identity in their students (Gallant, 2004).

### 3.1 Integration in the Francophone Minority Setting: The Role of the School

In New Brunswick schools, the French language needs of allophone students are determined and it is the Department of Education who funds the programme that is offered outside of regular school hours in the form of tutoring. According to Gallant (2004), this “uniformist” approach calls for the Frenchifying of immigrant allophone students *elsewhere than in the school*, involving the school only once the students are fluent, with no sustaining institutional framework or qualified personnel (Gallant, 2004). This lack of official guidelines results in enormous discrepancies in terms of the level of language acquisition and accompaniment of these immigrants.

From that point of view, the integration enterprise couldn’t be achieved with the negation of differences, or what Bourdieu (1966) called the indifference to differences. It goes without saying that opening to diversity in education involves changes which have implications on other institutions. The starting point is to make major changes in the training of teachers, curriculum, schools, and society (Ducette et al., 1996).

In fact, in a context where immigrants are few and heterogeneous, providing a common programme or immersion/integration classes is difficult, which is why schools must play a key role with these groups.

## 4. Method

This section presents the Participants, Data Collection Tools, and the Data analysis procedure.

This study has received the approbation from the Research Ethics Committee on human subjects of Laval University. Participants understood that the focus of the study was to identify the challenges associated with the integration of immigrant students in the FMS. They were free to participate or not, knew their role, etc., an understanding which is conform to the norms of the Committee.

### 4.1 Participants

Thirty-six respondents (N = 36) participated in the study: school principals (P) and vice-principals (VP) (N = 10), teachers (T) (N = 21), resource teachers (RT) (N = 2), a pedagogical advisor (PA) (N = 1), and immigration experts (N = 2).

Table 1 show that our participants were coming from nine schools (N = 9) and three Districts of the francophone sector (01, 03, and 11): four primary schools, two composed of kindergarten and classes from 1 to 5, one composed of classes from 1 to 8, and one composed of classes from 6 to 8; three high schools composed of classes from 9 to 12; and two schools involving both levels: one composed of classes from 1 to 12, the other one from 6 to 12.

**Table 1 Distribution of Schools in Districts and Levels**

| Cities        | Districts and levels Schools | Districts | Kindergarten and primary |     |     | High-school | Primary and high-school |      |
|---------------|------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----|-----|-------------|-------------------------|------|
|               |                              | Levels    | Kinder 1–5               | 1–8 | 6–8 | 9–12        | 1–12                    | 6–12 |
| Moncton       | L'Odyssée                    | 01        |                          |     |     | X           |                         |      |
|               | Le Mascaret                  | 01        |                          |     | X   |             |                         |      |
|               | Saint-Henri                  | 01        | X                        |     |     |             |                         |      |
|               | Mathieu Martin               | 01        |                          |     |     | X           |                         |      |
| Dieppe        | Champlain                    | 01        | X                        |     |     |             |                         |      |
| Shédiac       | Mgr-François Bourgeois       | 11        |                          | X   |     |             |                         |      |
|               | Louis-J.-Robichaud           | 11        |                          |     |     | X           |                         |      |
| Saint Léonard | École Grande-Rivière         | 03        |                          |     |     |             | X                       |      |
| Fredericton   | Sainte Anne                  | 01        |                          |     |     |             |                         | X    |

### 4.2 Data Collection Tools

In this study, participants were interviewed using semi-structured interview techniques, which are most valuable when the fieldwork requires an insider perspective (Fetterman, 1989). Each interview lasted 1 hour to 1:30 hour, and included open-ended questions. The main questions for the teacher interview protocol are presented in Table 2. The questions asked have been adapted to the participant status: school principals, teachers, resource teachers, pedagogical advisor, and immigration experts. For example, the teaching practices with teachers, the management practices with school principals, etc.

In general, this study was oriented with a grounded theory. This approach consists in a developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed. Theory evolves during the actual research, and it does this through the continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; p. 273).

The semi-structured interviews focused on the experiences of the various education agents with immigrant students (daily teaching practices, relationships with these students and their parents, with peers, etc.), the effect of this contract on their education practices and the problems encountered, their expectations in promoting the

French language and the Acadian culture, as well as the deployed strategies and proposed solutions to assist immigrant students in their adaptation.

**Table 2 Guidelines for Teachers' Interview**

|  |
|--|
| <b>Main questions</b>  |
| 1. What is your experience with immigrant students?  |
| 2. What kind of relationship do you have in your daily practice with immigrant students and their parents?           |
| 3. What are the effects of this relationship on your teaching practices?   |
| 4. What are the relationships between immigrant students and their peers?  |
| 5. How do you characterize the adaptation of students from the welcoming society regarding these immigrant students? |
| <b>Specific questions</b>  |
| 1. What kind of challenges do you face?  |
| 2. What kind of strategies do you use?   |
| 3. Do you have any solutions to propose regarding a better adaptation for the immigrant students?                    |

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

In order to respect the reliability criteria, each coding category was determined and subjected to inter-code validation. The rates of agreement, calculated as the “number of agreements and disagreements multiplied by 100”, amounted to 81% before revisions and 93% following revisions of categories and a correction of errors and omissions. An agreement of 90% was considered reliable (Huberman and Miles, 1991).

Our analysis creates meaning from data in order to gain an understanding of the challenges facing the integration of immigrant students in francophone minority area schools.

Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti). Transcripts of the interviews were coded and themes emerged through constant comparison: challenges they had to deal with, strategies used and solutions proposed, adjustments of questions with the main themes discussed and the participant discourse.

Data were coded into a “thematic tree” and conclusions were drawn and verified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Researcher coded independently and in a second time coded with another researcher to confirm the decisions made about initial coding and emerging categories. A coding operation was conducted on part of the corpus by other coder who applied the principle of inter-code reliability (Miles and Huberman, 2003). Numerous cycles of analysis were performed; refining and conceptualizing the themes. The results are reported as themes supported by quotes and a referenced data source.

## **5. Results**

The data enabled us to identify two main themes:

(1) Perception of immigration in FMS. This theme is constructed around two sub-themes: 1.1 New Arrivals: a boon to the FMS; and 1.2 New Arrivals: a challenge for the FMS.

(2) Consequences of challenges.

### **5.1 Theme 1: Perception of Immigration in FMS**

New Arrivals: Benefits Challenges for the FMS

Our participants perceived two representations of immigration in a francophone minority setting: 1.1 new arrivals were a benefit to the FMS, and 1.2 new arrivals created a challenge for the FMS.

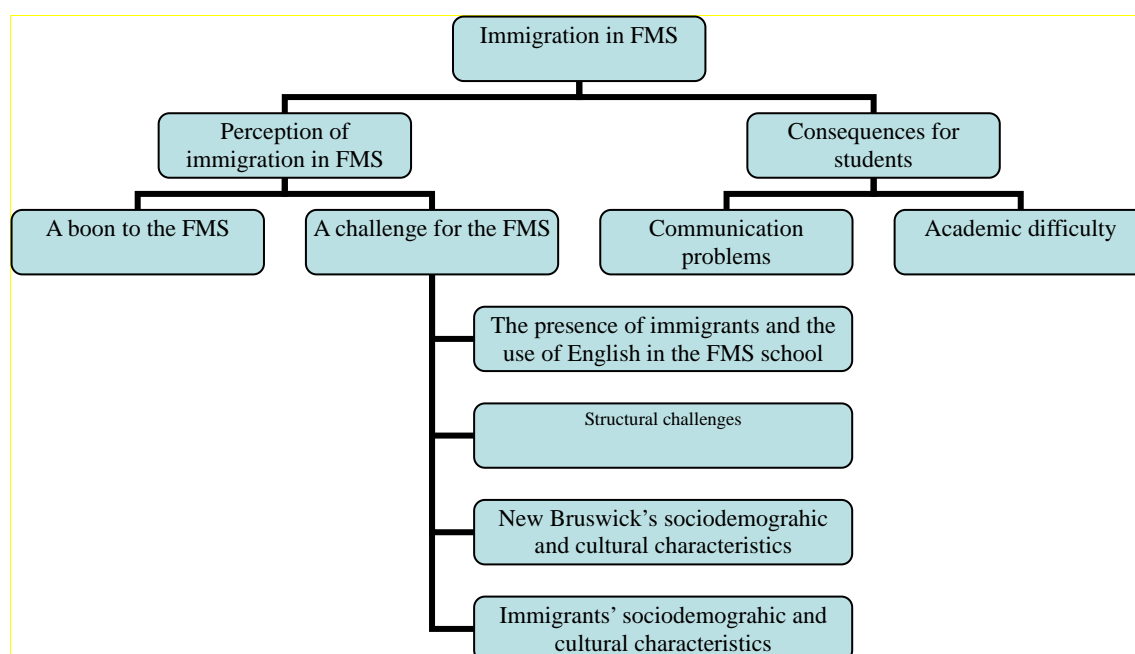


Figure 1 "Thematic Tree"

#### 5.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: New Arrivals: A Boon to the FMS

Participants began by saying that immigration was not always synonymous with difficulties, in terms of the acquisition of language and culture. They referred notably to new arrivals whose transition posed no problem, such as, for example, immigrant investors who had chosen Canada as their new home and who hailed from crisis-free countries.

They arrive here as wealthy individuals with an education level equal to our own when they arrive at school. Of course these people also need to be welcomed, we must also ensure their integration, but in my opinion it's a bit easier for them than for the student who has lived three or four years in a refugee camp before coming to Canada (PA)

In the opinion of our participants, despite the presence of immigrants who are challenged in terms of the language, the FMS nevertheless succeeded in its fight to preserve the language. The presence of new arrivals provided welcoming students with an opportunity to learn about Francophones elsewhere in the world. There are students who do not have to deal with the language barrier: "We have students who are immigrants and things are going extremely well. They arrive here and have an equal level if not above-average level of education. That's interesting to see." (PA). Some respondents mentioned certain immigrants who were perceived as examples in terms of the quality of their language: "So she brought this rich vocabulary, and the way in which she expresses herself is why I often choose her to read aloud in class." (T4)

We identified two positive points as to how immigration was perceived, namely that the presence of immigrants legitimized discussions on the language and that the mission of FM schools was in continuity with the immigrants rather than opposed to them.

#### (1) The Presence of Immigrants Legitimizes Discussions Regarding Language

Some participants viewed the immigrants as a valued addition rather than a menace to the language in a minority setting, as they contribute to sustaining this community. A few participants believed that the language

barrier created problems that hindered the promotion of the French language in the FMS, while others considered this challenge as a means to generate discussion on preserving the French language. In this sense, they considered immigrants in the FMS as an opportunity to demonstrate *in vivo* what standard French was. Their presence enabled educators to get the message across to the francophone students of New Brunswick regarding the importance of their own language. Furthermore, in the presence of immigrant students, an improved standard French would be more justified and would become somewhat more legitimate in facilitating communication.

Having immigrants in our schools, the students realise what a language well spoken is. We notice that immigrants often have an accent that is definitely more French than ours is. Now, not because it's better or worse, but at one point there is also a conversational French, a standard French that people must learn too to be able to communicate. For us, it becomes a really good tool to get them to understand. That's how I see it: it's a good thing. (P5)

## (2) The FMS School: Promoting Continuity

Along with the promotion of the French language, the respondents emphasised the promotion of the Acadian culture as another mandate of the FM school, which concerns Acadian students as much as the immigrant students, who must adhere to this principle:

[...] In addition to promoting the Acadian culture, we have the promotion of the French language. I therefore feel that it sort of meets the needs of the students more. Our policy applies not only to the Acadian students but to the others in the school as well [...] the District's linguistics policy, in addition to meeting the needs of the immigrant students, responds to the needs of our main clientele. (P6)

Aside from acknowledging the complexity of the teachers' practice, a pedagogical advisor involved in the case of immigrant students stated that the teacher's workload did not necessarily increase with the arrival of immigrant students in the FMS:

I think that the school staff has a heavy workload because they must be very conscious of our reality, of our minority setting. Their job involves not only the born-and-bred Acadians but also those who come from all over the world, so it's not exclusive; it's not because they are not necessarily Francophone or Acadian: as their teacher, they have a job to do. (PA)

Regardless of their opinion, our respondents were unanimous in denouncing the lack of essential resources and services to welcome and support the new arrivals. Among other comments, they pointed out the difficulties faced by immigrant students in French language comprehension and the challenges they themselves encountered in communicating with allophone parents. The participants were all conscious of the importance of helping new arrivals to develop an awareness of the linguistic reality in the FMS.

### 5.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: New Arrivals: A Challenge for the FMS

While several participants saw no potential language barrier problems brought on by the presence of immigrant students in the community, others expressed their concern with regard to the language level of immigrants in a context where educators are particularly sensitive to the linguistic question.

#### (1) The Presence of Immigrants and the Use of English in the FMS School

Certain participants reiterated that the school's mission was to safeguard language and culture, regardless of the advantages of immigration within the minority setting. In this regard, they assured that French was spoken during recess and in the extra-curricular activities. Moreover, in the presence of students who did not speak French in class or outside of class and as the use of English became more evident, teachers had to be doubly

vigilant: “We must really intervene to remain proud of our French in our school” (P4). Several participants feared that speaking English on a daily basis would weaken the importance of French.

[...] I noticed... in the halls and in the cafeteria, we spoke English more when we were with them [immigrant students]. We have a duty to perform with regard to that, because we are in a francophone school, but I don't see the presence of immigrants as being a threat to the language, even if we have to watch that from time to time. (T7)

In fact, certain situations brought some teachers to allow the use of English, but strictly on a sporadic basis when they were understood by the immigrant. In essence, it meant using English as a means to communicate in situations where they had no other choice. The teachers remained preoccupied, however, that this would perhaps incite other students to do the same; they were concerned to see that this tolerance went against their role as defenders of the importance of using French in school.

In class, I became aware that at one point there were students who spoke English as well as they spoke French, so it was easier for them to speak English to her than to speak French. We had to watch that, because the others did the same thing, so it's something to watch out for. (T9)

A few participants agreed that it was important to involve these students in promoting the language, regardless of their ethnic origin or language of origin, although they were unsure as to whether these new students would want to promote the language: “I don't think that promoting the language is as important to them as it is to us” (VP3).

## (2) Challenges Associated to the Frenchifying of Immigrants

We identified three types of challenges related to immigrant Frenchifying: structural challenges, sociodemographic and cultural characteristics of New Brunswick, and sociodemographic and cultural characteristics of the immigrants.

### (A) Structural challenges

Our participants talked about the tutoring practices in this setting, the inadequate preparation on the part of the school system, and the lack of preparation of the immigrants themselves among these structural challenges.

#### (A.1) Tutoring

One major problem deplored by the majority of participants was the fact that the students followed a tutored French programme outside of regular school hours. This practice was strongly criticised for tutoring was provided by personnel who were not necessarily French language specialists:

...the entire school day and at the end of the day the child had to go be tutored from 4:30 to 5, in addition to all of the homework he had to do at night... Can you imagine the conditions we place these children in? (P4)

Practices varied. Some mentioned tutoring as the support provided in several subjects to bring the new arrival up to par. “We also have tutoring services for them; services to accelerate their learning, because there was fairly obvious catching up to do on different levels” (P1). The teachers also spoke of the language difficulties and the support provided:

I noticed in their summaries that they had difficulty writing and sometimes the words made no sense in relation to the story. At that moment, we had a retired teacher who came in to help X to correct his texts to write complete sentences. (T7)

Some students partially integrated the regular class, spending the rest of the time learning the language;

however, both the teachers and the principal reported that one student transferred from the francophone to the anglophone sector:

The integration should have been done at the beginning, as with X, another immigrant. She only came to two classes, and for all of the others she had help to try to learn the language. Her approach was different, I think, but she also left for John Caldwell. (T8)

Despite considering several options, several of our participants believed in the benefits of first directing the student toward learning the language with specialised human resources prior to beginning any other learning process:

...have one year of schooling with someone who is a specialist who knows the context, who knows what they have gone through, rather than just throwing them into classrooms right away. (T3)

#### (A.2) The school system: deficient and unprepared

The participants viewed the system as being ill-equipped to welcome immigrants by failing to provide educators with the necessary resources to accompany these new students.

At the immigration level, they bring them to Canada. Yes, they are better off here than in their own country, but the people who bring them here send them into a school system that does not yet have the right tools; we are not properly equipped to accompany these children. (VP1)

The teaching staff is often overwhelmed by situations that go beyond their professional abilities, where communication (at the heart of any support measure) remains arduous and at times even impossible, resulting in a feeling of incompetence:

[...] that it's impossible to know anything about these people. How can we help them? We offer some services to the students at school, but it's always a question of communication. We help a student who manages to share little things with us, but when all we see is the suffering in their faces, how do we go about helping them, exactly? (P3)

The communication problems affect not only those who do not speak French but also those who do. In fact, certain adjustments are even made to the local dialect: "We get individuals from French-speaking countries, but often, for some of them, it's their third or fourth language and French is not always their mother tongue" (PA).

The problems related to comprehension are not limited to the oral but also to textbook content: "Our books are made in Canada, so in our books we use terms which mean something different to them. We have to explain almost every word of a text to them to enable them to understand the content." (T10)

#### (A.3) Unprepared immigrants

Our respondents also deplored the fact that new arrivals receive little preparation or information as to the social and educational context that awaits them:

They make a quick pit stop in Québec or Toronto or Montréal, then arrive here where they know little about the area, little about our culture, and are disadvantaged in terms of the economic level or their understanding of the school system. (P2)

On the other hand, what bothers me is how little these individuals are prepared. If they knew exactly where they were going and were well informed about the culture or the customs pertaining to the language of the area, where they will settle, etc., it would probably help them make better choices as to where they would go. Has the family been well prepared before coming here? (VP2)

(B) New Brunswick's sociodemographic and cultural characteristics

The participants emphasized another concern caused by the province's small population level.

(B.1) Low population

Our respondents pointed out that the small population of New Brunswick perhaps explained the slow immigration rate, suggesting that the province must foresee investing long-term in this process and somehow compensate this deficiency by providing a better quality of life for its new arrivals:

Here, our province is rural, so if we want to invest in this area, in the long term, we won't have any choice. They have to want to, and we have to spread the word that when you come to New Brunswick, you are welcomed and supported. It doesn't mean spending exorbitant sums of money, but providing guidance and accompaniment for families and for students who attend school throughout their entire integrative process. (VP2)

According to the CIR directors, the sociodemographic constraints of small communities warrant that we "rethink" and "redesign" the existing system that currently hinders the growth of programmes that are likely to ensure well-adapted pro-integration services. They found it difficult to develop and implement such services, and emphasize the obstacles facing cultural organisations in this rural context in maintaining their autonomy as well as other networks which contribute to keeping immigrants in the area:

It's always a question of how we can revamp existing programmes not just for the larger centres... This is not easy, unless cultural organisations start up by themselves; otherwise, it's tough, and also because we often see just how important these networks are for an immigrant to stay in the area. (CIR)

Currently, the small number of immigrants within the system does not enable to provide appropriate French immersion services: "It's not as easy as that to go look for tutors and even Frenchifying specialists; it often depends on the size of the school, as we often don't have enough students" (CIR).

(C) Immigrants' sociodemographic and cultural characteristics

Among the factors related to the sociodemographic and cultural characteristics of the new arrivals, we have been able to find: (1) linguistic diversity, (2) school-family relationship, and (3) sociocultural characteristics.

(C.1) Linguistic diversity

To ensure adequate Frenchifying, the role of the school becomes that much more important in terms of linguistic diversity, a phenomenon that is increasingly present with the arrival of allophone social groups whose mother tongue is neither French nor English.

But lately we have had children from China and Korea. We obviously expect that they be French-speaking citizens who will promote the French language and that they be able to function; it's more a case of being able to function in this language. (VP+TA)

Such diversity is even noticed within the family: "The father speaks Spanish, the mother speaks another language (English), and they have chosen a French school, yet they are unable to help with their child's homework" (P10).

(C.2) School-family relationship

Children's education cannot take place without the active participation of their parents. Communicating with the parents calls for a certain adaptation with regard to the spoken language. Because of the language barrier, several participants mentioned the difficulties they themselves experienced when trying to communicate with the parents of their students. Some teachers reported having to translate and communicate with parents in writing.

Also stated was the fact that these adjustments required more time and energy on their part because it was not easy for them to write in English. In certain cases, the teachers were assisted in translating their correspondence with the parents: “Yes, with the parents, at the beginning of the year, I called them to introduce myself. In terms of the language, it was difficult; there was like a wall. We didn’t understand each other very well” (T6). In addition, the teachers spoke of having to resort to writing in English or getting someone to translate their messages to the parents, which thereby increased their workload:

For me, what I found most difficult was corresponding with the parents. My English is not 100%, while for them, it was their language [...] A retired teacher translated my things in English, then she spoke to the parents, which is how we managed to establish a contact with the parents. (T9)

As Allophones, these parents were unable to help with homework: “But sometimes, the homework is not done, but it’s because the parents don’t understand the spelling, the spelling tests, the writing assignments... They sometimes just don’t understand the vocabulary” (T6). In the case of students who did not speak French at home, the participants agreed that their role in the lives of these children was very important in terms of promoting the French language: “Maybe we can have a bigger impact on them at home because they speak neither English nor French and it’s up to us to sell them the idea” (P7).

### (C.3) Sociocultural characteristics

The notion of time was brought up as being perceived differently by the new arrivals:

These people are, by their very nature, very laid back. Such is the case with X, who is really slow. We are used to pushing and sometimes I feel that I push him too hard, because he always takes his time. It’s not the same lifestyle. (T8)

This point, however, was not shared by all of the participants who found that the slowness in accomplishing tasks was attributable rather to their non-fluency.

## **5.2 Theme 2: Consequences**

Our study identified two significant consequences resulting from the various difficulties in communication as well as those experienced in class.

### **5.3 Communication problems**

The CIR members referred to remarks dominating many discussions on the subject of immigration in which the provincial government admitted that New Brunswick was not yet ready for immigration. When the language (essential to procuring information and learning) is not mastered, the result is confusion and delays in these processes: “When we get immigrant children, the initial obstacle to overcome is obviously at the communication level” (P3). The lack of information occasionally results in confusion in the perceptions and expectations one has of the other: “As I mentioned, the challenge here is in the *expectations*. They come from a system where the teacher’s expectations of their students are different and vice-versa” (T1).

What was said of the students applied to the parents as well: “With them, it would be interesting if the parents could received information on, for example, the school system” (T4), or again “And I think that the school expects the parents of our immigrant students participate like the parents who are from here, but that’s not necessarily the case” (T6). This situation therefore has many consequences. In short, our respondents mentioned several challenges with regard to immigration.

Not knowing the language hinders communication at several levels, particularly between teacher and student: “This year, I welcomed a new student who was placed in my Grade 10 class, and in the beginning, I didn’t know

if she spoke French, English, or another language. I just could not understand” (T3), or “...but when he explained, I didn’t understand him, you see? It’s because that’s not the way we usually explained things to him where he came from” (T1). The lack of communication also has definite repercussions on student/student dialogue, which stunts their socialisation, and subsequently, their integration.

Being in the same class with students their own age with no way of communicating, new arrivals feel isolated, which is paradoxical, as they are physically present in these classes where they work on ‘projects’, yet they remain absent by their lack of understanding of what is going on around them in class, and by their silence:

...because the language barrier is also present when he must stay in the same class, work on a project... The result... we’re under the impression that they are on another planet because they have no idea what the others are saying. (T1)

Even those who hail from francophone countries are unsettled by the *chiac* (a regional dialect combining old and new French with English):

They come from a francophone country where English is not used at all in the French language, so they already have a handicap as they do not yet master French and now they have to deal with other students who combine French and English, so it’s an added difficulty for them as they don’t understand at all. (T1)

#### 5.4 Academic difficulties

It goes without saying that the contradictory context in which new arrivals are placed is not to their advantage: we ask that they learn new content without even first learning the language, which prevents them from moving forward in their learning experiences. “How can she possibly answer science questions when she cannot communicate? Science is all greek to her” (T3). Consequently, they do not learn at the same rate as the others. The real challenge, however, are situations involving allophone immigrants, who often drop out of the francophone sector and transfer to the anglophone sector: “He left and went to an anglophone school because of the language barrier. In his case, it’s simple: He really liked school, that’s for sure, but we lost him because of the lack of available services for him. He was worried that his marks would suffer” (VP2).

### 6. Discussion

Our findings reveal several obstacles in the integration of new immigrants in FMS schools. All of the challenges mentioned by the respondents essentially pertain to the fact of being non-fluent in the language. In the FMS, Frenchifying activities for new arrivals are provided in the form of tutoring outside of regular school hours. This standardize approach currently used by the school system is deemed inadequate, as it has no institutional basis, and is rarely dispensed by qualified teachers (Gallant, 2004).

In fact, the integration of immigrant students can be achieved only with the recognition of their differences, or what Bourdieu (1966) called the indifference to differences. This recognition should be the starting point in order to achieve the equality of chances which is one of the main themes in the actual discourse regarding equality and equity for the financing of francophone schools. On this particular topic, the French Teachers Federation of New Brunswick was reminding us a decision from the Supreme Court of Canada (Arsenault-Cameron c. L’Île-du-Prince-Édouard, [2000] 1 R.C.S. 3, 2000 CSC 1, par. 31) where they talk about the possibility, if necessary, of different treatments in accordance with the needs, in order to ensure a quality of education equivalent to the one of the majority (l’Association des enseignantes et des enseignants francophones du

Nouveau-Brunswick (AEFNB), 2008).

At present, there is no available data on the rate of migration toward the anglophone sector following a more or less lengthy stay in the francophone sector. Several of our participants spoke of this phenomenon which occurs following a partial or total integration in regular class. While a number of causes may explain this transfer (seeking better grades, a belief that the English language is easier to learn, students' age), we must seriously examine current practices and revitalise the human and material resources deployed in this process.

The province of New Brunswick has seen several debates on the subject of immigration; none, however, have directly discussed its policies and perspectives, which as a result have created a feeling of uncertainty and incompetence among its educators, which thus explains the many personal initiatives taken to address the urgent needs of immigrants, as is evidenced, among others, in the differentiation between education and evaluation.

Our participants felt strongly that the system should improve their response to this new clientele by addressing several inadequacies in its integration process of immigrant students, such as how we welcome them and their families, the lack of understanding with regard to our educational system, the lack of open, effective communication, and clearer expectations by both parties.

The respondents maintained that they remained confused as to how to interact with new arrivals under these difficult conditions (we know nothing about you and have not met, there is no possibility of any clear communication between us, we are unable to provide the essential support services because we do not know your needs or your interests, to name a few), only to lose them to the anglophone sector. Participants shared their feelings of uneasiness caused by the obvious lack of the number one resource that is essential to communication, namely, language, thereby hindering all possibility of communication and consequently, any possible integration. In this sense, when the language is not fully acquired, trying to communicate becomes almost futile. In short, the various challenges evoked were mainly attributed to the fact of not mastering the language.

We must nevertheless consider this issue within its socioeconomic and cultural context: immigration occurs less here and is heterogeneous because of the ethnic origin of the immigrants, which is why teachers are key agents for change with these new students (different evaluations/pedagogy) in a context where they must consider the mission of the school in preserving and promoting the French language. This adaptation process cannot be successful without high-quality trained personnel, which is another issue to be explored.

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