

THE EFFECT OF A DUAL-LANGUAGE STIMULATION PROGRAM FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN

RESEARCHERS: Andrea MacLeod¹, Diane Pesco², Sylvania Côte³, Rabia Sabah Meziane³, Manar Jaber³, and Emilie Desforges³

AFFILIATION: University of Alberta¹, Concordia University², and Université de Montréal³

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OBJECTIVE: This study developed an early intervention program, StimuLER, to support the bilingual language development of refugee children in Québec.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Rising numbers of refugees and the risks associated with families' forced displacement have underscored the need to better understand and support the language needs of refugee children. While early language stimulation programs have been developed for particular groups of children (e.g., late talkers or children with developmental disorders), we have not found programmes designed specifically for multilingual children from refugee backgrounds.

PRACTICAL GOAL: This study furthers our understanding of how to support the dual language acquisition of refugee children and provides a data-supported program for the bilingual language development of refugee children that involves community partners and parents.

PRIMARY AUDIENCE: Educators, speech-language pathologists, and settlement service providers

HOW THE DATA WAS OBTAINED

Through community organizations and schools, the StimuLER program was implemented and fine-tuned with over 100 children. The intervention consisted of 8 to 10 weekly sessions of 60 to 90 minutes, offered to children aged 3 to 6 years old. Participating children were assessed on wellbeing, including emotional regulation, via a questionnaire and interviews with parents and the intervention teachers. To assess children's language development, observations and language sampling provided the primary data, while receptive vocabulary tests in French and Arabic were administered before the first intervention session and after the last session. Syrian preschoolers who had recently arrived to Canada were compared to other groups of children. Additionally, a case study was conducted with three children who participated in the intervention.



CALL TO ACTION

- To foster resiliency in refugee children, schools must find a way to build bridges with parents to support children's language learning in both the language of school and home.
- Many families would benefit from extended and continued support postmigration, particularly support provided in their first language.
- Teachers should learn about each family's strengths -which in this study included home language knowledge, valuing of education, and high levels of parental education- and to build on these to support children's language learning.
- School boards should provide services to reduce the burden on families caused by the two-step integration into schools.
- Community partnerships should be strengthened to improve refugee families' knowledge of and access to available services.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

This study identified several factors in the familial and school context that affect children's language development:

Within the familial context:

- Families faced economic hardships due to difficulties finding work.
- Language barriers following their arrival in Montréal, specifically the language barrier between families and schools made it hard for parents to be involved in their child's education.
- There were changes in the family responsibilities related to the migration, such as absence of a primary caregiver or mothers acting as the sole income earner.

Within the school context:

- Some children attended "welcome classes" which provide support for French language learners but were, in this instance, centralized in a particular school, requiring some children to travel rather than attend the neighborhood school.
- Teachers were able to recognize the consequences of limited first and second language proficiency, such as difficulty making friends and understanding tasks in class.
- Some teachers had unrealistic learning goals for the children.
- Some teachers displayed a lack of understanding regarding the challenges that families with refugee backgrounds face, and the magnitude of the task for parents to learn a new language while adapting to a new country.

[View Project Webpage](#)



ABOUT CYRRC

The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) is a network of researchers, service providers, and government partners working together to produce and share research that facilitates the integration of young refugees and their families in Canada and beyond.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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