

**The Experiences of non-French-speaking International Students at a Bilingual Canadian
University**

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Abstract

This study investigates the academic and social experiences of English-speaking international students at the University of Ottawa, a bilingual institution where both English and French hold official status. Framed by critical multilingualism theory, the research explores how these students navigate the university's bilingual policies and their impact on academic performance, social integration, and overall inclusion. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, with thematic analysis applied to the interview data for a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. The analysis reveals that although many participants perceived the bilingualism policy as a barrier to their academic success and daily lives, others valued it as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Findings indicate that while the bilingual framework enhances students' cultural and linguistic exposure, it also poses significant challenges for those with limited French proficiency, including restricted access to academic resources, reduced classroom participation, and social exclusion in predominantly French-speaking spaces. Quantitative data further indicated disparities in academic performance based on self-reported French proficiency levels. The study recommends expanding language support services, offering greater flexibility in language requirements, and fostering a more inclusive campus environment to better support international students in bilingual settings.

Keywords: Bilingual education, Higher education, International students, Language policy, Critical multilingualism

Résumé

Cette étude examine les expériences universitaires et sociales des étudiants internationaux anglophones à l'Université d'Ottawa, un établissement bilingue où l'anglais et le français ont le statut de langues officielles. Encadrée par la théorie du multilinguisme critique, la recherche se penche sur les manières dont ces étudiants s'adaptent aux politiques bilingues de l'université et à leur impact sur la performance académique, l'intégration sociale et l'inclusion générale. En utilisant une approche méthodologique mixte, données ont été recueillies par le biais d'entretiens qualitatifs et de sondages quantitatifs, avec une analyse thématique appliquée aux données des entretiens pour une compréhension approfondie des expériences des participants. L'analyse révèle que, bien que de nombreux participants perçoivent la politique bilingue comme un obstacle à leur réussite universitaire et à leur quotidien, d'autres y voient une occasion de développement personnel et professionnel. Les résultats indiquent que, bien que le cadre bilingue améliore l'exposition des étudiants aux cultures et aux langues, il pose également des défis importants pour ceux ayant une maîtrise limitée du français, notamment un accès restreint aux ressources académiques, une participation réduite en classe et une exclusion sociale dans des espaces principalement francophones. Les données quantitatives ont également révélé des disparités dans la performance académique en fonction des niveaux autodéclarés de compétence en français. L'étude recommande de développer les services de soutien linguistique, d'assouplir les exigences linguistiques et de favoriser un environnement de campus plus inclusif afin de mieux soutenir les étudiants internationaux dans un contexte bilingue.

Mots-clés : Éducation bilingue, Enseignement supérieur, Étudiants internationaux, Politique linguistique, Multilinguisme critique

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Context

This study was conducted at the University of Ottawa, the largest bilingual English-French university in the world, where students can choose to pursue programs in either English or French (University of Ottawa, 2023b). Most programs at the university provide both English and French options, allowing students to select one language to complete their studies (University of Ottawa, 2024b). However, students are not typically required to alternate between the two languages for coursework or assignments, nor is bilingualism expected in completing academic tasks.

One unique feature of the University of Ottawa, particularly within Ontario, is its flexibility in allowing students to submit assignments or exams in either official language, even if it differs from the language of instruction. This accommodation is largely feasible due to the predominantly bilingual faculty, a reflection of Ottawa's status as Canada's capital, where the federal government promotes bilingualism. This policy, rather than (as might first appear) reinforcing what Flores & Rosa (2015) describe as an "elite bilingual ideology," can instead be seen as an effort to accommodate students who have varying levels of proficiency in English and French. Given that English-French bilingualism is Canada's official language pairing, individuals proficient in both languages often experience elevated social and academic standing (Haque, 2012; Ricento, 2013). However, by allowing students to submit their work in either English or French regardless of the language of instruction, the policy acknowledges and supports those who may not have fully achieved elite bilingualism. While this provides greater linguistic flexibility for students as far as Canada's two official languages, it does not extend to speakers of

other languages, raising questions about the broader inclusivity of linguistic policies in academia (Ricento, 2013; Wu & Veronis, 2022).

The University of Ottawa's approach to bilingualism reflects federal bilingual policy, which seeks to promote diversity but may fall short in fostering true inclusivity. The university's language statistics classify students based solely on their official language use—either English or French—without acknowledging the linguistic diversity that international students bring. This framing contributes to the erasure of other languages on campus, reinforcing an ideology that prioritizes English and French while overlooking the presence of additional linguistic communities. According to these statistics, 68.5% of students primarily use English, while 31.5% primarily use French, illustrating the institution's emphasis on its official languages (University of Ottawa, 2023b). While this bilingual framework may offer more linguistic inclusion than monolingual universities in Canada—where either English or French dominates as the sole language of instruction and services—it still participates in the iconization of official languages and the privileging of elite bilingualism.

1.2 Background

The global neoliberal trend has led to a rise in students from all over the world pursuing higher education in English-speaking Canadian universities. This surge can largely be attributed to the rising global emphasis on the English language (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Evans & Morrison, 2011; Guo & Guo, 2017; Kubota, 2016; Ou & Gu, 2021). Statistics from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) reveal a remarkable increase in the number of international students from China who have chosen to study in Canada since 2013 (Statistics Canada, 2022b). From 2010 to 2020, the number of international students enrolled in Canadian

universities skyrocketed by 327%, rising from 153,790 to 503,270 (Global Affairs Canada [GAC], 2017; Institute of International Education [IIE], 2020). Over the past five years, the overall number of Canadian student permit holders has surged by nearly 300,000 (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Although the number of students from China has remained relatively stable, there has been a significant increase in students from other Asian countries, such as India, South Korea, and the Philippines (Statistics Canada, 2022b; IRCC, 2024b). This dramatic increase positions Canada as the country with the fastest-growing international student population in higher education worldwide (IIE, 2020).

International students are increasingly choosing Canada for their higher education, drawn by its reputation for academic excellence, safety, and inclusivity (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2023). These students often arrive with high expectations, hoping to acquire valuable skills, enhance their English proficiency, and engage in meaningful cultural exchanges with locals (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Piller, 2016; Ranta & Meckelborg, 2013). Many international students view their time studying in Canada as a valuable opportunity. After graduation, they can typically remain in Canada on a work permit for up to two years, allowing them the chance to apply for permanent residency and enjoy many of the benefits afforded to Canadian residents. This opportunity benefits not only the students but also the Canadian government, as international students contribute substantially to the economy. In 2018, for example, international students added around 21.6 billion CAD to Canada's GDP, largely due to the higher tuition fees they pay—graduate students, on average, pay about 2.5 times, and undergraduates about 4.5 times, the tuition fees of their Canadian counterparts (Government of Canada, 2024).

For universities, international student recruitment has become increasingly important. As government funding continues to decline, many institutions rely on the higher tuition fees from international students to support operations and maintain educational quality (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In recent years, the Canadian government's approach to attracting international students has bolstered both the economy and the reputation of Canadian universities (GAC, 2023).

However, in January 2024, the federal government announced plans to reduce the number of new international student permits issued in order to alleviate pressures on housing, healthcare, and other public services (IRCC, 2024a). While the policy aims to enhance the overall learning environment, many universities have raised concerns about potential funding challenges, underscoring just how essential international students are to Canada's economy, particularly within the higher education sector (Macdonald, 2024).

1.3 Problem

International students contribute significantly to the diversity and sustainability of Canadian universities, yet they often encounter substantial challenges that go unrecognized by both the academic community and Canadian society at large. Although international students report generally positive experiences in Canada (CBIE, 2023), they face difficulties in adjusting to new academic and social environments. Many struggle with issues of linguistic discrimination, social exclusion, and a lack of linguistic support (Andrade, 2006; Ramsay et al., 1999). In a survey by CBIE (2023), 9% of respondents reported feeling isolated or unwelcome, with students from China and India among those who frequently considered leaving due to social exclusion. Chinese and Iranian students, in particular, cited experiences of discrimination,

revealing the gap between Canada's diversity ideals and the lived experiences of many international students (CBIE, 2023).

Language barriers emerge as a primary obstacle for international students in Canadian universities, significantly affecting both their academic and social experiences. International students often arrive with limited knowledge of one or both official languages, resulting in challenges such as social isolation, limited participation in campus activities, and restricted engagement in classroom discussions (Robertson et al., 2000; Sawir, 2011; Trice, 2003).

Language barriers not only impede their ability to build friendships with domestic students (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002) but also amplify feelings of homesickness and isolation. Many international students feel compelled to socialize only with peers who share their native language, limiting their opportunities to experience immersive language learning and cultural integration (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002).

At bilingual institutions, language inclusiveness is a crucial yet often neglected factor in international students' educational experience. Despite institutional claims of inclusivity, many universities lack policies or resources that adequately support non-native English or French speakers. International students may be expected to use the official languages even in social contexts, restricting their freedom to use their native languages. The result is an environment where official language fluency is prioritized, leading to potential biases in grading, participation, and access to campus opportunities (Wu & Veronis, 2022). Research suggests that allowing students to occasionally use their native languages (L1) can enhance their learning experiences and facilitate second language acquisition (Harbord, 1992). However, in many cases, the linguistic diversity that international students bring is undervalued or even dismissed as a barrier to their success.

The consequences of linguistic exclusion extend beyond the classroom. Studies show that language barriers create anxieties about job discrimination and students' potential to establish long-term roots in Canada. Many students express concerns that their limited English or French skills may hinder their ability to secure employment or integrate fully into Canadian society (Nunes & Arthur, 2013). Furthermore, universities frequently overlook the need for a linguistically inclusive environment, rarely providing language-specific tutoring or academic support that acknowledges students' multilingual backgrounds (Cheng et al., 2004). This oversight perpetuates a linguistic hierarchy that often leaves non-Anglophone and non-Francophone students marginalized, with their native languages viewed as obstacles rather than assets (Page, 2023).

The prevalence of linguistic imperialism, whereby English and French are positioned as the sole “acceptable” languages of instruction, research, and campus interaction, intensifies these issues. Canadian university policies often implicitly undermine the value of other languages, presenting English and French proficiency as prerequisites for academic success (Martin, 2024). This pressure places additional strain on international students, who may feel compelled to prioritize official language proficiency over maintaining their native language skills, a phenomenon that can impact both their academic engagement and their sense of identity and belonging (Phillipson & Kabel, 2024). The lack of inclusive language support and the dominance of official languages leave many students feeling “foreign” or unwelcome within the academic environment, further exacerbating their feelings of isolation (CBIE, 2023).

In sum, the diversity that international students bring to Canadian universities is often unaccompanied by genuine inclusivity. While diversity means the presence of varied backgrounds, beliefs, and languages, inclusion implies active support and celebration of these

differences (Tienda, 2013). Yet, many international students report feeling alienated rather than embraced, facing unique challenges due to the lack of a supportive linguistic environment that could foster their academic and social success (Cheng & Fox, 2008). If Canadian universities seek to fully integrate international students, addressing the structural and linguistic barriers they face is essential to building a truly inclusive academic community.

1.4 Positionality

As an alumnus of an undergraduate program at the University of Ottawa, I bring a deeply personal and informed perspective to the issue of bilingualism and its impact on international students and new immigrants in Canada. My own journey through the academic and social landscapes of a bilingual institution has given me firsthand experience with the challenges and nuances that accompany Canada's language policies. Having been part of a community where French and English are not just languages but cultural pillars, I am acutely aware of how Canada's bilingual policies shape not only communication but also identity and belonging within educational institutions.

Coming to Canada from a non-English-speaking background, I have personally encountered many of the linguistic and cultural barriers that new immigrants and international students face. My own experiences with navigating academic and social environments where English and French are privileged over other languages have given me insight into the pressures and adjustments required of students whose first languages are neither of the official languages. The process of integrating into a bilingual environment that prioritizes English and French highlighted the unique struggles faced by students who, like myself, must adjust to language policies that do not fully acknowledge or accommodate their native languages. This positioning

allows me to approach this research with both empathy and a critical perspective on the inclusivity—or lack thereof—within Canada’s bilingual framework.

In my research, I am particularly attentive to the lived experiences of international students and immigrants who must navigate the expectations and limitations imposed by Canada’s language policies. Canada’s official bilingualism is often seen as a model of inclusivity, but my personal and academic journey has made me aware of the gap between policy ideals and on-the-ground realities. While the bilingual policies are well-intentioned, their implementation often favors individuals already proficient in English or French, leading to a situation where speakers of other languages may feel marginalized.. This hierarchy reinforces the perception that languages beyond English and French are secondary or even incongruent with Canadian identity (Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute [OLBI], 2022). My position as someone who has lived under these policies at the University of Ottawa informs my understanding of how such a hierarchy impacts students’ academic performance, social interactions, and sense of belonging.

Moreover, my own academic background in Second Language Education has provided me with theoretical and pedagogical frameworks to analyze the effects of Canada’s bilingual policies on international students. Through this lens, I am able to critically evaluate how language policies shape learning environments and influence the inclusivity of educational spaces. My studies have underscored the importance of recognizing students’ linguistic diversity as an asset rather than as a barrier, a perspective that contrasts with the often assimilationist nature of bilingual policies in practice. I am particularly interested in examining how these policies may unintentionally perpetuate linguistic imperialism, where English and French are seen as the only languages of academic and social relevance, thereby sidelining the linguistic and cultural capital that international students bring with them.

In addition, I recognize that my research is not conducted in a neutral space. My personal experiences with linguistic marginalization inevitably shape my views on the importance of creating genuinely inclusive multilingual environments. I approach this work with a commitment to advocating for policies that respect and promote linguistic diversity beyond the official bilingual framework. By acknowledging my positionality, I am aware of the potential biases I may bring to this research, particularly in my critique of Canada's bilingual policies. My goal, however, is not to disparage these policies but to highlight areas where they fall short in serving Canada's increasingly multicultural and multilingual population.

Finally, my role as an international student gives me a unique empathy for the experiences of other students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. I understand the challenges they face, including feelings of alienation, the pressure to conform to linguistic norms, and the struggle to maintain their cultural identities in an environment that may not fully support them. This empathy drives my research and informs my commitment to advocating for policy reforms that foster a more inclusive academic environment for all students, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. Through this research, I hope to contribute to a greater understanding of how Canada's bilingual policies impact international students and to encourage the development of educational practices and policies that honor the full spectrum of linguistic diversity within Canadian universities.

1.5 Overview

This thesis examines the impact of bilingual and multilingual policies on higher education, focusing on the University of Ottawa. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature on Canada's bilingual policy, the university's specific bilingual framework, and the broader

social contexts of linguistic imperialism, multiculturalism, and colonialism. It also highlights issues of linguistic inclusion and discusses critical research methods.

Chapter Three introduces the theoretical frameworks of critical multiculturalism and critical multilingualism that guide the research. It also outlines the qualitative methodology, including the research design, participant recruitment, methods for data collection, and approaches to data analysis.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the online questionnaire and interviews, exploring the experiences of international students in the bilingual environment of the University of Ottawa. Chapter Five discusses these findings, focusing on the implications for international students and universities.

Chapter Six concludes with the study's limitations, contributions to the field, and suggestions for future research. This research aims to enhance understanding of the challenges and opportunities created by bilingual policies in Canadian higher education and to promote more inclusive academic environments.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature, focusing on key themes related to bilingualism and multilingualism in the Canadian context. It begins by examining Canada's bilingual policy and its application at the University of Ottawa, followed by an exploration of linguistic imperialism, multiculturalism, colonialism, and immigration. The chapter also addresses issues of linguistic inclusion within Canadian language education, considering the interplay between colonialism, racism, and multilingual practices. Finally, it highlights the relevance of critical research methods for understanding these complex social dynamics.

2.1 Canada's Bilingual Policy

In 1969, the federal government of Canada passed the *Official Languages Act*, declaring English and French to be Canada's official languages (Department of Justice Canada, 1985). However, this legislation was opposed at the time by minority language groups, such as Indigenous communities in Canada, or groups that did not speak both official languages (Haque, 2012; Mady, 2012). Many non-English/French-speaking bilinguals (persons who do not speak one of the official languages) feared that English and French would create linguistic privilege at the national level, thereby reducing the country's tolerance for multiculturalism (Haque, 2012; Mady, 2012). To allay this concern, however, the federal government passed the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (Government of Canada, 1985), which stated that the recognition of English and French does not remove any rights or privileges associated with other languages, nor does it deny the use of these languages. *The Canadian Multiculturalism Act* was designed "to preserve and enhance the use of languages, other than English and French, while strengthening the status

and use of the official languages of Canada” and “to facilitate the acquisition, retention and use of all languages that contribute to the multicultural heritage of Canada” (Department of Justice Canada, 1985, p. 3). However, many commentators have argued that this has not been successful (Bissoondath, 2022; Gwyn, 1996), and anxiety and concern about official languages among non-English and French bilinguals has persisted because the Canadian federal government has done little to support language education in non-official languages, making the respect for minority languages in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act a mere rhetorical exercise (Haque, 2012; Mady, 2012). Mady (2012) and Ricento (2013) show, by analyzing the *Official Languages Act* and other federal documents released by the government, that despite the government’s claiming to respect languages other than the official languages, the federal government has clearly placed English and French in a privileged position, which is “at odds with Canada’s self-image as a ‘mosaic’ of cultures and languages” (Ricento, 2013, p.475).

2.2 The Bilingual Policy at the University of Ottawa

The University of Ottawa holds a unique position in Canada’s higher education landscape as the largest bilingual university in the country. Established in 1848, the university is committed to Canada’s official languages policy, offering courses in both English and French to uphold its bilingual mandate—though this focus on linguistic duality may overlook the experiences of international students and speakers of other languages. This bilingual mission, formalized in university policies, aims to foster an inclusive environment where both languages coexist and are actively used in academic and administrative contexts (University of Ottawa, 2023b). At the core of the university’s bilingual policy is the principle of language equality, enabling students to choose whether to study in English or French. This policy allows students, regardless of their

chosen language of instruction, to submit assignments, exams, and theses in either official language (except in language-specific courses), ensuring that language is not a barrier to academic success (University of Ottawa, 1974, 2024c).

This bilingual framework extends beyond classrooms to administrative and social aspects of campus life. The university provides communications, student services, and official documents in both languages, creating a fully bilingual experience. Faculty and staff are also expected to be proficient in both languages, encouraging teaching and research that celebrate Canada's bilingual heritage (Behiels, 2004). Programs like Translation and French Studies are deeply embedded in this bilingual mission, and department such as the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) further support students' language development, enhancing bilingualism across diverse linguistic backgrounds (University of Ottawa, 2022; OLBI, 2024).

However, challenges exist. The bilingual policy predominantly supports English and French, which can be challenging for multilingual international students who may not be proficient in both official languages. Research by Wu and Veronis (2022) highlights this issue, showing that some international students experience difficulty in bilingual environments. One student noted, "I couldn't understand about 60% of what was said during a supposed bilingual meeting because much of it was in French" (Wu & Veronis, 2022, p.549). While students at bilingual institutions often have the option to pursue studies in either English or French, they may still be required to attend meetings or events that are intended to accommodate both languages. This can lead to confusion or frustration for non-bilingual students, particularly if the dominant language shifts unexpectedly. This reveals a potential gap in the policy's inclusivity and suggests that broader support for multilingual engagement may be needed to ensure equal access and participation for all students.

Students may also encounter limitations in mentorship and other campus opportunities if they do not speak both languages. For example, one student expressed frustration, saying, “I can’t apply for any mentorship here [at the University of Ottawa] because they need someone with French language” (Wu & Veronis, 2022, p.550). This mentorship program aims to improve the student experience by helping mentees develop transferable skills and professional networks, while also offering mentors an opportunity to share their expertise and improve their leadership abilities (University of Ottawa, 2025). However, many of these mentorship opportunities require proficiency in both French and English, limiting access for students who are only comfortable with one language (Wu & Veronis, 2022). This highlights a gap in the inclusivity of such programs, potentially excluding non-bilingual students from valuable career preparation and networking experiences.

Recognizing these challenges, the University of Ottawa is enhancing its bilingual support services and expanding its bilingual offerings. For example, initiatives such as offering more French-language courses in traditionally English-dominated fields and encouraging the French Immersion Stream demonstrate the university’s commitment to promoting bilingualism (University of Ottawa, 2023). The French Immersion Program, which specifically requires students in that program to take one-third of their courses in French, presents a structured pathway for non-native French speakers to develop language skills with the assurance of academic support.

Despite these efforts, the percentage of students whose stronger or preferred official language is English remains low in French-language courses. According to data from 2009, only 5% of English-speaking students enrolled in French-language courses (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2009a). This suggests that while the university promotes

French language learning, interest among native English-speaking students may be limited, potentially indicating challenges in the university's bilingual outreach.

The university offers financial support programs, like the Differential Tuition Fee Exemption Scholarship for international Francophone students, to encourage French degree completion (University of Ottawa, 2024a). However, because enrollment in bilingual programs is voluntary, many international students may not prioritize bilingualism, limiting the policy's impact on integrating non-bilingual students. Nonetheless, the university remains committed to bridging linguistic divides by continually adapting and expanding its bilingual programs.

2.3 Linguistic Imperialism in Canada

Linguistic imperialism, defined by Robert Phillipson (1992) as the transfer of a dominant language and culture to marginalized groups, has profound implications in multilingual societies like Canada. Canada's unique sociolinguistic landscape—characterized by its dual official languages, English and French—complicates the dynamics of linguistic imperialism (Sonntag, 2009). The country's bilingual framework, while intended to promote linguistic equality, has historically and contemporaneously affected minority and Indigenous languages in ways that can perpetuate linguistic dominance, both at institutional and social levels (Canadian Heritage, 2023).

The roots of linguistic imperialism in Canada can be traced back to the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), a conflict that culminated in the British conquest of New France and established English dominance over French-speaking populations (Haglund & Massie, 2018; Haque, 2012). This historical event set the stage for the linguistic and cultural tensions that would persist in Canada, as Francophones often faced marginalization in political, economic, and social spheres.

These tensions reached a critical point in the 1960s, when the federal government was compelled to address growing inequalities and separatist sentiments in Quebec (Haque, 2012; Mills, 2010). The *Official Languages Act* (1969) emerged as a direct response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission), which highlighted systemic disadvantages faced by Francophones and called for measures to promote bilingualism (Haque, 2012; Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2009b). Meanwhile, the rise of the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and its acts of terrorism underscored the urgency of addressing Francophone grievances to preserve national unity (Haque, 2012; Hewitt, 1994). Yet, the very framework of bilingualism introduced through such measures can be critiqued as perpetuating linguistic imperialism by privileging English and French while marginalizing Indigenous and immigrant languages, thereby maintaining colonial power structures (Haque, 2012; Haque & Patrick, 2014; Léglise & Migge, 2007).

As previously mentioned in this section, Canada's *Official Languages Act* of 1969, which enshrined English and French as the country's official languages, was a landmark policy in promoting bilingualism at the national level (Department of Justice Canada, 1985). However, while the policy aimed to create equal opportunities for both linguistic groups, it implicitly reinforced the dominance of English and French over other languages, particularly Indigenous languages (Haque, 2012; Mady, 2012). The framework of official bilingualism, rather than promoting linguistic diversity in its broader sense, primarily privileges English and French, leading to systemic marginalization of minority and Indigenous languages (Haque, 2012; Ricento, 2013). This results in what scholars argue can function as a form of linguistic hegemony, where two officially recognized languages are privileged in ways that may marginalize other linguistic groups (Haque, 2012; Heller, 2006; Mady, 2012; Phillipson, 1992).

This system of bilingualism affects immigrant communities and Indigenous populations disproportionately. Based on data from Statistics Canada (2005), some interpretations suggest that immigrants who do not speak English or French often feel compelled to downplay their native languages in favor of one or both official languages to secure social and economic opportunities. Indigenous communities face similar pressures, as fluency in English or French is often necessary for accessing government services, participating in political processes, and securing employment (Ferguson & Sidorova, 2023). Thus, the institutionalized bilingual framework inadvertently perpetuates linguistic imperialism by enforcing the dominance of English and French as the primary languages of social mobility and participation (Zeng et al., 2023).

Education is a primary site where linguistic imperialism is both enacted and contested (Phillipson, 1997). In Canada, language education policies largely prioritize English and French, often at the expense of Indigenous and immigrant languages (Patrick, 2016). In cities like Ottawa, policies are in place to protect and promote bilingualism, ensuring citizens' rights to use English or French in various public domains (City of Ottawa, 2022). However, within the education system, this emphasis on official languages translates into limited institutional support for Indigenous and immigrant languages. As a result, schools reinforce a hierarchy of languages, where English and French are perceived as more “valuable” or “necessary” than others, further marginalizing linguistic diversity.

In provinces outside of Quebec, the predominance of English as the language of instruction in most schools further enforces linguistic imperialism (Martin, 2024). While French immersion programs aim to develop students' proficiency in Canada's other official language, the opportunities for immersive, real-world engagement with French can be limited, particularly

in predominantly English-speaking regions (Ray & Gilbert, 2020). Despite the growing popularity of immersion programs, functional literacy and academic success often rely heavily on English, reflecting its dominant role in most aspects of Canadian society (Martin, 2024). Although immersion students and their parents appreciate the program's benefits, the broader sociolinguistic context may still constrain the practical application of French beyond the classroom. For Indigenous communities, this can mean that Indigenous languages are positioned as secondary or irrelevant within educational settings, perpetuating the marginalization of Indigenous identities and contributing to the erosion of cultural heritage (Khawaja, 2021).

Furthermore, language proficiency tests required for university admission, professional certification, and immigration are predominantly in English and French, reinforcing the idea that these two languages are necessary for upward mobility (Piller & Bodis, 2024). Many Indigenous and immigrant students may feel pressured to abandon or deprioritize their native languages to succeed academically and professionally, a phenomenon indicative of what Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) calls "linguistic genocide," where policies and practices devalue and contribute to the extinction of minority languages.

Many international students in Canada face unique challenges navigating a bilingual environment where French is often emphasized, particularly in French-dominant or bilingual regions, such as Quebec province or the city of Ottawa (Wu & Veronis, 2022). For those without prior knowledge of French, integrating socially and academically can be difficult. Students report feeling excluded from activities and social groups conducted primarily in French, which can affect their sense of belonging and academic engagement (Wu & Veronis, 2022). For international students who have already had to adapt to English as an academic language, the additional challenge of integrating into a French-speaking environment can be isolating.

The examination of linguistic imperialism within Canada's bilingual framework highlights both the strengths and limitations of current language policies. While Canada's official bilingualism serves to uphold both English and French as national languages, this structure often inadvertently marginalizes other linguistic communities, including Indigenous groups, immigrants, and international students (Ferguson & Sidorova, 2023; Khawaja, 2021; Wu & Veronis, 2022). The dominance of English and French creates challenges for those who speak heritage languages, limiting their access to resources and their ability to fully participate in social, academic, and professional spaces (Martin, 2024). For immigrant and international student populations, navigating Canada's bilingual requirements often means balancing integration with the preservation of their own linguistic identities.

2.4 Multiculturalism, Colonialism, and Immigration in Canada

"Canada is internationally renowned as a welcoming and peaceful country, a 'host society,' with a wealth of experience integrating newcomers from around the globe" (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2014, p.2). The Canadian landscape has evolved significantly over time, particularly in terms of its linguistic diversity and multiculturalism. According to census data by Statistics Canada (2021), while English and French are still the primary languages spoken in Canada, 9 million Canadians do not speak either language as their mother tongue. Moreover, one in eight Canadians now speaks a language other than English or French at home, marking a peak in linguistic diversity since the mother tongue question was first introduced in the 1901 census (Statistics Canada, 2021). This linguistic diversity is also reflected in educational institutions; the University of Ottawa, for instance, accommodates approximately 10,600 international students from 145 countries, accounting for 26% of its student body

(University of Ottawa, 2023a). This diverse environment highlights the urgency of addressing the dynamics between Canada’s official languages and linguistic minorities on campus.

The University of Ottawa, aligned with the federal government’s bilingual policy, does not expect ethnically diverse students, particularly those without bilingual proficiency in English and French, to conform to a single “Canadian” identity (Development Office, 2024). Instead, multiculturalism policies encourage these students to retain their unique cultural identities and languages, with an emphasis on ensuring they experience a campus environment as inclusive and comfortable as that of bilingual students (Development Office, 2024). However, despite these policies, the University’s Regulation on Bilingualism—while underscoring the importance of official-language bilingualism for Anglo-French community ties—makes no mention of linguistic minorities or international students, nor does it specify how support might be offered to students with linguistic disadvantages (University of Ottawa, 1974).

Historically, English and French speakers have been considered two distinct dominant ethnic groups in Canada. In the 1991 census, Anglophones and Francophones made up 28% and 23% of Canada’s population, respectively. Despite growing linguistic and cultural diversity due to immigration, dominant language groups—particularly English and French speakers—continue to shape public discourse (Badets, 1989, 1993; Logan, 1991). The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (2014) predicts that by 2031, nearly a quarter of Canada’s population will be first-generation immigrants. Some scholars argue that this demographic shift is often framed by the government as a challenge to the country’s bilingual identity, with concerns about its potential impact on Canada’s cultural makeup (Banting, 2022; Fleras & Elliott, 1992).

This apprehension reveals the underlying protectionism of the ruling class, particularly the Laurentian elite—a term referring to the powerful political, business, and cultural figures

concentrated in Canada's historical centers of power along the St. Lawrence River, such as Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. This group has historically promoted bilingualism as a means of preserving their socio-political and economic privileges, often framing it as a unifying national ideal while maintaining their dominance in decision-making and resource allocation (McDougall, 2020). Though the Canadian government extols the virtues of bilingualism to newcomers, it often disregards dissenting views, effectively sidelining minority voices that challenge its policies.

Canada's multiculturalism framework is intrinsically tied to its history of immigration. In 1971, then-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced "Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework," marking Canada's first formal multiculturalism policy (Haque, 2012). This policy shift followed pivotal changes in immigration laws in the 1960s, when the government began prioritizing applicants' education, training, and skills over racial or geographic origin (Haque, 2012). Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Ellen Fairclough's 1962 announcement emphasized that immigration selection would henceforth be based on "education, training, and skills as the primary criteria for admission, regardless of the applicant's country of origin" (House of Commons Debates, 1962, as cited in Haque, 2012). Prior to this, Canadian immigration policy was marked by explicit racial discrimination. Between 1885 and 1962, Canadian immigration law was explicitly discriminatory in both language and purpose, actively discouraging or outright prohibiting immigration from non-white, non-European populations (Taylor, 1991, as cited in Haque, 2012), as evidenced by legislation such as the *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1885, *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1923, the "continuous journey" provision of 1908, and the *Immigration Act* of 1910 (Haque, 2012). The racial and ethnic biases embedded in these laws reflected the prevailing attitudes of the time, which sought to preserve a

predominantly white, British-derived national identity (Haque, 2012). These laws, often aimed at excluding certain ethnic groups, were debated in 1947, when Prime Minister Mackenzie King remarked in the House of Commons that Canadians were wary of large-scale immigration altering the country's character (Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1947, p. 2644).

Although the *1952 Immigration Act* marked some progress, provisions designed to limit non-European immigrants remained. Troper (1993) argues that the government's "high-profile waiver and repeal" of these discriminatory practices was "less to court non-white immigration than it was to improve Canada's international image and align immigration legislation with human rights" (p. 266). This ambivalence was evident in the 1966 White Paper on immigration, which emphasized Canada's need for skilled, educated immigrants over those suited for manual labor: "Our people are moving off the land, not on to it... Canada's expanding industrial economy offers most of its employment opportunities to those with education, training, skills" (Department of Manpower and Immigration Canada, 1966, p. 8).

The *1966 White Paper*, by removing overt racial discrimination from policy, represented progress but did not fully eliminate racism from Canadian immigration. Instead, it introduced new criteria that ensured Canada's immigrant population would predominantly comprise skilled, educated individuals—a shift that, as noted by Zink in a 1996 article published in the now-defunct *Toronto Telegram*, was designed to maintain Canada's image as a "white man's country while creating the impression that all forms of racial discrimination had been eliminated." Following these policy changes, immigration numbers surged between 1962 and 1970, particularly as Canada became increasingly pressured to align its practices with growing global advocacy for human rights (Statistics Canada, 2024a).

Canada's evolving immigration policy during this period, known as the Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B and B) Commission era, underscores the complex intersections of language, race, and immigration (Blanding, 2013). Initially, the B and B Commission proposed that "founding" groups (white settlers and white immigrants) be included in Canada's white-settler identity (Haque, 2012). This inclusivity, however, did not extend to "real minorities" or visible minorities, a category including non-European racial groups, who faced systemic exclusion due to their non-Caucasian appearance (Blanding, 2013). As Lupul (1983) describes, "white ethnics" were primarily concerned with language and cultural preservation, while "real minorities" struggled with assimilation due to visible ethnic differences (as cited in Haque, 2012, p. 39).

The uniquely Canadian term "visible minority" was introduced in response to rising non-European immigration (Statistics Canada, 2022c). It describes non-Aboriginal persons who are non-Caucasian or non-white—including South Asians, Chinese, Blacks, Filipinos, Arabs, Latin Americans, Southeast Asians, West Asians, Koreans, and Japanese (Statistics Canada, 2022c). The term emerged as Canadian immigration policies shifted from favoring Europeans to superficially recognizing the diversity of non-European immigrants (Blanding, 2013; Haque, 2012).

In sum, Canada's policy of multiculturalism is deeply influenced by its colonial and postcolonial histories. The B and B Commission's efforts and the 1966 White Paper reflect a tension between upholding Canada's official bilingualism and addressing the needs of an increasingly diverse population (Brosseau & Dewing, 2009; Haque, 2012). While policies such as the removal of overt racial clauses suggest a progressive shift, they have also masked an underlying reluctance to fully embrace multiculturalism, particularly for those who cannot easily assimilate due to visible ethnic differences (Haque, 2012). Thus, multiculturalism in Canada

remains a complex, contested ideal, shaped by historical and ongoing struggles over language, race, and cultural identity.

2.5 Plurilingualism and Translanguaging under the Canadian Bilingual Framework in Higher Education

2.5.1 Plurilingualism in Canadian Higher Education

Plurilingualism, as defined by the Council of Europe (2001), refers to an individual's ability to use and navigate multiple languages flexibly rather than being confined to a static bilingual or monolingual identity. Canadian universities, particularly those with bilingual mandates, such as the University of Ottawa, have begun to acknowledge the importance of plurilingual competencies among students. Research by Marshall (2019) highlights how plurilingual approaches in Canadian classrooms enhance students' metalinguistic awareness and cross-cultural competence, fostering a more inclusive academic environment. Despite these benefits, institutional policies often remain rigidly structured around official bilingualism, limiting the formal recognition of languages beyond English and French (Haque, 2012).

2.5.2 Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Approach

Translanguaging refers to the dynamic process by which multilingual speakers fluidly shift between languages to construct meaning, as explored by García (2009) and further developed by García and Li Wei (2014). This process reflects how speakers leverage their full linguistic repertoire in communication (Leonet et al., 2024). Within Canadian universities, translanguaging has been explored as a pedagogical strategy to support students whose linguistic repertoires include languages other than English and French. Studies by Rafi and Morgan (2024) demonstrate that allowing students to draw on their full linguistic resources in academic

settings—whether through multilingual classroom discussions, code-meshing in writing, or incorporating home languages in learning activities—enhances comprehension and engagement. However, the tension between translanguaging practices and official bilingual policies remains a challenge, as universities often prioritize strict language separation in academic and administrative contexts (Ballinger et al., 2017).

2.6 Linguistic Inclusion in Canadian Language Education

Linguistic inclusion is a vital concept within the broader discussion of diversity and equity in education, especially in a multicultural and multilingual context like Canada. However, it is worth noting that linguistic inclusion and linguistic diversity are not the same thing (Tienda, 2013; Roberson; 2006). Diversity refers to the demographic composition of an organization, institution, or nation-state and is often measured through quantitative methods such as censuses or surveys, typically represented as percentages (Jensen et al., 2021). While diversity provides a crucial starting point by highlighting the presence of varied identities, including linguistic diversity, it is only the first step, because no single term can fully capture the harm, barriers, and violence experienced by members of underrepresented groups, both historically and in the present, who continue to face inequality and exclusion (Calman, 2022; New Frontiers in Research Fund, 2024). True progress requires moving beyond numbers to focus on inclusion, which addresses the quality of interaction and participation within a diverse space, ensuring that all individuals feel valued, respected, and supported.

In recent years, the importance of linguistic inclusion has been increasingly recognized as a key element in promoting social justice and ensuring equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds (Ainscow, 2020; Calman, 2022). Ainscow (2020)

contends that enhancing inclusion in education fosters greater community involvement, which can more effectively support learners at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement. For Asian international students studying in Canadian universities, linguistic inclusion goes beyond the mere recognition of their language needs; it encompasses the creation of an educational environment where their linguistic identities are valued, respected, and actively supported in the learning process (Li, 2024).

While Canada officially recognizes English and French as its two official languages, it is home to a vast array of other languages due to its diverse immigrant population (Statistics Canada, 2024a). Among these languages, Mandarin, Punjabi, Cantonese, and many other languages spoken by Asian international students have become significant linguistic communities within Canadian educational settings (Statistics Canada, 2005). Despite the multicultural nature of Canadian society, however, students whose first languages fall outside the official bilingual framework often face challenges related to language proficiency, cultural differences, and educational practices that may not fully accommodate their needs (Wu & Veronis, 2022).

Linguistic inclusion in education refers to the idea that all students, regardless of their first language, should have access to an education that respects and values their linguistic backgrounds and supports their development as multilingual individuals (Tienda, 2013). This concept is particularly relevant in higher education, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds—such as international students—often encounter unique challenges in adapting to an academic environment (Nwachukwu et al., 2024). For Asian international students in Canada, this can involve difficulties related to language barriers, academic expectations, and cultural integration, all of which can impact their educational experience (Nwachukwu et al., 2024).

In the context of Canadian bilingual education, linguistic inclusion can be viewed through the lens of how bilingual policies—primarily those promoting the use of English and French—interact with the linguistic needs of international students. While Canada’s bilingual framework aims to promote language equality between English and French speakers, it can inadvertently marginalize students whose first languages are neither of the official languages (Imran & Natsir, 2024). In particular, Asian international students, who often arrive in Canada with limited proficiency in English or French, may find themselves excluded from full participation in the academic and social aspects of university life (Mandell et al., 2022).

Canada’s commitment to bilingualism, enshrined in the *Official Languages Act* and other policies, is a foundational aspect of the country’s identity (Canadian Heritage, 2023). However, while bilingualism is often framed as a strength in Canadian education, the policy does not fully account for the country’s rich linguistic diversity beyond English and French (Statistics Canada, 2022a). International students, particularly those from Asia, find themselves navigating an educational system that privileges English and French, while their home languages—often Mandarin, Cantonese, or Punjabi—are overlooked or marginalized (Xu, 2021; Tavares, 2022). This creates an uneven playing field, where students must often struggle to meet academic and linguistic standards that are not reflective of their own cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Linguistic inclusion, therefore, requires a reimagining of language policies that moves beyond the exclusive focus on English or French as the sole language of instruction and engagement. It involves incorporating a broader range of languages into the fabric of Canadian educational institutions, ensuring that Asian and other international students are not merely accommodated but fully included. This could take the form of providing multilingual support services, offering language programs that recognize and build on students’ home language skills,

and creating an academic environment that acknowledges the value of linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a hindrance (Calman, 2022).

For Asian international students, the absence of linguistic inclusion can result in a number of challenges that affect their academic success and well-being. Language proficiency is often considered the primary barrier for international students; however, research has shown that linguistic exclusion can have a more profound impact on their overall educational experience (Ma, 2020). When their home languages are not respected or valued in the classroom, these students may experience feelings of isolation, alienation, and marginalization. They may be hesitant to participate in class discussions or collaborate with peers, fearing judgment due to their linguistic differences (Tavares, 2022).

Moreover, the pressure to conform to Canadian language norms—primarily the use of English and French—can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and undermine students’ self-esteem. This phenomenon is often referred to as “linguistic insecurity,” where students doubt their language abilities and feel that they are at a disadvantage compared to their native-speaking peers (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2021). In the case of Asian international students, linguistic insecurity may also intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as racial or cultural biases, further compounding their challenges (Li, 2024).

Linguistic inclusion, therefore, is not just about addressing language proficiency but also about creating an environment where linguistic diversity is celebrated, and students are empowered to express themselves fully both in their academic and in their social lives (Hossain, 2024). Institutions that promote linguistic inclusion can help alleviate the isolation felt by international students and provide them with the tools they need to succeed academically, socially, and personally (Alasmari, 2023).

Several theoretical frameworks help to contextualize the importance of linguistic inclusion in education, particularly as it pertains to the experiences of international students. One such framework is multilingualism—the idea that being able to speak multiple languages is not a deficiency but rather an asset that should be embraced within educational settings (Backus et al., 2013). Scholars such as Cenoz and Gorter (2010) argue that multilingualism should be viewed as a resource for both individuals and society, promoting cognitive flexibility, cross-cultural understanding, and the development of critical thinking skills.

2.7 Critical Research Methods

2.7.1 The Role and Nature of Critical Research Methods

Critical research methods extend beyond the confines of traditional academic inquiry, serving as dynamic tools for social transformation. They are not limited to merely examining societal structures but aim to actively “[promote] social justice and equity through critical examinations of power and politics that produce and maintain domination and subordination in various dimensions of local and global society” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 12). These methods challenge the conventional paradigms of positivist research, which often emphasize neutrality, objectivity, and detachment (Kubota, 2023). Instead, they embrace a transformative agenda, seeking to identify, analyze, and disrupt systemic inequalities within societal and institutional frameworks (Kubota, 2023).

A key distinction of critical research methods lies in their rejection of presumed neutrality. Unlike positivist approaches that claim objectivity, critical methods are unapologetically subjective in their stance against injustice (Tavares, 2022). This intentional subjectivity is not a limitation but a strength, allowing researchers to engage directly with the

complexities of power dynamics, race, and systemic injustice (Tavares, 2022). By prioritizing equity over objectivity, these methods open up new avenues for understanding and addressing deeply rooted social inequalities.

2.7.2 Critical Research as a Lens for Power and Inequality

Critical research methods act as a powerful lens for interrogating the structural power dynamics that underpin society (Dodge et al., 2021). They encourage scholars to critically engage with the ways in which institutions, policies, and practices perpetuate domination and subordination (Ryoo & McLaren, 2010). This approach moves beyond surface-level analysis to explore the underlying ideologies that sustain systemic inequalities.

For instance, in educational research, critical methods might focus on how curriculum design and pedagogical practices privilege certain knowledge systems while marginalizing others (Ryoo & McLaren, 2010). By highlighting these disparities, researchers can advocate for transformative changes that promote inclusivity and equity (Kubota, 2023; Ryoo & McLaren, 2010). Moreover, critical research challenges scholars to question their own positionality and the ways in which their work may reinforce or challenge existing power structures.

2.7.3 Subjectivity as a Tool for Advocacy

The intentional subjectivity of critical research methods is a deliberate counterpoint to the perceived objectivity of traditional methodologies (Kubota & Lin, 2009). This subjectivity allows researchers to take a clear stance on issues of injustice and inequity, aligning their work with the needs and voices of marginalized communities. Rather than striving for detachment, critical researchers embrace the idea that all knowledge production is inherently political (PoReSo, 2020).

This stance empowers researchers to not only uncover systemic inequities but also advocate for meaningful change. For example, by examining the lived experiences of marginalized groups, critical research can highlight the ways in which institutional practices perpetuate exclusion and discrimination (Kubota, 2004). These findings can then inform policy recommendations, curriculum reforms, and other initiatives aimed at fostering equity and justice.

2.7.4 Bridging Research and Social Action

Critical research methods blur the boundaries between academia and activism, emphasizing the importance of translating research findings into tangible social change (Datnow et al., 2023). This approach recognizes that knowledge production is not an end in itself but a means to address pressing social issues (Bronner, 2017). By connecting theory to practice, critical research fosters a more engaged and impactful scholarship.

For instance, in the field of language education, critical research might examine how linguistic policies and practices reinforce colonial power dynamics (Kubota, 2004). By exposing these inequities, researchers can advocate for more inclusive and equitable approaches to language teaching and policy-making (Kubota, 2023). This emphasis on action-oriented scholarship underscores the transformative potential of critical research methods.

2.7.5 Expanding the Scope of Critical Inquiry

The scope of critical research methods is not confined to any single discipline or context. These methods are equally applicable to local and global issues, making them a versatile tool for addressing a wide range of social justice concerns (Harvey, 2022). Whether examining racial disparities in education, economic inequalities in urban planning, or the intersectionality of oppression in healthcare, critical research provides a framework for uncovering and addressing systemic injustices.

In a globalized world marked by interconnected systems of power and oppression, critical research methods offer a comprehensive approach to understanding and challenging these dynamics (Harvey, 2022; Muncie, 2006). By centering the experiences of marginalized groups and amplifying their voices, critical research contributes to the broader struggle for equity and justice (Harvey, 2022).

In sum, critical research methods are more than a set of academic tools; they are a call to action for scholars and practitioners alike. By rejecting neutrality, embracing subjectivity, and prioritizing social justice, these methods offer a powerful framework for addressing the systemic inequalities that shape our world (Muncie, 2006). Through their transformative potential, critical research methods not only deepen our understanding of societal dynamics but also inspire meaningful change.

2.8 Colonialism and Racism

2.8.1 Colonialism and Its Legacy in Higher Education

The persistence of colonial power dynamics in higher education is a testament to the enduring influence of historical systems of domination. In the Canadian context, academic institutions continue to function within frameworks that privilege colonial ideologies and practices. As Kubota (2023) notes, the majority of students and faculty develop academically within systems that reinforce colonial power relations. These systems prioritize certain forms of knowledge—typically those aligned with Eurocentric and neoliberal ideals—while marginalizing others.

One manifestation of this colonial legacy is the dominance of English and, to a lesser extent, French in academic publishing. This linguistic hierarchy reflects a broader colonial

agenda that privileges the languages of the colonizers, perpetuating the marginalization of other linguistic and cultural traditions. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986, as cited in Kubota, 2023) critiques this phenomenon, arguing that universities play a role in controlling the minds of the colonized elite, thereby maintaining the cultural and linguistic dominance of the colonizers.

This systemic privileging of colonial languages and epistemologies has profound implications for equity in higher education (Omodan, 2024). It not only restricts the diversity of knowledge that is deemed legitimate but also perpetuates a cycle of exclusion for those whose linguistic and cultural identities fall outside the dominant paradigms (Meighan, 2023; Omodan, 2024). By challenging these dynamics, critical research methods seek to dismantle the colonial structures that underpin higher education.

2.8.2 Racism and Its Embeddedness in Knowledge Systems

Racism, as defined by Kubota (2009), is “the dominance, normalizing and continued reference to White Eurocentric forms of knowledge,” which inherently favors certain worldviews and knowledge systems while marginalizing others (as cited in Pennycook, 2022, p. 3). This definition underscores the role of racism in maintaining the status quo in academic and societal institutions. In the context of applied linguistics and higher education, racism manifests through the systematic privileging of white Eurocentric knowledge, which is often framed as objective and universal (Kubota, 2009).

This form of epistemic racism is deeply embedded in the fabric of higher education (Cranston & Bennett, 2024). It shapes the ways knowledge is produced, evaluated, and disseminated, creating barriers for scholars and students from non-dominant linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Cranston & Bennett, 2024). By interrogating these practices, critical

research methods aim to expose the inequities that underpin academic systems and advocate for more inclusive approaches to knowledge production.

2.8.3 The Paradox of Canadian Multiculturalism

Canada's commitment to multiculturalism and inclusivity, while well-intentioned, often falls short of its aspirations. Since the late 1970s, the Canadian government has promoted an image of inclusivity, emphasizing diversity and opposition to racism (Department of Justice Canada, 2022). However, as scholars like Bannerji (2000) and Walcott (2003) argue, these official narratives often mask the continued dominance of white settler ideologies.

This paradox is particularly evident in Canadian bilingual policies, where the emphasis on English and French excludes other languages and cultures. García et al. (2021) and Santos (2007) describe this phenomenon as “abyssal thinking,” a framework in which colonial knowledge systems are deeply entrenched, even as their existence is denied. Under this framework, multiculturalism is often reduced to superficial displays of diversity, such as celebrating cultural holidays, without addressing the deeper power dynamics that perpetuate inequality.

2.8.4 Linguistic Discrimination in Higher Education

In Canadian higher education, linguistic discrimination often stems from racial-linguistic ideologies that privilege the official languages of English and French while marginalizing others (Kubota, 2023). Students who are unofficially bilingual—those fluent in languages outside the official frameworks—are frequently perceived as having linguistic deficits (Kubota, 2023). This perception is rooted in the colonial logic embedded in Canada's bilingual policies, which fail to recognize the legitimacy of non-official linguistic practices (García et al., 2021).

These discriminatory practices have far-reaching consequences. Students from non-dominant linguistic backgrounds often face systemic barriers, both within academic settings and in society at large (Kubota, 2023). They are more likely to encounter discrimination, exclusion, and limited access to opportunities, perpetuating cycles of inequity (Caxaj et al., 2018). Critical research methods seek to challenge these practices by exposing the racial and linguistic biases that underpin them and advocating for more inclusive policies and practice

2.8.5 Destabilizing Hegemonic Structures Through Research

One of the most powerful applications of critical research methods is their ability to destabilize hegemonic structures in higher education and society (Gayá & Brydon-Miller, 2017). By centering the lived experiences of marginalized groups, researchers challenge dominant narratives that uphold white hegemony and colonial ideologies (Kubota, 2022, 2023). This is especially relevant in language education and policy, where mother-tongueism and racial-linguistic ideologies perpetuate inequities (Kubota, 2022).

By amplifying historically marginalized voices, critical research provides a counter-narrative to dominant frameworks shaping academic and societal institutions (Miller et al., 2020). It envisions higher education as a more equitable and inclusive space where diverse linguistic and cultural identities are valued. Through this work, researchers advance social justice by challenging systems of domination and subordination (Ryoo & McLaren, 2010).

2.9 Multilingualism

Multilingualism, while seemingly a straightforward phenomenon, is deeply multifaceted and subject to diverse interpretations across academic disciplines, including linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and education. This trend has become a global phenomenon,

influenced by factors such as globalization, advancements in language-learning technology, and the growing accessibility of resources for learning widely spoken languages like English and Mandarin (Lanvers, 2024). Despite its ubiquity, there is no universally accepted definition of multilingualism. Li Wei (2008) offers an individualistic perspective, defining a multilingual as “anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading).” On the other hand, the European Commission (2007) expands the concept to societal and institutional levels, describing multilingualism as “the ability of societies, institutions, groups, and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives.” These definitions illuminate two primary dimensions: multilingualism as a sociolinguistic phenomenon involving social and cultural contact, and multilingualism as a personal repertoire reflecting individual language agency and usage patterns.

Multilingualism at the societal level is increasingly shaped by interconnected global forces. It enables cultural exchanges, supports economic growth, and fosters opportunities for social mobility (Romanowski, 2020). However, multilingualism does not imply fluency across all languages at all times. Instead, individuals may exhibit varying levels of proficiency depending on context, need, and exposure (Kalan et al., 2024). This flexible and dynamic nature of multilingualism underscores its subjectivity, empowering language users to self-identify as multilingual or otherwise, based on their unique linguistic experiences and competencies.

2.9.1 Multilingualism in Policy: Symbolism and Reality

Many nations have embraced multilingualism as a cornerstone of their official language policies, promoting inclusivity and social cohesion. Countries like Canada and Belgium have established bilingual or multilingual frameworks that symbolize national identity rather than

requiring individual fluency (Hambye & Richards, 2012). For instance, in Canada, official bilingualism in English and French serves as a unifying symbol, yet it does not obligate citizens to achieve bilingual proficiency. While this approach supports societal harmony, it also raises questions about linguistic hierarchies and the practical implications of such policies.

In today's globalized labor market, multilingualism increasingly intersects with economic imperatives (Filippi et al., 2024). For instance, specific regions within countries may prioritize certain languages, subtly compelling individuals to acquire them to secure employment. This phenomenon, often driven by governmental language policies, reflects the growing use of multilingualism as an economic and political tool. Governments may not explicitly endorse one language over another to maintain multicultural ideals, yet policies that indirectly emphasize certain languages create implicit hierarchies (Hambye & Richards, 2012). This dynamic has led to the perception that multilingualism, while celebrated as cultural capital, often functions as a mechanism for reinforcing linguistic imperialism and elite privilege (Hambye & Richards, 2012).

2.9.2 Economic Pressures and Cultural Identity

The economic value of multilingualism has led families to view language learning as a strategic resource (Tang & Calafato, 2024). Particularly in the post-COVID era, the global labor market has heightened the demand for multilingual professionals (Alkhatnai, 2021). While this trend benefits individuals who possess linguistic diversity, it also imposes pressures on families and individuals to adapt to policy-driven expectations (Hollebeke et al., 2023). These expectations often prioritize official languages over minority or heritage languages, creating tensions for immigrant families who wish to preserve their native tongues.

In Canada, for instance, immigrant families frequently wrestle with the implications of bilingual or multilingual education for their children (Riches & Curdt-Christiansen, 2010). While they recognize the potential economic advantages, they often fear that learning official languages might erode their children's proficiency in their language of origin, or their cultural identity (De Longueville, 2010). This apprehension underscores the broader challenge within Canada's bilingual framework, where multilingualism is both an asset and a potential source of identity conflict.

2.9.3 Multilingualism as Ideology

Although Canada's bilingual system is presented as a bridge between English and French-speaking communities (University of Ottawa, 1974), its ideological underpinnings extend further. For international students and immigrants, acquiring proficiency in both official languages is often equated with accessing critical economic resources and societal opportunities (Xu & Hou, 2023). Yet, this multilingualism frequently operates within an ideological framework that privileges certain languages and identities (Fisher et al., 2020). For minority language speakers, especially new immigrants and international students, multilingual education can become a vehicle for cultural assimilation rather than empowerment.

The commodification of multilingualism aligns with broader societal ideologies, legitimizing linguistic hierarchies and reinforcing the status of dominant languages as symbols of elite culture (Lovrits, 2024). At the federal level, the Canadian government asserts that bilingualism does not diminish the status of non-official languages (Government of Canada, 2022). However, practical realities often suggest a different picture. Multilingual education—especially when directed toward marginalized communities—plays a subtle role in upholding

societal structures that prioritize economic utility over cultural diversity (Kubota, 2016; Mouboua et al. 2024).

By situating multilingualism within these broader sociopolitical and economic contexts, it becomes evident that language policies and practices are not neutral. They reflect and perpetuate underlying power dynamics, raising critical questions about equity, access, and identity in multilingual societies (Henninger, 2020). In exploring these tensions, this study uncovers the complex interplay between language, ideology, and social transformation, emphasizing the need for critical examination of multilingualism as both a personal and societal phenomenon.

2.10 Summary

This literature review examined the interplay of bilingualism, multilingualism, and linguistic inclusion in Canadian language education. It analyzed Canada's bilingual policy at the University of Ottawa, noting its links to linguistic imperialism and the marginalization of minority languages. The review then discussed how multiculturalism, influenced by colonial legacies and immigration, creates tensions between diversity and entrenched hegemonic structures.

Critical research methods were highlighted as tools for addressing systemic inequities rooted in colonialism and racism. The analysis critiqued Canadian multiculturalism's paradoxes, revealing persistent linguistic and racial hierarchies in higher education. Finally, the review explored multilingualism's dual role as an economic asset and cultural marker, showing how language policies can both empower and perpetuate inequalities.

Together, these themes provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complexities of Canadian language education, with a focus on equity, inclusion, and identity.

CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Framework and Research Design

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the theoretical foundations and research design that underpin this study. It begins by introducing critical multiculturalism and critical multilingualism as essential conceptual frameworks, emphasizing their relevance in exploring the complex dynamics of language, culture, and power in educational contexts. These frameworks offer critical insights into how language practices intersect with issues of identity, inclusion, and social justice. The chapter then elaborates on the methodological choices guiding the study, outlining the rationale for the selected qualitative approach. It describes in detail the participant recruitment strategies, including criteria for selection and efforts to ensure diverse representation. The data collection process is then explained, with a focus on the use of online surveys and semi-structured interviews, highlighting their suitability for capturing participants' experiences and perspectives. Finally, the chapter presents the data analysis procedures, explaining how thematic analysis was applied to interpret and make meaning of the collected data, thus ensuring a rigorous and systematic examination of findings.

3.1 Critical Multiculturalism

Critical multiculturalism, introduced by the Chicago Cultural Studies Group in 1992, critiques how corporate and dominant Anglo-American influences have diluted the transformative potential of multiculturalism. This framework examines postcolonial and postauthoritarian aspects of cultural politics, emphasizing that “[c]ultural studies will only lose its utopian import—will become merely utopian, in other words, if its imagination of value is controlled either by the disciplines of knowledge in the Western academy or by the rhetoric of

generalism against which academic disciplines are usually contrasted” (Chicago Cultural Studies Group, 1992, p. 531).

This perspective calls for reimagining the politics of cultural communication in pluralistic societies like Canada, where English-dominated ideologies shape social and academic discourses. Critical multiculturalism does not merely aim to celebrate diversity but critically analyzes systemic biases and power imbalances that marginalize non-Western perspectives. In academic disciplines, particularly applied linguistics, the pervasive influence of Western postcolonial norms has become entrenched. This dominance reinforces the need to confront these biases to ensure that the norms of cultural analysis are inclusive and equitable. By fostering a critical lens, this approach underscores the importance of analyzing the ideological underpinnings of multicultural practices. In a Canadian context, where multiculturalism is a foundational policy, the application of critical multiculturalism serves as an important counterbalance, encouraging deeper reflection on how inclusivity is framed and enacted in education and public discourse.

3.2 Critical Multilingualism

Critical Multilingualism is not a widely used theory in academia, but has only been brought up in recent years through the integration of the theory of critical multiculturalism as well as previous theories of critical applied linguistics.

From 1971 onward, Canada’s government adopted multiculturalism as a core policy. Pierre Trudeau, serving as Prime Minister at the time, contended that the constitutional protection of bilingualism was vital to preserving Canadian unity. According to Esses and Gardner (1996), immigration significantly contributes to Canada’s economic prosperity, and

multicultural policies emerged largely in reaction to the concerns of Allophone immigrant communities about the formal recognition of only English and French as official languages.

Young (1987) criticized multicultural policy for focusing too narrowly on individual prejudice as the cause of inequality, arguing that exploitation and oppression must be understood at a national level, where Canada's identity has been shaped by a dominant patriarchal Englishness that subordinates other groups. Haque (2012) expanded on this by highlighting how racialized views of language are embedded in the *British North America Act of 1867* and reinforced in contemporary language policies, which frame immigrants' perceived lack of official language skills as a deficit, overshadowing their other competencies. This view ties into human capital theory, which treats knowledge acquisition as an individual endeavor rather than a collective process. Corson and Davies (1990) added that while multicultural education is valuable, it remains superficial unless combined with anti-racist pedagogy, as it fails to address the root causes of academic challenges faced by minority students or close the achievement gap among different groups.

3.3 Methodology

Methodology and methods, although sounding very similar, actually mean very different things. Methodology refers to the perspective that a researcher adopts in his or her research, while methods refers to a means of recognizing that the methodology can underpin the research (Watkins & Gioia, 2015). Therefore, it is often assumed that methods are meant to serve the methodology (Hesse-Biber, 2010), as mentioned in Jennifer Greene (2002):

Most . . . methodologies have preferences for particular methods, but methods gain meaning only from the methodologies that share and guide their use . . . An interview

does not inherently respect the agency of individual human life; it only does so if guided by and implemented within a methodological framework that advances the stance. So, any discussions of mixed methods . . . must be discussions of mixed methodologies, and thus of the complex epistemological and value-based issues that such an idea invokes. (p. 260)

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to explore the perceptions of international students (particularly English speakers) about Canada's bilingual system and their experiences of living and studying in a bilingual system. This chapter will specify how the mixed methods approach was applied to this study, how the participants were recruited, how the surveys and interviews were conducted, and how the data were analyzed.

3.4 Research Design

As an alumnus of a B.A. program at the University of Ottawa, I am well aware of the potential impact Canada's bilingual policies (whether at the federal, municipal, or university level) may have on new immigrants and international students. However, until now, very few researchers have paid much attention to this issue, and most of the research in the field has been devoted to advocating for the superiority of Canada's bilingualism policy. The purpose of this study is to explore international students' perceptions and experiences of bilingualism at the University of Ottawa and to analyze whether bilingualism truly promotes inclusiveness and enhances multilingualism and multiculturalism within the university community. In order to achieve this goal, this study uses as a case study the University of Ottawa, the world's largest English-French bilingual university, located in Ottawa, Canada's legally bilingual capital. I argue that the University of Ottawa is eminently representative of bilingual education at the university

level, and that its bilingualism policy can be viewed as a microcosm of federal bilingualism policy. Data for this study were collected using online data collection through Microsoft Teams questionnaires (both quantitative and qualitative), as well as follow-up voluntary questionnaire-based interviews. The two research questions guiding this study are:

1. How has the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy affected the on-campus experiences of international students who speak English but not French?
2. Does the bilingual system at the University of Ottawa promote inclusiveness, multiculturalism and multilingualism within the university community and beyond?

This research employed a mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. Such an approach is particularly valuable in social science research, as it enables the exploration of multiple perspectives on a single research question by drawing from diverse data sources. Mixed methods offer a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon by combining numerical data with in-depth, subjective insights (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The strength of my methodology lies in its design, which enables me to facilitate triangulation, thereby reducing potential biases that may arise from relying solely on either quantitative or qualitative data.

The definition of mixed methods research has evolved over time, reflecting changes in the broader academic landscape. Initially conceptualized by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), mixed methods research was defined as the use of "at least one quantitative method (designed to collect numbers) and one qualitative method (designed to collect words), where neither type of method is inherently linked to any particular paradigm" (p. 256). This definition emphasized the combination of distinct methodological traditions, allowing for greater flexibility. Later, Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) redefined mixed methods as research that

“collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study or program of inquiry” (p. 4), highlighting the integration of the two methods at various stages of the research process.

Quantitative research typically relies on numerical data to describe phenomena, employing statistical tools to identify patterns and trends (Gray, 2007). It is especially useful in producing generalizable and replicable results, often favored in large-scale studies for its efficiency in identifying clear patterns over a short period. However, while quantitative methods provide breadth, they often lack the depth needed to fully understand complex social phenomena.

In contrast, qualitative research focuses on exploring the subjective experiences, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals within specific contexts (Meadow, 2003). This method is especially valuable for studying data that cannot be easily quantified, such as emotions and attitudes. Through methods such as interviews, observations, and focus groups, qualitative research captures the nuances of participants’ experiences, providing rich, contextualized data. This approach also allows for greater flexibility, enabling researchers to adapt their methods as new findings emerge throughout the research process.

Mixed methods, therefore, combine the strengths of both approaches, allowing researchers to gather detailed qualitative insights while also benefiting from the generalizability and efficiency of quantitative data. As Hesse-Biber (2010) notes, this combination fosters a more “rigorous” approach by integrating diverse forms of evidence. In this study, the mixed methods approach was instrumental in capturing both the broad trends in international students’ experiences of bilingualism at the University of Ottawa and the deeper, more personal insights that emerged through qualitative interviews. By blending these two approaches, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how bilingualism policies influence student experiences.

Mixed methods stand out from purely qualitative or quantitative research by allowing for the rigorous collection and integration of data from both approaches, offering a more comprehensive perspective (Hesse-Biber, 2010). While the integration of quantitative and qualitative data can be challenging, it is essential for studies that aim to explore complex social phenomena in depth. The mixed methods approach not only facilitates the analysis of numerical data through statistical tools and hypothesis testing, but also incorporates participants' voices, opinions, and experiences, leading to a richer understanding of the research subject (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

In this study, data collection began with a detailed online questionnaire designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information on participants' attitudes toward Canada's bilingualism policies and their experiences within the bilingual system of the University of Ottawa. This initial phase identified broad trends and patterns in the participants' responses, allowing me to establish a solid foundation for subsequent analysis. The questionnaire included a variety of question types, such as demographic queries and specific questions related to the participants' perceptions and experiences of bilingualism (see Appendix A: Online Questionnaire).

Following the analysis of this quantitative data, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants, focusing on themes that emerged from the questionnaire results. These interviews provided an opportunity to delve deeper into individual perspectives, offering detailed insights into how the participants experienced and interpreted the bilingual system of the University of Ottawa in their everyday lives. By combining both data sets, the study was able to contextualize quantitative findings within personal experiences, offering a more nuanced understanding of how bilingual university policies impact international students.

This comprehensive approach captures not only the general attitudes toward bilingualism but also the personal, lived experiences that shape these views.

3.5 Participant Recruitment

After receiving certificates of ethics approval for research involving humans from the Research Ethics Board offices of both McGill University and the University of Ottawa, I used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit English-speaking international students (N = 28) attending the University of Ottawa, none of whom spoke English as a first language (i.e., native English-speaking international students from the UK/USA were not among the target participants). The participants in this study came from a variety of countries, reflecting the ethnic diversity of international students at the University of Ottawa and in Canadian society. However, the majority of them spoke Mandarin Chinese as their first language, which can be attributed to the higher percentage of international students from China at the University of Ottawa, as well as the use of snowball sampling in this study.

Notably, one participant, Nikos, in this study had also spent a significant portion of his life in Canada. While I initially questioned whether he met the criteria for international student status, he self-identified as an international student and met the study's participation requirements (see Table 3.1).

There were no restrictions on the English language proficiency of the participants in this study. However, all participants had been admitted to and were currently enrolled at the University of Ottawa, which requires applicants who have not completed at least three years of full-time study in an institution where English is the only language of instruction to meet specific English proficiency standards (University of Ottawa, 2024b). These include achieving a

minimum IELTS Academic score of 6.5, a TOEFL score of 86, or a Duolingo English Test score of 120 (University of Ottawa, 2024b). It is therefore reasonable to assume that the participants possessed sufficient English language proficiency to engage in academic tasks and effectively participate in the study. Furthermore, during the recruitment process for this study, the ability to participate in English was a requirement, so it was reasonable to assume that the majority of participants would have an English proficiency level of IELTS 6.5 (CEFR High B2), even if they never took a language test for admission. However, due to my own language proficiency being limited to English and Mandarin Chinese (the latter is my mother tongue), and the very limited number of international students at the University of Ottawa with French as a second or additional language choosing a French program, this study did not include any international students in the French program among the participants. Consequently, French was not included as an option in the questionnaire or interviews.

It is worth noting that I realize that snowball sampling is susceptible to many biases, such as the fact that people who belong to a particular community may be more likely to be recruited into the sample. However, since the University of Ottawa, for its part, understandably refused to provide emails and lists of students out of concern for their privacy, as a researcher, I felt that snowball sampling was the most efficient way to conduct this study, as I was then able to efficiently include people I did not know through my own social network.

To recruit participants for the study, I employed a multi-faceted approach, leveraging various social media platforms to reach a diverse group of international students at the University of Ottawa. The recruitment poster (see Appendix B: Recruitment Materials) was shared widely across platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and WeChat, ensuring that the call for participants reached individuals from different countries and cultural backgrounds. In addition to

public posts, I also utilized more personalized strategies, sending private messages through social media and email to individuals within his personal and professional networks. As an alumnus of the University of Ottawa, I had built a strong social circle that included former classmates, professors, and friends, making these personalized communications an effective method to engage potential participants who were already familiar with him. This combined approach not only broadened the pool of potential participants but also fostered trust and interest through existing connections.

Table 3.1 below provides a comprehensive summary of key demographic information for the study participants, including their levels of English and French proficiency, faculty affiliation, academic program, and level of study. Additionally, the table presents details on the languages spoken by the participants, categorized by language dominance. The participants in this table have been systematically sorted according to their English proficiency, from lowest to highest, to allow for a clearer comparison of language abilities across the sample. To ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all individuals involved in the study, a pseudonym has been assigned to each participant, thus safeguarding their identities while maintaining the integrity of the data presented.

Table 3.1*Demographic Information of Participants*

Pseudonym	English Proficiency	French Proficiency	Faculty	Program	Level of Study	Languages by Dominance
Liwei	B1-Intermediate	NA	Science	Computer Science	MSc	Mandarin, English
Junhao	B1-Intermediate	NA	Science	Computer Science	MSc	Mandarin, English
Zhiming	B1-Intermediate	NA	Science	Mathematics and Statistics	MSc	Mandarin, English
Mingfan	B1-Intermediate	NA	Science	Mathematics	BSc	Mandarin, English
Linyue	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Education	Education	MA	Mandarin, English
Meifang	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Education	Education	PhD	Mandarin, English, Cantonese
Boqiang	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Education	Education	PhD	Mandarin, English
Jianing	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Arts	Acting	BFA	Mandarin, English
Ruian	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Arts	History	BA	Mandarin, English
Yixuan	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Science	Mathematics	BSc	Mandarin, English
Kaiwen	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Health Sciences	Health Sciences	Graduate d (BHSc)	Mandarin, English
Fengyuan	C1-Advanced	A2-Elementary	Medicine	Nursing	MSc	Mandarin, English, French
Haoran	C1-Advanced	B2-Upper Intermediate	Science	Physics	MSc	Mandarin, English, French
Tianlei	C1-Advanced	NA	Science	Mathematics and Statistics	MSc	Mandarin, English
Chenyu	C1-Advanced	NA	Science	Computer Science	BSc4	Mandarin, English
Jianhao	C1-Advanced	NA	Education	Education	Graduate d (MA)	Mandarin, English
Xiulan	C1-Advanced	NA	Education	Education	PhD	Mandarin, English
Anna	C1-Advanced	NA	Education	Education	MA	Mandarin, English, Korean, Spanish
Molly	C1-Advanced	NA	Arts	English	Graduate d (BA)	Mandarin, English,

						Japanese, Cantonese
Shengyi	C1-Advanced	NA	Arts	Fine Arts	MFA	Mandarin, English
Ningzhao	C1-Advanced	NA	Social Sciences	Feminist and Gender Studies	MA	Mandarin, English
Hanyi	C1-Advanced	NA	Health Sciences	Health Sciences	MSc	Mandarin, English
Nikos	C2-Proficient	A1- Beginner	Social Sciences	Political Studies	BA	English, Greek, French
Chloe	C2-Proficient	A2- Elementary	Education	Education	PhD	Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Portuguese, French
Hanfeng	C2-Proficient	B1- Intermediat e	Science	Mathematics and Statistics	MSc	Mandarin, English, French
Jianli	C2-Proficient	NA	Education	Education	PhD	Mandarin, English
Ruichen	C2-Proficient	NA	Education	Education	MA	Mandarin, English
Wenjie	C2-Proficient	NA	Education	Education	PhD	Mandarin, English, Spanish

The first phase of this study involved the distribution of an online questionnaire, which led to 28 participants consenting to take part in the research after several months of recruitment. To protect participants' privacy, their names were not recorded, though some individuals voluntarily provided their email addresses for potential follow-up interviews. It is important to highlight that a significant portion of the participants (see Table 3.1) were graduate students. This initial focus on graduate students stemmed from my assumption that language policies would have a more pronounced impact on their academic and personal lives due to the complex and specialized nature of their studies. However, as data collection progressed, it became evident that the influence of language policies extended beyond this group. I realized that language policies also shape the experiences of undergraduate students, and that their perspectives are equally valuable. As a result, despite the fact that 20 (approximately 71% of the sample) of the

participants were graduate students, the study also incorporated the voices of undergraduate students to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Additionally, although some participants were no longer pursuing degrees at the time of the study, this does not imply that they were not currently enrolled in an academic institution. Rather, their current affiliation is not with the University of Ottawa, though they all have prior experience studying at the university.

In this study, I made a concerted effort to include participants from as many academic fields as possible in order to ensure a diverse representation of student perspectives. While it was not feasible to recruit participants from every single faculty at the University of Ottawa due to time constraints and logistical limitations, the study successfully included students from more than half of the university's faculties (see Table 3.1). This broad academic range allowed me to capture a wide variety of experiences and insights, reflecting the diverse academic backgrounds and fields of study represented at the university. By ensuring that students from a variety of disciplines, including both the sciences and the humanities, were included, the study aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the university's bilingualism policies and practices impact students across different academic contexts. Although some faculties were not represented, the inclusion of participants from a majority of the university's faculties still provided a strong cross-section of the student body, contributing to the study's overall validity and the richness of the data collected.

In Table 3.1, the self-reported English proficiency levels of all study participants are displayed, offering an overview of their perceived language abilities. The data reveals that the majority of students feel confident in their ability to use English, though at a relatively modest level overall. Notably, 4 participants (approximately 14% of the sample) indicated that they had not yet achieved the B2 level of English proficiency, which is particularly striking given that B2

(equivalent to an IELTS score of 6.5) is the minimum standard required by the University of Ottawa for admission into academic programs. It is reasonable to assume that a small subset of students, despite being admitted, may have gaps in their language skills relative to the institution's expectations.

Among the range of self-assessed proficiency levels (A1-C2), the largest proportion of participants, 11 students (approximately 39%), identified themselves as having attained the C1 level, which indicates a high degree of English competence. This is consistent with a strong command of the language, enabling effective communication in academic and professional contexts. Interestingly, six participants rated themselves as having reached the C2 level, which signifies near-native proficiency. Achieving a C2 level typically suggests an individual can handle complex academic and professional tasks with ease, exhibiting a level of fluency comparable to that of native speakers. The distribution of these self-assessments highlights the variability in English proficiency among the students, despite their shared academic environment. This variability may have important implications for their academic experiences and their ability to navigate the university's bilingual setting.

While the target participants in this study were international English-speaking students at the University of Ottawa, this does not necessarily imply that all participants lacked French language skills entirely. In designing the recruitment poster (see Appendix B: Recruitment Materials), I did not explicitly exclude individuals with any level of French proficiency. Instead, the study aimed to recruit participants who either “did not speak French” or had “low French proficiency.”

The rationale behind this recruitment strategy was based on the understanding that international students who do not speak any French and those with limited French skills may

face similar challenges within the University of Ottawa's bilingual environment, where the ability to navigate both English and French is crucial for full participation in academic and social contexts (Page, 2023; Ricento, 2013; Wu & Veronis, 2022). I hypothesized that the experiences of these two groups in navigating academic and social settings where both English and French are prominent would not differ substantially, especially given their shared status as non-native or limited French speakers. However, I was also aware that certain aspects of participants' language experiences, such as their ability to access campus resources or engage in classroom discussions, could vary depending on their actual level of French proficiency.

Among the 28 participants who took part in the study, 5 (approximately 18%) self-reported having some level of French proficiency, despite being primarily English-speaking students. This proportion is not unexpected, considering that a significant number of international students in English-language programs may have had some prior exposure to French, particularly if they come from countries with a presence of both languages or have encountered French in previous academic or professional contexts. The fact that the majority of participants, 23 (82%), reported little to no French proficiency aligns with the general profile of international students studying in English-language programs at bilingual institutions like the University of Ottawa, where many come from non-French-speaking backgrounds. Nonetheless, the presence of a subset of students with limited French skills adds nuance to the study's exploration of how varying degrees of bilingualism influence their academic and social experiences. This distinction is particularly relevant given the unique linguistic dynamics at the University of Ottawa, where students are required to navigate an environment that operates in both official languages. Therefore, this mix of language proficiency levels allows for a more

comprehensive analysis of how language barriers and bilingual policies affect international students' adaptation and academic success.

It is particularly noteworthy that among the five participants who reported some level of French proficiency, two indicated that they had achieved a B-level proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), with one of these individuals even self-assessing their proficiency as B2, which corresponds to an upper-intermediate level (see Table 3.1). According to the CEFR's standardized criteria, B-level proficiency signifies the ability to engage in moderately complex interactions in French, including understanding main ideas in familiar contexts and expressing opinions on a range of topics. Therefore, these two participants, by CEFR standards, would not be considered low-proficiency French speakers, as B2 proficiency implies a relatively strong command of the language in both academic and social settings.

However, it is important to highlight that this study did not employ CEFR levels as a formal screening criterion during participant recruitment. Instead, the recruitment materials specified that participants should self-identify as either “non-French-speaking” or possessing “low French proficiency,” without imposing strict linguistic benchmarks such as the CEFR scale. The flexible criteria allowed participants to join the study based on their own perceptions of their French abilities, rather than an externally imposed standard. As a result, it is particularly intriguing that these two participants, despite indicating higher proficiency levels based on CEFR descriptors, still categorized themselves as possessing limited or low French proficiency. This self-identification, which appears to contradict their self-reported language proficiency levels based on the CEFR scale, adds a complex and thought-provoking dimension to the study's findings. This phenomenon may be explained by various factors, such as the participants'

perceived inadequacies when navigating the bilingual environment at the University of Ottawa, or a relative comparison to native French speakers, which could cause them to underestimate their actual proficiency. Alternatively, it may reflect a broader psychological or cultural tendency among language learners to downplay their skills, particularly in environments where their proficiency is constantly being challenged or compared to higher standards. While these participants self-assessed as intermediate to upper-intermediate on the CEFR scale, they nonetheless perceived themselves as low-proficiency speakers. This disparity indicates that language self-assessment is deeply influenced by personal perceptions and social comparisons. In bilingual or multilingual contexts, such comparisons may be heightened due to the presence of multiple linguistic benchmarks. In contrast, in a monolingual context, individuals might still be modest or self-critical—perhaps downplaying their skills when compared solely with “native speakers”—but the range of comparisons is naturally more limited. This observation suggests that the dynamics of self-assessment could differ between monolingual and bilingual environments, an area that would benefit from further empirical investigation. This adds a unique layer to the study’s exploration of how international students perceive and experience their own language competencies in relation to the linguistic demands of a bilingual academic institution. Consequently, this insight enriches the overall understanding of the challenges faced by students with varying degrees of French proficiency and the implications of bilingualism in shaping their academic and social experiences.

3.6 Online Survey Methods

The online questionnaire for this study was administered via Microsoft Forms, which enabled me to overcome traditional limitations of time and space, thereby reaching a broader and

more diverse participant pool. This was especially beneficial for accessing individuals who may have been geographically distant or less available for in-person data collection. By utilizing this digital platform, I was able to gather input from a wider range of participants, some of whom might have been difficult to engage through more conventional research methods. The questionnaire was structured to elicit a variety of perspectives on participants' attitudes toward Canada's bilingual system, as well as their learning experiences within the bilingual environment of the University of Ottawa (see Appendix A: Online Questionnaire).

The questionnaire consisted of 20 carefully designed questions, aimed at collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. These questions employed a range of formats, including short-answer responses, Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and yes/no questions. This mixed-methods approach allowed me to capture not only measurable data but also the nuanced opinions and personal reflections of the participants. Each question type was chosen with specific goals in mind, to ensure that the data collected was as comprehensive and relevant as possible. For instance, the Likert scale items were designed to assess participants' subjective attitudes and experiences, asking them to rate statements such as, "I feel that I belong in the bilingual community at the University of Ottawa" and "The University of Ottawa's bilingual policy has positively impacted my academic performance." These statements allowed participants to express the degree of their agreement or disagreement, providing insight into how bilingualism influences their sense of belonging and academic success.

The multiple-choice and yes/no questions were similarly designed to be open-ended in nature, encouraging participants to reflect on their personal experiences and provide honest responses. For example, questions such as, "Do you believe that the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy will positively influence your future career development?" and "Do you

understand the reasons why Canada is officially bilingual in English and French?” were intended to provoke thoughtful consideration of the broader implications of bilingualism in both academic and professional contexts. Although these questions were formatted in a seemingly straightforward manner, I intentionally crafted them to prompt deeper reflection on the participants’ experiences and attitudes toward the University’s bilingual environment.

In contrast to the majority of questions in the survey, only one item was designed as a short-answer question: “Why do you think the University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy will have a positive or negative impact on your future development?” This open-ended question was included to allow participants the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts in greater detail. However, the decision to limit the number of short-answer questions was deliberate. I aimed to strike a balance between gathering detailed information and maintaining participant engagement, as an overly lengthy or complex questionnaire might have led to participant fatigue or decreased response rates. Recognizing the potential for further elaboration during the follow-up interviews, I opted to gather additional details in that context, where participants could provide more in-depth insights without the constraints of the online questionnaire format.

3.7 Interview Methods

The online interviews conducted in this study followed a semi-structured format with Microsoft Teams, allowing for a balance between predetermined questions and flexibility to adapt based on the flow of the conversation and the participants’ individual responses. Prior to each interview, I prepared a set of core questions designed to delve deeper into the participants’ perspectives, particularly in relation to their experiences with the University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy and their broader attitudes toward bilingualism in Canada. However, the semi-

structured nature of the interviews allowed me to modify or expand upon these questions in response to participants' answers to the earlier questionnaire, thereby ensuring that the interviews remained responsive to each participant's unique experiences and viewpoints.

The interview questions were primarily aimed at gaining a more in-depth understanding of the participants' awareness and perceptions of bilingualism within the context of their university experience. For instance, participants were asked questions such as, "How much did you know about the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy before enrolling?" and "Do you believe there is room for improvement in the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy?" These questions encouraged participants to reflect on their preconceptions about bilingualism before arriving at the university and to assess whether their experiences aligned with or contradicted those expectations. Additionally, these questions were open-ended, allowing participants to express their thoughts freely, even if their familiarity with the bilingual system was limited or their responses veered into related but unanticipated topics. This approach was critical for fostering a conversational and open-ended dialogue, enabling participants to share their genuine thoughts and experiences.

During the interviews, I tried not to interrupt or redirect participants, even when their initial responses seemed tangential or unrelated to the specific question asked. This strategy was rooted in the understanding that participants' seemingly off-topic remarks could still provide valuable insights relevant to the broader themes of the study. For example, some participants shared personal anecdotes about their experiences traveling or living in other Canadian provinces, where they compared different regional attitudes toward bilingualism. While these narratives may not have directly addressed the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy, they provided rich contextual data about how participants perceived bilingualism across Canada,

contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their experiences in the university's bilingual environment. These spontaneous reflections often illuminated broader social and cultural attitudes towards bilingualism, adding depth to the data collected. These serendipitous and unexpected findings will be explored further in the Discussion chapter, where their implications for the study's themes and conclusions will be examined in greater detail.

3.8 Data Analysis

To analyze the responses from the online questionnaire, I employed descriptive statistics to provide a comprehensive overview of the experiences of international students navigating the bilingual environment at the University of Ottawa, as well as their general attitudes toward bilingualism. The data for this analysis were derived from multiple key areas of inquiry, including their awareness and understanding of both federal and institutional bilingual policies, as well as their personal experiences on campus within this bilingual framework.

The use of the CEFR scale as a self-assessment tool remains a topic of ongoing debate among scholars. Critics, including Fletcher (2020), Piamsai (2023), and Piccardo et al. (2011), argue that the CEFR lacks the precision of objective proficiency evaluations. However, its adaptability and efficiency make it particularly valuable in research contexts where extensive proficiency testing is impractical. Broadfoot et al. (2002) highlighted that students are often capable of accurately assessing their own language proficiency, although self-assessments may occasionally be viewed as unreliable. Further research by Fletcher (2020), Kirby and Downs (2007), and Duque Micán and Cuesta Medina (2017) indicates that the CEFR self-assessment scale can yield inaccuracies, particularly among less experienced language learners.

Despite these concerns, studies by Piamsai (2023) and Stan (2024) reported a medium to strong correlation between CEFR self-assessment results and language placement test outcomes, although occasional discrepancies between self-reported and actual proficiency levels were observed. This finding aligns with Ross's (1998) assertion that self-assessments are generally reliable and valid for most learners. Consequently, while the CEFR self-assessment scale may not fully capture participants' actual language abilities, it remains a valuable tool for research and experimental purposes.

In this study, the CEFR scale for English and French was presented to participants through links. This scale contains the CEFR levels and their corresponding detailed performance descriptors for the four competencies: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Providing these links allowed participants unfamiliar with the CEFR to access and review the scale independently. However, it is worth noting that some other studies, such as those by Piamsai (2023) and Stan (2024), used more comprehensive methods for assessing students' language proficiency. These methods involved asking participants with no prior experience to answer detailed questions about their abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. While enabling participants to self-assess their proficiency using questions across multiple dimensions can produce more objective results, implementing such methods in this study was challenging due to time constraints and concerns about maintaining participants' willingness to participate.

For the interview data, I transcribed participants' responses and conducted thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify and interpret recurring patterns or themes in data, providing insights into participants' experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I chose this approach because it offers flexibility, allowing both explicit content and underlying meanings to emerge, making it ideal for exploring the complex, varied

experiences of international students in a bilingual environment. Thematic analysis also facilitates the organization of large datasets into meaningful themes, helping to draw connections and identify key issues relevant to the research questions (Nowell et al., 2017).

In this study, I color-coded and analyzed the transcribed participant responses from the interviews. By repeatedly reading and comparing participants' responses, I identified key themes and patterns related to their experiences with bilingualism at the University of Ottawa. This process involved categorizing their answers based on recurring ideas or perspectives, such as their knowledge of bilingual policies, feelings of inclusion or exclusion, and challenges in adapting to a bilingual academic environment. The color coding allowed for easier visual identification of recurring themes, which helped to streamline the comparison of responses across participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

This chapter presents the findings from both the online survey and the online interviews conducted for this study, focusing on participants' experiences and perceptions regarding French-English bilingual policy at the University of Ottawa. The chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 4.1 reports the results from the online survey, exploring participants' understanding and awareness of official bilingualism, their academic and campus participation, the impact of the bilingual policy, their sense of belonging, and their interest in learning additional languages, especially French. Section 4.2 provides a thematic analysis of the online interview data, which further explores participants' knowledge of bilingual policies, feelings of inclusion and exclusion, challenges in adapting to a bilingual academic environment, and perspectives on multilingualism and language support. Each section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the data while preserving participants' voices to offer a clearer understanding of their lived experiences.

4.1 Online Survey Data

The following section presents the results obtained from the online survey data, focusing on various aspects of participants' experiences and perspectives related to bilingualism at the University of Ottawa. Subsection 4.1.1, *Understanding and Awareness of Official Bilingualism*, reports data on participants' knowledge of Canada's bilingual policy and their perceptions of how effectively the university promotes bilingualism. Subsection 4.1.2, *Academic and Campus Participation*, explores participants' engagement in academic activities and campus life within the bilingual community, measured using Likert scale responses. Subsection 4.1.3, *Impact of the Bilingual Policy*, examines both the academic and personal effects of the university's bilingual

policy, highlighting response patterns and correlations between these two dimensions. Subsection 4.1.4, *Sense of Belonging*, presents data on participants' feelings of inclusion within the university's bilingual environment. Finally, Subsection 4.1.5, *Interest in Language Learning*, reports findings on participants' motivation for further language learning, particularly regarding the improvement of their French language skills.

4.1.1 Understanding and Awareness of Official Bilingualism

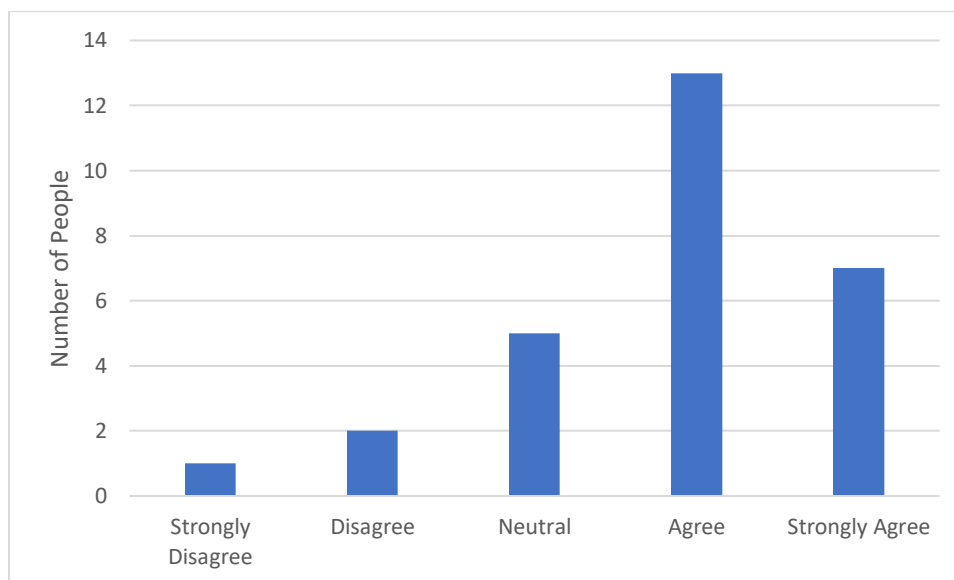
In the survey, the question, "Do you understand why Canada is an officially English-French bilingual country?" (a yes/no question) revealed that 25 out of the 28 participants responded "Yes," indicating that they thought they understood the concept of Canada's official bilingualism, while 3 participants responded "No." The three participants who selected "No" self-reported English proficiency levels of B2, C1, and C2, with none reporting any knowledge of French. This result implies that the majority of participants identified themselves as being aware of the reasons why Canada is officially bilingual in English and French.

The statement, "The University of Ottawa is promoting English-French bilingualism effectively," was assessed using a Likert scale. Seven participants selected "Strongly Agree," 13 chose "Agree," five responded with "Neutral," two selected "Disagree," and one participant chose "Strongly Disagree" (see Figure 4.1 below). The mean score for this question, calculated by summing the numerical values of all responses and dividing by the total number of participants, was approximately 3.86. The median score, determined by identifying the middle value when the responses were ordered numerically, was 4. The mode, the most frequently occurring score, was also 4, with 13 participants selecting "Agree." This distribution shows a concentration of responses in the higher range of the scale. Among the five French-speaking participants, three chose "Agree," one selected "Neither agree nor disagree," and one indicated

“Strongly Agree”. Of the seven participants who rated the university’s promotion as highly effective with a “Strongly Agree” response, three self-reported English proficiency at the C2 level, three at the C1 level, and one at the B2 level. This range of responses highlights varying perspectives on the effectiveness of the university’s bilingualism initiatives across participants with different language backgrounds.

Figure 4.1

I believe that the University of Ottawa is effectively promoting English-French bilingualism



4.1.2 Academic and Campus participation

The survey item “I usually participate in academic activities at the university (e.g., academic conferences, administrative meetings)” was presented using a five-point Likert scale. Among the 28 participants, 10 selected “Strongly Agree,” while another 10 chose “Agree.” Five participants responded with “Neutral,” and three selected “Disagree,” while none chose “Strongly Disagree”. The mean score for this question was approximately 3.96, with a median of 4.0 and a mode of 4, suggesting that most participants reported relatively high levels of engagement in academic activities on campus. Additionally, seven of those who selected

“Strongly Agree” reported high English proficiency levels (five at C2, four at C1, and one at B1), with three of them also indicating they spoke French at varying proficiency levels (two A2 and one B1).

The survey question “Do you have a job on campus?” was presented as a yes/no question to the 28 participants. Eight participants reported having on-campus employment, while 20 indicated they did not, meaning that most participants did not manage to secure a job on campus. Of the eight participants who reported being employed, seven were graduate students, including three pursuing Ph.D. degrees and four enrolled in master’s programs. Among these participants, six responded affirmatively when asked whether the university’s bilingual policy would have a positive impact on their future development, while the remaining two did not share this belief. However, no significant relationship between participants’ employment status and their language skills was observed in this study.

4.1.3 Impact of the Bilingual Policy

Participants’ responses to the Likert scale question regarding the academic impact of the University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy demonstrated mixed perceptions. Out of the 28 respondents, four participants selected “Strongly Agree,” four chose “Agree,” eight indicated “Neutral,” 10 selected “Disagree,” and two chose “Strongly Disagree.” The mean score for this question was 2.9, the median was also 3.0, and the mode was 3.0 (Neutral). Notably, three out of the four participants who selected “Strongly Agree” self-reported their language proficiency at the C2 level, while the remaining participant reported a C1 level. However, one participant at the C1 level and another at the C2 level selected “Strongly Disagree,” reflecting a range of views across similar language proficiencies.

Responses to the question regarding the personal impact of the bilingual policy showed a similar distribution, with two participants selecting “Strongly Agree,” nine choosing “Agree,” eight indicating “Neutral,” seven selecting “Disagree,” and two choosing “Strongly Disagree.” The mean score for this question was 3.1, the median was 3.0, and the mode was 3.0 (Neutral). The two participants who selected “Strongly Agree” for personal impact also selected “Strongly Agree” for academic impact. Similarly, the two participants who chose “Strongly Disagree” for personal impact had also selected “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” when assessing the academic impact, indicating consistency in individual perceptions across both areas. Additionally, the distribution of responses suggests a central tendency towards neutral and disagreeing perspectives, highlighting the mixed effects perceived by the participants.

The question “Do you think the University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy will have a positive impact on your future development (e.g., obtaining employment or accessing additional degree programs)?” received mixed responses. 16 participants answered “Yes,” while 12 responded “No.” Open-ended comments offered additional insights into the reasoning behind these responses. Among those who responded positively, several participants mentioned the potential career opportunities associated with bilingualism, while others noted the possibility of enhanced access to further academic programs. Conversely, some participants who responded “No” described a perception of French as not useful in their professional contexts. Others mentioned job-related considerations, though the survey did not require them to specify whether these were related to language barriers or to broader employment factors.

4.1.4 Sense of Belonging

The survey also included the statement “I feel that I belong in the bilingual community at the University of Ottawa,” measured on the same kind of Likert scale. Responses were more

widely distributed, with two participants selecting “Strongly Agree” and four selecting “Agree.” The majority, 13 participants, responded with “Neutral,” while five chose “Disagree,” and four selected “Strongly Disagree.” The mean score for this question was approximately 2.82, with a median of 3.0 and a mode of 3.

4.1.5 Interest in Language Learning

The survey question assessing participants’ interest in improving their French language skills was presented as a yes/no question to all 28 participants. Of these, 20 participants indicated an interest in improving their French language skills, while eight participants reported no interest in further developing their French proficiency. Among the eight participants who responded “No,” six self-reported their English proficiency within the B level range, including two participants at the B1 level and four at the B2 level. The remaining two participants who indicated no interest in improving their French reported English proficiency at the C1 and C2 levels. No direct patterns linking language proficiency and interest in language development were observed in the data.

4.2 Online Interview Data

In this section, the data from the online interviews, conducted with eight participants, will be presented and analyzed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted in English, primarily due to the limited timeframe for data collection and analysis in this Master’s study, as well as the requirement that the thesis be written in English—even though most participants shared Mandarin with myself, the interviewer, as their first language. The demographic information of the interview participants is outlined in Table 4.1, below. The thematic analysis identified four key themes emerging from the interviews: participants’

knowledge of bilingual policies, their feelings of inclusion and exclusion within the academic environment, challenges faced while adapting to a bilingual setting, and their experiences with multilingualism and available language support. Each theme will be discussed in detail to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Table 4.1

Demographic Information of Interview Participants

Pseudonyms	English Proficiency	French Proficiency	Faculty	Program	Level of Study	Languages by Dominance
Mingfan	B1-Intermediate	NA	Science	Mathematics	BSc 3	Mandarin, English
Yixuan	B2-Upper Intermediate	NA	Science	Mathematics	BSc 3	Mandarin, English
Chenyu	C1-Advanced	NA	Science	Computer Science	BSc4	Mandarin, English
Jianhao	C1-Advanced	NA	Education	Education	Graduate d (MA 3)	Mandarin, English
Anna	C1-Advanced	NA	Education	Education	MA 2	Mandarin, English, Korean, Spanish
Molly	C1-Advanced	NA	Arts	English	Graduate d (BA 4)	Mandarin, English, Japanese, Cantonese
Nikos	C2-Proficient	A1-Beginner	Social Sciences	Political Studies	BA 4	English, Greek, French
Chloe	C2-Proficient	A2-Elementary	Education	Education	PhD 2	Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Portuguese, French

4.2.1 Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Knowledge of Bilingual Policies

The participants' responses reveal varying levels of awareness regarding the University of Ottawa's bilingual policies, often shaped by their regional contexts and prior experiences. Some participants demonstrated a limited understanding of bilingualism in Canada, while others had more exposure due to their academic or professional backgrounds.

For example, Molly noted, "Everyone knows that Canada has two official languages, but in most cases, unless you're living in Quebec, it doesn't feel like French is truly an official language. Most of the time, even Mandarin seems more commonly spoken in major cities like Toronto and Vancouver." This highlights a perception where the presence of French is seen as regionally confined rather than a national norm.

Similarly, Nikos reflected on how his understanding evolved:

"I knew about Ottawa's bilingual policy before moving there, but I was unaware of it when I first moved to Toronto. To clarify, I moved to Canada at 18 and lived in Toronto for four years before moving to the UK for two years, where I completed a master's degree. After that, I spent another year in the United States before finally coming to the University of Ottawa. During my time in Toronto, I studied history and political science, and it was in my history program that I learned about the bilingual policy introduced in the 1970s under Pierre Trudeau. I visited Quebec a couple of times with friends and noticed that French was more actively used there than in Toronto. I found its implementation beautiful, as it complemented the cultural landscape."

His reflections suggest that historical and cultural education can deepen one's understanding of bilingualism.

Other participants, however, reported minimal knowledge of the policy. Mingfan admitted, “I don’t think I knew much about the policy. The only thing I was aware of was that the tuition fees for French courses and English courses are quite different.” Chenyu echoed this limited awareness, saying, “I have almost no knowledge about the bilingual policy at the University of Ottawa. I only know that it is the largest bilingual university using both English and French, but I’m not familiar with its specific policies.”

On the other hand, Chloe’s response suggests a more nuanced understanding shaped by prior academic work. She was pursuing a PhD degree in the field of second language education:

“I had a general understanding of Canada’s bilingual policy because during the first two years of my PhD studies in Macau, my research focused on language assessment for immigration purposes in Canada. This led me to explore the bilingual policy at a national level, and I was aware that the University of Ottawa is a bilingual institution. However, I had no idea to what extent I was expected to speak French until I arrived here. While I understood Canada’s bilingual policy quite well, my knowledge of the University of Ottawa’s specific policies was limited. For example, I noticed that emails were always sent in French first, followed by English, but I wasn’t sure how much French I was expected to understand or speak before coming to the university.”

These responses collectively emphasize the diversity in participants’ awareness and the influence of prior experiences and regional exposure on their understanding of bilingual policies.

Theme 2: Feelings of Inclusion and Exclusion

The thematic analysis of participants’ feelings of inclusion or exclusion within the University of Ottawa’s bilingual environment reveals a complex and often mixed experience. While the university promotes inclusivity through its bilingual policies, some participants feel

that these efforts fall short in addressing the diverse needs of students, particularly those who do not speak both official languages.

One participant reflected on their exclusion as an anglophone, noting that while the university's bilingual practices, such as offering courses in both languages and bilingual emails, may make francophones feel included, it creates barriers for monolingual English speakers:

“Well, they speak both languages, and they’ll often say ‘bonjour-hi.’ So, it feels like they prioritize French in a way, which, in that sense, is inclusive. However, as a student who only speaks English, I don’t feel included because I don’t understand the French part. The university doesn’t offer any accommodation for students like me. For example, in bilingual meetings, how do they include anglophone or francophone students? I don’t think they’ve really considered the needs of students who can only speak one language. They seem to focus more on providing flexibility for the lecturers or speakers who can handle both languages, but they don’t think about the rest of us” (Jianhao).

Although participation in certain meetings is typically limited to faculty or designated representatives, this account likely reflects experiences in contexts where student input is solicited—such as feedback forums or meetings at which only students are present. In these instances, reliance on supposedly bilingual practices without clear provisions for monolingual individuals can exacerbate feelings of exclusion. This observation calls for a closer examination of how inclusivity is operationalized, ensuring that all students, regardless of language proficiency, are adequately supported.

Another participant offered a broader critique of Canada’s overall approach to inclusion, stating that the country itself can feel exclusive, but this exclusivity stems more from broader immigration policies rather than the bilingual system: “I actually feel that the outcome of Canada

being an exclusive country isn't necessarily a result of the bilingual system. It's more a combined outcome of various immigration policies. It's not just about the bilingual system alone" (Molly). This quote emphasizes how experiences of exclusion can be shaped by broader systemic factors beyond language policy alone.

One participant questioned the relevance of the bilingual policy in today's multicultural society. They pointed out that when the federal policy was established, it may have been inclusive for the English and French communities, but it does not reflect the diverse population of modern Canada:

"I would say that when [the federal] policy was created 100 years ago,¹ it was considered inclusive because it represented both the English and French communities. But now, inclusiveness means considering immigration from all over the world. So, there's a contrast between the historical context and the current situation" (Yixuan).

This reflection highlights the evolving understanding of inclusivity and suggests that while language policies were originally designed for a French-English bilingual context, they may have overlooked the multilingual realities in the past that are only now being widely acknowledged.

Another participant mentioned anti-French sentiment and separatism, while identifying as an international student despite their family's long residence in Canada:

"When [my father] was growing up, he inherited the anti-French attitudes of many English-speaking Canadians around him. To this day, he still jokes about them. I've also been in contact with people here who are French separatists, and I've heard their experiences of growing up in Quebec and being expected to learn English. I can see how

¹ Clearly Yixuan is not aware that the federal policy dates back only to 1969 (Department of Justice Canada, 1985).

this policy, which forces people to accommodate others, can create resentment in some people” (Nikos).

This narrative reveals how historical tensions around bilingualism can persist across generations and influence feelings of exclusion.

Finally, one participant expressed disappointment and frustration with the bilingual policy, perceiving it as a barrier to broader inclusivity and multiculturalism:

“I don’t actually think they should reinforce bilingualism anymore because I see it as a system of manipulation. It’s like a way to control people’s minds, saying that English and French are the best languages to maintain the status quo. It’s about maintaining power for certain groups, and I think that’s disgusting. There should be improvements in this area. They should include all languages, not just English and French. For example, why not include German, Spanish, and Mandarin? The university should strive to be more multilingual. After all, Canada is proposed to be an inclusive and diverse country. If that’s really the case, then the university should be multilingual, not just bilingual” (Anna).

This statement underscores the perception that bilingual policies can be exclusionary when they do not reflect Canada’s full linguistic diversity. However, it also reveals a bias toward dominant world languages, which, paradoxically, may undermine the ideals of inclusivity and equity that are being promoted.

In summary, participants’ reflections reveal a range of experiences and perspectives on bilingualism and inclusion at the University of Ottawa. While some feel the policy promotes cultural representation, others experience barriers due to their language proficiency or question the policy’s relevance in a multicultural context.

Theme 3: Challenges in Adapting to a Bilingual Academic Environment

Participants faced several challenges when adapting to the bilingual academic environment at the University of Ottawa. The dual-language system, while integral to the university's identity, created hurdles for those less proficient in French, limiting their access to certain academic and professional opportunities.

For some students, not speaking French posed significant barriers to fully participating in university life. One participant expressed frustration about missing out on various activities and job opportunities, stating that being monolingual in English limited their experience: "Being able to speak only English sometimes limits those opportunities for me. As a result, I feel I don't have the same rights or opportunities as bilingual students to fully engage and have a better experience." (Jianhao). This highlights the feeling of inequality experienced by anglophone students, who felt excluded from opportunities that were more accessible to bilingual peers.

The omnipresence of French in the university's communications and signage was another adjustment for many anglophone students. One English-French bilingual participant from the Faculty of Science shared how French was consistently presented first in emails and public announcements, which bothered some students from predominantly English-speaking regions like Toronto. However, this participant saw it as an opportunity for growth: "I recognize that the University of Ottawa was originally a French-speaking university, and second, I appreciate being exposed to the French language upfront. It challenges me and encourages me to learn it, which is something I welcome and embrace" (Nikos). This sentiment reveals that while the dominance of French can be daunting for some, others, especially someone like Nikos who has knowledge of French and has lived in Canada for a while, may perceive it as a way to enhance their language skills, even if it is initially challenging.

Nevertheless, not all students shared this optimistic view. Chloe, a participant from the Faculty of Education, described the significant challenges of working in a bilingual academic setting. Although her supervisor did not expect her to speak French, Chloe found herself on a research team where meeting minutes were kept in French, making it difficult for her to fully participate. She explained:

“Yes, my limited ability to speak French significantly limits my chances of getting a job on campus. I was able to get my current position because my supervisor hired me, and I wasn’t expected to speak any French with them. I’m part of a research team that includes three other students, two of whom are fluent in French. Even our meeting minutes are kept in French because one of the students is specifically fluent in the language.

That’s a significant challenge for me. For example, every time I read our meeting minutes, I have to use DeepL or ChatGPT to translate them so I can fully understand what was written. Even with that, I often feel like I don’t fully grasp the content.

Aside from teaching or research assistant positions under my supervisor or other professors, I don’t think I could get a job in the library or any other roles that require direct interaction with other students without being able to speak French. It’s a major limitation for me.”

This example highlights the persistent barriers faced by English-speaking and non-French-speaking students in navigating a bilingual academic environment. These challenges are particularly pronounced when seeking employment on campus, as many roles require French proficiency for direct interactions or administrative tasks. Even in positions where French proficiency is not explicitly required, students often need to rely on translation tools or other

workarounds to participate effectively, underscoring the limitations they face in both academic and professional contexts.

Some participants also faced linguistic challenges within their courses. One participant from the Faculty of Arts recalled struggling in a course due to difficulty understanding the professor's accent, which affected their ability to engage with the lecture material and ultimately led to their failing the course:

“It was extremely difficult for me to understand her [professor's] accent, so I couldn't fully grasp the content of the lectures and ended up not passing the course. After a few terms, I retook the same course with a different professor whose English was much clearer, and I ended up getting an A. Do you see the discrepancy? I believe that's a clear example of the negative impact language barriers can have” (Molly).

This experience reflects the complex role of linguistic diversity in higher education. While it illustrates how language barriers can impact academic performance, it also raises important questions about linguistic bias and students' expectations of English proficiency. The perception of certain accents as “difficult to understand” is shaped by dominant linguistic ideologies, often influenced by the privileging of certain varieties of English over others (Lippi-Green, 2012). This suggests that linguistic challenges in the classroom are not solely a matter of comprehension, but are also tied to broader power dynamics surrounding language, accent, and legitimacy in academic spaces.

In contrast, another participant in the Faculty of Science noted that despite the university providing more opportunities to French-speaking students, English speakers could still have a positive experience:

“I never had a negative experience due to not speaking French. While the University of Ottawa offers more opportunities to French-speaking students, it doesn’t harm the opportunities available to English-speaking students. If you speak only English, you can still have a good student life at the University of Ottawa” (Chenyu).

This view suggests that while there are challenges, English-speaking students are still able to navigate the academic environment and succeed, albeit with some limitations.

In summary, students had diverse experiences adapting to the University of Ottawa’s bilingual academic environment. While some encountered challenges that affected their academic opportunities, others—particularly those in science-based programs—saw bilingualism as an opportunity for personal growth. However, perceptions of language barriers may also be shaped by broader linguistic ideologies. Given that the university is often characterized as a space of parallel monolingualism, where English-speaking students can primarily function in English and French-speaking students can primarily function in French, some difficulties may reflect ideological attitudes toward bilingualism rather than concrete barriers to access.

Theme 4: Multilingualism and Language Support

Participants expressed concerns regarding the limitations of the University of Ottawa’s bilingual framework, emphasizing the need for greater multilingual support and enhanced resources for language learning. Their perspectives reveal a call for structural changes that promote a more inclusive and equitable linguistic environment on campus.

Jianhao critiqued the existing bilingual policy, emphasizing perceived inequities in treatment between francophone and non-francophone students. He stated,

“Rather than reinforcing a narrowly defined bilingual policy, I hope the University of Ottawa can embrace a broader understanding of multilingualism. They should work to

deconstruct the hierarchy they've built on campus and truly embrace the diversity of languages brought by students from all around the world—especially if they want to benefit financially from international students. I think that's fair because francophone students pay less, while I pay more, yet they receive more privileges. That doesn't seem fair to me. So yeah, I think it's pretty straightforward.”

His remarks highlight concerns about fairness in the tuition structure and the need for a more inclusive policy that benefits all language groups equally.

Chloe proposed a structural change to better accommodate linguistic diversity, suggesting a physical separation of campuses based on language use. She explained,

“One suggestion I have for the University of Ottawa, based on my observations, is that it might be better to separate the campuses—one for French-speaking students and another for English-speaking students. Of course, students could still move between campuses and enroll in courses in either language if they choose. However, they wouldn't be forced to stay on one campus and be expected to speak both languages all the time.”

Rather than promoting flexibility, Chloe's suggestion reflects a parallel monolingualism approach—often called the “two solitudes” in Canada—where linguistic communities remain separate (Cummins, 2008). In contrast, integrative frameworks like translanguaging or plurilingualism encourage fluid language use and greater interaction between languages.

Molly advocated for more practical language learning opportunities, emphasizing the importance of experiential learning in mastering a second language. She noted,

“For students taking FSL courses, I think more support and resources would be really helpful. Not just workshops, but also more materials and opportunities to practice. For example, the university could organize informal events like parties or language salons

where we can actually use the language we've learned in class. Learning a language from books is completely different from using it in real-life situations. I believe these kinds of experiences are the only truly effective way for us to improve our language skills.”

These insights underline the need for immersive language experiences beyond traditional classroom instruction.

Anna called for a more diverse representation among university staff to better support language learning and cultural integration. She asserted,

“The university should make its campus more diverse by placing people from different language and cultural backgrounds in key positions. They should have individuals who speak both English and their mother tongue in these roles. This way, they can help students improve their language skills and better facilitate their transition into the university environment.”

Anna's statement points to a structural change that could foster a more supportive and diverse linguistic environment for all students.

Overall, participants highlighted several key areas where the University of Ottawa could improve its bilingual framework, including the need for greater fairness in policy implementation, more practical language learning support, and structural adjustments to promote inclusivity.

4.3 Summary

This Chapter has presented the findings from both the online survey and interviews, providing a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences with bilingualism at the University of Ottawa. The survey data highlighted key trends in participants' knowledge of

bilingual policies, their engagement in academic and campus activities, their perceptions of the policy's impact, and their sense of belonging within the bilingual environment. Complementing these findings, the interview data offered deeper insights into the personal challenges and perspectives of participants, with a focus on their understanding of bilingual policies, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, adaptation to a bilingual setting, and interactions with multilingualism and language support resources.

In Chapter Five, Discussion, these findings will be critically analyzed in relation to existing literature and the research questions. This discussion will examine the broader implications of the bilingual policy at the University of Ottawa, focusing on its effectiveness in promoting inclusivity and multilingual support for international students. Recommendations for fostering a more equitable and supportive environment in bilingual academic contexts will also be explored.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

This chapter discusses the key findings from this study and interprets their implications within the broader context of bilingual policies and student experiences at the University of Ottawa. Section 5.1 provides an overview of the study's main results, highlighting the central themes that emerged from both survey and interview data. Section 5.2 delves deeper into these findings, beginning with the impact of bilingual policies on students' academic and social participation (5.2.1). This subsection critically examines how students understand the bilingual framework in Canada (5.2.1.1), its influence on student identity, policy perception, and participation (5.2.1.2), and perceptions of inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and multilingualism (5.2.1.3), before concluding with a discussion on employment trends and language barriers (5.2.1.4). Section 5.2.2 explores the role of bilingual policies in shaping students' social integration and sense of belonging, while Section 5.2.3 examines their interest in language learning, particularly the motivation to improve French skills (5.2.3.1). Through this structured analysis, the chapter connects the study's findings to broader theoretical and practical considerations, offering insights for policy and practice in bilingual higher education contexts.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

The major findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data highlight a complex relationship between the bilingual policy at the University of Ottawa and the experiences of non-English-French bilingual international students. Survey data revealed that while most participants were aware of Canada's bilingualism and actively participated in academic activities, the policy's impact was perceived as neutral by many, with mixed opinions on its effectiveness in fostering inclusivity. A significant number of students struggled to secure on-campus

employment, and feelings of belonging within the bilingual community were ambivalent. Interview data further emphasized that participants' understanding of the bilingual policy varied, with some feeling excluded by the dual-language system, especially those less proficient in French. Challenges in adapting to the bilingual academic environment were evident, with students reporting limited access to opportunities. Many also expressed the need for more multilingual support and resources. These findings directly connect to the research questions, indicating that while the bilingual policy at the University of Ottawa is recognized and promotes some level of engagement, it does not fully support the inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and multilingualism that it aims to achieve, particularly for international students who are not proficient in both official languages.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings

5.2.1 Impact of Bilingual Policies on Academic and Social Participation

5.2.1.1 Critical reflection on participants' understanding of the bilingual system in Canada

Although the majority of survey participants indicated an awareness of Canada's bilingualism policy and the reasons behind it, the interview data revealed a more limited and surface-level understanding of the policy's historical, cultural, and political dimensions. While many participants could identify Canada as a bilingual nation with English and French as its official languages, their explanations often lacked depth, focusing primarily on the policy as a formal requirement rather than as a reflection of broader sociopolitical dynamics. For instance, few participants demonstrated an understanding of the historical context, such as the role of language rights legislation in protecting French-speaking communities, the legacy of colonialism, and ongoing linguistic tensions between Anglophone and Francophone populations.

This superficial awareness may be linked to participants' prior educational experiences, where bilingualism might have been presented as a static fact rather than a complex and evolving policy tied to issues of identity, power, and historical reconciliation.

Several misunderstandings about bilingualism emerged with respect to both the university and federal levels of policy. For example, Anna, a participant in the interviews, expressed the belief that "The University [of Ottawa] should be multilingual, not just bilingual," suggesting a lack of awareness of the university's historical role as a bilingual institution situated in Canada's capital, where both official languages are central to national identity. Her statement reflects a broader misconception that bilingualism excludes the possibility of linguistic diversity, despite the university's unique mandate to represent both official languages as part of its core identity (University of Ottawa, 1974). Similarly, Yixuan stated, "I would say that when this policy was created 100 years ago, it was considered inclusive because it represented both the English and French communities." However, this statement reflects a factual inaccuracy, as Canada's bilingualism policy, formalized through the *Official Languages Act*, was only established in 1969—approximately 55 years ago, not a century ago (Department of Justice Canada, 1985). This misinterpretation suggests significant gaps in understanding the historical timeline and motivations behind Canada's bilingual framework, raising concerns about the accuracy of information available to students regarding bilingualism in Canada.

The limited depth of knowledge identified in the qualitative data could influence how students perceive and experience the bilingual environment at the University of Ottawa. For example, participants who lacked a clear historical understanding of bilingualism may be less likely to critically engage with the university's bilingual policies or see them as central to Canada's efforts toward linguistic equity and cultural representation. This disconnect may

explain the survey findings, where many participants selected “Neutral” when asked about the personal and academic impact of the bilingual policy, reflecting either uncertainty or a lack of strong opinions on the subject. Furthermore, limited awareness of the historical motivations behind bilingualism could affect how students, particularly international students, interpret their role within the bilingual community, leading to feelings of exclusion or confusion rather than belonging.

These findings raise critical questions about whether the University of Ottawa provides sufficient orientation regarding Canada’s bilingual framework, particularly for international students who may come from monolingual or differently multilingual contexts. A more comprehensive introduction to the historical and social foundations of bilingualism, along with the policy’s impact on Canadian identity and language rights, could help students better understand the significance of the bilingual framework. This deeper knowledge may, in turn, foster more meaningful participation in the university’s bilingual initiatives and reduce the sense of disconnection reported by some participants. Addressing this gap in understanding could be essential to enhancing both academic and social inclusion within the bilingual environment of the University of Ottawa.

5.2.1.2 Impact of Bilingual Policies on Student Identity, Policy Perception, and Participation

The bilingual policies at the University of Ottawa significantly shape students’ academic, social, and identity-related experiences, yet their impact is multifaceted and varies across the diverse student body.

For non-French-speaking students, the bilingual framework often acts as a double-edged sword. While it is designed to reflect Canada’s commitment to linguistic duality and foster inclusivity, its practical implementation frequently creates barriers. Students reported challenges

in accessing academic resources, such as bilingual conferences and administrative meetings, due to insufficient French proficiency. These difficulties underscore a gap between the university's aspirations for bilingual inclusivity and the tangible support available to help students succeed within the dual-language system. Survey data revealed that many participants expressed neutral feelings about their sense of inclusion within the bilingual community. This detachment stems from limited opportunities to engage with bilingual practices and a lack of clear communication about the policy's objectives, leaving students unsure of their place within the bilingual narrative.

The policy's impact extends beyond academics to influence students' social lives and perceptions of identity. For some, particularly those proficient in French or motivated to develop bilingual skills, the policies present opportunities for personal growth and social integration. These students saw their French proficiency as an asset, enabling them to form connections with both Francophone and Anglophone peers while enhancing their career prospects. However, for many non-French-speaking students, the dual-language environment fosters feelings of isolation. Language barriers often limit participation in social events, student organizations, and informal interactions, creating a sense of exclusion from the broader university community.

Financial disparities exacerbate these challenges for international students, who face higher tuition fees yet receive limited resources to support their language development. Participants expressed frustration at being excluded from work opportunities that require bilingualism, which could otherwise enhance their résumés and provide financial support. This structural inequity further alienates non-French-speaking students, amplifying their sense of disengagement from the university's bilingual framework.

Despite these difficulties, some participants recognized the bilingual framework's potential value. For those aspiring to work in bilingual settings, such as federal institutions, the

policies motivated them to improve their French language skills, viewing the bilingual environment as a stepping stone toward professional goals. Interestingly, students in STEM disciplines often perceived the policies as having little impact on their university experience, noting that the framework enhanced opportunities for French speakers without significantly hindering English speakers.

To bridge the gap between the policy's ambitions and students' lived realities, the university should address structural inequities while also enhancing awareness and accessibility of existing support systems. While resources such as free or subsidized French courses, mentorship programs, and informal language practice spaces are available, better promotion and flexibility could improve student engagement, especially given students' demanding academic and work schedules. Additionally, expanding the university's commitment to multilingualism by celebrating linguistic diversity beyond Canada's two official languages could foster a more inclusive environment. Initiatives such as multilingual events, cultural exchange programs, and greater representation of diverse linguistic groups in leadership roles would help create a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of their linguistic background.

In summary, while the bilingual policies at the University of Ottawa aim to promote inclusivity and engagement, their uneven implementation often leaves non-French-speaking students feeling disconnected. By addressing these structural barriers and prioritizing equity and diversity, the university can align its bilingual ambitions with its commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive community for all students

5.2.1.3 Perceptions of Inclusiveness, Multiculturalism, and Multilingualism

Participants' perceptions of the University of Ottawa's bilingual system highlighted a complex relationship between policy ideals and practical experiences. While the university's

bilingual policy aims to promote inclusiveness, multiculturalism, and multilingualism, many participants questioned whether its emphasis on bilingualism—by centering English and French—truly fosters these values or instead marginalizes other linguistic identities.

For some students, the bilingual framework created a sense of exclusivity rather than inclusiveness. Non-French-speaking participants, in particular, felt that their limited proficiency in French often hindered their full participation in academic and social activities. These students described experiences of exclusion in bilingual settings where French was the dominant language, which amplified feelings of isolation. As one participant, Jianhao, explained,

“Well, they speak both languages, and they’ll often say ‘bonjour-hi.’ So, it feels like they prioritize French... However, as a student who only speaks English, I don’t feel included because I don’t understand the French part... The university doesn’t offer any accommodation for students like me... They seem to focus more on providing flexibility for the lecturers or speakers who can handle both languages, but they don’t think about the rest of us.”

Jianhao’s perception highlights a broader issue beyond individual language proficiency. While French is not objectively the dominant language on campus, the presence of official bilingualism may contribute to a sense of exclusion for students who do not engage with both languages. This perception could stem from the privileged status of English and French in Canada’s linguistic hierarchy, where official bilingualism is valued over other forms of multilingualism, such as Mandarin-English bilingualism. It is important to emphasize that while these feelings of exclusion exist, multiple resources—including free courses, conversation groups, language certificate options, digital apps, and community-based learning placements—are available to support students in navigating the bilingual environment. However, the promotion and

accessibility of these resources may need to be improved to ensure that all students are aware of and able to benefit from them.

While a minority of participants viewed the bilingual system as a gateway to greater cultural and social integration, this positive perception was primarily tied to their ability to navigate both English- and French-speaking environments. These students noted that their bilingual skills allowed them to engage meaningfully with diverse communities, highlighting the benefits of bilingualism when adequate proficiency is achieved. However, this experience was not universal, as many participants felt that the bilingual system catered more to those already proficient in both languages, leaving others at a disadvantage.

The university's bilingual policy also raised questions about its approach to multiculturalism. Although it is designed to reflect Canada's multicultural identity, participants criticized the policy for its narrow focus on English and French, arguing that it overlooked the linguistic and cultural diversity of the university community. International students, in particular, felt that their native languages and cultural identities were undervalued within the bilingual framework. The emphasis on English and French as the sole official languages often made other linguistic and cultural groups feel marginalized, thereby limiting the university's capacity to truly embrace multiculturalism.

Furthermore, participants called attention to the need for more diverse representation in leadership roles within the university. Many felt that the bilingual system reinforced existing power dynamics, privileging certain linguistic and cultural groups over others. This perception led some students to question whether the policy genuinely supported inclusiveness or if it primarily served to maintain systemic inequities, such as favoring those who were already proficient in both official languages. As Anna suggested,

“The university should make its campus more diverse by placing people from different language and cultural backgrounds in key positions... They should have individuals who speak both English and their mother tongue in these roles. This way, they can help students improve their language skills and better facilitate their transition into the university environment.”

By fostering leadership that reflects the linguistic and cultural diversity of its student body, participants believed the university could create a more supportive and equitable environment for all.

Despite these critiques, some participants expressed an appreciation for the university’s efforts to promote bilingualism and recognized its potential to encourage multilingualism. Several students noted that learning French at the University of Ottawa could serve as a stepping stone for engaging with other languages in the future. However, this optimism was often tempered by the challenges they faced in achieving French proficiency, such as a lack of tailored language courses and practical immersion opportunities on campus.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy is motivated by noble aspirations, its implementation falls short of fostering an inclusive, multicultural, and multilingual environment for all students. Participants advocated for broader recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity, enhanced support for language learning, and greater efforts to ensure that the policy aligns with the lived experiences of the university community. Addressing these concerns would enable the university to more effectively realize its vision of inclusiveness and equity.

5.2.1.4 Employment trends and language barriers

The bilingual requirement for many campus jobs and volunteer opportunities at the University of Ottawa significantly impacts students' ability to secure employment, especially those who are not proficient in both English and French. Many participants viewed this requirement as a restrictive barrier, limiting access to job opportunities and, consequently, affecting their financial stability and professional development during their academic journey. As Chloe explained:

“My limited ability to speak French significantly limits my chances of getting a job on campus... I don't think I could get a job in the library or any other roles that require direct interaction with other students without being able to speak French.”

This highlights how the bilingual requirement can marginalize non-French-speaking students, leaving them with fewer opportunities for employment and growth.

For non-French-speaking international students, the bilingual requirement often leads to frustration, as it excludes them from valuable work opportunities that could bolster their résumés and provide much-needed financial support. This added barrier compounds the challenges of their academic lives, as they face the dual burden of excelling in their studies while navigating the expectation to acquire a second official language to improve their employability. This disconnect highlights a significant gap between the university's promotion of bilingualism and the tangible support available to help students meet these expectations.

Despite these challenges, a small number of non-bilingual students has successfully found on-campus jobs. These students often rely on roles that do not require bilingual proficiency or on employers who prioritize other skills over language ability. Their experiences highlight the importance of diversifying campus job opportunities to include positions where bilingualism is not a strict requirement, allowing a broader range of students to participate in

campus employment. Additionally, expanding language-learning initiatives and offering transitional support for non-bilingual students could reduce barriers and help create a more equitable and inclusive employment landscape on campus.

5.2.2 Social Integration and Sense of Belonging

This research presents a mixed picture of the impact of the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy on students' social integration and sense of belonging. For a small number of participants, particularly those with a strong foundation in French, the policy served as a valuable tool for deeper social engagement. These students reported that their French language skills enhanced their ability to connect with peers and faculty, participate in bilingual events, and navigate the dual-language environment more effectively. For instance, participants like Nikos emphasized how their French proficiency not only facilitated communication but also enabled them to view the French language as an asset, particularly in fostering relationships and participating in activities that bridged linguistic and cultural divides. For such students, the bilingual policy was not merely a requirement, but also a pathway to meaningful connections and integration within both the university and the broader Canadian context.

However, the majority of participants, particularly those in disciplines like the sciences, expressed a sense of indifference or neutrality toward the policy. These students often viewed the bilingual framework as peripheral to their academic and social experiences. Unlike participants in the humanities or social sciences, where language skills are more deeply integrated into the curriculum and daily interactions, students in STEM fields reported limited opportunities or motivation to engage with the university's bilingual initiatives. This disciplinary divide highlights how the perceived relevance and impact of bilingualism may vary significantly, suggesting that the policy's benefits are not equally distributed across the student body.

Furthermore, the data revealed that French language proficiency does play a role in fostering acculturation and social integration for some students, but the relationship is neither universal nor straightforward. While certain participants with higher levels of French proficiency felt more comfortable navigating social and academic spaces, others with limited French skills relied on alternative strategies to adapt, such as using translation tools like DeepL or gravitating toward English-dominant environments. These avoidance strategies that a lack of French proficiency does not necessarily equate to social exclusion but may nonetheless limit opportunities for deeper cultural engagement within the Francophone community.

Additionally, some participants voiced frustrations about the exclusivity of the bilingual framework, which they felt prioritized English and French at the expense of other linguistic and cultural identities. This perception was particularly evident among international students, who argued that the university could do more to embrace multilingualism and diversity beyond the two official languages. They suggested that creating a more inclusive environment, where multiple linguistic and cultural identities are recognized and celebrated, could enhance the sense of belonging for a broader range of students.

These findings underscore the need for a more nuanced and flexible approach to fostering social integration. While the bilingual policy provides clear benefits for certain groups, its current implementation appears insufficient to address the diverse needs and experiences of the entire student body. Recognizing the intersecting factors that influence a student's sense of belonging—such as disciplinary focus, linguistic background, and access to inclusive opportunities—will be crucial in making the campus a more welcoming and supportive environment for all.

5.2.3 Interest in Language Learning

5.2.3.1 Motivation for improving French skills

Participants' motivations for improving their French language skills varied widely, reflecting a blend of pragmatic, social, and personal aspirations. A prominent driver for many students was the perception that proficiency in French could enhance future job opportunities. Particularly for those considering careers in government or other sectors where bilingualism is a prerequisite, the ability to speak French was viewed as an essential asset. These participants saw the University of Ottawa's bilingual environment as an advantageous platform for developing these skills, even if the process required significant effort and adjustment.

Another critical factor influencing motivation was social integration. Students with an interest in engaging with the Francophone community or navigating Canada's bilingual culture expressed a desire to improve their French to build connections and foster a sense of belonging. For these individuals, learning French was not solely about career advancement but also about participating more fully in cultural and social experiences. Some participants highlighted the practical benefits of being able to converse in French, such as facilitating everyday interactions, attending bilingual events, or forming friendships with Francophone peers.

Financial incentives also played a role in motivating some students. Several participants noted that their desire to improve their French was partially driven by the potential for reduced tuition fees, which are available to Francophone students. This financial motivation underscored the material benefits associated with French proficiency and how these benefits could alleviate some of the financial burdens faced by international students.

For a smaller group, personal interest and curiosity were key factors. These participants expressed a genuine enthusiasm for language learning, viewing it as an intellectually rewarding

and enjoyable pursuit. For them, improving French skills was not merely a means to an end but a way to engage with a new culture and broaden their linguistic repertoire.

Despite these varied motivations, some participants expressed frustration with the resources and opportunities available for French language learning. They indicated that while the university encourages bilingualism, more targeted support—such as more accessible language courses, tutoring, or immersive experiences—would be helpful in achieving their goals. This feedback suggests that while many students are motivated to enhance their French proficiency, the existing infrastructure may not fully meet their needs, potentially hindering their progress.

Overall, the findings highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of students' motivations for improving their French language skills. Addressing these motivations with tailored support and resources could not only enhance individual outcomes but also contribute to a more inclusive and linguistically empowered campus community.

5.3 Closing Thoughts

The University of Ottawa's bilingual policy aims to promote inclusivity but presents challenges, especially for non-French-speaking international students. While bilingual students benefit from increased opportunities, others face barriers due to language requirements for employment and limited language support. The policy's focus on English and French overlooks the university's broader linguistic diversity, making it difficult for some students to fully integrate academically and socially. To foster true inclusivity, the university should enhance language learning support and recognize diverse linguistic identities, ensuring its policies align with students' lived experiences.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

This study offers an exploratory analysis of the academic and social experiences of English-speaking international students at the University of Ottawa, a bilingual institution where English and French hold official status. Grounded in critical multilingualism theory and employing a mixed-methods approach, it examines how these students navigate institutional bilingual policies and their impact on academic performance, social integration, and inclusion. Data from qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys reveal that while the bilingual framework enriches cultural and linguistic experiences, it poses significant challenges for non-French-speaking students. These include limited access to academic resources, barriers to academic and social participation, disorientation about linguistic identity, and feelings of social exclusion in French-dominant spaces. Quantitative findings highlight disparities in students' on campus experience tied to French proficiency, underscoring the dual role of bilingual policies as both opportunities for growth and barriers to success. Despite challenges, some students view the environment as a motivator to learn French. The study identifies the need for enhanced language support, flexible language requirements, and more inclusive practices to improve the experiences of international students.

6.1 Limitations

As with any research, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. While the research offers valuable insights into the experiences of a specific group of English-speaking international students, it may not fully capture the diversity of experiences among all students who interact with the University of Ottawa's bilingual framework. The experiences of students from different

linguistic and cultural backgrounds, including those who are more proficient in French or those who come from multilingual settings, may differ significantly.

Another limitation is the time-bound nature of the data collection, which took place over one academic year. As language policies and the academic environment are subject to change, future circumstances might shift the nature of students' experiences. Moreover, the research focused on the perspectives of students themselves, which, while critical, only offer one facet of the larger institutional dynamics at play.

Finally, this study did not account for other external factors that might influence students' academic journeys, such as socioeconomic background, access to language learning resources, or previous exposure to bilingual or multilingual environments. These factors could play significant roles in shaping individual experiences and outcomes, and future research could benefit from exploring these dimensions.

6.2 Contributions

Despite its limitations, this study makes several important contributions to the fields of language education, language policy, and intercultural communication, particularly within the context of higher education. The research provides a valuable insight into the impact of bilingual and multilingual policies on students, especially international students, in Canadian universities. Specifically, it contributes to the broader discourse on how bilingualism policies, such as those at the University of Ottawa, affect students who are not fully integrated into either of the institution's official language communities.

From an academic perspective, the study offers a critical lens on the implementation of bilingual policies within a Canadian context, contributing to the ongoing discussion on the

tension between official bilingualism and the reality of multilingual student populations. By examining how students navigate a bilingual environment, this research adds to the growing body of literature on language policies in higher education and their implications for both academic and social inclusion. The findings emphasize that French-English bilingualism, while central to the Canadian identity, can create barriers to academic and social integration for students who do not possess proficiency in both official languages.

The theoretical contribution of this study is significant, as it applies a critical multilingualism framework to analyze the intersection of language policies and the lived experiences of students. This theoretical approach challenges traditional notions of language policy that are often limited to the binary of official languages—English and French—and advocates for a more inclusive understanding of linguistic diversity. By moving beyond the English-French dichotomy, the study broadens the scope of language policy analysis and suggests that institutions should consider multilingualism as an asset, based on the patterns observed in the data. However, further interview data would be necessary to fully substantiate this claim and convince readers of its broader applicability. This perspective is especially pertinent in an increasingly globalized world, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds are enrolling in higher education institutions. The findings underscore the importance of developing policies that not only accommodate but actively support the multilingual realities of students, recognizing the value of their linguistic capital and ensuring that their academic and social needs are met.

On a practical level, the research highlights the gaps in support structures at institutions like the University of Ottawa, particularly for international students who are unfamiliar with navigating a bilingual educational environment. The experiences of these students reveal the

need for more robust language learning resources, such as tailored language workshops, tutoring services, and bilingual academic materials, to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by a lack of language proficiency. The study also emphasizes the importance of providing clear, accessible information about bilingual policies to ensure that students are aware of the linguistic expectations they will face and the support available to help them meet those expectations.

Socially, the research has important implications for the university's role in fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for international students, especially those who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. By addressing the challenges faced by students in bilingual settings, this study contributes to the broader conversation on social equity and inclusion in higher education. It underscores the need for universities to reconsider their approach to bilingualism, taking into account not only the integration of English and French but also the languages spoken by international students, as suggested by the findings in this study. However, additional interview data would be necessary to fully support this recommendation and demonstrate its relevance across different contexts. This approach could lead to more inclusive academic spaces where students feel valued and empowered, rather than marginalized due to their language background.

Economically, the findings point to the potential for improved student retention and academic success if institutions adopt more inclusive language policies. When students feel supported in their linguistic and academic needs, they are more likely to succeed academically and socially, leading to higher graduation rates and increased satisfaction with their university experience. Politically, this research advocates for more inclusive language policies that align with the principles of linguistic equality and diversity. By promoting multilingualism in higher

education, universities can contribute to broader societal goals of fostering inclusive citizenship and greater social cohesion, particularly in multicultural societies like Canada.

Educationally, this study contributes to the conversation on the development of language education policies that reflect the needs of an increasingly diverse student body. It calls for a reimagining of bilingual education policies that do not merely focus on official languages but also acknowledge the importance of all languages spoken by students. As international students continue to form a significant part of the student body in Canadian universities, it is crucial that institutions create policies that support not only bilingualism but also the multilingualism that characterizes the globalized nature of modern education. By embracing linguistic diversity as a resource, institutions can cultivate more inclusive, dynamic, and globally engaged learning environments.

In conclusion, this research contributes both theoretically and practically to the understanding of bilingual and multilingual policies in higher education. It provides important insights into the experiences of international students in bilingual universities, advocating for more inclusive policies that recognize linguistic diversity as an asset. By addressing the gaps identified in this study, universities can better support their students, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their linguistic background, have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive academically and socially.

6.3 Future Directions

Looking ahead, future research could build on these findings by expanding the scope of inquiry. For example, studies could include a larger, more diverse sample of students, including both domestic and international students from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how different student groups interact with and are affected by the university's bilingual policy. Such research could also benefit from incorporating a comparative analysis with other Canadian institutions that operate within a bilingual or multilingual framework, offering cross-institutional insights into best practices for supporting students in similar environments.

Moreover, future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach, tracking students' experiences over the course of their entire academic careers to examine how their relationship with bilingualism evolves over time. This would allow for a deeper understanding of how bilingual policies affect not only immediate academic outcomes but also long-term career prospects, language development, and social integration. Additionally, longitudinal research could investigate how these experiences shape students' identities and sense of belonging within a bilingual or multilingual academic setting.

Future research could also explore the perspectives of other key stakeholders, such as faculty members, university administrators, and policymakers. Their insights could provide a more holistic view of how bilingual policies are designed, implemented, and perceived at multiple levels within the institution. Understanding the challenges and opportunities from the perspective of those responsible for enacting and enforcing language policies could lead to more effective and inclusive language planning.

Furthermore, exploring the role of language support services, such as tutoring programs, language exchanges, and academic workshops, would be beneficial in determining how these resources can be optimized to support students struggling with bilingual requirements. By evaluating the effectiveness of these services, future studies could offer practical

recommendations for improving language support systems in ways that promote both academic success and social integration for all students, regardless of their linguistic background.

6.4 Final Thoughts

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significant impact of language policy on student experiences within a bilingual academic environment. It calls for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to bilingualism that takes into account the multilingual realities of modern student populations. By adopting a critical multilingualism perspective, universities like the University of Ottawa can better support their diverse student body and foster an academic environment that fully recognizes and leverages linguistic diversity as a valuable asset.

Incorporating the findings from this study into institutional policies and practices could help create more inclusive academic environments that support all students, regardless of their language background. By embracing linguistic diversity and providing targeted support to students who may face language barriers, universities can enhance both academic outcomes and the overall student experience.

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Appendix A: Online Questionnaire

1. Participant Consent Form

Please read this document before continuing on to the survey. Submitting your study responses indicates that you consent to participate in this study. Please save or print a copy of this document to keep for your own reference.

Link to Microsoft OneDrive for accessing the complete consent form:

https://mcgill-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/haiyi_yan_mail_mcgill_ca/EZtRQoRWlgROm7JOpH6889sByIy7ljGIUhiJ4ma_4E8hEQ?e=zSqn3q

Contact Information:

Researcher (Principal Investigator):

Haiyi Yan

M.A. Student

Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE),

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(873) 288-0465

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Faculty of Education,

McGill University

susan.ballinger@mcgill.ca

Have you read and agreed, in its entirety, to the contents of the consent form?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. What is your current degree pursuit status?

☐ Undergraduate

☐ Master's program

☐ Doctoral program

☐ Professional degree program (e.g., MD, JD)

☐ Continuing education or certification

☐ Not currently pursuing a degree

3. Which faculty are you currently or have you been affiliated with at the University of Ottawa?

☐ Faculty of Arts

☐ Faculty of Science

☐ Faculty of Engineering

☐ Faculty of Social Sciences

☐ Telfer School of Management

☐ Faculty of Medicine

☐ Faculty of Law

☐ Faculty of Education

☐ Faculty of Health Sciences

4. What is the name of the academic program in which you are currently registered or have been previously enrolled?

5. Please list all the languages you know in order of dominance, putting your most dominant language first.

For example:

1. Mandarin
 2. English
 3. Japanese
 4. Cantonese
-

6. How would you rate your proficiency in English?

(If you are not sure what these levels mean please refer to the official translations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Global Scale developed by Council of Europe:

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bc7b>; or, the CEFR diagram developed by Cambridge University Press &

Assessment: <https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/126130-cefr-diagram.pdf>)

- ☐ A1-Beginner
- ☐ A2-Elementary
- ☐ B1-Intermediate
- ☐ B2-Upper Intermediate
- ☐ C1-Advanced
- ☐ C2-Proficient

7. Do you speak French?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. How would you rate your proficiency in French?

(If you are not sure what these levels mean please refer to *les traductions officielles de l'échelle*

globale du Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues [official translations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages global scale] (CECR) developed by *Conseil de l'Europe* [Council of Europe] (in French):

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bc7c>; or, what *la République française* [the French Republic] has to say about *le Cadre européen de référence pour les langues* [The European Framework of Reference for Languages] (CECRL) (in French): <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F34739>)

☐ A1-Beginner

☐ A2-Elementary

☐ B1-Intermediate

☐ B2-Upper Intermediate

☐ C1-Advanced

☐ C2-Proficient

9. Do you understand why Canada is an officially English-French bilingual country?

☐ Yes

☐ No

10. I usually participate in academic activities at the university. (e.g., academic conferences, administrative meetings)

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

11. Do you have a job on campus?

☐ Yes

☐ No

12. The University of Ottawa's bilingual policy has positively affected my academics.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Neutral

13.The University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy has positively affected my personal life.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Neutral

14.Do you think the University of Ottawa’s bilingual policy will have a positive impact on your future development (e.g., obtaining employment or accessing additional degree programs)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

15.Please provide a brief explanation of your answer to question 14.

16.I feel that I belong in the bilingual community at the University of Ottawa.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ Disagree

17.The University of Ottawa is promoting English-French bilingualism effectively.

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither agree nor disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

18.Are you interested in improving your French skills?

☐ Yes

☐ No

19.Are you interested in participating in the follow-up interview?

☐ Yes (please provide your email address)

☐ No

20.Please provide your email address so we can contact you for the follow-up interview.

Appendix B: Recruitment Materials

Recruitment Poster

**McGill** | Faculty of Education

ARE YOU AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT WHO SPEAKS ENGLISH?



REQUIREMENTS:

- ✓ **International** student at the Univ. of Ottawa
- ✓ Do **NOT** speak French/ low French proficiency
- ✓ Be able to use **English** to participate in this study

You can participate in this study at any location!

To join this study you will be invited to complete an online questionnaire and participate in an optional online virtual interview.

LINK & QR CODE TO ACCESS THE QUESTIONNAIRE



<https://forms.office.com/r/GCWDw1yc6W>

Contact Information

Haiyi Yan (Principal Investigator)
Faculty of Education, McGill University
haiyi.yan@mail.mcgill.ca

Dr. Susan Ballinger (Supervisor)
Faculty of Education, McGill University
susan.ballinger@mcgill.ca

Contact Script for Recruitment

Dear [Staff/Student Association Name],

My name is Haiyi Yan, and I am a Master's student from the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University. I am conducting a research study titled "The Experiences of non-French-speaking International Students at a Bilingual Canadian University," and I would appreciate your help in distributing recruitment materials to your members.

The purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties faced by English-speaking international students who are not officially bilingual and the practices they experience under the language policy of a bilingual university, using the University of Ottawa as an example. Therefore, I am looking for English-speaking international graduate students at the University of Ottawa, who do not speak French or with low level French proficiency.

Your support and contribution to this study will provide critical insight into the impact of bilingual policies on English-speaking students and the experiences of English-speaking students in bilingual institutions.

I have attached a poster with a QR code that leads to the consent form and questionnaire. Please feel free to distribute the poster to your students, members, or post it on your organization's social media platforms. Additionally, here is the link to the consent form and questionnaire for this study (which serves the same purpose as the QR code): [link]

Thank you for considering my request, and please do not hesitate to contact me (haiyi.yan@mail.mcgill.ca) or the supervisor of the study, Dr. Susan Ballinger (susan.ballinger@mcgill.ca), if you have any questions or concerns.

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Best regards,

Haiyi Yan

Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University

Recruitment Email for Questionnaire
To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Haiyi Yan, and I am a Master's student from the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University.

I am writing to you because I am looking for participants for my research and would appreciate your support and help.

My present study is about English-speaking international students in bilingual universities and hopes to recruit English-speaking graduate international students from different faculties at the University of Ottawa.

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire based on a voluntary principle, with an optional virtual interview. The duration of participation in this study is not expected to exceed 2 hours.

Your support and contribution to this study will provide critical insight into the impact of bilingual policies on English-speaking students and the experiences of English-speaking students in bilingual institutions.

Your privacy and confidentiality are our top priority. We will not share any of your identifiable data with any third party for any reasons. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, without any negative consequences.

If you consider yourself qualified and interested in participating in this study, you are welcome to access the online questionnaire by clicking on the following link: (LINK)

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or the supervisor of this study using the following contact information:

Researcher: Haiyi Yan

M.A. Student, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), Faculty of Education,
McGill University

haiyi.yan@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Susan Ballinger

Associate Professor, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), Faculty of
Education, McGill University

susan.ballinger@mcgill.ca

Best regards,

Haiyi Yan (he/ him)

Recruitment Email for Individual Interviews

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Haiyi Yan and I am a Master's student from the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University.

I am writing because you indicated in the previous questionnaire that you are willing to participate in the following interview.

I appreciate your interest and participation in this study and hope to schedule a virtual meeting with you. Our virtual meeting will be conducted through Microsoft Teams or WebEx, please let me know in advance if you are unavailable for either of the two software.

The following are my available time slots, please choose the one that suits you best.

If none of these time slots are available to you, please feel free to let me know your available time if you would like. Although I am more than willing to meet with you virtually, however, I cannot guarantee that you will be interviewed due to unfavorable scheduling.

Please understand that even if you agree to participate in the interview now, you are free to cancel or reschedule the meeting with me at any time.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me or the supervisor of this study using the following contact information:

Researcher: Haiyi Yan

M.A. Student, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), Faculty of Education,
McGill University

haiyi.yan@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Susan Ballinger

Associate Professor, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE), Faculty of
Education, McGill University

susan.ballinger@mcgill.ca

Thank you,

Haiyi Yan (he/ him)

Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University

Appendix C: Consent Form



Participant Consent Form

Please read this document before continuing on to the survey. Submitting your study responses indicates that you consent to participate in this study. Please save or print a copy of this document to keep for your own reference.

Researcher (Principal Investigator):

Haiyi Yan

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Title of Project: The Experiences of non-French-speaking International Students at a Bilingual Canadian University

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties faced by English-speaking international students who are not officially bilingual and the practices they experience under the language policy of a bilingual university, using the University of Ottawa as an example.

Study Procedures:

You are being asked to complete a survey on Microsoft Forms asking you questions to obtain information on your overall perceptions of the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy and campus experience. You may be asked to participate in a follow-up, individual online interview based on the responses that you give on the questionnaire. To discuss and schedule that interview, the researcher would contact you via email. This interview would be audio and video recorded. You could withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences. Interviews will be conducted using Microsoft Teams or Webex. The researcher will transcribe and analysis the interview data using NVivo software.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that even if you agree to participate in the interview now, you are free to cancel or reschedule the meeting with me at any time.

Potential Risks: The researcher does not foresee any harms or risks to you. The researcher will assign you pseudonyms to be used in any presentation of the data. All data will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. Your identifiable information will be stored in a separate file.

Potential Benefits: Participating in the study will have no direct benefit for you; however, we would like to learn about the experiences of English-speaking students in bilingual institutions through your provision of data. However, your participation will provide critical insight into the impact of bilingual policies on English-speaking students and the experiences of English-speaking students in bilingual institutions.

Compensation: You will not receive any compensation for completing the study.

Confidentiality & Data Security:

During the course of the study, you will be given the opportunity to choose or be assigned a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality upon dissemination of the data. You may refuse data collection, request reasonable adjustments, or withdraw from the study at any time. However, please note that including contact information in the questionnaire is optional. If you do not include your contact information (your email address) when completing the questionnaire, your

answers will be anonymous. Therefore, should you decide to withdraw from the study after completing the questionnaire, the researcher will be unable to withdraw your responses. If you have provided contact information and decide to withdraw from the study after completing the questionnaire the researcher will be able to withdraw your responses from the data.

Even if you agree and choose to participate in the interview, you may withdraw from the interview at any time. If you withdraw, all the data you provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. Once data has been combined for analysis, it can't be withdrawn in its entirety. It can only be withdrawn from further analysis.

Coding for this study will be done through NVivo. All non-identifiable data from this study will be stored in the researcher's password-protected personal password protected laptop and OneDrive, and will be accessible only to the Principal Investigator (Haiyi Yan) and the supervisor, Dr. Susan Ballinger. Your name and your email address will be stored in a separate file in the Principal Investigator's laptop.

All identifiable study materials (e.g. consent forms, study data, contact information, recordings) will be stored in a separate file in the researcher's password protected laptop. Only the researcher will have access to participants' identifiable information and the audio and video recordings made during the course of this study. After seven years, all the data collected during this study will be destroyed.

Dissemination of Results:

The researcher intends to disseminate the research results through a MA thesis, academic conferences, and academic publications. The researcher also plans to write a report for the university and to use the conclusions and findings from this study in his teaching.

Questions:

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact researcher, Haiyi Yan at 873-288-0465 or haiyi.yan@mail.mcgill.ca; the supervisor of the study, Dr. Susan Ballinger at susan.ballinger@mcgill.ca. If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca

Appendix D: Interview Questions Sample

Interview questions may be adjusted based on participants' questionnaire responses.

1. Can you tell me about your language background?
2. How much did you know about the bilingual policy before you came to the University of Ottawa?
3. In your daily life at the University of Ottawa how does the university's bilingual policy affect you? What signs do you see of the policy in your campus activities?
4. Has the university's bilingual policy impacted your studies? (For example, additional degree pursuits in the future.) If so, how?
5. Have you had any experiences in which not being able to speak French has negatively impacted you at the University of Ottawa? If so, what steps did the university take to support you in that situation?
6. Do you think there is room for improvement in the University of Ottawa's bilingual policy? If so, could you please elaborate?